



ReSPA

Regional School
of Public Administration

BUILDING TOGETHER
GOVERNANCE FOR THE FUTURE

ANNUAL REPORT

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Effective HRM for Public
Administration of the Future



Co-funded by the
European Union

Empowering Public Servants: Building Strong Institutions with Commitment and Vision

The ReSPA team is committed to boosting regional cooperation, empowering public servants, fostering growth, and catalysing reforms that contribute towards a shared European Administrative Space through capacity building, policy dialogue, collaboration and technical support.

As a key partner of the European Commission and the governments of the Western Balkans¹ in this area, ReSPA is dedicated to enhancing public administration professionalisation and efficiency, elevating service quality for citizens and businesses, and underpinning the region's EU accession path.

To date, ReSPA has implemented approximately 800 initiatives toward modernised and digitalised public administration, strengthened management systems, enhanced the competencies of more than 12,000 civil servants, and fostered knowledge exchange and mobility within the region and with EU member states.

¹ReSPA operates under the governance of five Members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, while Kosovo* is a beneficiary.

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

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BC	Budget Committee	PP	Policy Paper
BR	Better Regulation	PoW	Programme of Work
CAF	Common Assessment Framework	PoA	Plan of Activities
CEF	Centre of Excellency in Finance	QPAS	Quality of Public Administration and Services
CoE	College of Europe	QM	Quality Management
CoG	Centre of Government	RQMC	Regional Quality Management Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organization	RAI	Regional Anti-corruption Initiative
DG	Directorate General	RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
EC	European Commission	ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
EU	European Union	RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
EUI	European Union Integration	RTG	Regional Thematic Group
EUI	European University Institute	RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
EPC	European Policy Centre	SBS	Sector Budget Support
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
GB	Governing Board	SEE	South-East Europe
HRMD	Human Resources Management and Development	SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	SL	Senior Official level
INSP	French Institute for public services	SNA	Italian National School of Public Administration
IPA	The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance	SSEI	Seasonal School on European Integration
IT	Information Technology	ToT	Training of Trainers
KDZ	Zentrum für Verwaltungsforschung	WBs	Western Balkans
ML	Ministerial Level	WB3C	Cyber Capacity Centre
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	WG	Working Group
NALAS	Network of associations of local authorities of South East Europe		
NEAR	Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG)		
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator		
NISPAcee	Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe		
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		
OFM	Operations and Finance Manager		
OG	Open Government		
OGD	Open Government Data		
OGP	Open Government Partnership		
PA	Programme Assistant		
PAR	Public Administration Reform		
PC	Programme Committee		
PEF	CAF External Feedback Procedure		
PFM	Public Finance Management		
PIA	Policy Impact Assessment		
PM	Programme Manager		

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Chair of the ReSPA Governing Board's Welcome



Goran MINCHEV
Minister of Public Administration of North Macedonia

Respected,

It is a privilege and honor to reflect on the invaluable role that ReSPA has played in advancing public administration reforms in North Macedonia.

Over the past years, ReSPA's support has been instrumental in driving forward our Public Administration Reform (PAR) agenda, shaping the future of our governance, and building a robust foundation for continuous improvement.

For North Macedonia, the evaluation of our PAR Strategy 2018-2022, led by ReSPA, was a pivotal moment. It allowed us to take stock of the progress made and identify key lessons that would guide us moving forward. This evaluation laid a strong foundation for the development of our new Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023-2030, and I cannot overstate the importance of ReSPA's expertise in this process. Their guidance has been invaluable in shaping an actionable, forward-looking strategy that addresses the needs of our citizens and institutions alike. Alongside the comprehensive Action Plan for 2023-2026, this strategy will modernize and further enhance our public administration for the coming decade.

The structure of our new PAR Strategy is fully aligned with the SIGMA/OECD Principles of Public Administration, ensuring that we remain on the path toward greater accountability, transparency, and efficiency. Additionally, the development of an IT tool to monitor and report on the realization of the PAR Strategy via a state-of-the-art web platform marks another critical step forward in our reform journey. This tool not only enhances transparency but also strengthens our ability to track progress in real time, ensuring that we remain focused on delivering tangible results for our citizens.

Beyond strategic planning, ReSPA has been a vital partner in strengthening the institutional capacities of our public administration. One of the clearest examples of this is the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) within the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, an effort that has significantly improved our quality management and accountability mechanisms. Similarly, the development of our National Quality Management Plan would not have been possible without ReSPA's continuous support and expertise.

A key milestone in our partnership has been the strengthening of the Secretariat for Legislation. Through the establishment of an electronic database system for laws and by-laws, fully aligned with European Union Law - ReSPA has helped us streamline our legislative processes and enhance our alignment with EU standards. This upgrade marks a significant step towards greater legislative efficiency, transparency, and readiness for EU integration.

On behalf of the Government of North Macedonia, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to ReSPA for their unwavering support and partnership. Together, we have not only set a high standard for public administration across our region but also established a model for others to follow. The progress we have made speaks to the strength of our collaboration, and I am confident that together, we will continue to achieve great things.

As we look to the future, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank ReSPA and all its members for the constructive cooperation we experienced during our presidency. Your commitment and dedication have been critical in making our shared vision for public administration reform a reality.

Thank you once again for your trust, your partnership, and your belief in the power of public administration to transform societies.

I look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration as we continue to build better, more efficient institutions for all our citizens.

Director's Welcome



Maja HANDJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA

Dear ReSPA partners and friends,

It is my pleasure to present ReSPA's Annual Report, showcasing the collaborative achievements and progress made over the past 12 months in fostering a professional, accountable, resilient, and citizen-focused public sector that serves as a true catalyst for responsive governance and sustainable development of the region.

With robust support from the European Commission and strategic guidance from our Governing Board, the ReSPA team have contributed to strengthening public administration in the Western Balkans, striving for excellence and future integration into the European Administrative Space while nurturing strong regional ownership and collaboration.

Over the last 12 months, ReSPA has delivered significant value to the public sector by implementing **14 mobility exchange schemes**, providing **3 tailored technical assistance projects**, launching **two e-Gov pilots**, and creating **60 opportunities for learning, networking, and growth for 1,100 civil servants**. A total of **29 scholarships are provided to public servants** from the region under the Horizontal Facility to partake in pertinent training of programmes and initiatives in various EU-based institutes and schools. ReSPA also takes pride in advancing high-level Ministerial dialogue on Public Administration reforms via the ReSPA-coordinated regular Regional Ministerial dialogues – the latest of which took place in Ljubljana this October.

Our recent monitoring reflects high satisfaction levels, with participants noting these initiatives as instrumental in their personal and institutional development, reinforcing our commitment to excellence in public administration.

Some of the significant milestones include the launch of an extensive **capacity-building and mobility** program in collaboration with Italian public institutions and academia, funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and implemented in cooperation with SNA, and the implementation of the **Western Balkans Regional Mobility Programme** with multiple components, including a job-shadowing segment in regional organisations such as CEFTA, RCC, RAI, RYCO, CEF, TCT, WBF and ReSPA itself. Additionally, we launched the 3rd cycle of the **Western Balkans Public Administration Awards** and the **Regional Open Data Challenge**—two unique regional competitions developed with our trusted partners.

While boosting the mobility initiatives, we continue nurturing our long-term capacity-building initiatives, such as the Interoperability Academy, Data Protection Academy, the Regional Academy on Evidence-Informed Policymaking, the Multi-Modular Training Programme on Clusters, and the Seasonal Schools on EU Integration and Digital Transformation, which have continued to thrive. Our joint initiatives have been co-developed with several academies and schools of governments in EU member states, EC services, and renowned partners such as College of Europe, EUI, Hertie, EIPA, etc.

One of our objectives was to facilitate the participation of civil servants from the Region in EU-based platforms and activities, such as the Public Administration Cooperation Exchange (PACE) initiative, DISPA, and EUPAN, amplifying the region's voice and contribution.

Those successes stem from the significantly improved and broadened collaboration with trusted partners like DG NEAR, the SIGMA Programme, KDZ, GIZ, SNA, EIPA, EUI, the College of Europe, Hertie School, DGAFP, INSP, INA, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the French Ministry of Public Administration Public Sector Transformation and the Civil Services, the Croatian National School for Public Administration, EKDDA, and key regional organisations, including CEFTA, RCC, RAI, RYCO, CEF, TCT, and the WBF.

ReSPA Members showed increased interest and update of the tailored technical support. Over the last 12 months, we undertook **13 “On-demand” projects** to address particular challenges of our Members in reforming and modernising public administrations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we assisted the Civil Service Agency of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in developing strategic HR documents and supported the Ministry of Justice in creating an e-tool for registering associations and NGOs. In Montenegro, we contributed to the “Ready4EU” Programme and the Digital Academy, while in North Macedonia, we helped develop a web platform to monitor the PAR Strategy 2023-2030 implementation as a follow-up to our earlier contribution towards the elaboration of the Strategy. In Serbia, we conducted a comprehensive analysis to enhance governmental transparency, identifying key areas for improvement. Committed to innovation in the public sector, we launched two eGov pilot projects to enhance digital training management services at the National Academy for Public Administration in Serbia and develop software modules for the IDDEEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Our **Regional Quality Management Centre has become a hub for excellence in quality management**, enhancing the capabilities of public administrations. We proudly awarded the CAF-Excellence Label to the Civil Service Agency of Republika Srpska, the Office for Combatting Drugs of the Government of Serbia, and the Ministry of Public Administration and Information Society of North Macedonia (recently divided into the Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Digital Transformation). Currently, we are implementing CAF in three institutions.

In recent months, we have concentrated on developing the **Knowledge Management Platform** - an educational and collaborative digital space to empower our public administrators and policymakers. This platform will foster knowledge sharing, peer-to-peer exchange, and capacity development, creating a community of civil servants. I am excited to announce that we will officially launch the platform during the High-Level Ministerial Dialogue in Skopje on 27 November 2024.

The role of ReSPA and the importance of public administration reform for the enlargement process were acknowledged at the Growth Summit held in Kotor in May 2024 and in the **Declaration from the EU-Western Balkan Summit** held in Brussels in December 2023, in which the EU recalled: “its continued support to the reforming and capacity-building of public administrations in the Western Balkans, provided notably through grants, twinning as well as through the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)”. Looking ahead, **ReSPA Strategic Orientation for 2025 – 2030**, “From Public Administration Reform to Public Administration Excellence,” underscores our commitment to supporting our Members in their collaboration and full inclusion in the European Administrative Space.

The ReSPA team stays dedicated to nurturing learning, networking, and exchange among public administration teams across the Western Balkans while fostering connections with our EU colleagues. Together with the European Commission, our partners, and the outstanding public administration teams in the Western Balkans, we continue to work hard for continuous improvement in our communities and future generations by building governance excellence.

ReSPA's Regional Approach: Navigating Transformative Changes

In recent years, public administrations in the Western Balkans have faced increasingly complex challenges while navigating major transformations, such as adapting to digital and green transitions. Limited budgets have made it difficult for administrations to modernise, attract, and retain skilled staff, reducing their capacity to manage more demanding tasks. However, the necessity to enhance the delivery of results towards citizens and businesses and the requirements stemming from the European integration process has constantly driven public administration reform (PAR) in the region.

Today, the future of governance in the Western Balkans is guided by the Principles of Public Administration, which serve as the foundation for good governance and are critical factors in the EU accession negotiations dynamics and the accession process itself. EU-funded support, including budget assistance and technical aid, most recently expanded with the Growth Plan and gradual integration opportunities, plays a vital role in helping governments in the region with their reforms.

Thanks to this partnership with the EU, Western Balkan administrations have undergone multiple cycles of public administration reform, achieving varying levels of readiness for EU accession, ranging from “some level of preparation” to “moderately prepared.” While these efforts have led to improvements, significant strides remain to be made. Progress so far has largely focused on policy instruments and legislation, but implementation remains uneven across different government sectors and levels.

