

2025 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (GARI)

August, 2026

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List of abbreviations

Acronym	Full Name
AFIR	Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation
AKIS	Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System
AP	Action Plan
ARA	Albania Roads Authority
ASCIs	Areas of Special Conservation Interest
BAT	Best Available Techniques
BDTF	Biodiversity Task Force of the Western Balkans
BMEF	Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
BSP	WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030
BTRI	First Biennial Transparency Report
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education (Erasmus+)
CCDR	World Bank Climate and Development Report
CE	Circular Economy
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CIAM	Centre for Integrated Assessment Modelling
CIF	Climate Investment Funds
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
CLRTAP	Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution
CMO	Common Market Organisation
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
CRM	Common Regional Market
CRMA	Critical Raw Materials Act
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DART	Digital Agriculture and Rural Transformation
DRS	Deposit Return System
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission

Acronym	Full Name
ECS	Energy Community Secretariat
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
EEA	European Environment Agency
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
eFTI	Electronic Freight Transport Information
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIP	Economic and Investment Plan / Electricity Integration Package
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
EMEP	European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme
EnC	Energy Community
ENVAP	Environment and Climate Action Programme
EPBD	Energy Performance of Buildings Directive
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
ESPR	Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation
ETS	Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
EWRS	European Water Resilience Strategy
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEC	Final Energy Consumption
FITD	Fund for Innovation and Technological Development
FLR	Forest Landscape Restoration
FLRP	Forest Landscape Restoration Plan
GAINS	Greenhouse Gas – Air Pollution Interactions and Synergies model
GARI	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan Implementation Report
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
IEA	International Energy Agency
IECE	Institute for European and Circular Economy
IED	Industrial Emissions Directive
IFC	International Finance Corporation

Acronym	Full Name
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
IPR	Integrated Progress Report
IRTAD	International Road Traffic and Accident Database
ITP	Innovation and Training Park
ITS	Intelligent Transport Systems
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JRC	Joint Research Centre of the European Commission
KEEF	Kosovo* Energy Efficiency Fund
LCPD	Large Combustion Plants Directive
LPIS	Land Parcel Identification System
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
LULUCF	Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
MRVA	Monitoring, Reporting, Verification and Accreditation
NAP	Adaptation Plan
NBSAP	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDC	Determined Contribution
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NEC	Emission Ceiling
NECD	Emission Ceilings Directive
NECP	Energy and Climate Plan
NERP	Emission Reduction Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMVOC	Non-Methane Volatile Organic Compounds
NRL	Domestic Reference Laboratory
OCR	Official Controls Regulation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPWR	Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
REAWG	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Soil Management

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Acronym	Full Name
RECONOMY	Regional Circular Economy Programme
RERI	Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute
RIAMS	Railway Infrastructure Asset Management System
RINF	European Register of Infrastructure
ROAR	Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report
RRD	Regional Rural Development
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategy
SBUR	Second Biennial Update Report on Greenhouse Gas Emissions
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEE	South East Europe
SEVC	Subsidy Scheme for Energy-Vulnerable Consumers
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
SO₂	Sulphur Dioxide
SSMS	Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
SURCE	Scaling Up Residential Clean Energy Project
SWG	Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development in South-Eastern Europe
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TCT	Transport Community Treaty
TENT	Termoelektrane Nikola Tesla
TFIAM	Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling
TPP	Thermal Power Plant
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USD	United States Dollar
VAT	Value Added Tax
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTMIS	Vessel Traffic Management Information System
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WBBCR	Western Balkans Biodiversity Conservation Report

Acronym	Full Name
WBCEH	Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework
WBSP	Western Balkans Soil Partnership
WHO	World Health Organization

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (GARI) provides an overview of progress achieved across the 58 actions of the GAWB Action Plan (2021-2030) and assesses developments across the seven thematic Roadmaps: Climate Action, Energy, Sustainable Transport, Circular Economy, Depollution, Sustainable Agriculture, and Protection of Nature and Biodiversity. The report evaluates regional and domestic-level progress during 2025, identifies implementation gaps and barriers, and outlines priority actions required to accelerate alignment with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the EU accession process.

The monitoring framework developed by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) establishes a structured mechanism for tracking the implementation of the Action Plan across the Western Balkans Six (WB6). Through annual reporting and coordination with the European Commission, regional coordinators designated under GAWB Action Plans, international partners, the monitoring system supports the identification of implementation bottlenecks, facilitates evidence-based policy adjustments, and ensures that progress towards the Green Agenda remains measurable and transparent. The report synthesises information from WB6, RCC, European Commission, regional coordinators under GAWB AP, international financial institutions, statistical databases and policy monitoring platforms to present a consolidated regional overview of implementation progress.

In 2025, implementation of the Green Agenda continued within a context of increasing political and economic pressure for accelerated decarbonisation and environmental reforms. The entry into force of the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the continued alignment with the EU climate and energy acquis have reinforced the urgency of structural reforms across the WB6. At the same time, the WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap, endorsed in 2025, represents a significant milestone in strengthening regional cooperation on climate resilience and adaptation policy development.

Progress across the seven Roadmaps remains uneven across the region and across policy areas. While important advances have been made in strengthening legal and strategic frameworks, the implementation of many measures remains at an early stage, with persistent challenges related to institutional coordination, financing, regulatory alignment, and data availability.

Under the Climate Action Roadmap, several WB6 have advanced the development of climate legislation and governance frameworks aligned with the European Climate Law. Four of the WB6 have adopted climate laws, while others continue to develop draft legislation. Progress has also been made in preparing or updating domestic Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and submitting updated domestic level Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the UNFCCC framework. However, implementation capacity and institutional coordination remain uneven in the WB6, particularly in those cases where NECPs have yet to be finalised or formally notified to the Energy Community Secretariat. Efforts to introduce carbon pricing instruments

and align with the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) are advancing gradually, although most of WB6 remain at the preparatory stage. The increasing exposure of regional industries to CBAM obligations is expected to intensify policy momentum for carbon pricing reforms and strengthened monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems.

Within the Energy Roadmap, progress has been recorded in expanding renewable energy capacity, particularly through the development of solar and wind projects. Nevertheless, the regional energy mix continues to be dominated by large hydropower and coal-based electricity generation. Coal-fired power plants remain a major source of emissions and continue to operate under transitional compliance mechanisms under the Large Combustion Plants Directive (LCPD). While several WB6 have begun discussing coal phase-out pathways and just transition strategies, the pace and modalities of this process differ across the WB6 and remain dependent on energy security, availability of replacement capacities, socio-economic impacts and domestic strategic planning frameworks.

Advances in energy efficiency policies have been observed, including progress in transposing the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and improving energy intensity indicators. However, the scale of renovation programmes and financing mechanisms remains insufficient to address structural inefficiencies in the building sector or to effectively tackle energy poverty.

Transport presents a similar dynamic. Frameworks are gradually aligning with the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy, which includes better railway arrangements, infrastructure upgrades, improved road safety, but transport demand continues to grow, and road dominates the modal split. Alternative fuel infrastructure remains sparse, and electrification is at an early stage in most of WB6.

In the circular economy, the gap between ambition and implementation remains wide, as regulatory reforms on resource efficiency, waste management and sustainable production are still in early stages, and integration into European industrial ecosystems and viable circular business models remain distant without more determined coordination.

Under the Depollution Roadmap, infrastructure investments in air quality and wastewater treatment have delivered measurable improvements; however air, water, and soil pollution remain significant, and the level of alignment and enforcement of EU environmental directives across the region remains overall at the lower end.

Agricultural reforms are progressing across key areas, including food safety, plant and animal health, rural development, and land management, with alignment to EU standards progressing at a pace and depth that varies considerably across WB6.

On nature and biodiversity, the most significant deliverable of 2025 was the publication and ministerial endorsement of the Outline of the Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 at the Dubrovnik Ministerial in October 2025. Regional cooperation through the Biodiversity Task Force and its two newly constituted thematic expert groups has meaningfully strengthened the institutional architecture for biodiversity action. Full alignment with EU nature directives remains a longer-term objective, and the gap between biodiversity mapping and formal legal protection, particularly through the Emerald Network, continues to widen.

The pattern that emerges across all seven Roadmaps is one that practitioners in the region will recognise: policy frameworks are maturing faster than implementation capacity. The WB6 have, in many areas, credible strategies and endorsed plans. What remains limited is the institutional coordination needed to translate those plans into enforceable measures, the

financing instruments required to support their implementation, and the monitoring infrastructure necessary to effectively demonstrate results.

Overall, the 2025 assessment confirms that the WB6 have made incremental progress in advancing the Green Agenda, particularly in strengthening policy frameworks and expanding regional cooperation. However, translating these commitments into effective implementation and measurable environmental outcomes remains the central challenge for the coming years. Accelerating implementation of the revised GAWB Action Plan will require stronger political commitment, improved institutional coordination, enhanced monitoring systems, and increased mobilisation of public and private investment aligned with the regional green transition objectives of the WB6.

2. PROGRESS REPORT ACROSS THE ROADMAP

2.1 Climate Action Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with the Climate Action Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Adopt or finalise pending climate change laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina (at entity levels, with central level coordination) and North Macedonia (where the draft law remains unadopted), ensuring alignment with the European Climate Law and binding 2030 targets.
- Update climate laws to align with the EU 2050 climate neutrality target and in the case of Kosovo* to include MRVA provisions.
- Establish or strengthen institutional bodies responsible for monitoring climate law implementation and reporting progress against domestically determined targets, ensuring that adopted laws translate into enforceable obligations.
- Complete or update NECP cycles and submit NDC 3.0 submissions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* (on a voluntary basis, given its non-UNFCCC status), and North Macedonia, aligned with the Energy Community 2030 targets and sector-specific decarbonisation measures.
- Fulfil obligations under Article 3 of the Governance Regulation by notifying NECPs to the Energy Community Secretariat - particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and pursue equivalent steps in Kosovo* in line with the applicable frameworks governing its participation in EU pre-accession processes.
- Operationalise NECP implementation units within lead energy and environment ministries, with dedicated budgetary allocations and measurable annual milestones to ensure NECPs move beyond planning into delivery.
- Plan the transition from coal within NECPs and climate policy frameworks, taking into account energy security, availability of replacement capacities, socio-economic impacts in affected regions and communities, and the need for a just and orderly transition.
- Advance carbon pricing reform, with a view to operationalising adequate mechanisms by 2030, keeping in mind alignment with CBAM obligations. Progressing Serbia's carbon tax mechanism (€4/tonne CO₂, in force since 1 January 2026), providing that foreseen

deductions do not undercut the carbon price signal and align the instrument progressively with the EU ETS trajectory.

- Advance Montenegro's ETS from legislative commitment to operational status and develop a plan for its gradual improvement and approximation with the EU ETS to support progress in EU accession Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change).
- Pursue regional coordination on the implementation of Monitoring, Reporting, Verification and Accreditation (MRVA) to reduce administrative burden on WB6 exporters subject to CBAM and ensure data comparability across WB6 Integrate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) definitions and requirements into domestic legislation, spatial planning frameworks, and public investment appraisal criteria by 2027, removing the legal gap that currently blocks blended finance and private investment in NbS.
- Accelerate adoption of North Macedonia's pending Adaptation Plan and Kosovo*'s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, as both documents remain outstanding commitments under the existing domestic climate frameworks.
- Establish the regional NbS financing mechanism foreseen under IUCN ADAPT 2.0, redirecting a share of public climate finance and IPA pre-accession instruments towards nature-based approaches with quantified mitigation and adaptation co-benefits.
- Translate the WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap (endorsed 2025) into domestic sectoral action plans with assigned institutional responsibilities, financing estimates, and monitoring indicators, in preparation for the Regional Adaptation Strategy expected in 2026.
- Establish or formalise domestic multi-stakeholder climate dialogue platforms, ensuring civil society, youth organisations, and affected communities have a structured role in NECP review, climate law monitoring, and adaptation planning.
- Develop the WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy (expected 2026) through an inclusive, multi-stakeholder process, ensuring full alignment with the EU Adaptation Strategy and the European Climate Law.

2.1.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 1	Align with the EU Climate Law with a vision of achieving climate neutrality by 2050
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The European Climate Law (ECL)² sets a binding target to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050 at the latest. On the path towards net zero emissions, the ECL includes the target to reduce net GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990, while an intermediate 90% reduction target for 2040 has been recently adopted by the EU co-legislators³. The Western Balkans Six (WB6) Climate Change Laws are expected to be aligned with the European Climate Law and thus reflects the law's core objectives including the commitment to climate neutrality by 2050.

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119>

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/03/05/2040-climate-target-council-gives-final-green-light/>

Four of the WB6 have adopted climate change laws: Albania in 2020⁴, Kosovo*⁵ in 2023, Serbia in 2021⁶ and Montenegro has adopted a new law in 2025⁷. However, only Montenegro's new climate law is aligned with the EU target to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. North Macedonia has prepared a draft law (including 2050 climate neutrality commitment), but the adoption is still pending. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made some progress in preparing draft climate change laws at entity level. Serbia is expected to update and strengthen its existing Climate Change Law by 2027. Kosovo* is expected to update its climate law to include climate neutrality commitment and the MRVA provisions.

Economy	Law	Adopted	Comments
Albania	Climate Change Law	2020	Not aligned with 2050 climate neutrality target
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Climate Change Law		Draft available at the entity level; however jurisdiction's climate law is expected by the EU
Kosovo*	Climate Change Law	2023	Not aligned with 2050 climate neutrality target
Montenegro	Climate Change Law	2025	Aligned with 2050 target
North Macedonia	Climate Change Law		Draft available
Serbia	Climate Change Law	2021	Not aligned with 2050 climate neutrality target Adoption of changes expected in 2027

Table 1: Status of alignment of the legal framework on climate change in the WB6

(source: Author's interpretation from literature³⁴⁵⁶)

Action 2	Set forward-looking 2030 energy and climate targets
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WB6 set their targets for GHG emission reduction with EU climate goals, generally targeting significant GHG emission reductions by 2030, compared to 1990, through the NDCs and Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). The Energy Community Ministerial Council has adopted 2030 GHG emission targets through Decision 2022/02/MC-EnC⁸, which includes net GHG emissions reductions that account for land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) emissions and removals (Annex XIV)⁹. WB6's second revised version of NDC was submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with Albania,

⁴ https://climate-laws.org/document/law-no-155-2020-on-climate-change_1817

⁵ https://climate-laws.org/documents/law-08-l-250_6ef1?id=law-on-climate-change_15c7

⁶ https://climate-laws.org/documents/serbian-law-on-climate-change_2bbd?id=serbian-law-on-climate-change_7d49

⁷ <https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/8ab8547a-a255-459c-a972-dcd592482853?version=1.0>

⁸ The 2023 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (2023 Report on GAWB AP)

⁹ With the exception of Montenegro whose Energy Community 2030 target does not include LULUCF emissions and removals

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia submissions in 2021, and Serbia in 2022, while only Montenegro and Serbia submitted their NDC 3.0 in 2025. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia are still obliged to submit their NDC 3.0 to the UNFCCC Secretariat. Kosovo* is not part of the UN, hence it does not have the obligation to submit an NDC but it has voluntarily adopted its first NDC¹⁰ in 2025 to align with global climate goals. As part of its Climate Change Law, Kosovo* states its targeted GHG values for 2030. These targets were presented in the 2023 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (2023 Report on GAWB AP)¹¹, Table 3.1.2. with the overall contribution of the WB6 region amounting to a 22% reduction in GHG emissions compared to 1990 levels.

Six notable specifics were highlighted:

1. Albania's binding Energy Community 2030 GHG target allows for an emissions increase of up to 53.2% compared to 1990 levels, reflecting the economy's already low-carbon electricity mix;
 2. Bosnia and Herzegovina's 2030 GHG target requires a 41.2% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, including LULUCF;
 3. Kosovo*¹² 2030 GHG target is set against a 2016 baseline, with a projected 16.3% reduction in net emissions by 2030;
 4. Montenegro's 2030 GHG target requires a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 1990, excluding LULUCF;
 5. North Macedonia's 2030 GHG target requires an 82% reduction in net GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, including LULUCF;
- According to Serbia's NDC 3.0, reduction target of greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 is 40.1% compared to 1990, excluding the land use, land use change and forestry sector (LULUCF).

Action 3	Develop and implement integrated Energy and Climate Plans
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During the period 2023-2024, the focus across the WB6 was on the preparation, adoption, and notification of NECPs. By 2025, part of the region had completed the adoption and notification process, while other WB6 have yet to finalise this key strategic document. As a result, the region has partially transitioned from the planning phase to the implementation phase, with individual WB6 advancing at different paces and with varying levels of operational readiness.

Serbia adopted its NECP in July 2024 and submitted the adopted plan to the Energy Community Secretariat. Montenegro adopted its NECP after a series of delays in December 2025. Albania and North Macedonia adopted their NECPs prior to the setting of the 2030 Energy Community targets, in 2021 and 2022 respectively. Within 2025, both undertook efforts in updating their NECPs but neither has finalised the update process. Kosovo* and Bosnia and Herzegovina failed to notify the Secretariat of their NECPs, despite their obligations under Article 3 of the Governance Regulation.

With the adoption and notification of NECPs, the focus is gradually shifting to operationalisation of measures and targets defined in the plans. NECPs have become the central

¹⁰ [DECISION GRK NO. 20_253 The Nationally Determined Contribution \(NDC\) of Kosovo.pdf](#)

¹¹ https://www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:421f0dca-1b16-4bb5-af86-067bc35fe073/Decision_02-2022-MC_CEP_2030targets_15122022.pdf

¹² https://climate-laws.org/document/law-on-climate-change_15c7; [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)

framework for integrating energy and climate policies across the region. However, implementation remains at an early stage in most of WB6, with challenges related to institutional coordination, data availability, and financing of planned measures.

Action 4 Prepare and implement climate adaptation strategies

The WB6 continue to develop their climate adaptation strategies based on vulnerability to climate change and risk assessments, setting priorities for risk reduction and cross-sectoral adaptation. These strategies are aligned with broader European adaptation efforts, including the European Climate Law, the EU Adaptation Strategy, and other relevant European Green Deal policies.

Since the publication of 2024 GARI, there has been limited progress in adopting new adaptation-related policy documents across the WB6. North Macedonia is in the process of developing its Adaptation Plan (NAP). Albania (2021), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022), Serbia (2023 together with the corresponding Action Plan for the period 2024-2026) and Montenegro (2025) have already adopted policy documents aligned with their NAPs and submitted them to the UNFCCC¹³. In 2025, Montenegro adopted the Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the period 2025-2035, together with the corresponding Action Plan for the period 2025-2027.

Kosovo* has drafted its Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation and Action Plan and completed the public consultation; the Strategy has not yet been adopted. In 2025, WB6 endorsed a WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap¹⁴, which sets out strategic guidance, priority areas, and actionable recommendations to strengthen regional cooperation on adaptation. The Roadmap outlines the steps needed to align with EU policies and global best practices, while identifying key gaps, investment needs, and opportunities for coordinated action under the climate pillar of the GAWB Action Plan. The Roadmap is recognised as a critical prerequisite for the development of the WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy and as a key input into the ongoing implementation of the GAWB Action Plan, strengthening the region's collective response to climate risks and enhancing preparedness for EU accession.

A Regional Adaptation Strategy is expected to be developed in 2026, ensuring full alignment with the Revised GAWB Action Plan.

Action 5 Align with the EU Emission Trading System and/or introduce carbon pricing instruments

The WB6 endorsed the Sofia Declaration in 2020, committing to the implementation of the Green Agenda in alignment with the European Green Deal, including the introduction of a carbon pricing instrument (tax or ETS). The alignment of the WB6 with the EU Emissions Trading System is envisaged within their respective EU accession processes as any new Member State will be expected to be fully part of the EU ETS, at the latest, from the first day of accession into the EU.

The process of developing appropriate carbon pricing mechanism as a transitory step was elaborated on within the “Impact Assessment for the Establishment of a Regional Emissions Trading System in the Contracting Parties of the Energy Community Treaty”. This impact

¹³ Albania in 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022, Serbia 2024 and Montenegro 2025, accessed 4 March 2025

<https://napcentral.org/submitted-naps>

¹⁴ [file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/WB6%20Climate%20Adaptation%20Roadmap%202025%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/WB6%20Climate%20Adaptation%20Roadmap%202025%20(1).pdf)

assessment proposed four carbon pricing design options to the contracting parties of the Energy Community:

1. Regional market under an Emissions Trading System (ETS);
2. Fixed price ETS;
3. Carbon tax;
4. Integration into the European Union's ETS.

The 23rd Energy Community Ministerial Council held in December 2025 recognised that WB6 preferred to develop carbon pricing models in line with their decisions and domestic circumstances, while ultimately aiming for alignment with the EU ETS upon accession. The Ministerial Council mandated the dedicated technical working group to serve as a coordination platform for gradual implementation of carbon pricing systems where the WB6 would provide regular, streamlined updates on progress in establishing carbon pricing.¹⁵

Economy	Direct carbon pricing	MRV	MRVA
Albania	Under consideration: ETS mentioned in Albania's draft NECP (2022)	In law	In draft law
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Under consideration: Draft Roadmap for ETS implementation prepared with Energy Community (2022)	In law	No legal framework
Kosovo*	The 2023 Climate Change Law introduced a domestic climate council and plans for studying the EU CBAM	In law	No legal framework
Montenegro	ETS in place, covering stationary installations, aviation, shipping and ETS2 sectors (buildings, road transport and small industry); MRVA legislation has been adopted and is expected to become operational within 2026	In law	In law
North Macedonia	Under consideration: in 2022 North Macedonia adopted its NECP; a Climate Change Law is under preparation, which defines the basis for a carbon fee	Not specified in source tables	The draft Climate Change Law should include MRVA provisions
Serbia	A carbon tax was adopted in 2025 and has been applied since January 2026, as part of Serbia's trajectory towards alignment with the EU ETS	In law	In law

Table 2: Carbon Pricing and MRV/MRVA Developments in the WB6¹⁶

Note: MRV ("in law") refers to a domestic legal basis for greenhouse gas monitoring and reporting under the Governance Regulation (EU) 2018/1999. MRVA ("in law") refers to regulation aligned with the MRVA-relevant provisions of the EU ETS Directive 2003/87/EC and Implementing Regulations (EU) 2018/2066 and 2018/2067, specifically supporting the

¹⁵<https://www.energy-community.org/events/2025/12/MC.html>

¹⁶ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/europeandcentralasia/challenges-and-opportunities-carbon-pricing-western-balkans>

carbon pricing mechanism. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* have not yet transposed or implemented the MRVA-relevant acts.

Despite improvements in renewable energy, the region remains reliant on coal, which makes the introduction of a high-price carbon challenging, given the region's comparatively low GDP per capita levels.

Action 6	Increase opportunities for deployment of Nature-based Solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change
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The 2024 Report¹⁷ on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (GAWB AP), as well as findings from the IUCN reports developed under the ADAPT¹⁸ and ADAPT 2.0¹⁹ projects, identify key actions, gaps and opportunities for strengthening the implementation of the Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in the WB6. Increasing understanding of NbS for climate change mitigation and adaptation and promoting their integration into domestic and regional policies and practices requires sustained regional cooperation as well as support for the development of regional strategic frameworks such as the Western Balkans Forest Landscape Restoration Plan. Integration of NbS into domestic policy and project design processes in WB6 remains at a relatively early stage. Existing NbS initiatives are often not fully aligned with the IUCN Global Standard²⁰ for NbS and frequently lack systematic assessment of their potential impacts and trade-offs, which may affect long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness. NbS-related actions are recognised as priorities in the WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap²¹, while their operationalisation within regulatory frameworks, financing mechanisms and investment planning remains limited. NbS integration is identified as one of three cross-cutting priorities for building long-term climate resilience in WB6, regardless of future climate scenarios.

To increase opportunities for NbS implementation as a sustainable adaptation approach with mitigation co-benefits, several actions are considered critical:

- introduction of NbS concepts and requirements into domestic legislation and strategic frameworks;
- adoption of fixed terminology of NbS across the region;
- development of a standardised methodology to assess whether proposed measures qualify as NbS;
- implementation and scaling of NbS at domestic and regional levels (including afforestation and forest restoration, wetland and peatland restoration, green roofs and urban green infrastructure); and
- support for the development and implementation of regional NbS-relevant policies, including the Western Balkans Forest Landscape Restoration Plan.

More efficient promotion of NbS implementation in WB6 can be achieved through targeted improvements in regulatory frameworks to formally recognise NbS and require their consideration in planning and investment processes. This should be complemented by adaptation of financing rules and mechanisms to prioritise NbS and by adoption of regulations governing NbS integration. The planned regional NbS fund under IUCN ADAPT 2.0 project

¹⁷ <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/218/2024-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-green-agenda-for-the-western-balkans-action-plan-gari>

¹⁸ <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/adapt-nature-based>

¹⁹ <https://iucn.org/adapt2.0>

²⁰ IUCN, 2020: Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. A user-friendly framework for the verification, design and scaling up of NbS, <https://iucn.org/our-work/topic/iucn-global-standard-nature-based-solutions>

²¹ <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/213/wb6-climate-adaptation-roadmap>

represents an important step towards sustained financing. Additional regional recommendations include integrating NbS into strategic and spatial planning frameworks, redirecting public investment and donor funding towards NbS, strengthening alignment with the IUCN Global Standard for NbS, and encouraging private-sector participation in NbS projects.

Action 7

Ensure participation of Western Balkans economies in the European Climate Pact or consider development of a similar mechanism

The European Climate Pact serves as an effective mechanism for empowering individuals and organisations to engage in climate adaptation planning and implementation, as an essential component for timely and effective adaptation, given the broad range of sectors and scales that require climate-related knowledge and capacity.

However, eligibility for full participation is currently limited to individuals and organisations residing in EU Member States. While the WB6 meet many of the other participation criteria, this residency requirement restricts their full access to the Pact's benefits and opportunities.

Building on this approach, the WB6 will, under the forthcoming Climate Adaptation Strategy, explore the development of similar or complementary mechanisms to strengthen stakeholder engagement, knowledge sharing, and capacity for climate adaptation across the region.

2.2 Energy Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with Energy Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Finalise and notify outstanding NECPs without further delay, making their adoption a condition for accessing WB6 Growth Plan and IPA III energy sector funding. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, and Albania must complete their NECP processes in 2026, including submission of biennial integrated progress reports under the Energy Community Governance Regulation, and establish dedicated NECP implementation units with cross-ministerial coordination mandates.
- Accelerate domestic carbon pricing adoption, in particular for electricity generation, accompanied by the momentum of the CBAM application for electricity exports to the European Union, with Serbia and Montenegro operationalising their instruments in 2026 and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo* committing to economy-specific pathways, whether carbon tax or ETS, on defined legislative timelines. Revenues from carbon pricing should be explicitly ring-fenced for renewable energy investment, low-income household renovation grants and coal region just transition support, with transparent public reporting from the outset.
- Prioritise electricity market coupling with the EU internal market as a critical infrastructure decision, assigning cross-ministerial coordination responsibility and defining quarterly transposition milestones.
- Introduce binding coal phase-out timelines in Bosnia and Herzegovina and convert Serbia's 2050 horizon into an interim milestone framework with decade-by-decade capacity retirement schedules.
- Domestic Emission Reduction Plan (NERP) and opt-out compliance should be enforced with the joint finding of a solution for their implementation by the EnC Secretariat and the CP.
- Scale up public building renovation pipelines using the EU recast Energy Performance of Buildings (EPBD) as the alignment reference, with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia developing blended-finance renovation programmes structured

around minimum energy performance standards. WB6 could consider benchmarking against Montenegro's EKO Fund and Kosovo*'s public buildings programme, EU co-financed under the Regional Energy Efficiency Programme (REEP) and now entering implementation, alongside its complementary schemes for households and for targeted socially vulnerable households, as emerging regional models.

- Redesign renovation financing schemes to target energy-poor households rather than capital-owning prosumers, ensuring that grant instruments reach 23.2% of the WB6 population at risk of poverty most exposed to energy price increases. Serbia's SURCE project and Montenegro's EKO Fund household programme should be documented as replicable models and adapted across the region. According to the findings of the OECD that the instruments of Serbia would need to be scaled by a factor of 2.5 to 4.6 to adequately cover vulnerable consumers used as a quantified regional ambition benchmark.
- Adopt statutory legal definitions of energy poverty in all WB6 by 2027, drawing on Serbia's model under the 2025 Law on Energy. Without legal definitions, governments cannot design means-tested support programmes, report on coverage and impact, or access pre-accession financing instruments requiring a defined target population.
- Develop structured just transition plans for coal-dependent communities as a prerequisite for accessing WB6 Growth Plan and IPA III energy sector funding, including decommissioning schedules, worker retraining programmes and community economic diversification strategies. The RCC and Energy Community Secretariat should develop a standardised planning framework drawing on North Macedonia's Climate Investment Fund (CIF) Accelerated Coal Transition methodology, whose €3 billion Just Energy Transition Investment Platform provides the region's most advanced replicable model.
- Phase out fossil fuel subsidies on a 2026–2030 schedule and redirect savings to energy transition and social protection spending, in line with OECD modelling confirming that the €4.2 billion in projected WB6 energy sector public support for 2025–2030 under current policies represents a growing fiscal risk. Reform pathways should be revenue-neutral, with subsidy phase-out proceeds directed to renewable investment, building renovation for low-income households and coal region support.
- Integrate energy transition targets and indicators into the Economic Reform Programmes of all WB6, using the Energy Community's CBAM Readiness Tracker, OECD Economic Convergence Scoreboard and RCC monitoring as reference tools for tracking progress on decarbonisation, energy efficiency and social protection adequacy across the region.

2.2.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 8	Review and revise, where necessary, all relevant legislation to support progressive decarbonisation of the energy sector
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WB6 continued aligning their legislative and policy frameworks with EU energy and climate acquis to support the progressive decarbonisation of the energy sector. This process is largely driven by obligations under the Energy Community Treaty, the adoption of 2030 targets in 2022, and the preparation and finalisation of NECPs.

In 2025, the focus across the region remains on **implementation, updating and further alignment** of previously adopted legislation rather than the adoption of entirely new frameworks. Progress is uneven across WB6.

Albania continues efforts to update its NECP and advance alignment with the EU acquis. The update of the NECP remained ongoing in 2025 and has not yet been finalised. Also, Albania is in the process of updating its climate law. Progress has been observed in climate reporting and implementation of governance requirements, although certain obligations, including GHG projections and adaptation reporting, remain incomplete. While a legal basis for long-term decarbonisation exists, Albania has not yet adopted a long-term strategy aligned with the 2050 climate neutrality objective.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made very limited progress in aligning its legislative framework with the EU climate acquis. The economy has not yet adopted its final NECP and failed to submit required climate reporting data in 2025, including information under the biennial integrated progress reports and other reporting streams foreseen by the Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action. The adoption of a comprehensive climate law is still pending. Bosnia and Herzegovina is receiving technical support through the EU4Energy project to assist in meeting its energy and climate reporting obligations towards the European Union.

Kosovo* has established a partial legal framework for climate governance through the Law on Climate Change, but implementation remains limited. The NECP has not yet been finalised or notified, and key elements such as the 2030 climate target are not embedded in legislation. A long-term strategy has not yet been adopted, and further alignment with EU governance requirements, including MRVA systems, is still required.

Montenegro has an established legal framework for climate governance based on the Climate Change Law adopted by the Parliament of Montenegro on 11 December 2025, replacing the 2019 Climate Change Law and strengthening alignment with the EU acquis. The NECP was adopted by the Government of Montenegro in December 2025 and notified to the Energy Community Secretariat.

North Macedonia continued to advance policy alignment through implementation of its NECP and preparation of additional strategic documents, including climate-related legislation still under development.

Serbia continued aligning its legislative framework with the EU acquis, focusing on implementation of previously adopted laws and further development of carbon pricing mechanisms.

Economy	Description	2025
Albania	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)	60%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	80%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	84%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	88%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	25%
	MRVA	28%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)	3%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	0%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	12%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	0%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	41%

Economy	Description	2025
	MRVA	0%
Kosovo*	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)	27%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	0%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	66%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	0%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	25%
	MRVA	6%
Montenegro	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)*	15%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	0%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	55%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	0%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	25%
	MRVA	49%
North Macedonia	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)	40%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	80%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	23%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	85%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	44%
	MRVA	0%
Serbia	NECP and Integrated Progress Report (IPR)	97%
	Greenhouse Gas 2030 Target	80%
	Domestic climate reporting systems	75%
	2030 Renewable energy targets	65%
	Long-term strategy and climate neutrality	69%
	MRVA	88%

Table 3: Progress indicators for Action 8: Review and revise, where necessary, all relevant legislation to support progressive decarbonisation of the energy sector

* The data presented reflect the status at the time of preparation of the Energy Community Secretariat Implementation Report (November 2025). Montenegro subsequently notified its NECP to the Secretariat in December 2025.

Across the region, NECPs remain a central policy instrument. While some WB6 have already adopted them, others are in different stages of preparation and updating. In parallel, progress has been observed in establishing Monitoring, Reporting, Verification and Accreditation (MRVA) systems, which are essential for future alignment with the EU Emissions Trading System.

Action 9	Prepare an assessment of socio-economic impact of decarbonisation at domestic and regional levels
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Progress on producing a comprehensive domestic socio-economic assessment of decarbonisation remains limited in 2025, though the analytical landscape has deepened considerably compared to previous reporting periods. The foundation laid by the two RCC/GIZ policy briefs validated in 2024 on mitigating negative social and labour market impacts of the energy transition and on addressing vulnerable groups including coal workers and women - continues to inform regional policy dialogue, but translating their recommendations into domestic action plans with assigned institutional responsibilities and budgetary backing has not occurred in any WB6.

The most significant new analytical contribution in 2025 comes from the OECD's report *Energy Prices and Subsidies in the Western Balkans: Reforms for a Fair and Green Future* (May 2025)²², which for the first time provides a quantified macroeconomic assessment of energy subsidy reform scenarios for the region. The report finds that between 2025 and 2030, WB6 governments are projected to disburse approximately €4.2 billion in financial support to the energy sector under current policies, while generating €14 billion in benefits through energy consumption — a ratio that underscores the fiscal unsustainability of the status quo. Crucially, the OECD modelling shows that removal of direct coal production subsidies has modest but positive GDP effects (expansionary impacts of 0.01–0.06 basis points), challenging the political economy argument that fossil fuel support is necessary for growth. Without structural reform, the report warns that WB6 CO₂ emissions per capita — already high relative to the region's income level — would reach 4.5 times the current EU average if the WB6 continue their current development trajectory until they reach today's EU income level.

The World Bank's Climate and Development Report (CCDR) for the Western Balkans Six, updated in early 2025, provides the most detailed domestic-level assessment available²³. It estimates that the WB6 would need to invest an additional US\$32 billion, equivalent to 2.1% of GDP per year through 2050, to achieve economy-wide net zero — a significant but manageable investment provided structural reforms are undertaken in parallel. Under a net zero scenario with appropriate reforms, the CCDR projects positive GDP outcomes, driven by lower emissions, improved competitiveness vis-à-vis CBAM obligations, and benefits under the European Green Deal and Western Balkans Growth Plan framework. Climate inaction, by contrast, carries a steep cost: combined damages from droughts, heat stress and riverine flooding are modelled at 8.9% of GDP under a moderate emissions pathway (RCP 4.5) by 2050, rising to 16.8% under a weighted scenario that includes seismic risk.

The social dimension of the transition has gained greater visibility in 2025 through the World Economic Forum's platform, which highlighted that nearly 3 million jobs in the Western Balkans Six are either directly exposed to climate shocks or at risk due to the green transition, and that in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina alone, over 29,000 jobs tied to coal are at risk²⁴. These figures, set against the absence of adopted just transition plans in most WB6, point to a growing structural gap between the analytical understanding of transition risks and the institutional readiness to manage them. North Macedonia remains the most advanced in this regard, having adopted a Just Transition Roadmap and an Accelerated Coal Transition Investment Plan²⁵ that are specifically designed to address the socioeconomic implications of phasing out TPP Oslomej and other coal assets in the Southwest Planning Region.

The Energy Community's CBAM Readiness Tracker (October 2025)²⁶ estimated the annual CBAM financial exposure of EU importers of electricity could reach €1.17 billion. According to the data for 2024, EU importers of electricity from and transiting through Serbia face the largest share at an estimated €612.5 million annually, followed by North Macedonia (€200 million), Montenegro (€190 million), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (€158 million)²⁷. No WB6 achieved the market coupling nor the equivalent carbon pricing recognition required for

²² https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/energy-prices-and-subsidies-in-the-western-balkans_082ea26a-en.html

²³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/07/17/western-balkan-economies-need-to-strengthen-climate-resilience-to-protect-people-and-boost-growth-wbg-report>

²⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/07/climate-change-is-already-rewriting-the-job-market-in-the-western-balkans/>

²⁵ <https://justtransitionfinance.org/casestudy/north-macedonia-tapping-multilateral-climate-finance-to-kickstart-an-economy-wide-just-transition/>

²⁶ <https://www.energy-community.org/news/Energy-Community-News/2025/10/20.html>

²⁷ Energy Community, 2025, CBAM-Readiness Tracker. Available at: https://www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:78740bd6-dba0-4e8b-855c-69f00c84bc73/25343_EC_CBAM_v09_AU_pages_LQ.pdf

a CBAM exemption by the January 2026 deadline, meaning that exporting firms are now facing direct financial obligations at the EU border: a development that is translating abstract carbon pricing debates into immediate commercial pressure and, for the first time, creating a domestic business constituency for accelerated decarbonisation.

Despite this broader analytical progress, the core obligation of Action 9 - the preparation of formal, government-endorsed socio-economic impact assessments at the domestic level leaves space for progress in most WB6. Albania, Kosovo*, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not produced dedicated assessments. In Serbia and Montenegro, relevant analytical work is embedded in NECP processes and energy strategy development but has not been published as a standalone assessment document. The gap between regional and international analytical output and domestic policy integration continues to represent the primary obstacle to meaningful progress under this action.

Action 10 | Prioritise energy efficiency and improve it in all sectors

Progress on prioritising and improving energy efficiency across all sectors in the WB6 shows a varied picture. Some have made clear advances, indicating strengthened policies, increased implementation of efficiency measures, or greater institutional capacity to drive improvements. This reflects a growing focus on energy efficiency as a strategic priority.

Others show little change or even a slight decline, suggesting challenges in maintaining momentum or translating policy into tangible results. In these cases, structural, financial, or administrative barriers may be limiting further progress. Several participants are already at a relatively high level of energy efficiency prioritisation, and their incremental gains suggest ongoing fine-tuning rather than major reforms. While the region sees pockets of strong progress, the trajectory is uneven. Some WB6 are advancing steadily, others are stagnating or facing setbacks, highlighting the need for targeted support and consistent policy enforcement to achieve broader improvements.

WB6	2023	2024
Albania	55%	65%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49%	45%
Kosovo*	71%	64%
Montenegro	79%	78%
North Macedonia	66%	68%
Serbia	83%	86%

Table 4: Progress Indicators: Prioritise energy efficiency and improve it in all sectors²⁸

The data on energy intensity and trends for the WB6 indicates that the region is generally becoming more energy efficient, although performance varies. The ratio of final energy consumption (FEC) to gross available energy highlights how efficiently energy is being used relative to what is available. Some WB6 have higher ratios, suggesting that a larger share of the available energy is actually consumed, which may reflect less efficient conversion, distribution, or end-use practices. Others show lower ratios, pointing to either lower consumption relative to supply or more efficient energy management. Energy intensity values, which measure energy use per unit of economic output, differ significantly across the region. WB6 with lower intensity are using energy more efficiently relative to their economic activity, while higher values indicate greater energy use per unit of output and potential room for efficiency improvements. Trends in energy intensity are uniformly negative, meaning that all

²⁸ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2024, Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2025

WB6 are reducing the amount of energy required to generate economic value. Some are achieving faster reductions, suggesting more effective energy efficiency measures, structural changes in the economy, or improvements in technology. Others are reducing energy intensity more slowly, indicating gradual progress and potential for further improvement. The region is moving towards greater energy efficiency, but the pace and scale of improvement vary, reflecting differences in economic structure, energy management practices, and policy effectiveness.

WB6	Gross available energy (ktoe)	FEC (ktoe)	FEC to Gross available energy ratio	Energy intensity value (ktoe/mil €)	Energy intensity trend
Albania	2234	1942	86.9%	0.17	-4.0%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6951	4405	63.4%	0.39	-6.8%
Kosovo*	2552	1526	59.8%	0.37	-7.9%
Montenegro	1099	788	71.7%	0.25	-2.7%
North Macedonia	2701	1794	66.4%	0.29	-3.8%
Serbia	15970	9833	61.6%	0.37	-6.4%

Table 5: Energy intensity value and trend²⁹

Energy efficiency in the WB6 clearly requires substantial improvement to reach the EU average, both in terms of converting gross available energy into final energy consumption and in using energy efficiently to generate economic output. However, there is a lack of detailed analysis on the quality and sustainability of nominal GDP growth in the region, particularly once the current phase of infrastructure and tourism-related construction slows down. Therefore, the apparent improvements in energy intensity should be interpreted cautiously, as they may not fully reflect long-term efficiency gains.

Transport provides another example of how policy impacts energy use. Despite advances in vehicle technology and efficiency, fuel consumption in the transport sector has continued to rise. This reflects a growing reliance on road transport at the expense of rail and waterborne transport. While this trend contributes to GDP growth, much of it depends on imported fossil fuels. Road transport benefits from infrastructure investment and generates higher fiscal revenues and service sector growth compared to other energy uses, such as the primary solid fuel value chain, which contributes minimally to fiscal revenues.

As a result, the increase in transport fuel use may appear to support GDP and energy efficiency metrics, but it is not necessarily sustainable. Inefficient use of fuel, such as vehicles idling in congested urban areas, can still generate significant economic output per unit of energy, masking inefficiencies. Rising fuel consumption in transport therefore requires careful policy attention, not only to maintain overall energy efficiency and energy security, but also to address environmental impacts such as air pollution.

The data show a clear long-term upward trend in transport energy consumption across most WB6, although with temporary declines during specific periods.

In the early years, several WB6 experienced strong growth in transport energy use, reflecting economic recovery, rising vehicle ownership and expanding road traffic. This upward

²⁹ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2025

trajectory continued for much of the following decade, although some WB6 saw short-term fluctuations linked to economic cycles.

Around the period of the global financial crisis, a slowdown or temporary decline is visible in several cases. After that, transport energy consumption resumed its growth path, often reaching new peaks towards the end of the observed period. This suggests increasing reliance on road transport, expanding mobility demand and continued growth in passenger and freight activity.

A notable interruption appears around the pandemic period, when most WB6 recorded a visible drop in transport energy consumption. This decline is consistent with reduced mobility, travel restrictions and lower economic activity. However, the rebound in the years that followed is strong, with many WB6 surpassing their pre-pandemic levels, indicating a rapid return of transport demand.

The regional pattern points to structurally increasing transport energy use over the long term. This trend likely reflects growing motorisation, infrastructure expansion and a dominant role of road transport. From an energy efficiency and energy security perspective, the persistent growth in consumption suggests that improvements in vehicle technology have not been sufficient to offset rising demand for transport services.

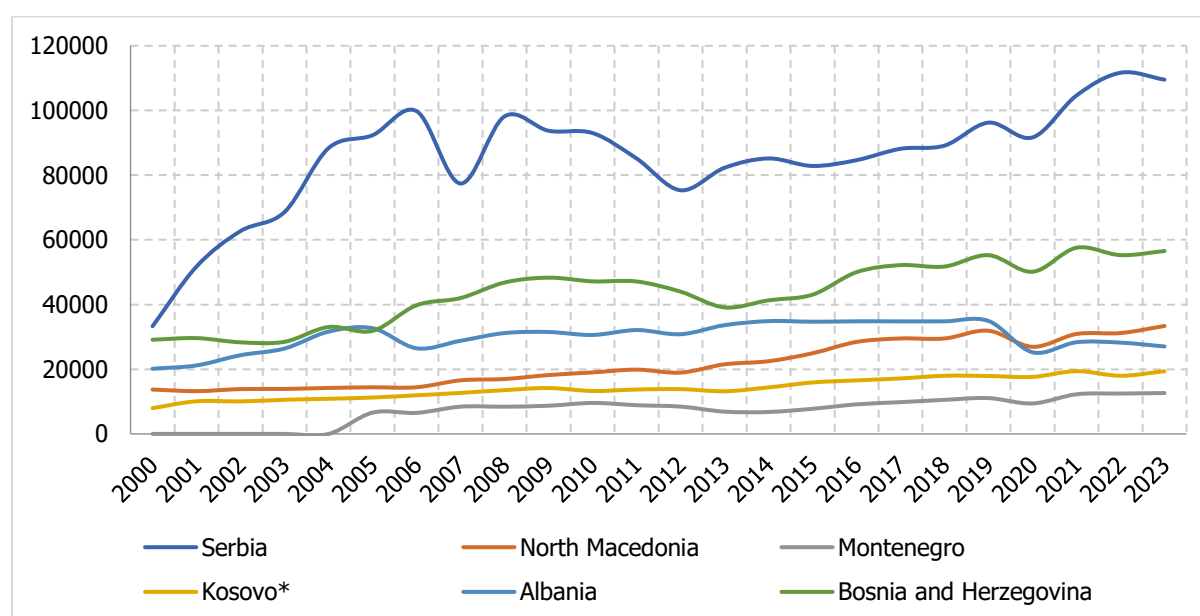


Figure 1: Evolution of total final consumption in transport in WB6 since 2000 in TJ³⁰

Action 11

Transposition and full enforcement of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive

Progress on the transposition and enforcement of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive shows an overall positive trend, although the pace differs across the WB6. Some WB6 have made clear forward steps and are now approaching full alignment and implementation. Their recent improvements suggest strengthened legislative transposition and more effective enforcement mechanisms.

