

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY

We, the undersigned organizations,

are writing to you to emphasize the importance of including the promotion of environmental justice and the protection of the environment within Common Regional Market decision-making in the Western Balkans.

Our region is blessed with natural beauty and a rich biodiversity which is increasingly threatened by the climate change, pollution, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources.

Such environmental issues not only threaten our ecosystems but also disproportionately impact our marginalized communities, further exacerbating existing inequalities.

To us, environmental justice means equitable access to clean air, water and healthy ecosystems, regardless of one's circumstances, including economic position and geographic location.

We firmly believe that environmental justice is key to a contemporary understanding of not only justice, but also the nuances of human rights and the interplay between the environment and rights protections.

We remain dedicated to advocating for policies, legal reforms, and the implementation of best practices that strive for a clean, safe, and sustainable environment for all across the region.

We urge our governments, regional bodies, and relevant institutions to:

1. Integrate Environmental Justice into Policy and Practice: It is imperative that environmental justice is woven into our regional and individual governmental policies, laws, and cultures. This includes promoting clean energy solutions, sustainable agriculture, and conservation efforts which prioritize the most vulnerable communities. Sustainable development goals must be mainstreamed in all economic and infrastructural policies and development projects.
2. Promote an Inclusive Approach to Decision-Making: Environmental decisions should ensure the meaningful participation of all community members, particularly those who are disproportionately affected by those decisions. Ensuring that the voices of all communities, especially marginalized groups, are heard is essential to achieving environmental justice.
3. Create efficient monitoring mechanisms: To ensure implementation of existing legal and strategic documents, whilst allowing for timely adaptation where necessary, it is important to have efficient mechanisms - such as shadow reports and consultations with CSOs which would highlight successes and deficiencies on the ground.
4. Prioritize the Protection of Natural Resources: Our region's natural resources must be conserved and managed sustainably before it is too late. This involves strengthening

legislation and regulations to prevent exploitation, deforestation, and pollution, as well as promoting responsible land use.

5. Invest in Clean Technologies and Infrastructure: Transitioning to clean and renewable energy sources not only mitigates climate change but also creates new job opportunities and promotes economic growth in a sustainable way. Investing in infrastructural solutions to pollution contributes to the well-being of all peoples.
6. Addressing the Disparity in Environmental Injustice: We must acknowledge and remedy the historical and ongoing discrimination in the impact of climate change and acknowledge the heavier price paid by certain communities and peoples.

In prioritizing environmental justice and sustainability, we can build a more equitable and resilient future for our region. This commitment to a clean environment will not only benefit the health and wellbeing of our peoples and communities but also contribute to economic stability, social cohesion, and a brighter future for all. We need to be proactive to persuade people to make the Western Balkans a home for them and their families.

We look forward to your support and partnership in advancing these crucial environmental goals and hope that together we can work towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all in our region.

Sincerely,