



ReSPA

Regional School
of Public Administration

BUILDING TOGETHER
GOVERNANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Annual Report

16 October 2021 – 15 October 2022



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by the European Union

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**Ms. Maja Handjiska
Trendafilova**
ReSPA Director



Mr. Gentian Xhaxhiu
*Legal Manager and
Programme Coordinator*



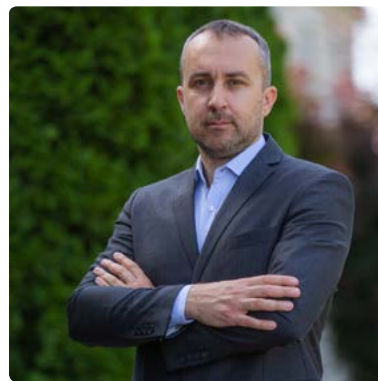
Mr. Borislav Orechovski
*Operations and Finance
Manager*



Ms. Ivana Bajo
*Personal Assistant to the
Director*



Ms. Natasa Kuč
*Finance/Operations
Assistant*



Mr. Vladimir Nikolić
Programme Assistant



Mr. Milutin Rasović
IT Technician



Mr. Janko Rovčanin
Driver and General Services



Ms. Milena Drača
*Communication &
Visibility Officer*

ReSPA Project Staff

The Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) is a joint initiative financed by the European Commission and the Western Balkans governments. It is managed and governed by five Members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, while Kosovo* is the beneficiary.



Mr. Dragan Đurić
Programme Manager



**Ms. Ranka Bartula-
Mušikić**
Programme Manager



Ms. Olivera Damjanović
Programme Manager



Ms. Vanja Ivanović
Programme Assistant



Mr. Slaven Bukarica
Programme Manager



Ms. Marija Orović
Programme Assistant

ReSPA is recognised as the leading regional organisation for public administration development. As a networking and knowledge hub, it strongly affects individual levels of training, skills enhancement, and professionalism among civil servants and improves the organisational capacities within public administration institutions in the Western Balkans.

To meet the growing needs of the Western Balkans governments, ReSPA shapes its program of work in several key areas – policy coordination and development, better regulation, human resources development, quality management and e-Government. So far, through more than 600 various ReSPA activities (training, workshops, seasonal schools, etc.), more than 8,000 civil servants from the entire region advanced their capacities, knowledge and experience they embedded into the reform processes within their respective institutions and countries.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and ICJ Advisory opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of independence.

List of Acronyms

BACID	- Building Administrative Capacities in the Danube Region
BC	- Budget Committee
CAF	- Common Assessment Framework
CSO	- Civil Society Organization
DG	- Directorate General
EC	- European Commission
EIPA	- European Institute for Public Administration
EU	- European Union
EUI	- European Union Integration
GB	- Governing Board
GIZ	- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IPA	- Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IT	- Information Technology
KDZ	- Zentrum für Verwaltungsforschung
NEAR	- Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
NIPAC	- National IPA Coordinator
NISPAcee	- Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe
OECD	- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGP	- Open Government Partnership
PA	- Programme Assistant
OGD	- Open Government Data
PAR	- Public Administration Reform
PM	- Programme Manager
PoW	- Programme of Work
PoA	- Plan of Activities
QPAS	- Quality of Public Administration and Services
QM	- Quality Management
RACVIAC	- Centre for Security Cooperation
RAI	- Regional Anti-corruption initiative
RCC	- Regional Cooperation Council
ReSPA	- Regional School of Public Administration
RQMC	- Regional Quality Management Centre
SEE	- South East Europe
SIGMA	- Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SL	- Senior Official level
ICT	- Information and Communication Technology
HRMD	- Human Resources Management and Development
WG	- Working Group

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Foreword by the Chair of the ReSPA Governing Board

Reforming the Public Administration in Albania is one of the key elements under the pillar “Fundamentals: Good Governance, Democracy and Rule of Law” of the NSDI 2015- 2020, with the vision of developing a public administration in line with the European Administration’s standards aiming to provide high quality services to citizens and businesses, in a transparent and efficient way, through the use of modern technologies and innovative services, in line with the European Integration, through impartial and professional civil servants part of efficient structures, which is also the vision of the Cross-Cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy (CCPARS).

CCPARS 2015-2022 was designed to link the policies set out in the NSDI II and the long-term objectives, which aiming at improving the effectiveness of the public administration, reducing the levels of corruption, creating a professional, impartial and merit-based system as well and also improving

public services and administrative and oversight procedures.

During 2022 a lot of advancement in policies, regulation and back-office enablers such as interoperability of systems were carried out to provide better service delivery to all citizens and business. Fully digitalized public services have been a priority and starting from 1st May 2022 the services were delivered online.

This new phase of service delivery was accompanied with a new system of Circulation of Documents with Electronic Signatures, based on the Decision of Council of Ministers lessens the burden for the citizens and businesses to receive documents and attestations from every possible office in the public administration. Furthermore, this system enables the coordinators of that system to undertake daily monitoring of the services being delivered by the state institutions and check if deadlines are met.

Nowadays Albania is working with ReSPA and UNDP on introducing the quality management approach in the public administration, focusing on service delivery agencies. This approach is creating a base to take care of Standard Operating Procedures from one side, and monitoring the quality of service delivery from the other side.

Feeling really proud for what has been achieved during this period, despite the difficult situation created in Albania and in the region by cyber attack, a new road was set up and digitalization process will be irreversible.

I will take this opportunity to thank all our International Partners, who supported us, and especially to the European Commission who accompanied us in every step of this transformation process.



Ms. Milva Ekonomi,
Minister of State for Standards of Services
Republic of Albania

I will use this opportunity to thank all colleagues and partners of ReSPA countries for their trust, institutional cooperation, and always constructive exchange of experiences. ReSPA is a very useful mechanism for regional co-operation in strengthening the public administrations of the Western Balkans. One of the most important characteristics of ReSPA is sharing views during the implementation of public administration reform priorities, as well as in building efficient and stable administrative systems, structures, and processes that deliver high quality services.

“Citizens in the center” will always be a great motto to stimulate all the Public Administration Agencies and staff to deliver their services and design the policies with integrity and full transparency.

ReSPA Director’s Welcome



Ms. Maja Handjiska Trendafilova,
ReSPA Director

Dear ReSPA partners and friends,

It is my pleasure to present you with ReSPA Annual Report and achievements towards building modern, professional, open, accountable and transparent public administrations. In accomplishing that goal, we jointly work on public administrations’ organisational, technological and cultural shifts that reshape our present and future.

In this process, ReSPA plays a crucial role by deepening regional dialogue at the highest level; supporting the design and deployment of reforms; providing technical assistance and capacity-building tools and facilitating the regional exchange of knowledge.

ReSPA’s achievements generated over the last eleven years are the joint success of the dedicated ReSPA team, its stakeholders and its partners. I am proud to continue on the same track with an upbeat trend and a sharp focus on constant improvements.

Though amidst very challenging global and regional contexts, this year is one of the crucial ones regarding ReSPA’s further strategic orientation. Ministers from ReSPA Members confirmed the clear commitment to ReSPA’s work and regional cooperation on public administration reforms **endorsing the extension of the ReSPA Agreement and mandate until 2031**. Additionally, with the clear support of the European Commission, **ReSPA is ready for the new development cycle within the fifth EC Action Grant 2023-2026**.

Finally, ReSPA revised **Strategy 2019-2024** aims to strengthen cooperation between the region’s public administrations, promote collective learning and knowledge transfer, and

facilitate the realization of Members’ European integration aspirations through upholding and supporting the European Principles of Public Administration. ReSPA Strategy was revised in response to technological advances, shifting political and economic landscapes, increasing complexity of policy issues, green transition, as well as evolving Member priorities. With it ReSPA is adapting to address emerging challenges and exploit new opportunities, harnessing the dual powers of innovation and transformation while retaining collaboration as the underlying organizational driver.

Together, during this year, we organised 62 networking and capacity-building actions involving 1346 civil servants from the entire region who advanced their capacities, knowledge and experience to meet the growing needs of citizens and businesses and implemented five regional comparative research projects with pertinent PAR policy recommendations. These results couldn’t be realised without an exceptional ReSPA team, government representatives involved in our governance structures, working groups, liaison officers as well as representatives of the EU, and numerous experts engaged in different areas.

In an effort to further boost regional ownership, the implementation period of this Annual report also saw a massive uptake of the on-demand In-country technical assistance support instrument, leading to a number of concrete reform deliverables in the region.

The quality of our public administrations is a clear determinant of growth and prosperity and is crucial for advancing long-term strategic and policy objectives and delivering to the needs of citizens. Successful public administration reforms are crucial for more prosperous economies, more resilient societies, and for our accelerated EU integration!

We will continue to empower civil servants by enhancing regional cooperation and knowledge transfer and providing tailor-made expertise and capacity-building tools to better equip them for addressing significant societal challenges.

Looking ahead, ReSPA stays fully committed to our region’s transformational journey and our most valuable asset – our people, as enshrined in the organisation’s motto, “Building Together Governance for the Future”.

1. Executive Summary

This Report covers the actions implemented from **16 October 2021 to 15 October 2022**.

By implementing the actions defined in its Work Programmes, ReSPA has assisted in policy development, depoliticisation and professionalisation of public administration, as well as improving the quality of public services. With the clear support of the European Commission and joint efforts with the Western Balkans governments, implemented actions have contributed toward building transparent, accountable and professional public administration institutions in the region. Continuous improvement of resilient public administrations, innovation and digitalisation remain high on ReSPA's agenda for the current and upcoming period.

ReSPA has addressed some important challenges emerging in the administrations of the Western Balkans: the attractiveness of public administration; enhanced service delivery based on digitalisation, innovation and quality assurance for user-oriented public administrations, as well as the resilience of public administrations ready to face the emerging challenges and crisis. Leveraging on its regional approach, ReSPA supported the design and implementation of reforms related to public administration, good governance and institution building; provided learning and capacity-building tools and peer-based guidance; facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as promoted research and innovation in public service. In addition, ReSPA has supported WB administrations with expertise in the forms of diagnostic analyses, comparative assessments and policy recommendations on ways to address reform needs aiming to boost sharing of relevant good practices through regional intergovernmental networks and enhanced mobility among public servants.

In full synergy with the new accession momentum, with screening starting for the first-time encompassing PAR as part of the fundamentals negotiations cluster for Albania and North Macedonia, the clear recommendation for granting to Bosnia and Herzegovina the candidate status and the importance of assisting all ReSPA members on PAR related reforms and initiatives, ReSPA Secretariat finalized the revision of ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024 and the priorities of the next EC grant (post-2022), under the strategic guidance of the Governing Board.

In pursuing its vision, ReSPA has expanded its partnership and stakeholders base with numerous regional and international organisations and supported the interaction of public servants with renowned experts, EC officials, academia, civil society, practitioners from member states, etc.

Strengthening Public Administration Capacity within ReSPA's Purview

Number of networking and cooperation activities

ReSPA organised 62 networking and capacity-building actions (High-Level Policy Dialogues, Seasonal Schools, Conferences, Workshops, Working visits, Training, Meetings, Mobility schemes, and In-country support workshops) encompassing 1346 participants, with 3668 participant days and involving 147 international and regional experts and implemented five regional comparative research initiatives.

