



## **Analysis of Kosovo's European Integration Path in Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change**

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### **Abstract**

Since its liberation in 1999 and the declaration of independence in 2008, the Republic of Kosovo has consistently expressed its aspiration to join the European Union, a goal officially endorsed by all governments. However, the EU integration process requires not only political commitment but also substantial progress in meeting economic, political, and sector-specific criteria. This study assesses developments under Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change over the past five years by analyzing EC Progress Reports and comparing their assessments with the perceptions of students and academic staff. A mixed-methods research design was applied. The quantitative component included 243 respondents from two groups: students and academic staff, while the qualitative component comprised interviews with eight representatives from government institutions, civil society, the media, and the EU Office in Kosovo. Field work was implemented during the first part of 2025. The findings indicate very limited progress in the field of environment and climate change during the examined period. The study indicates that Kosovo lags behind other Western Balkan countries in terms of progress achieved over the past five years in the field of environment and climate change. Quantitative results reveal a high level of public trust in the assessments presented in the Progress Reports, highlighting the need for institutions to take their conclusions and recommendations seriously. Qualitative findings further confirm that the reporting process is perceived as inclusive, transparent, and consultative. Notably, a hundred percent alignment was identified in 10 out of 19 assessed areas between the Progress Report evaluations and participants' perceptions. The study provides a solid scientific methodological framework for comparable analyses of other EU Progress Report chapters, contributing to efforts to accelerate country reforms toward EU membership.

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### **Keywords**

*Acquis; Accession; Climate change; Environment; Progress Report; Standards*

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### **1. Introduction**

As the youngest state in Europe, the Republic of Kosovo has one of the slowest rates of EU accession among Western Balkan nations seeking to join the EU. Since declaring its independence on February 17, 2008, Kosovo has pursued its European ambitions in a one-way manner, despite several government changes. However, this process has been hampered by a number of issues, including internal problems within Kosovo as well as regional and international political factors and the disparities in perspectives of the EU member states (five of which still do not recognize Kosovo as a state). The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) for five Southeast European nations hoping to

join the EU was launched at the Zagreb Summit in 2000, right after the conflict in Kosovo. The European Commission acknowledged this act following the proclamation of Kosovo's independence, but handled Kosovo as a sui generis instance. The European Commission declared its plan to submit a feasibility study for Kosovo in the 2008 Enlargement Strategy. The European Council approved the Commission's proposal in December 2008 to submit a report looking at the tools for advancing Kosovo's socioeconomic and political development. "The EU's readiness to support Kosovo's political and economic development through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region," was reiterated by the European Council (European Commission, 2009 a). After the war in Kosovo, the EU took the lead in economic rehabilitation and reconstruction. After the declaration of independence, the EU took the lead, concentrating its efforts on creating democratic institutions, human and administrative capacity, good governance, and the rule of law in addition to the economic restoration of the region (Economides, 2025).

The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), which came into effect in April 2016, was signed by the EU and Kosovo in 2014. Since then, Kosovo has encountered numerous internal and external obstacles in meeting its obligations under the SAA. These include the EU's lack of political will to expedite the enlargement process and the non-recognition of Kosovo by five EU member states (European Commission, 2009 b). In order to comply with the integration process, Kosovo is just beginning to meet the requirements of the European Union (EU) *acquis*, including environmental standards (Bekteshi, 2020). The ongoing and urgent need for environmental regulations in Europe has made Kosovo's integration process even more difficult. The next stages of integration will require recognition from the five EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo, even if, up to now, EU institutions have discovered a workable legal way to get over their veto for some processes. Kosovo's journey to EU membership is already and will be impacted by this dire political situation (Shasha, 2020). As of right now, Kosovo has the status of a potential candidate country. The Kosovo government submitted an official application for EU membership in 2022. Other than receiving the application and requesting clearance from the EU Council for additional assessment, the European Commission has not yet provided a tangible answer (Radio Free Europe, 2024).

The EU Council approves an Enlargement Communiqué every year, containing suggestions for the enlargement process based on specific assessments for each candidate country. The European Commission (EC) Progress Reports, on the other hand, offer a thorough evaluation of the changes and advancements candidate and prospective candidate countries have achieved on their own path to EU membership. Recommendations and instructions about reform goals are included in these publications. Every year, the EC releases the Progress Report, which summarizes the current state of accession and the advancements each country has made in the respective year. The EU Council uses this report as a vital resource to evaluate candidate states' progress toward EU membership. The EC Progress Report, which is prepared every year, assesses candidate countries' adherence to EU membership requirements and offers a thorough analysis of their political, economic, and social advancements. The EC Progress Report's main goal is to provide a transparent and impartial summary of candidate countries' progress in putting the Copenhagen Criteria and the *Acquis* into practice. The report helps the European Parliament and the EU Council assess a candidate state's level of compliance with membership requirements (European Commission, 1998). Since 2006, the EC Progress Report for Kosovo has been published by the European Commission using the same framework and procedures as other countries undergoing admission. Each of the five clusters that make up the Progress Report has multiple chapters. Chapter 14 (Transport policy), Chapter 15 (Energy), Chapter 21 (Trans-European Networks), and Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change) are the four chapters that make up the Green Agenda cluster (European Commission, 2020).

