



ReSPA

Regional School
of Public Administration

BUILDING TOGETHER
GOVERNANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Annual Monitoring of ReSPA's Activities in 2023

Executive summary
October, 2023

Policy Development
and Coordination

European Integration
and Accession
Negotiations

Human Resources
Management and
Professional
Development

Quality
Management

Digitalisation



Co-funded by
the European Union

List of Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia & Herzegovina
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CSA	Civil Service Agency
e-Gov	e-Government
EFAC	CAF External Feedback Actors
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
HRMD	Human Resources Management and Development
HRMIS	Human Resources Management Information System
IPA III	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III
ITIL	Public Administration Service Catalogue
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PARCO	Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office
PEF	CAF External Feedback Evaluation Procedure
QM	Quality Management
ReSPA	Regional School for Public Administration
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
RQMC	Regional Quality Management Center
RS	Republika Srpska
RR	Regulatory Reform
WB	Western Balkan
WG	Working Group

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The Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA) is an inter-governmental organisation for enhancing regional cooperation, promoting shared learning and supporting the development of public administration in the Western Balkans. As such, it supports governments in the region to develop better public administration, public services and overall governance systems for their citizens and businesses and helps prepare them for membership and integration into the European Union (EU). The ReSPA members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, while Kosovo*¹ is a beneficiary.

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1. Introduction

Efficient public administrations and strong and resilient institutions remain crucial factors for sustainable and inclusive growth and for delivering growth-enhancing reforms. Good quality, well-functioning and professional public administrations are the basis for a successful, sustainable and resilient region. Public Administration Reform (PAR) also lies at the heart and is an integral part of the EU integration and accession agenda of the Western Balkans administrations – members of ReSPA. As part of the revised 2020 EU Enlargement Strategy², PAR is firmly embedded in the “fundamentals first” principle and a part of the Fundamentals Cluster of the accession process.

Over the past years, the Western Balkan (WB) administrations have been implementing reforms and initiatives to meet the Principles of Public Administration to be efficient, professional, impartial and accountable to serve the interests of citizens and businesses. Significant common public sector challenges remain, while some areas have seen more marked advances, such as digital service delivery. According to the EC 2022 Enlargement package³, modernising public administrations remains a key concern throughout the region. “While there is awareness of key reform needs for creating more professional and merit-based administrations overall, more leadership and effort will be needed for improving policy planning, public finance, people management and accountability. Improving administrative capacity will be essential to fulfil the functions of the state, plan and execute essential investments in strategic infrastructure and strengthen alignment with the EU acquis.”⁴

| Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)

acts as the key regional knowledge centre supporting the advancements of the capacities of public officials. It contributes to institutions in the WB administrations in meeting the standards in PAR needed for improved policy outcomes, accelerated EU integration and more efficient public service to its citizens and businesses.

This Executive Summary of the Annual Monitoring Report presents the key results and feedback from the third consecutive monitoring efforts ReSPA had undertaken since 2020 when the monitoring framework was defined following its Strategy 2019-2024 adoption. It is focused on monitoring the achievement of mid-term outcomes and (direct and induced) outputs defined in the ReSPA Strategy and accompanying Intervention Logic (IL).

Table 1 – Medium-term outcomes of the ReSPA Strategy

Outcomes (level of PAR output in the different administrations)	Approaches, policy measures, institutional mechanisms and systems have been adopted and implemented in the Western Balkans at regional and administration levels in accordance with the Principles of PA and the EI agenda, aimed at ensuring:			
	Improved PAR programming and implementation	Improved coordination and coherence of the processes in PAR, PFM and the European Integration Agenda	Strengthened consideration of merit and performance in PA recruitment and careers	Improved quality of services delivered to citizens, including greater accessibility and digitalisation

² EC: *Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans*, 2020

³ EC: *2022 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*, 12.10.2022 COM (2022) 528 final

⁴ *Ibid*

The present monitoring focuses on reflecting on concrete professional benefits, outputs, skills and know-how at the level of individual officials and trace contributions to institutional advances in the five thematic areas ReSPA focuses on Policy Development and Coordination (PDC); Regulatory Reform and Implementation of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA); Human Resources Management and Development (HRMD); Quality Management (QM); and eGovernment (E-Gov) as well as to the overall PAR process at the regional and level of each ReSPA administration – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

This Annual monitoring report was prepared based on the following:

- ✧ *analysing post-event questionnaires;*
- ✧ *general satisfaction survey (for participants and institutions) results (23% of respondents within 16 May – 12 June 2023);*
- ✧ *the in-country support mechanism reports by beneficiary institutions, and*
- ✧ *reports on the implementation of study recommendations.*

Additionally, follow-up feedback and testimonials were collected in September 2023 to showcase concrete and targeted support cases during 2022.

