With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

PRINCIPLES

FOR BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY

WRITTEN BY THE BALKAN GREEN DEAL COALITION

WHY WE NEED BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY

In trying times like the current COVID-19 crisis, we are all reminded of our need for interconnectedness and cooperation within and between communities, generations, institutions, countries and sectors. Every step we take now towards tackling this crisis will be the foundation for building the solutions and resilience for all other pre-existing crises such as the climate crisis, the social and economic inequities and the interwoven systemic injustices. We are at a tipping point; when bold demands for equitable and more democratic societies can only be heard through coordinated collective actions towards the socially just and environmentally sound future we want to live in. A bold recovery plan that will help our economies and societies build preparedness and resilience for all of the national and global challenges that we are facing and are going to face, in this transitioning period is a must.

THE TIME FOR A BOLD COLLECTIVE ACTION TO BUILD A BETTER POST-COVID FUTURE IS NOW.

The scale of the intersecting challenges that we face can only be taken on with a big bold joint plan. Small, detached incremental changes won't cut it. We need a strong united front with a radical vision of the future, rooted in solidarity, justice and care for our communities and our environment. To work both individually and collectively towards that just and sustainable future, we must build a collective vision of a post-COVID-19 world that centers the voices of the deliberately silenced; the individuals and communities that are most affected, especially in times of crisis, by the extractive and exploitative capitalist system that is in decay. To work towards that future, we need to be able to visualise it and to jointly plan towards it.

THIS IS WHERE THE BALKAN GREEN DEAL AND THE BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY PLAN COME IN.

We need a Balkan Green Deal and a Balkan Green & Just Recovery Plan that put people and the planet first and set out radical demands for building back better from the interlinked crises we are facing now. To create these visions and demands and the movement around them, we need everyone on board; from human rights organisations and LGBTQI+ rights groups, to feminist groups, to environmental justice and migrant justice groups, to farmers' and mining workers unions, to scientists, artists, healthcare workers, educators and youth.



BALKAN GREEN DEAL

To take on the system we need a bold vision that would be drafted through building seemingly unlikely allyships and collecting visions from individuals, groups, and communities throughout the process. We envisage the Balkan Green Deal to reflect the collective vision of 2030 we build together in the process, the joint dreams of a world of abundances for the many on a livable planet.



THE BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY PLAN

None of us can work on the intersections of the crises that we face alone. The Balkan Green & Just Recovery Plan is envisaged to be a pathway towards reaching the future we collectively design in the Balkan Green Deal. We believe that we need to plan the actions we are going to take individually, with our groups, organisations, and/or communities to build back better from the pandemic and the economic and social failures, in order to transform our societies into places that we want to live in.

THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS OF COLLECTIVE CREATION OF THE BALKAN GREEN DEAL AND THE BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY PLAN UPON COMPLETION WILL BE SHARED WITH RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS OUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND MPS, AS WELL AS WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND MEPS, TO THE EACEA, AND BE PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE OF YOUTH AND THE 26TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES OF THE UNFCCC.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DOCUMENT:

Building on the foundation of shared principles for a green & just recovery, we invite movements, initiatives and organizations across the Balkans to share the guiding principles for specific policy recommendations informed by their lived experiences and voices of the communities they work in, with and represent. We offer these principles as a shared platform to amplify each others' voices and work together towards a more resilient and just world that puts people and ecosystems first.

IN ORDER TO CREATE THIS DOCUMENT, WE PUT FORWARD SOME STEPS FOR ALL OF US TO FOLLOW:

1.Read the whole document carefully (open letter and principles)
2.Discuss with your community/initiative/organization how would you like to support the joint initiative for a Balkan Green & Just Recovery Plan and Open Letter from movements & organizations across the Balkans
3.If you have comments and contributions and/or want to support it, email us at balkancoalition2020@gmail.com with the full name of your initiative/group/ organisation.

