

The Just Green Transitions Policy Landscape

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# The Just Green Transitions Policy Landscape

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The core dimensions of JGTs, as outlined in Chapter 2, are wide-ranging, which means the concept is understood, interpreted, and defined heterogeneously by different institutional actors, sectors, and other key stakeholders, including international organisations, industries, unions, environmental lobbyists, and civil society groups. Consequently, the methods for achieving JGTs are sometimes unclear and dependent on how different actors perceive transitions in terms of scale, context, and time (Shaker & Berisha, 2025). The

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high level of conceptual differentiation is reflected in the evolution of the JGT term at the international, national, regional, and local policy levels, where the overall focus on different JGT dimensions has changed and developed over time. The chapter provides an overview of the evolution of JGT policies at the supranational level and also within a Western Balkan context.

### 3.2 JUST GREEN TRANSITION POLICY EVOLUTION AT THE SUPRANATIONAL LEVEL

The origins of the term ‘just transition’ go back to the United States during the 1970s and the American Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union leader, Tony Mazzocchi (Moodie et al., 2021). During the ‘ban-the-bomb’ peace movement, Mazzocchi lobbied for labour unions and the national government to support workers whose jobs might be threatened by disarmament, receiving support comparable to that provided by the GI Bill of Rights, which helped millions of World War II veterans’ gain peacetime education and employment (Tapia et al., 2025, in this volume). Later, in the 1980s, Mazzocchi worked actively to bring labour unions and environmental movements together, arguing that a ‘super fund’ for workers was required to provide financial, educational, and training support for blue-collar workers at risk of unemployment in industries threatened by new environmental legislation (Roessler, 2016). In the 1990s, the ‘super fund’ was retroactively named the ‘just transition fund’ and officially endorsed by North American labour organisations. These early JGT developments focused solely on the social dimension of JGTs and the need to address the potentially negative impacts of environmental regulations and industrial closures on workers and citizens, including immediate job losses and long-term unemployment (Thomas, 2021). Mazzocchi deserves credit for considering social impacts during a period where climate policy discussions largely focused on the environmental and economic dimensions of JGTs (Tapia et al., 2025, in this volume). The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm introduced climate governance and environmental issues onto the global agenda, leading to the development of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). During the 1980s, climate and environmental ‘sustainability’ became a popular term and goal in policy circles due to the 1983 Brundtland Report produced by the UN Commission on Environment and Development (Tavares, 2022). The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit) led to the establishment of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to combat human interference with the climate and stabilise greenhouse gas emissions. The first UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) was held in Berlin in 1995, which started climate negotiations that led to the creation of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (COP III Kyoto Summit) that established legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The term ‘just transition’ was not central to these discussions. The environmental dimension of climate

transitions dominated these international climate policy debates focusing on promoting long-term environmental sustainability through targeted reductions in greenhouse gases (Tavares, 2022). The carbon reduction targets outlined in the Kyoto Protocol were a highly contentious topic for international trade unions as they were concerned about the societal impacts that these climate targets would have for primary and secondary jobs. Trade unions were faced with the difficult dilemma of addressing the eminent environmental threat to society while protecting the interests of their industrial affiliates and workers (Thomas, 2021). The merger between the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Christian World Confederation of Labour (WCL) into the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2006 represented an attempt to strengthen the capacity of international trade unions to influence climate policies (Ibid). With this merger, the ITUC gained member status within the UNFCCC, and the concept of just transition returned to the forefront of the global climate debate. As Johansson (2023) notes, working in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the ITUC, the term ‘just transition’ was used to illustrate the ITUC’s support for strengthened climate action was compatible with its core mission to secure social justice for workers and affected communities. Once again, the social dimension of transitions became central to the debate around climate and environmental policies. This was evident at COP 13 in Copenhagen where the notion of just transition was included in the draft text for negotiation (Johansson, 2023). Although the just transition was not included in the final text from the Copenhagen summit, it was included in the Cancun Agreement at COP16, which noted that ‘addressing climate change requires a paradigm shift towards building a low-carbon society [...] while ensuring a just transition of the workforce that creates decent work and quality jobs.’ The COP also recognised ‘the importance of [...] promoting a just transition of the workforce [and] the creation of decent work and quality jobs.’ The commitment of the ITUC to representing the social dimension in debates within the UNFCCC culminated in the term’s inclusion in the 2015 Paris Agreement (COP 21 Paris Summit). Johansson (2023) notes that during discussions over the Paris Agreement an alliance between the ITUC and other civil society organisations advocated for ‘a common article introducing a rights-based approach to climate action with reference to ensuring the respect, protection, promotion, and fulfilment of human rights, including indigenous rights, gender rights, intergenerational equity, food sovereignty, and a just transition of the workforce that creates decent work and quality jobs.’ In the final agreement, the term just transition was separated in the text and given its recognition in the phrase ‘[t]aking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities’. The ITUC has used the just transition concept to strike a balance between meeting climate and environmental objectives while protecting and equipping workers most at risk from climate interventions. This is confirmed by Rosemberg (2017),