During this time, **ReSPA has continued to evolve its work to support its members in improving their public administrations** and has played a central role in driving these reforms, serving as a regional hub for knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and technical assistance. ReSPA has empowered administrations to implement reforms better and align with European standards by providing platforms for collaboration, peer-to-peer exchanges, and expert advice. ReSPA's targeted initiatives, such as those in digital transformation, public policies, European Integration, and human resource management, have been instrumental in addressing emerging challenges. In doing so, ReSPA remains a vital partner for the region's public administrations, supporting their efforts to modernise and meet the demands of both citizens and the European integration process.

Empowering Civil Servants by the Numbers

While navigating reform processes in the Region, ReSPA remains focused on human capital issues in the public sector. It recognises their crucial role in determining whether public administration serves as a vector and catalyst for delivering on EU-aligned policies and impactfully implementing funding or becomes a bottleneck for effective implementation. To drive meaningful reforms, public officials must tackle the evolving challenges within the sector, acquiring new skills to enhance decision-making, improve efficiency, promote accountability, and foster innovation.



The ReSPA team has addressed Western Balkan administrations' critical challenges in collaboration with working group members. This includes improving strategic, evidence-informed policy development, ensuring the effective transposition and enforcement of EU policies during accession, professionalising merit-based recruitment, and enhancing service delivery through digitalisation, innovation, and quality assurance—all aimed at creating a citizen-centred public administration that drives growth.

With the backing of the European Commission and under the strategic guidance of the Governing Board, through 60 activities, the ReSPA team leveraged the expertise of 1,100 public officials who hail from close to 150 public institutions and have collectively participated for 2,242 days. We collaborated with 110 international and regional experts, speakers, lecturers and practitioners.

- ✦ Through **4 high-level policy dialogues and events**, ReSPA brought together ministers, senior officials of the WB administrations, and representatives of the European Commission and other partners to reiterate a high political commitment to the governance reform process and agendas, supporting voicing and following up political declarations/statements in close coordination with EC;
- ✦ Through **60 learning, networking, and capacity-building activities**, ReSPA empowered **1,100 civil servants** from over 150 public institutions across the Western Balkans, strengthening regional collaboration and public service excellence;
- ✦ Through **13 “On-demand” projects** across diverse sectors, ReSPA addressed the specific needs of its Members, driving targeted improvements across various domains of the public sector;
- ✦ With **14 mobility activities**, including the launch of the Regional Mobility Programme and a new collaboration with Italian public administration institutions, ReSPA connected teams from the Western Balkans with peers in EU member states, advancing the integration of a European public administration space;
- ✦ **29 scholarships** awarded by ReSPA enabled public servants to participate in specialised training programs in EU Member States, enhancing their expertise and capacity;
- ✦ **6 policy briefs and thematic snapshots** offer in-depth analysis of topics such as integrated planning systems in the Western Balkans, inclusive and transparent policymaking, the new Growth Plan for the region, the use of emerging technologies, and merit-based recruitment and performance appraisal processes;
- ✦ Under the initiative **“Well-being of our civil servants matters,”** ReSPA supported its Members in implementing staff satisfaction surveys at the local level. The surveys addressed civil servants' physical, mental, and social well-being in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. ReSPA subsequently disseminated these results to the broader public;
- ✦ The ReSPA team reinforced its commitment to **building partnerships** by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with five institutions while holding a series of high-level bilateral meetings;
- ✦ The ReSPA team advanced its learning and development efforts, actively championing a greener, more sustainable Western Balkans through socially responsible initiatives.

Advancing Reforms & Empowering Civil Servants Per Thematic Area

Over the years, ReSPA has adapted itself to effectively meet the needs of its Members, aiding them in enhancing their public administration systems, efficiently adapting to societal changes, and addressing emerging issues like increased policy complexities, digital transformation, environmental concerns, and shifting demographics.

Jointly, with working group members, the ReSPA team has addressed critical challenges Western Balkan administrations face. These include improving strategic and well-coordinated evidence-informed policy development, ensuring the transposition, implementation, and enforcement of EU policies and standards during the accession phase, professionalization, merit-based recruitment and enhancing service delivery through digitalisation, innovation, and quality assurance, all focusing on creating citizens-centred public administration that delivers growth.





POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COORDINATION



Policy Development and Coordination thematic area aims to strengthen the role of public administration in advancing evidence-informed policymaking, enhancing regulatory processes, and improving policy coordination

For administrations in the Western Balkans region, achieving effective policy coordination requires predictability, medium-term planning, budget alignment, evidence-based decisions, and stakeholder consultations. While most critical CoG functions necessary for effective policy coordination and government decision-making are in place in the Western Balkans, coordination between different CoG institutions remains insufficient.

Government planning and monitoring quality has seen slight improvements during past years. However, challenges like methodological gaps and limited central guidance result in weak planning and high rates of legislative commitments being carried forward. Sectoral strategies have improved minimally in quality but suffer from poor alignment between policy and financial plans, creating inefficiencies.

While regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) and public consultations are formally established and improving, their impact on policy quality is limited due to inconsistent application and use of feedback. Interministerial consultations require more consistent implementation, and quality control of legal drafting, though established, faces challenges.

During the reporting period, ReSPA strengthened the coordination capacities of the Centers of Government and implemented an extensive multi-modular capacity development program to achieve this complex objective of enhancing evidence-informed policymaking. This included the continuation of **the Regional Academy for Evidence-Informed Policymaking**, established in 2022, which featured two comprehensive modules:

During the **3rd Module of the Regional Academy on Evidence-Informed Policymaking**, held in Mostar in April 2024, **43 civil servants specialising in policymaking and budgetary matters immersed themselves in the intricacies of costing and budgeting.** They gained valuable insights into the synergy between policy formulation and budget planning processes, learned to apply tools for costing and budgeting policy documents, and explored practical examples from policy development and coordination, as well as budgeting practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The **4th Module of the Regional Academy on Evidence-Informed Policymaking**, held in Ohrid in September 2024, focused on **policymaking in the digital world.** Over 35 mid- and senior-level professionals engaged in a dynamic learning environment featuring interactive presentations, World Café discussions, expert lectures, and sharing of best practices from Western Balkan administrations. Participants also gained valuable insights from Croatia's experience in enhancing civic engagement in policymaking through the eSavjetovanja platform, while Statistics Estonia demonstrated their use of social media to promote data collection efforts and introduce an innovative tool to track progress on strategic goals.



ReSPA joined forces with SIGMA Programme in two high level events during past 12 months:



In October 2023, the **“Regional conference on challenges of achieving effective policy planning in the Western Balkans”** brought together key Western Balkans public officials and highly-ranked Austrian governmental bodies and prominent experts to exchange insights, ideas, learn strategies and good practices aiming to drive a transformative journey for the region’s administrations in the policy-planning area. The Conference provided deeper insights and proposed some alternative scenarios on how to steer and guide the transformative journey in policy planning and explored how key planning documents bridge the gap between vision and reality.



In October 2024, in Rome, ReSPA and SIGMA gathered senior officials and experts from the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the European Commission, and the European Parliament Research Services at the regional **high-level conference on Parliaments and Evidence-based Lawmaking in the Western Balkans**. Held in the impressive building of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the Conference enabled Secretaries-General, heads of parliamentary institutes, and senior officials from the Western Balkans to discuss key challenges in ensuring evidence-based parliamentary scrutiny and the coordination of legislative work between parliaments and governments. The conference also facilitated the exchange of experiences and best practices, including the use of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) in lawmaking.



ReSPA also connected teams from the Western Balkans with Hungarian civil servants on the topics of policy coordination and EU integration:



Study visit to Ludovika University boosted capacities on various professional development models for civil servants, harnessing EU programs, and highlighting leading educational and training institutions in public policy. Guided by 14 experts and lecturers from various government bodies, universities, and academic institutions, they engaged in critical discussions aimed at accelerating the region’s EU integration process. Key topics included exploring professional development models for Hungarian civil servants, leveraging EU programs, and showcasing Hungary’s leading educational and training institutions in public policy.

Working Group Meetings continued to be a source for developing a working programme based on the real needs of the region in the policy development area:



In October 2023, civil servants from the Western Balkans, dealing with the Better Regulation Agenda, **discussed recent developments as regards the implementation of impact assessment and public consultation across the region, sharing good practices and brainstorming on further ReSPA’s activities.**





EUROPEAN INTEGRATION THEMATIC AREA AND HORIZONTAL INITIATIVES

European Integration thematic area and horizontal initiatives seek to boost the capacities of the Western Balkans administrations for an accelerated EU accession process and boost horizontal skills needed for navigating the challenging accession process.

“Enlargement is a vital policy for the European Union”, underlined EU President von der Leyen in her statement on the 2023 Enlargement Package and the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The “EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029” emphasises a new dynamic in the enlargement process and that both the EU and the candidates are responsible for making the most of this policy and communicating it clearly. In light of the concrete efforts of the European Union to advance the European

perspective of the region, in March 2024, the Commission adopted a Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews, reaffirming its strategic interest in enlargement and underlining the importance of EU values and policies through gradual integration confirmed in initiatives such as the “Growth Plan” and the “Common Regional Market Within the Western Balkans”. The main focus of the WBs administrations during 2024 has been on the preparation of the Reform Agendas, a

prerequisite for the implementation of the “Growth Plan”, laying down a reforms and priority measures in areas such as good governance, rule of law, justice, human capital, public administration, digital transformation, education, etc.

In various formats, from online sessions, extensive summer school, and multi-modular learning programmes, ReSPA empowered civil servants dealing with the EU integration agenda with the latest updates on various topics such as communication of the EU process, translation and implementation of the *acquis*, the phasing-in approach, accelerated and progressive integration concepts, the new Growth Plan, support for the SDGs, the renewed momentum for EU enlargement and much more.

Aiming to share insights about the **2023 Enlargement Package and the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans**, ReSPA gathered virtually in December 2023 around 70 regional public officials that delved into key aspects of the Enlargement Package and the conclusions drawn from the recent EU-Western Balkans Summit.



ReSPA also continued bolstering its **collaborative endeavour with renowned European Institutes, esteemed lecturers and partners from the European Commission, and speakers from EU Member States**, resulting in numerous activities crafted with prominent partners:

Workshop on **Leading with Vision: Cultivating Foresightful Leadership** held in October 2023, was meticulously co-designed by ReSPA in collaboration with the French Directorate General of Administration and Public Function (DGAFP) and the French Institute of Public Service (INSP). The event brought together senior public officials responsible for strategic planning and coordination of EU integration from the Western Balkans who learned and exchanged ideas on Leadership and Foresight as key differentiators, integrating foresight into policy-making, harnessing foresight for positive future-shaping, and effective leadership's focus on immediate and future challenges. With this Workshop, ReSPA aimed to empower senior officials to proactively lead, combining strategic foresight for envisioning the future and policy-making with effective leadership skills, also in view of the EU accession process.



In February 2024, in Brussels, **ReSPA concluded the multiple-module capacity-building programme for the translation of acquis**, crafted with the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) of the European Commission. **Brussels Masterclass** brought together in DGT HQs in Brussels over **40 participants to achieve excellence in translation and transposition of the acquis**. Public servants from the Translation Coordination Units of the Western Balkans and Trio (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) went through an ambitious programme with 6 different modules as of September 2023 and had the opportunity to learn, discuss and share practices with the in-house staff and peers of the DGT on quality management in the translation process, terminology, usage of technology and artificial intelligence, etc.



This year's **Summer School on EU Integration**, co-created and implemented with the prestigious Hertie School in July 2024, focused on "Advanced European Governance and Integration". Through an intensive series of sessions, more than **20 civil servants from across the Western Balkans boosted their leadership skills and deepened their understanding of European governance, focusing on public administration, governance reforms, and EU integration processes.**



In partnership with NALAS, GIZ, the EU Delegation to Tirana, the Committee of Regions, the European Commission, SIGMA, NALED, ADA, the Western Balkans Fund, the Council of Europe, and the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, ReSPA held in Tirana in April 2024, the two-day conference **"EMPOWER LOCAL: Building Capacities for the Western Balkans' Local Governments on the EU Integration Journey"** which brought together 25 local civil servants to discuss the most pressing capacity development needs stemming from the existing and future EU-related tasks. ReSPA and the partners commit to design a regional multiple-module capacity-building programme targeting public servants from the Local Government Units across the Western Balkans to be delivered during 2025.



