

THE STATE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF JUST TRANSITION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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List of abbreviations

CSO.....	Civil Society Organisation
EU.....	European Union
GAWB.....	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GCE.....	Generation Climate Europe
GHG.....	Greenhouse Gas
JTM.....	Just Transition Mechanism
NDC.....	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO.....	Non-governmental Organisation
NECP.....	National Energy and Climate Plan
TPP.....	Thermal Power Plant
UNFCCC.....	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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Key messages

Since 2019, the European Union (EU) has embarked on a path towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, with a commitment to ensuring that this transition is just and inclusive. To support the EU communities that are still dependent on coal mining and coal-based power generation, the EU has used initiatives like the Just Transition Mechanism and the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition (which predates the Green Deal). In 2020, the EU launched the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine (hereafter “the Initiative”) with the aim of extending the coal phase-out effort to its neighboring regions. While this Initiative shares similarities with the EU's domestic endeavors, it lacks the substantial financial resources provided by the billions of EU funding dedicated to the just transition in the EU member states.

The Initiative held its first physical meeting in 2022, which the EU proclaimed as the European Year of Youth. Youth featured prominently in the Union's just transition, representing the next generation that will be responsible for shaping the development of supported communities. In 2022, two reports by Bankwatch and Generation Climate Europe (GCE) demonstrated that youth engagement was indeed a notable aspect of the just transition in several EU countries.

Taking into consideration the substantial differences between the EU just transition and the process in the Western Balkans, this briefing attempts to provide an initial overview of the implementation of the energy transition in the five Western Balkan states supported by the Initiative (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), with a specific focus on whether and how the youth was involved in shaping the related policies. The briefing was developed by employing a combination of desk research and interviews with local environmental and youth NGOs.

Our results show considerable differences among the five countries on the state of the just transition, with some countries having advanced plans (ex. North Macedonia), while others are at the very initial stages. However, in terms of youth engagement, while most countries did conduct public consultations for their just transition plans, we could not identify any evidence or instances of youth involvement in such consultation formats.

Recommendations

- We encourage national and local policymakers in the Western Balkans to meaningfully involve youth representatives in the just transition design and implementation, leveraging best practices from EU member states.
- We urge international organizations and national authorities to provide financial support for capacity-building initiatives that empower local CSOs and youth representatives to participate in the decision-making process.
- We call on public organizations to endorse and promote educational programmes for young people on the topics of just transition and political participation.
- We call on EU policymakers to promote the open and effective involvement of local civil society organisations and youth representatives in all just transition projects funded by EU programmes.

Summary table

Country	Territory supported by CRiT WBUA	JT policies (both adopted and under development)	Youth engagement in state-led JT activities
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Tuzla canton, Srednjobosanski canton, Zeničko-Dobojski canton, Ugljevik region, Gacko region	National Energy and Climate Plan (draft) Framework Energy Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2035 Environmental Strategy and Action Plan 2030+ (draft)	Low
Kosovo	Prishtina region	Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2022-2031 Energy Strategy Implementation Program 2022-2025 National Energy and Climate Plan (draft)	Low
Montenegro	Pljevlja region	National Strategy on Climate Change until 2030 National Energy and Climate Plan (draft) Just Transition Diagnostic Document	Low
North Macedonia	Bitola region, Kičevo region	Energy Development Strategy until 2040 The National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 The Just Transition Roadmap	Low
Serbia	Kostolac region, Kolubara region, Obrenovac region, Pomoravlje region	Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (draft) Just Transition Diagnostic Document (draft) The Energy Sector Development Strategy 2040 (draft) Strategy on the Low Carbon Development 2023-2030	Low

Western Balkans

In 2019, the European Union (EU) committed to a path toward climate neutrality with the Green Deal. This just transition entails addressing the impact of both climate change and corresponding mitigation measures on the welfare of all individuals, with a particular focus on marginalized communities and future generations.¹ Consequently, the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) was launched in 2021 as a regional development programme expected to mobilise over EUR 55 billion for the EU regions heavily dependent on fossil fuels and hard-to-abate industries.²

The JTM, presently in implementation, is based on the informal efforts of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition. This Initiative, established by the European Commission in 2018, serves as a platform to connect coal regions across the EU with the goal of supporting each other in the phasing out of coal and the socio-economic transition accompanying it.³ While the Initiative remains in place, the launch of the JTM has added concrete financial backing to its transition plans, as the regions supported in the Initiative coincide with those selected to be supported by the JTM. According to the EU's plans, this is expected to facilitate a just transition away from fossil fuels in the coming years across the coal regions of the Union.

