

# CAF Impact Study 2025

The impact of the Common Assessment Framework on quality, change and innovation in the public sector

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## I Executive Summary

The CAF Impact Study 2024 examines the transformative role of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in enhancing public sector performance globally. Developed in 2000 under the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), CAF has become a cornerstone of quality management, addressing the unique challenges of public governance through principles of Total Quality Management (TQM).

CAF 2020, the most recent iteration, reflects emerging priorities such as digitalization, agility, and sustainability, ensuring its relevance in a rapidly evolving governance landscape. With over 4,100 registered users worldwide, predominantly in Europe, CAF demonstrates remarkable adaptability across administrative levels, sectors, and cultural contexts.

Drawing on survey data from 197 organizations and expert interviews, the study highlights CAF's significant impact in key areas of public administration. Survey respondents report improved leadership and strategic alignment, with over 90% of organizations indicating that CAF enhanced their ability to define strategic goals, improve leadership accountability, and align organizational efforts with citizen needs. CAF fosters a collaborative and inclusive organizational culture, promoting employee engagement and satisfaction. Moreover, the framework's structured self-assessment process enables organizations to systematically identify improvement areas, prioritize actions, and embed a culture of continuous quality improvement.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has demonstrated significant impact across its core criteria, particularly in the domains of Enabler and Result criteria. Its structured approach fosters improvements in leadership, strategy, people, partnerships, and processes, providing public organizations with a framework for continuous enhancement and societal impact.

CAF's alignment with broader societal goals, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscores its strategic relevance. By fostering inclusivity, environmental sustainability, and innovation, CAF contributes to global efforts to address pressing challenges in governance and public administration.

Furthermore, the survey reveals that a continuous implementation of CAF cycles and CAF experience (4+ years) show concentrated periods of progress, with the first and second cycles driving the most substantial changes. Initial enthusiasm often leads to measurable improvements, but sustaining momentum requires the integration of CAF results into strategic planning and management practices of public administrations. Organizations with multiple CAF cycles and prolonged CAF experience demonstrate superior outcomes, emphasizing the value of iterative learning and long-term commitment:

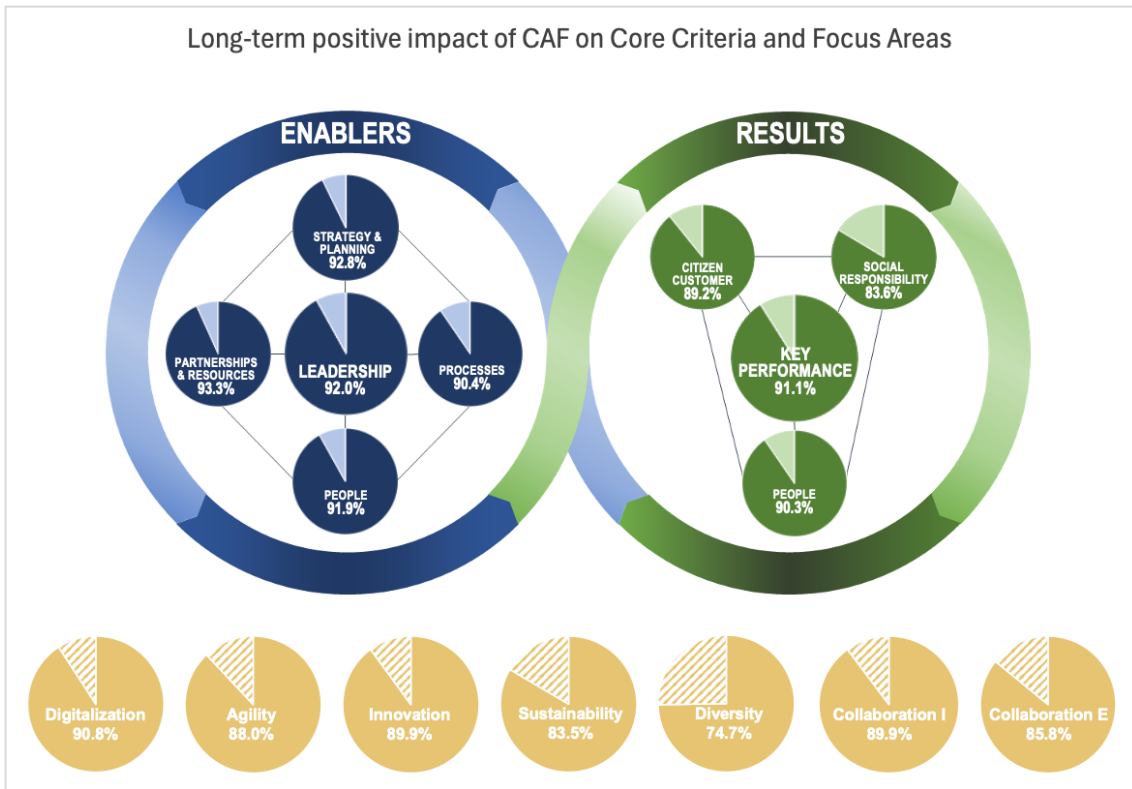


Figure 1: Perceived positive long-term impact on core criteria and focus areas

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of CAF experience (N=99-125) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on core criteria and focus areas.

The findings show a substantial positive impact on all CAF criteria (above 90%) and slight lower scores in the field of Citizens/Customer oriented Results and Social Responsibility Results (between 80 and 90%). The findings indicate potential for further growth in this area, especially in the translation of perception measurement results into performance data and improvement of services. Also, more attention should be paid to the measurement of the societal impact of public administrations which could lead to more visibility and underline the specific public value contribution of public administrations.

Having a closer look into the findings on the impact of CAF on the 28 CAF sub-criteria the findings show following results:

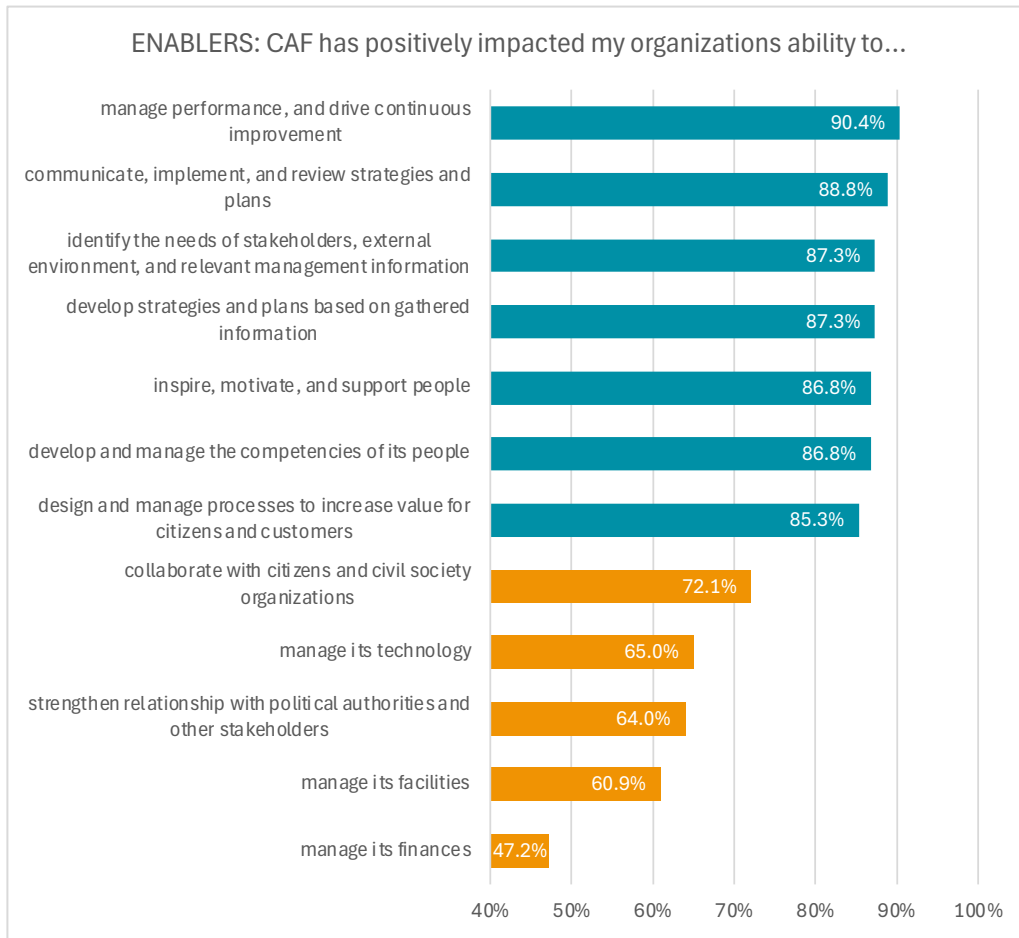


Figure 2: Enabler areas positively impacted by CAF implementation

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on various organizational capabilities (Enabler). The chart highlights the seven areas with the highest positive responses and the five areas with the lowest positive responses.

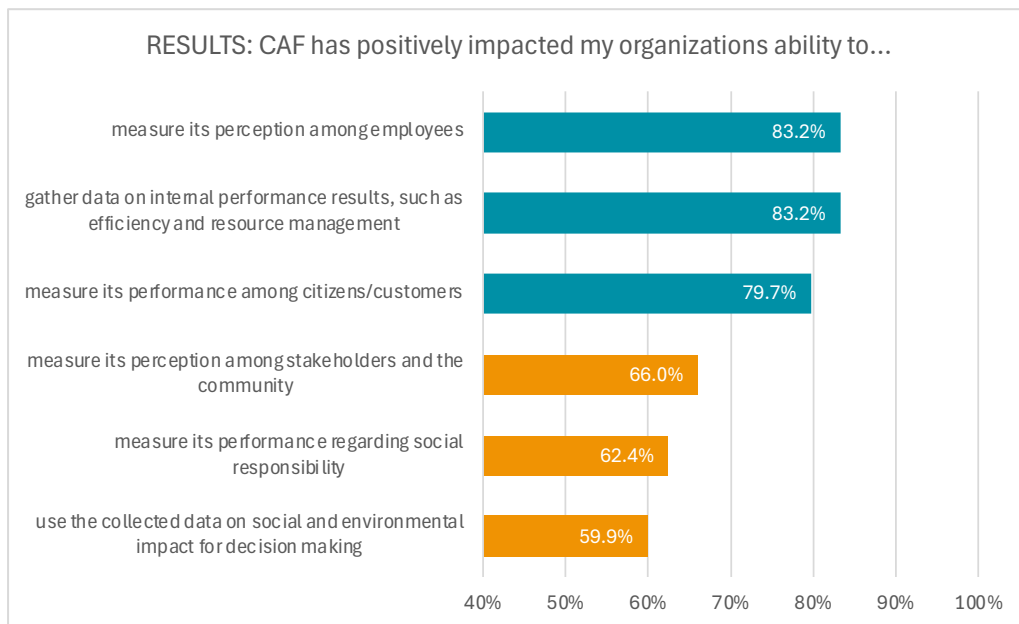


Figure 3: Results areas positively impacted by CAF implementation

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on various organizational capabilities (Results). The chart highlights the five areas with the highest positive responses and the five areas with the lowest positive responses.

CAF's greatest strengths lie in managing performance and driving continuous improvements. CAF also strengthens workforce engagement and competency development, creating a people-centric culture that aligns with organizational goals.

Despite these achievements, certain challenges persist. Stakeholder engagement and external collaboration require more structured approaches to foster trust and inclusion. Financial (47.2%) Facility (60.9%) and IT (65%) management also show lower positive impacts, indicating areas for further improvement.

CAF's influence also extends to organizational outcomes, linking strong internal processes with external results. Employee perception and internal performance metrics are areas of strength, with 83.2% of respondents citing positive impacts. However, gaps exist in measuring perception among stakeholders (66%), social responsibility (62.4%) and the use of social and environmental data for decision-making (59.9%).

Bridging internal improvements with external stakeholder needs and social responsibility remains a challenge. While CAF enhances strategic clarity and operational efficiency, achieving sustained societal impact requires better alignment between organizational processes and external expectations.

Having a closer look into the aggregated data of all respondents into the question how CAF affects certain focus areas the study reveals following interesting insights:

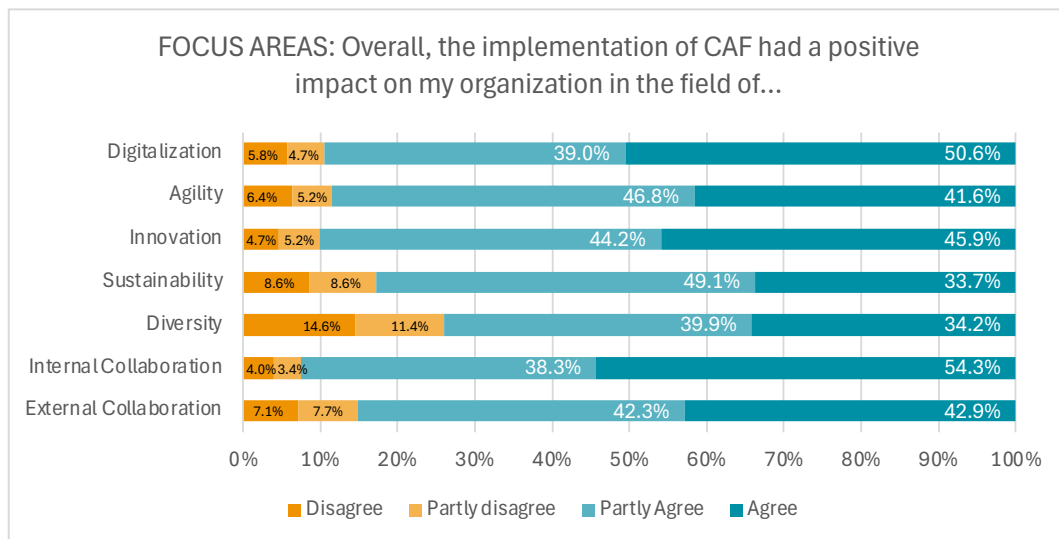


Figure 4: Perceived positive impact of CAF implementation on focus areas (N=158-175)

- ❑ **Internal Collaboration (92.6% positive impact):** CAF excels in fostering organizational cohesion, breaking down silos, and improving team communication. (e.g. Improved communication within teams, enhanced cross-departmental collaboration, supportive organisational culture etc.).
- ❑ **Innovation (90.1% positive impact):** CAF drives creative problem-solving and continuous improvement (e.g. improvements in training/development of digital skills, etc.).
- ❑ **Digitalization (89.6% positive impact):** Organizations enhance citizen-centric services supporting the integration of digital-tools with CAF (e.g. improvements in training and development for digital skills, the adoption of new digital processes and tools, increased online services for citizens/customers etc.).

- ❑ **Agility (88.4% positive impact):** Organizations improve adaptability and operational flexibility with CAF (e.g. adjustments to strategies in response to changing environments, increased employee adaptability, development of new problem-solving approaches etc.).
- ❑ **External Collaboration (85.2% positive impact):** CAF fosters governance perspectives in public administrations although the engagement with external stakeholders shows slower progress compared to internal collaboration.
- ❑ **Sustainability (82.8% positive impact):** CAF stimulates the integration of sustainability aspects into strategic planning and operations although the adoption of eco-friendly practices, improvements in energy efficiency etc. are planned and/or implemented in average just 48% percent of CAF implementing organisations.
- ❑ **Diversity (74.1% positive impact):** CAF stimulates Diversity although promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities lags behind in comparison with other focus areas. In average just 45.3% of CAF organisations report the implementation of diversity measures.

The study concludes with recommendations to strengthen CAF's impact. These include enhancing stakeholder engagement frameworks, expanding training and capacity-building initiatives for under-resourced organizations and encouraging organizations to leverage CAF to actively support and drive improvements in social responsibility, finances and diversity. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for a clear, forward-looking strategy to develop CAF further, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness in addressing the evolving challenges of public governance. Such steps can ensure that CAF remains a vital tool for driving excellence and resilience in public sector organizations worldwide.

In conclusion, the CAF Impact Study 2024 reaffirms CAF's critical role in modern public administration. By fostering strategic clarity, accountability, and citizen-centred services, CAF empowers public sector organizations to meet the demands of an increasingly complex governance environment.

## II Introduction

### Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of CAF on quality, change, and innovation in public administrations worldwide. By examining how CAF has contributed to improvements in governance, strategic planning, leadership, and service delivery, the study aims to determine CAF's effectiveness as a tool for fostering continuous improvement.

Moreover, the study aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities that have emerged from CAF's implementation, focusing particularly on how public administrations, whether highly developed or emerging, can leverage CAF to achieve more agile, innovative, and citizen-centred services.

### Scope, Methodology and Limitations

This study focuses on the application of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) within public administrations in Europe, including both EU and non-EU countries, as this region has historically seen the most extensive use of the framework. However, the findings also aim to provide insights that can be applied more broadly to public sector organizations worldwide.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of CAF's implementation and impact, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings are based on two key sources:

- ❑ Online Survey: Distributed by KDZ, national CAF correspondents, the European CAF Resource Centre at EIPA and the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), the survey reached a wide audience of public sector institutions known for having implemented CAF. A total of 197 responses were received, with participants evaluating CAF's effectiveness across its nine core and six focus areas. The survey highlighted CAF's impact on organizational quality, change management, and people. Descriptive statistics were used to identify common patterns and themes. Multiple responses from some organizations were included, which could introduce variability in perspectives.
- ❑ Semi-Structured Interviews: Five interviews with CAF experts from across Europe provided qualitative insights into CAF's implementation. These interviews explored:
  - CAF's impact on organizational leadership and culture.
  - Success stories and inspiring practices in implementing CAF.
  - Challenges encountered during implementation, such as resource constraints and resistance to change.
  - Recommendations for further development of CAF to meet the evolving needs of public administrations.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data complemented the survey findings by offering deeper insights into the successes, challenges, and future opportunities for CAF. Combining these methods provided a balanced perspective, integrating broad trends with specific, in-depth experiences. Together, these insights illustrate CAF's relevance as a tool for fostering leadership, organizational agility, and continuous improvement within public administrations.

Despite its strengths, the study acknowledges several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings:

- ❑ **Regional Limitations:** While CAF has global adoption, this study focuses mainly on Europe, with limited representation from Asia, the Americas, and none from Africa. Consequently, global insights may be underrepresented.
- ❑ **Survey Constraints:** Although 197 responses provide valuable data, they may not fully reflect the diversity of CAF users, especially in less-represented regions and sectors, creating potential gaps.
- ❑ **Multiple Respondents:** Multiple respondents from some organizations may introduce variability in perspectives, affecting consistency.
- ❑ **Interview Availability:** The five semi-structured interviews with CAF experts offer qualitative insights but may not capture the full diversity of experiences and opinions.
- ❑ **Methodological Limitations:** Response biases, such as overreporting successes or underreporting challenges, and incomplete data may affect comprehensiveness.

While these limitations highlight areas for further research, the findings emphasize the significant contributions of CAF in enhancing quality, fostering innovation, and building resilience in public administrations. They also underscore the importance of continued evolution in CAF to address emerging challenges such as digitalization, innovation, and institutional support. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods not only provides robust evidence for CAF's impact but also identifies critical areas for its future development, ensuring its ongoing relevance in meeting the evolving needs of public sector organizations.

## Respondent Demographics

The survey conducted as part of this study collected responses from 197 public sector organizations across Europe and beyond, offering valuable insights into the implementation and impact of CAF across different regions, levels of government, and sectors. The following sections present key demographic data from the survey.

### 1. Geographic distribution

CAF's roots and primary applications remain predominantly in Europe, as evidenced by the geographic distribution of respondents. A significant majority (78%) of the responses originate from EU Member States. The highest number of responses came from Slovakia (29), followed by Slovenia (27), Austria (17), and Bulgaria (16). An additional 19% of respondents represent non-EU European countries, emphasizing CAF's broader European relevance. Responses were gathered from Bosnia and Herzegovina (11), Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia (6 each), as well as Albania. This highlights CAF's significance in Southeast Europe and its appeal to countries currently in the process of EU accession.

Only 3% of respondents are from outside Europe, illustrating that while CAF is primarily a European tool, its principles are applicable globally. Responses from non-European countries include African and Asian countries (4). This geographic distribution highlights CAF's dominance in Europe and suggests opportunities for expansion into underrepresented regions like Asia, the Americas, and Africa.

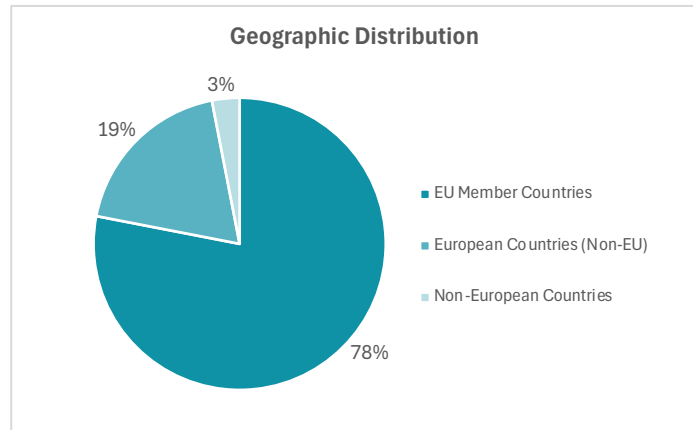


Figure 5: Geographic distribution of respondents (EU/Non-EU)

Note: Data are based on N=164 respondents. The "No response" group (33 cases) was excluded from the analysis.

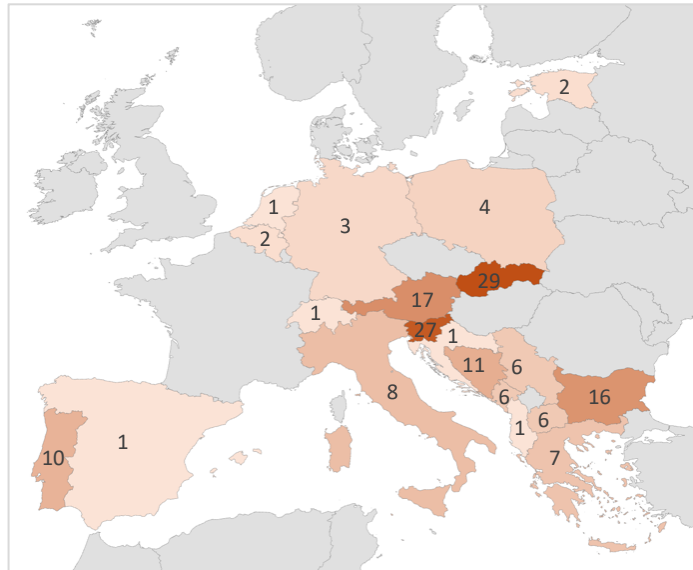


Figure 6: Geographic distribution of respondents (European countries)

Note: Data are based on N=164 respondents. The "No response" group (33 cases) was excluded from the analysis.

## 2. Levels of government representation

The survey respondents represent a diverse array of governmental levels, showcasing the CAF framework's adaptability across various administrative layers. The largest group of respondents (40%) comes from central government institutions, where the CAF is frequently utilized to spearhead large-scale reforms and implement strategic quality management initiatives. This reflects the framework's utility in addressing the complex challenges faced by national-level organizations.

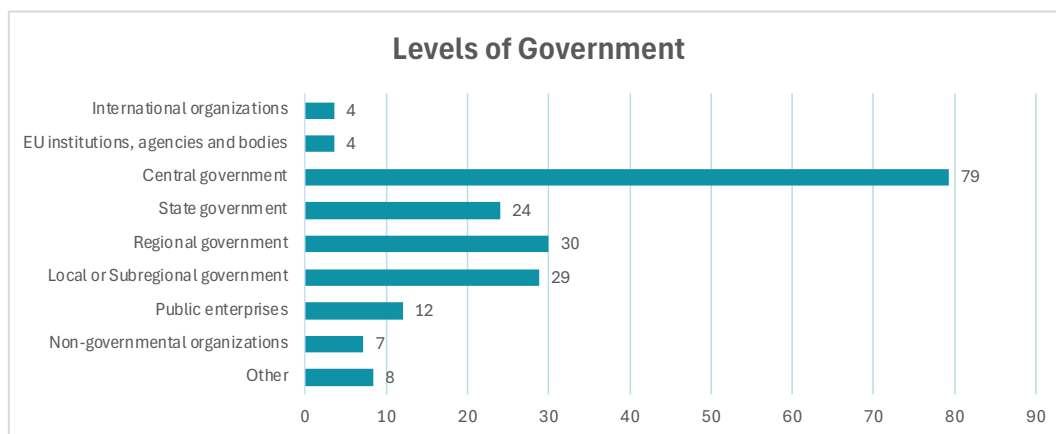


Figure 7: Levels of government represented by respondents

Note: The data reflect the distribution of all respondents (N=197) across different levels of government and organizations.

