

Building a Sustainable Partnership with the Citizen on Environmental Protection: **Challenges and the Way Forward**



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Introduction

Environmental protection and environmental problems are global responsibilities; thus, they require worldwide coordinated sustainable solutions. The improvement of one environmental governance indicator for a country does not necessarily translate into a better overall indicator. For instance, if illegal dumpsites are the problem, and if this problem is 'solved' by relocating them from a developed to a developing country – the solution is not sustainable. Such an unsustainable solution would mean moving waste from one room to the other room, while destroying the very home that shelters us.



Nature and environment are a constitutional responsibility for every Kosovar citizen and public institutions should provide everyone with an institutional opportunity to contribute toward environmental policy making¹. However, only 16.1% know a lot about this topic

1 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Art. 52 [Responsibility for the Environment]

while 15.2% of citizens have no knowledge on this topic; and 68.7% know a little or have average knowledge about this right.² According to the same report, gender disaggregated data about having knowledge on this topic, show a difference of 3 percentage points in favour of men. While, age disaggregated data are non-existent, though they would be informative for decision makers in terms of what age groups in society are oblivious of environmental issues and what groups are aware of such problems and challenges. These data perception statistics portray a worrisome picture of the state of play in terms of the public knowledge related to living in a healthy environment, throughout Kosovo.

On the other hand, the global scientists and leaders are calling for sustainable solutions to protect the environment from climate change before it becomes too late. The 2021 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change points out that

"It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred."³

In this global fight for protecting environment and nature while controlling the climate change, the younger generations should play a key role because they will bear the greatest burden of its impact. As such on December 2019 governments and youth activists united to sign the Intergovernmental Declaration on

2 Public Pulse Brief XXI. (2021). UNDP. Available at <https://dpl.us/m9d>

3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2021). "Climate Change 2021- The Physical Science Basis – Summary for Policymakers" Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Children, Youth and Climate Action. ⁴ This Declaration, amongst others,

acknowledges children and young people as agents of climate change;

advocates for global recognition and fulfillment of children's inalienable right to a healthy environment;

calls for strengthening the capacity of children and young people on climate change mitigation by establishing and investing in climate change and environmental education.

Moreover, a high number of youth environmental activists have been active across the world. One of them is the Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg, who from a high school student turned into a global environmental leader. Thunberg began by organizing outside of parliament protests while calling on them to adhere to all the Paris Agreement points. This initiative of her became a global Friday initiative known as Fridays for Future.⁵ This initiative has raised environmental awareness among youth population in the world and has demanded the young people to engage in environmental policy making while also requesting governments around the world to take urgent action on the climate crisis. Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 constitute 35% of the Kosovo population and over 65% are under the age 30.⁶ These demographic statistics paint a clear picture that Kosovo is a young country with a majority youth population. Thus, youth should be at the centre of environmental decisions while framing their future. Given the demographic factor, in this brief we address only youth-centered environmental public policies and youth education in environmental related policies. To what extent are youth in Kosovo

involved in environmental policy making or through what institutional mechanisms? Is there a structured institutional approach to educate youth about protecting the environment and about their right to live in a healthy environment? Do other societal actors play a role in strengthening or educating the young people about their environmental rights and environmental challenges?

Aimed at addressing these questions and finding out the extent to which a sustainable partnership is being built with the young Kosovar to protect the environment, this policy brief contributes to the onset of a public discussion on the need to increase the participation of youth in environmental policies, to educate them and to acknowledge them as agents of change.

In this brief, drawing on interviews, desk research, and our own experience as an active organization in promoting the involvement of youth in environmental governance through digital tools, we assess the current state of play of youth engagement in environmental policies. We also identify government structures responsible for education related aspects. At the end, we provide a set of policy recommendations addressing these issues aimed at increasing the knowledge and capacity of young people towards protecting the environment and being able to demand accountability from the policymakers.

⁴ Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action 9 December 2019. 25th Conference of the Parties in Madrid, Spain. Available at <https://dpl.us/901>

⁵ For more see <https://dpl.us/rvg>

⁶ For more see <https://dpl.us/jmc>

Key Policy Institutional Actors and their Role

Serious environmental problems in Kosovo are related to air, water, and soil pollution, threatened biodiversity and deforestation and they have a direct negative impact in the health of the population.⁷ Considering the country demographics discussed above, the impact is highest among youth.