Jointly with the Transport Community Treaty Secretariat, ReSPA supported the **Summer School to enhance sustainable transport in the Western Balkans**, focusing this year on Green Mobility. In Prishtina, in July 2024, experts and stakeholders from the Western Balkans and the EU discussed sustainable transport policy development, mobility solutions and future-oriented transport policies, focusing on the EU's strategies for green and smart mobility in the Western Balkans, emphasising regional and governmental commitments to sustainable practices.



In March 2024, ReSPA enriched the two-day workshop of the European Sustainable Development Network, organised in cooperation with the Government of Montenegro and the UN Development Programme, **contributing to bolstering SDGs implementation across the Western Balkans** and engaging in discussions on trends, perspectives, and challenges to advance SDGs coordination mechanisms.



Jointly with TCT, ReSPA held a **regional dialogue on advancing skills in the Western Balkans transport sector in Belgrade in November 2023**, which **fostered a comprehensive discussion on the coordination and management of EU funding for transport and connectivity projects**, the future landscape of the transport industry in the region through insightful panels and expert engagement. The event identified emerging opportunities in the sector, particularly focusing on future jobs and professions.



The first training module in the 2024-2025 series on negotiation chapter clusters, held in June 2024 in Belgrade, streamlined to speed up the EU accession negotiations, focusing on the fundamentals of the EU accession process. Over 25 public administrators delved into the latest updates on Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom, and Security), engaging in intensive lectures, panel discussions and a group work program.



Additionally, ReSPA has played a significant role in advancing various aspects of the EU integration agenda. With strong support from the European Commission and in collaboration with renowned EU learning institutions, **ReSPA has initiated a range of comprehensive learning programs which tackled important topics**, including the EU Acquis, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing and negotiation chapter clusters:

- ✦ **Six-module Training program on “Translation of the acquis”**: during the reporting period 4, modules were executed in collaboration with DG Translation (European Commission) to enhance the region’s translation capacities, covering quality management, terminology management, the use of e-tools in translation, and managing language data and procurement;

- ✦ **Training on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing** enhanced the skills of 50+ civil servants working within Chapter 4 (Free Movement of Capital) and Chapter 32 (Financial Control);

- ✦ **The training “Comparative approach in European Public Administration systems”**, organized remotely in partnership with the French INSP (Institut National du Service Public), provided participants with the opportunity to delve into the differences among Europe’s various administrative systems and public administration cultures, focusing on countries where they will embark on internships. The ReSPA expert explained the added value of comparison and presented the administrative systems in France, Germany, and Italy and their comparative typologies. Participants discussed the different administrative traditions and practices, boosting better understanding.

- ✦ ReSPA contributed to **the Tirana Connectivity Forum 2024** (September 2024) under the motto “Better Together – Building a Resilient Europe”. In the session focused on “The Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and Human Capital”, ReSPA Director delivered a keynote intervention and discussed under various sessions of the regional Forum, emphasising “the way how we approach the human capital issue in the public sector will determine whether public administration becomes a key vector for delivering EU-aligned policies and funds or a bottleneck for optimal implementation”. ReSPA called for swift operationalisation of the accelerated integration of EU’s platforms and instruments relevant to public administration reforms.





HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Human Resources Management and Professional Development is pivotal in fostering a professional, motivated, and proactive civil service. Civil servants are essential for building transparent, accountable, and effective public administration institutions. Strategic human resources management is critical in attracting young professionals to the public sector and ensuring their growth and retention.

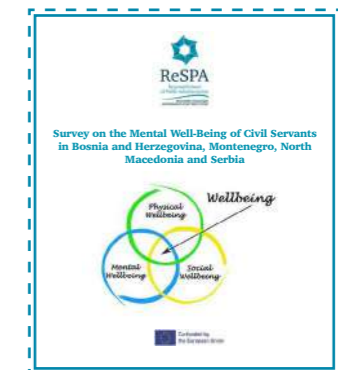
This highlights the need for comprehensive policies that attract talent and motivate and retain employees with the right skills and competencies, positioning the public sector as an employer of choice. These policies should prioritise merit-based recruitment, promotion, and dismissal processes, lifelong learning and career development, staff well-being, purposeful roles, leadership aligned with the principles of good public administration, and an enabling environment for mobility. Competitive remuneration, strong employer branding, inclusive working conditions, and flexible work arrangements are crucial to enhancing the sector's overall appeal as a desirable workplace.



Well-qualified staff remains crucial for enhancing the administrative capacity of public authorities. Central HR units often focus on immediate issues rather than strategic goals, and while HRMIS infrastructure is generally in place, digitalisation and integration vary widely. Improved interoperability is needed to streamline data exchange and boost accuracy. Lifelong learning and talent management are gaining attention, with some progress in professional development, but a cohesive approach remains absent. Strengthening leadership, particularly in digital skills, and fully utilising existing competency frameworks is vital for driving innovation and improving regional public service performance. Leadership is crucial for driving reforms and guiding organisations through transformations in the Western Balkans, requiring continuous strengthening to foster integrity, accountability, and

value-driven governance. Conducting staff satisfaction surveys is a positive step towards strengthening the participation of civil servants. It highlighted the need to enhance leadership and well-being as foundations for sustainable reform.

In the realm of **HRMPD thematic area**, the ReSPA team unveiled the results of a comprehensive survey on the mental health of civil servants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, tackling in parallel various crucial topics such as the necessity of enhancing civil servants' competencies for digitally ready governments, the latest trends, challenges, and innovations in HRMIS, LMS, and TMS in the Western Balkans, and the critical role of employer branding and talent management. Their focus was also on leadership and creating motivated and empowered public service employees, thereby enhancing the overall attractiveness of the public sector.



During the virtual presentation, over 60 participants get insights into the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of 5,669 civil servants, including 1,303 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 838 from Montenegro, 1,293 from North Macedonia, and 2,235 from Serbia. Some findings show that the overall mental well-being score is 3.49 - above average.

Some of the recommendations for improving the well-being of civil servants include identifying and addressing "hidden stress," implementing stress management practices like meditation and mindfulness, arranging training sessions on effective communication and active listening, and offering specialised managerial training to improve workload management and foster constructive feedback. Additionally, the report advocates for implementing routine mental well-being surveys across ReSPA members to track advancements, promote awareness, and exchange insights on mental health best practices.

Continuously bolstering partnerships with the EU and partners from the region, the ReSPA team created various activities:



Co-created with the French Ministry of Public Sector Transformation and the Civil Service Support, the dialogue “Navigating Transformation: Empowering Public Service for Today’s Trends and Challenges” brought together (in June 2024 in Tirana), esteemed guest speakers in a vibrant exchange on the best practices in France, Croatia and Western Balkan administrations on transforming public service in the Western Balkans to align with modern trends and EU integration demands, discussing workforce attractiveness, ethics, diversity, AI integration, and public service image. The workshop also introduced tools and initiatives like CompAct, TAIEX, ReSPA’s Mobility Programme, and Young Cells Albania to enhance regional cooperation.



Crafted with the Ministry of Public Administration of Slovenia, the Conference **“Innovative HRM for Public Administration of the Future”** brought together over 20 WBs ministers, deputy ministers, state secretaries, and senior officials from the OECD, SIGMA, UNDESA, and key ministries from Greece, France, Italy, and other EU Member States, from 2-3 October 2024 in Ljubljana to address the critical societal, technological, and geopolitical shifts shaping the future of public sector HR management. On the first day, a high-level panel gathered ministers and deputy ministers to discuss how governments can build the public administrations of the future. Discussions centred on the need for public sector leadership to adapt to rapid societal and technological changes. The second day focused on making public administration more attractive as a career, identifying the key competencies needed for the future workforce, and effective onboarding of new employees to facilitate the transition and maximise employee engagement and productivity. The HRMD Working Group meeting - organised back-to-back with the Conference - served as a floor for discussion based on the main takeaways from the Conference. In particular, **WB Members discussed trends, needs and ReSPA’s role in further support of the Western Balkans toward future-ready public administration.**



In June 2024, virtually, ReSPA raised awareness of **employer branding and talent management** among 30 civil servants, policymakers, HR professionals and others interested in enhancing motivation and talent management practices. They learned from the Federal Public Service Policy and Support (BOSA) of Belgium, the Directorate General for Administration and the Civil Service (DGAFP) of France and the National School for Public Administration of Croatia about strategic approaches to employer branding and talent management from EU public administrations, both at entry and throughout career development. The event highlighted the importance of strategic talent management in creating motivated, empowered public service employees and enhancing public sector efficiency and effectiveness.



In October 2023, at the margins of the DISPA Meeting, ReSPA held the **2nd Meeting of Directors and Heads of training institutions** to share their best practices, deliberate on common challenges and explore opportunities for regional partnership. The meeting was a good opportunity for presentations of exemplary practices and flagship initiatives by each ReSPA Member, alongside insights into the experiences of Croatia and Portugal. Finally, the directors and heads of training institutions and departments explored concrete possibilities for further collaborative efforts.



In November 2023, **ReSPA gathered 49 public officials to discuss the concept of talent management** and experience from the Czech Republic public administration and the Western Balkans. ReSPA shared valuable EU practices and insights to raise awareness of the importance of talent management in the public service, which is focused on putting the right people in the right place at the right time and retaining them to stay and work for public administration. The online conversation aimed to encourage public employees to contribute to reaching the organisational goals to the best of their abilities since talent management, as a strategic tool for public service, can enhance productivity and improve the efficiency of public servants.



The ReSPA **Meeting of the Regional Thematic Group on HR Management and Public Administration Development (HRMPD RTG)** took place in Belgrade from 30 November to 1 December 2023, focusing on talent management, merit recruitment, and performance appraisal in public administration. Key insights from Slovenia's experience highlighted the importance of adapting to generational differences, fostering lifelong learning, and creating a respectful, attractive workplace. Colleagues from Albania and Serbia emphasized the need to attract young talent and showcase civil service as an open, professional career path.

ReSPA **connected the civil servants from the Western Balkans with their counterparts from Portugal's National Institute for Public Administration (INA) and Agency for Administrative Modernisation (AMA):**



The INA team generously shared their expertise spanning training methodologies, scholarly inquiry, and technical support to drive innovation and modernisation within public administration. This knowledge transfer directly benefited 13 civil servants hailing from various training institutions/departments, civil service agencies/authorities, focusing on HR management and professional development. At INA, participants were immersed in comprehensive discussions on initiatives geared towards HR practices, focusing on training, performance management, and fostering innovation and modernisation. At AMA, through insightful dialogues and practical demonstrations, they gained valuable insights into how Portugal has leveraged digital technologies to streamline public services and enhance citizen satisfaction.

ReSPA continued to advance HR teams across the Western Balkans through **learning programs** which tackled essential topics such as job description, HRMIS, LMS and TMS practices, and many more:

✦ **Two-day training on job design and job description** held in December 2023 in Budva provided participants with an opportunity to delve deeply into job analysis techniques, identifying key positions and determining criteria for them, job evaluation and methodologies of job evaluation, harmonisation of job descriptions and job families, and catalogues of jobs. Participants gained skills and knowledge about job analysis, design, and job descriptions, including tools and methods used for job analysis; job description formats and their optimal content; criteria and the process of identifying key positions, and a better understanding of the process of creating grading and pay structures, with special emphasis on job evaluation, job families, and job catalogues.

✦ **A two-day workshop on Human Resources Management Information Systems (HRMIS), Learning Management Systems (LMS), and Training Management Systems (TMS)** held in Tirana in May 2024 empowered senior managers responsible for HRM with the latest trends, challenges, and innovations in these areas. Through a dynamic mix of presentations, panel discussions, interactive sessions, and group work, they enhanced their understanding and implementation of HRMIS, LMS, and TMS practices. They benefited from the shared experiences and insights from renowned public servants of France and Slovenia.

