

CLIMATE GOVERNANCE ANALYSIS AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY WESTERN BALKANS

Exchanging knowledge, sharing ideas, discussing challenges, finding solutions: the Climate Bridges Network aims to improve the implementation of climate mitigation solutions in South East Europe. Regular exchanges, common campaigns and activities strengthen the collaboration of the members and fosters cooperation between CSOs and governmental organizations.

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I. INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: Focus area of this report; Image rights pixabay

This document contains a summarized analysis of current climate policy in the Western Balkan countries plus Croatia (Figure 1).

The focus is on the status of climate policy adoption and implementation for Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia.

This report points out aspects such as the status of the alignment of national climate policy with EU regulations and gives information about the relevant obligatory strategies at country level and their implementation status, as well as about bilateral and transnational strategies. The purpose of the analysis is to better understand the current situation regarding climate policy on the national level in order to make comparisons and develop a common set of recommendations for improved transnational climate policy in the region. A SWOT analysis

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) gives an overview of climate governance structures at national and transnational level. Finally, transnational climate policy recommendations and a framework for a capacity building strategy have been elaborated.

II. COUNTRY REPORTS ON CURRENT CLIMATE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES



ALBANIA

Albania received EU candidate status in 2014 and started accession negotiations in 2022.

Institutional framework

The main institution involved in national climate policy is the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE). It is responsible for environmental and climate change policy and legislation in the country. Also significant are the recently established Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Climate Change and the State Inspectorate of Environment, Forestry, and Water, which is responsible for verifying legal compliance and enforcing environmental legislation. When it comes to monitoring and reporting on environmental issues, the National Environment Agency (NEA) with its 12 regional environmental agencies is the most important institution.



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The most relevant instruments at strategic level are the Law on Climate Change and a National Climate Change Strategy and Plan 2017. Other relevant documents are the National Strategy for Development and Integration, the Strategic Document on Climate Change with an adaptation plan to climate change, the Crosscutting Strategy for Rural and Agricultural Development, the General National Plan, Albania 2023, the Document of Strategic Policies for Protection of Biodiversity and a draft document for monitoring and reporting GHG emissions. Lastly, the Law on Local Government transferred some functions from central to local level, such as the implementation of measures for the protection of air, soil, water, biodiversity and nature, as well as educational activities concerning environmental protection.

New financing instruments are emerging that leverage private investment in climate-resilient projects and programmes, i.e. the incentive for the construction of small renewable energy power plants.

Among the most relevant international agreements are the UNFCCC and EU obligations, as well as the membership in the Covenant of Mayors which obliges cities to develop SE-CAPs and SEAPs. Albania has ratified the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the Agenda 2030, and is a member of the Energy Community. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the South East Europe 2020 Strategy affirm commitment to regional cooperation and joint efforts to address climate change and follow the goals of the European Green Deal.

Strengths and weaknesses

One of the positive developments is the Inter-Ministerial Working Group, established to improve cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination of ministerial tasks according to UNFCCC obligations. Furthermore, progress can be seen in market reforms towards more realistic market pricing in the energy and transport sectors, in working together internationally and bilaterally to create incentives for joint climate-friendly investments, and in the creation of cross-sectoral strategies for climate mitigation integration. Moreover, the establishment of a monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) system for climate change implementation of adopted laws and strategies has been initiated.

The biggest challenge to date is the lack of monitoring and evaluation for the implementation of strategies and documents. Additionally, an effective climate finance system is not available, thus weakening the implementation of policies and strategies. Lastly, cooperation and joint actions in the WB also need to be strengthened among municipalities and cities.

Recommendations

A climate financing system is needed to advance the implementation of climate policies and strategies. The regulatory and legislative environment also needs to be further strengthened and improved so as to turn recent innovations such as non-concessional loans and guarantees into potentially significant sources of financing in the mid- to long-term future. In addition, the process of implementing a monitoring and evaluation system for the implementation of documents should be supported.



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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina received EU candidate status in 2022 and was granted to start accession negotiations in 2024.

Institutional framework

The main institutions for national climate policy in BiH are the Ministry of Environment and Tourism Federation BiH, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology of the Republic Srpska, which also acts as the contact point for the UNFCCC, and the Government of Brcko District. Also relevant is the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of BiH, as it is responsible for coordinating and harmonizing the plans of bodies and institutions. In addition, the Federation of B&H Environmental Protection Fund and the Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency of the Republic of Srpska are relevant due to their role in the collection and distribution of financial resources for environmental protection.

