



ReSPA

Regional School
of Public Administration

BUILDING TOGETHER
GOVERNANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Regional School of Public Administration
(ReSPA)

SUMMARY OF STRATEGY

2019–2024

Building Together Governance for the Future

Revised in July 2022

1. Strategic Goal

ReSPA works to strengthen cooperation between the region's public administrations, promote collective learning and knowledge transfer, and facilitate the realization of Members' European integration aspirations, with its engagement underpinned by a firm commitment to the European Principles of Public Administration. Through its 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 organisational driver.

ReSPA's overarching strategic goal for the coming period remains **to support member public administrations' in responding effectively to the needs of the citizens and businesses they serve**. This goal, arising as a result of a partner-centric strategic review, will be pursued through strengthening regional cooperation in areas of public administration reform and EU integration; supporting the implementation of PAR strategies; facilitating professionalization and depoliticization of the civil service; enabling digital transformation; and helping deliver improvements in the quality of public services. Therefore, and in addition to acknowledging the impact of public administration performance on society at large, ReSPA's strategic focus also explicitly recognizes the indispensable role public administrations play in advancing Members' long-term EU objectives.

2. Strategic Programmatic Objectives

ReSPA's focus for the period covered by the revised strategic document is reflected in the three specific programmatic objectives. Under **Specific Objective 1 - Improved implementation of PAR Strategies in the Western Balkans**, the focus is on enabling and facilitating the implementation of strategy frameworks as the principal policy tools through which all administrations pursue their respective reform agendas.

In order to further improve the quality of relevant strategic documents, as well as encourage greater commitment of implementing authorities, ReSPA will redouble efforts to provide the requisite analytical support, technical advice, regional networking and capacity building in support of partner institutions (Centre of Government) across this thematic area. ReSPA will, in particular, support PAR coordination in line with evidence-based policymaking principles, working to improve inclusive and evidence-based policy development, as well as coordination and monitoring mechanisms. This process will require special consideration for gender, environmental issues and vulnerable groups as critical cross-cutting priorities for the strategic planning processes; strengthened implementation of a coherent general administrative regime; and support to mechanisms for improved internal and external accountability of central administrative bodies.

With PAR a fundamental prerequisite of the EU accession process, and in order to effectively address the challenges stemming from EU integration requirements, ReSPA will support accession efforts with specific focus on PAR and governance aspects of the process.

Specifically, this will entail strengthening capacities of public servants - and relevant institutions - on the EU integration process, coordination mechanisms, available tools and methodologies, as well as the accession negotiations process and skills, while supporting

alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis. In addition, ReSPA will work to enhance Member capabilities in accessing and managing EU funds, as well as improving internal coordination of the accession process within the Members' administrations.

Under Specific Objective 2 - Improved professionalization of public service, ReSPA will work to address the lingering threats to professionalism and impartiality of the region's civil service.

With people at the centre of any effort to improve the performance of public administrations, attracting, developing and retaining the right talent is of paramount importance. As public sector jobs diminish in appeal, ReSPA will support public administrations in making a career in civil service an attractive proposition for qualified entrants in the job market. Ensuring that recruitment and selection are governed solely by considerations of merit, however, is a critical prerequisite for building a professional civil service and this will be reflected in ReSPA's work in this area. Succession and workforce planning will be targeted, alongside improvements in the job classification system and better utilization of data driven HRM analytics.

Alongside helping public administrations staff their civil service with the right people, ReSPA will also support efforts to ensure that the right talent is retained, remunerated and promoted through a comprehensive system of performance appraisal and career development. ReSPA's work here will be guided by staff surveys in order to generate empirical data on job engagement, career expectations, and, inter alia, the relationship between performance, turnover and retention. Finally, ReSPA will also support public administrations in building resilience to emergencies, foresight capacities, thus helping develop agile leaders who embrace innovation, and building modern HR units that thrive in adversity as well as diversity.

Under Specific Objective 3 - Improved public services using digital technologies and quality assurance models, the focus is on transforming and modernizing the way public administrations provide their services to the public. ReSPA will work to help partner public administrations develop user-friendly e-service models that place the client at the centre of the service provision process. Services digitized through this model will be subjected to continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess user experience and system performance. With personal data protection paramount to building public confidence in new technology, ReSPA will support partner public administrations in considering cyber security implications of digitized services.

Furthermore, ReSPA will work to address lingering issues with accessibility, data management and interoperability. Accessibility of public services remains a concern across the region and factors restricting access will be explored in more detail, with solutions pursued through peer exchanges and best practice demonstrations. Enhanced data management will be pioneered and deployed to inform the development of "once-only" new services with best practices once more deployed to showcase what is feasible in the region. ReSPA will support the implementation of interoperability standards and protocols, in line with the requirements of the European Interoperability Framework 2.0, providing tailored capacity building and learning opportunities adjusted to the relevant baseline levels of knowledge and skills of targeted civil servants.

Reacting to emerging opportunities presented by developments in information technology, ReSPA will examine and support blockchain and AI application in public administration, using technological advancements to build trust, improve transparency and increase efficiency in service delivery. Innovative, tech-driven services already in use by select Western Balkans

administrations will be showcased and promoted. Under the programmatic heading Data for a Knowledge-Based Economy, ReSPA will champion efforts to harness data as an enabler of greater transparency and accountability, as well as to provide inputs in the development of a knowledge economy. This will entail assessing both the demand and supply of open data by public administrations and educating civil servants as well as members of the public about the benefits of open data. In its efforts to promote public administrations that are open, responsible and accountable, ReSPA will also continue to work through The Open Government Partnership, a platform that brings government reformers together with civil society leaders in a joint endeavour to encourage closer cooperation between the two sectors in ensuring accountability, transparency and openness of governments.

Quality management remains a critical prerequisite underpinning reforming of service delivery as ReSPA Members look to redouble efforts at improving the level of services on offer and performance of public institutions. ReSPA will accordingly continue supporting the implementation of quality management models and instruments that identify and address weaknesses in service delivery models. Encouragingly, there is increased uptake in quality management by Member Governments and ReSPA is well positioned, through its recently established Regional Quality Management Centre, to spearhead this process in the Western Balkans for the foreseeable future.

ReSPA will also continue to recognize 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.

Crosscutting Themes

All ReSPA pursuits will be informed by a series of underlying principles aimed, among others, at: i) *ensuring inclusion of diverse interests*, to include internalizing 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.

Modes of Delivery

ReSPA will pursue its program through a combination of 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.

Target Groups

ReSPA's primarily caters to mid- and senior level public servants, policy makers and sector specialists working in ministries and governmental agencies responsible for PAR and European integration. Stakeholders from sub-national level will be also targeted by ReSPA actions, however to a limited extent.



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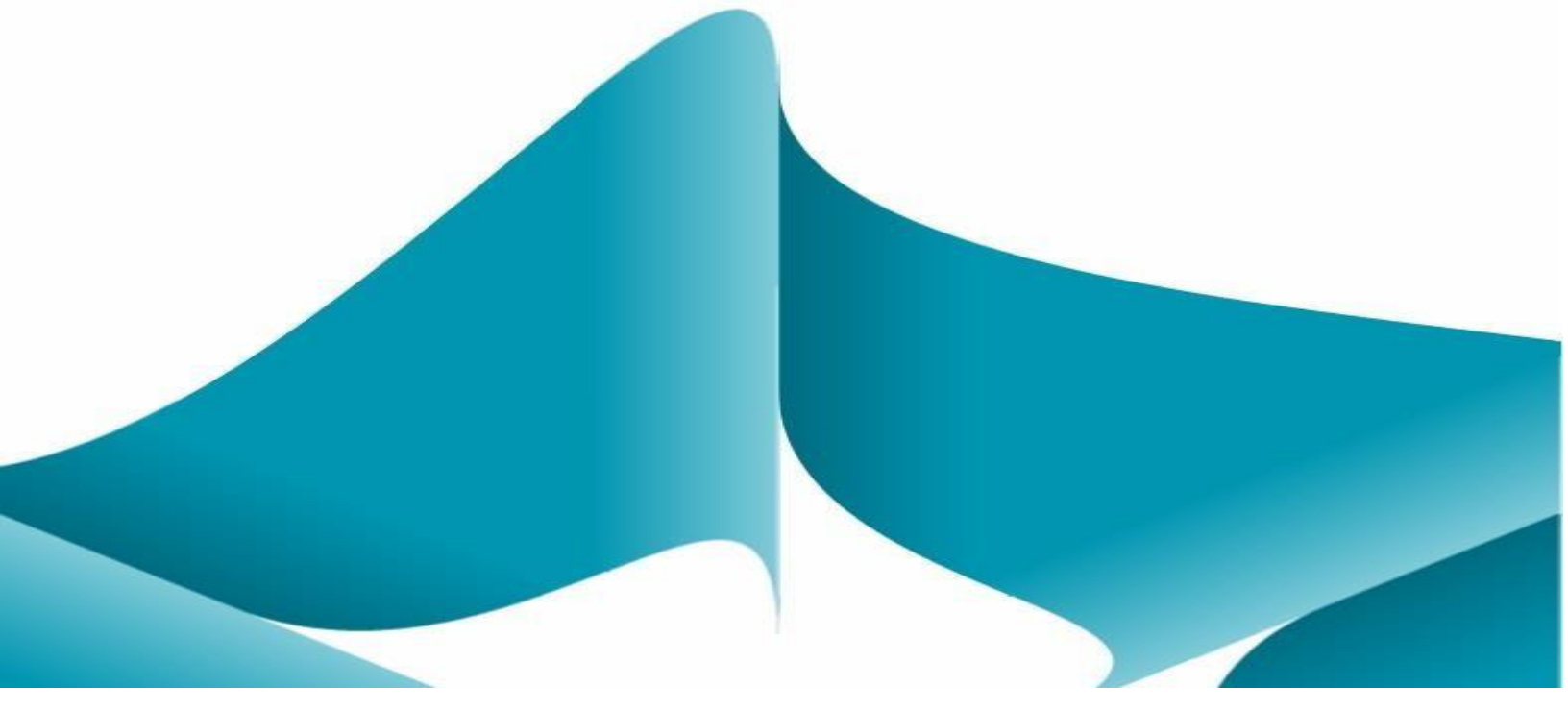
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List of abbreviations

AB	Advisory Board of ReSPA
ApB	Appeal Board of ReSPA
BR	Better Regulation
BS	Budget Support
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CEF	Centre of Excellence in Finance
CoE	Council of Europe
CoG	Centre of Government
DG NEAR	Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DISPA	Directors of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration
EI	European integration
EIPC	European Integration Programme Committee
EU	European Union
EU MS	EU Member State
EUPAN	European Public Administration Network
EC	European Commission
EMPA	Executive Master in Public Administration
FIA	Fiscal impact assessment
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GB	Governing Board of ReSPA
HR	Human Resources
HRMD	Human Resources Management and Development
ICEGOV	International Conference of Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JRC	Joint Research Centre
KDZ	Centre for Public Administration Research (Zentrum für Verwaltungsforschung)

MA	Managerial Accountability
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NIC	National Investment Committee
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
OECD/SIGMA	SIGMA programme within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPG	Open Government Partnership
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PA	Public Administration
PAP	European Principles of Public Administration
PFM	Public Finance Management
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
ReSPA Agreement	Agreement Establishing the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) of 21 November 2008
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
SCS	Senior Civil Service
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
WB	Western Balkans

Executive summary

Public administration reform is paramount to strengthening governance at all levels. This includes improving the quality and accountability of administration, increasing professionalism, depoliticization and transparency, also in recruitment and dismissals, more transparent management of public finances, and better services for citizens.

In its 2014 and 2018 Enlargement Strategies, the European Commission (EC) **highlighted public administration reform (PAR) as one of three “fundamentals first” areas** of the EU enlargement process: *“Addressing reforms in rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance remains the most pressing issue for the Western Balkans. It is also the key benchmark against which the prospects of these countries will be judged by the EU”*. The Commission's proposal under the 2020 Revised Enlargement methodology¹ **reconfirms the central role that public administration reform plays among the fundamentals of the enlargement process**. According to the new Enlargement methodology, negotiations on the fundamentals will be opened first and closed last and progress on the fundamentals will determine the overall pace of negotiations. As the highest policy objective of this strategy, ReSPA will aim to contribute to the **United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals**, more specifically Goal 16 which aims to build, among others, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The fundamentals first approach became an incentive for the Western Balkans to advance in PAR, although substantial challenges persist. Due to political changes in the region and the economic difficulties derived from the pandemic some of the efforts made in the past have been reversed and many of the PAR areas are experiencing a setback.

In 2018, at the time of drafting the initial ReSPA 2019-2024 Strategy, comprehensive Public Administration and Public Financial Management (PFM) reform strategies have been adopted in all the Western Balkan administrations, and now the situation has evolved significantly. Within the current PAR strategic framework across ReSPA Members, **the quality of policy planning and links to sector planning still need to be substantially improved** across all administrations. Often policies are prepared without a systematic impact assessment and consultations and urgent legislative procedures are extensively used. Consultation with external stakeholders did not lead to their genuine involvement and contribution. Modern civil service legislation is in place; however, professionalization of the civil service is still lacking, while political appointments continue, especially in senior positions. Most Western Balkans administrations have increased their efforts to improve service delivery with a focus on e-government services, but initiatives often lack strategic steering and coordination. While laws on general administrative procedures are in place, a substantial amount of sector legislation still needs to be amended to reduce special administrative procedures to a minimum. Addressing reforms in good governance thus remains a pressing issue for the Western Balkan administrations.

So far, ReSPA, as an international inter-governmental organization and **a key regional endeavour in PAR**, has contributed through various capacity-building and networking activities, in-country

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enhancing-accession-process-credible-eu-perspective-western-balkans_en

support mechanisms, peering and the development of regional research material aiming to support implementation of public administration reform and address some of the challenges identified above.

In 2018, at the time of the development of the initial strategy 2019-2024, the proposal was justified by the following:

- The need to have a comprehensive strategic document for a longer period with clear objectives and targets better aligned with the Principles of Public Administration.
- The commitment of ReSPA members and the European Commission (EC) to provide further support to ReSPA (*extension of Agreement on establishing ReSPA until 2024*, as well as the new EC grant worth more than €4 million for the period 2019–2022).
- ReSPA's stronger position, confirmed through the implementation of the EC Grant 2016–2018, providing an added value on the PAR Agenda in the region.
- The high relevance of ReSPA's activities in the region confirmed by the ex-post evaluation and ROM report on the previous ReSPA grants, which also provided important recommendations for improvement.

The ReSPA Strategy 2019– 2024 was endorsed by GB ML at the ministerial meeting held in Brussels in November 2018.

The Strategy was revised, updated and improved during March-July 2022, taking into account new potentials for ReSPA support in its members as well as the most recent developments related to implementation of PAR, PFM and EU integration agenda in the Western Balkans. The revised 2019–2024 Strategy focuses on **the improvement of the ReSPA members' performance in key horizontal governance and public administration reform fields** identified in the respective national PAR strategies of the ReSPA members, national PAR Action Plans, mainly through in-country support.

