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THE UNDECLARED:

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF WESTERN BALKANS

2024

CONFERENCE REPORT

WORKSHOPS

Is a **Regional Circular Supply Chain** Possible?

Group 1: Regulatory Framework and Enforcement

Discussion Points:
1. Current state of waste management regulations in the Western Balkans.
2. Best practices from examples from other countries you know of – e.g. policy recommendations for improving the waste management
3. What can be the strategies for strengthening regulatory frameworks and improving enforcement mechanisms?

- Current state of waste management regulations in the Western Balkans is terrible!
- There is no quality regulatory framework, and implementation is a serious issue in Bosnia and Macedonia! There is very little effort spent in informing the citizens and even the language used in environmental interventions and regulations is not optimised and is poorly understood by people. There are some good examples of proper waste management at a local level, but they are not publicised,
- It appears that in Macedonia we are having regulations for the sake of regulations. There is a huge gap between commitments to the EU accession process and the capacities of municipalities to implement them. There is a strong focus on the importance of penalties in Macedonia forgetting the element of education,
- There is no leverage in implementing complex activities in the waste management sector in the Western Balkans! The trust in institutions is very low that affects citizens' compliance with the regulations,
- Prilep's 15-year long initiative for waste sorting is a good example that is worth sharing! It's a story of commitment and hard work that pays out in the end. They are building their secondary waste selection facility that will improve their capacity in waste selection,
- The key word is system, and we don't have it! Lack of coordination is also a serious issue.
- The laws and regulations are adopted through top-down approaches. Lack of genuine engagement of citizens in the process of adopting waste management legislation results in lack of ownership that in turn reinforces poor trust in national institutions and widens the gap in communication between national and local authorities,
- There is serious lack of multi-level coordination in Bosnia and Macedonia! There are conflicting information coming from different institutions, the responsibilities to act are passed on indefinitely and the decision-making process is stalled.

Is a Regional Circular Supply Chain Possible?
Facilitators: Ivana Petrisková **(CRPM)**
and Emil Angelov **(SALAR International)**

Is a **Regional Circular Supply Chain** Possible?

- Lack of capacities at national/local level is a serious issue. There is no competent, well-educate staff in environmental ministries and the situation is getting worse every year. This is especially true about the Macedonian MoEPP,
- Is environmental protection a priority for the people? It's a complex issue and it depends on several factors so it's difficult to generalise. There are very little efforts in educating the community about environmental concerns and the election campaigns are full of nationalist rhetoric (there were general and presidential election in May in Macedonia and environment was nowhere to be found in the parties' programmes). That makes focusing on environmental issues a difficult task for people unless they reach a level of emergency – in which case people tend to mobilise (like the environmental initiative in Mostar, survey run by CoE in 2022 but with no epilogue in significantly affecting national policies).
- Empowerment of citizens is a relevant strategy for strengthening waste management efforts; it is one of the approaches to mobilise support to change together with change of mindset and raising awareness of the importance of solidarity and the responsibility for the future generations. Apparently, people get more active when the unfavourable situations reach a tipping point. The process can be strengthened with public awareness campaigns aimed and young children as part of the education system

Group 2: Innovation and Green Entrepreneurship

Discussion Points:
1. What support mechanisms are essential to foster green entrepreneurship?
2. What technological innovations can support the development of better waste management and circular supply chains?
3. How can we build strong collaboration between CSOs, businesses, and government?

- There is missing structural support mechanisms for fostering green and circular entrepreneurship in Western Balkan countries,
- Subsidies are being provided mostly for installations of solar panels (such as Solar 5000 in Montenegro or others) and heating pumps for the households as part of the "green strategy" of the governments- with the solar panels there is an application which shows the energy production of solar panels in the real time,
- Serbia gives subsidies for electrical cars,
- Missing tax incentives, that would be providing financial incentives for green businesses, such as subsidies, tax credits, and reduced VAT for eco-friendly products,
- Also, there should be regulations and standards that would be implementing and enforcing environmental regulations that push businesses towards sustainable practices,
- Missing capacities of the state to engage businesses and ministries in the common tenders supporting green/ circular businesses,

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- In Macedonia, the Ministry of Economy has programs for subsidies for energy efficiency, in both programs the used criteria is "First come first served", which is a highly discriminating criterion for several reasons. Also, users of guaranteed minimal support who receive subsidies the "monetary support" for part of the energy expenses are not eligible for applying for subsidies under the Energy Efficiency Program 2024- these exclusion criteria are controversial to the cause itself.
- In Macedonia the best functioning example is Pakomak, a waste management company that focuses on packaging waste. They work on establishing an efficient recycling system and increasing public awareness about recycling. Pakomak is supported by national policies promoting recycling and waste management, as well as partnerships with local municipalities.
- In all the Western Balkan countries there is a general lack of political will to invest strategically into green entrepreneurship,
- Green Investment Funds (such as Green Climate Fund) are dedicated to supporting green startups and projects,
- Some banks (e.g. EBRD) are providing microfinancing and grants/ (micro)loans and grants SMEs to invest in green technologies.
- There is need for entrepreneurship programs that would educate aspiring entrepreneurs on green business models and sustainable practices as well as training in green technologies and sustainable practices to build a skilled workforce.
- V4 is developing good practices of establishing Circular Hubs as innovation hubs that provide resources and networking opportunities for green entrepreneurs to connect with investors, mentors, and peers.
- We need more investment in technological innovations to speed up the transformation of the waste management for possible circular supply chains in the future.