Regional governments and local or subregional government institutions also constitute a significant share of the respondents, each accounting for approximately 15%. These levels demonstrate the CAF's ability to scale and provide value across smaller administrative units that engage directly with citizens and community needs. Additionally, 12% of respondents are affiliated with state governments, further highlighting the widespread application of the CAF across intermediate administrative structures.

Other represented groups include public enterprises (6%) and non-governmental organizations (3.6%), demonstrating the framework's relevance beyond traditional government entities. Smaller segments of respondents originate from international organizations (2%) and EU institutions, agencies, or bodies (2%), reflecting the CAF's presence within supranational and cross-border governance structures.

This distribution underscores the CAF's versatility and its capacity to deliver tailored solutions for quality management and strategic improvement at multiple levels of governance. By engaging institutions across central, regional, and local tiers, as well as non-governmental and public enterprises, the CAF fosters a broad, multi-level approach to public sector excellence.

## 3. Sectoral and organizational focus

CAF's applicability across a broad range of public service sectors is evident from the survey results. The most represented sector, Administration and Home Affairs, accounts for 50% of respondents, reflecting CAF's strong presence in general administrative functions. This sector often deals with internal governance, public administration, and strategic management, where CAF's principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) are most impactful.

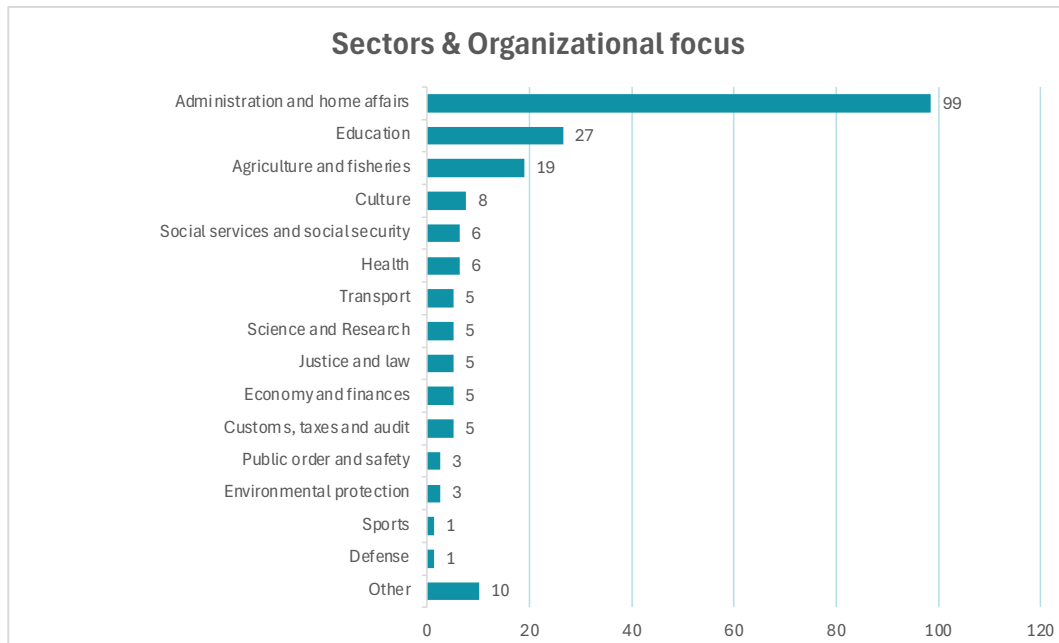


Figure 8: Sectors and organizational focus of respondents

Note: The data represent the distribution of respondents (N=197) across various sectors and organizational focuses.

In addition to administration, CAF has been implemented in more specialized sectors, including Education (12.7%) and Agriculture and Fisheries (9.7%). Other sectors are also represented, though to a lesser extent.

This distribution reflects CAF’s flexibility, with its principles being particularly well-suited to general administrative functions, but also adaptable to more specialized sectors.

#### 4. Experience with CAF and number of processes implemented

The data reveals that 65% of respondents have been using CAF for 4 or more years. However, 43% of respondents have only undergone one CAF process, despite their long-term engagement with CAF. Further 32% of respondents have completed three or more CAF processes, showing a more sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

This suggests that while many organizations have long-term experience with CAF, only few of them yet implemented it on a cyclical or regular basis. To fully realize CAF’s potential, regular use of the framework is crucial for continuous adaptation and improvement.

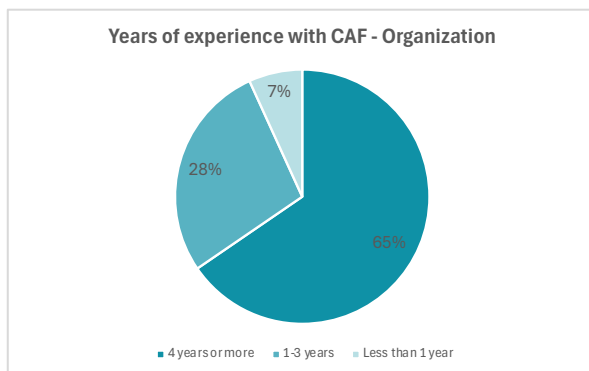


Figure 9: Years of experience with CAF at the organizational level

Note: The data reflect the distribution of respondents (N=191) by years of experience with the CAF framework in their organizations.

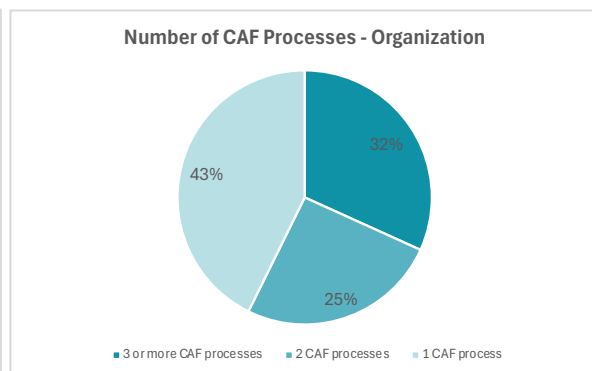


Figure 10: Number of CAF processes at the organizational level

Note: The data represent the distribution of respondents (N=192) by the number of CAF processes implemented in their organizations.

### 5. Effective CAF User Label adoption

60% of the respondents came from organizations that have been awarded the Effective CAF User Label, underscoring a strong commitment to formal quality management practices and excellence in public administration. This achievement demonstrates the widespread adoption of Total Quality Management principles and highlights the value placed on systematic improvement and external recognition. Additionally, 14% of respondents expressed plans of their organization to apply for the Label, showcasing its appeal as a pathway to enhanced transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency.

However, 26% respondents indicated that their organizations have not pursued the Label, potentially due to resource constraints, strategic differences, or alternative priorities. These findings suggest that while the CAF Label is widely regarded as a benchmark for excellence, further efforts may be needed to address barriers and expand its adoption.

The prevalence of the CAF Label among public sector organizations signals a growing recognition of its benefits in fostering continuous improvement and stakeholder trust. As a certification of quality and innovation, the Label supports organizations in achieving both internal performance goals and broader public service excellence, solidifying its reputation as a valuable tool for good governance.

### 6. Roles of respondents

The survey results provide a comprehensive view of the organizational and CAF-specific roles of respondents, shedding light on their involvement in the implementation and management of the framework.

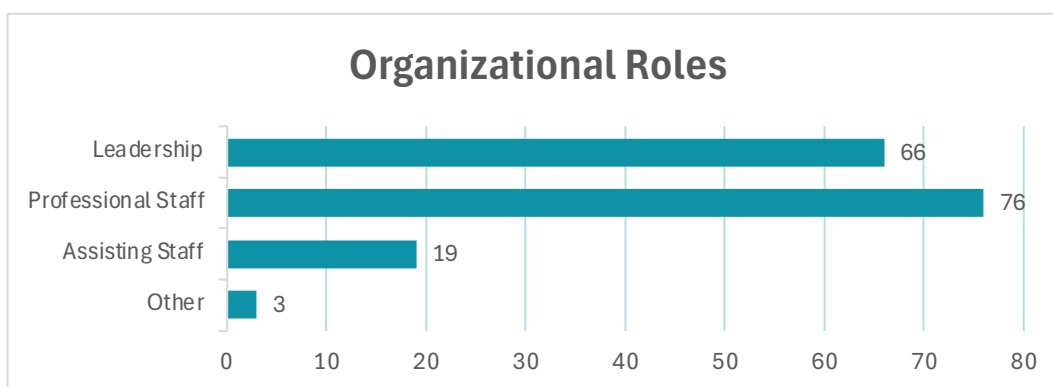


Figure 11: Organizational roles of respondents  
 Note: Data are based on N=164 respondents. The "No response" group (33 cases) was excluded from the analysis.

A significant proportion of respondents (46%) identified themselves as professional staff, indicating their central role in the day-to-day implementation of the CAF framework and operational processes. Complementing this, 40% of respondents hold leadership positions, emphasizing their responsibility for guiding strategic planning and ensuring that CAF principles are effectively integrated into their organizations' goals and operations. Meanwhile, 11.6% of respondents are assisting staff, contributing logistical and administrative support to facilitate the CAF process.

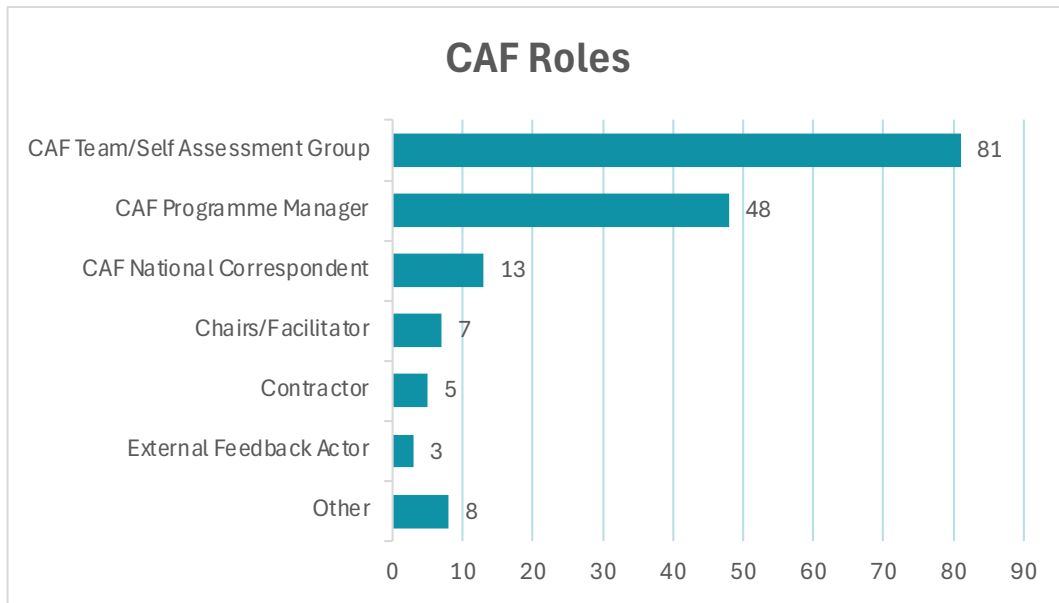


Figure 12: CAF roles of respondents

Note: The data reflect the distribution of respondents (N=165) by their roles related to the CAF framework. The "No response" group (32 cases) was excluded from the analysis.

In addition to their organizational roles, the survey captured insights into respondents' specific functions within the CAF process. Notably, 49% of respondents were members of CAF Teams or Self-Assessment Groups, demonstrating their direct involvement in assessing organizational strengths and identifying areas for improvement. Another significant group (29%) represented CAF Program Managers, tasked with leading and coordinating the implementation of the CAF framework. A smaller yet crucial subset, 8%, comprised CAF National Correspondents, who play a vital role in promoting and supporting CAF adoption at the national level. Chairs or Facilitators, responsible for guiding discussions and managing the assessment process, accounted for 4.3% of respondents. Additionally, 3% served as contractors, while 1.8% participated as external feedback actors. The remaining 4.9% indicated other roles within the CAF process.

These findings reflect the diversity of expertise and engagement among the respondents, with a strong representation of both strategic leaders and operational practitioners. The balanced distribution of roles underscores the collaborative nature of the CAF framework, where leadership sets the vision, and professional staff ensures its execution. The prominent involvement of CAF Teams, Self-Assessment Groups, and Program Managers highlights the commitment to internal evaluation and continuous improvement, essential components of the CAF methodology. This respondent profile ensures that the survey draws on perspectives from individuals deeply embedded in the CAF process, providing reliable and informed insights into its implementation and impact.

## Summary and Interpretation

The survey results provide a rich dataset that allows for a nuanced understanding of how CAF is being applied across different regions, levels of government, and public service sectors. Here are the key takeaways:

- ❑ **Geographic reach and regional representation:** CAF remains predominantly a European tool, with the vast majority of respondents coming from EU Member Countries. While the survey reflects CAF's deep roots in Europe, its limited application outside of Europe, particularly the absence of responses from Africa and the Americas, highlights an opportunity for expansion into underrepresented regions. CAF's growing global reputation could benefit from increased adoption in regions beyond Europe.
- ❑ **Institutional reach across government levels:** CAF's versatility is reflected in its application across central, regional, and local governments. The high representation of central government institutions indicates that CAF is often used to drive national-level reforms and large-scale quality management initiatives. However, its relevance at regional and local levels demonstrates that CAF can be adapted to various administrative layers, including those that are closer to service delivery and citizen engagement.
- ❑ **Sectoral diversity and CAF's flexibility:** CAF demonstrates significant sectoral diversity, with its strongest adoption in Administration and Home Affairs, where its principles excel in enhancing governance, strategic planning, and operational management. Beyond these core administrative functions, CAF's adaptability is evident in its successful application to specialized sectors such as Education and Agriculture, showcasing its ability to address diverse public service challenges. Additionally, CAF has proven valuable for public enterprises and non-governmental organizations, supporting improved governance, operational efficiency, and service delivery. This broad applicability underscores CAF's flexibility as a comprehensive quality management tool across various organizational contexts.
- ❑ **Long-term engagement and CAF process regularity:** While 65% of respondents have been using CAF for 4 years or more, the data reveals that 43% of organizations have completed only one CAF process during this period. This indicates that despite long-term experience, many organizations have not yet implemented CAF regularly. To fully realize CAF's potential, organizations should aim to undergo multiple CAF cycles, allowing for continuous self-assessment and improvement. Regular implementation is key to ensuring that CAF remains an effective tool for adapting to changing demands.
- ❑ **CAF label as a benchmark:** The high adoption rate of the Effective CAF User Label indicates that many respondents see value in pursuing formal recognition for their quality improvement efforts. For them, the CAF Label serves as a benchmark of their success in embedding CAF principles into their operations. However, some organizations have yet to pursue the Label, either due to being in early stages or due to differing priorities.
- ❑ **CAF roles and engagement in implementation:** The fact that a significant portion of respondents hold key roles in both leadership and CAF process implementation shows that the survey was primarily completed by individuals with in-depth knowledge of the framework. The data also shows strong representation from CAF Program Managers, CAF Teams, and Self-Assessment Groups, which underscores that many of the respondents are actively involved in both the strategic and operational aspects of CAF. This provides confidence that the survey results are informed by participants who are well-versed in CAF and its impact on their organizations.

### III Context and relevance of CAF

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been instrumental in transforming public sector organizations across Europe and beyond. Introduced in 2000 under the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), CAF embodies the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), tailored for public administration's unique challenges. Its core objectives are to drive continuous improvement, enhance service delivery, and foster citizen-centred governance. Over time, CAF has evolved into a flexible framework, addressing emerging priorities such as digitalization, sustainability, and resilience.

CAF was introduced at the First European Quality Conference in Lisbon to meet the demand for quality management tools specifically designed for public administration. Recognizing the sector's unique complexity, defined by diverse stakeholders, political oversight, and constrained resources, CAF offered a structured yet adaptable approach to organizational self-assessment. Iterative updates, culminating in CAF 2020, reflect its responsiveness to governance trends like digital transformation, diversity, and sustainability. CAF 2020 also emphasizes innovation, agility, and collaboration, equipping organizations to address contemporary challenges effectively.

CAF provides a systematic roadmap to achieve excellence, built on two pillars: enablers and results. Enablers focus on organizational elements like leadership, strategy, and resources, while results address measurable outcomes such as citizen satisfaction, societal impact, and performance metrics. This dual approach uniquely positions CAF to manage complexity, aligning objectives with societal goals such as transparency and inclusivity.

The framework fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement, enabling organizations to adapt to evolving demands. CAF's emphasis on evidence-based decision-making empowers entities to collect, analyse, and act on performance data, driving targeted improvements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations using CAF demonstrated resilience, leveraging its approach to ensure operational continuity and stakeholder engagement.

CAF also supports collaboration and learning through initiatives like the European CAF Network and the Effective CAF User Label. These platforms promote best practice sharing and foster cross-border innovation. Additionally, the Professional External Feedback Procedure (PEF) enhances credibility by formally recognizing organizations committed to quality management.

Though designed for European contexts, CAF's adaptability has led to its application globally. African and Asian countries have utilized CAF to modernize governance and improve service delivery. Its alignment with international frameworks, like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes social responsibility, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement, contributing to global efforts to address pressing societal challenges.

CAF continues to evolve in response to the complex public sector landscape. It emphasizes agility and innovation, enabling proactive governance, while its focus on digitalization helps organizations harness technology to improve efficiency and service delivery. CAF also promotes inclusivity by encouraging consideration of diverse stakeholder needs, fostering trust and legitimacy in public services.

CAF's capacity to address operational and strategic challenges ensures its relevance as a tool for modern governance. While its adaptability has allowed it to address global governance needs, its deeper integration into European public administrations holds immense potential. Strengthening its application within Europe, where it was first conceived, would ensure CAF remains a vital blueprint for resilient, innovative, and citizen-centric governance.

## IV Impact on Core Criteria

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) provides a robust structure for self-assessment, centred on nine core criteria designed to enhance the performance of public sector organizations. These criteria are organized into two interconnected groups: Enablers and Results. Together, they offer a comprehensive framework for driving and measuring performance improvement.

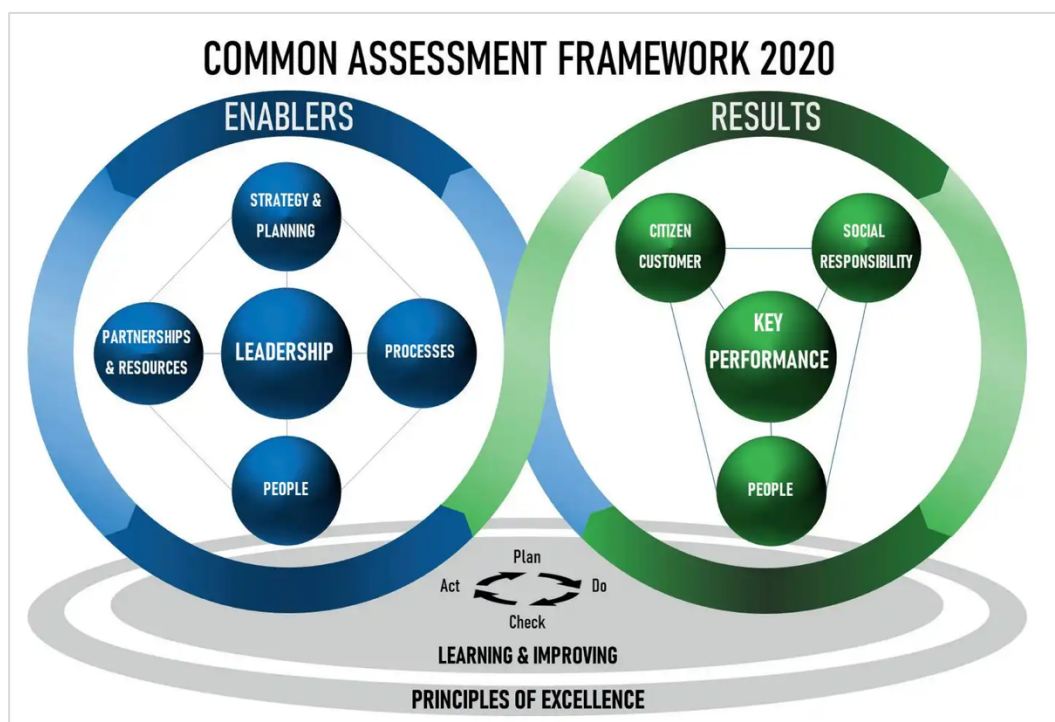


Figure 13: The CAF Model, KDZ (2020)

- ❑ **Enablers (Criteria 1-5):** These focus on the foundational elements that propel organizational excellence, including Leadership, Strategy and Planning, People Management, Partnerships and Resources, and Processes. By optimizing these enablers, organizations establish a strong base for sustained success.
- ❑ **Results (Criteria 6-9):** These capture the output and outcomes of applying the enablers, emphasizing Citizen/Customer Satisfaction, People Results, Society Results, and Key Performance Results. This dual focus ensures alignment between strategic objectives and tangible results.

Each core criterion is further divided into detailed sub-criteria, enabling organizations to pinpoint specific strengths and areas for improvement. This granularity supports targeted action plans that align with the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) and continuous improvement, fostering transparency and accountability.

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the nine CAF criteria, emphasizing their role in advancing public sector governance. Drawing on both quantitative data from the survey and qualitative insights from expert interviews, the analysis evaluates the framework's impact on organizational performance. By dissecting successes, identifying challenges, and exploring development opportunities, this chapter illustrates how the CAF criteria collectively empower public administrations to achieve excellence in governance and service delivery.

## 1 CAF Enablers

This section examines the impact of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) on public sector organizations, focusing on the five Enabler criteria. These foundational criteria serve as the building blocks for public sector excellence, providing the tools and capacities necessary for effective governance and service delivery. The aggregated responses show overwhelmingly positive feedback on CAF's influence, with nuanced differences that warrant closer examination.

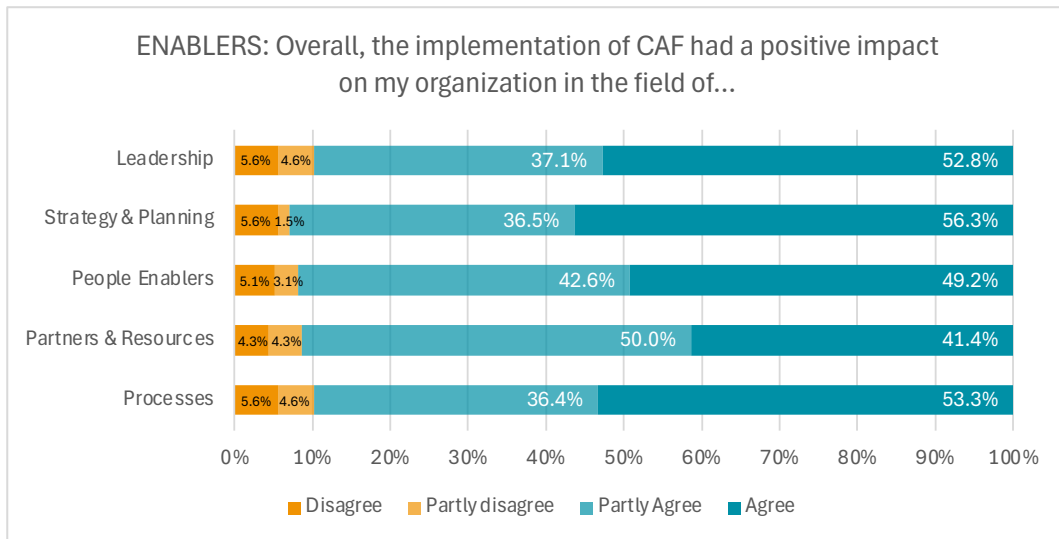


Figure 14: Perceived positive impact of CAF implementation on enabler criteria (N=197)

- ❑ **Leadership** is one of the highest-rated areas, with 89.9% of respondents perceiving CAF as having a positive impact. This indicates that CAF effectively supports the development of visionary leadership, enabling organizations to foster strategic alignment and stakeholder engagement. However, the 10% disagreement suggests that some organizations may struggle to fully embed leadership improvements. This highlights the need for tailored support for leadership development in certain contexts.
- ❑ With 92.8% of respondents noting positive impacts, **Strategy & Planning** emerges as the strongest performing enabler. This reflects CAF's ability to guide organizations in establishing clear objectives, robust planning mechanisms, and cohesive strategies. The exceptionally high agreement rate suggests that CAF's emphasis on aligning operations with strategic goals resonates strongly with public sector organizations, particularly in navigating complex governance landscapes.
- ❑ The high perception of improvement in **People Enablers** (91.8% agreement) reflects CAF's role in enhancing workforce engagement, capability development, and alignment with organizational objectives. However, the slight dip compared to Strategy & Planning may indicate challenges in fully operationalizing workforce strategies across diverse contexts. This reinforces the importance of addressing employee training, collaboration, and motivation as part of a broader organizational development strategy.
- ❑ **Partnerships & Resources** presents a slightly more mixed perception, despite 91.4% of respondents indicating a positive impact. Notably, this area has the highest proportion of respondents who only partially agree, suggesting that while many organizations recognize improvements, these may not be as consistent or impactful as in other criteria. This could reflect variability in sub-criteria, resource availability, partnership maturity, or the specific contexts in which CAF is applied. The mixed feedback points to the need for a closer examination of how CAF supports organizations in managing resources and fostering collaborations.