The main stakeholders continue to be the ministries responsible for public administration within the Western Balkan governments, as well as the centre-of-government institutions. The ultimate beneficiaries are the citizens and business community of the Western Balkans, to whom public institutions deliver public services.

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** - Within this specific objective ReSPA will cover the essential Principles of Public Administration such are: the strategic framework for public administration reform, policy development and co-ordination, and to limited extent, public finance management. ReSPA will ensure a structured framework for policy dialogue on PAR, PFM and EI. This will be achieved through the strengthening of sector strategic planning, monitoring and reporting, improved coordination and quality control procedures related to inclusive and evidence-based policy and legislative development in accordance with EU better regulation agenda.

- **European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects** – aiming to promote good governance and support administrative capacity of the administrations in the Region to take on the obligations of the EU accession in particular public administration reform (PAR) at all levels of government. This will be achieved by improving the capacities and skills of public servants across the region dealing with the accession talks (specifically) and European integration process (in general). In addition, administrations in the region are facing delays in programming and implementing EU Funds. This is often caused by weak administrative structures, inadequate programming and management capacity and limited project design skills. ReSPA will also dedicate efforts in increasing their capacity to plan, manage and implement the EU funded operational programmes and projects.
- **Human resources management and development** – Aiming to attract and retain the right people, support the development of skills and career paths, to enhance and develop potential, support the development of new ways of working, including teleworking, and the deployment of digital skills, for more modern administrations. ReSPA will be dedicated to the establishment of transparent and resilient public institutions that meet users' expectations. ReSPA will continue to contribute to the further professionalization of the public service by strengthening merit recruitment and performance appraisal. Merit recruitment/ of top management, linking professional/career development with a performance appraisal system, strengthening the capacities of the top management and building professional, modern and resilient public administrations will remain high on ReSPA's agenda.
- **Digital transformation in public administration** – for supporting governments and institutions to undergo a digital transformation, through enhanced digital capacities of senior civil servants for increasing in the uptake and deployment of digital technologies, which would contribute to acceleration in developing greater coherence in digital initiatives in the WB and alignment with the most recent trends and practices in the EU. ReSPA will engage in digital capacity building efforts, piloting of innovative public services, using GovTECH models for connecting PA with private sector and in streamlining of digital leadership for best use of their capabilities in advising on government-wide digitalization of processes and functions. Enhancing the quality and usability of human-centric digitized public services, promotion of the best reference models in data protection and security, building knowledge on interoperability, shaping policies and cross-border practices in open data and Open Government partnership, advocating to ensure the inclusiveness and accessibility to public services, will be priority topics of work. Anchored in the postulate of Lisbon declaration regarding promotion of the multi-stakeholder cooperation in the digital context the activities will be developed in partnership with authorities and all relevant stakeholders.
- **Quality management** ReSPA will continue providing the services of Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC) to meet the specific needs of the members' institutions for enhanced use of QM models (CAF) as well as the requirements to create national QM plans and roadmaps that would be used for laying the foundations of applying QM in systematized

way. Building the quantum of knowledge of civil servants to facilitate using QM and monitoring of the results of applied models will expand according to the acknowledged interest in PAs and authorization that ReSPA have got with establishment of RQMC to act as a body for formal evaluation of success in applying QM (CAF). Measuring of satisfaction of the users with delivered public services (including e services) as the crucial factor for their continual upgrading will be new theme addressed as the regional initiative. ReSPA will intensify communication, volume and nature of the cooperation with EUPAN and EIPA CAF Resource Centre to increase visibility of the QM practices from WB in the EU and to ensure import of knowledge pertaining to QM from the best EU practices to WB region.

The current review of the Strategy identifies potential improvement and provides an opportunity to streamline the Objectives defined in 2018. ReSPA will provide capacity-building activities at regional, national and local levels with key stakeholders, international experts and representatives of EU Member States to generate policy dialogue and receive feedback from peers. In addition, it represents a learning opportunity for ReSPA and the administrations of the Western Balkans in light of following:

- New Enlargement Methodology published in 2020 which gives higher relevance to PAR.
- Recent publication of the SIGMA Monitoring Reports that assess the state of play and progress in improving the quality of national public administrations. In 2017, SIGMA established a baseline in all areas of public administration. In 2019, monitoring was conducted against selected Principles. The full scope is covered again in the 2021 reports, which compares performance against the 2017 baseline and regional averages;
- 2021 EC Enlargements reports;
- Substantive technological transformation, green transition, demographic challenges, increasingly complex policy environment, strained fiscal contexts – all necessitating stepping up efforts, learning and support;
- New EC grant for the period 2023–2026 (in the amount of more than €4 million);
- Challenges faced in the region in the last two-years due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the public administration.

ReSPA will strive to boost leadership and political support towards PAR Agenda in the Region during the course of the upcoming years. ReSPA will focus on **further engagement with civil society, donor community, youth, academia, chambers of commerce** active in the area of PAR and European integration, through regional forums of discussion and action, which will bring together civil society, donor community and public servants. In addition, in view of **growing importance of sub national level** (regional, local government), ReSPA will entail support and networking toward regions and municipalities, which will be horizontal to all the thematic areas however to a limited extent.

ReSPA will ensure the provision of a unique framework for **networking and peer-to-peer learning**, and therefore the mutual exchange of experiences and practices in area of PAR will be an important segment of all further actions. The common PAR problems faced by the administrations could be more efficiently addressed through peer reviews and **sharing of good practices across the region** as regional cooperation in this field also contributes to the

development of effective and efficient administrations in the Western Balkans. **The peer bench-learning approach employed by ReSPA** will support public institutions from ReSPA members to improve their performance by comparing themselves with peer institutions, share knowledge and learning from them. ReSPA will also devote energies to the seek to knowledge management through the development of the **PAR Knowledge Platform**, which can facilitate desired behaviours and outcomes in the domain of PAR and EU integration.

More efforts should be invested also in assisting the administrations of the region in planning and coordination of sectoral policies and ensuring that **core PAR principles are duly reflected in sectoral policies**, since Public Administration can be as a backbone for twin transition, but also for a better implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan as well as the post pandemic resilience building reforms. To that aim, ReSPA shall be opened and flexible for partnering and jointly acting with other regional organizations and initiatives.

Communication activities will be diversified in three directions: raising ReSPA brand awareness and recognition, promoting EU support to the region, and strengthening PAR communication by promoting tangible results and good practices. In all three aspects, the informative and human-centric approach of communication will be dominant.

1. About ReSPA

The Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) is a **unique endeavour**, a joint initiative of the Western Balkan administrations² and the European Commission. The ReSPA initiative was initially formulated following the June 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda. From November 2006, ReSPA operated through a virtual network of the national schools and authorities of public administration of the ReSPA partners. The ReSPA Agreement was concluded on 21 November 2008 and became effective in 2010. It was formally launched as an inter-governmental organization in September 2010 and became fully self-managed from 1 October 2011.

ReSPA has been entrusted with the mission of **boosting regional cooperation in the field of public administration** in the Western Balkans. As such, ReSPA has been established to support the creation of accountable, effective and professional public administration systems for the Western Balkans which would provide better services to citizens and businesses.

The ReSPA Agreement sets out the strategic **organizational objectives** as follows:

- Improve cooperation in the field of public administration amongst the members of ReSPA;
- Strengthen exchange with the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area;

² Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Croatia withdrew from the ReSPA

membership as of 1 January 2015. Since the establishment of ReSPA, Kosovo* benefits from all ReSPA's activities on an equal footing with ReSPA members, although not contributing to the functioning of the organisation. Kosovo*'s application to accede to ReSPA was accepted in 2013 but its institutions have not yet completed the accession procedure.

- Strengthen administrative capacity in the public administrations of the members of ReSPA as required by the European integration process;
- Develop human resources in the public administrations of the members of ReSPA in line with the principles of the European Administrative Space.

For the first four years after its establishment, ReSPA operated as a regional training provider and an in-service training centre for public servants from the Western Balkans. ReSPA made the strategic shift from being primarily a training institution to an institution focused on capacity development and networking. Thus, it has become a regional hub which supports its members, individually and collectively, to develop their public administrations' capacity and foster experience exchange and regional cooperation. In an effort to enhance quality and capability of public administrations, the **training (capacity development) component** will be strengthened horizontally for all the thematic areas and more attention shall be paid to the main newly emerging topics and needs, with ReSPA serving as a learning and capacity building institute and a bridge between public servants and renowned experts and trainers.

1.1. ReSPA's mandate and strategic context

In accordance with its mandate defined by the Agreement Establishing the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA Agreement), ReSPA will keep pursuing its vision and mission.

The **vision**: ReSPA is an inter-governmental innovative regional hub for policy research, knowledge sharing, regional cooperation and networking in the field of public administration.

ReSPA's **mission** is to improve regional cooperation, promote shared learning and support the development of public administrations within the Western Balkans and, through this, support integration into the EU.

ReSPA's **motto** is: Building Together – Governance for the Future.

ReSPA is accomplishing its vision and mission in accordance with the following **key principles**:

- Supporting the development and improvement of **effective public services** in ReSPA's members;
- Supporting **innovative and comparative research** that would guide policy recommendations and would allow public-sector decision makers to measure their performance within the region and beyond, and to recognize their potential for improvement;
- Fostering the **exchange of experience, mobility, peering and bench-learning** and sharing of good practices in the region and with the European Union;
- Building **closer ties with the European Union** and its programmes for the region and ReSPA members;
- Building **cooperation and collaboration** with other actors in the region to ensure that efforts towards public administration reform and European integration are effective and

yield positive results;

- **Promoting the principles of good governance**, democracy and gender equality through networking and peer-to-peer learning. Fostering the principles of **sustainable administrations** as quality public institutions are instrumental to achieve green goals, to address the climate crisis and the significant economic and societal transitions outlined in the SDGs.

ReSPA shall serve as the **Western Balkans knowledge centre on public administration reform and good governance** which fosters regional cooperation on public sector transformation and supports its members to design and implement public administration reforms. It also boosts mutual learning among its members and builds stronger links with EU institutions and member states. ReSPA is dedicated to supporting its members in **managing and implementing changes, building organisations that are attractive as employers, as well as transforming institutions into resilient organizations able to manage crisis and instability**. ReSPA will seek to **understand/analyse** the trends, constraints and context in its member administrations and wider in EU MS, **promote** best practices, mutual learning, standards and principles and ultimately **deliver support** and expertise to its members.

ReSPA shall establish **a knowledge platform** that will support the respective administrations in learning how modern administrations work, screens trends in public administration nowadays, pools repository of relevant knowledge resources, identifies and promotes good practices. The platform will map relevant projects and initiatives in the domain of good governance and PAR in an inventory, thus enabling members to share lessons learned and best practices, learn from each other's positive and negative experience and also liaise with EU PAs and their knowledge base. ReSPA will contribute to **coordination in capacity building. Mapping of experiences and lessons learned** is important part of knowledge management. Understanding the underlying contexts and reasons behind "what works or what does not" supports administrative improvement and building on other PAs' successes, promotes mutual learning, and transfers related experience and inspiring cases across the WB and beyond. It is especially important in the area of **digital transformation** and it should be disseminated among WB administrations. It is important to know what countries are doing and how, therefore the Platform shall seek to further boost exchange of experiences, identification and proliferation of inspiring examples, etc. Mapping of experiences and sharing of lessons learned will be expanded to other areas as well. Through the platform, ReSPA will also continue to strengthen networking with the EU.

ReSPA shall contribute to **better networking, breaking silos** and putting on the agenda the issues and themes that bring different actors together to make changes. ReSPA will continue with its problem-based approach.

Some of the key issues that ReSPA seeks to address are:

- 1 Attractiveness of Public Administration;
- 2 Enhanced service delivery based on digitalisation, innovation and quality assurance for user oriented Public Administrations
- 3 Resilient public administrations ready to face the emerging challenges and crisis.

1. Public Administration is becoming a less attractive employer than it was before. Staff turnover is evident in several ReSPA members but also in a considerable number of EU member states. Attractiveness of PA has been affected, among others, by a lack of meritocracy, political influence, retention policies and salary issues. Staff turnover is especially present in IT sector and EU integration sector where employees who gained very good skills and who strengthened their knowledge and capacities became more competitive in the market and became more attracted by the private sector.

In order to respond to the challenges described above, ReSPA shall concentrate on providing support in **building a future-oriented strategic, efficient and effective human resources management (HRM)**. Support will be provided in:

- Strengthening the attractiveness and inclusiveness of public administration jobs;
- Strengthening the strategic workforce planning and moving from traditional to modern one;
- Creating human resources that promote learning and career development opportunities;
- Supporting human resources management including employment and retention in the civil service, talent and age management;
- Innovation and other changes on future structures and skill requirements;
- Supporting the development of new ways of working;
- Promoting the development of skills and diversification of career paths;
- Strengthening leadership and employer branding in public administration.

2. Emerging lessons from the response to the pandemic in WB point to the need that public sector needs to be flexible and innovative in its service delivery and to adapt new models of government operations and management. It has become apparent that PA s as responsible provider of public services face the challenge to enhance the quality and usability of public services for all users as well as to be prepared to react to changes in an efficient manner regardless of the tight public finances. In order to assist PA s in WB in their responses to such challenges ReSPA will address common issues of service delivery related **to digitalization of public services, quality management and change management**.

The WB administrations have similar ambitions to accelerate the process of **digitalization** but there is different level of progress that is reflected in different level of the provision of digitized services. The political support remains the crucial factor for more intensive creating of the policies and services in the area of digitalization. Understanding these processes and relying on the results achieved to date in regards to digitalization ReSPA will focus on key areas such as: enhancing the level of key digital enablers, data driven policy making (including open data), design of digitized services that affects usability, accessibility and inclusiveness as well as the data management, interoperability and interconnectedness of data registers. ReSPA will also promote the benefits of data driven administration, value of open data and of using data for knowledge-based economy.

The performance of public institutions and the administrative culture that accept the quality as the highest value when providing public services will be in the center of the programme related to **quality management**. The right management framework that is constantly striving for enhancement of functioning of the PA institutions need to be adaptable and capable for managing

internal and external changes. Using quality management and CAF as its tool, contributes to creating the resilient organizations that can more easily accept organizational changes and deploy **change management** culture and practices.

3. The Covid-19 pandemic in Western Balkans, the conflict in Ukraine as well as the subsequent economic crisis has shown the public sector is facing turbulent problems characterized by the emergence of unpredictable and uncertain events. Clearly, **public institutions and governmental programs need to more flexible and agile** so they can adapt in response to turbulence and scale their problem-solving efforts. These efforts cannot be undertaken without robust governance strategies for tackling turbulent problems, also texturing the necessity of public organisations from the Western Balkans to strengthen their collaboration with affected actors in other sectors, enhance knowledge-sharing and coordination, stimulate innovation and build common ownership to joint solutions. ReSPA shall promote foresight capacities, as an important basis for becoming more resilient and agile in face of the uncertainties affecting public institutions, especially in the WBs. ReSPA will support its members to maintain a high level of service to users in times of crisis, adapting public services to extreme conditions, and communicating in transparency on service changes and adaptations. In addition, attention shall be paid to the development of a foresight approach to identify potential crises, particularly in cyber or geopolitical fields, and supporting administrations to anticipate strategies to deal with them. ReSPA will promote the upskilling among public servants and training on the critical issues of our time.