Building on the model of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, the EU launched in 2022 a similar platform aiming to support coal regions in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU, namely the Western Balkans (i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and Ukraine.⁴



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This extra-EU platform bears the same name as the intra-EU one, namely **Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine**. Similar to the intra-EU platform, it serves as an arena to connect policy makers, investors and international organisations operating in the coal regions of the Western Balkans (with the notable exception of Albania, which has no coal extraction on its territory) and Ukraine.

1. European Commission (2019). "A European Green Deal." COM/2019/640 final. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

2. See Just Transition Mechanism. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 11.11.2023).

3. See "Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition." ([Link](#). Last consulted: 11.11.2023).

4. Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 13.11.2023).

In line with the EU's ambition to become climate neutral by 2050, the Western Balkan countries endorsed the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB). In November 2020 the Western Balkan governments signed the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans as a concrete plan to expand the European Green Deal to the region.⁵ The Action Plan adopted in 2021 is one of the outcomes of the Sofia Declaration and serves as a guiding tool for its implementation.⁶ The Agenda is embedded in the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, funded by the EU, which aims to spur the green and digital transformation of the region.

Furthermore, the Western Balkan countries are a contracting party to the Energy Community - an international organization that unites the EU with its neighbours to create an integrated pan-European energy market. By adopting the Energy Community Treaty, the Western Balkan countries made a legally binding commitment to adopt core EU energy legislation, the so-called "acquis communautaire". In 2021 they adopted the legislative package "Clean Energy for All Europeans" and the corresponding Decarbonization Roadmap, outlining the sequence of decarbonization-focused rules that would put the countries on a path towards achieving 2030 and 2050 decarbonization targets.⁷

Involving stakeholders in the design and implementation of the just transition is essential to garnering their acceptance and to the transition's success. Attaining distribution, procedural, restorative and recognition justice requires an open and inclusive public dialogue alongside meaningful political participation opportunities for local communities. Young people, in particular, have the right to be actively included in the decision-making process concerning climate change mitigation, given that they will disproportionately bear the greatest impacts.



5. Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (2020). Regional Cooperation Council. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 23.09.2023).

6. Action Plan for the Implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans 2021-2030 (2021). ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

7. Energy Community (2021). Energy Community adopts Clean Energy Package. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 23.09.2023).

The initial phases of the Initiative for Coal Region in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine coincided with 2022, which was designated as the European Year of Youth. As a result, youth engagement has been a topic of discussion since the first physical annual meeting of the Initiative in November 2022. As evidenced in the two past joint reports of Bankwatch and Generation Climate Europe (GCE), youth involvement was a major topic also in the just transition of the EU.⁸ The European Commission also promotes the inclusion of youth in the policy decisions regarding the allocation of JTM resources as they are the generation that will live in the new post-fossil fuel economy that EU funding aims to enable.



The two reports revealed that youth engagement did take place in some form in the majority of the 15 EU countries that were surveyed, with some notably outstanding cases where the input of youth was clearly reflected in the plans, designed to access funding from the JTM.

Drawing from Bankwatch and GCE's expertise in the fields of just transition and youth engagement, this briefing provides a first overview of the state of the just transition in the five Western Balkan countries supported by the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition.

Each country profile presents a brief outline of the most important policy developments and subsequently delves into the extent to which youth has been or is currently being involved in the design and implementation of the just transition. The report is based on semi structured interviews with civil society representatives from the region, publicly available information and informal input gathered from the ground by CEE Bankwatch Network and partners working on fossil fuel-related issues in the Western Balkans. Although the Initiative covers Ukraine as well, the country has been kept out of the analysis due to the ongoing Russian aggression and the impossibility to find specific information for the time being.

8. The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism of the EU: <https://gceurope.org/report-on-youth-engagement-in-the-just-transition/>

Country profiles



Bosnia-Herzegovina

In Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans supports five local administrative divisions: the three cantons of Tuzla, Srednjobosanski and Zeničko-Dobojski, and the two municipalities of Ugljevik and Gacko. The coal power plants are situated in Tuzla (715 MW installed capacity), Kakanj (466 MW), Gacko (300 MW), Ugljevik (300 MW) and Stanari (300 MW). More than half of its electricity generation capacity is comprised of hydropower, with the remaining portion being supplied by five lignite power plants.⁹

