



Circular Economy in the Western Balkans region: Waste Management as a Challenge

The Balkan Forum
May 2021

Foreword

This introductory research on the circular economy of the Western Balkans serves as a wide-ranging overview document, framing its presence as a model of production and consumption in the region.¹ By presenting an introductory insight into prevalent practices encompassed by circular economy, we aim to inform a broad audience, beyond the communities of practitioners engaged or already familiar with its innerworkings. As a result, our research seeks to address stakeholder interaction with the circular economy from not only a policy-oriented professional perspective, but one geared toward individuals and organizations unfamiliar with the concept. This regional overview is the first out of four publications tackling the circular economy in the Western Balkans region, soon to be published by The Balkan Forum.

Conceptualizing the Circular Economy

The past 150 years of industrialization have been characterized by a linear economic model relying on the principle of ‘take-make-waste’. This model has fostered increased dependency on scarce resources, resulting in both environmental degradation and egregious amounts of waste. To counter these far-reaching consequences, the development of circular economy, based on the principle of reduced resource use, has become nothing short of a necessity.² By committing to this principle, circular economy is aimed at minimizing the use of resource inputs, carbon emissions, and the creation of waste. This results in the creation of closed-loop systems through consistently reusing, resharing, repairing, refurbishing, remanufacturing, and recycling.

Five pillars stand central to any successful circular economy:³

1. Reuse, reduce, recycle
2. Energy efficiency
3. Closed circle
4. System thinking
5. Social inclusiveness

A common objective includes keeping products, equipment, and infrastructure in use for as long as possible, which improves the overall productivity of these resources. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, all ‘waste’ should become a ‘source’ for another process: either a by-product or recovered resource for another industrial process or as regenerative resources for nature (e.g., compost).⁴

¹The Western Balkans region includes the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

²The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Toward the Circular Economy*, 2013, <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/Ellen-MacArthur-Foundation-Towards-the-Circular-Economy-vol.1.pdf> [accessed 15 March 2021]

³Franceska Korance, Build Green Group, Founder, CEO, Researcher and environmental consultant, Albania, 2021

⁴“Build Green Group is an NGO which provides consults and projects in environment. Also a platform for environment knowledge and education operating in Albania.” Build Green Group official Twitter profile description, 2021, https://twitter.com/bgggroup_al [accessed 26 May 2021]

⁴The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, *Toward the Circular Economy*, 2013, <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/publications/Ellen-MacArthur-Foundation-Towards-the-Circular-Economy-vol.1.pdf> [accessed 15 March 2021]

“Circular economy uses both linear economy definitions (in terms of economic benefits) and sustainable concepts (for environmental and socio-economic sustainable development). The difference is that a circular economy makes the production of goods more eco-effective.”⁵ There are several key elements that make the transition from a linear to a circular economy possible, such as improving prevention, management and recycling waste, investing in renewable energy sources, protecting biodiversity, sustainably extracting and cycling water resources, responsible consumption, and extending the utility of products’ environmental ecosystems.⁶ In construction, for example, the Albanian NGO Build Green Group consults companies on how to build durable, multipurposed facilities with materials fit for reuse following demolition.⁷



Due to the complexity and range of actions, events, and projects, determining the "circularity" of a product or service can be difficult. There is no universally acknowledged paradigm for assessing and reporting "circularity" in organizations, which corresponds with one of the most important approaches to a circular economy.⁸ As each state has its own unique set of circumstances, specific measuring methods are necessary.⁹ With this in mind, every state should draft and put into practice their own tailormade measurements built on the economic situation of their jurisdiction. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF), the main goal in measuring a circular economy is to support companies in adopting virtuous practices designed to lengthen the life cycle of products.¹⁰ Below are the key metrics presented by the USCCF:

- Amount Recovered;
- Carbon Footprint;
- Estimated Cost Savings per Rental;
- Estimated Impact Offset (Resources, GHGs, Water);
- kWh Produced;
- Payback Time;
- Percent Materials Composition;
- Percent Recovered; Percent Recyclable;
- Progress Toward Goal;
- Return on investment (ROI).¹¹

⁵Franceska Korance, Build Green Group, Founder, CEO, Researcher and environmental consultant, Albania, 2021

⁶E. Galdek, *The Seven Pillars of the Circular Economy*, Metabolic, 2019, <https://www.metabolic.nl/news/the-seven-pillars-of-the-circular-economy/> [accessed 24 May 2021]

⁷Franceska Korance, Build Green Group, Founder, CEO, Researcher and environmental consultant, Albania, 2021

⁸U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, "Measuring Circular Economy", 2021, <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/circular-economy-toolbox/about-circularity/measuring-circular-economy> [accessed 26 May 2021].

