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INCLUSIVE CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN KOSOVO

POLICY BRIEF



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INCLUSIVE CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN KOSOVO POLICY BRIEF

CARE Deutschland e.V. Office in Kosovo

Green Horizons - Youth and community led green transition initiative in Western Kosovo project

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGE	Agency for Gender Equality
CRB	Climate Responsive Budgeting
GEO	Gender Equality Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
EGD	European Green Deal
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
MESPI	Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
GHG	Greenhouse Gas Emissions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT BACKGROUND

Kosovo is increasingly feeling the impacts of climate change, experiencing more frequent and severe extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, heat waves, and water scarcity. These environmental disruptions intersect with social inequalities, intensifying existing vulnerabilities among women, youth, rural populations, and other marginalized groups. At the same time, Kosovo's climate is defined by a predominantly continental profile, with cold winters and warm summers, and regional variations influenced by mountainous terrain and the Mediterranean conditions of the Dukagjini plain. This geographical context currently shields the country from coastal and large-scale hazards faced by some of the neighbouring countries in the region, thus contributing to Kosovo's relatively low disaster risk score of 22¹, the lowest in the Western Balkans. However, this low disaster disguises a more concerning reality, which is that Kosovo's resilience capacity remains among the weakest in the region.

The country's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and recover from climate-related shocks, amongst others, is limited due to inadequate infrastructure and under-resourced municipal institutions. Furthermore, besides poor infrastructure and under-resourced municipal institutions, Kosovo's climate vulnerabilities span across key sectors, exacerbated by rising temperatures and erratic precipitation. Water resources are under severe stress, with four of five basins projected to become water-scarce by 2050 due to increased demand, inefficient systems, and low storage capacity². Agriculture, largely small-scale and reliant on rainfall, faces growing risks from droughts, shifting weather patterns, and limited irrigation coverage. Human health is threatened by poor air and water quality, with heightened risks of respiratory diseases, heat stress, and vector-borne illnesses. Forests, covering 44.7% (according to the National Forest Inventory conducted in 2012) of the country, are declining in health due to illegal logging, erosion, and increasing forest fire risks.³ Additionally, the country's poorly regulated infrastructure, combined with reliance on coal-based energy, increases vulnerability to climate shocks, such as floods and heatwaves, while limiting potential for renewable energy expansion. These sectoral impacts underline the urgency for Kosovo to adopt cross-sectoral, inclusive, and climate-resilient planning approaches.⁴ Recent flooding events in 2022 and 2023, which impacted over 21,000⁵ individuals, exposed these systemic weaknesses, particularly in hard-hit municipalities like Skenderaj, Mitrovica, Peja, etc.

Kosovo's greenhouse gas emissions profile according to the latest inventory data by the Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency - KEPA is dominated by the energy sector, re-

1 The World Climate and Security Report 2022: Climate Security Snapshot - The Balkans. Product of the Expert Group of the International Military Council on Climate and Security. Authors: Elsa Barron (CCS) and Hugo van Manen (HCSS). Edited by Erin Sikorsky and Francesco Femia. Published by the Center for Climate and Security, an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks. July 2022.

2 USAID. Kosovo Climate Change Risk Profile. 2017. https://web.archive.org/web/2025020111419/https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2017_USAID_Climate%20Change%20Risk%20Profile%20-%20Kosovo.pdf

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 UNDP Kosovo & Suge Data hub: Household Building and Business Premises Damage Assessment in Kosovo following the January 2023 Floods. April 2023. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/hbda-bpda-in-kosovo-following-the-january-2023-floods.pdf>

sponsible for 87%⁶ of total emissions, largely due to dependence on lignite coal. The agriculture, forestry, and land use (AFOLU) sector contribute 7%, while waste accounts for 4%, a figure understated by the sector's broader environmental footprint. In total, Kosovo emitted 10.617 MtCO₂eq in 2021, when compared to the 2011 inventory, the total emissions increased moderately by 4.12%.⁷ Systematic inefficiencies in waste management, poor landfill conditions, and the near absence of recycling infrastructure contribute to both local pollution and untapped circular economy potential. Furthermore, when it comes to climate data generation be those useful for decision-making in climate adaptation or mitigation, Kosovo lacks a transparent and open-access centralized climate data system, making it difficult to conduct risk assessments, plan evidence-based interventions, or track progress toward adaptation and mitigation targets. According to the European Commission's Kosovo Report 2024, amongst others, Kosovo needs to develop a legislative framework for the monitoring, reporting, verification and accreditation of GHG emissions as well as a mechanism on carbon pricing with a view to aligning with the EU emissions trading system.⁸

Despite Kosovo's formal policy alignment and commitments to the international frameworks like the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda, which aligns Kosovo and other WB countries with the EU Green Deal, being a signatory of the Energy Community treaty, as well as the adoption of progressive national laws such as the Law on Climate Change (2024), National Climate Change Strategy (2019-2028), Energy Strategy (2022-2031), and the Law on Gender Equality (2025), Kosovo Integrated Waste Management Strategy – KIWMS (2024), as well as Kosovo's Circular Economy Roadmap and the submission of the first voluntary NDC (National Determined Contributions), implementation at the local level remains inconsistent and fragmented. Institutional gaps, limited municipal capacities, and exclusionary governance practices prevent inclusive, effective climate action. Tasked with leading environmental and social transition, Municipalities lack sufficient funding, trained personnel, and inclusive mechanisms for community engagement.

The participatory research was conducted across five municipalities (Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovica North and South), using a participatory, mixed-methods approach, combining a desk review of legal and policy frameworks with 32 key informant interviews and a community survey of 180 respondents across the five municipalities. The study agenda and methodology were informed by CARE's own Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA). Guided by intersectional and do-no-harm principles, the research reveals critical barriers, amongst them: Limited institutional coordination, where siloed municipal departments operate in isolation; Exclusion of women youth and civil society from formal decision making, including public hearings, debates etc, limited climate literacy, especially among older adults and rural communities; Underfunded green initiatives, which are primarily driven by short-term, donor-funded projects; and Communication gaps, with complex climate policies rarely translated into accessible, practical messages. However, the report also highlights Kosovo's unique window of opportunity. While the country currently experiences lower disaster risk exposure compared to the neighbouring countries in the region, its climate resilience score remains among the lowest in the region.

