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Understanding Public Servants in Western Balkan Administrations:

**Insights from ReSPA Staff Satisfaction Surveys
for Reform and Action**

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for

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

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Introduction

Improving the quality of public administration is essential for achieving better governance and socio-economic outcomes such as increased economic growth, higher levels of public trust in government, and improved delivery of public services. Between 2022 and 2024, ReSPA supported staff satisfaction surveys in Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, ReSPA supported a staff satisfaction survey of local officials in Montenegro. These surveys generated more than 20,000 responses from public servants, offering a novel and granular understanding of how public services operate and where improvements are needed.

Staff satisfaction surveys serve as a powerful tool for evidence-based public administration reform. They go beyond legal assessments or expert evaluations. Instead, they directly 'give voice' to public servants who know best how public institutions operate. This approach is both empowering for public servants and instrumental in providing actionable evidence for policymakers.

By measuring public servants' job attitudes, behaviours, and their experiences with management, in particular, human resources management, these surveys generate evidence that helps governments, as well as regional and international organisations like ReSPA and the European Commission, to (1) monitor the performance of public administrations, (2) identify and address areas for improvement in leadership and management, and (3) develop targeted interventions and strategic reform programmes. Staff satisfaction surveys thus provide robust and actionable evidence for governments that seek to understand how public services work and how to improve them to serve their citizens better.

The following results highlight public servants' job attitudes and their experience with management practices across administrations in the Western Balkans.

Job Attitudes

- 64% are willing to do extra work for their job.
- 63% are satisfied with their job.
- 57% find it easy to balance the demands of their work and private life.
- 50% would recommend their organisation as a 'great place' to work.
- 50% often feel stressed at work.

Management Practices

- 85% have had their performance evaluated at least once in the two years before the survey. However, only 54% had a conversation with their superior to discuss the results (cf. feedback meeting).
- 64% agree or strongly agree that they have significant autonomy in determining how they do their job.

- 56% agree or strongly agree that their superior communicates a clear vision of their institution's future, while 47% say their superiors regularly inquire about their well-being.
- 44% participated in at least one job-specific training session in the 12 months before the survey, while only 32% participated in general training.
- 35% believe they have good career advancement opportunities inside their organisation, while 36% see opportunities in the wider public administration.
- 19% are satisfied with their salary.

Three **Key Lessons** emerge from the ReSPA-supported staff satisfaction surveys for future initiatives in the Western Balkan administrations:

1. They generate actionable evidence that enables both central civil service offices and individual institutions to target interventions and develop reforms effectively.
2. As they highlight significant differences between institutions within administrations, they point to the need for tailored interventions at the level of institutions to improve management practices.
3. By aligning with global best practices, they enable international benchmarking and cross-administration comparisons to draw lessons and inform future reforms.

This report's review of ReSPA-supported staff satisfaction surveys points to five **Priority Actions** for governments, as well as regional and international organisations with stakes in the region:

1. Address public servants' concerns over well-being and work-life balance through dedicated policies.
2. Strengthen leadership practices by investing in leadership training and skill development initiatives for public administration.
3. Improve the structural foundations of management practices, in particular in areas of salary management, career development, training, and HR capacity.
4. Institutionalise regular staff satisfaction surveys to monitor changes, track reforms, and evaluate progress over time.
5. Strengthen the capacity of administrations to conduct staff satisfaction surveys independently, support their use for reform and action, and facilitate cross-administration learning,

This report is structured in four sections:

1. Section 1 outlines the rationale for measuring staff satisfaction and conducting these surveys.
2. Section 2 describes the design, scope, and methodology of the surveys that were supported by ReSPA.
3. Section 3 presents the main findings, divided into, first, job attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and second, management practices, including leadership, job design, performance appraisal, and career development.
4. Section 4 concludes with general findings and recommendations for action and reform.

Rationale: Why Measure Staff Satisfaction

Staff satisfaction surveys in public administration measure public servants' job attitudes, behaviours, and experience with management, particularly human resources management. Job attitudes refer to individuals' evaluations, feelings, and beliefs about their job and workplace. Commonly studied job attitudes include job satisfaction and organisational commitment, both of which were measured in the staff satisfaction surveys in Western Balkan administrations.

Research in both the public and private sectors demonstrates that job attitudes, such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and organisational commitment, have numerous positive effects. For instance, job satisfaction and work engagement are frequently associated with better performance at the individual, team, and organisational levels. They also enhance health and well-being outcomes, reducing absenteeism and staff turnover.

Policymakers and managers in public administration, therefore, have a strong incentive to regularly measure job attitudes and intended behaviours of their staff. Absenteeism due to sick leave and staff turnover imposes considerable costs on organisations. Dissatisfaction and disengagement lower the productivity, innovation, and resilience of public servants and, by implication, public institutions. Gathering reliable evidence on public servants' job attitudes – and identifying the drivers that influence them – is thus essential for taking targeted, evidence-based actions that improve the quality of public service.

