

POLICY ANSWERS

**“R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd
Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS”**



POLICY ANSWERS, “R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS”, is a Horizon Europe project funded by the European Commission, Grant Agreement N° 101058873.

The POLICY ANSWERS consortium

Coordinator: Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) from Austria, ZSI

ZENTRUM FÜR SOZIALE INNOVATION
CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION



14 beneficiaries from:

Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo*

Montenegro

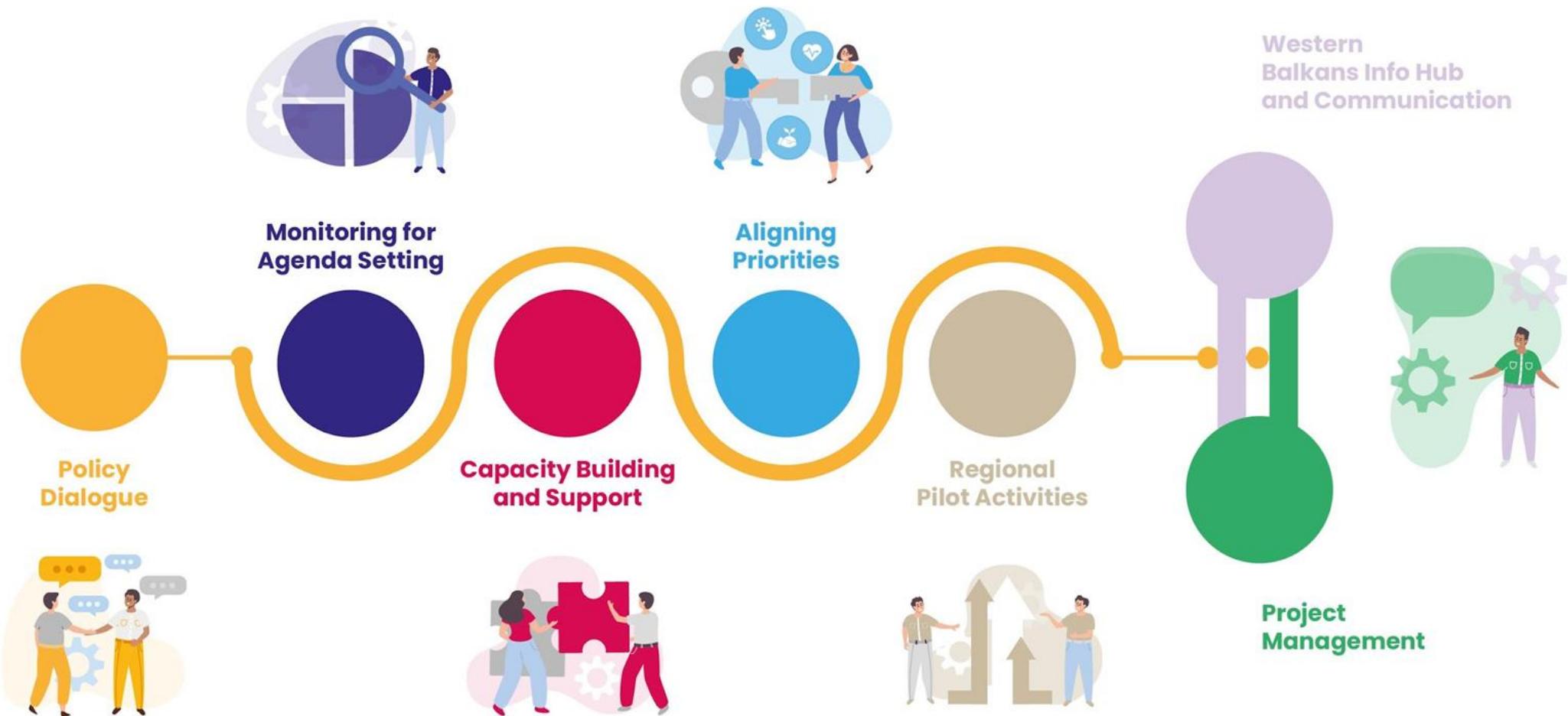
North Macedonia

Serbia

Austria, Croatia, Germany and Italy

* 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.