The most relevant instruments are currently various strategies. First, the Strategy of Adapting to Climate Change and Low-Carbon Development for 2013-2025 plays a crucial role in reaching climate targets. It is currently waiting to adopt a follow-up strategy. In addition, national contributions that assure the achievement of international obligations are among the main instruments, such as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NAP) and the Framework Energy Strategy of BiH until 2035, which is currently under implementation. Lastly, BiH is in the process of developing a National Energy Climate Plan (NECP).

Among the most relevant international agreements are its status as UNFCCC signatory and the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, as well as its membership of the Energy Community. BiH also supports the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and participates in the Berlin Process for the integration of the WB into the EU and in the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programme. Last, BiH is a signatory to the EU's Covenant of Mayors.

Strengths and weaknesses

One positive aspect of the current climate policies is that some local authorities voluntarily develop Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAP) and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP). Further, citizens pay a fee with their electricity bills as compensation for renewable energy sources, which is used for the construction of more renewable energy sources. In addition to the international obligations arising from the signing of the above agreements, harmonization of EU policies with national legislation is ongoing and investments have been made to increase adaptive capacity.

Among the main challenges is that BiH has not yet adopted a climate law. Further, as an Annex I country, there is no obligation to reduce greenhouse gases, which in turn leads to a lack of commitment. Other challenges are the limited institutional capacity and resources to effectively develop and implement climate policies and strategies, and a lack of clear targets and monitoring mechanisms for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Further, a major weakness is due to the fragmented policy landscape, with imperfectly aligned strategies and



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policies at national and regional levels and limited coordination and cooperation across different sectors and various levels of government. Generally, implementation is still weak due to limited resources, lack of coordination and a complex institutional framework. Lastly, reliable data on climate change are lacking, funding is limited, and infrastructure and resources are constrained.

Recommendations

Institutional capacities need to be strengthened both on a knowledge and resource basis, and a National Steering Committee on Climate Change should be established. A road-map for the reform of environmental management should be prepared and implemented. The alignment of environmental priorities needs to be aligned with BiH's development agenda. The implementation of climate policies and strategies needs to be prioritized. Better alignment with EU requirements in environmental management is required with a clear distribution of responsibilities. Moreover, the integration of environmental strategy goals into sectoral and regional plans, better implementation of climate-smart solutions and regional-scale cooperation among countries in the WB are needed.

Urgent needs for improvement

The most urgent need is to switch the energy system away from fossil fuels – mainly coal – towards low-carbon sources. In addition, new policies and regulations that incentivize and promote the adoption of sustainable and low-carbon practices, such as carbon pricing mechanisms, stricter emissions standards for industries and incentives for renewable energy projects, should be introduced.



CROATIA

Croatia does not belong to the political dimensions of the Western Balkans as also referred to by the EUKI. However, Croatia was additionally analysed because of the logic of the Climate Bridges project – namely having a Croatian partner in the consortium and determining the Western Balkans as a bigger geographical area, also incorporating Croatia, Slovenia and others. Further, as a former Yugoslavian region, Croatia is culturally and historically closely linked to the six Western Balkan countries and is now part of the EU: it is therefore of special interest to see if and how climate governance differs there.

Institutional framework

The main institution involved in national climate policy in Croatia is the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. Further, each of the 20 counties has its own environmental protection and sustainable development department, creating climate mitigation and adaptation policies. The Department for Nature and Environmental Protection, which previously operated as a separate state institute, as well as the Directorate for Climate Activities, have until recently been operating within the Ministry. The counties often also manage climate policy for municipalities, as most are too small to have their own environmental department; the cities however generally have their own departments for such matters. A



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number of cities and municipalities have already adopted their own climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

In addition, the Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund plays an important role, as does the Commission for Inter-sectoral Coordination of Policies and Measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The main instruments at the strategic level are incentives for citizens, public institutions, CSOs, businesses, and local authorities. They support among others energy renovations of family homes, renewable energy sources in family homes, energy-efficient vehicles, implementation of climate change adaptation measures for local and regional authorities, and documentation for greenhouse gas reduction in industrial plants for businesses.

In addition, there are **relevant strategies and laws**. On the national level, these are the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy up to 2040 and the Low-carbon Development Strategy up to 2050. Also playing an important role are the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan and Act on Climate Change and Ozone Layer Protection, documents that Croatia, as a member state, is obliged to periodically present to the EU. On the regional level, a programme for air and ozone layer protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation has been adopted and, at local level, SECAPs, SEAPs, SUMP, and Action Plans for the reduction of ground-level ozone pollution are relevant instruments. All national strategies are currently under implementation.