### **1.1. Study objective and research questions**

The objective of this study is to conduct an analysis of the EC Progress Report assessments for Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change for Kosovo, focusing on comparing them with the assessments of Kosovar university students and academic staff regarding real progress in the field of the environment. The main research question is: how much do our respondents trust the EC Progress Report assessments in Chapter 27, and how closely are the assessments of the report and the survey respondents using the same assessment scales? The supporting questions are:

What is the progress assessed according to the EC Progress Report for Kosovo in Chapter 27 in the last five years, and what are the areas with the best and worst performance?

How does Kosovo stand in the assessments of the EC Progress Report for Chapter 27 in relation to five neighboring countries that are in the EU integration process?

To what extent do the assessments made by the EC Progress Report for Chapter 27 match those made by students and academic staff of this study?

The research hypothesis is that the assessments given by the EC Progress Reports for Chapter 27 do not differ much from those assessed by our respondents: students and academic staff who live under the pressures of an environment burdened with pollution and without proper care. The study findings may serve as a methodological model for how a scientific analysis can be carried out for other chapters of the EC Progress Report, providing indications and recommendations on where the activities of institutions in the integration process should be oriented.

## 2. Literature review

Despite its small territory of 10,887km<sup>2</sup>, Kosovo is considered to be rich in natural resources and biodiversity. Approximately 11.5% of the territory is under legal conservation status with two national parks (Sharri and Bjeshket e Nemuna), the Mirusha Waterfalls, the Bifurcation of Nerodime River (the second example of its kind in the world), Germia Park, and the Pashtriku Mountains as the most notable protected natural sites (Veselaj & Mustafa, 2015). However, there is significant pollution and environmental deterioration in Kosovo. Pollution from the nation's industrial and energy past and pollution that emerged from the 1999 war in Kosovo are the two eras of environmental issues. Over the past century, Kosovo has experienced modest economic growth, but it has also been marked by the unchecked exploitation of natural resources like minerals and lignite, with little regard for the pollution and effects of this exploitation. The industrial sector has not recovered to its pre-war levels after the conflict, yet pollution has persisted. In the meantime, post-war pollution has been exacerbated by the rapid expansion of the transport sector, which currently ranks second in terms of air emissions after the energy sector. Water supply has gotten worse due to scarce water resources and inadequate wastewater treatment. Land has lost quality owing to pollution, as well as surface area due to development for infrastructure. The main pressures affecting Kosovars' lives continue to be rapid and uncontrolled urbanization, waste pollution, and noise (Veselaj, 2013).

Since 2002, when the first governing institutions of Kosovo were formed, the adoption of environmental legislation and policies began to address the mitigation and resolution of problems of air, water, soil pollution, nature and biodiversity conservation, climate change, waste, noise, industrial pollution, environmental impact assessment, etc. The aim of all these environmental laws and policies is harmonization with European standards, more like an expressed will towards EU integration. For instance, the basic Law on Environmental Protection in Article 1 specifies that "the purpose of this law is to promote the creation of a healthy environment for the people of Kosovo by gradually adopting EU environmental standards" (Assembly of Kosovo, 2009). However, effective legislation does not guarantee that it will have an immediate impact. In its most recent report on Kosovo, the European Commission also noted that "further progress is needed for full alignment and implementation of the remaining cross-cutting environmental directives" (Leka et al., 2019).

Reports by international organizations operating in Kosovo generally conclude that Kosovo's environmental laws are well-developed, widely accepted, and compliant with EU and international law (SIGMA & OECD, 2021). However, public authorities continue to implement sustainable development legislation at a very low level due to a number of factors, including a lack of professional capacity for implementation, a lack of financial support, a lack of cooperation between government agencies, and a lack of education and awareness for sustainable development (Veselaj, 2019). Environmental standards are among the most complicated and challenging requirements to meet in the admission process, as demonstrated by the practices of the nations that have recently joined the EU enlargement procedures. As a result, the EC Progress Reports' evaluations of candidate nations' adherence to environmental regulations serve as crucial markers of actual progress toward EU membership. According to the study by Istrefi & Kerolli-Mustafa (2017), Kosovo's authorities have "enacted a variety of environmental laws. However, a lack of efficient enforcement tools and noncompliance hinder environmental governance and its EU compliance in practice".