Project overview





Invitation to all of you to the project's final event

**Towards a Stronger European
Research Area: Lessons and Pathways
for the Western Balkans' Participation**

Tirana • 19 March 2026



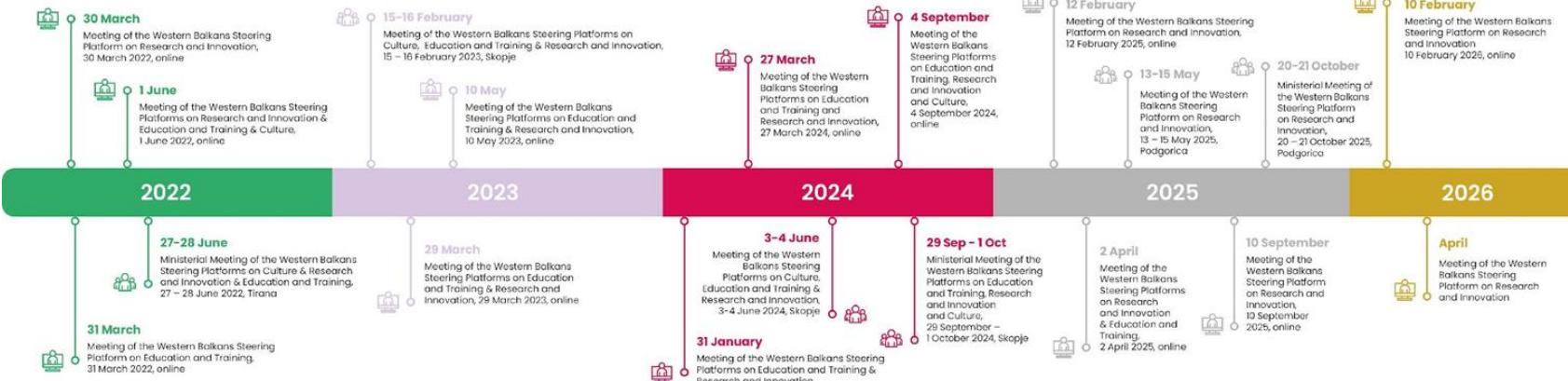
WP3 CAPACITY BUILDING & SUPPORT

Presentation of the results of our Capacity Building Programmes implemented in each WB economy, including trainings, policy papers, technical assistance, info days, etc.

Link to the final event in Tirana



Regular support to Steering Platform meetings



Further information



Follow-up dialogue

Event website



Registration



 **POLICY ANSWERS**

 Funded by the European Union

ONLINE WEBINAR VIA WEBEX

Democracy in the neighbourhood and EU enlargement:
Horizon Europe research insights

