

R&I POLICY Making, Implementation AND Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS

A project in progress

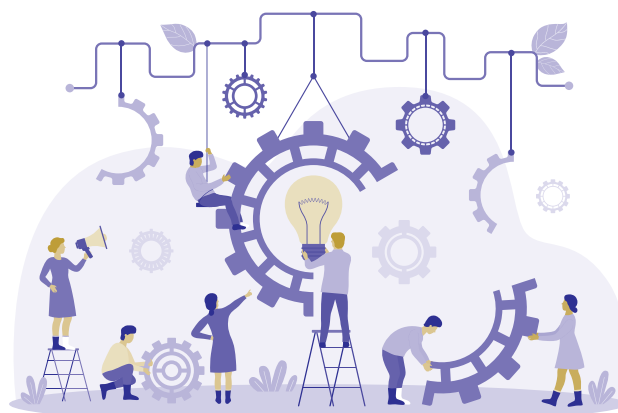
December 2024

Main Achievements by the end of 2024

The **POLICY ANSWERS** project aims at facilitating policy learning through political dialogue, policy analysis, capacity building, thematic coordination, and pilot activities in the Western Balkans (WB) region.

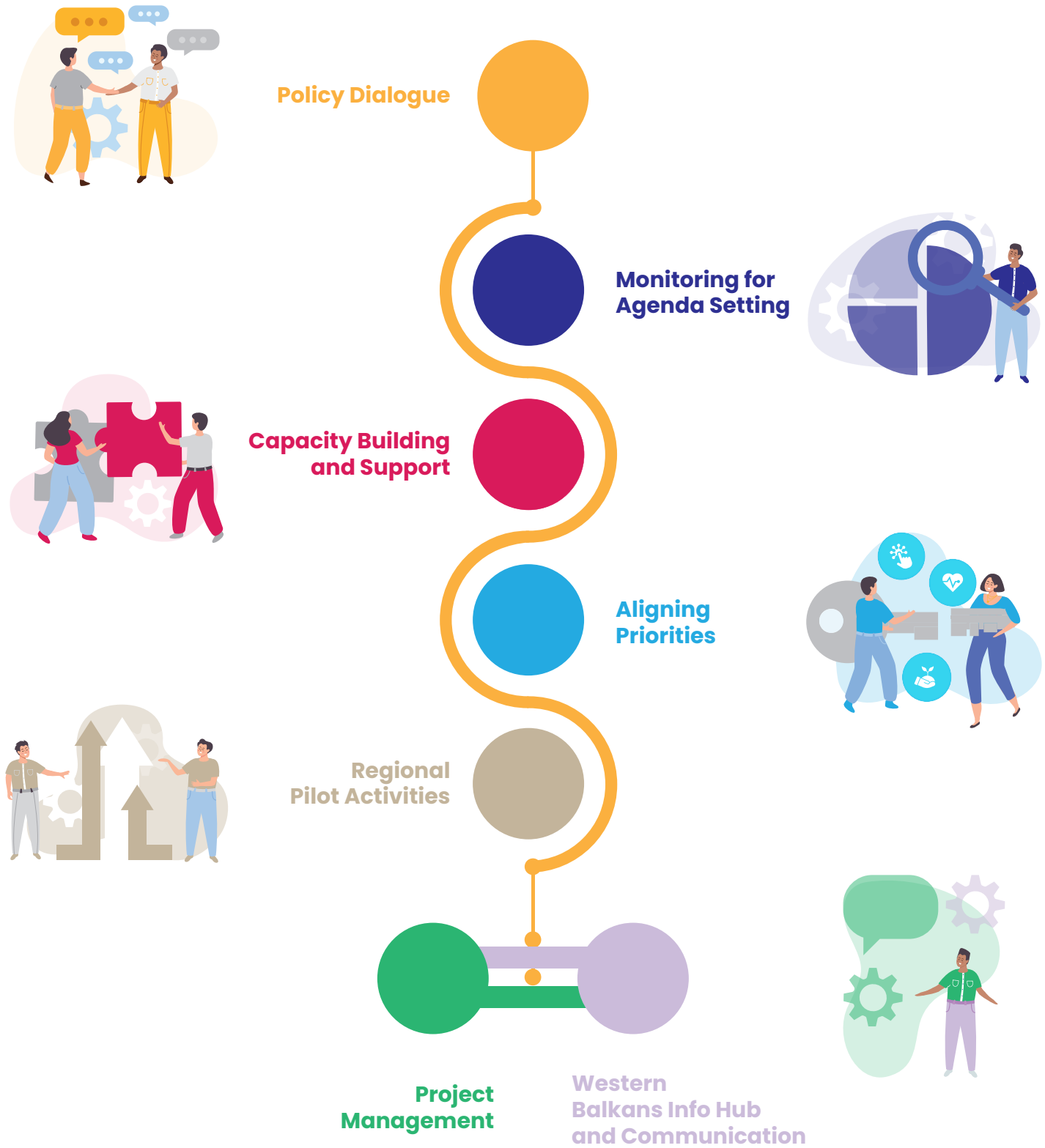
Focusing on research and innovation (R&I) policy and governance systems, the project also addresses related areas in education, culture, youth, and sports as well as priorities such as green, digital and health.