Number of institutions in the region represented at regional networking events

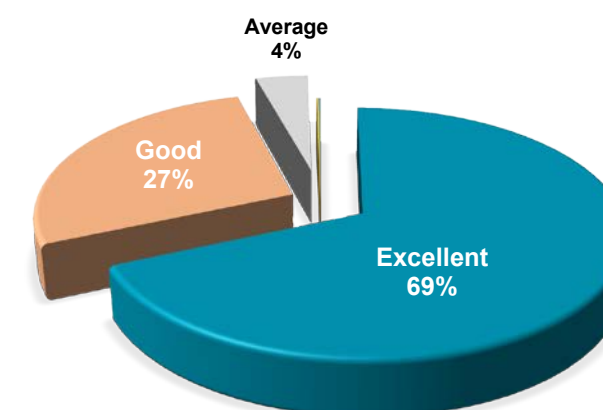
During the reporting period, representatives of 145 institutions in the region participated in the regional networking events: 26 from Albania, 66 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 12 from North Macedonia, 14 from Montenegro, 23 from Serbia and 4 from Kosovo*.

¹ We shall use the term action instead of activity throughout the report, and this shall mean: seminars, workshops, conferences, seasonal schools, trainings, mobility schemes, in-country support activities, etc.

% of persons who have enhanced their skills, knowledge, and awareness of the following thematic areas

96%

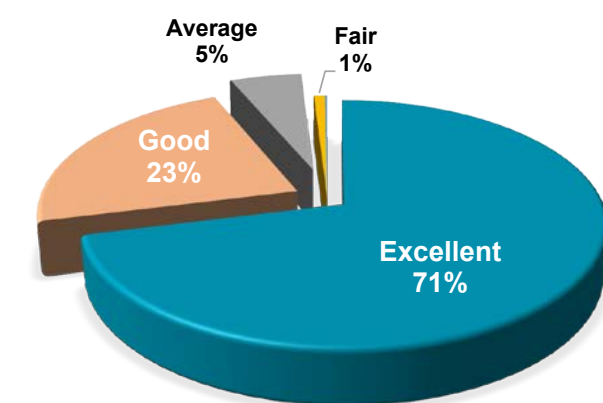
of all the participants evaluated the content of ReSPA actions as excellent/good.



CONTENT

94%

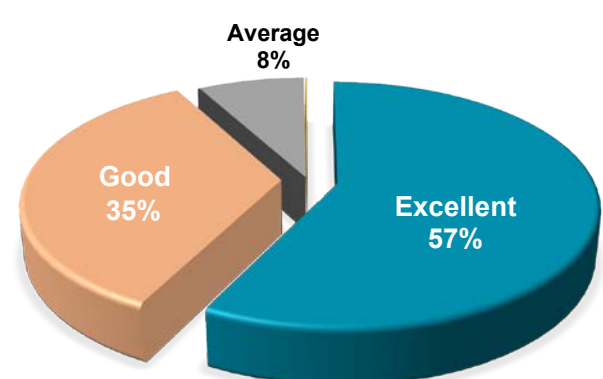
of all the participants evaluated the applied methodology as excellent/good



METHODOLOGY

92%

of all the participants evaluated the relevance of the ReSPA actions as excellent/good



RELEVANCE

ReSPA's main highlights

By empowering civil servants from the region, ReSPA supported joint work towards progress in professionalisation and building public trust in the Western Balkans institutions and towards collaborative public administrations that are the backbone of all the reform processes. In this process, ReSPA extended tailor-made networking, expertise and capacity-building tools to better equip civil servants for addressing crucial PAR in the areas of a strategic and institutional framework, policy development and coordination, public service and human resource management, digitisation, service delivery and quality management in public administration.

A renewed effort has been made on behalf of ReSPA to liaise strongly with its members, key regional and international partners, but also wider stakeholders, including youth, academia, think tanks, etc., to build reform mission alliances and partnerships focused on lasting PAR in Western Balkans. Such efforts were also aimed at repositioning ReSPA as a strong reform agent in the field of PAR, able to respond to the changing needs in the region, as well as at shedding a greater political spotlight on good governance reforms as fundamental for sustainable and inclusive growth.

A significant uptake in the use of ReSPA instruments – In-Country support and mobility schemes has been noted, attesting to their strong relevance and tangible contribution to ongoing reform processes and targeting all areas of expertise of ReSPA: from digitalisation, policy planning, good governance and HRMD.

Ministers from ReSPA Members endorsed the extension of the ReSPA Agreement and mandate until 2031, ensuring thus the legal and institutional sustainability and showing a clear commitment towards regional cooperation and implementation of fundamental PA reforms as a backbone for resilient and democratic societies in the region.



Western Balkans Ministerial Conference on Public Administration Reforms, 15th September 2022, Skopje, North Macedonia

Furthermore, Ministers renewed the highest-level policy dialogue on Public Administration Reform at the “**Western Balkans PAR Ministerial Conference**”, a unique forum for the exchange of practices and mutual learning for around 150 practitioners and public servants across the region and international guests and speakers. The high-level political dialogue on PAR brought new insights and actions to be taken forward and shed a greater regional political spotlight on the good governance reforms.

The unique recognition initiative, the **Public Administration Award in the Western Balkans, 2022 edition**, under the motto “Better Services for Better Lives of Citizens”, reached the stage of awarding exceptional practices in the provision of better public services at the Ceremony held during the “Western Balkans PAR Ministerial Conference”. Three winners were awarded for the distinctive, innovative and future-looking approach, and the other eight initiatives were awarded the Special Recognition award. The 2022 PA Award was specifically designed to recognise public administration efforts and innovations at the national and local levels.



In terms of highlights on thematic programmatic developments, a significant segment of ReSPA work during this year was focused on building regional capacities on EU accession negotiations as well as management of EU financial assistance, particularly through the successful organisation of the **Seasonal School on EU Accession Negotiations** and the series of **actions supporting programming and implementation of EU pre-accession assistance** (one regional Conference and four thematic workshops focusing on IPA III windows).



With the strong support of EC representatives from DG NEAR, ReSPA assisted in decrypting the IPA III programming process, aiming to strengthen strategies (policies), people (public servants) and financial support (among others IPA III). ReSPA ambition is to create a critical mass of public servants throughout the region equipped with a set of knowledge and skills for dealing with the European integration and accession process in the region for driving and leading future change.



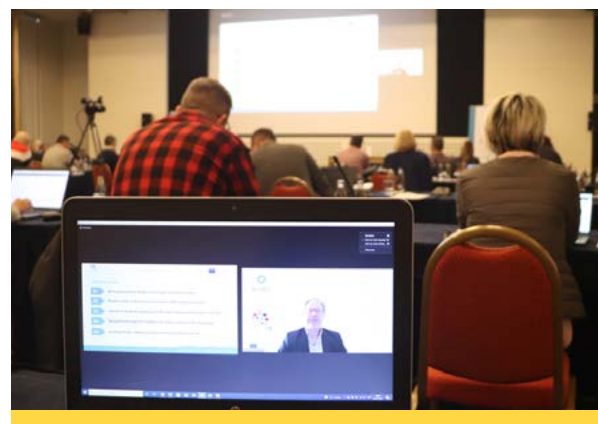


ReSPA established the **Regional Academy for Policy Coordination**, a new and robust mechanism for enhancing policy-making in the Western Balkans and making them more efficient and effective. The Academy kicked off in October 2022 with its first module on evidence-based policymaking and will continue during the upcoming years as a long-term, sustainable and more comprehensive learning and highly-participatory regionally-owned initiative.



The **Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC)** within ReSPA proved an essential resource of expertise and knowledge that public administration institutions need to apply in quality management to improve their services and overall performance. From the first certification for the "Effective CAF User" Label being implemented, CAF projects, extended training for CAF Facilitators and External CAF evaluators to Regional Quality Management Analyses and a regional Conference on Quality Management - the RQMC has been covering the needs for the institutionalisation of Quality management systems through building the capacities needed to apply it.

The **Seasonal School on Digital Transformation** continued to equip and inform the public officials working in the area of digitalisation with the latest insights and progress made in the areas of digital transformation that are of vital importance for the public sector to be able to keep pace with accelerated progress in this complex area. Furthermore, the Open Government Partnership Western Balkans Regional meetings served as an opportunity to present the models and instruments for enhancing the opening of governmental data as one of the most important policy areas of OGP.



In-Country support mechanism

Within the reporting period of this Annual report, 16 projects were undertaken to meet the specific needs in overcoming different challenges of our stakeholders on their paths toward reforming public administrations. By providing practical solutions, Members were supported in further digitalising public administration, developing better-regulated public policies and legislation that delivers without creating unnecessary burdens and enriching the learning of civil servants through different modules and approaches to respond to societal and digital challenges on eminent topics such as policy coordination, performance appraisal, strategy and roadmap development, managerial accountability, etc.



Mobility Scheme

With five undertaken mobility schemes, ReSPA enabled teams of civil servants to gain successful peer experience from different contexts. They had an opportunity to learn and develop their skill sets by exchanging and learning from relevant public institutions from other countries in the region.



ReSPA co-creates and contributes to numerous regional conferences

ReSPA took an active role with its partner institutions in designing and contributing to joint regional actions that tackled vital topics for the Western Balkans:

ReSPA, OECD/SIGMA and the Ministry of State for Standards of Services of Albania co-created the Conference “Good Governance Foundation for Quality Management in Public Administration” - Under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Albania, the Conference showcased the importance of the improvement of public administration and public services by introducing instruments for Quality Management (models, tools and standards) perceived as one of the key prerequisites for the sustainability of public administration reforms, modernisation and better performance of public administration that ultimately improvement of user satisfaction.

ReSPA and OECD/SIGMA organised the Conference “Achieving administrative simplification through evidence-based policymaking in the Western Balkans”, designed to identify ways to achieve better administrative simplification in policymaking and public service delivery.

ReSPA, Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF), and the Bled School of Management designed and delivered the regional workshop “ERP and IPA coordinators as inspired leaders”, bringing forward the message that reaching a collaborative approach, converging the strategic planning processes, breaking silos and keeping constant communication among IPA, ERP, PAR and strategic planning units across each of the administrations is the path forward.

Contribution to the Western Balkans Digital Summit - With the enduring commitment to advancing digitalisation, service delivery and open data culture, ReSPA contributed to the panel “The Use of Data in Digital Economy” and shed light on using big data and open data, focusing on the purposeful use of enormous quantities of governmental data to increase transparency and fuel a knowledge-based economy and society.

Contribution to the Annual Summer School for Public Servants of Transport Community Secretariat to support administrative capacity building on green agenda and implement core PAR principles in sectoral policies.

Contribution to the Annual Meeting of OECD’s Global Network of Schools of Government “Exploring post-pandemic learning cultures in the public sector”. As part of a stellar panel, “Developing the resilient civil service of the future”, ReSPA presented the Western Balkans’ regional perspective on the post-pandemic learning culture in the public sector.

Contribution to CEF and WeBER Conferences and RCC’s Annual Meeting showcased elevated cooperation with regional partners towards a more robust and resilient public administration - ReSPA took an active role in the regional CEF Forum Conference on “Strong Institutions deliver on Their Mandate”, WeBER Network Conference on “Mainstreaming PAR in sectoral policies”, and the 14th Annual Meeting of Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). For the first time, ReSPA has also been invited to partake in the regular coordination meetings of key regional cooperation organisations with the European Commission.

Contribution to the 30th NISPACE Annual Conference “Crises, Vulnerability and Resilience in Public Administration.” - Public servants from ReSPA members attended the Conference while ReSPA attracted the interest of a broad and diverse audience of academics, researchers and practitioners from Central and Eastern Europe with its dedicated panel moderated by ReSPA focused on resilience and crisis management in the Western Balkans.

ReSPA and UN Bosnia and Herzegovina organised the Regional Conference on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Participants from the Western Balkans shared regional experiences and good practices between countries, especially in coordinating policy-making, implementation and the broader strategic planning and development management system in the region, aiming to boost awareness and implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

ReSPA also continued its **active participation in the EU’s Network of Directors of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration (DISPA)** and is looking forward to future participation in the work of the **EUPAN network**.