The just transition in the country presently lacks a comprehensive strategy and relies predominantly on local initiatives. The legal and policy structure in the realm of energy and climate governance is incomplete and fragmented, which results in inconsistent enforcement.¹⁰ On the national level, the Framework Energy Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2035 was adopted in 2017 as the key strategic document for the energy sector. In 2021, BiH also submitted its enhanced NDC under the Paris Agreement, which pledges to reduce GHG emissions by 33.2% by 2030 (compared with 1990 levels)¹⁰. Another plan that establishes energy and climate policy goals is the Environmental Strategy and Action Plan 2030+, which is now undergoing adoption procedures. The plan was developed with the assistance of the Stockholm Environment Institute, employing a participatory approach and utilizing various communication tools. It aimed to engage all pertinent stakeholders, including 13 CSOs.¹¹

Moreover, the government is presently working on a National Energy and Climate Plan, which is supposed to define the path of decarbonization for BiH until 2030, with projections until 2050.¹² The draft makes several references to the just transition. It foresees no new fossil fuel plants but remains vague on the fate of existing coal power plants.¹³ The plan was published for public consultation at the end of July 2023.

9. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2021). The Political Economy of Energy Transition in Southeast Europe– Barriers and Obstacles. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

10. OECD (2022). Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans: From Analysis to Action, OECD Development Pathways, OECD Publishing, Paris. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

11. SEI (2023). Development of the Environmental Strategy and Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

12. Integrated Energy and Climate Plan Bosnia and Herzegovina. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

13. Bankwatch Network (2023). Bosnia and Herzegovina's draft NECP: The good, the bad and the ugly. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

Even though the draft states that the process of establishing the plan includes the active participation of citizens and civil society, it doesn't mention CSOs as a distinct stakeholder group included in the working groups for the development of the plan. It thus remains unclear to what extent civil society actors were a part of the decision-making process and raises concerns about its transparency and accountability. Along the same vein, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations is developing a 'Just Transition in Coal Regions Road Map', with the World Bank's technical assistance. While some news sources mention that the Roadmap is currently undergoing a public consultation process, we were unable to find the document or information detailing the flow of this process.¹⁴

In addition, the "Blueprint for Gender Responsive Just Transition for All" has been recently developed by UNDP BiH in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations.¹⁵ The publication presents a practical guideline to address the social and economic impacts of the low-carbon transition on various groups, including youth, by identifying respective measures.

The just transition is thus slowly entering the public discussion with several forums being organized on the topic in the last year, also by the CRiT WBUA platform, as confirmed by one of the interviewees. At the local level, the municipalities of Banovici (Tuzla Canton) and Kakanj (Zeničko-Dobojski Canton) are promoting plans for their alternative development and also participating in exchange programmes, organized by the Initiative.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the energy and climate policy-making in the country presently lacks sufficient inclusivity, underscoring the need for government initiatives to raise awareness and encourage public engagement.

Youth engagement is no exception from this. We didn't come across any instances of meaningful youth participation in the just transition policy-making. There is a lack of awareness and knowledge among Bosnian youth regarding the just transition, as pointed out by one respondent, and initiatives to include them in the process are largely absent. Therefore, several NGOs, working in the field aim to fill this knowledge gap by conducting different educational initiatives. Among other organisations that engage with youth, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, for instance, encourages cooperation among students in the region in order to bring the economic and societal aspects of the just transition closer to young people.

Without comprehensive inclusion of all societal groups in the planning of the just transition in BiH, it would be challenging to achieve the broader social consensus necessary for the successful implementation of the energy transition. This entails addressing policy deficiencies, promoting citizen participation, and notably, integrating youth into the narrative and decision making of a just and sustainable transition in the country.

14. Roadmap for the Just Transition of Coal Regions. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

15. UNDP (2023). Blueprint for Gender responsive Just Transition for All in Bosnia and Herzegovina. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023).

16. Informal input gathered from the ground by CEE Bankwatch Network and partners working in the Western Balkans.



Kosovo

Kosovo relies for over 90% of its domestic production of electricity on two lignite coal-fired heavily polluting power plants, Kosova A (5 units with 800 MW installed) and Kosova B (two units with 678 MW installed).¹⁷ Both power plants are located in the Pristina region, which is supported by the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition. They are infamous for their contribution to air pollution and Kosova B is the highest emitter of dust out of all the coal plants in the Western Balkans. Kosova A and Kosova B are supplied with lignite from the adjacent Sibovc Southwest and Sitnica mines. The country has very large lignite resources, totalling 12.5 billion tonnes, which it claims are the second largest in Europe.

Kosovo is not a signatory party of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), so no regular reporting (National Communications on Climate Change and Biennial Update Reports) is taking place. It is also not a party of the Paris Agreement, and as such, there is currently no legal basis for drafting Nationally Determined Contributions.

On the national level, however, Kosovo has been updating its climate and energy policy goals. In 2018 the government adopted the Climate Change Strategy 2019-2028 and the Climate Change Action Plan 2019-2021, key documents outlining the country's policy measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In addition, the Law on Energy Efficiency (2018) and the Law on the Energy Performance of Buildings (2016) are currently being reviewed, while the passage of the Law on Climate Change is still pending.