26 February 2026
9:30-12:30

09:30 – 11:00 Session 1:
Geo-scope on Western Balkans

11:00 – 12:30 Session 2:
Geo-scope on Eastern Partnership countries and Türkiye

Register for the webinar via the link provided in the description below

WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub



Monitoring of the Western Balkans Agenda

Progress of the WB in the implementation of the WB Agenda

4th and last monitoring round completed

> 2026 edition available soon

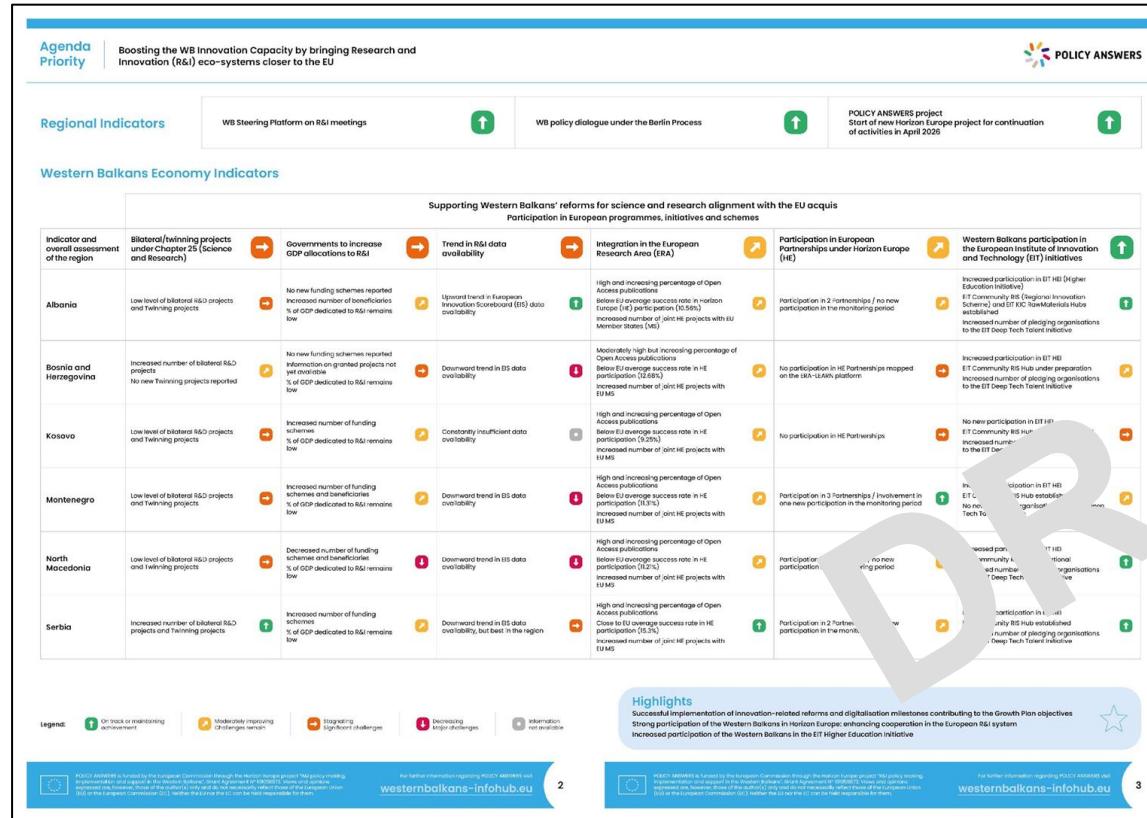
- Research and Innovation
- Digital Competitiveness
- Environment
- Youth, Culture & Sports
- Education & Skills
- Common Regional Market

Link to the
2025 version

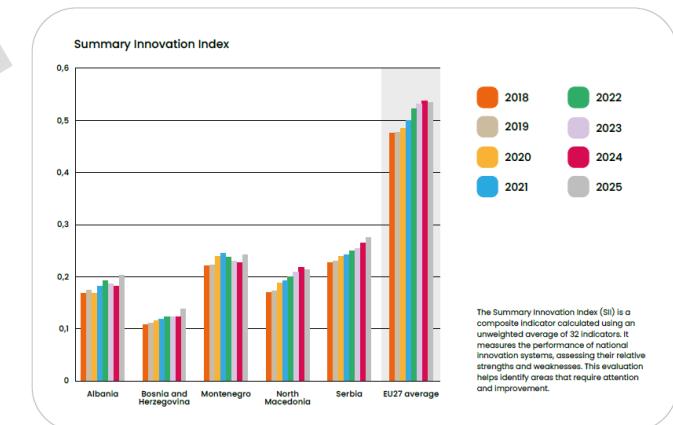


Monitoring Card on Research and Innovation

Agenda Priority: Boosting the WB Innovation Capacity by bringing Research and Innovation (R&I) eco-systems closer to the EU



Achievements in a wider context of the Western Balkans Agenda



Development of Policy Briefs

Preparing for FP10: Strengthening Western Balkans participation in the 2028-2034 programme landscape