Among the most relevant international agreements are the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement, EU membership, and the Covenant of Mayors.

Strengths and weaknesses

Positive aspects of the current climate policy are that, as an EU member, Croatia has to follow EU legislation on climate policy, which is the number one incentive for bringing the adoption of climate policy documents forward: furthermore, local and regional authorities are obliged to adopt strategic climate documents and strategies in order to apply for national and EU funding. Further education for climate change mitigation and adaptation is granted to regional and local administrations in the policy adaptation process.

The main weakness regards the implementation of climate policy, as there are no structured or methodological measures. Action and operational plans for implementing strategic documents hardly exist and no cross-sectoral cooperation is in place. Additionally, strategies and other political provisions are scattered throughout many acts, making them somewhat contradictory, which consequently makes their implementation difficult. Action against climate change is mainly declarative and lacks any acknowledgment of the urgency of climate action. Although research at national level shows that citizens are aware of the seriousness of climate change and want robust climate action, this still does not translate into the political sphere. For example, climate policies have not yet become an important topic in the political programmes of parties when preparing for elections.



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KOSOVO¹

Submitted its application for EU candidacy in 2022.

Institutional framework

The main institution for climate change is the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure.

The most important instrument are the new Law on Climate Change and the recently-adopted Climate Change Strategy 2019-2028 as well as the Action Plan 2021-2023. The re-established Climate Change Council takes care of the preparation of the voluntary NDC.

Among the relevant international agreements are the EU candidacy and the signature of the Energy Community Treaty. Given its international status, Kosovo is not part of UNFCCC and did not sign the Paris Agreement, so no international climate obligations exist. Kosovo signed the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda. In addition, Kosovo has a bilateral agreement for energy with Albania.

Strengths and weaknesses

Positive aspects are the re-establishment of the National Climate Change Council and the voluntary development of NDC. The Climate Change Council also has implemented a number of measures so as to mainstream climate action and increase awareness.

The biggest challenges are weak implementation of the climate strategy and action plan. A further problem is that the Law on Climate Change does not include all Energy Community targets 2030 or the national climate neutrality goal 2050. Further, the draft strategy for energy has not been finalized, showing limited progress in the energy sector. In addition, lack of funding and administrative capacity slow implementation; so do the low inter-institutional coordination and lack of CSO involvement. To date, there is no roadmap for the alignment of national regulations with the Green Agenda or with climate change objectives.

Recommendations

Most relevant is the full implementation of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan. Generally, far more ambition and administrative capacities are needed to align national policies with EU standards. This will require more consistency in the strategies and laws with the Green Agenda objectives. Finally, more consistent strategies and laws with Green Agenda objectives are needed.

¹ All information in this section is based on the EU Commission (2022). Commission Staff Working Document – Kosovo 2022 Report. [Kosovo Report 2022.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#) (accessed 01.08.2023) and from Vladimir Spasic (2024) Balkan Green Energy News: Kosovo adopts first law on climate change. [Kosovo* adopts first Law on Climate Change \(balkangreenenergynews.com\)](#)



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MONTENEGRO²

Montenegro received EU candidate status in 2010 and has been in accession negotiations since 2012.

Institutional framework

The main institution for climate change is the Directorate for International Cooperation, EU Integration and Climate Change within the Ministry of Ecology Spatial Planning and Urbanism (MESPU).

The most important instrument is the Law on Protection from Adverse Impacts of Climate Change. Together with the law, a number of relevant by-laws have been drafted and adopted. Further, a Law on Amendments to the Law of Adverse Impacts of Climate Change shall soon be adopted. In addition, Montenegro has a National Climate Change Strategy 2030 and a revised NDC that is in line with the goals of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Paris Agreement. Lastly, an important instrument is the newly established Working Group for Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change within the National Council for Sustainable Development.

Among the relevant international agreements is the UNFCCC member status. Montenegro has submitted Biennial Reports, while a revised NDC was adopted by the government and strategic planning documents have been adopted (NECP, NAP). Further, Montenegro ratified the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol, accepted the Doha Amendment, and signed the Energy Community Treaty.