While this year's monitoring was conducted with the same data-gathering approach (general and post-event surveys, reporting on in-country support and self-assessment of recommendation implementation), the reporting approach includes a greater focus on quality data and information with satisfaction, contribution and recommendations for further actions. The intention is that the Annual Monitoring Report provides a reflection on past activities and forward-looking perspectives to guide further planning of activities.

Methodologically, future monitoring would particularly benefit from introducing external feedback on implementing in-country support and implementing study recommendations. Moreover, gathering concrete case studies and testimonials from all activities into the annual monitoring report enhance showcasing and learning on what approaches work and where and what adjustment are needed for ReSPA to meet its set targets at the end of the Strategy implementation in 2024. Going forward, the solid methodological approach contained in the Monitoring tool-kit could benefit from adding a learning component, enhancing triangulation of data-gathering through considering expert and participatory data-gathering, simplifying the surveys and designing a user-friendly annual reporting format that communicates with a general audience and providing for learning for future programming and decision-making on ReSPA's future approaches and methods of work.



2. Main findings

| Strengthened networking and cooperation in PAR at the regional level are considered one of the most significant contributions of ReSPA

This reflects the unique ReSPA approach in organising learning, capacity development, networking and exchange activities by bringing together officials from ReSPA Member administrations in unique joint learning experiences. These are also the most appreciated activities among participants, while the specific type of activities depends on the identified needs in a specific thematic area. This also reflects that participants were most satisfied and reported the most contribution from ReSPA's activities towards improving cooperation within the institution the official works in, with other institutions from their administration and peers from other ReSPA's Member administrations. ReSPA provides a **community of practitioners** for public administration officials from its administrations. **The post-event survey also** demonstrates high appreciation for the quality, relevance, organisation and methodology of the actions delivered. On average, the general scores for events, content, methodology, relevance, quality and organisation range from 4.15 to 5 (out of 5). Detailed scores for events are available in the thematic areas section of the Full report.



| ReSPA is confirmed as a regional hub for capacity development and exchange as well as a source of best practices and innovation in PAR

High satisfaction with ReSPA's activities by officials and institutions testifies to both the relevance and added value of ReSPA's activities in 2022 and overall. There is high satisfaction with both the content and organisational aspects of the activities. The main benefits reported by participants are in the domain of specific new knowledge and skills, best practices from other practitioners and experts, as well as broadening their horizon and knowledge on new solutions, alternative approaches and best practices. Specifically, gaining new knowledge and information was valuable in RIA, IPA III, SDGs and eGovernment thematic areas. While training and exchange activities contribute to advancing the soft skills of officials on specific topics on which activities were organised with each thematic area, contribution to concrete steps forwards and achievements of their institutions in the specific thematic areas and the PAR overall is also noted.



Overall, at the personal development level, the majority (90%) of participants stated that ReSPA's activities have contributed greatly or to a good extent to facilitating communication and exchange of know-how among colleagues and/or leadership. Most (81%) participants have also stated that ReSPA's activities have contributed greatly and to good extent to acquiring knowledge and enhanced skills.

Greater contribution to personal development vs. institutional development is noticeable

High satisfaction and contribution reflect the activities set up, which, through training, seasonal schools, study visits, mobility schemes etc., focuses on advancing the personal ca-

pacities of public officials as a basis on which teams', departments', units', institutions' improvements are built. However, increased support through in-country projects with targeted interventions on specific issues in the thematic areas has made it possible to further consolidate the contributions to institutional development. For example, support in the preparation of the PAR Strategy in North Macedonia 2023-2030, producing Guidelines for the Preparation of Continuity Plans in the Provision of Public Services, creation of a Managing Authority (MA) and Intermediate Bodies for Policy Management (IBPM) under IPA III, implementation of the Action Plan under the PAR Strategy BiH 2018-2022 in policy development area, improving legal framework in supporting retaining employees in public administration, the support to establishing Forum of the Civic Service Agency (CSA) directors and support to changing CSA Law, introducing e-Services of the Serbian Business Register Agency (SBRA) and Office for Information Technologies and eGovernment (ITE) Office, creation of E-recruitment and draft Law related to recommendations by PAR Special group, drafting the National QM Programme of North Macedonia and QM Roadmap in Montenegro, development of employment satisfaction survey, Decision on the approval of the Document on implementation of CAF in administrative bodies in the Federation of BiH are some of the key institutional achievements reported that ReSPA's activities have had a crucial contribution to. Overall, ReSPA's contribution to the preparation, drafting of documents, coordination and inclusion of other institutions in the same administration and, to an extent, consultation with stakeholders is pronounced. Less concrete examples are reported in the domain of improved implementation and practice.