who notes that the just transition ‘can be understood as the conceptual framework in which the labour movement captures the complexities of the transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, highlighting public policy needs and aiming to maximise benefits and minimise hardships for workers and their communities in this transformation’. In 2015, the ILO published its own guidelines for a just transition where it defined just transition as ‘greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent working opportunities and leaving no one behind.’ (International Labour Organisation, 2015) The guidelines outline the need for high levels of investment in low-carbon technologies, a social dialogue and consultations between policymakers and affected groups; proactive labour market policies based on social protection and worker rights, including financial support and retraining opportunities for the unemployed; early-stage research into the potential socio-economic impacts of climate policies; and the development of local economic diversification plans (Ibid). The guidelines also make a distinction between social investment policies (e.g. active labour market policies and training and re-skilling policies to increase workers’ employability in a greener economy) and social protection policies (e.g. unemployment and minimum income benefits), meaning that both are required within a just transition framework (Moodie et al., 2021). The primary focus of the guidelines is, therefore, on addressing the social dimension of transitions and the need to protect workers’ jobs and provide retraining opportunities. However, the environmental, economic, and technical dimensions of JGTs are recognised in the guidelines through the need for greening the economy through high levels of investment in carbon-neutral technology. The democratic, governance, and communicative dimensions come through the guidelines as they argue that transitions require a collaborative effort based on inclusive and transparent dialogue with a range of actors and citizens. After the publication of the ILO guidelines, the multi-dimensional nature of JGTs became increasingly evident in other key international policy documents, including the UN 2030 Agenda and the corresponding 17 Sustainable Development Goals published in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs advocate for transformative climate and environmental actions, highlighting connections between sustainable development’s environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The COP24 event entitled ‘Just Transition for All’ held in Katowice in 2018 resulted in the multi-dimensional JGT approach outlined in ‘Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration’ (Tavares, 2022). The Declaration emphasised the social and environmental dimensions, stating that transitions should focus on creating work opportunities and quality jobs, while addressing environmental goals. The technical and economic dimensions are evident in references to JGTs enhancing economic growth and the need to ensure climate-resilient infrastructure. The governance and democratic dimensions of JGTs are present in the Declaration, which notes ‘the importance of a participatory and representative process of social dialogue involving all social partners.’ This reference showcases that transitions are a joint collaborative venture but falls short of

suggesting direct citizen engagement in the process. The spatial dimension is also recognised in the Declaration, which acknowledges ‘the specific needs and special circumstances of developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.’ Finally, the resilience dimension is referenced in the Declaration, which states that there is a need to enhance resilience in countries most vulnerable to the impacts of JGTs. The various agreements, guidelines, and declarations referenced above are strong on just transition rhetoric, but difficult to put into practice as they do not come with an implementation plan and funding. In response to these implementation obstacles, at the UN Climate Action Summit held in New York 2019, 46 countries committed to developing practical just transition strategies (Tavares, 2022). Similarly, the 2020 European Union Green Deal (EUGD) became the most comprehensive effort to deliver JGTs providing both implementation plan mechanism and substantial funding (European Union 2019). The EUGD follows the EU’s long history of supporting regions in industrial transition. The original European Coal and Steel Community provided technical and economic assistance for different regions undergoing industrial reconstruction. More recently, the 2017 Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition focused on providing guidance for European coal regions in transition. As part of this initiative, the EU Just Transition Platform was designed to facilitate an exchange of best transition practices, strategies, and projects that could guide the transition process in declining coal regions. Building on these initiatives, the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) was introduced as part of the EUGD to ensure that ‘no person or place is left behind’ because of climate transitions (European Commission, 2021). The JTM is split into three main pillars. The Just Transition Fund (Pillar 1) provides financial support to regions and sectors dependent on fossil fuels. The InvestEU Just Transition Scheme (Pillar 2), delivers budgetary support for private sector investments that support transitions. Finally, the Public Loan Facility (Pillar 3), supports public sector transition investments. Financial support is available to all member states but focuses on the most carbon-intensive regions and citizens most vulnerable to transitions (European Commission, 2021). The JTM will protect them by:

- supporting the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient activities;
- creating new jobs in the green economy;
- offering re-skilling opportunities;
- investing in public and sustainable transport;
- providing technical assistance;
- investing in renewable energy sources;
- improving digital connectivity;
- providing affordable loans to local public authorities;
- improving energy infrastructure, district heating, and transportation networks (European Commission, 2021).

EU member state access to transition funding, implemented within the remit of EU Cohesion Policy, is predicated on the development of Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs). TJTPs outline regional just transition processes up until 2030, identifying (1) which EU member state regions should require transition support; (2) the main climate-related challenges these regions face; (3) targeted technical, socio-economic and environmental transition actions; and 4) governance mechanisms needed to help implement these actions. EU member states have now developed and ratified their TJTPs which gives them access to dedicated financing under the pillars of the JTM. (European Commission, 2021). The aims and objectives of the JTM and TJTPs indicate an attempt to balance the technical, economic, environmental, and social dimensions of JGTs. The technical, economic, and environmental dimensions are reflected in the EU's commitment to investing in carbon-neutral and environmentally friendly production technologies, transport, renewable energies, and digitalisation, whereas the social dimensions are highlighted in the worker protection rights and re-skilling opportunities offered (Moodie et al., 2021). The spatial dimension of the just transition is embedded within the JTM as the Commission highlight the important role of regions and cities in guiding just transition processes: 'Citizens, depending on their social and geographic circumstances, will be affected in different ways. Not all Member States, regions and cities start the transition from the same point or have the same capacity to respond. These challenges require a strong policy response at all levels.' (European Commission, 2019). The territorial focus of the TJTPs is in keeping with the Commission's recent emphasis on territorial governance and place-based policymaking, such as the development of regional smart specialisation strategies, in addition to applying the concept of 'active subsidiarity' advocating a central role of regions in EU policymaking (Moodie et al., 2021).

JGT processes require effective institutional and stakeholder collaboration across multiple levels of governance. The governance, democratic and communication dimensions are highlighted in documents relevant to the EUGD, JTM and JTF (European Commission, 2019, 2021). The European Commission notes that TJTPs should be developed and implemented through open and inclusive processes based on local and regional knowledge and expertise to ensure that climate transition policies meet the needs of citizens and leave no one behind (European Commission, 2021). In a key passage within a communication document on the EU Green Deal, the Commission further outlines the core democratic and communication dimensions of the just transition: 'This transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. Since it will bring substantial change, active public participation and confidence in the transition is paramount if policies are to work and be accepted. A new pact is needed to bring together citizens in all their diversity, with national, regional, local authorities, civil society and industry working closely with the EU's institutions and consultative bodies (European Commission, 2019) In this excerpt, there is a strong emphasis on the democratic and

communication dimensions of the transition, particularly the need for open and inclusive social dialogue with citizens to promote trust, acceptance and support for TJGT policies. While the Commission strongly advocates that climate transition processes should be open and inclusive of all stakeholders and citizens, particularly underrepresented minority groups, in practice, there has been no significant citizen participation in the preparation of the TJTPs across the EU's transition regions (Georgieva & Ferry, 2023, 2024). There is, therefore, a need for further analysis on how best to include citizens directly in transition processes from a governance, policy, and communication perspective (Balz et al., 2023). Furthermore, TJTPs have been criticised by trade unions and civil society groups who have voiced concern that plans are too focused on the economic and technical dimensions of transitions while neglecting the potential social dimensions. This is largely because TJTP processes have been dominated by national governments and sectoral actors, with a constrained role for sub-national level institutions and other key stakeholders, including NGOs and societal groups (Moodie et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders have equal access to the process, so different voices, ideas and perspectives are recognised in the final plans.