- ❑ **Processes** received 89.7% positive feedback, underscoring CAF’s strength in improving workflows and operational efficiency. The alignment of CAF with the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle likely drives these results, helping organizations establish a culture of continuous improvement. However, the slight variation in agreement rates suggests that some organizations may face challenges in scaling process improvements, particularly in more complex or decentralized settings.

The aggregated results reflect a clear consensus on CAF’s positive influence across all Enabler criteria, while also revealing nuanced differences that merit deeper exploration. The standout performance in Strategy & Planning demonstrates CAF’s ability to support structured, strategic development, while the mixed perceptions in Partnerships & Resources highlight an area for closer scrutiny.

### CAF cycles and experience: Trends across CAF Enablers

The analysis of CAF’s impact based on cycles and years of experience reveals nuanced patterns across the five Enabler criteria. While early implementation phases often yield significant results, the trends differ between CAF cycles and years of experience, highlighting unique dynamics at play in how organizations evolve with the framework.

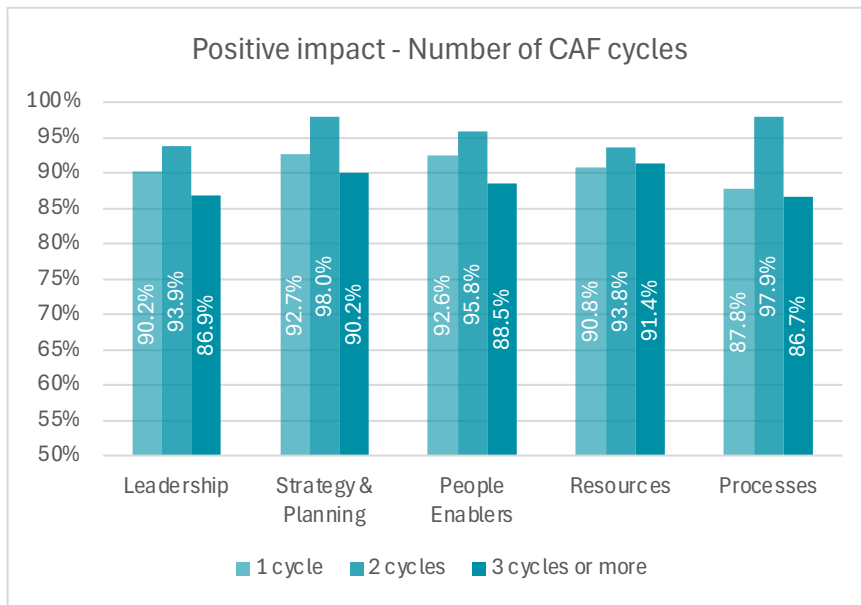


Figure 15: Perceived positive impact by number of CAF cycles (Enablers)

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197/197/195/186/195) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on enabler criteria, categorized by the number of CAF cycles carried out by their organization.

When analysing cycles, Strategy & Planning and People Enablers start with the highest levels of perceived impact in the first cycle, reflecting the prioritization of strategic frameworks and workforce engagement during initial implementation. Processes, while starting at a relatively lower level, join Strategy & Planning and People Enablers in achieving the most significant jump to the second cycle. This phase marks the peak of impact for these criteria, as organizations implement action plans and refine workflows for operational efficiency. However, in the third cycle, Processes, Strategy, and People, experience noticeable declines, dropping below initial values. Leadership also follows this trajectory, while Resources remain relatively stable across cycles, showing only slight fluctuations. This pattern suggests that while the early cycles focus on

transformative improvements, maintaining momentum through subsequent cycles becomes more challenging as foundational changes are embedded and opportunities for new gains diminish.

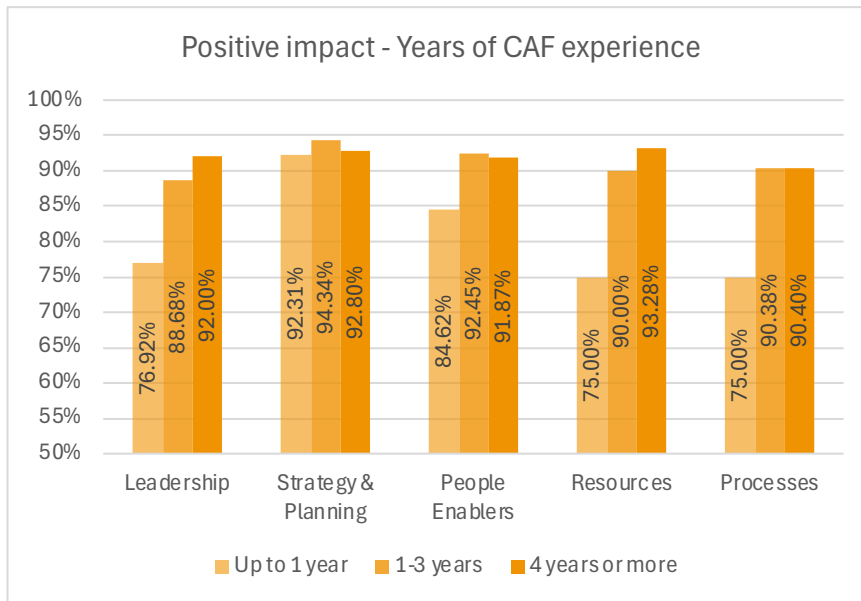


Figure 16: Perceived positive impact by years of CAF experience (Enablers)

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197/197/195/186/195) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on enabler criteria, categorized by the number of CAF cycles carried out by their organization.

In contrast, years of CAF experience paint a different picture. The first year generally shows a lower perceived impact for most criteria, as organizations are still in the early stages of self-assessment, action planning, and implementation. However, Strategy & Planning and People Enablers already demonstrate strong perceived impact during this phase, reflecting their prioritization in the initial CAF efforts. After the first year, all criteria see substantial improvements, with Leadership and Resources making the most significant jumps as organizations begin to realize the tangible outcomes of their early efforts. Processes, while also experiencing significant growth between the first year and 1-3 years, remains consistently high afterward, reflecting the stabilization of operational efficiency. Strategy & Planning and People Enablers, while still benefiting from additional years of experience, show slight declines after 4+ years, likely reflecting stabilization after initial successes rather than a lack of progress.

The key difference between CAF cycles and years of experience lies in the timing and trajectory of improvements. Cycles show concentrated periods of change, with the most significant gains occurring between the first and second cycles. However, the third cycle often marks a decline in perceived impact as opportunities for further large-scale changes diminish. In contrast, years of CAF experience show a more gradual progression, with steady growth in Leadership, Resources, and Processes, while Strategy & Planning and People Enablers stabilize or slightly decline after 4+ years, reflecting a shift toward sustaining earlier successes.

The transition from the first to the second cycle is pivotal for achieving substantial gains. Organizations should consolidate early successes by embedding foundational changes and refining long-term strategies. Beyond this stage, strategic interventions are crucial to sustain engagement. By aligning CAF practices with evolving priorities and fostering innovation, organizations can maintain continuous improvement and adapt to new challenges. Aligning CAF practices with organizational maturity ensures that the framework remains a valuable tool for driving excellence in governance and service delivery.

### 1.1 Leadership

The Leadership criterion evaluates an organization’s capacity to inspire, motivate, and support people, manage performance for continuous improvement, establish mission, vision, and values, and build relationships with stakeholders. As outlined earlier, 89.9% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on their organization’s leadership culture.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of leadership. While strong results were observed in performance management and employee engagement, challenges remain in stakeholder relationships, as detailed below.

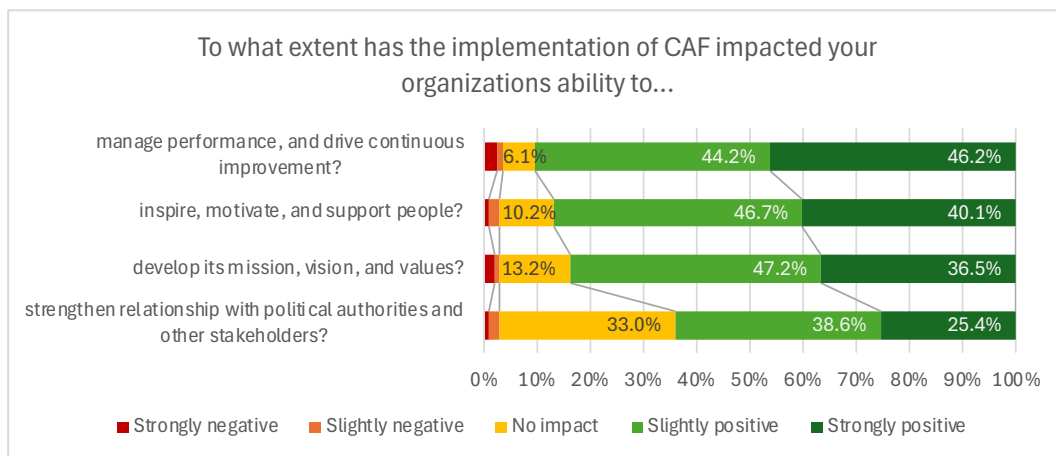


Figure 17: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Leadership“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Performance management:** CAF’s emphasis on results-oriented leadership was highly effective, with over 90% citing improvements in performance management.
- ❑ **Employee engagement:** Nearly 87% of respondents noted a positive impact on inspiring and motivating staff, reflecting CAF’s ability to support leadership in creating an environment where employees feel valued and motivated.
- ❑ **Mission, vision, and values:** Over 83% of respondents reported a positive impact, showcasing CAF’s effectiveness in helping organizations articulate a clear identity and strategic direction.
- ❑ **Stakeholder relationships:** While 64% of respondents reported improvements in engaging political authorities and stakeholders, the low score in this area suggest that additional strategies could enhance complex stakeholder management.

CAF fosters a leadership culture of accountability, strategic alignment, and employee motivation, demonstrating its robust impact on internal organizational functions. By equipping leaders with tools to define clear missions, manage performance, and engage employees, it supports a more results-oriented and collaborative public sector. However, data suggests stakeholder relations, though positively influenced, remain an area for growth. Enhancing this dimension could involve tailored strategies such as specific engagement plans, leveraging best practices from other CAF users, and fostering cross-sector partnerships. For instance, organizations could establish formal feedback loops with authorities and stakeholders to ensure alignment and responsiveness. Strengthening external stakeholder engagement would allow CAF to not only build foundational trust but also enable public sector leaders to develop coalitions and drive systemic improvements in governance. Addressing these opportunities would further solidify CAF’s role as a comprehensive tool for fostering both internal excellence and broader societal impact.

## **Empowering leadership and processes in Serbia's Republic Agency for Peaceful Resolution of Labour Disputes: A CAF success story**

### **Context and Background**

The Serbian Republic Agency for Peaceful Resolution of Labour Disputes, dedicated to peaceful dispute resolution, aimed to enhance internal processes, staff engagement, and service quality through CAF implementation.

The agency, a public administration entity serving Serbian citizens, required a structured framework to drive quality improvements, address stakeholder needs effectively, and establish a collaborative, transparent work culture. Following a government-led quality management initiative, the agency saw CAF as a means to improve service delivery, increase employee satisfaction, and strengthen leadership support.

### **Objective of CAF Implementation**

The agency's objectives in adopting CAF included:

- Building a culture of continuous improvement and staff engagement,
- Enhancing the efficiency and quality of services delivered to citizens,
- Strengthening leadership involvement and accountability,
- Fostering communication and knowledge-sharing within the organization.

### **Process of CAF Implementation**

The agency's CAF journey began with strong leadership support and a dedicated CAF coordinator who led the following steps:

- Establishing staff engagement and communication: Communication plans, workshops, and regular Monday meetings kept all staff informed and motivated throughout the CAF process.
- Workshops and external guidance: The agency received expert support and training from national CAF facilitators, KDZ consultants, and mentors to align CAF initiatives with their unique organizational needs.
- Task management with digital tools: Utilizing the free ClickUp application, the agency assigned tasks, monitored progress, and tracked deadlines to ensure efficient CAF implementation.
- Self-assessment and action plan development: Through self-assessment questionnaires, consensus workshops, and collaborative action plan discussions, the agency identified critical improvement areas and set "quick wins" for immediate progress.

### Outcomes and Achievements

CAF implementation at the agency led to significant improvements:

- ❑ Enhanced leadership and accountability: Leadership support was a vital part of the CAF process, with a culture of open communication and problem-solving that promoted staff trust and morale.
- ❑ Process and service improvements: Simplified processes, such as an online form for initiating cases, improved accessibility for citizens, reducing time and effort previously required to submit cases.
- ❑ Digital and operational advancements: A mobile application enabled users to track case progress, connect with arbitrators, and access information on services, making the agency's services more citizen-friendly and transparent.
- ❑ Strengthened employee engagement: Regular meetings and open forums facilitated an inclusive work environment, with staff motivated by meaningful contributions recognized in performance reviews.

### Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Several factors were essential to the successful CAF implementation:

- ❑ Leadership commitment and openness: Strong, visible support from the director and clear communication with staff reinforced the commitment to CAF, fostering trust and dedication among employees.
- ❑ Transparency and staff engagement: Open discussions and dedicated time for CAF activities, like workshops and task assignments, encouraged honest feedback and proactive involvement.
- ❑ Use of digital tools and task Tracking: ClickUp allowed the agency to streamline the CAF process, manage responsibilities, and foster accountability with real-time tracking.
- ❑ Agility and adaptability: The agency remained adaptable throughout the process, incorporating staff feedback and adjusting workflows based on needs identified in self-assessment exercises.

CAF empowered Serbia's Public Administration Agency to build a cohesive, responsive, and quality-focused culture, significantly enhancing service delivery to citizens and promoting operational efficiency within the organization.

## 1.2 Strategy & Planning

The Strategy & Planning criterion in the CAF framework evaluates an organization's capacity to create data-driven strategies that align with internal goals and stakeholder expectations. This includes identifying needs, developing actionable plans, implementing strategies effectively, and fostering innovation and adaptability. As outlined earlier, 92.9% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on strategy development and planning processes.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Strategy & Planning. Strong results were observed in communication, stakeholder awareness, decision-making, and fostering innovation, while continuous attention to managing change and reviewing strategies can further enhance effectiveness.

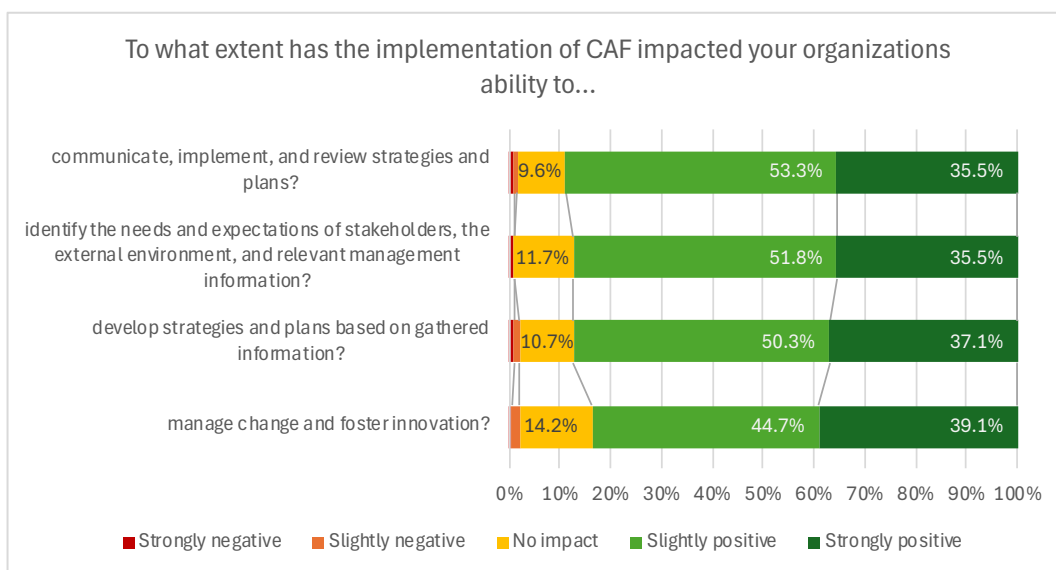


Figure 18: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Strategy & Planning“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Improved communication and accountability:** A strong 88.8% of respondents agreed that CAF enhanced their organization's ability to communicate, implement, and review strategies. This demonstrates CAF's contribution to transparency, monitoring, and aligning strategic objectives effectively.
- ❑ **Enhanced stakeholder awareness:** CAF supports evidence-based planning, with 87.3% of respondents acknowledging its role in helping organizations identify stakeholder needs and better understand external environments.
- ❑ **Data-driven decision making:** Approximately 87.3% of respondents reported improved capacity to develop strategies based on gathered information. This highlights CAF's effectiveness in linking evidence to decision-making for structured and aligned planning.
- ❑ **Support for innovation and change:** CAF fosters adaptability and innovation, with 83.8% of respondents highlighting its positive impact on change management. This reflects CAF's ability to foster resilience and responsiveness to evolving demands.

CAF's impact on managing change and fostering innovation stands out, with the 39% of "strongly positive" responses. This suggests that organizations view CAF as effective in enabling forward-looking changes. In contrast, communication, implementation, and review of strategies scores the highest for "slightly positive" (53%), indicating that many organizations experience moderate but consistent benefits in this area. These findings reflect CAF's particular strength in driving strategic innovation while suggesting that additional support may be needed to ensure that strategies are communicated and embedded effectively across organizational processes. Enhancing CAF's focus on aligning operational execution with strategic goals could further amplify its impact.

## eu-LISA: Driving strategic alignment and operational excellence through CAF

### Context and Background

eu-LISA, the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice, plays a critical role in maintaining Europe's border security and justice systems. With over 450 staff members across multiple locations, including Tallinn, Strasbourg, and Austria, eu-LISA manages high-stakes IT infrastructure for the Schengen Area. After a failed CAF attempt in 2016, eu-LISA re-engaged with the CAF framework in 2020 to unify its quality management practices, improve internal cohesion, and establish continuous improvement processes across its complex structure.

### Objective of CAF Implementation

The primary goals of implementing CAF at eu-LISA were to:

- Integrate various quality management efforts into a cohesive, organization-wide framework,
- Strengthen strategic alignment by linking operational tasks to broader organizational goals,
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement, agility, and accountability,
- Improve internal communication and rebuild trust among staff after a prior unsuccessful CAF implementation attempt.

### Process of CAF Implementation

eu-LISA re-initiated CAF in 2020 with an approach focused on transparency, engagement, and collaboration across all levels. The following key steps defined the process:

- Establishment of a quality board: eu-LISA formed a permanent quality board to oversee the CAF implementation and ensure the initiative was maintained as an ongoing organizational priority rather than a one-time project.
- External support and staff engagement: Expert guidance from KDZ, a CAF specialist, provided training, mentoring, and support throughout the process. Open communication channels allowed staff to ask questions, give feedback, and engage meaningfully in CAF activities.
- Agile project management: eu-LISA incorporated agile methodologies, using quarterly progress reports, flexible resource allocation, and a "wave approach" to manage tasks and improve responsiveness.
- Knowledge management and surveys: A new knowledge management system addressed staff turnover, while regular surveys provided actionable feedback on both staff and customer satisfaction, strengthening the quality of internal processes.

## Outcomes and Achievements

CAF implementation at eu-LISA yielded several strategic and operational achievements:

- ❑ Improved leadership accountability: The quality board formalized leadership accountability across all levels, ensuring that quality management was embedded within the agency's core operations.
- ❑ Enhanced agility and innovation: Agile methods and AI-driven resource management have made eu-LISA's operations more responsive and adaptable. Notably, the agency's headquarters in Tallinn became one of the greenest public administration buildings in the city.
- ❑ Knowledge retention and process alignment: The development of a knowledge management system and the creation of a comprehensive services and processes catalog strengthened cross-departmental alignment and streamlined organizational processes.
- ❑ Increased staff engagement and satisfaction: Communication efforts and performance-based recognition of contributions to CAF fostered staff engagement and improved morale, establishing a more inclusive quality culture.

## Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Several factors contributed to the successful implementation of CAF at eu-LISA:

- ❑ Leadership commitment and governance: The permanent quality board ensured sustained leadership commitment, even during executive transitions, embedding CAF in the agency's long-term strategy.
- ❑ Strategic communication and transparency: A communication plan that included short videos, open discussions, and accessible feedback channels rebuilt trust and engagement with CAF, addressing past implementation issues.
- ❑ Agile approach and continuous improvement: Adopting agile methodologies allowed eu-LISA to stay flexible and responsive to changing needs, enhancing CAF's integration into daily operations.
- ❑ External expertise and training: Support from KDZ provided essential training and guidance, helping staff understand and internalize CAF principles and build organizational capacity.

CAF empowered eu-LISA to achieve strategic alignment, operational resilience, and a culture of quality improvement, demonstrating how CAF can drive excellence in complex, multi-layered organizations pursuing both strategic and operational goals.

### 1.3 People Enablers

The People Enablers criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s ability to manage human resources, develop and support employee competencies, empower people, and promote well-being. This criterion reflects CAF's role in fostering a supportive, competency-driven, and empowering environment within public sector organizations. As outlined earlier, 91.8% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on People, highlighting its influence on aligning workforce capabilities with organizational strategies.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of People Enablers. While strong results were observed in competency development, further attention could be given to empowering people and managing human resources to support organizational strategies.

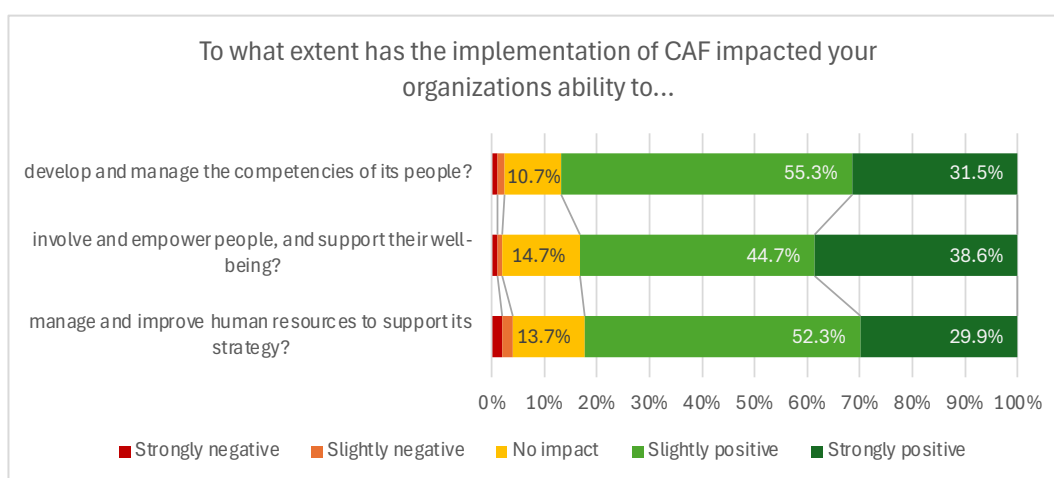


Figure 19: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „People Enablers“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Enhanced competency development:** With 86.8% of respondents reporting a positive impact, CAF supports organizations in developing and managing employee competencies. This feedback highlights CAF's ability to foster a workforce equipped to meet evolving demands and deliver on strategic priorities.
- ❑ **Positive impact on empowerment and well-being:** CAF promotes inclusive and supportive work environments, with 83.3% of respondents recognizing its positive role in empowering employees and supporting their well-being. This empowerment fosters higher job satisfaction and engagement, essential for organizational success.
- ❑ **Managing and improving human resources:** CAF supports effective HR management aligned with organizational strategies, as noted by 82.2% of respondents. This reflects its role in optimizing workforce allocation, performance, and strategic alignment.

CAF’s most pronounced impact is on developing and managing competencies, with a significant proportion of respondents rating it as "slightly positive" (55%). This suggests widespread acknowledgment of CAF’s role in addressing workforce skill development, though its impact may be perceived as moderate. On the other hand, involving and empowering people received the highest "strongly positive" responses (39%), reflecting its transformative influence on creating an empowering workplace culture. CAF's emphasis on aligning individual growth with organizational needs highlights its value in fostering a collaborative and competency-focused workplace. To further strengthen its impact, organizations could integrate mechanisms to address emerging workforce challenges, such as hybrid work environments and rapidly evolving skill requirements.