⁹Franceska Korance, Build Green Group, Founder, CEO, Researcher and environmental consultant, Albania, 2021

¹⁰U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, "Measuring Circular Economy", 2021, <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/circular-economy-toolbox/about-circularity/measuring-circular-economy> [accessed 26 May 2021].

¹¹ibid

Evidence suggests that the shift from a linear to a circular economy is a major challenge that requires stronger commitment to sustainable management of waste and resources, including:

- generating less waste by developing sustainable products and deploying infrastructure for reuse and repair on a massive scale;
- investing in greater recycling capacities, in particular for waste from food, plastic, and packaging;
- and reducing incineration and landfilling to a minimum, while at the same time tackling the legacy of European landfills to regain land and ecosystems.¹²

In recent years, European and international policies that aim to implement circular economy have been put in place, such as the Sustainable Development Goals,¹³ the Circular Economy Action Plan,¹⁴ the European Green Deal,¹⁵ and the European Plastics Strategy.¹⁶ The EU Circular Economy Action Plan notes that it is impossible to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050 without transitioning to a fully circular economy.¹

In order to have an easy-to-grasp focus point, our research will primarily cover waste issues, one of the key components of the circular economy. The persistent difficulty in measuring data remains a large obstacle hindering the implementation of the circular economy in the Western Balkans. A reality that also contributed to our choice to focus on this area. It should be noted that waste generation and recycling are just components of the circular economy and only gain their full significance if realized with all other factors.

The Regional Perspective

One notable episode enables us to concretely demonstrate the salience of issues related to the circular economy model in the Western Balkans region. In early 2021, numerous international media outlets reported a floating landfill clogging the Drina river near the eastern Bosnian town of Višegrad, nestled between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Plastic bottles, refrigerators, rusty barrels, and other waste could be seen floating on the Drina's surface, threatening to shut down the Višegrad powerplant. Every year, between 6,000 and 8,000 cubic meters of floating waste are collected in the river, an issue that can cost the same powerplant up to €100,000 yearly in clean up fees.¹⁸ So much refuse accumulated in the river this year that it was necessary to hire a specialized garbage-picking vessel from Germany to clear the floating waste site.

But where has this waste come from?

This question remains difficult to answer. Western Balkan countries have historically poor waste management systems, resulting in tonnes of refuse ending up in rivers. After consistent annual surges of high winter waters over landfill sites near riverbanks, the Drina tributaries in Bosnia and

¹²OECD, *Business Models for the Circular Economy – Opportunities and Challenges from a Policy Perspective*, 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/environment/waste/policy-highlights-business-models-for-the-circular-economy.pdf> [accessed 25 May 2021]

¹³The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been described as “the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all” by 2030. Main SDGs contributing to circular economy are: SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production, SDG 2 End hunger (via sustainable food production), SDG 6 Clean water, SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13 Climate action, and SDG 15 Life on land. United Nations, The 17 Goals, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/> [accessed 16 April 2021]

¹⁴European Commission, *New Circular Economy Action Plan*, Brussels, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/new_circular_economy_action_plan.pdf [accessed 15 March 2021]

¹⁵European Commission, *A European Green Deal*, Brussels, 2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document2> [accessed 15 March 2021]

¹⁶European Commission, *A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy*, Brussels, 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1516265440535&uri=COM:2018:28:FIN> [accessed 15 March 2021]

¹⁷V LOONELA & D STOICHEVA, “Press corner: Questions and Answers: A New Circular Economy Action Plan for a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe”, in *European Commission*, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_419 [accessed 17 May 2021].

¹⁸J. Gomez, Euronews. *Illegal landfill sites along rivers in the Balkans are causing an ecology disaster*, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/19/illegal-landfill-sites-along-rivers-in-the-balkans-are-causing-an-ecology-disaster> [accessed 12 April 2021]

and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia have been recorded to carry even more debris than in the past. The three countries which border the Drina have expressed their concern at the situation, but invariably blame each other, fail to act as a result, and continue to contribute to this ongoing ecological disaster.