There aren't many studies on Kosovo's integration procedures and EC Progress Reports' use as political tools in this process. A study by Tare (2023) reminds the priority steps for Kosovo to continue its path towards EU integration, focusing on key areas such as reforms, democratic governance, alignment with the EU Acquis, economic development, human capital, regional cooperation, administrative capacities, citizen engagement, dialogue with the EU and progress monitoring. However, no research has yet been done on Kosovo's integration efforts in some of the most challenging but crucial areas of EU standards, such as the environment and climate change. According to the literature on EU-Kosovo relations, the EU has had a significant impact on Kosovo's institutional and political orientation, especially through the instruments of reform support and conditionality. Many experts stress that, compared to other nations in the region, Kosovo's situation is considerably more complicated due to the non-recognition of five member states and the ongoing hostilities with Serbia. Research shows that these elements reduce the efficacy of EU programs and produce ongoing doubt about Kosovo's chances of integrating into the EU (Mexhuani, 2023). Significant legal changes may be necessary for EU integration, especially with regard to EU legislation and harmonization with European standards. In order to guarantee institutional and normative approximation with the EU, Kosovo should explicitly address issues that may restrict the application of EU legislation, based on the experiences of states that modified their legislation (Gruda, 2023). Since joining the EU is a long-term objective, new environmental legislation that continues to envision adopting the EU environmental acquis has supplemented and, in some cases, repealed existing environmental laws since the declaration of independence. Even though the majority of environmental laws such as Law on the Environmental Protection, Law on Nature Protection, Law on Water, Law on Air Pollution etc., have already been passed and put into effect, most indicators of compliance, such as limits on permissible spills, emissions and quality standards, or the designation of zones of protection, still need to be included in Kosovo's laws to prevent the environmental harm (Fajardo, 2016).

A study by Aliu-Zhuja & Nallbani (2014) about the integration processes shows that university professors had the most understanding of integration processes out of three groups surveyed: public officials, university professors, and students. As a result, 73 out of 80 university professors reported having very excellent or decent knowledge of the EU integration process. Regarding their level of knowledge, public officials were equally split. Out of 120 students, 64 reported having very good and good knowledge, whereas the remaining students reported having little to no such knowledge. A study by Shala & Hyseni (2018) analyzed Kosovo's environmental legislation in the light of its approximation with the EU acquis by using mainly the comparative legal approach and substantial aspects. The findings of the study indicated that the "step-by-step" approximation of EU environmental law into Kosovo environmental legislation is partial, reaching around 40%, but still remains far from being complete and its implementation. Despite yearly reporting about the EC Progress Reports, there is a significant gap in the academic literature providing systematic, longitudinal, and evidence-based analysis of Kosovo's progress in aligning with the EU acquis under Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change (European Commission, 2024).

### **3. Materials and methods**

The research project was conducted using a mixed method with a quantitative and qualitative approach. A desk review was performed to contextualize the concepts of EU enlargement and the Progress Report as a crucial instrument for candidate countries in the EU accession process. Data analysis combined qualitative content analysis of Progress Reports and policy documents with quantitative statistical analysis of survey responses to identify trends, comparative performance, and perception-based assessments of progress in the environment and climate change chapter. This served to support the analysis with information on the last five years of progress reports and Kosovo's integration policy documents. The desk review also includes an evaluation of the 2024 EC Progress Report across its 31 chapters and a comparison of progress reports from the last five years, specifically for Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change (European Commission, 2024). Additionally, a comparison was made regarding Kosovo's progress in relation to the neighboring countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia over the past five years (2020-2024), with aim to show Kosovo's EU integration path as a member of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The quantitative research focused on analyzing the perceptions and assessments of progress in the field of environment and climate change among students and academic staff.

To conduct the statistical analysis, an online questionnaire was developed and completed by students and academic staff from various public universities. The questionnaire contained the same set of questions for students and academic staff. The questionnaire is composed of three sections: the general aspects of assessing the environmental situation in Kosovo, the second section addressed the credibility and evaluation of the Progress Report assessment grades, while the third section covered respondents' recommendations for expected environmental improvements from the standpoint of the institutional, legal, curricular, and civic framework.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Sample description**

The research sample consisted of 243 respondents, of whom 191 (78.6%) were students and 52 (21.4%) were academic staff. The respondents came from five public universities in Kosovo. The number of questionnaires sent to five universities was 1,500 (300 per university), but since student responses were entirely voluntary and anonymous, we ultimately received only 24 completed questionnaires from students. Also, out of the 100 questionnaires sent to academic staff (20 per university), we received 52 completed ones. Questionnaires were distributed electronically during the period January-February 2025. Among the respondents, 191 (78.6%) were female, while 51 (21.4%) were male. A total of 160 respondents (65.8%) were from urban areas, while 83 (34.2%) were from rural areas. The three most represented age groups in the sample were: 20-30 years old, with 142 respondents (58.7%); under 20 years old, with 40 respondents (16.5%); and over 50 years old, with 27 respondents (11.2%). Among the students, 148 were bachelor's-level students, 45 master's level students, and three doctoral students. Communication with students and distribution of questionnaires were conducted through their professors, who initially completed the questionnaire themselves and subsequently distributed the same instrument to their students for completion, thereby ensuring a structured and mediated data collection process.