POLICY ANSWERS monitors and promotes policy coordination within the European Union (EU)-WB cooperation, supporting the six WB economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. It works to enhance their potential for successful participation in regional and multilateral activities, fostering cooperation and increasing access to networks, information and excellence in the abovementioned areas.



* 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.

POLICY ANSWERS project structure



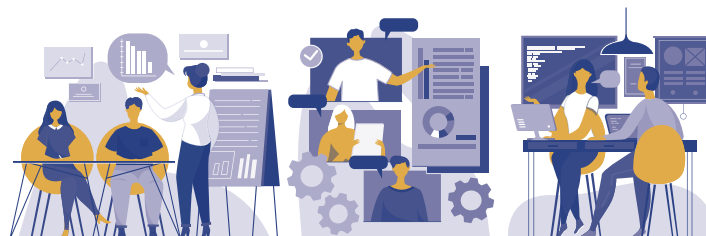
POLICY ANSWERS is a four-year project started in March 2022.



The project activities in a nutshell

Policy Dialogue

POLICY ANSWERS organises policy dialogue events with the main stakeholders of the WB, providing a platform for networking, exchange and learning.



+ 300

Policymakers and stakeholders engaged

2

Ministerial Meetings in Tirana (2022) and Skopje (2024)

9

Steering Platform co-organised meetings: 7 virtual and 2 in person

Monitoring for Agenda Setting

POLICY ANSWERS has been conducting analytical and monitoring activities, including an extensive mapping of relevant institutions, programmes, initiatives, needs, and common priorities in the WB. The activities in this part of the project also decide on tracking the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda, while monitoring and analysing the progress of the WB towards integration into the European Research Area (ERA). The next steps will involve foresight activities in the Western Balkans, followed by the development of policy briefs aimed at providing additional recommendations to policymakers.



Stakeholder Ecosystem Mapping

+ 350

Stakeholders

+ 200

Programmes/Policies

+ 100

Initiatives/Best Practices



- **Monitoring the Implementation of the WB Agenda**

A set of indicators was developed, leading to the creation of Monitoring Cards¹ for six key areas with a first baseline monitoring in 2023. This framework has been further developed for the latest edition of the Monitoring Cards in 2024². The six key areas are: Research and Innovation; Education; Youth, Culture, and Sport; Digital; Environment; Common Regional Market.

- **Monitoring and Analysing the WB ERA Integration**

Two editions of ERA reports have been drafted with the help of experts from the WB in 2023 for all six WB economies and in 2024 for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia. Selected results of these reports were published in the ERA Cards (2023) and an ERA Fact Sheet (2024)³. Further highlights of the activities regarding WB ERA integration were an ERA Workshop⁴ in Skopje in June 2024 on the occasion of the WB Steering Platforms and a POLICY ANSWERS webinar⁵ that dealt with the implementation of ERA in the WB.

- **Strengthening the R&I Community and Promoting Joint R&I Actions**

Foresight exercises at a workshop in Podgorica in June 2023 facilitated a discussion with key experts from the region on anticipatory science advice and foresight. The results were summarised in Foresight Card⁶ to support future actions and served as an input to further discussions back-to-back at the Ministerial meeting in Skopje in September 2024.

- **Policy Input for the Upcoming EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)**

A Policy Brief⁷ was issued, offering input from a Western Balkans perspective and supporting the region's economies in enhancing their participation in the in multinational research and innovation programmes.

Capacity Building and Support

A methodology to carry out the **capacity-building activities was co-designed** with regional stakeholders. The selected actions were categorised into five broad topics:

- Capacity building and technical assistance in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- Support for participation in EU programmes
- Specific support to universities and technology transfer activities
- Specific support to the business sector
- General training sessions for quadruple helix actors in circular economy, blue growth, and health societies

The main results and highlights of the capacity-building activities are explored in detail in the section **"Focus on Capacity Building Work Programme"** (see page 8 below).



Aligning Priorities

POLICY ANSWERS designs policy recommendations for decision-makers in the WB, addressing the EU's key priorities such as digitalisation, green economy, and health.

- **Assessing WB Participation in European Partnerships and Missions**

A Policy Brief provides an "Overview of WB Research and Innovation Performance in EU Programmes and Initiatives"⁸.