ReSPA supported the development of two regional self-assessment initiatives, developed two studies as well as one regional periodical analysis



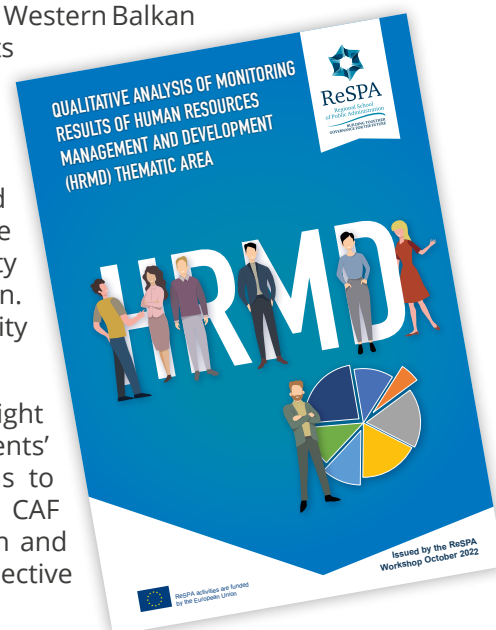
ReSPA developed a tool, a **self-assessment framework**, for conducting the self-assessments of both merit recruitment and performance appraisal. As a result, two regional analyses were prepared to present the state of the art and recommendations for addressing the challenges.

ReSPA has finalised the content of two studies, which will be published by the end of 2022:

Study on competency frameworks in the Western Balkans takes a closer look at the professional requirements and competency frameworks at the central level to understand their usefulness in supporting different human resources management (HRM) areas in the Western Balkan civil services. *The study concludes that* the professional requirements in the region are usually seen as a choice between two extremes: formal knowledge and skills vs behavioural competencies.

The study on Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) in the Western Balkan Civil Service analyses the use of the HRMIS and related applications in the digitalisation of HRM processes through three dimensions: the analysis of the technology dimension, functionality dimension and the analysis of data availability and quality dimension. The study also provides recommendations on data availability, quality and reporting to be possibly addressed by the administrations.

Periodical Regional QM Analysis was developed aiming to get insight into the level of Quality Management (QM) and primarily its instruments' (mainly CAF) application in the Western Balkans region, as well as to show the existing needs for the institutionalisation of CAF, external CAF evaluation and of embedding QM at the policy level. The integration and reference to QM/CAF in the strategic PAR documents and their respective importance have also been examined.



2. Implementation of the ReSPA Programme of Work

Five ReSPA's working groups (WG) of Centre-of-Government Institutions, Better Regulation, Human Resource Management and Development, E-Governance and Quality Management, as well as the Programme Committee, have met regularly and performed most of the planned activities within the strategic areas.

ReSPA, in consultation with the members of the respective Working Groups, adopted the Programme of Work by the end of 2021 and finalised the bi-annual Programme of Work 2021-2022 accordingly. It also pursues recommendation of the European Commission and pays special attention to support region in policy planning to respond effectively to societal concerns and strengthen alignment with the EU standards and acquis, modernizing public services focusing on digital & citizen-centered service delivery and building capacities of public administrations as attractive employer by creating more professional and merit-based administrations with strong leadership. In line with the philosophy of the EU accession process, ReSPA members are expected to advance steadily on their respective reform agendas in the areas of the 'fundamentals', to secure solid and irreversible achievements in the rule of law, the economy, the functioning of democratic institutions, and public administration reform. Having this in mind, ReSPA Secretariat, under the strategic guidance of the Governing Board and the programmatic orientation of the Programme Committee designed the actions of 2022 in such a manner and priority-oriented, so that they contribute to PAR advancement in the region.

2.1. Improved Implementation of PAR Strategies across the region

Further progress in key PAR areas, including EI planning and co-ordination, can help the Western Balkans to deliver better policies and services to citizens and accelerate growth. Public administration reform is paramount to strengthening governance at all levels, although there are still delays and shortcomings in the implementation of PAR strategies in the Western Balkans in general. For Western Balkan administrations further efforts are needed to ensure the quality of the strategic frameworks and strengthen capacities for evidence-informed policymaking, while policy monitoring capacities should also be increased. Various assessments stress the need for improved implementation of both PAR and PFM Strategies in the Western Balkan administrations, while the quality of the strategic frameworks has yet to be strengthened.

Having these in mind, ReSPA has developed specific support to its members, not only at regional level, but also direct support through the in-country support mechanism, especially related to quality of policy planning in the Centre of Government institutions as well as alignment of policy making and legal drafting with the EU Better Regulation Agenda. More specifically:

2.1.1 Quality of policy planning in the Centre of Government institutions

The quality of policymaking is very important to steer growth and social development and help manage continuous crises. ReSPA has promoted throughout its actions the importance that policymaking should be predictable as much as possible and evidence-based; it should be planned, at least, for the medium term, linked to the budget perspective and consulted with relevant stakeholders. Overall, in the region, the quality of policy planning has experienced improvements, but administrations face different types of challenges, such as gaps in the methodological frameworks, limited co-ordination, and central guidance, which result in weak planning and implementation of government work. Activities implemented under this thematic area are highlighted below:

Regional Conference on Policy Coordination in the Western Balkans brought together senior public servants from the Western Balkans responsible for implementing the government role in policy coordination in various aspects as well as renowned experts and practitioners from across the region. The Conference focused on comparing the legislative and institutional framework for policy coordination in Western Balkans administrations, providing examples of the coordination of PAR and PFM strategies, strategic planning and mid-term planning, coordination of EU integration process, EU acquis alignment and IPA III assistance. Through comparison of experiences, presentation of successful practices and finally through the answering the question how civil society sees the quality of policy coordination in Western Balkans, the Conference provided new initiatives on further strengthening policy coordination in the Region. An informal Network of Policy Coordinators in Western Balkan was established which discussed further plans of ReSPA support to efforts of the governments in improving policy coordination.



The meeting of the ReSPA Programme Committee targeted the state of play, goals, priorities, and examples of good practices in PAR in the Western Balkans. Participants exchanged views on the state of play of Public Administration Reform in the latest EU Commission Enlargement package 2021 and the novelties introduced in IPA III. The Ministerial PAR Declaration was introduced to Programme Committee Members, which committed to embed the objectives of the Declaration, to the maximum extent possible, in the internal PAR Strategic Framework. In addition, ReSPA presented the recommendations for improving policy coordination in Western Balkans, which came after ReSPA prepared a detailed analysis on policy coordination in each administration of the region.



The first meeting of the Regional Network of Policy Coordinators focused on the design of the program of the ReSPA Academy on the evidence-based policymaking process. Country presentations were held during a participatory session on policy coordination and evidence-based policymaking, targeting the following matters: What reform measures have been recently implemented and how successful are they; What challenges remain, and how do administrations intend to overcome them. In addition to the members of the Network, the meeting was attended by various civil servants dealing with the coordination of public policies in ReSPA Members as well as representatives of the academia from the region, and of OECD/SIGMA.



The Seasonal School on EU Accession Negotiation assembled civil servants dealing with the accession process eager to learn more on the EU accession process, new accession negotiations methodology, legal and political dimensions of EU enlargement, and experiences from Montenegro and Serbia in the negotiation process for EU membership. Besides topics of a more general character *the programme* was focused on specific chapters of the acquis, such as: Intellectual property Law; Transport Policy; Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments funds; Judiciary and Fundamental Rights; Consumer Protection and Health, etc. An interactive session on negotiation techniques attracted interest of participants to a large extent. The Seasonal School on EU Accession Negotiations brought together 30 public servants dealing with stabilization and association process, EU acquis alignment, and EU accession negotiations from ReSPA Members.



The Western Balkans PAR Ministerial Conference brought together ministers and high-ranking EC representatives in charge of PAR as well as the most important PAR actors from the region to discuss the future of citizen-centered approach in governance, digitalization agenda, transparency, and decisive political leadership as a cornerstone of public administrations' organizational and cultural transformation that enhance the welfare of citizens. Speakers and panellists, while acknowledging the substantial progress made in this regard, concluded that, enhancing trust in public sector shall be a priority in the Western Balkans, while an impartial public administration is key for attracting and developing talents in public sector. European Commission practitioners emphasised that Public Administration Reform, in addition to being an important pillar of EU accession process, is a crucial tool towards democratic

and resilient societies in the Western Balkans. The conference was a unique forum of exchange of practices and mutual learning for around 150 practitioners and public servants across the region and international guests and speakers.

2.1.2 Alignment of policy making and legal drafting with the EU Better Regulation Agenda and the EU funds planning capacities

Regulatory reform, evidence-based policy making, stakeholder engagement and inter-ministerial consultation **have experienced improvements** in many Western Balkan administrations, mainly due to the adoption or upgrade of key regulations and of previously missing guidelines, as well as a better and more consistent application of existing tools of regulatory policy management in practice. Nevertheless, all administrations still face major challenges in ensuring fully harmonized and effectively functioning government planning and co-ordination systems and further strengthening of the quality, relevance and impact of key regulatory management tools, such as regulatory impact assessment (RIA) and public consultation. The latter, as the two main regulatory management tools for ensuring evidence-based and participatory policy making, are formally established, and used in all administrations of the Western Balkans. These two areas, also thanks to ReSPA extensive activities in relation to them, have shown satisfactory progress, largely in the recognition of strengthening of the regulatory and methodological frameworks and more consistent implementation of the existing formal rules. Activities implemented under this thematic area are highlighted below:



Thematic meeting of the Better Regulation Working Group focused on citizens' and civil society empowerment and engagement in the policy and legislative development by identifying and presenting inspirational models from European Union in public consultation and engagement with civil society. In addition, five representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from the region presented their assessment on the quality of public consultations in their respective countries and future perspectives. Through fruitful dialogue, CSOs representatives and members of the Working Group enhanced the exchange of practices and identified good examples from the Region by raising challenges, difficulties, and plans for the future. Among the main conclusions of the meeting was that introduction of early consultations is crucial for improving legislative making process in the Western Balkans.



Regional Conference on the Instrument of pre-Accession Assistance IPA III was organized in coordination with DG NEAR. It brought together representatives of public administration from the Western Balkans dealing with the coordination of EU financial assistance and representatives of DG NEAR and EU Delegations to reveal all the aspects related to the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III. Through a set of presentations by representatives of the European Commission and renowned experts, the Conference practically brought closer the new financial perspective to the Western Balkans public administrations to smoothly fulfil the EU accession criteria through deep and comprehensive reforms. It envisaged the future steps on all the aspects related to IPA III to ensure further, smooth implementation of defined goals and priorities of the Western Balkans public administrations. A comprehensive document was developed after the Conference containing the operational conclusions and a set of questions and matters to be clarified by EC.

The regional workshop dedicated to Window 1 of IPA III "Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy" brought together NIPAC Offices as well as IPA Units in Ministries of Justice and Ministries of Interior, speakers from European Commission, EU Delegations, and renowned IPA III experts. Participants were introduced with the main novelties of the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and important elements were explained, such as the policy first approach (which replaces the sector approach), the performance-based approach as well as the necessity to link IPA Programming with National development strategies. A specific session on how to ensure the quality of Actions proposed to be financed under IPA III was held. Representatives of the administrations had an interesting session with the Unit in charge of the Rule of Law in DG NEAR where they discussed information related to programming actions under Window 1 for 2023.

The Regional Workshop on Window 2 of IPA III "Good governance, EU acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication", served as a platform of discussion among NIPAC Offices, various institutions from the Western Balkans (General Secretariat, PM Offices, Ministry of Finance, European integration, Parliament etc.) as well as officials of DG NEAR (EC). Representatives of DG NEAR, discussed extensively with public servants from the region on the programming of IPA III allocations for Window 2. DG NEAR team emphasized that there is a necessity to bring IPA programming closer to the strategic planning Units while institutions in charge of PAR and Good Governance should have a decisive role in the identification, design and development of the actions to be funded under this Window. Participants shared the same view that for proper management of EU pre-accession assistance, it is crucial to strengthen administrative capacities and have a professional civil service. Specific sessions also covered other relevant topics such as the design of "budget support" actions, development of indicators, IPA III Result Framework, mainstreaming gender equality in action documents, etc.