## Fostering engagement and inclusion: The Slovenian ministry's CAF journey

### Context and Background

The Slovenian Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (MHESI) began implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in 2017 as part of a government initiative aimed at fostering continuous quality improvements across public administration. With over 150 staff members and recent structural reorganizations, the ministry applied CAF to drive strategic alignment, performance improvements, and an enhanced organizational culture. The ministry's journey demonstrates CAF's adaptability through organizational transitions and leadership changes, solidifying CAF as a cornerstone of quality management.

### Objective of CAF Implementation

The main objectives behind implementing CAF were to:

- Embed a culture of continuous improvement,
- Strengthen strategic focus by aligning actions with the ministry's mission, vision, and values,
- Increase employee engagement and satisfaction,
- Foster cross-departmental collaboration and support sustainable development goals.

### Process of CAF implementation

MHESI began operating as a legally independent entity in April 2023. The legal successor to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport (MESS) is the Ministry of Education (ME), from which the field of higher education and science was separated in April 2023. MEES began with self-assessments in 2017 and 2020, followed by an external feedback procedure in 2021, which awarded them the Effective CAF User (ECU) label.

Key steps in the 2024 process included:

- Collaborative workshops: Two workshops, facilitated by the minister using the "Six Thinking Hats" method, invited all employees to contribute to shaping the ministry's mission, vision, and values, fostering a collaborative environment. According to a survey conducted after the workshop, over 90% of participants expressed satisfaction, with a large majority supporting continued workshops facilitated by leadership.
- Strategic themes and monitoring: The minister outlined three strategic focus areas, ensuring alignment with leadership's priorities. Action plans were monitored flexibly, using a semi-structured process that allowed progress tracking without excessive rigidity.
- Employee satisfaction surveys: Through a "Working Environment Questionnaire" known as the "Employees' Eye," the ministry collected ongoing feedback, allowing it to respond to employee needs and continuously improve organizational culture.

### Outcomes and Achievements

CAF implementation at the ministry has produced several notable outcomes:

- ❑ Organizational alignment and clear mission: A newly defined mission, vision, and values document was created, incorporating input from all staff. This clarified the ministry's purpose and provided a "red thread" linking all actions to overarching strategic goals.
- ❑ Enhanced employee recognition program: The ministry launched a formalized recognition program that includes awards for outstanding achievements and innovation, holding regular ceremonies that celebrate employee contributions and foster a motivated, inclusive culture.
- ❑ Digitalization and sustainability: The ministry developed an electronic higher education application system, integrated with a virtual assistant (chatbot) to enhance user support and reduce paperwork. This initiative exemplifies sustainable and citizen-friendly digital solutions.

### Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Several factors contributed to the successful implementation of CAF in the ministry:

- ❑ Leadership commitment and communication: Ministers and top management actively engaged in the CAF process, providing clear strategic direction and reinforcing the importance of CAF initiatives. Transparent communication helped staff understand "what's in it for them," increasing motivation and ownership.
- ❑ Government support and collaboration: Support from the Ministry of Public Administration, including access to training resources and collaboration events, was crucial in operationalizing CAF and building a network of practitioners across ministries.
- ❑ Inclusion of middle management: CAF working groups included middle management representatives, ensuring that the ministry's strategic direction benefited from the insights and needs of day-to-day operations.
- ❑ Semi-structured monitoring: A flexible approach to tracking action plans allowed the ministry to maintain accountability while adapting to real-time needs, ensuring sustained progress without unnecessary bureaucracy.
- ❑ Continuous learning and adaptability: The ministry's CAF journey, termed the "CAF Snowball Effect," highlights the importance of continuous improvement. As CAF initiatives took root, improvements became embedded within the organization's culture, resulting in both strategic and operational gains.

CAF has empowered the Slovenian Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation to achieve strategic coherence, operational efficiency, and an enriched work environment, making it a powerful framework for public administrations pursuing excellence.

## 1.4 Partnerships & Resources

The Partnerships & Resources criterion in the CAF framework evaluates an organization’s capacity to develop and manage partnerships, collaborate with civil society, manage finances effectively, and handle information and knowledge resources. This criterion emphasizes creating value through strategic relationships and optimizing resource use. As outlined earlier, 91.4% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on Partnerships & Resources, with a very high proportion of partial agreement responses (50%). This suggests that while CAF provides a foundation for partnerships and resource management, it may not fully address more advanced challenges in these areas.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Partnerships & Resources. While managing information and knowledge stands out as relatively strong, other areas, including managing partnerships, technology, facilities, and finances, would benefit from greater attention and further enhancement.

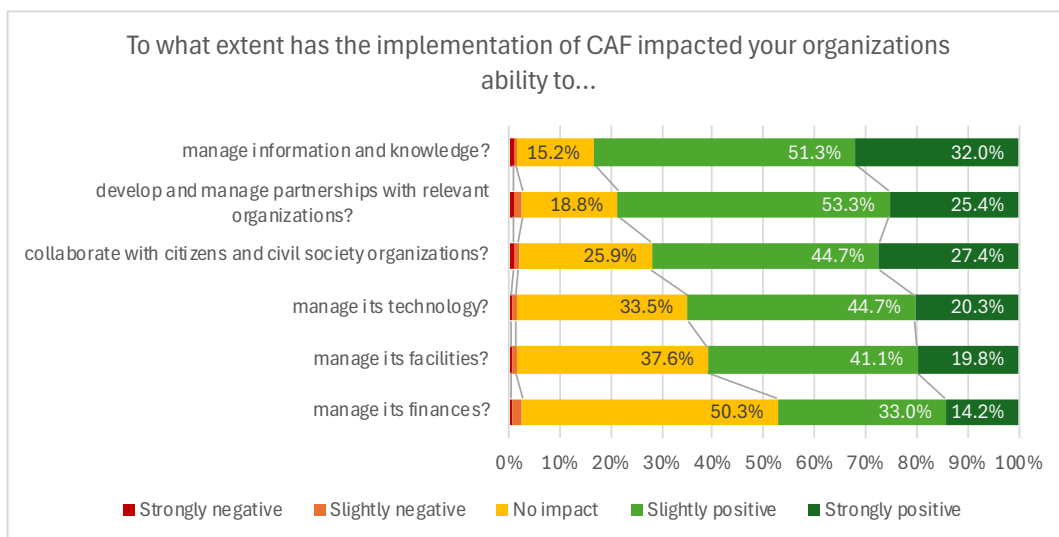


Figure 20: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Partnerships & Resources“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Managing information and knowledge:** With 83.2% of respondents reporting positive outcomes, CAF effectively supports organizations in structuring and utilizing information. This capability is critical for fostering informed decision-making and enhancing organizational learning.
- ❑ **Developing and managing partnerships:** 78.7% of respondents acknowledged improvements, reflecting CAF’s strong role in facilitating collaborations with relevant organizations. Strategic partnerships are vital for resource-sharing, achieving public sector objectives, and strengthening inter-organizational cooperation.
- ❑ **Collaborating with citizens and civil society organizations:** With 72.1% of respondents reporting positive impacts, CAF supports efforts to build inclusivity and transparency. Nevertheless, this lower score suggests that many organizations could benefit from further strengthening their engagement with civil society to better align services with community needs.
- ❑ **Managing technology:** Only 65% of respondents noted improvements, indicating that CAF’s role in this area is less impactful. This may reflect the presence of established frameworks in IT departments, which provide more specialized guidance on technology governance and operations. It could also point to the fact that technology management is often handled in silos, disconnected from broader organizational strategies.

- ❑ **Managing facilities:** Facility management saw a 60.9% positive impact, suggesting room for improvement in how organizations handle physical resources and sustainability practices. Facilities teams may rely on ISO standards or other operational frameworks, which could reduce the perceived value of CAF in this area.
- ❑ **Managing finances:** Financial management scored the lowest, with just 47.2% of respondents reporting improvements. This highlights the challenges organizations face in addressing complex financial planning, budgeting, and resource allocation. Established financial planning tools and systems, may already dominate this domain, reducing the perceived relevance of CAF.

CAF demonstrates relatively strong effectiveness in fostering partnerships and knowledge management but faces clear limitations in its impact on technology, facilities, and financial management. These findings may reflect operational silos in many organizations, where IT, finance, and facilities operate independently of broader organizational strategies. Additionally, the presence of highly specialized tools and frameworks in these areas may overshadow CAF's influence.

To strengthen these areas, organizations could leverage CAF's structured approach to foster greater integration across departments and align these domains with broader strategic goals. For example, technology management teams could use CAF to identify gaps in how their efforts support organizational strategies, even while continuing to rely on specialized IT governance frameworks. Similarly, finance and facilities teams could use CAF to improve their alignment with sustainability goals, resource allocation priorities, and strategic objectives. Strengthening inter-departmental collaboration through CAF could help reduce silos and foster more holistic approaches to resource and partnership management.

CAF's significant strengths in partnerships and knowledge management provide a solid foundation for strategic alignment. However, addressing its perceived weaknesses in technology, facilities, and financial management through greater integration and targeted use of existing tools can enhance its overall impact on organizational performance.

## 1.5 Processes

The Processes criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s capability to design, manage, and coordinate processes effectively to create value for citizens and stakeholders. This criterion emphasizes efficiency in service delivery, process integration, and consistency across departments and with external partners. As outlined earlier, 89.7% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on process development.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Processes. While positive impacts were observed in designing and delivering processes, improving coordination across organizations shows slightly lower results and could benefit from further attention.

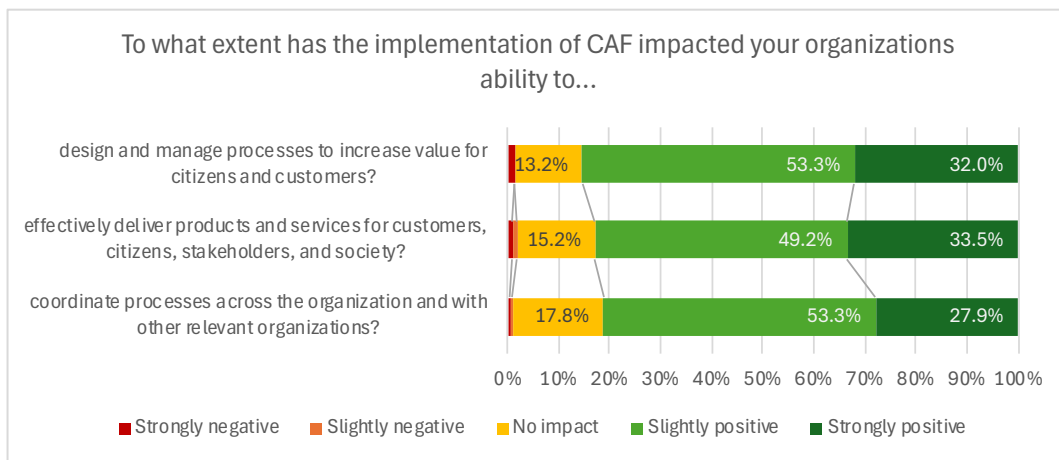


Figure 21: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Processes“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Designing and managing processes to increase value:** CAF has helped organizations adopt a citizen-centred approach to process design, with 85.3% of respondents reporting positive outcomes. This demonstrates CAF’s effectiveness in enabling organizations to design processes that enhance public satisfaction and deliver greater value.
- ❑ **Effectively delivering products and services:** With 82.7% of respondents noting improvements, CAF has streamlined service delivery processes, enabling organizations to meet public expectations with greater reliability and timeliness.
- ❑ **Improved coordination across the organization and with external partners:** Positive outcomes were noted by 81.2% of respondents, reflecting improvements in internal and external coordination. However, the slightly lower score in this area suggests room for growth in fostering internal collaboration and partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

CAF enhances process management by fostering systematic approaches to designing, managing, and coordinating processes. However, challenges in aligning internal and external coordination may arise from structural silos or limited cross-departmental collaboration mechanisms. CAF’s strengths in driving process efficiency and service delivery are evident, but addressing coordination gaps is crucial. Organizations can leverage CAF to identify barriers and invest in mechanisms like interdepartmental task forces or cross-functional teams to enhance integration. Lessons from successful service delivery cases can help replicate best practices across departments and external partners, fostering seamless, responsive systems. By aligning processes with strategic goals and prioritizing citizen value, CAF is a vital tool for improving effectiveness. Reinforcing collaboration will further maximize its potential for integrated and agile service delivery.

## Streamlining operations and quality integration: The City of Vienna's CAF success story

### Context and Background

The City of Vienna has a well-established commitment to quality management across its diverse public administration, reflecting the city's complex service portfolio, which includes areas like water management, waste disposal, and Social Welfare, Social and Public Health Law. Vienna's administration began utilizing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) alongside ISO 9001 and EFQM over two decades ago, aiming to strengthen both internal and public-facing quality standards. With these tools, the city created an integrative quality management (QM) approach that allows each department to align with the city's strategic objectives while meeting specific service needs. CAF became essential in Vienna's mission to promote adaptability, resilience, and strategic cohesion within its administrative operations.

### Objective of CAF Implementation

Vienna's objectives in implementing CAF include:

- ❑ Establishing a culture of continuous improvement: CAF promotes structured self-assessment and helps departments embed quality improvement into daily processes.
- ❑ Enhancing organizational autonomy and capacity: By providing a flexible framework, CAF enables departments to self-evaluate and tailor improvement measures suited to their unique operational needs.
- ❑ Supporting cross-departmental quality management (QM): CAF integrates effectively with other QM models, allowing Vienna to promote quality cohesively across various sectors, from infrastructure to community services.
- ❑ Driving resilience and agile response: Particularly valuable during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, CAF fostered Vienna's adaptability by encouraging departments to be proactive, responsive, and collaborative.

### Process of CAF Implementation

Vienna's CAF application process is collaborative and structured, with several ongoing elements:

- ❑ Training and onboarding: CAF training is introduced at the earliest stages, such as newcomer orientations, and is reinforced in job-specific courses and ongoing professional development programs.
- ❑ Expert circles and knowledge sharing: The Quality Management (QM) team organizes "Expert Circles," twice-annual meetings where representatives from various departments gather to share insights, discuss quality challenges, and align on best practices across different management disciplines.
- ❑ CAF as a moderation and support tool: The QM team supports departments in conducting self-assessments, preparing for quality certifications, and moderating CAF-driven improvement projects, making the CAF process more accessible and manageable for departments.
- ❑ Cross-functional teams: CAF working groups often include representatives from process, risk, and knowledge management, promoting integrated planning and operational improvement within departments.

## Outcomes and Achievements

Implementing CAF in Vienna has led to notable advancements in quality and operational efficiency:

- ❑ Improved self-competency and autonomy: CAF has equipped departments with the skills and resources to independently assess and improve their functions, fostering a culture of self-directed quality management.
- ❑ Enhanced crisis response and coordination: A recent study, OECD (2023), *More Resilient Public Administrations After COVID-19: Lessons from Using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) 2020*, highlights the benefits of continuous CAF self-assessments in fostering agility and effective crisis management. The Viennese case study underscores CAF's role in enabling rapid adaptation and coordinated responses, driven by clear and shared objectives, resulting in noticeable improvements during times of crisis.
- ❑ Integrated quality management: CAF's flexibility has enabled Vienna's departments to align their unique quality management approaches within a unified framework, enhancing cross-departmental cohesion and public service quality.
- ❑ Continuous improvement: Departments in Vienna actively engage with CAF not only to meet operational standards but also to continually elevate service levels, exemplified by initiatives that range from process optimization to knowledge sharing.

## Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Several factors underpin Vienna's success with CAF:

- ❑ Flexibility and integration: CAF's adaptability allows it to work alongside other quality models, supporting Vienna's tailored approach to meet diverse departmental needs.
- ❑ Centralized Support and Guidance: The QM team's role as a central facilitator provides crucial support and oversight, ensuring departments are well-equipped to implement CAF effectively.
- ❑ Collaborative knowledge exchange: "Expert Circles" encourage departments to share insights and align practices, creating a dynamic environment for cross-departmental learning and quality enhancement.
- ❑ Structured autonomy and responsiveness: By maintaining a balance between structure and flexibility, CAF enables departments to independently address quality improvement while aligning with city-wide objectives.
- ❑ Resilience through self-assessment: CAF's focus on internal evaluation has built a resilient culture within Vienna's administration, empowering departments to adapt independently in response to both routine and crisis situations.

Through CAF, the City of Vienna has achieved greater strategic coherence, improved service quality, and a strong foundation for continuous improvement, making it a valuable framework for public sector excellence.

## 2 CAF Results

This section examines the impact of CAF implementation on public sector organizations by focusing on the four Results criteria. These criteria capture the tangible outputs and outcomes achieved through the enablers, providing a measure of how well CAF aligns organizational performance with strategic objectives and stakeholder needs.

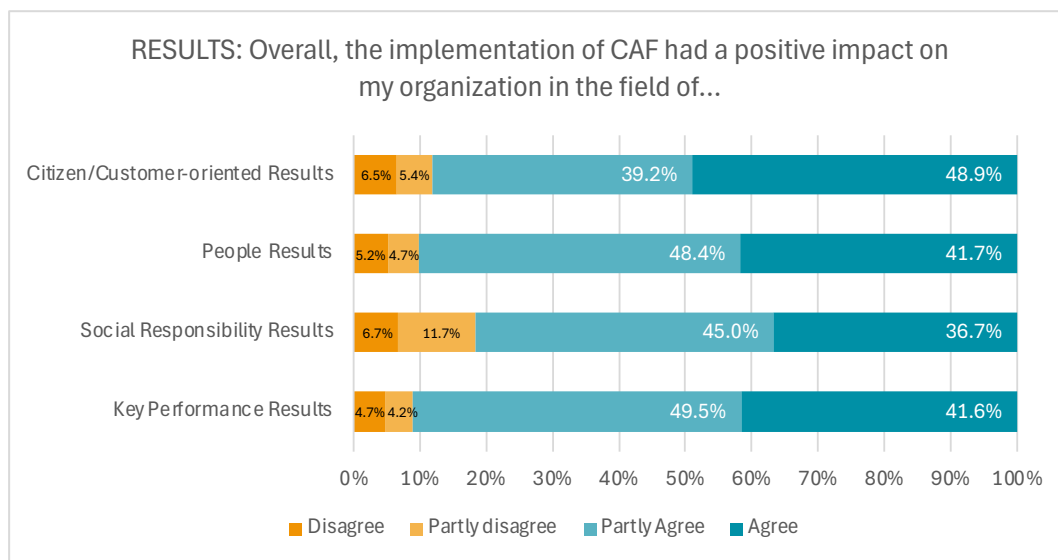


Figure 22: Perceived Positive Impact of CAF Implementation on Results criteria (N=197)

- ❑ **Citizen/Customer-oriented Results**, with 88.1% positive responses, highlight CAF’s impact on aligning services with citizen expectations. While results are strong, the slightly lower ranking compared to People Results may reflect variability in how quickly outcomes materialize or differing priorities among organizations in engaging external stakeholders.
- ❑ **People Results**, with 90.1% positive feedback, reflect CAF’s role in fostering workforce satisfaction and engagement. Like Key Performance Results, this area has a high proportion of "partly agree" responses, indicating that while the framework provides a strong foundation, converting people-centred strategies into consistent, tangible outcomes remains a work in progress for some organizations.
- ❑ **Social Responsibility Results** rank lowest, with 81.7% agreement, indicating room for growth in embedding sustainability, ethics, and societal contributions into public sector operations. These outcomes often require longer-term planning and deep integration into organizational frameworks, which may explain the lag compared to other criteria.
- ❑ **Key Performance Results** stand out as the strongest-performing criterion, with 91.1% of respondents reporting a positive impact. This highlights CAF’s ability to drive measurable improvements in operational efficiency, productivity, and strategic effectiveness. However, the relatively high share of "partly agree" responses suggests that while progress is evident, organizations may still be navigating challenges in fully embedding these improvements across all operations.

Overall, the data demonstrates CAF’s ability to deliver substantial outcomes, particularly in operational performance and workforce engagement. The relatively high share of "partly agree" responses across multiple criteria suggests that while progress is being made, there is room to strengthen implementation and address context-specific challenges. The nuanced differences across criteria highlight areas for further focus, particularly in ensuring that social responsibility becomes an integral part of organizational culture.

## CAF cycles and experience: Trends across CAF Results

This section examines how CAF implementation impacts the four Results criteria through the lens of both cycles and years of experience. The analysis reveals significant improvements in the early phases of implementation while highlighting differences in how outcomes develop over time.

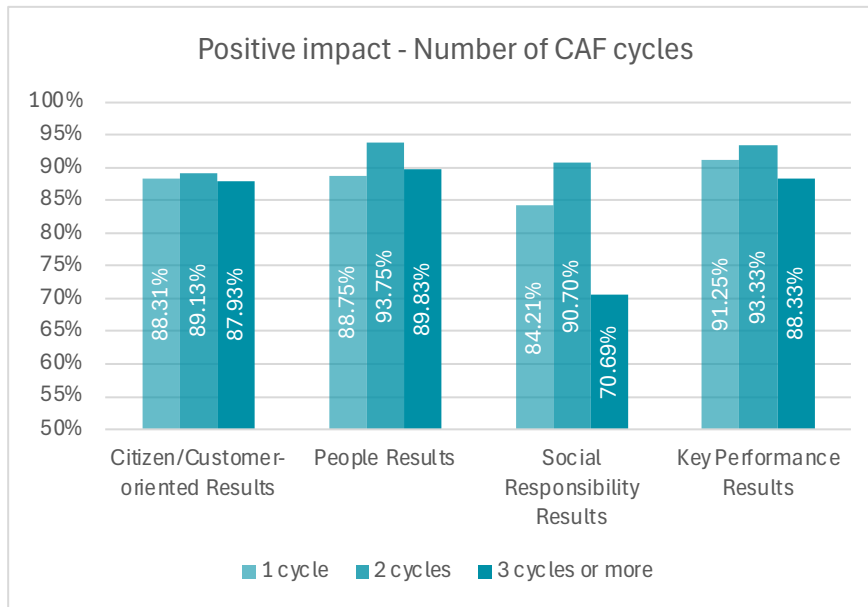


Figure 23: Perceived positive impact by number of CAF cycles (Results)

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=186/192/180/190) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on result criteria, categorized by the number of CAF cycles carried out by their organization.

CAF cycles show concentrated periods of progress, with the first and second cycles driving the most substantial changes. Key Performance Results deliver strong outcomes in the first cycle and see further gains in the second, though maintaining these levels in the third cycle or beyond proves challenging. People Results emerge as the most consistently positive criterion across cycles, demonstrating CAF’s ability to foster sustained workforce engagement and satisfaction. Meanwhile, Citizen/Customer-oriented Results tend to plateau after the first cycle, indicating that while CAF aligns services with stakeholder expectations, further advances may require renewed focus. Social Responsibility Results, in particular, experience the sharpest variability, improving significantly in the early cycles but showing difficulties in sustaining momentum later. These patterns suggest that CAF cycles often prioritize foundational improvements, with diminishing returns in later phases as organizations focus on maintaining earlier achievements.

Years of CAF experience, on the other hand, reveal a steadier progression, with improvements continuing over time as organizations deepen their engagement with CAF principles. Key Performance Results and People Results benefit from sustained application, with outcomes stabilizing at a high level as organizations embed their practices into long-term operations. Citizen/Customer-oriented Results show a clear trajectory of growth, with organizations gradually improving their alignment with stakeholder needs over the years. Social Responsibility Results, though initially weaker, also show consistent development as organizations mature, reflecting the gradual integration of sustainability and societal goals into public sector practices. These trends

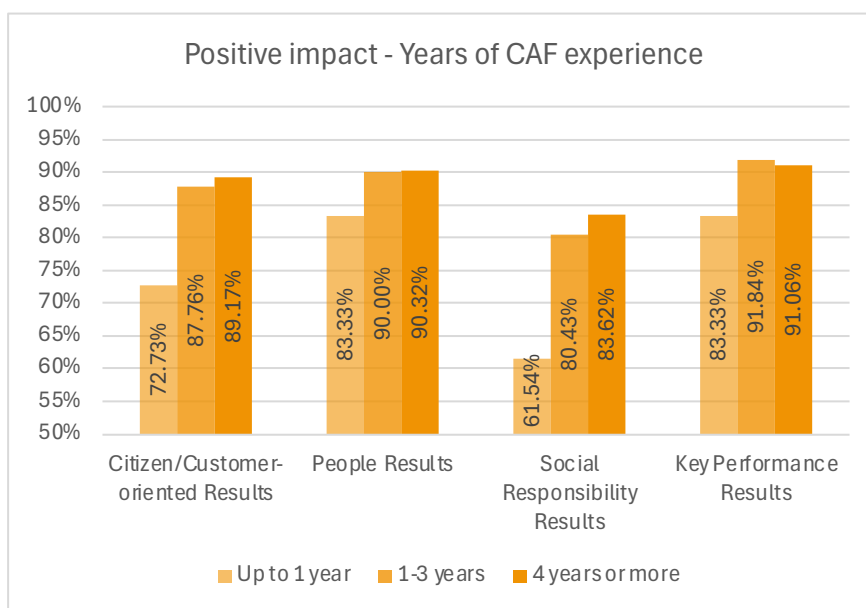


Figure 24: Perceived positive impact by years of CAF experience (Results)

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=186/192/180/190) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on result criteria, categorized by the number of CAF cycles carried out by their organization.

suggest that years of experience provide organizations with the opportunity to consolidate early gains and refine their approaches, enabling steady progress across all Results criteria.