ReSPA as unique, *sui-generis*, regionally owned mechanism driving lasting regional PAR across the WBs, supports its members with expertise in the forms of: diagnostic analyses, comparative assessments and policy recommendations on ways to address reform needs; sharing relevant good practices through regional intergovernmental networks, peer benchmarking, seminars, conferences and workshops. In addition, ReSPA runs two specific demand-driven instruments which deploy immediate expertise and support to various institutions in the region for developing and implementing targeted solutions to address gaps and reform needs, namely the “in-country support mechanism” and the “mobility scheme”.

To deliver its support, ReSPA uses **a wide range of experts** and practitioners from regional and EU MS administrations, international organisations, academia, renowned experts, consulting companies, or expertise directly from the European Commission.

2. ReSPA's drivers for change

In February 2020, the Commission put forward a new Enlargement methodology to drive the EU accession process by making it more credible, with a stronger political steer, more dynamic and predictable. Credibility should be reinforced through an even **stronger focus on fundamental reforms**, starting with the rule of law, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration as well as the economy of the candidate countries³. According to the new

³ Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (europa.eu), Brussels, 5 February 2020.

Methodology, PAR has become even more central in the accession negotiations. For the first time, negotiations on the fundamentals will be opened first and closed last and progress on these will determine the overall pace of negotiations. Negotiations on PAR as a fundamental will be guided by a roadmap on the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform.

Further progress in key PAR areas, including EI planning and co-ordination, can help ReSPA beneficiaries to be ready for the next, more challenging phase of the EU integration process. In addition to the new Enlargement methodology, **the review of ReSPA Strategy takes stock of all the activities implemented between 2019 and the first quarter of 2022, as well as the recently published SIGMA Monitoring Reports, the 2021 EC country reports and the first ReSPA annual monitoring report. This revision will facilitate the preparation of the future ReSPA Strategy in 2023 / 2024, which will cover the years 2025-2031.**

2.1. Challenges

The Western Balkans, as whole Europe, **is experiencing important geopolitical swings**. The implications of the conflict in Ukraine, including energy, food, economy, security, defence, but also the restrained fiscal space and demographic changes, have clearly affected the Western Balkans efforts to achieving growth, further stability but also green and digital transitions. The current geopolitical shifts confirm the need to accelerate the twin transitions, reinforcing the Western Balkans resilience as well as developing sustainable policies for stronger societies and administrations. Education and training systems in the Region targeting public sector, **need to be adapted to the new socio-economic reality**. This requires both learning skills to adapt to a rapidly transforming technological reality and labour market, as well as green skills and climate awareness to support value creation in the green transition and responsible citizenship.

The first period of implementation of the Strategy was marked by the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic hit ReSPA Members and Kosovo* amidst a reacceleration of economic activity and affected the functioning of the public administration. By threatening disruption of public service delivery, the crisis forced the administrations and public servants to adapt quickly and re-adjust the way in which services are delivered to **minimize the negative impact of the pandemic** on individuals and communities. All these rapid adjustments were positive to ensure continuity of public services, but the issue of quality of public services (sustainability of providing public services on the proper quality level) in medium or long term is open. In the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ReSPA had to react quickly to find solutions for public service and public servants. Many who were used to operating in routine, predictable and regulated systems had to deploy quick thinking, instant creativity and innovation to counter the effects of the pandemic in service delivery.

Despite the difficulties in organizing online events and maintaining the level of motivation and participation, ReSPA successfully adjusted to the new reality. The satisfactory profile of public servants participating in the activities of ReSPA's working groups and networks remains a challenge and should be addressed in the future; the need for improvement of the annual programmes and intermediate targets for "in-country support" projects, as well as cross-cutting

programmes related to PAR and EI demands expressed by the ReSPA members.

One of the main challenges for ReSPA continues to be meeting the requirements of its members which are at different levels of development regarding PAR, as well as the accession negotiations with the EU.

The fundamental lesson learnt so far is that PAR requires strong political commitment and that tangible achievements in PAR need more time. In this regard, Ministers in charge of PA reform in the ReSPA Members endorsed a Joint PAR Declaration in November 2021 *“On the affirmation of commitment to increase policy dialogue, regional cooperation and political attention to Public Administration Reform in the Western Balkans”*, aiming to ensure political leadership for public administration reform and accountability for its implementation.

3. ReSPA’s main achievements and their connection with future initiatives

Through implementation of its activities, ReSPA has become recognized as the leading regional organization for public administration development. However, in the past ReSPA’s activities have often been fragmented and have addressed too wide a set of PAR-related issues in the region. For that reason, ReSPA, in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders, decided to concentrate its efforts during the six years of Strategy implementation on a number of key horizontal issues that have been supported through the development of a number of studies and baseline analyses with recommendations for follow-up activities and these can be found on the ReSPA website at [ReSPA | ReSPA Research Documents \(respaweb.eu\)](https://respaweb.eu). Some of the most important recent results so far are presented below:

ReSPA has contributed to an improvement in policy development and coordination. In 2021, ReSPA published a Study on **“Policy Co-ordination in the Western Balkans”**. The study recognizes the need for increase co-ordination to deliver on government promises, the co-ordinating role performed by Centre of Governments (CoG) in many countries is increasingly important to help governments deliver on government-as-a-whole agendas. In order to be effective, PAR needs to be an overarching priority of the government. The Study was accompanied by individual administration studies that present *the current state of affairs and dynamics of policy co-ordination* in each of the administrations of the Western Balkans.

ReSPA contributed to support WB administrations with further improving and strengthening the RIA systems that they have been setting up in the past years. Following consultations and expressed interest of the ReSPA Members and based on the findings and recommendations of various available analysis and papers in the domain of Better Regulation in the Region, ReSPA presented the so-called **“Practical RIA package”**, which serves to the public administrations in the Region to improve their competences and capacities in the domain of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). **The RIA process is crucial for the European Integration**

process of all WB administrations. Impact analysis has the potential to provide a strong basis for implementation of the EU Acquis from societal and budgetary angles. RIA also provides countries with the argumentation needed to negotiate with the European Union about practicalities such as implementation deadlines and possible EU support to ensure effective implementation of EU rules.

ReSPA has supported its members in the European integration related processes by strengthening their administrative capacities for the successful conduction of negotiations as well as programming and utilization of EU funds. It has also conducted a study on the EU support to public administration reform through the IPA II: an overview and lessons learned, which provides, among other, analysis of the results achieved and impact of the EU sector reform contracts for PAR throughout the region, as well as the absorption capacities related to those contracts. In addition, ReSPA has facilitated the **discussions, proliferation of knowledge and exchange of regional experiences on IPA III Programming Framework** through the organization of a regional conference on IPA III as well as dedicated thematic workshops, focused on each Window of this funding instrument. The conference led to the development of a framework document on operational conclusions which was used by administrations in the region as well as DG NEAR as orientation paper for further alignment of actions in this area. ReSPA has also organized several **capacity building activities on legal harmonization and translation of the *acquis***. It has been recognized that seasonal schools on accession negotiations (in particular for chapters 23 and 24) have been a valuable tool on two-fold: acquiring new knowledge as well as exchanging experiences and methodologies at regional level among ReSPA members.

ReSPA contributed to support **further strengthening of merit recruitment and performance appraisal**. The guidelines on individual staff performance appraisal (ISPA) in the public administrations of the Western Balkan countries were developed to review practices, provide practical examples and to present new trends, which can enhance implementation. The Study on Merit-based Recruitment was published drawing broader lessons from the Western Balkans for the Western Balkans on how to make merit-based recruitment work more effectively. The self-assessment frameworks have been developed as tools for monitoring and assessing the progress made in the area of merit recruitment and performance appraisal. The reports produced with support of this tool also contribute to SIGMA as well as EC assessments. The study on Human Resources Management Information Systems (HRMIS) analyses the use of HRMIS and related applications in the digitalization of HRM processes in the Western Balkans civil services through the following three dimensions: technology (whether it is fit to face the challenges), functionality (how different processes are integrated with HRMIS and how this influences the overall digitalization of HRM processes) and data availability and quality. ReSPA continued to promote standards, principles and practices in the area of HRM and support learning and capacity building.

ReSPA contributed to enhance digital transformation. In November 2020, ReSPA members signed a joint **Declaration on Digital Transformation** of the Western Balkan Ministries for Public Administration, including coordinated response on emergency situations. ReSPA established a COVID-19 Western Balkans Digital Collaborative Platform in April 2020 which launched discussion on the most prioritized institutional challenges and the modalities aiming to set a

sustainable pattern of risk mitigation and resolving existing problems. The principles of Open Government partnership were continuously promoted through attendance and active participation of public officials from WB PAs at OGP global and regional events. ReSPA assisted in addressing most critical issues of opening of governmental data such as standardization, assessment of impact of data opening, management of open data portals and initiated talks about cross border exchange of open data. This area will be expanded with inclusion of OGP link with digitalization and with concept of using the data for knowledge-based economy data.

Improvement of the digitized public services - ReSPA promoted the methodologies and techniques for upgrading the e-services to be more user centric and innovative by design using traditional or new emerging technologies. This was done through Seasonal School on Digital Transformation 2020 that promoted rapid innovation labs as means for improving the user centric design of the digitized services. The need to know more about EU policies and practice in using emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, Blockchain has found the response in ReSPA Seasonal School 2021. This programme direction will continue through specific capacity building schemes related to human center design, use of AI in innovative ways, pilot initiatives with private sector related to new models in cyber security, enhanced use of key enabler (e payment) or digital tools for measuring the users' satisfaction (sandbox) etc. Although the generic training on agile management approach and tailored training aimed at further enhancing of the awarded innovative initiatives were provided within follow up work with awarded initiatives from PA Award 2020, this part of the programme will be upgraded. ReSPA will work more intensively with awarded initiatives from PA Award 2022 which tackle the digitalization of public services by providing concrete support to get insight into the most advanced EU similar practices, by engaging them into relevant programme actions and by providing the opportunity for further developing of the awarded solution within E GOV pilot schemes.

ReSPA will expand its work in the area of data management and interoperability with sustained support in improving the knowledge and capacities needed to undertake systematic work on interoperability. ReSPA has started and will continue in promoting already advanced interoperability practices and supporting the cross-border initiatives aimed at recognition of trust services and e-ID systems within existing or new bilateral agreements in the region.

Introduction of Quality Management in public administration - from first meeting of regional group of QM practitioners (2016) to Regional QM Centre (2021) ReSPA provided considerable assistance to the Members, through capacity building, research, institutionalization of CAF and promotion of QM and CAF specifically. Through two specific researches in 2017 and 2022, Feasibility Study in 2019 and within comprehensive Service Delivery Study in 2018 ReSPA was assessing the use of QM in the Region, reasons for embedding the QM policies and practices and ways of how to introduce quality and QM in for enhancing performance of the institutions, bettering of the services and measuring client's satisfaction. Almost 20 CAF projects have been implemented, five capacity building training at regional level, and number of thematic meetings and workshops all done to build the knowledge in the region for sustainable growth of quality management. The recognition for the work came from member countries who provided ReSPA with the "Memorandum on Establishment and Operation" of **Regional Quality Management**

Centre within ReSPA with authority to issue CAF Effective User Label, continue on CAF institutionalization, building firm links with EU CAF Network, etc.

In 2022, ReSPA continued already in 2020 initiated the **Public Administration Awards in the Western Balkans**. Together with the OECD/SIGMA the Awards aimed to enhancing the governance initiatives and support the establishment of strong public governance systems in the Western Balkan region. The 2020 Awards focused on successful responses by the Western Balkan administrations to address the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. In the 2022 edition, the PA Awards will highlight innovative elements, solutions, systems, tools and approaches introduced by governments within efforts not only to respond to the needs in crises but to go beyond and develop new or upgrade existing services with ensured enduring quality, assured focus on the users' needs and accelerated delivery, which in total have measurable effects on bettering lives of citizens.

These achievements will serve as the basis for further continuation of activities in all the fields relevant for an improvement in PAR in ReSPA members, but the focus will be on implementation of defined strategic and specific objectives in the remaining period of the Strategy implementation.

In addition, a general overview of PAR Agenda implementation in each administration of the WBs can be found in Annex 1 of the Strategy.

4. Programme Objectives of the 2019–2024 ReSPA Strategy

At the time of the 2019-2024 Strategy preparation, the objectives were formulated as a result of the different participatory steps taken during the strategy preparation exercise, while taking into account ReSPA's mandate, the Governing Board's decisions, as well as the recommendations of the SIGMA Monitoring Reports of 2017. Three years later, the publication of the 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Reports, ReSPA achievements and the new EC enlargement package open up the possibility of a revision of the objectives.

Specifically, in revising the objectives the following were considered:

- i) ReSPA members' individual needs and demands (their own developmental targets);
- ii) The overall demands of ReSPA members in the field of public administration;
- iii) The evolution of ReSPA towards being a hub for regional public administration excellence.

Strategic programme goal

The strategic programme goal of ReSPA over the six years is to contribute to the **effective response of the public administrations of ReSPA members to the needs of citizens and businesses. It will be achieved through strengthened regional cooperation in the area of PAR and EUI.**

In meeting this strategic goal in the Western Balkans, ReSPA will work on the further improvement of implementation of PAR and PFM strategies, the professionalization and depoliticization of the senior civil service, digitalization and the improvement of the quality of public services.

Specific programme objectives

In order to achieve its strategic goal, ReSPA will focus on achieving the following three specific objectives:

Specific objective 1: Improved implementation of PAR Strategies in the Western Balkans;

Specific objective 2: Improved professionalization of public service;

Specific objective 3: Improved public services using digital technologies and quality assurance models.

These objectives will be achieved through activities precisely defined in the annual Programmes of Work with detailed list of activities.

4.1. Specific objective 1: Improved implementation of PAR Strategies in the Western Balkans

Further progress in key PAR areas, including EI planning and co-ordination, can help the Western Balkans be ready for the next, more challenging phase of the EU integration process. The 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy highlights that 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**. It reports that for Western Balkan countries further efforts are needed to ensure the quality of the strategic frameworks and strengthen capacities for evidence-informed policymaking. Policy monitoring capacities should also be increased. Similarly, the 2021 SIGMA Monitoring Reports indicate that overall, there is a low rate of implementation of both PAR and PFM Strategies in the Western Balkan countries, in fact, lower regional average than in 2017. This is also due to **the quality of the strategic frameworks has deteriorated since 2017**, because of weaknesses in the quality of the strategies approved, their performance monitoring frameworks and the process of extending their period of validity beyond 2020.

