



POLICY ANSWERS

Shaping the future in the Western Balkans together

Highlights from the POLICY ANSWERS project

March 2022 – April 2026



POLICY ANSWERS was funded by the European Commission through the Horizon Europe project "R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS", Grant Agreement N°101058873.

From alignment to integration

Over four years, the POLICY ANSWERS project has operated in a context of transformation across the six Western Balkans (WB) economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. While their integration into the European Research Area (ERA) has long been a strategic objective, there has been a shift from formal alignment towards more active and structured participation.

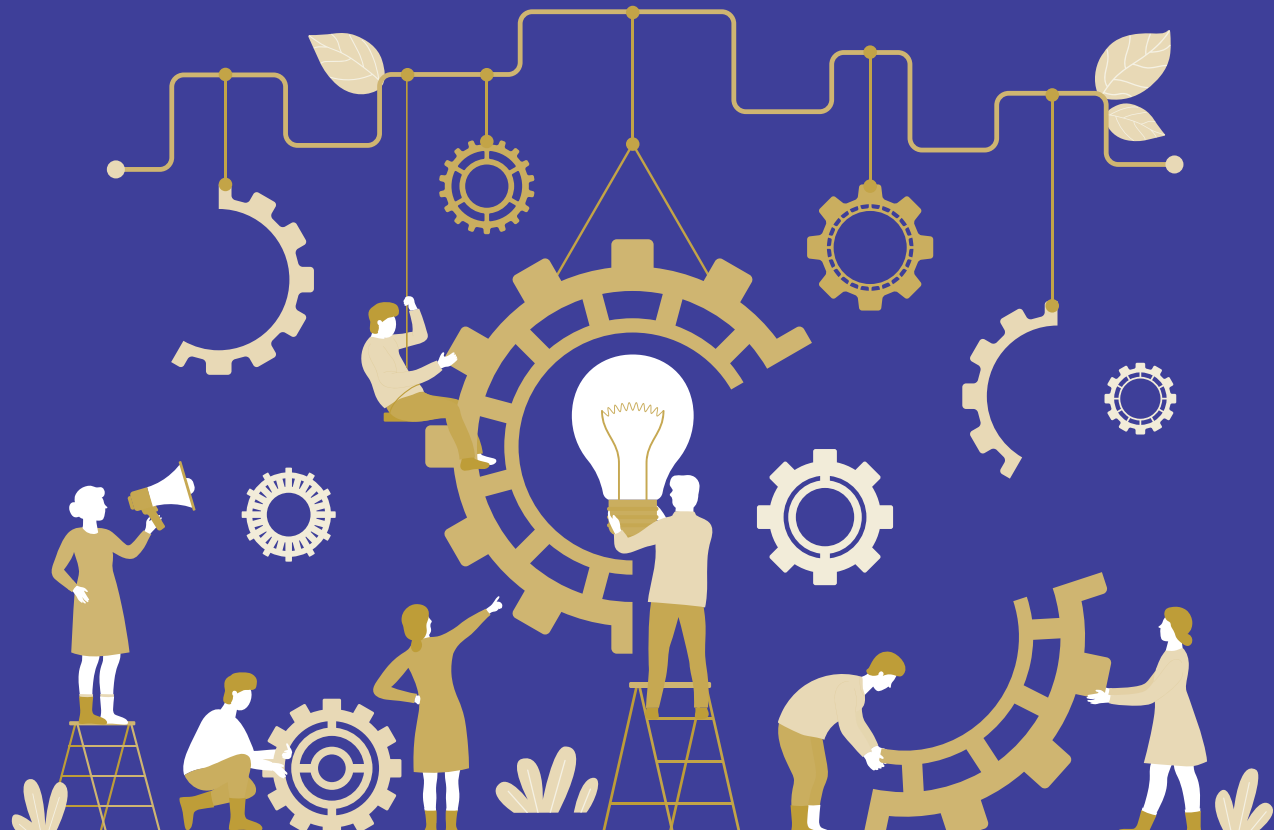
The project has contributed to this transition by supporting research and innovation systems across the region in strengthening capacities, cooperation mechanisms and engagement within the European context.

Across the Western Balkans, scientists, innovators, policy makers and other stakeholders are increasingly engaging with EU programmes and initiatives not only as reference points, but as spaces for collaboration, joint priority setting and shared implementation.

By combining policy dialogue, analytical work, capacity building and pilot activities, POLICY ANSWERS has supported more connected, responsive and implementation-oriented systems in the WB region.

This evolution reflects a broader process of integration already underway, where regional actors are progressively contributing to shared European priorities.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



The project structure: POLICY ANSWERS Work Packages (WP)



POLICY ANSWERS (R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS) was running from March 2022 to April 2026. It structured its works in seven WPs: the following sections of this e-book focus on the main achievements along its 4-year journey.

[Click the coloured buttons to go to the specific sections](#)



Policy Dialogue

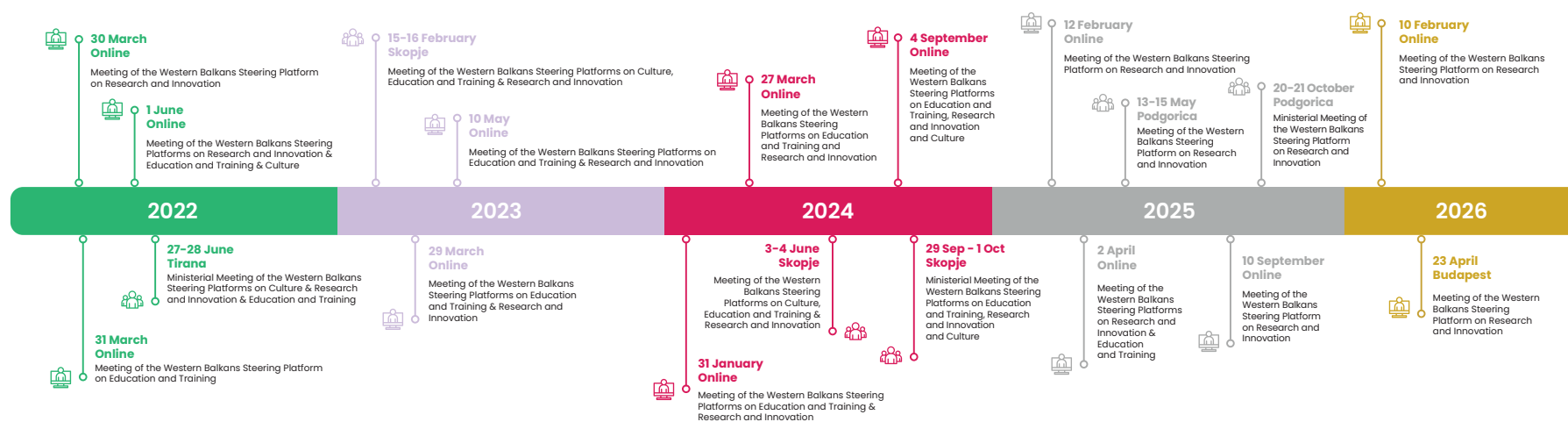


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POLICY ANSWERS enabled the organisation of policy dialogue events thereby strengthening the Western Balkans Steering Platforms (SP) as hubs for networking, knowledge exchange and shared learning. By bringing together policymakers and stakeholders from across the Western Balkans and the European Union, the project has supported the emergence of shared priorities and more aligned policy approaches. This process has contributed to strengthening cooperation across the region while supporting a more coordinated positioning within the European Research Area.



The links to the respective events are in the following pages (6-10).



Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Research and Innovation & Education and Training

Held in Tirana on 27-28 June 2022, the Ministerial Meeting marked a key milestone in advancing the "Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport"

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Ministerial Meeting in Skopje Strengthens EU-WB Cooperation in Research and Innovation, Education and Training, and Culture

Held on 29 September-1 October 2024, the Ministerial Meeting gathered over 180 participants, reinforcing political commitment and setting strategic directions for joint actions in research, innovation, education and culture across the Western Balkans.