Furthermore, the Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2022-2031¹⁸ was adopted in March 2023, followed by the approval of Kosovo Energy Strategy Implementation Program for the period 2022-2025.¹⁹ The Strategy pledges to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and indicates the same year for coal phase-out.²⁰ The only concrete closure date mentioned is that one unit of Kosova A would be closed in 2026, after the other two have been refurbished.²¹ By 2031 the share of renewable energy sources is envisaged to reach at least 32% of final energy consumption.

17. Bankwatch Network (2021). The energy sector in Kosovo. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

18. Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo 2022-2031. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

19. Ministry of Economy of Kosovo (2023). The Energy Strategy Implementation Program approved. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

20. Bankwatch Network (2023). Kosovo becomes the first Western Balkan country to stop promoting new hydropower. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

21. Todorović, Igor (2023). Kosovo outlines energy transition until 2031 in strategic document. Balkan Green Energy News. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 15.10.2023).



Kosovo

Public discussions were purportedly conducted as part of the drafting phase of the Energy Strategy 2022-2031. The Ministry of Economy held several consultative meetings with civil society before the publication of the draft Energy Strategy 2022-2031.²² Furthermore, multiple visits to Kosovo's municipalities were conducted to familiarize citizens with the strategy's objectives and plans and to provide both citizens and municipal representatives with the opportunity to share their comments and input.²³

At the same time, the country submitted its draft National Energy and Climate Plan, a key document for laying out the energy transition strategy. The draft is already published on the Energy Community Secretariat webpage.²⁴ Nevertheless, in contrast to other Western Balkan countries, Kosovo still doesn't have a Just Transition Diagnostic document, which is the basis of the creation of a Just Transition Roadmap.

According to the draft version of the NECP, the plan's overarching goals, policies and measures should be communicated with stakeholders, including the social partners and civil society as part of the plan's development process. Representatives of civil society and academia were appointed in the six thematic working groups, responsible for specific areas of focus (ibid.). In March and April 2023 four workshops were organized with stakeholders where the proposed policies and measures were discussed (ibid.). Moreover, at the beginning of 2023, the stakeholders were consulted about the input data used (ibid.). Another round of workshops is envisioned after the completion of the NECP draft version (ibid.). Young people and youth representatives have not been considered as a distinct category in the discussions.

In the context of Kosovo's just transition, stakeholders have voiced their concerns, revealing a landscape marked by challenges and a lack of clarity. Insights from local NGOs, with whom we spoke, shed light on the complexities and hurdles faced in Kosovo's journey toward a more sustainable and equitable energy future. Local interviewees have expressed a profound sense of opacity surrounding the management of the just transition.

22. Ministry of Economy of Kosovo (2022). The Ministry of Economy held a consultation with civil society before the publication of the draft Energy Strategy 2022 – 2031. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

23. Ministry of Economy of Kosovo (2022). Public consultations on the Energy Strategy 2022-2031 in Municipalities commence. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

24. National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Kosovo 2025-2030. First Draft Version (2023). ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.10.2023).



Kosovo

Government institutions have been criticized for failing to provide adequate information or take proactive measures to initiate and guide the transition process. The absence of transparency has left civil society organizations and the youth uninformed about the progress and plans related to the just transition. This lack of information-sharing has been a significant source of frustration and confusion, as expressed by the interviewees. According to their input, young people have been largely excluded from discussions and decision-making related to the just transition in Kosovo. Notably, they are unfamiliar with the concept of a just transition, and the absence of consultations with them has not prompted substantial responses from their side. This lack of engagement is attributed to the broader issue of inadequate education and awareness about environmental and energy-related topics within the country. Our respondents thus emphasized the pressing need for educational initiatives to raise awareness and foster a sense of responsibility among the youth regarding the just transition.

Kosovo has a limited presence of NGOs working specifically on the just transition. This shortage of dedicated organizations has led to a deficiency of knowledge and expertise concerning how the just transition process is managed. Some NGOs have even suggested that the concept of a just transition is largely absent from the public debate in Kosovo. The interviewed NGOs have cited financial issues as a significant barrier to progress in this domain.

In light of these multifaceted challenges, it is evident that Kosovo faces a complex journey toward achieving a just transition. Addressing issues related to transparency, increasing civil society and particularly youth involvement, and fostering education and awareness regarding the just transition concept are essential for implementing sustainable energy solutions in the country.