Municipalities, tasked with leading local environmental and social transitions, often lack the necessary funding, trained personnel, and inclusive governance mechanisms. Institutional fragmentation, marked by weak coordination among departments dealing with the environment, youth, gender, and social inclusion, limits comprehensive responses. Public consultations are incon-

6 Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure – MESPI, Kosovo Environment Protection Agency – KEPA: Kosovo's first and voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions – NDC. March 2025. [https://ammk-rks.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/DECISION%20GRK%20NO.%2020_253%20The%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\)%20of%20Kosovo.pdf](https://ammk-rks.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/DECISION%20GRK%20NO.%2020_253%20The%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20of%20Kosovo.pdf)

7 Ibid

8 European Commission: Kosovo 2024 Report – 2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy. October 2024. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c790738e-4cf6-4a43-a8a9-43c1b6f01e10_en?filename=Kosovo%20Report%202024.pdf

sistently held and poorly communicated, while data collection systems lack disaggregation by gender, age, and disability, thus preventing evidence-based policy design.

Within this complex context, the circular economy emerges as a transformative model to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation while promoting social equity. Unlike the traditional “take-make-dispose” model, circular economy practices prioritize waste reduction, resource efficiency, and product reuse. Although currently driven primarily by civil society and donor-funded initiatives, circular economy principles have the potential to generate green jobs, spur innovation, and increase community resilience, particularly if scaled through strategic investments and supportive policy. Besides the Circular Economy Roadmap, Kosovo targets the promotion of circular strategies and efficient resource utilization through its Strategy for Industrial Development and Business Support (2030), where it outlines the creation of green industrial parks in Kosovo, as well as the facilitation of a circular and green economy, including through a window for Circular Economy Innovation within the Innovation Fund. To this date, Kosovo has established the National Climate Change Council – NCCC, and the Secretariat, while the Scientific Advisory Board is still in process. Nevertheless, with many different projects under implementation or initiation phases, according to the country’s voluntary NDC document, Kosovo will need additional resources to achieve its climate goals, especially considering that the country is not yet fully integrated into the global climate agenda – considering that it is not an official member of the UN. This, limits Kosovo’s access into international funding mechanisms and opportunities for interventions/projects in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Some of these funds include Global Environment Facility – GEF, the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund,⁹ etc.

Kosovo’s alignment with the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans offers an important framework for action. To translate policy into impact, Kosovo must invest in circular economy infrastructure, strengthen institutional capacity for climate governance, and ensure that communities, especially women, youth, and marginalized groups, are fully included in the green transition. Addressing climate change cannot rely on technical interventions alone; it requires inclusive, participatory, and justice-oriented approaches that empower communities as co-creators of a sustainable future.

This brief, therefore, outlines practical, community-rooted, and actionable recommendations to enable Kosovo’s green transition to be equitable, inclusive, and responsive to community realities. These include strengthening local governance, embedding gender and youth perspectives in climate planning, investing in grassroots circular economy initiatives, and aligning municipal efforts with EU policy frameworks and funding channels.

Kosovo’s transition cannot succeed through technical or environmental action alone; it must be socially inclusive, participatory, and equitable, ensuring that all communities are empowered as partners in building climate resilience and sustainable local economies.

9

Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure – MESPI, Kosovo Environment Protection Agency – KEPA: Kosovo’s first and voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions – NDC. March 2025.

STRATEGIC PILLARS FOR A GREEN AND JUST TRANSITION IN KOSOVO

This policy brief deriving from the participatory research conducted in Prizren, Peja, Gjakova, Mitrovica South, and Mitrovica North, identifies five key pillars to support municipalities in advancing a green and just transition. Drawing from participatory research across five municipalities, the pillars link specific barriers with targeted policy actions that can be adopted at the local level. Each pillar addresses a critical dimension, such as: Governance, Participation, Financing, Education, and Grassroots innovation, ensuring that climate action is not only environmentally sound but also inclusive, equitable, and aligned with Kosovo's legal commitments and EU integration goals.

PILLAR ONE: LIMITED CLIMATE DATA AND EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING

A significant cross-cutting barrier to effective climate action in Kosovo is the lack of comprehensive, and up-to-date climate data. Currently, Kosovo does not have a centralized, publicly accessible climate data platform capable of tracking key indicators such as GHG emissions, climate hazards, environmental degradation, sector-specific vulnerabilities, and the socio-economic impacts of climate change. This gap severely limits the evidence-based planning and ability of policymakers, municipal authorities, and practitioners to understand trends, forecast risks, or allocate resources efficiently. Without reliable baseline and trend data, climate policies are often based on assumptions rather than evidence, thus weakening their relevance, precision, and long-term impact. For example, this institutional weakness means that even when municipalities face disasters like the 2023 floods that impacted over 21,000¹⁰ people, they are unable to comprehensively map vulnerability and forecast needs for resilient infrastructure, and adaptive measures in general.

Moreover, municipalities in particular lack reliable data to assess local risks or guide investments in climate resilience and mitigation. The absence of disaggregated data by gender, age, geography, and vulnerability status further contributes to the problem. It hides the differentiated impacts of climate change in marginalized groups, making it difficult to assess vulnerabilities and design targeted adaptation strategies that address the needs of women, youth, minorities, people with special needs and other marginalized groups. For example, without gender-disaggregated data, it is impossible to determine how climate-related disruptions such as water scarcity or flooding may uniquely impact women's caregiving roles or economic activities. Similarly, the lack of data on youth, minorities, and persons with special needs hinders inclusive planning and reinforces existing inequalities. prevents inclusive and targeted policy responses. This information gap not only weakens the effectiveness of government action, but also limits the potential contributions of CSOs, academic researchers, journalists, and the local innovators/private

10 UNDP Kosovo & Suge Data hub: Household Building and Business Premises Damage Assessment in Kosovo following the January 2023 Floods. April 2023. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-05/hbda-bpda-in-kosovo-following-the-january-2023-floods.pdf>

sector to meaningfully engage in climate action or access external funding opportunities that require evidence-based proposals. Furthermore, the lack of data is also streamlined in other contexts and sources (e.g.: Kosovo does not have a climate profile in the World Bank: Climate Change Knowledge Portal)¹¹ so very often to get projections and data in general, one has to either use the region as a reference or rely on old data. To address these challenges the local governance should work towards:

Contribute to developing an Open Access National Climate Data System

Contribute to the creation of an open-access centralized climate data platform that consolidates information on emissions, climate risks, vulnerability and mapping, and adaptation needs. This platform should serve national institutions, municipalities, researchers, and civil society actors.