The comparison between cycles and years of experience reveals distinct dynamics in how organizations achieve and sustain results. Cycles tend to drive rapid, concentrated improvements, particularly in the early phases of implementation, but sustaining momentum becomes increasingly challenging in later cycles. In contrast, years of experience offer a more gradual and consistent trajectory, with steady gains in most criteria as organizations mature. This difference highlights the importance of tailoring CAF strategies to the organization's stage of maturity, leveraging the strengths of both approaches to maximize long-term outcomes.

Jointly analysing these perspectives underscores the enduring strengths of CAF. Key Performance Results and People Results consistently deliver high levels of impact, whether through cycles or years of experience. Citizen/Customer-oriented Results, while improving significantly over time, may require renewed attention in later cycles to sustain alignment with evolving citizen expectations. Social Responsibility Results present the greatest challenge across both perspectives, reflecting the complexities of embedding societal and sustainability goals into operational frameworks. Addressing these challenges will be essential to ensure that CAF continues to deliver balanced and comprehensive improvements.

Overall, the trends across cycles and years of experience demonstrate CAF's ability to drive transformative changes while supporting long-term organizational development. To sustain these benefits, organizations must adapt their strategies to their stage of implementation, focusing on embedding continuous improvement processes and recalibrating efforts to address emerging priorities. By aligning their approaches with the principles of CAF, public sector organizations can ensure that the framework delivers meaningful and lasting value across all Results criteria.

## 2.1 Citizen/Customer-oriented Results

The Citizen/Customer-oriented Results criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s ability to measure customer perception, use performance data effectively, and ultimately impact customer satisfaction. This criterion emphasizes understanding citizens' needs, measuring service outcomes, and making data-driven decisions that enhance public satisfaction. As outlined earlier, 88.1% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on customer satisfaction.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Citizen/Customer-oriented Results. While strong results were observed in performance and perception measurement, using collected data for decision-making shows slightly lower results and presents opportunities for further improvement.

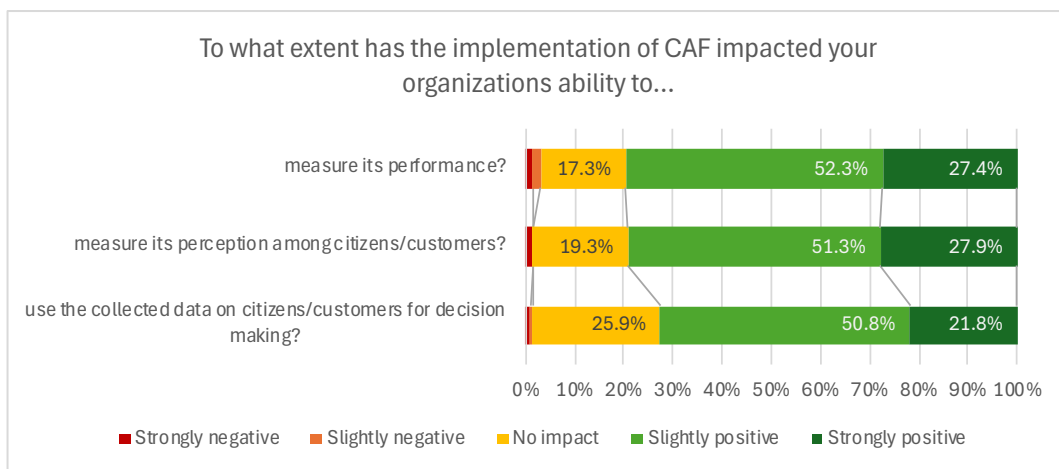


Figure 25: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Citizen/Customer-oriented Results“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Enhanced performance measurement:** 79.7% of respondents reported that CAF improved their ability to measure performance effectively, underscoring its role in establishing reliable metrics to monitor and assess the quality of services delivered.
- ❑ **Strong influence on perception measurement:** With 79.2% of respondents reporting a positive impact, CAF significantly enhances organizations' ability to measure citizen and customer perceptions. This enables public sector entities to better understand how their services are viewed, generating actionable insights for improvement.
- ❑ **Using collected data for decision-making:** While 72.6% of respondents reported positive impacts in this area, the slightly lower score suggests a gap in translating collected data into actionable decisions. This indicates that organizations may excel at gathering information but face challenges in integrating insights into decision-making processes.

CAF’s structured framework improves citizen/customer-oriented processes by emphasizing performance, perception, and satisfaction measurements, which enhance transparency and responsiveness, key elements for maintaining public trust. However, the gap between data collection and its use in decision-making highlights an area for growth. Organizations may require additional mechanisms or training to effectively translate insights into service improvements. Addressing this gap would enable CAF to further strengthen its impact on citizen-focused governance. By leveraging its structured approach to performance and perception measurement, CAF can empower public sector organizations to make data-driven decisions that deliver tangible benefits to citizens, enhancing trust and satisfaction over time.

## 2.2 People Results

The People Results criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s ability to measure employee perception, monitor performance, and positively impact employee satisfaction. This criterion focuses on understanding employee needs, evaluating performance outcomes, and using data to improve employee engagement and satisfaction. As outlined earlier, 90.1% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on employee satisfaction.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of People Results. While strong results were observed in perception and performance measurement, using employee performance data for decision-making shows lower results and presents an area for improvement.

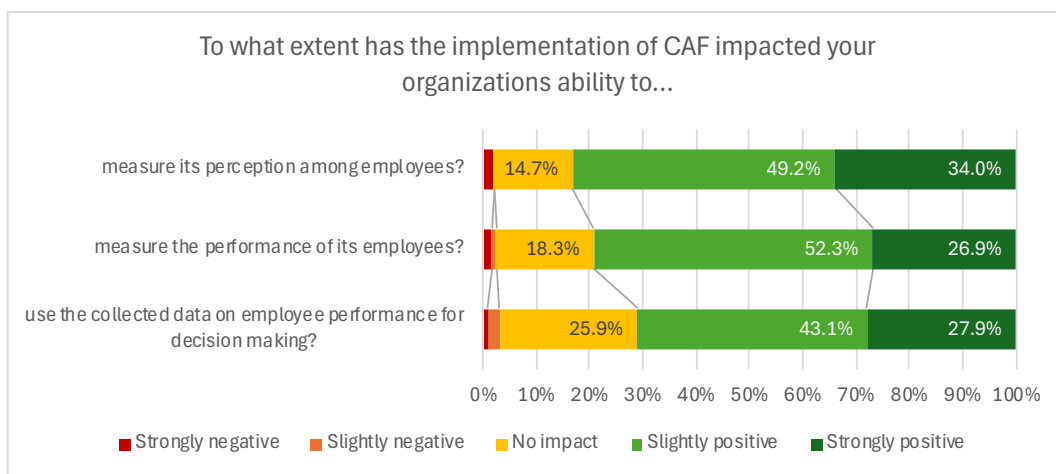


Figure 26: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „People Results“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Strong positive impact on perception measurement:** CAF supports organizations in effectively measuring employee perception, with 83.2% of respondents noting positive outcomes. This demonstrates its capacity to generate critical insights into workforce attitudes and needs, enabling targeted improvements.
- ❑ **Enhanced performance measurement:** 79.2% of respondents reported improvements in measuring employee performance, reflecting CAF’s ability to establish metrics that evaluate productivity and effectiveness, essential components of organizational success.
- ❑ **Using collected data for decision-making:** While 71.1% of respondents noted improvements in using employee performance data for decision-making, this lower score reveals a gap. Organizations excel in data collection but face challenges in integrating insights into decisions that drive meaningful change.

CAF significantly enhances organizations’ ability to measure employee perception and performance. However, the gap between data collection and decision-making highlights room for improvement. Organizations could implement structured feedback loops to ensure data-driven insights inform management strategies and workplace initiatives. Engagement surveys, paired with targeted follow-ups, can monitor the impact of changes and refine approaches. Cross-departmental collaboration in analysing employee data, such as HR working with team leaders to contextualize performance metrics, can align strategies with team-specific needs. Training managers to interpret and apply employee data effectively would further bridge the gap between insights and actions, empowering decision-makers and fostering engagement. Addressing these challenges ensures CAF drives long-term satisfaction and organizational success.

### 2.3 Social Responsibility Results

The Social Responsibility criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s ability to measure and improve its social and environmental impact, including understanding stakeholder perceptions, measuring performance, and using relevant data to inform decisions. As outlined earlier, 81.7% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on social and environmental responsibility. However, while partial agreement is moderate (45%), the proportion of full agreement is notably lower (36.7%) compared to other results criteria, suggesting that CAF’s influence in this area may be more foundational than transformative.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Social Responsibility Results. While perception measurement shows low moderate results, performance measurement and data-driven decision-making reveal significant gaps that need further attention.

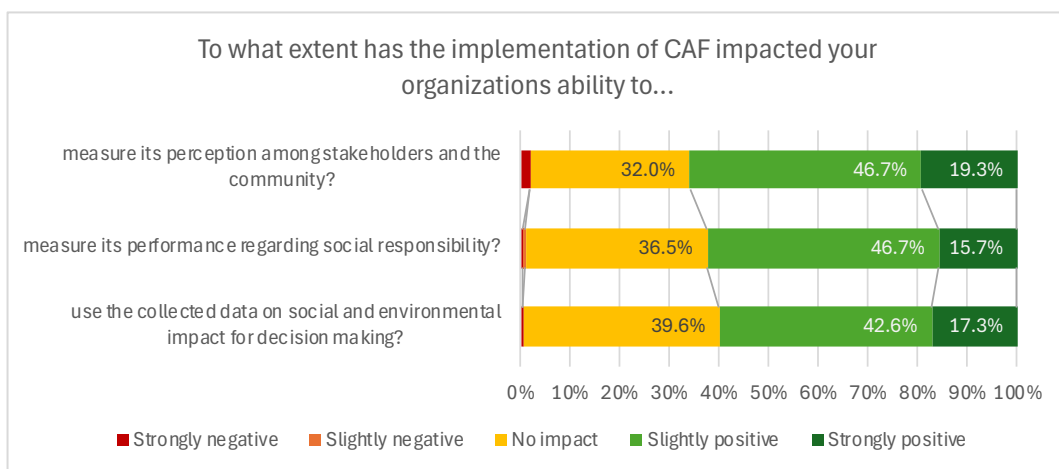


Figure 27: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Social Responsibility Results“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Low moderate impact on perception measurement:** CAF supports organizations in measuring stakeholder and community perceptions, with 66% of respondents noting positive outcomes. However, limited positive responses suggest that while CAF raises awareness, it does not directly foster deeper engagement or trust-based relationships.
- ❑ **Limited support for performance measurement:** 62.4% of respondents reported positive impacts in measuring social responsibility performance, reflecting the framework's basic capacity but a need for more advanced methodologies.
- ❑ **Weak impact on data-driven decision-making:** CAF's influence is weakest here, with only 59.9% of respondents reporting improvements in using data for decision-making. This highlights again a clear gap in translating insights into impactful actions.

CAF has the potential to support organizations incorporate social responsibility into their operations by raising awareness of key issues and supporting baseline performance tracking. However, the limited strong weaknesses in data-driven decision-making indicate significant room for growth. Organizations may benefit from integrating complementary tools or methodologies tailored to measuring and acting on social and environmental data. For example, sustainability reporting frameworks or stakeholder platforms can complement CAF by offering actionable metrics and deeper insights. To maximize CAF's impact in this critical area, organizations should emphasize trust-based stakeholder engagement, actionable social responsibility metrics, and decision-making frameworks that translate insights into tangible improvements. Addressing these gaps will enable public sector organizations to better align their operations with societal and environmental goals, making social responsibility a core component of their strategic direction.

## 2.4 Key Performance Results

The Key Performance Results criterion in the CAF framework assesses an organization’s ability to measure both internal and external performance outcomes, such as efficiency, resource management, outputs, and public value. As outlined earlier, 91.1% of respondents reported a positive overall impact of CAF on performance results, though a high proportion of partial agreement responses (49.5%) suggests room for improvement in implementation.

The following graphic breaks down how CAF has influenced specific aspects of Key Performance Results. While internal metrics show strong results, external data collection and the use of data for decision-making highlight areas requiring further attention.

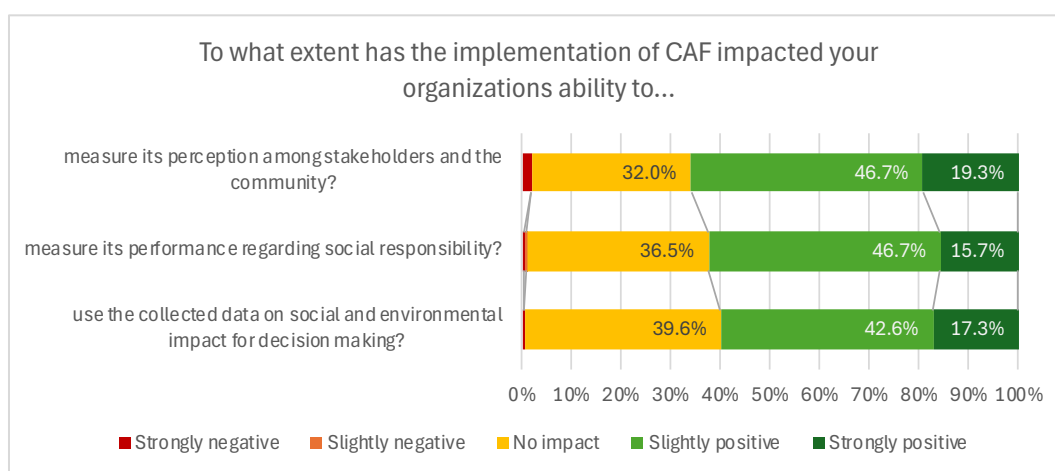


Figure 28: Perceived impact of CAF on criterion „Key Performance Results“ (N=197)

- ❑ **Strong positive influence on internal metrics:** 83.2% of respondents noted positive outcomes in tracking internal metrics like efficiency and resource management. CAF's support in these areas helps streamline processes and optimize operations.
- ❑ **Enhanced external data collection:** CAF improves the collection of external data, such as outputs and public value, with 75.1% of respondents reporting positive impacts. This lower percentage, compared to internal metrics, highlights the challenges of gathering public-facing data, which often requires more resources and coordination.
- ❑ **Using collected data for decision-making:** 74.6% of respondents reported positive impacts in using performance data, indicating that while CAF facilitates robust data collection, organizations face challenges in translating insights into actionable decisions.

CAF significantly enhances organizations' capacity to collect and monitor data, promoting transparency, and operational efficiency. However, the difference between internal and external data underscores the complexity of gathering public-facing data, often involving greater logistical and resource challenges. Also, the gap between data collection and decision-making highlights a key area for growth. To address this, organizations should focus on strengthening the use of data for strategic decision-making. Targeted training could help staff to interpret performance metrics more effectively and align them with their goals. Moreover, fostering collaboration across departments can ensure that data-driven insights are shared and acted upon cohesively. In the case of external data collection, leveraging partnerships or adopting innovative data-gathering methods may help overcome resource constraints and improve public-facing metrics.

### 3 Key Insights: Core Criteria

CAF's implementation demonstrates a transformative impact across core criteria, fostering improvements in leadership, strategy, people, partnerships, and processes. Leadership consistently stands out, with 89.9% of respondents highlighting positive impacts, particularly in performance management and strategic alignment. However, stakeholder engagement and external collaboration remain challenges, underscoring the need for more structured approaches to build trust and inclusion.

CAF delivers substantial early gains, particularly in leadership, strategic clarity, and operational efficiency. However, sustaining impact in later cycles, particularly in Results criteria such as Social Responsibility and Key Performance Results, requires recalibration to avoid diminishing momentum. This highlights the importance of long-term strategic adjustments to sustain relevance and effectiveness.

The relationship between enablers and results is evident: strong internal improvements in Leadership, Strategy, and People Enablers often translate into better external outcomes, such as Citizen/Customer-oriented Results. However, bridging this internal-external gap remains a challenge, particularly in areas requiring stakeholder engagement and societal impact. Organizations must adopt a balanced approach that aligns internal processes with external stakeholder needs to ensure sustained momentum.

Figures 25 and 26 illustrate the strongest and weakest sub-criteria within the Enablers and Results domains. CAF excels in fostering performance management and strategy communication, as seen in the Enabler results where 90.4% of respondents reported improvements in managing performance and driving continuous improvement. However, weaknesses persist in financial and facilities management, with only 47.2% and 60.9% of respondents, respectively, citing positive impacts. Similarly, the Results criteria show strengths in measuring employee perceptions and internal performance, both scoring 83.2%, but reveal challenges in social responsibility performance (62.4%) and decision-making using social and environmental data (59.9%).

CAF's emphasis on fostering people-centric practices yields long-term cultural benefits, particularly in workforce engagement, competency development, and alignment with strategic goals. These gains contribute to building resilient and motivated public sector organizations. However, gaps in data utilization, particularly in Results criteria like Social Responsibility and Key Performance, reveal opportunities for improvement. Enhancing CAF's support for evidence-based decision-making and integrating insights into actionable strategies can amplify its impact.

Finally, the transition between one and two CAF cycles emerges as a critical inflection point, where initial enthusiasm gives way to measurable improvements. Organizations with sustained CAF experience and multiple cycles demonstrate consistently better outcomes across criteria, reinforcing the importance of commitment to iterative learning. Addressing challenges in stakeholder collaboration, data-driven decisions, and cross-functional alignment will enable organizations to unlock CAF's full potential, driving both internal transformation and societal impact.

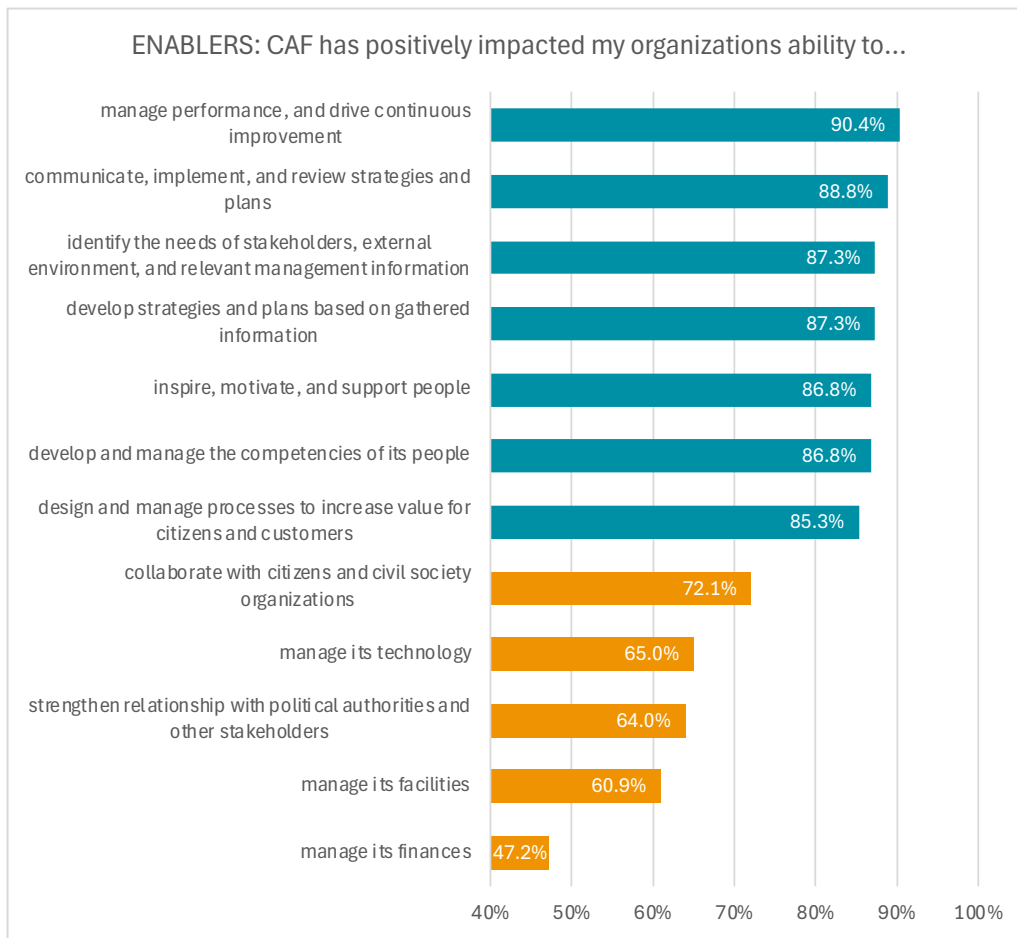


Figure 29: Enabler areas positively impacted by CAF implementation

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on various organizational capabilities (Enabler). The chart highlights the seven areas with the highest positive responses and the five areas with the lowest positive responses.

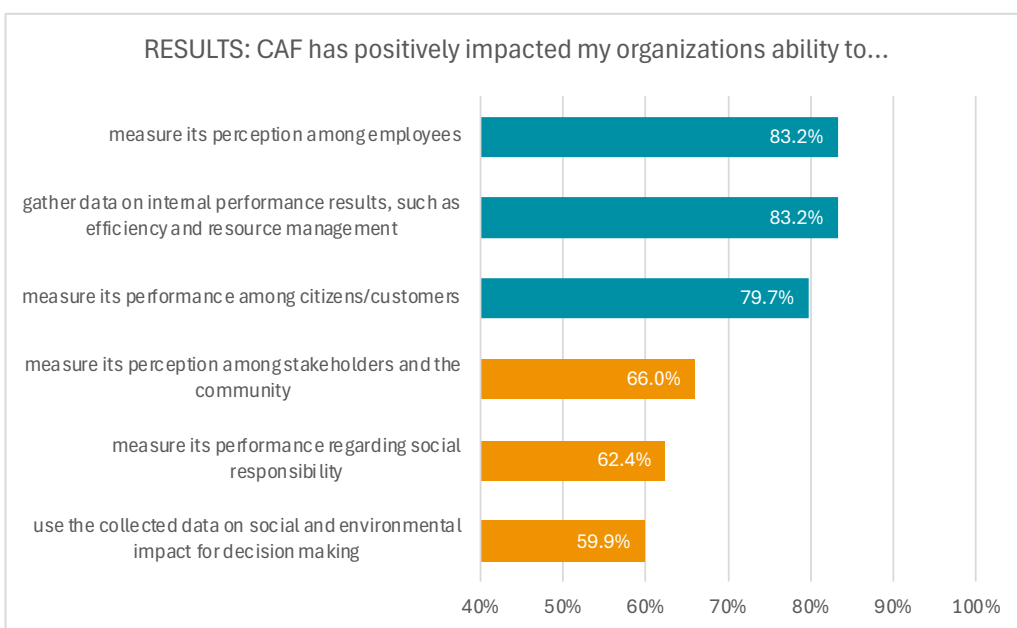


Figure 30: Results areas positively impacted by CAF implementation

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents (N=197) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on various organizational capabilities (Results). The chart highlights the five areas with the highest positive responses and the five areas with the lowest positive responses.

## V Impact on Focus Areas

Beyond its core criteria, the CAF model addresses six focus areas that reflect emerging trends and challenges in the public sector. These focus areas, Digitalization, Agility, Innovation, Sustainability, Diversity, and Collaboration, represent key priorities for public administrations seeking to remain relevant, effective, and resilient in a rapidly changing world.

The focus areas go beyond traditional performance management by emphasizing the need for public sector organizations to adapt, innovate, and become more inclusive in their operations. They highlight the importance of integrating digital technologies, fostering organizational agility, promoting sustainable and environmentally conscious practices, ensuring diversity and inclusion, and strengthening collaboration both within and across organizations. In this study, Collaboration has been analysed in two dimensions – internal collaboration and external collaboration – to better understand how CAF influences cooperation within organizations as well as with external stakeholders and partners. This distinction reflects the importance of addressing both organizational cohesion and stakeholder engagement in achieving broader public value.

This chapter examines how public sector organizations have applied CAF to enhance their capabilities in these focus areas. Drawing on survey data and qualitative insights, it explores the impact of CAF on fostering digital transformation, driving innovation, creating sustainable and inclusive practices, and building collaborative relationships. By addressing these focus areas, public administrations can not only improve their current performance but also better prepare for future challenges and opportunities.