Montenegro

The Pljevlja Power Station is Montenegro's sole source of fossil fuel-derived electricity and is very important for the national power system. In this regard, the just transition process will directly affect the municipality of Pljevlja and its inhabitants.²⁵ Coal Mine AD Pljevlja and Thermolectric Power Plant "Pljevlja" as a subsidiary of Elektroprivreda Crne Gore AD Nikšić (EPCG) are the most important economic companies in Pljevlja, thereby exerting a notable impact on the development of the region and the income of citizens (ibid.).

The decarbonization of the energy sector is also a matter of great importance for the whole country. This is underscored by the fact that the Pljevlja Thermal Power Plant serves as Montenegro's sole source of baseload energy, accounting for 36.45% of the total electricity production in 2021 (ibid.). At the same time, the largest share of GHG emissions, roughly 80%, comes from electricity production.²⁶

Against this backdrop, TPP Pljevlja has been operating illegally since late 2020.²⁷ It had already surpassed its granted 20,000 operating hours under the Large Combustion Plants Directive, which were intended to last until the end of 2023.²⁸ As such, Montenegro is now subject to an infringement procedure by the Energy Community for this breach. Plans for Pljevlja 2 power plant were abandoned, in line with decarbonization plans. Pljevlja 1, however, is still in operation and despite its regulation violation, presently there have been no official announcements regarding its closure. That said, Montenegro has committed to a coal phase-out date by 2035.

In this regard the country has taken important steps to advance the green transition. In 2021 Montenegro updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), committing to reduce GHG emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.³⁵ These commitments align with the National Strategy on Climate Change until 2030 (2015) and with the Law on Climate Change Protection (2019).

In addition, the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) is currently under development by the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Capital Investments and should be adopted by the end of 2024.²⁹ The plan should enable the implementation of necessary measures to meet the strategic goals by 2030 and achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

25. United Nations Development Programme Montenegro (2023). Diagnostics of socio-economic situation of coal region Pljevlja. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.09.2023).

26. Ross, Kelvin (2022). Montenegro: small country with big ambitions for its energy transition. Enlit Europe. ([Link](#). Last consulted 15.09.2023).

27. Bankwatch Network (2023). Comply or Close. Five years of deadly legal breaches by Western Balkan coal plants. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 10.11.2023)

28. Ciuta, Ioana (2022). Montenegro to decide on life after coal. Just Transition. ([Link](#). Last consulted 15.09.2023)

29. Bešović, Sanja (2023). Facilitative Sharing of Views – Montenegro. Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.09.2023).



Montenegro

As of November 2023, however, a draft version has still not been published although some ³⁰ draft chapters were shared with the Energy Community Secretariat for informal review in 2021. In addition, no public consultation or national dialogue have been initiated neither before nor after the adoption of the new 2030 targets (ibid.). This raises concerns about transparency and democratic participation in the plan's development before its submission to the Secretariat.

Apart from the NECP, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is carrying out the Roadmap for Just Transition project. As part of the project, a diagnostic analysis of the socio-economic situation has been conducted and published in 2023 with the objective of fostering a nationwide inclusive dialogue that should ultimately result in the creation of a National Roadmap for a Just Transition.³¹ In preparation for the Just Transition Diagnostic document, a consultation process has been performed with the relevant stakeholders, as stated in the document. Interviews were carried out with employees of the coal mine and the TPP; business associations; trade unions, state agencies, municipal leaders and NGOs among others. Youth representatives, however, do not appear to be among the consulted stakeholders.

So far, the public debate on the just transition has been limited, falling short of the necessary level required for Montenegro to achieve coal phase-out in 2035. Consultations have mainly taken place within the National Council for Sustainable Development, which includes government representatives, local authorities, academia, the business sector, CSOs and independent experts. The Council, with the support of the newly established Working Group for Just Transition, intends to gather all relevant partners within a single consultative body focused on policies and financial investments in the just transition.³²

Nevertheless, information regarding the development of the energy transition in Pljevlja remains scarce and hardly accessible to civil society. In the same vein, youth involvement in the just transition policy-making has been limited, according to one interviewee. Based on our information, youth representatives were not adequately involved in the consultations concerning the preparation of the relevant policy documents. Although government and municipal representatives have shown a growing openness to recommendations from CSOs, in the view of our respondent, young people are still not recognised as relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process.

30. Climate Action Network Europe (2023). National Energy and Climate Plans in the Western Balkans – Progress Update. ([Link](#). Last Consulted: 15.09.2023).

31. United Nations Development Programme Montenegro (2023). Diagnostics of socio-economic situation of coal region Pljevlja. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.09.2023).

32. Gasparikova, Daniela (2023). Just transition - Between Myth and Reality. United Nations Development Programme Montenegro. ([Link](#). Last Consulted: 15.09.2023).