Strengths and weaknesses

Positive developments can be seen in the draft of the Law on Amendments to the Law of Adverse Impacts of Climate Change, with its adoption a further alignment with EU legislation can be expected. Another positive aspect is the increase of capacities to design long-term policies and access funding sources at the national and local levels. Further, the Council of Ministers of the Energy Community have adopted a new 55% GHG emission reduction goal, which still needs to be reflected in the next revision of the NDC.

The key challenges are found in the need to build and enhance the capacity to plan and implement climate policy and its integration into all relevant national policies and strategies. In addition, Montenegro is lacking in financial capacities as well as cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation at the local and national levels.

² The information in this section stem from the Coalition 27 (2023). Progress on a Break. Shadow report on Chapter 27 Environment and Climate Change.pdf. Coalition 27 (2020). Progress of Montenegro 2020: Long way to the EU. [Contribution-report_Montenegro-2020.pdf \(koalicija27.me\)](#) and UNDP (2022). Third Biennial Update Report of Montenegro. [BUR/BUR3/2022 \(unfccc.int\)](#)



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Recommendations

Among the priorities should be the adoption of the national and energy climate plan and a serious de-carbonization of the energy sector. Further, a clear division of responsibilities is required and administrative and inter-sectoral cooperation needs to be strengthened through e.g. training and the integration of climate policy into other sectors. Involvement of civil society organizations in legislative and strategic processes has to be enhanced and public discussion organized.



NORTH MACEDONIA³

North Macedonia has had EU candidate status since 2005 and started accession negotiations in 2022.

Institutional framework

The main institution is the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning.

The most relevant instruments are to date the Law on Environment (2005), the National Climate and Energy Plan which has been adopted and supports the integration of climate change in the energy sector, and the long-term strategy for climate action and action plan. A law on Climate Change has been drafted but not yet adopted, meaning that the current main law is the Law on the Environment. However, this is not aligned with EU legislation and very few EU directives have been transposed into the national system.

Some of the most relevant international agreements are membership of the UNFCCC and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement. Also relevant are the membership in the Energy Community and the ratification of the Doha Amendment and Kigali Protocol. Additional international obligations are a National Plan for Dealing with Desertification and Mitigating the Effects of Droughts, a National Strategy for Adaptation of the Health Sector to Climate Change, and a National Action Plan for the implementation of SDGs.

Strengths and weaknesses

One positive development is that the Law on Climate Action and the Law on Control of Industrial Emissions have been drafted and will be adopted in the near future. Their adoption will significantly contribute to the transposition of the EU legislation. Another improvement is the establishment of a national coordination body that divides the roles among institutions regarding the implementation of climate action.

Among the main challenges are:

There is as yet no climate law, which means that national contributions to climate change are voluntary and not taken seriously. In addition, there is a lack of cooperation between sectors, which leads to a weak integration of climate action into other policy sectors. There is not

³ The information in this section is from the “Shadow Report for Chapter 27” developed by Platform 27 [Shadow report EN-22-REV-1.pdf - Google Drive](#) (accessed 01.08.2023)



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enough investment in renewable energies, while actions for decarbonization are not implemented in other sectors, which results in a slow decarbonization process. CSOs and other relevant stakeholders are neither sufficiently involved in the process of policy development nor informed about it. Further, governmental policies often do not correspond to climate action documents and the implementation of national legislation remains insufficient. In general, the administration of the state is inefficient and is lacking in qualified staff, resources, coordination, and inter-sectoral cooperation. Finally, funding is insufficient and investments are neither long-term nor well-coordinated.

Recommendations

From the above-mentioned shortcomings, a number of recommendations emerge: First, the climate action law needs to be aligned with international obligations and follow the goals of the national climate contributions, and its adoption has to be accelerated. Second, a national adaptation plan is needed as well as local-level adaptation plans that are well aligned. Relevant stakeholders should be involved in the preparation process. Third, an institution responsible for monitoring the implementation of protocols needs to be assigned. In addition, clear roles and responsibilities of the different institutions have to be defined and inter-institutional coordination and communication should be improved. For greening the economy, a carbon tax and a monitoring authority need to be defined. As regards expertise and capacities, an analysis of necessary professionals and a systematization of jobs is needed to ensure the hiring of qualified staff.

National societal needs have to be included in climate regulations and CSOs need to be involved more. Work should be better distributed between non-governmental and governmental actors. Finally, transparency in the development of climate policies must be improved.



SERBIA⁴

EU candidate status since 2012; accession negotiations since 2014.

