



JUL
2021



HIGHLIGHTS

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EDITORIAL by the UN Resident Coordinator

KEY DATES

JUNE

- 1** Shar Mountain proclaimed National Park by the Assembly of North Macedonia, with UNEP support.
- 1-3** Gender-responsive budgeting training for representatives of the State Audit Office, organized by UN Women
- 7-8** UN Women-organized workshop for 21 local self-government units as part of support for gender-responsive budgeting.
- 8** Launch of the UNODC *World Drug Report 2021* that provides an in-depth analysis of the global drug markets and paints a comprehensive picture of the measurable effects and potential impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the world drug problem.
- 9** Conclusion of 10-day training for primary school teachers and kindergarten educators on environmental and climate science integration in curriculum, organized by UNICEF as part of programme on environment education.
- 12** A workshop to foster inter-institutional exchange of information in firearms related cases, organized by UN ODC.
- 13** Commencement of UNOPS/UNIDO-supported clean-up of former factory OHIS that is expected to finish by July 2021.
- 14** Promotion of UNFPA-supported handbook for families of children with autism spectrum disorder 'Living with autism: challenges and support strategy'.
- 14-15** Workshop organized by UNDP with the representatives of nine municipalities from Polog region, on disaster risk reduction management.

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee did not add Ohrid to the list of endangered world heritage sites at its 44th session in July 2021, which is an important decision that carries three key messages:

First, this decision does not diminish the urgency to act, but – on the contrary – signals that the time is running out.

For decades, Ohrid has been plagued with inappropriate and often illegal construction, poor management of fishing and a lack of protection for its underwater life. The need for the preservation of its natural and cultural treasures has been met with apathy.

The immense issues that Ohrid faces today require a holistic approach to rectify the damage that has been accumulating for years and utmost importance to be given to the future planning and management of the site. The time to act is NOW!

Secondly, being given two more years to significantly increase efforts towards corrective measures and improved management of the site is an immense opportunity. All efforts must be doubled to restore the site's values as soon as possible.

This will require coordinated action and close cooperation by all stakeholders, with lead role of the central and local governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), private sector, citizens of surrounding settlements, tourists and the international community.

I welcome the recent efforts of the Government of North Macedonia and Ohrid and Struga municipalities and I commend the dedicated efforts of civil society. The UN family in North Macedonia stands ready to provide support for Ohrid to stay off the List of Endangered World Heritage!

Finally, the fate of Ohrid's natural and the cultural heritage demonstrates the importance of joint action or lack thereof. We must act jointly because Ohrid is a common good, shared by the people that live on its shores, municipalities and state institutions that manage

the overwhelming natural and cultural treasures, to all of us, by all Macedonian citizens and global citizens.



Ohrid is a treasure for the whole world, and it is our joint duty to protect and conserve it, for our and future generations.

Ohrid's deterioration over the past few decades is a stark reminder of the impact of human behaviour on natural and cultural heritage.

We cannot wait for our joint heritage to be put on the endangered list to change our attitudes and our practices. To be clear, that does not mean that we should halt all development, but that we should ensure sustainable development and action. This is the essence of Agenda 2030.

We must pre-emptively take bold and transformative steps that will lead towards improvements in all three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Taking a holistic approach is the key to ensure the sustainable development we want to see in Ohrid and everywhere else. We must act now to protect Ohrid and all other treasures of North Macedonia.

Rossana Dudziak
UN Resident Coordinator in North Macedonia

UN ACTIVITIES

United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the National Association of the Blind, launched the first natural voice speech synthesis application in Macedonian language. This application, called Kiko, is free and easy to use for all ages, but was primarily developed to assist the more than 3,000 blind or visual impaired persons in the country in navigating the world of information by translating digital text into voice in their native language. The app is available on desktop and Android devices through the [RHVoice Play Store application](#); select Macedonian language after installation.