Montenegro

On the other side of the spectrum, there are promising initiatives led by NGOs in the country, aiming to educate and involve youth in climate change and sustainable transformation discussions. One such example is the Panda Labs for a Just Transition project which has organized³³ roundtable discussions involving both youth and authorities of the Pljevlja municipality. During these discussions, authorities made informal commitments to increase youth participation in the just transition process, as revealed by our interviewee. At the same time, the need for formal representation of young people in the form of youth associations active on the topic has been emphasized.

A challenge to enhancing youth participation lies in the limited knowledge among young people about the just transition. Awareness of the term "just energy transition" among Montenegro's youth is low, with 8% being familiar with this concept.³⁴ Therefore, one respondent from a local environmental NGO highlighted that a significant hurdle remains as youth in Montenegro have little knowledge to actively participate in the just transition process, while politicians in Montenegro seem unmotivated to engage them effectively.

Nevertheless, adolescents in Montenegro generally have a positive attitude towards climate and energy-related topics, with 60% expressing a desire to learn about and be involved in the country's energy transition (ibid.). Government institutions in Montenegro should seize this opportunity to educate the youth about the meaning, challenges, and opportunities of the energy transition and meaningfully include young people in the decision-making process, as they would be the driving force behind a more sustainable development of the country.

33. Panda Labs for a Just Transition project: ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

34. Panda Labs Youth for Just Energy Transition (2022). Quantitative Survey. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).



North Macedonia

A coal phase-out process has been underway in North Macedonia for several years now. Nevertheless, lignite continues to play a predominant role in the country's domestic energy mix³⁵. In North Macedonia, coal mining and combustion take place in two regions, namely Pelagonija (TPP Bitola) and Kicevo region (TPP Oslomej), both in the country's southwest.³⁶ The lignite deposits in Pelagonija are used in the three units of the Thermal Power Plant Bitola, each with a capacity of 233 MW. In contrast, the "Oslomej - West" mine today produces an insignificant quantity of lignite, and the thermal power plant with a capacity of 125MW operates with imported and more expensive lignite (ibid.). At present TPP Oslomej functions at limited capacity, primarily during the winter months.³⁷

In the last few years, North Macedonia has established a solid legislative foundation for the low-carbon transition and made visible progress in aligning the country's legal framework with EU legislation as evidenced by the Energy Law, the Energy Efficiency Law, the Long-Term Strategy on Climate Action and Action Plan as well as schemes for supporting new renewable energy projects.³⁸ The country also submitted an ambitious enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution as part of the Paris Climate Agreement in May 2021 with the aim to reduce GHG emissions by 30% by 2030.³⁹ Furthermore, the Law on Climate Action has been under development for over three years and a draft version was only recently unveiled to the public.⁴⁰

The concept of a just transition is prominently featured in various official documents such as the Energy Development Strategy Until 2040, adopted in 2019, and the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 (NECP), adopted in June 2022. Key goals include a plan for the gradual closure of TPP Oslomej and TPP Bitola by 2027 and the acceleration of the use of renewable energy sources in combination with energy efficiency measures in all sectors.

35. National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of North Macedonia (2022). Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Published by GIZ. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 13.09.2023).

36. Just Transition Roadmap (2023). Just Transition Diagnostic. Delegation of the European Union Republic North Macedonia. Specific Contract No 300012650-SIEA-2018-1906. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 13.09.2023).

37. Bankwatch Network. The energy sector in North Macedonia. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 13.09.2023).

38. Junior Achievement Macedonia (2022). Generation for Change. Study on the potentials of implementing social and just transition in North Macedonia with focus on Pelagonija (Bitola) region as case study. ISBN-13 978-608-66901-0-6.

39. Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (2021). NDC Implementation Roadmap for North Macedonia 2020-2030.

40. Naumovska, Sanja (2023). The law on climate action with new obligations for the institutions, but also charges for the industry. META MK Новинска агенција. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 13.09.2023).



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Nevertheless, conflicting media statements by government officials have mentioned 2027, 2030, 2032 and 2033 as coal phase-out dates due to concerns over the national energy security.⁴¹ At the same time, practical actions such as potential lignite mining in Zivojno could also extend the life of TPP Bitola by approximately 11 years, contradicting these stated dates.⁴²

More recently, on the 13th of June 2023, the government adopted the Just Transition Roadmap, prepared in the context of the “Just Transition diagnostic” project, funded by the European Union.⁴³ It outlines explicit measures aimed at facilitating the just transition, including recommendations for enhanced institutional and governance mechanisms, policy reforms and specific investments. It also designates the Ministry of Economy as the National Just Transition Coordinator. The Just Transition Roadmap is the first official government document dedicated exclusively to the just transition.