Localize Data Collection

To build a solid foundation for evidence-based climate action, Kosovo's municipalities must be equipped with the tools and resources, and institutional support necessary to collect, manage, and use localized climate and environmental data. Local governments are on the frontlines of climate impacts, from flooding and drought to infrastructure degradation and shifting agricultural cycles, but they often lack the capacity to track and respond to these changes in a structured way. This means that climate action plans are often based on incomplete or outdated information, limiting their effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Investing in localized data systems would allow municipalities to gather critical information on climate risks, land use, waste management, air and water quality, and community-level vulnerabilities. This could include digital dashboards for real-time data entry, GIS mapping tools for risk and resource tracking, and community-based monitoring that engages residents in collecting data on environmental conditions. Building partnerships with universities, civil society organizations, and national statistical agencies can also help standardize data collection methods and ensure quality control. Furthermore, integrating social variables into local climate data collection, such as gender, age, income level, and disability, will allow for more nuanced and equitable planning, ensuring that the most at-risk populations are prioritized. Ultimately, localized data systems are not just a technical need; they are strategic tools for empowering municipalities, improving cross-sectoral coordination, strengthening public accountability, and unlocking climate finance from national and international sources.

Investing in Capacity Building

To enable effective and data-driven climate governance, municipalities in Kosovo must prioritize systematic capacity building for local government staff, civil servants, and other key stakeholders involved in planning and decision-making. At present, many municipal directorates lack the technical expertise and operational tools needed to gather, analyse, and apply environmental and climate data in meaningful ways, but also the human resources to carry out these tasks effectively. At the same time, our field research data shows

11 World Bank: Climate Change Knowledge portal: For Development Practitioners and Policy Makers. <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/XKK>.

that municipal directorates responsible for environmental management and emergency response often operate with understaffed teams, and that many of the first responders to climate-related emergencies, such as floods or wildfires, have limited training, often restricted to firefighting.¹² This dual gap in expertise and staffing significantly constraints the local government's ability not just to develop sound climate action plans, and apply for climate finance, but also to respond proactively to emerging environmental and climate risks.

To address these foundational constraints, municipalities should begin with a Workload and Staffing Needs Analysis – WLA, which starts by assessing the current personnel levels, functional gaps, and projected workload associated with implementing climate strategies. This analysis should identify key positions needed, such as climate data analysts, environmental planners, and community engagement officers, and inform targeted recruitment and resource planning. Without such an analysis, capacity-building efforts risk being ineffective due to the basic lack of staff to absorb and apply new knowledge. Recruitment strategies should also prioritize diversity, including gender balance and representation from marginalized communities, to promote inclusive governance from within.

Following this, capacity building should begin with training programs tailored to local needs, focusing on core competencies such as climate risk assessment, environmental monitoring, gender-sensitive data analysis, and results-based planning. Staff should also be trained in the use of digital tools and technologies, including GIS mapping, climate vulnerability indexes, data visualization platforms, and mobile-based reporting tools that support real-time data collection and informed decision-making. Where possible, municipalities should collaborate with national institutions, universities, civil society organizations, and international development partners to design and deliver these trainings, ensuring that they are context-specific, practical, and inclusive. Moreover, capacity-building must extend beyond one-time donor-supported workshops. Municipalities should establish long-term learning frameworks that include mentorship programs, peer-learning exchanges across municipalities, and regular refresher courses. This will help institutionalize knowledge within local governments and foster a culture of continuous improvement. By investing in people and not just policies, Kosovo can create a cadre of local climate champions capable of designing, implementing, and tracking resilient, inclusive, and data-informed solutions to the climate crisis. Such investments will also increase municipalities' credibility with donors and improve their eligibility for external climate finance mechanisms that require strong monitoring, evaluation, and reporting capacities.

PILLAR TWO: INCLUSIVE CLIMATE GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the primary local governance challenges to a green and just transition in Kosovo is the institutional fragmentation across municipal departments. Key directorates responsible for environment, gender equality, youth, and social affairs often operate in silos, resulting in uncoordinated and inconsistent climate planning and implementation. This fragmentation undermines the potential for integrated, cross-sectoral responses to complex climate issues. Another critical issue is the systematic exclusion of women, youth, and civil society organizations (CSOs) from formal climate policy and decision-making processes. Despite their frontline experiences and demonstrated capacity for local inno-

vation, these groups are frequently left out of consultations, task forces, and implementation mechanisms, weakening the legitimacy and effectiveness of municipal responses. In particular, Gender Equality Officers (GEOs), who are legally mandated to contribute to all decision-making under Law No/L-020 on Gender Equality, are often not integrated into climate governance structures. Their exclusion from key bodies such as municipal task forces and emergency committees limits the ability to mainstream gender perspectives into climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Moreover, public consultation processes remain weak, symbolic, and largely inaccessible to the wider community. These consultations are often held without sufficient communication, accessibility, or follow-up, resulting in minimal community input and poor public trust in local institutions.

Altogether, the lack of compliance with existing gender equality legislation and the absence of inclusive governance structures severely conditions municipalities' ability to deliver climate action that is both equitable and effective. Strengthening institutional coordination and embedding inclusion mechanisms across governance structures are essential first steps toward addressing these barriers. To address these barriers the local governments should work towards:

Mandate Gender Equality Officer (GEO) Participation and Conduct Inclusive Audits

To ensure a more inclusive and equitable climate governance, municipalities should formally mandate the participation of Gender Equality Officers - GEOs in all municipal climate-related bodies, including: working groups, emergency committees, and task forces. Their inclusion should go beyond symbolic presence, as the GEOs must be brought up to an equal position of the decision-making members. This step aligns with Kosovo's legal obligations under the Law on Gender Equality (Law No. 05/L-020) and its critical for ensuring that climate policies reflect the distinct needs, roles, and capacities of women, men, people with special needs, and other marginalized groups. In parallel, municipalities should conduct regular audits, at least annually to evaluate gender representation and stakeholder participation across all climate and environment related structures. These audits should include disaggregated data and be reviewed by relevant oversight institutions, such as the Agency for Gender Equality, to ensure compliance and accountability.