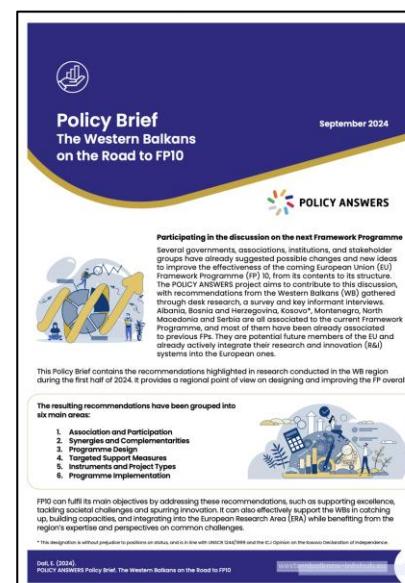
- Provides recommendations on the path towards FP10 (forthcoming)
- Update of the Policy Brief on FP10 from September 2024



Link to the Policy Brief FP10



¹ Consistent with activities under the European Competitiveness Fund



The SCIENCE|BUSINESS website homepage features a banner for a study on Widening measures, a sidebar for newsletters, and a main content area with a photo of Reinilde Veugels speaking at a meeting.

SCIENCE|BUSINESS®
Bringing together industry, research and policy

Widening measures should differ for each country, new European Parliament study concludes

Reinilde Veugels speaking at a meeting of the European Parliament's Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) Panel in Strasbourg on 22 January, 2025.

Development of Policy Briefs

Western Balkans Monitoring and Reporting: Challenges and Key Takeaways

POLICY ANSWERS Policy Brief: Western Balkans Monitoring and Reporting Challenges and Key Takeaways

Published: 28 August 2025

Policy Brief | Western Balkans monitoring and reporting: challenges and key takeaways | POLICY ANSWERS

Characteristics	Description
Data Availability	Difficult to obtain timely data
Surveying and Sampling	Business register updates and functioning CRIS are prerequisites
Data Harmonisation	Methodological changes affect data comparability
Data Owners	Lack of designated data owners, contact and focal points
Data Use	Results often not used for decision and evidence based policy-making
Data Reliability	Proxy indicators and unresolved questions related to data reliability
Problem Awareness	Policy makers are often unaware of challenges
Resources	General lack of resources available in the R&D ecosystem and in particular at statistical offices

Other Documents

Western Balkans – Unleashing the Potential of Innovative Start-Ups and SMEs in the Western Balkans : Investment Readiness Program 2.0

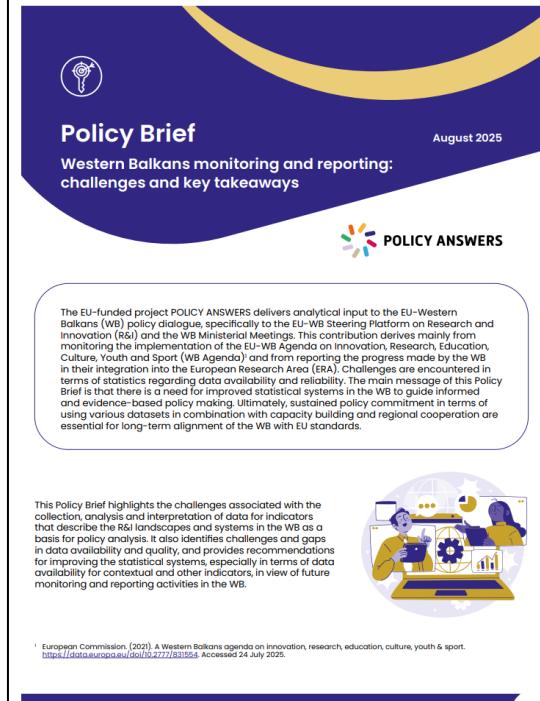
"Western Balkans: unleashing the potential of innovative start-ups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Western Balkans: investment readiness [...]"

Open Innovation Testbeds – Lessons learnt in EU projects

Open Innovation Test Beds (OITBs) are one form of Technology Infrastructures that offer services for the development, testing and upscaling [...]