✦ **A two-day workshop on exploring competencies, digital transformation, and innovation** in ReSPA in July 2024 gathered 20 civil servants from the Western Balkans to explore their skills for digitally ready governments. Participants were equipped with cutting-edge trends and best practices in competency frameworks, fostering mutual learning and drawing on valuable experiences from OECD and EU member states.

✦ Held in December 2023 in Tirana, **a two-day workshop on career development** provided an opportunity for civil servants from the Western Balkans to learn more about career development, a process of exploration of a person's career path. A blend of experience sharing, joint discussion, group work, and role play enabled participants to delve into career development techniques, exercise the role of a career counsellor, and discuss the use of career development in staff attraction and retention but also challenges faced in the introduction of career development and how to overcome them in the Western Balkan administrations with position-based systems.

Staff satisfaction surveys

In the pursuit of enhancing human resource management, employee satisfaction surveys serve as a vital instrument, offering in-depth insights into employee views on governmental operations. These surveys highlight areas within work processes that require improvement, leading to increased job satisfaction and better service quality. Consistent employee satisfaction monitoring provides a data-driven foundation for effective human resource management.

Strategic leadership in the public sector benefits greatly from these insights, guiding efforts to position the public sector as an attractive employer. Inclusive leadership and open communication are strengthened, and the data enables a continuous evaluation of processes over time, allowing for meaningful comparisons and targeted improvements. The feedback gathered underscores the importance of positive employee attitudes, which boost productivity, enhance well-being, and reduce turnover. Surveys conducted in the Western Balkans align with international standards, revealing both strengths and areas for improvement. Key areas identified for development include staff well-being, career advancement opportunities, salary levels and management, training access, and the capacity of HR departments. Leadership development stands out as a priority, given its significant impact on other management practices.

In 2024, comprehensive satisfaction surveys were conducted among civil servants in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, capturing essential perspectives on job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, well-being, and experiences with HR practices, including recruitment, salary management, and leadership. Conducted across various levels of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, the survey reached 12,468 respondents. Findings indicated relatively low satisfaction with well-being and work-life balance, scoring 32,6% in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions 31%, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 32%, Republika Srpska 35%), and Serbia 34%. Salary management also emerged as a weak area. However, work motivation and job characteristics scored positively.

The Service Delivery thematic area integrates efforts towards more digitised governments and enhanced quality management as a prerequisite for better work performance and public services.

Digitalisation

In the digitalisation sub-area, ReSPA's primary focus was to empower civil servants across various aspects of digital transformation. While emphasising the importance of upgrading technical knowledge and fostering peer learning throughout all activities, the necessity of innovative policies for the efficient implementation of laws and bylaws was thoroughly analysed and discussed. Additionally, innovative practices were prioritised, featuring a comprehensive presentation of the EU's latest policies on interoperability, cybersecurity, open data, and the use of AI, alongside newly developed practices in human-centric design and innovative open data applications. These efforts encompass interoperability, reducing administrative burdens, enhancing quality management, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to leverage open data effectively.

In today's rapidly evolving landscape of public administration, the need for interoperability, defined as seamless communication and data sharing among government institutions, has become increasingly important. As public officials grapple with the complexities of modern governance, the challenges of breaking down informational silos and fostering collaboration are more pronounced than ever. To address these challenges effectively, a series of targeted skill development programs have been meticulously designed and implemented to equip public officials with the necessary expertise to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. Several key training programs focused on interoperability have emerged, demonstrating a commitment to advancing this essential capability across

various regions. The ReSPA Interoperability academies were designed for the needs of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Cross-regional Exchange on Digital Transformation in Brussels was a great possibility for participants for ReSPA members to improve their knowledge and exchange experience in the area of interoperability. In parallel with interoperability, the themes of open data and good governance are critical for fostering transparency and accountability in public administration. Aiming to recognise and promote the innovative use of open data among ReSPA members for improved transparency, accountability, and service delivery, ReSPA collaborated with UNDP Serbia to realise the Regional Open Data Challenge, to foster collaboration between government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to drive data-driven innovation and raise awareness about the benefits of open data for economic and community development.

Digital transformation stands as a cornerstone of modern public administration aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and service delivery. To help public officials adapt to this shift, ReSPA organised two Seasonal Schools on Digital Transformation. The program was designed to equip officials with essential skills in digital services, cybersecurity, open data, and emerging technologies. Recognising the increasing cybersecurity threats, ReSPA has also prioritised education and training in this area through the seasonal schools and training of trainers. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding digital infrastructure in public administration.

Data protection has also emerged as a vital area of focus. A significant initiative was the Data Protection Academy hosting its 2nd High-level Exchange and Learning Week in Brussels, bringing together participants from ReSPA Members to exchange best practices and address emerging data privacy and security challenges.



SERVICE DELIVERY



In March 2024, ReSPA inaugurated its inaugural **“Public Administration-Based Interoperability Academy,”** aimed at enhancing cooperation on interoperability. The initiative seeks to facilitate the design and implementation of policies and practices that enable seamless e-services tailored to the genuine needs of end users.



The ReSPA Interoperability Academy Montenegro, the first in a series of academies, took place in March 2024 in Bar. This event combined capacity-building sessions with dialogue among key stakeholders in Montenegro, resulting in the identification of short- and mid-term measures to enhance interoperability in the country.

Twenty-three operational-level public officials and policymakers from various ministries and agencies—including Public Administration, Interior Affairs, Justice, Education, Finance, Health, Labor and Social Welfare, the Agency for Data Protection, and the Cadaster and State Property Administration Office—engaged in discussions with lecturers. Their **focus was on optimizing existing legal provisions, policies, and practical developments to identify key bottlenecks while referencing the National Interoperability Framework and the layers of the European Interoperability Framework.**



Building on the success of the inaugural Interoperability Academy in Montenegro, the **Interoperability Academy in Bosnia and Herzegovina** held in July 2024 in Jahorina, brought together key representatives from two significant interoperability networks: the Inter-sectorial Working Group for Interoperability and the Coordination Group for the Interoperability of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They collaborated under the technical support of the Ministry of Transport and Communication of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ensured a robust and productive exchange of knowledge and strategies.

ReSPA convened **two Seasonal Schools on Digital Transformation**, one of ReSPA's flagship initiatives.



The Seasonal School on Digital Transformation 2023, held in Budva in November 2023, bolstered the region's digitalisation reform efforts by offering a wealth of knowledge from 15 distinguished experts. This event combined their expertise with the insights and experiences of participants, focusing on priorities identified by ReSPA's working group members. Key areas of discussion included **enhancing the design of user-friendly and interoperable digital services to increase adoption; leveraging GovTech partnerships and AI as effective tools for modernising service delivery; and developing a robust cybersecurity framework to ensure the secure delivery of essential public services, protect sensitive data, and increase confidence in users.**



The Seasonal School on Digital Transformation 2024, held in Budva in July 2024, offered 30 senior public officials the possibility to delve into **cutting-edge topics crucial for future governance.** Through a rich blend of lectures, workshops, and expert panels, they explored **innovative approaches such as leveraging open data for knowledge-based economies, applying user-centric services through Rapid Innovation Lab models, and navigating the evolving role of AI in public administration.**

This year, ReSPA has further strengthened its successful collaboration with the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre, concentrating on enhancing the cyber hygiene skills of civil servants:



A 3-day Training of Trainers on Cyber Hygiene, joint initiative crafted with WB3C included 20 senior officials to champion cyber resilience within their organizations. They are empowered to train their colleagues to manage cyber security risks effectively within their institutions across the Western Balkans.





Regional Open Data Challenge 2024 (RODC 2024), launched in collaboration with the UNDP Serbia, aimed to encourage **collaboration between the government, CSOs, academia, and the private sector in delivering data-driven innovation** that improves public services, empowers citizens or boosts economic activities. During the Open Call (18 March – 3 May), 17 applicants submitted their projects under “solution” and “idea” categories within 4 challenges: mobility and transportation data, workforce mobility, tourism atlas and demographic trends.



At the **RODC 2024 Awarding Ceremony**, held on the first day of the Seasonal School of Digital Transformation in Budva (July 2024), the winning teams from Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania presented their projects and discussed leveraging the open data.



Video Statement from the 1st Place Winner of RODC 2024: Miodrag STRAK, Block Build Bor, Serbia – [LINK](#)

Video statements of other RODC2024 Winners are available on the [LINK](#)

In collaboration with the SIGMA Programme and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), ReSPA continued to foster connections between teams from the Western Balkans and their counterparts in the Eastern Partnership Region, engaging with European bodies responsible for specific topics:



In June 2024, all three institutions propelled interoperability and digital transformation forward for the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership. **Through the Brussels Learning Week, 40 experts in interoperability and digital transformation from these regions converged to share best practices and delve into the nuances of digitalization and interoperability in public services across national, regional, and international levels.** This initiative aimed to foster a rich exchange of knowledge and experiences among experts, thereby enhancing digital public services and interoperability while promoting digital cohesion across the EU and its neighbouring regions. Key insights were provided by experts from the European Commission and EU Member States, covering vital EU standards such as the European Interoperability Framework, the “once-only” principle, eID, eIDAS 2.0, e-wallets, and trust services.



In September 2024, during the **Data Protection Academy for the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership Region**, representatives from data protection authorities and ministries from both regions convened for the 2nd High-Level Exchange and Learning Week.

Under the patronage of the European Commission - DG JUST, the Data Protection Academy facilitate the exchange of policy updates and legal frameworks related to data protection, allowing participants to discuss GDPR implementation challenges, public sector oversight, and enforcement strategies with their peers from , the Council of Europe (CoE), EDPB, EDPS, and national DPAs, sharing experiences on the training of data protection officers and sharing knowledge on data protection challenges arising from increased digitalization of services and promoting a unified approach to data protection across these services. The week-long event underscored a unified approach to data protection, advancing capabilities and knowledge-sharing among DPAs across borders



ReSPA and SIGMA continued the third cycle of prestigious Public Administration Awards in the Western Balkans:



The third cycle of the Western Balkans Public Administration Awards titled “Building a Better Public Administration for and with Users!” aimed to highlight, reward, and promote initiatives that create meaningful benefits for the region’s citizens and businesses.

After a selection process by esteemed experts from the Western Balkans and the EU, the winners will be celebrated at the Awards Ceremony, part of the High-Level Ministerial Dialogue, on 27th November 2024.

The ReSPA Digital Service team contributed to various regional workshops, conferences and dialogues:



In February 2024, ReSPA contributed to the regional conference “Shaping the Future Agenda of Administrative Burden Reduction (ABR), enriching regional **discussions about the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and participation** despite existing technical and organisational barriers.



In March 2024, ReSPA **contributed to the workshop organised by the UNDP Montenegro and the Ministry of Public Administration** which shed light on the **pivotal role of data interoperability in digital transformation**. It was a great opportunity for unveiling and presenting the upcoming Interoperability Academy.



Moderating the panel at the **INFOFEST 2024** held in July in Budva, ReSPA Digitalization Officer Bojana BAJIĆ explored the critical factors shaping the future of e-government, together with an outstanding lineup of experts. One key takeaway is that **public trust is the backbone of successful digital services, as well as the importance of straightening partnerships between public institutions and private innovators and increasing investment in technology and infrastructure to ensure long-term success**.

The Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC) within ReSPA offers regional expertise in Quality Management, assisting public administrations in enhancing their capacities to implement effective Quality Management tools and systems.



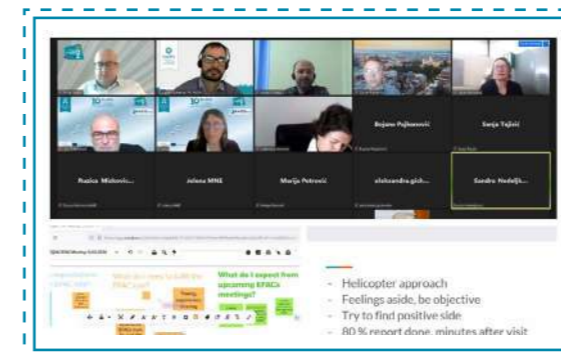
RQMC implemented a spectrum of activities:



In February 2024, the RQMC team hosted the **Inaugural Conference of the Regional Initiative for Sustainable Quality Management in Eastern Partnership Countries** – a collaborative effort with SIGMA, GIZ and EIPA. Partners and representatives from Eastern Partnership Countries - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, shared extensive expertise on enhancing excellence in the Western Balkans to encourage public administration reforms within the Eastern Partnership countries.