Formalize Civil Society Engagement Across Climate Governance

For climate action to be truly inclusive and community rooted, municipalities must have beyond ad hoc consultations and establish formal, institutionalized partnerships with CSOs. This is especially critical for organizations led by women, youth, people with special needs, ethnic minorities, and other underrepresented groups, whose voices and lived experiences are essential to designing climate policies that are responsive and equitable. To achieve this, municipalities should enter into formal Memoranda of Understanding - MoUs with CSOs that clearly define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making rights across all phases of climate policy and programming. These agreements should enable CSOs to co-design local climate strategies, including Local Environmental Action Plans, Climate Action Plans, and Local Circular Economy Action Plans/Strategies or Roadmaps. Involving civil society from the earliest stages of planning allows for greater contextual relevance, increases public ownership, and ensures that local knowledge and innovation are leveraged to address environmental challenges. Beyond the design phase, CSOs must also be engaged throughout the implementation, helping to deliver outreach,

mobilize local communities, and facilitate behaviour change campaigns. Furthermore, CSOs should have a direct role in monitoring and evaluating municipal climate actions, including contributing to the development of performance indicators and progress tracking tools.

Moreover, Municipalities should adopt participatory governance tools to institutionalize this engagement, such as community scorecards, citizen feedback loops (e.g., “You Said | We Did” summaries), and annual Inclusion Audits that document who participated, how they were engaged, and what impact their contributions had on decision-making. These tools should be supported by digital dashboards that allow for real-time public reporting, increasing transparency and enabling citizens to assess progress. This model of sustained and structured cooperation strengthens accountability, fosters trust between citizens and institutions, and helps municipalities align with European Union standards on participatory and inclusive climate governance.

Institutionalize Inclusive Public Consultation Mechanisms

Public consultation processes must be transformed into accessible, consistent, and meaningful platforms for community engagement. Municipalities should adopt clear protocols to hold consultations at regular intervals, with a minimum frequency of twice per year. These events should be scheduled at inclusive times and locations and be complemented by online formats to enhance accessibility. Additionally, communication materials should be clear, visually accessible, and available in multiple languages, including minority and sign languages ensuring that all community members, including older adults and persons with disabilities, can meaningfully participate. Furthermore, to address the low accountability seeking rates from the citizens, the Municipality should design more innovative and reachable methods, to motivate the citizens in joining and participating in decision-making. A good example to follow is that of Prizren Municipality in organizing public discussions at the community level (neighbourhood by neighbourhood and village by village) for its annual budget planning. Thus, finding and meeting the community where it is at, and contributing towards the long-term awareness and public involvement/participation in decision-making in the future. At the same time, feeding the feeling of accountability amongst the communities. Particular attention should be paid to women’s participation, as timing, location, and social norms often discourage their involvement. Municipalities should actively engage women’s civil society organizations and consider holding women-only consultation sessions to ensure inclusive participation.

PILLAR THREE: CLIMATE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS

One of the most significant barriers to effective climate action and green transition in Kosovo is the low level of climate literacy, particularly among older adults and rural populations. The participatory research highlights a gap in public understanding of climate change, where 90% of survey respondents acknowledged that environmental issues are a serious concern in their communities, yet their understanding is often limited to visible issues such as waste, air pollution, or lack of green spaces.¹³ Deeper, systemic causes, such as greenhouse gas emissions, fossil fuel dependency, or ecosystem degradation, remain poorly understood, particularly among populations not actively engaged in civil

society or environmental education. This limited literacy is further intensified by the near absence of environmental and climate topics in school curricula. Despite global and regional calls for climate education, formal educational systems in Kosovo have yet to integrate structured learning on climate change, sustainability, or circular economy principles across primary and secondary education levels.

In parallel, public awareness campaigns are sporadic and generally are more focused in the environmental awareness than on the awareness to climate change, or specifically climate action. Most outreach initiatives rely on technical language or bureaucratic formats that fail to resonate with the everyday experiences of youth, women, people with special needs, or marginalized communities.¹⁴ Nevertheless, creative projects from local CSOs organized by organizations such as: 7Arte, Rilindja e Gjelber, Syri i Vizionit, Ec Ma Ndryshe, KEERC, etc, continue to contribute on raising awareness in the most unique, innovative and participatory focused ways. This was confirmed through the participatory research as well, where youth interviewed in the study expressed a desire for more creative, participatory forms of learning, such as hands-on eco-projects, digital campaigns, and school-based environmental clubs. Yet these remain largely NGO driven and are rarely institutionalized. Cultural norms, especially in rural areas also play a role in limiting public discourse, as environmental topics are not widely discussed in households, media, or community gatherings. This lack of awareness not only hinders informed decision-making and public participation but also weakens civic pressure for climate accountability, leaving institutions unchallenged and unmotivated to take bold actions. Overall, without targeted investments in climate education and inclusive accessible climate literacy campaigns, the broader public remains disconnected from both the risks of climate change and the opportunities for mitigation and adaptation. Some of the recommendations generated from the participatory research to close this gap that it is not just an educational necessity but also a prerequisite for a green and just transition in Kosovo are highlighted below.

Integrate Climate and Circular Economy Topics into School Curricula

To strengthen climate literacy and promote environmental responsibility from an early age, Kosovo's Ministry of Education should collaborate with municipalities to systematically integrate climate change, sustainability, and circular economy concepts into national school curricula. This integration should go beyond theoretical knowledge, focusing on practical, localized examples that reflect the realities of students' lives and communities. Lessons should highlight issues such as pollution, deforestation, and extreme weather events in places like Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovica (South and North), and showcase local youth-led solutions. The research findings point to a significant gap in formal environmental education, with most students currently relying on NGO-led projects to gain awareness. Institutionalizing these topics within the education system will ensure all students develop the necessary understanding, values, and skills to actively participate in Kosovo's green and just transition.

Collaborate with NGOs for Experimental, Hands-On Learning

Municipalities and schools should actively partner with local NGOs and community organizations to deliver experiential climate education through activities like composting

workshops, recycling drives, eco-walks, mural painting, and participatory urban greening projects. These initiatives provide students with practical skills and foster a personal connection to environmental issues. The research notes that many of the most effective awareness and engagement activities across the five municipalities studied were implemented by civil society organizations such as Ec Ma Ndryshe, Syri i Vizionit, 7Arte, Rilindja e Gjelber, KEERC etc. Formalizing these partnerships through school programming can amplify impact, promote innovation, and foster a stronger culture of environmental stewardship among youth. Furthermore, to bridge the gap between grassroots initiatives and municipal governance, each municipality should appoint a dedicated Civil Society Liaison Officer. This role would serve as a direct link between public institutions and CSOs, particularly those led by women, youth, and ethnic minorities. The officer would be tasked with maintaining an up-to-date registry of CSOs working on environmental and climate issues, coordinating engagement opportunities, and ensuring that grassroots contributions are acknowledged and integrated into municipal plans. Formalizing this role helps institutionalize cooperation, improves visibility for local initiatives, and ensures that community-based innovation is integrated in public climate strategies.