In addition to suffering from both extremely poor waste generation and waste management systems, Western Balkan countries encounter the chronic dilemma of primarily generating energy via coal or fossil fuel-based sources. Emissions from existing coal power plants acts as one of the primary concerns for the wellbeing and health of citizens in the region.¹⁹ Coal generation in the Western Balkans is in need of major reform to align with the demands of a circular economy-based structure. By increasing decarbonization efforts, aiming to completely eliminate non-renewable sources and coal-based energy, and implementing clean and renewable energy infrastructures, the region will be closer to reaching climate neutrality and sustainability. In turn, this will enable these countries to meet their commitments as participants of the Western Balkans Green Agenda. However, when it comes to shifting toward a circular economy, it is evident that the region is presented with a wide range of challenges.

The circular economy, through all of its components, is a significant point on the agenda for the European Commission's policies for the Western Balkans region. These issues are not always brought forward in the scope of the EU's enlargement perspectives, which distinctly vary at stages of advancement from one country to the next. The circular economy is often stressed as an independent topic to a certain extent. This broad concept has been repeatedly advocated as deserving the utmost dedication from the Western Balkan countries, with favorable consequences for the region used as a stimulation tool by the EU.²⁰

In addition to this, the circular economy section in the Western Balkans leaders' declaration, taken from the 2020 Sofia Summit,²¹ is almost entirely identical to the initiatives proposed in the October 2020 document drafted by the European Commission: *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans [...] - An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans*.²² The Paris Agreement commitments are also included in this document. As are the European Commission's calls for enhanced regional coordination, raising the question as to whether a double objective is being pursued. On the one hand, we have to primarily take into account our topic while contextualizing the Commission's request. On the other hand, enhanced synergies regarding the circular economy among the Western Balkan countries might additionally encourage innovations and good practices, trigger new cooperation, and foster existing combined efforts within the region, even beyond the circular economy and the

¹⁹Climate Action Network Europe, Energy transition in the Western Balkans: 2020 missed opportunities, 2020 <https://caneurope.org/energy-transition-western-balkans-2020-missed-opportunities/> [accessed 25 May 2021]

²⁰European Commission (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations - DG NEAR), COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT - *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans - Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans* {COM(2020)641final}, in , European Commission (DG NEAR), 2020, p. 7 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf [accessed 8 April 2021]

²¹Western Balkans leaders, *Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, in Sofia, Berlin Process - Regional Cooperation Council - European Union, 2020, pp. 3 & 4, <https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Leaders-Declaration-on-the-Green-Agenda-for-the-WB.pdf> [accessed 16 April 2021].

²²European Commission (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations - DG NEAR), COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT - *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans - Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans* {COM(2020)641final}, in , European Commission (DG NEAR), 2020, pp. 2, 7, 8, 9, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf [accessed 8 April 2021].

EU enlargement perspectives. This double dimension illustrates the wide range of positive side effects that could result from the successful implementation, especially in terms of cross-border cooperation and its benefits.

Regional Patterns

In recent years, the circular economy has been recognized as a new concept to be implemented throughout the Western Balkans region. However, as the concept is still in its formative years, many across this region only have a partial understanding of what a circular economy fully entails.²³

Research suggests communities in the region are not aware of the core concept of the circular economy model, the path towards its development, and the benefits of its adoption. Even though there is a common will towards protecting the environment, there is a lack of complete understanding of how companies and individual actions contribute towards a progressively healthy existence.²⁴

Another deep-rooted misassumption shared by consumers within this region is that the materials extracted from nature for a linear model of “take-make-waste” are inexhaustible.²⁵ Other misconceptions are not only present among “ordinary citizens”, but also among policy-makers and local media outlets. When combined, these factors have generated a fracture between international standards concerning circular economy and the current in-country situations of all six Western Balkan states.²⁶