TOPICS TO THINK ABOUT AND DISCUSS BEFORE CONTRIBUTING TO THE DOCUMENT:

1.How did COVID-19 change our perceptions of life and work?What do we see as a green & just recovery after COVID-19 on a local level?
2.What do we want to prioritize in order to have a green & just recovery?
3.How do we challenge existent thinking and inform policy & practice?
4.What are the important steps and processes that need to be taken? Which policies and solutions need to be implemented?
5.How do we see the cooperation between communities and authorities in the Balkans regarding the recovery?
6.How do we build the joint movement to collectively push for these changes on different levels and different fronts?

THE CREATION AND BASE OF THE BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY PLAN:

The following principles for green & just recovery have been recognized by numerous movements, organizations, initiatives and countries around the globe. We have drafted the concept for the Balkan Green & Just Recovery Plan following the principles laid out by allied groups and organizations in order to inspire us, check what works for us and what to adapt to our context, as well as what to lay out in our principles for a green **& just recovery for the Balkans.**

YOU CAN READ MORE ABOUT THE RESPONSES IN THE FOLLOWING LINKS:

- Time to invest in a healthy future: Time for a Green & Just Recovery
- 350.org Open letter for Just Recovery
- Scotland's Just and Green Recovery from COVID-19
- Just Recovery with the Indigenous-led struggle for decolonization
- Feminist Economic Recovery Plan
- EU global response to COVID-19
- Green Sacrifice Zones, or Why a Green New Deal Cannot Ignore the Cost Shifts of Just Transitions
- Request and recommendations for a sustainable recovery and public policy reform for Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Zahtjev za zeleni oporavak i zeleni rast Hrvatske
- Green Recovery for Albania
- Joint NGO proposals on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans



A Just Recovery from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic demands swift and unprecedented action from national governments and the international community. Choices being made right now will shape our...

350.org

OPEN LETTER

Across the world, communities, institutions and governments are engaged in an unprecedented global effort to save lives and protect the most vulnerable. As Coronavirus and climate chaos tear apart people's lives, we are seeing pre-existing inequalities laid bare and exacerbated as the poorest suffer the most. Our daily lives are in upheaval and will continue to be so for the unforeseen future, yet a simple return to business-as-usual is both unrealistic and undesirable.The COVID-19 crisis has made visible how inequality is lethal to human life, but it has also shone a light on acts of solidarity and cooperation and centred the vital role of public services, key workers and unpaid carers. Amidst a global threat to human rights and democracy, this crisis has also brought forward the possibility of an economic revival that ensures resilience to future crises, including the climate emergency.

Hundreds of groups, initiatives and organizations around the globe endorse jointly created Principles of a Just Recovery. As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and prepare to rebuild, movements and organizations across the Balkans want governments and institutions to know that we cannot go back to the way things were. We are standing on the threshold between the old world and the next and we must choose to build the socially equitable and environmentally-safe future we need.

The following principles for green & just recovery for the region go way beyond the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans that is put forward by the European Commission. As decision-makers take steps to ensure immediate relief and long-term recovery, it is imperative that they consider the interrelated crises of wealth inequality, racism, discrimination and ecological decline (notably the climate crisis) which existed long before COVID-19, and now risk being intensified. A structured involvement in decision-making on tackling the intertwined crises between governmental institutions, civil society and the most affected must be ensured. Beyond a national response; a regional approach must be taken in order to ensure positive transformations that shift us away from the current unjust and unsustainable system.

Recovery efforts must not take us backwards; they must accelerate the transition towards a more healthy, sustainable, and equitable society. To do so, we have identified Principles for a Balkan Green & Just Recovery for the people and the planet. These principles stretch beyond immediate, emergency responses to consider how we might build an economy that supports all people, instead of people working to support the economy. Overall, national and regional recovery efforts should move us toward a diversified economy and systems that:

- **Put an end to social and economic inequity;**
- **Respect planetary boundaries;Restore ecosystems;**
- **Protect the soil, land, water, and air;**
- **Uphold human rights and decency, do not reproduce colonial effects and Indigenous land dispossession in the course of just transition;**
- **Support people, even who are not in the workforce, to thrive;**
- **Create decent low-carbon jobs;**
- **Foster social, emotional, and cultural health and resiliency from infants to elders, from individuals to whole communities.**

We, the undersigned groups and organisations, call for a coordinated regional yet global response to COVID-19 to contribute to a green & just recovery. Responses at every level must uphold these principles:

PRINCIPLES FOR BALKAN GREEN & JUST RECOVERY



1.PUTTING PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING FIRST, NO EXCEPTIONS.