For the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the preparation, consultations, or comments on the EC Progress Reports for Kosovo in Chapter 27. Four government officials (two from the Assembly and two from the Government of Kosovo), two representatives from civil society organizations, two journalists, and an official of the EU Office in Pristina were interviewed. Participants of interviews were purposively selected to ensure representation of all principal stakeholders engaged in the preparation, consultation, and dissemination processes of the EC Progress Report, including representatives from governmental institutions, civil society organizations, media, and the European Union Office in Kosovo. The purpose of selecting this diverse sample for interviewing was to ensure the perspectives of all parties involved in the process of evaluating progress: government, civil society, media, and the sponsor of the EC Progress Report, which is the representative of the European Commission Office in Kosovo. Respondents for the interviews were selected according to the following criteria: Government officials within institutions who have been responsible for the environmental reporting and EU integration processes; journalists selected by the media who regularly cover environmental reporting; and civil society organizations that work directly in the field of the environment and EU integration. Meanwhile, the EU Office is officially in charge of the Environment and Climate Change chapter for Kosovo. The semi-structured interviews examined institutional roles and responsibilities, the degree of stakeholder involvement, identification of priority sectors and intervention areas, and the extent to which the Report's recommendations are systematically incorporated into the formulation and implementation of national environmental and climate change policies. The field interviews were conducted during the February-March 2025 period. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded for data analysis. The qualitative and quantitative study findings offer an assessment of Kosovo's real progress in the areas of climate change and the environment, as well as how the local people view these developments.

### **4.2. Findings**

The quantitative part of the study used a five-point rating system to assess respondents' perceptions of the country's environmental changes during the previous five years, ranging from the belief that things have significantly deteriorated to the belief that things have significantly improved. According to the data, less than 1% of respondents

believe that the country's environment has significantly improved. Approximately one-third of the respondents believe there has been a minor improvement, while more than half (51.1%) believe the environmental situation has deteriorated or deteriorated severely. The environmental situation has not improved or deteriorated, according to 11.9% of the respondents. In order to address environmental and climate change issues in a society, environmental knowledge and information are crucial. Because of this, the study examined the sources from which respondents have learned about the environment and climate change thus far. The internet and social media are the primary source of information and knowledge for 42.2% of respondents, and this is before prior education by 23% and television as the third source for 17.4% of respondents. This is also the case with many other studies, including those conducted at the pre-university level (Qirjo & Veselaj, 2022). In this study, scientific sources (journals, books) are a more prevalent source of information than in previous studies, for 8.9% of respondents, which is also related to the characteristics of our study group (academic staff and students). On the other hand, radio, newspapers, and Non-Governmental Organizations have been the least helpful knowledge source to them. Concerning, the study's findings indicate that our respondents are not influenced by environmental non-governmental organizations, whose mission is to inform and raise public awareness of the environment and climate change, in addition to serving as a "watchdog" of government institutions. Despite the fact that many environmental NGOs are registered, interviewed respondents confirm that their contribution to significant environmental improvements remains minimal. According to the interviewees of this study, NGOs have brought attention to a number of Kosovo's environmental problems in recent years, such as nature conservation, air and water pollution, waste management, thermal and hydro power plants' impact on the environment, etc., through documentation (reports, policy papers) and forums (workshops, conferences, public discussions, green forums). EU official interviewed stressed the EU's support for a more robust and autonomous environmental civil society. As a result, the EU concentrates on enhancing environmental NGOs' capabilities and bolstering their oversight role over governmental establishments.

In terms of level of preparation, Table 1 shows that seven chapters (out of 31) are in the early stages of preparing Kosovo's policies and legislation for EU membership, sixteen have some level of preparation, eight have moderately prepared legislation, and none have a good or advanced level of preparation.

**Table 1.** Kosovo's preparation in the legislation and integration policies (from early to very advanced stage) and Kosovo's progress (from no progress to substantial progress) in the 31 chapters of the 2024 EC Progress Report  
Source: (European Commission, 2024).

<b>Level of preparation</b>	<b>Early stage</b>	<b>Some level</b>	<b>Moderately prepared</b>	<b>Good level</b>	<b>Advanced level</b>
<b>Number of chapters 2024</b>	7	16	8	0	0
<b>Level of progress</b>	<b>No progress</b>	<b>Limited progress</b>	<b>Some progress</b>	<b>Good progress</b>	<b>Substantial progress</b>
<b>Number of chapters 2024</b>	2	16	10	3	0

This demonstrates how behind Kosovo is in drafting and approving legislation and policies that comply with the Acquis's standards. Regarding the level of progress in the EC Progress Report 2024, Table 1 shows that there has been no progress in two of the chapters (Company Law and Fisheries and Aquaculture), limited progress has been noted in the other sixteen chapters, some progress has been noted in ten chapters, and good progress has been evaluated in three chapters. None of the chapters have made any substantial progress in 2024.