Regional Workshop on Window 3 of IPA III "Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity", brought together not only NIPAC Offices, but also representatives from CFCUs, NAO Support Offices and IPA Units in Ministries of Transport, Energy and Environment. During the discussions, DG NEAR representatives listed the top priorities which the administrations should address through EU Funded actions: circular economy, waste management, fighting and monitoring pollution, energy security (phasing out of coal and carbon-based industries), sustainable urban mobility and investments related to the TEN-T Network. On the other hand, representatives of the six administrations also presented their priority actions for funding during the upcoming years (2022-2023) in the environment, transport, and energy sectors. A crucial session was the one led by DG NEAR IMBC Verifications Unit which presented the new management structures for the management of IPA III that the administrations need to establish for a smooth transition from IPA II to IPA III.

Regional Workshop on Window 4 of IPA III "Competitiveness and inclusive growth" targeted IPA Units in Ministries of Economy, Social protection and employment, Education, Health; Agriculture, etc. The workshop was an opportunity to foster more clarity when it comes to IPA III programming for window 4 and its requirements, but also enabled participants to present some lessons learnt and to discuss challenges, processes and coordination mechanisms and how to improve them, thus ensuring more effective and efficient utilization of IPA III in these sectors. A critical session was devoted to new management structures for the management of IPA III, while for the first time in a regional forum, DG NEAR presented the IPA III Results framework, the tool for measuring progress towards achieving the IPA III indicators.



Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy

Good governance, EU acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication



Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity



Competitiveness and inclusive growth



The *Regional Conference on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* gathered representatives of Centre of Government and RIA oversight Units from the region to share regional experiences and good practices between countries, especially in coordinating policy-making in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Administrations presented their efforts related to coordination and implementation of the 2030 Agenda on achieving the SDGs, highlighting the importance of incorporating the SDGs in the internal strategic frameworks of the countries of the Region, thus enabling a more empowering environment. Participants were also introduced to good practices and challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda within Policy coordination, Institutional framework, Financing and “localization” of indicators for measuring the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.



Selected public servants from the Western Balkans attended the *Trans European Dialogue (TED) Conference 2022*, focusing on “Bureaucratic Transformations: Longitudinal Perspectives on Local and (Supra) National Public Administration”. ReSPA enabled the participation of public servants from ReSPA Members in this event, upon invitation by the University of Bergen. The participatory conference discussed pertinent issues of staff attitudes toward public sector reforms, the difficulties in introducing change in public administration, innovation, failure culture and culture change, etc.



The meetings of the *Centre of Governments (CoG) and Better Regulation (BR) working groups and a joint Working Visit to CEF* – Senior managers and civil servants of CoG and BR units from the relevant institutions of ReSPA Members actively deliberated and analysed different aspects related to structural changes of the governments, program and logistical aspects of organizing the future Academy on evidence-based policymaking process, RIA implementation, and EU law transposition. They also had the opportunity to meet, network, and exchange practices with the Centre of Excellence in

Finance (CEF) experts on various matters related to the region’s reform agenda, focusing mainly on the Economic and Reform Programmes implementation in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, a dedicated meeting was organized with representatives of OECD/SIGMA where civil servants were introduced to the findings of the SIGMA monitoring reports, identifying “red flags” and aiming to address them in the short future through the support of ReSPA and other regional/local initiatives.

The Conference “*Achieving administrative simplification through evidence-based policymaking in the Western Balkans*”, designed by ReSPA and SIGMA to identify ways to achieve better administrative simplification in policymaking and public service delivery. Through various panel discussions composed of public servants from the region, the Conference contributed to knowledge transfer and debate on regional challenges in planning and implementing better regulation and administration simplification programs. They exchanged concrete experiences in simplifying and digitalizing processes to deliver better services for citizens, raising vivid interest from the audience, provoking critical thinking and brainstorming. The Conference was highly praised by attendees since most of the challenges are common in all the WBs administrations, enabling the undertaking of similar approaches to overcome them.



30th NISPAcee Conference and ReSPA Panel was attended by public servants from ReSPA members focused on “Crises, Vulnerability and Resilience in Public Administration”. The Conference brought together academics, researchers and practitioners from Central and Eastern Europe who exchanged their perspectives and different points of view related to educating and training current and future policy and decision-makers. Keynote speakers highlighted that good governance and trust remain fundamental cornerstones of thriving democracies and remain crucial for building resilient institutions. ReSPA attracted the interest of a broad and diverse audience of academics, researchers and practitioners from Central and Eastern Europe with its dedicated panel during the Conference. ReSPA Panellists (senior public servants from the region) deliberated on the opportunities that bring emerging crises as game-changers for public administrations in turbulent times like those we live in.





ReSPA contributed to the Annual capacity building for civil-servants *Summer school of Transport Community* to support administrative capacity-building and boost implementation of core PAR principles in sectoral policies. The school offered participants from the Western Balkans an opportunity to gain sound knowledge and understanding of the latest development at the EU and regional level, specifically focusing on green agenda and safe, smart and sustainable mobility. ReSPA highlighted the importance of knowledge generation and improved skills sets, as well as building regional peer and practitioners' networks. No matter the sectoral scope – all policies and strategic and regulatory frameworks must rest upon the core principles of sound and coherent policy-making: evidence-based, public consultations and impact assessments, with inbuilt monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to cater for any adjustment needs. With transport policies being a vital factor for economic development, this capacity-building initiative strongly impacted driving connectivity and competitiveness reforms.

The regional workshop “ERP and IPA coordinators as inspired leaders” designed and delivered by ReSPA, Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF) and the Bled School of Management, brought together public servants from the Western Balkans and Turkey, dealing with the coordination of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) as well as coordination of the IPA III instrument. The workshop aimed to bring forward the message that reaching a collaborative approach, converging the strategic planning processes, breaking silos and keeping constant communication among IPA, ERP, PAR and strategic planning units across each of the administrations is the path forward. The workshop helped participants to have a holistic understanding of the various roles of public officials involved in the ERP development and the IPA programming and identified potentials for deeper regional cooperation and networking. Special space during the workshop was devoted to capacity building session aiming to develop skills for leading informal and formal teams across the institutions and developing collaborative spirit and reconciliation tools.



2.2. Improved Professionalisation and Depoliticization of the Civil Service System

No changes can be made without qualified, motivated and dedicated people. A lack of well-qualified staff is one of the main reasons for low administrative capacity and weak performance of public authorities throughout the region. Although there is awareness on the need to create more professional public administration which is based on merit-based administrations, there is a challenge to build a professional and stable public administration. Attracting, development and retaining talent remains a challenge which requires capable and knowledgeable leadership that will fulfil these tasks.

ReSPA continued with its support to the administrations to meet the challenges on their way to making the civil service systems professional and depoliticized. ReSPA provided support in addressing both merit-recruitment and performance appraisal. ReSPA took a closer look at the professional requirements and competency frameworks at the central level trying to understand their usefulness in supporting different human resources management (HRM) areas and provided recommendations for its members on the steps that should be undertaken for addressing the identified issues. Establishment of functional HRMIS was supported by ReSPA through the analyses of the use of the HRMIS and related applications in the digitalisation of HRM processes. Technology, functionality, data availability and quality were analysed and recommendations were prepared to be possibly addressed by the administrations. Exchange of experience, presenting examples of good practice and learning from one another but also from EU countries remains a useful tool that all administrations are enabled to utilise.

Self-assessment report on merit recruitment – ReSPA continued with supporting its members in conducting the self-assessments with support of a self-assessment framework that was developed in 2020. Based on the ReSPA study from 2020, a framework was conceived as a self-assessment tool for ReSPA members to reflect on their recruitment practices and to identify gaps. Following the analysis, the reports were prepared reflecting on the recruitment practices, identified gaps and proposed recommendations. Through presentation of the reports at the meeting held in Tirana HRMD WG members were supported in the exchange of experience and learning from one another at a meeting of the HRMD WG members.

Self-assessment report on performance appraisal - As a follow up of the training on performance appraisal with the aim to enhance participants' skills in areas which pose particular challenge to more effective implementation of performance appraisal (development of objectives, providing ongoing feedback and coaching, agile management and link of performance appraisal to other HRM functions), ReSPA initiated development of the user-friendly framework for self-assessment of performance appraisal. The framework is based on the check list provided in the guidelines on performance appraisal produced by ReSPA in 2020. ReSPA also supported countries to fill out of the performance appraisal frameworks based on which the report has been produced. The results of the report were presented at the workshop in Tirana.



Workshop on the state of the art of merit recruitment and performance appraisal in the Western Balkans targeted participants from ReSPA members, presenting the findings of their self-assessment reports, state of art in their respective countries in regard to both performance appraisal and merit-based recruitment. In addition, several good practice examples were presented and discussed. The Workshop contributed to strengthening the work of the HRMD WG in merit recruitment and performance appraisal and exploring possibilities for cooperation and exchange of good practices.



During the *Workshop on competency frameworks and career development* the participants gained better understanding of the competency management and career development. With each administration presenting their competency frameworks, they learned from one another through the exchange of their experiences, but also through the presentation of three practices from the EU on competency-based management (Lithuania, Ireland and Slovenia) and two practices on career development (Estonia and Belgium).



The workshop on "Digitalization of Human Resources Management Data and Processes in the Western Balkans" enabled the exchange of experiences on digitalization of Human Resources Management data and processes among the ReSPA members. Relevant case examples were provided from Members on interoperability, inclusion of local self-government levels, self-service functionalities, digitization of trainings, integration with tax declaration systems, etc, while the case of digitalisation of HRM processes in Estonian public administration was presented as an inspirational example of the potential benefits of fully-operational HRMIS. The participants also learned about the impact of emerging technologies and the provisions of PAR strategies regarding digitalization of human resources management in the Western Balkans.

2.3 Improved Quality of Public Services

Service delivery is the area that has most substantially improved in the Western Balkan in the recent years. There are positive trends on improving service delivery with a strong focus on digital services in Albania and in Serbia, and to a lesser extent in North Macedonia, while limited progress was made in modernizing public service delivery in Kosovo* and Montenegro.

Regionally the digital transformation has been high on the political and administrative reform agendas, but results within administrations have been uneven. Based on a clear policy framework and political support, the administrations in the region rapidly digitized services. The availability of online services has proved to be an asset during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Despite the improvements in digitalization, many services are still provided only in a traditional form, leaving the potential provided by digital enablers often underutilized. Besides the unevenness of digitalization throughout the administrations, the differences in focus should be noted, while there is a growing importance of cyber-resilience for government infrastructure and services, as attested by recent attacks and systems blockages. Digital for business already yields very positive trends, however, for citizens this trend is more mixed.

Public Administration Award 2022

The provision of better services to improve the lives of citizens was the overarching theme of the 2022 PA Awards. The Awards highlighted future-oriented, innovative elements, solutions, systems, tools and approaches introduced by public administrations. In particular, the Awards recognized efforts that have gone beyond responding to the immediate challenges of the pandemic to develop new or upgraded services with a focus on users' needs and accelerated service delivery with measurable improvements for the lives of citizens. Three main categories of the competition were:

1. Digital transformation of the public sector
2. Quality management for improving services.
3. A public administration for all.

There has been an encouraging interest and turnout registered, with the number of applications doubled from the first edition of 2020.