- **Designing Policy Recommendations**

This involves examining green and digital transformation as well as healthy societies, identifying challenges, opportunities, and strategies for transformation. Policy reports and Policy briefs on **Digital Transformation**⁹ and **Green Transition**¹⁰ have been published, while a third one on Healthy Societies is forthcoming.

- **Stimulating Policy Dialogue on Priority Alignment**

A POLICY ANSWERS conference was organised in Sarajevo in September 2023:

140 Participants from **19** European economies

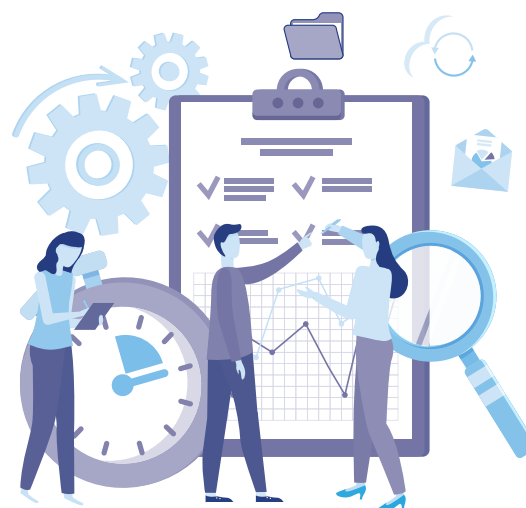
9 European Partnerships

17 Government Representatives from Western Balkans

38 Bilateral meetings

EU-Western Balkans Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform¹¹ was launched

- **Webinars** - Monthly POLICY ANSWERS webinars are hosted on the Western Balkans Info Hub, providing key insights and promoting discussions on policy priorities in the region for the topics of Digital, Green, and Health and participation in the European Partnerships and Missions.



Regional Pilot Activities

The POLICY ANSWERS Pilot Programmes support tangible change and enhance impact across the WB. These regional pilot activities directly engage academia, industry and civil society, fostering new initiatives and success stories at the programme level.



- The **WB Mobility Scheme**¹² provides grants to early-career researchers from WB economies for research stays in other WB economies. With a call budget of EUR 100,000, it will fund 22 projects, selected out of 31 applications submitted to the pilot call.
- The **WB Innovation Vouchers**¹³ are financial incentives designed to facilitate partnerships and knowledge exchange between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and public research institutions across the Western Balkans.
- Under the **Regional Promoter Scheme for Research Infrastructures**, five Research Infrastructure Ambassadors have been appointed for the Western Balkans.
- The **Regional Innovation Academy** platform has been established and is currently in its testing phase.

Western Balkans Info Hub and Communication

The communication and dissemination activities aim to engage the R&I community and foster stakeholder involvement. These efforts focus 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. A key tool for these activities is the WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub (www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu), which serves as a central platform for sharing updates and resources.



+ 3,000 Average monthly number of WB Info Hub platform's visitor

29 Newsletter issues shared with our recipients

+ 8,400 Followers across LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and X

+ 150 Events attended, including workshops and training sessions

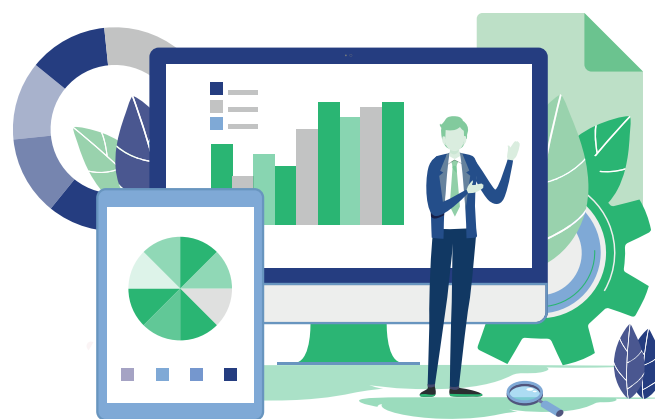
Project Management

The project fosters a strong culture of cooperation, ensuring open communication and exchange among 14 partners from across the region. These partners represent a diverse range of stakeholder types, including funding agencies, universities, public and private research institutes, science and technology parks and SMEs. All activities

are implemented collaboratively by this diverse group, both within and beyond the WB region, working closely with the European Commission (EC), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and other stakeholders engaged through the Project Advisory Board (PAB).

The Western Balkans Info Hub, a key initiative of the project, has been recognised as a flagship under the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, further enhancing its strategic importance.

Project management ensures effective administrative, financial and technical coordination within the partnership and with the EC. This coordination aims to support policy alignment and foster dialogue between the EU and the WB, reinforcing the impact of the project's activities.