According to the latest SIGMA Monitoring reports published in November 2021, the indicator of the **quality of the strategic framework of public administration reform** has a regional average lower than 2 out of 5 (in 2017 it was 3 out of 5)⁴. The other indicator measuring the effectiveness of the PAR implementation and comprehensiveness of monitoring and reporting has a regional average lower than 1 out of 5 (the value given in 2017)⁵. The **financial sustainability of PAR** has a regional average below 1, even lower than the average of 2017 (1 out of 5)⁶. There are discrepancies between the cost estimates of planned PAR measures and the actual funding

⁴ Albania (3/5), BiH (2/5), North Macedonia (3/5), Kosovo* (1/5), Montenegro (0/5) and Serbia (2/5) in comparison with the value given in 2017: Albania (4/5), BiH (3/5), Macedonia (3/5), Kosovo* (3/5), Montenegro (5/5) and Serbia (3/5). For BiH, although the SIGMA Monitoring reports do not cover the strategic framework, the current state of place with regards to the PAR/PFM has been taken into consideration.

⁵ Albania: (0/5), BiH (0/5) North Macedonia (2/5), Kosovo* (1/5), Montenegro (0/5) and Serbia (0/5) in comparison with the 2017 scores: Albania: (1/5), BiH (1/5) North Macedonia (1/5), Kosovo* (2/5), Montenegro (1/5) and Serbia (1/5)

⁶ Albania (2/5), BiH (0/5), North Macedonia (1/5), Kosovo* (0/5), Montenegro (0/5) and Serbia (0/5) in comparison with the 2017 scores: Albania (2/5), BiH (0/5), North Macedonia (0/5), Kosovo* (1/5), Montenegro (1/5) and Serbia (1/5).

allocated for those reforms in the state budget. The PAR strategic documents in the Western Balkan administrations should contain information about the foreign donors supporting reforms, as currently they do not provide full details about specific projects and/or the extent of the planned financial assistance.

Accountability and coordination in PAR have a regional average of 1 out of 5 (2 out of 5 in 2017)⁷. This group of indicators has the lowest regional average together with the indicators on PFM. As per the SIGMA data on the latter, the quality of the medium-term budgetary framework, the quality of the annual budget process and budget credibility, the transparency and comprehensiveness of budget reporting and scrutiny and the indicator for the functioning of internal auditing all have a regional average of 2 out of 5, so it remains the same average as in 2017, while the functioning of internal control has a regional average even lower than in 2017, below 1 out of 5⁸. These very low values for the indicators require interventions in at least three reform areas: the conceptual approach for the PAR Strategy, the PFM Strategy and policy development and coordination.

Regarding the **coordination process, the PAR Strategies usually foresee coordination at the political and administrative levels, however the quality of central government strategic planning and the links to sector planning need to be substantially improved in the Western Balkans**. Coordination between the PAR and PFM strategies is especially important, as is coordination among many subjects. The majority of WB countries have problems in such coordination. Resolving these problems means close cooperation between the Centre-of-Government institutions and ministries responsible for public administration and finance.

In line with the Public Administration Principles, ReSPA will contribute to the improved performance of beneficiaries in the fields of horizontal governance and public administration reform identified in the national PAR and PFM strategies and in line with the requirements stemming from the EI process. In addition, ReSPA will support the implementation of the national PAR Strategy Action Plans mainly through in-country support to the ReSPA members.

Within this specific objective ReSPA will cover the essential Principles of Public Administration such are: the strategic framework for public administration reform, policy development and co-ordination, and to limited extent public financial management. ReSPA will provide analytical support, advice and capacity building support to partner institutions in its Members in their efforts to implement the key Principles of Public Administration: to strengthen sector strategic planning, monitoring and reporting in coordination with CoG institutions in charge of strategic planning coordination and quality control; to improve coordination and quality control procedures and line ministry outputs related to inclusive and evidence-based policy and legislative development in accordance with EU better regulation agenda. Through engagement of the Programme Committee ReSPA will ensure coordination and collaboration on the regional level of the main actors and functions on horizontal aspects of PAR/PFM policy dialogue meetings.

⁷ Albania (1/5), BiH (0/5), North Macedonia (2/5), Kosovo* (2/5), Montenegro (2/5) and Serbia (1/5) in comparison with the 2017 values: Albania (3/5), BiH (3/5), North Macedonia (2/5), Kosovo* (2/5), Montenegro (2/5) and Serbia (2/5).

⁸ According to the current assessment: Albania (1/5), BiH (0/5), Macedonia (0/5), Kosovo* (1/5), Montenegro (0/5) and Serbia (1/5).

According to the 2021 SIGMA reports, the quality of policy planning for European integration has a lower regional value than in 2017 (lower than 2 in comparison with 2 out of 5). Similarly, the sub-indicators which constitute this composite indicator are also very low: the quality of planning documents for EI has a value of 2 out of 5. The indicator, the implementation rate of the government's plans for EI-related legislative commitments (%), has a value of 0 out of 4. The EI-related commitments indicator carried forward has a value of 1 out of 4. According to the indicator the legal framework enables harmonized planning of EI, which has a value of 2 out of 2, the legal framework is at an adequate level regarding planning harmonization.

To this aim, ReSPA proposes to include under the area of policy co-ordination activities aimed **at contributing to the effective functioning of the EI coordination mechanisms at political and administrative level, as well as effective coordination of the PFM Reform programmes.**

The EU accession process has not only significantly accelerated activities in the area of legislative reforms but has also contributed to a more systemic and comprehensive approach to creating a new legal system. All the countries in the Western Balkan region have adopted regulatory strategies, with the aim of simplifying and making their business environment more competitive, with a comprehensive approach to better regulation/regulatory policy and have made it a pillar of their public-sector reform efforts. This "whole-of-government" approach represents a major step taken in recent years, embedding administrative simplification in the overall regulatory quality system at the national level. However, very often the need to transpose EU legislation quickly undermines all the efforts done by the countries to implement Better Regulation.

PAR is crucial for building resilient societies and economies in the region, but also an important fundamental pillar for advancing in the EU accession process. Therefore, ReSPA will devote to this process a specific focus aiming to enhance and promote regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and Governance aspects. The main aim will be to promote good governance and support administrative capacity of the administrations in the Region to take on the obligations of the EU accession in particular public administration reform (PAR) at all levels of government. This will be achieved by improving the capacities and skills of public servants across the region dealing with the accession talks (specifically) and European integration process (in general). ReSPA will also dedicate efforts in increasing their capacities to programme, manage and implement the EU funded operational programmes and projects.

In order to improve the implementation of the PAR Strategies in the Western Balkans, ReSPA will work on the following key areas:

- Coordination of PAR in accordance with evidence based policymaking principles;
- European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and Governance aspects.

4.1.1. Coordination of PAR in accordance with evidence-based policymaking principles

The interconnection, implementation and long-term sustainability of the PAR reforms, associated with requirements stemming from the European integration process of the Western Balkans, need to be ensured. The preparations for accession and membership need to be underpinned by arrangements and capacities for policy planning, development, co-ordination and implementation that enable consistent policy planning and co-ordination of government activities with ensured public finances and included priority setting in relation to the EU accession process.

In all ReSPA members, **the institutional architecture at the at the Centre of Government for carrying out policy planning and co-ordination functions should be enhanced to ensure the well-organized and competent functioning of the policy-making system.** An additional important need is enhancing the quality of public financial management and **ensuring the appropriate financing sources** for the planned reform activities. The **problem becomes more persistent when it comes to the reforms and the EI coordination body(ies) which is some cases have limited authority and capacity to coordinate and plan the EI policy, the EU assistance and the transposition and translation of the EU acquis.**

Even though such strategies have been developed in the WB countries and have already been implemented for a certain number of years, the policy coordination processes are still suffering from a lack of proper policy analysis capacity, a low quality of legislative drafting and policy development, a lack of inter-ministerial coordination, inadequate public consultations, inadequate costing of action documents raised by the strategies, and weak fiscal and regulatory impact assessments. A lack of inter-institutional cooperation, as well as systematic and coherent stakeholder engagement in all phases of the planning and policy-making processes are leading to shortcomings in the coordination of policies. There is need for strengthening the capacities for monitoring reporting add evaluation of public policies. Also, the interconnection between the European integration process and legislative plans is often missing.

The preparations for EU accession and membership require **administrative capacities for policy planning and development** and for their adjustment with the EU integration agenda. These efforts are to be performed by the CoG institutions, in the first place, but the fulfilment of policy priorities is also the responsibility of line ministries. The line ministries and other relevant bodies must possess sufficient administrative capacities for policy development and to define its strategic objectives in the medium term. The institutions in charge of coordinating the EI process should play a role within the policy-development process and ensure the systematic and timely transposition of the EU *acquis*. Strategic and other policy documents should be adjusted both in terms of their substance and time sequencing with the European Integration Programme. In order to be achievable, all policy objectives should have sustainable financial sources for their implementation. An effective connection with research evidence in policy making from academia and think tanks together with inclusion of various civil society attitudes will be proofed trough the implementation of the comprehensive regional academy on evidence-based policymaking process.

ReSPA activities will have a goal to **improve inclusive and evidence-based policy development and coordination** and monitoring mechanisms, with specific attention to gender, environmental issues and vulnerable groups as cross-cutting priorities during the strategic planning processes; to put in place and strengthen implementation of a coherent and appropriate general administrative procedures; to support mechanisms for improved internal and external

accountability of central administration bodies. ReSPA will introduce digitalized skills and technics in PAR and overall policy coordination activities.

Through the previous activities of the Programme Committee, ReSPA has been focused on policy planning and alignment with European integration and PFM, therefore the need to continue providing support on the basis of the above values is self-evident. ReSPA will build on its results achieved to date, especially through **further development of regional cooperation among the CoG institutions of the Western Balkans**. Thus, the Programme Committee, Regional Group on CoG, the proposed new Regional Group on EI will offer platforms for experience exchange, peer learning and programme streamlining. Relevant forums for policy dialogue will also be facilitated and supported, while comprehensive training activities on all segments of policy cycle will be realized. Following the guidance provided by the Regional Groups, ReSPA will produce policy paper on integrated planning system containing relevant recommendations for the improvement of its members' planning and coordinating systems.

Based on the **ReSPA's Study on Better Regulation**, published in 2018, and the **"Practical RIA package"**, published in 2021, ReSPA will support its members in strengthening RIA functions, strengthening public consultation processes (both on-line and off-line) and improving monitoring of the implementation of the consultation requirements. In addition, ReSPA will support development of a policy framework for ex-post reviewing of regulations by application of RIA methodology. In addition, it is of outmost importance ReSPA's support to linking and analysing practice and quality of RIA implementation and EU acquis transposition in Western Balkans. Special attention, even though limited, shall be also paid to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 in the Western Balkans.

4.1.2. 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 administrative capacity of the administrations in the Western Balkans to take on the obligations of the EU membership in particular public administration reform (PAR) at all levels of government **by improving the knowledge and skills of public servants dealing with European Integration process as well as accession negotiations**. Reforming public sector remains fundamental for building resilient societies and economies in the region as well as for running successful countries but it is also an important priority reform for advancing in the EU accession process. The challenging accession negotiation process which is now a reality in four out of five ReSPA members requires knowledgeable and skilled public service which shall bring the process forward with a satisfactory pace. Therefore, ReSPA will devote to this process a specific focus aiming to enhance and promote regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects.

European Commission Reports and the SIGMA assessment show that PAR challenges in the Western Balkans include, among others, **lack of coordination capacities related to European**

Integration planning and implementation. All administrations in the region have established the **critical functions for co-ordination of European Integration** (EI) activities and processes as well as have developed required guidelines to support implementation of these critical EI functions. However, according to 2021 SIGMA assessment, the formal mechanisms and co-ordination bodies for EI, both at the political and administrative levels, were not fully functional in any of the administrations of the region. Infrequent meetings and weaknesses in the functioning of central co-ordination bodies do not ensure timely and substantive discussions to identify and address implementation challenges, leading to the conclusion that gaps and weaknesses (including capacities) exist in EI planning and monitoring in many administrations.

All administrations in the Western Balkans have established the necessary legal and regulatory basis **to achieve harmonized planning of EI work**, but implementation has been inconsistent and slow. The status of EI planning documents is clearly established, and the roles and responsibilities of key institutions are defined in regulations in all administrations. Challenges remain in actual implementation, as a large number of EI-related legislative commitments were not adopted as planned. It is crucial that policy planning in Centre of Government takes into account the “EU policy first” approach for designing policies and programmes which are in synergy with the accession process and further accelerate it.

It can be noted that **the effectiveness and quality of transposition of the European Union acquis has declined** slightly compared to 2017. While administrations of the region have the necessary procedures and requirements in place to ensure informed transposition of the EU acquis, the actual implementation of the transposition plans was weaker in 2021 than in 2017 (except for Albania). Most administrations, have challenges in ensuring timely translation of the original EU law to help plan and implement evidence-based transposition.

Despite the different stages of accession process, ReSPA Members and Kosovo* **face similar challenges in meeting a number of conditions defined in the frame of the European accession process** and reforming their public administrations, which could more efficiently address through peer review and sharing of good practices at regional level. Efficient co-operation among different institutions within the administration remains essential for managing the accession process, even though the main “burden” falls to the “Centre of Government”, mandated with coordinating the EI process. On the other hand, every single central institution has a demanding role, among others, in the alignment of legislation with the EU acquis, and therefore the process requires an efficient public administration, motivated and agile. Being a cross cutting issue, the European Integration process requires a coherent approach by all relevant stakeholders and therefore there is a permanent need to support development of adequate administrative capacities in this domain.

All ReSPA Members are facing challenges and delays in **programming, implementing and absorbing EU Funds**, in particular the Instrument of pre-accession assistance. This is often caused by weak administrative structures and capacities, inadequate programming and management capacity and limited project design skills. ReSPA shall support its members in increasing their capacity to programme, manage and implement the operational programmes

and have access to further funding instruments of the Union.

ReSPA actions in this area will be concentrated in the following building blocks, which will feed the fulfilment of the specific objective:

- a) Strengthening the capacities of public servants and relevant institutions on the EU integration process, coordination, tools, methods as well as on the accession negotiations process and skills (focused on specific clusters and chapters of the acquis).
- b) Supporting effective alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis and its implementation.
- c) Enhancing administrative and human capacities in the WBs administrations for processing and managing EU funds and design mature projects.
- d) Improve internal co-ordination of accession process within the administrations of ReSPA Members (communicating the European integration process, improving reporting quality, etc.)

The improvement of public administration efficiency is crucial for the success in the EU accession process and the *link among the accession process and principles of Public Administration remains direct*. In this regard, it is a necessity to make additional efforts to operationalize and systematically use national structures and instruments for EU integration co-ordination, planning, monitoring and reporting, including strengthening the capacities of public servants engaged in this process and especially the accession negotiation talks. The ambition of ReSPA in this thematic area is **to create a critical mass of public servants** throughout the region which will be equipped with a set of knowledge and skills for dealing with the accession process in the region for driving and leading future change in the Western Balkans.

4.2. Specific objective 2: Improved professionalization of public service

Public administration has to cope with the constant changes which affect today's society and continue to ensure citizens' well-being. Based on rigidity, hierarchy, procedures, formalities, and specific norms, public administration is now confronting with the **challenge of changing its traditional values**. It should become more flexible, adaptable and, in the end, transformational.