In February 2024, **the 3rd Annual RQMC Meeting** showcased achieved results and outlined future plans to enhance regional expertise in Quality Management within public administration, benefiting all ReSPA Members. RQMC focused on strengthening internal capacities with guidance from KDZ Austria, participating in the PEF revision led by EIPA at the European level, facilitating peer learning among CAF users, and advancing the institutionalisation of CAF projects.



In March 2024, at the **PEF Network’s Member Meeting**, the RQMC team convened over 20 EFACs from the Western Balkans to discuss enhancing PEF procedures and EFAC engagement, as well as reviewing and completing ongoing PEF procedures.





Crafted with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in February 2024, **CAF Open Day in Serbia** gathered 50+ representatives from Serbian public administration institutions who explored the benefits of implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Performance Evaluation Framework (PEF) procedures. Jointly with distinguished guests from SIGMA, Austrian KDZ, and EIPA, along with representatives from prominent public institutions in the region, we shared perspectives and experiences regarding the use of CAF.

During the event, **ReSPA awarded the “Effective CAF User” certificate to the Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes of Serbia**, marking it as the second institution in the Western Balkans and the pioneering one in Serbia to receive this prestigious recognition of excellence.



Director Ivica Lazović’s statement on being pioneers in Serbia to receive the CAF Certificate – [LINK](#)

Apart from the Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Labour Disputes of Serbia, **ReSPA RQMC awarded the CAF-Excellence Label** to the Civil Service Agency of Republika Srpska, the Office for Combatting Drugs of the Government of Serbia, and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration of North Macedonia (later on divided into two ministries: Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Digital Transformation).

During the reporting period, the ReSPA RQMC team finalised the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in the Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro and started the implementation in the Municipality of Zeta, Montenegro, 2nd cycle in the Bureau of Metrology and Secretariat for Legislation of North Macedonia.



Two flagship Mobility and Capacity-building programs

In 2024, ReSPA continued to deliver impactful mobility and capacity-building programs, fostering regional cooperation and advancing the professional development of public servants across the Western Balkans. These programs, developed in collaboration with leading European and regional institutions, facilitated knowledge exchange, skill enhancement, and peer-to-peer learning. Two flagship initiatives – the Mobility Programme, supported by Italian public institutions and the Regional Mobility Programme with a Job-Shadowing component – stand out for their contribution to enhancing public administration capacities, aligning with EU integration efforts, and promoting best practices in governance.

Mobility programme supported by the Italian public institutions

In collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the National School of Administration (SNA), ReSPA launched the Capacity Building and Mobility Programme that connects public administration teams from the region with their peers from Italian public institutions and 50+ prominent experts from the EU and the region. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the program provided a platform for over 55 public servants to participate in a comprehensive series of intensive training modules and engage in study visits and exchanges with various Italian institutions.



The Opening Conference held in Podgorica in April 2024 brought together distinguished guests, including Maida GORČEVIĆ, Minister of European Affairs, Montenegro; Naim GJOKAJ, State Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro; H.E. Ms. Andreina MARSELLA, Ambassador of the Republic of Italy to Montenegro; H.E. Ambassador Massimo GAIANI, Head of the European and International Affairs, SNA and over 50 public servants from the Western Balkans ready to embark on the multi-modular capacity building and mobility learning journey.



The First Cycle of the Capacity Building and Mobility Programme, held immediately after the Opening Conference in Podgorica, brought together over 50 civil servants across three modules, along with more than 15 lecturers and speakers, for an intensive two-day event. Participants explored key topics in European Integration, Digital Transformation, and Policy Development. The programme emphasized networking and collaboration, highlighting the importance of building strong connections and fostering cooperation with the Italian administration at both national and international levels.



The Second Cycle of the Capacity Building and Mobility Programme, held in June 2024, combined learning programme in Caserta, organised by the Italian National School of Administration (SNA) and peer learning opportunities during visits to various public administration institutions in Rome, such as the National Cybersecurity Agency – CAN, Office for Coordination of European Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Office for European Affairs, Center for International Politics Studies and more. Again, participants were divided into three modules, tackling various topics.



Milica Alavanja and Stanislav Vasilovski are among 55 civil servants gaining essential insights into the latest European public administration reforms, covering policy development, better regulation, EU integration, and digital transformation. They learned from over 50 experts from the Italian SNA, EU institutions, and Western Balkans organisations. Watch their insights on learning, connecting, and sharing in Caserta and Rome.

[WATCH HERE](#)



In the Online session titled “Sustainability Transition and the Role of Green Public Procurement,” over 60 public servants and practitioners from the Western Balkans engaged deeply in exploring topics such as green public administration, green procurement, sustainability transition, resource scarcity, and the circular economy. Led by Prof. Matteo Mura, the session underscored the pivotal role of public administrations as drivers of sustainability transition. Through the adoption of Green Public Procurement (GPP), governments not only mitigate the environmental impact of public spending but also set benchmarks for sustainable practices across society.

The Closing Conference of the programme, scheduled for end of Year, will serve as a prelude to the next phase, which is tailored for the upcoming year. A grant from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation will again support the programme’s continuation.



Regional Mobility Programme with Job-Shadowing Component

ReSPA tailored and led an extensive regional mobility programme in partnership with the following regional organisations: Regional Cooperation Council; CEFTA Secretariat; Transport Community Treaty Secretariat; Regional Anti-corruption Initiative; Regional Youth Cooperation Office; Centre of Excellence in Finance; Western Balkans Fund.

The programme involved 23 civil servants across the Western Balkans and consists of four pillars: Induction and preparatory day, Executive education in a Colleague of Europe with study visits and exchanges with selected EU institutions in Brussels and Job shadowing in regional organisations in the Western Balkans.



After the Induction and Kick-Off online Meeting, the **Executive Training in Governance Development and Advanced Leadership Programme**, combined with a study visit to the European Commission’s Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, and the European External Action Service, was developed in collaboration with the College of Europe and various EU institutions. It offered an immersive learning experience, diverse skill-building opportunities, and invaluable networking prospects to more than 30 senior public officials from the Western Balkans.



The next phase of the programme—a **job-shadowing experience**—began in June 2024, providing 23 civil servants from the region with the opportunity to work, learn from, and exchange ideas with colleagues at CEFTA, RCC, RAI, RYCO, CEF, TCT, and WBF during a week-long job shadowing. The ReSPA team in September welcomed Fabiola Islami, Merima Tanović, Srđan Mitrović, and Rebeka Rakip.



Impressions from Enxhi Oga, who spent a week at the Transport Community Secretariat:

“I am Enxhi Oga from Albania. I am a Specialist in the Sector of Information, Environment Statistics, and Geography Information Systems at the National Environment Agency, which operates under the Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania.

I am here at the Transport Community through a job shadowing opportunity provided by the Regional School of Public Administration. As transport has significant environmental impacts, I appreciate the kindness and openness of everyone here in sharing their knowledge and insights”.

Mechanisms of Direct Support

“On-demand” Support Instruments

“On-demand” Support Instruments address the specific needs of ReSPA Members, helping them tackle various challenges in reforming and modernising public administrations and promoting effective governance in the Western Balkans.

In **ALBANIA**, ReSPA assisted the Department of Public Administration (DoPA) in **drafting the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy 2023-2030**, creating indicator passports, and formulating the action plan for 2023-2025. In addition, support was provided for developing an initial draft of the Cybersecurity Action Plan 2025 and revising the Methodology for the Identification of Critical Infrastructure.

In **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**, ReSPA assists the Civil Service Agency of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in **developing strategic documents for Human Resources Development at the administrative levels**, including Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions, Republika Srpska and Brčko District. Also, ReSPA supports the Ministry of Justice in developing an **e-tool for the e-registration of associations, foundations, and Non-Governmental Associations**, supporting their efforts to digitalise the NPO registry in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, ReSPA supports a comprehensive **training program on eIDAS and eIDAS 2.0**, which covers the legal framework, technical implementation, security, data protection, strategic planning, case studies, and group work.

In **MONTENEGRO**, upon invitation of the Government of Montenegro, ReSPA supports the **development of the Ready4EU Programme**, a multi-module training initiative designed to prepare Montenegrin civil servants for future prospective roles within EU institutions, bodies and agencies once these opportunities become available. Additionally, ReSPA assists in **developing the Digital Health Strategy** (in conducting a comprehensive analysis that includes assessing current digital health capabilities, identifying gaps and opportunities, and providing strategic recommendations to strengthen digital health infrastructure and services) and finally contributes to the **development of the Digital Academy** through interconnected training programs focused on topics such as Human Centric Design of the public services, Application, Challenges and Ethical Issues of ChatGPT, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning and Conflict Management in Public Administration. Finally, support was provided for the **Preparation of the Analysis and Report on the Law on Administrative Procedures**.



The “Ready4EU” Training Programme officially launched on 17 October 2024 at the Conference, which brought together Montenegro’s top officials, training programme participants and key stakeholders in European integration, among the distinguished participants - the Minister of European Affairs, Ms Maida GORČEVIĆ; Acting Director for the Local Self Government in the Ministry of Public Administration, Ms Nina BLAŽIĆ; ReSPA Director, Ms Maja HANDJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA; and the Director of the Human Resources Management Authority, Mr Agron M. CAMAJ.

The “Ready4EU” programme, crafted by the Human Resources Management Authority and with the support of the Ministry of European Affairs, the Ministry of Public Administration, and ReSPA, was developed in response to Montenegro’s accelerated EU accession negotiations. The programme equips Montenegrin civil servants with essential EU administrative knowledge and skills, preparing them for future roles within EU institutions, agencies, and advisory bodies. With six comprehensive modules covering topics such as EU History and Public Administration, Law, International Relations, Forms of Work in the EU and Employment Opportunities, and Business and Digital Skills, the programme spans 30 days of training in total. The first training session will commence on October 23, 2024, at ReSPA’s premises, with the current cohort set to complete their training in April 2025.

In **NORTH MACEDONIA**, ReSPA supported the development of a **web platform for monitoring and reporting on the PAR Strategy 2023-2030** implementation, which was carried out in three interconnected phases: inception, implementation, and finalisation. In addition, ReSPA strengthened the capacities of the Secretariat for Legislation through a comprehensive training and need-analysis process, leading to the creation of an electronic database for laws and bylaws that are subject to alignment with EU law.

Finally, in **SERBIA**, ReSPA assists in **enhancing the transparency of the Government's** work by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and identifying key areas for improvement.

As part of the **eGov Pilots projects**, ReSPA supports further **digitalising training management services at the National Academy for Public Administration in Serbia**, as well as **developing software modules for the IDDEEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina** by enhancing data visualisation, updating metadata to meet the DCAT-AP standard, creating an automated metadata generation module, and conducting final testing with necessary adjustments.

Over the last 12 months, through **traditional ReSPA Mobility Schemes**, public servants from one ReSPA Member (or more than one) have the opportunity to visit and exchange with relevant homologue institutions in another ReSPA Member or an EU member state and gain in-depth direct insights on particular success factors in public administration reform processes and various themes of interest:



In December 2023, ReSPA facilitated **Montenegro's Ministry of Public Administration officials to enhance their knowledge of EU-related affairs and quality management through active participation and exchange with the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA)**. During a two-day visit, the participants accessed EIPA's extensive expertise in promoting effective governance and public administration, aligning perfectly with the broader regional cooperation framework.



In February 2024, ReSPA facilitated an exchange between **Montenegro's Human Resources Management Authority (HRMA) and their counterparts from Bosnia and Herzegovina: from the Civil Service Agency of Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina, Civil Service Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Civil Service Agency of Republika Srpska**. During the exchange, HRMA officials delved into the intricacies of training management systems. Colleagues from the CSA Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the CSA of Bosnia and Herzegovina provided valuable insights, covering the selection process of trainers, the TMS system and its integration with HRMIS-CSA of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and online training through iLearn.