Group 3: Local Production as Regenerative Production

- Discussion Points:
- How can we shift our local production practices to become more regenerative and sustainable?
- Can you provide examples of successful regenerative production models from other regions or countries?
- How can local production be integrated into circular supply chains to enhance sustainability?
- Integrating local production into circular supply chains to enhance sustainability involves rethinking and redesigning the production and consumption processes to create a closed-loop- system where materials are reused, remanufactured, or recycled instead of being discarded – the local production needs to be supported to use raw materials that are renewable, ethically sourced, with low environmental impact,

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- Local material sourcing – enhancing the use of locally sourced materials to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation and support local economies and designing the products which can be easily recycled or reused at the end of their life cycle.
- Energy recovery from waste- such as using biomass energy facilities to convert agricultural waste into energy.
- Water conservation requires special attention, and we need to think of the systems that reduce water usage, such as rainwater harvesting and water recycling systems, especially in water-intensive industries – fruit and vegetable farming, meat production, textile, etc.
- Local production means also transition to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, or bioenergy to power production processes.
- Convert organic waste into compost or biomass energy= regenerating natural systems and reducing landfill use.
- Community development = Local supply chains.
- Examples of the local circular production:
- 1. Agricola Moderna – Italy - a farm in Rome that uses vertical farming techniques to grow crops without soil and with minimal water usage. The farm operates on renewable energy and incorporates circular economy principles by recycling all organic waste back into the system- hydroponic systems, where crops grow in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution, eliminating the need for soil.
- 2. Lush Cosmetics – UK- cosmetic products (soaps, shampoos, lotions, makeup, and more), using natural and ethically sourced ingredients - customers return packaging for recycling. Fair trade practices
- 3. La Rhea – Germany- repurposing coffee grounds, typically a significant waste byproduct in the coffee industry, into a substrate for mushroom cultivation.

Climate and Security

The workshop aimed to bring together CSO representatives and relevant professionals, to discuss how climate change affects security related risks. The workshop also served as a platform for discussing what are the possible approaches and strategies to mitigate the security risks and foster regional cooperation in addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change and security. More specifically, different experiences, from diverse regions from the globe will be shared on how climate change influence migration movements (considered as one of the major security risks), food and water security, disaster risks and how the society builds its resilience in combating such risks.

Introductory part:

The facilitator used short power point presentation, outlining:

·The legal and institutional aspects of climate change and the roles of international community, UN, OSCE) in tackling the challenges;
·The importance of regional approach to CC&security;
·The connection between climate change and security (indirect and direct, from Holocene to Anthropocene) with references to the following aspects:
a) the climate crisis and human security (temperature rise, water sustainability;
b) climate change can act as a threat multiplier and/or can contribute to good neighborly relations, conflict prevention and confidence-building (explaining the details of it in terms of economics, environment, health, migration, political stability etc…);
c) political dialog and how is climate change related to foreign policy, CC and peace…;
d) activities on the ground in SEE, the regional consultation process

Workshop

The four pillars divided into three working groups for elaboration:
1. Fire management and illegal logging
2. Air pollution and health
3. Climate change and migration
4. Gender and youth aspects and intersections to the pillars above.

Group 1 - fire management and illegal logging

The group was comprising of representatives from Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. In total 7 participants and one moderator. The topic was "Fire Management and Illegal Logging" how to find solutions and how are women and youth affected.

Climate and Security
Facilitator: Kristina Jovanova, OSCE

Climate and Security

In North Macedonia, last year there were several devastating fires, damaging up to 25% of the woods in the Osogovo region. Not only that, there is not sufficient recovery process afterwards, in terms of afforestation.
Law enforcement is also at very low level, as the wood inspectors/officers do not possess the needed capacities and in addition they are most of the cases involved in the corruption chains.
Furthermore, great amount of the woods is being cut for construction needs (small hydro plants) and again the officials to not pay attention on afforestation.
Illegal landfills are yet another problem, because they are usually burned in non-controlled conditions, causing fires in their surroundings, that in most cases are woods.
Lastly, the volunteer firefighter groups are with limited capacities, both technical and human.