Launch Creative Public Awareness Campaigns like “Green Month”

Municipalities should institutionalize an annual public awareness campaign, proposed as a “Green Month”, that blends environmental education with creativity and civic engagement. This initiative could feature school competitions, public murals, community clean-up days, eco-fairs, interactive street performances, and youth-led digital content on different social media platforms. Research findings highlight the absence of sustained, youth-friendly environmental communication. Such campaigns would make climate discourse more accessible, especially to younger audiences, and create a positive community-wide narrative around sustainability. By celebrating local eco-champions and showcasing grassroots innovation, “Green Month” can shift public attitudes and stimulate broader community involvement in the green transition.

PILLAR FOUR: FINANCE FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE CLIMATE ACTION

Another persistent barrier to effective local climate governance in Kosovo is the chronic underfunding of municipal environmental plans or activities related to climate and/or environmental action.¹⁵ Although several municipalities, including Prizren, Peja, Gjakova, and Mitrovica South have adopted environmental and circular economy strategies (integrated waste management strategy),¹⁶ these remain largely aspirational due to the lack of dedicated financial resources.¹⁷ In practice, most municipalities do not allocate a specific budget line for climate-related initiatives, instead they rely heavily on short-term, donor-driven projects. While these externally funded initiatives can spark important pilot programs, their temporary nature often results in fragmented implementation and limited sustainability. Additionally, there is an absence of targeted funding streams for groups most vulnerable to climate impacts, including women, youth, people with special needs, and other marginalized communities.¹⁸ This limits the ability of these populations to contribute to and benefit from green transition efforts. The lack of tailored financial support in-

15 Global Partnership for Social Accountability – BGF, ODK, FOL: Kosovo Green Action - Green Agenda Implementation and Needs Assessment. December 2024.

16 CARE Deutschland: Green Horizons - Participatory Research: Information gathered across interviews, April and May 2025.

17 Ibid

18 Ibid.

tensifies existing inequalities and undermines Kosovo's commitments to gender-responsive and inclusive climate action as laid out in its legal frameworks. Despite the central government having adopted progressive policies such as the Law on Climate Change (2024) and the Circular Economy Roadmap, Kosovo's municipalities struggle to translate these into effective programs due to funding gaps.

Moreover, municipal access to international climate finance remains constrained, mainly due to its political status and limited recognition in global institutions. As a non-member of the UN and many international climate finance mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund - GCF or Adaptation Fund, Kosovo is often ineligible to apply directly for funding. Additionally, while donors such as the EU, GIZ, SIDA, SDC, and UNDP offer funding for green and climate-related initiatives, municipalities often lack the technical capacity to prepare competitive proposals or navigate the complex application and compliance processes. Without dedicated personnel or grant development expertise, most local governments are unable to tap into larger climate finance mechanisms. This funding bottleneck not only limits the scope of local climate action but also prevents the scaling of promising circular economy and green innovation projects across Kosovo. Some of the recommendations to tap on inclusive and equitable green financing are as follows:

Dedicated Budget Allocation for Inclusive Green Projects

Municipalities should commit to allocating at least 10% of all climate and environment related budgets specifically for projects that are led by or directly benefit women, youth, people with special needs and other marginalized groups. This targeted allocation can support initiatives such as women-led circular economy and integrated waste management initiatives, youth-driven clean energy start-ups, or inclusive community-based climate adaptation projects. Dedicated budget lines ensure that funding is not just available in theory but actively directed toward groups that are often excluded from mainstream environmental financing. Such allocations also promote compliance with Kosovo's Law on Gender Equality and its Voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which call for inclusive and socially just climate responses.

Capacity Building in Climate-responsive and Gender-responsive Budgeting

In order to drive equitable and effective climate action at the local level, municipalities must invest in building internal technical capacity, particularly in budgeting methodologies that integrate climate and social equity concerns. This includes training finance and planning officers in Gender-responsive budgeting - GRB, Climate-responsive budgeting - CRB and Climate public expenditures and Institutional Reviews - CPEIR. These tools enable municipal authorities to better understand how budget allocations can be tailored to achieve gender equality and climate resilience simultaneously. For example, through GRB, municipalities can assess whether women and men benefit equally from public spending on energy, infrastructure, or environmental services. Meanwhile, CRB and CPEIR let governments track, evaluate, and improve climate related investments in line with mitigation and adaptation targets. Such approaches also make it easier for local governments to meet international donor criteria, improving their chances of accessing climate finance from mechanisms like EU IPA III, etc. Findings from the participatory research conducted across five municipalities indicate that very few local officials are currently familiar with these tools, and climate budgeting practices remain largely ab-

sent from existing municipal frameworks. In practice, this results in limited transparency, non-strategic allocation of funds and missed opportunities to prioritize vulnerable populations, such as women, youth, people with special needs, low-income households, in local climate responses. Without adequate capacity-building, municipalities remain reliant on short-term, donor-led projects that do not foster long-term sustainability or institutional learning. Integrating GRB and CRB training into municipal staff development plans, and including these tools within budgeting and planning processes, is therefore not only a technical necessity but also a policy imperative for achieving inclusive, community-rooted climate governance in Kosovo.

Improved Access to International Climate Finance and Create Support Structures - Proposal Teams and Matchmaking Partnerships

Local governments often lack experience in developing competitive proposals, meeting donor requirements, or navigating compliance systems. To address this, municipalities should establish dedicated proposal development teams, possibly in partnership with local civil society organizations or regional networks. These teams would focus on identifying relevant funding opportunities, building strong applications, and managing reporting requirements, thus unlocking needed resources for inclusive and sustainable climate action. Moreover, municipalities should develop a clear, standardized list of eligible projects that align with both climate mitigation/adaptation goals and community needs. These could include urban greening (e.g., tree planting, park restoration), energy efficiency upgrades in public infrastructure, nature-based flood management systems, circular economy pilots, and clean energy installations for community use. Defining project types not only helps guide investment decisions and community proposals but also makes it easier for municipalities to match opportunities with appropriate funding streams. This clarity will also support community engagement, ensuring that local actors are aware of funding opportunities and encouraged to participate.