In March 2024, **the HRMS team from Serbia exchanged and learned from their counterparts from the key Italian institutions for human resources**. At the Italian National Administration School (SNA), they delved deep into senior civil servants' recruitment and selection processes, while at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they gained valuable knowledge about the recruitment of future diplomats.



In April 2024, **the Serbian team**, comprised of the Acting Assistant Minister for Good Governance and for European Integration and International Cooperation, and Independent Advisors, **collaborated with representatives from the Danish Agency for Public Finance and Management (under the Ministry of Finance), KL – Local Government in Denmark** (an association representing the 98 Danish municipalities), and the municipality of Herlev. The Serbian delegation gleaned valuable insights and best practices crucial for enhancing the implementation of targeted activities outlined in the PAR Strategy Action Plan.



In May 2024, the **Montenegro Ministry of Finance collaborated with counterparts from the Croatian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development**, aiming to improve the framework for the implementation of public-private partnership policies through a joint approach, as well as encourage further development in this area. They discussed the motives and drivers for important investment projects, the specificity of certain types of investments, as well as all the challenges from the moment of presenting the investment idea.



Albanian RIA Oversight Unit, part of the Prime Minister's Office, visited the Czech Republic Government RIA Unit to improve regulatory quality through impact assessment tools and public consultation mechanisms. The Albanian team learned about the roles of key actors in the Czech RIA process, including the Government Legislative Council, the RIA Board, and relevant stakeholders such as business associations, NGOs, and academia.

- ✦ **In addition, a team from the Ministry of Information Society and Administration of North Macedonia met with their Italian Department for Public Administration counterparts** to learn and exchange information about the organisational structure of Italian public administration, the range of job positions, and their regulatory framework. They gained detailed insights into the recruitment process for fixed-term and temporary positions and how the mobility of public servants is managed and implemented through the NPA.
- ✦ Public officials from the **Serbian Public Policy Secretariat (PPS) established collaboration with their counterparts in Austria**, specifically in the Federal Performance Management Office, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Environment. They gained insights into Austrian best practices, which will aid in the ongoing development of new RIA and PIA regulations in Serbia.
- ✦ **RIA institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina exchanged with their Slovenian counterparts** from the General Secretariat, Legislative Office, and Ministry of Public Administration. They discussed key topics, including the legislative framework, strategic framework, and integrating the RIA system into policy making.
- ✦ A team from the **RIA institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina exchanged experiences with colleagues from the Legislative Office of Croatia**. The Croatian counterparts shared their insights on the RIA system, including training needs analysis, educational programs and curricula, implementation, success stories, and system development. They also discussed the roles and performance of relevant institutions responsible for overseeing and controlling the RIA system (Finance-Economic, Social, Environment, etc.) and their cooperation with Parliament.
- ✦ The **State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, North Macedonia, had a 2-day working visit to the host institution the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption of Serbia** in October 2023, to share ideas about possible advancement of the integrity system in the public sector in North Macedonia, development of new preventive measures to strengthen the personal, sectoral and institutional integrity and extended knowledge about the implementation of the Integrity System in public sector institutions

The Horizontal Facility Instrument

One of ReSPA's key achievements was enabling public servants from the Western Balkans to participate in and contribute to the significant **PACE initiative by the European Commission**. They took part in programs hosted by the Direction générale de l'administration et de la fonction publique (DGAFP) and engaged in the "Prospective approach of Careers: Coaching, and Mentoring" - a comprehensive platform for exploring the prospective approach to careers in civil service.



In January 2024, for the first time, ReSPA enabled the participation of Western Balkans civil servants in the Exchange Week as part of the PACE Initiative, which the French administration coordinates. **As part of the strategic collaboration between ReSPA and the French Ministry of Public Service Transformation, French counterparts have invited public servants from the region to participate in the Exchange Weeks.** They discussed **"Attracting and retaining talents in the civil service: strategies, tools, and actors"**, focusing on exploring a comprehensive approach to attractiveness, as outlined in the toolbox of attractiveness used in central government administrations. This included understanding factors of attractiveness and unattractiveness, developing and implementing employer branding, communication and recruitment strategies, attracting specific profiles, and addressing working conditions and retention policies.



Testimonial of Samra LJUCA, Deputy Director for Vocational Education and Civile Service Development, Civil Service Agency of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, during her participation in the PACE initiative hosted by the Direction générale de l'administration et de la fonction publique (DGAFP):

"I accentuate the importance of the information gained through discussion regarding the HR platform with a focus on partnership with the private sector. Also, the training platform mentor.gouv.fr provides many opportunities related to HR tools, such as management by values, intergenerational management, and conflict management. French HR Strategy covers issues of managing older employees as well as the attractiveness of young people. France is in the process of branding the State as the Employer for youth allowing them to work on service contracts and further career development"



In March 2024, ReSPA enabled participants from the Western Balkans to attend the PACE week exchange on **“Prospective approach of Careers: Coaching, mentoring”** - a comprehensive platform for exploring the prospective approach to careers in civil service. Through shared experiences, challenges, and best practices, participants gained valuable insights into recruitment, performance appraisal, skills development, career mobility, and motivational strategies. Over several days, they delved into various aspects of civil service careers, from recruitment processes to performance appraisal, skills development, and career mobility. Representatives from different countries, including France, Belgium, Italy, Albania, North Macedonia and the EU Commission, shared insights and experiences, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing civil service careers.



In December 2023, teams from the Western Balkans attend the Winter University **“Learning to Address Tomorrow’s Administrative Challenges in Europe”** in Sofia, Bulgaria. They have addressed a variety of relevant topics, from digital transformation of the state, innovation as a public policy tool, public sector career paths, reporting to the decision-makers and leaders in general, public speaking, the rule of law, etc.



In June 2024, ReSPA enabled six public servants to participate in the **Summer School on “EU Better Regulation and EU Integration”**. They actively engaged in group work and discussions, analysing a Strategic Plan and a Management Plan of a Commission DG. They also examined the alignment of EU Impact Assessments with national RIA systems and explored possibilities for moving towards EU best practices for Better Regulation.



In November 2023, ReSPA facilitated participation of public servants from the region at the data.europa.eu **workshop on Open Data**. The two-day workshop features a comprehensive agenda to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among 45 participants from 27 countries, including civil servants from the ReSPA Members, allowing them to get acquainted with Open Data novelties.

Executive Training Programme and Certificate in Economics for Policymakers, organised by the European University Institute

In November 2023, four participants from ReSPA Members went through an executive training program with a hands-on and practical approach, emphasising implementation over economic theory. Instead of delving into theoretical concepts, the focus is on applying ideas, data, and policy tools in different economic policy areas to make informed decisions or comprehend the decision-making process. Experienced economists and policymakers lead interactive sessions, drawing from their extensive expertise and real-world data to provide valuable insights and practical knowledge for making economic decisions in various policy domains.



The School of Management and Francophonie, in cooperation with EKDDA, organised the **Leadership Academy in Athens**, Greece, from 1-5 July – as part of their Summer University and hosted four participants from the Western Balkans. The Leadership Academy focused on the participants who enhanced their leadership skills in the public sector, and it covered key topics, including HR leadership, managerial innovation, transformation leadership, emotional intelligence, and leadership communication.

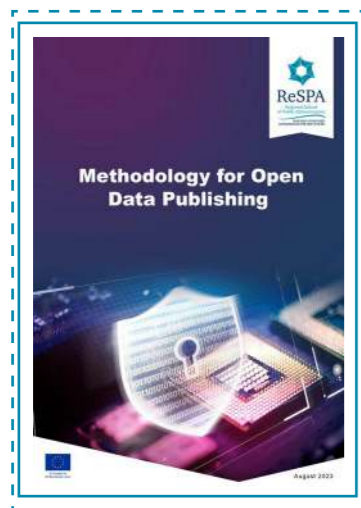
Policy Briefs



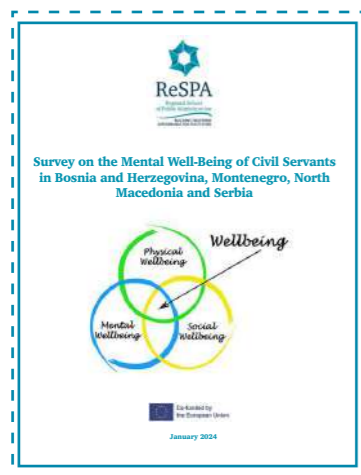
Snapshot on the **Western Balkan's current policies, development and implementation of emerging technologies (with an AI focus)** aims to uncover the public administration digital ecosystem's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, also tackling what leaders can do to enhance efficiency.

Methodology for Open Data Publishing

The Methodology provides valuable insights into the open data initiatives and evaluations of ReSPA Members' administrations, organized into three sections: the first assesses the value of open datasets for Western Balkan administrations, the second examines open data practices and the role of Creative Commons licenses in enhancing data accessibility, and the third reviews open data portals in the region, identifying trends, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

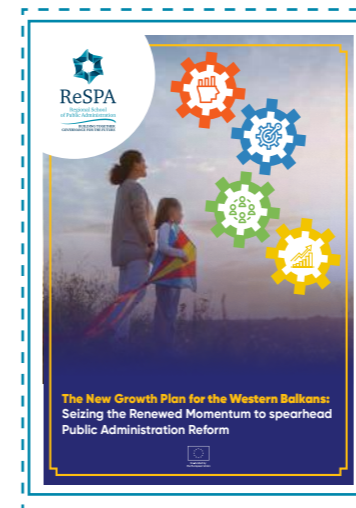


Results of our comprehensive **survey on the mental health of civil servants in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia** provided insights into the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of 5,669 civil servants, including 1,303 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 838 from Montenegro, 1,293 from North Macedonia, and 2,235 from Serbia.



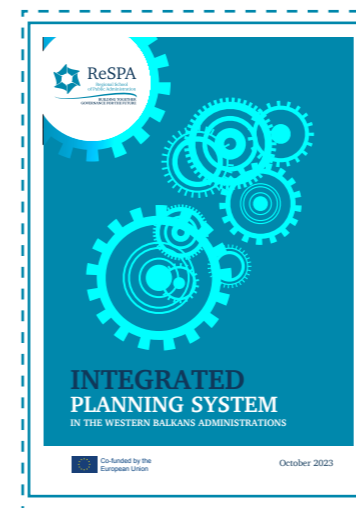
"The New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans: Seizing the Renewed Momentum to Spearhead Public Administration Reform"

The snapshot focus on public administrations, the backbone of EU accession, new Growth Plan adoption and reform agendas and focus on public administration reform and regional cooperation. A robust public administration is crucial for transparent governance, efficient public services, and sustained growth. It's also essential for the EU accession process, driving key reforms and dialogue with the European Union.



Integrated Planning System in the Western Balkans

The study aims at providing comparative analysis of the strategic planning system in Western Balkan administrations, more precisely on the planning system's strategic, legal, and institutional aspects. The analysis thoroughly explains public administration institutions' role in improving the integrated planning process, provides benchmarks from the EU countries and highlights good practices from the Western Balkans.



"Inclusive and Transparent Policy-Making Process as a Precondition for Sustainable Reforms in the EU Accession"

Key Aspects of the Paper include the essential role of public and state institutions in policy-making, how elected/appointed officials and civil servants channel ideas into outcomes, and a detailed analysis of the policy cycle: from setting the agenda to continuous improvement. Public policies aim to generate public value by effectively utilising resources, delivering high-quality services, establishing regulations, and organising public life. The ultimate goal? To improve citizens' lives and foster an environment where rights and freedoms are exercised freely.



Partnerships

Our strong partnerships are flourishing and expanding rapidly.