### Overall Impact of CAF on Focus Areas

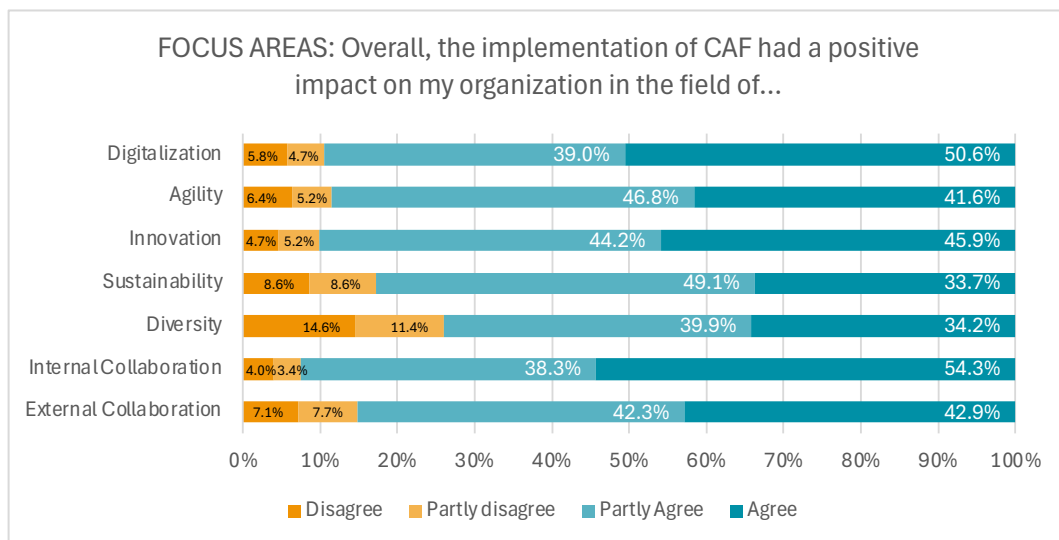


Figure 31: Perceived positive impact of CAF implementation on focus areas (N=158-175)

CAF's impact on the focus areas demonstrates its ability to address emerging priorities in the public sector. The strongest results are seen in Internal Collaboration, with 92.6% of respondents (aggregating "Partly Agree" and "Agree") reporting a positive impact. This highlights CAF's strength in fostering organizational cohesion and breaking down silos across departments. Innovation (90.1%) follows as another strong area, demonstrating CAF's ability to foster creative problem-solving and forward-thinking practices. Similarly, Digitalization (89.6%) underscores CAF's role in enabling public administrations to integrate digital tools and processes effectively.

Agility (88.4%) further reflects CAF's capacity to support organizations in adapting to change and navigating dynamic environments.

External Collaboration (85.2%) also shows positive results, reflecting CAF's ability to promote partnerships and stakeholder engagement, though to a lesser degree than internal collaboration. This area highlights the inherent complexity of fostering cooperation beyond organizational boundaries, yet the high levels of "Partly Agree" responses suggest steady progress.

CAF's impact is seen more critically in Sustainability (82.8%), where organizations often struggle to embed environmentally conscious practices into operational frameworks. While CAF helps align operations with global sustainability goals, lower outright "Agree" responses indicate challenges such as limited expertise, data systems, and cross-departmental alignment. This suggests the need for tailored support, including sustainability metrics and green procurement policies, to drive further improvements.

Diversity (74.1%) emerges as the weakest focus area, underscoring ongoing struggles with inclusivity and representation in the public sector. While CAF promotes inclusivity initiatives, the low levels of outright "Agree" responses reflect the difficulty of translating policy-level commitments into cultural and structural changes. Addressing these gaps requires more inclusive leadership practices, diversity audits, and targeted mentorship programs to foster greater equity and representation.

The data reveals that while CAF excels in fostering internal alignment, innovation, and digital transformation, public sector organizations face difficulties in translating these internal improvements into external impacts. To address these challenges, organizations should focus on deepening diversity initiatives, enhancing stakeholder engagement frameworks, and leveraging CAF's guidance to create more agile and innovative operational models. These findings provide a roadmap for leveraging CAF to address critical priorities and achieve more balanced improvements across all focus areas.

## 1 Digitalization

Digitalization evaluates how public sector organizations integrate digital tools, processes, and infrastructure to enhance efficiency, service delivery, and stakeholder engagement.

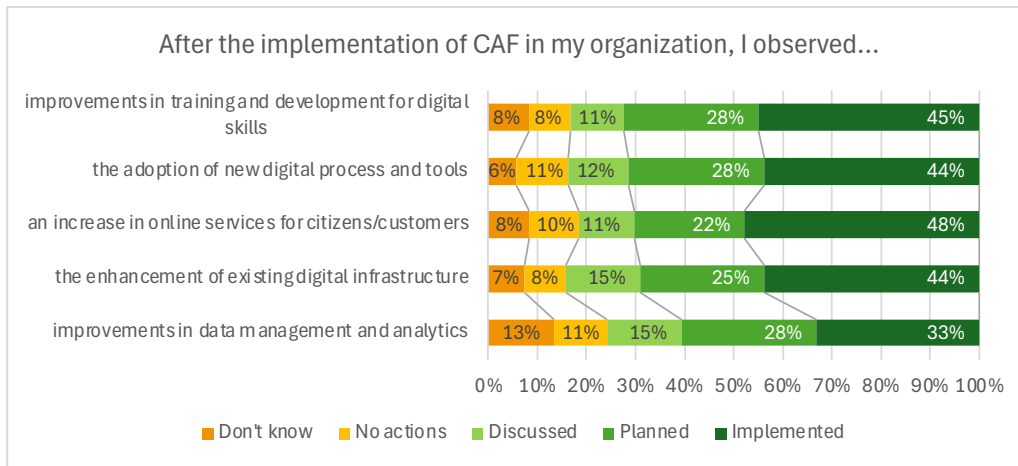


Figure 32: Observed activities in the CAF focus area Digitalization (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area:

- ❑ **Improvements in training and development for digital skills** show substantial implementation, with 45% of respondents reporting progress. This reflects a recognition of the need for a digitally capable workforce. Many organizations have prioritized targeted training initiatives to support transformation and improve employee competencies.
- ❑ **The adoption of new digital processes and tools** has also progressed significantly, with 44% of respondents reporting implementation. Organizations are modernizing work and introducing technology-driven solutions, though a notable proportion (40% combined "Planned" and "Discussed") indicates that some remain in the exploratory phase.
- ❑ **An increase in online services for citizens/customers** emerged as the most advanced area, with 48% of respondents reporting implemented improvements. This highlights a strong commitment to enhancing citizen-centric service delivery, with many organizations focusing on expanding accessibility and responsiveness.
- ❑ **The enhancement of existing digital infrastructure** shows steady progress, with 44% of respondents implementing improvements. However, a significant portion (40%) remains in the planning or discussion stages, reflecting challenges related to long-term investments and resource constraints.
- ❑ **Improvements in data management and analytics** lag behind other areas, with only 33% of respondents reporting implementation. Limited progress suggests ongoing challenges in translating data into actionable insights, which are essential for informed decision-making and strategic planning. The higher percentage of "Don't know" responses indicates gaps in communication or awareness in this critical area.

CAF's impact on digitalization is most evident in areas with direct and visible benefits, such as online services and tools as well as workforce training. These findings underscore the framework's ability to guide organizations toward practical and impactful digital improvements. However, foundational challenges in data management and infrastructure remain, requiring greater focus and investment. Public administrations must prioritize scaling these areas to ensure long-term scalability and sustainability while leveraging CAF to drive cross-departmental collaboration and innovation.

## 2 Agility

Agility assesses an organization’s ability to adapt swiftly to changing circumstances, innovate processes, and maintain operational efficiency in dynamic environments.

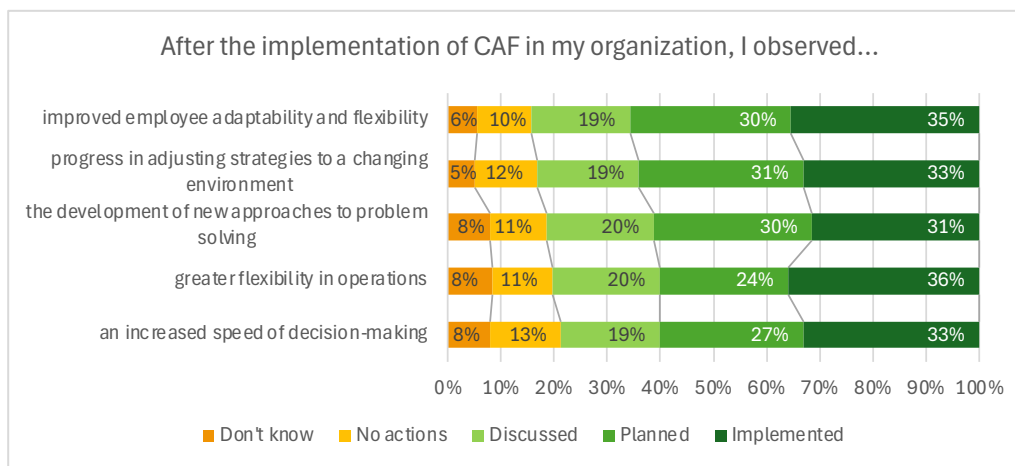


Figure 33: Observed activities in the CAF focus area Agility (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area:

- ❑ **Improved employee adaptability and flexibility** emerged as a key area of success. Implementation stands at 35%, with another 30% of respondents planning improvements. These results reflect strong efforts to enhance workforce responsiveness to change, likely supported by CAF’s frameworks for addressing workforce needs.
- ❑ **Progress in adjusting strategies to a changing environment** shows steady advancement. 33% of respondents report implemented measures, while 31% are in the planning phase. This indicates that while strategic adaptability is widely recognized as important, challenges remain in aligning resources and execution with shifting priorities.
- ❑ **The development of new approaches to problem-solving** is progressing but remains lower than operational flexibility. Implementation stands at 31%, with another 30% of respondents planning initiatives. Organizations appear to be exploring innovative practices but face barriers to fully institutionalizing these approaches.
- ❑ **Greater flexibility in operations** is a standout area, with 36% of respondents reporting implemented measures. These results highlight commitments to optimizing processes and adapting workflows to changing demands. Twenty-four percent of respondents indicate additional initiatives are under discussion or planning.
- ❑ **Increased speed of decision-making** shows the slowest progress, with 33% of respondents reporting implemented improvements and 27% in the planning phase. The findings reflect ongoing challenges in streamlining structures and fostering the cultural shifts needed for quicker decisions.

The data highlights CAF’s effectiveness in fostering agility, particularly in enhancing employee adaptability and operational flexibility. However, areas such as speeding up decision-making and fully embedding innovative practices remain challenges for many organizations. To further strengthen agility, public administrations should focus on simplifying decision-making structures, fostering cross-departmental collaboration, and embedding agile principles into their strategic and operational planning processes. These efforts will enable organizations to proactively respond to shifting demands and foster long-term resilience.

### 3 Innovation

The Innovation focus area evaluates an organization’s ability to foster creativity, enhance collaboration, and adopt governance structures that support sustainable improvements.

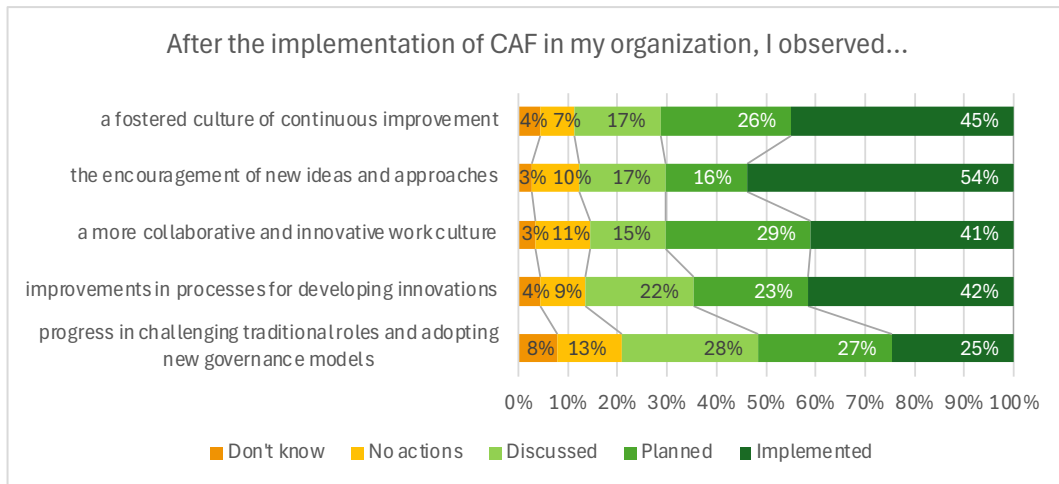


Figure 34: Observed activities in the CAF focus area Innovation (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area.

- ❑ **A fostered culture of continuous improvement** stands out as a key area of progress, with 45% of respondents reporting implemented improvements. Another 26% have initiatives in the planning stage, demonstrating public administrations' commitment to sustained enhancements in processes and practices as a foundation for innovation.
- ❑ **The encouragement of new ideas and approaches** is another area of notable success. Implementation stands at 54%, the highest among the innovation dimensions. This indicates that many organizations have effectively created environments that value and act upon creativity.
- ❑ **A more collaborative and innovative work culture** shows slightly slower progress, with 41% of respondents reporting implementation and 29% planning initiatives. These results suggest ongoing challenges in breaking down silos and achieving buy-in for cross-functional collaboration.
- ❑ **Improvements in processes for developing innovations** are progressing steadily, with 42% of respondents reporting implemented improvements and 23% in the planning stage. However, the relatively high number of exploratory initiatives indicates barriers in formalizing innovative practices or scaling them organization-wide.
- ❑ **Progress in challenging traditional roles and adopting new governance models** lags behind other areas, with only 25% of respondents reporting implementation. The high percentage of discussions (28%) suggests that organizations recognize the need for reforms, but complexities and resistance to change may slow implementation efforts.

The data highlights strong advancements in cultural and operational aspects of innovation, particularly in fostering continuous improvement and encouraging new ideas. These results demonstrate public administrations' growing commitment to embedding innovation as a core value. However, slower progress in governance reforms and collaborative cultures reflects ongoing barriers, such as institutional inertia or misaligned priorities. Addressing these challenges will require building consensus, enhancing communication, and linking governance changes to broader organizational goals.

## 4 Sustainability

The Sustainability focus area evaluates how organizations integrate sustainable practices into operations, planning, and leadership.

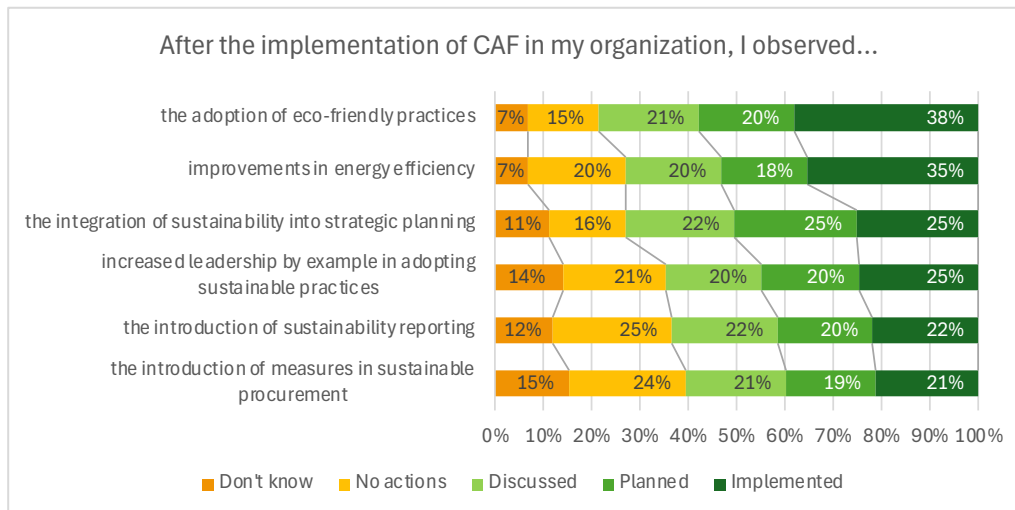


Figure 35: Observed activities in the CAF focus area Sustainability (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area:

- ❑ **The adoption of eco-friendly practices** demonstrates the highest level of implementation (38%). Initiatives such as resource-saving measures and waste reduction are visible and actionable, reflecting growing awareness of sustainability's benefits.
- ❑ **Improvements in energy efficiency** also show significant progress, with 35% implementation. Practical efforts like optimizing energy consumption provide dual benefits of cost savings and environmental responsibility, making them a priority for many.
- ❑ **The integration of sustainability into strategic planning** shows moderate progress, with 25% of respondents reporting implementation and an additional 25% in the planning phase. These results highlight the importance of aligning strategic priorities with operational execution, though challenges remain in achieving full integration.
- ❑ **Increased leadership by example** in adopting sustainable practices is also progressing slowly. A high percentage of responses in the planning and discussion stages (40%) suggests the need for leaders to more actively model sustainable behaviours, influencing organizational culture and setting clear expectations.
- ❑ **The introduction of sustainability reporting** lags behind other dimensions, with only 22% of respondents reporting implementation. Barriers such as the complexity of data collection and the need for cross-departmental collaboration impede progress, limiting transparency and evidence-based decision-making.
- ❑ **The introduction of measures in sustainable procurement** also struggles. Supply chain constraints, legal requirements, and a lack of expertise are likely barriers, despite the potential for procurement to influence broader environmental impact.

While areas like eco-friendly practices and energy efficiency demonstrate progress, critical systemic gaps persist in procurement, reporting, and leadership engagement. These weaknesses reflect a lack of strategic alignment and hinder organizations from achieving deeper, large-scale environmental impacts. To address this, public administrations must strengthen leadership commitment, build robust reporting systems, and integrate sustainability into all key operational areas. Without such measures, progress risks remaining superficial, undermining the transformative potential of CAF in fostering sustainability.

## 5 Diversity

The Diversity focus area evaluates how organizations promote inclusivity, equal opportunities, and representation of diverse groups.

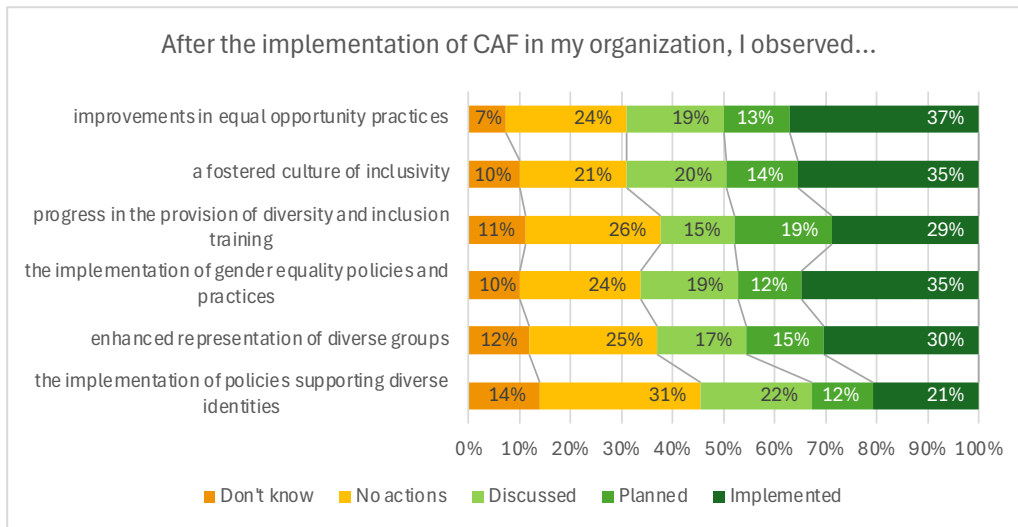


Figure 36: Observed activities in the CAF focus area Diversity (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area:

- ❑ **Improvements in equal opportunity practices** show the strongest progress (37%). This indicates a growing commitment to creating equitable working environments, with many organizations addressing disparities in hiring and workplace policies.
- ❑ **A fostered culture of inclusivity** also shows strong results, with 35% implementation. Organizations appear to be actively promoting inclusivity as a core value, integrating it into workplace norms and encouraging diverse perspectives.
- ❑ **Progress in the provision of diversity and inclusion training** remains in earlier stages for many organizations, with only 29% reporting implemented programs. A relatively high proportion of respondents (34% combined "Discussed" and "Planned") highlights ongoing efforts to structure training initiatives and raise awareness among employees.
- ❑ **The implementation of gender equality policies** and practices has made significant advancements, with 35% of respondents reporting progress. Many organizations have established formal frameworks to address gender disparities, though challenges may persist in translating policies into consistent practices across organizational levels.
- ❑ **Enhanced representation of diverse groups** is progressing unevenly. Barriers in recruitment and retention strategies likely account for this variability, requiring long-term planning and targeted outreach efforts.
- ❑ **The implementation of policies supporting diverse identities** shows slower adoption. Many organizations remain in the "Discussed" or "Planned" stages, suggesting ongoing challenges in adapting policies to recognize and support diverse identities widely.

The data highlights significant advancements in areas like equal opportunity and inclusivity, which are relatively straightforward to implement and resonate well with employees and stakeholders. However, slower progress in areas such as diversity training, representation, and policies supporting diverse identities reveals deeper cultural and structural challenges. Achieving meaningful change in these areas will require long-term investments, deliberate recruitment and retention strategies, and cultural shifts that promote understanding and inclusion. Public administrations must ensure that diversity efforts extend beyond policy creation, embedding these principles into daily operations to achieve sustainable, impactful results.

## 6 Collaboration

Collaboration is a key focus area in the CAF framework, emphasizing the importance of fostering teamwork, breaking down silos, and creating partnerships both within and outside the organization.

Given the diverse nature of collaboration, this analysis separates internal collaboration, which focuses on teamwork, communication, and alignment within the organization, from external collaboration, which examines partnerships and engagement with stakeholders. This distinction enables a better evaluation of progress and challenges in these distinct but interconnected areas.

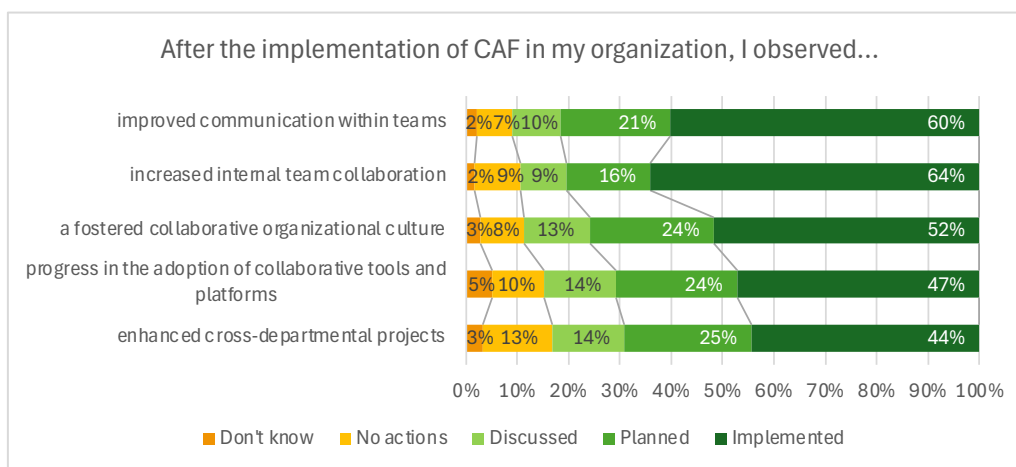


Figure 37: Observed activities in the CAF focus area (internal) Collaboration (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area of **internal collaboration**:

- ❑ **Improved communication within teams** shows the most progress, with 60% of respondents reporting implementation. This reflects significant efforts to align team dynamics and streamline workflows, ensuring better coordination and cohesion.
- ❑ **Increased internal team collaboration** builds on these communication improvements, with 64% of respondents reporting implemented measures. These results highlight organizations' focus on fostering mutual accountability and shared goals within teams.
- ❑ **A fostered collaborative organizational culture** demonstrates steady progress, with 52% reporting implementation. However, 37% of respondents remain in the “Planned” or “Discussed” stages, suggesting challenges in breaking down silos and embedding collaboration across broader organizational levels.
- ❑ **Progress in the adoption of collaborative tools and platforms** shows slower development, with 47% implementation. Barriers such as technical readiness, resources user adoption, and integration issues appear to limit further advancement.
- ❑ **Enhanced cross-departmental projects** show the slowest progress, with 44% of respondents reporting implementation. Structural barriers and unclear frameworks often hinder these initiatives, despite their potential to break down organizational silos.