Furthermore, to improve the likelihood of securing external climate finance, municipalities should create internal proposal support teams and build matchmaking partnerships with civil society, academic institutions, and the private sector. These teams can provide technical assistance for project design, budgeting and donor alignment, while matchmaking efforts can bring together diverse stakeholders to co-develop scalable, high-impact initiatives. Partnerships with experienced NGOs or regional hubs can also help municipalities connect with donors, share best practices, and replicate successful models. This coordinated approach can reduce dependency on ad-hoc donor funding and promote long-term institutional and financial resilience.

PILLAR FIVE: LOCAL INNOVATION AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY LEADERSHIP

Kosovo has witnessed the emergence of promising grassroots initiatives led by youth, women, and civil society actors, particularly in the field of circular economy and local climate action. These include recycling hubs, urban gardening projects, upcycling workshops, composting pilots, and youth-led awareness campaigns, many of which are facilitated by NGOs or community volunteers. However, a major barrier to scaling these efforts lies in the lack of institutional support, coordination, and visibility within formal municipal

climate policies.¹⁹ Most municipalities do not systematically map or integrate grassroots initiatives into their planning cycles, resulting in missed opportunities to align bottom-up innovation with top-down policy frameworks. Municipal strategies often overlook these initiatives, which limits their replication, funding, and long-term sustainability. In many cases, circular economy and sustainability efforts operate on minimal budgets, relying on short-term donor support or unpaid community labour.²⁰ Municipalities rarely offer co-financing, technical assistance, or access to public infrastructure (e.g., public land, collection points, or storage facilities) that could enhance the viability and impact of these projects. Civil society organizations frequently report that their contributions are treated as external or peripheral, rather than as key partners in municipal climate responses. On the other hand, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of Circular Economy principles among both businesses and the general population.²¹ Furthermore, existing public subsidies, such as grants for agriculture, energy, or small businesses, are rarely designed to prioritize or incentivize climate-smart practices, nor do they reward circular economy models. This disconnect not only undermines the effectiveness of local sustainability efforts but also weakens trust between institutions and communities. A more strategic and inclusive approach is needed, and certain measures need to be taken, as outlined below.

Launch targeted Micro-grants for Community-led Green Initiatives

Municipalities should introduce annual micro-grant schemes ranging from €5,000 to €15,000 to directly support grassroots circular economy projects and climate innovations. These grants should prioritize applications from women, youth, people with special needs, and marginalized groups, particularly those often excluded from mainstream funding opportunities. Eligible initiatives could include composting systems, rooftop gardens, small-scale recycling enterprises, rainwater harvesting, eco-design start-ups, and sustainable food production. To ensure accessibility, application materials should be simplified and available in minority languages. Municipalities should also provide guidance throughout the application process, including pre-application sessions or open days. These micro-grants will serve as an entry point for local innovators to scale their impact, promote circular practices, and contribute to inclusive green growth. Furthermore, these grants will support the private sector on undertaking circular economy and upgrade from it being mostly a CSO and Donor pushed initiative.

Establish Local Green Innovation/Incubation Hubs for Women and Youth

To foster long-term innovation and entrepreneurship, municipalities, ideally in partnership with local NGOs and universities, should create dedicated green incubation hubs tailored to the needs of women and youth. These hubs should offer seed funding, coworking spaces, mentoring, skills development, and access to networks of experts and peers. The incubation model should focus on promoting sustainable business models across sectors such as eco-tourism, zero-waste products, upcycled materials, green construction materials, and digital tools for climate resilience. By reducing entry barriers and providing hands-on support, these hubs can empower underrepresented communities to participate meaningfully in Kosovo's green and just transition by being an active stakeholder as well as a community member.

19 GIZ: Circular Economy in Kosovo – Opportunities for reusable packaging systems and women's participation. <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2023-en-kosovo-reusable-packaging-systems-and-women-participation.pdf>

20 CARE Deutschland: Green Horizons - Participatory Research: Information gathered across interviews, April and May 2025.

21 Ibid

Simplify Grant Procedures and Build Application Capacity

Access to funding is often hindered by bureaucratic complexity, lack of transparency, and limited applicant capacity. Municipalities should streamline the grant application process by reducing administrative burdens, eliminating unnecessary documentation, and offering online submission options. At the same time, they should run recurring grant-writing clinics and capacity-building workshops, especially targeting CSOs, youth groups, and small businesses that lack institutional support. These clinics should offer hands-on training in proposal writing, budgeting, and results-based planning, and can be delivered in cooperation with donor agencies or NGOs experienced in participatory methods. Empowering local actors to navigate funding processes effectively is essential for scaling community climate solutions.

Build Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs to Scale Local Impact

Municipalities should develop public-private partnerships to scale successful grassroots circular economy projects. These PPPs could include joint investments in recycling centres, composting sites, or community repair cafes, where local entrepreneurs, cooperatives, or NGOs are supported by the municipality and private investors. Municipalities can offer co-financing, land, or in-kind support (e.g., machinery, marketing) while private partners contribute capital or distribution channels. Clear partnership agreements, sustainability metrics, and accountability mechanisms must guide these efforts to ensure that they align with both social and environmental goals. Scaling proven models through PPPs offers a pathway to generate green jobs, improve service delivery, and foster inclusive growth.

Integrated Inclusive Criteria in procurement and Subsidy Programs for Green transition

Public procurement represents a powerful tool for municipalities to shape local markets and promote socially responsible entrepreneurship. Yet, the research shows that current procurement systems in Kosovo are largely based on cost-efficiency alone, with little consideration for environmental or social performance. This has created a situation where small-scale, green, or socially inclusive businesses, especially those led by women and youth, are at a systemic disadvantage when applying for public tenders or local subsidies. The research found that circular economy practices in Kosovo are primarily driven by NGOs and informal initiatives, often without consistent municipal support or financial incentives. Civil society actors highlighted the lack of mechanisms to reward or prioritize community-based recycling initiatives, social enterprises, or zero-waste models. Moreover, women- and youth-led businesses reported facing higher entry barriers due to the technical complexity and opaque requirements of tendering processes. In parallel, agricultural and economic subsidies are often distributed without climate-smart conditions, resulting in missed opportunities to promote sustainability and resilience at the local level.

