



Advancing the Digitalisation of the ERP Preparation Process

CEF DISCUSSION PAPER



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* 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.

ADVANCING THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PREPARATION PROCESS

CEF Discussion Paper

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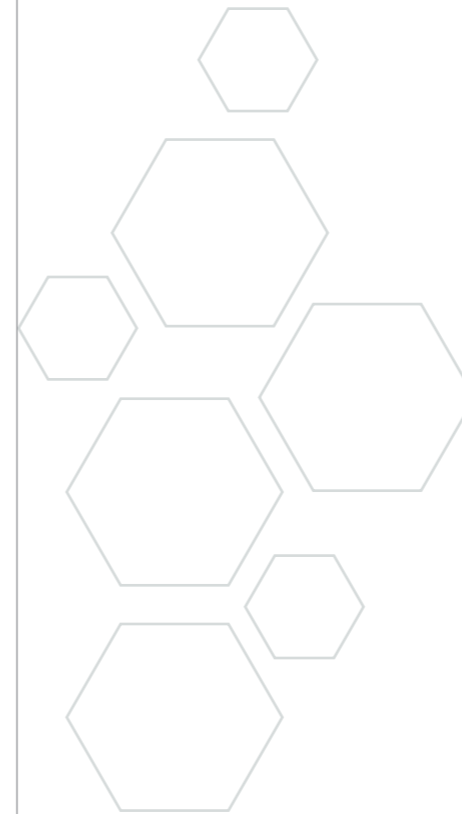
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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the need to improve digitalisation in the public sector. Processes that engage a large number of stakeholders, entail a lot of data and information sharing, and follow tight schedules may particularly benefit from more advanced digitalisation.

Covid-19 disrupted the normal operation of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) preparation processes in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Several ERP Coordinators have expressed the need to further digitalise these processes, whereas some have pointed out that there are already several good digitalisation experiences. The spread of Covid-19 certainly reinforces the need for digitalisation of the ERP process, although there are many documents that direct towards digital transformation.

Through interviews with key stakeholders, this discussion paper captures current practices, challenges and opportunities for further digitalisation of the ERP process. It includes opportunities for peer learning and suggests the next steps that individual ERP teams could take.

The majority of interviewees proposed setting up a digital collaboration platform that should be used for all activities in the ERP process, including submission of proposals for new reform measures, submission of reports for implementing the reform measures, diagnostics, feedback to line ministries on the submitted texts, reports for implementing joint policy recommendations, dialogue with the European Union (EU), public consultations, etc.

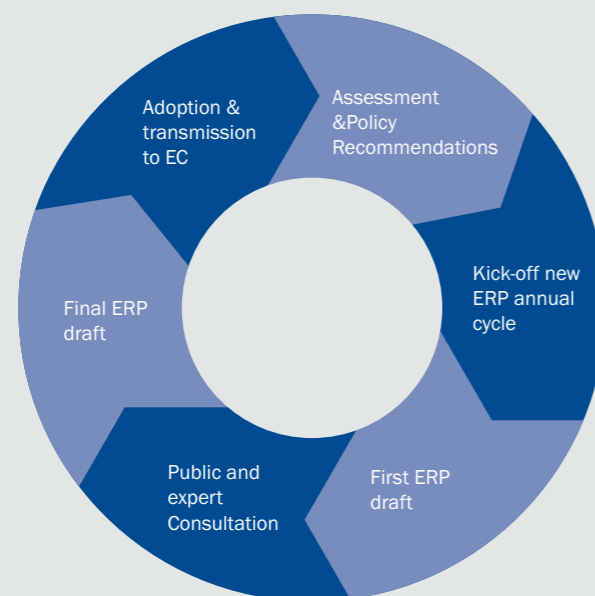
All interview respondents proposed strengthening the digital skills of the public servants involved in the ERP process – not only regarding the use of a digital platform but also digital skills in a broader sense (which are crucial nowadays), online communication skills, the best ways to share knowledge through the platform (knowledge packaging), connection with the usage of software and hardware, security issues, copyrights, and so on.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

The annual Economic Reform Programme exercise led by the European Commission in all Western Balkan countries and Turkey is a crucial tool for supporting the modernisation of those economies and achieving closer economic coordination with the EU. The purpose of the ERP is to prepare an economy to participate, in future, in the process of the economic and fiscal scrutiny conducted in all EU Member States (European Semester). The entire process of preparing, implementing and monitoring the ERP can be considered as a “Light European Semester”.

In the Enlargement Package 2021,¹ the EC emphasises that implementing the reforms, set out in the ERPs and in the policy guidance jointly adopted with EU Member States, is essential not only to improve competitiveness, foster job creation and facilitate social inclusion but also to ensure fiscal sustainability, meet the economic criteria in the accession process and maximise the potential impact of the EU’s investment package. Along this process, many stakeholders are involved, including, for example, different line ministries and government agencies, the wider public (business community, social partners and civil society), and the EC.



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en

The ERPs are prepared following the ERP Guidance Note issued by the EC annually, and the preparation is centrally coordinated. In each economy, an official ERP Coordinator is nominated, typically from the Ministry of Finance, to steer the process and to ensure a widespread consensus. If the official ERP Coordinator is the minister of finance or other appointed official, he/she coordinates the process at the official political level. In such case, there is another ERP Coordinator appointed from among the public servants in the same institution who coordinates the process on the working and technical level, and also participates in the Project Steering Committee of the CEF-led and EU-funded Fiscal Implications of Structural Reforms (FISR) project. In addition, coordinators are appointed from among the public servants within each relevant line ministry. On the working level, an ERP Working Group is formed, including the ERP Coordinator, the coordinators from the line ministries, and some additional members. In this research, the term ERP Coordinator (ERPC) refers to a public servant that coordinates the process on working and technical level, and also participates in the FISR Project Steering Committee.

For the purpose of this paper, **digitalisation is defined as a process in which analogue systems and processes as well as the information that feeds into them are turned into digital form, which may require setting up new digital infrastructures, digitising analogue data, interconnecting different systems and data sources, and promoting digital literacy of the users.** In the context of the public sector, this includes, for example, establishing digital communication channels with different stakeholders, connecting their different information sources electronically, automating administrative processes, and so on. Applying the latest technologies and new procedures in the public sector promises to improve core government systems, enhance the quality of services delivered to citizens, and enable their engagement.

For the purpose of this research, we focus on the ERP process and how data and information is exchanged within the process. Work interruptions like those due to Covid-19 lockdowns, lack of or outdated information sharing, and delayed or insufficiently informed inputs may challenge a smooth and efficient ERP preparation process. Further digitalization can reduce the risk that ERPs are at the risks of being submitted late, incomplete and at weaker quality.

Closely following the instructions of the ERP Guidance Note, and based on the economy’s medium-term fiscal policy strategy and objectives, the ERP lays out the economic and fiscal policies, and the structural reforms envisaged for the upcoming three years.

The information shared within the ERP should be in line with the information shared within the domestic PFM system (e.g. the budgetary process). If the budgetary process is developed poorly (e.g. when the multi-year perspective is still non-existent or weak), the ERP process can help develop it further and bring synergies with PFM and wide economic governance reform efforts. Readiness to share and compare data – to break down silos – and the ability to provide accurate data is a crucial precondition. However, so far little is documented about the state of digitalisation in the ERP process and the co-integration of the digital processes of the ERP preparation and public policy planning and financial management; that is, whether they break down silos.

Such improvements would be reflected, for example, in an enhanced public service delivery, stronger understanding of and support for envisaged reforms, as well as improved structural reform performance. However, no systematic overview is available of such initiatives or their results.

In this paper, we also analyse to what degree ERPCs have an enabling environment within their institution, support across government and from international partners (EC, donors, knowledge and IT providers, etc.), sufficient capacity and resources to identify, adopt and drive new technical solutions, and opportunities to embed such initiatives within a wider digitalisation agenda.

NEED FOR DIGITALISATION

The exchange of information between ERPCs, their teams and other stakeholders is largely based on e-mail communication, phone calls and in person meetings. The Covid-19 pandemic isolated ERPCs, their teams and the ERP Working Groups at home, interrupted meetings in person, and disrupted the normal operation of the ERP preparation process. The crisis exposed the urgency of adopting new technologies to continue the ERP preparation process in the new reality.

