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Comparative Analysis of Climate and Sustainability Practices in Education: Bridging Gaps Between EU and Western Balkan Countries

This paper investigates the differences in climate and sustainability practices between higher education institutions (HEIs) in the European Union (EU) and the Western Balkans (WBC) within the Erasmus+ 1FUTURE project. Using a comprehensive gap analysis, it examines legal frameworks, institutional structures, curricula, research, and sustainability-related services.

The study draws on environmental implementation reviews and national reports from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia, as well as EU member states Sweden, Germany, and Italy. Findings reveal key disparities in policy implementation, curriculum integration, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While EU HEIs adopt more structured and holistic approaches, WBC HEIs face challenges related to institutional capacity, resource allocation, and cross-sector coordination.

Additionally, the report outlines variations in the adoption of circular economy practices, biodiversity protection, climate action, and environmental governance. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to strengthen collaboration, enhance educational innovation, and position WBC HEIs as vital contributors to regional and global sustainability agendas. The findings support the broader goals of the 1FUTURE project, aiming to foster sustainable development and climate awareness through capacity building and systemic reform in higher education.

Keywords: sustainability, higher education, Western Balkans, climate action, 1FUTURE.