### 3.3 JUST GREEN TRANSITION POLICIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

In their process for EU accession, the WB countries have started to take measures in the framework of Just Green Transition (Berisha, 2025a, 2025b). These can be seen across the four main pillars of JGT: governance, technological, socio-economic, and ecological. The different measures can be categorised in aspects such as administrative and governance changes, policy development to support green transition, and direct investment in infrastructure and technology. This section of the book's introductory chapter will discuss some of the main drivers supporting these measures, including international and EU frameworks, national policy frameworks, and regional or local ones.

*The Paris Agreement* has been signed by 5 of the WB countries and offers a wider framework for intervention in adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Meanwhile, Kosovo\*,<sup>1</sup> although not a direct signatory of the agreement due to its status and representation within the United Nations Framework, through bottom-up initiatives, is showing its commitment to decarbonisation and climate action, including the voluntary preparation of the NDC (Dietachmair et al., 2024). These measures have been turned into national legislation and strategies, leading to a direct impact in orienting governance and policies. While the focus is tackling climate change, they contribute to achieving also JGT.

<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The *UN Sustainable Development Goals* and the *Sendai Framework 'On Disaster Risk Reduction'* (DRR) are other important global actions supporting green transition. Both frameworks have been ratified at the national level, leading to legal, governance, and policy changes in the WB countries. The Sendai Framework has brought changes in the conception of civil protection sectors, going from a practice of managing 'emergencies/disasters' to managing and reducing risks. From a sectorial approach that deals with disaster events and manages the consequences, it has changed towards an integrated and comprehensive approach that reduces and manages risk from disasters. These have brought changes and established new legal frameworks, institutions, financing mechanisms, and instruments that can be used for policy development (Allkja et al., 2022). For example, now countries at national, regional, and local levels must develop Risk Assessment Strategies as well as Strategies for Disaster Risks Reduction. It is important to understand that some of the main 'natural' disasters are exacerbated by climate change, therefore there is a direct link between DRR policies and adaptation to climate change, thus contributing to JGT. The EU is one of the main drivers of JGT. Besides policies at the EU level, a tailored policy document has been prepared to orient the roadmap for green transition for the WB, respectively '*Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*'. The guideline offers policy and technical solutions for WB countries to follow in their efforts of green transition and supports governance and financing guidance. In addition, an Economic and Investment Plan has been adopted, which will support the WB countries to implement the Green Agenda. The EU has committed 1.25 billion Euros to support implementation through four flagship pillars: the Environment and Climate, Clean Energy, Sustainable Transport and Private Sector Development. Besides the above, the EU, through the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), provides additional assistance to support the green transition with direct investments in strategic projects. These funding opportunities tackle project preparation (design), capacity building, and direct investment in project implementation. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is another way the EU impacts WB in Just Green Transition. In this aspect, the most notable are territorial and cross-border cooperation programs (CBC). On the one hand, CBC programs are either bilateral or trilateral, and territorial cooperation includes large macro-regional areas such as the Adriatic–Ionian, Danube, Mediterranean, and Balkan Med. All these programs have priority axes or objectives related not only to climate change adaptation and environmental preservation (i.e. green transition) but also towards social inclusion and job creation, primarily focusing on new skills in youth or deprived regions (i.e. just dimension of transition) (Pinnavaia & Berisha, 2021; Solly & Berisha, 2021). As part of IPA programs, countries, regions, or local authorities can benefit through technical assistance and improvement in governance, technological development, ecological projects, as well as social ones, thus cross-cutting among the

main pillars of JGT. Table 3.1 offers an overview of the main IPA programs and their main priority axis, which are interlinked with JGT.

The above table shows overall coherence in territorial cooperation programs with the WB Green Agenda and EU targets on Green Transition. Although, in many cases, it is not explicitly stated that the program contributes to green transition, this can be associated with priorities on environment, energy, youth skills, support of SMEs and risk management. Only a few of the programmes have an explicit priority on green transition such as for example Greece–North Macedonia, Serbia–Croatia, Serbia–Hungary, Greece–Albania, Albania–Italy–Montenegro, and Danube. Another important aspect covered in most territorial cooperation programs is increasing labour skills, especially improving youth skills to adapt to new economic needs. This shows that now, not only the ecological component of JGT is considered but also the socio-economical one to balance the impacts of transition. While these programs do not directly apply to JGT, they influence and drive local policies towards these aims through financial conditionality. Additionally, the financing of projects that serve as best practices and highlight these priorities directly influences not only local authorities (i.e. institutions) but also communities, citizens, and SMEs to understand and contribute to JGT.