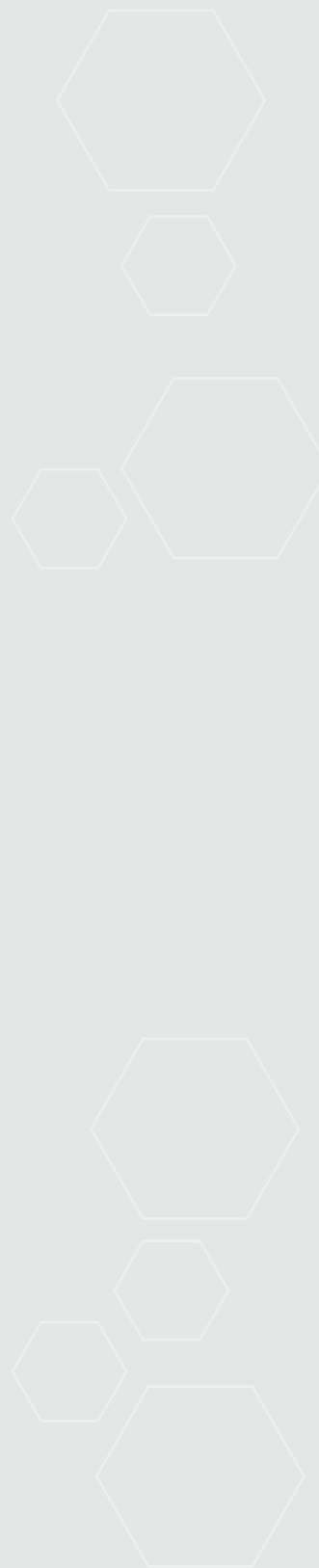
The Covid-19 pandemic with its massive interruption of work routines has increased the demand for more digitalisation across the public sector, scaling up a trend that is expected to persist also after the pandemic. The EU initiative for digital transformation and the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans support the transition of the region into a digital economy and bring benefits, such as stronger economic growth, more jobs, and better services.

The digitalisation initiatives in the ERP process may complement or reinforce digitalisation initiatives for the PFM and wider economic governance system. Understanding opportunities, but also barriers to co-integrating such initiatives in future, will be necessary, especially as effective co-integration will facilitate future participation in the EU Semester.

Digitalisation is expected to promote making those planning, implementation and results monitoring processes more co-integrated, better informed by the given evidence, more responsive to prevailing economic conditions, transparent, and executed according to the plan. ERP digitalisation could provide an enabling environment and opportunity to further develop policy planning systems, establish a functional medium-term fiscal framework, advance processes like the annual budget drafting, donor coordination, and adoption of the *acquis communautaire*.

Digitalisation can promote more effective and efficient cooperation of the ERPCs and line ministries throughout the ERP preparation process by safeguarding adherence to the instructions of the EC's ERP Guidance Note (common templates, deadlines, etc.).

The ERPCs have a major role in promoting digitalisation initiatives for the ERP process. They could, for example, stimulate and facilitate the search for overarching IT solutions (integrated with wider digitalisation of public sector systems) or promote a modular approach; establish joint standards and requirements across varying systems of different ERP stakeholders; set the right incentives and promote communication



aimed at digitalisation; and promote the management of knowledge about different digital solutions and tools across the ERP team.

Successful design and implementation of digitalisation initiatives depend on the digital skills of the stakeholders involved. Digital skills can be defined as the ability to capture, package and share data and information in digital form, i.e. through different IT devices (smartphones, laptops, personal computers, tablets) and digital communication channels (internet, social media, collaborative platforms). Given the pace of innovation in developing those devices and channels further, digital skills also entail readiness for constant learning and re-learning, as technologies can become quickly obsolete and replaced by others.

RESEARCH FOCUS

The envisaged analysis contributes to filling the identified knowledge gaps by two objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Capturing given digitalisation initiatives of the ERP preparation and implementation process *WHAT has been done in terms of digitalisation and what has been the role of the ERPCs in bringing them forward? HOW has it worked (or not)?*
- **Objective 2:** Exploring new initiatives for digitalisation that could further enhance the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process *WHAT could be done in future and what digital skills would be needed? HOW would further digitalisation improve the ERP process?*

Engaging selected ERP team representatives opens opportunities for peer learning and discussion of the next digitalisation steps. In addition, by promoting informal exchange with EC representatives, it helps identify opportunities for better digital exchange of ERP-related information with external partners.

The analysis will better inform the CEF's future capacity development initiatives under the EU-funded multi-beneficiary action "Fiscal Implications of Structural Reforms", as well as complementary and follow-up actions.

METHODOLOGY

Short interviews were conducted in December 2021 with all ERPCs and other key ERP stakeholders recommended by them, followed by an analysis of the captured experiences, identification of conclusions, and provision of recommendations for the next steps.

Based on the interviews with the ERPCs and other key ERP stakeholders, this exploratory research captured the current challenges and needs, good practices and lessons learned, and assessed the enabling environment and opportunities for adopting new digitalisation initiatives in the ERP preparation process.

All survey respondents have been involved in the ERP preparation process for many years. They have comprehensive knowledge of this process, and were highly motivated to participate in this survey.



MAIN FINDINGS

The conducted interviews helped us capture the current practices, challenges and opportunities for further digitalisation of the ERP process. We identified some general observations and trends in the current situation and future digitalisation of the ERP process, as well as several lessons learned that can be of use for other countries in the region.

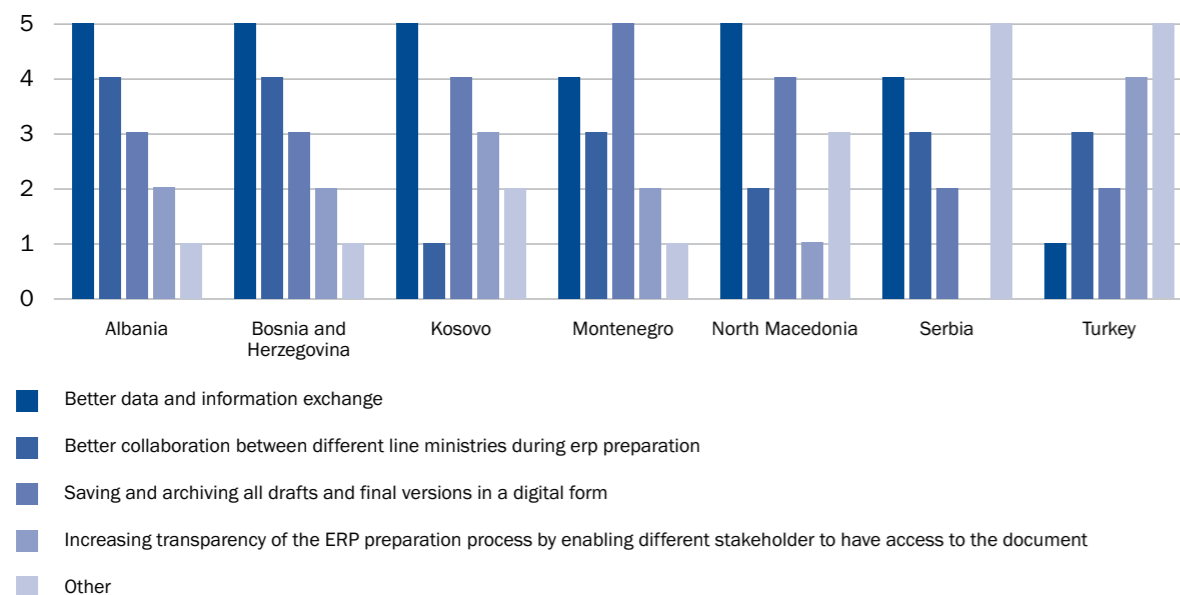
In most of the economies covered by our research, approximately 50 to 100 people are included in the ERP Working Group, with another 30 to 50 involved in elaborating the reform measures and finding funds to implement them. In Turkey, more people are involved, given the size of the country.

In most of the countries of our research, the participants in the ERP process are poorly equipped with basic hardware for online communication (microphone and speaker or headsets and web camera). Some have part of this equipment; others use personal smartphones for online communication, which is inconvenient, especially for accessing shared documents and providing inputs.

The current situation with the digitalisation in these economies is that they do not use digital tools or applications in the ERP process. E-mail exchange, videoconferencing, storing documents on websites and MS Office are the main electronic tools currently in use. In Turkey, there are some tools and digital platforms/systems for the national budget process in place, but they are not used in the ERP preparation process.

The below figure gives an overview of the main objectives in digitalisation per economy (scores are from the survey, where 5 points show the highest priority and 1 point indicates the lowest priority).

Main objectives in digitalisation per economy



Several participants proposed other objectives than those in the questionnaire. Respondents from North Macedonia and Turkey referred to increased efficiency, while the ERP team from Serbia pointed out the effectiveness of the ERP preparation. A respondent from Kosovo linked the application of digital tools to increased efficiency of the planning and monitoring system.