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EU and Western Balkans Deepen Cooperation on Research and Innovation at the Ministerial Meeting in Podgorica

Organised on 20–22 October 2025, with around 120 participants, the Ministerial Meeting on Research and Innovation marked another important milestone on the Western Balkans’ path toward closer EU integration, fostering cooperation, dialogue and shared progress in the research and innovation ecosystem.

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Steering Platforms Meetings: twelve online and four in person

Online meetings of the SP:

30 March 2022

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

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31 March 2022

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Education and Training

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

1 June 2022

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Research and Innovation & Education and Training & Culture

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

29 March 2023

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

10 May 2023

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation

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31 January 2024

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

27 March 2024

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

4 September 2024

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Education and Training & Research and Innovation & Culture

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

12 February 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

2 April 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Research and Innovation & Education and Training

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

10 September 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

10 February 2026

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

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In person meetings:

15-16 February 2023

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Culture & Education and Training & Research and Innovation (Skopje)

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3-4 June 2024

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Culture & Education and Training & Research and Innovation (Skopje)

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13-15 May 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation (Podgorica)

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23 April 2026

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation (Budapest)

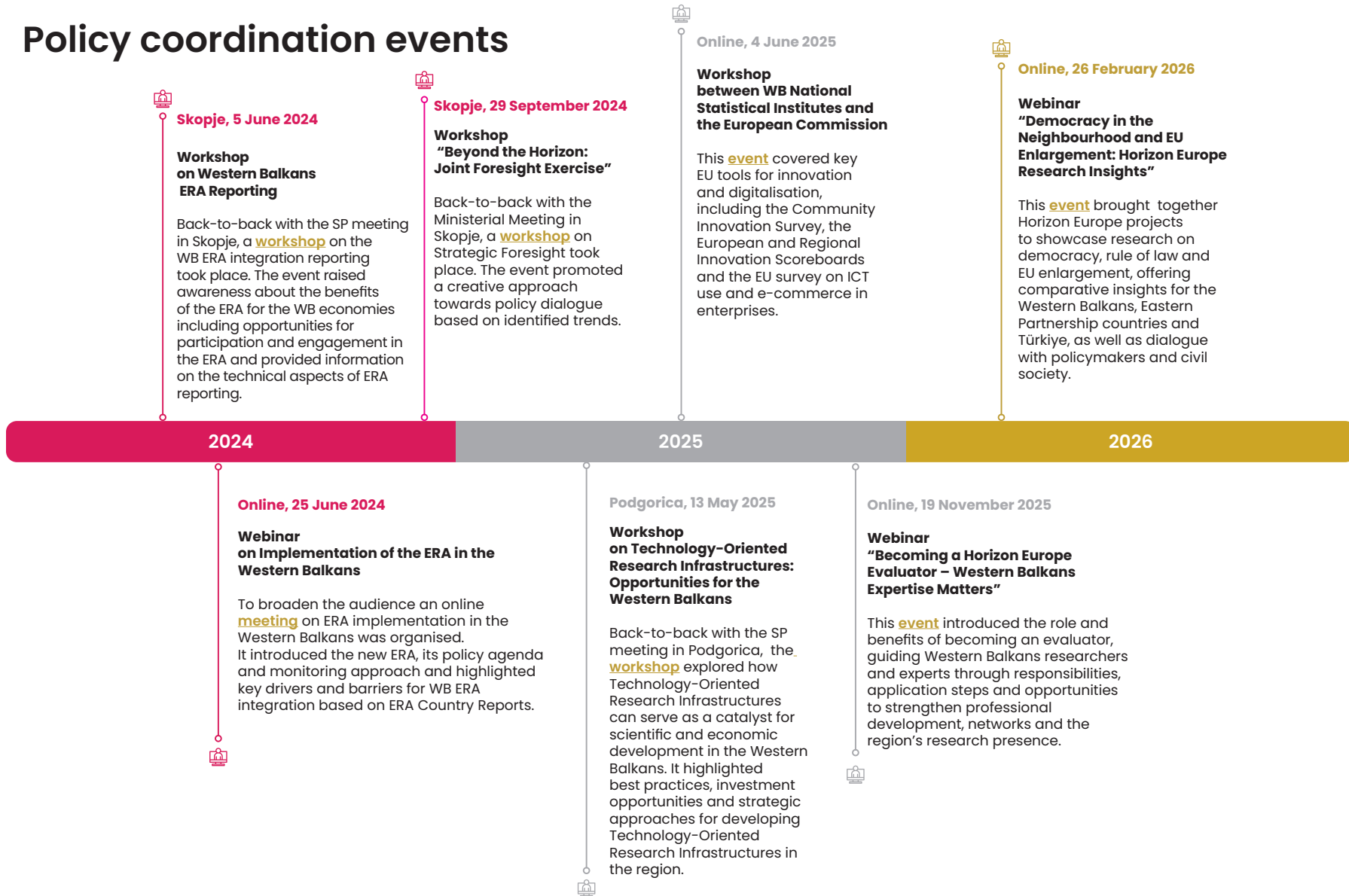
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Policy coordination events



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Policy Dialogue

Impact

Shaping Policies

Strengthened high-level policy coordination between the EU and Western Balkans through structured and continuous dialogue mechanisms.

Improving Practices

Institutionalised and sustainable formats for the technical and Ministerial Meetings of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms.

Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Enhanced engagement of policy makers and alignment of Western Balkans priorities with EU strategic agendas.





Monitoring for Agenda Setting



Monitoring and analytical activities within POLICY ANSWERS have contributed to strengthening evidence-based policy making across the region. By providing structured data, comparative analyses and regular tracking of progress, the project has supported more informed decision-making processes and alignment with European priorities.

These activities have also helped bridge the gap between policy design and implementation, ensuring that strategic frameworks are supported by evidence and operational tools.

- **Mapping the Stakeholder Ecosystem**

A comprehensive data set was collected on stakeholders of the Western Balkans region and beyond, comprising institutions and their programmes, initiatives, best practices, strategies, policies and media outlets accessible in the "[Ecosystem of engagement](#)"

- **Monitoring the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda**

Four editions of [Monitoring Cards](#) were developed to track progress across six key areas: Research and Innovation; Education and Skills; Youth, Culture and Sports; Digital Competitiveness; Environment; Common Regional Market.

- **Analysing progress towards ERA integration**

Two editions of ERA reports were produced, with findings summarised in [ERA Cards \(2023\)](#) and a [Fact Sheet \(2024\)](#). These activities were complemented by workshops and webinars, supporting dialogue and reflection among stakeholders.

- **Anticipating future developments through strategic foresight**

Foresight activities supported policy makers in exploring future scenarios and identifying priorities for research and innovation systems. Results were consolidated into a [Foresight Card](#) and discussed in regional workshops.

- **Providing evidence for policy development**

[Policy Briefs](#) and analytical reports contributed to informing decision-making processes on key topics such as FP10, monitoring frameworks, research infrastructures, innovation vouchers and mobility.





Mapping the Western Balkans Stakeholder Ecosystem

A comprehensive overview of the Western Balkans research and innovation ecosystem to support informed policy making and collaboration is available on the WB Info Hub.

Mapping the Stakeholder Ecosystem

430+
stakeholders mapped

200+
programmes and policies analysed

100+
initiatives and best practices identified

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Monitoring Cards

The progress in the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda has been summarised in six Monitoring Cards: Research and Innovation; Education & Skills; Youth, Culture & Sports; Digital Competitiveness; Environment; Common Regional Market.

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Four editions of the Monitoring Cards were published:

2023 version

[Click here](#)

2025 version

[Click here](#)

2024 version

[Click here](#)

2026 version

[Click here](#)

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Monitoring the WB Integration into the ERA

POLICY ANSWERS has reported on the integration of the Western Balkans into the ERA. Two editions of the report have been issued: for 2022, progress in ERA integration was reported for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia; and for 2023, POLICY ANSWERS produced ERA Country Reports for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

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You can access the ERA reporting here:

2022 edition

[Click here](#)

2023 edition

[Click here](#)



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ERA Cards

Based on the ERA Reports and for dissemination purposes, POLICY ANSWERS has published ERA Cards for all six WB economies in 2023 to show progress and provide recommendations with regard to ERA integration.