### 3.4 NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

There is no direct institution in the WB countries which deals explicitly with Green Transition. However, there are different institutions which deal with different components of JGT. For example in Albania there are different Agencies which deal with various dimensions such as the National Territorial Planning Agency (shapes spatial planning policies); National Agency of Civil Protection (deals with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies and climate change adaptation); National Environment Agency (deals with environmental policies and climate change adaptation); Energy Efficiency Agency (support energy transition); General Directorate of Road Transport (support decarbonisation of transport); Albanian Investment and Development Agency (support SMEs and attract FDI); National Agency on Employment and Skills (support new employment opportunities and increase of skills in vulnerable communities); Municipalities (cross-sectorial policies on JGT). Although, as previously mentioned, there is no explicit policy or strategic document which deals with JGT and supports the implementation of the Green Agenda. In an analogous manner, it can be said that also in Kosovo, several institutions deal with various aspects of JGT spanning from spatial planning to energy transition, waste management and employment (Dietachmair et al., 2024). In Serbia, also, several institutions play a key role in various aspects of the JGT, even though no single institution covers all its dimensions. As the central state body for environmental protection policy, the Ministry of Environmental Protection leads Serbia's efforts in the fight against climate

**Table 3.1** IPA territorial cooperation programs in the Western Balkan

| <i>IPA program</i>       | <i>Priority Axis linked to JGT</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <i>WB countries Involved</i>                      |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Danube                   | A more competitive and smarter Danube Region<br>A greener, low-carbon Danube Region<br>A more social Danube Region                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | BiH; Serbia                                       |
| Adriatic Ionian          | Blue Growth, Connecting the Region, Environmental Quality, Sustainable Tourism                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Albania; BiH; North Macedonia; Montenegro; Serbia |
| Mediterranean            | Strengthening an innovative sustainable economy, Protecting, restoring, and valorising the natural Environment and heritage, Promoting green living areas, and Enhancing sustainable tourism                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | BiH; Albania;                                     |
| Balkan Med               | Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Environment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Albania; North Macedonia                          |
| Kosovo–Albania           | Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, and risk prevention and management                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Kosovo; Albania                                   |
| Albania–Montenegro       | Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management; Promoting employment, labour mobility, and social and cultural inclusion across the border                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Albania; Montenegro                               |
| Albania–Montenegro–Italy | A smarter South Adriatic programme area, by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation<br>A greener South Adriatic programme area, by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change adaptation, and risk management<br>A more connected South Adriatic programme area by enhancing mobility and regional connectivity<br>A more social South Adriatic programme area | Albania; Montenegro; Italy                        |

(continued)

**Table 3.1** (continued)

| <i>IPA program</i>      | <i>Priority Axis linked to JGT</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>WB countries Involved</i> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Albania–Greece          | A greener and more resilient Greece-Albania cross-border region<br>A more accessible Greece-Albania cross-border region<br>An economically and socially sustainable Greece-Albania cross-border region                                                                                                                                                                                      | Albania; Greece              |
| Albania–North Macedonia | Enhancing competitiveness, business, trade, and investment (needs and opportunity-driven)<br>Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management (needs driven)                                                                                                                                                                  | Albania; North Macedonia     |
| Serbia–Hungary          | A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility<br>A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights | Serbia; Hungary              |
| Serbia–Croatia          | Cooperating for a smarter programme area<br>Cooperating for a greener and climate change resilient programme area<br>Cooperating for healthier and more inclusive programme area<br>Cooperating for more sustainable and socially innovative tourism and culture                                                                                                                            | Serbia; Croatia              |
| Serbia–BiH              | Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage<br>Investing in youth, education, and skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Serbia; BiH                  |

(continued)

**Table 3.1** (continued)

| <i>IPA program</i>       | <i>Priority Axis linked to JGT</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>WB countries Involved</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| BiH–Montenegro           | Environment protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management<br>Encouraging tourism, cultural and natural heritage                                                                                                                      | BiH; Montenegro              |
| Serbia–Montenegro        | Employment, labour mobility, and social and cultural inclusion across borders<br>Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage                                                                                                                                      | Serbia; Montenegro           |
| Serbia–North Macedonia   | Promoting employment, labour mobility, and social and cultural inclusion across the border<br>Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage                                                                                                                         | Serbia; North Macedonia      |
| Kosovo–North Macedonia   | Competitiveness, business environment and SME development, trade, and investment<br>Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management                                                                                      | Kosovo; North Macedonia      |
| Kosovo–Montenegro        | Promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border;<br>Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, and risk prevention and management;<br>Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage; | Kosovo; Montenegro           |
| Greece–North Macedonia   | Transition to a low-carbon Economy<br>Support and upgrade of Health & Social Services                                                                                                                                                                                       | Greece; North Macedonia      |
| North Macedonia–Bulgaria | Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment<br>Development of an attractive, all-season tourism product by means of smart solutions that ensure universal access and participation                                               | North Macedonia; Bulgaria    |

(continued)

**Table 3.1** (continued)

| <i>IPA program</i> | <i>Priority Axis linked to JGT</i>                                              | <i>WB countries Involved</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Serbia–Romania     | Environmental protection and risk management<br>Social and economic development | Serbia; Romania              |
| Serbia–Bulgaria    | Sustainable Tourism<br>Youths<br>Environment                                    | Serbia; Bulgaria             |

*Source* Authors elaboration

change. The ministry covers key sectors such as decarbonisation and the transition to clean energy. It is responsible for implementing national strategies related to environmental protection and sustainable resource management. Several other ministries also contribute to different aspects of JGT within their sectoral competences (Ministry of Environmental Protection—climate change efforts, decarbonisation and environmental protection issues; Ministry of Mining and Energy—promotion of renewable energy sources; Ministry of Agriculture—Forestry and Water Management ensures sustainable agricultural practices and manages water resources; Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure—development of green infrastructure and decarbonisation of transport, etc.). In addition to ministries, various national agencies, public companies, and institutes also play a significant role in the public domain. The Environmental Protection Agency of Serbia monitors the quality of the environment and implements policies to mitigate climate change. The Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia is dedicated to preserving Serbia’s biodiversity and natural habitats. The Institute leads efforts in ecosystem restoration and monitoring the effects of environmental degradation. The Energy Agency of the Republic of Serbia regulates the energy sector, promoting energy efficiency and sustainability. Finally, the public company ‘Serbia Forests-Srbija Šume’ manages forest resources and contributes to the protection of biodiversity. At the same time, UNDP Serbia supports broader sustainability initiatives with a focus on climate change resistance and green energy. In the private sector, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce plays a key role in the promotion of sustainable development. It focuses on areas such as the circular economy and rural development, supporting businesses in transitioning to greener practices. The Serbian Chamber of Commerce is also working on improving the production system and encouraging the use of sustainable resources. The German Organization for International Cooperation (GIZ) plays a key role in supporting the energy transition in Serbia. Focused on decarbonisation, GIZ cooperates with local and national actors in the implementation of sustainable energy solutions. The organisation also supports international cooperation in the Western Balkans, offering expertise in energy efficiency and adaptation

