



**POLICY  
ANSWERS**

## **The Water Resources in Kosovo**

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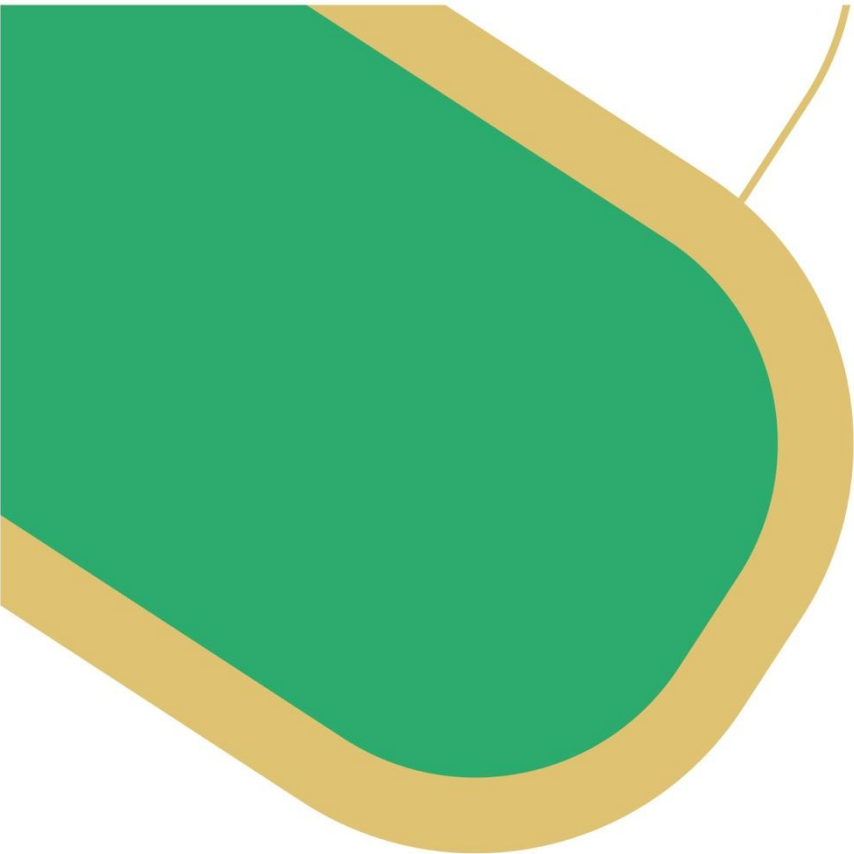
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# 1 Introduction

In a time when the world is facing the growing consequences of global warming and the on-going trend of population growth at a global level, the expected decline of water resources by 20 percent until 2040 is becoming increasingly concerning. In the context of this global situation, the situation of water resources in Kosovo\* appears even more alarming, given the fact that it is the driest country in Europe in terms of water resources<sup>2</sup>. Kosovo has about 16 percent of the average availability of water per capita per year compared to the Western Balkans region. In Kosovo, 42 percent less rainfall is accumulated compared to the average of the countries in the Western Balkans region.

Kosovo, according to estimates, is listed among the countries at risk of water stress, meaning a shortage of water when citizens need it most, particularly during summer periods, especially in the eastern and north-eastern parts of the country. Our country is also a transit country for water resources, where waters pass through Kosovo and flow into three different seas: the Black Sea through the territory of Serbia, the Adriatic Sea through the territory of Albania, and the Aegean Sea through the territory of North Macedonia. According to estimates, only ten percent of these waters remain in Kosovo.

As a factor that has influenced this situation is the transit character of water resources in Kosovo, as well as the poor maintenance and damage of surface waters, stagnation with investment in groundwater, and decades-long lack of investment in water accumulations and reservoirs. The artificial water reservoirs in which Kosovo invested heavily in the years 1960-1985, such as: Ujmani, Batllava, Badovci, and Radoniqi, with a total capacity of 563.6 million m<sup>3</sup>, when compared to the European or regional average, reflect the fact that water availability is one of the primary limiting factors for Kosovo's long-term development.

Therefore, considering the challenges that Kosovo faces in the context of water resources, as part of regular advocacy activities, Riinvest Institute, through the Green Action Space platform, organized a panel discussion at the end of January, which addressed in-depth the water resources in Kosovo and the challenges and opportunities that Kosovo has. This document summarises some of the key issues addressed in this discussion.

## 2 Challenges and opportunities for development

Kosovo's institutions have adopted laws and strategies regarding water resources and water in Kosovo in order to address the challenges that Kosovo currently faces and those in the future. Through the National Water Strategy 2017-2036, the Government of Kosovo, aims to address and create a good basis for action in terms of policies, operational actions, and investments in the water sector over a 20-year period. This document aims for an integration and sustainable development of the water sector in Kosovo, such as: providing drinking water, water for food production, irrigation of agricultural land, industry, sports and recreation, and electricity production. Among other things, it also includes the preservation and protection of water resources, economic valorisation of current water resources through more efficient management and benefiting from these resources. Relevant institutions take responsibility to address the challenges Kosovo faces, including the treatment of polluted waters through projects for building sewage treatment plants<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

<sup>2</sup> Water Security Outlook for Kosovo (2018). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>3</sup> In this panel discussion, the focus was on the challenges that Kosovo faces regarding water resources in Kosovo and the potential measures that relevant institutions should take. The following were invited to

Kosovo is exposed to flooding as a result of river pollution from waste and the exploitation of riverbeds. The strategy also aims to prevent the degradation of water resources over the years due to the rampant exploitation of rivers, damage to riverbeds, and discharge of industrial and sewage waters. In this context, the institutions' lack of understanding of the importance and urgency of Kosovo's water resources and the urgency to intervene through institutional mechanisms is also a challenge. Kosovo does not have an updated plan regarding water resources, operating with a plan from the 1980s. The reason these plans need to be updated is related to demographic trends, urban changes, and climate change. The dynamics of climate change and hydro-meteorological data that continuously change due to climate change have raised the urgency to update water resource operation and response plans. For this reason, the European Union (EU) has recommended updating these plans every six years.