Research highlights that management practices are one of the main drivers of job attitudes and behaviours. While personality factors and environmental conditions also play a role, management practices are particularly important because they are malleable and within the control of policymakers and managers. This makes them a direct lever to influence public servants' job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

Management practices encompass a wide range of actions and policies that institutions implement on a continuous basis. For example, leadership styles and practices, job design, performance management, team and collaborative management, and training programmes are all key drivers. Policies to support work-life balance and well-being have also been shown to positively influence job satisfaction, engagement, and organisational commitment.

For policymakers and managers, staff satisfaction surveys represent a critical source of evidence that is both actionable and granular. They allow targeted actions to address the needs of specific groups of public servants such as managers, those with specific roles, or demographic groups like younger staff and those approaching retirement. Importantly, they provide institution-level evidence and, where survey design permits, insights into units within institutions or specific geographical levels of administration.

In short, staff satisfaction surveys offer policymakers and managers a powerful tool to understand how public services work and how to improve them.

Staff Satisfaction Surveys: The ReSPA Experience

Since 2022, ReSPA has supported seven staff satisfaction surveys across Western Balkan administrations, out of which three surveys were conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one for each level (see Table 1). This initiative aligns with a growing trend in global public management to implement public employee surveys – a policy that has recently gained momentum in OECD and EU member states and candidate administrations.

Staff satisfaction and engagement surveys have been prominent in the private sector since the late 1990s. In the public sector, the United States was the first to implement the Federal Executive Viewpoint Survey in 2002, now conducted biennially. Since the 2010s, OECD countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have regularly implemented staff satisfaction and well-being surveys in the civil service.

More recently, staff satisfaction surveys have gained ground in EU member states. Since 2023, the European Commission has supported a Technical Support Instrument initiative implemented by the OECD to survey public servants in eight EU countries. Similarly, in 2024, OECD/SIGMA conducted a survey of civil servants to complement its regular monitoring of public administration in EU candidate administrations in Western Balkan administrations.

Table 1. *ReSPA-Supported Staff Satisfaction Surveys in the Western Balkans*

Administration	Year	Survey Frame	Office Responsible	Observations	Institutions with ≥1 Response	Institutions with ≥10 Responses	Re-sponse Rate
Albania	2022	Central government, selected municipalities	Department of Public Administration	5,842	>200	45	33%
North Macedonia	2023	Central government	Ministry of Information Society and Administration	1,630	62	31	25%
Serbia	2024	Central government	Human Resources Management Service	5,228	78	35	23%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2024	Ministries, non-ministerial bodies, Cantons	Civil Service Agencies	7,240	>300	99	20-28%
Montenegro	2024	Municipal level	Human Resources Management Authority	1,393	25	25	29%

ReSPA's first staff satisfaction survey was conducted in Albania in 2022 in collaboration with the Department of Public Administration. It was designed as a pilot and targeted central ministries, non-ministerial bodies, and municipalities. The survey generated 5,842 responses, with participation from over 200 institutions and 45 institutions contributing ten or more completed responses.

Building on this experience, ReSPA implemented a survey in North Macedonia in 2023. It was led domestically by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration. While targeting 106 central government institutions, 69 institutions participated, generating 1,630 responses. 31 institutions generated ten or more completed responses. This highlighted the challenge of securing broad institutional participation – an issue that requires proactive strategies, such as advanced communication by central civil service offices and workshops with HR units of participating institutions.

In 2024, ReSPA supported staff satisfaction surveys in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Serbia, the survey targeted 85 institutions, generating 5,228 responses. While 78 institutions contributed at least one response, the bulk came from 35 institutions (10+ responses). The response rate was 23%.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, surveys were conducted across the Bosnia and Herzegovina Institutions, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and *Republika Srpska*: In Bosnia and Herzegovina Institutions 1,254 public servants participated (20% response rate). In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the survey generated 4,469 responses, with over 200 institutions participating and 53 institutions generating ten or more responses. In *Republika Srpska*, 1,517 responses were generated from 44 institutions, with 28 institutions returning ten or more responses. In total, 7,240 public servants in Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the surveys.

In total, the ReSPA-supported surveys have generated 19,940 responses and detailed data from 216 institutions across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia. Kosovo* and Montenegro also have experience with staff satisfaction surveys. In Kosovo, a public employee survey was conducted in 2017 by the UK Department for International Development. In Montenegro, a staff satisfaction survey was conducted for the central-level administration in 2023 and the local level in 2024 using a different questionnaire; therefore, its results are not included in this report. Finally, in 2024, Albania became the first ReSPA Member to conduct a second round of staff satisfaction surveys based on the 2022 pilot experience. This current report focuses on the results of the first survey that was supported by ReSPA.