Table 2 presents an assessment of the progress within different sections of Chapter 27: Environment and climate change during the last five years. As can be seen from the data, there has been limited progress in the environmental sector during the course of the five reporting years, while there has been little progress in the field of climate change, with the exception of 2020. Additionally, six of the nine reporting fields had no improvement in 2020. Five fields saw no progress in 2022, and four of them saw no progress in 2023. In 2021, two areas (water and waste management) were evaluated as having made good progress, which was the highest positive rating. Waste management has been

the most positively evaluated field over the past five years, with progress reported every year, while water management is next, with only one assessment indicating no progress.

As for the environmental sectors, there are two areas where there has been no progress for five years: noise and chemicals, while industrial pollution, with the exception of 2023, has also not made any progress. This shows a contradictory data: while the 2013 assessment about the compliance of Kosovo's legislation for industry with that of the EU is at a rate of 97% with the Council Directive 96/61/EC concerning Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control- IPPC (MESP & KEPA, 2013), no progress has been evaluated in the last five years in its implementation regarding the industrial pollution referring to the EC Progress Reports.

**Table 2.** Assessments of Kosovo's progress in Chapter 27: Environment and climate change during the years 2020-24.  
Source. European Commission, 2020, European Commission, 2021, European Commission, 2022, European Commission, 2023, European Commission, 2024

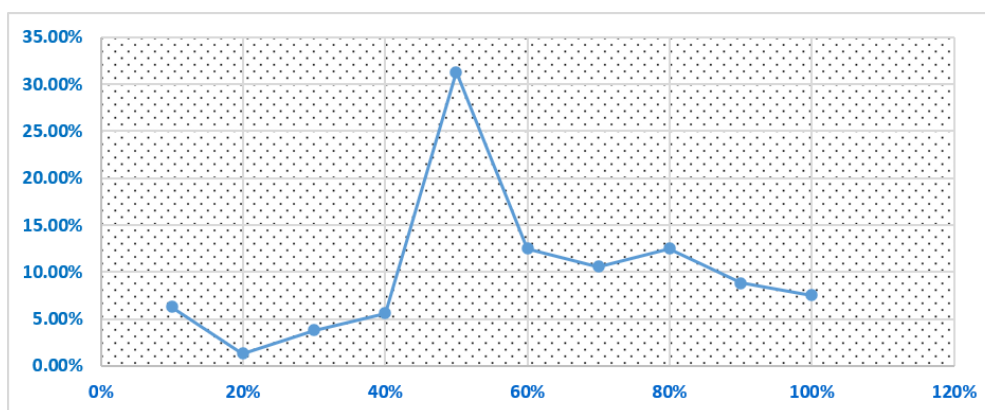
<b>EU Progress Report</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Environment	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Climate change	<i>No</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>
Horizontal issues	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Air quality	<i>No</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>
Waste management	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Some</i>
Water management	<i>No</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Nature protection	<i>No</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Some</i>
Industrial pollution	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>No</i>
Chemicals	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Noise	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Civil protection	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Some</i>

Additionally, the study has compared Kosovo's Chapter 27 performance to that of other neighboring countries that are in the process of EU integration. Table 3 shows that three Western Balkan countries, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania, have made limited progress in their environmental and climate change policies. Montenegro and Serbia, however, have advanced the most from the region in their path toward integration in the field of environmental and climate change.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Kosovo’s progress with neighboring countries in the years 2020-24, according to the EC Progress Reports in Chapter 27- Environment and Climate Change

EU Progress Report	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Kosovo	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Albania	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Montenegro	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>
North Macedonia	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>
Serbia	<i>Some</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>Good</i>

The level of trust in the EC Progress Report's assessments seems to be fairly high. Figure 1 displays the reliability statistics of the respondents in the assessment of EC Progress Reports, which range from 10% (very low trust) to 100% (full trust) on the vertical axis. The horizontal axis shows that more than half of the respondents (51.9%) strongly believe that the EC Progress Report appropriately reflects both positive and negative developments in Kosovo with regard to the environment and climate change. A tiny percentage of them do not trust the Report's assessments, and about one-third are unsure if the report is realistic in its assessments. As a result, most participants agree with the reality of progress as assessed in the EC Progress Reports.



**Figure 1.** Level of respondents' trust in the assessment of the EC Progress Report (from 10- very low to 100%-full trust).

The EC Progress Report, in general, and Chapter 27 in particular, according to the interviewees, accurately reflects environmental progress, as it is based on a variety of sources and goes through an inclusive and wide consultative process. Institutions, decision-makers, and societal structures should take the findings of the Report’s much more seriously and consult its findings, conclusions, and recommendations when making decisions pertaining to social reforms in general and the enhancement of environmental management.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the respondents' evaluations of the Chapter 27 progress for 2024, broken down into 19 distinct areas. The EC Progress Report's five-level assessment scale: no progress, limited progress, some progress, fair progress, and substantial improvement, was also used to gauge respondents' assessment. The first thirteen sections of Table 4 represent direct assessment sectors within Chapter 27. The remaining six sectors are related to environmental and climate change issues but belong to other chapters connected to the environment and climate change (energy efficiency and renewable energy, radioactive pollution and public health), and the last two sectors (education and research) are related to the goal of our study. One of the five assessment levels used in the EC Progress Report was available to respondents. The evaluation with the highest percentage of respondents' support (shown in bold) is considered the dominant assessment for the sake of conclusions of comparison EC Progress Report and respondent assessments. Ten out of the 19 sections (Climate change, Environmental legislation, Secondary

legislation, Air quality, Water management, Noise, Renewable energy, Civil protection, Public health, and Research and innovation) have assessments that are consistent with those provided by the EC Progress Report. As a result, the majority of respondents' progress evaluations align with the EC Progress Report for 2024.