In terms of legislation, strategies, and policies, there is a good infrastructure in the water sector. However, the implementation of laws and strategies, specifically the national water strategy even after its five-year review, remains a challenge that is related to several reasons: Firstly, the focus still remains on the consolidation of institutions. One of the most important challenges is the lack of human resources that affects the effective implementation of laws and strategies. Secondly, the current water resource strategy based on the law foresees that the Regional River Basin Authority (RRBA) to be an executive agency, a legal obligation that has not been implemented. All the aforementioned steps are initial steps contained in the Strategy but have not been addressed and remain current even after the five-year review of the strategy.

Kosovo needs to build a new developmental approach and philosophy regarding its water economy. This involves not only strategic investments in the development of new resources, most of which are linked to new accumulations, but also investments in developing water services. The government's focus should be on an updated master plan, as the country still uses a master plan from the 1980s. Feasibility studies have been carried out for the construction of dams to supply major cities with drinking water. These feasibility studies are expected to be completed by 2023, so that the tender process for the construction of dams can begin in 2024. In this context, feasibility studies have also begun for three other projects/dams. The focus is also on water services, which include the management and operation of water supply, sewage and treatment of polluted water. In recent years, governments have been giving importance to the treatment of polluted water through investments in projects in various cities in Kosovo. In this regard, a positive assessment has been given in the EU progress report, where Kosovo has made progress in monitoring groundwater and investments made in sewage treatment. It is worth noting that despite the lack of a more focused approach by the Kosovo government and frequent changes in government, active projects related to water resources continue to be implemented.

The role of donors in the context of water resources has been crucial in the post-war years. Until recently, donors have been the bearers of essential activities, while now they respond more to the requests of the institutions, and a partnership has been established between institutions and donors. In recent years, the focus has shifted from grants to co-financing and sustainability analysis of projects. However, the role and impact of donors, especially in technical assistance, has not been as effective due to the lack of absorptive capacity of institutions. Also, taking loans is considered unfavourable for making strategic investments. According to estimates, this is a condition imposed by creditors and the cost constitutes the loan itself. Therefore, in recent years there has been institutional awareness, and attention has been focused on combining donations with a focus on priority areas and funding by government institutions at the central and local level.

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participate in the panel: Ms. Fatlije Buza, representative from the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI), Mr. Baton Begolli, Advisor in the Interministerial Water Council (IWC), and Mr. Zeqir Veselaj, Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina (UP).

### 3 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been presented as a result of discussions with experts within the framework of the discussion on Water Resources in Kosovo:

- It is necessary to review the existing strategy as soon as possible and update it. In particular, the master plan from the 1980s should be updated and harmonized based on socio-demographic changes and urban development in Kosovo, and accompanied by an investment plan and follow-up activities for the timely preparation of projects (studies, financing sources, and project management).
- The National Water Strategy should focus not only on creating water reserves but also on protecting current water resources in Kosovo.
- Priority should be given to building institutional capacities of relevant institutions to ensure functionality and monitoring of the implementation of the strategy and laws related to water resources. The rationale for the establishment of RRBA as executive agency should be analysed.
- Through a five-year review of the national water strategy, there should be focus on concrete actions such as stopping the discharge of polluted water by industry and stopping the exploitation of rivers.
- Through civil society advocacy in cooperation with all government institutions at the central and local levels and the media, there should be more active involvement of citizens and the private sector to raise awareness regarding the importance of water resources and their protection from pollution.





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POLICY ANSWERS (R&I POLICY making, implementation AND Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS) supports policy coordination in the Western Balkans and with the EC and the EU. 14 partner organisations, representing network nodes in the region and EU expert organisations, support policy dialogue through formal meetings (such as ministerial and steering platform and ad-hoc policy meetings), monitoring and agenda setting, capacity building and implementation of the EU's Western Balkan Agenda, as well as the alignment of thematic priorities. The project implements regional pilot activities and offers an information hub based on the [westernbalkans-fohub.eu](https://westernbalkans-fohub.eu) online information platform. The partners provide analytical evidence via monitoring and mapping activities of the stakeholder ecosystem, of the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda and of the Western Balkans' integration into the European Research Area as well as via strategic foresight. POLICY ANSWERS also allows for tailored and targeted capacity building activities in the Western Balkans as well as regional alignment of priorities in relation to the digital transformation, the green agenda and towards healthy societies. Pilot activities provide learning opportunities on policy and programme level and reach out to final beneficiaries related to improved academia-industry cooperation, researcher mobility, inclusion of youth in policy processes, promotion of research infrastructures and increased innovation skills in all areas.