Others show only marginal advancement, indicating gradual but limited institutional or regulatory development. In these cases, progress appears incremental rather than structural. A

³⁰ IEA, Energy Statistics Data Browser

few participants remain unchanged compared to the previous year. This stability may reflect either consolidation at an already advanced stage or stalled reform efforts where further legal or administrative steps are still pending. One economy continues to lag behind the regional frontrunners, despite some improvement. This suggests that deeper reforms and stronger enforcement capacity are still required. The regional picture is moderately encouraging, with notable progress in several cases, but uneven implementation and enforcement remain key challenges.

WB6	2024	2025
Albania	86%	94%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	66%	67%
Kosovo*	89%	89%
Montenegro	90%	98%
North Macedonia	51%	56%
Serbia	64%	64%

Table 6: Progress Indicators: Transposition and full enforcement of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive³¹

Energy performance of buildings is also affected by renewable energy policies including promotion of self-consumption, energy communities and renewable energy in heating and cooling. The progress on renewable energy policies that influence energy use and building performance shows a mixed picture across the region.

In the area of self-consumption and energy communities, most WB6 are positioned at a similar and relatively advanced stage. This suggests that the legal and regulatory frameworks enabling prosumers and collective energy initiatives are largely in place across much of the region. One economy stands out as having fully implemented this framework, indicating a mature policy environment. In contrast, another remains at a more moderate stage, pointing to remaining gaps in regulatory clarity or practical implementation.

Regarding renewable energy in heating and cooling, the situation is more uneven. Some WB6 have made substantial progress in integrating renewable solutions into heating and cooling systems, reflecting stronger policy support and implementation measures in this segment. Others remain at an early stage, where regulatory development, incentives, or market uptake appear limited. A few are positioned in the middle, indicating partial progress but still considerable room for improvement.

Data for policy measures with tangible long-term effects that link building performance improvements with energy poverty eradication for 2024 is not yet available. While frameworks for self-consumption and energy communities appear relatively well developed across the region, renewable heating and cooling policies show greater disparities and represent a more significant area for further advancement.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Self-consumption and energy communities	75%	75%	75%	75%	50%	100%

³¹ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2024, Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2025

Renewable energy in heating and cooling	32%	45%	83%	70%	33%	83%
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Table 7: Renewable energy policies that may affect energy use and performance in buildings³²

Action 12	Support private and public buildings renovation schemes and secure appropriate financing
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Minimal progress is observed across the region. Implementation is slowing down. Progress across the WB6 is largely stable rather than dynamic. A few WB6 show slight forward movement, indicating continued but gradual strengthening of renovation schemes and financing mechanisms. However, most remain at the same level as the previous year, suggesting limited momentum in expanding or deepening reforms during the observed period. Some WB6 appear to be at an advanced stage of implementation and are maintaining their position, which may indicate consolidation rather than expansion. Others remain at a mid-level, where further structural improvements would be needed to accelerate progress. The regional picture reflects steadiness with modest improvements in selected cases, but no broad acceleration in advancing renovation support schemes and securing financing.

WB6	2023	2024
Albania	43%	46%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49%	49%
Kosovo*	73%	73%
Montenegro	69%	69%
North Macedonia	61%	63%
Serbia	96%	96%

Table 8: Progress Indicators: Support private and public buildings renovation schemes and secure appropriate financing³³

Although different support programmes, loans and leasing instruments exist, including through some utilities, private investment in building renovation remains limited. This is difficult to justify given the financial liquidity available among households. A significant amount of private savings is held in bank deposits that generate very low returns, yet these funds are not being redirected towards renovation projects. This suggests that structural factors such as the tax framework, weak protection of property rights and limited contract enforcement may be discouraging private investors.

In the industrial and commercial sector, investment has been directed primarily towards on-site renewable energy solutions rather than comprehensive energy efficiency improvements. Businesses have focused on small solar installations, wind turbines, biomass boilers and heat pumps, largely in response to unreliable energy supply and sharp increases in electricity prices. At the same time, several large and energy intensive industries have scaled down or ceased operations. Where energy efficiency measures had previously been implemented, these investments have in some cases lost relevance due to reduced production activity. Broader risks

³² Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2025

³³ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2024, Energy Community Annual Implementation Report 2025

such as energy insecurity, exposure to flooding, unclear property ownership and regulatory instability continue to discourage long-term capital investment.

A central challenge lies in ensuring that available renovation funds reach households that lack the financial capacity to invest independently. Many existing schemes are structured in a way that primarily benefits households with sufficient income which seek financial leverage rather than basic support. As a result, there is a missed opportunity to address energy poverty through improvements in building efficiency. Designing targeted support for energy poor households involves balancing investment between upgrading building envelopes and replacing inefficient heating systems. Given the widespread use of outdated solid fuel stoves and the availability of affordable alternatives, a combined approach appears reasonable.

In Kosovo*, Energy Efficiency Fund (KEEF) has become the central vehicle for delivering energy efficiency investments, spanning public buildings, residential renovation and targeted support for socially vulnerable households. Its public buildings programme, EU co-financed under the Regional Energy Efficiency Programme (REEP) and now entering implementation, together with its household and vulnerable-household schemes, represents one of the region's more developed institutional models for converting renovation financing into delivery.

Action 13	Increase the share of renewable energy sources and provide the necessary investment conditions
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Progress under Action 13 is assessed through indicators on renewable energy capacity growth, total installed capacity and the quality of support schemes. The data below provide an overview of recent developments and investment conditions across the WB6.

Economy	Parameter	2024
Albania	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+279
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	3.005
	Quality of support scheme	90%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+515
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	3.127
	Quality of support scheme	40%
Kosovo*	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+4
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	281
	Quality of support scheme	90%
Montenegro	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+27
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	866
	Quality of support scheme	70%
North Macedonia	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+351
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	1.663
	Quality of support scheme	65%
Serbia	Renewable energy capacity change 2023/2024 (MW)	+196
	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)	3.985
	Quality of support scheme	90%

Table 9: Progress indicators: Increase the share of renewable energy sources and provide the necessary investment conditions³⁴

³⁴ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report, November 2025

The data indicate uneven progress across the WB6 in increasing renewable energy capacity and improving investment conditions. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia recorded the highest annual increases in installed capacity in 2024, indicating a growing pipeline of renewable energy projects, particularly in solar and wind. In contrast, Kosovo* shows very limited capacity growth, reflecting ongoing structural constraints, including grid limitations and investment barriers. Albania and Serbia continue to maintain relatively high-quality support schemes, while Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces challenges in ensuring consistent and predictable investment frameworks. Montenegro has recorded moderate growth in renewable energy capacity, supported by a relatively robust support scheme. However, its overall installed capacity remains comparatively lower than in most of the other WB6.

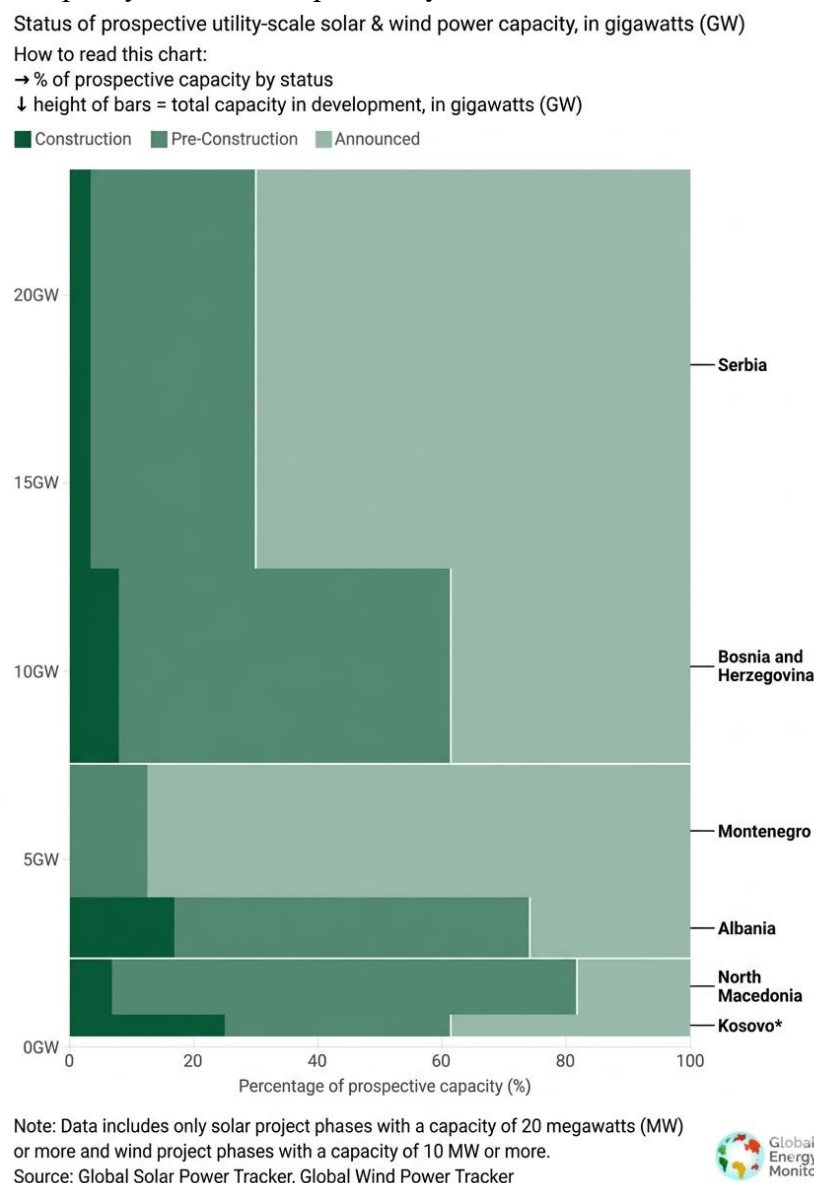


Figure 2: Status of prospective utility-scale solar and wind power capacity as of March 2024

The structure of renewable energy capacity in the WB6 (as shown in the table below) remains heavily dominated by hydropower, particularly large hydropower plants, which account for the majority of installed capacity in most WB6. Albania and Serbia exhibit the highest overall capacities, largely driven by significant hydropower infrastructure.

At the same time, the data highlight a gradual diversification of the renewable energy mix, with increasing shares of solar and wind energy. North Macedonia shows a notable expansion in solar capacity, while Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate relatively strong wind energy development.

Despite this progress, emerging technologies such as biomass and biogas remain marginal across the region, indicating untapped potential for further diversification. The limited deployment of these technologies suggests the need for targeted policy support and improved investment conditions.

Parameter	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Total capacities of renewable energy 2024 (MW)	3.005	3.127	281	866	1.663	3.985
Large hydropower	2.181	1.709	32	649	587	2.376
Pumped storage	-	420	-	-	-	614
Small hydropower <10 MW	375	169	96	56	133	129
Wind	-	219	137	118	82	606
Solar	449	608	14	43	848	179
Biomass	-	1	1	-	1	2
Biogas	-	2	-	-	12	79

Table 10: The structure of renewable energy capacity³⁵

Electricity prices represent an important factor influencing investment conditions and the competitiveness of renewable energy in the region. Variations in household electricity prices across the WB6 reflect differences in market structures, levels of regulation, and the extent of domestic-level intervention.

In several WB6, relatively low regulated electricity prices may limit incentives for investment in renewable energy and delay market-based reforms. At the same time, gradual price adjustments and market liberalisation are expected to play a key role in enabling further deployment of renewable energy projects and improving the financial viability of investments.

³⁵ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report, November 2025

Electricity prices for household consumers, second half 2025
(€ per kWh)

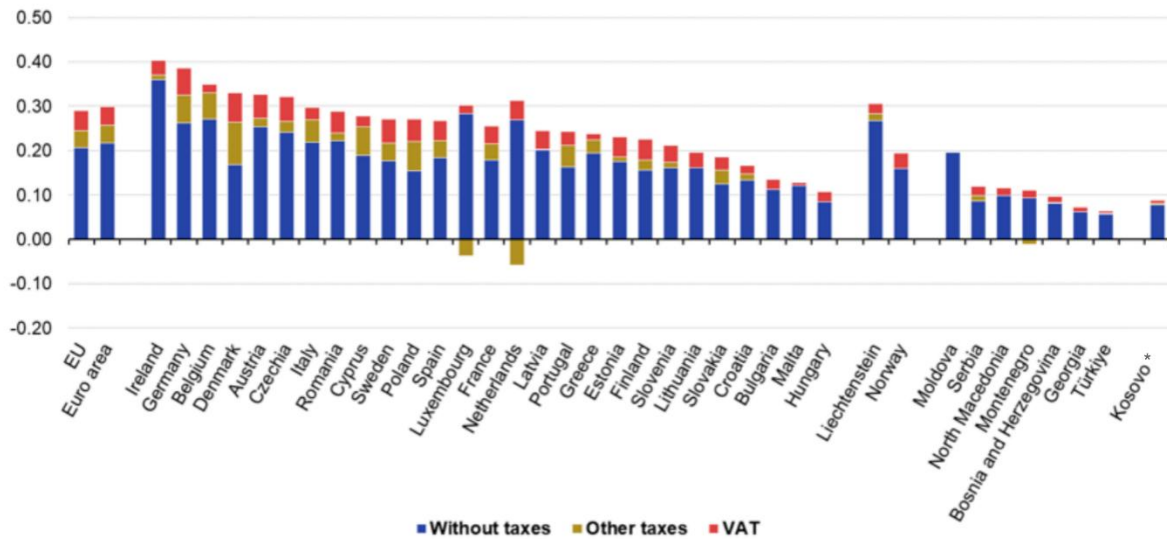


Figure 3: Electricity prices for household consumers, second half 2025 (EUR per kWh)³⁶

Action 14	Decrease and gradually phase out coal subsidies, strictly respecting state aid rules
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Enabling the phase-out of coal subsidies in the WB6 requires careful consideration of the underlying justifications, particularly in terms of energy security and social concerns.

According to the OECD (2025) report “Energy Prices and Subsidies in the Western Balkans: Reforms for a Fair and Green Future, OECD Development Pathways”, the coal sector remains a significant employer in the region, accounting for an estimated 33,782 direct jobs in coal mining, 7,728 direct jobs in coal-fired thermal power plants, and approximately 61,000 additional indirect jobs.

In the WB6 context, “phasing out coal subsidies” means reducing/ending any explicit or induced support that prolongs coal generation and removing implicit support by enforcing environmental obligations (LCPD/IED). Under the LCPD, large combustion plants either comply through a NERP pathway or operate under a time-limited opt-out pathway; when opt-out limits are ignored or NERP ceilings are persistently breached, the resulting regulatory forbearance functions as a subsidy-like advantage. In this context, the table below presents the number of installations covered by the LCPD, including those operating under the NERP and opt-out regimes.

	Albani a	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo *	Montenegr o	North Macedoni a	Serbi a
Number of plants falling	1*	13	5	1	8	17

³⁶ Eurostat (online data code: nrg_pc_204), 2025

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
under the LCPD						
Opted out plants	0	3	0	1	0	4
Plants falling under the NERP	0	10	5	0	8	13

Table 11: Installations under the Large Combustion Plants Directive (LCPD)

* *not in operation*

The data presented above illustrate the continued reliance on coal-based power generation across most WB6, as well as the scale of installations still operating under transitional compliance mechanisms.

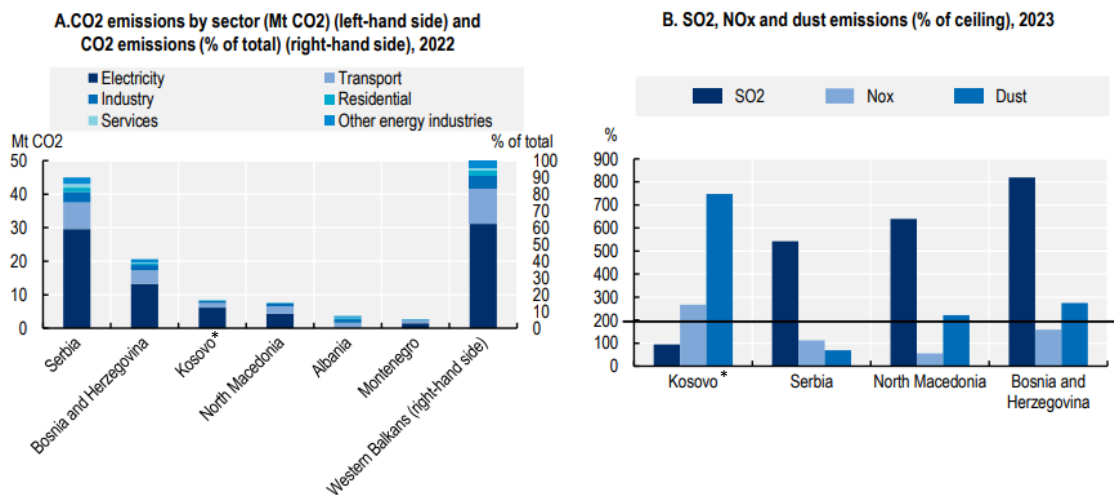


Figure 4: Emissions by sector in WB6

The LCPD regulates emissions of SO₂, NO_x, and dust from thermal power plants. Despite its entry into force in 2018, investments for compliance have been delayed, leading to widespread non-compliance in all WB6. In 2023, breaches of emission ceilings were reported for SO₂, NO_x, and dust in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Montenegro faces a related dispute settlement, with only Kosovo* achieving compliance with the SO₂ ceiling for the first time.

Large combustion plants remain the main source of GHG emissions, accounting for an average of 59% of total electricity generation in the region (ranging from 38% in Montenegro and North Macedonia, to 90% in Kosovo*). Non-compliance increases operational costs and reduces plant efficiency, and under CBAM, it will further pressure generators' revenues, incentivising investment in emission reduction or plant closure³⁷.

Action 15

Ensure participation in the Coal Regions in Transition initiative for the Western Balkans

³⁷ Energy Community CBAM – Readiness Tracker, 2025

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia participated in Coal Regions in Transition initiative for the WB6, when it was ongoing, while Albania did not participate, as the initiative was not applicable due to the absence of coal-dependent regions. By 2025, institutional participation across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia remained stable compared to previous reporting cycles. Engagement has primarily taken place through regional policy dialogue, exchange of experience and technical support mechanisms facilitated at regional level.

However, the 2025 regional assessment indicates that progress remains uneven, with tangible transition outcomes at economy level still limited. In particular, structured coal phase-out planning, detailed decommissioning schedules, and comprehensive socio-economic transformation strategies are not yet consistently developed across the WB6.

Region	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tuzla Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton, Ugljevik region, Gacko region
Kosovo*	Pristina District
Montenegro	Pljevlja region
North Macedonia	Bitola region, Kičevo region
Serbia	Kostolac region, Kolubara region, Obrenovac region, Pomoravlje region

Table 12: Coal Regions in Transition in the WB6³⁸

The level of operational implementation of the transition differs significantly across the WB6. While some WB6 have defined indicative timelines for phasing out coal in the electricity sector, others still lack established step-by-step plans for the closure of coal-fired power generation capacities at the economy level.

The NECP of Serbia foresees a coal phase-out by 2050, supported by a Just Transition Plan adopted in July 2025. Serbia has established a governance mechanism through an interministerial Government Committee and an intersectoral Working Group, though still lacking fully established financing mechanisms currently under consultation.

The earliest planned closure of coal-fired thermal power plants among the WB6 is set for 2027, as outlined in North Macedonia's Just Transition Roadmap Montenegro retains a long-term closure horizon for the Pljevlja thermal power plant (2041). Serbia has set a coal phase-out horizon for 2050, while Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to define a clear phase-out timeline.

From a regional perspective, coal phase-out commitments across the WB6 remain predominantly indicative rather than binding. Compared to earlier reporting cycles, the 2025 assessment does not indicate substantial acceleration in formalising detailed implementation pathways.

Membership in the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) remains uneven across the WB6. North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo* are members, whereas Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not³⁹. However, despite PPCA membership, only North Macedonia has adopted a Just Transition Roadmap for coal phase-out, while Montenegro and Kosovo* are still developing draft plans. Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not yet implemented operational coal exit strategies⁴⁰.

³⁸ Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, European Commission

³⁹ Energy Community Annual Implementation Report, November 2025

⁴⁰ Energy Community CBAM – Readiness Tracker, 2025

WB6	Draft NECP	PPCA
Albania	Not indicated, no coal used in electricity generation	Coal-free (electricity sector) PPCA member
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No phase-out in electricity generation ⁴¹	Not a member of PPCA
Kosovo*	No phase-out in electricity generation	2050 ⁴²
Montenegro	TPP Pljevlja is expected to be decommissioned by 2041 ⁴³	PPCA member, 2040
North Macedonia	No phase-out in electricity generation. However, the coal-fired thermal power plants (TPPs) in Bitola and Kičevo are scheduled for conversion by 2027.	PPCA member, 2030
Serbia	2050	Not a member of PPCA

Table 13: Coal phase-out timelines in NECPs and PPCA commitments across the WB6⁴⁴

The EU will continue to support the Just Transition for the Western Balkans Regions through a 3-year regional technical assistance action financed by the European Union under IPA III ((JET Balkans) aimed at responding to a shared need for a coordinated approach to managing the economic, social, and territorial implications of decarbonisation in coal-dependent and carbon-intensive contexts across the Western Balkans. The project will start in June 2026.

Action 16	Develop programmes for addressing energy poverty and financing schemes for household renovation and providing basic standards of living
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Progress across the WB6 on developing dedicated programmes to address energy poverty and establish accessible financing schemes for household renovation remained modest and uneven in 2025. The structural challenge is well-documented, as the share of people at risk of poverty across the region stood at 23.2% in 2024, and low-income households are disproportionately exposed to any upward movement in energy prices, as higher energy costs consume a larger share of their limited income⁴⁵. Yet, the financing instruments available to these households remain inadequate. The OECD finds that existing support programmes would need to be scaled by a factor of 2.5 for means-tested programmes and 4.6 for vulnerable customer programmes in Serbia - the economy with the most developed framework - to adequately compensate the most vulnerable.

The residential building sector is central to this challenge. The residential building industry accounts for between 30% and 60% of total final domestic energy consumption in WB6, compared to an EU average of 40%, with biomass accounting for 45% of residential energy use in 2020 and over 60% of all energy used for heating⁴⁶. Even under much higher renovation

⁴¹ According to the Policy scenario in the draft NECP, the share of coal in Bosnia and Herzegovina's energy transformation processes is projected at 70.1% in 2030. Under the Baseline scenario, which reflects projections based on existing policies and measures, the same indicator is expected to reach 80.46% in 2030.

⁴² Commitment as of December 2023: <https://poweringpastcoal.org/press-releases/the-united-states-heads-a-group-of-countries-making-new-commitments-to-phasing-out-coal/>

⁴³ NECP of Montenegro, final document, October 2025

⁴⁴ Energy Community CBAM – Readiness Tracker, 2025

⁴⁵ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/energy-prices-and-subsidies-in-the-western-balkans_082ea26a-en/full-report/social-protection-enabling-the-energy-transition-in-the-western-balkans_e3d654d4.html

⁴⁶ <https://wiiw.ac.at/the-energy-transition-in-the-western-balkans-the-status-quo-major-challenges-and-how-to-overcome-them-dlp-6896.pdf>

rates than those currently implemented, the WB6 would surpass the 50% share of renovated floor area only by 2038, meaning the renovation wave - as currently conceived - is too inefficient and slow to meaningfully mitigate the consequences of energy poverty within the relevant timeframe⁴⁷.

Serbia has made the most progress among WB6 in building a legislative and programmatic basis. It remains the only economy in the region with a legal definition of energy poverty, established through the 2021 Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy and 2025 Law on Energy, which defines energy poverty as resulting from a combination of low household income, large expenditure of disposable income on energy, and insufficient energy efficiency. The subsidy scheme for energy-vulnerable consumers (SEVC) was reformed in 2022 and amended in 2023 and 2025, expanding coverage to approximately 197,000 households at an estimated annual cost of EUR 17 million (in 2025), up from 75,000 beneficiaries and EUR 10 million in 2019. In 2022, the World Bank granted Serbia a USD 50 million loan for its Scaling Up Residential Clean Energy (SURCE) Project, aiming to provide clean heating solutions and rooftop solar panels for around 50,000 households over five years⁴⁸. However, the OECD's modelling confirms that even after these expansions, social protection instruments remain insufficient to cover the full scope of energy poverty. Comprehensive scheme linking renovation support to vulnerable household targeting is operational since 2024 within SURCE. Serbia had adopted its NECP in 2024 and supplemented this with a Just Energy Transition Plan adopted in July 2025⁴⁹.

Montenegro adopted its NECP in December 2025, setting out targets of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and a minimum 50% renewable energy share by 2030, and providing a framework for investments in grid infrastructure and a just transition for the Pljevlja coal region⁵⁰. The NECP adoption is the primary energy policy development of 2025 for Montenegro, but its content does not establish a dedicated programme linking renovation financing to energy-poor households. Montenegro's new Energy Law, adopted in March 2025 transposing Directive (EU) 2019/944, Energy Community and its Long-term Building Renovation Strategy published in June 2025, addresses household energy efficiency⁵¹.

The Energy Community Secretariat's 2025 Annual Implementation Report notes that Montenegro's existing support is largely limited to the electricity bill subsidy active since 2007, and warns that without additional measures, benefits from the green transition could be unequally distributed, further burdening already disadvantaged populations - particularly in rural areas⁵².

Montenegro's EKO Fund delivered the region's most visible household programme. By March 2025, more than 4,500 households were on the path to energy efficiency improvements, with over 2,500 applications approved and 27 Montenegro's companies engaged in implementation⁵³. EU funding of €8 million, supplemented by EKO Fund and Municipality of Pljevlja contributions, brought total programme value to over €15 million⁵⁴. Maximum grants

⁴⁷ <https://www.resfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Tackling-the-Immediate-Challenges-of-Energy-Poverty-in-the-Western-Balkans.-The-possible-role-for-the-EU.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://borgenproject.org/renewable-energy-in-serbia/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.mre.gov.rs/extfile/sr/12123/PLAN%20FOR%20JUST%20ENERGY%20TRANSITION%20FOR%20SERBIA%20UP%20TO%202030%20ADOPTED%20JULY%202025.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/montenegro-adopts-national-energy-and-climate-plan/>

⁵¹ Energy Community. 2025. Annual Implementation Report: Montenegro

⁵² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/montenegro>

⁵³ <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/press-releases/more-4500-households-montenegro-already-path-energy-efficiency>

⁵⁴ <https://energetska-efikasnost.me/en/2025/03/world-energy-efficiency-day/>

reached €10,000 per beneficiary for window replacements, thermal insulation, solar panels, and efficient heating systems⁵⁵. In February 2025, €2.5 million in subsidies was awarded to 15 hotels under a tourism-sector energy efficiency programme. A new household grant call opened in May 2025, and an appliance replacement scheme launched in October 2025⁵⁶.

Albania's most significant 2025 action on energy affordability was a reduction in the household electricity tariff, announced in January 2025 and effective from February. Through a proposal to the Energy Regulatory Authority, Albania approved a reduction for households consuming up to 700 kWh per month from 9.5 ALL/kWh to 8.5 ALL/kWh. Of roughly 1,070,000 household electricity contracts, approximately 95% fall within this bracket⁵⁷. According to Eurostat data, 38% of households in Albania are unable to heat their homes due to low incomes and high costs, making Albania the economy with the highest rate of energy poverty in Europe. Over one million families struggle to pay their heating energy bills, while 27% of the population faces ongoing difficulties in paying utility services regardless of income level⁵⁸.

At the strategic level, Albania's social protection strategy 2024–2030 aims to combat energy poverty by consolidating financial schemes and promoting the use of solar panels in rural areas⁵⁹. Albania's Reform Agenda (submitted to the European Commission in 2025) commits to gradual tariff adjustments to market prices accompanied by measures to address energy poverty, signalling that a more targeted approach is expected as part of EU alignment⁶⁰. However, as of 2025, no dedicated programme links renovation financing or heating improvement grants specifically to energy-poor households.

Bosnia and Herzegovina did not make progress on an economy-level energy poverty strategy or household renovation programme in 2025. In line with the competences of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including defining policies and basic principles, harmonisation of entity-level plans, and coordination of activities in the fields of energy and environmental protection at the international level, no central-level energy institution holds broad authority over social protection or building renovation, except for limited and sector-specific responsibilities. At the same time neither Bosnia and Herzegovina's entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina or Republika Srpska – has established equivalent institutional frameworks at the entity level.

The most significant 2025 government action in the energy/household space was in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it was focused on prosumers rather than the energy poor. The Operator for Renewable Energy Sources and Efficient Cogeneration of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a Programme for Co-Financing Household Prosumers (Decision published in the Official Gazette of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina No. 34/25) intended for individuals who are co-owners of residential buildings wishing to install renewable energy solutions⁶¹. However, this targets homeowners with capital to invest in solar, not households that cannot afford adequate heating.

⁵⁵ <http://energetska-efikasnost.me/en/>

⁵⁶ Energy Community. 2025. Annual Implementation Report: Montenegro

⁵⁷ <https://albaniantimes.al/albania-electricity-price-cut/>

⁵⁸ <https://recshqiperi.org/2025/07/30/albania-facing-the-challenge-of-energy-poverty-between-progress-in-sustainability-and-european-integration/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/albania>

⁶⁰ <https://reform-monitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Reform-agenda-Albania.pdf>

⁶¹ https://www.oieiek.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Program-prosumeri_sllist.pdf

Also in 2025, the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina formally launched development of a new Energy Strategy 2025–2035, with projections to 2055, coordinated by its Ministry of Energy, Mining and Industry, with completion expected within 14 months⁶². While this strategy is expected to address energy poverty as a cross-cutting theme, it presents a planning process rather than an operational programme.

The EEA's 2025 profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina confirms that energy poverty affects an estimated 30–40% of households, and that while the importance of addressing energy poverty is recognised in the Integrated NECP, with plans for the preparation of an energy poverty strategy, no such strategy has been adopted⁶³. The OECD's 2025 Western Balkans report identifies the root of this inaction directly: Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented governance system creates regulatory inconsistencies among different entities, delaying policy execution, and the success of any economy-wide climate or social energy plan depends on improved inter-entity governance co-ordination and structured implementation timelines that have not been established yet. The IMF's 2025 Article IV consultation mission similarly found that persistent political fragmentation, lack of consensus among governing bodies, and limited administrative capacity continue to obstruct the adoption and execution of key reforms – including in the energy sector⁶⁴.

North Macedonia's 2025 picture is one of genuine legislative progress. The most significant development was the adoption of a new Energy Law in May 2025. On 14 May 2025, the North Macedonia Assembly adopted a new Energy Law (published in the Official Gazette on 21 May), which introduces targeted social measures to protect energy-vulnerable consumers, including subsidies, deferred payment options, and priority access to essential services, aiming to reduce energy poverty⁶⁵. This formalises obligations that were previously aspirational and establishes the Council for Energy Transition.

In August 2025, North Macedonia launched the energy poverty package, which includes free inverter air conditioners for eligible vulnerable households⁶⁶. For financial support to cover electricity bills, eligible households include those with one or more members who have severe intellectual disabilities, the most severe physical disabilities, total vision impairment, or complete hearing impairment, with an application deadline set at the end of August 2025⁶⁷. However, this does not tackle the households that are energy poor due to low income or poor building quality, taking into consideration that energy poverty affects approximately every third household in North Macedonia⁶⁸.

Kosovo* does not have a formal legal definition of energy poverty yet, nor domestically established target for its reduction. While energy legislation recognises vulnerable consumers, standardised criteria for their identification are still lacking. Current support measures for low-income families include discounted electricity bills and provision of firewood during winter, with protection measures such as safeguards against disconnection and options for deferred payments.

⁶² <https://fbihvlada.gov.ba/hr/4-odluka-o-izradi-energetske-strategije-federacije-bosne-i-hercegovine-za-razdoblje-2025-2035-godina-sa-projekcijom-do-2055-godine>

⁶³ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

⁶⁴ <https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2025/07/01/cs-070125-bosnia-and-herzegovina-staff-concluding-statement-for-2025-aiv-consultation-mission>

⁶⁵ <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=e629a98e-71ec-470d-b980-15aff2e4ef99>

⁶⁶ <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/north-macedonia-tackles-energy-poverty-with-free-inverter-air-conditioners/>

⁶⁷ <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/north-macedonia-tackles-energy-poverty-with-free-inverter-air-conditioners/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.just-transition.info/energy-poverty-a-core-concern-for-the-just-transition-process-in-north-macedonia/>

Since 2025, the UNDP project Inclusive and Just Pathway to 2030: Green Energy Future, funded by Denmark and implemented by the Energy Efficiency Fund (KEEF) and the Ministry of Economy, has been retrofitting vulnerable households, with a target of up to 200 homes from the social assistance list by 2027⁶⁹.

In parallel, since 2022, several public calls have been launched to support the uptake of energy efficient heating systems, with higher subsidy levels provided to beneficiaries of social assistance schemes. According to the latest figures from 2018, 40.2% of households were unable to keep their homes adequately warm, while more recent data are not available through Eurostat.

2.3 Sustainable Transport Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with Sustainable Transport Roadmap actions are as follows:

- WB6 need to enhance the efficiency and timeliness of transposing key EU directives and regulations, particularly in priority areas such as: alternative fuels, digitalisation, interoperability, and road safety, in order to ensure full alignment with EU standards.
- WB6 need to be further encouraged and assisted in the consistent implementation of all action plans within defined timeframes. Recognising the need for consistent implementation of action plans, a realistic timeframe must be defined.
- The activities of the Transport Community and EU institutions need to be synchronised with regard to WB6 obligations in the area of transport and traffic.
- The capacities of competent institutions for managing and overseeing the implementation of sustainable and smart mobility solutions need to be further strengthened, including the establishment or strengthening of institutions for traffic management, safety, and environmental protection.
- A key priority is to accelerate investments in electric vehicle infrastructure, multimodal terminals, digital platforms, and digitalisation of processes, particularly in the context of EU financial instruments and regional projects.
- Ensure resilience to climate change in the development of transport infrastructure, highlighting the importance of applying TEN-T standards to ensure system resilience.
- Each WB6 should adopt and swiftly implement climate change adaptation strategies and plans, including vulnerability assessments and measures to protect transport infrastructure from natural and other disasters.
- Cooperation between WB6 in the areas of cross-border/boundary infrastructure, interoperability, safety, and traffic management needs to be improved through regional platforms, joint projects, and the exchange of good practices.
- Focus on developing policies for inclusive transport, including support for women and minority groups, persons with disabilities, and the implementation of safety and accessibility measures.
- Develop research and development projects in the areas of AI, IoT, autonomous vehicles, logistics, and other innovative solutions, and establish regional centres of excellence for training and knowledge transfer.
- Involve all levels of governance, from local to economy-level, in the development and application of digital platforms for traffic management, smart logistics, and mobility services.

⁶⁹ <https://www.undp.org/kosovo/projects/inclusive-and-just-pathway-2030-green-energy-future>

- Ensure the availability of financial resources through EU funds, international financial institutions, and public-private partnerships for sustainable and smart transport projects.
- Establish clear KPIs and monitoring mechanisms to track the implementation of strategies and plans, and regularly report on results and challenges, enabling timely adjustment of policies and measures.

2.3.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 17	Support the development of smart transport infrastructure, promote fostering of innovative technologies (such as paperless transport, artificial intelligence, multimodal passengers ticketing, mobility as a service, border/boundary crossing applications, 5G corridors, etc.)
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The future development of the WB6 transport system and its planning is governed by the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (SSMS), as well as the individual transport strategies of WB6, which aim to integrate the transport sector into the European Union framework in line with the highest legal and technical standards.

The WB6 continued to identify priority investments for multimodal terminals and logistics centres, and in technical cooperation with the Transport Community Treaty (TCT), nine priority multimodal freight terminals have been identified in the region that could potentially be proposed for inclusion in the TEN-T network.

However, multimodal logistics operations and governance frameworks remain underdeveloped, and investments in combined transport terminals are still limited. The study on Electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) architecture and digital freight documentation provides the basis for future efficiency improvements in freight transport and logistics⁷⁰.

In the area of developing smart transport infrastructure and providing better incentives for users, the WB6 are seeking to advance the modernisation of electronic tolling systems and cross-border/boundary interoperability. Serbia and North Macedonia have maintained full interoperability of electronic tolling, while Montenegro achieved interoperability with Serbia during 2024 and continued testing connections with North Macedonia. In Albania, a Road Management Unit was established in November 2024 with responsibility for implementing and managing tolling⁷¹. Furthermore, progress has been made in implementing the Road Infrastructure Safety Management Directive (2008/96/EC) and its 2019 amendment.

Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have introduced legal guidelines and regulations, although implementation remains limited. Kosovo* has transposed the Directive into its Law on Roads. Montenegro and Serbia demonstrated strong institutional capacities with authorised auditors conducting Road Safety Inspections (RSI), while North Macedonia advanced through a combination of legislative reforms, major projects, and ITS implementation. Some progress was also noted in the implementation of the Directive on minimum safety requirements for tunnels (2004/54/EC). Albania included it in its draft Road Safety Strategy, and Kosovo*

⁷⁰https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁷¹https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

transposed it into its Law on Roads. Montenegro not only transposed the Directive but also extended its scope to tunnels shorter than 500 metres and reported on an ITS project supported by the EBRD. In contrast, North Macedonia and Serbia reported no progress⁷².

The SSMS sets 2030 as the target for paperless freight transport, while the Western Balkans Six continue to aim for 2035.

Regulation (EU) 2020/1056 on electronic freight transport information (eFTI) provides a framework for digitalising cargo documentation across all modes of transport.

A study⁷³ on the introduction of e-freight in WB6 and the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2020/1056 on e-freight information demonstrated significant efficiency gains, reflected in reductions in administrative costs, printing and archiving costs, and compliance costs. No progress has yet been achieved in transposing Regulation 2020/1056 into WB6⁷⁴. New momentum for advancing electronic freight transport in the region is expected under the reform agenda, which prioritises the transposition and implementation of EU e-freight legislation.

The EU4Digital⁷⁵ programme, launched in 2024 by DG NEAR, co-financed by the EU and BMZ and implemented by GIZ, supports digital transformation in WB6 with one of its three pillars dedicated to e-freight. It will deliver domestic eFTI implementation plans for all WB6, covering strategic, legal, technical and financial prerequisites. Specific actions include awareness raising, a review of existing regulations and IT solutions, capacity building for public bodies, private sector engagement, plan development, and technical eFTI architecture pilot projects.

Furthermore, no progress has been made in WB6 on providing multimodal travel information services in accordance with Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/1926⁷⁶, supplementing Directive 2010/40/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council. The activities to transpose Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/1926 on Multimodal Travel Information Services (MMTIS) are underway only in Albania. In September 2024, TCT published a tender to assess the establishment of interoperable domestic Access Points (NAPs) and domestic Bodies (NBs) across WB6, in line with ITS Directive (EU) 2023/2661, with the aim of improving data integration, compliance and regional connectivity.⁷⁷

Albania made progress with regard to Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/670⁷⁸ on real-time traffic information (RTTI) services through partial transposition via Ministerial Guideline No. 12 of 30 December 2024. The guideline establishes the legal framework for RTTI services, designates the Albania's Roads Authority (ARA) as the future NAP, and proposes the Transport Institute as the NB. Some provisions applicable only to EU Member States were not included due to Albania's candidate status, and full transposition is targeted by 2027. Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs) for telematic applications in freight and passenger traffic define standards for digital communication and data exchange across railway networks.

Progress on transposing TSIs for telematic applications in freight and passenger traffic remains uneven. Serbia and Montenegro have achieved full transposition, Kosovo* has partially

⁷² https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁷³ <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Deployment-of-e-freight-in-the-Western-Balkans-Final-report.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02020R1056-20250109>

⁷⁵ <https://eufordigital.eu/>

⁷⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02017R1926-20240304>

⁷⁷ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302661

⁷⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0670>

transposed, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have yet to do so. This discrepancy highlights the varying levels of readiness across the region and underlines the need for stronger efforts to ensure full compliance with EU interoperability standards. New momentum for advancing multimodal passenger information services in the region is expected with the introduction of the New Growth Plan and its reform agendas⁷⁹, which prioritise the transposition and implementation of EU ITS legislation⁸⁰. All regional partners will actively work on developing an ITS strategy across different modes of transport and implementing ITS on motorways, railways, and inland waterways.

Although artificial intelligence is sporadically applied in some projects, no WB6 has yet established a comprehensive domestic strategic plan for artificial intelligence (AI), though initial steps are emerging through broader digital transformation policies. Digital Agenda of Albania 2022–2026 recognises AI as a cross-sectoral priority, with pilot ITS, smart ticketing and logistics digitalisation initiatives providing a foundation for future AI applications in transport.

Key priorities for advancing innovative solutions include developing research and innovation partnerships within WB6 and with EU bodies, fostering interdisciplinary cooperation between public institutions and universities on green and digital mobility, establishing innovation hubs, and preparing an AI plan for mobility.⁸¹ Based on the Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (WB DESI) for 2024⁸², there is significant progress in the digital infrastructure dimension compared to the previous assessment. However, WB6 continue to lag behind the EU in both network coverage and uptake of fast fixed-line broadband services. 5G services are already available in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo*, and Albania, while the auction process is currently underway in Serbia⁸³. Figure 5: Speed test shows the median mobile data download test speed for WB6 and neighbouring EU Member States for 2025.

⁷⁹ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/cid-amending-implementing-decision-c2024-7375-regards-addition-reform-agenda-bosnia-and-herzegovina_en

⁸⁰ https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁸¹ https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁸² file:///C:/Users/Korisnik/Downloads/DESI-2024-a_31.pdf

⁸³ <https://www.oookla.com/articles/serbia-5g-2026>

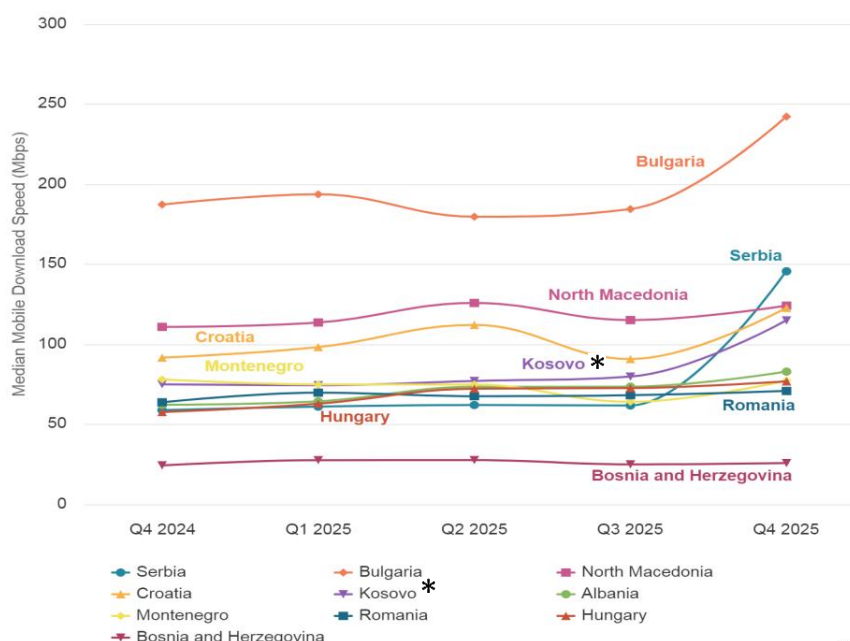


Figure 5: Speed test

Action 18 Implement the Regional Action Plan for Rail Reforms

The average implementation rate of the Regional Railway Action Plan stands at 58%. Table 14 shows the implementation rate of the regional action plan for all WB6.