According to the document, it has been developed in consultation with various public and private stakeholders. The list of stakeholders is presented in the Roadmap and includes different ministries, state agencies, energy companies, mayors, social partners, academia, manufacturing companies, agricultural representatives, NGOs, experts and others. Various formats were reportedly employed for the stakeholder consultations, such as study visits, on-site and online interviews, focus groups with employees at REK Bitola and Oslomej and ESM contractors (private companies); and questionnaires to the affected municipalities to solicit project suggestions. During the preparation of the Roadmap, a webinar and an on-site conference in Skopje have taken place to introduce key stakeholders to the just transition approaches. Smaller workshops and webinars were also held in Skopje and Bitola. Nevertheless, the events have not received wide publicity, according to some of our interviewees.

As reported in the Roadmap, the input of CSOs was taken into consideration during the drafting phase, but the extent to which this is actually the case is yet to be analysed. That said, some of the organisations that we interviewed expressed concerns about the transparency and inclusivity of the decision-making process as the government often engages with a select group of NGOs, which has led to the perception of unequal access to policymaking opportunities in the eyes of some organizations.

41. Informal input gathered from the ground by CEE Bankwatch Network and partners in the Western Balkans

42. Bankwatch Network. The energy sector in North Macedonia. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.10.2023).

43. Just Transition Roadmap (2023). Just Transition Diagnostic. Delegation of the European Union Republic North Macedonia. Specific Contract No 300012650-SIEA-2018-1906. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 15.10.2023).



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Even though the Just Transition Roadmap outlines various measures aimed at fostering youth employment, it does not explicitly identify young people as a separate stakeholder category that has been included in the consultations. This has been confirmed by our interviewees, who stated that national authorities often don't consider young people as relevant stakeholders in the planning of the energy transition. For instance, as self reported by the National Youth Council, the Council has not been involved in the process. To the best knowledge of our interviewees, there have been no consultations with youth representatives up to this point and no other efforts on the part of authorities to engage them in the topic. In general, despite the presence of a Law on youth participation and youth policies, there is still no established system of policy cooperation between authorities and young people in the country, as highlighted by the respondents. On the flip side, according to their viewpoint, young people didn't react to the absence of consultations because they had grown accustomed to being excluded from the policy-making process.

The findings of this report are in line with a recent study on the participation of youth in North Macedonia. The study reveals that a significant majority, 84.5%, of young people have never been consulted by any institution.⁴⁴ Even though many municipalities have established Local Youth Councils and adopted Local Youth Strategies, today most of these councils are inactive and their mandates have expired (ibid.).

At the same time, it should be noted that local NGOs organized several education initiatives to involve adolescents in the subject matter, but this was the extent of youth engagement on the issue. There are, however, a few NGOs that work specifically on the just transition, and none of them are youth organizations or situated in the coal-dependent regions. The National Youth Council is also not actively involved in the matter as it prioritizes more immediate concerns affecting youth, such as unemployment. The interviewees noted a lack of expertise and capacity among many CSOs to work on the just transition, citing insufficient financial support at national and international levels and burdensome administrative requirements as contributing factors.

In conclusion, youth involvement in the just transition in North Macedonia is still in its infancy, which reveals a two-sided challenge. Government representatives appear reluctant to involve the youth as a stakeholder in the process, while young individuals often lack the knowledge or capacity to participate effectively. Active efforts are needed to educate and empower young people to take part in the just transition decision-making process in the country.

44. Galevski, Martin (2019). Socio-Political Participation of Youth in North Macedonia: Apathy, Optimism or Disappointment?. Westminster Foundation for Democracy, North Macedonia.



Serbia

Since December 2020, the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine has been active in Serbia, specifically in the local municipalities of Kostolac, Kolubara, Obrenovac and Pomoravlje.⁴⁵ Serbia is a country with extensive coal reserves. As of the year 2022, coal represented the predominant energy source utilized in Serbia, accounting for 65.3% of the total energy usage.⁴⁶ The coal reserves are primarily situated in Kolubara and Kostolac. The Kolubara Mining Basin produces an average of 30 million tonnes of lignite annually, generating 50% of Serbia's electricity.⁴⁷ In addition, the Drmno mine situated near Kostolac supplies the remaining 25% of the country's total electricity. As a result, Serbia's energy sector accounts for two-thirds of its total CO₂ emissions.⁴⁸

The EBRD is presently conducting a Just Transition Diagnostic Study for Serbia and developing a corresponding Just Transition Action Plan with required policy reforms and a pipeline of potential targeted investments.⁴⁹ According to our interviewees, the process included the participation of relevant stakeholders, but as the final document is yet to be published, the outcome of the consultations remains to be evaluated.