The generation of waste in the Western Balkans region has increased steadily over previous years due to economic development and increased consumption, currently standing at around 1,000 kg per capita. While this is still lower than the EU average of 1,700 kg per capita, the very low recycling rates (below 3%, in comparison to the EU average of 44%) result in a higher per capita amount of waste not being recycled.²⁷ In Albania and Kosovo, recycling rates remain low. Despite the presence of a recycling industry, recycling companies fail to acquire enough quality raw materials from the domestic market to operate at full capacity. In 2019, the amount of recycled waste in Albania represents about 18% of the total amount of generated waste.²⁸ In Kosovo, the Municipal Solid Waste faces many challenges when it comes to introducing household separation, recycling, and institutional management,²⁹ with only about 5% of the total amount

²³ENV.Net, LIR Evolution, Circular Economy Report Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018,

http://env-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CE_Report_2018_BosniaHerzegovina.pdf [accessed 18 April 2021]

²⁴Hapçiu, A. *Circular Economy in Kosovo: Perceptions and knowledge of circular economy among Kosovars*, Kosova Live, 2020, https://kosovalive.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CE_AnneaHapciu_English_For_Print.pdf [accessed 7 April 2021]

²⁵R. Gjoka, *Regional Circular Economy Country Specific Report*, 2020,

<http://env-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Circular-Economy-Regional-Report-2019.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021]

²⁶European Union, *A Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Environment and resource efficiency*, 2020,

https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/plp_uploads/policy_briefs/Policy_brief_on_waste_management.pdf [accessed 7 April 2021]

²⁷European Commission (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations - DG NEAR), COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT - Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans - Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans {COM(2020)641final}, in , European Commission (DG NEAR), 2020, p.8, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf [accessed 8 April 2021].

²⁸Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), *Urban Solid Waste*, 2019, Tirana, Albania, p.4,

<http://www.instat.gov.al/media/7502/eng-mbetjet-e-ngurta-urbane-ne-shqipëri-2019-ref-18-pres-relase.pdf> [accessed 30 April 2021]

²⁹In Kosovo, the current collection rate is 70% and less than 40% of solid waste is disposed of in managed facilities.

of waste being recycled in 2020.³⁰ An even worse situation exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the recycling rate represents only 0.29%.³¹

Estimates suggest that around 10% of communal waste is recycled in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this is taken from unofficial data. This reiterates the long-standing and unaddressed problem of relevant ministries not publicly releasing this information.³²

The fact that there is a lack of valid data in local languages on the circular economy adds to issues concerning information dissemination and indicates that the initiatives and projects of the circular economy are not developed and implemented in the manner that the EU defines. In Montenegro, 10% of the total amount of municipal waste is reused or recycled. Whereas in Serbia, in 2018, the municipal waste recycling rate was at 3%, while the recycling rate for packaging waste was 35 to 40%.³³ In North Macedonia, “according to statistics, the percentage of the recycled packaging waste circulating on the internal market in 2016 was 39.47%³⁴ while recycling rates for municipality waste was 0.9%.”³⁵ Interestingly, another source provides different data: “from the total generated waste, 694 kg per capita, in 2016, treated waste is only 4 kg per capita, or 0.6%, is treated waste.”³⁶ This data discrepancy for the same issue illustrates the difficulty to assess the situation with certainty. Here is a more recent figure: “Concerning the reported total collected municipal and other non-hazardous waste in 2019, only 0.7% was reported as processed (composted waste, recycled paper, cardboard, glass, plastic, and metal), which again shows the tendency of an increase compared to 0.28% in 2013.”³⁷

Waste mismanagement is a significant issue hindering the adoption of a circular economy model in the Western Balkan countries. The waste sector in these countries is facing a growing challenge related to insufficient and inadequate infrastructure. Landfilling remains the most applied method of waste disposal, although according to the waste management hierarchy this represents the least desired option. Despite efforts to get rid of illegal dumpsites, they continue to thrive and represent a serious public health risk, particularly due to hazardous waste and groundwater contamination. There is still a long way to go until good practices are widely implemented by the whole spectrum of regional stakeholders.