Economy	2023	2024	2025
Albania	47	51	45
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51	56	52
Kosovo*	61	70	62
Montenegro	65	67	60
North Macedonia	61	62	62
Serbia	91	93	65
WB6	62	66	57.6

Table 14: Overall progress of the Regional Railway Reform Action Plan for WB6

As illustrated in Table 14, 2025 recorded a decrease in the overall progress of the Regional Railway Reform Action Plan for WB6. Overall progress regarding the openness of the railway market of WB6 stands at 62%. In 2015, the WB6 railway market was completely closed to private operators. Since then, significant liberalisation has taken place, driven by the connectivity reform agenda under the Berlin Process. Today, eighteen private freight operators are active in WB6, with the exception of North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the market remains closed. However, without market opening across WB6, current progress may not be economically or operationally sustainable. To address this, WB6 have committed to further EU legislative alignment, market liberalisation, and improved infrastructure governance through contracts between infrastructure managers and competent authorities. During the reporting period, the following was noted:⁸⁴

- Montenegro adopted a new Railway Law – a significant step towards full alignment with EU railway legislation. A new Railway Agency was established, combining the competencies of the NSA and RRA;

⁸⁴<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

- Bosnia and Herzegovina: Railways of Republika Srpska signed both a Multiannual Infrastructure Agreement and a Public Service Obligation Contract;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to carry out structural separation. However, progress is visible in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Republika Srpska, where the public railway operator began functioning as a holding company from January 2025, with a clear internal separation of infrastructure and operations;
- Albania established a new Railway Regulatory Agency and, by adopting the Separation Act of 2024, legally divided its domestic railway company (HSH) into separate infrastructure and operational entities.

North Macedonia's infrastructure manager signed a five-year multiannual infrastructure contract. Figure 6 showcases the open railway market rate for all WB6.

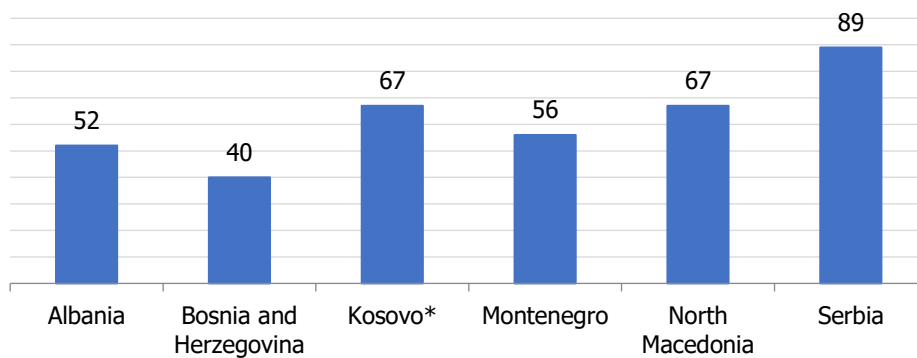


Figure 6: Percentage openness of the WB6 railway market for 2025

Overall progress regarding train driver licensing stands at 72%. No further progress was achieved during the reporting period on train driver licensing. The focus remains on full implementation of Directive 2007/59/EC⁸⁵, Regulation (EU) 2019/554⁸⁶ and Regulation (EU) 36/2010⁸⁷.

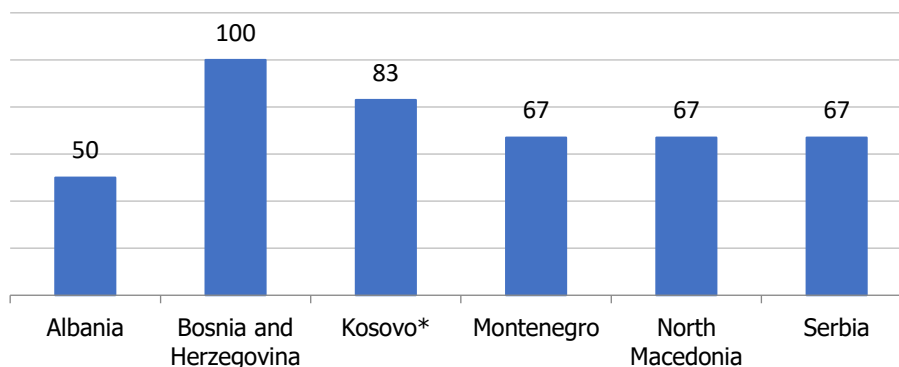


Figure 7: Percentage progress rate of WB6 regarding train driver licensing for 2025

WB6 wishing to integrate with the European TEN-T network must align their legislation with the standards and requirements set out in Annex I.2 of the TCT,⁸⁸ which contains all relevant EU legal acts on railways. All WB6 are obliged to transpose them into domestic legislation, including ensuring interoperability of railway systems, facilitating cross-border/boundary traffic, and improving overall regional connectivity. To support this, partners are required to transpose and implement Directive 2008/57/EC and its updated version, Directive (EU)

⁸⁵<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32007L0059>

⁸⁶<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0554>

⁸⁷<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010R0036>

⁸⁸https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Transport-Community-Treaty.MTN_.pdf

2016/797,⁸⁹ which is part of the 4th Railway Package. In parallel, the necessary steps include the establishment of an electronic rolling stock register, in line with the European Vehicle Register (EVR), and an infrastructure register, aligned with the European Register of Infrastructure (RINF). During the reporting period, the following was noted:

- Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia advanced on interoperability by initiating steps to establish domestic electronic vehicle registers;
- Montenegro drafted and adopted a Railway Safety Law, published in the Official Gazette at the end of 2025;
- Serbia and Kosovo* drafted railway safety laws, with adoption expected in the coming period.

Overall progress regarding interoperability for WB6 stands at 64%. The chart shows the WB6 interoperability rate.

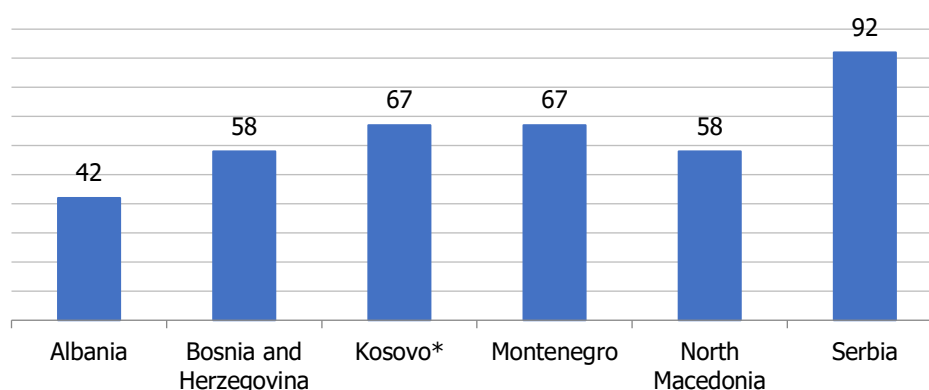


Figure 8: WB6 Interoperability rate progress

Regarding railway safety, the activities of WB6 are focused on achieving mutual recognition of four key railway safety documents at the regional level: operating licences, safety certificates, train driver licences, and vehicle authorisations. These elements are fundamental for opening the railway market beyond economy-levels and enabling seamless cross-border/boundary traffic. In parallel, the implementation of Safety Management Systems, certification of maintenance workshops, and streamlining of safety rules are crucial for ensuring harmonised, safe, and efficient railway operation throughout the region. Despite their importance, further efforts from all regional partners are needed to achieve mutual recognition of these four documents. Comprehensive legislative reforms are urgently needed to advance in this area and align with EU requirements. None of the WB6 made progress in this measure during the reporting period. Overall progress regarding safety from the previous period stands at 53%. Figure 9 shows the railway safety rate in WB6.

⁸⁹<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02016L0797-20200528>

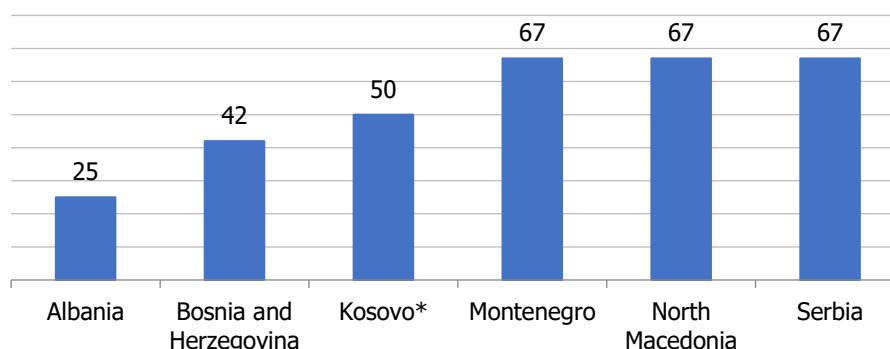


Figure 9: Percentual modernisation rates of railway infrastructure network in the WB6 in 2025

Overall progress regarding railway infrastructure modernisation for WB6 stands at 54%. Railway infrastructure modernisation in WB6 is examined through several key actions: the establishment of a Railway Infrastructure Asset Management System (RIAMS),⁹⁰ the development of strategies and action plans for priority regional railway projects – particularly those identified in the European Investment Plan (EIP)⁹¹ – and the preparation of tender documentation for improving safety at level crossings. During the reporting period, Kosovo*, Serbia, and Montenegro successfully applied for financing through the World Bank under the Smart and Sustainable Transport Programme (SSTP) and received European Commission grants for the implementation of safety upgrades at level crossings:

- Kosovo* – 22 level crossings,
- Serbia – 60 level crossings, and
- Montenegro – 5 level crossings.

The process of establishing RIAMS is underway in all WB6 and represents a key step towards structured maintenance planning and long-term infrastructure sustainability.

Action 19 Define rail freight and inland waterway transport corridors

Multimodality in passenger and freight transport is still at an early stage in the region, and work is underway to establish the necessary regulatory, institutional, and infrastructure frameworks. A key milestone in Serbia was achieved with the opening of the Batajnica freight terminal, which is now operational. Meanwhile, in Albania, work is underway on connecting Tirana Airport to the railway as part of the Tirana–Durrës link, and preparatory work is being carried out for connecting Porto Romano International Airport and Vlorë to the road and railway network. Despite these developments, the overall pace of construction of multimodal terminals and modernisation of road and railway infrastructure remains relatively slow. Regional partners Serbia and Montenegro have partially transposed Council Directive 92/106/EEC⁹² on combined transport of goods, while the other WB6 have not transposed it into their legislation.⁹³

Within the TEN-T network, road and railway networks and ports in the region are clearly defined, but multimodal terminals are not yet explicitly included. The revised Regulation (EU)

⁹⁰Railway Infrastructure Asset Management System

⁹¹https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/western-balkans-economic-and-investment-plan-support-economic-recovery-and-convergence-2020-10-06_en

⁹²<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31992L0106>

⁹³https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

2024/1679⁹⁴ on the TEN-T network underlines the importance of adequate capacity of multimodal freight terminals to support the network, and EU Member States are required to ensure that terminals serve urban hubs, industrial centres, ports, and logistics hubs, taking into account current and future traffic flows. To this end, they must carry out a market and prospective analysis of multimodal freight terminals on their territory and prepare an action plan for the establishment of a cohesive network of multimodal freight terminals, of which the European Commission is then to be notified.

These measures are designed to strengthen multimodal integration and improve freight transport efficiency in the TEN-T network and its extension to WB6.⁹⁵ To this end, the TCT Secretariat contracted Technical Assistance for multimodality, terminal assessment, and digitalisation, awarded in December 2023 and completed on 10 December 2024. The specific objective was to assist the six South-East European parties in aligning with the EU acquis, particularly with the TEN-T Regulation, identifying barriers to multimodality (infrastructure, policy, digitalisation), conducting a market and prospective analysis of terminals, and preparing an action plan for a regional network of multimodal freight terminals. Project deliverables included:⁹⁶

- Survey on satisfaction with multimodal/intermodal services,
- Market and prospective analysis and Action Plan for the multimodal freight terminal network,
- Digitalisation report for enhanced multimodality and seamless supply chains,
- Institutional capacity-building activities – Training/Study visit.

Members of the Technical Committee on Railways and the Technical Committee on Water and Multimodal Transport were actively involved, consulted on all deliverables, and agreed on the findings of the study. Under the criteria of TEN-T Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 – designation of the main rail-road terminal for each NUTS 2⁹⁷ region – nine multimodal freight terminals have been identified for WB6 for proposal to the European Commission:⁹⁸

- Albania: 1 (in or near Durrës)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2 (Sarajevo, Doboj)
- Kosovo*: 1 (Pristina)
- Montenegro: 1 (Bar)
- North Macedonia: 1 (Skopje)
- Serbia: 3 (Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad)

The identification of these nine multimodal freight terminals marks an important step towards aligning WB6 with the TEN-T framework. Their development will help integrate regional logistics chains into the broader European transport system, reduce bottlenecks, and improve cross-border/boundary connectivity and sustainability. By upgrading these terminals, the region can strengthen its role as a strategic link between the EU and neighbouring markets, while at the same time contributing to the objectives of the green and digital transition.

The overall implementation of the Water Transport and Multimodality Action Plan was slow to moderate, with a completion rate of 24% and an increase of 3% as of 2024. Albania made

⁹⁴https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401679

⁹⁵https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁹⁶https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

⁹⁷<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts>

⁹⁸https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

significant progress by successfully implementing a roadmap developed with the assistance of the Transport Community Secretariat, which led to its removal from the Paris MOU "Port State Control" blacklist.⁹⁹

In Montenegro, the Maritime Single Window (MNSW)¹⁰⁰ entered the testing phase, while the second phase of the Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS) became operational in December 2024.¹⁰¹ In Albania, VTMIS implementation is ongoing. At the infrastructure level, several important projects are advancing, particularly those involving digital, social, and green elements for inland waterways. Notably, the renovation and modernisation of the Brčko river port in Bosnia and Herzegovina was completed in 2025, while the Batajnica intermodal terminal was completed by Serbia. In addition, several projects aimed at improving the navigability of the Danube and Sava rivers are underway.

Action 20	Define an overall strategy to shift traffic from road to more environmentally-friendly modes
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The SSMS continues to guide WB6 towards a cleaner, more efficient, and better-connected transport system. Grounded in the principles of the European Green Deal and the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, the Strategy provides a regional framework for aligning policies, investments, and infrastructure development with EU standards. The reporting period for 2025 marks a continued transition from planning to implementation.¹⁰²

Regional partners are increasingly incorporating sustainability, digitalisation, and resilience into transport planning and infrastructure projects. Progress is evident in the expansion of electric vehicle charging networks, the implementation of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), and the gradual integration of climate change resilience into investment planning and domestic transport strategies. Although progress is uneven and challenges persist – particularly in legislative alignment, financing, and institutional capacities – the direction of change is clear and consistent across all three pillars of the SSMS.

Focused on promoting the use of zero-emission vehicles and alternative fuel infrastructure, the region has advanced its transition to cleaner transport systems through the introduction of alternative fuel infrastructure, sustainable urban mobility planning, and gradual fleet renewal. The expansion of electric vehicle charging networks has continued, with Albania and Serbia showing tangible growth along main corridors and in urban areas. However, although charging stations have increased, none of the regional partners has yet transposed the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation, and no airport or port in the region is equipped with alternative fuel infrastructure. Technical assistance launched by the Transport Community in relation to the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR) will support all partners in preparing their domestic policy frameworks and identifying priority corridors.¹⁰³

Enhancing multimodal freight transport is crucial for building a more efficient and sustainable logistics system. Integrating road, railway, and waterway traffic enables the seamless movement of goods while reducing dependence on any single mode of transport. Greener solutions – such as low-emission vehicles and alternative fuels – further reduce the sector's

⁹⁹Transport Community Action Plans and the EU Acquis – Progress Report
¹⁰⁰IFC Montenegro National Single Window Blueprint – Executive Summary
¹⁰¹<https://www.elmansrl.com/vtmis-montenegro-completed/>
¹⁰²https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf
¹⁰³https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

environmental impact. In WB6, this approach mitigates congestion on overloaded networks, while at the same time supporting safer, more cost-effective, and environmentally responsible freight operations. This flagship programme will be implemented through the following actions:

- Railway Corridor Initiative – WB6 will join rail freight corridors,
- Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for WB6,
- Assessment of bottlenecks in modal interconnections and the current incentive system.

Within the TEN-T network, road and railway networks and ports in the region are clearly defined, but multimodal terminals are not yet explicitly included. The revised Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 on the TEN-T network underlines the importance of adequate capacity of multimodal freight terminals to support the network. EU Member States are required to ensure that terminals serve urban hubs, industrial centres, ports, and logistics hubs, taking into account current and future traffic flows. To this end, they must carry out a market and prospective analysis of multimodal freight terminals on their territory and prepare an action plan for the establishment of a cohesive network of multimodal freight terminals, of which the European Commission is to be notified. These measures are designed to strengthen multimodal integration and improve the efficiency of freight transport in the TEN-T network and its extension to WB6.¹⁰⁴

The TCT Secretariat contracted Technical Assistance for multimodality, terminal assessment, and digitalisation, the specific objective of which was to assist the six South-East European Parties in aligning with the EU acquis, particularly with the TEN-T Regulation, identifying barriers to multimodality (infrastructure, policy, digitalisation), conducting a market and prospective analysis of terminals, and preparing an action plan for a regional network of multimodal freight terminals.¹⁰⁵ No progress has been made in transposing Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/1926¹⁰⁶ of 31 May 2017, supplementing Directive 2010/40/EU¹⁰⁷ of the European Parliament and of the Council. This regulation concerns the provision of EU-wide multimodal travel information services. Preparations to transpose Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/1926 on multimodal travel information services (MMTIS) are underway only in Albania. New momentum in advancing multimodal passenger information services in the region is expected with the introduction of the New Growth Plan and its reform agendas, which prioritise the transposition and implementation of EU ITS legislation.

In Albania, the forthcoming Sectoral Transport Strategy 2030 will provide the main framework for aligning infrastructure development, regulatory reform, and digital transformation with EU standards and sustainability objectives. Environmental protection and green transport priorities are being integrated into domestic policies, promoting low- and zero-emission vehicles, sustainable urban mobility, and multimodal green transport solutions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina completed the revision of its Framework Transport Strategy at the end of 2022, with EU-funded technical assistance support. The updated strategy integrates 2022 measures promoting sustainable transport, although its formal adoption had still not been completed by the end of 2025.

¹⁰⁴https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰⁵https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰⁶<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017R1926>

¹⁰⁷<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010L0040>

In Montenegro, the Ministry of Transport is updating the Montenegro Transport Development Strategy 2019–2035, with an Action Plan for 2026–2027 and an evaluation report covering activities carried out during 2020–2024. The updated strategy will explicitly highlight green and low-emission vehicle initiatives, reinforcing Montenegro's commitment to sustainable transport development.

In North Macedonia, technical assistance under the SUPRAE (Support for Policy Reforms, Accession and Effectiveness)¹⁰⁸ project supported the preparation of the third progress report on the Transport Strategy 2018–2030, covering January 2022 to December 2023. Work started in May 2024 and included data collection, analysis, and the drafting of a strategy revision. The report provides evidence-based recommendations for decision-makers to improve implementation and align activities with strategic objectives. Although the strategy addresses CO₂ emission reduction through defined measures and scenarios, no data on actual implementation or effectiveness are available.

A presentation was delivered on Serbia's Transport Strategy 2023–2030, implemented with support from the World Bank under the Western Balkans Trade and Transport Facilitation Project. Among the key objectives is the promotion of modal shift – particularly increasing the use of rail and public transport through improvements to legislation and general mobility plans in the region. Next-generation action plans aim to make the transport sector more resilient, accessible, and safe for all road users.¹⁰⁹

Action 21	Identify the EU technical standards and ensure their implementation and digitalisation of all transport modes
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Next-generation action plans focus on creating sustainable, smart, and resilient transport systems, with digitalisation, decarbonisation and infrastructure maintenance as central pillars. The implementation of measures established in these plans will raise the level of safety through the introduction of advanced technologies in key transport areas, ensuring the continued development of digital platforms for seamless transport.

Regarding decarbonisation and the global focus on reducing CO₂ emissions, there are plans to increase the number of electric charging stations, improve railway legislation and services, and align legislation with green agenda measures and the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, particularly in areas relating to e-freight regulations. Additionally, efforts are directed at promoting multimodality through the preparation and approval of action plans for the development of a multimodal freight terminal network. Progress in 2025 was shaped by two key regional initiatives advancing these objectives in parallel.

On e-freight, the EU4Digital programme, co-financed by the EU and BMZ and implemented by GIZ¹¹⁰ in coordination with the TCT Secretariat, launched the EU4Digital initiative, co-financed by the EU and the BMZ, one of whose three key components is dedicated to e-freight. The programme aims to improve digital infrastructure, enable cross-border/boundary services, and support business digitalisation.

¹⁰⁸<https://www.gopa.eu/en/stories/supporting-north-macedonias-accession-eu>

¹⁰⁹https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

¹¹⁰https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/index_en

On multimodality, the extension of the TEN-T Regulation to WB6 defines the core and comprehensive network for roads, railways and ports, but multimodal terminals remain underdeveloped. During the reporting period, the TCT Secretariat worked with regional partners to identify barriers to multimodality, conduct market and potential analyses, and develop an action plan for a cohesive multimodal freight terminal network. Nine key multimodal rail-road terminals were identified and agreed upon with regional partners for potential inclusion in the TEN-T network.

As digitalisation of the transport sector advances, ensuring a just transition remains an important consideration. Modernising the transport workforce, attracting young professionals and providing training in new technologies are priorities for the region, requiring coordinated support to capitalise on emerging digital opportunities while addressing the social dimensions of the transition.

Action 22 Implement the Regional Transport Facilitation Action Plan

The average implementation rate at WB6 level stands at 30%.¹¹¹ The overall progress in implementing the Transport Facilitation Action Plan is shown in the chart below.

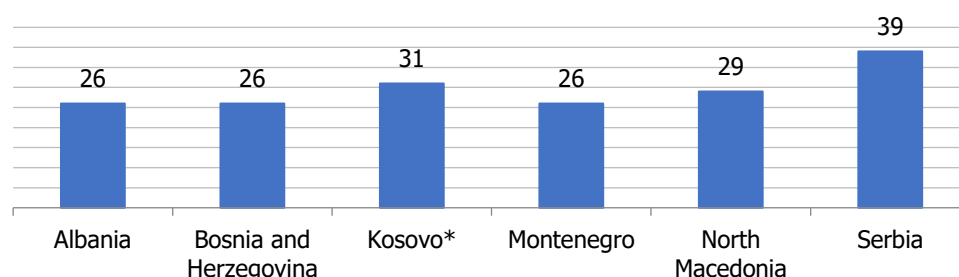


Figure 10: Percentage progress rate in transport facilitation in WB6 for 2025¹¹²

The improvement in efficiency of railway border/boundary crossings/Joint Border/boundary Crossings in WB6 is 19%. Following the establishment of efficient joint border/boundary control of railway traffic between Montenegro and Serbia at the joint railway station in Bijelo Polje – considered one of the most significant achievements in 2024 under the previous Transport Facilitation Action Plan – continued and uninterrupted operation in the implementation of this railway agreement has been noted throughout 2024 and 2025. The positive effects of this joint border/boundary control, such as reduced waiting times for passenger and freight trains, increased efficiency of railway and logistics operations, and increased attractiveness of rail transport, were clearly presented at a regional event in December 2024 in Vlorë.

However, activities foreseen in the Next Generation Action Plan in 2025 showed very little or no progress. Exceptions are the activities of Serbia and Hungary related to a new Border/boundary Control Agreement for railway traffic and the establishment of an operational link between Subotica and Szeged. Other WB6 partners made no significant progress in establishing legal frameworks for joint border/boundary controls, establishing joint railway stations, or renewing cross-border/boundary railway lines. Major efforts are still needed from regional partners and neighbouring EU member states (Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania) to advance railway traffic and improve cross-border/boundary connections.

¹¹¹<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹¹²<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

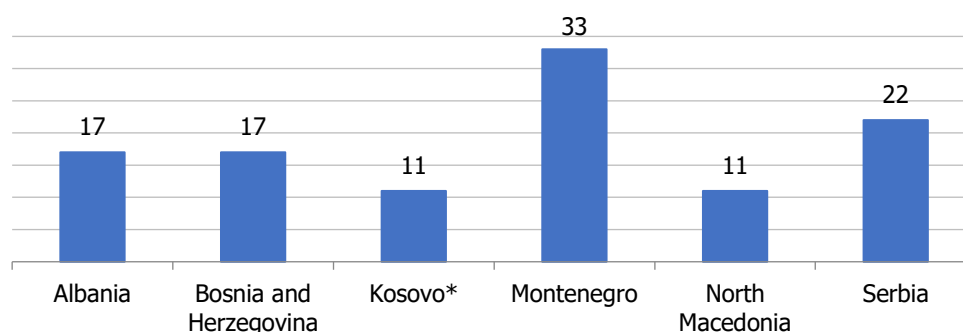


Figure 11: Percentage progress rate of efficiency of railway border/boundary crossings and joint railway border/boundary crossings by WB6 for 2025¹¹³

The improvement in efficiency of road border/boundary crossings/joint border/boundary crossings in WB6 is 33%. In 2025, moderate progress was recorded in regulatory, infrastructure, and operational measures to improve the operation of border/boundary crossing points (BCPs/CCPs)¹¹⁴ on the extended TEN-T network in WB6. A bilateral agreement signed between Kosovo* and North Macedonia on the establishment of joint border/boundary crossings led to the launch of joint controls for passenger vehicles at the Hani i Elezit/Blace crossing in May 2025. Also, from July 2025, one-stop control systems were established at the Tabanovce/Presevo crossing, reducing waiting times and increasing the efficiency of border/boundary services.

In April 2025, a second joint border/boundary crossing between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (Sitnica/Zupci) was opened, after the first in 2023, demonstrating good bilateral cooperation and practical examples of cross-border/boundary traffic facilitation. Work on preparing documentation for two more joint crossings is underway.

At WB6–EU crossings, the EU-WB6 Green Lanes initiative encouraged more active coordination aimed at modernisation, advancement of customs cooperation, and infrastructure improvements. At the Brussels Summit, financial resources were agreed for the modernisation of 11 priority crossings, through the Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme 2.0, with the total required amount estimated at €57 million. Domestic authorities were involved in project preparation through the CONNECTA¹¹⁵ instrument, and a workshop on technical project preparation was also held.

Additionally, the Albania's Customs Administration, in cooperation with Italian customs, CEFTA, and the TCT Secretariat, organised the Second High-Level Conference on Customs Directorate Cooperation, during which regional partners and neighbouring EU member states reaffirmed support for the Green Lanes initiative and highlighted the need for its expansion, infrastructure improvement, and strengthening of cooperation, including real-time data sharing via the SEED+¹¹⁶ platform.

¹¹³<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹¹⁴https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ONLINE_Crossing-points-fiches_explanatory-note.pdf

¹¹⁵<https://connecta-info.eu/>

¹¹⁶<https://cefta.int/projects/seed/>

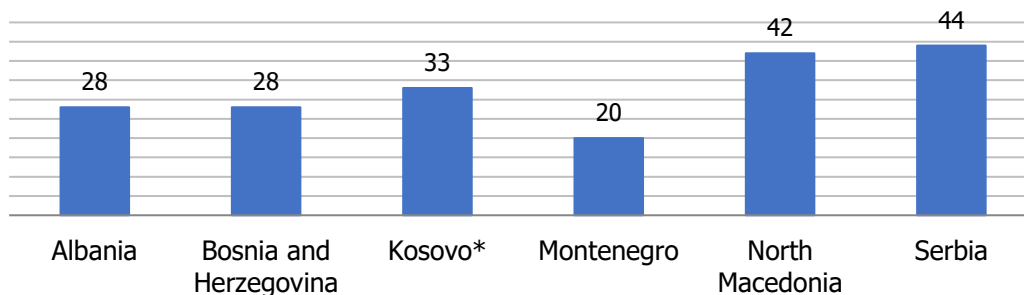


Figure 12: Percentage progress rate of road border/boundary crossings/joint border/boundary crossings by WB6 for 2025¹¹⁷

The implementation of horizontal measures in WB6 stands at 39%. Horizontal transport facilitation measures are divided into two groups: (1) strengthening the administrative capacities of border/boundary agencies, applicable to road and railway border/boundary crossings, and (2) digitalisation and e-freight, which also apply to other sectors. Most WB6 reported ongoing activities in the area of recruitment and training of the relevant officials, mainly customs officers, while no information was available on training for border/boundary guards and other border/boundary services.

Regarding e-freight, by August 2025, domestic-level eFTI working groups had been established in Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo*, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia were progressing in the establishment process with the support of ongoing analyses of legal and IT barriers for the preparation of reform plans by early 2026.

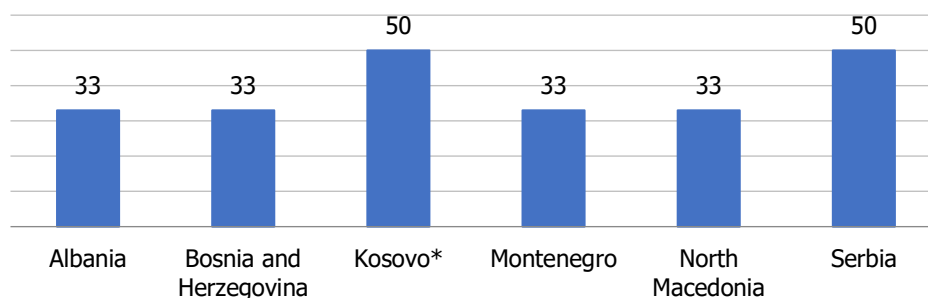


Figure 13: Percentage progress rate in the implementation of horizontal measures in WB6 for 2025¹¹⁸

Action 23 Implement the Regional Road Safety Action Plan

The average implementation rate at the regional level stands at 55%. The implementation rate for each regional partner is shown in the chart below.

¹¹⁷<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹¹⁸<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

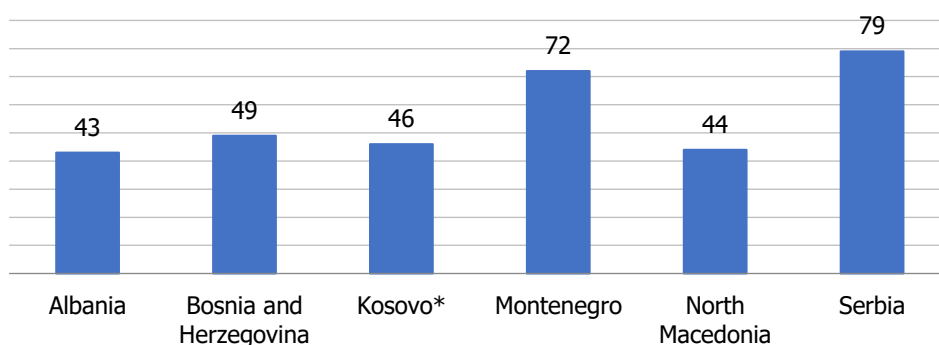


Figure 14: Percentage progress rate in the implementation of road safety action plans in WB6 for 2025¹¹⁹

Overall road safety data in the WB6 region show a varying trend in the number of fatalities over the years. The total number of fatalities decreased from 1,261 in 2023 to 1,225 in 2024, a reduction of 36 fatalities or 2.9%. North Macedonia and Serbia recorded increases in fatalities: North Macedonia by 11.8%, from 127 to 142, and Serbia by 2.2%, from 503 to 514. Four WB6 recorded decreases: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, and Montenegro. Albania reduced fatalities by 8.9%, from 192 to 175; Bosnia and Herzegovina by 12.9%, from 255 to 222; Kosovo* by 8.5%, from 106 to 97; and Montenegro by 3.8%, from 78 to 75. The above data raises concerns regarding the region's strategic goal of reducing fatalities and serious injuries by 50% by 2030. The following chart shows the percentage progress of the region towards this goal, compared to the European Union average.

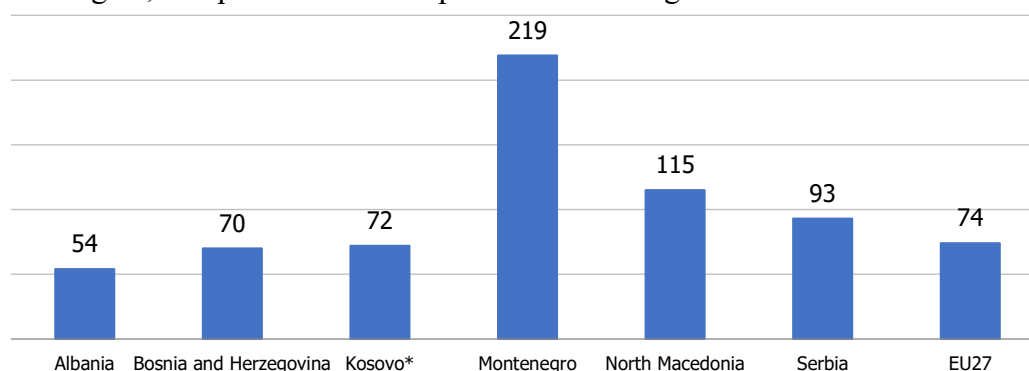


Figure 15: Percentage rate of how far WB6 are from the 2030 target compared to EU27¹²⁰

The improvement in the efficiency of road safety management in WB6 stands at 52%. Serbia took the most proactive steps, adopting a Decision in July 2025 establishing the NCB for Road Traffic, with ten expert working groups and its first meeting held on 1 October 2025. No other regional partner recorded progress, with coordinating bodies remaining inactive. No new Road Safety Agency has been established across WB6: Kosovo* adopted a Law on Roads enabling such an agency; Montenegro decided against a separate agency, incorporating its competencies into the new coordinating body; Bosnia and Herzegovina envisages a Traffic Safety Unit within the Ministry of Communications and Transport; and North Macedonia has recorded no progress for two years.

In the area of improving or establishing the quality of systematic and consolidated data collection on fatalities and serious injuries in traffic based on EU methodology, Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a Rulebook on the collection and processing of road accident data. Under

¹¹⁹<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹²⁰<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

a Cooperation Agreement with the Ministry and OECD/ITF,¹²¹ data are shared with the International Road Traffic and Accident Database (IRTAD).¹²² Other regional partners recorded no progress in this area, with the exception of Serbia, which became an observer in the CARE database in 2023.

Regarding MAIS3¹²³ implementation, Serbia and Montenegro showed progress. Serbia aims to improve datasets and registers for serious injuries, including MAIS3 implementation, and to strengthen cooperation between the health and transport sectors, as well as to build capacity in the health sector. However, the adoption of the necessary legislative and financial measures is still in progress. Montenegro published a study on the MAIS3+ scale and a draft amendment to the rulebook for the reporting period.

Regarding the Road Safety Strategy, Albania's new strategy, developed under an EU project, is in its final phase. Bosnia and Herzegovina made no progress in establishing a Traffic Safety Council. Kosovo*'s proposed Road Safety Plan is awaiting approval. North Macedonia established a commission to draft a new strategy, while Montenegro and Serbia adopted their strategies and action plans. The improvement in the promotion of safe road infrastructure in WB6 stands at 57%. Western Balkans partners made progress in implementing the Road Infrastructure Safety Management Directive (2008/96/EC) and its 2019 amendment. Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina developed legal guidelines and regulations, but their implementation is limited. Kosovo* transposed the directives into its Law on Roads. Montenegro and Serbia demonstrated strong institutional capacities, with authorised auditors conducting audits and inspections. North Macedonia combined legislative reforms, major infrastructure projects, and the integration of safety into asset management, along with the application of intelligent transport solutions.

Partial progress was recorded in the implementation of the Directive on minimum safety requirements for tunnels (2004/54/EC). Albania transposed that directive into its draft Road Safety Strategy, while Kosovo* included it in its Law on Roads. Montenegro transposed the directive and extended its scope to tunnels outside the TEN-T network, and reported progress through an EBRD ITS project. Serbia reported partial transposition of the directive, while North Macedonia recorded no progress. Progress was also made in strengthening speed management, combining legislative reforms with enforcement and technology. Montenegro led in aligning with Directive 92/6/EEC and implementing large-scale projects with ITS and speed radars, while Serbia already has an extensive network of 174 devices. Kosovo*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia advanced through improved enforcement and oversight capacities, while Albania remains at the preparatory stage.

¹²¹<https://www.itf-oecd.org/>

¹²²<https://www.itf-oecd.org/IRTAD>

¹²³https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/european-road-safety-observatory/data-and-analysis/serious-injuries_en

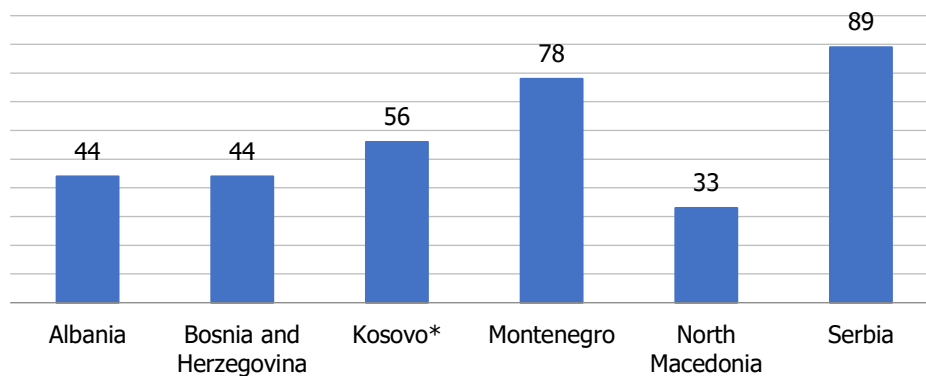


Figure 16: Percentage rate of promotion of safe infrastructure in WB6 for 2025¹²⁴

The improvement in the promotion of protection of road users in WB6 stands at 58%. Some progress was recorded in the protection of vulnerable road users. Albania and Montenegro improved school zones, adopted Safer Routes to School guidelines and strategic programmes, while Albania's Smart City project is focused on improving enforcement. Kosovo* focused on educating children through digital tools and activities. Serbia expanded awareness campaigns targeting drivers, parents, and two-wheeler users. North Macedonia increased road checks, penalties, and plans for implementing the Safe City system. Bosnia and Herzegovina mainly focused on awareness raising campaigns.

To address dangerous behaviour, the region implemented a combination of legislative amendments, targeted enforcement, and awareness campaigns. Albania is still working on a draft Road Safety Strategy, while Bosnia and Herzegovina introduced stricter penalties for repeat and high-risk offences. Kosovo* increased penalties for violations related to seatbelts and mobile phone use. Montenegro uses systematic monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and conducts campaigns, while North Macedonia strengthened police capacities through the Safe City automated enforcement system.

In the area of driving licence regulation and cross-border/boundary enforcement of traffic rules, some progress has been achieved. Albania drafted a Road Safety Strategy; Bosnia and Herzegovina is seeking to modernise training and licensing through updates to secondary legislation; and Kosovo* is advancing in the digitalisation of driver education. Montenegro is drafting a law introducing new rules for young drivers. Serbia is preparing a draft road safety law that will transpose Directive 2015/413¹²⁵ on cross-border/boundary information exchange, with a plan for adoption in 2026. Although police and judicial cooperation mechanisms exist, cross-border/boundary information exchange has not yet been established, which represents a key gap in enforcement. Progress was recorded across WB6 in road user education, training and awareness. Albania is developing new educational materials; Bosnia and Herzegovina is updating driver training legislation; Kosovo* is digitalising driver education; Montenegro is tightening rules for new drivers and introducing school programmes; North Macedonia is strengthening oversight and youth-focused campaigns; and Road Safety Programme of Serbia covers school education, awareness and certified professional driver training.

¹²⁴<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹²⁵<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015L0413>

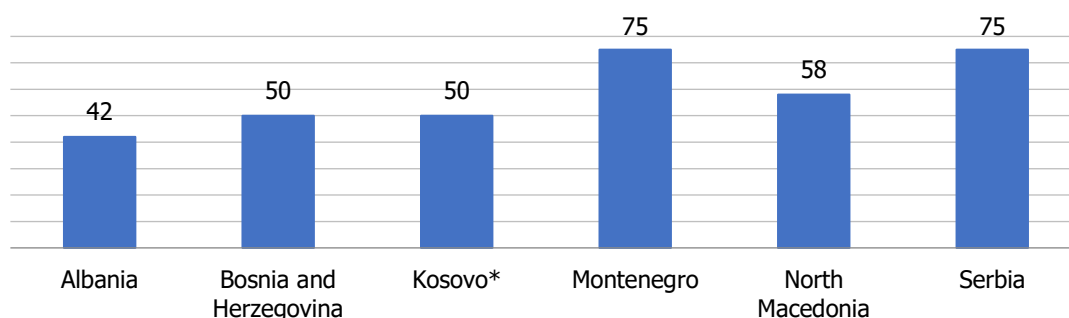


Figure 17: Percentage rate of achieved promotion of road user protection in WB6 for 2025¹²⁶

The improvement in the promotion of the use of safe vehicles in WB6 stands at 37%. In the area of vehicle safety and meeting technical requirements, Albania modernised its inspection system, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is updating its rules to align with EU standards. Montenegro fully transposed the relevant EU directives, and North Macedonia is preparing legislative amendments with support from the planned Safe City system. Serbia's new Law on Road Traffic Safety is expected to be fully aligned by 2026, although implementation is still partial. Kosovo* recorded no progress in this area.

Regarding ensuring interoperability with EU standards for eCall and 112 via ITS, Albania's draft Road Safety Strategy includes only initial ITS measures. Kosovo* adopted an ITS Strategy and Action Plan but needs to ensure implementation and resources. Montenegro launched an eCall service integrated with the 112 system, forwarding data and voice messages to the Operational Communication Centre 112, in line with EU standards. North Macedonia introduced intelligent transport systems in Skopje and along Corridor X. Serbia is working on establishing a 112 system under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but full functionality has not yet been achieved.

Regarding the alignment of vehicle type approval with EU regulations, Albania prepared a Decision to transpose Regulation (EU) 2018/858¹²⁷ and is awaiting TAIEX support. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, and North Macedonia recorded no progress in this area. Montenegro, with Transport Community support, finalised its Type Approval Law, assisted by a peer review to ensure EU alignment. Serbia applies type approval procedures in accordance with UNECE¹²⁸ regulations, but full harmonisation with the EU is challenging and requires ongoing cooperation and support. The TCT Secretariat plans a regional TAIEX workshop on Regulation (EU) 2018/858, with the aim of providing expertise and promoting harmonised type approval and market surveillance for vehicles, systems, and components.

¹²⁶<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹²⁷<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02018R0858-20240701>

¹²⁸<https://unece.org/homepage>

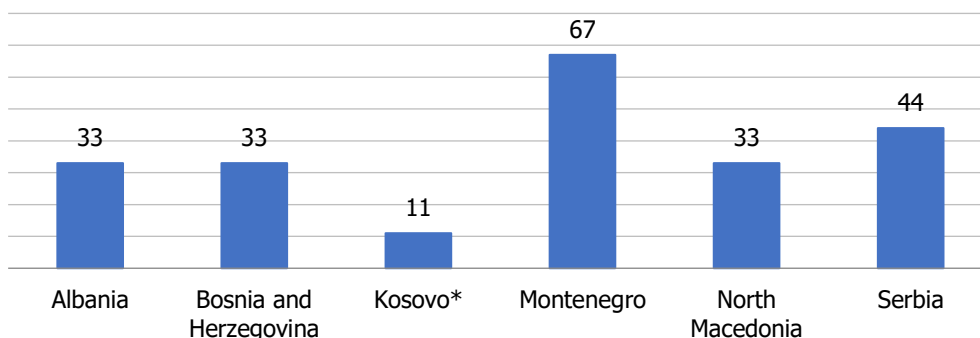


Figure 18: Percentage rate of achieved promotion of the use of safe vehicles in WB6 for 2025¹²⁹

The improvement in regional cooperation and experience sharing in WB6 stands at 72%. Technical Committee and WBR SO¹³⁰ meetings covered best practices and knowledge in road safety at the global, regional, EU, and Eastern Partnership level. Key speakers from the European Road Safety Observatory, the Eastern Partnership Road Safety Observatory, and WHO shared their experience on the latest developments in the EU, with a particular focus on mortality trends and KPIs.

Action 24 Implement the Road Action Plan

The average implementation rate across WB6 stands at 53%. Implementation rates for each regional partner are shown in the chart below.

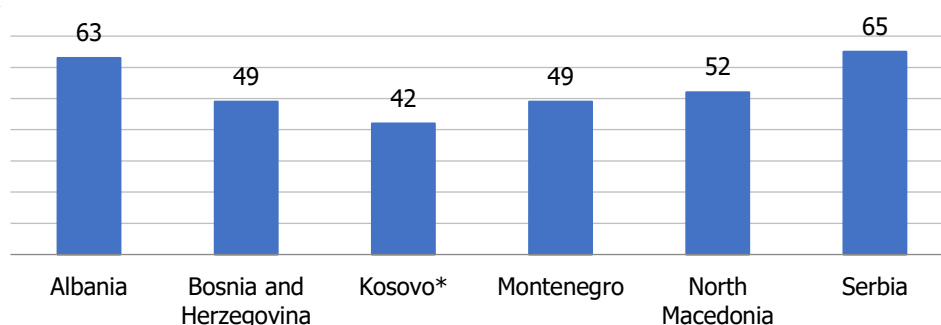


Figure 19: Percentage implementation rate of road action plans in WB6 for 2025¹³¹

Overall progress in the area of establishing a functional and efficient road infrastructure maintenance system stands at 42%. Two new measures have been added to this set: Data Collection and Inventory, and Asset Condition Assessment. For measures carried over from the previous Action Plan, progress was very limited or non-existent, highlighting the need for increased efforts by regional partners in establishing a Road Asset Management System (RAMS) and signing Service Level Agreements.