At the heart of ReSPA's mission is nurturing robust relationships with public administrations in the Western Balkans. Over the last months, ReSPA Director has engaged in active bilateral meetings with high-level officials, including the **Prime Minister of Montenegro, the Minister of Public Administration of Montenegro, the Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption of Albania, the Minister of EU Integration of Montenegro, Ministers Andonovski and Minchev from North Macedonia, Serbian Minister for Public Administration**, Minister for Local Government of Albania, Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Tirana, etc. Additionally, Director HANDJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA maintained **regular updates with key partners based in Montenegro** (including Ambassadors of France and Germany to Montenegro, EUD to Montenegro, and Ambassadors of ReSPA Members based in Podgorica), met with the **newly appointed GIZ Country Director for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro**, and many more.

ReSPA has made significant strides in strengthening cooperation with EU partners, including DG NEAR, EEAS, the European Committee of Regions, DGAFP (France), the Council Working Group COWEB, the Croatian National School of Public Administration and Service for Knowledge Transfer, the European Institute of Public Administration, the College of Europe, SIGMA.



Signed Memorandum of Understandings:



In November 2023, **ReSPA Director Handjiska-Trendafilova and Stanislas GUERINI, the French Minister of Transformation and Public Service, signed a Declaration of Intent** aimed at bolstering bilateral cooperation in the realm of public administration and civil service. This cooperation will be additionally strengthened through the placement of the French technical advisor in ReSPA in autumn 2024.



In December 2023, **Director Maja HANDJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA and Renaud DEHOUSSE, President of the European University Institute (EUI), formally inked a partnership agreement** fostering research, policy discussions, training sessions, mobility programs, and internships. Its primary goal is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, training, and mobility opportunities among civil servants and academic members from the Western Balkans and EUI. Ultimately, the aim is to bolster Public Administration Reform in the Western Balkans through collaborative efforts.



In March 2024, the **ReSPA Director signed the Memorandum of understanding with Mr Marco ONGARO, Director-General at EIPA**, underlining that “partnership with EIPA has been longstanding, invaluable, and meticulously cultivated since the inception of ReSPA. From the outset, the ReSPA team received tremendous support from our colleagues at EIPA, laying a solid foundation for our collaboration. Over the years, this partnership has flourished, with EIPA becoming a natural ally, consistently striving to enhance each other’s endeavours.



In June 2024, **ReSPA Director HANDEJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA** and **Director of the National School for Public Administration of Croatia** signed the **Memorandum of Understanding**, underlining the importance of building strong partnerships to create robust public institutions and accelerate the EU accession of the Western Balkans.



In September 2024, **Director HANDEJISKA-TRENDAFILOVA** and **Mr. Vasileios EXARCHOS, Vice-President of Greece's National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (EKDDA)**, signed the **Memorandum of Understanding**, which will additionally strengthen cooperation between public administration teams in the Western Balkans and their counterparts in the EU, thereby facilitating the EU accession process through enhanced administrative capacities.

ReSPA Continues to Elevate Western Balkans' Public Administration on the EU and Global Stage



In June 2024, enriching the Ministerial Panel at the **OECD High-Level Conference on SEE**, the ReSPA Director underlined the significance of strong institutions and empowered human capacities in the public sector to shoulder all growth-enhancing reforms and the need for boosting digital competencies while harnessing digital transformation potentials: "Challenges are not just technology-related. A great deal has to do with the governance standards, quality of public administration, the strength of institutions, and sound and evidence-informed policymaking. All in our remit must assist with deploying concrete support on the ground. The OECD does this brilliantly via deep scans, data and evidence-informed policy advice and benchmarking. ReSPA has an important role to play in building public sector skillsets and digital competencies, but also agile and innovation mindsets in the public administration".

In April 2024, the **ReSPA Director**, at two consecutive events at the **EU and Global levels**, delivered one key message: **ReSPA, as a leading organisation in the region for empowering civil servants to foster the growth of civil servants through capacity building, peer learning and mobility is seeking EU and Global partnerships and alliances to enhance opportunities for the public sector:**



Enriching virtually the **23rd Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (UNCEPA)**, the ReSPA Director presented ReSPA's approach to the implementation of mobility and peer-learning initiatives: "Addressing the needs of the region, we offer mobility programs that operate in two directions: firstly, focusing on regional peer learning where public servants engage in executive education, study visits to EU institutions, and practical job shadowing. Secondly, we connect them with counterparts in various institutions and esteemed schools across EU member states".





Enriching DISPA meeting “Evidence-based Learning & Development” while presenting ReSPA’s experience and impact in evidence-based learning and development, gathered through more than 600 capacity building and networking activities, Director Handjiska-Trendafilova underlined the importance of ReSPA’s close collaboration with partners within the DISPA family which allows that “our civil servants have increasing opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas, learn from, and collaborate with their EU counterparts through study visits, valuable networks, projects, and initiatives such as PACE”.



In June 2024, **at the ComPact High-level Conference:** “A Growth-Enhancing Public Administrative Space”, the ReSPA team exchanged with high-level officials and practitioners from the EU institutions, Member States and social partners to discuss how ComPact is reducing the administrative burden and making Europe more competitive and how it completes the Single Market.



The first time that **ReSPA took an active part in the work of the EUPAN Working Level Meeting**, held under the Hungarian presidency in October 2024, in Budapest. During the panel on “Skills Development in Public Administration related to Digital Services,” ReSPA Director highlighted ReSPA’s important role in advancing public administration reform across the Western Balkans and showcased initiatives supporting development of digital skills, such as the Seasonal Schools on Digital Transformation, Data Protection Academy, Interoperability Academy, regional initiatives on open data and cyber-resilience, and more, including important tailor-made bilateral technical support to ReSPA Members in this important area.



In May 2024, the ReSPA Director emphasized the importance of enhancing human capital in public administration at the **Western Balkans Summit on the Growth Plan:** “The quality of institutions can be the vital factor to meaningfully harness this great growth and convergence opportunity ahead of us!” The summit, focused on the Growth Plan, gathered Western Balkans leaders, Oliver Varhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, James O’Brien, US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, EU member states representatives, and regional partners, including ReSPA.



The day before the summit, Montenegro’s Minister of European Affairs, Maida Gorčević, hosted a **meeting of European Affairs and Finance Ministers from the Western Balkans** that gathered highly ranked representatives from the European Commission. Key topics discussed were access to the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), trade and transport facility improvements, the supply of critical medicines, and the Center for Digital Innovation. Director Handjiska-Trendafilova assured the ministers and partners that ReSPA, as a regionally-owned organization, is committed to contributing swiftly to initiatives such as the Digital Single Market Academy.



In June 2024, at the **Athens Conference of Public Administration Schools**, the ReSPA Director explored future collaborations for advancing public administration in the Western Balkans.



In May 2024, the ReSPA Director moderated a panel at the **2024 Annual Meeting of the OECD Network of Schools of Government**, diving deep into innovative learning methodologies and fostering an exchange of best practices among participants. This session allowed for identifying emerging best practices and provided opportunities for schools to collaborate on developing and implementing transformative learning strategies.



In October 2023, ReSPA Director at the **biannual DISPA Meeting** called for stronger Western Balkans participation in key EU platforms: “The strong presence and active involvement of the Western Balkans in key European Union platforms and networks such as DISPA are crucial for the reform and modernisation of our public administrations, progressive European Union integration and attainment of the high standards of the European Administrative Space. This is the first time all ReSPA Members have participated in the DISPA meeting, following the network’s opening during the Council’s Bulgarian Presidency. ReSPA has been privileged to play a facilitating role in this endeavour.”



In September 2024, at the **18th Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations**, ReSPA Director showcases regional cooperation best practices. Hosted by the Central European Initiative (CEI), the event brought together senior representatives from the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Regional Cooperation Council, and the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, with participation from the European Commission’s DG NEAR. The meeting focused on reviewing achievements from the past 12 months, setting priorities for the next Meeting, exploring collaborative opportunities to advance good governance, and exploring new synergetic opportunities.



In December 2023, Director HANDJSKA-TRENDAFILOVA, at the **17th EU-Montenegro Joint Consultative Committee Meeting**, provided insights on the main challenges in PAR in Montenegro and the region and outlined an overview of overall ReSPA’s support to the region and Montenegro’s government, including a blend of capacity-building and learning multi-modular programmes co-created with prominent EU and EU MS institutions, fostering exchanges between Montenegro’s civil servants and their counterparts from the EU MS and the region and by providing on-demand technical assistance.



In November 2023, ReSPA Director took part at the **Meeting of Directors General of the EUPAN Network**, contributing to enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation with key actors at the EU level with the aim to pave the way toward further joint initiatives with academia and public institutions from the EU member states for the benefit of civil servants from the Western Balkans.



In September 2024, ReSPA Director took part at the **21 Joint Consultative Committee CoR-Montenegro meeting**, contributing to an important exchange on the critical role of municipalities in implementing legislation and shaping a brighter future for citizens, highlighting the significance of the capacity development of civil servants and its “of great importance, especially in times of urgency and opportunities, like the current moment in the EU integration process.”



In November 2023, **ReSPA was honoured with the inaugural “Partner of the Year” award by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of Serbia.**

For the first time, the Ministry awarded one institution as part of the Student Professional Practice Fair. Receiving the award, Director Handjiska-Trendafilova expressed gratitude for this acknowledgement, rooted in the trust and respect between the MDULS and ReSPA, and reiterated the institutional dedication to cultivating qualified teams and staying abreast of modern administration trends.

Monitoring of ReSPA activities

Enhanced networking and collaboration in Public Administration Reform (PAR) at the regional level are acknowledged as one of the most substantial achievements of ReSPA. This annual monitoring report is the fourth of its kind and targeted the regional activities (working group meetings, workshops, training, conferences, and seasonal schools) implemented in 2023.

The results show that ReSPA is confirmed as a regional hub for capacity development exchange and a source of best practices and innovation in PAR. Overall, both in terms of acquiring better working methods and exchanges with colleagues (>99% of respondents), and in terms of new skills acquired (>97%) and personal development, including career development.

The average rating from all post-event questionnaires completed by participants at the conclusion of each activity held in 2023 is 4.7 out of 5. The Monitoring Report shows that **the overall average rating for ReSPA’s support and impact, as assessed by participants across all thematic areas, is 4.1 out of 5.** Participants rated ReSPA’s **contribution to personal development and improvement with an average score of 4.25 out of 5** across all thematic areas. Based on participant feedback across thematic areas, the average score for **ReSPA’s contribution to institutional improvement is 4.0 out of 5.** Specific institutional support through ReSPA projects and studies was very much appreciated. Institutions also benefited from specific ReSPA support aimed at directly strengthening their capacities, either through on-demand projects or through policy studies with the formulation of recommendations.

Also, ReSPA’s activities have contributed greatly or to a good extent to facilitating communication and exchange of know-how among colleagues and/or leadership, while over **80% of respondents think that ReSPA’s actions contributed to advancing the PAR Agenda in their respective administrations.**





ReSPA Governance

ReSPA Governing Board

The decision-making body, consisting of representatives from the ministries responsible for public administration reform in ReSPA Member States, operates on the Ministerial and Senior Official levels. The European Commission participates in Governing Board sessions in an advisory capacity.

The chairmanship of the Governing Board rotates annually among the members, with each assuming the role for one year. During the current reporting period, North Macedonia holds the chairmanship of ReSPA.

During the reporting period, the Governing Board meetings took place at both the Ministerial and Senior Official levels, focusing on strategic, financial, and operational issues concerning the ReSPA.

The **15th Governing Board Meeting at the Ministerial Level**, held on 17 November 2023 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, comprised two distinct sessions. The closed session dealt with internal governance issues, while the open session hosted a high-level policy dialogue on Attractive and Skilled Public Service Fit for the Future. During the closed session, the Governing Board endorsed the Annual Report between November 2022 and October 2023, along with the Ministerial Joint Statement. Two important resolutions were adopted: Resolution No GB-ML R/01-2023 on the ReSPA Budget for 2024-2025 and Resolution No GB-ML R/02-2023 on the Envelope to Annual Core Budget for 2024. A notable moment of the meeting was the chairmanship transition, where Mr Davor Bunoza, the outgoing Chair and Minister of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina, formally handed over responsibilities to Mr Azir Aliu from the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, North Macedonia.