In Albania, new incinerators – which can have serious implications for public health and the environment – continue to be built without being in compliance with EU *acquis* related to waste,

³⁰European Commission, Kosovo 2020 Report, page 9, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/kosovo_report_2020.pdf [accessed 5 April 2021].
Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency, Kosovo Environment 2020: Report of environmental indicators, 2021, Prishtina, Kosovo, p.76, https://www.ammk-rks.net/repository/docs/Mjedisi_i_Kosov%C3%ABs_2020_Raport_i_treguesve_mjedisor%C3%AB-_ANGLISHT.pdf [accessed 13 April 2021]

³¹I. Maleš (INCIEN SK) & contributors, European Environmental Bureau, Institute for the Circular Economy, Guidelines On Circular Economy For The Countries Of The Western Balkans And Turkey, 2020, https://mk0eeborgicuyptuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guideline-WBT_INCIEN_final.pdf [accessed 15 March 2021]

³²R. Gjoka, Regional Circular Economy Country Specific Report, 2020, <http://env-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Circular-Economy-Regional-Report-2019.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021]

³³I. Maleš (INCIEN SK) & contributors, European Environmental Bureau, Institute for the Circular Economy, Guidelines On Circular Economy For The Countries Of The Western Balkans And Turkey, 2020, https://mk0eeborgicuyptuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guideline-WBT_INCIEN_final.pdf [accessed 15 March 2021]

³⁴Statistical Yearbook 2016, 02. Environment and Geography - footnote present in the initial UNECE document

³⁵A Rodic, Current state and development of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) - April 2019 - Republic of North Macedonia, in Geneva - Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Nechunaeva Ksenia, 2019, p. 14 https://unece.org/DAM/env/EMA/UNDA_2018-2021/UNDA_North_Macedonia_ENG.pdf [accessed 11 May 2021].

³⁶Z Janevski & V Krstik Tasheva, Circular Economies Resource Efficiency, Challenges And Opportunities For "Green" Economy In North Macedonia, in , Skopje, 2021, pp. 57 <https://ek-inst.ukim.edu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/4.CIRCULAR-ECONOMIES-RESOURCE-EFFICIENCY-CHALLENGES-AND-OPPORTUNITIES-FOR-GREEN-ECONOMY-IN-NORTH-MACEDONIA.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021].

³⁷I. Maleš (INCIEN SK) & contributors, European Environmental Bureau, Institute for the Circular Economy, Guidelines On Circular Economy For The Countries Of The Western Balkans And Turkey, 2020, p.23

including the waste hierarchy principle and recycling targets.³⁸ The figures of existing “wild” dumps or landfills in North Macedonia are high, and there is a data deficit accompanying this issue at a national level.³⁹ North Macedonia now has about 1,000 municipal “dumps”, especially in rural areas, and 43 active landfills with a total area of about 2,433 (1,000 m²).⁴⁰

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are only two regional waste disposal sites partly implementing circular economy standards: Smiljevići (near the capital, Sarajevo), and Ramići (near the city of Banja Luka). The country is still without a waste market.⁴¹

In Serbia, there are nine regional sanitary landfills and two municipal landfills (plus two regional landfills under construction) operating according to European standards.⁴² About 2 million tonnes of municipal waste were placed into landfills in 2019.⁴³ It is important to emphasize that in Serbia there are no facilities for the treatment of organic municipal waste, which should be regarded as a necessity, especially when considering that about 50% of municipal waste is organic.⁴⁴

In Kosovo, currently, there are only four landfills under the Kosovo Landfill Management Company operating in Prizren, Gjilan, Prishtina, and Podujeva, as well as one transfer station in Ferizaj. These sites are managed responsibly to ensure that landfills are operated safely and efficiently and that they comply with all environmental requirements.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the number of illegal dumpsites surpasses the amount of those that are legal, with the former reaching a total of 2,529 in 2019.⁴⁶

In Albania there are 9,046 reported illegal landfill dumpsites of which only 6% are cleaned.⁴⁷ Landfills that are managed are situated at sites in Sharra, Bushat, Bajkaj, Maliq, and Elbasan. In Elbasan, there is also an incinerator near the landfill. The National Waste Management Plan aims to replace current sites with 12 regionally controlled facilities.⁴⁸

³⁸“The EU legislation for incineration plants sets parameters for emissions and requires these to be monitored. Many in Albania worry that the operational incinerator in Elbasan, and the planned incinerators in Fier and Tirana, are not developed according to this legislation. Albania has no previous experience with the construction of waste incineration plants and there is no rigorous and transparent Environmental Impact Assessment procedure accompanying the building permits of the incinerators.”