In Albania, the entire domestic road network continues to be maintained through performance-based contracts, with €105 million allocated for maintenance over the next three years. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, all four public road administrations use GIS databases for inventory, but regular updating of condition data remains a challenge. Currently, only Roads of Bosnia

¹²⁹<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹³⁰<https://wbrso.transport-community.org/>

¹³¹<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

and Herzegovina Federation company has a fully functional RAMS for prioritising maintenance, while the other three have partially implemented systems.¹³²

Kosovo* prepared tenders for multi-year maintenance contracts. In Montenegro, a medium-term programme for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and protection of roads through 2028 was adopted on 26 June 2025. With EBRD support, RAMS software and a road network database have been installed. North Macedonia is developing a ten-year strategy for the development and maintenance of domestic roads. Serbia is continuing the implementation of the Service Level Agreement for the 2024–2026 period.

A key challenge in the region remains the continuous collection of data on the condition of the road network, which is crucial for the efficient functioning of RAMS. Even where RAMS systems are fully established, the challenge of finding and retaining qualified professionals within road authorities and public companies remains. The introduction of Service Level Agreements is expected to be a significant step forward and a potential game-changer in the region.

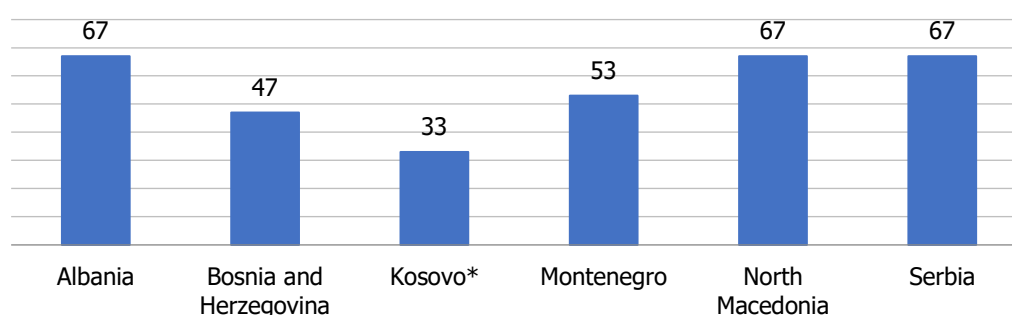


Figure 20: Percentage implementation rate of a functional and efficient road maintenance system in WB6 for 2025¹³³

Overall progress in the implementation of ITS measures on core/comprehensive road networks was slow, with a regional average implementation rate of 27%. Limited progress is mainly caused by significant changes introduced in this pillar to align with the Reform Agenda of the New Growth Plan, which now includes the transposition of three new EU legislative acts: Directive (EU) 2023/2661¹³⁴ amending ITS Directive 2010/40/EU, and two Delegated Regulations, (EU) 670/2022 and (EU) 490/2024. Of the seven measures in this pillar, four are newly introduced.

Key results in ITS implementation are mixed, with some regional partners advancing in preparatory steps but facing delays in formal approvals and broader implementation. In Albania, i5w Access Point and Body have been designated, and Delegated Regulation 670/2022 has been partially transposed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, although the ITS Strategy was completed in 2023, its approval is still pending. Kosovo* is advancing in the design of its Traffic Management Centre and is working on the preparation of ITS legislation. Montenegro is implementing its ITS Programme for 2022–2026 in stages. North Macedonia is advancing in the transposition of relevant legislation through the SUPRAE project; tendering for ITS implementation on Corridor X is planned by the end of 2025. In Serbia, the ITS Strategy is complete and a new Law on Roads has been prepared for EU alignment, although the Strategy is still awaiting adoption. In June 2025, PERS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with

¹³²<https://jpcfbih.ba/en/organizacija/sektori-department-of-road-safety-and-protection-rams-and-it-systems/12>

¹³³<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹³⁴https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302661

motorway operators from Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, and the Czech Republic to strengthen cooperation on motorway traffic management.

New momentum in ITS implementation in the region is expected to be driven by the New Growth Plan and its Reform Agenda, which prioritises the transposition and implementation of EU ITS legislation.

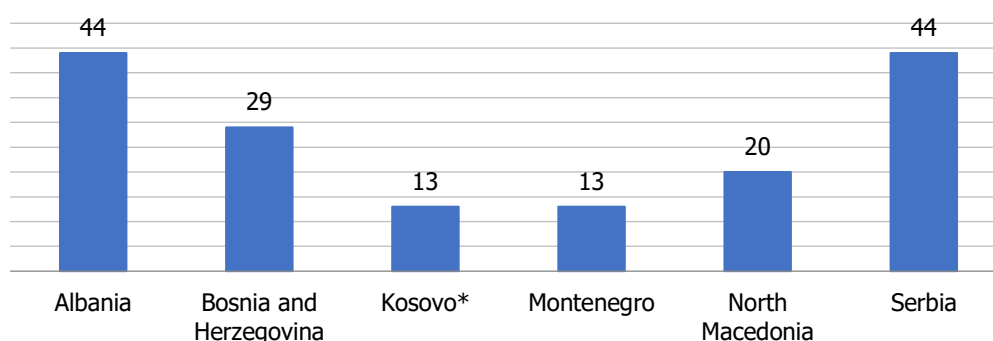


Figure 21: Percentage implementation rate of ITS measures on core/comprehensive road networks in WB6 for 2025¹³⁵

Overall progress in this set of measures was moderate, with a regional average implementation rate of 31%. This pillar is divided into two groups of measures: those relating to climate change resilience, which remained unchanged compared to the previous Action Plan, and those concerning alternative fuel infrastructure, which now include two new measures: transposition of AFIR Regulation 1679/2024¹³⁶ and adoption of a domestic Policy Framework, as one of the obligations under that Regulation. The main challenges in this pillar remain the slow legal transposition of AFIR Regulation 1679/2024 and limited implementation of alternative fuel infrastructure, which has still not moved beyond isolated pilot installations. To support progress in the transposition and implementation of AFIR Regulation 1679/2024 across the region, the Transport Community Secretariat will launch and award a technical assistance project by the end of 2025.

In Albania, the installation of nine fast chargers in key cities, ports, and border/boundary crossings was completed, each with a capacity of up to 150 kW, integrated into a central management system. On Serbia's motorway network, PERS has so far installed 32 EV chargers, of which 19 are already operational, while the remaining 13 are being prepared for connection to the electricity grid due to the need for higher capacity. PERS is actively working on completing these connections, which are expected by the end of 2025. The results of technical assistance related to climate resilience and strategic frameworks for electric charging are still awaiting integration into the domestic strategies of all regional partners, which is slowing down coordinated and effective implementation.

¹³⁵<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹³⁶https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401679

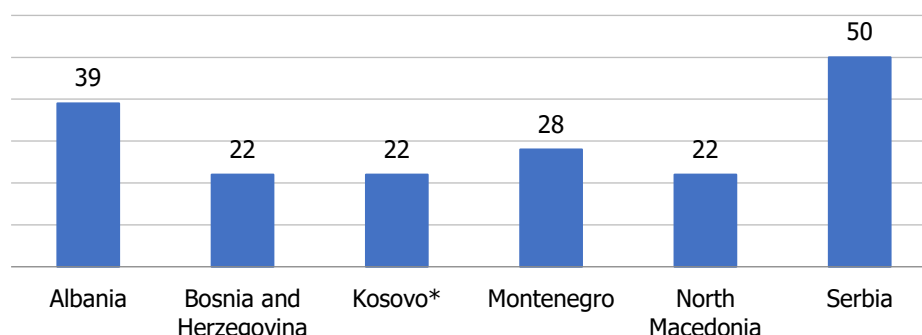


Figure 22: Percentage rate of climate resilience of road transport and alternative fuel use in WB6 for 2025¹³⁷

Regarding regional cooperation and experience sharing in WB6, this sector has an exceptionally high rate of cooperation. The Memorandum of Understanding signed at the Road Summit in June 2022 by the directors of road administrations and public companies gave new momentum to regional cooperation in developing the indicative extension of the TEN-T network for the road Core and Comprehensive Network in the Western Balkans Six. Its implementation is ongoing, and the Road Managers Network continued its annual meetings, with the most recent held in May 2025 in Sofia.

To address the slow progress in climate resilience and strengthen cooperation in responding to natural hazards, an amendment to the Memorandum is planned to introduce a formal regional framework for climate-related incidents.

Action 25

Develop and implement climate resilience plans for Western Balkans transport networks

Transport infrastructure in the WB6 remains highly vulnerable to climate change, with risks including floods, landslides, high temperatures, sea surges, and snowdrifts. Vulnerability assessments show that nearly 56% of road networks and 34% of railway links in the northern WB6 are highly exposed under both 2030 and 2050 scenarios. The top 20 most vulnerable road and rail segments have been identified per economy, guiding priority interventions.

Progress in 2025 has been supported by technical assistance from CONNECTA and the TCT Secretariat, integrating climate resilience into project planning, infrastructure design, and EU funding proposals. WB6 have taken concrete measures to strengthen resilience across road, rail, and maritime networks, with a growing focus on regulatory frameworks and risk-informed planning. Climate resilience planning is now systematically integrated into road and railway design, TEN-T corridor management, and project funding, especially for high-risk infrastructure segments. WB6 are strengthening institutional and technical capacities for climate-proofing, aligned with European Commission guidance for 2021–2027. Ongoing challenges include full operationalisation of Resilience Action Plans, implementation of targeted interventions, and legislative harmonisation to embed climate adaptation across all transport sectors.

In Albania, reconstruction of 27 priority bridges continued under the World Bank's Resilient Bridges project. Guidelines and methodologies for climate vulnerability assessment are now operational, and risk-based interventions are ongoing. Progress has been moderate in Bosnia

¹³⁷<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

and Herzegovina, with resilience considerations included in TEN-T corridor sections. Technical capacity for climate-proofing infrastructure is improving, supported by TCT Secretariat guidance. Kosovo* developed risk assessment methodologies and integrated them into the MMTS 2023–2030. Implementation of targeted interventions for vulnerable road and rail segments is ongoing. The Road Infrastructure Climate Resilience Strategy and accompanying Action Plan are under development in Montenegro with support from EBRD. Priority risk-based interventions on roads and bridges are being planned.

North Macedonia climate resilience considerations are increasingly integrated into detailed road designs, while efforts continue to establish domestic legislation addressing natural hazards and adaptation measures. In Serbia, Public Enterprise Roads of Serbia (PERS) has expanded the Road Weather Information System (RWIS) network to 81 operational units, supporting early warning, preventive maintenance, and climate-responsive operations. Risk-based interventions continue on the most vulnerable core road and rail segments. Overall, the WB6 are progressing towards climate-resilient transport networks, combining technical, institutional, and legislative measures, with priority given to high-risk road and rail segments identified through vulnerability assessments. These efforts are crucial for safeguarding mobility, freight efficiency, and public safety under changing climate conditions.

Action 26

Promote preparation and implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans for urban areas in the Western Balkans

The development and implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) across the WB6 continued to advance in 2025, supported by international donors, local governments, and regional initiatives, including GIZ, UNDP, Interreg, ADRION, and World Bank/AFD-funded programmes. SUMP remain central to improving urban transport efficiency, reducing environmental impact, promoting active mobility, and ensuring inclusive and safe transport options, in alignment with the SSMS for the Western Balkans.¹³⁸

SUMP are becoming central to urban transport policy, serving as instruments to foster green, safe, and inclusive mobility. WB6 cities are advancing towards modern, sustainable urban transport systems, using SUMP to guide emission reduction, active mobility promotion, and alignment with regional and EU objectives. The progress in 2025 demonstrates an ongoing commitment to green urban transport planning and operationalisation of SUMP measures. Newly adopted TEN-T Regulation strengthens the EU's commitment to a sustainable and resilient transport network, while improving connectivity. It sets ambitious urban mobility targets for cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, including those in the Western Balkans Six. By 2027, these urban nodes must adopt SUMP for their fully functional urban areas, integrating modes of transport, promoting low-emission mobility, reducing pollution, and improving accessibility. By 2030, they must also establish multimodal passenger hubs to improve first and last mile connections. The designation of urban nodes in the Western Balkans Six is underway, after which they will be required to fulfil these TEN-T obligations. In addition, in the Western Balkans Six and among observer participants, and as a continuation of the Clean Bus and Clean Fleet Initiative and the Green Mobility Declaration adopted on 5 June in Sarajevo, the Regional Steering Committee adopted the platform's *modus operandi* at the Regional Steering Committee meeting in May 2025.

¹³⁸ Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy in the Western Balkans, Progress Report 2025, Transport Community, https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

The platform's goal is to encourage voluntary participation to accelerate the transition to zero-emission public fleets throughout the region. Its objectives include promoting clean energy through electric and hydrogen buses, advancing green technologies for battery efficiency and lifecycle management, and ensuring sustainable disposal. It also focuses on building the necessary infrastructure – such as charging and refuelling stations – and integrating digital systems such as MIS, ERP, and RTI to improve traffic management. Partnerships between public and private actors, as well as multi-city cooperation, are key drivers, along with financial incentives and the mobilisation of grants and private investment. By establishing a regional data platform for performance measurement and transparency, the platform aims to strengthen governance, planning, and the integration of public transport into broader logistics and government fleet systems. Implementation will be structured around four main operational blocks: legislative transposition, capacity building, technical assistance and project preparation, and procurement and financing.

In Albania, several municipalities are advancing sustainable urban mobility initiatives. Tirana is already implementing measures such as the introduction of electric buses, expansion of cycling lanes, regulation of electric scooters, creation of pedestrian zones, and the development of an upcoming Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. A formal Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) for Tirana is currently being prepared with GIZ support. In Durrës, urban mobility is being integrated with port development and road and railway access improvements. Other cities such as Shkodër, Elbasan, and Berat are taking initial steps through cycling infrastructure and the renewal of public transport fleets. The Western Balkans Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy progress report promotes the adoption of SUMP in all municipalities and ensures alignment with sustainable urban mobility requirements under the Transport Community. In North Macedonia, the World Bank is providing technical assistance for the development of SUMP in five municipalities – Kavadarci, Prilep, Kočani, Strumica, and Struga. The project, launched in June 2024, follows a structured five-task approach covering institutional structure, baseline mobility assessment, scenario development, action planning, and final adoption. Tasks 1, 2, and 3 have been completed, while the remaining activities for Task 4 are planned for completion by January 2026, and Task 5 is to be completed by April 2026.

In Serbia, five cities (Belgrade, Aleksinac, Kruševac, Valjevo, and Šabac) have officially adopted SUMP, while eight others (Kragujevac, Niš, Pirot, Bajina Bašta, Vranje, Svilajnac, Čajetina, and Užice) are at various stages of preparation. Under the Local Infrastructure and Institutional Development (LIID) Project, additional SUMP will be developed in further 28 cities, divided into two phases (11 in the first and 17 in the second). In Montenegro, the Ministry of Transport is updating the Transport Development Strategy 2019–2035, together with an Action Plan for 2026–2027 and an evaluation report for the previous period. The updated strategy will explicitly include activities related to sustainable and smart mobility, ensuring greater coherence between domestic transport planning and local SUMP initiatives.¹³⁹

Action 27A	Define a plan for deployment and building of charging stations for electric vehicles
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WB6 are increasingly prioritising EV infrastructure as part of broader climate and sustainable mobility goals. Adoption of regulatory incentives, subsidies, and pilot projects is still critical to accelerate EV uptake. Coordination between domestic governments, municipalities, and

¹³⁹https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Smart-and-Sustainable-Strategy-2025_Progress_report_FINAL.pdf

regional technical assistance programmes remains essential to achieving comprehensive electronic vehicle charging stations (EVCS) coverage and aligning with EU standards.

WB6 currently have a low share of electric vehicles (EVs) in the total vehicle fleet – mainly due to high vehicle prices, lack of charging infrastructure, and limited incentives. Nevertheless, things are changing. Montenegro and Serbia recorded growth in the number of public charging stations over the past year, and Sarajevo and Skopje announced public procurement of electric buses through EU- and EBRD-financed projects. Also, governments are beginning to introduce subsidies for EV purchases and exemptions from customs duties or taxes. The implementation of measures for the construction of electric vehicle charging stations will increase the level of safety through the introduction of advanced technologies in key transport areas, ensuring the continued development of digital platforms for seamless transport across all WB6. Regarding decarbonisation and the global focus on reducing CO₂ emissions, there are plans to increase the number of electric charging stations.

Albania completed the installation of nine fast chargers in key cities, ports, and border/boundary crossings, each with a capacity of up to 150 kW and integrated into a central management system. On Serbia's motorway network, PERS has so far installed 32 EV chargers. Of these, 19 are already operational, while the remaining 13 are in the process of connection to the electricity grid as they require higher-capacity electrical connections. PERS is actively working on completing these connections, which should be finalised by the end of 2025. The results of technical assistance related to climate resilience and electric charging strategic frameworks are still awaiting integration into the domestic strategies of all regional partners, which is hindering coordinated and effective implementation. Albania is transposing Regulation (EU) 2023/1804¹⁴⁰ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure, repealing Directive 2014/94/EU. It is planned that this alignment will be achieved at the end of 2025 through a draft Council of Ministers decision, aimed at promoting clean road transport vehicles and establishing alternative fuel infrastructure. Since this draft decision was directly linked to the ongoing revision of the Law on Energy Efficiency, both were adopted at the end of 2025. The World Bank's Bridge Resilience Building (BRB) programme is still underway. Additionally, in Albania's Plan for European Integration 2024–2026, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy envisaged the transposition of Directive 2009/33/EC on the promotion of clean and energy efficient road transport vehicles. The draft secondary legislation for implementing the Clean Vehicles Directive requirements has been completed. Its approval is linked to the 62nd amendment to the Law on Energy Efficiency, which is currently in process. The Agency for Energy Efficiency is actively expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure throughout Albania, based on a feasibility study and a detailed charging station development report.

A significant project completed during the reporting period was the installation of nine fast chargers in key border/boundary cities and along the main transit routes, including Sarandë, Vlorë, Korçë, Durrës, Elbasan, the Port Authority of Vlorë, the Port Authority of Durrës, and the Hani i Hotit border/boundary crossing, with capacities ranging from 50 kW to 150 kW. All stations are fully operational and have been handed over to local municipalities. Furthermore, a 150-kW charger is being installed in cooperation with the Kakavijë customs post. These stations are integrated into a central cloud-based system enabling real-time communication and management. Despite efforts to transpose clean vehicle and alternative fuel infrastructure legislation, this group of measures remains stalled.

¹⁴⁰<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R1804>

No significant progress has been recorded in the implementation of these measures in North Macedonia. To support progress in the transposition and implementation of AFIR Regulation 1679/2024 across the region, the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community will launch and award a technical assistance project in the coming period.¹⁴¹

The steps to adopt EV-friendly regulations were initiated in Kosovo*, including tax reductions and VAT exemptions, in line with strategic plans for EV infrastructure. Municipalities such as Pristina and Peja are preparing pilot EVCS projects.

Serbia is making steady progress in implementing the measures set out in the Next Generation Road Action Plan, achieving an overall implementation rate of 65%. However, it is worth noting that no progress has been made in measures carried over from the previous Road Action Plan. The implementation of the Service Level Agreement for 2024–2026 is ongoing, with EU-funded technical assistance support for the development of a Road Asset Management System (RAMS). The launch of a Performance-Based Maintenance Contract is still pending due to funding constraints. Regarding climate resilience and alternative fuels, work is advancing on legislation aligned with the AFIR Regulation, and 32 EV charging stations are in place, of which 19 are now operational and further 13 are awaiting connection.¹⁴²

E-mobility in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in its initial phase and incentive measures for its faster development are necessary, particularly for infrastructure development. The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina has continuously extended customs duty exemptions on the import of electric vehicles, with the measure confirmed through to end-2026¹⁴³. In the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, EV and plug-in hybrid vehicle purchase incentive programmes have been in place since 2022, while the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Republika Srpska has not yet introduced financial measures to encourage e-mobility. By June 2025, 539 BEVs were registered, presenting a 37% increase compared to 2023, alongside approximately 380 charging stations. The planned construction of 7 DC charging stations along Corridor 5c, as part of the TEN-T network, represents a key step in infrastructure development.

At the end of 2025, Montenegro started a project for the preparation of domestic policy frameworks for deployment of alternative fuel infrastructure. The total number of charging stations is not officially registered. Based on available data, there are approximately 95 charging stations in total, of which 12 are private. Among them, around 10 stations are fast chargers. The remaining installations are mainly AC chargers with a capacity of up to 22 kW. None of the electric charging stations is installed on the motorway. Although there is willingness, the challenges are numerous: non-standardised infrastructure, slow bureaucracy for charger installation, and a lack of systemic solutions for charging in residential buildings. Also, electricity grids are not yet ready for mass vehicle charging.

WB6	Registered EVs
Albania	2891 ¹⁴⁴
Bosnia and Herzegovina	989 ¹⁴⁵
Kosovo*	585 ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹⁴²<https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Progress-report-Western-Balkans-Web-1.pdf>

¹⁴³<https://secw.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/SECW-2025-PANEL-VI-Mustafa-Music.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ General Directorate of Road Transport Services (DPSHTRR), <https://www.dpshttr.al/statistika-green.com>, The Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/industry-trade-and-services/transport-accidents-and-characteristics-of-road-vehicles/publikimet/2025/characteristics-of-road-vehicles-2024>

¹⁴⁵ BIHAMK, annual report 2025, <https://bihamk.ba/assets/storage/files/83749/Broj%20registrovani%20motornih%20vozila%20u%20Bosni%20i%20Hercegovini%202025.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ <https://archive.kosovotwopointzero.com/en/do-electric-cars-have-a-future-in-kosovo/>

Montenegro	552 ¹⁴⁷
North Macedonia	561
Serbia	6000 ¹⁴⁸

Table 15: Number of registered EVs in the WB6

Action 28 Increase regional cooperation in the area of alternative fuels infrastructure development

In 2025, regional cooperation on alternative fuels infrastructure in the WB6 continued to develop from a foundational stage towards more structured policy, legislative and planning progress. Although the alternative fuels network remains limited in scale, WB6 partners made notable efforts to align domestic frameworks with the EU's Regulation (EU) 2023/1804, which replaced the earlier Directive 2014/94/EU on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure and entered into force on 13 April 2024. This regulation sets mandatory minimum requirements for electric charging and hydrogen refuelling stations along core and comprehensive transport networks in the EU and has influenced regional planning.¹⁴⁹

Regional cooperation activities in 2025 focused on legislative preparation, technical assistance, and coordination mechanisms to enable interoperable infrastructure deployment across borders/boundaries, improve data exchange, and attract investment through aligned domestic policies. Albania continued to integrate alternative fuels infrastructure elements into domestic transport and energy strategies, reflecting commitments under its Plan for European Integration to transpose and implement Regulation (EU) 2023/1804 by 2025. Strategic planning for expanded EV charging point deployment along key transport corridors progressed with support from technical assistance.

Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in preliminary assessments and mapping exercises of EV charging and other alternative fuels infrastructure needs, supported through regional workshops and stakeholder coordination forums. Institutional cooperation improved through shared planning exercises; however, formal legal transposition has yet to be completed. Early steps were taken towards establishing a regulatory basis for alternative fuels infrastructure in Kosovo*, including developing drafts of incentive-based frameworks aligned with EU norms. Intergovernmental exchanges were held to share best practices on planning and financing alternative fuels networks.

In Montenegro, preparatory work for updating its transport strategy to incorporate alternative fuels infrastructure deployment progressed. Although a comprehensive methodology for EV charging station rollout was not yet adopted, feasibility studies and preliminary planning activities were initiated, with a view to full strategic integration in 2026. Planned regulatory frameworks advanced in North Macedonia for alternative fuels deployment following commitments made during bilateral screening exercises. Technical assistance from regional partners initiated an analysis to determine the legal and institutional pathways to transpose the EU regulation effectively.

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs database

<https://monstat.org/uploads/files/publikacije/statistika%20saobracaja/2023/PUBLIKACIJA-%20GODISNJA%20STATISTIKA%20SAOBRAKAJA%202023-en%20%282%29.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Ministry of Environmental Protection

¹⁴⁹ Regulation (EU) 2023/1804 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023R1804>

Serbia established and continued operating a working group on alternative fuels infrastructure, tasked with drafting a Law on Deployment of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure and coordinating efforts to expand both EV charging and other alternative refuelling networks across major transport corridors.

Economy	Known E-Charging / Alternative Fuel Infrastructure	Notes / Progress (2025)
Albania	EV charging stations established (60+)	Recent installations along key routes, including border/boundary and urban nodes; integrated into cloud system for real-time monitoring.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	EV charging stations established (90+)	Existing EVCS largely in cities; planning for strategic deployment remains evident but uneven.
Kosovo*	EV charging stations established (10-20)	Limited network; early-stage plans for expansion.
Montenegro	EV charging stations established (40+)	Growing network; feasibility and planning for expanded deployment is underway.
North Macedonia	EV charging stations established (50+)	Existing EVCS present; further scaling planned via domestic and regional initiatives.
Serbia	EV charging stations established (80+)	Largest existing network in WB6; connectivity to TEN-T corridors being enhanced.

Table 16: Alternative Fuel Infrastructure in the Western Balkans Six

The Transport Community Secretariat, together with partner organisations, continued to facilitate technical workshops and peer-review exchanges on alternative fuels infrastructure deployment, bringing together transport and energy authorities to align strategies, legal frameworks and investment priorities across the WB6. Despite these efforts, the physical extent of the alternative fuels network remains modest, and current infrastructure is concentrated mainly in urban areas and along limited segments of the TEN-T network. Integration of alternative fuels planning into domestic transport and climate strategies, greater coordination on financing instruments, and accelerated legislative transposition of EU standards will be critical to scale infrastructure deployment region-wide in the coming years.

2.4 Circular Economy Roadmap

Key recommendations for advancing implementation of the Circular Economy Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Strengthen governance of primary raw materials by ensuring that all Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)-related cooperation, investment partnerships and prospective strategic raw materials projects in the WB6 are subject to robust EIA/SEA procedures, transparent public participation, strong social safeguards and effective enforcement of environmental legislation.

- Integrate circularity into mining and raw materials strategies by requiring specific domestic-level plans for waste minimisation, improved tailings management, secondary raw materials recovery and site rehabilitation. Regional knowledge sharing, skills development, and technology transfer should be supported through relevant EU instruments and innovation networks.
- Use the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) and the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) as core regulatory drivers for circular product design, packaging performance, and resource efficiency, while aligning industrial transition measures with the Waste Framework Directive as last revised Directive (EU) 2025/1892 and using CBAM preparedness to accelerate decarbonisation and strengthen competitiveness in export-oriented sectors across the WB6.
- Maximise the benefits of CRM 2.0 and GAWB as regional cooperation platforms to support convergence of market-enabling instruments relevant for circular economy implementation, including exchange of good practice on EPR systems, deposit-return approaches, industrial symbiosis and eco-industrial parks.
- In line with the EU waste management acquis, accelerate the development of integrated, waste management systems, including regional landfills, material recovery facilities, separate bio-waste treatment and related financing and maintenance arrangements, while strictly applying the waste hierarchy and avoiding lock-in to incineration that could undermine recycling and prevention efforts.
- Address illegal dumping and narrow the implementation gap by expanding regular collection in rural areas, systematically mapping and remediating illegal dumpsites, and strengthening inspection, sanctioning, traceability and data systems for waste and environmental offences.
- Scale up consumer-targeted initiatives on waste prevention, repair, separate collection and informed consumption by linking long-term awareness campaigns with visible service improvements and clearer information on product durability, reparability and recyclability.
- Implement the Regional Action Plan on Prevention of Plastic Pollution, including Marine Litter, by prioritising bans on, and/or significant reduction of, the most polluting single-use plastics, increasing recycled content in plastic packaging and coordinating river-basin and coastal actions to cut plastic leakage into the Adriatic.
- Integrate circular economy targets and indicators into industrial, raw materials and waste strategies and into the Economic Reform Programmes of all WB6, using the OECD Economic Convergence Scoreboard and RCC monitoring as reference tools for tracking progress in the greening and circularity dimensions.
- Integrate green practices and circular economy principles into existing funding and guarantee schemes (e.g. SME support, innovation funds, development funds) to prioritise projects that improve resource productivity, increase secondary raw material use, reduce waste generation and support SME greening through clear eligibility and appraisal criteria.
- Promote eco-design and eco-labelling of products, in line with ESPR and PPWR, to drive more sustainable production models and enable consumers to make informed, low-impact purchasing decisions.
- Introduce practical circular economy modules and programmes at secondary and university level, including vocational education and training (VET), co-designed with businesses and

local administrations, to equip the future workforce with the skills needed for green and circular transitions.

- Integrate circular and green criteria into public procurement, especially for construction materials, furniture, textiles, ICT equipment and packaging-related procurement, to create stable demand for low-impact, resource-efficient products and services.
- Support the development of secondary raw materials markets by improving quality standards, traceability and data on secondary materials, strengthening recycling and re-manufacturing capacities and facilitating cross-border/boundary trade in secondary raw materials in line with EU requirements.
- Build institutional capacity and enhance coordination for circular economy implementation by strengthening inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, reinforcing the mandates and resources of key implementing agencies and improving cooperation between central and local authorities, business support organisations and civil society.

2.4.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 29 Improve sustainability of primary production of raw materials

The year 2025 marked a significant intensification of the discourse surrounding primary raw material production in the WB6, driven by the full operationalisation of the EU's Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) and the geopolitical imperative for resource security^{150, 151}. The region has been firmly positioned as an important partner for the EU in its efforts to diversify supply chains and reduce dependencies on other global actors. At the same time, the WB6 have increasingly recognised the strategic and economic importance of critical raw materials (CRMs), identifying the sector as an opportunity for industrial development, investment, employment generation, and integration into European raw materials value chains. In several WB6, CRMs have been prioritised within smart specialisation strategies and broader economic development agendas. This approach was formalised through the EU-Serbia strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery value chains, and electric vehicles, signed in July 2024 and actively pursued throughout 2025, while individual projects, including the Jadar lithium project, remain subject to domestic legislation, permitting procedures, and environmental impact assessment requirements¹⁵². In June 2025, the European Commission further solidified this approach by designating the Jadar project as a Strategic Project under the CRMA, with the aim of accelerating its development. In response, a range of civil society and experts as well as local communities have continued to provide data, analysis, and awareness raising efforts, placing particular emphasis on upholding the right to a healthy environment.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ BIEPAG. (2025, March). Mining in the Western Balkans: The Rise of Dangerous Transactionalism.

<https://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/mining-in-the-western-balkans-march-2025-217.pdf>

¹⁵¹ European Commission. (3 December 2025). RESourceEU Action Plan. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01c448d6-dc93-40d7-9afe-4c2af448d00c_en

¹⁵² Müller, M., & Vulović, M. (12 March 2025). The EU's Raw Materials Diplomacy: Serbia as a Test Case. SWP Comment 2025/C 10. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-eus-raw-materials-diplomacy-serbia-as-a-test-case>

¹⁵³ European Western Balkans. (5 June 2025). European Commission approves controversial Serbian lithium project as strategic for the EU. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/06/05/european-commission-approves-controversial-serbian-lithium-project-as-strategic-for-the-eu/>

^{154, 155}. The adoption of the RESourceEU Action Plan in December 2025 further accelerated the implementation of the EU's critical raw materials strategy, explicitly building on the CRMA framework¹⁵¹.

Progress on sustainable primary raw materials governance across WB6 in 2025 remained uneven. Key areas requiring further development include the quality of environmental impact and strategic environmental assessments, mining waste and tailings management, site rehabilitation obligations, raw material traceability, recovery of secondary raw materials from extractive waste, ESG compliance, and the uptake of cleaner technologies in mining and processing. The European Commission's 2025 Enlargement Package noted that EIA and SEA implementation requires strengthening across the WB6¹⁵⁶. Incidents such as the tailings spill at the Toranica mine in North Macedonia¹⁵⁷ and water quality concerns reported in the vicinity of the Vareš mine in Bosnia and Herzegovina have underlined the importance of monitoring systems and consistent enforcement of existing regulatory frameworks¹⁵⁸. Bridging the gap between formal legislative requirements and their practical application on the ground remains the central challenge for the sector across the region.

Serbia continued to feature prominently in regional discussions on mining developments in 2025. Serbia also adopted the Strategy for the Management of Mineral and Other Geological Resources, positioning itself among the regional frontrunners and providing a relevant strategic example for the development of a modern, responsible and sustainable mining sector, based on sustainable resource management, environmental protection, application of modern standards, development of critical and strategic raw materials, and strengthening of domestic value chains. Following a 2024 Constitutional Court decision that annulled the earlier cancellation, any further consideration of the Jadar lithium project remains subject to domestic legislation, permitting procedures and environmental assessment requirements. The project's designation as an EU Strategic Project in June 2025 was accompanied by reactions, from a segment of the public, presented by their proponents as concerns related to environmental protection and governance aspects. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025 saw a surge in exploration activities for critical raw materials, often with limited transparency and public consultation¹⁵⁵. Three CRM related projects were underway, including lithium exploration by Arcore in Lopare and by Lykos Balkan Metals in Jezero¹⁵⁰. The operational Vareš silver mine, run by Adriatic Metals, continued to be recognised as one of the most significant recent mining investments, contributing to local employment and export potential. At the same time, reports of water contamination and concerns raised by local communities underlined the importance of transparent environmental monitoring and effective regulatory oversight¹⁵⁰. The fragmented governance structure and the absence of a comprehensive mineral resources strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to represent major obstacles to sustainable management and effective oversight of the sector¹⁵⁹.

Albania made a significant step forward in fostering innovation by launching the EIT RawMaterials Regional Innovation Centre in Elbasan in late 2024, which became fully operational in 2025. The centre hosted its first regional workshop in December 2025, aiming

¹⁵⁴ RERI. (2025, November). THE JADAR PROJECT: Strategic Project or Strategic Error. <https://reri.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/The-Jadar-Project-Strategic-Project-or-Strategic-Error.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ European Western Balkans. (20 November 2025). Spotlight on mining in the Western Balkans. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/11/20/spotlight-on-mining-in-the-western-balkans/>

¹⁵⁶ European Commission, 2025 Enlargement Package, 4 November 2025: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2025-enlargement-package-shows-progress-towards-eu-membership-key-enlargement-partners-2025-11-04_en

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.intellinews.com/toxic-mine-spill-in-north-macedonia-threatens-health-food-safety-374100/>

¹⁵⁸ Centre for Investigative Reporting (CIN), Adriatic Metals Loses Mining License in Vareš, February 2025: <https://cin.ba/en/adriatic-metals-loses-mining-license-in-vares/>

¹⁵⁹ European Commission. (2025). Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report.

to catalyse innovation, education, and business creation in the raw materials sector for the entire region^{160, 161}.

In March 2025, North Macedonia faced an environmental incident involving significant tailings spill at the Toranica lead-zinc mine, operated by the company Bulmak 2016. The release of hazardous substances, including lead, cadmium, and cyanide, into the Kriva River¹⁶² underscored the importance of strengthening environmental governance, emergency response mechanisms, and regulatory oversight. It also prompted public discussion regarding the effectiveness and proportionality of existing enforcement measures, as the financial penalty imposed on the operator (approximately EUR 3,200) was widely perceived as insufficient to reflect the scale of the incident¹⁶². The European Commission's 2025 report also noted weak implementation of EIA and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) legislation by the administration¹⁶³.

In Montenegro, the administration demonstrated responsiveness to public and expert pressure by terminating the concession for the Brskovo zinc mine project with Tara Resources¹⁵⁰. The decision followed a sustained public advocacy campaign that highlighted serious environmental and health concerns, as well as inaccuracies in the data provided by the developer. This case stands out as a notable exception to the broader regional pattern of prioritising investor interests over community welfare and environmental protection.

Kosovo* continued to operate under its 2012-2025 Mining Strategy, with discussions ongoing for a new strategic framework that would better align with the EU's CRMA and circular economy principles. The focus in 2025 was on exploring the strategic importance of its existing mineral resources within the new EU regulatory context and identifying pathways for sustainable development¹⁶⁴.

In 2025, the primary raw materials sector in the WB6 remained shaped by the significant economic opportunities associated with strategic partnerships with the European Union, while also highlighting the need for continued strengthening of governance, regulatory implementation and public trust across the region.

Action 30

Apply an industrial ecosystem approach to attain environmentally sustainable, balanced economic recovery

The industrial transition of the WB6 should go beyond traditional industrial policy measures and explicitly align domestic industrial policies and support schemes with the objectives of the new Industrial Strategy for Europe, including the twin green and digital transition, stronger industrial ecosystem resilience, and deeper participation in EU Single Market value chains. The life cycle approach remains central to the EU's sustainability and industrial transition agenda, with the ESPR, which entered into force on 18 July 2024, providing a key framework

¹⁶⁰ EIT RawMaterials Albania. (5 December 2025). First Regional Workshop. <https://www.rawmaterialsalbania.al/>

¹⁶¹ EIT RawMaterials. (23 April 2024). EIT RawMaterials partners with Government of Albania to launch landmark regional innovation. <https://eitrawmaterials.eu/press-releases/eit-rawmaterials-partners-government-albania-launch-landmark-regional-innovation>

¹⁶² Gjorgjioska, A. (20 June 2025). North Macedonia Monthly Briefing: The Toranica Mine Spill. China-CEE Institute. <https://china-cee.eu/2025/06/20/north-macedonia-monthly-briefing-the-toranica-mine-spill-environmental-degradation-corruption-networks-and-political-influence/>

¹⁶³ European Commission. (2025). North Macedonia 2025 Report.

¹⁶⁴ Kosovo* Chamber of Mines. (2025). KCHM Seminar on Kosovo*'s mineral resources and the EU CRMA. <https://kosovochamberofmines.com/kchm-seminar/>

for making sustainable products the norm¹⁶⁵. The adoption of the first ESPR and Energy Labelling Working Plan (2025–2030) in April 2025 further clarified the EU’s ambition to make sustainable products the norm, prioritising selected high-impact product groups such as textiles, furniture and electronics, and horizontal measures for future eco-design and information requirements¹⁶⁶.

These regulations, mandating durability, reparability, and resource efficiency, present a significant compliance challenge for the WB6 industries, but also a crucial opportunity for modernisation and integration into EU value chains.

The new Common Regional Market Action Plan (CRM 2.0) for 2025-2028, adopted in October 2024, provides an important regional cooperation framework for supporting competitiveness, market integration and elements of green and digital industrial transition in the WB6, although implementation remains uneven across WB6¹⁶⁷. At the same time, the start of the CBAM definitive regime on 1 January 2026 has increased the urgency of industrial decarbonisation, especially for exporters of electricity, iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers and hydrogen-related value chains.

A CEE Bankwatch Network report from October 2025 warned that insufficient preparation by WB6 administrations could create a “perfect storm”, as carbon-intensive exports, particularly electricity, will face significant costs, potentially slashing revenues and impacting industrial competitiveness¹⁶⁸.

Throughout 2025, the WB6 have taken varied steps to adapt their industrial policies. Montenegro recorded notable progress, adopting an action plan for its 2024-2028 industrial policy in June 2025 and updating the Competitiveness Council’s plan to address business barriers in March 2025¹⁶⁹. It also adopted a waste management plan for 2025-2029, laying the foundation for a circular economy transition¹⁶⁹.

Serbia continued implementing its 2021-2030 Industrial Development Strategy and adopted a new SME strategy for 2025-2030 in August 2025, building on its regional leadership in green finance established with its 2024 ESG bond¹⁷⁰. However, challenges in waste management persisted, with several landfill fires occurring in the summer of 2025 despite the adoption of a new waste prevention plan¹⁷⁰.

Albania advanced its Business and Investment Development Strategy, and in a significant move, signed a cooperation agreement on 22 May 2025 to develop eco-industrial parks with support from the EU and the International Finance Corporation (IFC)¹⁷¹. However, Albania still needs to make significant progress to address waste management challenges from taking urgent action on littering to improving the legislative framework on integrated waste management and extended producer responsibility.

¹⁶⁵ European Commission. (18 July 2024). Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation. https://commission.europa.eu/energy-climate-change-environment/standards-tools-and-labels/products-labelling-rules-and-requirements/ecodesign-sustainable-products-regulation_en

¹⁶⁶ European Commission. (16 April 2025). First ESPR and Energy Labelling Working Plan. https://green-forum.ec.europa.eu/implementing-ecodesign-sustainable-products-regulation_en

¹⁶⁷ Regional Cooperation Council. (14 October 2024). Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028. <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/189/common-regional-market-action-plan-2025-2028>

¹⁶⁸ CEE Bankwatch Network. (30 October 2025). CBAM: Western Balkan governments must act now to avoid ‘perfect storm’. https://bankwatch.org/press_release/cbam-western-balkan-governments-must-act-now-to-avoid-perfect-storm-new-report

¹⁶⁹ European Commission. (2025). Montenegro 2025 Report.

¹⁷⁰ European Commission. (2025). Serbia 2025 Report.

¹⁷¹ Western Balkans Investment Framework. (11 June 2025). Eco-industrial parks project progressing in Albania and Serbia. <https://www.wbif.eu/news-details/eco-industrial-parks-project-progressing-albania-and-serbia>

In Kosovo*, the comprehensive 2023-2030 strategy for industrial development and business support continued, though with an implementation rate below 40%¹⁷². Positive steps included the start of the beneficial ownership register in August 2025 and the transformation of two industrial parks into eco-industrial areas. Access to finance for SMEs saw marked improvement, with the Kosovo* Credit Guarantee Fund enabling loans worth EUR 944.2 million by September 2025¹⁷².

North Macedonia adopted a new development strategy for 2024-2044 and a new SME strategy for 2025-2030, but implementation of circular economy principles was reported as stagnating, and the Fund for Innovations and Technological Development was closed following findings of irregularities and subsequent restructuring of support mechanisms¹⁷³.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the absence of a coherent domestic-wide industrial policy strategy remains a major obstacle to applying an integrated industrial ecosystem approach, particularly given fragmented competences and uneven legislative alignment across levels of governance. While the Republika Srpska enacted an SME Innovation Action Plan and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a sectoral strategy for textiles, overall legislative alignment with the EU acquis, particularly the Small Business Act and Late Payment Directive, is incomplete¹⁷⁴.

At the regional level, several initiatives in 2025 aimed to accelerate the green industrial transition. The OECD continued its project on Digitalising and Greening SMEs in the Western Balkans¹⁷⁵. The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) pilot project on Eco-Industrial Parks gained significant momentum, with workshops for Serbia's first greenfield park in Šabac and the finalisation of the agreement for pilot projects in Albania¹⁷⁶. In parallel, the RCC, in cooperation with UNIDO and other partners, launched technical assistance for identifying industrial symbiosis opportunities through eco-industrial parks in the WB6, supporting the gradual development of more resource-efficient industrial zones in the region. Furthermore, a new Go Digital in the Western Balkans programme was launched by the EBRD and EU in April 2025 to boost SME digitalisation and green technology adoption¹⁷⁷.

In summary, while the WB6 are making unequal progress in adapting their industrial ecosystems, the strategic direction is clear. The combination of EU regulatory drivers like ESPR and CBAM, coupled with targeted regional support for eco-industrial parks, SME greening, and circular economy roadmaps, is creating a strong impetus for change. The key challenge for 2026 will be to translate these strategies and pilot initiatives into broader and more systematic implementation so as to ensure that industries across the region remain competitive in an increasingly green European market.

Action 31

Develop circular economy strategies looking at the entire lifecycle of products

¹⁷² European Commission. (2025). Kosovo* 2025 Report.

¹⁷³ European Commission. (2025). North Macedonia 2025 Report.

¹⁷⁴ European Commission. (2025). Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report.

¹⁷⁵ OECD. (4 June 2025). The Secretary-General's Report to Ministers on OECD Global Relations.

<https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/events/2025/06/mcm/MCM-2025-Secretary-General-s-Report-to-Ministers-on-OECD-Global-Relation.pdf>

¹⁷⁶ Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), "Eco-industrial parks project progressing in Albania and Serbia," news release, 2025. Available: <https://wbif.eu/news-details/eco-industrial-parks-project-progressing-albania-and-serbia>

¹⁷⁷ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. (1 December 2025). EBRD and EU boost SME development in the Western Balkans. <https://www.ebrd.com/home/news-and-events/news/2025/ebrd-and-eu-boost-sme-development-in-the-western-balkans.html>

In 2025, the WB6 accelerated their transition from linear policy frameworks towards integrated, lifecycle-based circular economy strategies, driven by the dual pressures of EU regulatory alignment and growing grassroots momentum. In line with the Circular Economy Roadmap of the GAWB Action Plan, the quality of circular economy strategies should now be assessed not only by their formal adoption, but by whether they contain concrete deliverables, defined timelines, sector-specific priorities, clear implementation responsibilities, and monitoring arrangements.