What can be done?
Use of modern technologies to prevent fires and detect illegal dumping (drones or satellite) and also establishing a platform where citizens could report environmental harm and violence, sharing the exact GPS supported with picture.
Law enforcement and fines for illegal logging and for the fire-starters, ecocide is regulated with the Criminal Code.
Early education in kindergartens and elementary schools for raising the awareness and knowledge on fire hazards and environmental protection.
Greater support for the volunteer firefighter groups.
Women and youth considerations?
The participants were discussing that women should be more engaged in the firefighter groups and in the crisis management centres.
Youth can be involved in eco-patrols together with NGOs.
Education for the youth and raising the awareness about the urgency of the matter.

Group 2 - air pollution.

The group was comprise of representatives from Poland, Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia. In total 6 participants and one moderator. The topic was "Air pollution" how to find solutions and how are women and youth affected.
Air pollution is present not only in Balkan countries but also in Poland. The issue is multi-sectoral and solution is not simple. Participants pointed out that low awareness is present among citizens that are using highly pollute materials for heating due to low awareness or poverty.
In North Macedonia fines for this are almost impossible to be declared due to juridical obstacles and low number of environmental inspectors.

Climate and Security

Furthermore, fines are rare also for big factories due to corruption and in the end big polluters always buy more time for their activities without investing in modernization of filters and other equipment.

On the other hand if there are any fines for environmental pollutions than these funds are not earmarked for improvement of air quality.

Subsidies for invertors or electric scooters should be given to poor families and not on the principle first come firs served. As a conclusion the group stated that the issue of air pollution is constant fight and collective challenge.

What can be done?

Awareness raising for clean air and causes for pollution should start in kindergartens and schools. Also campaigns on a municipal level are needed for general public.

Bigger fines for big polluters are needed, as well as for individuals.

The funds gathered from fines can be earmarked for various activities like subsidies for improving air quality, campaigns etc.

Equal share is needed for subsidies for invertors or electric vehicles for families with social needs.

Women and youth and the topic air pollution?

The participants were discussing tha women and youth are most affected group from air pollution but there are no specific research for this groups and air pollution.

The public health experts are working on air pollution as one of the high factors for death but there are no clear data by age and gender, about air pollution as main factor for respiratory diseases and death. More research and multidisciplinary approach in this context is needed.

Women in rural areas are not present on public events so more to more campaigns are needed to engage this group in rural areas.

Group 3 - Climate change and migration

The group was comprise of representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy and North Macedonia. In total 5 participants. The topic was "Climate change and migration" how to find solutions and how are women and youth affected.

The proposed challenges and solutions in our group work were intersectional in their entirety so youth and gender issues were addressed in each one of them. The identified challenges and solutions are as follows:

1. Not addressing intersectional inequalities stemming from climate change and migration

This indicates that there is a vast difference in how both climate change and migration are affecting diverse groups of persons. For example, women and children are under more risk of the deteriorating effects of climate change, but also their mobility/migration is conditioned by their gender, social status, class, and systems of oppression.

Climate and Security

A solution to this is a needs-based approach to strategy-, policy-, and budget-making processes, with an emphasis on intersectionality, i.e., a focus on minority issues, gender-related inequalities and social inequalities.

2. Food security

This entails the rising food insecurity in our region which poses one push factor for migration. It is often caused by climate change and deteriorating effects it has on human security in general. This issue, however, transcends borders and should be perceived as a problem everywhere.

A solution to this are reforms in terms of agricultural policies, education of agricultural producers, and improved value chains relations.

3. Absence of migration strategies and systems

This means that there are no systems in place to tackle the rising migratory paths across our region, they are rarely updated and pose a security threat oftentimes. The lack of systems also sheds light on the gender and other intersectional identity categories which play a crucial role in dealing with migration and utilizing strategies and systems.

The solution is to set up clear systems and strategies for dealing with migration, but also for accountability. Ideally, in-depth strategies for integration are to be created.

4. Absence of analysis on gender inequality and social inequality and its effects on mobility

This means that no gender or social analyses are conducted prior to setting up strategies, support systems, or mobility policies. The lack of these analyses indicates a profound lack of understanding of the consequences and effects inequalities of different kind (gender, social, racial, age) have on migration.

A solution this group proposed indicates that governments should conduct large-scale research and an imperative being inclusion of CSOs in conducting this research as CSOs are the closest to the local communities.

5. Bureaucracy and understanding of the bureaucratic language

The bureaucratic processes related to migration are oftentimes using convoluted language and that makes the documents and processes incomprehensible for a lot of persons, which also depends (mostly) on inequalities in terms of education, age, gender, social status, etc. Their complicated character results in climate change subsidies being given only to those who have the intellectual means to apply for them, migration being very privileged action, and so on.

A solution to this is simplifying the bureaucratic procedures, especially in times of crises (climate change), and using different languages, e.g., minority languages (such as Romani in our context).