In 2013, according to a World Bank report on environmental analysis in Kosovo, the environmental priorities were planned to be in line with EU acquis, steadily fulfilling EU standards within five years.⁸ According to the same source, in terms of GDP cost, the annual cost of environmental degradation in Kosovo is estimated to be up to 327 million Euro and this is close to 7% of GDP.⁹ The first document reflects a plan to improve the environmental state of play, yet after more than seven years (after 2013 World Bank report) the environmental situation continues to be worrying and faces a high-level number of problems.

While, at the time of writing this policy brief, it is 2021 and according to the most recent European Commission Report on Kosovo “Kosovo is at an early stage of preparation on environment and climate change. Limited progress was achieved...(2020).”¹⁰

The four key recommendations of the 2019 report are not fulfilled and they are reiterated in the 2020 report. These recommendations address the need to establish an effective water monitoring system, increase of the waste collection coverage, enforcing of legal provisions on environmental liability, and implementation of the climate change strategy and the action plan on climate change.

Moreover, the European Parliament in its resolution to Kosovo, have called on and encouraged the local institutions to ensure alignment with EU standards and policy objectives on climate protection and environment in line with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the strategic objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 as part of the European Green Deal.¹¹ This resolution also underlines, that the Parliament is “deeply concerned that the overwhelming majority of energy in Kosovo derives from coal, as well as the plants...”.¹² This resolution, like other documents from the EU that provide evidence based assessments, do urge institutions to act and improve the environmental situation.

Mapping key actors and programs:

Actors that guide, initiate, write, monitor, educate, and implement environmental public policies and youth involvement in such policies are found in both, the governmental and non-governmental sector, in Kosovo. In the below paragraphs, we address their activities as compared to their role and vision.

To begin with, the Kosovo Environmental Programme (KEP) is a complex program that foresees the finalization of different documents, studies, and analysis in the form of notes, minutes, training material, chapter reports and books.¹³ PKEP is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the main beneficiary institutions are the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (hereinafter, Ministry) and the Inter-Ministerial Water Council (IMWC). The latter is a committee composed of relevant Government Ministers chaired by the Deputy Prime-Minister responsible for improving the situation in the water sector through systemic

7 The Kosovo Environmental Programme (KEP). See more at <https://dpl.us/r9m>

8 World Bank. (2013). “Kosovo Country Environmental Analysis-Cost Assessment of Environmental Degradation, Institutional Review, and Public Environmental Expenditure Review.”

9 Ibid.

10 European Commission Country Report on Kosovo 2020.

11 European Parliament Resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission Report on Kosovo, March 2021. Available at <https://dpl.us/jwj>

12 Ibid.

13 The Kosovo Environmental Programme (KEP). See more at <https://dpl.us/vli>

assessment, development of new policies in line with good EU and international practices.

Second, the main beneficiary, the Ministry is responsible for drafting and implementation of all policies in the realm of environment, water, waste, management, air protection, nature protection, housing, spatial planning, and construction. Among Ministerial departments, there is a department on environment protection which has four divisions including 1) the one on water, 2) division for industrial management, 3) division for chemicals and waste, 4) division for nature protection.

Intrinsically one would think that the responsibility to inform and educate the public, in particular younger generations, falls within the remit of the Ministry. Through educating the younger generations about the need to protect the environment, we also empower them as actors in environmental governance. Thus, education remains a key precondition towards building a sustainable partnership with youth. This precondition is also entrenched in the Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action.¹⁴

However, due to restructuring of the Ministry in 2017, the Department on Education was dissolved, and the team joined the Public Communications division.¹⁵ Based on interviewing data, this Department prior to dissolution had the competences of educating citizens in relation to environmental protection and living in a healthy environment.

Activities organized by the former Department of Education in the Ministry, amongst others, included one-day environment related education classes in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. Though, since these

structural changes took place, the educational dimension has been left out and no other division has taken these responsibilities.¹⁶

Yet, it is important to note that the Ministry marks international days like the one on earth, environment and similar, while coordinating with the communications division. During these days, for educational purposes they produce various brochures and spread them among citizens, targeting youth.

Marking of these days are necessary, yet not sufficient to educate the citizen, in particular the young citizen, towards environmental protection and their right to live in a healthy environment. At the same time, the Ministry does not have any specific strategy/goal/regulation that targets youth's involvement in drafting environmental related policies. According to the interview data, it is challenging to get young people involved in such processes due to various reasons including lack of knowledge related to environment, lack of knowledge in policymaking, and not only; there is no genuine interest even among those paid to draft such policies.¹⁷

In addition, the tools employed during the drafting process are the same as for every other public policy, be it law or strategy, and they do not incorporate any different dimension to foster youth participation in drafting or monitoring of environmental policies.