A significant regional step was taken in October 2025, when WB6 Economy Ministers at the Berlin Process in London endorsed Regional Green Public Procurement (GPP) Criteria for the Western Balkans Six, facilitated by the RCC, presenting a concrete step towards operationalising the Roadmap's identification of sustainable consumption, including green public procurement, as an integral part of the lifecycle approach to circular economy¹⁷⁸. While the gap between strategic ambition and on-the-ground implementation persists, the year was marked by a notable increase in regional cooperation, private sector innovation, and targeted EU support, signalling a shift from scattered pilots to more coordinated and systemic action.

The strategic context was significantly shaped by the entry into force of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) on 11 February 2025¹⁷⁹. The Regulation applies from 12 August 2026, requires all packaging to be recyclable, introduces recyclability performance requirements over time, and obliges Member States to establish deposit-return systems for single-use plastic and metal beverage containers by 2029 unless they already achieve high separate collection rates. In parallel, Directive (EU) 2025/1892 amended the Waste Framework Directive by introducing binding food waste reduction targets and requiring Member States to establish EPR schemes for textiles and footwear within the implementation timeline set by the Directive, thereby tightening the EU framework for waste prevention and more circular product systems. This regulation, coupled with the upcoming separate collection obligation for textiles, has created a clear and urgent impetus for the WB6 to modernise their waste management systems and harmonise Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. However, progress remains uneven. As of December 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia submitted their formal applications under the EU Waste Shipments Regulation to be on the EU List of jurisdictions authorised to import waste from the EU after 21st May 2027¹⁸⁰.

At the regional level, RCC-facilitated stakeholder cooperation on green and circular economy issues continued to expand, building on the Western Balkans Green and Circular Economy Stakeholders Platform launched in 2024 and other regional initiatives supporting policy exchange, awareness and implementation dialogue¹⁸¹. In addition to the RCC-led platform, important roles were played by the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF)¹⁸², which mobilises business and chamber networks around green competitiveness, and the Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub (WBCEH), a multi-stakeholder initiative that connects

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.rcc.int/news/974/western-balkans-economy-ministers-endorse-landmark-package-of-rcc-facilitated-economic-deliverables>

¹⁸⁰ Strengthening Waste Management and EPR in the Western Balkans: Aligning with EU Standards through the CRM Framework, Policy Brief, November 2025. https://zelenaekonomija.komorabih.ba/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Policy-Brief-EPR-in-the-Western-Balkans_2025.pdf

¹⁸¹ BCSDN, "Supporting Circular Transitions: Launch of the Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub," 15 May 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://balkancsd.net/supporting-circular-transitions-launch-of-the-western-balkans-circular-economy-hub/>

¹⁸² Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF). <https://www.wb6cif.eu/who-we-are/>

governments, businesses and civil society to promote practical circular economy solutions and innovation across the region¹⁸³.

Its flagship Circular Economy Awards, held for the first time in October 2025, showcased the growing ecosystem of innovators across the region, with winners including Recycling Albania for establishing Albania's first Circular Economy Park, Rilindja Gjellbër for launching Kosovo*'s first Textile Recycling Centre, and the City of Smederevo in Serbia for its municipal leadership in waste separation and solar energy projects¹⁸⁴. These initiatives, alongside events like the Western Balkans Circular Economy Week in May 2025, have been instrumental in building a shared regional identity around circularity¹⁸⁵.

Despite this momentum, significant structural challenges remain. The OECD's 2025 Economic Convergence Scoreboard highlighted the region's profound circularity gap, noting that over 83% of municipal waste in the WB6 is still disposed of in landfills (compared to 23% in the EU), with recycling rates as low as 2-3% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* and Serbia¹⁸⁶.

Serbia continued to build on its established policy framework, supported by a new EUR 16.3 million EU support package launched in early 2025. This package allocates EUR 14.1 million for bio-waste collection and EUR 0.7 million for developing local circular economy roadmaps, directly addressing the economy's low recycling rate of 15.5%. The adoption of the Waste Prevention Plan 2025–2030 provided further strategic direction, though the closure of the Duboko waste management centre and subsequent landfill fires in the summer of 2025 underscored persistent infrastructural weaknesses¹⁸⁷.

Montenegro recorded significant progress by adopting its Waste Management Plan (2025-2029) in October 2025, laying a clear foundation for its transition to a circular economy. The implementation of a ban on certain single-use plastics and thin plastic bags from October 2024 yielded tangible results, with some retailers reporting a 50% reduction in plastic bag use¹⁸⁸.

In Albania, the waste management sector in 2025 continued to face significant structural and implementation challenges. The Government announced a reform aimed at centralising waste collection and management under the Agency for Waste Economy (AKEM) by 2026. However, according to the European Commission's 2025 Enlargement Report¹⁸⁹, institutional capacities remained limited, while key draft laws on integrated waste management and EPR were still pending adoption. The report also highlighted weak implementation of environmental legislation and the need for urgent action against littering. At the same time, several local initiatives supported circular economy practices and innovation, including the launch of Albania's first CE Park, the continued pilot project on separate municipal waste collection in

¹⁸³ BCSDN, "Supporting Circular Transitions: Launch of the Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub," 15 May 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://balkanscd.net/supporting-circular-transitions-launch-of-the-western-balkans-circular-economy-hub/>

¹⁸⁴ Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub, "Circular Economy Awards 2025: The Western Balkans' First Regional Winners Announced," 20 November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://wbcirculareconomy.com/circular-economy-awards-2025-the-western-balkans-first-regional-winners-announced/>

¹⁸⁵ CENER 21, "Practical Circular Economy – Western Balkans Circular Economy Week 2025 Highlighted in Sarajevo," 3 June 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://cener21.ba/2025/06/03/practical-circular-economy-western-balkans-circular-economy-week-2025-highlighted-in-sarajevo/>

¹⁸⁶ OECD. (10 June 2025). Economic Convergence Scoreboard for the Western Balkans 2025: Greening cluster. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/economic-convergence-scoreboard-for-the-western-balkans-2025_bc0babf3-en/full-report/greening-cluster_2a8a946e.html

¹⁸⁷ SWITCH to Green, "Moving towards circularity: Serbia's path," October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.switchtogreen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/251002_Serbia_factsheet.pdf

¹⁸⁸ Government of Montenegro, Državni plan upravljanja otpadom za period 2025–2029 [National Waste Management Plan 2025–2029], adopted by the Government of Montenegro on 23 October 2025, on the proposal of the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Development. Available: <https://www.sluzbenilist.me/propisi/391339>

¹⁸⁹ European Commission, *Albania Report 2025*, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD(2025). Available: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2025_en

Berat, and the operationalisation of the EIT RawMaterials Regional Innovation Centre in Elbasan^{190,191}.

Despite having a comprehensive CE Roadmap since March 2024, North Macedonia saw implementation stagnate in 2025. The European Commission noted that the proliferation of Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) without sufficient supervision was jeopardising market functioning, and key domestic strategies for waste and sludge management remained pending¹⁹².

Kosovo* continued to strengthen its policy framework for circular economy and sustainable resource management during 2025. Building on the Circular Economy Roadmap adopted in 2023¹⁹³, the authorities advanced the implementation of circular economy reforms included in the Reform Agenda, particularly those aimed at supporting start-ups and MSMEs in the green and circular economy sectors through innovation support mechanisms, as well as measures promoting investment, resource efficiency, recycling and the development of green products. Further progress was supported through the implementation of the Integrated Waste Management Strategy 2024–2035 and its Action Plan 2024–2026, which provide the strategic basis for waste prevention, separate collection, recycling and the development of circular value chains. In parallel, implementation continued under the Construction and Demolition Waste Management Plan adopted in 2023, aimed at increasing the recovery and reuse of construction materials and reducing the landfilling of mineral waste streams. At the legislative level, preparations for the adoption of a new Law on Integrated Waste Management, under development since mid-2024, continued throughout 2025 and are expected to further align the regulatory framework with EU circular economy and waste management requirements.

Kosovo* also continued preparatory activities for the introduction of a deposit return system (DRS), although implementation timelines were affected by amendments to the implementing legislation introduced in March 2025¹⁹⁴. Despite these delays, the combination of strategic planning documents, legislative reforms and Reform Agenda commitments provides an important foundation for accelerating the transition towards a more circular economy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to lack a cohesive, domestic-wide strategy for circular economy, with progress largely confined to the entity level. The launch of the first Repair Café in Mostar in 2025, supported by the WBCEH, demonstrates the potential of community-led initiatives to drive practical change from the local level upwards^{195,184}. A project funded by the European Union, titled “Technical Assistance for Enhanced Material Recovery from Waste through Separate Collection, Reuse, and Recycling Based on Circular Economy Principles”, is currently being implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its objective is to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in progressing towards EU accession by aligning waste management practices with the European Green Deal and circular economy principles.

¹⁹⁰ Recycling Albania (RecyAl), "Circular Economy Park," 2025. Available: <https://recyclingalbania.com/circular-economy-park/>

¹⁹¹ Interreg IPA VI-A Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Greece–Albania 2021–2027, "DIGITAL: Introduction of Digital Tools for Monitoring Waste Management in Urban Areas," project application/summary, started 27 August 2025. Available: https://greece-albania.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/APPLICATION-FORM_DIGITAL.pdf

¹⁹² European Commission, North Macedonia 2025 Report, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD(2025) 753 final, Brussels, 4 November 2025, pp. 87–88, Chapter 27 (Environment and climate change), section "Environment" (waste management). Available: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/267b368e-6b55-4a42-bb72-6395593de4da_en?filename=north-macedonia-report-2025.pdf

¹⁹³ Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI), Circular Economy Roadmap of Kosovo*, Pristina, March 2023. [Online]. Available: https://mmphi.rks-gov.net/MMPHIFolder/DocumentsFiles/2023_8171e270-643b-4de3-9387-91794084eb8b.pdf

¹⁹⁴ Government of Kosovo*, Administrative Instruction (GRK) No. 04/2025, April 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ADMINISTRATIVE-INSTRUCTION-GRK-NO.-04-2025.pdf>

¹⁹⁵ Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub (WBCEH), "First Repair Café in Bosnia and Herzegovina launched in Mostar," news article, 2025. Available: <https://wbcirculareconomy.com/first-repair-cafe-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-launched-in-mostar/>

The project addresses the need for a sustainable, circular approach to waste management, with a focus on separate collection, reuse, and recycling in order to reduce environmental impact and promote economic growth¹⁹⁶.

Action 32

Make further progress in the construction and maintenance of waste management infrastructure for cities and regions

In 2025, the WB6 made tangible, albeit uneven, progress in modernising their waste management infrastructure, a critical step in aligning with EU environmental standards and advancing the circular economy. Recent investments include, for example, the opening of a new EU-compliant regional sanitary landfill and recycling centre in Živinice, Bosnia and Herzegovina, serving three municipalities in Tuzla Canton, as well as ongoing projects to construct regional sanitary landfills, transfer stations and collection infrastructure in several planning regions in North Macedonia, supported by EU and international financial institutions. Beyond the construction of physical facilities, effective waste management infrastructure also depends on sound operational practices, clear governance arrangements and predictable financing systems, and the Roadmap calls for a shift away from the linear “collect-and-dispose” model towards integrated systems that prioritise waste prevention, separate collection, treatment and recycling within sustainable funding frameworks. Similar landmark projects, such as the Belgrade Vinča waste-to-energy facility in Serbia and the Možura landfill gas power plant in Montenegro, further illustrate both the scale of recent investment and the diversity of technological pathways being pursued in the region.

At the WB6 level, progress in building physical infrastructure has not yet been matched by reforms in governance and financing, with municipal waste services still constrained by fragmented institutional responsibilities, underfunded environmental agencies and tariffs that rarely cover the full cost of collection and treatment. In most WB6, a large share of municipal waste continues to be disposed of in non-sanitary or illegal landfills with little or no pre-treatment, while gate fees, where they exist, often cover only basic operations and do not incentivise separate collection or waste prevention. As a result, many systems remain locked in a low-investment, low-performance equilibrium, and the Roadmap underlines the need for economy-wide reforms that clarify responsibilities, strengthen enforcement, and establish predictable, polluter-pays-based funding models to support integrated waste management systems, including through the gradual roll-out and improvement of extended producer responsibility schemes for packaging, WEEE and other priority streams across the region^{197,198}.

As municipal waste generation continues to rise across the WB6, waste prevention and treatment practices remain insufficient, and the share of municipal waste sent to landfill is still more than 3.5 times higher than the EU average, making waste disposal the weakest area of

¹⁹⁶ CETAP (Technical Assistance for Enhanced Material Recovery from Waste through Separate Collection, Reuse, and Recycling based on Circular Economy Principles), funded by the European Union, implemented by COWI, SEI and UBA, official project website. Available: <https://cetap.ba/en/home/>

¹⁹⁷ WB6 CIF, Policy Brief on Strengthening Waste Management and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in the Western Balkans, 2025. https://www.wb6cif.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Policy-Brief-EPR-in-the-Western-Balkans_2025.pdf

¹⁹⁸ European Environment Agency (EEA), “Municipal waste management in the Western Balkans 6”, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/municipal-waste-management-in-the-western-balkan-countries>

performance within the greening cluster¹⁹⁹. In 2025 notable progress was made in advancing EU-aligned waste management infrastructure, alongside continued discussions on the role of waste-to-energy solutions in a circular economy transition.

Investment in modern infrastructure, heavily reliant on the EU and the WBIF, delivered several landmark projects. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the new Živinice solid waste management centre officially began operations in April 2025. This EU-compliant sanitary landfill and recycling facility, serving approximately 95,000 residents, was financed through a EUR 5 million EBRD loan and grants from Sweden and the EU, highlighting the collaborative funding models essential for such large-scale projects²⁰⁰. Early operational experience indicates that the facility has started to reduce reliance on unsanitary dumpsites in the service area and enabled basic recycling activities, but its performance remains contingent on improving separate collection, ensuring stable cost-recovery through tariffs and strengthening institutional capacity, which will be critical for its long-term effectiveness. In North Macedonia, a significant step was taken in July 2025 with the signing of a EUR 2 million WBIF grant for technical assistance to prepare the second phase of the Regional Solid Waste Management Project. This initiative, part of a broader package including a EUR 55 million EBRD loan and a EUR 21.7 million EU grant, aims to establish modern waste management systems for over one million residents across 45 municipalities.

In January 2026, North Macedonia further advanced the project through the inauguration of new waste selection equipment for 18 municipalities in the Pelagonija and Southwestern regions, representing an EUR 11 million investment linked to the future regional waste management centre in Novaci and transfer stations in Prilep, Ohrid, Kičevo and Debar, as part of a EUR 60 million Regional Waste Management System supported through the Western Balkans Investment Framework. Preparations also continued for the construction of regional landfills and transfer stations as part of the broader EU- and EBRD-supported Regional Solid Waste Management Project aimed at establishing integrated and EU-compliant waste management services across multiple regions²⁰¹.

Serbia's long-awaited Belgrade waste-to-energy facility in Vinča became fully operational in 2025, processing 340,000 tonnes of waste annually to generate electricity and heat²⁰². While this reduces landfill dependency, it has also intensified discussions on whether investment in incineration risks diverting resources from higher-priority measures such as waste prevention, separate collection and recycling. Civil society organisations like Bankwatch have raised concerns, pointing to Sofia's abandonment of a similar project and warning that incineration could undermine recycling targets and lock the region into a carbon-intensive model²⁰³. These concerns were amplified by events in Serbia during the summer of 2025, when the closure of the Duboko waste management centre led to waste being redirected to unsanitary landfills, resulting in several major landfill fires¹⁷⁰.

¹⁹⁹ OECD, Economic Convergence Scoreboard for the Western Balkans 2025, "Greening cluster," OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc0babf3-en>. Available: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/economic-convergence-scoreboard-for-the-western-balkans-2025_bc0babf3-en/full-report/greening-cluster_2a8a946e.html

²⁰⁰ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), "Modern waste management centre starts operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina", 7 April 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ebrd.com/home/news-and-events/news/2025/modern-waste-management-centre-starts-operating-in-bosnia-and-he.html>

²⁰¹ [Regional waste management model in North Macedonia moves forward with new selection equipment](https://support4partnership.org/en/news/regional-waste-management-model-in-north-macedonia-moves-forward-with-new-selection-equipment), 25 January 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://support4partnership.org/en/news/regional-waste-management-model-in-north-macedonia-moves-forward-with-new-selection-equipment>

²⁰² GEM Wiki, "Vinca Waste-to-Energy power station," 11 December 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.gem.wiki/Vinca_Waste-to-Energy_power_station

²⁰³ Bankwatch, "Sofia's burned lesson: Why the Western Balkans must ditch waste incineration", 25 November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://bankwatch.org/blog/sofia-s-burned-lesson-why-the-western-balkans-must-ditch-waste-incineration>

In Montenegro, a pioneering step was taken with the launch of trial operations at the Možura regional landfill's biogas power plant in December 2025, the first of its kind in the Western Balkans Six. This 1.5 MW facility will convert landfill gas into electricity, supplying the equivalent of 400 households and demonstrating a viable alternative to flaring²⁰⁴. The adoption of the Waste Management Plan (2025-2029) further solidified the economy's strategic direction towards reducing landfill reliance²⁰⁵¹⁶⁹.

Albania announced a major reform of its waste sector in August 2025, aiming to centralise waste management under a new Albania-owned operator by 2026. While key legislation on integrated waste management is still pending, progress is visible on the ground, with 15 municipalities introducing composting and Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) and a pilot project for waste separation at the source running in Berat, indicating early but concrete steps towards the integrated, prevention-oriented systems envisaged in the Roadmap²⁰⁶.

In Kosovo*, despite the approval of an integrated waste management strategy in late 2024, the situation on the ground deteriorated, with the number of identified illegal dumpsites increasing by 13.6% during the reporting period, from 403 in 2023 to 458 in 2024²⁰⁷. Progress has been constrained by the limited financial resources available for investments in sanitary landfills and waste pre-treatment and treatment facilities, through both the domestic budget and external financing mechanisms. According to the Integrated Waste Management Strategy 2024–2035, approximately EUR 500 million in investments will be required over the next decade to achieve the landfilling diversion and recycling targets. The continued delays in approving and implementing inter-municipal waste management plans have further slowed the development of regional waste management systems. This divergence between strategic objectives and implementation on the ground highlights persistent financing, governance and institutional capacity challenges in the waste management sector.

Overall, 2025 demonstrated that while the WB6 are capable of delivering complex, EU-compliant waste infrastructure projects with international support, significant challenges remain. The lack of reliable waste data, persistent underfunding at the municipal level, and the need for greater public engagement in waste separation are common hurdles. Moving forward, a dual focus on constructing new facilities and strengthening the operational and governance frameworks to manage them will be essential for sustainable transition.

Action 33

Design and implement consumer-targeted initiatives to raise awareness of citizens on waste prevention, separate collection and sustainable consumption

Public concern over environmental degradation in the WB6 has intensified in 2025, with a notable shift in citizen priorities. According to the Balkan Barometer 2025, air and water pollution now dominate public concern, cited by 61% and 52% of respondents, respectively. While direct concern over waste management has slightly decreased to 34% (from 37% in

²⁰⁴ Bioenergy News, "Western Balkans' first landfill biogas power plant begins operations in Montenegro", 28 January 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.bioenergy-news.com/news/western-balkans-first-landfill-biogas-power-plant-begins-operations-in-montenegro/>

²⁰⁵ Government of Montenegro, Državni plan upravljanja otpadom za period 2025–2029 [National Waste Management Plan 2025–2029], adopted by the Government of Montenegro on 23 October 2025, on the proposal of the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Development. Available: <https://www.sluzbenilist.me/propisi/391339>

²⁰⁶ GIZ, Circular Economy in Western Balkans. <https://www.giz.de/sites/default/files/media/pkb-document/2026-01/study-circular-economy-western-balkans-final.pdf>

²⁰⁷ European Commission, Kosovo* 2025 Report, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD(2025) 752 final, Brussels, 4 November 2025, p. 16, Chapter 27 (Environment and climate change). Available: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2132161/kosovo-report-2025.pdf>

2024), the underlying issues of unsustainable consumption and inadequate waste infrastructure remain central to the region's environmental challenges²⁰⁸. This growing awareness, coupled with a clear policy direction from the EU, has catalysed a range of consumer-targeted initiatives aimed at fostering behavioural change and promoting a circular economy. At the same time, the Balkan Barometer 2025 Business Opinion survey shows that many companies still perceive lack of consumer demand as a major bottleneck for investing in circular business models, indicating a persistent gap between citizens' stated environmental concerns and their actual purchasing and consumption behaviour²⁰⁹.

At the regional level, 2025 was marked by continued RCC-supported dialogue and awareness raising efforts on green and circular economy issues, building on existing regional stakeholder platforms and cooperation mechanisms established under the Green Agenda framework, including development and endorsement of the Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter. The Regional Action Plan operationalises the 2023 Joint Statement by setting out six strategic goals, supported by a comprehensive set of measures and activities, aimed at preventing and reducing plastic pollution across marine and freshwater systems through the application of circular economy principles and strengthened alignment with EU legislation. It provides a structured roadmap for improving plastic waste management, reducing single-use plastics, and enhancing regional coordination, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement to protect ecosystems, biodiversity, and livelihoods dependent on clean aquatic environments.

Youth engagement remains a cornerstone of regional strategy. The RCC's Western Balkans Youth Lab (WBYL2) project delivered several practical tools in 2025 designed to empower young people as agents of change. These include the Eco Bonton guide, the Eco Youth Dictionary, and the Green Seat Manual, which aims to embed environmental advocacy within Local Youth Councils. The project also organised targeted workshops in five municipalities in Serbia (Žabari, Kragujevac, Zaječar, Pančevo, and Vranje) to train young people in local environmental decision-making processes²¹⁰.

At the WB6 level, initiatives have become more sophisticated, moving from general clean-up campaigns to targeted, data-driven interventions.

In Montenegro, the domestic environmental campaign "Čuvaj da te čuva" ("Protect it, it protects you"), launched on World Environment Day, has been particularly impactful. A broad coalition of the EU Delegation, government ministries, and CSOs organised six major clean-up and awareness actions across the economy, including the rehabilitation of an illegal landfill at Ćemovsko Polje. By December 2025, the campaign had expanded to include educational programmes in schools focused on environmental crime²¹¹. These efforts complement policy measures, such as the ban on certain single-use plastics, which led to a reported 50% reduction in plastic bag use in its first few months¹⁶⁹. The implementation of the Aarhus Caravan in the municipalities of Nikšić, Plužine, Herceg Novi, and Ulcinj represents a significant contribution to advancing Montenegro's European integration process, particularly in the context of fulfilling obligations under Chapter 27 – Environment and Climate Change. As one of the most demanding negotiation chapters, Chapter 27 requires a high level of alignment with the EU acquis, as well as active public participation, transparency, and strengthened institutional

²⁰⁸ Regional Cooperation Council, "Balkan Barometer 2025: Public Opinion", 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings_2025/2/

²⁰⁹ https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings_2025/2/

²¹⁰ Regional Cooperation Council, "Regular Report of the Secretary General on the Activities of the Regional Cooperation Council (1 June – 30 October 2025)" October 2025.

²¹¹ EEAS, "Čuvaj da te čuva," 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/montenegro/čuvaj-da-te-čuva_en

capacities, especially in the areas of noise protection, waste management, and environmental quality.

The Aarhus Caravan was carried out as a field-based initiative aimed at direct communication with citizens and local communities, with the goal of promoting the principles of the Aarhus Convention – access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters, including waste, waste separation and circular economy. Through organised events in Nikšić, Plužine, Herceg Novi, and Ulcinj, citizens were informed and educated on key environmental protection topics, with a particular focus on waste²¹².

Serbia has focused on integrating circular economy principles into its business sector with direct EU support. In November 2025, five companies in the textile and food sectors signed cooperation memorandums with the Ministry of Environmental Protection under the EU for the Circular Economy in Serbia project. This initiative provides expert consulting and training to help SMEs develop circular business models, addressing the fact that Serbia discards approximately 770,000 tonnes of food and 90,000 tonnes of textile waste annually²¹³. The adoption of the Waste Prevention Plan 2025–2030 provides a strategic framework for these and future initiatives¹⁷⁰.

Albania celebrated a significant success with the completion of its pilot project for waste separation at the source in Berat in October 2025. The project, which diverted over 120 tonnes of paper and 8.6 tonnes of plastic for recycling, was lauded as a replicable model for the rest of the economy and a crucial step as Albania began negotiations for Chapter 27²¹⁴. Despite this progress, the European Commission noted that urgent action against littering is still needed and that a ban on single-use plastics has not yet been implemented²¹⁵.

In North Macedonia, the focus has been on building capacity through education. The first Circular Economy Academy, organised by the CSO ARNO, concluded in June 2025, training 12 CSOs to develop circular business concepts. The academy provided over 250 hours of mentoring and produced innovative prototypes, such as eco-tiles from recycled plastic and sustainable fashion from textile waste²¹⁶. This bottom-up approach is critical, as the European Commission's 2025 report noted that the implementation of circular economy is stagnating due to limited stakeholder awareness and knowledge¹⁷³.

In parallel with awareness-raising activities led by civil society organisations, Kosovo* continued preparations for its waste prevention framework as part of its integrated waste management reform, being developed by the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure with the support from GIZ. This framework is expected to provide a strategic basis for promoting waste prevention, separate collection, resource efficiency and sustainable consumption, while strengthening public awareness and behavioural change initiatives. The Eco Champions project, led by The Balkan Forum, organised a series of workshops and the Prishtina Sustainable Design Week, engaging over 400 participants in upcycling and waste-sorting challenges. In February 2025, the project launched an online questionnaire to gather

²¹² Environmental Protection Agency, "Aarhus Caravan 2025". [Online]. Available: <https://epa.org.me/2025/11/08/arhus-karavan-2025-krece-iz-niksica/>

²¹³ EU in Serbia, "How the circular economy can be applied to fashion and food", 17 November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://europa.rs/how-the-circular-economy-can-be-applied-to-fashion-and-food/?lang=en>

²¹⁴ Albanian Telegraphic Agency, "Berat successfully completes project for waste separation at source", 8 October 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://en.ata.gov.al/2025/10/08/berat-successfully-completes-project-for-waste-separation-at-source/>

²¹⁵ European Commission, Albania 2025 Report, Commission Staff Working Document, SWD(2025) 750 final, Brussels, 4 November 2025, Chapter 27 (Environment and climate change), p. 83. Available: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf

²¹⁶ Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub, "The first Circular Economy Academy in North Macedonia ended with 12 concepts for circular businesses", 27 June 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://wbcirculareconomy.com/news-1/>

public input for a comprehensive waste management plan²¹⁷. The long-running Let's Do It Kosovo* initiative continued its annual clean-up campaigns, mobilising thousands of volunteers for World Cleanup Day on 20 September 2025²¹⁸. These initiatives contribute to raising public awareness on waste prevention, separate collection and sustainable consumption, complementing ongoing efforts to strengthen the policy framework for waste prevention and circular economy.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, although a comprehensive economy-wide strategy is still lacking, a growing set of grassroots and programmatic initiatives is emerging to fill the gap. The first Repair Café was launched in Mostar, providing a practical, community-based solution to promote product longevity and challenge throwaway culture²¹⁹. At the same time, UNDP has begun to systematise circular economy support through its Green Transition portfolio²²⁰, including the LOOP circular economy conference in Sarajevo²²¹ and a Switzerland-financed partnership that promotes circular economy frameworks, institutional capacities and circular business models as part of a broader just green transition²²². Complementing these efforts, GIZ's SEDEP/EU4PSD programme provides targeted support to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in adopting greener and more circular business practices, including advisory services, training and pilots that combine resource efficiency, digitalisation and competitiveness²²³. Together with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Circular Economy White Paper, which sets out priority incentive areas on legislation, fiscal measures, waste management pricing, green public procurement and awareness-raising, these initiatives provide an increasingly solid foundation for scaling up circular economy action.

Despite these positive developments, a significant gap persists between policy ambition and public behaviour. The EPR Policy Brief 2025 highlights that “limited public awareness and low household participation in separate collection reduce the quality and volume of collected recyclables”, undermining the effectiveness of new policy instruments²²⁴. Sustained, multi-channel awareness campaigns, coupled with the visible and consistent implementation of separate collection infrastructure, will be essential to bridge this gap and foster a genuine culture of sustainable consumption across the region.

Action 34

Conclude and implement a regional agreement on the prevention of plastic pollution, including specifically addressing the priority issue of marine litter

Marine ecosystems in the WB6 continue to face severe impacts from plastic pollution, a

²¹⁷ The Balkan Forum, “Eco Champions”, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://thebalkanforum.org/eco-champions/>

²¹⁸ Let's Do It - Ta Pastrojmë Kosovën, Facebook Post, 20 September 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.facebook.com/tapastrojmekosoven/>

²¹⁹ Western Balkans Circular Economy Hub (WBCEH), “First Repair Café in Bosnia and Herzegovina launched in Mostar,” news article, 2025. Available: <https://wbcirculareconomy.com/first-repair-cafe-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-launched-in-mostar/>

²²⁰ UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Advancing Circular Economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina Towards Green Transition and Sustainable Future”, press release, 15 February 2024. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/press-releases/advancing-circular-economy-bosnia-and-herzegovina-towards-green-transition-and-sustainable-future>

²²¹ UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, “UNDP BiH successfully hosted first Circular Economy Conference in Sarajevo”, news story, 15 May 2024. Online. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/news/undp-bih-successfully-hosted-first-circular-economy-conference-sarajevo>

²²² UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Switzerland and UNDP Join Forces to Advance Circular Economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, news story, 6 November 2025. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/news/switzerland-and-undp-join-forces-advance-circular-economy-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

²²³ DigiGreen / GIZ, “EU4 Private Sector Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EU4PSD)”, project description, 2025. Online. Available at: <https://digigreen.ba/en/eu4psd/>

²²⁴ WB6 CIF, Policy Brief on Strengthening Waste Management and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in the Western Balkans, 2025. https://www.wb6cif.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Policy-Brief-EPR-in-the-Western-Balkans_2025.pdf

problem primarily rooted in inadequate waste management systems. Key contributing factors include insufficient waste collection infrastructure, uncontrolled disposal practices, illegal dumping, widespread littering, and substandard landfill conditions, which collectively exacerbate the leakage of plastics into the region's rivers and the Adriatic Sea²²⁵.

On 14 October 2025, the RCC convened the Second Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Among the key outcomes was the endorsement of the Regional Action Plan on Prevention of Plastic Pollution, including Marine Litter²²⁶. This Action Plan operationalises the 2023 Regional Joint Statement and is expected to play a pivotal role in strengthening waste management systems and promoting more sustainable practices across the WB6 region²²⁷.

The Action Plan provides a more operational regional framework for tackling plastic leakage, improving waste management and advancing circular domestic-based prevention measures across the WB6. Additionally, emphasis is placed on strengthening EPR schemes and exploring funding mechanisms for systematic clean-up operations. Key targets include reducing the availability of the most polluting single-use plastics by 80% by 2028 and ensuring all plastic packaging contains at least 30% recycled content by 2030²²⁸.

Development and implementation of this Action Plan is coordinated by the RCC through the Regional Working Group on Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, in collaboration with the European Union and other stakeholders. Effective execution will require both financial and technical resources at the local and regional levels. As of 2025, progress in the full transposition and implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive across the WB6 remains limited, and the adoption of an ecosystem-based management approach is necessary to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources.

Multiple programmes and projects are currently addressing marine litter. Among them, the Integrated Waste Management and Marine Litter Prevention (MLP) initiative supports coordinated strategies to reduce plastic leakage, engaging public and private sector entities along with civil society. This initiative provides technical guidance to minimise plastic waste entering the Adriatic Sea²²⁹.

Furthermore, the AdriPlast project, financed through the EU Interreg VI-B IPA Adriatic-Ionian Programme, held its kick-off meeting in February 2025. The project fosters collaboration among Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Albania to devise sustainable solutions for plastic waste reduction²³⁰.

Launched in late 2024, the TETHYS4ADRION project, which targets riverine plastic pollution in the Adriatic-Ionian region, advanced its monitoring activities in 2025. It has established a coordinated monitoring network at five strategic river sites, including Buna and Bojana

²²⁵ GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), "Integrated Waste Management and Marine Litter Prevention in the Western Balkans (MLP)," factsheet, August 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2022-factsheet-marine-litter.pdf>

²²⁶ Regional Cooperation Council, "Western Balkan Ministers of Environment endorse Dubrovnik Declaration, moving from plans to action", 14 October 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rcc.int/news/972/western-balkan-ministers-of-environment-endorse-dubrovnik-declaration-moving-from-plans-to-action>

²²⁷ Regional Cooperation Council, "Regional Action Plan on Prevention of Plastic Pollution Including Marine Litter", 14 October 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/212/regional-action-plan-on-prevention-of-plastic-pollution-including-marine-litter>

²²⁸ Regional Cooperation Council, "Regional Action Plan on Prevention of Plastic Pollution Including Marine Litter," 14 October 2025. Available: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/212/regional-action-plan-on-prevention-of-plastic-pollution-including-marine-litter>

²²⁹ GIZ, "Integrated Waste Management and Marine Litter Prevention in the Western Balkans (MLP)", 2025. <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2022-factsheet-marine-litter.pdf>

²³⁰ AdriPlast, "Adriplast KoM – 3rd February 2025 at University of Ferrara", 27 February 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://adriplast.interreg-ipa-adriion.eu/2025/02/27/adriplast-kom-03-04-february-2025-at-university-of-ferrara/>

(Albania, Montenegro) and Neretva (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina). A workshop in Shkodër, Albania, in November 2025 presented preliminary findings, highlighting that plastic constitutes approximately 90% of marine litter along the Albania's coast, with significant inputs from the Buna and Drin rivers²³¹.

Action 35	Further implement Smart Specialisation Strategies, place-based, innovation-led transformation agendas for sustainability
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In 2025, the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and place-based, innovation-led transformation agendas for sustainability across the WB6 remained at an uneven and predominantly early-to-intermediate stage. While some WB6 have advanced their S3 processes significantly, others continue to face structural challenges in translating strategic priorities into operational programmes and concrete investments. The broader context of EU accession and the increasing alignment of WB6 with EU innovation and cohesion policy frameworks has provided important external motivation for advancing S3 implementation.

Albania adopted its Smart Specialisation Strategy 2025–2030 in December 2024 via Council of Ministers Decision No. 824, accompanied by a costed Action Plan and an Interministerial Committee led by the Deputy Prime Minister. The strategy identifies six priority areas through an Entrepreneurial Discovery Process engaging: Agriculture/Fishing/Forestry, Manufacturing Industry, Energy (with a renewable emphasis), Tourism, ICT, and Business Process Outsourcing²³². Cross-sectoral priorities include the Blue Economy and Renewable Energy Resources. In 2025, implementation frameworks were put in place, and the EIT RawMaterials Regional Innovation Centre in Elbasan, which became fully operational in 2025, organised the first Raw Materials Community Dialogue in May 2025 in Albania, anchoring a regional cluster around sustainable raw materials²³³. Albania's R&D spending stood at 0.19% of GDP, against a 2030 target of 1%.

Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to face major structural obstacles to smart specialisation in 2025, with fragmented competences and weak domestic-wide coordination continuing to limit progress. The EC 2025 Enlargement Package concluded that no progress was made, with research capacities remaining very limited and R&D spending below 0.3% of GDP²³⁴. The economy's complex institutional architecture, with no central level competence over research or industrial policy, continues to prevent a coherent S3. The European Innovation Scoreboard placed Bosnia and Herzegovina at 33.1% of the EU average.

Kosovo* does not yet have a formal Smart Specialisation Strategy, although selected innovation and industrial development initiatives continued to support elements of place-based transformation. In 2025, the Innovation and Training Park (ITP) Prizren consolidated its position, welcoming 14 new tenant companies to reach 60 companies on-site with approximately 478 employees²³⁵, supported under the 2023 Law on Industrial and Technological Parks (€33 million allocated for 2024–2026). Kosovo* signed a Free Trade

²³¹ TETHYS4ADRION, "Knowledge Transfer: TETHYS4ADRION Workshop 'Monitoring and Managing Plastic Pollution in the Buna River'", 12 November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://tethys4adrion.interreg-ipa-adrion.eu/2025/11/12/knowledge-transfer-tethys4adrion-workshop-monitoring-and-managing-plastic-pollution-in-the-buna-river/>

²³² <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/draft-of-the-smart-specialization-strategy-s3-in-albania/>

²³³ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/the-european-institute-of-innovation-and-technologys-eit-transformative-impact-in-the-western-balkans/>

²³⁴ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/2025-enlargement-package-key-findings-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-related-to-the-knowledge-economy/>

²³⁵ <https://www.giz.de/en/regions/europe/kosovo/news/innovation-skills-and-sustainability-strengthening-kosovos-innovation>

Agreement with EFTA in March 2025²³⁶. GIZ continued to support Kosovo's innovation ecosystem, including innovation skills and sustainability activities at ITP Prizren. However, there is no evidence of S3-aligned prioritisation or formal Entrepreneurial Discovery Process underway.

Montenegro was the first WB6 to adopt an S3 (June 2019) and in 2025 completed its first full implementation cycle. Its Industrial Policy 2024–2028 was adopted in August 2024²³⁷, and the provisionally closing of EU accession Chapter 20 (Enterprise and Industrial Policy) at the Intergovernmental Conference on 16 December 2024 confirmed formal recognition of this progress. In December 2025, Montenegro provisionally closed five additional EU accession chapters²³⁸, bringing the total to 12 out of 33. Montenegro launched preparation of a new S3 for 2026–2031, with the Innovation Fund of Montenegro and the Council for Innovation and Smart Specialisation remaining active. First and second disbursements under the EU Reform and Growth Facility were approved in July and October 2025 respectively²³⁹.

North Macedonia's S3 2024–2027 (adopted December 2023) saw active implementation in 2025 with state funding for science increasing to €11 million, which presents a 58% increase over 2024, with €5.5 million earmarked for S3 key initiatives²⁴⁰. However, the Fund for Innovation and Technological Development (FITD) was closed in August 2025²⁴¹. A new Law on Innovation Activity, Scientific and Technological Development and Entrepreneurship was adopted, establishing a replacement Agency for Innovation, Scientific and Technological Development and Entrepreneurship. North Macedonia also established its European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) and led WB6 in EIT Jumpstarter 2025 submissions with 23 applications²⁴².

Serbia is in its fifth year of S3 implementation (adopted 2020, covering 2020–2027), with over 70% of first action plan activities successfully completed. The Science Fund maintained 13 funded programmes with a total budget of €106.5 million, and R&D investment reached 0.88% of GDP in 2023²⁴³. The most notable 2025 development was the advancement of three eco-industrial park (EIP) pilots under the EU/IFC programme (€3.6 million WBIF grant): the greenfield Šabac EIP (the first greenfield EIP in the Western Balkans²⁴⁴); the MIND Park Kragujevac brownfield EIP (the first brownfield EIP in the region, agreement signed in March 2025)²⁴⁵; and the Marera Industrial Park Pobeda in Novi Sad, which joined the initiative in October 2025²⁴⁶, consolidating Serbia's position as the most advanced WB6 in translating S3 into operational innovation investments.

At the regional level, the Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025–2028 (CRM 2.0), signed by WB6 Prime Ministers at the 10th Berlin Process Summit in October 2024, provides an

²³⁶ <https://www.rcc.int/news/895/bregu-common-regional-market-is-a-key-unifying-regional-cooperation-framework-of-common-good-and-interests-in-the-global-game>

²³⁷ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/2024-enlargement-package-key-findings-on-montenegro-related-to-the-knowledge-economy/>

²³⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/12/16/eu-and-montenegro-provisionally-close-another-five-chapters-in-accession-negotiations/>

²³⁹ <https://www.eu.me/en/poglavlje-20-preduzetnistvo-i-industrijska-politika/>

²⁴⁰ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/news/smart-specialisation-strategy-of-the-republic-of-north-macedonia-2024-2027-and-the-action-plan-2024-2025/>

²⁴¹ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/2025-enlargement-package-key-findings-on-north-macedonia-related-to-the-knowledge-economy/>

²⁴² <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/the-european-institute-of-innovation-and-technologys-eit-transformative-impact-in-the-western-balkans/>

²⁴³ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/2025-enlargement-package-key-findings-on-serbia-related-to-the-knowledge-economy/>

²⁴⁴ <https://wbif.eu/news-details/first-greenfield-eco-industrial-park-pilot-western-balkans>

²⁴⁵ <https://wbif.eu/news-details/eco-industrial-parks-first-brownfield-site-kragujevac-serbia>

²⁴⁶ <https://mareraproperties.com/en/marera-industrial-park-pobeda-joins-the-eco-industrial-parks-initiative/>

important cooperation framework for strengthening regional market integration, competitiveness and selected elements of green and innovation-led transformation, including those relevant to S3 implementation and industrial ecosystem development²⁴⁷. The EBRD/EU Go Digital in the Western Balkans programme, launched in April 2025 with €377 million in total financing and targeting approximately 750 businesses, addresses the 20-percentage-point gap in digital intensity between WB SMEs and EU peers, with first operational loans signed in 2025 with NLB Banka Skopje and ProCredit Bank Bosnia and Herzegovina²⁴⁸. The EIT Community Hubs were launched in Albania (February 2025) and Serbia (October 2025)²⁴⁹, and EIT Jumpstarter 2025 received 82 submissions from WB6 - approximately 10% of the global total.

The SMART Project, implemented from 2022 to 2025 under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme, bringing together fourteen partner institutions from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia, Italy, and Germany, set out to strengthen the role of higher education institutions as drivers of regional innovation and smart specialisation²⁵⁰. The project established seven SMART Innovation Centres across partner universities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, including the SMART City Hub at the University of Vlora, the SMART Business Hub at the University of Shkodër, the Center for Digital Innovations at the University of East Sarajevo, and a 3D Printing Innovation Centre at the University of Montenegro. Guided by the Quintuple Helix innovation model, the project built capacity among higher education institutions to contribute actively to Smart Specialisation Strategies, combining training workshops, student innovation contests, university–industry counselling, and the creation of a regional SMART Knowledge Exchange Network. The project's final conference was held on 23 October 2025 at the University of Donja Gorica in Podgorica, and its findings were consolidated in a joint publication released by the consortium in late 2025.

Overall, the defining regional challenge remains to move from the formal adoption of S3 strategies to their effective implementation through measurable, place-based transformation results.

2.5 Depollution Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with Depollution Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Complete ratification of outstanding CLRTAP protocols across WB6, particularly the 1999 Gothenburg Protocol (amended version) and the 1998 Protocols on POPs and Heavy Metals, where multiple WB6 remain non-compliant;
- Prioritise review and stakeholder dialogue around the Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling (TFIAM)/ Centre for Integrated Assessment Modelling (CIAM)²⁵¹ policy brief on emission reduction targets rather than further modelling, and use the preliminary ERCs developed under EU4Green and ENVAP as the basis for formalising domestic emission reduction commitments for SO₂, NO_x, NH₃, NMVOC and PM_{2.5}.