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

Survey Approach and Methodology for Western Balkan Administrations

The staff satisfaction surveys were initiated by central civil service offices such as civil service agencies and ministries of public administration, which are members of the ReSPA Working Group on Human Resources Management and Development in the Public Sector. Following the pilot staff satisfaction survey in Albania and the presentation of results at the ReSPA Ministerial Conference in Tirana in November 2022, other ReSPA Members requested the design and implementation of staff satisfaction surveys for their administrations.

As a first step, central civil service offices provided detailed information on the structure, size, and demographic features of the target institutions. The surveys primarily targeted public servants and employees in central government ministries and administrative bodies unless the inclusion of sub-central institutions was agreed upon in advance (e.g., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Front-line staff, such as public servants working in the health and education sectors or personnel in the police and military, were not included in the surveys.

The surveys were designed by a team of experts led by the author of this report in collaboration with the central civil service offices. Each survey consisted of approximately 80 questions. Survey items were selected based on validated international models of staff satisfaction and management surveys, such as the Global Survey of Public Servants and examples from OECD countries, including the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom.² The questionnaires were carefully adapted to the local context to ensure alignment with legal terminology and administrative structures while preserving the validity of the constructs and comparability across surveys.

Survey Implementation and Data Protection

The surveys were conducted in compliance with general data protection regulations. Public servants were required to provide informed consent prior to participation. Respondents were assured that participation was voluntary, withdrawal was possible at

²Schuster, C. et al (2023) The Global Survey of Public Servants: Evidence from 1,300,000 Public Servants in 1,300 Government Institutions in 23 Countries. *Public Administration Review* 83(4): 982-993.

any time, answers would remain anonymous, and data would be securely stored to minimise potential harm.

The surveys were translated into local languages and uploaded to the Qualtrics online survey platform. Each survey was pre-tested with staff from central civil service offices and a small number of public servants to ensure the technical soundness and clarity of survey items. In some cases, online workshops with HR units or contact points were conducted to explain the purpose and logistics of the survey to participating institutions.

The surveys were distributed via email by central civil service offices to HR units or contact points within participating institutions, who then disseminated the invitation internally. The email contained an anonymous survey link for all participants. Although personalised survey links disseminated through HRM Information Systems would maximise control of the survey frame, this option has not yet been technically feasible in Western Balkan administrations, but it may become possible in the future. Future reforms and initiatives to strengthen the capacity to conduct staff satisfaction surveys might want to address this issue.

Monitoring and Response Rates

The detailed information provided by central civil service offices enabled the survey team to monitor response rates continuously in relation to institutional staff size and demographic features (e.g., rank, gender, and age distribution). While the response rates mentioned above are conservative estimates, they are consistent with typical online surveys, where rates between 20% and 30% are common and generally not a cause for concern. Research shows that administration-wide samples in public employee surveys produce reliable averages regardless of response rate levels, although caution is needed when comparing results between institutions or demographic groups.

After the initial rollout, central civil service offices sent reminders to public servants via HR units and contact points after two and four weeks. The survey remained open for approximately six weeks in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in Albania and North Macedonia, it remained open for approximately three months to account for the summer period in 2022 and 2023, respectively. For future implementation, it is generally preferable to conduct surveys outside the holiday season to maximise participation.

Data Processing and Analysis

Following survey closure, the data was downloaded, cleaned, and recorded. The survey team designed standardised report templates for:

1. Main, administration-wide reports, and
2. Institutional reports for institutions with at least 10 completed responses.

The threshold of ten responses aligns with international practices to ensure anonymity and prevent the identification of individual respondents.

The reports include indices that aggregate conceptually related survey items (e.g., job engagement measured through three items, salary management using five items). Readers are encouraged to consider the individual survey items underlying larger indices, as formal measurement models for scalability were not applied.

In addition to descriptive statistics, the main reports include regression analyses to explore the relationships between management practices and job attitudes and intended behaviours. These regressions were conducted separately for each administration. Across the surveys, they confirmed statistically significant associations observed in the broader literature on public management. This serves as both a validation of the surveys and evidence of the critical role of management practices in shaping public servants' job attitudes and behaviours.

Results of ReSPA-Supported Staff Satisfaction Surveys

This section presents the results of public servants' attitudes and behaviours and their evaluations of management practices in Western Balkan administrations. Scores are calculated as averages across the surveys conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia, with equal weight given to each survey rather than based on a consolidated regional dataset.

The results are presented as index scores ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores reflecting more desirable attitudes or practices. Generally, scores above 70–75 indicate areas of relative strength, while scores below 60–65 highlight areas for improvement. However, the interpretation of scores depends on context. For example, any score below 100 for issues like unethical behaviour or harassment would require immediate attention. Moreover, external events (e.g. political changes, leadership transitions, re-organisations) can influence scores. Therefore, the findings presented here provide general trends and should be read alongside the detailed reports for each administration, which are available on the ReSPA website.