Moreover, in accordance with the Law on Environmental Protection, the Ministry has established an agency named after the Environmental Protection Agency (KEPA). KEPA, a government institution, is responsible for monitoring and reporting the environmental qualities and attributes for a healthy environment and sustainable economic growth.¹⁸ Yet, none of its public activities target youth

14 Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action. 9 December 2019. 25th Conference of the Parties in Madrid, Spain. Available at <https://dpl.us/x5x>

15 Interview with Ismail Hetemaj. Head of Division for Nature Protection. Department on Protection of Nature and Water. Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure. 16 August, 2021. Prishtine.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency. For more see <https://dpl.us/yqh>

or their education related to the impact of environment in their life or their right to live in a healthy environment. Most of their activities include conferences that address the state of energy, the protection of environment through energy, or monitoring about the environment.¹⁹

Since, as explained in the beginning, this policy brief targets the education and involvement of youth in environmental policies, it is central to discuss the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports as another core policy actor in the field. The Ministry, amongst other departments, has a Youth Department. This department's mission is to strengthen and support youth voices by establishing an environment conducive to growth and participation in public life.²⁰

According to the interview data, this Ministry does not entail any objective related to the education of youth in environmental policies, yet they incorporate various activities that involve youth in raising environmental awareness about the youth.²¹ On yearly basis, they provide grants to youth non-governmental organizations, but they do not target environmental activities; however, environmental education related activities are not excluded from funding.

Furthermore, some of the youth environmental activities, mentioned by the Director of Youth, include financial support for the summer camps or various voluntary activities.²² In addition, no cooperation with the Ministry of Environment has been highlighted for similar purposes.

The role of societal actors: Other actors including formalized structures like civil society organizations or political parties and non-for-

malized structures like movements can play a role in environmental policymaking.

In Kosovo, the role of non-governmental actors, in particular civil society organizations (CSOs), in public policies and awareness raising is evident in Kosovo. There is also a high number of CSOs that target environmental policies, yet not necessarily youth.

Moreover, the participation of youth in environmental protection takes various forms like youth groups, environmental movements, youth councils and similar. Though, in Kosovo, one mainly encounters a more formal group like civil society organizations, examples of which are discussed in the above section. This portrays the immense role of CSOs as opposed to the government in regard to awareness raising in the field of environmental protection.

Among the organizations, who aim to increase the participation of youth in decision-making and to enhance their knowledge on environment is also our organization, Democracy Plus (D+). D+ has launched an online platform entitled www.ndreqe.com

This platform serves as an online tool for citizens of Kosovo, targeting youth, to report environmental related problems including illegal dumpsites. According to the public data on the platform, 3654 cases have been reported, 1563 of which have been solved by the municipalities throughout Kosovo. Moreover, D+ also holds meetings with youth throughout Kosovo to raise awareness about their right to live in a healthy environment and the consequences of living in a poor environment. Youth living in rural areas are also targeted through various meetings and gatherings. In addition, on continual basis D+ informs and encourages youth about the online platform (www.ndreqe.com)

19 For more, see the Environmental Protection Agency activities at <https://dpl.us/026>

20 Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports. For more, see <https://dpl.us/pey>

21 Interview with Xhevat Bajrami. Head of Division for Youth. Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. 12 August, 2021. Prishtine.

22 Ibid.

Moreover, there are other organizations operating in Kosovo that through grant-giving on environment target youth. For instance, Balkan Green Foundations, has funded local CSO activities related to youth inclusion in environmental decision-making, environment awareness raising campaigns at the local level, and prevention of air pollution.²³ This organization and its activities are financed by international actors like EU funds and their grant-giving schemes are based on these funds.

There is another organization named after Let's Do It Kosova! and is part of the global movement Let's Do It World! which started in Estonia in 2008. The key goal of this organization is to protect the environment by facilitating the organization of citizens in various volunteering activities towards protecting the environment throughout the country.²⁴

Overall, one can observe that civil society organizations are more active in approaching youth and educating them through the organization of various activities as compared to institutional actors. Various organizations apply a proactive method, while moving beyond the symbolic dates of Earth and Air, to aspire and educate youth about their right of living in a healthy environment.

