

# Shaping the Future Together

## Selected insights from the POLICY ANSWERS project

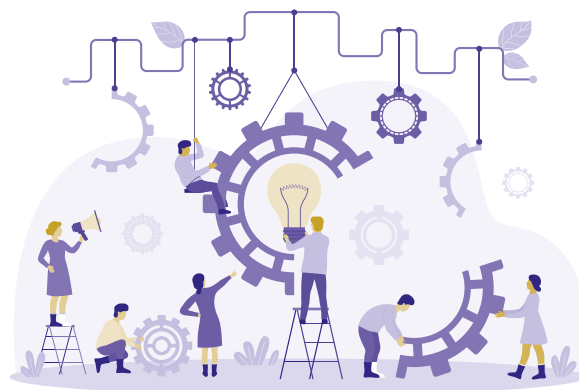
### Celebrating Achievements up to September 2025

The POLICY ANSWERS project aims at facilitating policy learning through policy 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 sport as well as priorities such as Green Transition, Digital Transformation and Health.

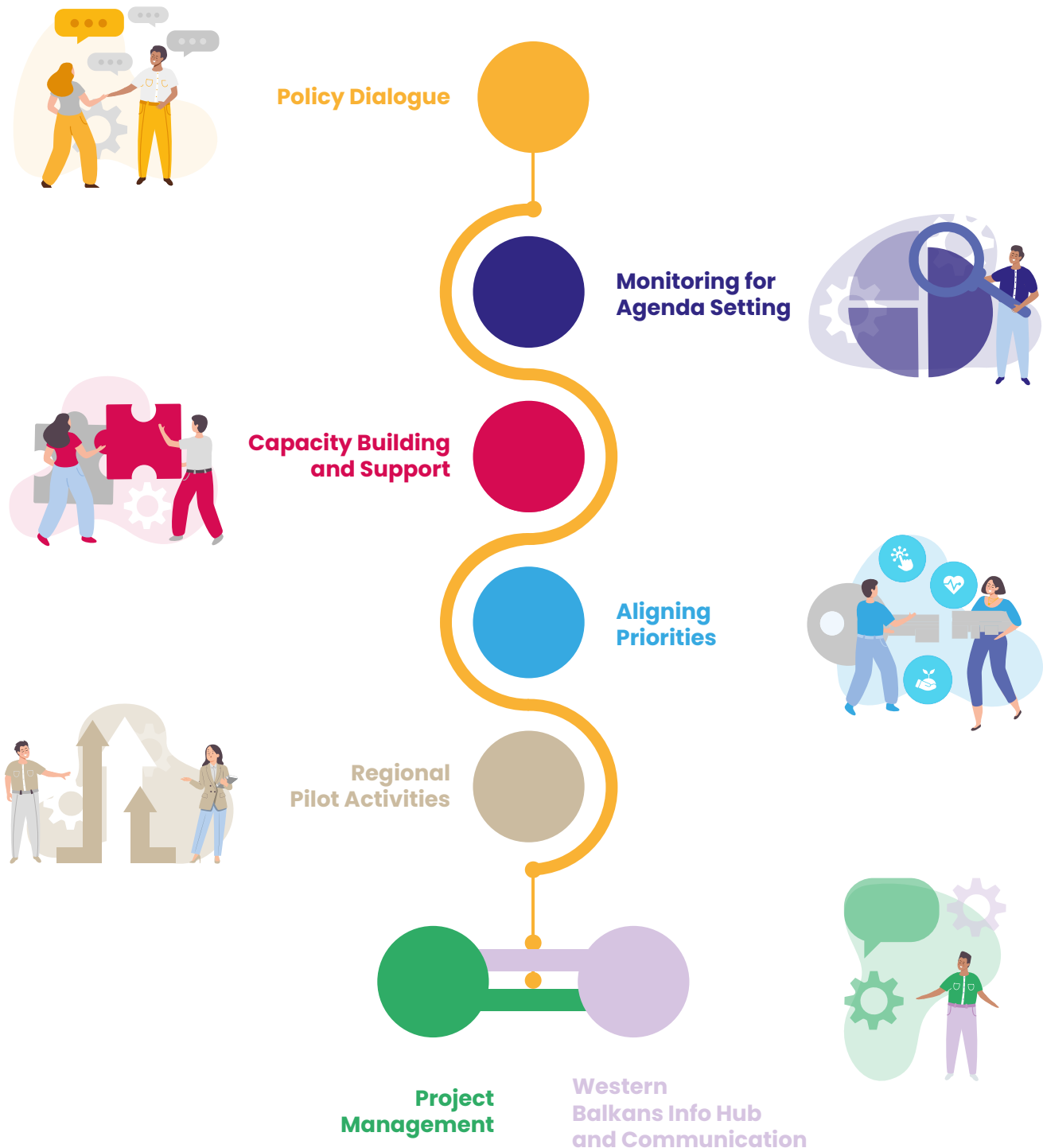
POLICY ANSWERS monitors and promotes policy coordination within the European Union (EU)-WB cooperation, supporting the six WB economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. It works to enhance their potential for successful participation in regional and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