The first natural voice speech synthesis application in Macedonian language called Kiko

UNDP launched a call for projects on intermunicipal cooperation within the project Reversing the COVID-19 crisis: municipalities as drivers of sustainable development. In cooperation with the Bureau for Regional Development and the Ministry for Local Self-government, UNDP is supporting innovative initiatives for the establishment of intermunicipal cooperation on diverse topics such as financial management, environment, disaster risk reduction and other topics related to local and regional development. To mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, the supported projects are expected to bring digital solutions for better municipal services closer to citizens, especially the vulnerable groups. The implementation of the projects will set the ground for promotion of intermunicipal practices and policies in North Macedonia. The project funds (\$350,000) have been secured by UNDP and the Bureau for Regional Development.

Building on the achievements to-date, UNDP's project Building Municipal Capacities for Project Implementation will be supported with an additional \$471,000 from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. This additional support will enable the expansion of the project to municipalities, regional centres and public health institutions for preparing complete technical documentation for priority infrastructure development projects. As part of the project-supported Technical Documentation Fund, 47 municipalities, two regional centres and nine hospitals will receive technical documentation that is essential for providing funding from different governmental, donor and other sources for important investments. The technical documentation is the first step towards implementation of complex infrastructure projects that will result with overall improvement of the quality of life for citizens.

UNDP, in collaboration with the partners from the Ministry of Interior, has completed Phase 2 of the development of a new Police Information Management System (IMS): Incident Recording, Documents and Activities Module (IRDAM), as part of the project Improving National Small Arms and Light Weapons Practices and Building Resilient Communities. The Police IMS will be designed to support police activities, whilst providing key information that will help decision-makers to identify and more effectively combat prolific offenders, criminal hotspots and crimes that generally cause public

concern.

UNDP's Empowering Municipal Councils project expanded the use of its e-dashboard from 24 to 36 municipalities, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Finance. The on-line dashboard with financial data was developed in 2016 for municipalities to publish their revenues, expenditures, liabilities, annual and quarterly financial reports, resulting in enhanced fiscal transparency at the local level, as well as to improved civic monitoring over the municipal budgeting processes. According to the latest public expenditure and financial accountability assessment conducted in the partner-municipalities, there has been significant improvement of the public expenditure and financial accountability of the municipalities involved in the project since 2017, thanks to the comprehensive Capacity Development Programme delivered to more than 250 municipal councillors.

UNDP, together with the representatives of nine municipalities from Polog region, is working on cleaning of the riverbeds, culverts, establishing early warning systems, operational flood protection plans and smart solutions for urban resilience. As part of these efforts, a two-day workshop of the Swiss-funded Network for Protected and Resilient Polog project was held on 14-15 July, concluding that an integrated approach and joint action is crucial to the successful management of the risks of floods and other natural disasters.

At the beginning of June, the **United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF)**, in partnership with USAID and Finance Think, published an update of the analysis of the social and economic effects of COVID-19 on children, originally presented in July 2020. While the Government's COVID-19 socio-economic measures – and particularly social transfers – have mitigated the impact on extreme child poverty, more children are living below the average standard of living in the country. COVID-19 is projected to strongly affect child poverty: Relative poverty is forecast to increase from 27.8 percent before the pandemic to 32.4 percent after the pandemic, putting an additional 19,000 children below the relative poverty threshold. However, the adjusted and expanded cash transfers contributed strongly to the reduction of the number of children living in extreme poverty, from 1.5% to 0.6%. Nonetheless, it is worrying that an estimated 27% of families eligible to take advantage of the relaxed criteria for accessing key anti-poverty social transfer (the guaranteed minimum allowance) are not utilizing this assistance. Furthermore, disruptions to social protection and education services and decreased demand for health services are putting children at further risk as the pandemic lingers. A survey of paediatricians showed a decrease of workload during COVID-19, predominantly due to the fear of parents and children to contract COVID-19 while visiting medical facilities. The analysis indicated the need for further policy measures, including to ensure continuity in the relaxed access to the key poverty-fighting cash transfer; prepare for the safe reopening of schools; increase investment in schools capacities to respond to mental health challenges; reduce the digital divide in education especially for the most vulnerable, including children with disabilities; fully restore child protection – including violence prevention services; introduce additional measures to increase public confidence and demand for services including support for mental health; improve outreach, information and support for potential beneficiaries to be able to access cash benefits.