Another key societal actor in framing environmental policies are political parties. Political parties have the capacities to raise awareness and to involve youth in environmental protection due to their set structures across cities and villages throughout the country. Yet, we cannot evidence any systemic activity held by any political party in Kosovo towards building a partnership with the youngster to prioritize and thus protect the environment.

Further analyzing the political party programs of last national elections (14 February, 2021), one can realize that the green agenda is not reflected and is not part of their programs.²⁵ If political parties do not entrench environment in their program, it is unrealistic to think that they will prioritize it once in the government or that they will facilitate the involvement of youth in environmental policymaking.

At the same time, it becomes challenging for these political parties once in power to meet the challenge of governing human interaction with the environment in the interest of sustainability, if they have not planned about it in advance.

However, the same oblivious approach to environment is not present at the local level national elections (held on 17 October, 2021). For instance, the mayor candidates for Prishtina, had environment as one of their key program pillars.²⁶ Programs like "Clean Prishtina" and "Green Prishtina" draw on a number of projects and activities at the core of which lies a sustainable environmental policy. Though, the same does not apply to all mayor candidates across the country, the case of capital is a major step forward in prioritizing environmental policy at the local political level.

To sum up, the analysis of environment mainstreaming at the local level political party program differs positively from the national level political party program. Although, one cannot acknowledge environment priority at the national level, this dimension is evident at the local level.

23 Interview with Besfort Kosova. Balkan Green Foundation. 25 August 2021, Prishtine.

24 For more on the organization and its activities, see <https://dpl.us/x8r>

25 INDEP. (2021). "Zgjedhjet Parlamentare të vitit 2021: Programet e Partive Politike dhe Agjenda e Gjelbër". INDEP Publication.

26 Arben Vitia, LVV candidate for the mayor of Prishtina. For more see Prishtina Jone. Programi Qeverisë Prishtina 2025. Perparim Rama, LDK candidate for the mayor of Prishtina. For more see <https://dpl.us/rx9> Uran Ismaili, PDK candidate for the mayor of Prishtina. For more see <https://dpl.us/vbu>

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This policy brief contributes to the onset of a public discussion on the need to encourage and facilitate the participation of Kosovo youth in environmental public policymaking, to educate them and to acknowledge them as agents of change.

The analysis has looked at the extent of youth involvement in environmental policy making and the role of societal actors in facilitating this process. Our key question addressed is the extent to which a sustainable partnership with the young Kosovar is being built to protect the environment.

Therefore, in the first part we have assessed the overall state of play based on secondary data and mapped key institutions and their role. In the second part, we have looked at the role of societal actors like civil society organizations and political parties in educating and encouraging youth to protect the environment, participate in environmental policy making and monitor the implementation of such policies.

THE ANALYSIS DEPICTS THE FOLLOWING:

- ❖ a worrying picture where the young Kosovar is not acknowledged as an agent of change, thus no coordinated institutional approach is identified to target and facilitate the participation of youth in environmental policies,
- ❖ weak institutional efforts can be evidenced towards building a sustainable partnership with the young Kosovar,
- ❖ lack of an institutional department/division responsible for the continuous education of youth towards protecting the environment and enhancing their knowledge regarding environment,
- ❖ lack of political party efforts and activities are recognized to facilitate the involvement of youth in environmental policymaking or to educate them about environment
- ❖ a proactive role of civil society organizations through various activities toward raising awareness about protection of the environment.

TO ADDRESS THE ABOVE-MENTIONED CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS, THE FOLLOWING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS NEED TO BE SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED BY RELEVANT ACTORS:

- ❖ there is a need for stronger political steer in addressing environmental challenges and prioritizing such policies,
- ❖ there is a need for an institutional address that would be responsible for the youth education dimension, as this remains a key precondition toward recognizing youth as an agent of environmental change,
- ❖ there is a need for systematic and coordinated efforts amongst institutions (Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Youth) to encourage youth participation in environmental policies while increasing their knowledge in this regard,
- ❖ political parties should play a more active role toward increasing environmental awareness among citizens, in particular the younger generations. Political parties have their own structures across the country, thus in terms of organization and management, this would not be a challenging task for them.
- ❖ civil society organizations shall continue to employ a proactive approach to environmental protection through youth environmental activities, awareness raising campaigns, and their direct involvement in monitoring environmental policies.