Health is a human right and is heavily dependent on the health and wellbeing of ecological systems. Recognizing this, ensures that all policies and programs address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health and are responsive to the climate emergency, which is, in itself, a health crisis. To tackle this, we need to have public services for people, not profit:

- Ensure access to quality healthcare services for all
- Make necessary investments in expanding the healthcare system and infrastructure so as to cater to everyone in need
- Local and regional support centers for physical and mental health
- Equal access to clean water for cities, suburbs and rural areas, for people and ecosystems
- Ensure food justice for all; establish publicly-funded programs for fulfilling everyone's basic dietary needs
- Provide decent housing for all
- Ensure adequate income for everyone
- Develop policies and make investments that keep communities and workplaces, particularly those on the frontlines, safe
- Strengthen democracy and respect for human rights through shifting towards direct democracy
- Acknowledge the rights of nature for nature's own sake as well as for the sake of future generations
- Increase the resilience of our health and social systems – expand and invest in health services, social services and frontline services everywhere
- Aim to provide publicly-funded, quality elderly and child care
- Provide direct support to teachers, educators, artists and creatives
- Provide a platform for youth voices in tackling and dealing with the crises to be heard
- Ensure services are public, culturally safe, linguistically appropriate, digitalised when necessary, and accessible to all without discrimination based on status, location, or circumstance – including people in remote communities, migrants, and undocumented people.evaluate offers.



2.PRIORITIZE THE NEEDS OF WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES, NOT CORPORATE EXECUTIVES.

Assistance directed at specific industries must be channelled to communities and workers, not shareholders or corporate executives, and never to corporations. Steps to achieve this should:

- Center the voices of affected citizens and provide platforms for direct participation in decision-making
- Create and provide a platform for People's Councils that support and directly assist the needs of workers and affected communities
- Build solidarity and equity between each other and with migrant communities
- Build resilience in the intersections of the food-water-energy-economy-decision-making structures, for instance:

Food and Agriculture:

- Build schools and neighbourhoods with outdoor spaces for leisure and community gardens for joint food cultivation
Promote local & small scale agriculture
- Put subsidies and laws and bylaws in place for the proliferation of green roofs
- Ensure food sovereignty & food supply independence of cities and encourage self-sufficiency through community gardens, green roofs, etc.
- Support and invest in environmentally friendly agriculture, organic farming, agroforestry, high nature value agriculture and permaculture
- Increase the support of rural circular economy through appropriate investments and

Energy:

- Tackle fuel and energy poverty, especially for marginalized groups and communities
- Design policies nationally and regionally that prevent shifting costs and hiding the effects of minerals' extraction needed for a just transition and 100% renewable energy
- Immediately impose a ban on new investments in fossil fuel projects
- Ban on new investments in hydropower plants in protected areas; adopt a document with "No-Go Zones" for hydropower projects
- Cut subsidies to fossil fuel industries and tax the existing ones appropriately - channel the money into supporting the requalification of workers and into good practices instead
- Ensure just transition for workers and communities in the fossil fuel industry and in other carbon-intensive industries like cement, steel, etc.
- Set up an appropriate legislative framework for decarbonisation and decentralization of the energy system
- Set up an appropriate legislative framework for community-owned and community-controlled decentralised renewable energy projects (solar & wind), starting with people and communities that are transitioning away from fossil fuels projects
- Promote energy efficiency models and incentives for households and communities
- Reduce and eventually eliminate pollution from existing state-owned companiesProvide the necessary legislative framework and investments for retrofitting of homes and buildings for each household
- Ensure investments, infrastructure and incentives for building and mass use of green transport: bicycle paths, electric buses and trams, railways, charging stations for electric vehicles, etc.
- Ensure the design and redesign of (rural) communities and urban neighbourhoods with functional public spaces in close proximity: parks and green areas, (open) markets, kindergartens, schools, public services; use of best practices, eg. the Barcelona superblocks