Three winners were selected, "Beyond National - one stop shops services through their digitalization and interoperability in the Western Balkans", North Macedonia/regional project, "Central Information System for Consumer Protection (CISCP)", Montenegro and Development of key digital enablers for citizens of Serbia, Serbia. **Eight Special Recognition** awards were also provided to initiatives from all ReSPA Members and Kosovo*.

The three winners are awarded with capacity-building "Innovation Learning Journey" to EU where they will meet their peers from the similar projects, either awarded or recognized with EU PA awards. The Journey will contain two workshops on "Public Management" and "Innovation Action Plan". ReSPA, supported by OECD/SIGMA, has the intention of fostering these practices into the Community of good practices so that the knowledge, experience and culture of innovativeness and future looking from these practices can be used as transferable models for replication or inspiration to interested counterparts or the wider public.



2.3.1 Quality management

Within the Service Delivery area of reforming the public administrations, Quality Management (QM) can be seen as the cornerstone of public administration reforms. The quality of services provided needs to be seen as the value that is embedded in civil service striving for excellence in operations. Continuous improvement of the organisations to provide in a more effective and more efficient manner the services with users' needs in its centre needs to be monitored and self-assessed. That puts the CAF (Common assessment Framework) in the spotlight as it improves public sector organisations through self-assessment and contributes to good governance. Quality Management and CAF are the backbones of Regional Quality management Centre (RQMC) established in ReSPA in 2021.

Achievements, stability and expansion of RQMC services has been recognised and since January 2022 RQMC is supported also by BACID III Project, funded by Austrian Development Agency. The two-and-a-half-year ambitious project aims at contributing to sustainability of the RQMC by providing the support and mentoring to RQMC, to its network (CAF Network) and pool of CAF facilitators and certified civil servants for PEF, further CAF institutionalisation in the region (envisaged 12 CAF projects), implementation of CAF External feedback Procedure (envisaged 4 PEF Procedures), promotion and equipping ReSPA with online tools for efficient CAF projects.

Complementary to RQMC, ReSPA programme works in QM includes the regular meeting with QM Working Group and activities pertaining to regional conferences.

Equipping and operationalizing the RQMC- Internal documentation, PEF Guidelines, CAF Network and PEF Network/Pool, first Annual meeting of RQMC

Operational aspect of the RQMC has been regulated by Rules and Procedures on the Operation of RQMC, while the CAF External Feedback Procedure (PEF Procedure) is regulated by developed PEF Guidelines which is a comprehensive set of documents developed with KDZ, Austria that provides all rules for PEF Procedure done by ReSPA based on EU standards. Two regional networks hosted within RQMC with the aim at supporting the further spreading of CAF in the region (Regional CAF network) and quality implementation of the PEF Procedure (PEF Regional Network/Pool) meet under BACID III Project to discuss potential CAF projects and PEF procedures. The Annual meeting in December 2021 in Tirana, served as the opportunity to officially adopt all the internal documentation, CAF Network members and define the Plan of Activities for 2022.

CAF Projects

Three CAF projects with nine workshops were implemented out of which two in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agency for Gender Equality, Civil Service agency of Republika Srpska, BiH) and one in North Macedonia (Ministry for Information Society and Public Administration) while in the pipeline there are four additional candidates for CAF projects. The principle of geographical equality is respected and the CAF Networks is consulted accordingly.

CAF External Feedback Procedure (PEF Procedure)

First PEF Procedure conducted by RESPA/RQMC in Western Balkans started in the Civil Service Agency of Federation BiH, BiH in March 2022. CAF External evaluators belong to the PEF Network/Pool of evaluators that ReSPA and KDZ trained in 2021. The procedure is done according to PEF Guidelines developed for ReSPA/RQMC containing EU standards for CAF external evaluation that indicated whether an organisational applicant who implements CAF has reached the satisfactory level of "excellency" according to EU criteria/principles so that it can be awarded with "CAF Effective User" label.

Training for CAF Facilitators and Certified training for External CAF Evaluators (EFACs) targeted 19 public officials, quality management practitioners from all ReSPA Members, selected within the open call for the training. The aim of the training was twofold: to increase capabilities of quality management practitioners by deepening their CAF facilitation skills and to train them to act as CAF External Feedback Expert (EFAC) who will do the CAF external evaluation. The consecutive second module has been held in September and the third module will be organised in December.



Ministry for Information Society and Public Administration, North Macedonia



Civil Service agency of Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Agency for Gender Equality, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Training for CAF Facilitators and Certified training for External CAF Evaluators

Research- Periodical Regional QM Analysis

This biannual Analysis provides most updated information on the state of play in quality management in the region. The Analysis conducted in the period November 2021-May 2022 indicate QM standards/models most in use in the Western Balkans are CAF and ISO. North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have the highest CAF and ISO implementation. The analysis notes that the clearer managerial commitment and strategic approach towards the QM application is on the increase in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, while strategic commitment towards the QM in Albania and Kosovo* has yet to be demonstrated. Quality Management is clearly embedded in the existing PAR strategies in Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and from 2021 in Serbia and Montenegro. The Analysis indicates that needs refer mostly to required support in the development of sustainable quality management national roadmaps or plans, support in implementation of specific QM activities and in awareness raising and promotion. A number of respondents pointed out that support for CAF and ISO trainings, CAF implementation (CAF roll out), development of the CAF online questionnaire, increased networking in the WB region and with EU peers are the omnipresent needs for strengthening the reforms in the service delivery and specifically quality management.

Conference "Quality Management in Public Administration" with QM EG and CAF Network meeting. In partnership with the Ministry of State for Standards of Services of Albania, ReSPA and OECD/SIGMA co-hosted a Conference to further boost the interest for QM in Albania and present possible way forward on disseminating QM in the Albanian public administration. ReSPA presented first findings from the Periodical Regional QM Analysis for Albania and held the panel with CAF correspondents from ReSPA Members who shared the experiences on the QM approaches in strategic directions and concrete actions implemented in their respective countries. The Conference confirmed the importance of quality management for enhancing public services as strategic approach in Albania to be included in the upcoming strategic PAR documents.

As back-to-back event, the QM Working Group and CAF Network met and discussed current developments in each member country and new ideas and concepts that deserve more programmatic attention. The conclusions called for enhancing the exchange of knowledge with regional and EU counterparts regarding CAF and PEF procedure and especial emphasised the need to address the customer satisfaction measuring and the possibility to create regional QM toolbox and online application for customer satisfaction measuring.



2.3.2 Digitalization of public services

ReSPA is overseeing the situation in the developments in digital transformation and is adjusting its current and planned programmatic activities accordingly. While service delivery has improved in the region, it requires political and administrative leadership to maintain sustainable progress and guarantee ownership to initiate and co-ordinate service delivery improvement initiatives. ReSPA's actions in this area are focused on the following:



E GOV Seasonal School on Digital Transformation brought together senior public servants from EGOV WG and HRMD WG, with central topic "Using Emerging ICT Technologies in Public Administration". The underlying idea of the E-Gov Seasonal School was to look more closely into the technological aspect of innovativeness within digital transformation in public administration. Interactive sessions on Human Centred Design (HCD) methodology preceded the sessions about most recent trends in EU of policies and practice in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and of applying HCD in creating digitised services with AI. Lecturers presented the challenges and benefits of using Cloud and Blockchain in public administration. The topic of cyber security has been elaborated from the perspective of threats and benefits that new technologies can produce in the area of the protection of data.

E GOV pilots initiative – ReSPA has launched a new initiative through open call for E GOV pilot projects in 2021 with the core theme of enhancing the quality of digitized public services by piloting design or redesign of e-services, work processes or policies. approached ReSPA for getting the assistance within E GOV pilot initiative, for developing the Digital COVID Certificate. As the first stage of the E GOV Pilot, ReSPA supported the Agency for Identification Documents, Registers and Data Exchange of Bosnia and Herzegovina (IDDEEA) IDDEEA in the process of developing digital COVID certificate by facilitating the exchange of experiences in relation to the implementation from technical, administrative and legal perspective of the EU Digital COVID Certificate in Montenegro.

Digital Summit 2022 - ReSPA and UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and Central Asia designed and co-moderated the panel "Using Data for Digital Economy". The panel dealt with several topics related to using big data and open data as the means of purposeful usage of enormous quantities of data in public sector to increase transparency and provide the fuel for a knowledge-based economy and society. The topics included protection of the data and ethical safeguards, using big data and open data for enhanced services in health sector, open data for improving the transparency in fiscal economy and strengthening the CSOs as the channel for better supply of governmental open data for the economic purposes and societal needs.





Improving policies and practice in Open Data, 2nd Peer Exchange Meeting: From 2016 to date ReSPA is focusing on the area of data opening in relation to the measures from OGP national plans tackling open data, and from 2021 the broader issues of open data under overarching theme “*Improving policies and practice in Open data*”. The Peer Exchange Meeting captured EU good practices in developing Open data ecosystem and in managing open data portals and in parallel was used as the opportunity to find out which regional initiative could address common issues in data opening. Interesting presentations were held related to main provisions of EU Directive for data opening from 2019, EU legislative framework and experiences from EU (Slovenia) in creating open data ecosystem, standardisation of data for opening and possible metrics for measuring the level of openness and using the EC Landscape tool for measuring the readiness and state of play related to data opening in WB countries. In addition, during the meeting was also held a presentation of OGP Europe Unit about good EU practices in OGP related data opening.

2021 OGP Regional meeting – ReSPA co-organized the session on Proactive Transparency and under the theme “Improving Policies and Practice in Data Opening” presented IT perspective and different solutions for the standardization of data selected to be “opened”. The review of policies and good practice in data opening in Croatia was presented by Central State Office of Digital Society from Croatia with whom ReSPA has established a reliable partnership.

2022 OGP Western Balkans Community Dialogue was co-organised with OGP Europe Unit as the side event to OGP Europe event. It gathered OGP National Point of Contacts and senior public officials who discussed the challenges related to the implementation of the measures related to opening of data in countries OGP national plans as well as to looked into modalities of defining measures which include using open data for monitoring the public spendings in public procurement. The monitoring of public procurement with open data done from a CSO perspective and its impacts were presented, and confirming the importance of having the measures combining open data and public procurement in national OGP plans.



The *Regional Study on Digitalisation* will be ready by end of 2022 providing findings and recommendations for public administrations in WB on the state of art in areas of: digital infrastructure, connectivity of registries, interoperability, open and accessible data, once-only principle, digital-by-default / digital-by-design, trust services and emerging technologies. The Study will lean on the most recent findings related to improving digitised public services for citizens, businesses and the general public throughout the region and capture the good practices in the areas where most improvements have been noted.

2.4 Utilization of ReSPA support mechanisms: Mobility schemes and In-country support

During the reporting period, ReSPA witnessed a large interest in the use of its direct support instruments – In-Country support and mobility schemes, attesting their strong relevance and tangible contribution to ongoing reform processes and targeting all areas of expertise of ReSPA: digitalization, policy planning, good governance and HRMD.

2.4.1 Mobility schemes

ReSPA continued to design, tailor and support peer-to-peer learning exchanges among public servants from national institutions of the countries in the region by organising 5 Mobility schemes, which are implemented in the format of working visits:

Working visit of HRMA (Montenegro) to the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) of Serbia – Participants had the opportunity to learn from their peers about the selection process, the competency framework and challenges to the adoption of human resources plan. In addition, they also learned about the Serbian HR network and they could make comparison with the work of the similar network established in Montenegro and the challenges faced. In addition, HRMS presented their communication channels and their career management system. There was also possibility to hear about coaching that has been introduced in the work of Serbian administration, while projections for future work were also presented.



Working visit of BiH Civil Service Agencies to the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) of Serbia – The visit was of specific practical importance since all administrative levels in BiH levels are in the process of amending the legislation relating to civil service, therefore replication of successful models are of relevance. The participants had the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills regarding psychometric tests and e-recruitment process in the civil service; learn about innovative concepts of a competency-based interview; gain knowledge on a new model of performance appraisal; learning about achieving anonymity in the written examination process.