Presented here are key insights drawn from the project's e-book "Shaping the Future Together". The complete version of the e-book, with links to all reports and tools mentioned here, can be accessed by scanning the QR code on the side.



\* 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



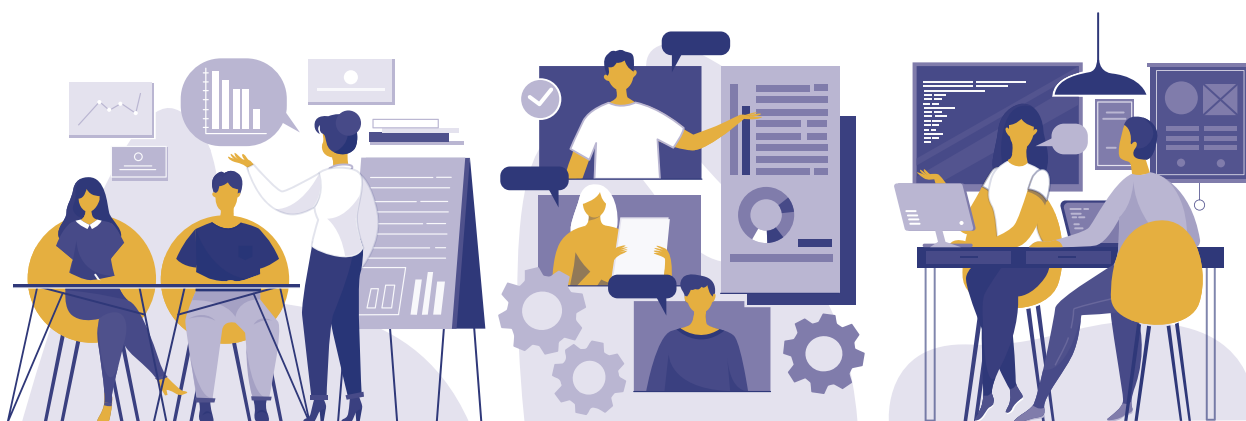
POLICY ANSWERS (R&I POLICY making, implementation AND Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS) is a four-year project running from March 2022 to April 2026. The project is structured into seven Work Packages (WPs). This brochure highlights the key achievements of each WP as of September 2025.



## Policy Dialogue



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



**400+** Policymakers and stakeholders engaged

**3** Ministerial Meetings: Tirana (2022), Skopje (2024) and planned Podgorica (2025)

**14** Steering Platforms co-organised meetings: 11 online and 3 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 best practices in the WB. The activities in this part of the project monitor the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda, while also analysing the progress of the WB towards integration into the European Research Area (ERA). Besides foresight activities in the WB, the project developed Policy Briefs aimed at providing recommendations to policymakers.