Seven sections (Environment, Waste management, Forests, Chemicals, Industrial pollution, Radioactive pollution, and Education and awareness) received better progress assessments from the respondents than those found in the EC Progress Report. Therefore, respondents evaluate more progress in these categories than in those reported in the 2024 Report. However, in two areas (Nature conservation and Energy efficiency), respondents' evaluations of progress were lower than those given by the EC Progress Report. According to the findings, noise (40.4%), pollution from radiation (29.8%), and forest management (26.2%) are the three areas where the majority of respondents said there had been no progress.

**Table 4.** Comparison of the EC Progress Report 2024 assessment and respondents by sections of Chapter 27 (The highest percentage of respondents' assessments is in bold. Highlighted sections are those where the EC Progress Report and respondents' assessments match fully in a five-level rating scale)  
Source. European Commission, 2024.

	<b>Progress Report 2024</b>	<b>No progress</b>	<b>Limited progress</b>	<b>Some progress</b>	<b>Good progress</b>	<b>Substantial progress</b>
1. Environmental protection	Limited	14.2	30.2	<b>45.3</b>	10.2	0
2. Climate changes	Some	16	38.2	<b>39.6</b>	6.2	0
3. Environmental legislation	Limited	16	<b>34.7</b>	34.7	13.8	0.9
4. Horizontal legislation	Limited	20	<b>34.2</b>	31.1	12.4	2.2
5. Ambient air quality	Some	16	36.4	<b>40.4</b>	6.2	0.9
6. Water management	Some	15.6	31.1	<b>33.3</b>	17.3	2.7
7. Waste management	Limited	13.8	27.6	<b>34.2</b>	20	4.4
8. Nature conservation	Some	17.8	<b>36.4</b>	31.1	14.2	0.4
9. Forest and deforestation	Limited	26.2	28.4	<b>33.3</b>	11.1	0.9
10. Chemicals	No	28.4	30.2	<b>32.9</b>	8	0.4
11. Industrial pollution	No	25.8	<b>38.2</b>	30.2	5.8	0
12. Noise	No	<b>40.4</b>	28.9	20.4	8.9	1.3
13. Civil protection	Some	20	33.3	<b>34.2</b>	10.2	2.2
14. Renewable energy	Some	16	29.3	<b>36.9</b>	16	1.8
15. Energy efficiency	Good	13.3	21.8	<b>36</b>	24	4.9
16. Radioactive pollution	No	29.8	<b>37.8</b>	22.2	9.3	0.9
17. Public health	Limited	24.4	<b>32</b>	28.4	12.4	2.7
18. Education	Limited	9.8	28.4	<b>37.8</b>	21.3	2.7
19. Research and innovation	Limited	17.8	<b>36</b>	33.3	12	0.9

All respondents assess that none of the 19 sections has made good or substantial progress, which also reflects the country's environmental situation. When combining the respondents' assessment of the Report's good progress level with respondents' assessments, the study finds that the energy efficiency sector, for 28.9% of respondents, has demonstrated positive development. The subsidies for residential energy-efficiency investments that citizens have received over the past two years appear to have contributed to the assessment of energy efficiency as good progress. Although there has been some progress in the waste management sector due to the increase in the infrastructure for garbage collection and disposal, the state of municipal waste is still far from improving. The numerous illegal dumpsites, the absence of recycling, the low waste collection rate, the inadequate landfill management, etc., all attest to this. The daily water cutbacks during the previous years have been much reduced, and people's confidence in the responsible institutions' ability to monitor the quality of drinking water has increased, suggesting that water management has made progress.

The adoption of environmental secondary legislation, particularly those pertaining to climate change, as well as the creation and approval of strategic documents generated from these laws, stand out among the areas where important progress has been noted by interviewed officials. Environmental monitoring and reporting, investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, waste collection and the decrease in the number of illicit dumping sites, water management, and inspections all show some progress. However, in the domains of the environment and climate change, both at the national and local levels, stagnation is clearly visible due to a lack of legislation implementation and weak institutional capacities (both in terms of human and financial resources). The improvement of air quality, decarbonization, lack of recycling and circular economy principles in waste management, the inadequate protection of rivers from pollution and degradation, chemical control, and the failure to apply international environmental principles (such as the "polluter pays" and extended producer responsibility) are further areas where setbacks are noted during interviews.