Focus on Capacity Building Work Programmes

The capacity building work programmes play a crucial role in POLICY ANSWERS project. They were approved and launched in 2023¹⁴ and regularly revised. Their implementation is ongoing. Activities conducted in the six WB economies include:

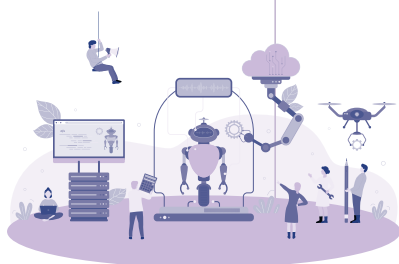
Albania

- Training programme held at ten universities in aim to prepare and implement Gender Equality Plans
- Support to participation in Horizon Europe
- Technical Assistance to promote EU funding for companies and increase the take-up of opportunities
- Supporting WB Agenda requirements on S3 implementation
- Promotion of innovation opportunities related to the blue economy through two training workshops



- Support for preparation of Horizon Europe partnerships and proposals: four workshops supporting participation in Horizon Europe, proposals in Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), applications for other EU funds
- Capacity building in research management and administration: study visits at Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), University of Rijeka (Croatia), R&I institutions (Slovenia); capacity building event related to the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH)
- A series of trainings in research management and administration topics for university staff
- Building and strengthening the academia-industry linkages (two events held), understanding patent life cycle workshop and IPR day promotion
- Assistance in (co)creating policy documents: support to various levels of government in creating policy documents and implementing science programmes

Bosnia and Herzegovina



Kosovo

- Training for 50 researchers for preparation of applications and implementing projects in Horizon Europe
- Technical assistance for the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation and the National Science Council
- Support in advancing curricula with thematic priority areas at university level
- Increasing cooperation between the private sector and institutions in the field of R&I
- Workshop and methodology guidelines for project identification and preparation in light of the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans
- Establishment of a Coordination Forum of Quadruple Helix to create synergies among key actors
- Technical assistance on the implementation of the WB Green Agenda
- Monitoring the implementation of the Digital Agenda
- Technical assistance for the Ministry of Health
- Report on financing issues in R&I aimed at researchers
- Inputs for the National Science Programme in Kosovo



- Two-day conference “Anticipatory Science Advice in the Western Balkans”
- Inputs for the Smart Specialisation Council of the Government of Montenegro
- Two trainings for the preparation of applications for Horizon Europe projects
- Two trainings for the implementation of Horizon Europe projects
- Upcoming trainings: Training for implementation of the Circular Economy Principles and Training to Support the Development of Sustainable Agriculture and the Food Value Chain in Montenegro



Montenegro



North Macedonia

- Info Session + Q&A: Overview of the Western Balkans (WB) Agenda, including its purpose and connections to the green economy and digitalization initiatives
- Training: Developing policy design and coordination skills with a focus on co-creating and harmonizing policies
- Training: Crafting indicators specific to Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI), education, and culture; establishing processes for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL), including tools, mechanisms, green indicators, and budgeting
- Study Visit: Exploring EU institutional practices in policy design, monitoring, and evaluation within RDI, education, and youth sectors



- Eleven capacity-building trainings on Digital Transformation and Green Transition completed, involving more than 200 participants
- Realised synergies with several important projects and stakeholders: Enterprise Europe Network, several Regional Chambers of Commerce in Serbia (Vojvodina region, cities of Niš, Kruševac and Valjevo), Science and Technology Park in Čačak
- Videos with the testimonials of the participants presented at the network of local TVs across Serbia, available at POLICY ANSWERS YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@westernbalkansinfohub1309)
- Training sessions on monitoring and evaluation practices in policies and programmes started in 2024 and to be continued and completed in the first half of 2025



Serbia





Notes

- 1 Monitoring of the WB Agenda 2023
 
- 2 Monitoring of the WB Agenda 2024
 
- 3 ERA Factsheet 2024
 
- 4 ERA workshop in Skopje in June 2024
 
- 5 POLICY ANSWERS webinar Implementation of ERA in the WB
 
- 6 Foresight Card
 
- 7 Policy Brief: The WB on the Road to Framework Programme 10
 
- 8 Policy Report: Overview of the Western Balkans Research and Innovation Performance in EU Programmes and Initiatives
 
- 9 Policy Brief: Digital Transformation
 
- 10 Policy Brief: Green Transition
 
- 11 EU-WB Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform
 
- 12 WB Mobility Scheme
 
- 13 WB Innovation Voucher
 
- 14 Capacity Building work programme
 



Strengthening Research and Innovation in the Western Balkans: The POLICY ANSWERS project

POLICY ANSWERS is a strategic initiative funded by the European Commission through the Horizon Europe project "R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn Balkans". The project focuses on enhancing research and innovation (R&I) policymaking and governance systems in the Western Balkans, while also addressing aspects of education, culture, youth, and sports. By providing essential support to the region's development, POLICY ANSWERS plays a crucial role in strengthening the Western Balkans' potential for successful participation in regional and multilateral research and innovation activities.

Partners



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