In recent years, the country has been making efforts to bring its domestic legal framework in line with its international commitments in the realm of climate and energy policy. The Energy Sector Development Strategy up to 2025 with projections up to 2030 was adopted in 2015, establishing the main priorities of the energy sector.⁵⁰ The government has already started drafting a new Energy Development Strategy 2040 with projections until 2050, defining the country's new energy policy (ibid.). Moreover, in March 2021, the Serbian Ministry of Environment released a series of new laws in the area, including the first Law on Renewable Energy, a Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy and a Law on Climate Change. More recently, in 2023, the government adopted the Strategy on the Low Carbon Development of the Republic of Serbia for the 2023-2030 period with projections until 2050.

45. European Commission. Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

46. Statista (2022). Distribution of Electricity Generation in Serbia in 2022, by Source. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

47. CEE Bankwatch Network. The Energy Sector in Serbia. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

48. OECD (2022). Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans: From Analysis to Action, OECD Development Pathways, OECD Publishing, Paris. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

49. EBRD. Just Transition Diagnostics: Serbia. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

50. One Planet Network (2022). Energy Sector Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period by 2025 with projections by 2030. ([Link](#). Last consulted: 12.11.2023).



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Furthermore, in June 2023, the Serbian government unveiled the first draft of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (INECP or NECP), which aims to delineate the country's energy policy for the coming years.⁵¹ The just transition is inadequately addressed in the plan, with specific details deferred to a separate Just Transition Action Plan.⁵² The INECP sets a relatively modest target of reducing the use of lignite in electricity generation by 25% by 2030, as compared to 2019 levels.

The plan was developed by different working groups, consisting of key stakeholders, and involved the participation of just two NGOs.⁵³ Public consultations on the INECP and the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Report were officially conducted in the summer of 2023.⁵¹ The meetings were attended by representatives from energy companies, banks, ministries, embassies, NGOs, experts and the University of Belgrade (ibid.). At the time of writing, no youth involvement in the meetings has been reported. As confirmed by our interviewees, the public consultation events were largely passive, involving presentations of the plan rather than providing a genuine opportunity for meaningful dialogue with the various stakeholders. In addition, the government has still not published the report from the consultation process, hindering an evaluation of the extent and impact of public involvement.

The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2035 is another relevant policy document, which among other things,⁵⁴ foresees the possibility of building new production capacities of coal-fired thermal power plants. The public consultations process carried out in 2021, has been rather problematic, purportedly in violation of regulations, as no public discussion, public presentation or cross-stakeholder consultations were organized (ibid.).

The described consultation practices highlight an unfavorable environment for fostering social dialogue on the just transition. As also noted by our interviewees, authorities often perceive the public consultation process as a mere formality, rather than as a means for relevant stakeholders to influence policies. Violations of procedures and laws, lack of timely and adequate notifications and limitation of participation due to unclear, contradictory, and incomplete information suggest inadequate political will and insufficient capacity in public administration to genuinely involve citizens in the green transition planning (ibid.).

51. Balkan Green Energy News. (2023). Serbia presents draft National Energy, Climate Plan. ([Link](#), Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

52. Bankwatch Network (2023). Serbia's draft NECP: What is the actual plan? ([Link](#), Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

53. Mapiranje pravedne zelene tranzicije u Srbiji (2022). ([Link](#), Last consulted: 12.11.2023).

54. Mapiranje pravedne zelene tranzicije u Srbiji (2022). ([Link](#), Last consulted: 12.11.2023).



Serbia

This dynamic does not encourage the participation of young people. To the best of our respondents' knowledge, youth organizations and representatives have not been actively participating in or monitoring the just transition development process. Even NGOs working in the field, find it challenging to stay adequately and accurately informed by the authorities, as expressed by our interviewees. Genuine efforts by authorities are necessary to involve youth representatives in the process, including through the use of appropriate communication channels. On the flip side, young people typically refrain from utilizing formal institutional channels to engage in decision-making, primarily due to a pervasive distrust in political institutions. Instead, they prefer external influence strategies like protests and other awareness-raising activities.

At present, Serbia lacks an institutionalised dialogue on energy and climate policy-making between public entities and civil society, particularly youth. Broad involvement of all stakeholders including the future generation that will live in the post-coal regions is indispensable for the success of the just transition. In this regard, authorities should make deliberate efforts to create suitable spaces and formats for young adults, enabling their active participation in the process, and provide youth representatives with targeted and timely information on participation opportunities.