to climate change. Thus, as it can be seen from a governance and institutional perspective, the lack of an overarching institution and policy framework means that the JGT is primarily driven by institutional and sectorial coordination and the willingness of the different stakeholders to achieve this. Meanwhile, while there is a lack of coordination at the national level, municipalities have a far greater opportunity in achieving JGT as compared with the national level, and institutional coordination (at least in theory) is easier to achieve. Considering the above-mentioned situation, it is interesting to discuss the contribution of the different sectors to JGT. Understanding the diverse types of policies that contribute to JGT offers a good opportunity to also understand gaps in policies which may hinder achieving JGT. This analysis, combined with the contribution from the different chapters with case studies from WB in this book as well as comparative research with EU regions, could lead to recommendations on further policy and institutional improvement.

### 3.4.1 *Spatial Planning*

As an overarching and cross-sectorial policy, it plays a significant role in achieving climate goals (Davoudi, 2020) and promoting green transition. At national, regional, and local levels, policies of spatial planning can play an integral role. When looking at the WB, most national spatial plans were prepared before the emergence of the JGT concept in the policy milieu. Therefore, there is little direct and explicit reference to it. In Albania, the General National Territorial Plan was prepared in 2016, and it has policies referring to climate change adaptation, promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency, for instance. In the Republic of Serbia, the latest Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2020–2035 (SPRS),<sup>2</sup> which is still in the drafting phase (it is expected to be adopted in the following period), touches on numerous issues of environmental protection and sustainable development but does not specifically focus on ‘just green transition’ (JGT) in the sense in which this term is known internationally, especially when talking about aligning decarbonisation with social justice. While the plan contains elements related to sustainable use of resources, protection of natural resources and environmental impact assessment, greater emphasis is placed on the broad goals of infrastructural and regional development, including energy efficiency, transport infrastructure and environmental protection. However, it lacks a detailed framework to ensure that the green transition is implemented in a socially just manner, especially for vulnerable sectors and regions that could be affected by the transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources. This represents a key challenge for the development of certain regions in Serbia, especially those whose economy relies on the exploitation of coal and other fossil fuels, urban areas with high emissions from traffic and heating or rural areas with weak energy infrastructure and limited access to renewable energy sources. However, the lack of

<sup>2</sup> More detailed in: Jeftić et al. (2021).

a clear regional policy in the Republic of Serbia, which results from a slow transition from dominant centralism and unitarism in the socio-political and economic system, has led to the marginalisation of the role of some regions in national development. This directly affects their ability to adapt to transformative processes, such as the green transition. The neglect of the principle of functionalism is particularly visible in the existing NUTS 3 nomenclature, which does not sufficiently take into account the network of settlements and the functional organisation of urban centres in Serbia (Jeftić et al., 2019). Administratively defined regions often ignore their functional characteristics. The introduction of a functional approach, based on the specific economic, ecological and social needs of the region, is crucial for a successful transition and sustainable regional development. Also, as the key carriers of regional development, urban centres should play a central role in shaping sustainable and balanced spatial development. Without a functionalist approach to regional planning, the potential of regions in Serbia to significantly contribute to the green transition remains underutilised. This problem becomes even more pronounced in the context of the green transition, where it is crucial to direct resources and development measures according to the real needs and possibilities of the region. Statistical units are currently used in the allocation of EU structural funds, which often leads to insufficient use of those funds. Some of the urban centres in rural areas in Serbia have already been recognised as key priorities for the allocation of these funds, but an additional improvement of the functional approach is necessary to enable the even inclusion of smaller regional centres (Jeftić et al., 2021.). Only integrating a functional approach can ensure sustainable regional development and successful implementation of the green transition. Separate initiatives in Serbia, often in partnership with international organisations such as UNDP, directly address a JGT, with an emphasis on mitigating the socio-economic consequences of decarbonisation. These initiatives are usually complementary to national development strategies but are not explicitly part of the Spatial Plan. In Kosovo, the National Spatial Plan 2010–2020 too has policies referring to climate change adaptation and energy transition. It remains to be seen whether the new spatial plan will have dedicated policies in terms of JGT. Similarly, when looking at the local level, policies try to deal with different sectorial issues in terms of energy, transport, waste management, but due to the time of preparation and the emergence of the concept of JGT, it is difficult to find policies and attempts which deal with this aspect. An interesting study prepared by UN-Habitat (Caka, 2021) in Kosovo highlight some of the challenges in dealing with climate change which are true also for JGT. For example, 84% of municipal staff in Kosovo are undertrained and have no experience in dealing with climate change issue. Thus, it can be said that this may hold true also for JGT considering that it is a new concept which needs to integrate knowledge from different disciplines, as for example staff in municipalities have medium to low level of knowledge and expertise in green cities, resilient cities and low-carbon cities. An adequate system of protection, education and sustainable management of

natural resources (especially forests, water, land, etc.) is the basis for the long-term stability of the area, which directly contributes to the employment of the local population and investments in environmental protection (Gatarić et al., 2022.). This approach supports the concept of green growth and can be integrated into regional development and spatial planning strategies. According to the declaration of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, the greatest demand for personnel is expected to be in the sectors of renewable energy sources, circular economy and sustainable business. In order to respond to these demands, it is necessary to develop new educational programs and profiles in Serbia, with a focus on ‘green’ professions. This process includes further development of dual education, improvement of professional practice and master’s training, as well as other forms of acquiring practical knowledge and skills, in accordance with the needs of Industry 4.0 and the challenges of ‘green’ and digital transition (Živanović et al., 2025.). These findings, although with differences, have similar implications for local authorities in the other WB countries. Traditional planning systems and approaches have mostly focused on urban areas and urban regulatory frameworks (Berisha et al., 2018, 2024). Thus, the transition towards spatial planning and towards a wider comprehensive and integrated approach, which is necessary for JGT, is yet in process and faces challenges of capacity building and lack of expertise.