Decision-making and governance:

- Design and promote tools and platforms for participatory and direct democracy
- Set up rotational governance models; public rotation in community councils and in other public functions positions
- Employ green governance mechanisms at diverse levels of decision making, ranging from the personal to the global, always centering affected communities on the frontlines of extraction of minerals and resources for a transition to a low-carbon society
- Re-imagine public institutions, set up models of polycentric governance
- Set up a set of principles and a certain positive impact that the ones taking up public office exhibit and have exhibited in the past
- Ensure centralised decision-making and decentralised implementation of strategies on use of (natural) resources
- Ensure municipalisation of commonsEnsure decentralised community ownership and control over infrastructure and services
- Set up a joint coalition amongst Balkan municipalities - Green Municipalities Belt
- Ensure enforcement of the “polluter pays” principle, establish mechanism for transparent and accurate identification and tracking of all climate and environment-related taxes, adopt and put in place a policy for investing these taxes and fines in programmes and projects that facilitate the transition to renewables
- Ensure fair and sustainable public procurement



3. PROVIDE ECONOMIC RELIEF DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE.

Focus on people and workers – particularly those marginalised in existing systems – our short-term needs and long-term conditions. More specifically, center economic justice and resilience by ensuring:

- That affected people's voices are centered in any relief support provided
- That workers and most marginalised people and communities are seen to first
- Relief provided directly to the people, not through companies & corporations
- Wealth redistribution through different financial mechanisms (progressive tax, wealth levies, universal basic income, a cap on max income, etc.)
- Food justice for all; establish publicly-funded local programs for fulfilling everyone's basic dietary needs
- Start by providing locally grown and cultivated food and by not taxing basic food needs (bread, milk, flour, salt, oil)The establishment of models for providing a universal basic income for everyone
- The building of economic models that center around the wellbeing of people and ecosystems Production only within resource capacities
- Jobs creation and guarantee, partnerships between communities, governments and businesses and civil society
- A ban on corporate influence and corporate capture of policymaking and relief support



4. CREATE RESILIENCE FOR FUTURE CRISES.

We cannot recover from the current crisis by incrementally fixing systems that will cause the next crisis. We must invest in sustainable infrastructure and build resiliency within communities, ensuring that people can access essential public services and meet their basic needs. We must create millions of decent jobs that will help power a just recovery and transition for workers and communities to the zero-carbon future we need. This should be achieved by supporting and promoting social and environmental justice and resilience and strengthening collective health through specific strategies and policies that advance:

- Acknowledge, celebrate and enable just transition initiatives led by frontline and affected communities such as: Indigenous knowledge-based sustainable forestry, local and Indigenous climate-resiliency policy plans and frontline-community energy-democracy projects
- Community-wide (both rural and urban) disaster and risk reduction plans that are centered around local knowledge, and involve the whole community
- Participatory and direct governance models
- Ecological systems' learning for all, from infants to elders
- Collective wellbeing of ecosystems and communities
- Low-carbon work and decent compensation
- Quality public services for all (social services, healthcare, education)
- Building green public spaces & public luxuries for all
- Redistribution of work, reduced work hours and expanded leisure time
- Supporting care work, housework and creative work
- Radical climate action & nature restoration activitiesNature-based holistic education centering care & the development of critical thoughtDecentralization & decarbonization of the energy system