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ERA Fact Sheet

The integration of the Western Balkans into the ERA was summarised in a Fact Sheet, which includes highlights and recommendations for each of the six WB economies.

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Fact sheet

This fact sheet provides selected highlights and recommendations of the integration of the Western Balkans (WB) into the European Research Area (ERA). These findings are based on the ERA Country Reports for the reporting year 2023 for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – all of which are associated to Horizon Europe. This fact sheet is part of the POLICY ANSWERS project activities to monitor and analyse progress made by the WB economies in their integration into the new ERA.

ERA Country Reports

The ERA Country Reports are prepared annually for the EU-27 and the countries associated to the Horizon Europe by different contractors (among them POLICY ANSWERS and its experts). The ERA Country Reports monitor the progress towards achieving the ERA objectives set out in the European Commission's Pact for Research and Innovation and in the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. Quantitatively, the reports are based on the ERA Dashboard and its related indicators. Qualitative information is added to provide more context for the current state of ERA integration. The ERA Country Reports are published by the European Commission on the ERA Platform: <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/era-country-reports-2023>.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/2001 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Schrago, V. et al., (2024). POLICY ANSWERS Fact sheet: Implementation of the European Research Area in the Western Balkans.

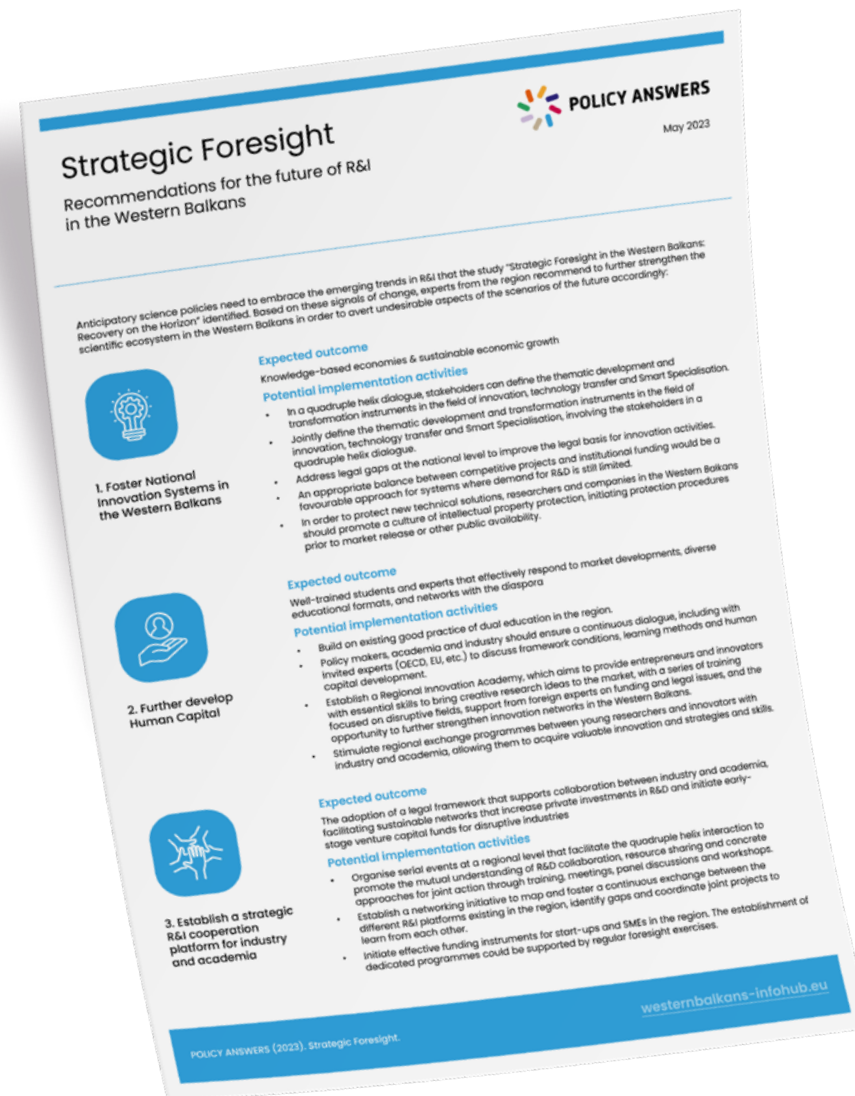
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Foresight Recommendations for the Futures of Research and Innovation in the Western Balkans

This Foresight Card presents key recommendations for strengthening research and innovation in the Western Balkans through anticipatory policy approaches, developed during expert consultations held in Podgorica in 2023. The discussion continued during a workshop held in Skopje in 2024.

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Policy Briefs and Policy Reports

POLICY ANSWERS produced various briefs and reports based on the specific needs to emphasise the outcomes of its activities:

- [POLICY ANSWERS Policy Brief on Western Balkans Mobility Schemes](#)
- [POLICY ANSWERS Policy Brief: Preparing for FP10: Strengthening Western Balkans participation in the 2028-2034 programme landscape \(2026\)](#)
- [POLICY ANSWERS Report and Policy Brief on the Promotion of Research Infrastructures](#)
- [POLICY ANSWERS Policy Lessons from the Western Balkans Innovation Voucher Pilot](#)
- [POLICY ANSWERS Policy Brief: Western Balkans Monitoring and Reporting Challenges and Key Takeaways](#)
- [POLICY ANSWERS Policy Brief: The Western Balkans on the Road to Framework Programme 10 \(2024\)](#)
- [Several Policy Reports for Kosovo](#)

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Key insights from analysis and monitoring

Analysis and monitoring activities within POLICY ANSWERS have demonstrated the effectiveness of deliverables and outputs as sources of information on R&I systems in the Western Balkans.

The project's experience has highlighted the need to maintain and update databases while performing stakeholder mapping.

A continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda allows to show progress and support accession negotiations.

Support to stakeholders dealing with statistics, indicators and data is important and needs to be prolonged.

Overall, foresight exercise has emerged as an effective tool for policy makers to support programming.

Finally, Policy Briefs have proven useful as sources of information and recommendations.





Monitoring for Agenda Setting

Impact

Shaping Policies

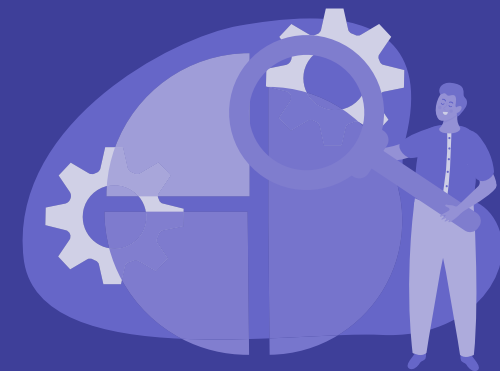
Supported evidence-based policy making through structured monitoring of the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda and reporting on ERA integration.

Improving Practices

Shared analytical framework (Monitoring Cards, ERA reports, Policy Briefs).