### 3.4.2 *Disaster Risk Reduction*

It is a new concept which has penetrated also in the WB countries. The Sendai Framework has led to changes in terms of revising legal and institutional frameworks. In Albania, for example, there is a new Agency of Civil Protection and a new Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction. One of the innovative aspects of this strategy is the introduction of the Nature Based Solution (NBS) in the national policy framework which contributes towards JGT. Currently, municipalities in Albania have started to prepare their local DRR Strategies. From a content perspective it can be seen that there are attempts to promote NBS as well as climate change adaptation policies and priority projects. Similarly, in Kosovo, the legislation has changed, and a DRR Strategy has been prepared, leading to the introduction of new concepts and policies which contribute to JGT. Serbia’s institutional framework for disaster risk reduction includes multiple levels—from legislative frameworks and state institutions to local initiatives and international cooperation, which contributes to the importance of capacities in the country. Serbia adopted the Integrated National Climate and Energy Plan (INECP) and National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction until 2030 which sets goals for strengthening disaster resilience and integrating risk reduction measures into all sectors of society and the economy. Law on Climate Change includes measures to introduce green technologies and promote sustainable development, which is key to mitigating the consequences of climate disasters. At the local level, local risk reduction plans are developed by municipalities based on risk assessment, which include early

warning systems, risk mapping, evacuation routes and training for the population. For example, municipalities with large watercourses implement measures such as the construction of defensive leaves, restoration of natural floodplains and local early warning systems. Nature Based Solutions (NBS) are also part of the local governments' implementation procedures that include green space and watercourse restoration to mitigate the effects of floods and droughts, improving community resilience.

### 3.4.3 *Climate Change Adaptation*

It has introduced new legislation and policies in the WB. In Albania, the law 155/2020 On Climate Change was approved in 2020, while in Kosovo, law 08/L250 On Climate Change was endorsed in January 2024. These legislations provide a framework for the reduction of GHG emissions in line with the Paris Agreement as well as new opportunities for policy development. Both countries have also prepared action plans for Climate Change Adaptation which prioritise (in Albania) among other the encouragement of economic transition towards a low-carbon economy, increase of capacities as well as integration of climate change in sectorial policies. Meanwhile, in Kosovo, besides the promotion of a low-carbon economy, there is also a dedicated objective on mobility planning and decarbonisation of the transport sector and a more tailored approach to the energy sector in terms of renewable energy use, energy efficiency and district heating. Similarly, at the local level there are efforts from municipalities to prepare Local Strategies of Climate Change Adaptation. In Albania, these efforts have been supported so far by UNDP, while in Kosovo, municipalities are being supported by UN-Habitat to prepare the strategies which contribute directly to JGT. In Serbia is adopted the Law on Climate Change prepared by the Ministry of Environment, the Climate Change Act (2021), National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (NAP), The Law on Environmental Protection (which basically covers all pillars of GT), Air Protection Law, The Law on Waters, The Law on Soil Protection (Depollution), The Law on Nature Protection, National strategy for sustainable use of natural resources and goods and Biodiversity Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (Biodiversity), Law on Agriculture and Rural Development and The Law on planning and construction (Sustainable Food Systems and Rural Areas). National strategy for sustainable development, Law on Nature Protection, National action plans for the sector (agriculture, forestry, and energy), etc.

The current overview of the policies that are concerning the issue of JGT in Serbia are mainly on a national level but there are examples of policies on the regional and local one. Significant regional policies and practices are related to the administrative areas of the City of Belgrade and the autonomous region of Vojvodina (Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan for the City of Belgrade—SECAP, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for the City of Belgrade, Green City Action Plan for the City of Belgrade, AP Vojvodina Environmental Protection Program for the Period 2016–2025 etc.) while local activities and

policies are mostly concentrated in larger and better developed municipalities and cities (Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Subotica etc.). In general terms, Serbia has strategies and plans for the green transition, but they are not sufficiently coordinated and mutually integrated. In this sense, better integration of different policies and plans at the national and local levels is needed. The European Commission's reports on Serbia's progress often emphasise the need to speed up the implementation of policies in the field of environmental protection and climate change, pointing to challenges in effective implementation. North Macedonia has the advanced policy and strategic framework, as well as a well-defined governance structure, and is evaluated by the EC (EC Country Progress Reports) as a country with some level of preparation for the environment and climate change. However, the country needs to accelerate the implementation of the Green Agenda and the economic and investment plan, including the just transition process. Moreover, the country needs to improve its governance and institutional capacities for policy implementation. Montenegro's climate governance is managed through national ministries and specialised agencies working collaboratively to address environmental and climate challenges. The Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning, and Urbanism is central, overseeing climate policies and international cooperation through its Directorate for International Cooperation, EU Integration, and Climate Change. Additional pivotal ministries include the Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism and the Ministry of Capital Investments. The Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) plays a crucial role in data collection and reporting, while the State Statistical Office and Environment Protection Agency are responsible for preparing emission inventories. Furthermore, the Working Group for Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change within the National Council for Sustainable Development provides strategic guidance and coordination. Law on Protection from Adverse Impacts of Climate Change with relevant by-laws already drafted and adopted, sets the framework for climate action in Montenegro. Also, Law on Amendments to the Law of Adverse Impacts of Climate Change will further refine and strengthen the legal framework and it will be soon adopted. Strategic documents such as the National Climate Change Strategy 2030 and the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 demonstrate Montenegro's alignment with global sustainability goals as outlined in the UN Agenda 2030. The revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) is particularly notable, setting an ambitious target of at least a 35% reduction in national GHG emissions (excluding land use, land-use change, and forestry—LULUCF) by 2030 compared to 1990. Furthermore, the planned reduction in biodegradable municipal waste disposable to landfills highlights Montenegro's commitment to sustainable waste management practices.