Based on their knowledge of events over the last five years, we asked respondents how satisfied they were with the work of the country institutions in charge of tackling environmental and climate change. For each of the institutions, respondents could rank their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 (completely dissatisfied), 2 (dissatisfied), 3 (moderately satisfied), 4 (satisfied), and 5 (extremely satisfied). Municipal governments received respondents' highest level of satisfaction, followed by the environmental inspectorate and environmental non-governmental organizations. However, the work of the Assembly of Kosovo (for 22.5% of respondents), the Government of Kosovo (for 20% of respondents), and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (for 18.1% of respondents) are the most unsatisfactory institutions. It is clear that the public is dissatisfied with the actions of the institutions that are most legally and constitutionally responsible for making decisions that will improve the nation's environmental conditions and deal with climate change. According to the EU officials interviewed, the EU's Young Cell Scheme was established to support Kosovo's administrative system by training young people in EU institutions so they may use what they've learned, including the responsible institutions for the environment and climate change. However, it is now known that the majority of candidates who finish their specializations under this program depart the institutions for the private sector and consultancies as soon as their contractual duties with the EU expire.

The study examined respondents' perspectives and suggestions for the areas in which the government should prioritize improving Kosovo's environmental and climate change conditions during the next five years. Respondents used five scale measurement instrument to indicate their level of prioritization. Table 5 displays the outcomes of the responses, which range from level 1 (extremely high priority) to level 5 (very low priority). According to the data in Table 5, the three most important areas that future governments should prioritize when it comes to environmental and climate change policies are: education and awareness of citizens (35% of respondents), application of international environmental principles (33.8%), and harmonization of environmental legislation with that of the EU (27.5%).

**Table 5.** Level of prioritization measures to improve the state of the environment in the future (in % of respondents)

<b>Priority measures:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Raising the environment and climate change in government policy priorities	26.3	20.6	<b>31.3</b>	13.8	8.1
Increasing national budget for the environment	20.6	30	<b>30.6</b>	12.5	6.3
Increase number or environmental inspectors	23.1	24.4	<b>35</b>	10.6	6.9
Harmonization of environmental legislation with EU	<b>27.5</b>	25	27.5	8.1	11.9
Application of environmental international principles (polluter pay, producers' extended responsibility etc.)	<b>33.8</b>	19.4	24.4	13.8	8.8
Education and awareness raising of citizens about environment and climate changes	<b>35.0</b>	18.8	25.6	11.9	8.8
Investment in scientific research and innovation	28.1	19.4	<b>30.6</b>	12.5	9.4
Membership in international environmental mechanisms (treaties, conventions, protocols)	21.9	26.9	<b>29.4</b>	15	6.9
Access to international financial mechanisms for environmental related projects	24.4	<b>28.7</b>	25	14.4	7.5

The Kosovo national curriculum adopted in 2011 is a competency-based curriculum and a student-centered approach. One of the six competencies is “Competence for life, work and the environment”. According to this competence, by committing to the development and protection of the environment, students become “Productive contributors” to society as a final result of the curriculum. The national curriculum is organized in curricular fields, and one of the six fields is “Society and environment”. Through these curricular fields, students develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that are necessary for a democratic society. This field helps to develop their understanding of their own environment and beyond, and enables them to participate and contribute actively in the local, national, and global community in which they live and engage on environmental issues (MEST, 2016).

Opinions on higher education and research are split; while some think there is existing room for environmental and climate change-related studies, the majority of interviewed officials contend that these issues are grossly underrepresented in both public and private university curricula. A study about the incorporation of climate change content into higher education curricula was carried out in 2023 (Veselaj, 2023), and a rather unsettling set of statistics came from the analysis done at twelve public and private universities. Only one course has the keyword "climate change" in its title out of the 239 courses and 101 study programs that were analyzed. The absence of a specific course or study program on climate change is a sign that higher education institutions and decision-makers need to address this shortcoming. However, this does not imply that there is no substance on climate change in environmental studies courses. Furthermore, it is observed that academic institutions still play a very minor role in the creation of action plans, environmental strategies, and environmental laws.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the persistent challenges Kosovo faces in aligning its environmental and climate change policies with the EU Acquis under Chapter 27 of the EC Progress Report. Quantitative data reveal that respondents perceive environmental conditions as deteriorating rather than improving, with more than half of respondents reporting worsening trends. This perception is consistent with the EC Progress Report's repeated assessment of “limited progress” across most environmental sectors over the past five years. The alignment between citizens' views and the EC evaluations suggests that the EC Progress Report accurately reflects the reality of Kosovo's environmental situation. A closer look at sectoral performance shows uneven progress. Waste management stands out as the most positively evaluated area, with consistent improvements noted across all reporting years. Water management also demonstrated occasional progress, particularly in 2021, when it was rated “good progress”.

