

PROFEEDBACK POLICY BRIEF

POLICY EVALUATION LANDSCAPE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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The use of evaluation to support rational decision-making processes has been steadily increasing over the last couple of decades (Vedung, 2010). Evaluations have become integral to policy management in various fields, utilized by diverse entities with different purposes and methodological approaches. This policy brief highlights the evolving landscape of evaluations in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (*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*), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and emphasizes the need for structured evaluation policies and development of the evaluation systems to improve quality of decision-making processes. The methodological basis for development of the document represents desk analysis of the available secondary data and interviews with representatives of the national government institutions dealing with policy evaluation and voluntary organisations of evaluation professionals in the analysed countries.

Key Messages

The current state of evaluation in the Western Balkans reveals a pressing need for a cultural shift towards evidence-based policy making. Despite the ongoing efforts to develop evaluation frameworks and initiatives, significant barriers remain, such as low awareness among key stakeholders and insufficient budgets and political support. Strengthening the evaluation culture is not merely about implementing methodologies; it requires fostering an environment where evaluations, including RIA and ex ante assessments, are valued, findings are actively used, and policymakers prioritize evidence in their strategies. By addressing these challenges, the region can move towards more accountable and effective governance.

- Strengthen national evaluation policies to increase demand and use of evaluation findings.
- Develop structured National Evaluation Systems to define methodologies and responsibilities.
- Invest in capacity building and budget allocation for evaluation integration into the policy cycle learning from experience of countries who went through similar transition process (eg. Visegrad countries, Slovenia, Croatia, etc.).
- Establish practice of conducting regular ex-post evaluations of the public policy or government intervention using comprehensive and rigorous impact evaluation methods.
- Increase transparency of the policy assessments through provision of publicly available monitoring and evaluation reports of the public policy documents.

Introduction/Problem/Context

This policy brief aims to outline the core elements of the policy evaluation architecture in WB countries, focusing on institutional settings and current evaluation practices, while analyzing the demand and supply of policy evaluations. The primary goal is to identify critical gaps in national policy evaluation systems and offer recommendations to strengthen the institutional and strategic frameworks, enhance institutional arrangements, and improve capacity-building mechanisms. Landscape analysis helps assess country-specific contexts, mapping stakeholders, legal frameworks, capacities, and public attitudes towards evaluations. This understanding is vital for achieving policy goals.

National evaluation policy represents a systematic and institutionalised monitoring and evaluation framework in several interdependent organisational entities with the purpose of informing decision-making and securing oversight function (Hojlund, 2015). The relationship between public policy and evaluations is complex, primarily referring to the role of social sciences in policy-making processes. Policymakers require evaluations for various reasons, such as obtaining a better understanding of issues, challenging information from interest groups, providing legitimacy for political actions, and ensuring they are well-informed (Weiss, 1999). However, the channels through which evaluations influence policy-making are often hindered by the absence of institutional mechanisms and limitations within evaluations themselves, such as a lack of data and quality of the performed assessments (Weiss, 1999). Despite these challenges, evaluations are essential in democratic societies, as they promote evidence-based decision-making. National evaluation policies play a crucial role in increasing the demand for evaluations, structuring evaluation systems, and allowing for budget and capacity building (Chirau et al., 2021).

In the Western Balkans, the culture of evaluation remains underdeveloped, largely influenced by the EU accession process and institutional reforms. Countries in the region have shown varying degrees of commitment to integrating evaluations through ex-ante evaluations, regulatory impact assessments (RIA) and ex-post policy evaluations.

Institutional solutions and incentives for the development of evaluation systems worldwide

While national evaluation policy provides a normative framework guiding the evaluation processes and activities, established national evaluation systems represent infrastructure defining the purpose, responsibilities and organization of the public sector evaluation function (Segone et al. 2014). However, it should be noted that undertaking evaluations is not necessarily absent if such a system does not exist. Analysing the overall status of the national evaluation policies worldwide, Rosenstein & Kalugampitiya (2021) collected information on the existing practices in 113 countries and the findings we represent in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation practice

Category	Number of Countries
Countries with a national evaluation policy framework	35
Countries regularly carrying out evaluations without national evaluation policies	21
Countries preparing to adopt a national evaluation policy	10
Countries with evaluation policies defined at the sectoral level	7
Institutional Models for Evaluation	
Evaluation function within a specific ministry or department	21%
Ministry of Planning and Development as central role	19%
Coordinating body within the Office of the President/Prime Minister	17%

Source: Rosenstein & Kalugampitiya (2021)

There are two development trends that pushed evaluation policy to the forefront of the policy agenda in the recent period – efforts relating to Sustainable Development agenda emphasizing the importance of evaluation culture and capacities for evaluation of the SDGs, and global evaluation initiatives reflected in development of the National Evaluation Capacity Index, establishment of the national and regional associations of evaluation professionals (eg. VOPEs), and spread of the global evaluation initiatives such as Eval4Action, EvalYouth Global Network, IPDET, and many others (Rosenstein & Kalugampitiya, 2021).