To address these issues, municipalities should integrate inclusive and green criteria across all stages of procurement and grant-making. This can include:

- Scoring incentives** Provide additional points in evaluation frameworks for bidders with strong environmental track records, gender balance in staffing, employment of marginalized groups, or integration of circular economy models.
- Eligibility incentives** Create separate tender lots or micro-contracts accessible to smaller, start-up, or community-based initiatives that meet sustainability and inclusion standards.
- Subsidy reform** Introduce sustainability benchmarks into agricultural, business, or household subsidies, such as eco-certification, local sourcing, energy efficiency, or organic production, as prerequisites or value-adding criteria.

Furthermore, municipalities should provide pre-tender support to help smaller or first-time applicants navigate the system, including guidance documents, workshops, and help desks. This is especially critical in rural and underserved areas, where low administrative capacity can prevent eligible actors from participating at all. By leveraging public procurement and subsidies as levers for change, municipalities can create market incentives for sustainable behaviour while making the green transition more inclusive and locally rooted. This approach not only stimulates innovation but also ensures that public resources actively contribute to social equity and environmental resilience key principles identified throughout the research as foundational for a just transition in Kosovo.

CONCLUSION

Kosovo stands at a critical crossroads in its path toward climate resilience and inclusive green development. While national commitments and legal frameworks provide a solid foundation, the findings of this research make clear that meaningful progress requires transformative change at the local level, where policies must be implemented and communities engaged. The implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, underfunded, and fragmented at the local level. The participatory research conducted across five municipalities has revealed that despite growing public concern about environmental issues, limited institutional capacity, siloed governance structures, and exclusionary decision-making practices continue to undermine the effectiveness of climate action.

Furthermore, Kosovo's lack of open-access, centralized, and disaggregated, climate data further prevents evidence-based planning, policy monitoring, and the targeting of vulnerable populations. Civil society, particularly women- and youth-led initiatives, play an active role in advancing environmental awareness and grassroots innovation, but their contributions are rarely recognized or integrated into formal governance systems. At the same time, climate education is lacking in school curricula, and public awareness campaigns often fail to resonate with diverse segments of the population, weakening civic engagement and accountability.

To bridge the gap between policy ambition and community reality, this policy brief outlines a five-pillar strategy for inclusive climate governance: (1) Building climate data systems and local capacity, (2) Integrated gender and equity in municipal climate governance, (3) Enhancing climate education and public awareness, (4) Expanding access to inclusive and sustainable financing, and (5) Scaling grassroots innovation and circular economy leadership. These pillars represent a practical, community-rooted roadmap for municipalities, national institutions, and development partners committed to advancing a just and effective green transition in Kosovo.

Moving forward, it is critical that all stakeholders work collaboratively to institutionalize inclusion, invest in long-term capacity building, and elevate community voices in shaping climate solutions. Kosovo's transition cannot rely only on technical fixes or donor-funded pilot projects, it must be participatory, equitable, and locally grounded in order for it to be sustainable. With the right investments, partnerships, and political will, Kosovo has the opportunity to turn its climate challenges into a catalyst for inclusive development and lasting resilience.

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ANNEX A - KOSOVO CLIMATE PROFILE

Kosovo's climate is primarily continental, marked by cold winters and warm summers, with regional variations shaped by topography. The Dukagjini plain in the southwest exhibits Mediterranean influences, resulting in milder winters, more frost-free days, and greater annual precipitation.

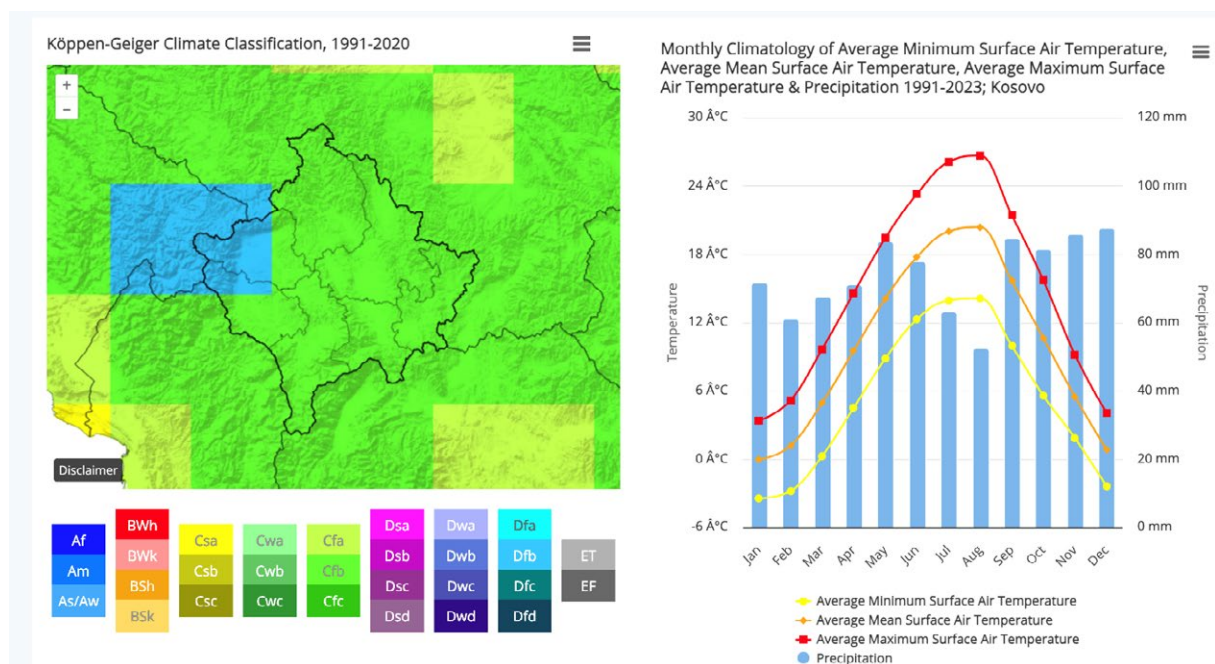


Fig. 1.: Source: World Bank: Climate Change Knowledge Portal. <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/albania>

According to the Köppen-Geiger climate classification system, which categorizes global climates based on long-term temperature and precipitation patterns, Kosovo exhibits a mix of two primary climate types: **Cfb** and **Dfb**.