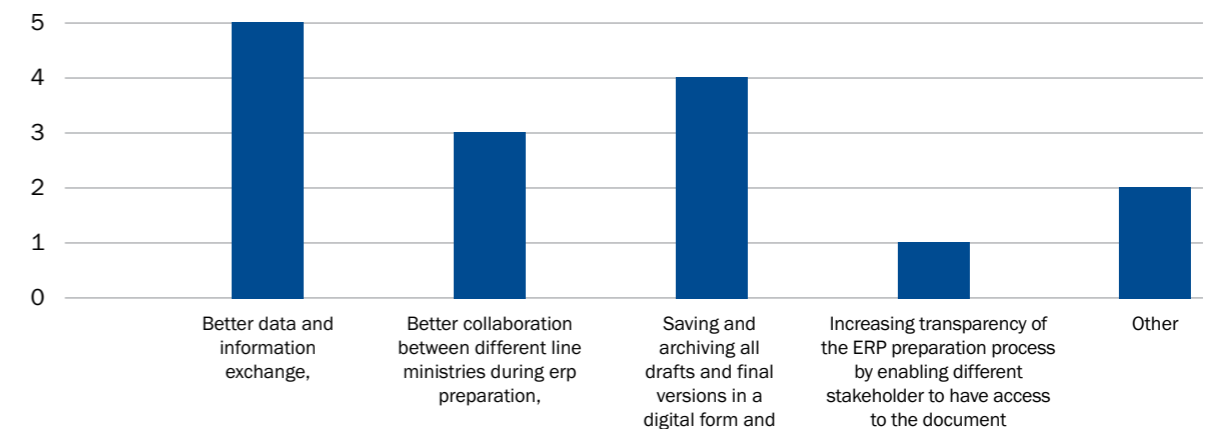
When we speak about the main regional objectives in digitalising the ERP process, better data and information exchange is definitely the first priority (see the figure below). Next comes better collaboration between line ministries during ERP preparation, followed by saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form. Increasing the transparency of the ERP process is the lowest priority in the digitalisation process because there is a high degree of transparency even now, with special governmental platforms for public consultations in place in several countries, like <https://ekonsultacije.gov.ba> in Bosnia and Herzegovina, <https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net> in Kosovo, <https://ener.gov.mk> in North Macedonia and <https://ekonsultacije.gov.rs> in Serbia.

The below figure gives an overview of the main objectives in digitalisation in the region, based on the survey scores (5 is the highest score and 1 is the lowest).

Several respondents shared that they could not use some proprietary collaborative software because, for various reasons, not all institutions have the possibility to procure such software or pay the annual fee. The possible solution could be to use open source software.

Finally, in all countries, there is some institution that determines the rules which allow or forbid the use of certain software and hardware in public IT systems.

Main objectives in digitalisation in the region



RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey respondents of seven group interviews made the following proposals for the future digitalisation of the ERP process:

- In four out of seven interviews, the survey respondents proposed a digital collaboration platform to be created to replace the constant exchange of information by e-mail. This new platform should be used for all activities in the ERP process, including the submission of proposals for new reform measures, submission of reports for implementing reform measures, diagnostics, feedback to line ministries on the submitted texts, reports for implementing joint policy recommendations, dialogue with the EU, public consultations, etc.
- In one interview, the respondents shared that they had started a project to create a platform for automatizing all phases of the ERP preparation, including the submission of inputs for new reform measures, reporting on previous reform measures, joint policy recommendations with the EU, diagnostics, etc. They also acknowledged that colleagues from other countries could have similar software and hardware needs in the ERP preparation process, and expressed readiness to share their own experience in setting up such a platform and to cooperate regionally through a common digital initiative.
- In two interviews, the survey respondents proposed trainings for public servants for working on shared documents in MS Office 365 (Teams, Collaboration, etc.) and also training for OneDrive and Dropbox.
- In one interview, the respondent proposed to enable SharePoint for the ERP team as a first step to have a joint working space instead of using phones and e-mails, and to enable tools for online communication with the EC.
- In many countries, there might be a need to use open source software. In several interviews, respondents shared that they could not use some proprietary collaborative software because, for various reasons, not all institutions have the possibility to procure such software or pay an annual fee. Open source software might be a possible solution. However, it should be taken into consideration that open source software is not fully free of charge software, because the user has to pay for software operation and maintenance.
- Before accepting a proposal to use some software or hardware, the proposal must be communicated in the institution that regulates the use of all software and hardware in public IT systems, in order to clarify whether the use of such software or hardware is allowed.



- In all interviews, the survey respondents noted that the public servants involved in the ERP process would benefit from strengthening their digital skills – not only regarding the use of a digital platform but also digital skills in a broader sense (which are crucial nowadays), online communication skills, the best ways to share knowledge through a platform (knowledge packaging), skills in connection with the usage of software and hardware, security issues, copyrights, and so on. One respondent elaborated the idea in more detail:
 - **Information and data literacy:** To articulate the information needs, locate and retrieve digital data, information and content, and to judge the relevance of the source and its content.
 - **Communication and collaboration:** To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity.
 - **Problem solving:** To identify needs and problems, resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments, and use digital tools to innovate processes and products.
 - Except basic digital skills as those mentioned above, the participants in the ERP process could benefit from **advanced skills** to use data for policy modelling, evaluation, data analytics and data mining, which would support policy-making, service delivery, impact evaluation and project management.

There is another elaborated digitalisation initiative proposing to create a Digital ERP platform, which would enhance communication and knowledge sharing for the ERP team and the representatives from the line ministries.

Possible additional useful digital tools for ERP Working Group members could include:

- Chat tool for informal communication, which would help the participants to get more information and updates on the reform measures quickly, serving as a tool to enhance collaboration and communication between the participants.
- Shared planning tool for the events to coordinate the process, inform about the meetings and their agendas, share the main points and content of the meetings, etc.
- Video conferencing tool for online meetings, which would enhance communication and exchange of ideas among the participants.
- To implement any digitalisation initiative, the ERP team would need collaboration from all participants to tailor the initiative to their individual needs and available IT infrastructure. For creating a digital ERP platform, the team would need technical support and user training.





ANALYSIS

The following analysis is based on the conducted interviews and captures the main observations for each economy.





ALBANIA

The main goal is to improve the ERP process and address the related challenges through digitalisation. The key proposal is to look into the possibility of setting up a digital platform that would help prepare and draft the ERPs in a more user-friendly manner, making it easily accessible to everybody from anywhere.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The official national ERP Coordinator is the Minister of Finance and Economy, while the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE) leads the process from an institutional point of view. A public servant from the MFE is responsible for ensuring proper coordination with institutions for the preparation and drafting of the ERP. He has been involved in the ERP process in Albania since the first National ERP in 2014. He is also present at the regional ERP meetings and Steering Committee meetings of the FISR project, while the minister is a high-level coordinator in the Government of Albania.

Many public servants and institutions are involved in the ERP process. There is a lot of background work going on in line ministries and institutions toward the preparation of their contribution to the ERP. There is also a core group of approximately 40 people who report directly to the ERP Coordinator in the MFE. In addition, there are focal points in line ministries who exchange information and draft ERP inputs together with other officials in line ministries.

The situation with the basic hardware for online communication is the following: hardly anyone has a laptop, some have microphone and speakers, and hardly anyone has a headset or camera. Many opt to use personal smartphones to connect to online meetings, since workplace facilities in the majority of institutions are lacking considerably in terms of IT equipment. Desktop computers in institutions are unequipped with microphones, speakers or cameras. Such equipment is generally rare and they are provided only by donors.

The survey respondent listed the main digitalisation objectives of the ERP process (in order of importance):

- Better data and information exchange
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholder to have access to the document

The role of the ERPC in the ERP digitalisation process (in developing and managing past/ current digitalisation initiatives, and bringing forward new initiatives in the future) largely depends on their experience. For example, the main responsibility of the ERPC is donor coordination of foreign aid.

Based on the ERPC's experience, digital systems for the ERP processes have advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include easier use of information (no need to do manual work). A disadvantage is the risk that the developing company could design a system that does not suit the beneficiary's needs. Such a system could be also very strict and difficult to use. Furthermore, in Albania there is a National Agency for Information Society that defines the rules for developing a new system or platform for any government institution.

The ERPC's role could definitely be to help develop the system for the ERP by providing input and feedback on potential features to be included in the system. Experience in managing and using similar centralised information management systems shows that there is a tendency to overburden the system with redundant features, which could do more harm than good. It would be beneficial to learn about the experiences of other countries where similar systems are in place.

Other ERP team members could use their personal or institutional experiences. For example, the Office of the National IPA Coordinator could help with information regarding IPA III programming, if needed.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The current status of digitalisation in Albania shows that digital tools and applications are not used yet in the ERP process.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the work on the preparation of the ERP document was done via electronic communication. However, after the spread of the pandemic, when face-to-face meetings were replaced with virtual ones, many people were forced to try and adapt to this change. Admittedly, having a headset and/or a web camera installed in the work PC was not considered as a necessity in the past, but now officials are scrambling to find solutions, often using personal smartphones and laptops to connect. This is not always feasible when connection to the internet is restricted by the institution's IT policies.