- Localised production and consumption of goods and services produced by small environmentally friendly businesses/collectives/cooperatives
- Small (green) businesses that employ marginalised groups(only as a possibility in the short run)
- Incentives for environmental services provided by communities, organisations, groups and individuals (e.g. compensation for planting trees, greening of cities; clean-ups of beaches, etc.)
- Mass investments and organising the return of ecosystems to their previous state (ecosystem restoration, rewilding), environmental and awareness-raising projects on environment and climate crisis
- Institutional and international support in public mobilisation and organising in preventing the worst consequences of climate change-induced catastrophes

Discussions around resilience of future cities must include prevention and disaster risk reduction (DRR), including:

- Flood hazards, addressing the increased risk of flooding
- Occurrence of heat waves and urban heat islands in the city
- The need for separation of fecal sewerage, setting up storm sewers and other adequate DRR infrastructure
- Alleviating the negative consequences of strong winds damaging city greenery and (residential) buildings
- The prevention of high-level sun exposure of boulevards and pedestrian zones in the city centers because of the absence of tall greenery, including in residential areas
- Use of passive heating/cooling to minimize energy use
- District heating, locally produced and used renewable energy
- Establishing operations plans - emergency communications, protecting records/inventory, securing interior environments
- Establishing an innovative team in city governance structures that will lead cities' resilience efforts

KEY PRINCIPLES TO CENTER BUILDING OUR SOCIETIES' RESILIENCE AROUND

- Develop DRR and prevention plans through participative democratic methods and broaden participation in designing and implementing
- Center the needs of the people (citizens and small businesses) during crises Foster complex adaptive systems thinking
- Maintain biological and ecological diversity
- Encourage learning
- Promote gender equity in all actions
- Promote polycentric governance, a multiple governing bodies interact to make and enforce rules within a specific policy arena or location. It is considered to be one of the best ways to achieve collective action in the face of disturbance and change. It represents flexible solutions for self-organisation where more formal procedures seem to fail



5.BUILD SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY ACROSS BORDERS

In a globalized world, what happens to one of us matters to all of us. A green & just recovery plan for the Balkans must be guided by the principles of equity, solidarity, and sustainability across domestic and international relations. Recovery efforts must honour and expand human rights, including the rights of local and affected communities, as well as migrant communities, and advance gender equity while opposing authoritarian regimes and oppressive systems.Emergency expenditures and measures must not be used as an excuse to subvert or suspend human rights, to centralize or reduce checks and balances on power, or to revert to austerity, protectionism, xenophobia, racism, ableism or pre-pandemic systems that sustain structural inequalities. They must advance increased support and regional collaboration between the Balkan countries and communities. We must not let the structural inequalities and oppressive systems use the crisis as an excuse to trample on human rights, civil liberties, and democracy. In that regard, we call on governments, institutions, national and international agencies and groups to:

- Recognize class struggles, and break through the nationalism that is currently nurtured across the Balkans
- Plan joint actions to combat the pandemic and the interconnected crises
- Exchange best practices, share experiences and communicate more effectively and more unitedly as a region
- Increase awareness about the topics of common interest such as the climate emergency and the ecological collapse
- Reclaim the commons - build stronger and more resilient communities with each and every one of our actions
- Hold spaces and platforms for people and communities' from across the region to collaborate and cooperate

- Stand united in front of the international community (including the EU)
- Denounce and resist Eurocentric development logic, the replication of a form of climate colonialism, the reproduction of 'green sacrifice zones' and stand in solidarity with communities and movements on the frontlines of mineral extraction around the world
- Weave networks of collaborations and solidarity with resistance community and people's struggles for climate and social justice from across the globe

---

SIGNATORIES:

Kolektiv Z - Young Friends of the Earth Macedonia City of Skopje Innovation Center - Skopje LabSmartUp Social Innovation LabEnvironmental Center for Development Education and Networking - EDENInstitute for Environmental Policy (IEP), AlbaniaEnvironmental Citizens' Association "Front 21/42", North MacedoniaValentina Gjorgievska ALBRIE XHEMAILI-Young European Attache for Western Balkans (North Macedonia)

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union