Working visit of Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro to Office for IT and E Government of the Government of Serbia – Montenegro has signed an agreement on cross-border recognition of electronic trust services with the Republic of Serbia which is not yet technically implemented but represents a legal basis for regional cooperation for these two countries. Team of public officials from the Ministry of Public Administrations discussed with the colleagues from IT and E Government of the Government of Serbia key steps for the implementation of the signed agreement between the two countries. The exchange of good practices will contribute also to the improvement of electronic identification and electronic trust services practice in Montenegro.

Working visit of Ministry of Information Society and Administration of North Macedonia to the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-government (MPALSG), Serbia – the Mobility Scheme was held at MPALSG, Public Policy Secretariat, the eGovernment office, and the National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA) in Serbia. The participants were given the opportunity to exchange experience and discuss the PAR processes in both countries in the EU accession process; discuss the coordination mechanisms and lessons learned in the process of implementation of the previous and current PAR Strategy as well as share information and know-how among professionals involved in developing the strategic framework and in the implementation of reform activities. The working visit enabled the possibility to discuss specific issues related to HR management and development, salary reform, digitalization and service delivery as well as policy development and coordination.



Working visit of the Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro to various Albanian institutions, such as Department of Public Administration, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The mobility scheme enabled Directorate for Strategic Planning, international cooperation, and IPA funds staff (MPA, Montenegro) to: get more insights on communication aspects and coordination mechanisms in the Albanian Government regarding PAR; the institutional and legal framework for the coordination of PAR in Albania; discuss the connection between the digital transformation process and PAR; acquire necessary knowledge on preparatory phases for Sector Budget Support in Albania, as well as share the experience of PAR Special Group meetings.



2.4.2 In-country support mechanism

This practical and effective wide-range support mechanism to public administration institutions as hands-on support that ReSPA tailors to the needs of ReSPA stakeholders has attracted a substantial interest from ReSPA member administrations. ReSPA Members have had the opportunity to swiftly address specific needs and make a direct impact by requesting and receiving expertise in the identified field. Based on detected needs during the reporting period, ReSPA tailored **16 in-country support projects** to its members, aiming to meet specific requirements in overcoming different challenges on their paths toward reforming public administrations. Below, a brief overview of actions implemented or under implementation during the reporting period in various thematic areas:

Thematic area: PAR, policy planning, better regulation

Development of the proposal of support to the PAR Council – ReSPA supported the Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society, and Media (at that time) of Montenegro in developing the proposal to support the PAR Council's work. One of the purposes of the intervention was the proposal of a coordination structure for monitoring and implementation of the strategy, which will be used to disseminate the necessary information. The proposed Concept was used as a basis for setting up the coordination structure and support to the work of the PAR Council.

Developing the new Passport of Indicators for monitoring the Cross Cutting Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2021-2022, in Albania – Through this assistance, support was provided in revising the existing set of indicators that will be used to monitor the implementation of the PAR Strategy during 2021 and 2022. Upon its completion, a full set of materials was prepared and submitted, containing all the revised indicators' targets for the period mentioned above. Given the developments affecting PAR and consequently PAR's Strategy, the current passport of indicators was updated and adjusted, and the target values for the years 2021 and 2022 were set. This solution best fits the needs of the assignment, paving the way for the new PAR Strategy and its Action – Plan, post 2022.

Expertise in strengthening the capacities of the Albanian public administration on management and coordination of Sector Budget Support Instrument – The purpose of this assignment was to identify, organize and deliver training to specific segments of the Albanian public administration on the management and coordination of Sector Budget Support Instrument (SBS), also known as Sector Reform Contracts (SRCs), related, but not limited to, change of indicators and disbursement packages for SRCs. The action aimed and succeeded to increase and maintain the effectiveness of managing the SBS Instrument in Albania and mainly targeted all active SRC leader institutions and responsible contact points, mostly in technical level. The main beneficiary of this assignment was the Albanian Ministry of Finance.

Development of an all-inclusive and functional Network of Civil Servants for Strategic Planning, requested by the Secretariat-General of the Government of Montenegro (still under implementation¹) – Its key result is developing an all-inclusive and functional Network of Civil Servants for Strategic Planning to ensure standardized planning and monitoring process. There is a need to introduce new procedures in each of the steps, roles, and responsibilities of the key institutions and establish a formal coordination



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Actions which are "still under implementation", will be fully implemented by end of 2022.

mechanism that will ensure continuous interaction and cooperation throughout the different stages of the process. The action will strengthen the capacities of the Secretariat General of the Government of Montenegro and its Department for Coordination, Monitoring Alignment, and Implementation of Strategies defining Public Policies in promoting sustainable and coherent inter-institutional coordination on the national level. The focus will be on EU policy planning, close collaboration with the Network of Civil Servants for Strategic Planning, and improving their visibility within the system.

Support in developing the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2023-2030 and its Action Plan, requested by MISA (still under implementation) – The drafting of the PAR Strategy and Action Plan shall be done in close cooperation of the engaged expert with the MISA team and six working sub-groups. ReSPA expert should also cooperate with the SIGMA experts throughout the process phases as the need arises, however, the overall finalization of the strategy is under the responsibility of MISA. The situational analysis should be based on the findings and recommendations of the relevant reports and documents and supported by relevant evidence. In addition, it should be ensured that the PAR Strategy is fully in line with the new Methodology and Guidelines for developing the sector and multisector strategies adopted by the Government.

Expert for strengthening ILIAS e-learning platform in Montenegro (still under implementation) – The crucial task for the Ministry of Public Administration is to develop new content, material, presentations, video material, and online lectures for different priority areas (in the given standards of the platform) and those to be published and available on the platform for all employees in public administration. This will be reached, among others, through developing two e-learning courses on the ILIAS platform. With the ILIAS platform as the main e-learning tool for civil servants and state employees, two e-learning modules will be developed in their full content according to the standards of this platform.

The first training module will refer to PAR Reform, including the reforming priorities from 2011 until today, up to the current PAR Strategy 2022-2026. The second training will focus on Sector Budget Support (SBS) as the modality used under IPA III in supporting both PAR and PFM reforms.

Expertise to develop an analysis of the current practice of the Public Policy Secretariat (Serbia) related to the PIA and RIA quality control role and recommendations for further improvement (still under implementation) – The purpose of the assignment is to develop a thorough analysis of the current PPS practice that is related to the PIA and RIA quality control role and recommendations for further improvement of the PIA and RIA quality control role of the PPS. In addition, the assignment shall provide findings and a comparative analysis with best practices in EU MSs with the main aim to improve the current practice, and shall also tackle the issue of effective coordination of the quality control in the Centre of Government. The expert has been identified, to be contracted soon.

Thematic area: Human Resources Management and Development

Strategic document for harmonization of HR functions in the civil service system of FBiH – ReSPA provided support to FBiH CSA to elaborate discrepancies in the civil service system in FBiH and determine strategic direction towards harmonization of HR functions in the civil service system of FBiH. The participants from all cantons in FBiH contributed to the development of the document.

Evaluation of the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy 2018 -2021 and its Action plan of the Republic of North Macedonia produced both general and detailed conclusions on implementation of the Strategy and the Action plan. Furthermore, the preparation of the new PAR Strategy 2023-2030 and the Action plan was supported through recommendations that were produced. The added value of this activity was also bringing the participants from various institutions/departments to participate in this process through conducting two workshops.

Establishment of a Forum of Directors in BiH further strengthened communication and fast dissemination of ideas and lessons learned among Civil Service Agencies in BiH. Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the heads of civil service agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH institutions level, Federation of BiH, Republika Srpska and Brcko District). Rules of procedure were prepared and adopted by the heads of civil service agencies. The Forum has a potential for producing some long-term results in regard to the activities that will be focused on improving regulations and practices, strengthening the capacity of civil servants and affirmation of the position and status of agencies.

Roadmaps for software development in the area of training/ learning management systems in BiH – The analysis of the current use of LMS/TMS systems supported the development of the road maps which will contribute to the improvement/establishment of modern and functional LMS and TMS systems. Road maps should contribute to further digitalisation of the work processes in respective agencies. Three roadmaps offer short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions for developing the information systems in the agencies. The generated recommendations with clearly listed priorities shall support gradual development of the software.

Improving the recruitment process in the Albanian Civil Service with special focus on the Interview phase. ReSPA supported DoPA to improve the recruitment process in Albania. Personality assessment of each candidate was improved as well as the compliance of the job position requirements with appropriate candidates' profiles. The Competency Based Interview Guide (CBI) and Question bank were developed. Seventy-eight Evaluation Commission members and DoPA representatives were trained in interviewing based on the key competencies and behaviour. The knowledge gained could be transferred into a unified methodology for drafting the interview questions for other commissions for recruitment of civil servants in the independent institutions as well as for the human resource units at the local level.

Development of the software platform (FBIH, RS) and development of Module 1: "E-application" – Development of the software consists of two modules/phases. First phase covered with this project ensured development of e-application which includes: Administration of roles and users, Codebook (Šifarnik) administration, Administration of vacancy types, Exam Type Administration, Administration of Experts, Administration of notification types, Review and search of published vacancies, User registration, Administration of a user profile, Administration application for the vacancy, Review of Notices. During this reporting period the first phase was completed with the adaptation of applications for the RS CSA.

Thematic area: E-Gov

Development of the Digital Transformation Strategy of Montenegro (2022-2026) support to the Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro. The Strategy defines the strategic directions, objectives and actions that will enable digital transformation and efficient management of the processes pertaining to the transformation. Proposed strategic objectives and horizontal principles for defined strategic objectives were confirmed by engaged expert and inter-ministerial Working Group. The Ministry of Public Administration adopted the Strategy of Digital Transformation 2022-2026 in December 2021.

Development of the ITIL catalogue of IT services of the General Secretariat of the Government of FBiH (BiH) The process of developing the ITIL catalogue with IT services of the Secretariat has been completed. It resulted with the creation of the document that presented the ITIL catalogue with included all existing IT services of the General Secretariat of FBiH with all relevant conjuncted information such as: title of service, description, right of using, SLA agreement on the usage of services, procedures of compliance etc. Employees of the Secretariat actively participated in tech production of tech catalogue.

Best practice and knowledge transfer for key IT service delivery enablers in B&H for PARCO

ReSPA provided support to Public Administration Reform Coordinator Office (PARCO) in BiH, with expertise for outlining the Roadmap for "Establishing of key digital enablers for service delivery on administrative levels in BiH" related fully to the implementation of the Measure 4.2. from the Action Plan for implementation of BiH Public Administration Reform Strategy Framework 2018-2022. Under this assignment two key documents were developed: "Situation Analysis" and "Comparative analysis of practices in developing key enablers for the delivery of digital services" in order to present the situation and good practices in creating the conditions to develop key enablers in BiH. Through wide consultations with variety of stakeholders across all administrative levels of BiH the building blocks for the Roadmap for establishing key enablers was developed. At the Final Conference, around 70 attendees from all BiH administrative levels were present, and the Roadmap has been examined and discussed.



3. ReSPA Annual Monitoring

The summary captures the results of the ReSPA annual monitoring exercise for 2022, with findings based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative inputs solicited from representatives of Member public administrations. Relevant inputs include data collected via 1) surveys assessing beneficiary satisfaction with specific ReSPA activities covering key programmatic areas¹, 2) partner-informed reviews of the state of implementation for ReSPA-issued recommendations, and 3) after-action assessments of in-country support projects.

All the tools utilized have been designed to capture the level of achievement of ReSPA's short-term outcomes, in line with the ReSPA strategy and intervention logic. While inputs collected through topical surveys and after-action assessments are subjective and based on the perception of participants taking part in the relevant activities, implementation reviews are data-led and are directly related to the achievement of specific and measurable outcomes.