²⁴⁷ <https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/0e5e72bb8334509a1feb954cdc7a3e54.pdf>

²⁴⁸ <https://webalkans.eu/en/news/new-sme-financing-programme-for-the-western-balkans/>

²⁴⁹ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/the-european-institute-of-innovation-and-technologys-eit-transformative-impact-in-the-western-balkans/>

²⁵⁰ <https://westernbalkans-infohub.eu/documents/smart-innovation-for-next-generations/>

²⁵¹ <https://iiasa.ac.at/policy/applications/centre-for-integrated-assessment-modelling-ciam>

- Adopt and implement air quality strategies without further delay, particularly in Montenegro where the Air Quality Management Strategy has been repeatedly postponed, and in Kosovo* where no progress was recorded during the reporting period.
- Develop spatially differentiated air quality plans that account for variation in pollution sources between urban and rural areas, as uniform measures have proven insufficient across Albania and North Macedonia.
- Accelerate adoption of pending air quality legislation at the central-level in Bosnia and Herzegovina, building on entity-level laws already adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina's entities of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024) and of Republika Srpska to establish a coherent domestic air quality management framework.
- Expand local air quality plan coverage in North Macedonia beyond the municipalities that have already adopted plans (Ohrid, Prilep, Veles), completing pending plans for Kumanovo, Kavadarci, Gostivar and Struga, and finalising the remaining pollution cadastres.
- Strengthen compliance of WB6 with NERP emission ceilings, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (212,905 tonnes SO₂ in 2024, 11.3× the permitted level) and Serbia (177,924 tonnes SO₂, approximately 5× the limit), with targeted support from the EU and regional partner organisations, including the Energy Community Secretariat, within the framework of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Ensure that existing desulphurisation equipment is brought into full operation, including Ugljevik (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where a functioning DeSOx unit remains offline, and that the commissioning of the TENT B (Serbia) DeSOx system results in verifiable and sustained emissions reductions.
- Advance the decommissioning of thermal power plants operating under expired opt-out schemes, including Morava and Kolubara A in Serbia and Pljevlja in Montenegro, and pursue structured dialogue through available regional and Energy Community frameworks to support timely closure in line with existing commitments.
- Strengthen BAT-based permitting capacity in Albania and Kosovo*, where industrial permitting does not yet systematically incorporate BAT conclusions and administrative capacity in permitting authorities remains critically constrained.
- Use CBAM financial obligations (in full force from 1 January 2026) and the 2027 NERP compliance deadline as leverage to accelerate BAT uptake and investment in clean industrial technology across all WB6, particularly in steel, cement and large combustion plants.
- Establish domestic-level Reference Laboratories (NRLs) for air quality monitoring in all WB6, following the precedent set by Montenegro, as developed under EU4Green, to ensure data quality and comparability across the region.
- Finalise and adopt pending water legislation, including Laws on Water Services at both entity-levels of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro's new Law on Water Services, and North Macedonia's new Law on Waters, ensuring alignment with the Water Framework, Urban Wastewater Treatment and Nitrates Directives.
- Adopt River Basin Management Plans and updated water monitoring strategies in North Macedonia and complete primary (Water Law) and directive-specific secondary legislation in Serbia, Kosovo* and Albania, addressing persistent gaps in ecological monitoring, sensitive area designation, and sludge management.
- Align WB6 water governance and investment frameworks with the European Water Resilience Strategy (EWRS), treating it as the overarching regulatory and investment reference alongside the core EU water acquis, and ensure that GAWB implementation

and EU accession/approximation processes reflect its priorities on water security, ecosystem protection and climate adaptation.

- Modernise water monitoring infrastructure across WB6 by expanding monitoring network density, upgrading laboratories to EU standards, developing interoperable basin-level databases, and integrating environmental monitoring with utility performance systems.
- Secure long-term operational financing for wastewater treatment plants under construction or recently commissioned through WBIF, ensuring utilities have adequate staffing, technical capacity and maintenance budgets to operate new infrastructure effectively.
- Strengthen financial sustainability and project preparation quality for the WBIF 2024–2030 wastewater pipeline (23 planned projects), establishing robust milestone tracking systems and ensuring regulatory alignment keeps pace with infrastructure investment.
- Strengthen the operational capacity of the Western Balkans Soil Partnership (WBSP), coordinated by the SWG RRD, by securing dedicated funding, formalising its regional soil monitoring framework, and accelerating the development of the regional soil database and contaminated sites registry, building on the findings of the 2024 State of Soil Pollution in the Western Balkans report. Integrate soil protection objectives into spatial planning, agriculture, industrial permitting and land-use policies across all WB6, addressing the current absence of dedicated soil protection legislation in most of the region.
- Strengthen regional coordination on transboundary air and water pollution, building on existing GAWB frameworks and drawing on Balkan Barometer 2025 findings which show that air pollution is the leading environmental concern for 61% of Western Balkans Six citizens and water pollution for 52%, reflecting the urgency of addressing pollution challenges that transcend borders/boundaries through enhanced regional cooperation mechanisms.
- Establish a GAWB Depollution monitoring framework with standardised indicators for air quality, water status and industrial emissions, enabling systematic tracking of progress against NERP ceilings, NEC commitments and EU acquis alignment milestones.

2.5.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 36	Finalise the process of ratification of Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols
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Five of WB6 ratified the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air. Kosovo* is the only one from the Western Balkans Six that did not ratify the Convention²⁵² due to not being part of the UN.

Title	Entry into force	Status of ratification	Albania	Bosnia and Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
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²⁵² CHAPTER XXVII: ENVIRONMENT 1. Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution Geneva, 13 November 1979, STATUS AS AT: 19-06-2025 09:15:36 EDT, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-1&chapter=27&clang=_en

1999 Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone and its 2012 amended version	17 May 2005	Original protocol					√	
	7 October 2019	Amended version						
1998 Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and its 2009 amended version	23 October 2003	Original protocol Amended version, annexes I, II				√	√	√
	20 January 2022	Amended version, annexes I, II, III, IV, VI, VIII						
1998 Protocol on Heavy Metals and its 2012 amended version	29 December 2003	Original protocol				√		√
	8 February 2022	Amended version						
1994 Protocol on Further Reduction of Sulphur Emissions	5 August 1998						√	
1991 Protocol concerning the Control of Emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds or their Transboundary Fluxes	29 September 1997						√	
1988 Protocol concerning the Control of Nitrogen Oxides or their Transboundary Fluxes	14 February 1991		√				√	
1985 Protocol on the Reduction of Sulphur Emissions or their Transboundary Fluxes by at least 30 per cent	2 September 1987		√				√	
1984 Protocol on Long-term Financing of the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range	28 January 1988		√	√		√	√	√

Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP)								
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Table 17: The status of protocol ratification in 2026²⁵³

Action 36A	Support modelling to establish economy-wide emission reduction commitments for the five main pollutants covered by the NEC Directive and the Gothenburg Protocol under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution
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Through several initiatives such as ENVAP, IPA 2014 and EU4Green^{254,255} preliminary Emission Reduction Commitments (ERCs) for SO₂, NO_x, NH₃, NMVOC and PM_{2.5} have been prepared for all WB6. These ERCs cover the period 2020–2029 as well as projections for 2030 and beyond, using the Greenhouse Gas – Air Pollution Interactions and Synergies (GAINS) model²⁵⁶. These commitments aim to achieve a 50% reduction in premature deaths attributable to air pollution between 2005 and 2030 across the entire WB6, in line with the methodology used to derive ERCs for 2030 under the Emission Reduction Commitments Directive (NECD). The modelled ERCs are to be considered by the WB6 as a basis for establishing formal targets.

The approach adopted is consistent with that of the EU Commission in deriving ERCs for EU Member States for 2030. The 50% reduction target in premature deaths attributable to air pollution is set at the regional level for the WB6. Using the GAINS optimisation model, specific measures have been identified for each WB6 that, when implemented collectively, achieve the regional target in the most cost-effective way. These measures include the introduction of cleaner residential boilers, flue gas cleaning technologies in industry and more efficient application of mineral fertilisers.

The results of the modelling exercise highlight the importance of regional cooperation. While a 50% reduction relative to 2005 is technically achievable for the region as a whole, this level of reduction cannot be attained by each of WB6 in isolation. By developing scientifically grounded ERCs and enhancing data quality, the modelling sets the ground for substantial improvements in air quality and public health. Continued cooperation and data sharing among the WB6 will be crucial in achieving these ambitious targets and ensuring a greener future for the region.²⁵⁷

The Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling (TFIAM), in collaboration with the Centre for Integrated Assessment (CIAM/IIASA), prepared a document entitled Policy brief on potential targets to reduce risks for health and ecosystems²⁵⁸. The objective of the document was to assess the feasibility of introducing a risk-based overarching goal under the Convention, with a particular focus on a health damage reduction target. The analysis centred on the attainability of an indicative 50% reduction in health risks associated with exposure to particulate matter and ozone, as well as for the risk of biodiversity loss. Analyses for the WB6 highlights that residential combustion is the dominant source of particulate matter (PM) in many urban areas, contributing to 50% of ambient concentrations in certain cities. The power

²⁵³ <https://unece.org/protocols>

²⁵⁴ <https://eu4green.eu/>

²⁵⁵ <https://gains.iiasa.ac.at/models/>

²⁵⁶ <https://gains.iiasa.ac.at/models/>

²⁵⁷ <https://eu4green.eu/working-together-for-cleaner-air-reducing-emissions-in-the-western-balkans/>

²⁵⁸ https://iiasa.ac.at/sites/default/files/202411/TFIAMCIAM%20Policy%20Brief%20on%20targets%20to%20reduce%20risks%20for%20health%20and%20ecosystems_EN_V4_0.pdf

sector continues to be a significant contributor to air pollution in the region. Although baseline projections indicate some reductions, the expected pollution levels remain above the air quality standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO). This highlights the urgent need for strengthened mitigation efforts targeting local, regional, and intraregional sources of air pollution to achieve meaningful improvements in urban air quality across the WB6.

In the context of the ongoing revision of the Gothenburg Protocol, and based on inputs from the Task Force on Integrated Assessment Modelling (TFIAM) and CIAM/IIASA, as outlined in the referenced

policy brief, further modelling has been deemed a lower priority at this stage. Instead, the focus should

be placed on reviewing and assessing the findings of the policy brief along with any necessary updates and on fostering a dialogue that includes all relevant stakeholders.

Action 37 Develop and implement Air Quality Strategies

The Western Balkans Six have made progress in aligning with EU legislation on environment and climate, including policy adaptation, improved monitoring and reporting procedures, and greater focus on emission reduction targets; however, the implementation is still slow and insufficient.

In Albania, the implementation of air quality strategies is ongoing. Delays have been observed in the adoption of specific measures, including the development of local air quality plans²⁵⁹. Considering the variation in pollution sources and exposure levels across different areas, especially between urban and rural regions, spatially differentiated policies could offer a more cost-effective approach to achieving environmental improvements than uniformly applied measures.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Air Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted in 2024²⁶⁰ and in line with the Law on Air Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Republika Srpska²⁶¹, thus establishing a harmonised air quality management system within the entities and introducing regulatory measures for emissions from industrial facilities. Air quality objectives and target are also embedded in air quality strategies as part of environmental strategies at entity levels²⁶² while domestic-level of Bosnia and Herzegovina is still pending.

In Montenegro, the adoption of the Air Quality Management Strategy has once again been postponed²⁶⁴. The draft Strategy 2026-2029 foresees the development of new air quality plans for the three designated air quality zones (Northern, Central and Coastal) where pollution levels exceed established limits, with each plan tailored to address specific local pollution sources and priority pollutants. The draft Strategy 2026-2029 should encompass the Pollution Control Plan, prepared in accordance with the EU regulation.

²⁵⁹ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2025_en

²⁶⁰ <https://fbihvlada.gov.ba/sr/20-zakon-o-zastiti-zraka>

²⁶¹ <https://vladars.rs/srSPCyrl/Vlada/Ministarstva/mgr/Documents/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%20%D0%BE%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B4%D1%83%D1%85%D0%B0.pdf>

²⁶² https://vladars.rs/SPCyrl/Vlada/Ministarstva/mgr/Documents/ENVIRONMENTAL%20STRATEGY%20OF%20REPUBLIKA%20SRPSKA%202022%20to%202032_462217192.pdf

²⁶³ <https://fmoit.gov.ba/dokumenti/strateski-planski-dokumenti/page/2/>

²⁶⁴ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/montenegro-report-2025_en

In North Macedonia there were no legislative developments during the reporting period. The municipalities that adopted air quality improvement plans during the reporting period were Ohrid, Prilep and Veles. Strumica's plan is being developed, while plans for Kumanovo, Kavadarci, Gostivar and Struga are being updated. Air pollution cadastres for 10 municipalities – Kichevo, Prilep, Shtip, Kavadarci, Kochani, Gevgelija, Veles, Struga, Tetovo and Gostivar – have been completed, with cadastres for seven more municipalities, Strumica, Bitola, Probistip, Kriva Palanka, Delchevo, Debar and Sveti Nikole, expected to be completed²⁶⁵.

In Kosovo* further efforts are needed to revise and adopt relevant documents to implement commitments under the EU legislation and the Energy Community's Decarbonisation Roadmap. Strategy for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development (2022-2031)²⁶⁶ is still in the drafting process. The capacities of the environmental authorities at both central and local levels to implement the environmental acquis remain limited, which seriously hampers progress in the sector. There was no progress relating to air quality during the reporting period.

In the field of air quality, Serbia maintains a high level of alignment with the EU acquis. In June 2025, Serbia adopted a new Law on air protection. Further alignment is encouraged with the latest air quality acquis, as well as alignment with the EU air quality index. First Air Protection Programme (2022-2030) along with the Action Plan spanning from 2022 to 2026 is designed to reduce health damages resulting from poor air quality by 50% compared to the levels recorded in 2015. During the reporting period (2025) the Air Quality Plan for Sombor was adopted.

Action 37A	Increase the uptake of Best Available Techniques in accordance with the Industrial Emissions Directive
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Progress on increasing the uptake of Best Available Techniques (BAT) in accordance with the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) across the WB6 remained limited in 2025, with legislative developments in some of the WB6 outpacing the practical capacity to implement and enforce BAT-based permitting. The IED - the EU's primary instrument for regulating industrial pollution through Directive 2010/75/EU - requires permitting authorities to set permit conditions based on BAT conclusions derived through the Sevilla Process. For WB6, the obligation to bring large combustion plants into full compliance with IED Annex V emission levels is embedded in the Energy Community Treaty framework and linked to the NERP pathway, with the compliance deadline set for end-2027. The revised IED 2.0 (Directive 2024/1785/EU), which entered into force on 4 August 2024, expands the scope of regulation and is the first EU environmental law to enshrine the right of citizens to seek compensation for health damage from illegal pollution, particularly relevant for the WB6, which are aspiring to EU membership while struggling with extreme air, ground, and water pollution²⁶⁷.

The most significant legislative step in 2025 came from North Macedonia, where limited progress was made during the reporting period by adopting the Law on Industrial Emissions and amending the Law on Environment to ratify the amendments of the Espoo Convention, as

²⁶⁵ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2025_en

²⁶⁶ <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/deliver/ff74ae0e-en.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fpublication%2Fff74ae0e-en&mimeType=pdf>

²⁶⁷ <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/ied-2-0-allows-eu-citizens-to-sue-industry-over-health-damage-from-pollution/>

confirmed in the European Commission's 2025 Report on North Macedonia, though implementation and enforcement capacity remain the central challenge²⁶⁸. North Macedonia also adopted amendments to the 2020 Energy Efficiency Law in September 2025, strengthening the "energy efficiency first" principle in accordance with EU Directive 2018/2002 on Energy Efficiency²⁶⁹. Eight installations in North Macedonia are subject to NERP compliance pathways, and SO₂ emissions from these plants continued to exceed legal limits through 2024.

Serbia retains the most developed industrial permitting framework in the region. The EUR 215 million desulphurisation system at Termoelektrane Nikola Tesla (TENT) A3–A6 was commissioned in April 2024, thirteen years after funding was secured, while the TENT B facility was 91% complete at the end of 2024²⁷⁰. The system contributed to a 30.4% reduction in SO₂ emissions from NERP plants in 2024, to 205,991 tonnes, and a further reduction in 2025, to 177,924 tonnes, still around five times the NERP ceiling. Kolubara A entered a formal conservation phase in 2024, with EPS commissioning decommissioning design work in July 2025, while the Morava plant remains subject to an Energy Community dispute settlement case opened in October 2023. Serbia adopted its Just Energy Transition Plan in November 2025, acknowledging the need for structured closure planning for coal-dependent regions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to significantly advance IED transposition, as its fragmented institutional architecture continues to present structural challenges for harmonised BAT-based permitting. According to the Energy Community Secretariat's 2025 Annual Implementation Report, SO₂ emissions from NERP plants increased by 17.1% in 2024 to 212,905 tonnes, 11.3 times the permitted level, the highest in the region and approaching the all-time high recorded in 2020. Dust emissions decreased by 10.8%, though nitrogen oxide emissions also rose slightly²⁷¹. The Energy Community Ministerial Council issued a formal decision against Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2023 on NERP ceiling breaches, and two of the three plants previously subject to the opt-out mechanism continue to operate outside Industrial Emissions Directive standards. The Ugljevik desulphurisation unit, in place since 2020, has yet to be brought into consistent operation, representing a significant unrealised opportunity for emissions reduction.

Kosovo* needs to accelerate progress on BAT implementation, as its electricity system remains approximately 90% dependent on coal, with Kosovo* A and Kosovo* B operating at emission levels significantly above BAT-associated thresholds. Kosovo*B's dust emissions per unit were among the highest in the region at 9.2 times the applicable ceiling, and a dispute settlement case was escalated to the Energy Community Ministerial Council in December 2023²⁷².

Montenegro has only one large combustion plant – the Pljevlja Thermal Power Plant (TPP Pljevlja). The EPA issued an integrated permit to Elektroprivreda Crne Gore (EPCG) on 23 March 2018 for the operation of the entire TPP Pljevlja. A project for the ecological reconstruction of TPP Pljevlja is currently ongoing, aiming to extend its operational life while

²⁶⁸ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/267b368e-6b55-4a42-bb72-6395593de4da_en?filename=north-macedonia-report-2025.pdf

²⁶⁹ <https://energy.gov.mk/en-GB/odnosi-so-javnost/soopstenija/usvoen-zakonot-za-energetska-efikasnost-poniski-smetki-pocist-vozduh-i-evropski-standardi>

²⁷⁰ Elektroprivreda Srbije (EPS), "U postrojenju za odsumporavanje dimnih gasova TENT A," EPS official news page. [Online]. Available: <https://www.eps.rs/lat/vesti/Stranice/proizvodnja-gipsa.aspx>

²⁷¹ <https://www.energy-community.org/publications/flagships/IRs.html>

²⁷² <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/coal-plants-in-western-balkans-increase-so2-pollution-in-2023/>

reducing its negative environmental impact. This project includes the modernisation of emission purification systems, improvement of energy efficiency, and alignment with EU environmental standards. Among other measures, the reconstruction will achieve a reduction of sulphur and nitrogen oxides in flue gases, the construction of an auxiliary boiler system, the reconstruction of the existing internal ash and slag transport system, installation of a district heating system, construction of a cooling tower, construction of a wastewater treatment system, implementation of noise protection measures, and reduction of dust emissions through the installation of mist eliminators in the desulphurisation plant absorber. Accordingly, TPP Pljevlja will be able to continue operating during the transition period while alternative energy sources are being developed. In addition to the ecological reconstruction project, which is essential for the continued operation of TPP Pljevlja during the defined period and contributes to a successful and fair energy transition, a gradual phase-out of lignite is planned. Planned development directions include the construction of new renewable energy plants and the potential use of gas as a temporary solution during the transition period. In order to meet the final benchmarks for closing Chapter 27, Montenegro prepared a new Dynamic Implementation Plan for the Industrial Emissions Directive (DSIP) and submitted it to the European Commission. The government adopted its revised Climate Change Law and NECP in December 2025, acknowledging the need for ecological reconstruction of the plant, though a pause in operations planned for 2025 is likely to be postponed to 2026.

Albania has made limited IED transposition progress, with industrial permitting not yet systematically incorporating BAT conclusions and administrative capacity in permitting authorities remaining constrained.

The full entry into CBAM financial obligations from 1 January 2026 onward is expected to generate new economic pressure for emission reductions, as exporters in steel, cement, and other covered sectors face carbon costs at the EU border. This external lever, combined with the approaching 2027 NERP compliance deadline and the obligations attached to EU accession negotiations under Chapter 27, represents the most significant near-term driver for accelerating BAT uptake and closing the gap between legislative frameworks and industrial performance.

Action 38	Establish an adequate air quality monitoring system, including through accreditation of air quality monitoring networks
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Many WB6 cities are still suffering from the impact of air pollution. Pollution levels are frequently above the EU limit values currently in force and the guidelines of the World Health Organization. Moreover, the total premature deaths attributable to PM_{2.5} in the main cities of the Western Balkans Six in 2019 were between 4.6 and 5.3 thousand²⁷³.

In response, each of WB6 is undertaking assessments of the current situation, identifying key gaps, and developing targeted strategies to improve air quality, contributing to the broader goals of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Albania needs to improve environmental monitoring and strengthen administrative capacity to meet EU standards. No progress has been observed on alignment with the EU air quality acquis. The air monitoring system remains to be extended and improved, as it still has only seven automatic stations economy-wide, non-operational due to insufficient allocation of funds for their maintenance.

²⁷³ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC144080>

On air quality, Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to develop a domestic strategy to systematically and efficiently combat air pollution²⁷⁴. Air quality monitoring system was established in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's entities - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with 31 automatic measuring stations²⁷⁵,²⁷⁶ and Republika Srpska with 7 automatic measuring stations. Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently needs to significantly strengthen its administrative capacity in the sector in order to make progress in aligning with the EU climate acquis. Awareness raising activities should be strengthened.

In Montenegro, the adoption of the strategy on air quality management 2026-2029 and the related action plan are still pending. Air quality monitoring has been established and implies continuous measurement of pollutants at nine automatic measuring stations within the Air Quality Monitoring Network, distributed across three air quality zones (Central, Coastal and Northern). The Air Quality Monitoring Programme is implemented by Centre for Ecotoxicological Research, an accredited domestic reference laboratory, in accordance with the Law on Air Protection²⁷⁷.

In North Macedonia, there were no legislative developments on air quality during the reporting period. Limited steps have been taken to improve the very limited capacities to maintain, run and extend the existing monitoring system and structures in charge for collection, processing and reporting of data. Initial steps have been taken to amend and complete the legislative and strategic framework, in line with the new EU acquis. The process of delineating zones and agglomerations has progressed but still needs to be finalised²⁷⁸.

In Kosovo*, there was no progress on air quality. It continues to present a major health risk amid delays in the implementation of appropriate remedial measures to curb air pollution. Emissions of SO₂, NO_x and dust increased in 2024 compared with 2023 and exceeded emission ceilings²⁷⁹.

Serbia maintains a high level of alignment with the EU acquis in the field of air quality. In June 2025, Serbia adopted a new Law on Air Protection. The Environmental Protection Agency implemented the IPA project Improvement of Air Quality Monitoring, which enabled the installation of 9 new stations and new instruments at 31 existing stations for automatic PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} measurements. Leskovac, Prokuplje, Požega and Indija received automatic measurements for the first time, and new stations were installed in Subotica, Niš, Bor, Čačak and Kosjerić. After the stations and new instruments were put into operation, the data were made available to the public via Agency's website (<https://vazduh.sepa.gov.rs>) and the Open data portal (<https://data.gov.rs/sr/organizations/agentsija-za-zashtitu-zhivotne-sredine/>). The improved monitoring system enabled the results obtained to be presented in the Annual Report on the State of Air Quality for 2025 and to serve as the basis for determining air quality categories for 2025, even in cities where this was not previously possible due to the lack of adequate equipment.

Under the EU4Green project, a series of work packages have been designed to address several key aspects of air quality management, monitoring and emission reporting. To enhance air quality management in the WB6, EU4Green supported the development of air quality plans,

²⁷⁴ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2025_en

²⁷⁵ <https://rhmrzr.com/kontrola-kvaliteta-vazduha>

²⁷⁶ <https://www.fhmzbih.gov.ba/latinica/ZRAK/AQI-satne.php>

²⁷⁷ <https://epa.org.me/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Decembar-2025.pdf>

²⁷⁸ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/267b368e-6b55-4a42-bb72-6395593de4da_en?filename=north-macedonia-report-2025.pdf

²⁷⁹ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2025_en

including preparation of guidance documents, with particular emphasis on two significant air pollution sources: domestic heating and agricultural waste burning. Domestic-level Reference Laboratory (NRL) ensure the quality of the obtained air quality data and their traceability to domestic and international standards. The already established NRL in Montenegro sets a precedent for the other Western Balkans Six. As part of EU4Green project, requirements for NRLs were discussed and implementation plan for establishing NRLs in all WB6 was developed. Monitoring of ecosystem indicators covers air but also vegetation, forest, soil and water. Guidance document for the monitoring of ecosystem indicators was prepared in line with legal requirements²⁸⁰.

Action 39	Implement relevant EU water-related acquis (Water Framework Directive, Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and Nitrates Directive)
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The effective and sustainable operation of wastewater treatment infrastructure requires forward planning to ensure that personnel possess the necessary technical competencies. Across the region, alignment of domestic water legislation with the EU water acquis has progressed gradually, although disparities between WB6 remain significant. Albania has undertaken the most recent comprehensive reform through the adoption of a new Law on Water Resources in April 2024, intended to bring the domestic framework closer to the EU Drinking Water Directive, the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and Nitrates Directive²⁸¹. Additional implementing regulations and finalisation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for all River Basin Districts are important further steps²⁸² along with alignment with the provisions of the EU Drinking Water acquis²⁸³. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to work on draft Laws on Water Services at both entity levels within an inter-institutional coordination structure, but the legislation has not yet been adopted as of December 2025. Both entities have adopted Programmes for the Improvement of Water Services (2022-2032) and are currently preparing changes to the legislation regulating the provision of water services. At Republika Srpska entity level, the Draft Water Services Law and bylaws are under development, initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and comprising relevant institutions. At the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity level, the new Law on Water Services is also being prepared with the support of a newly established interdepartmental working group²⁸⁴.

In Kosovo*, actions under the 2023–2027 Water Strategy continue to advance, focusing on regulatory improvements and strengthened operational performance of water utilities to curb distribution losses and enhance the effectiveness of public water supply systems. Montenegro continues to prepare a new Law on Water Services intended to regulate drinking-water supply and municipal wastewater services and to strengthen alignment with the EU Drinking Water and Urban Wastewater Treatment Directives²⁸⁵; however, the legislation has not yet been adopted as of 2025 and full alignment with the Water Framework Directive remains pending.

²⁸⁰ <https://eu4green.eu/topics/depollution-of-air/>

²⁸¹ Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024: Albania, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/western-balkans-competitiveness-outlook-2024-albania_541ec4e7-en.html

²⁸² <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD-15-2025-INIT/en/pdf>

²⁸³ Directive (EU) 2020/2184

²⁸⁴ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/western-balkans-competitiveness-outlook-2024-bosnia-and-herzegovina_82e0432e-en.html

²⁸⁵ Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024: Montenegro, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/western-balkans-competitiveness-outlook-2024-montenegro_ead1588e-en.html

In North Macedonia, alignment with EU water requirements continues through implementation of measures under the UNECE-WHO Protocol on Water and Health, including regulatory improvements, strengthened water-quality monitoring and actions to improve drinking-water safety²⁸⁶. River basin management plans and the upgraded water monitoring strategy have not been adopted. There is no progress on aligning with the EU acquis on flood and water reuse. The 2025 water management programme was adopted. Lack of designation of sensitive areas and the lack of a sludge management strategy hinder wastewater treatment in line with the relevant EU acquis²⁸⁷. In Serbia, the Water Management Strategy (2017–2034) remains the central policy framework, while EU water directives continue to be only partially transposed through the existing Water Law and related bylaws; updates to directive-specific investment planning and preparation of secondary legislation for alignment with the Water Framework, Urban Wastewater and Nitrates Directives²⁸⁸ were ongoing in 2025, following adoption of the 1st River Basin Management Plan in April 2023, alongside adoption of a General Flood Protection Plan in August 2025^{289,290}. As a part of the “EU for improving Chapter 27 planning and implementation in Serbia” project, a compliance assessment and finalisation of the draft Water Law was done for articles related to EU water directives transposition. Despite progress in river basin planning and gradual expansion of wastewater infrastructure, implementation of the Water Framework, Urban Wastewater Treatment and Nitrates Directives remains incomplete across the Western Balkans, with persistent gaps in ecological monitoring, wastewater coverage and agricultural pollution control reflecting limited institutional capacity, fragmented governance and insufficient integration of water and agricultural policies²⁹¹.

Action 40

Modernise water monitoring infrastructure and reach good status for all water bodies

Limited overall progress has been recorded across the Western Balkans Six in 2025 in modernising water monitoring infrastructure and achieving good ecological and chemical status of water bodies. Most WB6 remain at early to intermediate stages of aligning monitoring systems with EU Water Framework Directive requirements. Structural constraints, including fragmented governance, insufficient monitoring networks, outdated laboratories and limited operational financing, continue to slow progress. OECD assessments confirm that water-related resource efficiency and environmental infrastructure performance in the WB6 remain below EU levels, with water productivity at roughly one-third of the EU average and stagnating in recent years. This reflects both inefficient water management and insufficient monitoring and control of water resources and pollution pressures²⁹². The investment context continues to be shaped by the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), which remains the central platform for financing water and environmental infrastructure, and technical assistance for project preparation and institutional strengthening. However, OECD and EU sources note that while WBIF has mobilised substantial infrastructure investments, implementation

²⁸⁶ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Macedonia_summary_report_6th_cycle_9Apr25_ENG.pdf

²⁸⁷ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/267b368e-6b55-4a42-bb72-6395593de4da_en?filename=north-macedonia-report-2025.pdf

²⁸⁸ https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/western-balkans-competitiveness-outlook-2024-serbia_1df89dd8/3699c0d5-en.pdf

²⁸⁹ <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/255601/government-adopts-decree-on-establishment-of-general-flood-protection-plan.php>

²⁹⁰ <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/255601/government-adopts-decree-on-establishment-of-general-flood-protection-plan.php>

²⁹¹ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2025-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en

²⁹² https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/economic-convergence-scoreboard-for-the-western-balkans-2025_bc0babf3-en/full-report/greening-cluster_2a8a946e.html

effectiveness is constrained by regulatory fragmentation and limited administrative capacity across WB6²⁹³.

Alignment with the European Water Resilience Strategy²⁹⁴ remains partial, particularly regarding digitalised monitoring, basin-scale data integration and pollutant tracking systems. Against this backdrop, progress in WB6 in 2025 was shaped primarily by infrastructure investments, with monitoring modernisation advancing at a different pace across the region. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the WBIF-financed €43.1 million Water and Sanitation Programme II supported water supply and sewage rehabilitation and utility-level monitoring improvements in 2025²⁹⁵. However, monitoring infrastructure modernisation remains limited due to fragmented institutional responsibilities and the absence of an integrated domestic monitoring database and pollutant registry. In Montenegro, major WBIF wastewater and water supply investments in 2025²⁹⁶ expanded treatment capacity and strengthened pollution control and monitoring functions, but monitoring network density and laboratory capacity remain insufficient for full ecological status assessment.

In Serbia, wastewater investments have continued, embedding EU-compliant water-quality monitoring within infrastructure projects such as the €84.8 million Palilula wastewater system in Belgrade. Nevertheless, monitoring modernisation remains uneven across river basins and data integration between environmental institutions and utilities is incomplete. In Kosovo*, WBIF investments including the €32.8 million Mitrovica wastewater treatment project have expanded wastewater collection and pollution control monitoring systems²⁹⁷. In North Macedonia, WBIF-supported investments have strengthened water infrastructure and monitoring-related functions, but key EU alignment measures, including the new Law on Waters, river basin management plans and the updated monitoring strategy, remain pending. Untreated urban wastewater and the absence of sensitive area designation and sludge management continue to hinder compliance with EU wastewater acquis²⁹⁸. In Albania, investment programmes in 2025 focused on modernising water supply and sanitation infrastructure, aimed at upgrading water systems and improving operational management. However, integration of environmental monitoring with utility performance systems remains limited. To further align with the EU water acquis, Albania needs to boost funding, enhance the implementation capacity and finalise a domestic-level water monitoring programme²⁹⁹.

Action 41	Build the necessary infrastructure for wastewater treatment
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Water supply, sanitation and wastewater infrastructure continues to represent the largest share of WBIF support within the environment sector, covering projects across municipalities of different sizes³⁰⁰. Overall, 2025 progress is characterised by continued implementation of previously endorsed flagship wastewater investments, confirming that wastewater infrastructure remains a core priority within the WBIF environment portfolio. For example, in North Macedonia, implementation continued in 2025 on the Skopje Wastewater Treatment Plant, where €204.8 million investment co-financed by a €72.7 million WBIF grant will

²⁹³ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/9b2cb622-d9b5-48ce-a187-56ba6dd14004_en

²⁹⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/environment/water-resilience-strategy_en

²⁹⁵ <https://wbif.eu/project-detail/PRJ-BIH-ENV-003>

²⁹⁶ <https://www.wbif.eu/procurements>

²⁹⁷ <https://www.wbif.eu>

²⁹⁸ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2025_en

²⁹⁹ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2025_en

³⁰⁰ <https://www.wbif.eu/news-details/additional-12-billion-wbif-investment-package-infrastructure-and-entrepreneurship-western-balkans>

establish central wastewater treatment for the capital and serve nine municipalities³⁰¹. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, wastewater infrastructure investments under the WBIF continue through flagship programmes such as the Water and Sanitation Programme at entity levels of Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributing to improved drinking water and sanitation access for nearly 590,000 people by 2030³⁰². In Kosovo*, construction activities continued on the €60.6 million Gjilan Wastewater Treatment Plant supported by a €22.6 million WBIF contribution³⁰³.

In Montenegro, the Podgorica Wastewater Treatment Plant project is being implemented with a total investment of €76.6 million, including €33.9 million in WBIF grants and a €35 million KfW loan, to establish modern wastewater treatment for the capital city³⁰⁴. In Serbia, implementation continued on the Belgrade wastewater treatment plant and sewerage system, a major urban environmental infrastructure project supported under the EU Economic and Investment Plan with a €271 million EU/WBIF grant component. The WBIF approved additional €3 million grant to construct new wastewater and sludge treatment facilities at the Makiš water treatment complex in Belgrade, improving treatment of process water and sludge currently discharged without prior treatment³⁰⁵. Although implementation plans for wastewater and water infrastructure investments are in place, additional work is still needed to establish robust financial arrangements and to strengthen systems for tracking implementation progress against defined milestones. Equally important is the development of sufficient technical and operational capacity of utility staff to ensure that newly constructed systems are effectively operated and maintained over the long term. For the 2024–2030 period, WBIF assistance is expected to support 23 projects across the Western Balkans Six focused on water supply, wastewater treatment and water loss reduction.

Further progress under the Green Agenda will encourage WB6 to strengthen the financial sustainability and operational readiness of wastewater utilities by securing long-term funding frameworks, ensuring adequate staffing and technical capacity for plant operation and maintenance, and establishing robust monitoring systems to track performance and compliance with EU wastewater directives. While implementation plans for wastewater and water infrastructure investments are progressing across the region, further efforts are needed to establish sustainable financial arrangements, strengthen milestone tracking systems, and build sufficient technical and operational capacity within utilities to ensure that newly constructed infrastructure is effectively operated and maintained over the long term. For the 2024–2030 period, WBIF support is expected to cover 23 projects across WB6 focused on water supply, wastewater treatment and water loss reduction. Realising the full environmental benefits of this pipeline will require parallel advances in regulatory alignment, project preparation quality, and the financial sustainability of utility operations, ensuring that infrastructure investment translates into durable improvements in wastewater treatment outcomes.

Action 42

Integrate soil protection in other policy areas and establish a regional soil partnership to improve knowledge exchange and identify examples of best practices for soil protection from pollution and degradation

³⁰¹ <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-ENV-002>

³⁰² <https://www.wbif.eu/beneficiaries/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

³⁰³ <https://wbif.eu/project-detail/PRJ-KOS-ENV-012>

³⁰⁴ <https://wbif.eu/beneficiaries/montenegro>

³⁰⁵ <https://www.wbif.eu/project-detail/PRJ-SRB-ENV-006>

Soil protection has gained increasing policy attention in the Western Balkans Six in recent years, partly driven by alignment with the European Green Deal. However, soil pollution management remains governed by fragmented legislation embedded in broader environmental, agricultural and land use laws. Although most WB6 have sectoral regulations on agricultural or forest land, and some have emerging soil-specific acts, these frameworks still lack an integrated and preventive approach to soil contamination control. At the European level, soil policy aims to safeguard human health and ecosystems through improved soil condition and sustainable land use, with the objective of achieving healthy soils by 2050. The EU Soil Strategy for 2030 is being operationalised through the Soil Monitoring and Resilience Law adopted in September 2025³⁰⁶, which establishes a harmonised definition of soil health, a coherent monitoring system, and obligations for sustainable soil management and remediation of contaminated sites. Alignment with these requirements represents a key strategic task for the WB6. Regional cooperation mechanisms are gradually emerging. The Western Balkans Soil Partnership (WBSP)³⁰⁷, established in 2022, promotes coordinated soil conservation and harmonisation with the European Soil Partnership. The forthcoming LUCAS Soil survey offers an important opportunity to standardise soil data collection across the region. EU4Green further supports WB6 in identifying diffuse soil pollution and contaminated sites, with soil health recognised as a cross-sector priority³⁰⁸. The European Environment Agency supports the WB6 through the EEA IPA III project (2025), aimed at strengthening the knowledge base by improving the collection and exchange of data on potentially contaminated sites. Across the Western Balkans Six, more than 7,000 locations where potentially polluting activities have taken place or are currently taking place have been recorded. The results generated under this project will form the basis of domestic statistics for the 2025 reporting cycle to the EEA.

Despite this progress, domestic frameworks remain uneven. Albania and Kosovo* lack dedicated soil protection legislation³⁰⁹. Bosnia and Herzegovina also lacks soil protection policy at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Republika Srpska is developing a Law on Soil Protection for the first time ever. Montenegro conducts annual monitoring focused on hazardous substances and plans to expand coverage to urban and industrial areas³¹⁰. North Macedonia is still developing its monitoring system alongside new legislation and strategies. Serbia is drafting the Programme for Industrial Safety for the period 2026-2035, expected to be adopted in 2026, which aims to enhance disaster resilience and industrial risk management³¹¹.

To facilitate effective remediation of sites contaminated by industrial activities, Serbia maintains a Cadastre of Contaminated Sites Information System, while the Environmental Protection Agency of Serbia (SEPA) regularly collects soil monitoring data during the operational, post-operational and remediation stages to identify potential health risks. Brownfield sites represent the most severely affected areas, often covering extensive zones with multiple abandoned installations and mixed contamination profiles. Progress in remediation across the WB6 remains highly dependent on international support, while limited regulatory clarity, financing, and site investigation capacity continue to hinder action. Across the WB6, implementation gaps persist. Enforcement of existing regulations is inconsistent, systematic risk assessment at contaminated sites is rare, and financial and technical capacities

³⁰⁶ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9474-2025-REV-1/en/pdf>

³⁰⁷ <https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/regional-partnerships/europe/western-balkans-soil-partnership/en/>

³⁰⁸ <https://eu4green.eu/library/>

³⁰⁹ <https://eu4green.eu/advancing-soil-monitoring-in-the-western-balkans-key-achievements-and-future-steps/>

³¹⁰ <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/THE-STATE-OF-SOIL-POLLUTION-IN-THE-WESTERN-BALKANS.pdf>

³¹¹ <https://www.undp.org/sr/serbia/news/nacrt-programa-za-industrijsku-bezbednost-dostupan-za-komentare-javnosti>

for site investigation and remediation remain limited. Establishing harmonised criteria for identifying high-risk sites and developing a regional inventory of contaminated locations are therefore essential steps towards prioritising remediation and aligning the region with EU soil policy objectives.

Action 43	Prepare and sign regional agreements on transboundary air and water pollution
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Several bilateral and multilateral agreements and cooperative frameworks are in place across WB6, with implementation efforts continuing during the reporting period.

Albania and North Macedonia maintain a bilateral agreement for the protection and sustainable development of Lake Ohrid³¹². Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to engage under the UNECE Water Convention, which has helped strengthen collaboration with riparian neighbours and establish a network of cooperating institutions. An inter-ministerial Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation concerning the regular functioning and maintenance of the flood forecasting and warning system in the Sava River basin remains operational³¹³. Serbia cooperates within the multilateral framework of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and International Commission for Sava River (ISRBC). The Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area signed in 2010 by Albania, Greece, North Macedonia and the European Union and in force since 2019 continues to provide integrated protection of the Prespa ecosystem, including the development of integrated river basin management plans³¹⁴.

A significant 2025 development was the launch of a new phase of the Drin Basin Strategic Action Programme (SAP) project in March 2025 in Tirana. Financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with a USD 7.1 million budget and a five-year timeline, the project advances transboundary cooperation among Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro and North Macedonia on water pollution, biodiversity degradation and water flow management in the Extended Drin Basin³¹⁵. UNECE is supporting the process towards a formal joint institutional arrangement for basin cooperation. At the Drin Core Group meeting in March 2025, representatives of the four riparians reaffirmed their commitment to integrating regional flood risk management measures into domestic planning processes.

2.6 Sustainable Agriculture Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with Sustainable Agriculture Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Strengthen administrative and technical capacity in IPARD operating structures and assure sound financial management principles.

³¹² UNEP, n.d, Agreement between the Council of Ministers of the Albania and the Government of North Macedonia for the protection and sustainable development of Lake Ohrid and its watershed. Available at: <https://leap.unep.org/en/countries/al/national-legislation/agreement-between-council-ministers-republic-albania-and>

³¹³ Sava Commission, n.d, Flood Forecasting and Warning System. Available at: <https://www.savacommission.org/flood-forecasting-and-warning-system/579>

³¹⁴ Society for Protection of Prespa, n.d, Transboundary Prespa Park. Available at: <https://spp.gr/project/transboundary-prespa-park/>

³¹⁵ UNECE, 2025, UNECE renews support for transboundary water cooperation in the Western Balkans' Extended Drin Basin. Available at: <https://unece.org/media/press/400843>

- Build administrative capacity in paying agencies, managing authorities, and integrated systems like Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), ensuring Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) interoperability, and verifying farm register data accuracy.
- Adopt economy-level agriculture and rural development strategies, harmonising support measures and integrating Green Agenda goals like climate adaptation.
- Adopt key laws including an economy-level organic production law, quality policy law, agriculture and rural development advisory services law, and implementing legislation on wine and agricultural market organisation, fully aligned with EU acquis.
- Speed up the action plan for EU acquis alignment in agriculture, rural development, quality policy, and organic farming, including vineyard register completion.
- Develop and adopt a multiannual, economy-level strategy for agriculture and rural development, harmonising support measures across regions per EU standards.
- Enhance vocational education and training (VET) by improving promotion, increasing graduates, and aligning skills with job market needs; advance education digital and green (twin) transformation and inclusiveness.
- Bolster infrastructure for cyber-resilience and set up administrative structures for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- Ensure robust implementation across all agri-rural reforms through targeted staffing and training.
- Increase food establishments compliant with EU standards; transform food systems for climate resilience, sustainable production, and consumer protection.
- Strengthen administrative capacity and infrastructure for food safety controls, disease surveillance, and vaccination.
- Improve IPARD implementation to avoid fund losses.
- Raise awareness among farmers and stakeholders on strategies/policies.
- Redesign budgetary support for climate-resilient production/productivity.
- Boost financing for AKIS, research, digitalisation, and competent authority capacity.
- Provide targeted guidance on climate policy, pesticide reduction, organic farming, nature conservation, and biodiversity.
- Increase financing for agri-environmental measures (AEMs, IPARD III Measure 4) beyond organics, including digital CSA platforms and pilots; strengthen monitoring by authorities.
- Support green capital investments in agriculture/food processing.
- Step up sustainable rural development, livelihood diversification, and LEADER/CLLD self-organisation.
- Establish manure management frameworks/guidelines, strengthen animal ID, registration, and movement controls.
- Coordinate sustainable agriculture with energy, circular economy, transport through spatial planning.

2.6.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 44	Align the agri-food and primary production sector with the EU standards on food safety, plant and animal health and welfare and environment, and address effluent, manure and waste management
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Albania made some progress during the reporting period. In the area of Common Market Organisation (CMO), implementing legislation was adopted in November 2024 on the classification of grape varieties for wine production and the definition of tasks for related responsible institutions, marking partial alignment with the EU acquis.

Regarding the rural development, IPARD II programme implementation continued but additional capacity building and oversight are required to complete IPARD II and launch efficient IPARD III implementation in full compliance with sound financial management.

No progress to align the legislation on quality policy, while legislation on organic production, labelling of organic products and control was adopted in October 2024.

The general food safety legal framework remains only partially aligned with the EU General Food Law Regulation. Legislation on official controls is still not aligned with the Official Controls Regulation (OCR).

In veterinary policy, Albania adopted the Animal Health Law in June 2025, though implementation will begin two years post-adoption. Two bylaws are adopted in July 2025 on the protection of animals at farm, during transport and at the time of killing. While main veterinary service elements exist under the current law, the sector reform remains incomplete due to insufficient human resources at central and local levels. Rabies vaccination campaigns were not continued.

For placing food, feed, and animal by-products on the market, Albania implemented its residue monitoring plan, though the plan lack comprehensiveness. No progress occurred on the legal framework for animal by-products (ABPs), and an EU-compliant system for their collection, storage, and processing remains absent.

On food safety rules, some progress has been recorded on food additives and identification of maximum levels for certain contaminants in food; however there is no progress on developing an economy-level programme to improve milk quality and on specific rules for feeds.

On phytosanitary policy, the Plant Health Law was adopted in June 2025 but will be applicable only two years after adoption. Albania approved the multiannual pest monitoring plan 2025-2028.

Bosnia and Herzegovina made no significant progress in the reporting period. In the area of common market organisation, Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to adopt implementing legislation for the economy-level law on the organisation of the market of wine and set up a register of grapes and wine producers and a vineyard register.

Legal framework on quality policy is without progress, and there is still a need to adopt an economy-level law on organic farming and production, and harmonise regulatory frameworks across all levels of administration.

On general food safety, alignment with the EU acquis of the laws on food and veterinary medicine remains low and there is a need to prepare and adopt laws on official controls, on animal health and on animal welfare.