WB evaluation landscape

From the Western Balkan policy perspective, additional push refers to the EU accession influence, as WB countries also belong to the group of countries that receive grants and aid from the EU. As reported in Stockman et al. (2020), some European countries are using evaluation only in EU projects related to Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy (Romania, and the United Kingdom) and others have said that they apply the EU and SDG requirements to their local programs (Greece, Italy, Poland). The EU is fueling the awareness and demand for better policies and use of public funds, training opportunities across Europe including several online courses emergent and young evaluators (Diogi, 2020). The process of strengthening evaluation culture itself has been strongly dependent on the success in implementing the overall institutional reforms and has been strongly correlated with the efforts made in the field of democratic governance, rule of law, anti-corruption, evidence-based policy making, etc. The EU accession process is considered one of the leading factors contributing to the culture of the evidence-based policy making (Djukic, 2024). At the same time the EU accession process for Western Balkan countries is expected to significantly increase the demand for evaluations. Striving to align with EU standards, these countries are expected to demonstrate transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking through rigorous evaluations of public policies and programs. The alignment with EU *acquis* requires regular assessments of policy impacts, ensuring compliance with EU directives. Additionally, access to EU funds mandates robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of funded interventions, fostering a culture of systematic evaluation and learning across government institutions.

The following paragraphs provide summary of the WB evaluation landscape focusing on the aspects of the evaluation system – evaluation practices, strategic and institutional framework, and capacity building mechanisms.

Findings on Ex-Ante, RIA and Ex-Post Policy Assessments in the Western Balkans

In Albania, the regulatory framework for both ex ante evaluations and Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) is still evolving. Key strategic frameworks like the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) and the Public Administration Reform Strategy emphasize the importance of evidence-based policymaking. While some initiatives exist, there is a lack of comprehensive guidelines mandating systematic evaluations prior to implementation, potentially leading to gaps in understanding the implications of proposed regulations. For instance, RIA should be performed for all policies rather only for draft laws. Regarding ex post evaluations, there

is an indication of a potential gap in established processes for reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of existing regulations post-implementation. Methodologies such as Results-Based Management and Cost-Benefit Analysis are employed, but their application is uneven. While institutions like the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the National Agency for Information Society play pivotal roles, capacity challenges persist. Relevant international reports indicate need for greater efforts in the field of results-oriented monitoring and performance analyses. Albania has made progress in aligning its statistical system with EU standards but needs to enhance data quality and the production of sectoral statistics.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, ex ante evaluations are mandated at the entity level due to the decentralized governance structure. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), these evaluations are required for all strategic documents. In Federation of B&H it is mandated by decree that ex ante evaluations can be done only by independent external evaluators and report must be published on the web page of the institution in charge of preparation of strategic document. However, in Republika Srpska, there is no same requirement for such evaluations, potentially leading to inconsistencies in assessments across the country. All policy proposals at all levels should be rigorously assessed through RIAs for their anticipated impacts, but practice is often not consistent with legal framework in place. With regards to ex-post assessments, no specific findings were provided for Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggesting that a systematic approach to evaluating existing regulations might be lacking. Bosnia and Herzegovina faces significant challenges due to fragmented statistical systems, requiring improved coordination among its statistical agencies.

Montenegro has established a regulatory framework for ex ante evaluations through the Regulation on the Manner and Procedure of Drafting Strategic Documents. This regulation ensures that all strategic documents meet minimum quality criteria, facilitating a more systematic approach to policy development and evaluation, including RIA processes to assess potential impacts before implementation. In overall, monitoring practices are well established and reports on implementation of the main strategic documents has been carried out on a regular basis. However, the system of ex-post analysis and addressing identified ongoing difficulties with regards to implementation is missing. There could be noticed lack of ex-post perspective following the absent system of ex-post assessments.

In **North Macedonia**, RIA implementation, although still not consistent, has been applied since 2012. The evaluation landscape in North Macedonia is shaped by a mix of legislative frameworks, strategic documents, and institutional efforts, yet significant gaps remain in the practice and impact of evaluations. While regulations such as the Law on Development Planning and the Law on Public Administration establish the legal basis for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), their implementation is inconsistent, and enforcement mechanisms are often weak. The country has taken a lead in the

region by adopting a Methodology and Handbook for ex post regulatory evaluations. This framework systematically assesses the effectiveness of regulations post-implementation, thereby improving overall governance and regulatory oversight, drawing on insights gained from prior RIAs. However, the recent reports indicate relatively low quality of the policy impact reports referring to lack of capacities at the level of Ministry. Institutions like the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration oversee some evaluation efforts, but their outputs are not always systematically utilized for future planning. Statistical system is largely harmonized with EU standards, but gaps remain mainly in environmental and social statistics.