3.1 Summary of results

3.1.1 Monitoring results by mode of delivery

Workshops, trainings, conferences and similar events

Activities examined under this heading, delivered in the form of workshops, trainings, network events and conferences, have been assessed overwhelmingly positively by the respondents, with an average respondent score of 3,99 out of 5, indicating that surveyed activities contributed "to a good extent" to individual growth of participating staff as well as institutional functioning of the seconding agencies and institutions.² General satisfaction with ReSPA events is even higher when assessed in the immediate aftermath and stands at an average of 4,36 out of 5. Overall, there is a slight improvement in both the size of respondent population (up to 26% from 20% in 2021) and in the general average score (up to 3,99 from 3,83 in 2021). The response rate for the general survey assessing participant satisfaction with ReSPA-organised events is 26% of all prospective respondents (or 108 ReSPA service users), a population size that calls for further improvement but does provide a sufficient sample as to ensure statistical validity of findings.

Regional studies

Regional studies, targeting specific reform measures under consideration for adoption by participating public administrations, are a major feature of ReSPA's work. The studies provide a blueprint for reform implementation, informed by a prior situational review, and are carried out in cooperation with relevant authorities. The ultimate indicator of success here is the objective rate of implementation for the recommendations put forth in the studies. The 2022 monitoring report looks at ReSPA recommendations issued across two focus areas, Regulatory Reform and Human Resource Management, with implementation scores of 4,21 and 3,71, respectively, indicating, on average, a satisfactory level of implementation by participating public administrations.

In-country support projects

In-country support targets specific PAR topics solicited by Members, with ReSPA mobilizing and deploying expertise needed by partner public administrations. Projects carried out under this heading

enjoy the highest respondent scores with the average across the four programmatic areas standing at an excellent 4,68 out of 5. This indicates a high degree of appreciation for tailored, on-site support that is demand driven and focused on troubleshooting in areas of interest to the requesting public administration.

3.1.2 Monitoring results by programmatic area

Policy development and coordination

ReSPA's overall contribution to both institutional and individual improvement across this thematic area averages at 3,86 (out of 5), a positive results that meets expectations of both ReSPA stakeholders and management, as well as representing a slight improvement on 2021 (up to 3,86 from 3,8). Respondents rate ReSPA's contribution to their individual improvement at an average level of 3,98, a higher score than that assigned to institutional improvement (3,74). The discrepancy in attitude can likely be attributed to the fact that institutional evolution requires a significantly greater investment in time and effort than improvement at an individual level and is a feature across most of the other programmatic areas as well. When it comes to assessing ReSPA's impact on implementing PAR priorities in this thematic area, an overwhelming majority (70,59%) feel that the organization has made a positive contribution in this regard. A total of 34 respondents from 27 different member institutions took part in the survey with 10 ReSPA activities covered.

Human Resources Management and Development (HRMD)

Respondents continue to positively rate ReSPA's contributions in the field of human resources management with an average respondent score of 3,98, a rating virtually unchanged from 2021. This result meets expectations of both ReSPA stakeholders as well as management for this thematic area. In addition to conferences, trainings, seminars and other events, ReSPA also provided support to five HRMD projects through the in-country mechanism with the outcomes rated favorably by partners (cumulative score of 4.2 out of 5). Furthermore, ReSPA supported the implementation of 57 recommendations arising from two thematic studies on HRMD conducted across the region with the implementation score at 3,71 (out of 5). In terms of overall contributions to PAR in their respective public administrations, respondents overwhelmingly feel ReSPA's engagement is beneficial to the reform process (82,35%).

Regulatory reform and implementation of the regulatory impact assessment (RIA)

With an overall average score of 4,27, ReSPA's work in this programmatic area has been rated very positively.³ Overall ReSPA contribution to the institutional and individual improvement in performance averages to 3,95 out of 5 with a creditable response rate of 44% (35 respondents from 28 different institutions). Meanwhile, some 85,7% of respondents feel that ReSPA's work in this area contributes to the implementation of PAR commitments under the relevant programmatic heading. In addition, ReSPA supported implementation of a better regulation study for all ReSPA members resulting in 45 recommendations; thus far, some 75,5% of all recommendations have either been implemented, or their implementation has been endorsed by the relevant authorities and is pending. The regional average of the scores of implementation of recommendations is 4,2. Finally, ReSPA also implemented two in-country support projects during 2021 within this thematic area and an impressive average score of 4.5.

Quality Management (QM)

Overall ReSPA contribution to the institutional and individual improvement of beneficiaries in this thematic area, as assessed by relevant respondents, averages at 4,1, an increase on 2021 (3,75). The results of the assessment are positive and meet the expectations of ReSPA stakeholders and management for this thematic area. A total of 8 respondents, representing 8 institutions, submitted their assessment of 4 the activities organized by ReSPA under the QM programmatic heading. An

¹ This includes surveys conducted in the immediate aftermath of an activity as well as the comprehensive monitoring questionnaire that is administered on an annual basis.

² This refers to data coming out of the comprehensive monitoring questionnaire only.

³ The overall average score comes as a result of the average score obtained by the "general thematic area questionnaire", the average of "the post event questionnaire" and the average score of the "in-country support questionnaire".

overwhelming majority of respondents (87,5%) feel that ReSPA is making a worthwhile contribution to PAR implementation in the area of QM. In addition to event-based learning, ReSPA provided support in the implementation of one QM in-country support with a perfect average score of 5.

E-Government

The results in the segment of E-government, as provided by a total of 14 respondents, indicate a marked improvement in beneficiary satisfaction (4,05 from 3,5 in 2021). ReSPA's contribution in this area can be assessed as positive and meeting the expectations of ReSPA stakeholders and management. ReSPA also helped deliver E-government in-country support projects; a total of three were implemented with two out of three receiving maximum scores (5) and one receiving a score of 3.

3.2 Findings and recommendations

3.2.1 Key findings

- ReSPA flagship activities are widely acknowledged and appreciated, at both individual and institutional levels. The dual nature of the assistance provided remains a huge asset to participating public administrations as the combination of individual capacity building with direct support to partner institutions represents a potent blend for initiating and driving public administration reforms across the region.
- ReSPA adds huge value as a regional hub for networking, with respondents universally acknowledging its unique capability to bring relevant regional actors together. Seasonal schools, thematic conferences and workshops, as well as working visits are all underpinned by the principles of good practices exchange and mutual learning. Regional comparative studies continue to be well regarded within the regional public administration community as they encourage best practice exchanges along specific lines and provide pointers on how to translate positive practices to new environs. The Quality Management Regional Centre merits special mention as its role as a disseminator of expertise and assistance has been highlighted by numerous respondents.
- ReSPA is a major reform asset to partner public administrations, with in-country support and comparative studies proving especially valuable as a tool for partner public administrations to address challenges hampering reform. The assistance provided through tailoring and adapting easily accessible support to local contexts.
- Overall monitoring results have shown a modest improvement compared to last year with some clear programmatic priorities emerging from the qualitative past of the assessment allowing for better targeting in future planning of activities.
- Nonetheless, there is need to ensure greater harmonization between monitoring and programming so that the programmatic recommendations from previous monitoring reports are better integrated into the planning and implementation process.

3.2.2 Recommendations

- Extend and expand seasonal schools for individuals and in-country support projects for institutions, as the two forms of assistance most appreciated by respondents.
- Consolidate and further enhance networking and the exchange of good practices between the countries in the region - and with the EU - as the two learning modes most appreciated by both individuals and institutions.
- Consider blended program design with direct support to institutions complementing capacity building. Ensuring a good blend of different but complementary activities should be considered in future programming.
- Expand specialised regional support, with the success of the Quality Management Regional Centre showing the value of a standing regional support platform. This is especially relevant in those programmatic areas where all partner public administrations are expected to internalize new practices and processes. Help desks and/or specialised platforms for the disbursement of rapid advice, information on good practices and tailored training services would make a very useful addition to the ReSPA arsenal.
- Employ monitoring in programming through a stronger link between the two. Results of monitoring, as well as the monitoring tools themselves, should be made more central to programmatic planning both via substantive inputs but also for baseline and verification information purposes.

4. Revised ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024

The initial ReSPA Strategy was developed during 2017-2018. Therefore, in light of recent developments and new momentum in the Region, ReSPA Secretariat initiated the process of revising the strategy from March-July 2022. The main goal of the revision is to make ReSPA more strategic, build on current achievements, better respond to the recent developments/needs/topics arising in the WB PAs, address lessons learned, enhance the partnership component, and introduce new/innovative tools & mechanism, boost knowledge management and peer learning, etc. The revised draft of the ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024, with accompanying annexes has been consulted with Governing Board and the PAR Unit at DG NEAR, EC. The revised 2019-2024 Strategy defines the strategic goal and specific objectives that are to be achieved within the following intervention areas for the period 2022-2024:

- Coordination of PAR in accordance with evidence-based policymaking principles
- European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects
- Human resources management and development of resilient public administrations
- Digital transformation in public administration
- Quality management

Through the revised Strategy document, prepared in response to technological advances, shifting political and economic landscapes, increasing complexity of policy issues, green transition, as well as evolving Member priorities, ReSPA is adapting to address emerging challenges and exploit new opportunities, harnessing the dual powers of innovation and transformation while retaining collaboration as the underlying o driver.

All ReSPA pursuits will be informed by a series of underlying principles aimed, among others, at: i) ensuring the inclusion of diverse interests, to include internalising civil society voices and gender mainstreaming considerations; ii) safeguarding ethics and integrity, as means of building trust and confidence in government; and iii) harnessing innovation and transformation, to exploit green and digital enablers emerging from the nascent dual transitions. Coupled with professionalism and a focus on performance, the insistence on transversal values as a critical consideration in ReSPA's work will continue to inform and shape the region's administrative culture and mindset.

ReSPA will pursue its program through a combination of policy dialogue, networking and cooperation events, capacity-building activities, best practice exchanges, as well as analytical and policy work, all underpinned by innovation. ReSPA interventions will ensure relevance by simultaneously working across two levels: regionally, addressing the shared interests of the entire ReSPA community; and individually with member public administration through the in-country support mechanism, driven by demand for specific reform agendas. Furthermore, mobility schemes, a flagship ReSPA initiative, will be upgraded, with the currently prevalent model of short-term mobilities augmented by executive education and longer-term job placements, aimed at helping civil servants learn first-hand about decision-making processes, EU affairs, public management, etc. ReSPA will also seek to establish the Western Balkans PAR Knowledge Network/Platform, bringing together individuals, teams and institutions across the region to formulate and share knowledge as well as best practices. In addition to providing know-how for front-line civil servants and line managers, ReSPA will, in parallel, continue to work on securing political buy-in and process ownership, as well as fostering regional cooperation, through the mechanism of the High-Level Policy Dialogue, bringing together senior figures from Member governments.

ReSPA will also continue to recognise and acknowledge excellence in service delivery through the Public Administration Awards. Starting with 2022, a Community of Award Winners will be established to spread best practices and to serve as a regional incubator of good ideas.

ReSPA primarily caters to mid- and senior-level public servants, policymakers and sector specialists working in ministries and governmental agencies responsible for PAR and European integration. In view of the growing importance of multilevel governance, stakeholders from the sub-national level can also be targeted by ReSPA actions, however, to a limited extent.

5. ReSPA Governance

Governing Board

In the reporting period ReSPA Governing Board held one session at the Ministerial level, and four sessions at the Senior Official level as follows:



13th Governing Board meeting at the Ministerial level, 9 November 2021 – The Governing Board endorsed the Annual Report of ReSPA for the period 16 October 2020 – 15 October 2021, adopted the Joint Declaration on PAR, adopted a Resolution on the Annual Envelope for 2022 in the amount of 150.000 EUR per ReSPA Member and a Resolution on the ReSPA Budget 2022-2023, as well as took note on the information on the procedure and the deadlines for the second extension of the Agreement Establishing ReSPA. At the end of the meeting, the Chair, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, formally handed over the Chairmanship of ReSPA to the representative of the Republic of Albania.