At the level of institutional satisfaction, most (76%) participating institutions stated that ReSPA's activities have contributed greatly or to a good extent to improved institutional communication, coordination and networking. The highest satisfaction was among institutions in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, followed by Serbia and BiH. Regarding thematic areas, ReSPA's contribution is most appreciated in eGovernment, QM and HRMD thematic areas, followed by PDC and RIA.

The majority (63%) of participating institutions stated that (to an adequate extent or more) ReSPA's activities have contributed to their improved institutional performance. The highest



satisfaction was among North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro institutions, followed by BiH and Serbia. Regarding thematic areas, ReSPA's contribution is most appreciated in QM, HRDM and PC thematic areas, followed by RIA and eGovernment.

Most (80%) participants stated that ReSPA's activities contributed to the institutional improvements which added to PAR reform implementation during the monitored period. Institutions from North Macedonia, Montenegro and BiH, followed by Albania and Serbia, consider the contribution. In terms of thematic areas greatest contribution is seen in QM, eGovernment and HRMD, followed by RIA and PDC.

Concrete benefits and satisfaction with support in specific thematic areas provided by ReSPA reflect the individual needs and challenges faced by ReSPA Member administrations



In-country support has increased from 11 projects in 2021 to 19 implemented projects in 2022. The satisfaction with the expertise provided, activities and outputs is high. The in-country support mechanism has proved to be a catalyst for implementing concrete, practical measures that target the identified bottlenecks in the PAR implementation. ReSPA's support in the development of a comprehensive HRD Strategy in BiH through an inclusive process, the development of the National Plan for Quality Management in the Public Sector 2023-2025 in North Macedonia as a step forward to improving service delivery to citizens, and development of training for Digital Academy in Montenegro that provides for improved design and delivery of projects and support based on citizens' needs are just several concrete examples demonstrating ReSPA's support delivered towards ReSPA Members' needs and identified challenges in the EC, SIGMA/OECD, as well as WeBER PAR Monitor Reports.

In the PDC thematic area, the highest satisfaction is among institutions from BiH and Montenegro. In the RIA, IPA III and SDGs, the highest satisfaction comes from North Macedonia, Serbia and BiH institutions. In the HRMD thematic area, the highest satisfaction comes from Albania, Montenegro and BiH institutions. In the QM thematic area, the highest satisfaction comes from institutions Montenegro and BiH. Finally, in the eGovernment thematic area, the highest satisfaction comes from BiH, Montenegro and North Macedonia institutions.

Monitoring of implementation of recommendations from studies in 2022, such as the HRMIS study, shows that the main challenge shared by the implementing institutions to fully implement recommendations lies in the lack of legal basis to proceed with implementation, lack of comprehensive approach in designing and implementing proposed recommendations or resources needed to execute them. Methodologically, future monitoring would benefit from introducing external feedback on implementing in-country support and implementing study recommendations that would provide concrete and actionable proposals for tackling these.



3. Case studies

Bellow case studies are snapshots illustrating and highlighting some of the concrete achievements and effects ReSPA has in supporting PAR in its Member administrations (through the direct support mechanisms, such as the “in-country support”). The case studies are based on the follow-up questionnaire sent to public administrations in September 2023.

Case study from Policy development and coordination thematic area:

Developing a comprehensive and targeted PAR Strategy 2023 – 2030 through an inclusive process

Findings of the evaluation of the previous PAR Strategy 2018-2022 and its Action Plan in North Macedonia were used in the designing of the new PAR Strategy 2023-2030 and supported capacity building of the strategic and technical operational framework for PAR, all supported through the in-country projects. Concretely, the support enabled the organisation of intra and inter-institutional meetings, workshops, group and networking activities during the development of the Strategy. The consultations and public hearings that helped to share the Strategy were implemented in line with the requirements of the Methodology and Guidelines adopted by the Government and SIGMA principles. Inputs received enhanced the PAR Strategy by including the General Secretariat of the Government as an institution that ensures the consistent application of the new methodological framework for preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting in the new PAR Strategy and Action Plan as well as in sector strategies and strategic planning documents. Moreover, it supported the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) on the importance of having a designated head of the sector who should bring together and organise all activities related to planning the PAR Strategy, its implementation and monitoring. MISA is currently planning to put an IT monitoring and reporting tool in place to support the implementation of the new PAR Strategy, which ReSPA will support.