Institutional framework

The main institutions are the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Mining and Energy.

The most relevant instrument is the Law on Climate Change, adopted in 2021. However, it cannot be fully implemented because the necessary by-laws have not yet been adopted. The Strategy of Low Carbon Development 2023-2030 was also adopted recently.

⁴ Coalition 27 (2022) Chapter 27 in Serbia: One step forward, two steps back Title of the original publication: Po-glavlje 27 u Srbiji: "Korak napred, nazad dva" [Climate-change-2022.pdf \(koalicija27.org\)](#)
Vladimir Spasic (2023) Balkan Green Energy News: Serbia adopts Low Carbon Development Strategy <https://balkan-green-energy-news.com/serbia-adopts-low-carbon-development-strategy/>



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Among the relevant international agreements are the ratification of UNFCCC and the accompanying acts: the Kyoto Protocol, Doha Amendment and Paris Agreement. In addition, the Energy Community Treaty was signed and the Green Agenda supported.

Strengths and weaknesses

One positive development is that a National Council for Climate Change with members from different ministries, academia, municipalities, and one CSO was established and the rules of procedure adopted.

The biggest challenges are the lack of implementation of by-laws, limiting the implementation of the Climate Law and climate mitigation and adaptation measures. In addition, the law does not include anything that prepares the industry for the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism as well as the general integration of climate policy in other sectors. Further, a lack of information, communication and opportunity to participate in decision-making for the public slows down implementation. The non-adoption of the latest Biennial Update Report (BUR) and the national report demonstrates the lack of political determination. Last, civil servants are not well trained in the field of climate change and capacities are generally lacking.

Recommendations

Development is recommended of an ambitious National Energy and Climate Plan that aligns national climate goals with the goal of zero emissions from the Green Deal and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. For a full implementation of the climate change law a number of bylaws need to be adopted and climate change issues and monitoring mechanisms have to be considered during the drafting of development plans at the level of self-governments.

III. SUMMARY

Based on the analyses of the climate governance situation in the various Western Balkan countries (and Croatia), we can draw the following picture:



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Figure 2: Enlargement perspectives; Graphic: APA/ORF; Source: APA, adapted and translated by CIPRA

National Climate Strategies, Laws and Action Plans

All Western Balkan countries have started developing national climate strategies (or energy strategies) to address climate change mitigation and also adaptation. These documents summarize the goals, policies and measures/actions to be taken. The level of the strategies differs from country to country. Another considerable difference is that only few countries have adopted a climate law, among them Albania and Montenegro.

Institutional Frameworks

Each country has its own institutional framework for climate policy, involving government ministries, agencies, and other relevant bodies. The responsibilities for climate-related matters are sometimes distributed across various departments, such as environment, tourism, energy, agriculture, and planning. Cross-ministerial governance structures are therefore decisive, but only exist in some countries (Albania, Serbia, Kosovo). It is noteworthy that the ministries responsible for the implementation of the Western Balkan Green Agenda differ from country to country (e.g. Ministry of Economy in Kosovo, Ministry of Tourism and Environment in Albania).

European Integration

As shown in figure one, five of the six Western Balkan countries have already candidate status and are in accession negotiations, BiH was granted accession negotiations only recently. Kosovo has applied to become a candidate. All Western Balkan countries aspire to join the European Union. As part of the accession process, they are expected to align their policies with EU standards, including those related to climate and environmental issues. The EU provides financial and technical assistance to help the WB countries implement reforms and meet the required criteria. This process offers a change towards better coordinated strategies at transnational level.



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International Agreements

All Western Balkan countries have signed international agreements and treaties related to climate change, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement, the Covenant of Mayors at local level, etc. These agreements set global standards for addressing climate change, and participating countries commit to specific actions and targets at global level. The exception is Kosovo, which is not a member of the UN and is therefore not a signatory to the Paris Agreement, so it does not have the same internationally binding climate obligations. Moreover, some of the WB countries use tools such as SEAPs, SECAPS and SUMP to implement EU climate policy.

Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders play a role in advocating for climate action and holding governments accountable. There is a great lack of collaboration between governmental bodies and CSOs and of well-functioning governance structures in all Western Balkan countries.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- European accession process: the aspiration of countries to join the EU is a driving force for aligning climate policies with EU standards (e.g. Western Balkan Green Agenda and Green Deal). Accession processes often lead to the adoption of more robust environmental and climate regulations.
- International cooperation: Western Balkan countries are part of international agreements and initiatives addressing climate change. Collaborative efforts with international organizations and neighbouring countries can enhance the effectiveness of climate governance.
- The application of tools like SEAPs, SECAPs and SUMP help to implement climate policy goals at regional and local levels.
- Civil society engagement: there are numerous CSOs active in the region that play a crucial role in advocating for climate action and holding governments accountable.