This section is divided into two parts. Part one presents public servants' attitudes and behaviours. Part two turns to their evaluations of management practices.

Public Servants' Attitudes and Behaviours in Western Balkan Administrations

The staff satisfaction surveys measured seven key job attitudes and behaviours.

- Job engagement
- Job satisfaction
- Work motivation
- Public service motivation
- Organisational commitment
- Intention to remain in public administration (cf turnover intention)
- Well-being and work-life balance

Figure1. *Job Attitudes in Western Balkan Administrations*

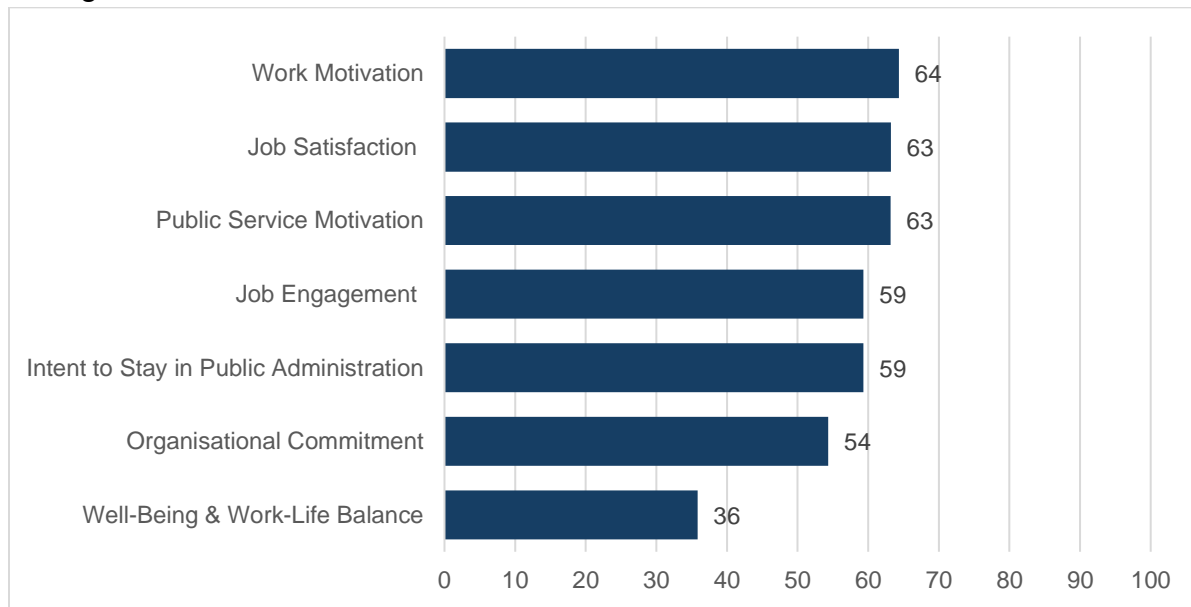


Figure 1 illustrates the overall results: Work motivation scores highest at 64. Job satisfaction and public service motivation follow at 63. Job engagement and the intention to remain in public administration stand at 59. Organisational commitment is weaker at 54. Finally, well-being and work-life balance stand out as the main areas of concern, with a score of 36.

Job Engagement, Job Satisfaction, and Work Motivation

Job engagement, job satisfaction, and work motivation are closely related to workplace outcomes. Together, they suggest that public servants in Western Balkan administrations share a generally positive outlook towards their jobs.

Work motivation refers to public servants' willingness to exert discretionary effort and go beyond expectations to achieve work goals. It represents future-oriented behaviour. Job satisfaction is a job attitude defined as 'how an individual feels about their job and its various aspects'.³ It is a critical determinant of work motivation.

Job engagement describes 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption'.⁴ It drives satisfaction, motivation, and outcomes like performance and well-being. In the surveys, job engagement was measured using three items. While the average score for Western Balkan administrations falls just

³ Rainey, H. G. (2009). *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁴ Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The Measurement of Engagement and Burnout: A Two-Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 71-92.

below 60, key dimensions of job engagement highlight an area of relative strength. For instance, 64% of public servants report being 'enthusiastic about their job'. However, the surveys also reveal that 25–30% of public servants are consistently disengaged, posing a potential cost for organisations in terms of lost productivity, innovation and resilience of public servants.

Public Service Motivation

Public service motivation (PSM), defined as 'an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded in public institutions', is central to public servants' identity and their drive to contribute to the public good.⁵ With an average score for Western Balkan administrations of 63, PSM reflects a broadly positive role understanding, though opportunities exist for strengthening.

Organisational Commitment and Retention

Organisational commitment differs from job engagement, satisfaction, and motivation in that it refers to an employee's bond with their organisation.⁶ It is closely linked to intentions to stay or leave public administration. The surveys show a weaker commitment to institutions: Only 50% of public servants would 'recommend their institution as a great place to work'.