In **Serbia**, ex ante evaluations are mandated through the Law on the Planning System, which requires comprehensive analysis of public policies and regulations, including RIAs. This approach ensures that national and sectoral strategies are strategically aligned and sustainable, enhancing the effectiveness of governance. The accompanying Regulation on the Methodology for Public Policy Management provides a structured method for evaluating potential impacts before implementation. Due to intensive efforts of the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies, the overall framework for conducting RIA and policy assessments is considered thoroughly developed. However, it could be noticed considerable gap between the established regulative and practice, especially with regards to monitoring activities and ex-post assessments of the implemented policies. There is notable lack of transparency as there is negligible number of ex-post evaluations of the public policy documents publicly available. Serbia's statistical office demonstrates strong institutional capacity, though improvements are needed in regional statistics and coverage of small enterprises.

In **Kosovo**, the government established ex post assessment guidelines for legislation in 2015, focusing on enhancing the evaluation process for existing laws. There are Manuals for RIA, respectively ex-ante for new policy initiatives ([Manual for concept documents](#) and [standard cost model](#)). Manual for planning and drafting of strategic documents has been developed and revised to strengthen the chapter on M&E. This framework aims to ensure that regulations, following their implementation, are effectively reviewed to gauge their impact and inform future legislative actions, which may also include insights from prior RIAs. However, there is a noticeable gap with regards to institutional responsibility for policy evaluations as the evaluation issues are not specifically assigned to any Department, while the analysis of previous efforts in promotion of evaluation culture indicates Strategic Planning Office in the Office of Prime Minister having the leading role.

In overall, analysis of the Ex-Ante, RIA and Ex-Post Policy Assessments practices in the WB helped us extract the following findings:

- Limited Development of National Evaluation Policies. Existing national evaluation policies are partially developed, lacking sufficient mechanisms to drive demand and ensure the systematic use of evaluation findings in policy development.
- Absence of a Structured National Evaluation System. National evaluation practices are fragmented, with no clear methodologies or defined responsibilities, leading to inconsistencies in the evaluation processes.
- Insufficient Capacity and Resources for Evaluations. Institutional capacities for commissioning, monitoring, and utilizing evaluation findings are underdeveloped. There is inadequate budget allocation and limited investment in training to build the necessary expertise for effective evaluation practices.
- Underutilization of Ex-Post and Impact Evaluations. Ex-Post evaluations of public policies and government interventions are rarely conducted, and rigorous impact evaluation methods are not consistently applied.
- Lack of Transparency in Evaluation Processes. Evaluation findings and policy assessments are not consistently made publicly accessible, undermining accountability and stakeholder engagement in the evaluation process.

The findings presented in Table 2 provide an overview of the state of evaluation systems and practices in Western Balkan countries. The insights offer a foundation for targeted actions and tailored support to strengthen evaluation capacities across the region.

Table 2: Ex Ante, RIA and Ex Post Regulatory Assessments Findings for Western Balkan Countries

Country	Ex Ante Evaluations Mandatory	RIA	Ex Post Evaluations Mandatory	Ex Post Evaluation Framework Established	Ex Post Evaluation Framework Details
Albania	No	RIA performed, although not full RIA is mandatory for every draft law. Introduction of full RIA is expected.	No	No	No
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes, in FBiH	RIA mandated; implementation and the quality varies	No	No	No
Kosovo*	No	No specific findings provided	Yes	Yes	Guidelines for ex post assessment
Montenegro	Yes	RIA recommendations include defining exemption criteria	No	No	No
North Macedonia	No	RIA integrated into regulatory processes	Yes	Yes	Methodology and Handbook for ex post evaluation
Serbia	Yes	RIA reports required for regulatory proposals	No	No	Partially developed

Recommendations

Building on the identified challenges and findings, the following recommendations aim to strengthen the evaluation ecosystem and promote evidence-based policymaking. These actions focus on addressing gaps in policy, institutional capacity, and transparency while fostering a culture of learning and accountability. By implementing these measures, stakeholders can enhance the integration of evaluations into the policy cycle, ensuring more effective and impactful governance.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen National Evaluation Policies

To effectively enhance the role of evaluations in policymaking, it is crucial to establish comprehensive national evaluation policies. These policies should provide a clear framework for what needs to be evaluated. Good practices are established in Montenegro, Federation of B&H and Serbia with laws on development planning and planning system. By doing so, they will foster a culture of accountability and transparency, ensuring that evaluation findings are not only produced but actively utilized in decision-making processes. Additionally, promising practices with regards to establishment of the ex-post evaluation frameworks were identified in North Macedonia and Serbia providing solid basis for further development of the practice of conducting high-quality ex-post assessments and use rigorous methodologies. Initial steps in conducting ex-post impact evaluations would bring important lessons for the whole region on the potentials that evaluation findings could produce in the national development context.