Weaknesses

- Dependency on fossil fuels: the reliance of the region on traditional energy sources, such as coal, is a huge challenge for the transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Policy implementation challenges: there are huge gaps between policy formulations and their implementation owing to a lack of capacity, but also to a lack of functioning cooperation and coordination structures between governmental bodies and civil society organizations.



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- Institutional capacity: there is a lack of institutional capacity and resources to effectively implement and enforce climate policies and actions. Strengthening capacities and cooperation at all levels is crucial for successful climate governance.
- Lack of stability in public administrations leads to constant change in administrative structures and human resources, with knowledge and investments in capacities also being drained and thus requiring regular renewal. As a result, public administrations at all levels lack staff who are well-trained in the field of climate mitigation.

Opportunities

- Public awareness, education and engagement: increasing awareness and engagement of the public in climate issues can create a supportive environment for policy implementation. Education and communication campaigns can play a crucial role in this regard.
- Stakeholder engagement: formal and informal networks for (semi-) governmental bodies and CSOs are an opportunity to build up trust and capacity building approaches.
- Policy integration: the integration of climate considerations (mitigation and adaptation) can improve all relevant policies and sectors, focusing on high emitters such as energy, transportation, agriculture.
- EU membership: the full membership is an opportunity for stronger climate protection.
- CBAM: full implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms may be able to function as a necessary force for the private sector and energy sector to shift the focus to a green economy and renewable energy sources, thereby also encouraging national governments to adjust their policies and implementation.

Threats

- Political instability: owing to other socio-economic challenges, climate protection is not always a priority for political agendas in the Western Balkan countries.
- Transnational cooperation: there is a lack of transnational cooperation at all levels when it comes to climate protection in the region, which is also due to the influence of various superpowers such as Russia, the USA or China. The unsolved conflict regarding Kosovo makes the situation even more complicated and critical.
- Financial constraints: although most of the major global donor organizations support the Western Balkan countries, in some countries/regions there is a lack of appropriate funding schemes.

SWOT summary

A closer look at the national climate governance structures in the various Western Balkan countries shows that even though their EU accession processes are at quite different stages, they share many structural challenges. All countries have in common the fact that progress in the implementation of climate action is slowed by a **lack of funding and administrative**



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capacity. Further, there is **insufficient transparency in policymaking and implementation**, as well as the **involvement of relevant stakeholders**. This is accompanied by a **lack of communication and information** about climate policy, leading to a **low acceptance of climate change activities** among the population. This lack of acceptance is also visible at the policy level, through a **low alignment of national policy goals with actual policy and decision-making**. Further, a barrier to improved implementation of the Green Agenda is a **lack of well-trained administrative staff in the field of climate change**. All countries also have **low inter-institutional and cross-sectoral coordination**, along with insufficiently distributed responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms. For all Western Balkan countries, a **relevant step forward lies in strengthening institutional capacities** by guaranteeing more permanency and stability in the holding of jobs, by **training and educating staff in the field of climate change** and by **providing resources** to implement and develop policies and strategies more effectively.

IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AT TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL

Even though climate governance in Western Balkan countries is not yet fully developed at a national level, policy recommendations can be drafted at a transnational level with their applicability to the national level:



1. **Regional cooperation and platforms:** Establish regional climate cooperation platforms, facilitate regular meetings, forums and working groups to promote dialogue, information exchange, and collaboration on climate policies and initiatives. This platform can serve as a forum for joint problem-solving and the sharing of best practices. The Climate Bridges Network or meetings on the Western Balkan Green Agenda can offer these platforms for exchange.



2. **Harmonization of policies and regulations:** Harmonize climate policies and regulations and work towards aligning national climate policies and regulations to create a consistent regional approach. This can facilitate the implementation of joint initiatives and ensure that efforts are complementary rather than conflicting. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is a step in the right direction.



3. **Joint mitigation and adaptation strategies:** Develop joint mitigation and adaptation strategies, collaborate on the development and implementation of strategies that address common climate risks. This could include sharing expertise on climate-resilient infrastructure, water management and sustainable agricultural practices.