Retention remains a challenge: For instance, 25% sought jobs outside public administration in the year preceding the survey. Another 25% plan to leave within two years. These findings highlight the connection between disengagement and intentions to leave: Disengaged public servants are far more likely to seek employment elsewhere. Addressing this issue is critical to avoiding potentially high turnover costs for public institutions.

Well-Being and Work-Life Balance

Well-being and work-life balance score the lowest across all indices at 36. This three-item index, comprising stress, burnout, and work-life balance, reveals that 50% of public servants often feel stressed at work, and 59% frequently feel worn out by the end of the day. These results signal a risk of burnout and underline the need for governments and institutions to invest in mental health support and measures to promote well-being.

⁵ Perry, J. L., & Wise, L. R. (1990). The Motivational Bases of Public Service. *Public Administration Review*, 367-373.

⁶ Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1), 61-89.

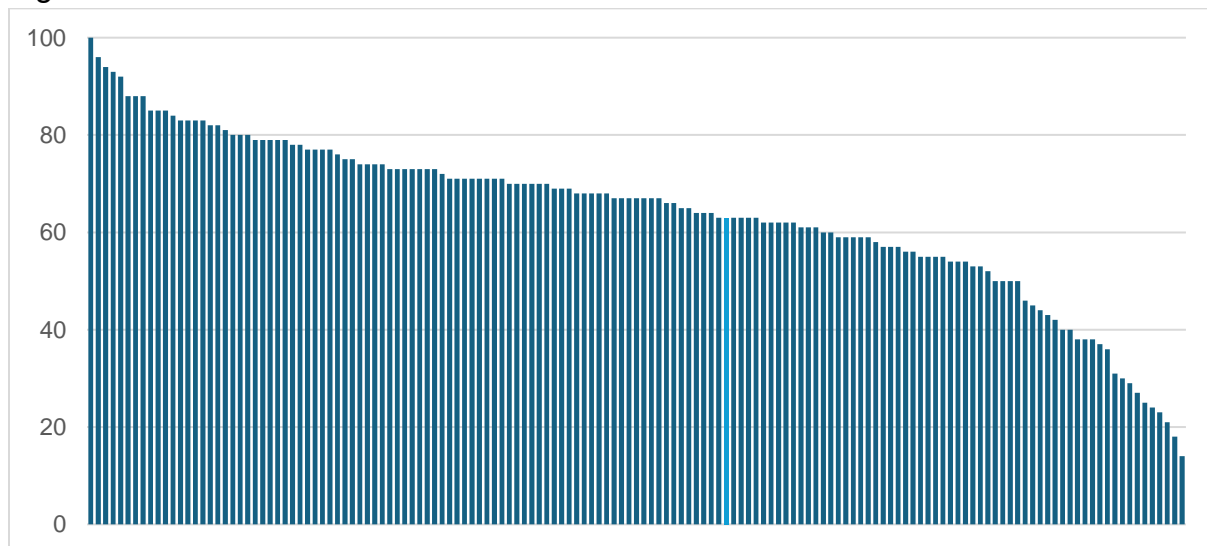
Institution-Level Differences

The results provide general trends but mask significant differences between institutions. Institutions – not administrations – are the primary units of variation in public servants' attitudes and behaviours.

Figure 2 illustrates the variation in job satisfaction across institutions. Scores range from 14 in the lowest-scoring institution to 100 in the highest. Similar disparities are found for other indices. For example, well-being scores in one of the administrations range from 19 to 70. This variation highlights an important lesson for governments, as well as regional and international organisations: Reforms and interventions must target the institutional level. While central civil service offices and ministries initiate reforms, these efforts need to be complemented by institution-specific actions to address local challenges.

The surveys further reveal that differences in job attitudes and workplace outcomes are greater between institutions than between demographic groups (e.g., gender, age, or rank). For instance, managers tend to report higher satisfaction and motivation than non-managerial staff but also experience lower well-being and work-life balance. However, institutional differences are far more pronounced, reinforcing the need for tailored interventions at the institutional level to improve attitudes, well-being, and retention.

Figure 2. *Job Satisfaction across Institutions in Western Balkan Administrations*