Recommendation 2: Develop Structured National Evaluation Systems

Developing structured National Evaluation Systems will create a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation within public sectors. These systems should delineate responsibilities among different ministries and agencies, establish standard methodologies for conducting evaluations, and set clear guidelines for the dissemination of findings. Also, as a part of strengthening evaluation system availability of data should be secured. Such a framework will ensure consistency and high quality in evaluation practices, ultimately enhancing the credibility and impact of evaluation results in policymaking.

Recommendation 3: Invest in Capacity Building and ensure Budget Allocation for Evaluations

Investing in capacity building and allocating sufficient budgets for evaluation activities is essential for integrating evaluations into the policy cycle in all phases, during policy design and implementation. This includes training evaluators, funding evaluation studies, and establishing dedicated units within government agencies responsible for

overseeing evaluations. By enhancing the skills and resources available for conducting evaluations, policymakers will be better equipped to utilize evidence-based approaches in their decision-making, resulting in more effective policies and improved governance. In this process learning from experience of countries who went through similar transition process is very important.

Recommendation 4: Establishment of the Regular Communication Channels

Promotion of the evaluation culture depends on the capacity of the policy makers to understand potential benefits of the high-quality evaluations and learn from the evaluation findings and practices. Therefore, evaluation commissioners should be informed on the contemporary evaluation methods and work of the prominent institutions conducting evaluations worldwide. Strengthening channels of communication between public administration officials and the evaluation professionals is necessary for the exchange of policy needs and evolving policy issues. In line with that, it is necessary for each country to support development of the local evaluation experts and benefit from using the local resources including experts already familiar with evaluation methodologies used for assessment of the EU-funded projects.

Recommendation 5: Increase Transparency of the Evidence-based Policy Making Practices

Even when conducted, ex-post evaluation reports are hardly publicly available. Sharing good practice examples is important element of developing national evaluation frameworks. In line with the EU practice applied for evaluation of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy, WB countries should establish similar practice for identified core strategic documents. In that context, rigorous evaluations of the specific policies could bring credibility of the implemented policy also bringing positive impact on both accountability and learning.

Joint efforts on strengthening evaluation practices and capacity building initiatives

There could be noticed several joint initiatives developed with the aim of integrating evaluation into the policy making processes and establish links between evaluation and public policy system.

Western Balkan Enablers for Reforming Public Administration (WeBER) is another joint effort initiated by the civil society organisations aimed at providing credible support to feed public administration reform in the WB region. One of the main results of the WeBER represents PAR Monitor reports (PAR) that provide comparative results for each country in the Western Balkan region based on an in-depth, year-long

transformation. Building on the points discussed above, the core components of a transformative innovation policy framework aimed at supporting the green transition are outlined in Box 1. Each component represents a foundational policy approach for fostering sustainable and systemic change. monitoring research effort. PAR results with detailed monitoring results and recommendations for each country including several priority areas - transparency, information provision to the public, citizen participation, accountability, equal opportunity and integrity.

ReSPA – represents a regional hub established in 2010 as a joint initiative financed by European Commission and WB administrations with a mission to support the creation of transparent, accountable and professional public administration institutions that provide efficient services to the benefit citizens and businesses.

Western Balkan Evaluation Network (WBEN) – represents an association of the voluntary organisations of professional evaluators in the Western Balkans with aim of promoting evaluation culture, strengthening the role of evaluation in policy making and cooperation between evaluation associations and professionals in the WB region. WBEN organise a biannual conference on policy evaluations and trainings aimed at strengthening capacities for high-quality evaluations.

Enhancing the Quality of Industrial Policies (EQUIP) was joint initiative aimed at developing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems that would be able to track the economic, social and environmental impact of their industrial policy packages. It represents support for policy makers to formulate and design evidence-based strategies for inclusive and sustainable industrial development. The main contribution of the project was based on providing toolbox along with a range of methodologies consisting of 8 different tools and example of policy interventions that could help stakeholders for industrial diagnostics and strategy design.

Limitations

The limitations of this evaluation brief include the potential bias in the available data, as evaluations may often be conducted with varying degrees of rigor and methodological consistency. Furthermore, institutional deficiencies in implementing evaluation findings and a lack of political will may hinder the effectiveness of proposed recommendations. The complexity of the public policy arena, influenced by interests, ideologies, information, and institutions, also limits the clarity and impact of evaluations on decision-making processes.

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