Digital devices, tools and applications used in Albania for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/ how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	Official work e-mails only	Draft ERP documents; guidance note; EC assessment; Joint Conclusions and other documents related to the process	ERP Working Group members	Work e-mails used in everyday work, so it is pretty much used for everything job-related	Both are managed by the IT department of the institutions	Almost everybody knows how to use e-mails	/
To enable consultation with the public	Official work e-mail; website of the Ministry and teleconferencing platforms (WebEx, Zoom)	Meetings and information sharing about the ERP process and stakeholders' important role in it; ERP draft shared for consultation	By invitation for teleconferencing and e-mail; everyone via website	Pretty much exclusive for this purpose only	Situational solution following the pandemic and limitations on physical meetings	N/A	Helped continue work during the pandemic and also to streamline the process because information is shared and available for a longer period of time
Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information				
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	PC only	/	/				
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	Official work e-mails only	/	/				
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	Official e-mails and very rarely letters in hard copy	/	/				
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Manual input of data in Excel	Estimated costs and actual spending of SRs, etc	ERP Working Group members				
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	/	/	/				

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The ERPC put forward the idea to improve the ERP process and address the related challenges by looking into the possibility of setting up a user-friendly digital platform that would allow the preparation and drafting of the ERP through easy access to everybody. This would reduce constant information exchange by e-mail and save time and manual work. For example, the main obstacles could be analysed in one document and the ERPC could see what has been added to the document and by whom. Another example, in a text on some reform measure, the ERPC could insert comments for officials from other ministries, who could then work on that. The main goal would be to make the ERP preparation process easier.

After the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is very important that such a platform would permit remote access to the document from different locations: office, home, etc. Another benefit would be saving all draft versions of the document in one place to speed up the preparation of the final version (the last edited version). The ERPC also expects that digitalisation would ease a lot of simple internal coordination activities that currently make the process burdensome. Moreover, the platform could be used for communication with EC representatives during their missions. Written inputs of the missions could be shared with more people involved in the ERP process. Even only recording the mission's meetings could help a lot in improving the text.

To sum up, it would be highly beneficial to have a digital platform that could solve many issues that exist today. In addition, capacity building would be needed to learn how to use the platform.





BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The digitalisation of the ERP process in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a big challenge because first the ERP preparation process needs to be developed further.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The official ERP Coordinator at the state level is the Director of the Directorate for Economic Planning. He has been involved in the ERP process for six years. The Directorate for Economic Planning is in charge of the ERP coordination in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is a national structure with two ERP coordinators on the sub-national, entity level, an ERP Coordinator in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and an ERP Coordinator in Republika Srpska.

More than 50 public servants in many institutions at the state and entity levels are involved in the ERP process.

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, there is a problem with adequate equipment. Only some officials have a laptop, microphone and speakers/headsets or cameras. Desktop computers in institutions are not equipped with microphones, speakers or cameras. So there is a need to procure such equipment in the ministries and at the entity level.

The respondent stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

- Better data and information exchange
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholder to have access to the document

The ERPC should be the primary organiser in the ERP digitalisation process (in developing and managing digitalisation initiatives, and bringing forward new ones). However, it is difficult to assess the results of the ERP digitalisation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina because first the ERP preparation process needs to be developed further. It is difficult to digitalise something that it is not functioning in reality.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, digital tools and applications are not used yet in the ERP process. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the work on the preparation of the ERP document was done via electronic communication. After the spread of the pandemic, face-to-face meetings were replaced with virtual ones, using WebEx and other online communication tools.

Digital devices, tools and applications used in Bosnia and Herzegovina for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/ how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	Official work e-mails and videoconferencing	Draft ERP documents; guidance note; EC assessment; Joint Conclusions and other documents related to the process	ERP Working Group members	Work e-mails used in everyday work, so it is pretty much used for everything job-related	Both are managed by the IT department of the institutions	Almost everybody knows how to use e-mails	
To enable consultation with the public	Website and public consultation platform of the Council of Ministers https://ekonsutacije.gov.ba	Meetings and information sharing about the ERP process and stakeholders' important role in it; ERP draft shared for consultation	Everyone				

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	PC only; final version published on the website		
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	Official work e-mails only		
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	Video conferencing		
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Manual data input in Excel	Estimated costs and actual spending of SRs, etc	ERP Working Group members
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	No learning platform		

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the respondent emphasised that it is difficult to assess the results of the future digitalisation process of the ERP. The reason behind this is that the ERP preparation process is poorly structured. It is difficult to digitalise something that it is not functioning.

The ERPC proposed to provide in the meantime MS Office for all persons included in the ERP preparation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This way, an internal document sharing platform could be developed. However, the main challenge is to develop local ICT infrastructure in the state buildings.

Public servants lack digital skills for working on shared documents. So it was proposed to organise training on shared technologies like MS Teams or Collaboration. In particular, public servants could improve digital skills for using OneDrive and Dropbox, and working on shared documents on a Microsoft platform.



KOSOVO

A digital tool is needed for increased efficiency and planning, as well as a monitoring platform. However, digitalisation should not be limited to the ERP process only; it should cover also general planning processes in Kosovo.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The Minister of Finance coordinates the ERP drafting process in the capacity of the National ERP Coordinator. The Coordinator is supported by the Strategic Planning Office at the Office of the Prime Minister (SPO) for the structural reform agenda, which includes public policies based on the areas defined by the Guidance Note of the European Commission and the Department for Economic, Public Policy and International Financial Cooperation (Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers) regarding the macroeconomic framework and fiscal policies, including fiscal support measures.

Following the instructions of the National Coordinator, the SPO invites General Secretaries and other institutions, based on the areas defined by the EC Guidance Note, to appoint area coordinators who invite line ministries to contribute to the drafting process and working meetings of the Economic Reform Programme. This forms the overall institutional ERP coordination in Kosovo. Each ERP preparation cycle is approved at government meetings by a government decision.

Approximately 35 staff members are involved in formal institutional coordination. 21 staff members, including from the Department of Budget, coordinate the costing of structural reform priorities. When it comes to 13 priority areas, apart from the 13 coordinators other civil servants are involved based on their responsibilities.

The respondent stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

- Better data and information exchange
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholders to have access to the document
- Other – a digital tool for increased efficiency and planning and a monitoring platform

The MoF has the authority to push the ERP digitalisation process forward. However, digitalisation should not be limited to the ERP process only, but it should be integrated with the digitalisation of the overall planning processes in Kosovo.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The current status of digitalisation in Kosovo is that digital tools and applications are not used yet in the ERP process.

As regards the basic precondition for online communication, everybody has got a personal computer but other equipment is lacking. The bandwidth is usually good, provided through cable or wifi, but sometimes the quality of the internet in government premises with private devices (smartphone or laptop) is poor. Therefore, many people have difficulties in joining online meetings, like CEF workshops.

SharePoint is administered by the state but with some limitations: 1) it cannot be accessed from outside the government network; 2) there are some problems with its sustainability and security; 3) it cannot be used as a joint working tool.

So far, Google drive is not allowed for saving and archiving by the Agency for the Information Society.

As everywhere, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the mindset of working; most of the work in 2021 was conducted online. Even though the situation has changed in 2022 – coordination with line ministries is conducted again in a face-to-face format – communication with external partners is still online only.

Digital devices, tools and applications used in Kosovo for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	Official work e-mails	Draft ERP documents; guidance note; EC assessment; Joint Conclusions and other documents related to the process	ERP Working Group members	Work e-mails used in everyday work, so it is pretty much used for everything job-related		Almost everybody knows how to use e-mails	
To enable consultation with the public	Public consultation platform https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net and e-mails	Entire document	Everyone interested	Separately			Used since 2017 and has turned out to be a very useful tool

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	N/A, only internal shared drives in the institution, in this case the Office of Prime Minister Private accounts used for OneDrive or Google drive Office 365 SharePoint cannot be used because licences have expired		
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	Official work e-mails only		
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	e-mails		
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Excel (for macrofiscal framework there are specific systems in use)		ERP Working Group members
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	No learning platform		

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

A digital tool for increased efficiency and planning, and a monitoring platform is needed to improve the ERP process. However, digitalisation should not be limited to the ERP process only; it should include the overall planning processes in Kosovo.

There is a project financed by the EU and discussions going on with the Chief of Cabinet of the Prime Minister to set up a digital tool for planning and monitoring the annual work plan of the Government by 2030.

The first step would be to overcome the limitations and to enable a collaborative online platform like SharePoint for the ERP team, to provide a joint working space instead of phone calls and e-mails. For this to be more efficient, more PCs are needed as well as equipment for online communication.

There is a need for capacity building to strengthen knowledge of MS Office 365. This is in line with the main platform for Kosovo Government, which has a licence for using Microsoft Office.

Kosovo is interested in the outcomes of this exercise because it sees a need for innovation in the ERP process to make the work of ministries easier.