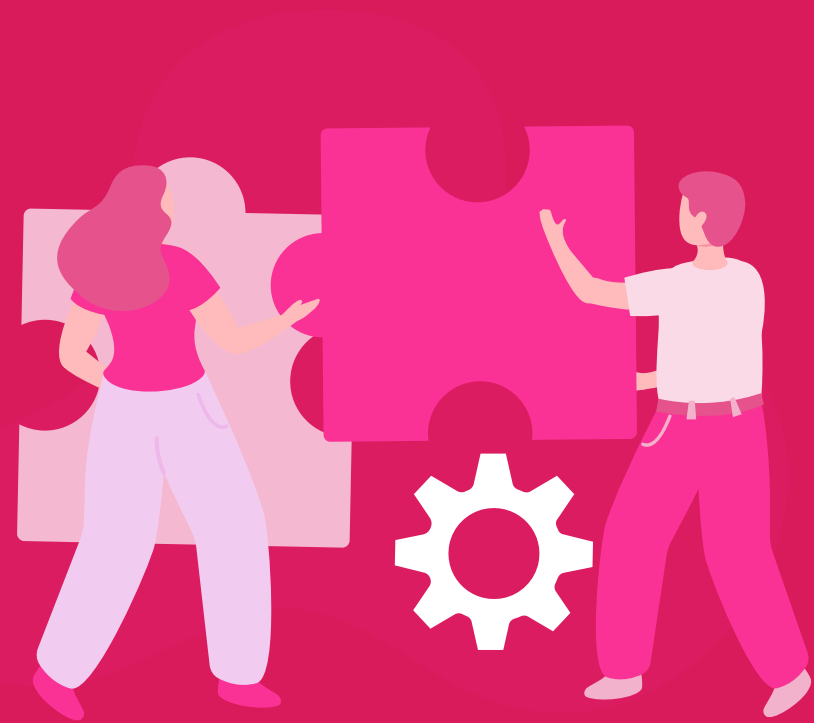
Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Increased availability, accessibility and comparability of data for decision makers and institutions.





Capacity Building and Support



Capacity building supporting implementation

Capacity building within POLICY ANSWERS has focused on strengthening practical skills, institutional capabilities and cooperation mechanisms across the Western Balkans.

Through targeted training programmes, technical assistance and peer learning activities, the project has supported researchers, policy makers and institutions in improving their ability to design, implement and manage research and innovation initiatives.

These efforts have contributed to enhancing participation in Horizon Europe, strengthening policy implementation capacities and fostering closer collaboration between academia, public institutions and the private sector.

By addressing country-specific needs while promoting regional exchange, POLICY ANSWERS has supported a more structured and implementation-oriented approach to research and innovation across the region.

Peer learning has been a central component of this approach. A series of thematic webinars and exchange activities enabled participants to share experiences, discuss challenges and identify practical solutions across different contexts.

These activities have supported the circulation of knowledge within the region and contributed to strengthening networks among institutions, policymakers and practitioners.

Overall, these activities have contributed to strengthening implementation capacities and supporting a more active participation of the Western Balkans in European research and innovation processes.



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Updated Capacity Building Programme 2024/2025

ALBANIA

1. Training programme at universities to prepare and implement Gender Equality Plans
2. Support participation in Horizon Europe
3. Support to promote EU funding for companies
4. Supporting WB Agenda requirements on S3 implementation
5. Promotion of innovation opportunities related to the blue economy
6. Roadmap to improve Albania's ranking in the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS)

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. Support for preparation of Horizon Europe partnerships and proposals
2. Capacity building in research management and administration
3. Capacity building in monitoring and evaluation
4. Building and strengthening the academia-industry linkages
5. Assistance in (co)creating policy documents
6. Support to Open Science

MONTENEGRO

1. Training for preparation of applications for Horizon Europe projects
2. Training for implementing Horizon Europe projects
3. Training for implementation of the circular economy principles
4. Training to support the development of sustainable agriculture and the food value chain
5. Inno-Bootcamp (Fast-Track Pre-Acceleration Program) "Transforming Research into Market-Ready Solutions and Scaling Startups"

KOSOVO

1. Training of researchers for preparation of applications and implementing projects in Horizon Europe
2. Technical Assistance for the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation & the National Research Council through providing inputs for the National Research Programme and increasing funding sources for R&I
3. Support in advancing curricula with thematic priority areas at university level
4. Support of increasing cooperation between the private sector and institutions in the field of research and innovation
5. Organisation of workshop and provision of methodology guidelines for project identification and preparation in light of the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans
6. Creation of a Coordination Forum of Quadruple Helix to create synergies amongst key actors
7. Technical assistance on the implementation of the WB Green Agenda
8. Monitoring of the implementation of the Digital Agenda
9. Technical Assistance for the Ministry of Health

NORTH MACEDONIA

1. Policy design, coordination, monitoring and evaluation (Research, Development and Innovation (RDI), education and culture specific)
 - a. Setting the stage: policy design
 - b. Institutions in practice: coordination & collaboration
 - c. Performance management: monitoring & evaluation
2. Strengthening capacities of the business sector for digital skills and innovations
3. Promoting peer learning & exchange of best practices for Technology Transfer (TT), innovation and twin transition
4. Supporting implementation of S3 Action Plan

SERBIA

1. Strengthening the capacity of the business sector for digital skills
2. Green transformation: new skills required to master the green transition
3. Green transition (advanced level)
4. Training sessions on Programme evaluation: evaluation practices in policies and programmes

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Achievements across the Western Balkans – Albania

Target group	Achievements
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Gender Equality Plans developed in universities.
SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical assistance provided to 22 SMEs, improving access to EU funding and strengthening project implementation skills.
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a roadmap to improve EIS position of Albania, thus strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem in the country.
Other/diverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 500 participants expanded their knowledge on European funding opportunities through Horizon Europe and other programmes promotion through conferences and training. 15 participants equipped with knowledge on innovation in the blue economy.



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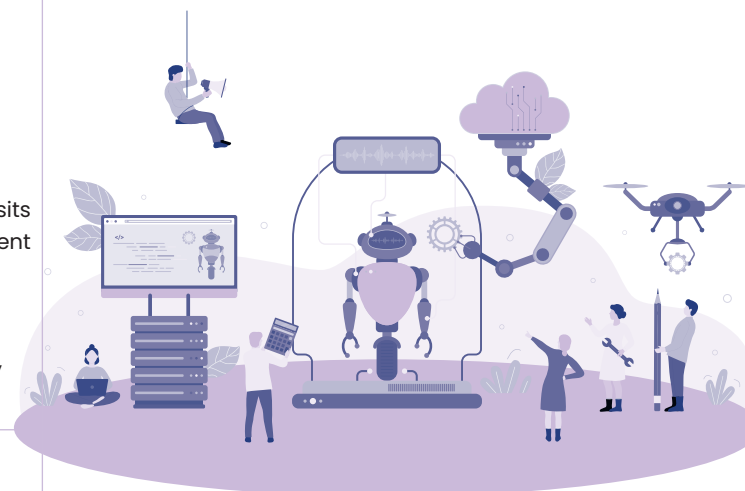


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Achievements across the Western Balkans – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Target group	Achievements
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 150+ researchers were trained in preparing Horizon Europe project proposals, contributing to an increased number of applications from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2024 compared to 2022. A Project Management Office for EU-funded projects was established at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka (UNIBL), strengthening institutional capacities for international project participation and management. The University of Sarajevo (UNSA) organised two international study visits for academic staff, enhancing their knowledge in research management and administration and expanding international partnerships. 100+ researchers trained at UNSA and UNBL in Open Science and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Improved digital literacy and use of Open Science principles for library services at UNIBL.
SMEs-Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SME and academia representatives were trained in IPR, increasing expertise and promoting stronger industry-academia collaboration (UNSA and UNIBL).
Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity of policymakers in BiH in monitoring and evaluation of research projects, as well as research administration and management, was strengthened through targeted workshops and study visits abroad. UNSA assisted policymakers in drafting eight strategic and legislative documents advancing science, R&D and education policies.



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Achievements across the Western Balkans – Kosovo

Target group	Achievements
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 researchers strengthened their skills in preparing and implementing Horizon Europe projects, resulting in the development of 10 project proposals.
 Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 reports and policy briefs addressing Digital Transformation, R&I ecosystem, Health and the Green Agenda were produced, raising awareness and engaging approximately 400 participants across related events. Public officials were trained on project identification and preparation under the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF).
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 200 stakeholders participated in activities promoting the Western Balkans Green Agenda through policy briefs and video production (Green Talks) within the Green Action Space established by RIINVEST. 50 participants from diverse stakeholder groups took part in the Green School, enhancing knowledge and engagement on green transition topics. The concept and operational model for a Quadruple Helix Forum was developed, including coordination mechanisms supporting the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3).