Totoni, L., Vrugtman, L., and Angjeli, D., Waste Management in Albania: An opportunity to demonstrate commitment to EU integration”, Institute for Democracy and Mediation, 2019.

³⁹Z Janevski & V Krstik Tasheva, *Circular Economies Resource Efficiency, Challenges And Opportunities For “Green” Economy In North Macedonia*, in , Skopje, 2021, pp. 57

<https://ek-inst.ukim.edu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/4.CIRCULAR-ECONOMIES-RESOURCE-EFFICIENCY-CHALLENGES-AND-OPPORTUNITIES-FOR-GREEN-ECONOMY-IN-NORTH-MACEDONIA.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021].

⁴⁰State Statistical Office, “Environmental Statistics, 2017”, Skopje, State Statistical Office, 2017, p.57. - Source initially provided by Z Janevski & V Krstik Tasheva, *Circular Economies Resource Efficiency, Challenges And Opportunities For “Green” Economy In North Macedonia*, in , Skopje, 2021, p. 57

⁴¹European Environmental Bureau, Institute for the Circular Economy, *Guidelines On Circular Economy For The Countries Of The Western Balkans And Turkey*, 2020,

https://mk0eeborgicuyptuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guideline-WBT_INCIEN_final.pdf [accessed 28 April 2021]

⁴²R. Gjoka, *Regional Circular Economy Country Specific Report*, 2020,

<http://env-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Circular-Economy-Regional-Report-2019.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021]

⁴³ibid

⁴⁴European Environmental Bureau, Institute for the Circular Economy, *Guidelines On Circular Economy For The Countries Of The Western Balkans And Turkey*, 2020, Link:

https://mk0eeborgicuyptuf7e.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/guideline-WBT_INCIEN_final.pdf [accessed 28 April 2021]

⁴⁵Webpost by Kosovo Trust Agency,

<http://kta-kosovo.org/html/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display&pid=139#:~:text=Kosovo%20Landfill%20Management%20Company%20> [accessed 28 April 2021]

⁴⁶European Commission, Kosovo 2020 Report, page 93-94, 2020,

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/kosovo_report_2020.pdf [accessed 5 April 2021]

⁴⁷Trash Out NGO, Trash Out Statistics, <https://www.trashout.ngo/statistics> [accessed 18 April 2021]