On phytosanitary policy, laws on plant health and on official controls need to be adopted.

Kosovo* made limited progress in the reporting period. In the area of common market organisation, Kosovo* still needs to adopt the implementing legislation for the law on market organisation for agricultural products.

On general food safety, there is a need to adopt implementing legislation on the law on food, and the strategy for aligning with the EU acquis in the field of veterinary and phytosanitary policy.

In veterinary policy, a five-year animal disease monitoring and control plan and a Law on Animal Health have yet to be adopted, and the 2004 Veterinary Law has yet to be repealed. Financial resources for rabies vaccination for 2025 and 2026 have been ensured. EU co-financed programmes for 2025-2027 for African swine fever, avian influenza and rabies are approved.

On the placing of food, feed and animal by-products on the market, Kosovo* sent its residue monitoring plan to the European Commission.

On phytosanitary policy, the concept document on plant health has been approved.

Montenegro made good progress in the reporting period. In the area of common market organisation, legislation in the wine sector, olive growing and olive oil was adopted.

Regarding the rural development implementation of the IPARD II programme was quite successful, with around 90% absorption of the EU funds. Furthermore, Montenegro has received the entrustment of four measures under the IPARD III programme.

On organic farming, Law on Organic Production was adopted in 2024.

On general food safety, food and feed safety quality measures have been implemented while monitoring programme for residues in animals and products of animal origin was prepared for the 2025 programme.

In veterinary policy, implementing legislation on the internal organisation and systematisation of the Administration for Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Affairs (AFSVPA) envisages significant increase in staff numbers. Mandatory animal health protection measures are being implemented and further strengthened for bird diseases that are subject to reporting. The veterinary information system became operational.

On the placing of food, feed and animal by-products on the market, an innovated management plan for animal by-products not intended for human consumption with an action plan 2025-2030 has been adopted, yet implementation needs to be accelerated.

On food safety rules, the food and feed safety measures programme has been implemented and 2025 programme adopted.

On phytosanitary policy, phytosanitary measures programme, including the programme on control of production of seed and propagating material and plant genetic resources has been implemented, and programme for 2025 prepared. Furthermore, programme for monitoring pesticide residues in food of plant and animal origin has been implemented, and programme for 2025 prepared. Domestic-level plan for sustainable use of pesticides (2021-2026) is being

implemented and activities for 2025 planned. Programme for the control testing of seed and planting material for 2025 has been prepared.

North Macedonia made some progress in the reporting period. In the area of common market organisation, legislation remains to be adopted and institutional mandates defined.

Regarding the rural development, IPARD III implementation is continuing, with insufficient progress in the entrustment of new measures under the IPARD III programme.

On general food safety, the law on official controls has still not been adopted.

On veterinary policy, a new law on animal health and implementing legislation on disease control has yet to be adopted. Rabies vaccination campaigns in 2024 and spring 2025 were not implemented. Implementing legislation on zoo-technics was adopted.

On phytosanitary policy, monitoring programme for plant health remained in place, and the phytosanitary information system was further developed; however, no measures for the sustainable use of pesticides were implemented.

Serbia made limited progress in the reporting period. In the area of common market organisation, the law on wine remains to be adopted, and there was no progress on the adoption of relevant legislation.

Regarding the rural development, the absorption (56.6%) of available EU funding under the IPARD II programme is low and there is limited progress with IPARD III measures.

On organic farming, Law on Organic Production (Official Gazette, no 109/25) was adopted in December 2025.

The following laws under the legislative framework for food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy were adopted in 2025: the Law on Official Controls (Official Gazette, no 109/25), the Law on Seeds and Planting Material of Agricultural and Ornamental Plants (Official Gazette, no 91/25), the Law on Amendments to the Law the Recognition of Varieties of Agricultural Plants (Official Gazette no 30/10 and 19/25), and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Reproductive Material of Forest Trees (Official Gazette, no 135/04, 8/05, 41/09 and 19/25).

On veterinary policy, Serbia implemented rabies vaccination campaigns in 2024 and 2025. The documentation for placing Serbia on the list of jurisdictions approved for the non-commercial movement of pets in accordance with Regulation 576/2013 was sent to the European Commission on 31 December 2025.

On phytosanitary policy, Serbia adopted and implemented the annual Programme of measures for survey and monitoring of harmful organisms and the Annual Monitoring Plan for Plant Protection Product Residues for 2025.

The annual Monitoring programme for food of plant and mixed origin for 2025 was adopted and implemented, as well as risk-based Plan of official controls for food of plant origin, mixed food and feed of plant origin during import in 2025.

Action 45**Strengthen the official sanitary controls along the entire food chain and improve traceability and labelling of food products**

General food safety legal framework in Albania needs improvements, the Food Authority of Albania (AKU) needs to strengthen its focus on inspection statistics, data management and transparency in line with the Official Controls Regulation. Modest administrative and financial resources remain an obstacle for strengthening official controls along the food chain. Multiannual economy-level control plan is not in place, as well as validated screening methods to guarantee the reliability of results for the relevant species and commodities.

Substantial efforts are needed to establish the necessary capacities on passive and active surveillance, and to strengthen veterinary sector. Vaccination campaigns against rabies did not continue, while monitoring brucellosis and tuberculosis in cattle herds were done. Update of animal register is needed.

Economy-level residue monitoring plan is in place but needs to be strengthened. The system of collection, storage and processing of animal by-products is not in place. Some efforts were made on food additives and identification of maximum levels for certain contaminants in food; there is still a need to enforce actions taken in the event of noncompliance and increase transparency.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to improve general food safety legal framework, in particular official controls for the export of beef, sheep and goat meat to the EU, and to ensure reliable certified animal health statements of the export certificates. Central database for animals and official controls and economy-level reference laboratories are not in place nor are they accredited to detect notifiable diseases, and the surveillance of notifiable diseases is not regularly implemented.

Salmonella control plan is updated but not yet fully implemented. Monitoring and surveillance of brucellosis and rabies was carried out, but needs to be strengthened.

A meeting was held on multiannual programme for monitoring pesticide residues in food of plant and animal origin in 2025.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), in collaboration with Opera srl and the Food Safety Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, organised a 2-day crisis preparedness training workshop (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye).

In the area of general food safety, Kosovo* still needs to improve its legal framework, particularly regarding the establishment of an epidemiological unit, and to implement a risk-based approach to controls. The Food and Veterinary Agency continued to implement the domestic plan for the control and monitoring of food and animal disease and completed the obligatory proficiency testing schemes with EU reference laboratories as part of the laboratory accreditation.

Five-year disease monitoring and control plan is still missing, as well as resources for the control of animal health and welfare. Rabies vaccination programmes are ensured, as well as programmes for African swine fever, avian influenza and rabies for 2025-2027.

Montenegro needs to improve its general food safety legal framework. The Administration for Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Affairs implemented the 2024 programme for food and feed safety quality measures, including the monitoring programme for residues in animals and products of animal origin, and prepared the 2025 programme. The veterinary information system became operational; still, farm registration and animal identification is not in place.

The Programme of mandatory animal health protection measures was implemented while 2025 monitoring programme for bird diseases that are subject to reporting was planned and enforced. Furthermore, programmes for African swine fever and rabies for the period 2025-2027 have been approved. An innovated management plan for animal by-products not intended for human consumption with an action plan 2025-2030 has been adopted, while implementation needs to be accelerated.

The food and feed safety measures programme was implemented, and programme for 2025 adopted. The same applies for phytosanitary measures, including the programme of control of production of seed and propagating material and plant genetic resources.

The Plan for sustainable use of pesticides is being implemented, as well as the programme for monitoring pesticide residues in food of plant and animal origin.

The general legal framework on food safety in North Macedonia is still partially aligned with the General Food Law Regulation. A new law on official controls has not been adopted yet.

Regular audits of laboratories in the veterinary and food safety area are performed.

The implementing legislation on disease control within a new law on animal health has not been adopted yet, while control measures for animal diseases need to be updated in line with the principles of the EU Animal Health Law.

Rabies vaccination campaigns have not been carried out, and collection, verification and analysis of data remain insufficient. The programmes for African swine fever, avian influenza and rabies for the period 2025-2027 have been approved.

The phytosanitary monitoring programme for plant health remained in place; however, no measures for sustainable use of pesticides were implemented.

Serbia adopted the Law on Official Controls (Official Gazette, no 109/25) in December 2025, and further work on adoption of necessary implementing legislation needs to be continued.

Phytosanitary Inspection carries out official controls in accordance with the Law on Plant Health, the Law on Food Safety and relevant secondary legislation. Sampling is carried out under the annual Plan of Official Controls. Since 2021, the Phytosanitary Inspection operates in an information system to record its controls. This system incorporates a risk analysis related to the sampling frequency obtained by the Risk Analysis Group, whereas the inspector can, at any time, see previous findings related to a specific product and a specific producer.

Veterinary Inspection carries out veterinary-sanitary controls for import and transit of consignments in accordance with the Law on Veterinary Matters and the Rulebook on types of consignments subject to veterinary and sanitary control and manner of performing veterinary and sanitary inspection of consignments at border/boundary crossings. The Rulebook on the establishment of the Programme for monitoring the safety of food of animal origin and animal

feed to be imported for 2025 was published in the Official Gazette no. 51/2025 on 17 June 2025, and is based on risk assessment principles. In addition, risk analysis is also carried out in the ITCM programme, information system of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management for food safety, in the part of sampling decisions where ITCM itself performs the percentage calculation of sampled shipments and helps the veterinary inspector to make a sampling decision.

Maximum levels for certain contaminants in food and maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in or on food and feed of plant and animal origin in 2025 is aligned with the new changes in those areas in the European Union.

The annual Monitoring programme for food of plant and mixed origin for 2025 was adopted and implemented, as well as the risk-based Plan of official controls for food of plant origin, mixed food and feed of plant origin during import in 2025.

Action 46

Promote environmentally-friendly (zero pollution) and organic farming and reduction of synthetic chemical products used in food production

Organic agriculture in the Western Balkans Six is an emerging sector characterised by slow but steady growth, despite early legal frameworks dating back to 2004 in some WB6. It remains a small fraction of total agricultural land—around 0.13%, with recent increases but still far below EU targets such as 25% under the Green Deal. Production areas have expanded notably in recent years: Albania reached 797 ha in 2023 (682 ha fully organic) rising to 802 ha in 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina hit 2,495 ha in 2024 (see table 18 for detailed overview), and North Macedonia saw 133.99% growth from 2019 to 2022. Most output is export-oriented to the EU and USA, with minimal domestic sales due to low consumer awareness of health and environmental benefits. Key barriers include limited know-how, underdeveloped value chains, soil contamination, and weak institutional support like control labs. Implementation of EU Regulation 2018/848 is ongoing but uneven. All WB6 have transposed elements of prior EU regulations (e.g. 834/2007, 889/2008) but are drafting/updating laws for 2018/848, with action plans via Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG). Progress includes submitted drafts for domestic laws and secondary legislation, as well as action plans for development of organic agriculture.

Serbia adopted the new Law on Organic Production (Official Gazette, no 109/25) in December 2025, which is in line with Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and labelling of organic products.

Economy	Organic area (ha)	Organic share (%)	Organic producers (no)	Export to EU and USA (MT)
Albania	802	0.1	162	1269
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2495	0.1	90	4406
Kosovo*	310	0.1	31	459
Montenegro	4541	1.8	532	18
North Macedonia	4114	0.3	873	221
Serbia	27447	0.8	863	13169

Table 18: Key indicators on organic in 2024³¹⁶

All WB6, as official EU accession candidates, have committed to implementing the Nitrate Directive as part of the EU environmental acquis but very few efforts are made in this direction. None of the WB6 have designated Nitrate Vulnerable Zones nor prepared an action plan to prevent and decrease nitrate pollution from harmful agricultural practices, or introduced measures such as crop rotation, lowering the amount of nitrogen used on crops, and enhancing the storage and handling of manure. Available data on agricultural use of fertilisers reveals inconsistencies (Table 19), probably the result of small and fragmented farms, changes in policy frameworks (i.e. reduction in subsidies for specific crops nutrient use), and economic shocks, including increase in the price of fertilisers, and environmental and climate impacts such as droughts.

Year/Economy	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Rank
Albania	39 036	22 971	48 876	60 817	57 609	112/200
Bosnia and Herzegovina	40 107	59 779	62 517	83 694	61 264	110/200
Montenegro	2 275	1 719	2 776	2 792	2 635	157/200
North Macedonia	22 575	18 579	21 055	34 451	25 667	125/200
Serbia	358 697	367 624	196 087	417 457	224 635	45/200

Table 19: Agricultural use of fertilisers³¹⁷

Action 47	Cooperate with scientific, education, business and agricultural holdings to facilitate transfer to innovative and environmentally-friendly technologies and farming methods
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Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG RRD) initiated a project on Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) in the Western Balkans Six. Roadmaps and action plans have been developed but full operationalisation lags.

Smart Specialisation Strategies aimed to increase educational opportunities as well as to spur collaboration and competitiveness of agricultural holdings, but with different levels of success across WB6. Montenegro was the first to adopt its strategy back in 2019. North Macedonia and Serbia completed mapping and stakeholder phases, including identification of priorities, but the strategies still remain in development or draft phase. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo* still lag behind and face coordination challenges.

The reform of advisory services in Albania continues with slow pace as capacity remain low³¹⁸. Some activities to strengthen advisory services have been undertaken recently, such as the

³¹⁶ Willer, H., Schlatter, B., & Trávníček, J. (Eds.). (2026). *The world of organic agriculture 2026: Statistics and emerging trends* (PDF). Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) & IFOAM – Organics International. <https://www.fibl.org/fileadmin/documents/shop/1861-organic-world-2026.pdf>

³¹⁷ Statbase. (2026). Agricultural use of fertilizers by nutrient, Global Data & Statistics Hub, available on: <https://statbase.org/datasets/agriculture/agricultural-use-of-fertilizers-by-nutrient/>, Accessed 3.3.2026.

³¹⁸ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Albania 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

“Policy Dialogue Event on Agricultural Information and Advisory Services”³¹⁹ or new EU-funded INSIST-VAT project - Institutional, Sustainable and Innovative Strengthening of Vocational Agricultural Training in Albania³²⁰ that brings together participants from different sectors with the aim to bring advisory services closer to farmers, particularly to small-scale farmers and farmers from remote rural areas. Furthermore, the Digital Agriculture and Rural Transformation (DART) programme aimed to transform how agriculture is practiced, supported, and accessed through the power of digital innovation³²¹.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to develop a farm advisory service and facilitate collaboration between actors in the sector³²². Some project-related activities have been initiated to facilitate knowledge and technology transfer among farming community through the EU projects such as: Smart, innovative and sustainable agriculture – SATECON³²³ or Sustainable soil and subsoil health promotion by implementing agroecological land use and management SUS-SOIL³²⁴ with its objectives to set up the first living lab in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Kosovo* needs to adopt the law on advisory services and support collaboration among stakeholders, facilitate knowledge and technology transfer³²⁵. Similar to other WB6, collaboration among the farmers and transformation of the sector are strongly supported through international projects, private-public partnerships, etc.

Some of the most recent examples includes projects such as: Promoting Private Sector Employment (PPSE)³²⁶, collaboration with professors and students to explore solutions to industry challenges³²⁷, empowering farmers, particularly women, youth, and marginalised communities, and collaboration with local and international partners to advance sustainable agriculture and environmental protection.³²⁸

³¹⁹ ANRD. (2025). Policy dialogue on agricultural information and advisory services: the QABR experience as a practical solution for rural development, Albanian Network for Rural Development – ANRD, Tirana, Albania, available on: <https://anrd.al/news/policy-dialogue-on-agricultural-information-and-advisory-services-the-qabr-experience-as-a-practical-solution-for-rural-development/>

³²⁰ CIHEAM. (2025). EU-funded project to transform agricultural training and innovation in Albania, CIHEAM Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain, Available on: <https://www.iamz.ciheam.org/agendas/eu-funded-project-to-transform-agricultural-training-and-innovation-in-albania/>

³²¹ UN Joint SDG Fund. (2026). Albania’s Digital Agriculture Programme Reaches Key Milestone, available on: <https://www.jointsdgfund.org/article/albanias-digital-agriculture-programme-reaches-key-milestone>

³²² European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³²³ Interreg HR-BA-ME.(n.d.). Smart, innovative and sustainable agriculture (SATECON), available on: <https://interreg-hr-ba-me.eu/project/project-library/satecon/>

³²⁴ SUS-SOIL (n.d.). About SUS-SOIL, available on: <https://www.sus-soil.eu/>

³²⁵ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Kosovo*2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³²⁶ Swisscontact. (n.d.). Kosovo*’s food sector strengthens foundations for systemic rural growth. <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/news/kosovos-food-sector-strengthens-foundations-for-systemic-rural-growth>

³²⁷ University of Iowa College of Education. (1 January 2025). *Kosovo* agriculture firms collaborate with professors, students to explore solutions for industry*. <https://education.uiowa.edu/news/2025/01/kosovo-agriculture-firms-collaborate-professors-students-explore-solutions-industry>

³²⁸ Initiative for Agricultural Development of Kosovo*. (n.d.). *Current projects*. <https://iadk.org/PROJECTS/Current-projects>

Montenegro farm advisory services need to be strengthened³²⁹, while some activities to support smart, innovative and sustainable agriculture are carried out through projects such as SATECON³³⁰ or Technical Cooperation Programme and Farmer Field School.³³¹

The Law on Advisory Services in North Macedonia was adopted back in 2023, but implementing legislation is not in place³³². Project-related activities are mainly focused on income growth, rural development and food quality³³³ or support to producers' organisation and collective structures³³⁴. Furthermore, some activities were carried out to support agricultural advisory services, and knowledge and technology transfer.

Collaboration between actors in Serbia is increasing on a daily basis. Introduction of several digital platforms supported exchange of information and technology, and set up ground for further growth. Several new initiatives are underway, from Hazelnut Excellence District initiative³³⁵ and regenerative agriculture programmes^{336,337} to projects that bring actors together to deal with climate change impacts (Strengthening the Resilience of the Agricultural Sector to Natural Hazards)³³⁸, and a workshop on digital agricultural services³³⁹.

As a Part of the EU-funded Strengthening Disaster Resilience in Agriculture project, e-learning platform was developed, offering free courses on modern farming topics such as new technologies (sensors, drones, AI), healthy soils for climate-smart agriculture, and sustainable practices. It targets current/future farmers to build resilience against disasters through accessible and innovative knowledge³⁴⁰

In addition to the platform, eight manuals/guidelines on good agricultural practices in the climate change conditions in various agricultural sectors (general, vegetable, livestock, and fruit production) were developed. These manuals support the implementation of the Climate Change Adaptation Programme for Serbia and its Action Plan.

³²⁹ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Montenegro 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³³⁰ Interreg HR-BA-ME.(n.d.). Smart, innovative and sustainable agriculture (SATECON), available on: <https://interreg-hr-ba-me.eu/project/project-library/satecon/>

³³¹ FAO. (19 May 2025). *Sowing the seeds of change: Montenegro modernizes smallholder feed production one experiment at a time*. <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/sowing-the-seeds-of-change--montenegro-modernizes-smallholder-feed-production-one-experiment-at-a-time/en>

³³² European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT North Macedonia 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³³³ Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı. (5 May 2025). *TİKA, Kuzey Makedonya'da çiftçilere destek sağlıyor*. <https://tika.gov.tr/en/tika-provides-support-to-farmers-in-north-macedonia/>

³³⁴ AES Europe Group. (n.d.). *Implementation of common market organisation (CMO) measures in North Macedonia*. <https://aesagroup.eu/reference/implementation-of-common-market-organisation-cmo-measures-in-north-macedonia/>

³³⁵ Netherlands Embassy in Belgrade. (27 October 2025). *Serbia: Advancing agricultural sector with key initiatives*. <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/actueel/nieuws/2025/10/27/serbia-advancing-agricultural-sector-with-key-initiatives>

³³⁶ Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. (31 October 2025). *Serbia: Regenerative agriculture in focus*. <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/actueel/nieuws/2025/10/31/serbia-regenerative-agriculture-in-focus>

³³⁷ ARC2020. (23 June 2025). *Serbia: Between tradition and transition—Regenerative agriculture in Vojvodina*. <https://www.arc2020.eu/serbia-between-tradition-and-transition-regenerative-agriculture-in-vojvodina/>

³³⁸ EU Delegation to Serbia. (29 January 2026). *Serbia sets the groundwork for climate-resilient agriculture with EU and FAO support*. <https://europa.rs/serbia-sets-the-groundwork-for-climate-resilient-agriculture-with-eu-and-fao-support/?lang=en>

³³⁹ FAO. (9 October 2025). *Advancing farmer-centered digital agricultural services in Serbia*. <https://www.fao.org/digital-villages-initiative/europe/news-and-articles-detail/advancing-farmer-centered-digital-agricultural-services-in-serbia/en>

³⁴⁰ Agrokursevi. (n.d.). *Kursevi*. <https://www.agrokursevi.rs/kursevi/>

Action 48 Devise actions to reduce waste in rural and coastal areas

Some progress has been made; still, WB6 need to adopt and implement major regulations such as Waste Framework Directive, Landfill Directive, Circular Economy Action Plan, Water Framework Directive, Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, Industrial Emissions Directive, Air Quality Standards, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive.

No progress has been made in Albania in terms of environment and climate change³⁴¹. Draft laws on integrated waste management and on extended producer responsibility need to be adopted.

New “mountain package” law was adopted, aimed to promote investment projects in forests and pastures but may lay foundation for deforestation activities and degradation of environment.

Full alignment, implementation and enforcement of the Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is expected to be achieved.

Five of seven River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) have been implemented, while several EU Directives on water quality are still pending.

Reform of waste management sector was announced in 2025, centralising waste collection and management.

Bosnia and Herzegovina made no progress on environment and climate change³⁴². Domestic strategy for waste management, EU Plastic Strategy and the Directive on Single-use Plastics needs to be adopted. This will support circular economy activities.

The list of potential Natura 2000 sites needs to be adopted, while the Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora (CITES) needs to be fully implemented.

Domestic strategy and sustainable investment plan on water management and urban wastewater management are still missing.

Some project-related activities were carried out through the IPA II programme, “Bear in Mind – Bringing environmental actions for biodiversity protection across the borders”³⁴³.

Little progress has been made on environment and climate change in Kosovo*³⁴⁴.

³⁴¹ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Albania 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³⁴² European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³⁴³ Cross-Border Cooperation Programme BiH-MNE. (2022, June). Environmental protection in the cross-border area of BiH and Montenegro raised to a higher level. <https://cbc.bih-mne.org/en/2022/06/zastita-okolisa-u-prekogranicnom-podrucju-bih-i-crne-gore-podignuta-na-veci-nivo/>

³⁴⁴ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Kosovo* 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

Law on waste, law on water and the approval of river basin management plans are pending. The list of potential Natura 2000 sites is at an early phase. Kosovo* adopted its first voluntary NDC.

Montenegro achieved some progress³⁴⁵, particularly with adopting and implementing legislation on waste management and climate change adaptation plan covering the period until 2035. This is setting ground for circular economy activities. The law on protection from the negative effects of climate change is pending.

Waste management plans at the local level are needed.

Some project-related activities were carried out through the IPA II programme, “Bear in Mind – Bringing environmental actions for biodiversity protection across the borders”³⁴⁶, “Improving Water Supply Management in Urban and Rural Areas of Kolasin and Rogatica municipalities” and “Green Islands”³⁴⁷.

Limited progress was achieved on environment and climate change in North Macedonia³⁴⁸. The law on climate change needs to be adopted, NECP and MRVA implemented.

The Law on Industrial Emissions was adopted. The law on water needs to be adopted and aligned with Water Framework and Groundwater Directives. The list of potential Natura 2000 sites is at an early phase.

Circular economy activities are low, and need to be strengthened with raising awareness, knowledge, and sufficient financial support and infrastructure.

Serbia made some progress on environment and climate change³⁴⁹, particularly through the improved legislation on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), the adoption of the Law on Air Quality, implementation of Monitoring, Reporting, Verification and Accreditation (MRVA) legislation covering stationary installations, the adoption of a waste prevention plan and adoption of legislation on hazard risk management. Waste Prevention Plan 2025-2030 is in place. In 2025, Serbia adopted the Plan for the Prevention of Waste Generation, one of the strategic documents in this area, which aims to reduce the generation of waste and develop a circular economy. The Plan envisages the following key measures:

- Support for sustainable production and consumption;
- Encouraging the design, production and use of green products;
- Support for reducing the generation of municipal and packaging waste;
- Supporting the reduction of food waste and encouraging food donation;

³⁴⁵ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Montenegro 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³⁴⁶ Cross-Border Cooperation Programme BiH-MNE. (2022, June). *Environmental protection in the cross-border area of BiH and Montenegro raised to a higher level*. <https://cbc.bih-mne.org/en/2022/06/zastita-okolisa-u-prekogranicnom-podrucju-bih-i-crne-gore-podignuta-na-veci-nivo/>

³⁴⁷ Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance. (16 September 2025). *Leveraging collaboration to enhance waste management for greater flood resilience*. <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/leveraging-collaboration-enhance-waste-management-greater-flood-resilience>

³⁴⁸ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT North Macedonia 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

³⁴⁹ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Serbia 2025 Report, Accompanying the document COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

- Promotion of waste reduction in processes related to industrial production;
- Encouraging product reuse and introducing systems that promote repair and reuse activities;
- Promotion of waste reduction from products containing critical raw materials.

The new water law is needed. The list of potential Natura 2000 sites needs to be facilitated.

Action 49	Step up efforts for sustainable development of rural areas with implementation of LEADER
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Progress on introducing the LEADER approach across WB6 remains at an early stage. The IPARD accreditation process for the LEADER measure has not yet formally commenced in any economy in the region, though 2025 saw tangible preparatory steps in several WB6³⁵⁰.

In Albania, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development continued close cooperation on preparations for implementing LEADER under IPARD III. Through a project on land management and local rural development in the context of EU accession, FAO provided technical assistance in November 2025 that included a capacity-building seminar for registered LAGs and central institutions, the development of domestic guidance materials, and a LEADER Readiness Assessment. Only two LAGs are currently formally registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, with several others still in the registration process under Law 36/2022³⁵¹.

In Montenegro, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture organised a two-day capacity-building training in September 2025 for the IPARD Managing Authority and Paying Agency, under the project Support to Creating Preconditions for Implementation of the LEADER Approach. Measure 5 (LEADER) is included in Montenegro's IPARD III programme but has not yet been accredited, only Measures 1, 3 and 7 are currently operational. No LAGs have been formally established, with five informal initiatives continuing to operate outside the IPARD framework³⁵².

In Serbia, 21 approved partnerships (potential LAGs) cover approximately 373,000 people, though their Local Development Strategies expired in 2023 and most remain largely inactive in the absence of sustained public financing. The IPARD Managing Authority continued preparing the entrustment package for Measure 5 during the reporting period, with accreditation still pending³⁵³. When it comes to the entrustment of Measure 5, decision was made to strengthen the capacities of potential LAGs and administrative capacities for the implementation of this measure in the next programming period through Measure 9 - Technical Assistance, including the development of its legal and procedural framework.

In Kosovo*, 30 LAGs have been established on a municipal basis since 2014 and are funded through the domestic Agricultural and Rural Development Programme. According to the most recent regional assessment available, a significant share remains inactive, with governance

³⁵⁰ <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Introduction-of-the-LEADER-approach.pdf>

³⁵¹ FAO (2025), Albania learns to adopt the EU LEADER approach, with FAO help. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/albania-learns-to-adopt-the-eu-leader-approach--with-fao-help/en>

³⁵² FAO (2025), FAO and Montenegro strengthen capacities for LEADER approach implementation. Available at: <https://montenegro.un.org/en/302054-fao-and-montenegro-strengthen-capacities-leader-approach-implementation>

³⁵³ SWG RRD (2025), Serbia chapter, op. cit.; European Commission (2025), Serbia 2025 Report, op. cit.

challenges and insufficient coordination between central and local institutions identified as the principal obstacles to more effective implementation³⁵⁴.

In North Macedonia, awareness raising activities in preparation for the LEADER approach are planned under IPARD Technical Assistance, though the temporary suspension of IPARD payments announced in November 2025 has introduced uncertainty for the period ahead.³⁵⁵

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, institutional structures for IPARD remain unestablished, which continues to preclude access to the LEADER measure³⁵⁶. No active LAGs exist in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where no public budget has been allocated for LEADER support. In Bosnia and Herzegovina's Entity of Republika Srpska, two registered LAGs exist, LAG SAVUS and LAG DEVETAK, though both face significant challenges in sustaining operations due to the absence of stable public financing. LAG SAVUS initiated the process of developing a Local Development Strategy in early 2024, while both LAGs remain dependent on intermittent project-based funding with limited capacity for continuous activity.³⁵⁷

Action 50	Support investments in renewable energy production and technologies as well as GHG emission reductions and adaptation to climate change measures in agriculture
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Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture in the Western Balkans Six are significant, contributing 10-20% of total emissions across the region, primarily through enteric fermentation from livestock, manure management, rice cultivation, and fertiliser use. Some efforts have been made to reduce environmental footprint, mostly as part of the international projects and support of donor organisations.

Agriculture contributes significantly to Albanias emissions (15% of total GHG)³⁵⁸, primarily enteric fermentation from livestock (cattle/sheep/goats emitting CH₄), manure management (N₂O/CH₄), and synthetic fertilisers (N₂O from excess nitrogen)³⁵⁹. The report projects modest mitigation: NDC scenario cuts ag emissions by 11.6% (2,344 kt to 2,071 kt CO₂eq by 2030 vs. 2016), versus BAU, a limited 3.2% reduction due to growing livestock/demand. Strategies include crop rotation, perennial crops/agroforestry, improved grazing/feed, afforestation of abandoned land, precision fertilisation, manure nutrient plans, and soil carbon sequestration, modernising family farms while preserving biodiversity³⁶⁰.

In Albania, for example, the Business4SDGs Phase II project is aimed at bridging scientific research with practical implementation, equipping Albania's future agricultural professionals

³⁵⁴ <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Introduction-of-the-LEADER-approach.pdf>

³⁵⁵ Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia, "North Macedonia has adopted a decision to temporarily suspend the payments under the IPARD Programme". Available at: <https://finance.gov.mk/en-GB/odnosi-so-javnost/vesti/rs-makedonija-donese-odluka-za-vremen-prekin-na-isplatite-na-sredstvata-od-ipard-programata>

³⁵⁶ European Commission (2025). COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report

³⁵⁷ <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Introduction-of-the-LEADER-approach.pdf>

³⁵⁸ Ministry of Environment, Albania. (2016). Third National Communication of the Republic of Albania under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. United Nations Development Programme. https://files.acquia.undp.org/public/migration/al/TNC_COMPLETE.pdf

³⁵⁹ Albania, Ministry of Environment. (n.d.). *First Biennial Transparency Report (BTR1)*. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/251111_BTR_Narrative%20Report_Final.pdf

³⁶⁰ Albania. (2022). Albania revised NDC. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2022-08/Albania%20Revised%20NDC.pdf>

with knowledge to address pressing global challenges³⁶¹. Furthermore, several small-scale initiatives were implemented to improve innovativeness among the farming population, one of them being Solutions Connecting Farmers project leading to better use of land, improvements in pruning, shredding, solar-powered irrigation, etc., which all resulted in decrease in CO₂ emissions³⁶².

Agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina contributes 12-14% of total economy-level GHG emissions³⁶³ (1.2-1.5 Mt CO₂eq annually), primarily from enteric fermentation in livestock (CH₄, 60% of sector emissions), manure management (CH₄/N₂O), and synthetic fertilisers (N₂O from agricultural soils)³⁶⁴. Bosnia and Herzegovina's NDC (36.8% reduction by 2030 vs. 1990, conditional) targets 15-20% agricultural cuts through: feed additives/improved grazing (CH₄ ↓12%), precision fertilisation (N₂O ↓20-25%), manure digesters/biogas (CH₄ capture), and agroforestry/cover crops (0.5 t CO₂eq/ha sequestration)³⁶⁵.

Agriculture in Kosovo* contributes ~7% of total economy-level GHG emissions (~0.3-0.5 Mt CO₂eq annually based on 2021 inventory), significantly lower than energy (87%) but notable among WB peers, primarily from enteric fermentation in livestock and N₂O from manure/fertilisers³⁶⁶. Kosovo*'s NDC targets 16.3% total GHG reduction by 2030 (vs. 2016), with agriculture mitigation via: improved feed/grazing (CH₄ ↓10-15%), precision fertilisers (N₂O ↓20%), manure biogas digesters, and agroforestry for soil carbon.

Agriculture contributes a smaller (4%) but still relevant share of greenhouse gas emissions in Montenegro³⁶⁷ and is dominated by methane from enteric fermentation and nitrous oxide from fertiliser use and agricultural soils. Older official reporting indicates that 70–80% of agricultural N₂O emissions come from nitrogen fertilisers, while 20–30% come from manure management, confirming that nitrogen management is a central mitigation lever. In the current policy cycle, Montenegro's 2025 Third NDC expands the domestic mitigation target to at least 55% net GHG reduction by 2030 (vs. 1990) and explicitly includes AFOLU, implying that agriculture is now more tightly integrated into the domestic decarbonisation framework. Strategies include improved livestock feed and breeding to reduce methane, modernised manure storage, and precision fertilisation to limit nitrogen runoff. Additional measures focus on agroforestry, organic farming expansion, and soil carbon sequestration, aiming to align family-owned mountain farms with EU environmental standards while protecting the unique mountainous biodiversity.

Agriculture contributes meaningfully to greenhouse gas emissions in North Macedonia³⁶⁸, with older inventory evidence indicating that enteric fermentation and agricultural soils each

³⁶¹ FAO. (19 March 2025). *Advancing climate-smart agriculture in Albania*. <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/advancing-climate-smart-agriculture-in-albania/en>

³⁶² Regional Environmental Center Albania (REC Albania). (14 May 2025). *Climate-smart agriculture techniques for olive crops in Albania*. <https://recshqiperi.org/2025/05/14/climate-smart-agriculture-techniques-for-olive-crops-in-albania/>

³⁶³ Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2022). Third National Communication (TNC) and Second Biennial Update Report on greenhouse gas emissions (SBUR) of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/publications/third-national-communication-tnc-and-second-biennial-update-report-greenhouse-gas-emissions-sbur-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

³⁶⁴ European Environment Agency. (28 September 2025). *Greenhouse gas emissions and removals in land and forests*. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina/lulucf-emissions>

³⁶⁵ United Nations Development Programme. (2025, 31 July). *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. <https://climatepromise.undp.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

³⁶⁶ European Environment Agency. (28 September 2025). *Total greenhouse gas emissions (without LULUCF)*. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/kosovo/total-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

³⁶⁷ Montenegro. (2025, February). Update of the NDC of Montenegro. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2025-02/001_eng_NDC_Montenegro.pdf

³⁶⁸ European Environment Agency. (n.d.). Total greenhouse gas emissions (without LULUCF) | North Macedonia | Europe's environment 2025. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/europe-environment-2025/countries/north-macedonia/total-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

account for roughly 40–50% of total agricultural emissions, while manure management and rice cultivation play smaller roles. In the 2002 inventory, agricultural emissions totalled 1,074.43 kt CO₂-eq, down from 1,907.36 kt CO₂-eq in 1990. More recent policy reporting sets an explicit 2030 agriculture-sector mitigation target of –29% relative to 1990, making North Macedonia one of the clearer cases in the Western Balkans Six where agriculture is linked to a formal sectoral decarbonisation pathway. Strategies include improved nutrition and breeding for livestock, land consolidation to enhance efficiency, perennial crop expansion, and afforestation of marginal agricultural lands. The plan also emphasizes manure nutrient plans, soil organic matter restoration, and the adoption of climate-resilient irrigation, focusing on empowering young and women farmers in rural communities.

Agriculture contributes significantly to greenhouse-gas emissions of Serbia, amounting to roughly 6 Mt CO₂eq per year (7.9% of total domestic GHG emissions), mostly coming from enteric fermentation in cattle and small ruminants (CH₄), manure management (CH₄ and N₂O), and agricultural soils where synthetic nitrogen fertilisers and manure generate N₂O.³⁶⁹ Since 1990, total agricultural emissions have declined by about 34% in CO₂eq, driven mainly by a 49% drop in CH₄ from enteric fermentation, partially offset by sharp increases in N₂O from inorganic fertilisers (+519%) and CO₂ from urea use (+489%)³⁷⁰.

Within the framework of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy, the following measures have been defined in the agricultural sector that contribute to the reduction of harmful gases³⁷¹:

- Winter cover crops;
- Increasing the share of legumes in areas for livestock feeding;
- Improving genetic potential for higher milk production per head, etc.

Serbia has also adopted the Integrated Energy and Climate Plan until 2030 with projections until 2050, within which measures have been identified in the agricultural sector that contribute to the reduction of GHG emissions³⁷²:

- Improvement of wastewater treatment and discharge systems;
- Sustainable forest management (forest land, remaining forest land);
- Conversion of uncultivated land into arable land;
- Increasing the area under tree plantations (smaller forest areas/parks/green roofs, sanitary protection zones around mines and industrial facilities, windbreaks and green zones along highways);
- Measures to reduce CH₄ emissions from enteric fermentation of animals;
- Improving manure management to reduce CH₄ and N₂O emissions;
- Measures to reduce direct and indirect N₂O emissions from managed land;
- Measures to reduce emissions from fertiliser use;
- Development of efficient supply chains to exploit the available potential of biofuels, bioliquids and biomass;
- Support schemes to promote energy efficiency in the agricultural sector;
- Advisory services and energy audits for farmers.

³⁶⁹ Serbia. (2024). *First biennial transparency report of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Paris Agreement*. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SERBIA%20First%20Biennial%20Transparency%20Report.pdf>

³⁷⁰ Serbia. (2025). 2025 national inventory document (NID). United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NID_Serbia_2025_March_31th.pdf

³⁷¹ <https://www.ekologija.gov.rs/dokumenta/klimatske-promene/strategije>

³⁷² <https://www.mre.gov.rs/tekst/1115/-integrirani-nacionalni-energetski-i-klimatski-plan-republike-srbije-za-period-do-2030-sa-vizijom-do-2050-godine.php>

In 2023, Serbia adopted the Climate Change Adaptation Programme for the period 2023-2030³⁷³, With the Action Plan which includes 25 measures in the agricultural sector.

The development of Guidelines for the Adaptation of Agricultural Production to Climate Change and Their Integration into Agricultural Policy has begun. The goal is to identify measures and activities for the adaptation of agricultural production and the manner of their implementation. The Guidelines will enable the inclusion of the proposed activities in strategic documents, both at the domestic and local levels.

Under the project Green Agenda Western Balkans – Supporting the Western Balkans Six in Adapting to Climate Change, SWG's REAWGs operate as the region's technical engine for evidence-based climate adaptation in agriculture. In 2025, the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Climate Change Adaptation in Agriculture helped governments align domestic strategies and action plans with the EU Green Deal/GAWB, CAP reforms, and IPA III, while strengthening institutions, data/monitoring frameworks, and stakeholder engagement. Through regional political and policy dialogue (APF, Ministerial meetings), workshops, and targeted technical assistance, the REAWGs translated analysis into practice by mainstreaming adaptation into sector planning. These efforts collectively aim to reduce climate risk, improve farm resilience, and support EU accession, consistent agriculture and rural development across the Western Balkans Six.

2.7 Protection of Nature and Biodiversity Roadmap

Key recommendations for progressing with Nature and Biodiversity Roadmap actions are as follows:

- Build on the Dubrovnik Declaration and the endorsed BSP 2030 Outline by advancing the development and adoption of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 at the next 2026 GAWB Ministerial Meeting and use this regional commitment as the basis for WB6 to progressively establish domestic implementation frameworks with designated institutional leads, dedicated budget lines, and indicative timelines. The Plan's five strategic goals - expanding and effectively managing protected areas, restoring degraded ecosystems, preventing species loss, integrating biodiversity into key sectors, and improving governance, knowledge, and financing - should be reflected in updated domestic-level biodiversity strategies and integrated into Economic Reform Programmes and IPA III programming documents.
- Commission and publish the State of Nature in the Western Balkans - Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR) on schedule, ensuring that its findings directly inform the next cycle of domestic-level biodiversity action plans and feed into the EU accession screening process under Chapter 27. The WBBCR, currently being coordinated by IUCN with the support of RCC under the Biodiversity Task Force of the Western Balkans (BDTF WB) framework, should establish a baseline against which progress on halting biodiversity loss can be tracked and reported to the European Commission.
- Establish a regional biodiversity monitoring and evaluation framework with harmonised indicators, including quantitative targets for the number, extent, and management effectiveness of protected areas; the status of key threatened species such

³⁷³ <https://www.ekologija.gov.rs/dokumenta/klimatske-promene/program>

as the Balkan lynx, Dalmatian Pelican, and endemic freshwater fish; and the condition of priority habitats including rivers, karst wetlands, and old-growth forests. Monitoring data should be reported annually through the GAWB Observatory Platform currently under development by RCC.

- Close the gap between legislation on and implementation of protected area management and environmental impact assessment, addressing the systemic challenges identified in the 2024 EuroNatur biodiversity report and the European Commission's 2024 Enlargement Package. In particular: Albania should repeal the 2024 amendments to its Protected Areas Law that create exemptions for infrastructure and tourism projects; Bosnia and Herzegovina should establish a Natura 2000 network and biodiversity monitoring system; Kosovo* should substantially increase administrative capacity for protected area management; and all WB6 should ensure that Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)³⁷⁴ are applied rigorously to all projects, including those with intraregional impacts on Ramsar sites and Important Bird Areas.
- Build on the regional momentum generated by the Dubrovnik Declaration by advancing the development of the WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan, drawing on the findings of the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR) expected to be finalised in 2026. The FLR Plan should be operationalised through domestic restoration plans, with priority given to interjurisdictional landscapes, disaster-prone areas, and habitats critical for biodiversity connectivity, and with resource mobilisation from the donor community and private sector explored in parallel with plan preparation.
- Integrate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) systematically into climate adaptation planning, infrastructure approvals, and spatial planning frameworks across all WB6, in line with the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan 2025–2030, the EU Nature Restoration Law and WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap. WB6 should designate NbS as a cross-cutting requirement in domestic-level climate adaptation strategies, urban planning ordinances, and flood risk management plans.
- Strengthen cross-sectoral governance by encouraging WB6 to embed biodiversity considerations into transport, energy, agriculture, and tourism planning, drawing on the technical guidance available through existing regional frameworks including the BDTF WB and relevant Technical Expert Groups (TEGs), to support biodiversity mainstreaming across sectors at the domestic level.³⁷⁵

2.7.1 Progress in implementing the Roadmap across the actions and the region

Action 51	Develop and implement a Western Balkans 2030 Biodiversity Strategic Plan
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Regional biodiversity governance in the WB6 rests on two mutually reinforcing pillars: a sound understanding of the state of nature across the WB6, and a common strategic framework to translate that knowledge into coordinated action, both of which advanced significantly during the reporting period, marking the most substantive progress to date on the regional biodiversity governance architecture. The outline of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP), developed jointly by the RCC and IUCN, in consultation with the BDTF WB, was published

³⁷⁴EuroNatur, "Balkan nature on the line: Environmental compliance lags in EU accession drive", November 2025. <https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/news/balkan-nature-on-the-line-environmental-compliance-lags-in-eu-accession-drive>

³⁷⁵<https://iucn.org/news/202601/inaugural-meeting-western-balkans-thematic-groups-ecosystem-restoration-and>

on the RCC website in October 2025.³⁷⁶ Its publication followed the endorsement of the Dubrovnik Declaration at the Second Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, held on 14 October 2025 in Dubrovnik, at which ministers of environment and sustainable development from WB6 formally endorsed the Outline of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan as one of four key strategic documents, alongside the revised Green Agenda Action Plan 2025–2030, the WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap, and the Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention.³⁷⁷

The BSP is structured around five strategic goals: expanding and effectively managing protected areas; restoring degraded ecosystems; preventing species loss; integrating biodiversity into key sectors; and improving governance, knowledge, and financing. It articulates the following vision and mission:

Vision: "By 2030, the Western Balkans Six (WB6) is a region where biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored, and sustainably used, contributing to resilient ecosystems, healthy societies, and a thriving green economy. Through collective action, strengthened governance, and regional cooperation, the region ensures that nature and people coexist in harmony, in line with global and European commitments."

Mission: "The Western Balkans 6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 provides a common regional framework for translating global and European biodiversity goals into coherent actions across the WB6. It aims to guide coordinated implementation, strengthen governance and institutional capacity, promote knowledge-based decision-making, and mobilise resources to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems across the region, while supporting alignment with biodiversity-related EU policies and the pertinent parts of the EU acquis, including Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change."