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Achievements across the Western Balkans – Montenegro

Target group	Achievements
SMEs-academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advanced training for preparing and submitting Horizon Europe project proposals (1 on-site and 7 online sessions) for SMEs and academia was delivered, resulting in the submission of 11 Horizon Europe project proposals and strengthened participation in EU R&I programmes.
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65 representatives from academia, industry, public and civil society received certificates after completing the trainings for preparation of applications for Horizon Europe projects and the advanced training for preparing and submitting Horizon Europe project proposals. 47 participants representing diverse stakeholders (academia, public, civil and private sectors) received certification after successfully completing trainings for implementing Horizon Europe projects. 65 participants representing diverse stakeholders (academia, public, civil and private sectors) received certification after successfully completing trainings on the implementation of circular economy principles. 28 participants, including rural producers and farmers, aspiring agripreneurs and ICT innovators, were certified after completing training to support sustainable agriculture and the food value chain. 22 participants, including university researchers, decision-makers and business representatives, were certified after completing Inno-Bootcamp, a Fast-Track Pre-Acceleration Programme, on the topic "Transforming Research into Market-Ready Solutions and Scaling Startups".



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Achievements across the Western Balkans – North Macedonia

Target group	Achievements
Polymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100+ policymakers strengthened their skills through capacity-building activities, including EU study visits, WB Agenda info sessions and trainings on policy design, coordination and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL).
SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43 SMEs were supported through digital transformation workshops, identifying digitalisation opportunities and exchanging good practices. 25 SMEs were upskilled in innovation management strengthening innovation capacities and organisational development. 25 SMEs were supported in strengthening their growth through technology, innovation and smart financing.
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 103 stakeholders participated in a TED Talks conference, raising awareness and dialogue on Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven innovation and future technology trends. 72 stakeholders from the fields of innovation and technology, young entrepreneurs and representatives of the research and business sectors collectively exchanged ideas on the future of technology and the role of AI in society. 150+ participants were engaged in the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP), strengthening coordination within S3 Action Plan implementation.



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Achievements across the Western Balkans – Serbia

Target group	Achievements
SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 250+ SMEs were trained in twin transition through series of 12 training sessions across Serbia.
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50+ representatives of diverse sectors enhanced their monitoring and evaluation capacities, supporting evidence-based policy making.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong synergies were established with key projects and stakeholders, including the Enterprise Europe Network, Regional Chambers of Commerce in Vojvodina, Niš, Kruševac and Valjevo, as well as the Science and Technology Park in Čačak. A notable awareness-raising campaign on capacity-building activities was implemented, featuring the broadcast of participant video testimonials across local TV networks and the dissemination of an integrated promotional video, extending outreach beyond the training activities.



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Peer Learning Webinars



Peer Learning Webinar 1

Strengthening SMEs for the Twin Transition through Capacity Building Activities

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Peer Learning Webinar 2

Open Science & IPR

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Peer Learning Webinar 3

Preparing Applications for Horizon Europe Projects

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Peer Learning Webinar 4

Capacity Building on Green / Circular Economy Principles

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Peer Learning Webinar 5

Gender Equality Plan (GEP) Development

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Peer Learning Webinar 6

Peer Learning Webinar: Training on Policy Design, Coordination and Monitoring and Evaluation

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Key insights from capacity building on sustainability

Capacity building activities within POLICY ANSWERS have demonstrated that long-term impact depends on the ability to embed results within institutional structures, strategies and practices. Across the Western Balkans, sustainability has been supported through the integration of capacity building outcomes into national policies, university programmes and organisational routines, ensuring continuity beyond the duration of the project.

The combination of institutional ownership and diversified funding approaches, including national resources, project-based funding and participation in European programmes, has emerged as a key factor for sustaining results over time.

Continued collaboration among stakeholders, including ministries, research institutions and innovation actors, has further strengthened the conditions for maintaining and scaling capacity building activities.

The reuse and adaptation of training materials, tools and methodologies has enabled the transfer of knowledge across contexts, supporting replication and wider uptake within the region.

Overall, these experiences highlight the importance of linking capacity building to implementation processes, institutional frameworks and long-term cooperation mechanisms.





Capacity Building and Support

Impact

Shaping Policies

Improved institutional capacities in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation across WB economies.

Improving Practices

Established scalable training models and peer-learning mechanisms adaptable beyond the project.

Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Strengthened skills across quadruple helix actors, enabling more effective participation in EU programmes.





Aligning Priorities



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Aligning priorities through policy dialogue and evidence

POLICY ANSWERS has supported the alignment of Western Balkans priorities with key European Union policy frameworks, focusing on three thematic areas: Digital Transformation, Green Transition and Healthy Societies.

By combining analytical work, policy dialogue and stakeholder engagement, the project has contributed to strengthening coherence between national priorities and European initiatives, including European Partnerships, EU Missions and Smart Specialisation Strategies.

A central element of this approach has been the creation of structured spaces for dialogue. The POLICY ANSWERS conference in Sarajevo brought together policymakers, experts and stakeholders from across the region and the European Union, supporting exchange, coordination and the identification of shared priorities.

This process has been further reinforced through the EU–Western Balkans Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform, which has enabled continuous interaction, knowledge sharing and collaboration across institutions and thematic areas.

In parallel, a series of webinars and exchange activities have supported ongoing engagement, contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and the strengthening of policy dialogue across the region.

Building on these processes, POLICY ANSWERS developed policy reports and policy briefs addressing key challenges, opportunities and transformation pathways in the three thematic areas, providing evidence-based and actionable recommendations for policy makers.



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The POLICY ANSWERS conference in Sarajevo involved **140** participants from **19** European economies, including policy makers, European Partnerships and institutional actors.

The EU–Western Balkans Policy Dialogue Platform brought together over **270** registered stakeholders from **26** economies, supporting continuous exchange and collaboration.

A series of **17** webinars involving **26** expert speakers engaged more than **370** participants and generated over **1000** views, contributing to sustained policy dialogue and knowledge sharing.

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Digital Transformation in the Western Balkans

The Policy Report looked at empowering the region's digital future through strategic insights, policy action and regional collaboration. The Policy Brief presented an executive summary of the Policy Report.

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Green Transition in the Western Balkans

The Policy Report addressed sustainable change with actionable policies for a greener and more resilient WB region. The Policy Brief presented an executive summary of the Policy Report.

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Health Policy Considerations in the Western Balkans

The Policy Report focused on key health issues in the region, addressing challenges and outlining opportunities in the transition towards more effective, equitable and sustainable policies. The Policy Brief presented an executive summary of the Policy Report.

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POLICY ANSWERS Conference (Sarajevo 2023)

On 13 September 2023, a conference was organised by POLICY ANSWERS in Sarajevo to stimulate policy dialogue on aligning priorities in the WB.

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The EU-WB Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform

The Platform, launched in Sarajevo in September 2023, included over 270 profiles, with monthly webinars actively supporting policy exchange.

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EU-WB Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform

Digital • Green • Health •



WESTERN
BALKANS
Info Hub



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Webinars

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Webinar 1

Overview of the Western Balkans' Digital Agenda Implementation: Challenges, Best Practices and Recommendations

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Webinar 2

Modern Health Policy in the Western Balkans

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Webinar 3

The Western Balkans on their Pathway to implement the Green Agenda

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Webinar 4

Mission-oriented Innovation: Status and Future Opportunities for the Western Balkans

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Webinar 5

Innovating the Food System: Status and Future Opportunities of European Partnerships for the Western Balkans (EIT FOOD)

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Webinar 6

Challenges and Opportunities for the mission-oriented Implementation of Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Cities

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Webinar 7

Adding Value to the Biomass in Eastern Europe and Western Balkans

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Webinar 8

Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda on Raw Material

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Webinar 9

Water4All Partnership: Opportunities for the Western Balkans

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Webinar 10

Smart Specialisation in EU Enlargement Countries

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Webinar 11

How to become active in EU Partnerships: The approach of Türkiye

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Webinar 12

The Role of HPC and e-Infrastructures in Montenegro's Development

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Webinar 13

PRIMA and the Western Balkans – Advancing Sustainable Innovation

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Key insights from aligning priorities

Policy alignment is most effective when supported by continuous dialogue, shared platforms and active stakeholder engagement.