According to the SIGMA reports, there is a need for improvement of the capacity of public administrations to adequately serve the needs of their societies in all ReSPA members. The national Strategies on Public Administration recognize the need to improve professionalization and depoliticization of human resources. ReSPA Members have made moderate progress since 2017 with the average of all indicator values increasing from 2.8 to 3.1. ReSPA Members have a sound legislative basis to effectively manage and develop a professional civil service but the implementation is lagging behind. Although there was some progress since 2017 in regard to quality of top management, this area remains the most problematic one. Merit recruitment/dismissal of top civil servants was one of the worst performing dimensions in 2021. Furthermore, **the performance appraisal systems are formal or not linked to professional/career development** activities when used. Linking performance appraisal with

training needs, promotion and remunerations in either a positive or a negative direction remains a challenge.

The existing professional development is not aimed at top management and it even deteriorated since 2017. The existing human resource authorities/civil service agencies are still relatively weak and need to develop internal capacities to cope with everyday challenges. The existing HRMIS in the Western Balkan administrations are not populated with data and do not yet allow for data-driven analytics and HRM.

ReSPA shall address this objective through several building blocks:

1. Merit recruitment and selection – People are the main asset of any organization. Attracting and retaining the right people is one of the key ReSPA tasks. Individuals are drawn to careers in public service, primarily, by a unique set of altruistic motives such as serving the public interest, effecting social change and shaping the policies that affect society. This perspective views public service as a distinct profession or calling to which certain types of people are morally compelled. Against this background, ReSPA shall continue to support merit-recruitment process. It will provide support to **promote the attractiveness of public service**, finding, developing and **attracting new talents** to join the civil service. ReSPA shall further support the development of HRMIS that allows for data-driven analytics. It will, among others, strengthen the capacities of civil servants in data analysis. ReSPA will support public administrations in **workforce planning, forecasting of the needed skills**, and how they accommodate the workforce in flexible conditions, especially during COVID pandemic. In addition, forecast of inflows and outflows that lead to exploration of steps and opportunities for advancement of individuals. Support will also be provided to ReSPA members in **improvement of the system of job classification**, and improving the quality of job descriptions.

2. Performance appraisal and career development – ReSPA will continue to support the linking of performance appraisal with promotion, remunerations and efforts to offer and **develop attractive careers in public administration at all levels**. In this context, ReSPA shall conduct a staff satisfaction survey of civil servants to generate system-wide evidence of job engagement, **career expectations and the relation between HRM performance, staff turnover and retention**.

Public institutions should strengthen their capacities to manage the unforeseen, namely, to **become resilient to different types of shocks**. More than ever, public institutions should show a high level of resilience as they must respond to the needs of the affected social groups. To this end, ReSPA shall provide support in the development of agile leaders, learning about **innovation leadership and innovation culture**. ReSPA will support learning about the **ageing workforce and generational solidarity; inclusion and diversity, teleworking, and the deployment of digital skills**. **The modernization and strengthening of HR units, changing of organizational culture and supporting innovations in HRM will also be supported**. In this context, ReSPA shall also focus on **fostering integrity in the public administration** in cooperation with the regional organizations that are dealing with this topic.

4.3. Specific objective 3: Improved quality of public services using digital technologies and quality assurance models.

Creating a more user-oriented administration remains a governments' priority in the Western Balkans. Progress in developing e-services continued in the region, which facilitated to a great extent the response of the administration to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to SIGMA, the key requirement in service delivery is a citizen-oriented public administration and for the quality and accessibility of public services to be ensured. The latest assessment of this carried out by SIGMA in 2021 indicates that delivery of citizen-oriented services⁹ has a regional average score of 3 out of 5, similar than in 2017 and the fairness and efficiency of administrative procedures¹⁰ has a regional average score of 4 out of 5, which represents an increase with regards to 2017 assessments. Moreover, the existence of enablers for public service delivery¹¹ and the accessibility of public services are assessed higher than in 2017, with a regional average score of 3 out of 5.

The contribution to the development of user-oriented PA that deliver quality public services will be targeted at:

- Digitalization of public services and data for knowledge-based economy
- Quality management underpinning the change management

4.3.1 Digitalization of public services and data for knowledge-based economy

Digitalisation of public services

Having in mind global challenges and trends in particularly Governance 4.0., rapid changes (pandemic, climate), digitalization of Public Administration remains both as enabler and provider for the PA ecosystem adaptation and transformation. Recent findings from SIGMA monitoring reports, ReSPA analytic documents such as Zero Open data guidelines and Comparative Best Practice Study as well as conclusions and recommendations obtained from E-government working group meetings and from high level events have shaped the strategic orientation of ReSPA in subject area. ReSPA strategy is aligned with the EU's digital strategy as well as with Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and is committed to: boosting research and innovation, increasing quality and usability of e-services, increasing cyber security, trust and digitalization of industry and strengthening the digital economy and society.

The European legal and regulatory landscape designated to privacy and security of the digital

⁹ Albania (4/5); BiH (1/5); North Macedonia (4/5); Kosovo* (2/5); Montenegro (2/5); Serbia (4/5).

¹⁰ Albania (4/5); BiH (3/5); North Macedonia (4/5); Kosovo* (4/5); Montenegro (4/5); Serbia (4/5).

¹¹ Albania (4/5); BiH (2/5); Macedonia (3/5); Kosovo* (2/5); Montenegro (2/5); Serbia (3/5).

identity and trust services such as Electronic Identification and Trust Services Regulation, European Interoperability Framework as well as Regional Interoperability and Trust services (2021) publication, have been also taken into account when designing thematic area designated to interoperability.

The digitalization segment will be aimed at **improving public services** (e-services) in the process of its transformation (digitalization) with a special emphasis on design, usability, and safe use of e-services, improved accessibility, data management and interoperability as well as deployment of new IT technologies.

More specifically the Programme activities will be developed around the building blocks of:

1. Increased quality, usability and safe use of e-services

ReSPA will develop programmatic activities that aim at increasing quality of e-services provision, while introducing fully user-centric service (re)design supported by the principle of living situations for all e-services. The adjacent activity will focus on the promotion of systematic monitoring of e services delivery performance or user satisfaction.

By adhering to proper security measures users are assured that their data is stored securely. Different security solutions in the field of e-government services and assistant to members in approximation of EU standards for safe and protected use of personal standards will be in the focus of ReSPA work with particular institutions and teams of civil servants belonging to IT security departments.

2. Improved accessibility, data management and interoperability

ReSPA will support the discussion on comparable international standards and best practices in addressing the question of the **accessibility of public services**. The discrepancy between the lack of information regarding the causes and effects of poor accessibility of public services and proclaimed policy objectives for improved accessibility throughout the region will be explored. This would result in preparation of background materials for guidelines for addressing the issue of accessibility. Peer exchange in the domain of the regional best practices that have been identified (accessibility) and discussion on the possibilities of mapping excellent practices in ensuring the Accessibility of Public Services and through this development/moderation of the growing community of practitioners in the Western Balkans using the collaborative (on-line) space.

Governments can use data to drive efficiency, and for achieving improved public services based on appropriately safeguarded, integrated and interoperable data infrastructure. Mapping relevant registries is the first step in understanding which data are available and where they are placed. Fast and automated data exchange require harmonized data formats and standards. ReSPA will support the “use cases” approach in **enhancing data management** and “data labs” for testing “once only” new services. The recognized good practices that entail “once only” principle in the provision of public services will be shared and promoted.

European Interoperability Framework - EIF 2.0 has set a ground for the national frameworks for the interoperability in the WB6 economies. ISA2 EU led initiative (follow up - GOV Tech Incubator)

has provided a lot of practical and standardized recommendations in the subject area. RESPA will be strongly contributing to the idea and ambition toward the Interoperable Western Balkans by investing into increasing of capacities **in domain of interoperability and will frame capacity building and learning opportunities** adjusted to different levels of knowledge and skills (beginners, intermediate, advanced) aligned with other regional initiatives.

ReSPA is also inspired from and contributes to by active participation (traditionally organizes ReSPA panel) at the Digital Summit of the WB 6 where interoperability, trust services and data for digital economy are one of the main building blocks.

3. Deployment of new IT technologies

Following the trends in development of the emerging “new” technologies and the growing interest in WB economies for potential application of, in particular AI and Blockchain, as the means for more efficient services and safe exchange of information, ReSPA will continue at providing insights into the most contemporary policies and practices of using these technologies in EU. The services which are already provided using AI in the WB will be showcased and promoted.

Data for knowledge-based economy

1. Strengthening the demand for open data

Use of data, including open data, has the potential to increase transparency and provide the fuel for a knowledge-based economy and society. The proactive use of data and big data by governments enables more responsive, inclusive, accountable governments - “open by default” approach. ReSPA will support the techniques for assessing existing available open data sets and the demand that exists for opening of data, identification of high value open data sets and their update, improvement of open data portals and raising awareness of the public and public administration about the importance of open data and the benefits of their reuse.

ReSPA will focus on promoting activities related to open data and the impact of open data while strengthening the learning from the region and abroad. There is a need for interoperability in the cross-border open data exchange in line with EU practice. The solutions would be tested within Open data GOV Tech Incubator.

2. **The Open Government Partnership** brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive and accountable. ReSPA will continue promoting the OGP in its future activities and will support the participation of its members in the OGP global summits. This intervention area is intrinsically connected with the transparency of public administration, which highlights the importance of cooperation and co/creation of policies of the CSO sector and relevant institutions.

4.3.2. Quality management underpinning the change management in public services

Quality of services, satisfaction of users with services and continuous improvement of

organizational functioning are becoming central elements in the reforms as the ways to enhance the institutional capacity and improve the efficiency (and effectiveness) of the public administration.

The **application of quality management models and instruments** (QM model-CAF, QM instruments-measuring of customers satisfaction, measuring staff satisfaction) can be considered **as one layer of the change management** as the application of QM means also enhancing the organisational readiness to respond to internal and external changes. Using the QM models, CAF primarily, is not a one-off measure. As CAF detects the weak points in the processes and reasons for poor results of one organization, it defines the measures for the improvement that align resources and leadership to support the change. The measures have the character of managing the changes that leadership will need to constantly apply in striving for better quality. QM instruments, on the other side, used for measuring the users' satisfaction, can act as a trigger force for changes in public administration/government that can underpin the trust in the government.

ReSPA will **support promotion of the change management** in the public sector in parallel with the actions aimed at **enhancing application of QM**. The positioning of quality management is on increase in the Western Balkans administrations, since in the current reform documents it has a) taken much more prominent place than before b) it is there for the first time or c) there is a strong political commitment to promote use of QM.

For ReSPA clear strategic opportunity is the establishment of **Regional Quality Management Centre** in the ReSPA structure since 2021 and implementation of CAF in ReSPA itself. The objectives as set up in the Memorandum of Establishment and Operation shows the trust the ReSPA Members placed to ReSPA to enhance the QM agenda and specifically to enhance Quality Management networking in the Region, support institutionalization of CAF and issuing CAF Effective User Label, spread good practices in QM (CAF primarily) through CAF Network and pool of external evaluators, etc.

Inherent to QM models and especially CAF 2020 (developed by EUPAN) are agile learning and design thinking and ReSPA will incorporate training on agile approach in management to QM capacity development activities. Adhering to EU standards practices will remain, and concrete efforts will be put in further strengthening already fruitful cooperation with EIPA (CAF Centre), so that members are assisted in benchmarking and bench-learning within the functional framework of this collaboration.

ReSPA will continue and constantly reinvigorate the **categories of PA Awards** in a way that they reflect the common trends (developments and shortcoming) in the service delivery while recognizing excellent examples of public services. Further building of examples of excellence will be done through support and work with Community of winners that will start in 2022. The Community will be systematically supported either through targeted capacity building, exposure to advanced practices, concrete technical assistance in further development of the services as well as through the extensive promotion and networking.

4.4. Crosscutting themes

Through its activities, ReSPA will also address, mainstream and implement a number of cross-cutting themes, such as ethics and integrity, digital transformation, green transition, civil society and gender equality.

Ethics and integrity are a prerequisite for a well-functioning public administration, which must behave appropriately in their dealings with citizens, businesses and other public authorities. Office holders, and public servants must behave professionally and ethically. Therefore, ReSPA shall concentrate on providing support in building core values in the public administration, boost value-driven leadership and management, enhance accountability, transparency, professionalism. Promotion of public good, trust in public administration, good governance, citizen-focus, participation of stakeholders in policy and decision-making shall also be promoted across all ReSPA initiatives and actions. Building a culture of integrity in public administration will also be an important intention of ReSPA actions in the long term.

Digital transformation is an essential change in the process of using digital technologies that can innovate public administrations. This process is an important prerequisite for efficient and transparent administrations, but also an important tool for economic growth.

Green transition will be also treated as a cross cutting theme aiming to increase the capabilities of Public Administration in the region for major societal challenges, notably the green and digital transitions and help Members design and implement reforms that support the green transition and contribute to achieving the goals of the European Green Deal and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB). To this aim, ReSPA will collaborate with sectoral regional partners on sectoral capacity building efforts, and this can be also synergise with ReSPA's contribution to EU integration/accession process.

Importance of *civil society* is proven by its roles in the Western Balkans as an agenda-setter and generator of ideas, participant in decision-making and fulfilling a function of control at the same time, thus shaping the evolution of public administration and policy making. ReSPA will continue the cooperation with think tanks, academic institutions, research institutes and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the Western Balkan who are dealing with public administration reform issues, and/or with European integration.

Gender equality and mainstreaming shall be treated as a fundamental cross-cutting issue aiming to promote inclusive diverse public administration. This will be done through implementing exemplary actions within public administrations in terms of achieving gender parity in all positions of responsibility in the civil service, diversity, inclusion, and boost the fight against discrimination. Positive actions shall be considered to strengthen the understanding of gender related issues and relevant capacity building of officials to enhance gender mainstreaming into national policies and programmes.

4.5. Mechanisms of intervention and target groups

ReSPA will achieve its programmatic objectives through the organization of **high-level political dialogues, conferences, networking events, working visits, mobility schemes, the delivery of capacity-building activities** (workshops, seminars, training, seasonal schools), **production of analytical papers, studies and research**, followed by policy recommendations based on the best regional, European and international practice, and other innovative methodologies. Through these types of activities, ReSPA **will transfer new knowledge and skills**, as well as facilitate the exchange of experiences and best-practice examples both within the region and between the Western Balkan administrations and the EU Member States.

ReSPA will ensure the provision of a unique framework for **networking and peer-to-peer learning**, and therefore the mutual exchange of experiences and practices in area of PAR and PFM will be an important segment of all further actions. The common PAR problems faced by the administrations could be more efficiently addressed through peer reviews and **sharing of good practices across the region** as regional cooperation in this field also contributes to the development of effective and efficient administrations in the Western Balkans.