Management Practices in Western Balkan Administrations

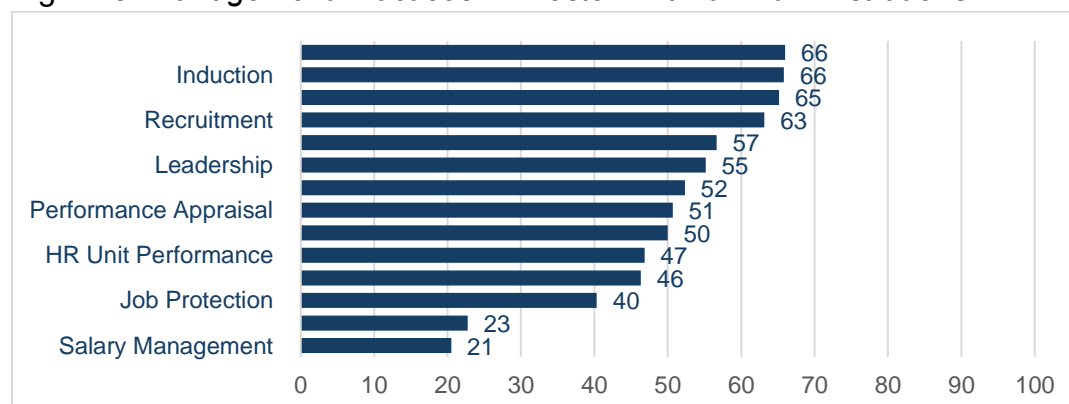
The staff satisfaction surveys measured 14 management practices:

- Recruitment and selection
- Induction and onboarding
- Career advancement and promotion
- Performance appraisal
- Salary management
- Job protection and stability
- Job design and characteristics
- Leadership practices
- Teamwork
- Training and development
- Communication satisfaction
- Well-being support
- Physical and office environment
- Performance of HR departments

While most management practices were measured across all surveys, some items, such as communication satisfaction and well-being support, were only included in specific administrations, as specified below. In these cases, a full review is thus limited.

Figure 3 provides an overview of index scores for management practices, which range from 66 for teamwork and induction to 23 for well-being support and 21 for salary management. Most management practices fall between these extremes, with a few areas showing moderate strength (scores above 63), though none exceed the 70–75 threshold typically considered strong. The results highlight that salary management and well-being support are areas of major concern across the region. Salary management consistently scores the lowest in all ReSPA-supported surveys.

Figure 3. *Management Practices in Western Balkan Administrations*



A closer examination of the results reveals four general insights into management practices in Western Balkan administrations.

Areas of Moderate Strength – with Scope for Improvement

With index scores between 66 and 63, teamwork, induction and onboarding, recruitment, and job design and characteristics emerge as areas of moderate strength in Western Balkan administrations. At first glance, this may seem surprising, but a closer examination of the survey items explains these results. It becomes further evident that even these moderately positive areas of management include lower-scoring items that highlight the need for targeted follow-up actions and reforms.

Induction and onboarding were measured based on four survey items, including managers welcoming new recruits, on-the-job training to familiarise recruits with rules and procedures, clear explanations of job tasks and expectations, and the assignment of a mentor to guide the new recruit.

The first three items score relatively high across most administrations in the region, particularly the practice of welcoming new recruits. However, only 51% of public servants report being assigned a mentor during recruitment. The finding has actionable implications at the governmental and institutional levels. For administrations *without* mentorship programmes, the surveys provide a basis for developing such initiatives to professionalise induction and onboarding. For administrations *with* existing mentorship programmes, the surveys help monitor implementation practices and identify institutions with low scores to target support for improvements.

For recruitment and job design, the survey results partially challenge conventional wisdom, which often criticises these areas of public service management in Western Balkan administrations. The area of job design includes seven survey items, balancing positive elements (e.g. autonomy and space to innovate) with challenges (e.g. excessive rules and political interference) public servants face when doing their job. For instance, 64% of public servants agree or strongly agree that they have autonomy in determining how they perform their jobs. Moreover, 80% indicate that their job goals and expectations are clear, making goal clarity a strength in the region's public services.

Public service recruitment and selection in Western Balkan administrations are often criticised for politicisation, but the survey results provide a more nuanced picture. Merit-based processes such as public advertisement of vacancies, written exams, and personal

interviews are generally implemented with few exceptions. However, non-meritocratic selection criteria remain a challenge: 29% of public servants report that political connections helped them secure their first job. 46% attach at least some importance to personal connections when reflecting on their first public administration role. While politicisation is a significant issue, the results thus suggest that personal favouritism and nepotism pose an even greater barrier to institutionalising merit-based recruitment in Western Balkan administrations.

Crucial Role of Leadership Practices

Leadership practices are among the weakest areas in the management of public services in Western Balkan administrations. Leadership quality is also a key determinant of other management practices such as communication satisfaction, performance management, training, career development, and well-being support.

The leadership index includes eight items in the staff satisfaction surveys in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and five in North Macedonia and Albania. These items assess aspects of transformational, ethical, transactional, and servant leadership styles by asking public servants to evaluate their direct superior. The index does not differentiate between experiences with senior, middle, or lower management.

No leadership style achieves high scores across Western Balkan administrations. Only 56% of public servants report that their superior communicates a clear vision for their institution's future (transformational leadership). 58% agree that their superior communicates clear ethical standards (ethical leadership). Scores are comparably lower for servant leadership practices, such as active listening, supporting growth, and skill enhancement. For example, just 47% of public servants say their superiors regularly inquire about their well-being. The results highlight the need to offer training opportunities to strengthen leadership skills in the region.