UNICEF completed a behavioural study on the low uptake of a vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR). Three prototypes' posters with information and frequently asked questions were developed and will be distributed around the country at immunization points. Activities will be evaluated next year to assess the impact of interventions on the key

target behaviour: on timely uptake of the MMR1 vaccine, to help understand if the intervention is cost-effective, and to support the case for scaling it up.

As part of the Perinatal masterplan 2030 developed in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNFPA in 2020, level-appropriate training curriculums for high- and mid-level perinatal care professionals (ob/gyns/neonatologists/midwives/nurses) were developed by UNICEF. Thirty health professionals at Level II neonatology wards were trained in evidence-based ante-natal care, principles of risk-appropriate perinatal care and maternal-new-born referral criteria.

Stakeholder consultation meeting to discuss the first draft of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) strategy and plan was organized by UNICEF on June 25. The consultation gathered the Government and development partners, practitioners, and civil society, and allowed to further shape the draft RCCE strategy. The document will be officially shared with the Government counterparts for their review and adoption.

In support of the ongoing reform of primary education, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Bureau for Development of Education, provided a tailored training to over 3,000 teachers on methods and techniques for planning and implementing the new curricula.

As part of UNICEF's programme on environmental education, 32 primary school teachers and 28 kindergarten educators, underwent a 10-days training on the experiential learning and the integration of environmental concepts in teaching between 28 June until 9 July. The primary goal was to provide educators with examples of how environmental and climate science can be integrated into early years/primary school teaching using experiential and inquiry-based learning. Content areas that received particular focus were water, heat, atmosphere, and soils.

As part of CINEDAYS, festival of European Film, UNICEF and partners have supported a film program on environmental and climate change themes, production of short documentary videos by youth on topics associated with water, air, waste, food, and climate change and other activities for youth engagement and raising awareness on environment and climate change.



Environmental and climate change films at CINEDAYS

Following the successful completion of training of trainers for the educational assistants, a coaching session with thirty trainers was organized by UNICEF. The focus of the coaching sessions was on strategies for training and facilitation. These sessions offer an excellent opportunity to address gaps in the knowledge and understanding and to provide space for discussions and reflections for trainers.

UNICEF together with youth, decision-makers, international organizations and experts, launched U-Report as a platform to support youth participation and empower youth to share

UN ACTIVITIES (continued)

their opinion on matters they care about and become positive agents of change in their communities. U-Report is present 85 countries around the world, with more than 15.000.000 U-Reporters engaged through the platform in important decision-making processes, development of policies and strategies that affect youth and their future. The U-Reporters from our country are now able to become part of the global community by registering on the U-Report MK chatbot on [Viber](#).

Joining 33 other countries, [North Macedonia is the latest country adopting the UNODC Blue Heart Campaign](#) in its efforts to tackle human trafficking. Announced during a session of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, the Blue Heart Campaign is now a central element of North Macedonia's awareness raising drive to end this crime and protect those most impacted. As a global awareness raising initiative to fight human trafficking and its impact on society, the Blue Heart Campaign seeks to encourage Governments, civil society, the private sector and individuals alike to act and help prevent this heinous crime.

UNODC hosted a [Ministerial level Forum](#) whereby the Ministers of Justice, Ministers of Interior, Deputy Ministers, State Secretaries and Heads of Anti-corruption agencies from the six Western Balkan jurisdictions have formally endorsed the Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans. The main areas of work identified are public procurement, enhancing the asset, income and interest disclosure systems and the creation of specialized network of prosecutors, law enforcement and financial intelligence units that will focus on targeted criminal typologies. The Roadmap is part of the Berlin Process for South-Eastern Europe (BP).

The UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme (CCP) organized a theoretical training cycle for the customs and border police officers to form part of the inter-agency group that will be established at the Skopje International Airport. Delivered through an online modality, the three-day Basic Theoretical Training (part 2) provided an overview of profiling and targeting techniques, detection of smuggling of illicit goods, air cargo safety and other topics covered in the previous training. This training was carried out under the framework of the joint EU-UNODC Action on promoting rule of law and good governance through targeted border control measures at ports and airports, funded by the European Union.