MONTENEGRO

For further digitalisation of the ERP process, the proposal is to set up a platform where the working group could exchange information about the ERP, and where all inputs could be stored and changed.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

From 2006 onwards, Montenegro first prepared an Economic and Fiscal Programme (EFP), then a Pre-Accession Economic Programme (PEP), and finally the ERP. The Ministry of Finance leads the ERP preparation process. The respondent is from the MoF, who was nominated as the official ERP coordinator in 2019. Previously, she has been a secretary, a member and a sub-coordinator of the ERP Working Group.

The ERP Working Group consists of approximately 60 people. Everybody involved in the ERP process has got basic hardware for online communication (microphone and speakers or a headset and a camera).

The respondent stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

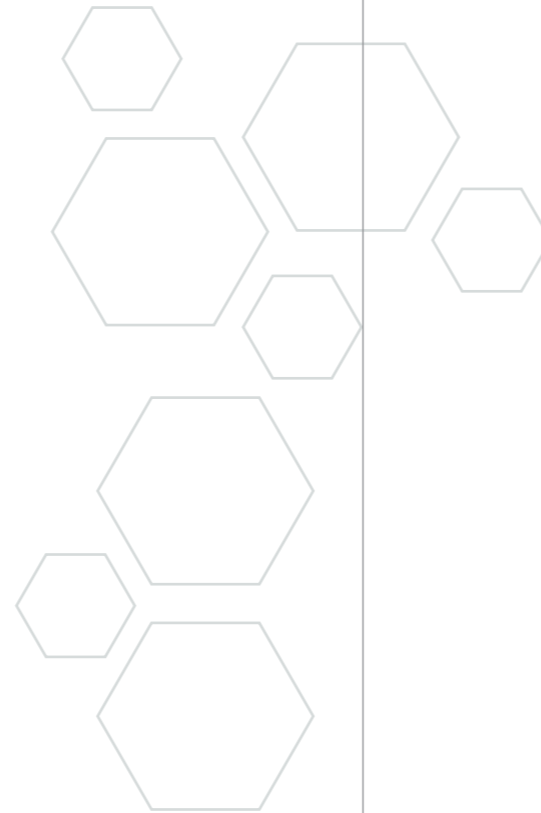
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Better data and information exchange
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholders to have access to the document

The role of the national coordinator in the ERP digitalisation process (in developing and managing past/current digitalisation initiatives and bringing forward new initiatives in the future) would be crucial. The ERPC should take initiative and lead the whole process.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The current status of digitalisation in Montenegro is that digital tools and applications are not yet used in the ERP process.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the preparation of the ERP. During the pandemic, all meetings have been organised online; the rest of the process has remained the same, the materials have been sent by e-mail like before Covid-19. Public consultations have been carried out in a hybrid form, with the minority present in person and the majority online.



Digital devices, tools and applications used in Montenegro for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/access this information	Whether/how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	e-mails, Zoom	All information, including organisational, technical, administrative details; revision of inputs from the ERP Working Group	ERP Working Group members			Everybody knows how to use e-mails	

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/access this information
To enable consultation with the public	Zoom, website		Everyone interested
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	On the PCs of two secretaries of the ERP Working Group		
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	e-mails		
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	e-mails		
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Excel		ERP Working Group members
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	With support from the CEF and UNDP ³ as of 2022		

³ Professor Mojmir Mrak and Ms. Nina Vujosevic (previous ERP Coordinator) are engaged in the component for drafting the ERP in the UNDP project financed by the Slovak MoF supporting PFM reforms. Among other things, they improved the public consultation process by explaining the methodology to the stakeholders.

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

For further digitalisation of the ERP process, the ERPC proposes to set up a platform where the Working Group could exchange information about the ERP, and where all inputs could be stored and changed. This should also be user-friendly for translators, technical secretaries, and the WG coordinator.

Furthermore, this platform should provide the possibility for stakeholders to see the text of the ERP and also propose changes in the text. This way, the traditional approach of exchanging e-mails and tracking changes in the text could be advanced. The IT solution of the new platform should be simple and easy to use.

Maybe such improvements could also be achieved through Google Docs. However, as it is an important process that repeats every year, it would be better to set up a specific platform.

Once the platform is prepared, a presentation of its features and functions should be made; first to the members of the Working Group and then to other stakeholders.

Last but not least, the digitalisation process is very important for Montenegro – not only because of Covid-19 but for greater efficiency.



NORTH MACEDONIA

The proposed digitalisation initiative is to create a digital ERP platform for the ERP preparation, communication and information exchange between ERP team members, representatives from line ministries, the EC and other stakeholders.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The Ministry of Finance is leading the ERP process. A person from the MoF is the official ERP coordinator (ERPC) since 2014. Not having frequent changes in the team has contributed to achieving high results in the ERP preparation.

Approximately 100 public servants from 20 institutions are involved in the ERP process. There is an ERP Working Group and Secretariat in place, established by a Decision of the Minister of Finance, which is updated from time to time. Currently, the Working Group includes 59 members (22 members from the MoF and 37 ERP coordinators from other institutions).

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, only some members of the ERP Working Group have laptops with microphones, speakers and camera. The majority use smartphones for online communication, which is inconvenient, especially for accessing shared documents and providing inputs.

PCs in institutions are unequipped with microphones, speakers or cameras.

The respondents stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

- Better data and information exchange
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Increasing efficiency
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholders to have access to the document

The main responsibility of the ERPC in the MoF is to cooperate with the EU, IFIs and other donors. He sees his role in utilizing his experience to help develop an ERP platform by providing input and feedback on the potential features to be included. The other ERP team members could also contribute their knowledge to help create a useful platform.



CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The current status of digitalisation in North Macedonia is that digital tools and applications are not used yet in the ERP process.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all live meetings have been substituted with virtual ones, using various meeting applications (WebEx, Zoom, MS Teams). The rest of the process has remained the same, including exchange of documents by e-mail.

Digital devices, tools and applications used in North Macedonia for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/access this information	Whether/how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	e-mails and online meeting applications	All documents	Members of ERP Working Group and other employees in the institutions involved in the ERP process	No	Procured ready-made from the shelf	Everybody knows how to use e-mails	
To enable consultation with the public	MoF website and e-mails for comments Government platform https://ener.gov.mk	Draft ERP Chapter 5	Publicly available	No	Website developed for MoF		Has increased transparency
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	Drafts saved on PCs, final version available on MoF website	ERP document	Publicly available on website	No			
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	Meeting applications and e-mails	Discussions for improvement of draft documents	ERP Working Group members and other employees in the institutions involved in ERP process	No			

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/access this information
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	e-mails	All draft and final documents	
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Excel		ERP Working Group members
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	Online meetings	ERP guidance note, course materials, etc.	

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

There is a proposal to digitalise the ERP process by setting up a digital collaboration platform, which would replace constant exchange of information through e-mail, for all activities: submitting proposals for new reform measures, submitting reports for implementing reform measures, diagnostics, feedback to line ministries on the submitted texts, reports for implementing joint policy recommendations, dialogue with the EU, public consultations, and so on.

The proposed digitalisation initiative is to create a Digital ERP platform, which would enable ERP preparation, communication and information sharing for the ERP team, representatives from line ministries and other stakeholders.

Possible additional useful tools for ERP Working Group members could include:

- Chat for informal communication, which would help the participants to get more information and updates on the reform measures quickly, and serve as a tool to enhance collaboration and communication between them.
- Planner for the events of process coordination, which would inform about the meetings and their agenda, share the main points and content of the meetings, etc.
- Video conferencing tool, which would help participants to enhance communication and exchange ideas.

To implement the initiatives, the ERP team would need collaboration from all participants to tailor their individual needs, IT infrastructure and support for creating a Digital ERP platform, and training the users to successfully use it.

As a result, the ERP preparation process would be more efficient and transparent, and involve less manual work by ERP Working Group members.

The public servants involved in the ERP process could strengthen their digital skills through:

- Information and data literacy to articulate their information needs, locate and retrieve digital data, information and content, and to judge the relevance of the source and its content.
- Communication and collaboration to interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity.
- Problem solving to identify needs and problems, resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments, and use digital tools to innovate processes and products.

Except for the basic digital skills mentioned above, the participants in the ERP process could benefit also from advanced skills to use data for policy modelling, data analytics and data mining, which would support policy-making, service delivery, impact evaluation and project management.



SERBIA

We plan to create a platform for the automatisisation of all ERP preparation phases, including the submission of inputs for new reform measures, reporting on previous reform measures, joint policy recommendations with the EU and diagnostics. At the end of this process, everything would be exported into one document.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The official ERP coordinator is the Minister of Finance. The Ministry of Finance leads the process and coordinates the structural reform part together with the Public Policy Secretariat (PPS).