The peer bench-learning mechanism - will aim at creating a systematic and integrated link between benchmarking and mutual learning activities. It will support public institutions from ReSPA members to improve their performance by comparing themselves with peer institutions and learning from them, in particular, via qualitative and quantitative assessments of the institution's performance.

The ReSPA interventions will be simultaneously organized in a twofold manner: **regionally** – to cover the common interests of its members; and directly as **in-country support mechanism** – targeting the specific demand driven topics defined by its members. These topics are expected to be raised by the operational conclusions from the PAR Special Group meetings, or the deficiencies identified in the action documents for implementation of PAR strategies. Direct in-country support activities will also be initiated to support the policy recommendations from the ReSPA regional studies, EC annual reports and SIGMA assessments.

Mobility schemes will be further upgraded. The current model of short term mobilities will be preserved, enabling thus to the public servants from one Member (or more than one) to visit homologue institutions in another Member, and be in depth informed on particular successes in reform processes of public administration. Further to this a **long-term Mobility Scheme** will be also developed within the next 2 years, aiming to help civil servants dealing with EU affairs to learn more about the EU decision-making processes and the way the institutions function. It will also offer excellent networking opportunities.

ReSPA will seek to establish the **Western Balkans PAR Knowledge Network/Platform**. In today's interconnected region, networks for sharing knowledge are increasingly important. By paying careful attention to the dimensions of network design, participants to the PAR knowledge network can facilitate desired behaviours and outcomes in the domain of PAR and EU integration in the Western Balkans. The knowledge network will assemble individuals, teams and institutions

who come together across organizational, spatial and disciplinary boundaries to formulate and share knowledge and best practices in the mentioned domains.

ReSPA's activities are aimed at the following target groups: senior and mid-level public servants, policy makers and sector specialists working in the ministries and governmental agencies responsible for PAR and EI. Among others, it is worth mentioning that ReSPA networking structures (mainly the **regional working/thematic groups**) that bring the relevant public administration representatives together to discuss, consider and propose activities related to certain thematic areas, will continue to function till the end of the current strategy with some slight revisions and adaptations, to reflect the recent developments.

For more information on ReSPA governance structures and networking groups, please see attached Annex 2.

4.6. Coordination with the partners

As an international and regional organization, ReSPA maintains active communication with a number of stakeholders in Europe and globally. The successful accomplishment of ReSPA's mandate requires cooperation and coordination with a number of entities that are implementing a similar mission within the Western Balkan region.

The EU plays an important role in supporting the Western Balkan region in conducting public administration reforms in accordance with the European Principles of Public Administration and in fulfilling necessary criteria for accession to the European Union. ReSPA is playing an important intermediary role in this process. ReSPA is well-positioned to build long-term partnerships with EU Member States' partner institutions, government bodies, universities, think tanks and NGOs around particular topics and to encourage and facilitate exchanges and cooperation with them and Western Balkan countries. Bearing in mind ReSPA's strong EI orientation, its main partner is the EU. ReSPA cooperates with the EC's services, **in particular with the DG NEAR**, which is the main donor for its programme activities. ReSPA also maintains good communication with the EU Delegations in its members in aligning the programmatic priorities based on tailored needs of the respective Members. ReSPA has established strong links with academia, research institutes, think tanks and civil society organizations within the Western Balkan countries.

ReSPA will continue and extend its already established cooperation with other **international organizations, donors and learning institutes (at EU level as well as EU MS level)**. Based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF) as well as the strategic cooperation with OECD/SIGMA, joint activities related to the interconnection of PAR and PFM will be organized. ReSPA will seek to develop activities and initiatives in partnership with other European and regional players, such as: European Institute of Public Administration, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI), EUPAN, UNDESA, KDZ, European School of Administration, etc.

Since it remains important to ensure that core PAR principles are duly implemented in sectoral

policies and since Public Administration can be as a backbone for twin transition, but also for a better implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan as well as the post pandemic resilience building reforms, **ReSPA shall be open to partnering** and synergetic efforts with other regional organizations and initiatives (even on sectoral level), such as, but not limited to: UN, RCC, TCT, CEFTA, RYCO, NALAS, WBF, etc.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

The Strategy provided the basis for a well-functioning monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in ReSPA, while contributing to spreading the M&E culture among ReSPA members and strengthening their capacities in this domain. In support of M&E development, an Intervention Logic has been developed that articulates what the activities to be implemented within the Strategy are expected to produce, starting from the outputs, which are under direct control of ReSPA, to the outcomes (subject to direct influence) and impact (subject of indirect influence). The Intervention Logic has been developed as a collective endeavour by ReSPA staff, GB and WG members, the Advisory Board and the EC.

A proper M&E helps ReSPA to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and visibility. A well-established monitoring system primarily contributes to:

- Better reporting on the progress achieved to both the ReSPA members and the stakeholders, as well as the donor community.
- A better decision-making process at different points in time;
- Better measuring of ReSPA's own contribution to the ReSPA members' public administrations;
- Improved effectiveness of ReSPA's actions;
- Timely undertaking of corrective measures based on the identified problems and/or potential risks.

In order to monitor the progress achieved, a Monitoring Toolkit has been developed with defined indicators. For each indicator, baselines were defined, together with the data collection tools and methods, responsibilities and frequency for conducting a monitoring exercise. Monitoring is focused on direct outputs and induced outputs (short-term outcomes) since the long-term outcomes and impact are out of the reach of the monitoring system and will be addressed through external evaluation. In 2021 ReSPA conducted its first annual monitoring exercise and the monitoring report was prepared.

Monitoring of ReSPA activities is conducted with post-event questionnaires that are filled out by the participants after each event and yearly questionnaires (general and specific questionnaires) that are filled out during the yearly monitoring exercise conducted in May/June each year. The collected data provide systemic information on where the activities are at a given time relative to the direct and induced outputs and related indicators. The monitoring data are used as inputs for a number of ReSPA reports, EC report, GB report, Annual report.

Reporting on monitoring of direct outputs is conducted in line with the respective contractual obligations towards the EC and the requirements of the Rules of Procedures on reporting to the GB. Analysis of the data will be conducted by the Secretariat.

6. Developmental opportunities

6.1. Additional members, observers and participants

ReSPA provides for modalities that may enable enhanced cooperation between ReSPA and third countries, as well as the admission of additional members into ReSPA. The ReSPA Agreement envisages that additional members may be admitted into the organization. It is stipulated that other candidate and potential candidate countries to the European Union, as defined by the European Union, may apply to accede to the present Agreement and thus to become members of ReSPA. In this regard, ReSPA Secretariat **shall reinvigorate the dialogue with the administration of Kosovo*** to explore possible solution for Kosovo* full accession to ReSPA as a member.

Furthermore, besides the status of ReSPA member, the ReSPA Agreement has envisaged the possibility for **other candidate and potential candidate** countries to the European Union, as defined by the European Union, to apply to become observers in ReSPA. Observers in ReSPA may attend meetings and participate fully in the Governing Board without the right to vote.

Finally, it is also envisaged that other candidate and potential candidate countries to the European Union, as defined by the European Union, the Member States of the European Union or European Economic Area, and other states and organizations may apply to participate in the activities of ReSPA. ReSPA may charge for such participation according to its Financial Regulations.

6.2. Business development

In the past period, ReSPA has been tentatively exploring the possibilities for business development, through communication with a few potential partners. Bidding for new projects requires established partnerships in order to enrich the portfolio of potential deliverables, and then applying for additional donor funds in line with ReSPA's interests and capabilities and those of other partner organisations. Success in business development would enable ReSPA to **generate additional income for its Secretariat** and increase the impact of its activities in the region.

ReSPA shall also be a key factor in **regional donor coordination process** in regard to PAR but also wider, good governance. It will work on the establishment of a donor coordination dialogue which would allow an overview of funding opportunities but also boost further support of the donor community to PAR. It will contribute to sharing of good practices and lessons learned that were generated through projects implemented not only in the WB but also in the EU member states (DG Reform).

ReSPA prepared a Framework for partnering, innovation and development that puts forth a set of guiding principles that will help the organisation **identify and mitigate threats to its sustainability**; maximize opportunities to consolidate existing, and build new partnerships; and identify emerging programming opportunities. In practice, the principles call for ReSPA to i) maintain relevance to current and emerging needs; ii) ensure effectiveness and efficiency of delivery; iii) assure accountability and transparency; iv) engage stakeholders; v) ensure strategic communication and donor visibility; and, wherever possible, vi) diversify the partnership framework. The Framework also provides some ideas for potential projects as well as the list of donors and the funding programmes.

In addition to donors, the Framework also takes stock of regional perceptions, or views and opinions of member public administrations as well as representatives of ReSPA's steering structures. The need to diversify and futureproof the organisation, both in terms of programmatic content and modes of delivery, is evident. At the same time, partner outreach is highlighted as an area that requires further attention to assure the continued commitment of the region's governments to ReSPA's mission.

7. Communication and visibility

Communication activities will continue to ensure the **promotion of ReSPA as a regional accelerator of reforms in the Western Balkans' public administration** which, as a regional knowledge hub on good governance, influences their organizational, technological, and cultural transformation by introducing trends, supporting modernization, and building stronger links with EU PA knowledge base. Here, the promotion of PA frontrunners' initiatives (mapped as good examples that can be re-used across the WB PA institutions) while promoting PA institutions as attractive employers, will be one of the pillars of communication.

Support of the European Union to the region (confirmed through the EU investment plan for the WB and Revised Enlargement Methodology 2020) will also continue to be in the spotlight of the communication activities, aimed to build more trust in the EU accession process and the importance of preserving of EU values in the WB societies among stakeholders and the broader public.

While communicating these two strategic objectives, ReSPA's communication activities will, in parallel, enable the raising of ReSPA brand awareness among stakeholders, partners, potential donors and experts as well as raising of ReSPA brand recognition among the broader public (citizens, businesses, CSOs, youth and media representatives). The ultimate goal is to promote ReSPA as a key player among the WB PA actors which connects and empowers them and thus is an attractive partner for numerous institutions, donors, and experts.

The indicated main communication objectives will be supported by relevant communication approaches and executed via various communication tools as it is stipulated below.

In promoting ReSPA's influence on PAR, the building of mutual collaboration with the PR Managers of the line ministries in charge of PAR is recognized as a crucial prerequisite for sharing experiences/communication tools and joining forces in the wider and more strategical promotion of PAR across the Western Balkans. Informing/educating the broader public and media representatives about PAR and its importance for the overall wellbeing of society (by presenting tangible results), as well as the development of unified master messages (understandable for all), are some specific topics to be tackled. Also, special attention will be paid to promoting synergies with regional partners and CSOs in contributing to the implementation of core PAR principles in sectoral and lasting public administration reforms. The communication tone will continue to focus on the voice of civil servants and citizens. With a “people for the people” voice of communication, ReSPA will continue to boost the importance of civil servants as a cornerstone of reforms that have been bringing a better life to citizens.

In promoting EU contribution to the reform agenda in the region, and preserving EU values, of the utmost importance will be informing/educating the citizens, and media representatives about overall EU support to the region, as well as ReSPA's role in that process. The human approach to communication will be dominant as well, by portraying EU values. ReSPA will continue to pay special attention to EU visibility which is already mandatory in all ReSPA activities.

In raising ReSPA brand awareness among stakeholders, partner institutions, potential donors and experts focus will be on presenting ReSPA as a unique regional focal point for PAR actors at all levels, its (tangible) results, and the constant need for engagement of prominent experts. Enabling regional collaboration at the highest level and ReSPA's flagship support instruments, including multi-country projects such as In-country support, CAF implementation, Mobility schemes, PA Awards, and other capacity-building activities (such as seasonal schools) will be also the focus of communication activities. The tone of communication will continue to be human-centric highlighting the ReSPA team (composed of professionals from the WBs) who are trustworthy and “here for you”, so empowered civil servants can better respond to the significant societal challenges and develop transparent, accountable, and participatory public administrations that work for the people.

In raising the ReSPA brand recognition among the broader public (citizens, businesses, CSOs, and youth), building long-term mutual collaboration with media representatives and inclusiveness of particular target audiences will be in focus. Aiming to inform and educate, the voice of communication will also encompass different aspects of ReSPA's strategic orientation enshrined in its motto, “Building Together Governance for the Future”, which depicts in the best way ReSPA's commitment to the region's transformational journey and the most valuable asset – the people.

Various visibility and communication activities & tools will be realized and developed, such as the organization of regular meetings with PR Managers, organization of ReSPA Open Days for media representatives, production & promotion of testimonials (of ReSPA Director and Programme Managers, EC representatives, ReSPA partners, opinion leaders within PAR, etc.), Value Creation Stories (with civil servants and citizens), promotional materials (brochures/factsheets/boilerplates), press releases, regular posting the news items on the ReSPA

website and social media channels, etc.

Additional communication formats will be developed/adapted following the detected needs.

8. Potentials for ReSPA beyond 2024

The ReSPA Agreement (Article 30 thereof) envisages the limited duration of ReSPA with the possibility of extending this period. The duration of the ReSPA Agreement was extended in 2016, and it will be in force until 31 July 2024. The issue of a **possible ReSPA Agreement extension** should be decided by the ReSPA members at least two years before the expiration of the validity period, i.e. by August 2022.

Since the Strategy covers the period of the Agreement's validity, it is worth pointing out the potentials for continued cooperation among the ReSPA members beyond 2024. The extension of ReSPA mandate for the following seven years will need the development of **new ReSPA Strategy which will cover period 2025-2031**.

Regional cooperation was conceptualized as a trajectory that should lead the participating parties towards **full integration within the EU**. Furthermore, regional cooperation through ReSPA has spread over different areas of mutual exchange and enhanced support among the involved parties and their connections, not only with the EU but also with its members, other international organizations and third countries.

ReSPA has offered a **structured, institutionalized and reliable framework for cooperation** and support since 2010 in the area of public administration, has strengthened exchange with the EU and its members and has contributed to the development of administrative and human capacities in the Western Balkans in accordance with the European Principles of Public Administration. During this period, ReSPA has demonstrated its ability to reconsider its concrete programmes and activities within the given mandate in order to adapt its operations and cooperation modalities to the best needs of the region. Thus, ReSPA has **evolved from a training institution into a regional hub** offering a wide range of cooperation modalities and support instruments to its members.

These dynamics of change and evolution proved their flexibility and sensitivity for adapting to new roles and tasks and demonstrated ReSPA's readiness to explore and implement the best ways to support its members to respond to particular challenges and reform requirements. This momentum should be followed beyond 2024 and **ReSPA should be further used as a tool for strengthening regional cooperation** among its members. ReSPA will continue to support the policy coordination efforts and the specific networking and exchange platforms that it has already established and would be able to develop and empower further. The long-lasting reforming and modernizing efforts, as well as the need to foster their effects and the further need for constant exchange among the administrations, would also require ReSPA's presence **as a cooperative**

framework in the future.

In the course of the upcoming years (post 2024), ReSPA shall focus more efforts on **enhancing dialogue with potential donors** active in the region (aiming to diversify its donor sources and expand the volume of work and projects implemented in the region); assess the possibility to undergo the EU **pillar assessment** process (which will make ReSPA eligible for accessing more funding opportunities and will increase its credibility in the eyes of the donor community) and **enhance the participation of citizens and businesses** (measuring their level of satisfaction and perception on PA related matters, out of which can be identified programmatic priorities and course of action).