UNODC held a Workshop on harmonization of court practice in North Macedonia. Ten judges and presidents of courts across the country were acquainted with UNODC's 'Analysis of verdicts for the criminal offenses of illicit manufacturing, possession, and trafficking in firearms. The presentation and distribution of the court cases analysis at the local level will be followed by regional meetings with an aim to achieve greater harmonization of court practice at the regional level and to foster the exchange of experience among judges in the Western Balkan region.

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) in cooperation with the Association of Journalists of Macedonia and the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) published a [Public Call for Award for professional reporting on the situation of refugees and stateless persons in North Macedonia for 2020](#). These awards have been presented annually since 2015.

UNHCR produced videos from activities involving refugees and asylum seekers as part of marking the World Refugee Day (20 June). A [table tennis tournament](#) and [bus tour through Skopje](#) was organized together with refugees and partners,

giving the opportunity to mark the day with the population of most concern.

UNHCR issued a [Public Call](#) to solicit proposals from interested service providers with relevant expertise in public sector innovation, foresight and strategic design to advise on and support the process of institutionalizing participatory, innovative and forward-looking planning and policy development across national institutions and all actors of society in North Macedonia. The engagement is part of the "Evidence based migration policy planning and discourse" joint program (JP) funded by the UN Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund that aims at to support national institutions in developing good migration governance in North Macedonia through enhanced evidence-based, data-driven and innovative migration discourse and policy development. The JP is implemented by the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#), [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#) and UNHCR.

A handbook for families of children with autism spectrum disorder 'Living with autism: challenges and support strategy', with UNFPA contribution and supported by Ms. Elizabeta Gjorgjievska, the spouse of the President of North Macedonia, was promoted on 14 July 2021. The event was organized by the Institute for Rehabilitation of Hearing, Speech and Voice Skopje and the Skopje University Clinic of Psychiatry.

The importance of quality, accessible, disaggregated, reliable and timely data to inform policies, action and public opinion on migration is well recognized and highlighted in multiple international frameworks, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. As a key data stakeholder in its own right and as the coordinator and secretariat of the United Nations Network on Migration, IOM is in a unique position to help reach these goals with respect to data on the movement of people. As part of the JP, IOM has been supporting the authorities in North Macedonia in strengthening the systems for collection, analysis and dissemination of official and reliable migration statistics. Throughout 2021, the National Roadmap on Migration Statistics has been jointly developed with the State Statistical Office and the Ministry of Interior. The Roadmap is a strategic guidance document that presents an overview of the current systems and practices on migration statistics in the country, including the needs and challenges, and provides solution-oriented timeline towards a complete harmonization with the EU standards on migration statistics.

On 23 June, IOM organized the last in a series of workshops aimed at the finalization of the Roadmap, which is expected to be validated and endorsed by the national authorities by September 2021, after which IOM will provide support in operationalizing the recommendations and solutions provided in the document. With the support of the European Union and in the context of the EU accession processes, IOM is engaged in similar comprehensive support activities on migration statistics across the Western Balkans.

Several capacity building and knowledge sharing activities were organized under the [UN Women](#) project "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia", funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency:

Together with the Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities, Club of Women MPs, Commission on Finance and Budget and the Parliamentary Institute, UN Women facilitated a thematic meeting on gender assessment

of policies and laws and the role of the Parliament as an oversight mechanism.

The Association of the Units of the Local Self-Government (ZELS) organized a Forum for exchange of municipal practices on gender mainstreaming and application of GRB at local level, gathering mayors and municipal officials across the country.

UN Women partner municipalities exchanged innovative ideas and local practices for investing in sustainable and gender responsive social services during a 2-day workshop organized as part of the continued training and mentoring programme on gender responsive budgeting.