Case study from Regulatory reform thematic area:

Strengthening the capacities of the Albanian public administration on management and coordination of SBS instrument

The in-country mechanism supported the design and delivery of training and on-the-job support for public administration staff responsible for managing sector budget support at the Ministry of Finance in Albania. The practical approach in analysing the contracts and discussing solutions to concrete challenges made it possible to update the indicators. Moreover, tools and templates were provided for the smooth management of sector-based contracts and a calendar was created. The tailor-made and practical approach enables the effective management of four sector-based contracts: EU for Economic Recovery, EU for Justice, EU for Social Inclusion and EU for Good Governance.

Case study from HRDM thematic area:

Development of a comprehensive strategic document for Human Resources Development in BiH through an inclusive process

The Government of the Federation of BiH adopted the Strategy on HRD in 2022. By adopting this document, the EC, through the PAR Special Group meeting held in June 2023, recommended the Government of Republika Srpska and the Council of Ministers of the BiH institutions to adopt the structure of the Strategy to the administrative context of RS and BiH institutions and recommended that ReSPA provides support in the

development of respective strategies. The Strategy as a document presents a detailed overview of the current civil service legislation state-of-the-art in the Federation of BiH, analysing the scope of the civil service, merit-based recruitment procedures and practices, categories of civil service positions, determination of HR units, training and education, appeal and disciplinary procedure. What was also significant was the involvement of 10 cantons in its development. Also, there is a focus on key strategic HR elements that need to be further emphasised by the CSA in the Federation of BiH and other authorities/civil service bodies in the Federation of BiH. The next step being put in place now is preparing an Action Plan on a three-year basis.

Case study from Quality management (service delivery) thematic area:

Improving service delivery in North Macedonia through strengthening quality management

The National Plan for Quality Management in the Public Sector in North Macedonia 2023-2025 was designed with the support of the ReSPA in-country mechanism. The purpose of the NP for QM in North Macedonia 2023-2025 is to strengthen and further improve the implementation of CAF and other QM systems, models, and instruments in the country and to improve service delivery in the public sector. With the assessment of the previous quality management documents, success factors, bottlenecks for CAF (QM) implementation, challenges, and current needs for the QM implementation in North Macedonia were identified. Activities from the National Plan for Quality Management in the Public Sector in North Macedonia 2023-2025 are included in the new Strategy for Public Administration Reform in the Republic of North Macedonia 2023-2030. The following steps involve analysing and updating QM legislation and capacity development for further implementation.

Case study from eGovernment (digitalisation) thematic area:

Development of Human-centric Development training for Digital Academy in Montenegro

The Human-centric Development (HCD) training offered a straightforward way to a much deeper understanding of the needs of the recipient of government services and their experience with government programmes. The online training included both employees of the public administration, as well as representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and private IT companies responsible for developing information systems and services to expand knowledge related to the field of designing services tailored to users. The knowledge gained at the training is significant and applicable to the daily work of the Ministry of Public Administration team. When executed well, an HCD approach creates government services that align with people's needs and desires. Involving end users in the overall design process leads to greater impact. The execution of the training has led to support Montenegro's efforts in the efficient provision of services, the introduction of QM of services provided, full interoperability of information systems, and increasing the number of electronic services at a high level of sophistication. Employing the HCD principle allows public administration projects to be planned and implemented, focusing on user's needs. Establishing the Digital Academy is crucial as it provides for education and networking among all relevant stakeholders involved in building digital and leadership skills for public officials, students, and strategically important vulnerable groups.

4. Recommendations



This year's survey encouraged participants to share their ideas for further support and activities. Overall, participants proposed new specific topics for training and exchanges (both in the region or EU Members) in each thematic area. While content-specific, most focus on the preparation and implementation phases in the policy-making process and less on monitoring and learning aspects of policies and regulations. Focus on needs in peer-to-peer learning, best practices sharing, and strengthening of exchange among practitioners demonstrate the value of ReSPA as a community of practices. This is specifically distinct in core thematic areas such as PDC, QM, HRMD and RIA. Participants seek access to theoretical and practical know-how and information on emerging topics, such as eGovernment, IPA III, and SDGs.