### 3.4.4 *Transport and Mobility*

It is one of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), in the WB region. Combined with the energy sector, transport is responsible for two-thirds of total emissions. Within that sector, the dominant contribution is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) originating from road transport, which accounts for more than 90% of total emissions from transport. Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for the Western Balkans through its three key components is the foundation for the JGT in the future. Smart mobility implies the integration of digital technologies and automation into transport systems with the aim of increasing the efficiency and sustainability of passenger and cargo mobility. For the successful implementation of this strategy, economies in the region must transform their transport systems through the introduction of multimodal ticketing systems, the ‘mobility as a service’ model, paperless transport and the application of software, 5G networks and artificial intelligence to optimise transport activities. The political landscape of urban mobility in WB is gradually shifting towards sustainability, driven by national strategies, local initiatives, and international support. There is a need to strengthen institutional capacities and better coordination between different levels of administration and sectors. The lack of an integrated approach hinders the effective implementation of policies. Strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in the implementation of the green transition is crucial, including the training of personnel and the provision of adequate resources. For example, institutional and legislative framework for transport and urban mobility in Serbia includes legislation (Law on transportation in road traffic, Law on road traffic safety, Law on Railways, Law on Planning and Construction, Law on Energy Efficiency), national strategies (National Traffic Development Strategy (2015–2030), National Climate and Energy Plan (NECP), Strategy of sustainable urban mobility, National railway development strategy), plans (for example Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for the City of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Užice, Subotica, Green City Action Plan for the City of Belgrade, the General Urban Plans of the larger cities such as Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš include measures that support a just green transition) and institutions (Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Traffic Safety Agency, Energy Efficiency Agency, Local governments) that regulate various aspects of transport, with an increasing focus on sustainability, energy efficiency and pollution reduction.

### 3.4.5 *Energy Transition*

Most of the WB countries are still significantly dependent on coal as a primary source of energy. Much of the electricity is produced in coal-fired thermal power plants, which contribute to significant CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and air pollution. This dependence slows down the process of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. On the other side, WB region has significant potential for the use

of renewable energy sources. The region is rich in natural resources for the development of wind energy (especially in the areas of the Dinaric Mountain range), solar energy (especially in the south), as well as hydropower (on which Albania, for example, completely relies today). In Serbia, a set of new laws in the field of energy has been adopted, including the first Law on Renewable Energy Sources and the new Law on Energy Efficiency and the Rational Use of Energy and Industrial Policy Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2021 to 2030 (Circular economy). In addition to the above-mentioned policies (which were adopted in 2021), when it comes to the pillar of Decarbonisation (Climate, Energy & Mobility), Serbia adopted other, also very important policies at the national level such as Integrated National Climate and Energy Plan for the period 2021 to 2030 with a vision until 2050 (INECP), The Law on the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia, Draft of the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2035 (in procedure) (2021, July). Ministry of construction, traffic and infrastructure. Government of the Republic of Serbia), Long term building renovation strategy Republic of Serbia 2050, Sustainable Urban Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia until 2030, Climate Strategy & Action Plan of the Republic of Serbia and Strategy for Development of the Energy Sector of the Republic of Serbia until 2025 with projections until 2030. Ministry of Mining and Energy is in the process of developing two important documents that would enable implementation of the green transition in a just way—Energy development Strategy and Integrated National Plan for Energy and Climate Up Until 2050. In general, the decarbonisation pillar went the furthest in terms of applying the postulates of the green transition. The adoption of these laws and policies in previous years initiated a series of activities and projects related to JGT. Nationally important are EU for Green Agenda in Serbia, advancing medium- and long-term adaptation planning in the Republic of Serbia, ALTERENERGY—Energy sustainability for Adriatic small communities (projects), Roadmap for circular economy in Serbia, Initiative for a Just Green Transition and Decarbonisation in Serbia, ECO SYSTEM Programme, Zero Waste Municipalities (initiatives and practices), etc. The Republic of North Macedonia is significantly exposed to the effects of climate change and has undertaken to implement an ambitious plan moderated to mitigate and adapt to those changes, with the aim of reducing emissions (Generalisation of emissions) to the effect of 0% by 2030, compared to the 1990 level. The key element of the decarbonisation process in the energy sector of North Macedonia is the gradual shutdown of outdated coal-fired thermal power plants, which have a harmful impact on the environment. This step is necessary to achieve the goal of reducing emissions and supporting the country's green transition. RNM aspires to make decarbonisation a priority in its policy through the development of a comprehensive strategy for the gradual withdrawal of coal, which will be well designed and integrated into various horizontal policies. The main strategic documents governing energy and climate policies include the Energy Strategy (2020–2040) and the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), which is currently

under revision to ensure flexibility regarding the deadlines for decommissioning thermal power plants. Although these documents have been adopted, implementation has been slow, and there is a lack of a clearly defined date for coal phase-out, especially as coal-fired power generation has recently increased due to rising energy prices. Montenegro employs a comprehensive suite of laws, strategies, and plans to guide its climate actions.<sup>3</sup> The Directorate for International Cooperation, European Integration, and Climate Change, which operates within the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning, and Urbanism, plays a key role in the coordination of international cooperation in the field of air conditioning and integration in Montenegro. The involvement of various stakeholders, including multiple ministries and specialised agencies, ensures that climate considerations are systematically integrated across sectors and at all administrative levels. Nevertheless, Montenegro faces certain challenges that threaten the effective implementation of climate policies. One of the key problems is the delay in the finalisation and adoption of the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). This plan is vital to establishing a clear and integrated strategy for achieving energy and climate goals, and its absence leaves a gap in climate policy. Montenegro faces challenges in the implementation and operationalisation of existing laws in the field of climate change. Although the Law on Protection from the Harmful Effects of Climate Change has been adopted, its effective implementation and compliance monitoring will require intensified efforts and additional resources. Also, Montenegro's reliance on international aid in achieving the goals of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions indicates a certain vulnerability in its climate strategy. To achieve ambitious climate goals, it will be crucial to ensure sufficient and sustainable international support, as well as to develop strong domestic mechanisms for financing climate activities. Montenegro has established a solid foundation for

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- National Climate Change Strategy 2030: Provides a comprehensive approach to mitigation and adaptation efforts.
- National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030: Aligns with the UN Agenda 2030, promoting sustainable development goals.
- National Energy Development Strategy: Details the path for sustainable energy development.
- Revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC): Sets specific targets for GHG emissions reduction.
- Roadmap towards the Circular Economy: Guides the transition towards a more sustainable economic model.