Lastly, it is worth emphasizing that the possible accession of some ReSPA members to the EU should be used as a good opportunity to enhance their exchange within the existing framework and particularly to enable a spill-over of the acquired experience gained through the work and national representation within the EU intergovernmental bodies and structures.

Annex 1 – State of play of PAR in the Western Balkans

Annex 2 – ReSPA governance structures and networking groups

Annex 1 - State of play of PAR in the Western Balkans

In accordance with the 2021 Enlargement Package almost all the Western Balkan countries, with the exception of BiH, which is at an early stage, and Kosovo* are moderately prepared in the area of public administration reform.

Albania, has made slow but steady progress in implementing important reforms in different areas of public administration. Compared to 2017, the values of five out of six key area indicators have increased, *according to SIGMA assessment 2021*¹. Albania has performed the strongest compared to its neighbors in the Western Balkans region, where the biggest step forward was registered in the area of digitalization of public services. At the time of monitoring done by SIGMA/OECD, 95% of administrative services have been available online, while on 1st of May 2022 Albania took a step towards going fully digital in delivery of public sector services.

Some progress was made in building capacity in line ministries to implement regulatory impact assessments, adopting guidelines for public consultations, setting up the IT systems for integrated planning, increasing the implementation rate of the National European Integration Plan. The Albanian Government maintained a focus on reforms on the country's EU path, despite the challenge of addressing the negative social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the consequences of November 2019 earthquake. Coordination within the administration needs to be improved, especially regarding the coordination of EU integration processes. In February 2021, the government adopted the National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) 2021-2023, currently under implementation. Greater efforts have been made in achieving a higher implementation rate of the NPEI during 2021, thanks to dedicated and effective steering and monitoring from the central government.

According to the Commission's recommendations², Albania should in particular carry out the following: upgrade the regulatory framework on integrated policy planning and increase the capacities for policy planning and monitoring, by rolling out the integrated policy-making system; activate the mechanism foreseen in the law on the Organization and Functioning of the State Administration by preparing the monitoring report on the status of the subordinated institutions; Encourage the merit-based implementation of the civil service law at all levels, especially at the local level where de-politicization of civil service and also better training are needed, and adopt a salary policy for civil servants and extend the automation of the payroll system through the human-resource-management information system.

Based on the Study on policy coordination in Albania³ the system for planning sector strategies, legal and institutional frameworks are formally established. CoG institutions are authorized to provide overall quality control for development of sector strategies. The hierarchy of planning documents is clearly set - this is not the case in other WB countries. The legal basis for the integrated planning system is in the process of being finalized. Responsibilities of ministerial departments responsible for policy development and policy co-ordination are not clear and could

¹ <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-2021-Albania.pdf>

² See Commission staff Working document, Albania 2021 Report accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions", Strasbourg, 19.10.2021, SWD(2021) 289 final, p. 14. [Albania Report 2021 \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu/press-room/media/30600/albania-report-2021)

³ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+policy+coordination+processes+in+Albania.pdf/9e347893cfcfa35b4745fcc0acba7733.pdf>

lead to overlapping of the responsibilities with other bodies/institutions. Although, policy and the budget planning requires a higher degree of alignment. Prime Minister Office should improve coordination with other centers of government institutions in policy processes / needs to step up efforts towards more evidence-based policy making. IPSIS system links strategic policy planning with the budget planning and public finance management – limited human capacities for work on it, further updates of the system are needed.

According to the ReSPA report on merit-based recruitment⁴, E-recruitment system has been successfully implemented in Albania since the mid-2010s. The Department of Public Administration in Albania went fully online with the entry examinations during 2020 and consolidated this approach during 2021, making the examinations more user-friendly and less costly for applicants. As a corollary, members of commissions received more training to manage the new examination format. Moreover, efforts were made to increase the transparency and opportunities for external scrutiny by allowing for the video recording of personal interviews. In Albania, the number of institutions kept outside the Civil Service Law has traditionally been low. However, the most recent trend suggests that the establishment of new institutions outside the scope of the Civil Service Law has become more frequent. As a consequence, the merit principle is weakened even though the Civil Service Law is not amended.

According to the ReSPA report on performance appraisal⁵, Albania has invested a lot in supporting the process of **performance appraisals** with capacity building activities. The existing solutions are perceived as flexible enough and the process is broadly in line with good international practices. However, not all preconditions for effective performance appraisals are in place. For example, the competency framework exists only for senior positions. Currently the performance on organizational level in Albania is not measured and the inflation of grades of individual performance appraisals is a challenge. Albania has implemented some solutions that could serve as inspiring cases, for example the E-performance IT system and HRM surveys that – among others – ask about the feedback on the performance appraisal system.

In **BiH**, during the last year progress was made by adopting the Action Plan on PAR as well as strategies on PFM at all levels of government. Bosnia and Herzegovina faces challenges to effectively implement the PAR Action Plan and to develop a comprehensive and countrywide PFM strategy. Ensuring political commitment and establishing an effective coordination structure on PAR remains a priority. In the current year, Bosnia and Herzegovina should in particular: adopt a countrywide strategic framework for public financial management 2021-2025 and continue the implementation of the action plan of public administration 2018-2022; establish a functioning coordination structure with a political decision-making body and improve the capacities of PAR Coordinators to steer coordination of public administration reforms across all government levels; develop and adopt amendments of civil service laws to ensure respect of the merit principle at all levels of government and strengthen the capacities of civil service agencies

⁴ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

⁵ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

to improve human resource management and trainings.⁶

The SIGMA assessment 2022, highlights that the Strategic Framework for PAR in BiH is now complete. It is comprised of a country-wide PAR Strategy and Action Plan and four PFM Strategies, covering the PFM area for each administrative level of BiH⁷.

Regarding policy coordination, in line with the complexity of the political system in BiH, there is a highly fragmented system of policy coordination at several levels in the country. There is a lack of whole-of-government approach, realistic planning and outcome focus (focus on simple results), together with a weak inter-ministerial cooperation and lack of harmonised legal provisions or methodological guidance for countrywide strategic planning. Stronger cooperation would contribute to the development of inter-ministerial strategic documents, but also strengthen coordination. Although there are bases for medium-term program budget planning that is linked to sector policy planning, with the performance indicators, a line budget is still being adopted, and planning is not based on measurable data and evidence.⁸

According to the ReSPA report on merit-based recruitment⁹, in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the level of BiH institutions, **e-recruitment** has already been set up and will become operational after relevant secondary legislation will be adopted by the Council of Ministers. In FBiH there is no system of e-recruitment in place yet, although there is a continuous preparatory work on the introduction of e-recruitment system as of the end of 2020. In RS as well, there is no system of e-recruitment yet although some preparatory work is in place. At the level of BiH institutions, social media activities to disseminate job vacancies have been expanded by the Civil Service Agency. In BiH Institutions, all externally recruited senior and expert staff in civil service positions must pass both written and oral examinations. Written examinations are also under review for the institutions at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In RS, candidates for senior and expert level civil service positions only need to have a personal interview when applying for a given position. Written examinations are not yet required. The Institutions at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina have already applied competency-based interviews for a few years.

According to the ReSPA report on performance appraisal¹⁰, **performance appraisal** schemes in BiH differ across the levels. All levels lack certain preconditions for effective performance appraisals. For example, although on all three levels competency framework is in place, it is not used, or not fully used in the process of performance appraisals. All levels have invested in awareness raising and capacity building to support the process of performance appraisals, however only FBiH managed to develop IT solutions that facilitate this process. On all levels the

⁶ Commission staff working document, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021 Report Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2018 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy",

⁷ <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-May-2022-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+policy-coordination+processes+in+BiH.pdf/ea1ee32ceb1ba55731129d06860017b7.pdf>

⁹ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

process is flexible enough, however in RS and State Institutions the criteria for appraising senior civil servants are the same as for other civil servants. In all cases, the inflation of grades is a fact and in all administrations performance appraisals are not perceived as a useful HR tool.

North Macedonia has shown some progress in finalizing the horizontal functional review of the state administration. Recommendations were made for the new organization of state administrative bodies with improved lines of accountability. These need to feed into the relevant legislation, which should be adopted and implemented. North Macedonia is currently reviewing the legislative framework on human resources management through the revision of the Law on Administrative Servants and the Law on Public Service Employees and is introducing a new Law on Top Management Service. The new framework should improve the management of human resources across the administration and will contribute to ensuring better respect for merit-based recruitments, promotions and dismissals, including at senior management level. The monitoring reports on the implementation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy and the Public Financial Management Reform Programme were presented. The State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) continued to address cases of alleged nepotism, cronyism, and political influence in the process of recruitment of public sector employees and in the process of appointment of members of supervisory and management boards. Its findings and recommendations need to be systematically followed-up by the concerned institutions. Most of last year's recommendations have been partially implemented. In the coming period, the country should, in particular: adopt and implement the revised Law on Administrative Servants, the Law on Public Service Employees and the Law on Top Management Service; adopt and implement the Law on State organization and other related laws in line with the recommendations for the new organization of state administrative bodies; ensure full implementation of the Law on General Administrative Procedures.¹¹

On the other hand, SIGMA assessment 2021 highlights that North Macedonia has progressed in most areas under accountability and is now a top performer in the region, while delivery of public services is steadily improving. There is progress in the e-infrastructure for interoperability of basic registries, especially for the key ones (population registries) while the accessibility remained at low level due to poor policies. The National e-Services Portal is fully operational and is a key enabler of service simplification and improvement¹².

Regarding the policy coordination, the Law on Government and Government priorities are the basis for budget planning with programs and sub-programs and sectoral policy planning. The existing Methodology provides a clear timetable for medium-term planning and an integrated planning system. But, the CoG functions are fragmented - although there is cooperation between the CoG bodies especially in terms of consolidating the GAWP and the EU affairs, there is no formal coordination mechanism to ensure coordination in the policy development process or for consolidating opinions, especially in cases when CoG bodies may have opposing opinions related

¹¹ Commission staff working document, North Macedonia 2021 Report Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2018 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy", Strasbourg, 19/10/2021, SWD(2021) 291, p. 13. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>.

¹² <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-2021-Republic-of-North-Macedonia.pdf>

to the draft proposals. An example of good practice is the establishment of an Expert Collegium through a new PAR – consisting of CoG institutions and representatives from the other ministries. GSoG has an administrative role - e.g. without the possibility of checking the quality of the reports of the ministries on the achievement of the Government's priorities and *focuses mostly on the formal aspects without going into analysis of the policy content of the proposals and materials and assessing the consistency of the proposals with the Government priorities*. There is no formal coordination mechanism in place that would set the modalities, contents and frequency of coordination practices between the CoG bodies in the strategic planning process - e.g. there is no formal cooperation between GSG and MoF, so coordination between planned policies and funds to achieve Government priorities is not established. Sectoral policy planning is not regulated and there is no consistent approach applied in managing and coordinating the strategic planning process at sectoral level - *planning units exist in every department, but their capacities are very weak*. The lack of clear prioritization affects the focus of achieving results, with unclear outcomes.¹³

According to the ReSPA report on merit-based recruitment¹⁴, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration further developed a special Law on Top Management, which will, if adopted, significantly raise the merit standards for the recruitment and selection of top managers such as State Secretaries and Directors at the top of central government ministries and non-ministerial bodies respectively. **E-recruitment** system has been implemented in North Macedonia since the mid-2010s. The consistency and effectiveness of written and oral examinations remain a challenge. The written part of the examination procedure will be revised in North Macedonia when the new Law on Administrative Services will be adopted.

According to the ReSPA report on performance appraisal¹⁵, North Macedonia has invested a lot in awareness raising and capacity building activities to support the implementation of **performance appraisals**. The only missing element is an effective IT system supporting performance appraisals, which was developed, but is not yet in use. The process of performance appraisals is well designed; however, it does not foresee setting objectives during an interview between the manager and an employee. The results of performance appraisals are used in different HR areas/decisions. Performance appraisal is complex and not user friendly. The innovative feature of the system in North Macedonia is using 360-degree feedback in performance appraisals, this practice and its effectiveness should be further analysed. A very positive development is the ongoing work on the new IT system that would support performance appraisals.

¹³ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+the+policy-coordination+processes+in++North+Macedonia.pdf/fb846310c0a984881b443cf3c110db25.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

Montenegro showed limited progress during 2021, as assessed by the EC 2021 Report. Public consultations were held on draft amendments to the Law on Access to Information, which remains to be adopted. Amendments to the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees, adopted in January 2021 at the initiative of the Parliament, lowered the requirements for merit-based recruitment, competence, and independence of civil servants. The impact of their practical implementation remains to be seen. Strong political will is needed to effectively address depoliticization of the public service, optimization of the state administration and effective implementation of managerial accountability. The future approach to optimization of the public administration remains to be defined by the government. Montenegro should in particular: start implementing the new PAR Strategy and finalize the PFM Strategy in line with the national guidance for strategic planning and its linkage with the mid-term budgetary framework; improve citizens' access to public information by finalizing, adopting and start implementing amendments to the Law on access to information; ensure effective lines of accountability between and within the institutions; ensure recruitments to all positions in the public administration according to the principles of merit, competence and transparency. Strong political will is still needed to effectively address the depoliticization of the public service and optimization of the state administration, as well as to ensure efficient implementation and financial sustainability of reforms.¹⁶ *SIGMA assessment 2021*, finds that Montenegro has made some progress on reforms in the areas of public service, human resource management and service delivery, while compared to its neighbors in the Western Balkans, Montenegro is exceeding the regional average in the area of accountability¹⁷.

The policy coordination system in Montenegro is highly formal. The cooperation and communication between the CoG bodies exists, however it is inconsistent and not necessarily linked to the key decision-making moments, i.e. preparation of the Government and ministerial working plans or the budget. The coordination with relevant development policy stakeholders needs to be further strengthened. Inclusive and evidence-based policy and legislative development remain only partially ensured. CoG capacities in coordination must be mirrored by increased policymaking capacity for ministries. Lack of strategic planning departments within ministries is evident. Integrated strategic planning system is not set up. A positive change arrived with the establishment of the Network of Civil Servants for Strategic Planning - informal mechanism that complements the policy co-ordination process in Montenegro. Also, the Education Program of Civil Servants for Strategic Planning shows good results.¹⁸

According to the *ReSPA report on merit-based recruitment*¹⁹, in Montenegro, the Human Resources Management Authority developed online videos provides to provide information for applicants. Initiatives to establish **e-recruitment** systems are in progress or planned. The Law on Civil Servants and State Employees (2017, in force since July 2018) includes the central state

¹⁶ Commission staff working document, Montenegro 2021 Report Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy", Strasbourg, 19/10/2021, SWD(2021) 293, p. 14. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-montenegro-report.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-2021-Montenegro.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+the+policy+co-ordination+processes+in+Montenegro.pdf/4e43a9ee9f09424654fb17c010b3646e.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

administration within its scope. However, a significant number of agencies and funds that exercise public authority are excluded from the scope of the Law and, by implication, the scope of merit-based recruitment. As a consequence, almost half of all central level agencies and funds do not follow the recruitment rules prescribed by the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees. In Montenegro, an amendment of the Civil Service Law in early 2021 made it possible for the government to appoint acting manager from *outside* the civil service rather than within. This change implies a weakening of the merit principle, as it has become possible to hire top managers without having to go through the standard merit recruitment procedure. The ad hoc opening of positions is possible if an unforeseen vacancy emerges. Moreover, if there is an urgent need the head of an institution can ask the Government for the ad hoc approval of the opening of positions. The latter occurs only in exceptional cases, but it weakens the capacity of staffing plans to shape recruitment activities²⁰.