The combination of events, digital tools and analytical outputs has enabled a more structured interaction between Western Balkans economies and European institutions.

The development of thematic roadmaps and policy recommendations has provided a common reference framework, supporting convergence across key priority areas.

Sustained engagement through platforms and webinars has demonstrated the importance of continuity in policy dialogue, beyond single events.

Overall, the experience shows that alignment is not a one-off exercise, but an ongoing process requiring coordination, evidence and long-term collaboration





Aligning Priorities

Impact

Shaping Policies

Contributed to shaping policy priorities and strategic roadmaps in Digital Transformation, Green Transition and Healthy Societies.

Improving Practices

Created structured interaction between WB stakeholders and European Partnerships and Missions.

Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Facilitated cross-sector dialogue and concrete collaboration opportunities, including bilateral engagements.





Regional Pilot Activities



The Pilot Programmes of POLICY ANSWERS implemented practical solutions to strengthen the R&I landscape across the Western Balkans. By bringing together academia, industry and civil society, these regional activities created a collaborative model that supports long-term success at the programme level.

- The **Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers** provided financial incentives to facilitate partnerships and knowledge exchange between SMEs and research providers, by having cross-border matching as a strict requirement.
- The **Western Balkans Mobility Scheme** provided early-career researchers with valuable capacity-building and regional mobility opportunities, directly supporting young researcher mobility in the Western Balkans.
- The **Western Balkans R&I Youth Awards**, alongside a dedicated Youth Campaign, recognised and celebrated the outstanding contributions of young innovators, empowering the next generation to drive transformative change within the regional R&I landscape.
- The **Regional Promoter Scheme for Research Infrastructures** appointed Research Infrastructure Ambassadors and delivered well attended on-site workshops focused on Technology-Oriented Research Infrastructures to increase the visibility of research infrastructure development and highlight its societal, economic and strategic value.
- The **Western Balkans Regional Innovation Academy** platform was launched to provide diverse, peer-reviewed and high-quality digital content. This dedicated webpage features searchable R&I education resources designed to foster innovation across the regional economies.
- The **Western Balkans Fellowship Programme** prepared local partners for European projects by providing practical, in-person experience at international research and innovation institutions, effectively bridging the gap between theory and practice and allowing professionals to bring first-hand knowledge back to the local economy.



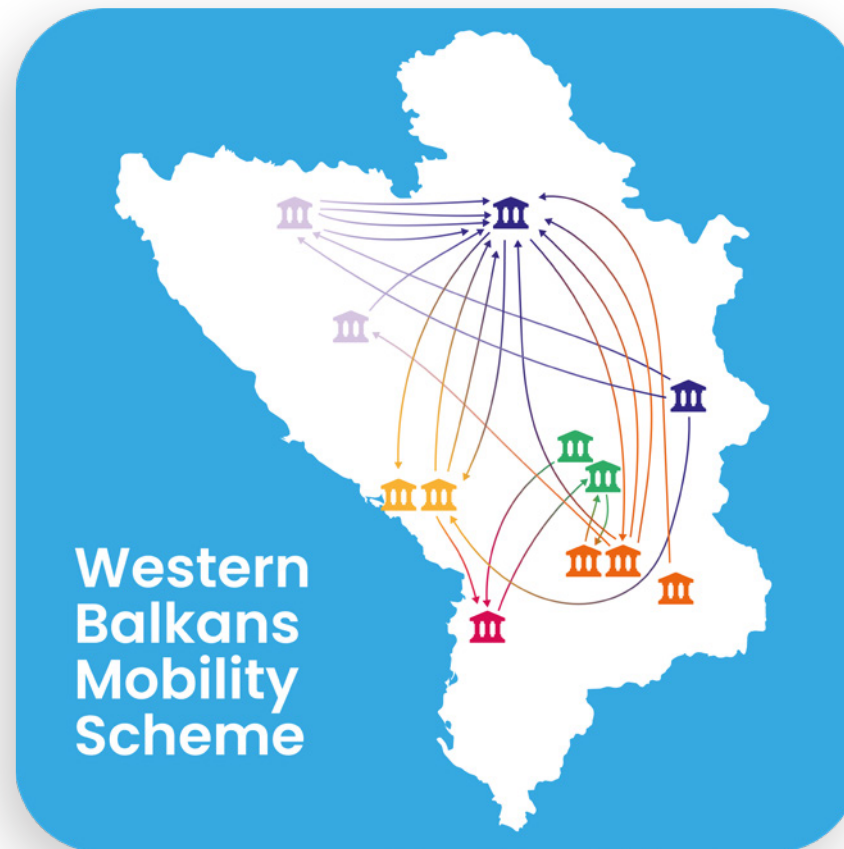


Western Balkans Mobility Scheme

The Western Balkans Mobility Scheme (WBMS) successfully completed 23 projects with a total investment of EUR 92,170, proving that, even with a limited budget, a high-efficiency model can turn brain drain into brain circulation.

The strong response from PhD students and post-docs confirms its value as an efficient tool for enhancing career prospects across the local economies.

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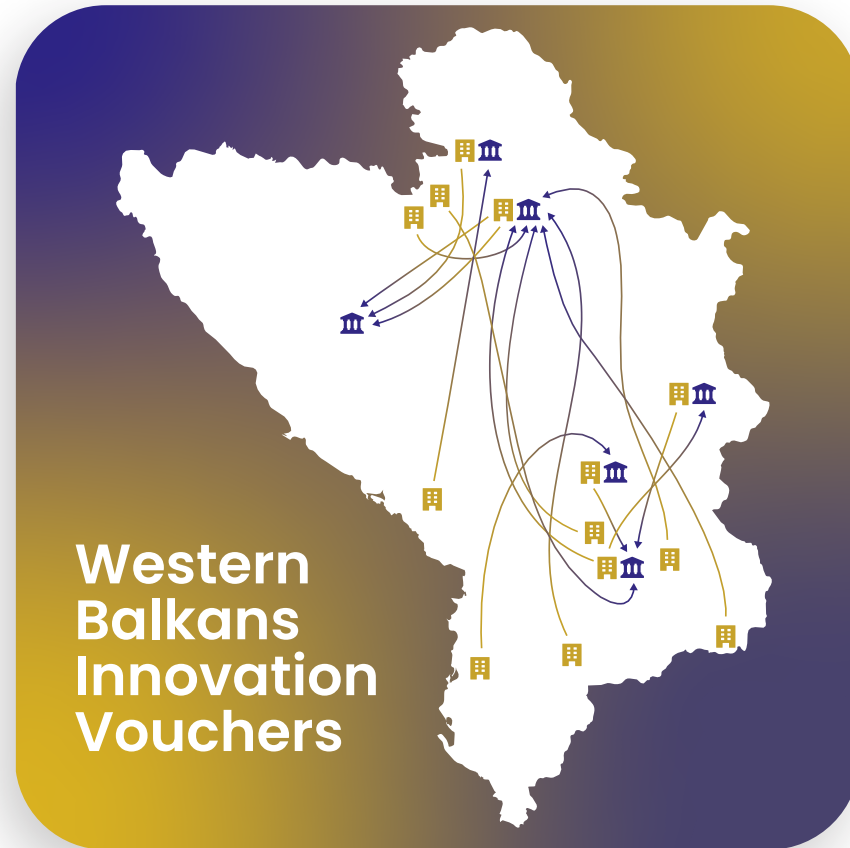




Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers

The scheme achieved cross-regional matching and tangible integration, investing EUR 111,040 across 15 completed projects that advanced by two Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), effectively justifying the EU investment through measurable success, as detailed in the publicly available Policy Brief.

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Western Balkans R&I Youth Awards

The Western Balkans R&I Youth Awards served as the foundation for a high-impact regional campaign, leveraging authentic success stories to boost the visibility of young innovators.

By receiving 65 applications from all six local economies in just two months, the initiative highlighted a robust youth-focused ecosystem.

The resulting campaign utilised six high-quality success stories to promote experiential learning as a vital driver for future-proof skills, effectively investing EUR 18,000 to inspire the next generation across the region.