4. **Shared monitoring and reporting systems:** Establish shared monitoring and reporting systems, implement a regional system for monitoring and reporting on greenhouse gas emissions, climate impacts and progress toward climate goals. This can enhance transparency, accountability and the ability to track collective achievements.



5. **Joint research and data sharing:** Promote joint research and data sharing, encourage collaboration among research institutions and universities in the region to conduct joint studies on climate change impacts, vulnerabilities, and adaptation



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strategies. Facilitate the sharing of data and information to strengthen collective knowledge.



6. **Capacity building and training:** Conduct regional capacity-building programmes, organize workshops, training sessions, and educational programmes to develop the capacities of government officials, NGOs and other stakeholders in the region. This can help create a skilled workforce with a deep understanding of climate issues.



7. **Adjustment of the legislation regarding the labour market:** Drainage of knowledge and constant investment in capacity building can be reduced by decoupling the labour market from national politics and installing adequate laws to protect and keep employees in the public sector more permanently in their positions.



8. **Pooling resources for climate finance:** Explore options for pooling climate finance, consider establishing a regional climate finance mechanism to pool resources for climate projects and initiatives. This can enhance the financial capacity of individual countries and support larger-scale, impactful projects.



9. **Public awareness and education campaigns:** Coordinate public awareness and education campaigns, collaborate on regional campaigns to raise awareness about climate change, promote sustainable practices, and engage the public in climate action. A united front in communication can amplify the impact of individual efforts.



10. **Joint participation in international agreements:** Coordinate and align positions and strategies in international climate negotiations to strengthen the region's voice and influence. Collaborate on joint initiatives to access international climate finance and support.



11. **Green diplomacy:** Engage in green diplomacy, use diplomatic channels to advocate for regional climate priorities. Engage with international organizations, neighbouring regions and global initiatives to promote the Western Balkans' commitment to climate action.

By adopting these recommendations in the framework of the Western Balkan Green Agenda, the region can foster a collaborative and integrated approach to addressing climate challenges, leveraging the strengths of each country to achieve shared climate goals, and build a more sustainable and resilient region. Regular communication, trust-building, and a commitment to shared objectives will be essential for the success of transnational climate governance efforts.

V. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

An essential element for the implementation of the above recommendations is capacity building among the key actors in the WB countries.

In this chapter we start with a short description of the basic elements of capacity development: its meaning, elements and steps will be briefly described and placed in the context of this project. In addition, a short summary of how capacity development has been tackled in



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the Climate Bridges project will be given. Lastly, recommendations for future capacity development for climate policy implementation in the Western Balkans will be sketched out.

Basic elements of Capacity Development

The Western Balkan region and its accession is of high relevance for the EU. This is also reflected in the many ongoing capacity building initiatives in that area, among them the UNDP's Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans⁵ and the EU's TACSO project for capacity development of CSOs in the region⁶. But why is capacity building of such importance and what exactly is meant by it?

According to a UN definition, "*Capacity building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.*"⁷ Capacities can be built on different levels, such as the intellectual, emotional or physical level, where different elements can and need to be tackled. The Local Government Academy describes these elements in terms of six different pillars:

- (1) Structure;
- (2) Competencies;
- (3) Management systems;
- (4) Enabling policies;
- (5) Knowledge and learning and, lastly,
- (6) Leadership⁸.

Consequently, depending on skills, resources, context and needs, one or more of these pillars has to be approached to build capacity. In order to start a capacity-building process, different steps need to be followed: the most relevant is that the target person/organization etc. is closely involved in a process consisting of the following steps:

- (1) Define your goal and whose capacities you need to build to achieve it;
- (2) Get the approval and participation of the target group;
- (3) Assess current capacities;
- (4) Define the desired capacities;
- (5) Analyse needs and gaps;
- (6) Develop a plan and a monitoring concept.

This shows how broad the concept of capacity building is, how many facets it has and how complex it is to achieve actual improvements. But in order for EU accession to be successful, many of those pillars need to reach a level similar to that in the EU; empowering, strengthening, stabilizing, educating and structuring stakeholders and processes between them are

⁵ www.undp.org/north-macedonia/projects/regional-programme-local-democracy-western-balkans-2-reload2

⁶ <https://tacso.eu/what-we-do/development-of-the-csos-institutional-and-organisational-capacity/>

⁷ United Nations. Academic Impact. Capacity-Building. [Capacity-Building | United Nations](#)

⁸ The Local Government Academy (2016) The LGU Capacity Assessment and CapDev Agenda Formulation Toolkit ([1590501045.pdf \(lga.gov.ph\)](#))



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therefore the main goals of different international initiatives, such as the European TACSO⁹ or ADA-financed EU4Green Recovery¹⁰ projects.