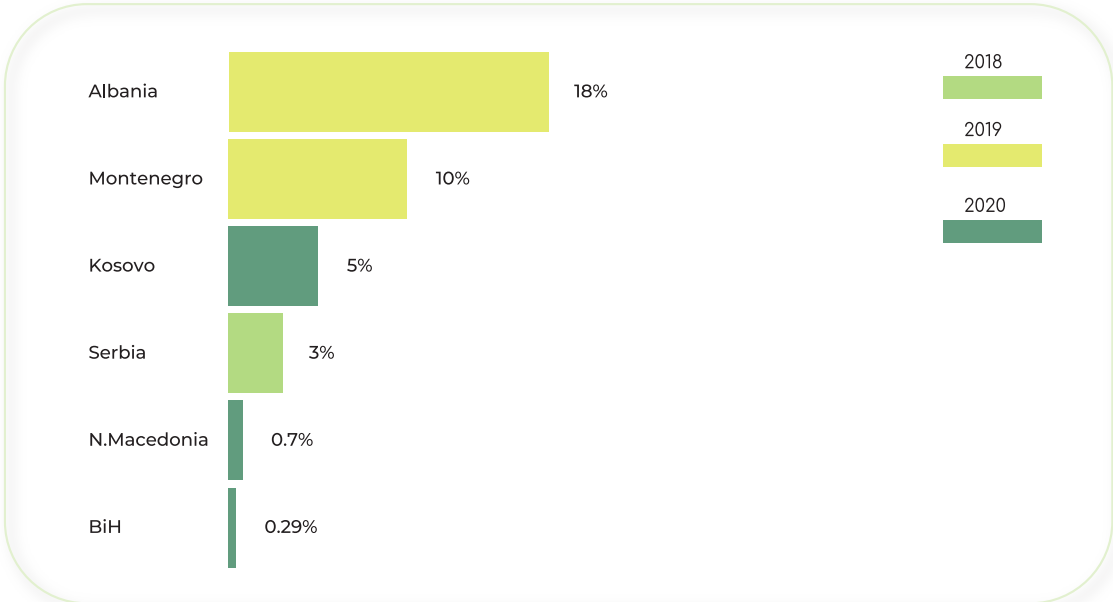
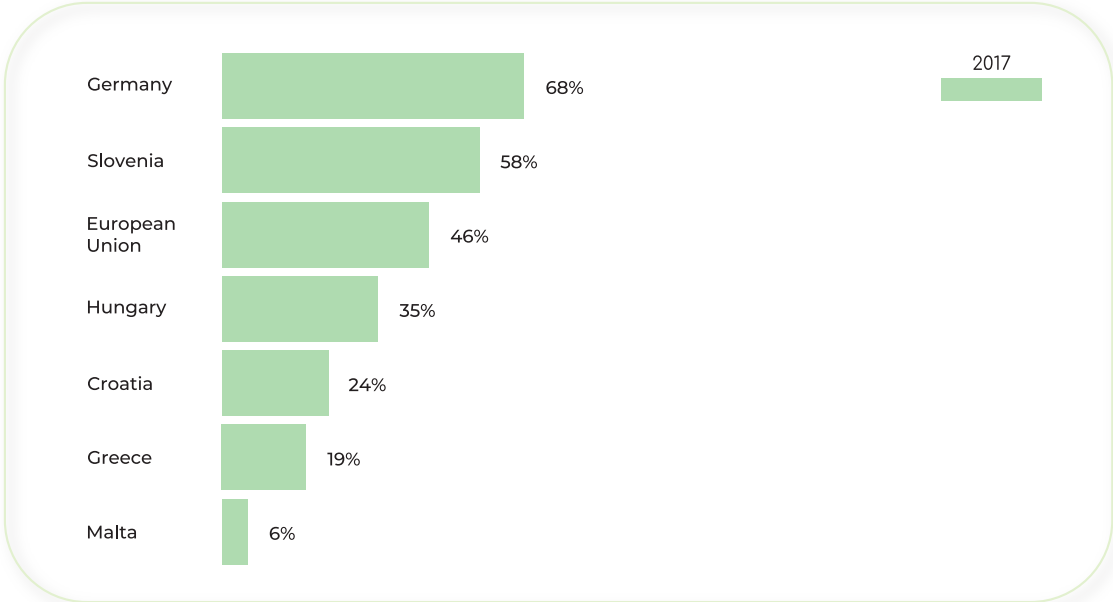
⁴⁸European Environment Agency, Municipal Waste Management, Albania 2018 Fact Sheet, 2018,

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/waste/waste-management/municipal-waste-management-country-profiles/albania-municipal>

Additionally, the government of Albania and the Vlora municipality are planning the construction of a new controlled and regulated landfill close to the city.⁴⁹

In Montenegro there are in total 273 unregulated landfills and approximately 60% of the total waste collected in the country ends up in these sites.⁵⁰

Recycling rates in six EU member states in comparison to the six Western Balkan countries



Source:
 European Environment Agency
 European Environmental Bureau & Institute for the Circular Economy (INCIEN)
 Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency
 The Institute of Statistics, Albania (INSTAT)

⁴⁹Exit News, New Landfill To Be Built in Vlora, 2018 <https://exit.al/en/2018/09/17/new-landfill-to-be-built-in-vlora/> [accessed 28 April 2021]
⁵⁰Zero Waste Montenegro, Domestic Waste Management in Montenegro, <https://www.zerowastemontenegro.me/waste-management-status-montenegro#:~:text=Waste%20collection%3A%20Montene gro%20is%20a,1000%20m3%20across%20the%20country> [accessed 28 April 2021]

Based on previous developments, it is clear that the circular economy concept is recognized but still needs to be developed and fully integrated in the Western Balkans region for citizens, consumers, companies, producers, and reproducers. The actions conducted by the governments of North Macedonia and Albania as frontrunners in the EU accession process and the efforts demonstrated to various extents by governments from the Western Balkan countries to seek circular economy integration are certainly positive developments. In fact, these factors may well act in favor of enhancing the possibility of a genuinely applied circular economy materializing in the region soon. However, the past and ongoing thorny relations of the Western Balkan countries with their neighbors runs the risk of diverting focus from this objective, as controversial diplomatic issues continue to dominate national agendas.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the establishment of a circular economy in the Western Balkans region finds itself in its developmental stages. There is clearly ample room for improvement at this juncture and a long path ahead until good practices in terms of waste management are widely integrated into existing legislation and effectively implemented by all stakeholders in the region. Advocacy and campaigns designed to raise awareness about the importance of the concept itself would inspire and encourage an alternative to counter ongoing waste mismanagement and illegal practices. The EU accession goal provides impetus in leaving wasteful linear economic model behind and shifting toward an implemented circular economy instead.