The 59th Governing Board Meeting at the Senior Official Level was held on 21 November 2023 in Paris, France, following a Workshop on Foresight and Leadership and co-organised in collaboration with INSP. The Board approved the Report from the previous meeting held on 12 October 2023 and the Report on ReSPA Operations from 17 September to 31 October 2023. Additionally, they adopted the indicative Programme of Work for 2024 and appointed KPMG as the independent auditor for ReSPA's 2023 Annual Accounts.

The 60th Governing Board Meeting at the Senior Official Level occurred on 5 April 2024 in Podgorica, Montenegro, and focused on key operational, financial, and strategic topics. The Governing Board approved the Report on ReSPA Operations covering 1 November 2023 to 1 March 2024. The Governing Board noted the preparation of the ReSPA Strategy 2025-2030, acknowledged the Director's Report for 2023 as satisfactory, and proposed a higher salary grade for the Director. Several financial resolutions were adopted, including Resolution No GB-SL R/01-2024 on the Addendum to the Core Budget 2023 and Decision No GB-SL D/01-2024 concerning the Working Capital Fund 2024. The Board also discussed ReSPA's liquidity and national contributions.



61st Governing Board Meeting at the Senior Official Level, held on 9 July 2024, in a hybrid format from Podgorica, Montenegro. The Governing Board meeting approved the Report on ReSPA Operations from 1 March to 1 June 2024. The Board reviewed the progress of the ReSPA Strategy 2025-2030 and adopted several important financial resolutions, including Resolution GB SL No R/03-2024, which approved the Independent Auditor's Report for the 2023 financial period, and Decision GB SL No D/02-2024, which discharged the Director from responsibilities for 2023. Additionally, the Board took note of the ongoing recruitment process.



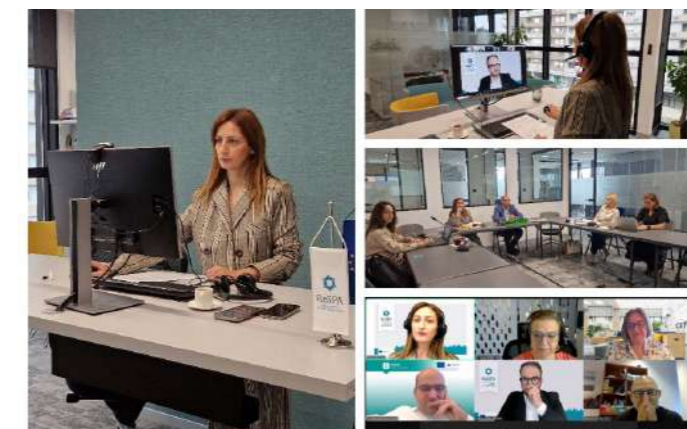
The 62nd Governing Board Meeting at the Senior Official Level was held on 4 October 2024 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The meeting agenda focused on preparing for the upcoming 16th Governing Board Ministerial meeting and reviewing the New ReSPA Strategic Orientation 2025-2030. The Board approved the Report from the 61st meeting and conducted thorough financial reviews, including the Interim Financial Statements for the first half of 2024, and draft budget for 2025/2026 and Envelope 2025. Further discussions centred on recruitment processes and staff issues.



During the reporting period, the Governing Board used written procedures to approve key decisions. At the Ministerial level, Decision No GB-ML D/01-2024 concerning the performance evaluation of the ReSPA Director was adopted on 1 May 2024. At the Senior Official level, Resolution No GB-SL R/02-2024 authorised the temporary utilisation of the Working Capital Fund on 25 April 2024.

ReSPA Advisory Board

The Advisory Board consists of representatives from our partner organisations and institutions, including 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 offering guidance and support in shaping our strategic vision and developing key strategic documents. The Board also helps identify program activities and priorities, provides insights on institutional matters, and advises on ReSPA's business development.



In September 2024, at the **Advisory Board Meeting**, ReSPA Director presented the Strategic Orientation 2025-2030 to a distinguished panel of Advisory Board members, including Peter VAGI, SIGMA Coordinator for the Western Balkans and Türkiye; Thomas PROROK, Managing Director of KDZ; Jana REPANSEK, Director of the Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF); and Biljana STANIŠIĆ DRAGOLJIĆ, Senior Expert from the Regional Cooperation Council. In her presentation, the Director emphasised that the new Strategy, created in collaboration with ReSPA's Governing Board and key partners, would serve as a roadmap for ReSPA's future initiatives and outlined ReSPA's commitment to enhancing regional cooperation and developing a professional, transparent, and innovative public sector. Members of the Advisory Board praised the draft of the Strategic Orientation and provided valuable input on the content of this strategic document for ReSPA.

ReSPA Budget Committee

Comprised of representatives from the ministries of finance or the finance departments in ReSPA Members, this body guides the Governing Board on financial and budget-related issues.

During 2023, **the ReSPA Budget Committee convened four times**, as a usual practice, before the Governing Board at Senior Official level sessions, ensuring the provision of comprehensive advice and recommendations for the Governing Board's acknowledgement and approval of financial operational matters. The BC members met in person and online and, in a constructive atmosphere, diligently reviewed the prepared documentation by the ReSPA secretariat. At the first meeting in March, the draft Financial reports for the previous year and the Core addendum budget were the main topics, followed by the June meeting review and endorsement of the Audited financial statement and Core budget verification reports, which showed a true and fair representation of the financial situation in ReSPA without any findings or Management letter points. The September meeting addressed the proposed Core budget for 2024, together with the annual contribution amount for ReSPA members, while at the fourth meeting, the annual budget utilisation and relocations in the Core and Core addendum budgets were endorsed by the BC members. During these meetings, the short-term and long-term liquidity and forecast were constantly scrutinised while the members were always informed on the progress of utilisation of the EC grant budget and budgets of other donors as well as the progress of the project for transferring of ReSPA premises to the new location in Podgorica which was finished by the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024.

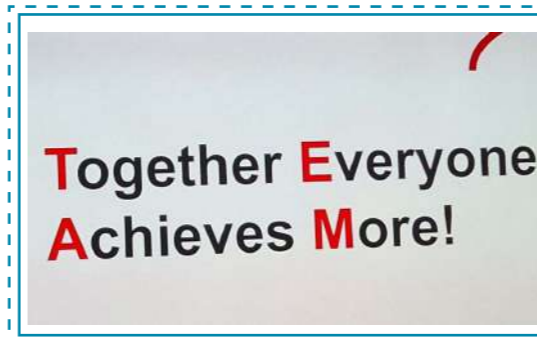


ReSPA Secretariat: Teamwork matters!

Empowered internally, the ResPA team remains dedicated to creating a greener region.



ReSPA has strengthened the team by welcoming two new program managers who are experienced professionals in public administration and international institutions. **Jelisaveta TASEV** from Serbia brings over 12 years of expertise in public administration, governance, EU accession negotiations, international relations, regional cooperation, policy advising, and regulatory and policy development. **Jelena MRDAK** from Montenegro joins us, continuing her professional growth with a wealth of experience in public administration reform, policy development and coordination, better regulation, and EU accession negotiations.



The ReSPA team, with the support of Peter Busby, learned how to empower as a team to initiate and implement a much more ambitious and demanding work programme for this and upcoming years. With the support of Peter Busby.

At the **Planning Workshop** ReSPA team pitched for elevating in driving progress in the Western Balkans public administration through more dynamic programmatic, mobility and on-demand initiatives.



Building on the successful tree-planting initiative in Podgorica last year, **ReSPA team embarked on a regional mission to plant at least 100 trees across the region** in the upcoming period. This year, in cooperation with the Tirana City Hall, we planted trees in Tirana.



To lead by example and inspire other public institutions to actively contribute to a greener, sustainable future in the region, **the ReSPA team volunteered at the Urban Garden Podgorica in September 2024.** They immersed themselves in sustainable practices, gaining insights into urban gardening, composting, and eco-friendly techniques.

The Way Forward: Navigating a Path to Excellence



Gentian XHAXHIU,
ReSPA Programme Coordinator

This Report reflects ReSPA's unwavering commitment to supporting public administrations across the Western Balkans in becoming more professional, modern, resilient, green, and inclusive—always aiming to improve citizens' lives. Public institutions are the cornerstone of any society, and at their heart are dedicated civil servants who work tirelessly to serve the common good.

Over the past year, every action we've taken has been directed at empowering civil servants **to adapt to the societal, economic, and environmental shifts** that define our present and future. Our mission has been to provide structured, impactful support to the governments of the Western Balkans and to the dedicated public administration teams who face complex and evolving challenges every day.

As part of this effort, the ReSPA Secretariat has developed **the Strategic Orientation of ReSPA 2025–2030**, which outlines our vision for transforming the public sector across the region. This ambitious Strategy aims to elevate governance in the Western Balkans to a level of excellence aligned with the European Administrative Space. The unique Western Balkans Knowledge Management Platform, which will be launched by the end of November 2024, is envisaged as a knowledge hub created for public administration professionals across the Western Balkan to learn, find tailored resources, connect with peers, contribute their expertise in fostering more innovative governance and driving public sector innovation.

In practice, we will achieve this through a variety of initiatives. We will continue organising high-level policy dialogues, facilitating peer learning, and offering tailored technical assistance and mobility programmes similar to "Erasmus for public servants". However, despite the innovations introduced in our programme, we will still continue designing and delivering **several training and learning initiatives**, decrypting the most recent concepts and advancements related to public sector management, policy development, European affairs and digitalisation with strong components of skills development.

These efforts aim to build a robust network of cooperation, enabling governments to tackle common challenges through shared platforms, joint initiatives, and knowledge exchange. Such partnerships will strengthen regional stability, drive prosperity, and enhance public institutions. ReSPA will remain a vital platform for sharing best practices from the region, including public sector internship programs, the Ready4EU initiative, and much more.

The possible **inclusion of EU candidates in EU bodies and programs is a welcome novelty in the enlargement policy**, which is in need of operationalisation in the PAR

area. In view of ReSPA's mandate to facilitate cooperation with European administrations, we will therefore work with the EC to explore and facilitate opportunities related to networks (DISPA, EUPAN, EC Expert Group on Public Administration and Governance, etc.) as well as programs (e.g. ComPact), including the possible channelling of resources to support these endeavours. In the advent of WB participating in ComPact and in case the TSI operationalises in the future also, towards the WBs, ReSPA can be the vehicle supporting such efforts. ReSPA aims to be a strong advocate for the region, actively representing and amplifying the voices of its member and beneficiary administrations in all relevant discussions on public administration.

ReSPA's **flexible programming** will remain responsive to the region's evolving needs, staying attuned to emerging trends and challenges in public governance. By embracing innovation, cultivating strong partnerships, and unlocking additional funding opportunities, we will further integrate the Western Balkans into EU platforms and programs for public administration.

At ReSPA, we aspire to be an even **greater force for regional reform, collaboration, and excellence**. We look forward to deepening our engagement with all of you, strengthening the public sector, and investing in human capital. Whether through mobility exchange schemes, tailored technical assistance, eGovernment pilots, or the regional Public Administration Awards excitement, we remain dedicated to achieving even more for public administrations in the Western Balkans.

On a personal note, my colleagues and I, under our Director's leadership and the Governing Board's strategic guidance, are honoured to continue serving the region's public sector. Together, we will continue building a better, more resilient future for the public administrations of the Western Balkans.

Delve into Our Blog

Delve into Our Blog, where we provide expert insights across various topics within the intricate landscape of public administration agenda issues.



Interoperability: Unlocking the Full Potential of Digitalized Services

Stefan DEDOVIĆ, Research Associate at KU Leuven Public Governance Institute and PhD Scholar at the University of Tartu - Center for IT Impact Studies



Why is the transition from personnel management to strategic human resource management important?

Wojciech ZIELINSKI, Senior expert on HRM and Public Administration Reform



The 'New' Enlargement Methodology: Opportunities and Challenges

Jelena DŽANKIĆ, European University Institute

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