

Training on AI and Digital Skills in Public Administration and Pilot Assessment

03.03 – 04.03.2026

National School of Public Administration

Zagreb

In line with its Programme of Work for the 2026–2028 period, and as a continuation of previous activities supporting Public Administration Reform (PAR), the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), in cooperation with the National School of Public Administration (NSPA) and with expert input from UNESCO, is organising a regional training and pilot assessment focused on strengthening AI and digital competencies in public administration. The initiative aims to support administrations in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighborhood in modernising their institutional capacities and governance practices, while establishing a shared understanding of AI readiness as a component of effective, accountable, and future-oriented public administration.

Public administration reform increasingly depends on institutions' ability to adapt to digital transformation while maintaining core public values such as legality, transparency, accountability, and service quality. Artificial intelligence is becoming an influential factor in how public institutions design policies, manage data, allocate resources, and deliver services. Without adequate institutional capacity, clear governance frameworks, and skilled public servants, AI risks reinforcing existing weaknesses rather than supporting reform objectives. In this context, AI should not be viewed merely as a technological upgrade, but as a governance and reform challenge closely linked to PAR priorities.

The proposed activity directly addresses this challenge by combining targeted capacity-building with a pilot institutional self-assessment, enabling administrations to reflect on their readiness to integrate AI in ways that support PAR goals. By applying the AI Competency Framework, the initiative helps institutions assess not only technical skills but also analytical, managerial, and leadership capacities essential to modern public administration. This approach reinforces key PAR dimensions, including strategic policy-making, human resource management, organisational development, and evidence-based decision-making.

Through a structured two-day programme, participants are guided through foundational learning on AI and its realistic applications in the public sector, alongside a critical examination of risks related to data quality, privacy, bias, accountability, and security. The institutional self-assessment process is designed as a learning and development tool, encouraging administrations to identify strengths, gaps, and reform priorities in a safe, peer-learning environment rather than through compliance-driven evaluation.

A central reform-oriented outcome of the activity is the translation of assessment results into concrete institutional actions. Participants are supported in identifying priority AI-related and digital skill gaps and linking them to practical PAR instruments, such as training strategies, recruitment policies, organisational structures, and internal governance arrangements. This ensures that digital transformation efforts are aligned with broader reform processes, rather than implemented as isolated or ad hoc initiatives.

The inclusion of a session presenting Croatia AI Index results further strengthens the PAR relevance of the initiative by demonstrating how evidence-based assessment tools can inform policy choices, institutional reforms, and capacity-building investments. The example illustrates how systematic measurement of AI readiness can support strategic planning and reform monitoring at both the institutional and national levels.

The initiative contributes to strengthening administrative capacity, policy coherence, and reform implementation across the region. By fostering a shared understanding of AI readiness, promoting comparable assessment approaches, and embedding digital competencies within PAR frameworks, the activity supports public administrations in becoming more resilient, adaptive, and citizen-oriented. The expected outputs, including pilot institutional self-assessments, identified priority skill gaps, and draft AI introduction and capacity-building action plans, will provide actionable inputs for ongoing and future PAR processes. Consolidated findings will be shared at a regional online event in November 2026, contributing to regional learning and informing reform-oriented and donor-supported initiatives.

First Day, 3rd March

Day 1 will focus on building foundational knowledge and establishing a baseline assessment. Participants will develop a shared understanding of what artificial intelligence is—and is not—its realistic and responsible applications in public administration, and the key constraints and risks related to data quality, privacy, bias, accountability, and security.

The UNESCO AI Competency Framework will be presented as a strategic policy and workforce-planning instrument, together with the AI Readiness Index and institutional maturity models. Through facilitated sessions and institutional breakout groups, participating administrations will undertake a structured self-assessment to map existing AI-related practices, capacities, strengths, and priority gaps, providing a common evidence base for subsequent capacity-building and reform actions.