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POLICY ANSWERS "R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn Balkans", Grant Agreement N° 101058873.

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Regional Promoter Scheme for Research Infrastructures (RI)

The Regional Promoter Scheme launched the RI Ambassadors initiative to increase the visibility of research infrastructure development and highlight its societal, economic and strategic value.

By showcasing excellence through BioSense, SEEIIST and other research infrastructures, the scheme advanced the "fifth freedom" – the free movement of knowledge – across the local economies.

This pilot successfully demonstrated that the region is an integral part of the European research landscape, bringing together more than 120 participants through dedicated regional workshops.

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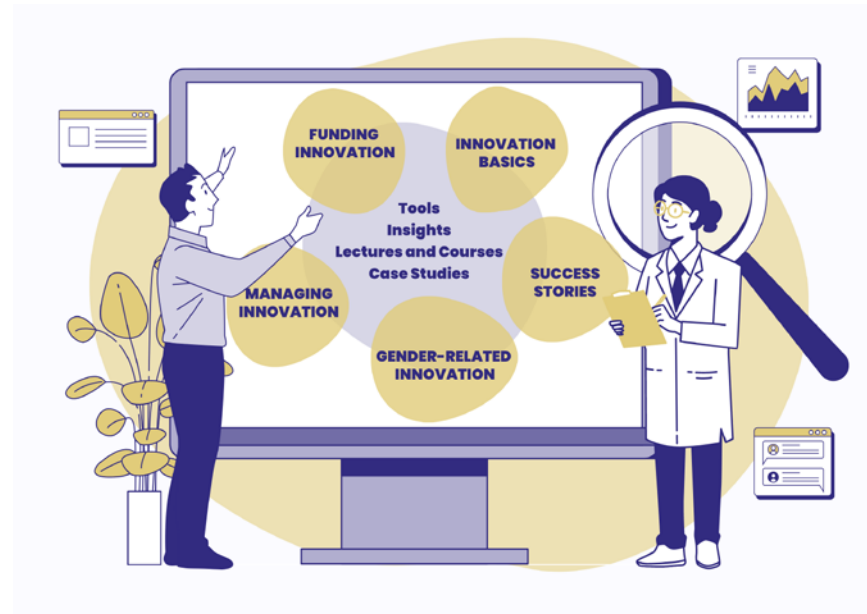




Western Balkans Regional Innovation Academy

The platform provides diverse, peer-reviewed digital content designed to foster innovation across the WB region. By evaluating over 120 sources, the Academy established a curated hub of 28 resources across five key R&I areas, including funding and gender-related innovation. This strategic resource attracted significant regional engagement, generating over 8,500 digital impressions in its initial months of promotion.

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Western Balkans Fellowship Programme

The programme prepared the project partners for future opportunities by providing practical, in-person experience at international research and innovation institutions.

All 16 fellowships were successfully completed, with a notable two-thirds female participation rate, and 16 individual technical reports were published on the Western Balkans Info Hub.

By allowing these professionals to bring first-hand knowledge of European project standards back to the local economy, the initiative effectively bridged the gap between theory and practice.

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Key insights from pilot actions

Pilot activities within POLICY ANSWERS have demonstrated the value of translating policy priorities into concrete actions that engage stakeholders across the research and innovation ecosystem. The combination of financial incentives, mobility schemes and capacity building initiatives has proven effective in fostering collaboration between academia, industry and public institutions. These experiences highlight the importance of flexible and targeted instruments that can be adapted to different contexts while maintaining a regional perspective. The pilots have also shown that practical, small-scale interventions can generate meaningful results, supporting knowledge exchange, strengthening capacities and contributing to the development of innovation ecosystems. Importantly, the approaches tested through these pilots provide models that can be scaled up or replicated within future programmes and policy frameworks.





Regional Pilot Activities

Impact

Shaping Policies

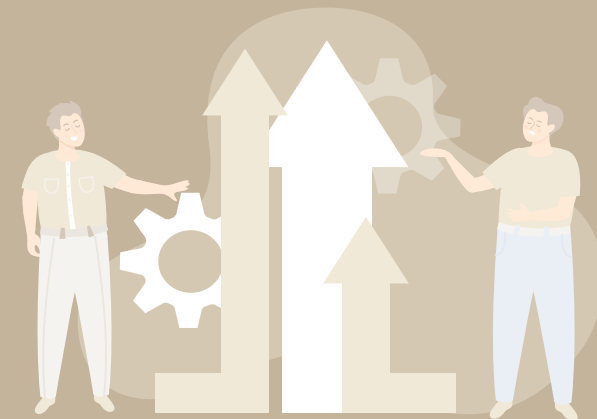
Demonstrated the feasibility of regional support schemes aligned with EU priorities (mobility, innovation, youth engagement).

Improving Practices

Tested and validated replicable instruments (Innovation Vouchers, Mobility Scheme, Youth Awards).

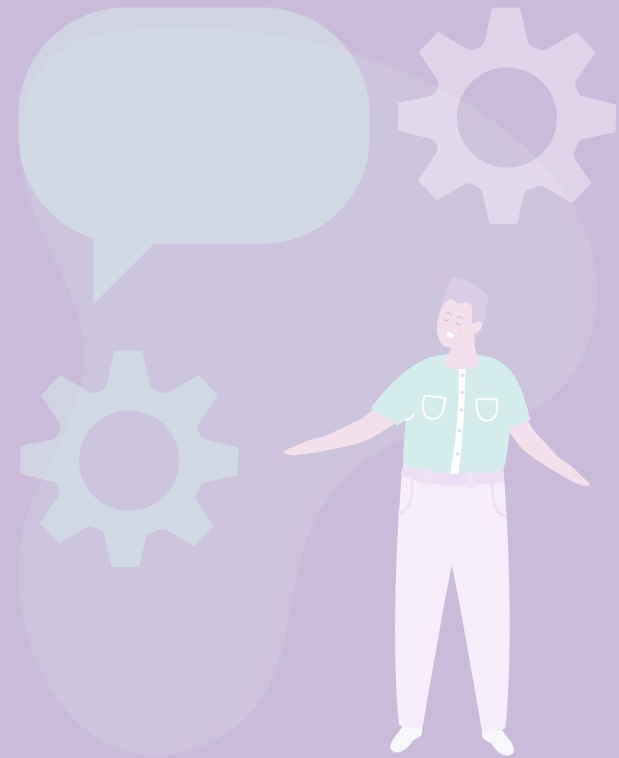
Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Enabled direct collaboration between academia, industry and early-stage researchers across the region.





Western Balkans Info Hub and Communication



Connecting stakeholders and supporting knowledge exchange

Communication and dissemination activities within POLICY ANSWERS have supported engagement across the research and innovation community in the Western Balkans. By providing access to information, facilitating exchange and strengthening connections among stakeholders, these activities have contributed to a more informed and connected ecosystem.

A central element of this approach is represented by the Western Balkans Info Hub, which serves as a platform for sharing updates, resources and opportunities, supporting continuous interaction across the region and with European initiatives.

The communication and dissemination activities have engaged the R&I community and have fostered stakeholder involvement. These efforts focused on raising awareness of Western Balkans R&I processes through tailored information, collaboration with innovation networks and media outreach to enhance the project's visibility and impact.

3,000+ average monthly pageviews of [WB Info Hub](#)

46 [newsletter](#) issues shared with our recipients

8,800+ followers across [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#)

150+ events attended, including workshops and training

To ensure sustainability and continuity, the platform services will be maintained under the follow-up project POLICY ENLARGE and further developed into an Enlargement InfoHub.





Webinars



Webinar 1

A Closer Look at POLICY ANSWERS
Gender Mainstreaming &
Inclusiveness Guidelines

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Webinar 2

POLICY ANSWERS Peer-Learning
Webinar: Inclusive Gender
Equality in R&I and Education

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Webinar 3

Gender Equality peer event:
AI in the 21st Century—Breaking
Stereotypes or Reinforcing
Inequalities?