The ERP Working Group, which is updated every year by the decision of the Minister, has 101 members from approximately 30 institutions.

With respect to the basic hardware for online communication, everybody has got a PC, but not all have a microphone, speakers and cameras. People use smartphones with headsets, which is not very convenient, especially for accessing shared documents and providing inputs. Some people have laptops with microphones, speakers and cameras.

The respondents stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

- Effectiveness of the ERP preparation
- Better data and information exchange
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form

The whole ERP document is prepared electronically. Inputs are collected from all coordinators in involved institutions, then a unified version is drafted based on the inputs to be shared with the EC and in consultation with the public. Later on, all proposals are integrated into the final document.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The current status of digitalisation in Serbia is that digital tools and applications are not used yet in the ERP process.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused to have more meetings online than in person. Documents were exchanged via e-mail even before the outbreak of Covid-19, so this part of the process has not changed. However, Serbia has started a process of automatisisation to make the ERP process more effective. In the future, every input, aggregation, translation into English, and preparation of the draft for the EC advisory mission and public consultation will move through this platform.



Digital devices, tools and applications used in Serbia for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/ how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	e-mail exchange of documents prepared in MS Office After Covid-19: WebEx, Zoom, MS Teams		ERP Working Group members			Everybody knows how to use e-mails	
To enable consultation with the public	Website and new portal https://ekonsultacije.gov.rs The ERP document is the first document in Serbia for public consultation on this platform (pilot consultation)	'e-konsultacije' is an online portal for all public consultations at central and local levels In the future all draft laws and other documents will be presented to the public through this portal	Everyone interested				

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	PCs		
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	e-mails, online platforms		
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	e-mails, online meetings		
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	Excel		ERP Working Group members
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	e-mails and kick-off meetings; meetings with newcomers		

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

Serbia is carrying out a project together with the GIZ in support of the Public Finance Reform and the Agenda 2030, financed by German BMZ and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Within this project, it is planned to create a platform for the automatization of all ERP preparation phases, including the submission of inputs for new reform measures, reporting on previous reform measures, joint policy recommendations with the EU, diagnostics, and so on. At the end of this upgraded process, everything would be exported into one document.

Training of public servants to use the new ERP platform will also be part of the GIZ project.

The Serbian ERP team acknowledges that also other participants may have similar software and hardware needs for the ERP preparation, and has expressed readiness to share its own experience in setting up such a platform and cooperate regionally.

MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE ERP AND JIS (UNIFIED INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION MONITORING, POLICY COORDINATION AND REPORTING)

The JIS, created for the implementation of the Law on Planning System (LoPS), is connected to the Information System for Budget Preparation of the Republic of Serbia (BIS). Participants in the planning system enter into the JIS the content of their policy documents and medium-term plans (including linking measures and activities with the programme budget) through which they report on various bases. The administrator of the JIS is the Public Policy Secretariat. The JIS includes:

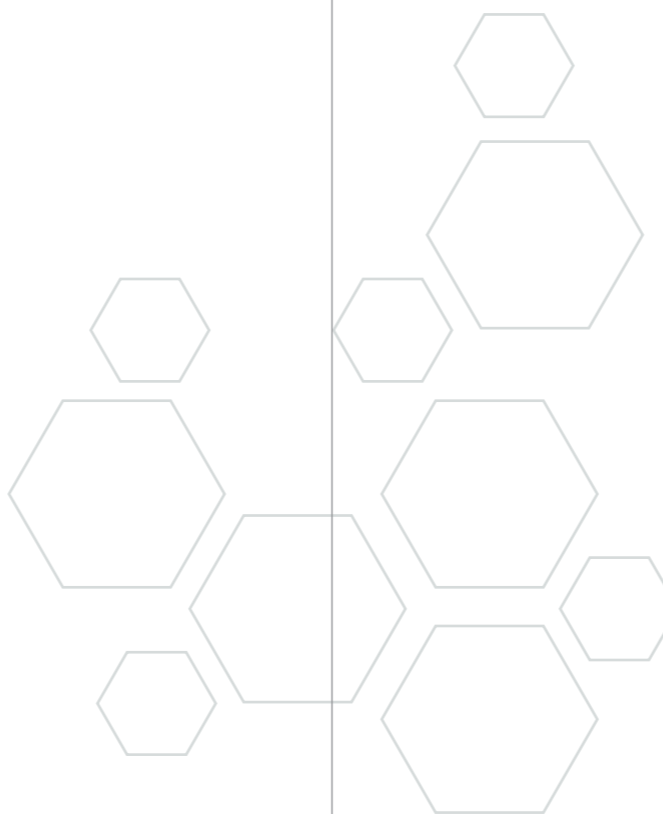
1. Public policy documents prepared in accordance with of the LoPS and the methodology of public policy management
2. Documents prepared in accordance with the instructions of the Government (Action Plan for the Implementation of the Government Programme and the Annual Work Plan of the Government)
3. Planning documents that Serbia prepares and adopts in the process of joining the EU in accordance with the methodological recommendations of the EC, such as the ERP

Currently, the JIS is functional for the first group of documents (basic module). The development of a module for the second group of documents is in the final phase. For the ERP, which belongs to the third group of documents, a technical specification for the ERP digitalisation module is being prepared. All additional modules that are being developed, including the ERP module, must use the JIS programming languages and the core module platform. For the preparation of the ERP, a unique template is being used, which takes into consideration to the greatest extent the methodological guidelines of the EC. This form will be digitised as well as the other tables attached to the ERP. The biggest challenge is to define the technical specification for changes in the EC Guidance Note, as well as the translation of the document into English.

MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THE JIS

The information system for public policy planning, monitoring, coordination and reporting is the unified national electronic system in which the planning system participants input the content of their public policy documents and medium-term plans, and perform reporting in accordance with the Law on Planning System of Serbia. The JIS is managed by the Government through the Public Policy Secretariat.

The JIS is managed by providing a link between the content of public policies, medium-term plans of the budget beneficiaries for the implementation of public policy measures, and their financial plans. It enables timely reporting on the achieved objectives and monitoring of the achieved performance evaluation indicators.



METHOD OF CREATING REPORTS ON THE RESULTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PUBLIC POLICY DOCUMENT BY A PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BODY

A public administration body generates reports as per Article 69 of the Regulation on the methodology of public policy management, impact assessment of public policies and regulations, and the content of individual public policy documents by taking over relevant data from the JIS entered there when drafting the policy documents and mid-term plans for their implementation, and during reporting on the implementation of the mid-term plans, and by direct entry of the missing data into the JIS.

Reporting on the results of the implementation of public policy documents is performed by publishing the reports on the website of the proponent and/or adopting authority, within the deadlines for reporting and in accordance with the law regulating the planning system. Public administration bodies report to the Government on the implementation of public policy documents through the JIS.

CONTENT OF THE JIS FOR PLANNING

The JIS contains relevant data on public policy documents and their implementation as well as related mid-term plans. During the drafting of the public policy document and at the latest before its adoption, and if the document is adopted by the Government prior to its submission to the Public Policy Secretariat for an opinion, the proponent of the policy document enters the following data into the JIS, with the option of revising the data until the adoption:

1. **Name of the public policy document** it refers to, with reference to the field of planning and implementation of public policy that it covers
2. **Duration**, i.e. the time period the document is being adopted for
3. **Overall objective**, with reference to the higher level planning document it is taken from, along with impact indicators at the level of the overall objective
4. **Specific objectives**, with outcome indicators at the level of specific objectives
5. **Measures** and/or group of measures for achieving specific objectives, with reference to the specific objective, along with output indicators at the level of individual measures
6. **Activities** and performance indicators at the level of activity and entered only if the implementation of an activity is critical for the implementation of a specific measure

The public administration body reports to the Government on the results of the implementation of the public policy document under their competence by entering data into the JIS as per Article 69 of the Regulation (Report on the results of implementation of a public policy document).

Parties with the obligation of mid-term planning enter data from their mid-term plans into the JIS, in particular the following:

1. **Overall objective**, along with impact indicators at the level of the overall objective, with reference to the public policy document or development planning document the goal was taken from
2. **Specific objectives**, along with outcome indicators at the level of specific objectives, with reference to the public policy document or development planning document the specific objective was taken from
3. **Measures for achieving the specific objective**, along with impact indicators at the level of individual measures, with reference to the public policy document or development planning document the measure has been taken from, or a designation that the measure has been established by a mid-term plan, and the programme activities and projects in the programme budget wherein funds for the implementation of the measures are provided
4. **Activities for achieving the measure**, along with deadlines and bodies responsible for implementing each of the activities, with reference to the programme activity or project in the programme budget wherein funds are provided for the implementation of the specific activity

A party with the obligation of mid-term planning reports on the results of the implementation of the mid-term plan during the preceding fiscal year by entering data into the JIS on the achieved annual values of performance indicators and the status of implementation of activities, along with explanations of deviations between planned and achieved indicator values, and deviations from the planned deadlines for implementing activities.