*According to the ReSPA report on performance appraisal*²¹, the preconditions for effective **performance appraisal** are not fully in place – it relates mostly to the competency framework. Montenegro has invested a lot in awareness raising and capacity building to support the implementation of performance appraisals, however IT solutions to support the process are not in place. Setting objectives at the start of the appraisal process in discussion between the superior and the employee are not regulated. They are recommended by guidebooks, but in a legalistic culture these recommendations are not always followed. The same applies to preparing TNAs with the use of performance appraisal results. Performance appraisals are also not always taken into account when determining the bonuses. Montenegro faces some challenges in making performance appraisals effective. Like in other administrations, there exists a problem of “inflation” of appraisal grades that makes it more difficult to link individual performance to organizational performance²².

In **Serbia**, limited progress was made in this area during 2021, according to EC 2021 Report. On human resources management, there was no progress in reducing the excessive number of acting senior manager positions. As regards policy development and coordination, there is still no mechanism in place to verify that the Public Policy Secretariat’s comments have been incorporated into the final draft versions of laws and policy documents submitted for government’s approval. On public financial management, the recommendation to develop a single mechanism for prioritizing all investments regardless of the type and source of financing still needs to be fully addressed. There is an urgent need to address all those shortcomings. Other developments include the adoption of a new PAR strategic framework for the period 2021-2030. The administration also swiftly responded to the COVID-19 crisis through the effective provision of related e-services. Serbia should in particular: ensure that recruitment procedures are launched for all the acting posts in order to reduce the excessive number of acting positions, and allocate sufficient resources for effective, merit-based recruitment processes; ensure a

²⁰ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

²¹ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

²² <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

strong quality control role for the Public Policy Secretariat to allow for the effective implementation of the law on the planning system; put in place a unified, comprehensive and transparent system for capital investment planning and management²³.

SIGMA assessment 2021, highlights that Serbia has made significant progress in service delivery, public service and human resource management and accountability, and has improved some aspects of public financial management since 2017. Compared to its neighbors in the region, Serbia is well above average in the area of service delivery (one of the regional leaders) and slightly above average in PFM, public service and HRM and policy development and coordination²⁴.

The institutional and legal framework for policy coordination are set up. The bottom up approach for GAWP and top-down for AP for Implementation of the Government Program – both complemented with program budgeting and National plan for Adoption of the Acquis – all of this make preconditions for integrated policy planning system. The Unified Information System is recently introduced - IT system for integrated policy planning and in future has to be merged with IT system for GAWP. But, GSoG plays its „traditional“ role - organizing and preparing government sessions, checking procedural requirements without assessing the quality and mutual compliance of acts proposed for Government decision making. Public Policy Secretariat - performs checks for draft laws and strategies with regards to their compliance with the strategic framework in place and controls the quality of impact assessments for all acts, but does not have the direct power to prevent a non-compliant act from reaching the government session (the same is for other CoG institutions - the Legislative Secretariat, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of European Integration. From another side, there are some critical remarks on policy development and coordinations mechanisms: Ad-hoc coordination of the CoG institutions - the lack of coordination mechanisms and structures among the CoG institutions. Lack of clear and widely accepted timetable for the coordination process - working groups often get formed too late in the policy process, once the key policy directions are already decided, which undermines their policy coordination potential. Lack of clear prioritization at the political level - the result is GAWP which only includes inputs from ministries. Also, a significant differentiation in coordination of the most important policies - results in several parallel central planning processes, duplication of obligations and goals, difficult communication between CoG institutions.²⁵

*According to the ReSPA report on merit-based recruitment*²⁶, the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) expanded the use of online and social media channels to disseminate job advertisements, for instance, by placing jobs on the Service's Facebook page and by setting up a Viber Community. HRMS also invested in a blog and video material to provide better guidance for applicants. The new Public Administration Reform Strategy further commits the HRMS to develop activities for the promotion of civil service employment. A start was made during 2021 by participation in student recruitment fairs and by establishing links with universities. In Serbia

²³ Commission staff working document, Serbia 2021 Report Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy", Strasbourg, 19/10/2021, SWD(2021) 288, p. 13. See at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-serbia-report.pdf>.

²⁴ <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-2021-Serbia.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+policy-coordination+processes+in+Serbia.pdf/f4db53195692ce8742982d073bdc212e.pdf>

²⁶ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+of+merit+recruitment+in+the+WBs-Update+2021.pdf/15751eaeaca0903d7bc853bd0d213f46.pdf>

initiatives to establish e-recruitment systems are in progress or planned. Several institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and the Tax Administration are not regulated by the Civil Service Law, but these institutions nonetheless follow the recruitment rules and standards of the Civil Service Law. However, some institutions such as so-called public agencies do not do so thereby presenting opportunities for non-meritocratic recruitment into administrative bodies. A high-level Working Group led by the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government has been formed to strengthen the meritocratic basis of senior civil service managers and to overcome the frequent appointment of 'acting managers' to top positions. The introduction of competency-based examinations in Serbia significantly strengthened the merit principle for the recruitment of non-managerial staff. The examination consists of several stages that test a mix of functional and behavioural competencies as well as digital literacy. As a result, the examination provides valuable information about candidates to enable the selection of the best candidate for a given position.

*According to the ReSPA report on performance appraisal²⁷, the competency framework is in place in Serbia, which should increase the usefulness of **performance appraisals**. The specific feature of the Serbian system is that objectives are defined only at the level of sectors/departments/sections. There are no objectives at the level of the whole organization, nor on individual level. This is an interesting solution to avoid practical problems with cascading objectives and promoting team work, but is not fully in line with good management practices. The IT system supporting performance appraisals was developed, but is not yet operational. Performance appraisal, according to regulations, should be used for professional development, however the practice may differ in different institutions. A strong point of the Serbian system is the use of behavioural competences and it is remarkable that some institutions (Customs) managed to curb the inflation of appraisal grades, which is rarely the case in the region.*

In **Kosovo***, according to EC Report 2021, little progress was made in the reform of its public administration due to the frequent changes of government that affected the functioning of the public administration and slowed down the implementation of reforms. The Law on Public Officials entered into force in June 2020, but no significant efforts were made to start its implementation especially about recruitment. The establishment of an effective central recruitment department was delayed, and its capacity remains limited. Undue political influence over appointments and dismissals of senior public functionaries and civil servants has been observed in some instances, and commitments to merit-based criteria have been only selectively respected. The organization and accountability of the administration has marginally improved with first steps being taken to align internal organization with the law in force. However, most internal regulations governing the functioning and accountability of institutions remain in need of alignment with the law. The process of rationalizing agencies has stalled due to institutional resistance and lack of political leadership to overcome it. Legal uncertainty for businesses and citizens persists due to the continued lack of progress on harmonizing sectorial legislation with the Law on General Administrative Procedure. Renewed commitment to the public administration reform and its diligent implementation is urgently necessary in order to make progress in this area.²⁸ However, some

²⁷ <https://respaweb.eu/download/doc/Self-assessment+report+on+performance+appraisal+in+the+WBs+.pdf/4291fc77ac64ec4d3a35c043c01cb4f6.pdf>

²⁸ Commission staff working document, Kosovo* 2021 Report Accompanying the document "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of

positive recent developments can be highlighted, namely: new PAR Strategy 2022-2026 and new PFM Strategy (pending approval soon); new draft Administrative Burden Reduction Programme; draft Digital agenda developed; new draft Law on Public Officials and Law on Salaries, etc.

SIGMA assessment 2021, finds that service delivery in Kosovo* has improved slightly since 2017, while this administration scores above the regional average as regards public financial management²⁹.

Regarding the policy coordination, program budgeting is supported through the alignment of the Government's medium-term priorities, but the medium-term expenditure framework and the budget is still not sufficiently tied to strategic planning. The lack of serious efforts to ensure clear linkages between strategic planning and the MTEF and other budgetary processes. The major challenge relates to the inability to focus on delivery in sectoral strategies. The system is characterized by a large number of strategies, without mutual coherence and with poor implementation. Departments for European Integration and Policy Coordination are in each line ministry, but with lack of the capacities, unclear position towards CoG. While there has been increasing cooperation between the various actors in the CoG and other institutions, no sustainable efforts have been made to ensure that the planning for development and for EI are functionally integrated. The concept of integrated planning has not yet come to life in full capacity. There is no clear integration between the development agenda and the European integration (EI) agenda.³⁰

the Regions 2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy", Strasbourg, 19/10/2021 SWD(2021) 291, p.12., See: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-Kosovo*-report.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-Executive-Summary-2021-Kosovo.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.respaweb.eu/download/doc/National+study+on+the+policy-coordination+processes+in+Kosovo.pdf/cb72630513d119bcc884bc2e1f0c7cc4.pdf>

Annex 2 – ReSPA Governance structures and networking groups

ReSPA's governing structures

As an international organization, ReSPA is composed of the governing bodies represented by its members and the Secretariat. The Governing Board of ReSPA (GB) is the decision-making body of the organization. It is composed of representatives from the ministries or the equivalent authorities of each ReSPA member responsible for public administration, human resources development or European integration. It operates at two levels: the ministerial level and the senior official level. The European Commission is represented at the GB sessions on an *ex-officio* basis without the right to vote. Thus, the decision-making process is under the full control of the Western Balkan governments.

The GB is mainly responsible for setting up the strategic directions for the development and running of ReSPA, including its activities, biannual or multi-annual Programmes of Work and ReSPA regulations and other decisions. The GB is also supposed to review and decide on the regular reports submitted by the Secretariat on the implementation of ReSPA's activities. The GB is chaired for a one-year term by ReSPA members.

The GB has created subsidiary bodies with specific mandates: Budget Committee (BC), Programme Committee (PC), Appeal Board (ApB) and Advisory Board (AB).

The PC is currently composed of the representatives of institutions in charge of PAR, PFM and governing policy planning and the EI coordination process. Its main responsibility is providing recommendations to the GB and guidance to the Secretariat to ensure that all ReSPA activities contribute to responses to challenges and tasks arriving from the EI process.

The BC is composed of representatives of the ministries of finance or the finance departments within the ministries in charge of the public administration. Its main responsibility is to advise the GB on financial and budgetary matters and to provide recommendations for the adoption of the budget and other decisions which have a financial impact. The BC also performs some auditing duties.

The AB is composed of representatives of ReSPA's partner organizations and institutions – OECD/SIGMA, the Council of Europe (CoE), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Austrian Centre for Research into Public Policy (KDZ) and the Centre of Excellence in Finance (CEF). Its main role is: to provide advice and support in defining ReSPA's strategic vision and to provide inputs for the development of ReSPA's strategic documents; to assist in identifying programme activities and priorities that may be carried out through ReSPA; to provide guidance in issues of institutional importance for the organization and for the improvement of its management and governance; to provide advice for business development of the organization; to facilitate ReSPA's networking with relevant stakeholders and to foster better understanding and coordination of individual donor activities of relevance for ReSPA.

The ApB is composed of independent experts, appointed by the GB for a five-year term, with the mandate to adjudicate any appeal to decisions related to staff matters taken pursuant to ReSPA's Staff Regulations. It also conducts independent reviews of recruitment procedures for ReSPA employees.

In order to manage the achievement of the planned results, ReSPA's regular annual governance activities include the following: one meeting of the GB at the ministerial level, four meetings of the GB at the senior official level, three meetings of the BC, meetings of the PC, and the AB. The ApB meets as needed for dealing with matters within its responsibility.

ReSPA Coordinating and Networking groups

The Programme Committee is responsible for inter-sector coordination of the themes and activities performed by ReSPA within the implementation period of the Strategy.

The networking groups (formerly known as Working Groups) bring the relevant public administration representatives together to discuss, consider and propose activities related to certain thematic areas. These networking groups have been aligned with the thematic content of ReSPA's operations as defined by this Strategy and the Biannual Programmes of Work enacted accordingly. The networking and coordinating structures are composed of the relevant representatives which have a focus on the specific thematic issues.

As defined in 2019, The ReSPA Strategy envisaged the functioning of five working groups:

- The Working Group of Centre-of-Government Institutions,
- The Working Group on Better Regulation,
- The Working Group on Human Resource Management and Development,
- The Working Group on E-Governance, and
- The Working Group on Quality Management.

In addition to that, Regional Quality Management Center (RQMC) was established.

After three years of Strategy implementation, additional needs for new activities at the regional level have arisen, which open the **possibility for the creation of other networking groups**. Therefore, the **new set up of the networking groups proposed** include the following:

- **Regional group on Centre of Government**, which would include specific Network of Policy coordinators. The role of this group will be to strengthen the regional co-operation in the field of policy co-ordination, regulatory environment, and gradual alignment of practices in the region with the EU Better Regulation Agenda, as well as further development of integrated planning systems through regular exchange of best practices.
- **Regional Group on European Integration** will tackle the most important matters related to policy coordination and capacity building aspects in relation to European Integration process. The Group will have a role to ensure that through inter-sectoral co-ordination all ReSPA activities contribute to responses of member states to challenges and tasks arriving from European Integration process and EU accession negotiation challenges. The identification of good practices and peer exchange in relation to the European integration wide specter of matters will be also in the focus of the group.
- **Regional group on Human Resource Management and Development** will support creating a future-oriented and dynamic HR capacity in public administration of the Western Balkans,

focusing on the improvement of professionalization and depoliticization of the public administration.

- **Regional group on Public Service Delivery** will be structure that would encompass and streamline the network developed under the Regional Quality Management Centre, i.e existing regional CAF Network and the previously established Quality Management Working Group. New structure will ensure addressing specific (CAF) and broader issues pertaining to QM at regional level. It will provide the specific expertise into the group that would be explored or used to meet specific demand for institutionalisation of QM models and will at the same time be equipped to work on variety of regional issues for further strengthening regional cooperation. Part of the group with specific knowledge on CAF will be more closely linked to programme activities of RQMC.
- **Regional group on Digital Transformation**, will involve a wide spectrum of regional senior officials with proven capacities to contribute to maintaining and upgrading the level of relevance of swiftly changing and evolving topics related to digitalisation of public services and e-government, accessibility, open data and Open Government Partnership. Common themes (use of emerging technologies, cyber security) will be discussed in the broader capacity of the group.

ReSPA shall seek to make the above-described structures operational as of 2023 under the overall guidance and consent of the Governing Board.