## Stakeholder Ecosystem Mapping

# 490+

Stakeholders

# 370+

Programmes/Policies

# 380+

Initiatives/Best Practices

- Monitoring the Implementation of the WB Agenda**  
 Three editions of Monitoring Cards have been released, encompassing six key areas: Research and Innovation; Education & Skills; Youth, Culture and Sports; Digital Competitiveness; Environment; Common Regional Market.
- Monitoring and Analysing the WB ERA Integration**  
 Two editions of ERA reports have been published and their results summarised in ERA Cards (2023, 2025) and an ERA Fact Sheet (2024). The WB monitoring of the ERA Integration was also discussed during an ERA Workshop in Skopje (June 2024, on the occasion of the WB Steering Platform meeting) and a POLICY ANSWERS webinar.
- Foresight Recommendations for the future of R&I in the Western Balkans**  
 Key recommendations for strengthening R&I in the WB through anticipatory policy approaches were developed during expert consultations held in Podgorica in 2023. Additionally, a foresight session was organised back-to-back with the Ministerial Meeting in Skopje in 2024.
- Policy Input for the Upcoming EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)**  
 A Policy Brief "The Western Balkans on the Road to FP10" was issued in 2024, offering input from a Western Balkans perspective on the upcoming European R&I Framework Programme.



## Capacity Building and Support



A methodology to carry out the capacity building activities was co-designed with regional stakeholders.

**35+**

**capacity building activities are being implemented across the six WB economies.**



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 healthy societies

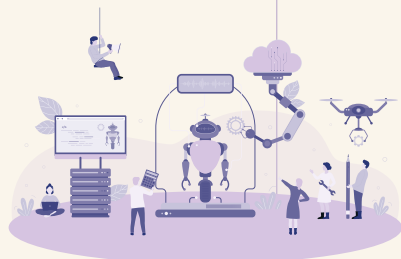
From April 2025, the project launched a peer-learning webinar series for partners to exchange successful practices in areas such as capacity building on Open Science, Gender Equality, Digital and Green Transition, policy design, monitoring and evaluation and preparation of Horizon Europe projects. A sustainability plan for Capacity Building Programmes is also to be completed for each WB economy.

## Focus on Capacity Building Work Programmes

The Capacity Building WP is a key part of the POLICY ANSWERS project. It focuses on tailored work programmes for each economy designed to build capacities for the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda. These programmes were launched in 2023 and are regularly reviewed, updated and implementation is ongoing. Below, a summary of the main activities and progress made so far in each of the six WB economies is provided.

### Albania

- Ten Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) developed in universities through dedicated training programmes
- 30 Horizon Europe capacity building events organised, engaging nearly 500 participants
- Technical assistance provided to 22 companies to boost access to EU funding and strengthen project implementation skills
- Two training workshops on promoting innovation in the blue economy carried out
- Research infrastructure mapping currently underway



- A series of trainings on proposal writing and partnerships and four workshops carried out, supporting participation in Horizon Europe and other EU funds
- Project management office established at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka, supported by five online modules and a study visit
- Capacity-building activities promoting monitoring, evaluation and academia–industry collaboration carried out
- Seven policy documents drafted to support government and implementation of science and innovation programmes
- Open Science promoted during a two-day event with 40+ participants
- The development of library services is underway

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Kosovo

- Training delivered to 50+ researchers on preparing and implementing Horizon Europe projects
- Technical assistance provided to various authorities
- Workshops and methodology guidelines developed for project identification and preparation under the EU Economic and Investment Plan
- Quadruple Helix Coordination Forum established to foster collaboration among academia, industry, administration and civil society
- 10+ reports and Policy Briefs produced to support Digital Transformation, Health and Green Agenda initiatives