North Macedonia's ERA Integration: Two-pager visual summary of the ERA report

POLICY ANSWERS publishes the visual summary of the report on North Macedonia's ERA integration.
0_WEB_Visual_Summary_ERAreport_NORTH_MACEDONIA_2023.pdf



Policy Brief
Western Balkans monitoring and reporting:
challenges and key takeaways
August 2025
POLICY ANSWERS

The EU-funded project POLICY ANSWERS delivers analytical input to the EU-Western Balkans (WB) policy dialogue, specifically to the EU-WB Steering Committee on Research and Innovation (R&I) and the WB Ministerial Meetings. This contribution derives mainly from monitoring the implementation of the EU-WB Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (WB Agenda¹) and from reporting the progress made by the WB in their integration into the European Union. The challenges are encouraging in terms of improving data comparability and reliability. The main message of this Policy Brief is that there is a need for improved statistical systems in the WB to guide informed and evidence-based policy making. Ultimately, sustained policy commitment in terms of using various datasets in combination with capacity building and regional cooperation are essential for long-term alignment of the WB with EU standards.

This Policy Brief highlights the challenges associated with the collection, analysis and interpretation of data for indicators that describe the R&I landscapes and systems in the WB as a contribution to the policy dialogue. It also provides recommendations in data comparability and quality and provides recommendations for improving the statistical systems, especially in terms of data availability for contextual and other indicators, in view of future monitoring and reporting activities in the WB.

¹ European Commission. (2023). A Western Balkans agenda on innovation, research, education, culture, youth & sport. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/831956>. Accessed 24 July 2025.

The full document is available
for download here:



Development of Policy Briefs



Includes good practices from the region and a set of recommendations for policy makers

Policy Brief and Policy Report (deliverable) on Research Infrastructures

The full documents are available for download here

The image shows two pages from the 'Policy Brief: Promotion of Research Infrastructures in the Western Balkans'. The left page is titled 'Exemplary Cases: Emerging and Developing Research Infrastructures' and features a section on 'Tech4Inn' (Technological Innovation Center) and 'BIO4Campus - Bioeconomy Hub (Baltic Sea Series)'. The right page is titled 'TechnoBalkan Campus - High Performance Computing Centre (Western Balkans and Neighboring)' and features a section on 'ESS ERIC - European Social Survey'. Both pages include small images of the respective facilities and text describing their operations and impact.



Specific recommendations for policymakers

Pan-European and WB regional initiatives should plan to develop and adopt OA principles and practices based on the 2024 EU Charter². Moreover, in each economy policymakers should:

- Establish economy level OA principles, defining OA RIs as a priority, outlining the benefits of OA RIs to different user groups and encouraging RPOs to adopt suitable OA policies.
- Consider making the adoption of an OA RI policy a legal requirement for accredited higher education institutions and RPOs.
- Introduce incentives for researchers and institutions to use and contribute to Open RI.
- Consider including OA RI Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) into RPOs' reporting (e.g. total number of OA users, type of OA users, number of new and repeat users, type of services, cost and value of providing access).
- Take steps to raise awareness of the benefits of OA tailored to different stakeholder groups, including the private sector, and monitor the effects in order to assess raised awareness. Promotional efforts should be repeated and linked to take up of services.
- Support participation in ERICs, including implementation of the ERIC Regulation at national level, and encourage engagement of WB economies in ESFRI-related initiatives and established ERICs (e.g. participation of WB6 in successive iterations of the European Social Survey).

² European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ec4692ae-ac6f-1ef-acb1-01aa75ed71a/language-en>. Accessed 28 November 2025

Recent highlights from our monthly webinars

POLICY ANSWERS  Funded by the European Union

WEBINAR
Thursday, 29 January 2026
15:00 (CET)

Research and Technology Infrastructures: Policy, practice and recent developments in Europe – emerging opportunities for the Western Balkans

Speaker:
Dr. Lisa Cowey
Director, The Technology Transfer Interface
Key Expert, RCC WB Knowledge Transfer Toolkit Initiative | Oxford, UK

Register for the webinar via the link provided in the description

WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub

POLICY ANSWERS  Funded by the European Union

WEBINAR 14
Malta's Experience in EU Partnerships: Contributions and Added Value

Annalisa Cartabia
R&I Funding Specialist, Internationalisation Unit (Xjenza Malta)