8.45 – 9.00	REGISTRATION AND WELCOME COFFEE
9.00 – 9.15	<i>Opening Remarks and Strategic Context:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AI and public sector transformation in the Western Balkans & EaP - Why AI is no longer an IT topic but a leadership and governance issue - Role of participants in driving AI-related change NSPA Representative ReSPA Representative Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation
9.15 - 10.15	<i>What Is AI Today: From Mathematics/Algorithms to ChatGPT/Generative AI</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History and key concepts of AI explained in non-technical language - Core concepts: algorithms, data, ML, models - Perception vs. real AI capabilities/Difference between hype and real capabilities - What AI can and cannot do in public administration Mr Vedran Antoljak, ReSPA Expert
10.15 - 11.15	<i>AI and Public Administration: Constraints & Risks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where AI realistically creates value in public administration - Data as a foundation: quality, availability, ownership - Key risks: security, privacy, bias, accountability - Interactive exercise: AI myths in public sector Mr Vedran Antoljak, ReSPA Expert
11.15 - 11.30	COFFEE BREAK
11.30 – 12.45	<i>AI Competency Framework – Structure & Application</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Framework dimensions and competency areas - Institutional vs. individual competencies - Use as a policy and workforce planning tool Ms Anne Lise Tan, UNESCO /Oxford University
12.45 - 13.00	<i>AI Competencies in Public Administration</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNESCO MOOC - Differences between user-level AI skills, analytical/data capacities, and managerial/leadership competencies - Implications for civil servants vs. senior management Ms Anne Lise Tan, UNESCO /Oxford University
13.00 - 14.00	LUNCH
14.00 –14.45	<i>AI Readiness & Institutional Self-Assessment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What it means to be “AI-ready” in public administration - Logic of AI readiness indices and self-assessment tools - Using assessment as a development tool, not an evaluation mechanism NSPA

14.45-15.30	<i>AI Index Methodology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scope and objectives of the index - Methodology, scoring, and evidence requirements NSPA Bulgarian School of Public Administration
15.30-16.30	<i>Guided Institutional Self-Assessment – Part I</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional breakout groups - Mapping existing AI-related competencies and practices - Identification of initial strengths and gaps NSPA Experts ReSPA Experts COFFEE BREAK WILL BE SERVED IN THE MEETING ROOM
16.30-16.45	<i>Wrap-up Day 1</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection and clarification - Preparation for Day 2 ReSPA Representative

Second Day, 4th March

Day 2 will centre on analysis, prioritisation, and implementation. Participating institutions will complete and validate their self-assessments, exchange experiences across administrations, and identify cross-country patterns and shared challenges.

Building on the assessment results, participants will move towards strategic prioritisation, distinguishing between exploratory initiatives and AI use cases with clear and demonstrable public value. The programme will conclude with hands-on work focused on:

- identifying priority AI and digital skills gaps;
- linking identified gaps to targeted training, recruitment, and organisational design measures;
- defining institutional AI governance models, roles, and responsibilities; and
- drafting a practical AI introduction and capacity-building action plan for each participating institution.

The activity will result in completed pilot institutional AI self-assessments, the identification of priority AI and digital skills gaps at both institutional and regional levels, and draft institutional AI introduction and capacity-building plans. Consolidated findings will be presented at a regional online event in November 2026, providing evidence to inform future reforms and donor-funded initiatives.

8.45 – 9.00	REGISTRATION AND WELCOME COFFEE
9.00 – 9.15	Reflection and Link to Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key insights from Day 1 - Unexpected findings - How perceptions of AI have changed within institutions NSPA Representative ReSPA Representative
9.15 – 10.15	<i>Guided Institutional Self-Assessment – Part II</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completion and validation of results - Peer exchange across administrations - Consolidation of institutional findings NSPA Expert ReSPA Experts

10.15 - 11.15	<p><i>From Readiness to Strategic Priorities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interpreting assessment results - Defining priority AI areas - Exercise: selecting 2–3 AI priorities <p>Mr Vedran Antoljak, ReSPA Expert</p>
11.15 - 11.30	<p><i>COFFEE BREAK</i></p>
11.30 – 12.00	<p><i>Croatia AI Index results</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concrete example of how evidence-based assessment can inform AI governance and capacity-building strategies. <p>NSPA Representative</p>
12.30 – 13.00	<p><i>Governing AI in Public Institutions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AI governance models - Roles and responsibilities - Good practice examples <p>NSPA Expert</p>
13.00 - 14.00	<p><i>LUNCH</i></p>
14.00 –14.45	<p><i>Building AI competencies of public servants and Harnessing AI for Learning & Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing programs to build AI skills - Workshop: Leveraging AI tools to plan and deliver impactful training <p>NSPA Expert</p>
14.45-15.45	<p><i>Developing an Institutional AI Action Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structure of an AI action plan - Final workshop - Final output: “How We Will Introduce AI in Our Institution” <p>NSPA Expert ReSPA Experts COFFEE BREAK WILL BE SERVED IN THE MEETING ROOM</p>
15.45-16.00	<p><i>Conclusions & Next Steps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summary of findings and lessons learned <p>NSPA Representative ReSPA Representative</p>