- Three training sessions on preparing Horizon Europe applications and two sessions on project implementation completed
- An advanced training session on Horizon Europe applications currently underway
- A two-part training programme on circular economy principles completed and four thematic workshops ongoing
- Training on sustainable agriculture and the food value chain delivered across regions carried out

Montenegro

North Macedonia

- Activities in policy design, coordination, monitoring and evaluation included study visits and wide stakeholder dissemination
- Capacity-building delivered for the business sector in digital skills and innovation
- Peer learning and best practice exchange on technology transfer and the twin transition promoted through the TwinTech Connect 2025 conference and TwinTech Talk 2025
- Capacity building provided to INOVA (FITD's successor) on financial instruments
- Experts appointed to strengthen the research and innovation ecosystem and facilitate implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3-MK) 2024–2027



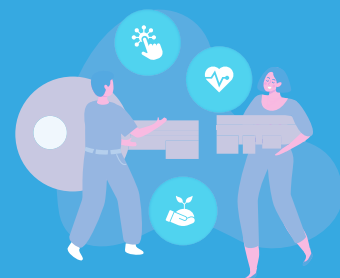
- 12 capacity building trainings on Digital Transformation and the Green Transition completed, engaging 250+ participants
- Strong synergies fostered with key projects and stakeholders: Enterprise Europe Network, Regional Chambers of Commerce (Vojvodina, Niš, Kruševac, Valjevo), and the Science and Technology Park in Čačak
- Participant testimonial videos broadcast on local TV networks and shared on the Western Balkans Info Hub YouTube channel
- Five training sessions on monitoring and evaluation in policies and programmes completed with 50+ participants

Serbia





# Aligning Priorities



The POLICY ANSWERS project designs policy recommendations for decision-makers in the WB, focusing on Research & Innovation, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, while addressing EU's key priorities such as Digital Transformation, Green Transition 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".

- **Designing Policy Recommendations**

This task involves examining Green Transition and Digital Transformation as well as Healthy Societies, identifying challenges, opportunities and strategies for transformation. Policy reports and briefs on Digital Transformation, Green Transition as well as Health Policy Considerations are now published and available.

- **Stimulating Policy Dialogue on Priority Alignment**

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

**140** participants from **19** European economies

During the Conference, the EU-Western Balkans Policy Dialogue Stakeholder Platform was launched:

**250+** registered stakeholders, including **10** European Partnerships

- **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 Transformation, Green Transition and Healthy Societies and participation in European Partnerships and missions featuring:

**250+** participants and **800+** views





## 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 Western Balkans Mobility Scheme**, which is now in its user-reporting stage, provided early-career researchers from across the region with valuable capacity-building and regional mobility opportunities.
- **The Western Balkans Innovation Vouchers** are in the implementation stage, providing financial incentives designed to facilitate partnerships and knowledge exchange between SMEs and public research institutions across the Western Balkans.
- **The Western Balkans R&I Youth Awards**, which is in its Youth Campaign stage, provided prizes and visibility opportunities for outstanding youth-focused success stories in research and innovation across the region.
- **The Regional Promoter Scheme for Research Infrastructures**, which is in its pre-final stage, has appointed Research Infrastructure Ambassadors for the Western Balkans based on a thematic grouping approach, and organised on-site workshops dedicated to Research Infrastructures and Technology-Oriented Research Infrastructures, which were greatly attended.
- **The Western Balkans Regional Innovation Academy platform**, which is in its final stage, has been established, with a dedicated web page, categorising peer-reviewed regional R&I education material with a search option.



## 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, which serves as a central platform for sharing updates and resources.



**5,900+** average monthly page views on WB Info Hub platform

**39** newsletter issues shared with our recipients

**5,500+** followers across LinkedIn and YouTube

**250+** events convened and attended, from workshops to training sessions



# Project Management



The POLICY ANSWERS 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. The coordination aims to support policy alignment and foster dialogue between the EU and the WB, reinforcing the impact of the project's activities.



## 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



Get in touch at  
[www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu](http://www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu)

and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#)

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