

Western Balkans Climate Resilient Growth Roundtable

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Summary of Discussions

The Western Balkans Climate Resilient Growth Roundtable brought together a multi-sectoral set of representatives from Western Balkans countries as well as participants from the European Commission and development partner organizations to review the main findings for Western Balkans from the recent World Bank Turn Down the Heat report and discuss actions needed at both the national and regional levels to scale-up and complement current climate resilience efforts in the region.

The World Bank report, *Turn Down the Heat: Confronting the New Climate Normal*,¹ prepared in collaboration with the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, reviews the latest scientific evidence on climate change risks to development. With warming of close to 1.5°C above pre-industrial times already locked-in and a 40% chance to exceed 4°C before 2100 if no further action is taken, the report warns that weather extremes considered as occurring maybe every 100 years at most may soon become the “new normal.” The third in the *Turn Down the Heat* series, the report includes a deep dive into the prospects for the Western Balkans of that challenging climate regime. Water extremes, both more prevalent droughts in summer and floods in winter/spring, are expected to intensify over the region, with implications for agriculture, energy, and population health and security, such as:

- Western Balkans emerge as warming hot spots, with more frequent heat waves, spanning as much as 80% of summer months in a 4°C world.
- Water availability in Summer is expected to decrease considerably through the century: there could be a 20% increase in number of Drought Days and river discharge could be reduced by more than 45% in a 4°C world.
- Winter and spring flood risk (>100-yr) is expected to increase along the Danube, Sava, and Tisza rivers, due to more intense snow melt in spring and heavier rainfall in the winter months.
- The intensification of drought and flood risks is posing major threats to the mostly rain-fed agriculture of the Western Balkans. Crop yields in Macedonia alone could drop by 50% in a 2°C world.

¹: The report can be found at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/publication/turn-down-the-heat>

- Hydropower stands to be at risk from climate change, such as in Albania where by 2050 the annual average output from large hydropower plants could be reduced by 15%, and 20% for smaller plants. Thermal generation could also suffer. Critically, these impacts would take place in the context of growing energy demand, including for cooling.
- Health Risks could grow as climate warms, with 20% increase in heat-related mortality and the growing threats of vector-borne diseases.

Participants to the Roundtable welcomed the presentation of *Turn Down the Heat*, noting in particular the Report's regional perspective helps better apprehend climate risks, which often transcend national boundaries. With main messages from the Report in background to the Roundtable's discussions, participants engaged in a conversation on i) main climate risks of concern in each country; ii) experience on main on-going and planned initiatives in response to these risks; iii) gaps and obstacles to implementation; and iv) priorities to scale-up and build on current efforts at both national and regional levels.

The discussions highlighted that countries in the Western Balkans are already taking action to address climate change, mainly along the water, agriculture and disaster nexus. Some have undertaken, or are carrying out, in-depth assessments of climate risks and solutions for key resources (e.g., water) or sectors (e.g., agriculture); some are preparing, or have developed, climate strategies or action plans; and some are learning how to deal with, and prepare their response to, the consequences of climate change, especially in the aftermath of disasters.

Several topics came up consistently as being important areas of intervention across two or more countries, including:

- Climate Policies and Institutions: share knowledge and experience on challenges and opportunities to integrate climate considerations in national or sectoral development plans and strategies and support their effective implementation, including on indicators and institutional arrangements for facilitating multi-sectoral coordination;
- Integrated Water Resource Management: need to integrate the (new) challenges from climate variability and change into river basin management plans;
- Disaster-Risk Management: improve monitoring and forecast of hydro-meteorological conditions and disseminate this information in a way to make it timely, understandable, and actionable for a broad range of stakeholders; explore risk-financing frameworks with greater participation from private sector (e.g., catastrophe/property insurance), drawing in particular on experience from the South East Europe and Caucasus Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CRIF) or similar regional initiatives;
- Agriculture: pursue land consolidation policies to remedy fragmentation of plot and enable farmers modernize practices and technologies for higher productivity and resilience, enhance water use efficiency and productivity in agriculture (e.g., rehabilitation of irrigation and

drainage schemes, introduction of water-saving practices and technologies), introduce crop varieties and livestock breeds adapted to the new climate normal;

- Energy: continue assessment, beyond collection of anecdotal evidence, of the multiple sources of vulnerability in the energy sector (e.g., for mining operations, for hydropower, conventional generation, transmission, etc.) to systematically integrate climate considerations in the design and operation of energy systems.

A number of common obstacles on the way to climate action were mentioned across countries and the following considerations emerged from the discussion to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience to the new climate normal:

- Look beyond disasters. Building effectively resilience requires not only to integrate closely disaster-risk management and climate change adaptation (which is happening in response to recent disasters) but also to prepare for the slow-onset impacts of climate change (e.g., sea-level rise and its impact on coastal zones, ecosystems, fisheries, and tourism; gradual warming that shifts agro-ecozones and may make current agriculture practices no longer adequate).
- Make an economic case for adaptation. Participants pointed to the need to generate a case for climate action, highlighting the cost of inaction and the benefits from action, including in terms of job creation (e.g., for instance around greener, cleaner and more resilient technologies) as well as potential for no-regret action (e.g., cost-effective action robust to climate and development uncertainties). They agreed continued knowledge and experience sharing can help on these fronts, for higher awareness of solutions and benefits from action.
- Find champions at highest levels. Participants noted challenges in implementing various climate strategies or investment plans, notably given the multi-sectoral implications of climate change. Securing high-level political commitment and leadership can facilitate coordination across sectors, in particular to support coherence in the mainstreaming of climate actions in sectoral policies (e.g., water, energy, agriculture, health, and disaster policy) and their implementation agencies; and to facilitate mobilization and allocation of funds aligned with climate priorities across different sectors.
- Continue awareness raising and capacity building at all levels of society. As building resilience is a shared responsibility, participants stressed the need to engage with and build capacity of stakeholders beyond central governments and reach out to academia, media, business associations, farmers, communities, etc., including through regional networks and events to share relevant knowledge and experiences.

In conclusion participants appreciated the opportunity for dialogue and learning from each other and requested to have a follow-up meeting. They noted regional collaboration is already happening, at different scales (notably river basins) and in various fora (such as ECRAN, RCC, the Energy Commission among others), which offers various platforms to integrate climate

considerations in existing dialogue and actions. They further acknowledged regional cooperation has great potential to share relevant knowledge, information, and experiences to engage and inspire climate action.