The consolidated finding of our research is that concrete and relentless efforts from all stakeholders are required for a circular economy to meet its full potential in the Western Balkans region. By striving as a united front and transcending borders for this objective, a spirit of mutual stimulation and coordination can only contribute to strengthening the development of the region. As the circular economy in Europe is still a new concept, there is a continued need for further research to be conducted.

More insights on the topic of the circular economy in the Western Balkans will soon be published by The Balkan Forum. The existing legislation across the region will be addressed in an upcoming research paper. This will then be followed by research focusing on mapping the main actors. A fourth and final paper will then focus on concrete examples of circular economy implementation throughout the region. All four documents will be made available both on our website and in our newsletter.

A TIMELINE FOR THE EU'S TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Waste Framework Directive (WFD)


Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD)












Landfill Directive (LD)

Single-use Plastics Directive (SUP)

 New EU Proposals

 Mandatory separate collection

 Targets for Countries

2018	4 July - Adoption of WFD, PPWD & LD
 2019	Methodology to calculate packaging waste generation 2 July - SUP Directive enters into force Methodology to calculate food waste generation Reuse calculation methodology Indicators to measure progress on waste prevention
 2020	Countries to start monitoring reuse based on new methodology Countries to recycle or prepare for reuse at least 50% of household waste Countries to recover at least 70% of construction and demolition waste 5 July - Transposition of WFD, PPWD & LD Countries shall stop burning or landfilling separately collected waste
 2021	Certain single-use plastic products banned in the EU Countries to report on implementation of article 10 of WFD (including separate collection)
 2022	Countries to submit first report on food waste generation
 2023	New food waste reduction target Biowaste Countries to introduce minimum requirements for EPR
 2024	100% of all packaging must be covered by EPR
 2025	Countries to recycle and prepare for reuse at least 55% of household waste Countries to recycle at least 65% of all packaging waste Plastic bottles to contain at least 25% of recycled content
 2027	Countries can report biowaste as recycling only if it comes from separately collected waste
 2028	Possible revision of the 2035 preparation for reuse / recycling targets
 2029	At least 90% of single-use plastic bottles
2030	Plastic bottles to contain at least 30% of recycled content Countries to recycle and prepare for reuse at least 60% of household waste recycled Countries to recycle at least 70% of all packaging waste
 2035	Countries to recycle and prepare for reuse at least 65% of household waste Countries to put at 10% cap on landfill
2040	Possible time derogation for the landfill reduction recycling targets

About the Balkan Forum

The Balkan Forum works to create a new vision for the Balkan region. It is a regional, multisector platform designed to advance cross-border dialogue and create a shared regional vision and agenda for cooperative action in the Balkan region based on economic integration, prosperity, and sustainable peace. We adopt a positive approach as the guiding principle for our activities; rather than re-emphasizing the problems that have divided the Balkan populations for many years now, we focus heavily on the positive elements that unite them.

We highlight good practices of regional cooperation to policy discussions and promote existing efforts to connect grassroots initiatives, knowledge, and successes to the decision-making levels that are responsible for policymaking and regional and/or EU integration. Together with our partners we focus our efforts on filling gaps and mobilizing action; facilitating consensus building and dialogue; and building political will for policy action on regional cooperation initiatives.

Donor:

This report was made possible with support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The opinions and views of the authors do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Fund.



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Acknowledgments:

This research has been conducted by The Balkan Forum's research team: Festina Kabashi, Jules Striffler and Samir Beharić, with the support of Alma Qerimi and Sonja Taga.

Special thanks to Franceska Korance (Build Green Group, Albania), Nadira Berbić (Center for Energy, Environment and Resources CENER 21, Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Rinora Gojani (Balkan Green Foundation, Kosovo) for their contributions to this paper.



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