Specifically, in the PDC thematic area participants recommended the implementation of:

- ✧ *Interactive training, ToTs, and other capacity development activities on topics such as: analytical skills, development, implementation, result-based management, presentation of results, coordinating the process, involvement of stakeholders; transparent and open government; public sector innovation; ethics and anti-corruption measures; e-government; creating organisational communication strategy in public institutions; Economic Reform Program and Public Financial Management; policy coordination and synchronisation with Agenda 2030; service delivery; ex-post impact assessment and evaluation techniques;*
- ✧ *Simulations and practical work on the actual preparation of strategic documents;*
- ✧ *Exchange of experience and best practices from EU Members on regulatory reforms and policy development and coordination;*
- ✧ *Knowledge of monitoring tools, and monitoring skills for better policy implementation;*
- ✧ *Support facilitation of establishing and running a Western Balkan regional network of practitioners within the policy development and coordination area;*
- ✧ *Publication with a collection of evidence on good practices and challenges in public management, coordination, and policy-making across the region.*

In the RIA, IPA III and SDG thematic area participants recommended the implementation of:

- ✧ *Capacity development on the regulatory framework and RIA including analytical skills and creation of public policies and/or Implementation of public policies based on results (result-based management), new procedures in the area of RIA, and functioning of control bodies in the area of RIA, harmonisation of evidence-based and transparent EU laws based on the views of those who may be affected, strengthening the consultative process in the legislative process, impact assessment, drafting qualitative RIA and PIA reports;*
- ✧ *Capacity development on EU accessions and IPA programming including implementation of Sectorial Operation Programs under IPA III, monitoring and evaluation of IPA III actions and projects, alignment and transposition of EU acquis, management structure for IPA III; transfer from IPA to the European structural and cohesion funds; preparation of programming documents for IPA III (OISs);*
- ✧ *Capacity development on SDGs, including research on the way to use IPA to accelerate specific SDG implementation and exchange on data collecting and monitoring of the SDGs*
- ✧ *Study the proper functioning of the administration structures in the RIA process.*
- ✧ *Preparation of EU integration roadmaps and training on new EU accession methodology;*

In the HRMD thematic area, participants recommended the implementation of the:

- ✧ Support to interoperability of different HRM IT systems and training management systems;
- ✧ Training and exchanges with peers and other practitioners on topics such as leadership, career management, recruitment process, performance management, competency framework, team performance, and professional competencies;
- ✧ Creation of a regional action plan for the development of human resources;
- ✧ Digitalisation of HR process.

In the QM thematic area participants recommended the implementation of the:

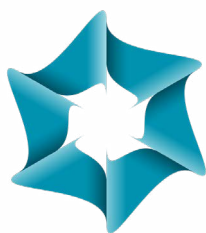
- ✧ Capacity development on the topics such as: External CAF Feedback Experts (EFACs); Common Assessment Framework (CAF) implementation in large and complex organisations/institutions; usability of the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Regulation tailored e-services (their safe use and accessibility) among all CEFTA parties; strengthening of monitoring skills and ways to maintain continuous improvement in quality; digitalisation of the archive/protocol, TOP management organisations;
- ✧ Sharing of experience through CAF practitioners, stronger regional cooperation, benchmarking know-how and mobility schemes;
- ✧ Sharing good practices in CAF implementation and organisation of study visits;
- ✧ Guidance and technical assistance to public administration institutions in developing robust performance measurement and evaluation systems.

In the eGov thematic area participants recommended the implementation of the:

- ✧ Providing information, exchange, and best practices on the latest trends in eGovernment, new technologies and IT solutions, implementation and best practices of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), implementation and best practices of eIDAS - trust service providers, zero paper administration; electronic Identification and trust services; data analytics, emerging technologies, digital project management, and cybersecurity;
- ✧ Specific activities for eGovernment development of cross-border digital platforms in the WB and enhanced work by the Working group.



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Vision:

We are an intergovernmental innovative regional hub for policy research, knowledge sharing, regional cooperation and networking in the field of public administration.

Motto:

Building Together Governance for the Future!

Mission:

We improve regional cooperation, promote shared learning and support the development of public administrations within the Western Balkans, and support the integration of the countries in the region into the EU.



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