The quality of leadership also impacts performance management. While 85% of public servants report receiving at least one evaluation over the past two years, only 54% of those formally evaluated received feedback conversations afterwards. This lack of follow-through on evaluations is a typical example of the widely criticised implementation gap in public service management in Western Balkan administrations. Addressing this issue is possible through targeted interventions, including general leadership training, focused training on performance conversations, feedback techniques, and the introduction of scheduling systems for evaluation meetings.

Effective communication within institutions also depends heavily on the quality of the leadership. According to the surveys conducted in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, only 44% of public servants believe their organisation, and, by extension, its management, communicates effectively with staff. To improve communication, administrations can use the survey results to identify and support low-scoring institutions through initiatives such as communication training for managers.

The ReSPA-supported surveys thus reveal a clear need to improve leadership practices across Western Balkan administrations. Strengthening leadership would have a multiplier effect on other management areas, such as communication, performance appraisal, and staff development, significantly contributing to the development of more effective public institutions in the region.

Areas Requiring Structural Reform

Several management areas with low and very low scores require more than leadership improvements to expect progress. These areas demand reforms and investments that address the structural foundations of public service management, enabling better practices and performance in the medium and long term.

Salary management consistently received low evaluations, largely due to dissatisfaction with salaries. Only 19% of public servants are satisfied with their pay, and many believe their salaries are insufficient to support their families. Without discernible salary increases, it is unlikely that these scores will improve soon.

Closely tied to salary management, career advancement, and promotion received critical evaluations. The index includes six items focusing on career prospects and criteria for future advancement: Only 35% and 36% of public servants believe they have good career opportunities within their institution or the wider public administration, respectively. In contrast, career opportunities outside public administration are rated much more positively. Addressing these challenges will require targeted investment in career management and mobility schemes to enhance career prospects and retain and attract talent into public administration.

The availability of infrastructure for well-being support, training, and HR capacity is another critical area of concern. While over 90% of public servants rate their own skills positively, training opportunities are perceived as limited, with only 32% and 44% attending at least one general or job-specific training course in the

past year. A culture of continuous learning will only be achievable with investments in training institutes, curricula, and staff.

Similarly, well-being support remains underdeveloped, with fewer than 20% of public servants reporting adequate provisions for mental health or health and safety at work. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of the importance of mental health, but progress in this area remains at an early stage. Policies supporting remote work, flexible working time, and part-time work require regulatory adjustments to create better work-life balance opportunities.

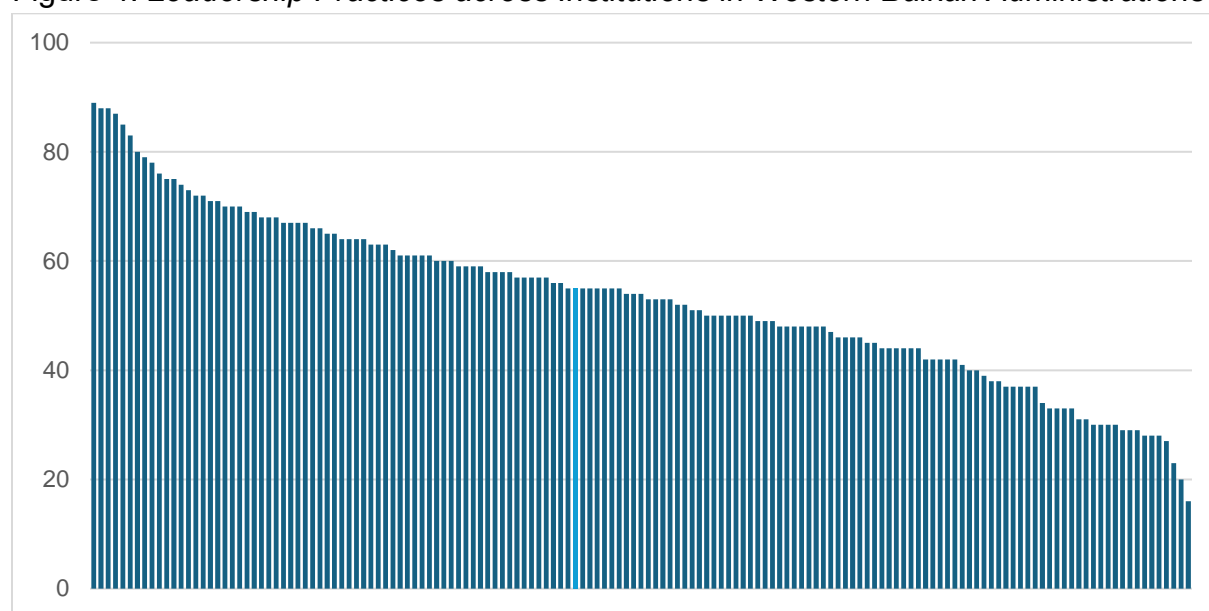
Strengthening HR departments is generally critical for improving management practices. HR performance was measured with a single survey item, asking public servants to evaluate their HR unit's effectiveness and responsiveness. The results show significant variation across institutions, reflecting differences in leadership quality, institutional weaknesses, and variability in the availability of resources. Structural reforms and investment in HRM skills and expertise are essential to improving these scores and achieving consistent, high-quality management practices in the future.