The institutional architecture underpinning the BSP is coordinated through the Biodiversity Task Force of the Western Balkans (BDTF WB), established under the Regional Working Group on Green Agenda for Western Balkans (RWG on GAWB) and by RCC and active since 2017, with its Secretariat hosted by IUCN. The Task Force plays a central role in steering biodiversity policy, advising governments, exchanging knowledge, and engaging with European and global processes, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.³⁷⁸ Its work is supported by the IUCN project Greening the Western Balkans (August 2024 – July 2028), funded by the Austrian Development Agency with a grant of €1.8 million, which is specifically designed to advance implementation of the Nature and Biodiversity Pillar of the GAWB and to develop the associated Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and GAWB Biodiversity Information Hub.³⁷⁹

The endorsement of the BSP outline represents a necessary and significant milestone. However, it marks the beginning rather than the completion of a process: the true measure of progress will be the adoption of domestic implementation frameworks, the establishment of clear, measurable indicators, and observable improvements of effective management of protected areas, restoring ecosystem integrity, preventing species loss, integrating biodiversity into all

³⁷⁶Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030. Published October 2025. <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/215/western-balkans-six-biodiversity-strategic-plan-2030>

³⁷⁷RCC, Dubrovnik Declaration – Second Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 14 October 2025. <https://www.rcc.int/news/972/western-balkan-ministers-of-environment-endorse-dubrovnik-declaration-moving-from-plans-to-action>

³⁷⁸IUCN, "Achieving global goals through regional collaboration: Biodiversity Task Force for the Western Balkans", May 2025. <https://iucn.org/blog/202405/achieving-global-goals-through-regional-collaboration-biodiversity-task-force-western>

³⁷⁹IUCN, Greening the Western Balkans project page (August 2024 – July 2028, funded by Austrian Development Agency). <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/greening-western>

sectors, and improving governance knowledge and finance across the region's diverse ecosystems.

Action 51A	Develop a Western Balkans Biodiversity Report
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Work is underway on the State of Nature in the Western Balkans - Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), which will provide a comprehensive assessment of the current status and trends of species, habitats, and ecosystems across the region. The Terms of Reference for this report were published by IUCN in August 2025, with the WBBCR to be coordinated by the IUCN under BDTF WB supervision and developed in consultation with public authorities, nature conservation institutes, and civil society.³⁸⁰

A landmark biodiversity assessment for the Western Balkans Six has been launched on 21 November 2024 by EuroNatur at the European Parliament in Brussels. The report examined the state of biodiversity in all WB6 through case studies in key ecosystems, including Albania's Vjosë-Narta wetlands, Livanjsko Polje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ulcinj Salina in Montenegro, and the transboundary habitat of the critically endangered Balkan lynx.³⁸¹ Its core finding was that although domestic legislation and international conventions nominally protect areas and species of conservation interest, the gap between legal frameworks and on-the-ground implementation is acute and widening. Specific violations of EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the Bern Convention were documented, with fewer than 40 Balkan lynx remaining in the wild - making it one of Europe's most endangered large carnivores.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to set up and develop a Natura 2000 network and biodiversity monitoring system; Kosovo*'s administrative capacity for environmental governance was assessed as “critically low”; and Albania's 2024 amendments to its Protected Areas Law were identified as a regressive step, creating carve-outs for infrastructure, irrigation, and tourism development within designated areas. Albania also needs to ensure that the [Vjosa River Park](#) and other sites have functional, well-resourced management plans. Montenegro needs to align with coastal management with biodiversity standards and protect marine biodiversity from tourism expansion and unsustainable aquaculture. North Macedonia has to put more efforts to restore degraded ecosystems with a focus on concrete rehabilitation plans for aquatic biodiversity, particularly in the [Ohrid-Prespa basin](#), and finalise and implement domestic biodiversity legislation that aligns with EU Natura 2000 standards. It also needs to mitigate infrastructure impacts and enforce strict environmental impact assessments for mining and industrial infrastructure to protect threatened habitats, with a focus on implementing the [Forest Landscape Restoration \(FLR\) plan](#). The Commission's conclusion that all WB6 have been informed that accession progress is contingent on demonstrable results on nature protection further underscores the stakes of the implementation gap.

Action 51B	Develop a Western Balkans Biodiversity Strategic Plan
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The outline of the Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP 2030) was completed and published on the RCC website in October 2025. It was developed jointly by the RCC and IUCN in consultation with the Biodiversity Task Force for the WB6, with its vision,

³⁸⁰IUCN, Terms of Reference – State of Nature in the Western Balkans: Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), August 2025. https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/attachment_1-tor-iucn-25-07-p04286-1-.pdf

³⁸¹EuroNatur, "Biodiversity: Spotlight on the Western Balkans", launched at the European Parliament, Brussels, 21 November 2024. <https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/news/biodiversity-in-the-western-balkans>

mission, and five strategic goals formally endorsed at ministerial level through the Dubrovnik Declaration. The reporting period also saw key consultative meetings held to advance the BSP's development ³⁸².

The Outline's development sits within the broader "Greening the Western Balkans" project (IUCN/International Partnerships Austria, 2024–2028), under which the BSP 2030, a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and the GAWB Biodiversity Information Hub are designated outputs to be progressively developed and operationalised over the project period ³⁸³. With the Outline now formally adopted, the BSP 2030 transitions in the next reporting period from a planning instrument into an implementation framework, with domestic-level uptake, financing, and monitoring as the primary outstanding requirements.

Action 52	Prepare nature protection and restoration plans including for marine areas
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The Western Balkans is entering a new phase in its conservation trajectory. Guided by the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and aligned with the EU Nature Restoration Law and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the region has made commitments to developing coordinated protection and restoration frameworks that span terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. Progress in 2024–2025 has been concentrated at the regional and programmatic level, with IUCN, RCC, and partner organisations laying the institutional foundations for domestic-level plans.

Progress on nature protection and restoration planning during the reporting period advanced principally through the same institutional architecture that produced the BSP 2030. The Biodiversity Task Force for the Western Balkans, coordinated by IUCN under the Greening the Western Balkans and ADAPT 2.0 projects, laid the technical and governance foundations for domestic-level and regional restoration plans across terrestrial, freshwater, and to a more limited degree marine ecosystems.

On the terrestrial and freshwater restoration front, the most concrete development of the reporting period was the initiation of the Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan, the preparation of which is advancing under ADAPT 2.0 (IUCN/Sida). The Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR), which will identify priority landscapes for restoration across the region, is expected to be finalised in 2026, after which the FLR Plan itself will be prepared. ³⁸⁴ The Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER), constituted in 2025 and meeting for the first time in January 2026, will provide scientific and strategic guidance for the FLR Plan and other restoration-oriented deliverables. Nature-based Solutions pilot sites in Serbia (Gledić Mountains), Albania (Shushica/Elbasan), and North Macedonia (Bukovikj) continue to generate baseline data and lessons relevant to domestic-level restoration plan development.

The marine dimension of nature protection planning remains significantly underdeveloped relative to terrestrial and freshwater priorities. None of the WB6 with an Adriatic coastline has

³⁸² https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2025-enlargement-package-shows-progress-towards-eu-membership-key-enlargement-partners-2025-11-04_en

³⁸³ IUCN, Greening the Western Balkans project page. The project explicitly lists the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030, the Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and the GAWB Biodiversity Information Hub as outputs under development. The project runs August 2024 – July 2028 with ADA funding of €1.8 million. <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/greening-western>

³⁸⁴ IUCN, "A bold step towards forest landscape restoration in the Western Balkans", February 2026. The Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER) is described as providing scientific and strategic guidance for ecosystem restoration under the FLR Plan and broader GAWB implementation. The article confirms that the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR) will be finalised in 2026, after which the WB6 FLR Plan will be prepared. <https://iucn.org/story/202602/bold-step-towards-forest-landscape-restoration-western-balkans>

adopted a comprehensive marine spatial plan aligned with EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive standards, and marine protected area coverage remains critically low. Montenegro's marine waters, for instance, are under formal protection at below 2%, against a 2030 target of 30%.³⁸⁵ The Dubrovnik Declaration's endorsement of a Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter, represents the first explicit regional commitment specifically addressing Adriatic marine ecosystem pressures, though it does not constitute a nature protection or marine spatial planning instrument.³⁸⁶

Key coastal wetland sites, including the Ulcinj Salina (Montenegro, Ramsar Site no. 2399, Nature Park since 2019), the Narta Lagoon (Albania), and the Boka Kotorska Bay (Montenegro) remain without active, resourced management plans commensurate with their ecological significance and EU accession obligations. At Ulcinj Salina, outstanding requirements include the implementation of an operational management regime and the resumption of salt production, which is essential for maintaining the halophyte habitats on which 252 recorded bird species depend.³⁸⁷ The EU has made effective protection of the Salina a benchmark condition for Montenegro's accession, lending particular urgency to progress on this site.

The forthcoming Western Balkans Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), currently in preparation under the Greening the Western Balkans project, will provide the first comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of protection and restoration needs across various ecosystems, including coastal and marine systems.³⁸⁸ Once completed, the WBBCR is expected to generate the factual baseline needed to prioritise and sequence domestic-level nature protection and restoration plans, and to identify the governance gaps that have so far delayed progress on the marine dimension of this action.

Action 53

Develop and implement a Western Balkans Forest Landscape Restoration Plan

A landmark regional gathering held in Belgrade on 26 and 27 January 2026, convened by IUCN under the BDTF WB framework, advanced the development of the Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan, described in a subsequent IUCN publication as “a bold step towards forest landscape restoration in the Western Balkans”.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵CEE Bankwatch Network, "Bern Convention: Western Balkan countries need to propose new protected natural areas", December 2024. Montenegro's current marine protected area coverage stands below 2% of its marine waters, far short of the 2030 target of 30%. No WB6 economy with an Adriatic coast has adopted a marine spatial plan aligned with EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive standards. https://bankwatch.org/press_release/bern-convention-western-balkan-countries-need-to-propose-new-protected-natural-areas

³⁸⁶RCC, Dubrovnik Declaration, 14 October 2025. Among the documents endorsed at the Second Ministerial Meeting, the Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter signals the first explicit regional commitment to address marine ecosystem pressures in the Adriatic. The Declaration also endorses a 30% protection target for marine areas by 2030. <https://www.rcc.int/news/972/western-balkan-ministers-of-environment-endorse-dubrovnik-declaration-moving-from-plans-to-action>

³⁸⁷Ramsar Sites Information Service, Ulcinj Salina (Site no. 2399). The Ulcinj Salina covers approximately 1,500 ha and hosts 252 recorded bird species (20 globally threatened). It was declared a Nature Park by the Ulcinj Municipal Assembly in June 2019 and listed as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. However, an active management plan and the resumption of salt production — essential for maintaining the halophyte habitats — remain outstanding requirements. <https://rsis Ramsar.org/ris/2399>

³⁸⁸IUCN, Terms of Reference for the Western Balkans Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), August 2025. The WBBCR will specifically assess ecosystem services, habitat protection, and climate adaptation across terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal/marine systems. Its terms of reference include transboundary conservation efforts and the effectiveness of protected area management across all ecosystem types. https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/attachment_1-tor-iucn-25-07-p04286-1-.pdf

³⁸⁹IUCN, "A bold step towards forest landscape restoration in the Western Balkans", 25 February 2026. <https://iucn.org/story/202602/bold-step-towards-forest-landscape-restoration-western-balkans>

The January 2026 event brought together biodiversity and forestry experts from across the region to define the mission, goals, and monitoring framework for forest landscape restoration in the Western Balkans. Two thematic groups were formally established at the gathering under the BDTF WB: the Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER), which will provide scientific and strategic guidance for ecosystem restoration in support of key regional policy documents including the FLR Plan; and the Thematic Group on Forest Landscape Restoration (TG-FLR). The Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration and the Thematic Group on Biodiversity Conservation are working under the IUCN ADAPT 2.0 and Greening the Western Balkans projects³⁹⁰. The inaugural meeting was organised within the framework [Nature Aligned Western Balkans](#), funded by the Federal Environment Ministry's Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP) of Germany for environmental protection in Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and EU neighbours. It is supervised by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation of Germany and the Environment Agency of Germany. The meeting was co-led and organised jointly with the [ADAPT 2.0: Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the Western Balkans](#), funded by Sweden (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)). Additional contributions were made through [Greening the Western Balkans](#) supported by the International Partnerships Austria.

The foundation for the FLR Plan is the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR), currently in development, which will deliver an overall analysis of the current state of forest landscapes across the region, including biodiversity aspects, changes in forest cover, and disaster-prone areas. A key output will be spatial maps identifying priority forest landscapes for restoration, with a focus on enhancing ecological integrity and habitat connectivity, safeguarding areas critical for biodiversity, and reducing disaster risks. The ROAR is expected to be finalised in 2026 and will serve as the direct basis for preparing the WB6 FLR Plan.³⁹¹

Once endorsed, the FLR Plan will provide a coordinated framework to guide restoration efforts across the region, helping restore forest landscapes, enhance biodiversity, and strengthen ecosystem resilience for generations to come. Its implementation is expected to strengthen regional cooperation and advance commitments under the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Paris Agreement. Mobilisation of resources from the donor community and private sector will be essential to translating the Plan's strategic goals into restoration outcomes on the ground.

Action 53A	Prepare Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report
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During 2025, a coherent programme of activities aimed at establishing a systematic approach to forest landscape restoration and strengthening climate resilience was implemented across the WB6 region, primarily through the IUCN-led ADAPT 2.0 project (Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the Western Balkans, funded by Sweden/Sida).³⁹² Working in close coordination with WB6 domestic-level authorities and

³⁹⁰IUCN, ADAPT 2.0: Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the Western Balkans, supported by Sweden. The Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER) and Thematic Group on Biodiversity Conservation (TG-BC) were established under the BDTF WB at the January 2026 gathering.

³⁹¹The Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR) will deliver an overall analysis of the current state of forest landscapes across the Western Balkans, covering biodiversity aspects, changes in forest cover, and disaster-prone areas. It is expected to be finalised in 2026 and will serve as the foundation for preparing the WB6 FLR Plan. Source: IUCN, February 2026. <https://iucn.org/story/202602/bold-step-towards-forest-landscape-restoration-western-balkans>

³⁹²IUCN, ADAPT 2.0: Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the Western Balkans (funded by Sweden/Sida). Project page: <https://iucn.org/adapt2.0>

regional partners, IUCN advanced both the analytical and institutional foundations required to support the development of the Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan.

A key analytical support for the FLR Plan is the ROAR, currently under preparation. The ROAR will deliver a comprehensive analysis of the current state of forest landscapes across the Western Balkans, covering biodiversity aspects, changes in forest cover, and disaster-prone areas. A central output will be spatial maps identifying priority forest landscapes for restoration, aimed at enhancing ecological integrity, improving habitat connectivity, safeguarding areas critical for biodiversity, and reducing disaster risks.

Complementing this analytical work, the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in SEE (SWG RRD) produced a regional report in 2025 entitled “Sustainable Forest Management in the Western Balkan Region: Assessment of Climate Change Adaptation Policies and Mitigation Measures”.³⁹³ The report synthesises data from reports submitted by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska), Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, providing a structured assessment of each economy's climate change adaptation and mitigation policies as they relate to sustainable forest management. In December 2025, the SWG RRD's 10th Interim Meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Sustainable Forest Management agreed on priorities and frameworks for regional cooperation in this area going into 2026.³⁹⁴ The priorities included emphasizing the harmonisation of data reporting, policy structures, and relevant legislation at both regional and international levels.

The ROAR and the broader ADAPT 2.0 analytical programme will additionally identify priority restoration areas and measures, support financing through technical justification aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Forest Strategy, and guide NbS interventions while supporting the establishment of a regional restoration fund.³⁹⁵

Action 53B	Prepare Forest Landscape Restoration Plan
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The Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (FLRP) is in the development phase. It is expected that the FLRP will be completed in the coming period through the implementation of the ADAPT 2.0 project. The pilot project with regional significance contributes to the more ambitious development of the regional FLR plan in the coming period.

Concrete on-the-ground pilot work that will feed directly into the regional FLR Plan is already underway. The IUCN initiative, Forest Restoration in North Macedonia and Albania, focused on the application of NbS, including FLR interventions across approximately 40 hectares of degraded forest land in Bukovikj in North Macedonia and Pashtrik-Morina in Albania³⁹⁶. These interventions are expected to significantly enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity, particularly within and around adjacent protected areas. The project began biodiversity baseline

³⁹³SWG RRD, "Sustainable Forest Management in the Western Balkan Region: Assessment of Climate Change Adaptation Policies and Mitigation Measures", December 2025. <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Sustainable-Forest-Management-in-the-Western-Balkan-Region-Biodiversity-and-Forestry-Policy-Assesment.pdf>

³⁹⁴SWG RRD, 10th Interim Meeting of the REAWG on Sustainable Forest Management, December 2025. <https://seerural.org/news/10th-interim-meeting-of-the-regional-expert-advisory-working-group-reawg-on-sustainable-forest-management/>

³⁹⁵IUCN, ADAPT 2.0 project page. One key goal of ADAPT 2.0 is to establish a regional fund by the end of the project to mobilise resources for future NbS development and implementation. <https://iucn.org/adapt2.0>

³⁹⁶IUCN, Forest Restoration in North Macedonia and Albania project page. <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/forest-restoration>. According to Global Forest Watch, North Macedonia lost 5.5% and Albania 6.5% of total tree cover in the last 20 years.

assessments at both pilot sites in 2025, covering forest flora, bird fauna, and other biodiversity indicators.³⁹⁷

The FLR measures are expected to deliver multiple benefits, such as increased carbon sequestration and ecosystem resilience, and improved habitat conditions for the Balkan Lynx and other threatened endemic species, thereby halting biodiversity loss. The project also aims to strengthen domestic capacities and commitments to future restoration efforts and sustainable forest management through active engagement of relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. Furthermore, it seeks to foster knowledge exchange and bilateral dialogue to reinforce commitments to FLR and sustainable forest governance in both Albania and North Macedonia.

A financial plan for the FLRP is being developed in parallel with the technical framework. The ADAPT 2.0 project has identified the establishment of a regional fund for NbS financing as one of its key objectives, and this mechanism is expected to provide a sustainable financing vehicle for the implementation of the FLRP once adopted. Mobilisation of resources from the donor community and the private sector will be essential to translating the Plan's strategic restoration targets into outcomes on the ground.

Action 54

Analyse biodiversity benefits of Nature-based Solutions and opportunities for their integration into the development of climate and other plans

The integration of NbS into climate planning across the WB6 is grounded in a clearly articulated regional policy framework. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, aligned with the European Green Deal and the EU Adaptation Strategy (2021) as well as WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap, explicitly includes NbS actions within both its climate and biodiversity pillars: supporting the preparation of the WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration Plan and providing analysis of the biodiversity benefits of NbS. At the EU level, the 2021 EU Adaptation Strategy dedicates a specific section to promoting NbS for adaptation and proposes continued assistance through assessments, guidance, capacity building, and EU funding.

NbS in the Western Balkans context encompasses a broad spectrum of approaches, such as forest restoration, wetland conservation, sustainable agriculture, green urban infrastructure, and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction, that simultaneously deliver climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and socioeconomic co-benefits. Despite growing recognition of their value, the application of NbS in the region remains insufficient and fragmented, with their benefits still systematically undervalued compared to conventional engineered solutions.

The ADAPT 2.0 project is the primary vehicle for advancing NbS analysis and integration across the region, building on the knowledge base established by its predecessor (ADAPT 1.0, implemented 2019–2024). Through scoping studies, pilot project implementation in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, and the development of the WB6 FLR Plan, ADAPT 2.0 is generating the evidence base needed to embed NbS systematically into domestic and regional climate plans, disaster risk reduction strategies, and sectoral policies. The project's work at the Gledić Mountains pilot site in Serbia, the Shushica/Elbasan site in Albania, and the Bukovikj site in North Macedonia provides concrete, replicable models for NbS deployment across the region's diverse ecosystems

³⁹⁷IUCN, Terms of Reference for Forest Restoration pilot site biodiversity assessments in Albania (Elbasan/Shushica) and North Macedonia (Bukovikj), January/April 2025. https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/attachment_1_tor_iucn-25-04-p04848-1.pdf

The interlinkages between climate change and biodiversity in the WB6 were prominently addressed in two major reports published in the 2024–2025 period.

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) published the report “Status of Environment and Climate in the Western Balkans” on 13 February 2025,³⁹⁸ providing a comprehensive overview of environmental and climate conditions across the region and highlighting gaps in alignment with EU policies and the *acquis*. The report found that the WB6 have made progress in aligning with EU legislation on environment and climate, including improved monitoring and reporting procedures and a greater focus on emission reduction targets, but that progress has been slow and significant issues remain. The analysis identified the climate-biodiversity nexus as a key area requiring strengthened action: biodiversity assets face growing threats from land-use changes, climate change, pollution, invasive species, and governance challenges, while the compounding effects of climate change are placing additional pressure on already stressed forest, water, and soil ecosystems.

This updated assessment built on the JRC's second edition of the same report, published in December 2024,³⁹⁹ which focused on hydrological aspects, forest fires, and heat waves as primary climate-biodiversity pressure points, and underlined the urgent need to strengthen environmental and climate management strategies across WB6.

Additionally, the European Environment Agency (EEA) launched Europe's Environment 2025 at a regional event in Podgorica, Montenegro in November 2025, marking two decades of cooperation between the EEA and WB6 through the Eionet network.⁴⁰⁰ The report includes WB6 profiles, co-created with relevant institutions from WB6, which highlight that WB6 have expanded or improved their networks of protected areas, presenting a contribution to both biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation through the protection of carbon-rich ecosystems. However, the profiles also confirmed that significant challenges remain in bridging the gap between expanded protected area designations and effective on-the-ground management.

The Western Balkans Climate Adaptation Roadmap further reinforces the climate-biodiversity nexus by highlighting the role of NbS as essential tools for building long-term resilience to climate change while simultaneously enhancing biodiversity. The Roadmap notes that NbS, encompassing large-scale interventions such as afforestation and restoration of forests, wetlands, peatlands, and coastal ecosystems, as well as smaller-scale urban greening and regenerative agricultural practices, deliver significant co-benefits for water quality, soil productivity, and biodiversity. However, the assessment concludes that integration of NbS into policy and project design processes remains at a relatively early stage across WB6, with measures often not fully aligned with the IUCN Standard for NbS and frequently lacking assessments of long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness. The Roadmap calls for WB6 to

³⁹⁸European Commission / Joint Research Centre (JRC), “Status of Environment and Climate in the Western Balkans”, published 13 February 2025. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/western-balkans-advances-environmental-and-climate-action-more-efforts-needed-2025-02-13_en. Full report: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC140061>

³⁹⁹JRC, second edition of “Status of Environment and Climate in the Western Balkans”, 12 December 2024.

<https://www.emwis.org/news-and-events/news/jrc-second-report-on-environment-and-climate-status-in-the-western-balkans>

⁴⁰⁰European Environment Agency (EEA), “Europe's Environment 2025” – regional launch in Podgorica, Montenegro, 25 November 2025. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/newsroom/news/regional-launch-of-europes-environment-2025-marks-two-decades-of-partnership-with-eeas-cooperating-countries>

adopt a common definition and verification standard for NbS, redirect public financing and donor programming towards NbS as the preferred alternative to grey infrastructure solutions, and strengthen regulatory frameworks that facilitate NbS implementation and the monitoring of their contribution to carbon sequestration and broader climate goals.⁴⁰¹

Action 55	Strengthen the mechanisms for regional cooperation and strategic planning on biodiversity conservation and implementation of commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity
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Regional cooperation architecture for biodiversity conservation in the Western Balkans Six was substantially reinforced during the reporting period. The BDTF WB established under the RWG GAWB and by RCC, with its Secretariat hosted by IUCN ECARO, plays a central role in steering biodiversity policy, advising governments, exchanging knowledge, and engaging with European and global processes, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

A significant step in strengthening the Task Force's technical capacity was the June 2025 launch of a call for experts to join two newly created Thematic Groups:⁴⁰²

- The Thematic Group on Biodiversity Conservation (TG-BC), seeking expertise in biodiversity policy, species and habitat protection, monitoring and evaluation, and protected area network management; and
- The Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER), seeking expertise in restoration ecology (forests, wetlands, grasslands), Nature-based Solutions, forest landscape restoration, and spatial planning.

Both groups were formally convened at the landmark January 2026 gathering in Belgrade, where they held their inaugural meetings under the ADAPT 2.0 and Greening the Western Balkans project frameworks.

They are tasked with providing scientific and strategic guidance for the implementation of key regional policy documents, including the WB6 FLR Plan and the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030.

The BSP itself provides the overarching strategic framework for regional cooperation, articulating five goals around which domestic and regional action should be organised: expanding and effectively managing protected areas; restoring degraded ecosystems; preventing species loss; integrating biodiversity into key sectors; and improving governance, knowledge, and financing.⁴⁰³ A critical governance gap identified in the reporting period is the expiry or absence of active domestic biodiversity strategies in several WB6. The 2025 SWG RRD assessment found that only North Macedonia has an active and valid domestic-level biodiversity strategy; those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia have all

⁴⁰¹ RCC, 2025, WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap

⁴⁰²IUCN, "Join Western Balkans thematic groups on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration" (call for experts), June–July 2025. <https://iucn.org/news/202506/join-western-balkans-thematic-groups-biodiversity-conservation-and-ecosystem>

⁴⁰³RCC, Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030. Five strategic goals outlined in the Plan include: expanding and effectively managing protected areas; restoring degraded ecosystems; preventing species loss; integrating biodiversity into key sectors; and improving governance, knowledge, and financing. <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/215/western-balkans-six-biodiversity-strategic-plan-2030>

expired, while Kosovo* and Albania face significant capacity constraints in implementing their existing frameworks.⁴⁰⁴ All WB6 need their NBSAP to be updated, some since 2014.

Addressing this gap is essential if the BSP's regional framework is to be translated into coherent domestic implementation. The adoption of updated domestic-level biodiversity strategies and action plans, aligned with the BSP's five strategic goals, the Kunming-Montreal GBF, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030's target of protecting at least 30% of land and sea, remains the responsibility of each WB6. WB6 protected area coverage, which in some WB6 remains below 5%, falls significantly short of this benchmark.

Action 56	Reinforce the engagement with the United Nations Rio Conventions (and synergy between the three), and join efforts in preparing a regional position on a global post-2020 biodiversity agenda
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As of the end of 2025, no formally agreed WB6 regional position paper on the global biodiversity agenda has been adopted. Parties to the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD) are responsible for their implementation, while ongoing regional dialogue through the BDTF WB and the RCC provides a degree of coordination. However, 2025 brought meaningful progress that moves the region closer to a coherent collective stance.

In relation to the three UN RIO Conventions, the most significant WB6-specific development was the adoption of the Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP 2030) in October 2025,⁴⁰⁵ endorsed by WB6 ministers of environment through the Dubrovnik Declaration⁴⁰⁶. The BSP 2030 operationally functions as the region's collective implementation position on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF): it adopts the KMGBF's structure, translates its targets into a WB6-owned framework of five strategic goals, and assigns governance responsibility to the BDTF WB. This makes the BSP 2030 the most substantive expression to date of a shared WB6 stance on the post-2020 biodiversity agenda.

The establishment of two new technical bodies under the BDTF WB in 2025: the Thematic Group on Biodiversity Conservation (TG-BC) and the Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER) materially strengthens the Task Force's capacity to contribute to international and EU processes with scientifically grounded, regionally consistent input.

A critical near-term obligation for parties to the CBD flows from the conclusion of CBD COP16 in Rome in February 2025,⁴⁰⁷ which adopted templates for Seventh domestic-level Reports due in 2026 ahead of the first KMGBF global review at COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia. This creates a concrete and imminent reporting deadline for parties to the CBD (except Kosovo*). Meeting this obligation credibly requires updated NBSAPs aligned with the

⁴⁰⁴SWG RRD, "Sustainable Forest Management in the Western Balkan Region: Assessment of Climate Change Adaptation Policies and Mitigation Measures", 2025, p. [biodiversity strategy section]. Only North Macedonia currently has an active and valid biodiversity strategy (2017–2027). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Strategy and Action Plan for Protection of Biological Diversity (2015–2020) has expired. Montenegro's Biodiversity Strategy (2016–2020) was evaluated as insufficiently implemented. Serbia's Biodiversity Preservation Strategy (2011–2018) is no longer in force. <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Sustainable-Forest-Management-in-the-Western-Balkan-Region-Biodiversity-and-Forestry-Poly-Assesment.pdf>

⁴⁰⁵RCC, Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030, published October 2025. The BSP 2030 is explicitly framed as the WB6 regional instrument for implementing both the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/215/western-balkans-six-biodiversity-strategic-plan-2030>

⁴⁰⁶RCC, Dubrovnik Declaration – Second Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 14 October 2025. The Declaration endorsed the BSP 2030 as one of four foundational strategic documents for the revised GAWB Action Plan 2025–2030. <https://www.rcc.int/news/972/western-balkan-ministers-of-environment-endorse-dubrovnik-declaration>

⁴⁰⁷CBD COP16 resumed session, Rome, 25–27 February 2025. Parties agreed on: biodiversity finance strategy (GBFF operationalised with ~USD 382 million in initial contributions); the full set of harmonised KMGBF indicators; and procedures for the global review at COP17 (2026); reports due 2026. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/press/2025/pr-2025-02-27-cop16-en.pdf>

KMGBF, yet, as documented by the December 2025 SWG RRD assessment, the majority of WB6 do not have an active NBSAP: Bosnia and Herzegovina's expired in 2020, Serbia's in 2023 (new NBSAP is being finalised for the period until 2031), and Montenegro's was evaluated as insufficiently implemented, with only North Macedonia maintaining a valid strategy (2017–2027).⁴⁰⁸ Closing this gap ahead of COP17 would represent a significant step forward for engagement with the CBD track of the Rio Conventions, and remains the responsibility of each party to those MEAs (except Kosovo*) to pursue within its own institutional and legislative framework.

On the convergence of the three Conventions, the Belém Joint Statement on the Rio Conventions, adopted at UNFCCC COP30 in November 2025,⁴⁰⁹ provides fresh political momentum at the global level for exactly the integrated approach that the GAWB embodies. The Statement calls for synergistic implementation across the Paris Agreement, KMGBF, and UNCCD Land Degradation Neutrality targets, noting that fragmented, convention-by-convention approaches undermine progress towards shared sustainability goals. For the WB6, this global signal reinforces the coherence of addressing climate, biodiversity, and land degradation through a single regional framework (the GAWB), and strengthens the case for formalising a coordinated regional voice at future subsidiary body sessions across all three Conventions.

Action 57	Set up the Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub to improve knowledge exchange and availability of information
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The establishment of the Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub and the development of a Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework are two closely linked deliverables under the Greening the Western Balkans project (IUCN/ International Partnerships Austria), both of which were in the preparatory phase during the reporting period⁴¹⁰.

The Biodiversity Information Hub is conceived as a regional digital platform to improve knowledge exchange, enhance data availability, and support evidence-based policy for the protection of nature and biodiversity across WB6. It will consolidate data from domestic environmental agencies, research institutions, and monitoring programmes, and interface with the GAWB Observatory Platform being developed by the RCC to track progress across all GAWB pillars. The main role of the Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Information Hub is to improve capacities of WB6 to set up indicators, collect and publish data on biodiversity, exchange knowledge, improve collaboration on data collection and analyses, and transfer technology across the WB region.

The Hub's development would take on added significance in light of the WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap, which identifies an integrated monitoring system for climate change

⁴⁰⁸SWG RRD, "Sustainable Forest Management in the Western Balkan Region: Assessment of Climate Change Adaptation Policies and Mitigation Measures", December 2025. Only North Macedonia has an active and valid biodiversity strategy (2017–2027). Bosnia and Herzegovina's Strategy expired in 2020, Montenegro's (2016–2020) was evaluated as insufficiently implemented, and Serbia's (2011–2018) is no longer in force. Kosovo* lacks a functioning biodiversity strategic framework. <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Sustainable-Forest-Management-in-the-Western-Balkan-Region-Biodiversity-and-Forestry-Policy-Assesment.pdf>

⁴⁰⁹Belém Joint Statement on the Rio Conventions, adopted 18 November 2025 at UNFCCC COP30, Belém, Brazil. Signed by the Presidencies of UNFCCC COP30 (Brazil), CBD COP16 (Colombia), CBD COP17 (Armenia), UNCCD COP16 (Saudi Arabia), and UNCCD COP17 (Mongolia). The statement calls for integrated, coherent policies and synergistic approaches across the Paris Agreement, KMGBF, and UNCCD Land Degradation Neutrality targets, describing institutional silos as impediments to achieving the Conventions' interrelated objectives. <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2025-11/Belem%20Rio%20statement.pdf>

⁴¹⁰ IUCN, "Greening the Western Balkans" project page. Available: <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/greening-western>

impacts on land and biodiversity as a priority need across the WB6, and which explicitly recognises the GAWB biodiversity monitoring measure as a key vehicle for building the data repository needed to support a nexus approach to climate risk assessment and adaptation planning.

The Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is being developed alongside WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030⁴¹¹ and will provide the quantitative backbone for assessing the Plan's implementation. The Framework will establish harmonised regional indicators for the status of species, habitats, protected areas, and ecosystem condition, enabling standardised reporting to EU bodies and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Its development is closely coordinated with the State of Nature in the Western Balkans — Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR) currently under preparation by IUCN, which will provide the baseline data against which future monitoring results can be measured.

Both tools are essential for closing the information and governance gaps identified across the reporting period, most critically, the absence of systematic, comparable, and regularly updated biodiversity data at the domestic level in most WB6. Until these tools are operational, the region will continue to face structural constraints in demonstrating progress on biodiversity commitments to the European Commission and to the international community.

Action 57A	Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
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The development of a Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (BMEF) for the Western Balkans Six is a dedicated deliverable under the Greening the Western Balkans project (IUCN / International Partnerships Austria, August 2024 – July 2028), and is also embedded as a core component of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 endorsed in October 2025⁴¹². The Framework is designed to provide the evidence base for policy decisions across the GAWB biodiversity pillar and to enable standardised progress reporting to the EU and to the CBD.

The Framework's development, anchored in the outline of the BSP 2030, endorsed by WB6 ministers through the Dubrovnik Declaration, is driven by two converging needs. First, at the regional level, the BSP 2030 requires a common system of harmonised biodiversity indicators to assess implementation progress consistently across all WB6.⁴¹³ Second, at the global level, the CBD COP16 session resumed in Rome (February 2025) adopted a finalised set of indicators for tracking progress towards all 23 KMGBF targets, with Parties required to use these indicators in their Seventh domestic-level Reports due in 2026⁴¹⁴. The BMEF is intended to be designed in alignment with this KMGBF monitoring framework, enabling WB6 reporting to simultaneously satisfy regional (BSP/GAWB) and global (CBD) obligations within a single, coherent system.

⁴¹¹ Regional Cooperation Council, "Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030," October 2025. Available: <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/215/western-balkans-six-biodiversity-strategic-plan-2030>

⁴¹² IUCN, Greening the Western Balkans project page. The project (August 2024 – July 2028, International Partnerships Austria, €1.8M grant) includes as a core deliverable the establishment of a Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to support evidence-based policy actions. <https://iucn.org/our-work/region/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/our-work/iucn-western-balkans/greening-western>

⁴¹⁴ CBD COP16 resumed session, Rome, February 2025. Parties adopted the full set of indicators for tracking progress towards KMGBF goals and targets, to be used by Parties in their Seventh Reports due in 2026. The monitoring framework provides "the common yardsticks that Parties will use to measure progress against the KMGBF's 23 targets". <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/en/news/key-decisions-agreed-as-cbd-cop16-concludes-in-rome>

The BMEF will draw on and integrate outputs from several concurrent workstreams active during the reporting period:

- The Western Balkans Biodiversity Report (WBBCR) currently under development by IUCN under the Greening the Western Balkans project (Terms of Reference issued August 2025) will provide the baseline data on species status, habitat condition, protected area effectiveness, and ecosystem integrity against which future monitoring results will be benchmarked.
- The TG-BC (Thematic Group on Biodiversity Conservation), established under the BDTF WB in June–July 2025 and inaugurated in January 2026, is tasked with providing technical guidance on indicator selection, monitoring methodologies, and evaluation criteria for biodiversity conservation outcomes.
- The TG-ER (Thematic Group on Ecosystem Restoration) provides parallel guidance on restoration-specific indicators, including forest landscape integrity, habitat connectivity, and species recovery metrics relevant to KMGBF Target 2 (ecosystem restoration) and Target 3 (protected and conserved areas).
- The SWG RRD's 2025 report on sustainable forest management documented in detail the current fragmentation of biodiversity monitoring across WB6, noting that approaches are “often intermittent, inconsistent and time-limited to inventory periods”, and that Kosovo* has no standardised form for collecting and monitoring biodiversity data.⁴¹⁵ These baseline deficits will need to be addressed through the BMEF.

The BMEF is expected to establish: (a) a set of regionally harmonised core biodiversity indicators covering species, habitats, protected area coverage and management effectiveness, ecosystem services, and pressures; (b) agreed methodologies and data collection standards for each indicator; (c) reporting templates compatible with both the CBD's domestic reporting requirements and the GAWB Observatory Platform being developed by the RCC; and (d) a governance arrangement specifying the roles of domestic-level environmental agencies, the BDTF WB, the GAWB Biodiversity Information Hub, and IUCN as technical coordinator.

The Framework was in a preparatory and design phase during the 2024–2025 reporting period. The full development and operationalisation of the BMEF is expected progressively over the 2026–2027 period, as the WBBCR baseline is completed and the TG-BC and TG-ER expert groups provide their technical inputs. Once operational, the BMEF will be a foundational tool for tracking the WB6 region's progress towards the BSP 2030's five strategic goals and for demonstrating compliance with EU biodiversity commitments under Chapter 27 of the accession process.

Action 58	Development of green infrastructures and ecosystem connectivity
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Progress on green infrastructure and ecological connectivity in the Western Balkans Six during the reporting period is best understood through the lens of the Emerald Network, the region's operative framework for protected areas and ecological connectivity under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, and the pre-accession equivalent of the EU's Natura 2000 network. The state of the Emerald Network

⁴¹⁵SWG RRD, 2025 Sustainable Forest Management report, section on biodiversity monitoring. Current approaches to forest biodiversity monitoring in the WB6 are “often intermittent, inconsistent and time-limited to inventory periods”. Kosovo* has no standardised form for collecting and monitoring biodiversity data. <https://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Sustainable-Forest-Management-in-the-Western-Balkan-Region-Biodiversity-and-Forestry-Policy-Assessment.pdf>

directly reflects the region's capacity to establish and maintain functioning ecological corridors and transboundary green infrastructure.

The key event of the reporting period was the 15th Meeting of the Bern Convention's Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, held on 7–8 October 2025 in Bar, Montenegro, presenting the first time the meeting was hosted in the WB6⁴¹⁶. The meeting reviewed the status of the Emerald Network across Contracting Parties with the explicit aim of supporting them in designating new protected sites and improving management of the existing ones. A new Emerald Network Standard Data Form was provisionally adopted, designed to strengthen the consistency of data collection across the Network. The group also discussed criteria for assessing negative changes to Emerald Network sites, which is relevant to the WB6 context given the ongoing infrastructure pressures on candidate sites. As part of the programme, participants visited Lake Skadar, one of Montenegro's principal Emerald sites.

The meeting took place against a backdrop of persistently inadequate implementation across the WB6. No new Emerald sites have been proposed by any WB6 since the network was first established in 2011, presenting a gap of over fourteen years. Current Emerald sufficiency rates fall far short of the Bern Convention's 2030 target of 35%: Bosnia and Herzegovina stands at 0.7%, Serbia at 13.5%, North Macedonia at 16%, Montenegro at 16.3%, and Albania at 28.3%⁴¹⁷. At the 44th Standing Committee meeting in December 2024, representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia acknowledged that sufficient scientific and technical information exists to propose new sites, but cited political and administrative obstacles as the reasons for inaction, and expressed readiness to advance in the coming period.

Domestic-level governance gaps compound the regional picture. In Montenegro, despite significant progress in mapping territory for the Natura 2000 ecological network, gaps remain between mapped biodiversity values and their reflection in spatial planning frameworks⁴¹⁸. In North Macedonia, the domestic-level biodiversity information system remains non-functional, impeding the identification and formal designation of potential Natura 2000 and Emerald sites. In Albania, recent legislative changes to the protected areas framework have raised concerns regarding the alignment of domestic legislation with EU nature protection standards⁴¹⁹.

The gap between mapped biodiversity values and legally protected areas is particularly acute in the context of river ecosystems. Assessments conducted under the Bern Convention's Emerald Network process have identified numerous rivers across the region, including the Vjosa, Black Drin, Neretva, Bosna, Morača, and Vardar as priorities for inclusion as Areas of

⁴¹⁶ Council of Europe, Bern Convention, The 15th Meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas and Ecological Networks, Bar, Montenegro, 7–8 October 2025. The meeting focused on the status of the Emerald Network across Contracting Parties, supporting designation of new protected sites, and adopted a new Emerald Network Standard Data Form. A field visit to Lake Skadar was included. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/-/the-15th-meeting-of-the-group-of-experts-on-protected-areas-and-ecological-networks>

⁴¹⁷ CEE Bankwatch Network, "Bern Convention: Western Balkan countries need to propose new protected natural areas", December 2024. At the 44th Standing Committee meeting, representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia acknowledged that sufficient information exists to propose new Emerald sites but that no new sites have been proposed since 2011 due to political and administrative reasons. Current Emerald sufficiency rates: Bosnia and Herzegovina 0.7%, Serbia 13.5%, North Macedonia 16%, Montenegro 16.3%, Albania 28.3%. The 2030 target is 35% for all Parties.

https://bankwatch.org/press_release/bern-convention-western-balkan-countries-need-to-propose-new-protected-natural-areas

⁴¹⁸ EuroNatur, "Balkan nature on the line: environmental compliance lags in EU accession drive", November 2024. Montenegro's new spatial plan widely ignores candidate Emerald sites despite over 70% of its territory having been mapped for the Natura 2000 ecological network. Less than 14% of Montenegro's land and under 2% of its marine waters are formally protected. North Macedonia's domestic information system for biodiversity remains non-functional, impeding the identification of potential Natura 2000/Emerald sites. <https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/news/balkan-nature-on-the-line-environmental-compliance-lags-in-eu-accession-drive>

⁴¹⁹ Council of Europe, Bern Convention, Emerald Network Reference Portal. Lists of officially adopted and candidate Emerald Network sites last updated December 2025. Albania is a signatory to the Bern Convention; following the 2024 amendments to its Protected Areas Law (which allow destructive infrastructure projects in protected areas), no new Emerald sites are expected to be proposed in the near term. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/emerald-network>

Special Conservation Interest ⁴²⁰. These rivers, and their tributaries, represent both critical ecological corridors and some of the last free-flowing river systems in Europe. Their continued exclusion from formal protection represents a structural weakness in the region's green infrastructure framework. To date, only one biogeographical seminar was convened to assess Emerald sites in the Western Balkans, in 2011, leaving the network's sufficiency formally unevaluated for over a decade.

Nature-based Solutions offer a complementary approach to green infrastructure development across the region. The WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap identifies NbS as a priority tool for ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, functions that are directly relevant to the development of connected, functional green infrastructure across the WB6.

The systematic assessment of ecological network status and connectivity needs across WB6 is a designated task of the Western Balkans Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), currently under preparation by IUCN under the Greening the Western Balkans project. The WBBCR's terms of reference explicitly include assessing the effectiveness of protected area management, ecological networks, green infrastructure, wildlife corridors, and transboundary conservation efforts across the region⁴²¹. Once completed, the WBBCR will provide the first comprehensive, science-based baseline against which progress on Action 58 can be systematically measured and will generate the evidence needed to inform coordinated proposals for new Emerald sites and cross-border/boundary ecological corridor designations.

The Greening the Western Balkans project more broadly supports governance strengthening relevant to ecological connectivity, including capacity building for the BDTF WB and enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration between environment ministries, spatial planning authorities, and protected area managers across the region. However, translating these institutional investments into concrete Emerald Network designations, and closing the gap between existing biodiversity mapping and formal legal protection remains the central unresolved challenge under this action heading into 2026.

⁴²⁰ CEE Bankwatch Network / Emerald for Rivers campaign. Shadow list of 88 rivers proposed for inclusion in the Emerald Network, prepared at the Emerald Green seminar (December 2022) by 39 scientists and NGO representatives from 11 economies. Key rivers include: Vjosa, Black Drin, Neretva, Bosna, Morača, Vardar, and their tributaries. To date, only one biogeographical seminar was held to assess Emerald sites in the Western Balkans — in 2011. <https://bankwatch.org/project/emerald>

⁴²¹ IUCN, Terms of Reference for the Western Balkans Biodiversity Conservation Report (WBBCR), August 2025. The WBBCR will specifically assess the "effectiveness of protected area management, ecological networks, including green infrastructure and wildlife corridors, and capacity needs for biodiversity conservation", as well as "transboundary conservation efforts and initiatives". https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/attachment_1-tor-iucn-25-07-p04286-1-.pdf