METHOD OF KEEPING AND MAINTENANCE OF THE JIS

The JIS is managed by the Government through the PPS, which keeps the public informed by making publicly available on their website all development planning documents, public policy documents, mid-term plans and reports on their implementation, mandatory for publication based on the law regulating the planning system.

METHOD OF DATA AND DOCUMENT ENTRY INTO THE JIS FOR PLANNING

Data and relevant documents are entered into the JIS using the respective software application for data entry. Documents are supplied in electronic form, in accordance with the law regulating electronic documents.



TURKEY

There is a kind request to first get the opportunity to assess any proposed new digital tools or digitalisation activities before moving ahead.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION AND COORDINATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The Presidency of Strategy and Budget leads the ERP preparation process officially. It is responsible for coordinating the whole process from the beginning until sending the ERP to the EC. The mission of this Office is to prepare development plans, including medium-term and annual programmes.

Turkey has been preparing the ERP document (and its predecessor the Pre-Accession Economic Programme) for almost 20 years.

In 2021, 23 line ministries and institutions were involved in the ERP process. At least 400 colleagues from different line ministries and institutions participated in it.

Most of the colleagues in the Turkish ERP team have got the basic hardware for online communication (laptops, microphones and speakers or headsets and cameras).

The respondents stated that the main objectives in the digitalisation of the ERP process are (in order of importance):

- Increasing the efficiency of ERP preparation
- Increasing the transparency of the ERP preparation process by enabling different stakeholders to have access to the document
- Better collaboration between different line ministries during ERP preparation
- Saving and archiving all drafts and final versions in a digital form
- Better data and information exchange

In Turkey generally, official electronic letters, e-mails and face-to-face meetings for connection with stakeholders are used. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, online meetings are frequently used rather than face-to-face meetings. Line ministries and relevant institutions send their responses and contributions via e-mail and official electronic letter. To get the contributions in the same format, a measure template is designed as a Word document and sent to the stakeholders. This working approach is quite effective and well-functioning.

CURRENT SITUATION WITH THE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

The situation with the digitalisation status of the ERP process in Turkey is different than in other participating countries. In Turkey, there are some tools and digital platforms/systems for the national budget process already in place. Those tools and platforms are used actively for preparing budget documents and monitoring the plans and programmes. For example, for the annual programme, responsible institutions propose their measures by using one of the digital systems developed by the IT department. The ERP coordination team at the Presidency of Strategy and Budget automatically selects and checks the budget of the ERP measures among all the measures covered by the budget plan. Whereas such digital tools and applications are already used for the budget and programming process, they do not focus directly on the ERP preparation process.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitalisation of the ERP in Turkey. The ERP coordination team at the Presidential Office has moved from face-to-face meetings to online meetings. Thanks to online meetings, the number of meetings organised for ERP preparations specific to the line ministries increased.

Digital devices, tools and applications used in Turkey for ERP preparation

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/ how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To enable digital communication among ERP Working Group members	e-mail, electronic letter, online meetings (PSB video conference programme, Zoom, WebEx, Teams etc.)		Within the ERP Working Group		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly
To enable consultation with the public	The public is consulted through a questionnaire when we prepare our top policy document and development plans		Everyone		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly
To save and archive different versions of the ERP document (drafts, final)	The ERP is published on the website in PDF format		Everyone		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly

Purpose	Digital devices, tools and applications used	Information exchanged digitally	Who can use/ access this information	Whether/ how it is used for / integrated with other processes rather than the ERP process	How it was set up	To what degree public servants can use it	How it has increased the efficiency, quality and transparency of the ERP process
To promote collaboration within the ERP team	PSB Cloud and e-mail		Within the ERP Working Group		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly
To exchange information between institutions during the ERP preparation process	e-mail		Within the ERP Working Group		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly
To generate the tables for the ERP document from given data sources	e-mail and a Word template for annex tables	Estimated costs and actual spending of SRs	Within the ERP Working Group		Cus-tom-made solution	Most are using the template; some do not prefer using the template	Significantly
To promote learning and knowledge sharing on the ERP preparation	Bilateral on-line meetings with every line ministry, e-mail	Guidance notes, joint conclusion, templates for annex tables	Within the ERP Working Group		Developed based on an open-source solution	Everybody knows how to use	Significantly

FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE ERP PROCESS

Turkish respondents noted that it would be useful to find a template for an annex table in Word format if the EC revised the tables. Sometimes it is time consuming to keep the contributions in the same format.

Should there be a plan to design a platform for the ERP preparation, there would be a need to identify new IT colleagues to design and solve the challenges that the ERP team would face.

However, such digitalisation options would be directly related to national negotiations with stakeholders and directors. Hence planning something for EU documents and the EU accession process would require high-level decisions. Thus, the Turkish ERPC kindly requested to first get the opportunity to assess any proposed new digital tools or digitalisation activities before moving ahead.

ACTION NOTES

ALBANIA

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, based on the current situation, there is a need to equip desktop computers in the institutions with headsets (speakers and microphone) and web cameras for videoconferencing. The institutions also have to provide internet connection with adequate capacity for online communication.

As regards the further digitalisation of the ERP preparation process, the proposal is to look into the possibility of setting up a user-friendly digital platform that would allow the preparation and drafting of the ERP to be easily accessible by everybody, so that there would be no constant need to exchange information through e-mails and people could save time and manual labour. This platform could be used also for communication with representatives from the EC during its missions and for public consultation with stakeholders.

For such a new digital platform, also capacity building would be needed to learn how to use it.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, based on the current situation, there is a need to equip desktop computers in the institutions with headsets (speakers and microphone) and web cameras for videoconferencing. The institutions also have to provide internet connection with adequate capacity for online communication.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is too early to discuss a further digitalisation of the ERP preparation process. The reason behind this is that the process of ERP preparation itself is not structured well enough and in reality, it is functioning with substantial difficulties. Therefore, the next step would be to strengthen and streamline the ERP preparation process, before taking steps for advancing the digitalisation of this process.

In the meantime, there is a proposal to provide an MS Office 365 licence for all persons included in the ERP preparation process in order to develop an internal document sharing platform.

Another proposal is to strengthen the digital skills of public servants, especially for using Office 365 and OneDrive as a document sharing platform.

KOSOVO

Regarding the basic conditions for online communication, the first priority is to establish a proper internet connection in the institutions. There is also a need to equip desktop computers in the institutions with headsets (speakers and microphone) and web cameras for videoconferencing.

For further digitalisation initiatives to improve the ERP process, a digital tool for increased efficiency and planning and a monitoring platform is needed. However, any digitalisation should not be limited to the ERP process only; it should include the overall planning processes in Kosovo. The first step could be to enable a web-based collaborative platform like SharePoint for the ERP team, to provide a joint working space instead of phones and e-mails only.

There is also a need for capacity building to strengthen knowledge of using MS Office 365. This is in line with the main platform for Kosovo Government, which has a licence for Microsoft Office.

MONTENEGRO

The priority of future digitalisation is to set up a specific platform where the working group could exchange information about the ERP, all inputs could be stored and changed, there would be a possibility for stakeholders to be included in the process, and it should also serve to assist translators, technical secretaries and the coordinator of the working group.

Once the platform is ready, the users have to be trained to use it.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, based on the current situation, there is a need to equip desktop computers in the institutions with headsets (speakers and microphone) and web cameras for videoconferencing. The institutions also have to maintain internet connection with adequate capacity for online communication.

The proposed digitalisation initiative is to create a Digital ERP platform, which would enable communication and knowledge sharing for the ERP team and the representatives from the line ministries.

Digital skills of the public servants involved in the ERP process have to be strengthened for: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, and problem solving. Furthermore, advanced skills could be strengthened in order to use data for policy modelling, data analytics and data mining to support policy-making, service delivery, impact evaluation, and project management.

SERBIA

Regarding the basic hardware for online communication, based on the current situation, there is a need to equip desktop computers in the institutions with headsets (speakers and microphone) and web cameras for videoconferencing.

Serbia has started the process of automatisation. The goal is to have a platform that would make the ERP process more effective, while ensuring its integration with the existing Management Information Systems for public policies.

Training of public servants to use this new platform is also planned.

Serbia has expressed readiness to share its experience in setting up such a platform and cooperate regionally through a common digital initiative.

TURKEY

Planning activities related to EU documents and the EU accession process would require high-level decisions in Turkey. Thus, there is a kind request to first get the opportunity to assess any proposed new digital tools or digitalisation activities before moving ahead.

REGIONAL APPROACH IN DIGITALISATION

There is a possibility for a regional approach in advancing the digitalisation of the ERP process in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The regional approach could achieve all the benefits of a country-specific approach, while opening up possibilities for additional advancing of ERP digitalisation that is not possible with a country-specific approach. It would provide a more comprehensive overview of the complete ERP process in the region, along with easier monitoring and evaluation of the ERP documents, better involvement of stakeholders, conducting regional analyses, and so on.