Capacity Development in the Climate Bridges project

Within the Climate Bridges project, capacity development was a relevant element and desired side-effect in most of the work packages and activities. It was therefore mainly implemented in the context of the specific activities, but the concept itself played an important role in achieving the overall goal of the project.

To define capacity development in the framework of the project a closer look at the project's goals can be taken: the overall goal of the project was to contribute to more effective climate policy implementation through better cooperation between CSOs and (semi-) governmental bodies and to support the goals of the Western Balkan Green Agenda. Therefore, in the context of the project, it was relevant to understand why climate policy implementation is not effective at the moment. For this purpose, the climate governance situation in the six Western Balkan countries and in Croatia was analysed together with the local partners and other regional experts. This analysis shed light on some of the main needs and gaps that are to be tackled in order to achieve more effective climate governance. It also became clear that there is not one single stakeholder group that needs to build its capacity, but rather that needs are distributed among different stakeholders and processes relevant for climate policy development and implementation. A detailed description of needs, shortcomings and challenges can be found in the previous sections. The table below shows some of the most relevant reoccurring capacity gaps of the three main target groups in the WB-region:

Stakeholder group	Capacity needs
Citizens	Socio-economic security, political stability, confidence in state institutions, knowledge of climate change, knowledge of how to get engaged in CSOs
CSOs	Cooperation structures with other stakeholders; financial resources; knowledge of tools, methods for citizen participation and societal engagement; economic and political stability, confidence in state institutions
Governmental bodies	Climate-related competences, cooperation structures (internal and external), political and professional stability, adequate laws and strategies, knowledge of governance and cooperation with CSOs, confidence in state institutions

⁹ Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey ([DEVELOPMENT OF THE CSOS' INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY - Tacso](#))

¹⁰ [EU4 Green Recovery: EU support to the Green Agenda implementation in the Western Balkans - Austrian Development Agency \(entwicklung.at\)](#)



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Apart from generating a general understanding of the capacity landscape, different capacity development pillars were tackled in the project by implementing targeted activities, some of which affected multiple pillars simultaneously:

Capacity development pillar	Project activities			
Competencies	Expert workshops	Knowledge exchange meetings	Co-development of climate strategies with experts	
Enabling policies	Status quo analysis	Expert workshop	Development of strategies	
Knowledge and learning	Study trips	Workshops	Exchange meetings	Good practice competition
Cooperation structures	Network launch	Co-development of strategies	Networking events	

Recommendations for future capacity development in the Western Balkans

In general, to ensure effective and holistic capacity-building in the region, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Perform an in-depth analysis** of all capacity building initiatives in the region, describing which elements and pillars they are approaching
2. **Get in touch** with as many of them as possible to obtain information about the status of the process, the stakeholders involved and the gaps they still see – to understand where subsequent projects should continue or dig deeper
3. **Together** with all relevant stakeholders, conduct an in-depth analysis of the outstanding needs
4. **Co-design** steps to tackle all relevant pillars based upon all information received.

The following more specific recommendations can be drawn from the results of the Climate Bridges project:

1. **At citizen level:** invest in the capacity pillars of knowledge and structures (see previous page) to create a better understanding of climate matters among citizens, e.g. following more participatory approaches, testing new methods and showing ways of how climate-friendly behaviour can accompany economic and political uncertainties. Create more involvement at national, regional and local levels to achieve a stronger sense of responsibility, relevance and motivation for the transformation required.



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2. **At governmental level:** strengthen the capacity pillar, enabling policies and competencies and structures (see previous page) to achieve economic stability, perspectives and opportunities, especially for young people to keep them in the country and give them security. At the same time invest in enabling policies to create more stability for civil servants to reduce fluctuations, then invest in knowledge and competencies for own staff. Similarly, work on cooperation structures and mechanisms by establishing cross-sectoral knowledge exchanges, both within entities and also across them and between stakeholders.
3. **At CSO level:** continue investing in cooperation structures between CSOs and governmental bodies and emphasise long-term structures to create trust. Invest in knowledge and competencies to create campaigns and programmes that strengthen the image and trustworthiness of CSOs in the eyes of citizens.

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