Among the others: National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP): Currently in progress, expected to be finalized soon; National Adaptation Plan: To be prepared under the Law on Protection against Climate Change.

climate change management through comprehensive laws, strategies, and an inclusive institutional framework. However, to fully realise its climate goals, the country must overcome challenges related to the implementation of existing measures, finalise key plans such as the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) and ensure stable financing mechanisms. With continued commitment and the strengthening of international cooperation, Montenegro can advance its climate ambitions and contribute to global efforts towards sustainability. The energy transition in the WB countries is an inevitable and necessary process. Still, it is burdened with numerous challenges, such as dependence on coal, outdated infrastructure, financial constraints, and social risks.

### 3.4.6 *Waste Management*

Most countries in the region, such as Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, have adopted waste management strategies that are aligned with EU goals. These strategic documents envisage measures to reduce waste generation, increase recycling and improve separate collection. However, many of these strategies remain at the planning level, without adequate implementation in practice. Insufficient infrastructure is one of the biggest problems in waste management in the WB. The lack of sanitary landfills, recycling facilities, and systems for the collection and treatment of special types of waste, such as electronic waste and batteries, significantly limit the ability of countries to effectively manage waste in accordance with EU directives. This is one of the biggest challenges facing countries in the region, leading to low levels of recycling and waste separation. For example, in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, some measures have been implemented for better management of special types of waste, such as electronic waste, textiles, and batteries, but these measures are still not sufficiently developed to significantly reduce the harmful effects of these types of waste. Despite some progress in alignment with EU waste management legislation, the implementation and enforcement of existing regulations in the WB remains a significant challenge. The strategies and roadmaps envisaged by the Action Plan for the WB should enable the development of waste management plans, including the definition of financial support models, such as subsidies, financial instruments, and public-private partnerships. These mechanisms aim to support the construction and maintenance of waste management infrastructure at the local and regional level. In this sense, these plans must be harmonised with the revised EU legislation and aimed at reducing waste generation, increasing separate collection and recycling, and encouraging circular business models. The economies of the region should define targets for the reuse and recycling of municipal waste by 2035, which is in line with EU targets, and set ambitious targets for packaging waste, scrap vehicles, and batteries, thus contributing to the overall goals of the circular economy. For example, the institutional and legislative framework in Serbia includes waste management issues and represents a significant part of the country's environmental policy. Adopted national policies that are

under the other four pillars of the GAWB in Serbia are the Law on Waste Management, the Law on Packaging and Packaging Waste, and the Waste Management Program of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2031. In general, the implementation of the Green Agenda is delayed due to various challenges, including lack of financial resources, political will, and coordination, so accelerating the implementation is necessary to achieve the goals of the green transition. The concept of a just transition is at an early stage of development, and more efforts are needed to ensure that the transition is inclusive and fair for all citizens. For example, Serbia receives support from the EU, but it is necessary to make better use of available funds and increase the capacity to absorb funds. On the other hand, reliance on EU funds and international financial institutions can create possible dependencies and uncertainty in the implementation of projects. Therefore, it is necessary to create more favourable conditions for attracting private investments and developing public–private partnerships. Continuous monitoring and transparent reporting are key to monitoring progress and adapting strategic documents, i.e. different types of plans at all planning levels as needed.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

This overview of key international level and WB just transition regulations, guidelines, and policies showcases how the concept has evolved in relation to core JGT dimensions. Early references to just transitions focused on the environmental and social dimensions highlighting the need to reduce greenhouse gas emission while protecting jobs. The temporal dimension is clearly recognised in the development of time sensitive climate targets. As the JGT became more focused on implementation, territorial, democratic, governance and communication dimensions have become more prominent as policymakers have stressed the need for place-based JGT plans based on open and inclusive policymaking processes. It is vital JGT policies are developed on the basis of a well-defined transition concept that considers a range of different JGT dimensions. The broad nature of the just transition notion means it is interpreted differently by stakeholders across governance levels. While acknowledging the rights of the EU, nation states, and regions to interpret and implement the JGT concept in different ways, some conceptual coherence can provide important guidance in ensuring that plans strike a balance in addressing a range of different JGT dimensions. When looking closer at the WB region, we see that countries are learning to navigate the complex institutional and policy framework of JGT. None of the countries have direct institutions or policies on JGT and this is predominantly tackled through sectorial approaches. The EU plays an important role in shaping these sectorial approaches and trying to integrate them. The path towards the Europeanisation of WB goes through JGT (Berisha, 2025b), and it is evident that this will require not only legal and policy adaptation but a rather broader and more comprehensive institutional and cultural change. The required changes are deep and run through

the roots of the governance system. Often, as argued, they are dependent on political will, human capacities, and the ability to think outside of the box and to use existing and new financial schemes to support JGT. Lastly, it is important that academic research also plays a role in JGT. As it was seen, there is a growth in research in the topic. Nevertheless, this needs to be integrated into policymaking as well as go beyond the identification of challenges or sectorial analysis in JGT. As such, the presence of WB institutions (academic, NGOs, and public authorities) in research programs such as Horizon, Erasmus, and COST supported by national research grants becomes very important in terms of pushing forward the JGT agenda.

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