13 November 2025
15:00 CET


#WBvision2030

WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub

POLICY ANSWERS  Funded by the European Union

WEBINAR 15
EIT Communities as Drivers of EU-Wide R&I Integration

Branka Žižić
EIT Community Officer Montenegro

11 December 2025
15:00 CET


#WBvision2030

WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub



R&I Youth Awards

- Pitching event and award ceremony in Skopje
- 5 months social media Youth Campaign



WP5 REGIONAL PILOT ACTIVITIES



- Policy Brief on Mobility (forthcoming)



Research in Motion

Empowering Innovation in the Western Balkans through the POLICY ANSWERS Pilot Mobility Scheme for Early-Career Researchers

WP5 REGIONAL PILOT ACTIVITIES

Policy Brief including key features, lessons learnt, success stories



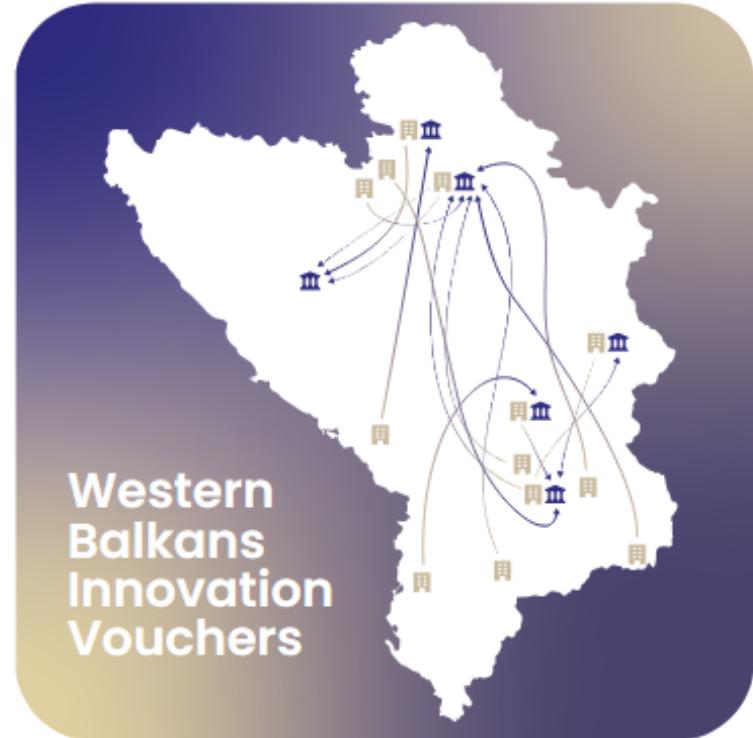
Policy recommendation: The argument for a regional R&I fund

The concept of a regional R&I fund for the Western Balkans has been a key recommendation by influential actors in the region, including the Berlin Process Joint Science Conference and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), who have previously highlighted the necessity of such a mechanism.

For example, the 7th Berlin Process Joint Science Conference⁶ directly recommended the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund. Similarly, the RCC has consistently supported a regional approach to R&I funding through strategic frameworks, such as the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan⁷ and the development of the Western Balkans Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation⁸, now part of a larger, forward-looking strategic context, the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2026–2028⁹.

The pilot activity within the POLICY ANSWERS project has provided compelling evidence that a unified, regional approach to funding R&I is not only feasible but highly effective. While Western Balkans economies' own innovation funds are crucial, they are often insufficient to foster the cross-border synergies required for genuine regional integration. The WBIV scheme, by mandating inter-economy collaboration, has demonstrated a powerful model for breaking down barriers and promoting a shared culture of innovation.