The **Cfb** classification represents a temperate oceanic climate, marked by mild temperatures throughout the year, the absence of a dry season, and warm, but not hot summers. This type dominates the central, eastern, and southeastern parts of Kosovo, and mostly includes the Kosovo Plain and surrounding lowland areas (*Prishtina, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Viti, Podujeve, Kamenica*). In contrast, the **Dfb** (humid continental) climate, marked in cyan, appears in higher elevation areas, particularly in the western and northern mountainous regions. This type features cold winters, also without a dry season, and warm summers. The Dfb climate type is found primarily in the higher-altitude western and northern parts of Kosovo. It includes the Dukagjini Plain and mountain areas (*Peja, Gjakova, Istog, Decan, parts of Mitrovica and Zubin Potok near the mountainous borders*). Across the country, the temperature extremes range from as low as -27 °C in winter to as high as 39 °C in the summer. Meanwhile, mean annual temperatures between 2001 and 2020 averaged, 11.3 °C, with highs reaching 30 °C in the summer and -10 °C in the winter.

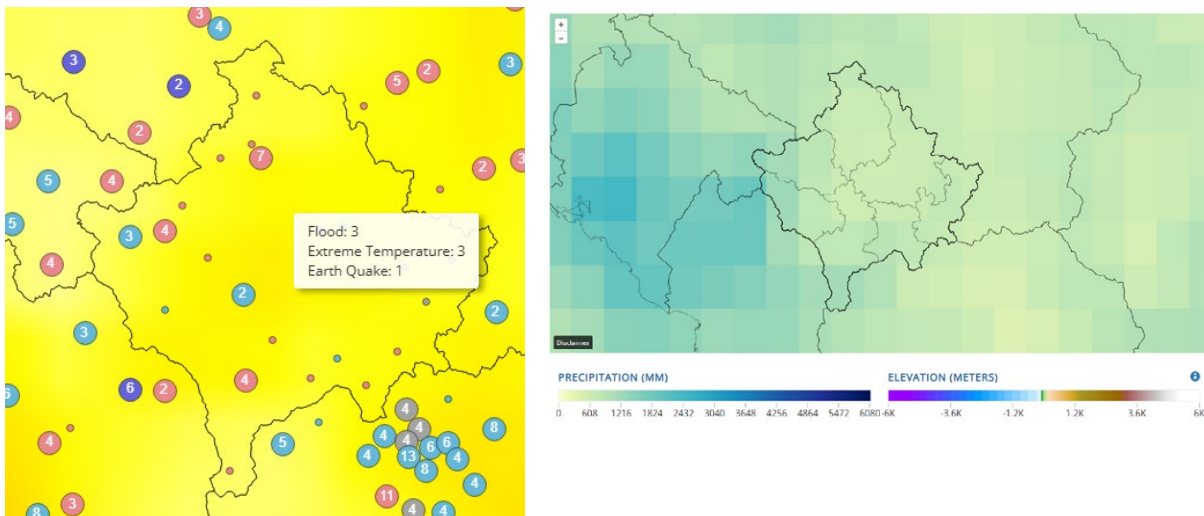


Fig 2. & 3.: Source: World Bank: Climate Change Knowledge Portal. <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/albania>

Annual precipitation varies significantly, from around 600mm in the eastern plains to 1300mm in the mountainous western regions.

The above climatological graph, further illustrates the average temperature peak in July at around 28-29°C, while minimum temperatures drop below freezing in January, confirming a strong seasonal variation typical of continental climates. Meanwhile, precipitation is fairly well-distributed throughout the year, ranging from about 45 mm in August to over 90mm in November and December.

Climate change poses a growing threat to Kosovo’s environment, society, and economy. Projections indicate that temperatures could rise by up to 6.5°C by the end of the century, especially under high-emission scenarios.¹ At the same time, precipitation levels, particularly during summer months, are expected to decline between 6% and 23% increasing the risk of droughts and water scarcity. These climate shifts have already manifested in more frequent extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, wildfires, and heatwaves, with riverine flooding notably affecting the Drin River basin and 65% of Kosovo’s territory considered at flood risk, which comprises 82% of the population.² The number of flooding events is in a constant increase, especially in the last two decades, where there is an average number of 18 cases per year.³ Between 2003 and 2022, floods affected nearly 10,000 hectares of land and more than 1,200 residential and commercial structures.

On the other hand, Kosovo also faces a growing threat from droughts, heatwaves and wildfires, which have intensified in frequency and severity due to rising temperatures and shifting climate patterns. Notably, droughts are increasingly recurrent. Drought episodes in 2007 and 2022 resulted in extensive crop failures affecting 10% of the country. This is mostly due to Kosovo’s limited water storage infrastructure and reliance on surface flows such as the Ibar River.

Water resources are under increasing stress, Kosovo is much more water scarce compared to its neighboring countries, and it has among the lowest level of water resources development and storage. In particular, Iber river basin is water stressed, and in it is ex-

1 Ibid
2 MESPI
3 Ibid

pected that in the next 20 years all Kosovo basins will be water stressed.⁴ Heatwaves are also becoming more frequent and prolonged, with projections indicating that Kosovo may face two to five additional heatwaves annually, each lasting between 5 – 15 days. Simultaneously, wildfires have surged, primarily in state-owned areas. Between 2015 and 2022, both the scale and frequency of forest fires increased significantly, with some years seeing as much as 3,500 hectares of forest affected.⁵

The cumulative economic impact of these range of climate-induced hazards could result in an estimate of 4% reduction in Kosovo's GDP by 2050⁶. Although, this projection is relatively lower compared to other Western Balkan countries, it still reflects the high vulnerability of Kosovo's economy, specifically in key sectors like agriculture, infrastructure, and energy. Between 2009 and 2017, droughts alone caused agricultural losses exceeding €50 million.⁷ Flooding, one of the most frequent hazards, caused property losses estimated at €28.9 million.⁸

In general, the implications of climate change extend across multiple sectors. Agriculture, which represents a vital source of employment and food security, particularly in the rural areas is highly vulnerable to fluctuations in rainfall and rising temperatures. Irrigation infrastructure remains limited, covering only 17% of agricultural land.⁹ The forestry sector, covering 44.7% (according to the National Forest Inventory conducted in 2012) of Kosovo's land is also under pressure. Illegal logging, soil erosion, and forest fires, intensified by prolonged droughts and high temperatures are degrading forest ecosystems.¹⁰

Together, these hazards underscore Kosovo's urgent need for comprehensive adaptation strategies, improved risk mapping, and stronger local resilience mechanisms. Going forward, Kosovo must strengthen its climate data infrastructure, improve coordination across sectors, and prioritize inclusive climate governance. Strategic investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy, water management, and climate education are essential. Empowering municipalities with the tools, data, and funding to act will be critical for advancing a green and just transition that protects both people and the environment.

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