Structural reforms in salary management, career advancement, training, well-being support, and HR capacity are essential to overcoming persistent challenges in public service management. These reforms will require targeted investment, regulatory adjustments, and adequate resource allocation to drive improvements in public administration across the Western Balkans.

Major Differences between Institutions

The staff satisfaction surveys in Western Balkan administrations reveal significant variation in management practices across institutions within administrations. Figure 4 highlights the disparities in leadership practices across more than 200 institutions, with index scores ranging from 16 at the bottom end to 89 at the top. Similar patterns are evident within individual administrations: for example, in one administration, leadership scores vary between 28 and 89 across institutions.

Figure 4. *Leadership Practices across Institutions in Western Balkan Administrations*



The substantial variation is not confined to leadership practices. Similar differences are observed across other management areas, reinforcing a key insight from the staff satisfaction surveys in the Western Balkans: Institutional-level interventions are essential for improving public administration.

While central civil service offices are responsible for initiating, coordinating, and monitoring reforms, these efforts must be complemented by institution-specific actions. Targeted support for underperforming institutions with low scores is essential to addressing their challenges, enhancing management practices, and improving staff attitudes and performance. Such efforts have the potential to significantly contribute to the overall effectiveness of public administration in the Western Balkans.

Conclusion & Recommendations

for ReSPA and Western Balkan Administrations

The staff satisfaction surveys supported by ReSPA have generated novel and actionable evidence on the management of public servants in the Western Balkans. By taking the perspectives of public servants, these surveys complement existing assessments (e.g., legal reviews, surveys of experts, citizens, or businesses) and provide a detailed picture of their job attitudes, behaviours, and experience with management.

With nearly 20,000 responses across several administrations in the Western Balkans, the ReSPA-supported surveys represent one of the largest cross-administration datasets in Europe and globally. Their design aligns with international standards such as the Global Survey of Public Servants and surveys conducted by OECD members, enabling policymakers to engage in benchmarking and cross-administration comparisons.

Three Lessons for Future Initiatives in Western Balkan Administrations

1. Staff satisfaction surveys are an effective tool to generate actionable evidence: The surveys provide granular insights for central civil service offices (e.g., civil service agencies), individual institutions, and regional and international organisations such as ReSPA, OECD/SIGMA, and the European Commission. These insights enable targeted actions, regular monitoring, and the development of strategic reform programmes.
2. Differences between institutions within administrations require targeted action: By revealing large variations within administrations, the surveys emphasise that institutions must be key areas for intervention. Addressing challenges at the institutional level will be critical to improving the quality of implementation, a core criticism of public service management in the region.
3. Opportunities for international benchmarking and comparison: By aligning survey designs with global best practices, the surveys allow policymakers to compare results internationally and adopt global benchmarks for enhancing public administration.

Five Priorities for Action

The review of staff satisfaction survey results highlights five key recommendations for governments in the Western Balkans, as well as regional and international organisations, including ReSPA, OECD/SIGMA, and the European Commission:

1. Enhance well-being and work-life balance: Well-being and work-life balance emerged as key concerns for public servants in the Western Balkans. Targeted policies to improve workplace well-being and flexibility should be prioritised.
2. Strengthen leadership practices: Leadership stands out as a cross-cutting area with significant potential to influence job attitudes, behaviours, and management practices. Measures to strengthen leadership skills should include training programmes, mentoring initiatives, and improvements in communication and performance management practices.
3. Invest in structural reforms: Structural reforms are required to improve key management practices. These include salary and career management, training and skills development, and HR capacity building to enable more effective public service management and planning at the level of institutions.
4. Institutionalise regular surveys: Staff satisfaction surveys should be conducted regularly (e.g. annually or biennially) to monitor changes over time, evaluate reforms and targeted interventions, and support policymakers in tracking progress and setting priorities. Institutionalising regular surveys should be a top priority.
5. Strengthen capacity to conduct surveys and translate findings into action. To facilitate the design and regular implementation of staff satisfaction surveys, efforts should focus on building technical capacity within administrations, supporting the development of action plans and reforms based on survey findings, and fostering regional collaboration, cross-administration learning, and sharing best practices.

In conclusion, the staff satisfaction surveys supported by ReSPA since 2022 provide a strong foundation for evidence-based public administration reforms in Western Balkan administrations. By institutionalising regular monitoring of public servants and management practices and by identifying and addressing priority areas for action, administrations can enhance the motivation, well-being, and performance of public servants, leading to more effective and citizen-oriented public administrations across the region.