The regional approach could be useful also for the European Commission in assessing and reviewing the level of economic governance in the whole region. Therefore, further discussion with the EC and beneficiaries in this direction is recommended to identify the benefits that all stakeholders could expect from a regional approach in ERP digitalisation.

Another benefit is better involvement of various development agencies, knowledge hubs and donors, which might be needed for the digital transformation of the ERP preparation process.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The following gives a short overview of the digital transformation activities of several development and knowledge sharing institutions in the region.

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN FINANCE (CEF)

The CEF's strategic objective in 2022–2026⁴ is to serve as a leader in learning and to inspire public officials as individuals and teams to shape institutional governance. The overall impact should contribute to the development of successful economies and fair societies. The CEF is a leader in applying people-centred learning approaches and holding the know-how of becoming and being a learning organisation.

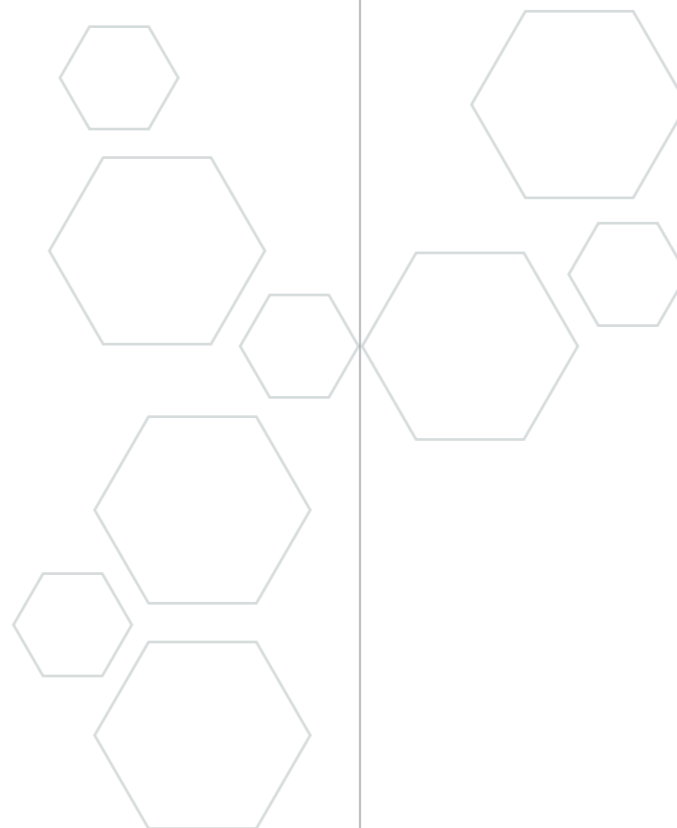
Over the next five years, the CEF will link the thematic focuses and projects to the strategic goals in the area of post-Covid-19 financial recovery, green financing and digitalisation. Supporting a better understanding of the current status and organic development steps in the ERP digitalisation process are learning and knowledge sharing initiatives in this effort, delivered as part of the CEF-led and EU-funded support to the ERP teams and process.

The CEF continuously upgrades technical features in its Online Learning Campus for better user experience, constantly advances its own integrated planning and monitoring information system, enhances the facilitation skills of its staff and experts for a digital environment, and deepens their understanding of e-learning methodologies.

Recent CEF knowledge products and learning events elaborate the methods linked to online facilitation techniques; training digital “soft” skills; organising virtual meetings; tips and tools for effective communication through camera and voice; digital communication of public officials; effective use of time, and online methodologies, among other things.

THE GERMAN AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (GIZ)

The GIZ supports the countries' digital transformation process.⁵ Such transformation can only be successful if it is people-oriented and shaped in a sustainable way, and at the same time linked closely with social goals.



The GIZ uses a variety of tried and tested cross-sectoral approaches, instruments and solutions to design projects in the best possible way. This way, partners are supported in making their governmental, economic and social activities more sustainable, inclusive and fit for the future. The current Corporate Strategy for 2020–2022 continues on the same note, with a focus on digitalised end-to-end business processes and data-driven and technology-based services.

A current GIZ activity in the target region is the “Public finance reform – 2030 Agenda” project in Serbia.⁶ The project aims to initiate key reforms for the 2030 Agenda and align them with the principles of good governance. The project activities are based on the public financial management reform programme, tax administration transformation programme, strategy for development of public internal financial control and the 2030 Agenda.

The ERP is one of the planning documents that Serbia prepares and adopts in the process of joining the EU in accordance with the methodological recommendations of the EC. Part of the project is the digitalisation of the ERP preparation process. Currently, a technical specification for the ERP digitalisation module is being prepared. The ERP module, like all additional modules that are being designed, must use the programming languages and the core module platform for the Unified Information System for Planning, Implementation Monitoring, Policy Coordination and Reporting (JIS).

REGIONAL SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (RESPA)

ReSPA as a regional hub aims to support governments in finding an effective and sustainable way to take forward the Western Balkans in the area of public administration reform and EU integration.⁷ ReSPA puts a special emphasis on quality management, e-governance, human resource management and development, centre of government and better regulation.

Digitalisation is the core driver for achieving more efficient and widely available public services for citizens and businesses. It inevitably changes the way society functions.

ReSPA focuses on digital transformation and takes a holistic approach. ReSPA has established an eGovernment Working Group that supports digitalisation among Western Balkan governments by developing e-services and focusing on open data and use of new information technologies.

ReSPA is organizing seasonal schools on digital transformation that provide a holistic perspective on the whole process, starting with a design-thinking and user-centred perspective (identification of challenges, obstacles, prototyping and using digital tools in finding solutions).

The seasonal schools look into how governments could cope and adjust when using rapidly emerging technologies, taking care especially of user-centric design, cybersecurity and communications. Communication challenges inherent to digital transformation in the public sector that refers to resistance and fears of users when accepting new digitised public service are tackled, too.

REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC)

*Digital transformation is an essential change in the process of using digital technologies to create new experiences, opportunities, innovative business processes and market requirements.*⁸

⁴ <https://www.cef-see.org/2022-2026-strategic-direction>

⁵ <https://www.giz.de/en/aboutgiz/83636.html>

⁶ https://www.giz.de/projektdateien/projects.action?pn=201721240&request_locale=en_GB
<https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/21219.html>

⁷ <https://www.respaweb.eu/>

⁸ <https://www.rcc.int/flagships/7/digital-transformation>

The RCC helps the Western Balkan region to grow by working on ensuring greater availability of digital infrastructure and enhancing connectivity, creating a trustworthy regional space and competitive environment for innovative businesses, working on digital upskilling, as well as enabling better regulatory framework that provides regulatory stability and consistency over time.

Digital skills are essential for development of the digital economy and society. The RCC creates a self-sustainable regional framework to support digital upskilling and reskilling, mirroring the EU practice that aims at establishing direct links between digital skills supply and demand, creating a conducive environment for innovation and start-ups, and supporting knowledge transfer and increased job opportunities for youngsters and other targeted groups.



MY NOTES

Horizontal lines for taking notes



ANNEX 1:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrija Aleksoski works in the Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia since 2001. Since 2007, he has served as Assistant Head of Department for relations with the EU and international financial institutions. Since 2014, he is the National ERP Coordinator for North Macedonia.

He has an educational background in economics and did master studies in public policy and management at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. Both help him in his professional focus on public management, policy analysis, policy recommendations, policy dialogue, development banking, international finance, official development assistance, and also in taking care of the impact on market structures and commercial aspects of the activities.

His executive Master of Electronic Governance at the EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland helps him to implement good governance through the deployment of appropriate ICT tools and the re-engineering of workflow processes to fit the technologies with the active involvement of stakeholders in both private and public sectors.

His digital transformation activities include:

- Leading the preparation of the Foreign Assistance Management Application (FAMA), a web-based information service for public sector projects in North Macedonia financed with foreign loans and grants, which provides a significant link in the process of foreign assistance coordination
- Being part of the group that prepares the technical requirements for the Ministry of Finance Integrated Financial Management Information System (FMIS)
- Publications on the Electronic Single Window System in Foreign Trade Transactions in the Republic of Macedonia and e-Exchange of Encrypted and Digitally Signed Documents

ABOUT THE CEF

The CEF is an international organization with the mission to support capacity development of public officials and their institutions in South East Europe through learning and knowledge sharing. We combine topical expertise with in-depth knowledge of countries in the region in the thematic areas of public financial management, tax policy and administration, central banking, and cross-cutting areas of data and analysis for designing policies and leadership for managing reforms.

Another important focus of our activities is support to our member institutions in becoming knowledge hubs and learning organizations.

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