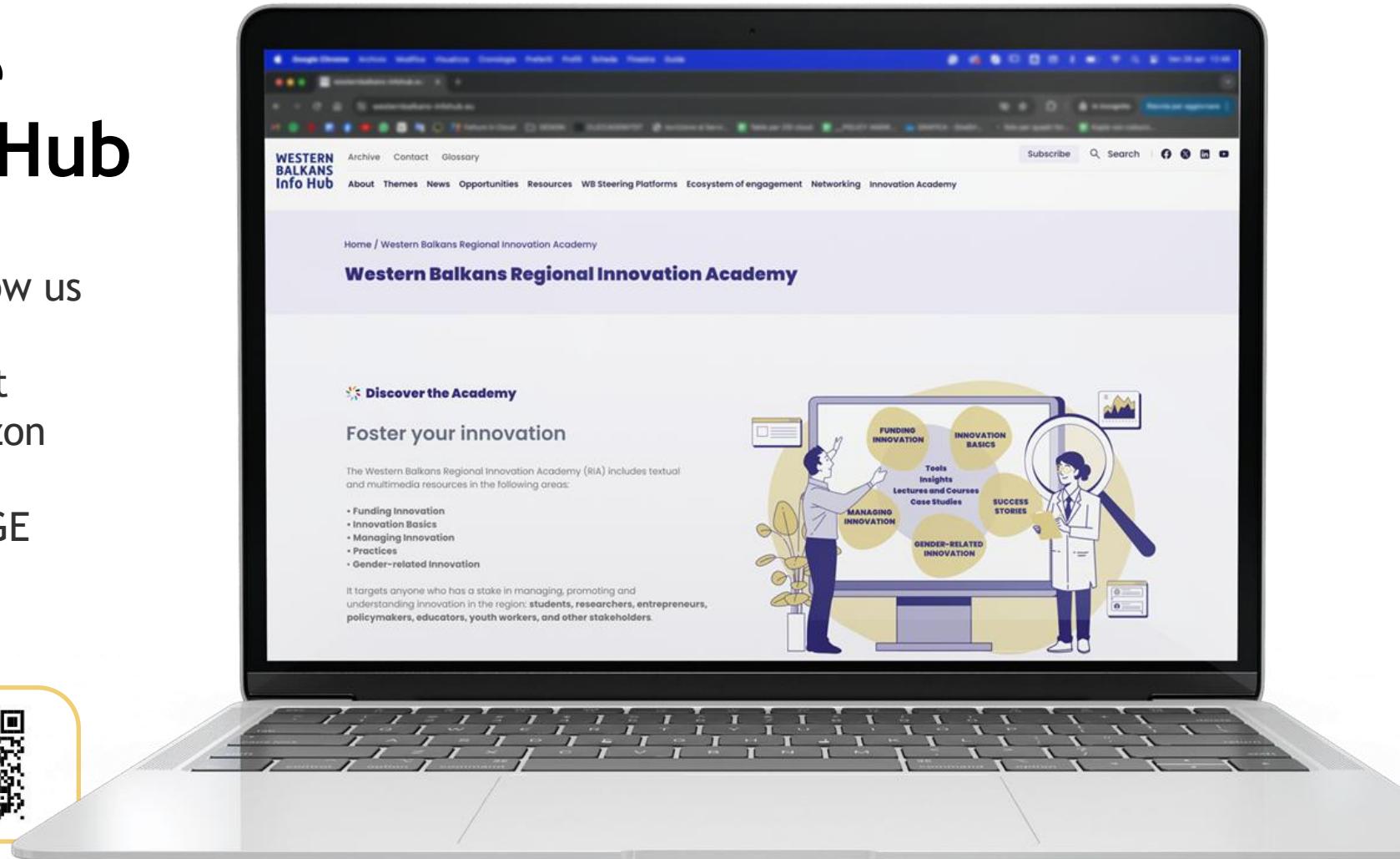
The regional approach enables an efficient pooling of resources and expertise, allowing the Western Balkans to tackle complex, shared challenges more effectively. Henceforth, one can argue that the regional innovation voucher scheme should be a key mechanism to be used by a future regional R&I fund to drive transformative change within the Western Balkans R&I landscape, particularly in the green transition and digital transformation fields.



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- Join our newsletter and follow us on social media
- Regular updates. Most recent focus on S3, upcoming: Horizon Europe
- Hand-over to POLICY ENLARGE

Follow us



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THANK
YOU!