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Communication, Dissemination & Info Hub

Impact

Shaping Policies

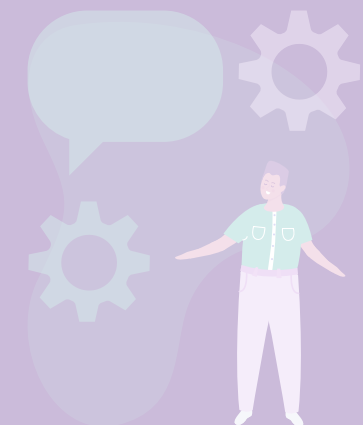
Increased visibility and accessibility of policy developments in research and innovation and opportunities for Western Balkans stakeholders.

Improving Practices

Western Balkans Info Hub serving as a central hub for trusted information.

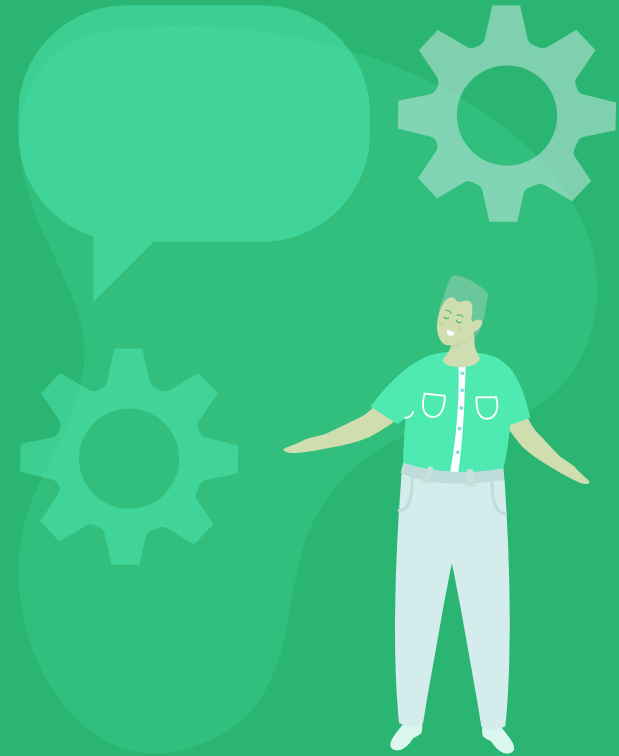
Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Broad community mobilized and connected through ongoing communication, engaging content, and interactive tools.





Project Management



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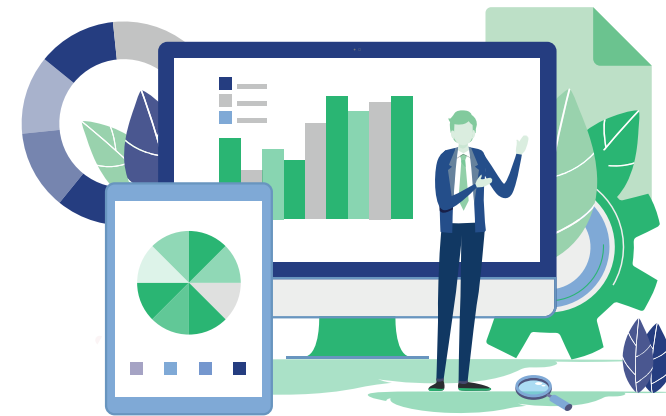
Coordinating partnerships and ensuring continuity

POLICY ANSWERS has been implemented through a coordinated partnership bringing together institutions, research organisations, public bodies and innovation actors from across the Western Balkans and the European Union.

This collaboration has enabled the alignment of perspectives, priorities and expertise, supporting the implementation of activities across multiple thematic areas and policy levels. Project management ensured effective administrative, financial and technical coordination within the consortium and with the European Commission, enabling the delivery of activities and the achievement of project objectives.

The coordination approach also supported policy dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the Western Balkans, contributing to stronger connections between regional and European research and innovation systems.

For sustainability and continuation, the project's activities and services will be maintained and further developed by the POLICY ENLARGE follow-up project, ensuring long-term impact and continued support for research and innovation in the Western Balkans.



Project impact and legacy: from project results to lasting transformation

POLICY ANSWERS has gone beyond the implementation of activities by contributing to a structural shift in how cooperation on research and innovation is organised between the European Union (EU) and the Western Balkans.

Rather than operating as a set of isolated interventions, the project has helped consolidate a more coherent, connected and forward-looking ecosystem – where policy dialogue, evidence, capacities and collaboration are increasingly aligned.

Strengthening policy coherence and strategic alignment

A key contribution of POLICY ANSWERS has been the reinforcement of a more structured and continuous policy dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans.

By supporting high-level exchanges and facilitating interactions across governance levels, the project has contributed to:

- greater alignment of regional priorities with EU strategic agendas;
- increased continuity in policy discussions beyond single events;
- stronger positioning of Western Balkans actors within European frameworks.

This marks a shift from fragmented and occasional exchanges towards a more stable and strategic policy coordination environment.

Building lasting structures for cooperation

Beyond individual outputs, the project has established enabling structures that will continue to support cooperation over time.

These include:

- a centralised information and knowledge platform;
- structured spaces for stakeholder interaction and exchange;
- a shared analytical basis supporting evidence-informed decision-making.

These structures represent a core element of the project's legacy, ensuring continuity and accessibility beyond its duration.



Enabling participation and strengthening capacities

POLICY ANSWERS has contributed to enhancing the capacity of actors across the Western Balkans to engage more effectively in research and innovation processes at both regional and European level.

This has translated into:

- improved institutional capacities in policy design and implementation;
- increased readiness to access and participate in EU programmes;
- stronger skills and connections across research, policy and practice.

Participation is therefore increasingly supported not only by opportunities, but also by strengthened capabilities.

Fostering a more integrated ecosystem

Through its activities, the project has contributed to reducing fragmentation and strengthening collaboration across the regional research and innovation landscape.

It has enabled:

- stronger connections between Western Balkans and European actors;
- increased interaction across the quadruple helix;
- a more coordinated approach to shared challenges.

This contributes to positioning the Western Balkans as a more connected and active part of the European Research Area.

A shift that continues beyond the project

The most significant legacy of POLICY ANSWERS lies in the conditions it has created for continued evolution.

The tools, networks and practices established during the project provide a foundation for:

- sustained policy dialogue and cooperation;
- continued use and development of shared knowledge resources;
- further participation in EU programmes and initiatives;
- ongoing collaboration across stakeholders and sectors.

Rather than concluding with the end of its activities, POLICY ANSWERS enables a continuation of processes, relationships and capacities.

Final considerations

POLICY ANSWERS shows that the value of a project is not only measured by what it delivers, but, most importantly, by what it enables.

By connecting policy dialogue, analytical capacity, stakeholder engagement and communication, the project has contributed to shaping a more resilient, strategic and interconnected research and innovation ecosystem between the EU and the Western Balkans.

Its legacy lies in the systems it has strengthened, the connections it has activated and the pathways it has opened for future cooperation.



Project Management

Impact

Shaping Policies

Ensured alignment with EC expectations and effective integration of feedback into project outputs.

Improving Practices

Implemented robust governance, Quality Assurance processes and coordination mechanisms across partners.

Strengthening R&I Ecosystems

Enabled efficient collaboration across a complex, international consortium.



Strengthening research and innovation in the Western Balkans

POLICY ANSWERS was a European Commission-funded initiative that supported cooperation, policy alignment and capacity development across the Western Balkans.

Over four years, the project contributed to strengthening research and innovation systems by supporting policy dialogue, evidence-based decision-making, capacity building and pilot actions across the region. By fostering collaboration among institutions, policymakers, researchers and innovation actors, POLICY ANSWERS supported a more connected and implementation-oriented approach to research and innovation. The experience of the project highlights a broader process of integration into the European Research Area, where the Western Balkans are increasingly engaging as active participants in shared priorities and initiatives.

Partners



Get in touch at
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POLICY ANSWERS, "R&I POLICY making, implementation AND Support in the WEsteRn Balkans", was a Horizon Europe project funded by the European Commission, Grant Agreement N° 101058873.