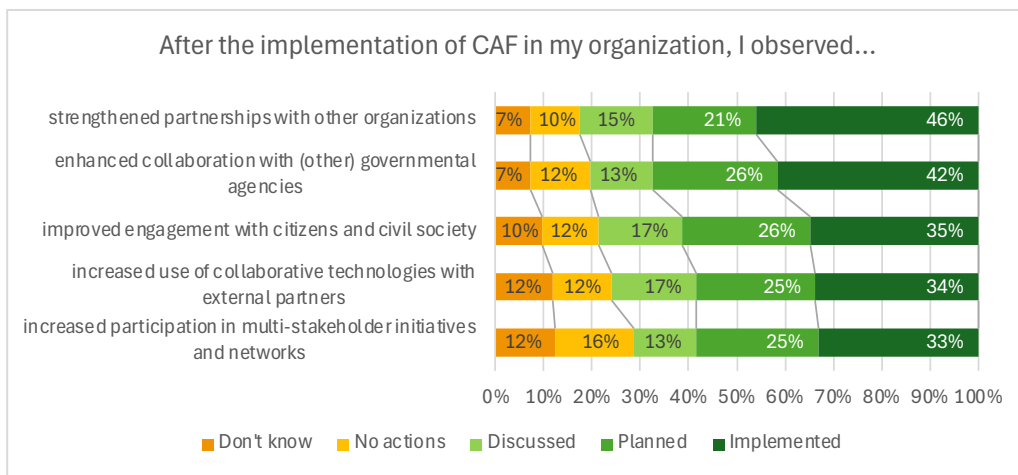


Figure 38: Observed activities in the CAF focus area (external) Collaboration (N=178)

The survey results provide the following insights for each key area of **external collaboration**:

- ❑ **Strengthened partnerships with other organizations** stands out as the most successfully implemented area. These efforts reflect a focus on building mutually beneficial relationships to enhance service delivery.
- ❑ **Enhanced collaboration with governmental agencies** follows closely, with 42% implementation. Organizations increasingly recognize the importance of inter-agency coordination to improve policy alignment and service outcomes.
- ❑ **Improved engagement with citizens and civil society** shows moderate progress, with 35% implementation. Organizations seem to face challenges in effectively involving external stakeholders in decision-making and co-creation processes.
- ❑ **Increased use of collaborative technologies** with external partners has progressed at slowly, with 34% of respondents reporting implementation, especially compared to internal platforms. Challenges in technical integration, shared system adoption, financial resources, lack of trust and privacy issues appear to limit more widespread use.
- ❑ **Increased participation in multi-stakeholder initiatives** and networks lags heavily behind, with only 33% reporting implementation. Higher rates of discussions and planning (38%) reflect ongoing efforts to address logistical and coordination barriers.

CAF has driven significant progress in fostering collaboration both internally and externally. Internally, organizations have succeeded in improving communication and team-level collaboration, resulting in more cohesive and efficient workflows. However, broader initiatives like cross-departmental projects and the adoption of collaborative tools remain less developed, reflecting barriers such as siloed structures, insufficient leadership engagement, and technical constraints. To address these challenges, organizations should prioritize breaking down silos by fostering cultural and structural alignment across departments, investing in digital platforms to streamline collaboration, and encouraging leadership to actively promote collaborative practices.

Externally, CAF has facilitated the development of partnerships and inter-agency collaboration, demonstrating strong progress in areas where goals and synergies align. However, slower progress in citizen engagement, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and the adoption of collaborative technologies highlights gaps in strategic planning and coordination. Organizations need to establish clear frameworks for collaboration, improve logistical capacities, and strengthen trust with external stakeholders through regular engagement and participatory practices.

## ReSPA: A collaborative model for regional quality leadership in the Western Balkans

### Context and Background

The Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) serves five ReSPA Members - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, while Kosovo<sup>1</sup> is beneficiary. ReSPA focuses on assisting public administration reforms and facilitating EU accession for its members. For over 15 years, ReSPA has promoted quality management, but it shifted its primary focus to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in recent years as a central tool for improving internal processes and establishing itself as a role model for quality management across the region. With a relatively small team of around 19 employees, ReSPA has leveraged CAF to foster agility, efficiency, and sustainable practices that align with its mission and regional goals.

### Objective of CAF Implementation

ReSPA's primary objectives in implementing CAF were to:

- Establish a culture of continuous improvement,
- Model best practices in public administration for the Western Balkans,
- Enhance internal communication and collaborative processes,
- Strengthen strategic alignment with organizational mission and vision,
- Build structured partnerships within the region and enhance its status as a quality management hub.

### Process of CAF Implementation

ReSPA began its CAF journey in 2018, supported by the BACID II and BACID III program and guided by mentors. The process evolved through the following steps:

- Initial self-assessment: In 2018, ReSPA conducted a self-assessment that involved all staff, which identified areas for improvement, such as internal communication and digitalization.
- Action planning: Based on the self-assessment findings, ReSPA developed an action plan focusing on operational improvements, enhanced communication, and digital process integration.
- Second CAF cycle and regional role expansion: Encouraged by the positive results of the first cycle, ReSPA's team initiated a second CAF cycle, which included establishing the Regional Quality Management Centre in 2021. This centre was pivotal in formalizing ReSPA's role as a regional hub and certification body for CAF, extending the framework to more public administrations in the Western Balkans.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Outcomes and Achievements

CAF implementation at ReSPA has led to several impactful results:

- ❑ Enhanced communication and employee engagement: Following CAF recommendations, ReSPA implemented regular staff satisfaction surveys and feedback-driven team-building initiatives. These efforts improved communication, morale, and alignment between programs and finances.
- ❑ Digitalization of internal processes: ReSPA successfully digitized several key processes, such as expert hiring, document management system, enterprise resource planning, budgeting, customer relationship management, event organization, and procurement. This not only reduced administrative burdens but also increased organizational efficiency and agility.
- ❑ Increased funding and resource allocation: Using CAF findings, ReSPA secured European Commission funding to support digital transformation initiatives and added new roles, such as Communication and Visibility Officer, Public Policies Innovations and Digitalization Officer and Partnership and Knowledge Management Officer, to reinforce its mission and capabilities.
- ❑ Regional quality management leadership: With two CAF cycles completed internally, ReSPA has supported 16 CAF implementations across the Western Balkans and awarded 9 CAF labels, while additional three institutions are in the process of obtaining certification. These efforts are focused on enhancing quality management practices within regional public administrations.

## Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Several factors contributed to ReSPA's successful CAF implementation:

- ❑ Leadership support and staff buy-in: From the outset, ReSPA's leadership demonstrated a strong commitment to CAF, which inspired staff buy-in. This support was especially crucial during leadership transitions, as new leaders embraced CAF as a strategic priority.
- ❑ Mentorship and regional collaboration: The mentorship from quality management experts, such as those involved in BACID projects, provided ReSPA with essential guidance. Additionally, regional collaboration fostered a supportive network that reinforced ReSPA's position as a regional quality management hub.
- ❑ Adaptability in implementation: CAF helped ReSPA respond to both external challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and internal restructuring, underscoring the importance of agility and adaptability.
- ❑ Focus on sustainable funding: By integrating CAF findings into its strategic framework, ReSPA systematically diversified its funding sources, ensuring long-term sustainability for CAF-led initiatives.
- ❑ Regional impact and knowledge sharing: ReSPA's CAF journey has extended beyond internal improvements to influence the broader quality management landscape across the Western Balkans, establishing a foundation for continuous improvement in public administration.

Through its structured yet flexible application of CAF, ReSPA has not only achieved operational excellence and strategic alignment but has also set a new standard for quality management in public administration across the Western Balkans. ReSPA's success illustrates the power of CAF in driving organizational resilience, efficiency, and regional leadership.

## 7 Key insights: Focus Areas

The analysis of CAF's impact on the focus areas reveals significant achievements but also underscores persistent challenges, particularly in scaling and sustaining progress. Organizations have demonstrated success in operational and cultural initiatives, such as improving online services, fostering team collaboration, and promoting eco-friendly practices. These achievements showcase CAF's ability to drive visible, tangible improvements. However, systemic and long-term issues, such as sustainability reporting, strategic agility, and cross-departmental collaboration, reveal the difficulty of addressing structural and cultural barriers.

Cultural shifts, including fostering inclusive, innovative, and collaborative environments, have been areas of progress, with notable advancements in equal opportunity practices and continuous improvement initiatives. Nevertheless, areas requiring greater systemic integration, such as the adoption of shared platforms, multi-stakeholder engagement, and embedding sustainability into strategic planning, remain underdeveloped. These gaps highlight the need for stronger leadership engagement, cross-functional alignment, and investments in digital tools and technical capacity to overcome logistical and structural barriers.

A recurring theme is the divide between localized successes and broader organizational transformation. CAF enables organizations to achieve initial wins in areas with immediate impact, yet struggles to ensure that these successes translate into cohesive, organization-wide improvements. To address these gaps, public administrations must prioritize breaking silos, fostering trust and inclusivity in partnerships, and embedding collaboration and innovation into strategic frameworks. Strengthening leadership accountability and aligning operational practices with long-term goals will be essential to maximizing CAF's potential.

CAF has proven effective in advancing public sector modernization, particularly in areas with direct operational benefits. However, addressing foundational gaps – such as stakeholder engagement, sustainable practices, and the use of analytics – will require sustained effort. By building on its strengths and tackling these shortcomings, public administrations can ensure that CAF fosters both immediate improvements and long-term resilience across all focus areas.

## VI Long-term impact of CAF

CAF’s strength lies not only in the short-term improvements it generates but also in its ability to create lasting, systemic change. By embedding quality management principles into the core operations of public sector organizations, CAF establishes a foundation for continuous improvement. Over time, organizations that consistently apply CAF experience far-reaching benefits, including enhanced operational efficiency, increased accountability, and better alignment with stakeholder needs.

One of the most significant long-term impacts of CAF is its capacity to foster a culture of self-reflection and continuous learning. Public sector organizations that use CAF regularly assess their processes, leadership, and service outcomes, leading to sustained improvements in decision-making and service delivery. Moreover, CAF’s focus on people development and leadership transformation helps organizations build resilient, forward-looking teams capable of addressing future challenges.

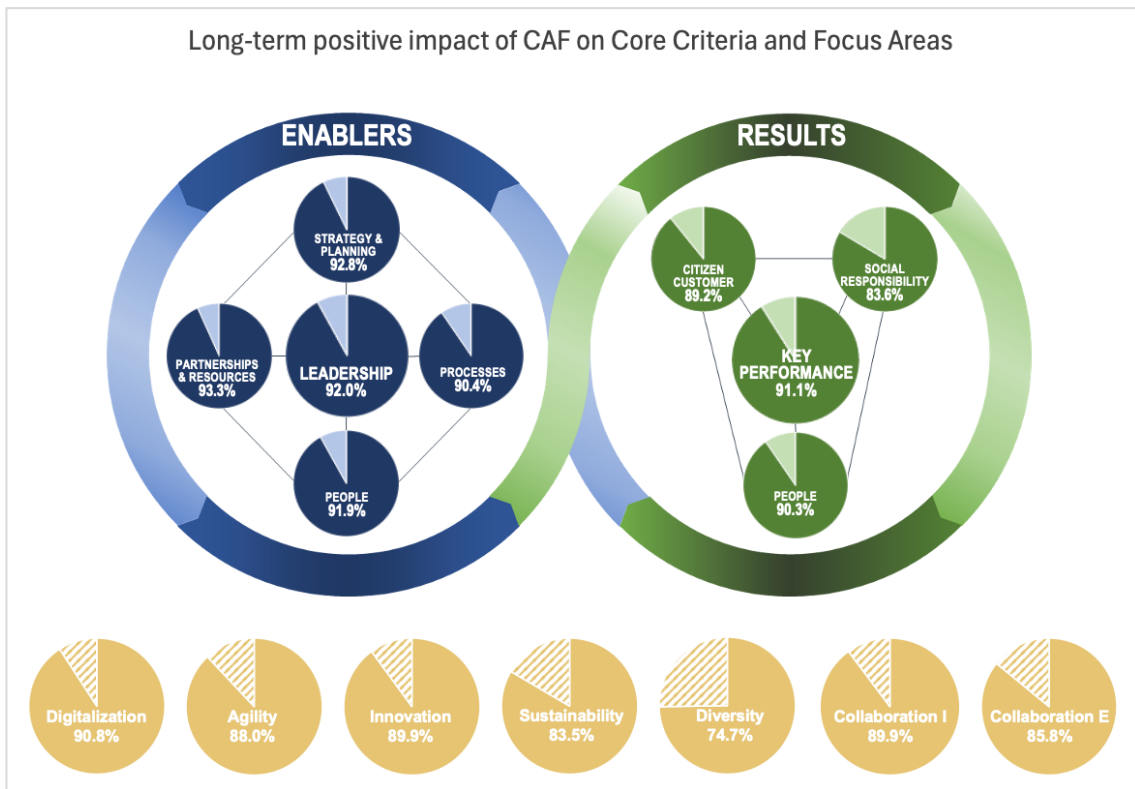


Figure 39: Perceived positive long-term impact on core criteria and focus areas by respondents from organizations with 4+years of experience with CAF  
 Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of CAF experience (N=99-125) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on core criteria and focus areas.

The graphic illustrates CAF’s long-term impact on core criteria and focus areas, drawing exclusively from organizations with four or more years of experience using the framework. It highlights CAF’s ability to strengthen enabling factors, such as leadership (92%), strategy and planning (92.8%), partnerships and resources (93.3%), and processes (90.4%), which form the foundation for organizational effectiveness. These enabling factors are complemented by significant positive impacts on results, including key performance results (91.1%) and people results (90.3%).

## Grouped Analysis: Long-Term Impact of CAF

To provide a clear and structured analysis of CAF’s long-term impact, all criteria and focus areas of CAF have been grouped into three overarching categories: Quality of Public Services, Change and Innovation, and Leadership and People Development. By examining the results through these overarching categories, we aim to offer a clear and balanced view of how CAF fosters high-quality services, adaptability, and effective leadership in public sector organizations:

- ❑ **Quality of Public Services:** CAF's structured approach to assessing and improving service delivery ensures that public services remain responsive, efficient, and aligned with citizen expectations. Over time, organizations have demonstrated sustained improvements in service quality, resulting in higher citizen satisfaction and trust in public institutions.
- ❑ **Change and Innovation:** In an increasingly dynamic and unpredictable environment, public sector organizations must remain agile and capable of embracing innovation. CAF fosters adaptability, encouraging public sector organizations to embrace change and continuously evolve.
- ❑ **Leadership and People Development:** Leadership and staff engagement are crucial for driving long-term success. CAF promotes a culture of leadership that is inclusive, transparent, and aligned with organizational goals. Over time, this has led to the development of stronger leadership structures and better people management practices, resulting in more motivated and empowered employees.

This approach ensures a holistic understanding of how CAF contributes to the overall performance of public sector organizations.

### 1.1 Quality of Public Services

Providing high-quality public services is a cornerstone of effective governance, enabling organizations to meet growing citizen demands while fostering trust in institutions. Key core criteria under this theme, processes (90.4%), citizen/customer-oriented results (89.2%), and key performance results (91.1%), underscore the importance of streamlined operations and measurable outcomes. Focus areas such as sustainability (83.5%), internal collaboration (89.9%), and external collaboration (85.8%) offer additional dimensions to achieving service excellence.

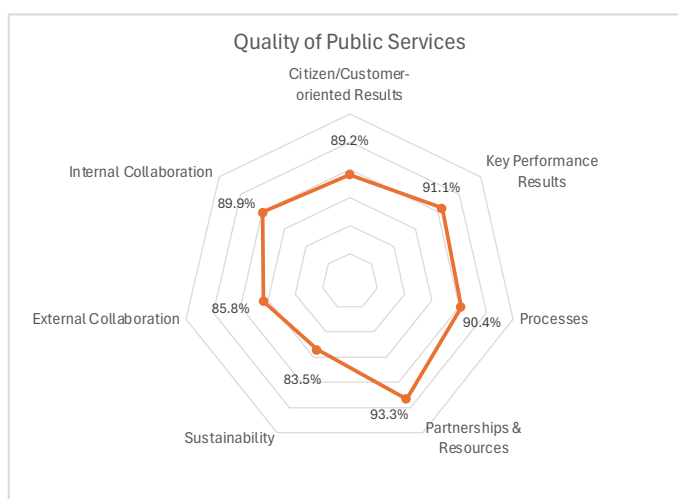


Figure 40: Perceived positive long-term impact on quality of public services by respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of experience with CAF

Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of CAF experience (N=103-125) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on core criteria and focus areas. Scale: 70% (centre) to 100%.

While CAF demonstrates strong performance in areas like processes and measurable outcomes, challenges in sustainability and external collaboration require attention. Sustainability remains underdeveloped, particularly in green procurement and sustainability reporting. Organizations often lack the technical expertise, data systems, and cross-departmental alignment to embed sustainability benchmarks into

everyday operations. To address these gaps, public administrations should integrate sustainability metrics into strategic frameworks, implement green procurement policies, and align sustainability efforts with global goals, such as the SDGs. Additionally, fostering inter-organizational partnerships can help address shared challenges like climate action and resource efficiency.

For external collaboration, structured stakeholder engagement is critical. Mechanisms such as citizen panels or participatory planning processes allow public administrations to co-create services with stakeholders, aligning public services with societal needs. Furthermore, partnerships with civil society and private sector actors can amplify public sector capacity and enhance access to equitable services.

## 1.2 Change and Innovation

In an era marked by rapid technological evolution and shifting societal priorities, public sector organizations must remain adaptable and innovation-driven. This theme encompasses core criteria such as strategy and planning (92.8%) and processes (90.4%), while focus areas like digitalization (90.8%), innovation (89.9%), and social responsibility results (83.6%) reflect specific opportunities to drive transformation.

CAF has driven meaningful progress in digital transformation and innovative practices, enabling public administrations to modernize their workflows and adopt new technologies.

However, there are notable equity challenges associated with innovation. Social responsibility results indicate that organizations often struggle to balance technological progress with inclusivity. Public administrations should embed social impact assessments into their innovation frameworks, ensuring that new technologies and policies address diverse stakeholder needs and avoid unintended disparities. Collaborating with universities and think tanks can also provide technical expertise and innovative methodologies to ensure innovation strategies create public value.

Organizations should also align their innovation efforts with ethical standards by integrating global frameworks such as the UN's SDGs into their strategic planning. This approach ensures that innovation balances technological advancement with environmental sustainability and social equity, maximizing its societal impact.

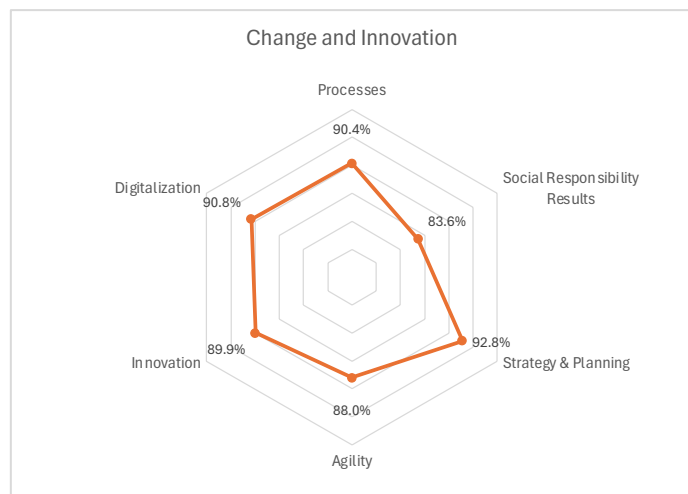


Figure 41: Perceived positive long-term impact on change and innovation by respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of experience with CAF  
 Note: The data reflect the percentage of respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of CAF experience (N=108-125) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on core criteria and focus areas. Scale: 70% (centre) to 100%.

### 1.3 Leadership and People Development

Strong leadership and engaged personnel are fundamental to fostering a culture of resilience and adaptability. This theme is anchored in core criteria like leadership (92%), people enablers (91.9%), and people results (90.3%). Focus areas such as diversity (74.7%), internal collaboration (89.9%), and external collaboration (85.8%) highlight areas where organizations can refine their approaches to unlock greater potential.

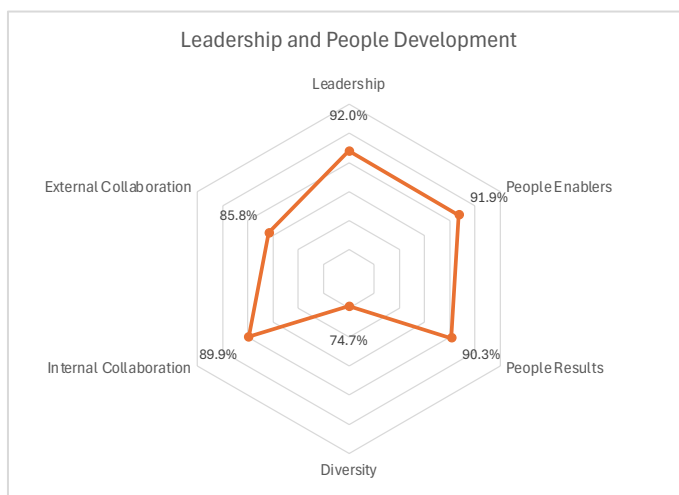


Figure 42: Perceived positive long-term impact on leadership and people development by respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of experience with CAF

Note: The data reflects the percentage of respondents from organizations with 4 or more years of CAF experience (N=99-125) indicating a positive impact of CAF implementation on core criteria and focus areas. Scale: 70% (centre) to 100%.

Diversity remains a critical challenge, with lower scores reflecting limited progress in representation and inclusivity. Public administrations need to move beyond policy-level changes by embedding diversity into their organizational culture. Conducting diversity audits to identify representation gaps and offering mentorship programs targeted at underrepresented groups are essential steps. Additionally, sustained leadership advocacy for inclusivity ensures that diversity principles are integrated into both daily practices and long-term strategies.

Enhancing external collaboration in leadership contexts involves structured cross-sectoral engagement. Advisory boards that include representatives from civil society, academia, and private sector stakeholders can diversify decision-making inputs. Public administrations should also invest in platforms that facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration, ensuring leadership strategies remain adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges.

This grouped analysis provides a structured framework for understanding CAF’s long-term impact on public administration. By targeting critical areas such as sustainability, external collaboration, social responsibility, and diversity, public sector organizations can align their efforts with broader societal priorities while improving organizational performance. These areas present both challenges and opportunities, demanding deliberate and data-driven approaches for sustained improvement. By embracing these priorities holistically, public administrations can navigate the complexities of modern governance while maintaining trust and delivering high-impact outcomes.

## VII Potential for further development of CAF

Public sector organizations face evolving demands to deliver high-quality services efficiently while remaining adaptable to change. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has become a valuable tool in helping these organizations improve quality management and foster a culture of continuous improvement. To maximize CAF’s impact and ensure its sustainability, this chapter presents a set of strategic recommendations derived from survey data and expert insights.

The following chart provides an overview of key areas for CAF improvement, based on survey responses. This visual summary highlights the highest-priority suggestions from survey participants, which have informed the structured recommendations in this chapter.