Governing Board meetings at the Senior Official level – During the reporting period, four meetings of the Governing Board at Senior Officials Level were held. At each session, the Governing Board adopted the quarterly report on ReSPA Operations and Implementation of the Programme of Work for the previous period (including the status on of the In-country support mechanism and BACID project). The Governing Board was also regularly informed about the implementation of the current EC Grant and preparation of the next one, as well as took note of the status of payment of National Contributions, takeover ReSPA Campus by the host country, and Kosovo* accession to ReSPA. Furthermore, the Governing Board was involved in the preparation of the meeting of the Governing Board at the ministerial level, Ministerial Conference and PA Award competition, and reviewed and revised ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024. Regarding the financial issues, the Governing Board acknowledged the Annual Financial Report 2021, Core Budget implementation, as well as nominated KPMG as the Independent Auditor to perform an independent audit of the Annual Accounts 2021. In addition, the Governing Board adopted a Resolution on the Addendum to the Core Budget 2022, a Decision on the amount of Working Capital Fund for 2022, a Resolution on the Independent Auditor's Report for 2021, a Decision on discharging the Director from her management and administrative responsibility for 2021, Expenditure verification report of the ReSPA Budget Implementation for 2021, as well as the Resolution on the amendments to the ReSPA Financial Regulations. The Governing Board also discussed amendments to the ReSPA Rules and Procedures for hiring experts and trainers and agreed to adopt the amendments in the written procedure. Adoption of the decisions in written procedure.

Budget Committee

ReSPA Budget Committee met four times during the previous reporting period, where the meeting in December 2021 mainly set the priorities and the program of work of the budget committee for 2022. At the first meeting in 2022, the Secretariat presented a report on implementing the ReSPA annual work program, budget, and staff resources. Budget Committee reviewed the annual financial reports and recommended to the Governing Board to acknowledge the same. At the same time, Budget Committee Members recommended payments into Working Capital Fund for 2022 and permitted carryover funds from the previous year for the authorised ReSPA activities listed in the ReSPA Core budget Addendum for 2022. Based on previous experience, the Secretariat recommended that the Governing Board nominates KPMG as ReSPA Auditor for 2021. The second BC meeting was organised to present and adopt the Auditors' report for 2021. At the same time, the Budget Committee recommended that ReSPA Governing Board adopt the Independent Auditor's Report for ReSPA Financial Statements for the period 01.01-31.12.2021 and discharge the Director from her management and administrative responsibility for 2021. Governing Board adopted all recommendations provided by the Budget Committee.

The most important agenda items on the Budget Committee session held in September were presenting the ReSPA Core budget for 2023/2024 and an update of ReSPA's financial regulations, which propose further alignment with the latest International financial reporting standards adopted in European Union (IFRS EU) also enabling the presentation of financial reports to the ReSPA Governing board on a more comprehensive and less technical manner.



6. Cooperation and Partnership Building

During the reporting period, ReSPA nourished and extended its already-established cooperation with other international organisations, donors and learning institutes (at the EU level as well as the EU MS level). Based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF) and the strategic cooperation with OECD/SIGMA, joint activities related to the interconnection of PAR and PFM have been organised. ReSPA developed activities and initiatives in partnership with other European and regional partners.

Communication with the relevant stakeholders in the region and beyond was intensified. The meetings served to reconnect with key national institutions in ReSPA members and key stakeholders and seek strategic guidance and discuss the future ReSPA role in improving good governance and PAR agenda throughout the region. These meetings also served as a tool for identifying the needs of various institutions, which can be targeted in the following period, and especially during the implementation of the new EC Grant 2023-2026.

During the visits, a number of consultation meetings with regional and international organisations based in the region were also held, including the Regional Cooperation Council, CEFTA, Transport Community Secretariat, Regional Anti-corruption Initiative, Centre of Excellence in Finance, Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Western Balkans Fund, NALAS, Council of Europe, GIZ, CoE, UNDESA, UNDP etc. In addition, meaningful meetings with representatives of civil society active in the PAR area and local EU Delegations aided to exchange of ideas on ReSPA's efforts in mainstreaming PAR in sectoral policies, as well as strengthening the EU integration support component to the region. For the first time, ReSPA joined the Secretariat of CEFTA, Regional Cooperation Council, Transport Community and RYCO in the regular coordination meeting of representatives of regional organisations active in the Western Balkans and EC.

Intensification of contacts with EU Member States' national schools/institutes and academies for public administration in the frames of the DISPA network and beyond was also pursued so as to bring forward a stronger EU-perspective and knowledge exchange in ReSPA-designed activities. Active pursuit of partnerships and synergies will follow in the forthcoming period as well in an effort to operationalise concrete activities in WBs, enhance existing collaboration, and explore possibilities for establishing cooperation in the future.



7. The Way Forward

The extension of ReSPA mandate for the following seven years will need the development of the **new ReSPA Strategy, covering the period 2025-2031**. By mid-2023, ReSPA Secretariat will kick off developing the new Strategy through a large participatory exercise.

ReSPA will focus on the development of the **regional knowledge platform on public administration reform** to allow civil servants to be informed in a digital environment and in a user-friendly way at any moment about all important topics, trends, developments and knowledge products related to PAR, as well as to liaise with each other, share practices and flag various activities of interest.

ReSPA intends to expand and diversify its **instruments and tools**: upgrade and strengthen the *in-country support mechanism* based on lessons learned, making it more responsive and inclusive; while continuing with the intra-region short-term mobility schemes, a more *comprehensive mobility scheme* will be designed with executive training component and short-term job placements; the *GovTech pilot initiatives* will be supported to make the public institutions operate in an agile way and to bring the innovative spirit from the private sector to the public administration set up; the *peer bench-learning mechanism* will be developed, aiming at creating a systematic and integrated link between benchmarking and mutual learning activities and will be modelled upon EU methodology on a similar mechanism. A "*Horizontal Facility*" will be established aiming at supporting on an ad-hoc basis the participation of public servants from the region in different regional and international conferences and/or training, also allowing for more flexibility in terms of partnering.

The staff satisfaction survey of civil servants will be further explored to generate system-wide evidence of job engagement, career expectations and the relation between HRM performance, staff turnover and retention. Based on the obtained findings, ReSPA shall envisage the activities that will address the mentioned challenges but also strengthen the leadership skills. Good leadership is crucial to building and maintaining a strong and resilient organisation that can properly perform its important duties for society.

Regional QM Centre will continue providing the services related to CAF institutionalisation and external evaluation for CAF Effective User Label, with strengthened support to enlarge the QM capacities and increase peer learning from EU best practices. The regional guidelines and online tools for measuring the quality of services by end users will be developed.



The emphasis on **digitalisation** will be on increasing the impact of digital public services through advanced design and better accessibility, managing the cyber security risks in digital service, converging the private and public sectors for IT development, enhancing the knowledge and skills related to interoperability, improving policies and practice for data opening and OGP policies. The possibility of establishing the Network of Digital Leaders will be explored to establish a regional structure to raise awareness of giving digitalisation an even stronger priority than it has been until now. This, in turn, would require keeping a close eye on the progress in digitalisation both at the national level but also benchmarking with other countries in and outside the region. Lack of coordinated policies to improve digital services and their monitoring will be the initial theme of work with digital leaders.

Regional and local authorities have a key role to play in service delivery, the EU alignment process and future application of EU rules, therefore, during the next period, ReSPA can also target its assistance to the sub-national level, albeit to a limited extent.

European Commission has confirmed the programmatic and financial support to ReSPA through the 5th Grant¹, entitled: *Support to the Regional School of Public Administration for implementing PAR Agenda and facilitating EU accession process in the WBs*. The indicative budget is EUR 4 350 000, while the implementation period shall be 36 months (3 years). The overall objective of the action is “to assist the reforming of public administrations in the Western Balkans in line with the Principles of Public Administration and European integration, contributing, among others, to good governance”. The new Grant will be focused on the following thematic areas, which constitute the main building blocks of ReSPA action in the following 3 years:

Policy planning, better regulation and coordination of the Centre of Government

ReSPA will ensure mutual exchange of the most valuable experiences not just from its members but also from good practices from EU member states. Particular attention will be devoted to improving the quality of the evidence-based policymaking process and policy coherence through the organisation of a comprehensive ReSPA Academy of the policymaking process. The better regulation agenda and quality of impact assessment and stakeholder engagement will also be a priority under this thematic area.

European integration and accession negotiations (with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects)

ReSPA's focus in this area will be to further promote good governance and support the administrative capacity of the administrations in the Western Balkans to take on the obligations of the EU membership in particular public administration reform at all levels of government by improving the knowledge and skills of public servants dealing with the European Integration process, including the accession negotiations. The ambition of ReSPA in this thematic area will be to create a critical mass of public servants throughout the region who will be equipped with a set of knowledge and skills for dealing with the EU integration and accession process in the region for driving and leading future change in the Western Balkans.

¹ Expected to start implementation by 1st of January 2023.

Human resources management and professional development

ReSPA shall continue to support merit-based selection, recruitment, promotion, talent management, performance appraisal and career development in the WB administrations. Furthermore, linking of performance appraisal with promotion, remunerations and efforts to develop attractive careers in public administration will be supported. Support will be provided in improving the job classification system and the quality of job descriptions. ReSPA will continue to support and promote the new trends in HR that will contribute to changing of organisational culture and the role of HR units, leadership and integrity.

Service Delivery (digitalization, simplification and quality management).

Understanding similar ambitions and topics of interest in PAs to accelerate the process of digitalisation, as well as different levels of progress achieved, ReSPA will focus on key areas such as: a) enhancing the level of digitized services (that affects usability, safe use of e-services, accessibility and inclusiveness), data management and interoperability, use of emerging technologies and b) the benefits of data-driven administration, the value of open data and of using the governmental data for a knowledge-based economy. The goal will be to raise the level of capacities for the digitalization of public services and boost the innovative and future-looking approach to developing digital services. Building capacities for the application of QM in the region will also be a priority.

ReSPA will continue to build on and substantively strengthen its communication activities. The rise of ReSPA brand awareness and recognition as a regional accelerator of reforms in the WB public administration is evident through broader outreach to stakeholders and partners' communication tools (websites, newsletters, social media, etc.) and media outreach, and it will be continuously improved. The constant support of the European Union to the region's PAR agenda will continue to be one of the spotlights of ReSPA communication. In strengthening communication results, ReSPA will stay focused on communicating reform initiatives from the region (mapped as good examples that can be reused across the WB PA institutions).

In all three aspects, the informative and human-centric approach to communication will continue to be dominant by focusing on the “voice of civil servants” (testimonials that focus on public services which meet the needs of the citizens and businesses) but also on the “voice of citizens” who are more and more aware of the importance and positive impact of public services on their wellbeing (most visible through e-services). ReSPA will strive to be more visible through the **Open days**, which will be organised in each administration to discuss PAR implementation issues, prospects for regional collaboration on PAR matters, present and discuss good examples from the member administrations, present the ReSPA mechanisms of support and planned activities, etc.

In the upcoming year, ReSPA will focus more on **enhancing dialogue with institutional partners and potential donors** active in the region, aiming to synergise and diversify its donor contribution base and hence expand the scope and volume of work and projects implemented in the region.

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Annual Report 2022

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.



Regional School of Public Administration

 Branelovica, 81410 Danilovgrad, Montenegro
 +382 (0)20 817 235
 respa-info@respaweb.eu
 www.respaweb.eu



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