However, other critical areas such as noise, chemicals, and industrial pollution have shown no progress, underscoring systemic weaknesses in enforcement and implementation. This stagnation is particularly concerning given that Kosovo's legislation is formally aligned with EU directives in some of these fields, suggesting that the gap lies not in lawmaking but in implementation. Comparative analysis with neighboring countries further illustrates Kosovo's relative disadvantage. While Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina share similar struggles, Montenegro and Serbia have achieved more substantial progress, with Serbia even reaching "good progress" in 2024. This divergence highlights the urgency for Kosovo to accelerate reforms if it wishes to remain competitive in the regional integration process. The study also sheds light on the sources of environmental knowledge among the respondents. The dominance of the internet and social media as primary sources of information reflects global trends but raises concern about the limited role of NGOs and scientific sources in shaping public awareness. Despite their formal presence, environmental NGOs in Kosovo remain underfunded and lack the capacity to influence policy or public discourse effectively. This weak civil society engagement further hampers the country's ability to build a culture of accountability and sustainability. Trust in the EC Progress Report emerges as a significant finding. More than half of respondents strongly believe that the Report provides an accurate reflection of Kosovo's environmental progress. This high level of trust reinforces the legitimacy of the EC Progress Report as a tool for guiding reforms. It also places responsibility on institutions to take its recommendations seriously. The consultative and inclusive nature of the reporting process, confirmed by interviewees, strengthens this trust and suggests that the Report can serve as a credible roadmap for reform.

Overall, the results point to a paradox: while Kosovo has developed a relatively comprehensive legislative framework aligned with EU standards, implementation remains weak, leading to limited or no progress in most areas. Respondents' perceptions confirm this reality, and comparisons with neighboring countries highlight Kosovo's lagging position. To move forward, Kosovo must invest in institutional capacity, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and empower civil society actors. Only through such measures can the country transform legislative alignment into tangible environmental improvements and advance meaningfully on its path toward EU integration.

The novelty of the study lies in its mixed-methods design, which triangulates: longitudinal qualitative content analysis of EC Progress Reports, comparative regional assessment across Western Balkan countries, and quantitative survey data capturing perceptions among students and academic staff. By integrating institutional performance analysis with perception-based evidence, the study extends beyond document-based policy reviews and offers a more comprehensive understanding of how EU environmental and climate reform progress is interpreted within academia. The study provides a solid contribution to international literature on EU integration and environmental policies, as it brings a unique approach by combining institutional assessments of the EC Progress Reports with respondents' perceptions. Unlike most studies that focus only on the legal or institutional analysis of the harmonization of the environmental acquis, this research links the political and technical dimension with the direct experience of society, providing a more comprehensive overview of the integration process. This makes the paper comparable with similar studies in other Western Balkan countries, but at the same time sets it apart due to the specific context of Kosovo as a new country and not yet recognized by five EU member states. In this way, the paper contributes to the international literature as a case study illustrating the dual challenges of legal harmonization and social perception in the processes of European integration in the field of environment and climate change.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study makes an important scientific contribution by providing a structured and combined analysis of qualitative and quantitative data on Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change of the EC Progress Report for Kosovo, comparing the institutional assessment with respondents' perceptions. For the first time, the credibility of the Report is empirically measured through a large sample of students and academic staff, as well as interviews with institutional and societal stakeholders. This methodological approach not only enriches the literature on Kosovo's European integration but also creates an applicable model for similar analyses in other chapters of the EC Progress Report. In this way, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges of harmonizing environmental legislation with the EU acquis and provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and civil society.

This is the first study to examine Kosovo's progress on Chapter 27 based on the EC Progress Reports assessment. It also compares the assessments provided by Kosovo students and academic staff using the same assessment scale with those found in the Progress Report. The findings demonstrated that the Progress Report's evaluations of the institutional, political, and legal changes necessary for the nation's integration process, in our case for Chapter 27, were strongly trusted by the study's participants. Compared to other countries, Kosovo is lagging behind other countries in the Western Balkans region in the integration process and in meeting the required standards in the integration process and in preparing for the implementation of the Acquis on the environment. In terms of progress in the sectors within Chapter 27, it is worrying that in the last five years, there has been no progress in two of the most stressful environmental pressures on citizens' lives: noise and chemicals. Additionally, it was found that in the majority of the 19 areas that the study evaluated, the respondents' evaluations agreed with those of the EC Progress Report. All interviewees confirmed the credibility of the EC Progress Report based on the institutional inclusiveness and correctness of the assessment of achievements, but also setbacks in the field of environment and climate change. This leads to the conclusion that the EC Progress Report is a tangible, trustworthy, and legitimate tool that country institutions ought to take far more seriously when advancing the nation's integration processes. It is advised that the evaluations of the nation's readiness and level of progress found in the Progress Reports serve as a foundation for integration policies and the achievement of the requirements of the environmental Acquis. The study about Chapter 27 has built a solid methodology, and its conclusions can be used as a model for comparable research in other chapters of the EC Progress Report. These studies would assist the country institutions in more precisely outlining the course of reforms and fulfilling the standards for EU membership.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no competing interests.

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