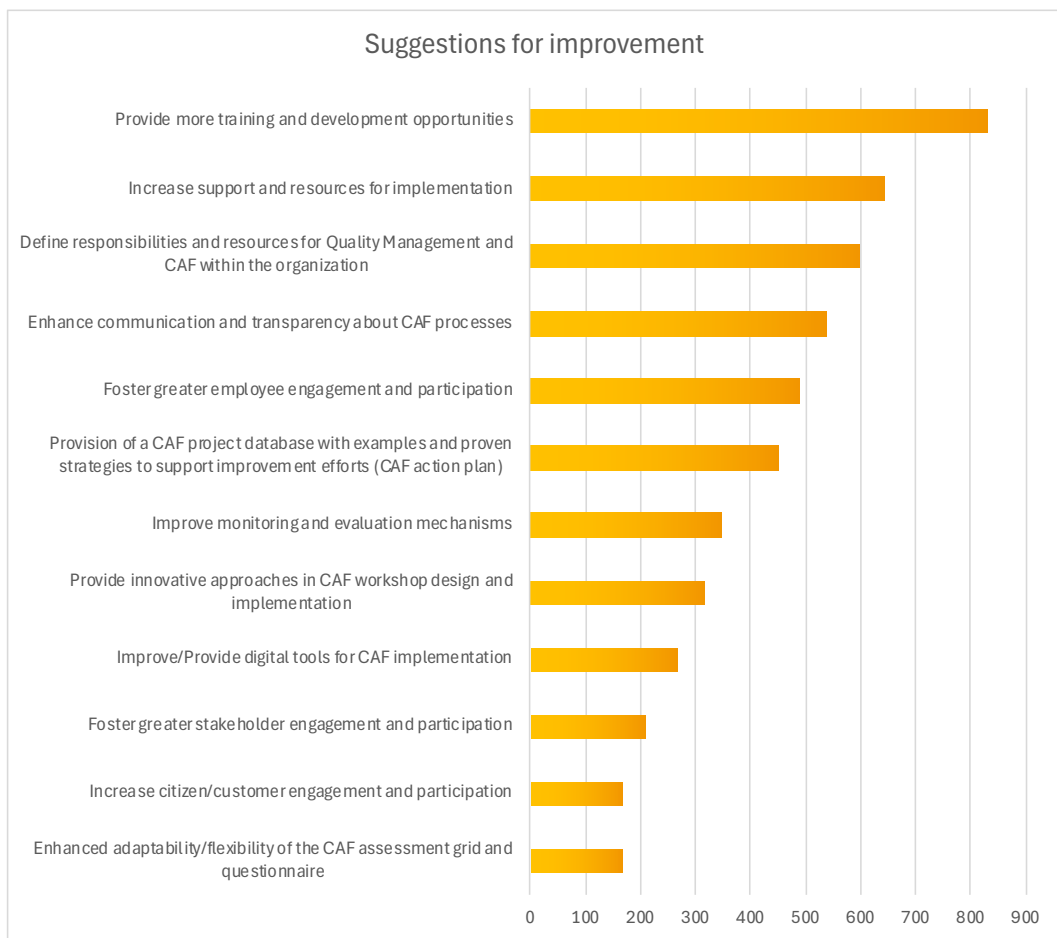


Figure 43: Ranking of suggestions for improvement

Note: The graphic displays survey results (N=165) on suggestions for improving CAF. Rankings are based on an exponential weighting system, where higher ranks received significantly more points

The following recommendations are based on results from the survey as well as expert interviews. They are organized into three overarching themes: Capacity Building and Resource Support, Operational and Process Enhancements, and Strategic Development and Long-Term Sustainability.

This structure provides a comprehensive yet focused analysis, allowing organizations to address both immediate needs and long-term objectives for enhancing CAF's effectiveness and relevance.

## 1 Capacity building and resource support

The category “Capacity building and resource support” refers to the institutional back-up for supporting CAF implementations in public administrations.

- ❑ **Provide more training and development opportunities**

Accessible training programs exist, but additional specialization is needed. Introducing tiered training for beginners, intermediate, and advanced users alongside modules focused on stakeholder engagement, social responsibility and sustainability would address gaps. Peer mentoring and online training options would enhance flexibility and user accessibility.
- ❑ **Increase support and resources for implementation**

The CAF Resource Centre offers valuable tools and services, but centralized hubs with step-by-step implementation toolkits, including templates and case studies, could streamline processes further. Government-backed support and resources would alleviate pressures on underfunded organizations.
- ❑ **Define responsibilities and resources for quality management and CAF**

Organizations should formalize roles like CAF coordinators to ensure integration into daily operations. This would sustain focus on quality management despite staff turnover and provide clear accountability across organizational levels. Dedicated roles should also focus on managing stakeholder relationships and monitoring inclusivity initiatives.
- ❑ **Foster greater employee engagement and participation**

Self-assessment workshops dedicated solely to CAF processes encourage focus and participation. Recognition programs can motivate staff, and involving employees at all levels would foster inclusivity and shared responsibility.
- ❑ **Expand the CAF project database**

The existing repository of best practices could benefit from interactive features like peer Q&A forums and regular updates. Detailed case studies categorized by criteria and focus areas would make the database a more practical resource. Success stories on areas with improvement potential (Sustainability, Social Responsibility, Partnerships & Resources), and stakeholder engagement should be prioritized.

## 2 Operational and process enhancements

The category “Operational and process enhancements” refers to design and methods in implementing CAF programs in public administrations.

- ❑ **Enhance communication and transparency about CAF processes**

Transparent communication strategies can build trust in the CAF process. Using dashboards to visually track progress and providing regular updates about goals and achievements would ensure engagement and alignment across teams. Highlighting benefits in areas like inclusivity, social responsibility, and stakeholder engagement would improve buy-in.
- ❑ **Post-CAF implementation support and sustainability**

Follow-up workshops and systematic assessments could focus on underperforming areas like resource management and stakeholder relationships. These steps would help organizations sustain their momentum and address emerging challenges effectively.

- ❑ **Support for innovation through customized tools**  
While tools like the CAF e-Tool support implementation, innovation-specific workshops and resources targeting client satisfaction, resource management, and stakeholder engagement would enhance CAF's relevance.
- ❑ **Strengthen knowledge management and continuity**  
A CAF knowledge repository can preserve institutional memory, while onboarding protocols for new staff ensure a smooth transition. Cross-functional training programs prepare multiple staff members to maintain CAF processes seamlessly. Knowledge sharing should include practical strategies for improving inclusivity and resource alignment.
- ❑ **Purify the CAF assessment scheme and methodology**  
Declining perceived effects after more CAF cycles indicate that CAF should be further developed making it more attractive and targeted for experienced CAF users. A more focused CAF assessment scheme including innovative interventions in delivering CAF programs can contribute to better results and more impact.

### 3 Strategic development and long-term sustainability

The category "Strategic development and long-term sustainability" refers to the capacity of CAF to further develop its position as tailor-made quality management system for public administrations:

- ❑ **Better integration with other performance management and governance systems**  
With CAF Public Administrations work towards better quality of services and with this stimulating the impact for the target groups. Linking CAF with acknowledged and already implemented performance management tools, public value and impact analysis approaches could concretize the important linkage between quality and results and with this a better output and impact monitoring of public services.
- ❑ **Expand CAF's visibility and applicability**  
CAF is widely used by prospective EU member states, helping them align with European administrative standards. However, it is underutilized by current EU institutions and member states. Encouraging adoption by these entities would serve two purposes: improving internal governance where gaps exist and reinforcing the EU's role as a model for quality management. Promoting CAF at the EU level would also enhance its credibility and foster stronger European integration.
- ❑ **Develop a clear strategy for CAF's future**  
A long-term strategy for CAF should incorporate user-driven feedback to ensure alignment with modern challenges, including digitalization and inclusivity. Communicating this strategy broadly would strengthen trust among users and showcase CAF's relevance to evolving public sector needs.

## VIII Conclusions

The CAF Impact Study 2025 highlights the transformative role of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in public sector governance, emphasizing its ability to drive quality improvement, innovation, and organizational change. CAF is more than a self-assessment tool, it is a framework for long-term transformation. Across sectors, administrative levels, and organizational contexts, its implementation has delivered significant improvements. Leadership and strategic alignment were notable areas of impact, with 90% of respondents reporting enhanced clarity and cohesion in planning and performance management. CAF also fosters evidence-based decision-making, equipping leaders to anticipate challenges and adapt strategies effectively.

Workforce empowerment emerged as another strength, with over 80% of respondents noting improved engagement, competency development, and alignment with organizational goals. CAF supports a competency-driven, people-centred environment, essential for sustaining motivation and productivity.

In service delivery, CAF prioritizes user-oriented results by improving processes and measuring satisfaction. However, organizations struggle to translate these measurements into actionable improvements. Stakeholder engagement also requires growth, with only 64% reporting significant advancements in relationships with civil society and political authorities. This underscores the need for tailored strategies to foster trust and collaboration.

Long-term adoption reveals mixed results. While early cycles yield substantial gains, diminishing returns are observed in areas like social responsibility and stakeholder engagement. This highlights the need for strategic recalibrations and complementary tools to sustain momentum.

The study underscores CAF's alignment with global trends, including digital transformation, sustainability, and agility. Its principles resonate with contemporary governance demands and support resilience by fostering adaptability. During crises like COVID-19, CAF-enabled organizations demonstrated the ability to maintain service delivery and engage stakeholders effectively. However, bridging internal improvements with external societal impact remains a challenge that must be addressed to maximize CAF's potential.

To enhance CAF's effectiveness, the study recommends developing advanced modules to address digital transformation and data-driven decision-making, ensuring users can integrate insights into actionable strategies. Strengthening frameworks for inclusive stakeholder engagement, especially to reach marginalized groups, is essential. Capacity-building should provide targeted support to resource-constrained organizations. Sector-specific adaptations, addressing unique challenges in fields like healthcare, can further expand CAF's applicability.

Sustainability is another priority, requiring regular recalibrations of CAF processes to prevent stagnation. Tools for scenario planning and foresight can help organizations anticipate emerging trends. Aligning CAF criteria with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) metrics will enhance its contribution to sustainability goals.

The study reaffirms CAF's role as a cornerstone of public administration excellence. By fostering alignment, innovation, and citizen-centred governance, it equips public sector organizations to navigate an increasingly complex world. However, as challenges evolve, so must CAF. Continuous commitment to self-assessment, collaboration, and improvement will ensure CAF remains a catalyst for resilient, inclusive, and effective public administration, capable of addressing the dynamic demands of modern governance.

## IX Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to this study. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the participants in the online survey for their valuable insights, which formed a crucial foundation for this research.

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- Eva Sejrek-Tunke, City of Vienna, Austria
- Matija Vilfan, eu-LISA – European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

We are particularly grateful to EIPA (European Institute of Public Administration), ReSPA (Regional School of Public Administration) and the National CAF Correspondents for their support in reaching out and forwarding the invitation to take part in the survey to the CAF organisations in their countries and networks.

## **X ANNEX: Overview of CAF activities under the BACID program**

*Authored by Igor Markovski (CAF trainer, expert and consultant in BACID III program)*

### **1 The BACID Program 2014-2024**

The BACID Program – Building Administrative Capacities in the Danube Region – financed by the Austrian Development Agency – was implemented in 3 phases (BACID I+II: 2014-2021 and BACID III: 2021-2024) starting in the year 2014. The main objective of BACID program was to improve good public governance in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova. BACID activities focused on two elements of governance that are in urgent need to be further developed and are not sufficiently supported by other donors and actors:

- Increasing the quality of public administration and public services with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Decentralisation and local autonomy as key elements of the “Western European Democracy Model” and guarantors for the provision of high-quality local services.

The BACID activities have been implemented together with two regional organisations. Both, Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) and Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS) have been established by their members – ReSPA by the Ministries for Public Administration in the Western Balkans and NALAS by the Local Government Associations of South East Europe.

In working towards the objective “Increasing the quality of public administration and public services with the Common Assessment Framework”, KDZ worked in close cooperation with the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) by supporting in setting up the Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC) and a row of CAF implementing activities. Through mentoring and coaching a sustainable know-how transfer could be established which laid the foundation for a sustainable anchoring of CAF in the Region.

### **2 CAF Implementations**

Under the BACID program mixed with support by ReSPA via RQMC and by “In-Country Support” mechanism, a total of 23 CAF (Common Assessment Framework) implementations have been successfully carried out across the Western Balkans region. These initiatives have contributed to enhancing administrative capacities and service quality. The institutions involved in these implementations include:

#### **CAF Implementations (BACID II)**

1. Bureau of Metrology of Montenegro – 2019
2. Directorate for Good Governance and Non-Governmental Organization Activities, Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro – 2019
3. Sector for the Development of Good Governance, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of Serbia, Republic of Serbia – 2019

4. Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania (ADISA), Republic of Albania – 2019
5. Regional School of Public Administration – 2018 (1st Cycle)

**CAF Implementations (ReSPA RQMC, In-Country Support)**

6. Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2022
7. Ministry of Information Society and Administration of North Macedonia – 2022

**CAF Implementations (BACID III)**

8. Civil Service Agency of Republic Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2022
9. State Commission for Prevention of Corruption of North Macedonia – 2023
10. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of North Macedonia – 2023
11. Regional School of Public Administration – 2023 (2nd Cycle)
12. Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office (PARCO), Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2023
13. City of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2023
14. Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro – 2023
15. Municipality of Gjorche Petrov, North Macedonia – 2024
16. Municipality of Zeta, Montenegro – 2024
17. Bureau of Metrology of Montenegro – 2024 (2nd Cycle)
18. Secretariat of Legislation of North Macedonia – 2024
19. Accreditation Body of the Republic of Moldova – 2024

**ReSPA RQMC, In-Country Support:**

20. Support to the Civil Service Agency of Republic Srpska in preparing and co-facilitating the CAF Consensus Workshop in the Ministry of Energy and Mining of Republic Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2019
21. Support to the Civil Service Agency of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in preparing and co-facilitating the CAF Consensus Workshop in the Municipality of Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2019
22. Support to the Civil Service Agency of Republic Srpska in preparing and co-facilitating the CAF Consensus Workshop in the Ministry of Administration and Local Self-Government of Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2021

**CAF Implementations (ReSPA RQMC)**

23. Municipality of Surcin – 2025 (In progress)

### 3 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Reflecting on the CAF programs implemented following reflections for effective CAF implementations can be drawn upon:

#### 1. Leadership and Commitment

- **Commitment to leadership in every step of the procedure:** Leaders' commitment to CAF and their active involvement in all phases of CAF-SA are essential for success.
- **The key to success is the commitment and openness of senior management:** Senior managers must communicate their commitment clearly to the organization's staff, ensuring honest and useful feedback.
- **Leaders' interest in a concise action plan and its complete implementation is crucial.**
- **Leaders' interest in quality development:** Senior managers must participate in prioritizing, implementing of the improvement actions at all levels, monitoring of the implementation of the Action plan for improvement, as to set an example to employees. This avoids quality development being made the responsibility of one specific person or service.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that senior leaders are fully engaged and committed to the CAF process. They should be actively involved in each phase, communicating their commitment to staff and ensuring the implementation of improvement actions at all levels. This includes setting an example for employees by "prioritizing" quality development across the organization, and ensuring that the responsibility for quality development is shared at all levels, not delegated to a single department.

#### 2. Transparency, Communication, and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Transparency and communication can overcome resistance to change:** Open discussions, communication via intranet, newsletters, staff meetings, trainings, and face-to-face meetings can improve participation and buy-in. By placing an emphasis on the benefits of change, resistance can be reduced.
- **More emphasis on communication with employees:** Communication should occur during all phases: preparatory work, before the self-assessment, during self-assessments, before and after the prioritization seminar, and throughout the plan for improvement (preparation, implementation, monitoring & reporting).
- **The involvement of management is crucial:** The commitment of senior management must be communicated to staff members to ensure honest and useful feedback and to guarantee the implementation of improvements.
- **CAF requires a clear stakeholder analysis:** This stimulates members of the CAF Self-Assessment Group (CAF SAG) to positively anticipate the relationship with relevant stakeholders and increases awareness of their needs.

**Recommendation:** Strengthen communication channels across all phases of the CAF process (preparation, self-assessment, improvement planning, and implementation). Ensure transparency through regular updates, newsletters, and face-to-face meetings. This openness will foster greater participation, overcome resistance to change, and improve the buy-in of employees. Additionally, conduct a thorough stakeholder analysis to anticipate needs of the stakeholders', ensuring broad support and effective engagement.

### 3. Capacity Building and Training

- **Teaching pays at both ends – for the “trainer” and the “trainee”:** Training should be conducted just before the work of the CAF Self-Assessment Group (CAF SAG).
- **Training for members of CAF SAG should include more examples:** Training should be comprehensive, with detailed examples that help participants understand the process fully.
- **The composition of the CAF SAG should be on a voluntary basis,** with clear presentation of the work to be done and the CAF model itself. This ensures ownership of the process.
- **Training for CAF SAG members** in the language of the institution (e.g., BHS for BiH institutions) facilitates better understanding and engagement.
- **Learning from other members of CAF SAG** can be beneficial for improving the process.

**Recommendation:** Organize targeted training for the Self-Assessment Group (SAG) members, ideally just before the self-assessment begins, to ensure they are well-prepared. Include practical examples in the training sessions and ensure that the training is tailored to the language of the institution. Facilitate a voluntary and clear presentation of roles within the SAG to ensure ownership and engagement. Additionally, encourage cross-learning among SAG members to enhance the process and build internal expertise.

### 4. Systematic and Targeted Improvement Actions

- **Areas of improvement need to be worked out in the action plan workshop:** The action plan should not be developed solely by the CAF SAG but through a collaborative process with the management.
- **Improvement actions should be SMART<sup>2</sup>** with realistic deadlines.
- **A balance between intensive discussions and avoiding getting lost in details** is key to effective self-assessment and improvement planning.
- **Avoid too many strategic improvement actions:** Only a few, well-defined strategic actions should be prioritized, leading to useful and measurable results.
- **Information on completed improvements should be disseminated** within the organization.
- **When using CAF for the first time,** experienced external assistance can help ensure a smooth prioritization process and appropriate scoring.

**Recommendation:** Prioritize the collaborative development of the action plan, involving both the CAF SAG and senior management to ensure alignment with organizational goals. Set SMART improvement actions with realistic deadlines and avoid excessive actions by focusing on a few well-defined, impactful areas. Ensure that any improvements made are communicated effectively across the organization, fostering transparency and shared progress. When implementing CAF for the first time, seek external support to facilitate smooth execution and accurate scoring.

### 5. CAF as a Tool for Organizational Growth

- **CAF is a tool for detecting potential improvements:** It complements ISO 9001 and helps reveal potential improvements that would otherwise remain unnoticed.

<sup>2</sup> SMART = Specific.Measurable.Achievable.Relevant.Time-bound.

- **The purpose of CAF is not to obtain the maximum points at any price:** The goal is to establish operational management systems and processes of continuous improvement, not just to score high.
- **Self-assessment generates new ideas and ways of thinking:** It encourages the organization to think critically (“out of the box”) about its processes and to explore opportunities for improvement.
- **The CAF model encourages measurement:** Measurement is essential for managing the organization and improving results. What is not measured cannot be managed.
- **CAF is effective when followed by improvement actions:** Implementing systematic, targeted actions based on the self-assessment leads to better outcomes.
- **CAF motivates a systematic collection of data:** This is then compared with previous periods and similar organizations, aiding in monitoring progress and identifying areas for improvement.

**Recommendation:** View CAF not merely as a scoring tool, but as a mechanism for continuous organizational improvement. Emphasize the development of operational management systems and processes that ensure long-term quality management. Encourage a culture of measurement and data-driven decision-making, ensuring that performance metrics are regularly tracked and compared over time. Link the results from CAF with targeted improvement actions to achieve tangible outcomes, and incorporate CAF as a complementary tool alongside other quality standards, such as ISO 9001.

## 6. Planning and Process Management

- **Planning is key:** Profound planning at the beginning of the process ensures smoother implementation.
- **Start thinking along the timeline:** The CAF process should be planned and compared over time for more effective results.
- **CAF SAG’s work needs to be better planned:** Clear planning helps avoid confusion and enhances the effectiveness of the self-assessment.
- **The art of an effective CAF-SA lies in balancing discussions and avoiding excessive detail:** Ensuring that discussions are focused on key issues and not lost in minutiae.

**Recommendation:** Prioritize robust planning at the start of the CAF process to ensure a smooth and well-managed implementation. Consider the CAF process as part of a broader, interconnected system and plan it over time, using timelines and benchmarks for comparison. Foster a holistic view of the process, ensuring that key issues are discussed without getting lost in unnecessary details. Effective planning will increase the efficiency and impact of the self-assessment process and ensure the focus remains on continuous improvement.

## 7. Institutional Commitment and Support

- **The organization must take an active approach towards CAF:** CAF should not be seen as a formal or optional process but as a core part of the organization’s commitment to continuous improvement.
- **It is better not to implement CAF if the institution is not fully committed:** Formal or half-hearted commitment can undermine the potential benefits of CAF.

- **Leaders must recognize the benefits of CAF:** It is up to leadership to understand and prioritize the value that CAF brings to the organization.
- **The composition of the CAF Self-Assessment Group (CAF SAG) is crucial:** It's positive when most participants have prior experience in some of the instruments of TQM, such as in ISO 9001 implementation.

**Recommendation:** Organizations must view CAF as a core commitment to continuous improvement, not as an optional or formal process. Before initiating the process, ensure full organizational commitment to the CAF implementation. This includes ensuring that leaders understand and communicate the value of CAF, and that the composition of the self-assessment team is based on voluntary participation with a clear understanding of the work involved. Where possible, involve team members who have prior experience with TQM methodologies such as ISO 9001 to ensure the process is effectively carried out.

#### 8. Strengthening RQMC as a Regional Hub

- There is a strong need to further strengthen and establish the Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC) as the primary contact point for CAF procedures in the region.

**Recommendation:** Allocate additional resources and support to RQMC, enabling it to take on a more prominent role in guiding and supporting CAF implementation across the region.

## 4 CAF Professional External Feedback Procedure

The following PEF (CAF Professional External Feedback) procedures were conducted:

### Implemented – Certificate Delivered (BACID II)

1. Regional School of Public Administration – 2020

### Implemented – Certificate Granted by the RCMC Secretariat (BACID III)

2. Civil Service Agency of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2022
3. Republic Agency for Peaceful Settlement of Labor Disputes, Republic of Serbia – 2023
4. Ministry of Information Society and Administration of North Macedonia – 2024
5. Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2024
6. Civil Service Agency of Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2024
7. Office for Combating Drugs of Serbia, Republic of Serbia – 2024
8. Accreditation Body of Serbia, Republic of Serbia – 2024
9. City of Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2024
10. Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office (PARCO), Bosnia and Herzegovina – 2024

### In Progress (BACID III)

11. State Commission for Preventing Corruption of North Macedonia – 2024
12. Mine Action Centre of Serbia, Republic of Serbia – 2024
13. Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro – 2024

14. Regional School of Public Administration, 2025

## 5 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

### 1. External Feedback Actors (EFAC) Selection Process

- Mixing experienced EFACs as leads (EFAC 1) with newer/newcomer EFAC (EFAC 2) in the selection process has proven effective.

**Recommendation:** RQMC to continue utilizing a balanced mix of experienced EFACs alongside newer members to ensure diverse perspectives, promote knowledge transfer, and enhance overall effectiveness in the selection process. Additionally, increase the compensation for EFAC members by doubling their fees to better reflect the value of their contributions.

### 2. Effectiveness of PEF Procedures

- PEF procedures have proven to be a "win-win" for both the implementing organizations and the EFACs engaged.
- High-quality CAF External Feedback (EF) reports have been delivered, providing a strong foundation for future PEF procedures.

**Recommendation:** RCMC Secretariat to continue to prioritize and replicate the high-quality feedback mechanisms established, ensuring that future PEF procedures build on these successes and maintain a collaborative approach with EFACs.

### 3. Innovation in Monitoring of the CAF action plan for improvements

- Preparing for PEF procedure have led to the development of innovative practices, such as the Click-Up Tool (RAMMRS) and CAF digital solutions.

**Recommendation:** ReSPA further to invest in the exploration and implementation of innovative tools and digital solutions to enhance the efficiency and adaptability of Monitoring of the CAF action plan for improvement, and in that sense the preparation for PEF procedures.

### 4. Importance of the EFAC Network and Knowledge Exchange

- EFAC meetings serve as a critical hub for exchanging lessons learned and sharing best practices in delivering PEF procedures.

**Recommendation:** ReSPA to strengthen the EFAC network by organizing regular meetings and ensuring that lessons learned and best practices are effectively disseminated among all stakeholders involved in PEF procedures. Make shore that EFACs have access to the PEF documentations form the previous PEF procedures.

### 5. Continuous Capacity Building

- There is a need for continuous follow-up activities, such as "train the trainer" programs, focusing on ECU report drafting, preparation for on-site visits, and assessment methodologies.

**Recommendation:** RCMC to develop and implement a sustainable training program for EFACs and stakeholders to ensure continuous improvement in the skills required for successful CAF implementation and PEF delivery.

## 6. Strengthening RQMC as a Regional Hub

- There is a strong need to further strengthen and establish the Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC) as the primary contact point for CAF and PEF procedures in the region.

**Recommendation:** GB to allocate additional resources and support to RQMC, enabling it to take on a more prominent role in guiding and supporting PEF procedures across the region.

## 7. Value of Monitoring Workshops

- The CAF Monitoring Workshop (e.g., CSA RS B&H) proved to be a good example of supporting CAF activities and preparing for PEF procedures. This experience will be valuable for RQMC and CAF National Correspondents in assisting beneficiaries.

**Recommendation:** Organize regular CAF Monitoring Workshops to continue supporting CAF implementation as PEF preparation. RQMC to ensure that CAF National Correspondents play an active role in guiding beneficiaries, facilitating bench learning, and promoting knowledge exchange.

Besides activities in the field of delivering CAF programs and implementing CAF External Feedback Procedures a series of CAF trainings and strategic workshops targeted for leadership and public officials and experts working in the field of quality management and organizational development could be implemented. About 160 participants across the region could be reached with tailor-made CAF trainings and capacity building workshops e.g. Quality and Governance Workshop in Albania (2023), CAF Basic Training (2021/2022/2023), Certified External CAF Feedback Training (2020/2021/2022/2023) etc.



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