The State Audit Office and UN Women are continuing the collaboration in strengthening the capacities of the State Audit Office on gender-responsive budgeting. 34 auditors from SAO gained knowledge on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the auditing processes and gender impact assessment of policies and regulations.

Mayors and presidents of municipal councils from North Macedonia had an opportunity to learn about the impressive work done by the Municipality of Bar, Montenegro for supporting women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment during a study visit organized by ZELS.

Akcija Zdruzenska, with support by UN Women in the frames of the GRB project, organized a three-day networking workshop for representatives from nine grassroots organizations and women from 20 rural communities.

UN Women North Macedonia office took part in the regional initiative ["Mural Artivism: Breaking the walls of gender inequality"](#).

UN Women office supported the communications efforts during the address of the President of North Macedonia, Stevo Pendarovski, to the Paris Generation Equality Forum. The President announced national commitments as country leader in the Action Coalition on Bodily Autonomy and Sexual Rights and Reproductive Health.

MYLA, a partner organization to UN Women in the frames of the Regional EAW Programme Implementing Norms Changing Minds, organized a closing event for their project "Creating a Culture towards Gender Equality" where 240 students and 18 high school staff were empowered to work as advocates against harmful gender stereotyping, violence against women and domestic violence.

Three local multi-sectorial groups for survivors of violence were established in Strumica, Shtip and Veles to ensure regular collaboration and quality of services provided to the survivors of violence against women. This process was supported by HERA, a partner organization to UN Women in the frames of the Regional EAW Programme Implementing Norms Changing Minds.

UN Women and other UN partners supported the organization of panel on "Women, Peace and Security - a viewpoint from the Western Balkans" as part of the Prespa Dialogue Forum, which included the Ms. Radmila Shekerinska, the Minister of Defense, and Mr. Miroslav Jenča, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, and other dignitaries from the region. They discussed how to ensure gender equality, equity and parity through advancing the women in peace and security agenda in the Western Balkans, and the advancement of women in all spheres of security sector.

UN Women took part in the first regional meeting of the

UN ACTIVITIES (continued)

Western Balkans countries, to discuss the support provided to the national governments related to gender equality facility and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) processes and next steps.

The field works for the remediation of the lindane deposits from the small dumpsite in the former factory OHIS have officially started. The complex clean-up operation is a coordinated activity of the Government of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, **UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** and the **UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** who joined forces to coordinate operations on the ground that will be carried out in line with national and international standards. In this partnership, UNOPS manages the Multi Partner Environmental Fund set up to mobilise national and international resources to sustain the cleaning of this site and facilitate donors' coordination. The clean-up activities are expected to be completed by July 2022.



Clean-up activities in the former factory OHIS were launched

UNOPS organized a theoretical and practical training for the staff of the office of the Ombudsman on the principles and techniques of running investigations and conducting effective examinations. The training focused on the mechanisms for protection of the right to life and freedom from torture, articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

WHO North Macedonia gathered over 80 representatives from the Ministry of Health, Institute for Public Health, USAID, World Bank, UN entities, embassies, medical associations, non-governmental organizations and other partners from a wide range of sectors to present and discuss the findings from the "Health care workers qualitative study for COVID-19 vaccination in North Macedonia" and "Latest round of COVID-19 behavioural insight study in North Macedonia". Understanding health care workers' and the general public's perspectives on COVID-19 vaccination is key to effective policymaking to address the pandemic.

WHO and UNICEF North Macedonia are jointly implementing the Summer Sense risk communication campaign. With the goal to reduce risks of people's infection with COVID-19 during summer and avoid surge, the campaign is focused on five areas: travel and tourism, sports events, life outdoors (social gatherings, festivals, weddings, beach holidays), behaviours of vaccinated people and schools, universities.

With the technical expertise from the WHO Balkan Hub, WHO organized a two-day consultative workshop for 32 participants from the Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health, regional Centres for Public Health, e-Health directorate, Institute of Epidemiology and others, to enhance the functionality of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) and the public health network. A functioning PHEOC plays a vital role in coordinating partners responding to public health threats and emergencies.

IN FOCUS Shar Mountain

With around 6,000 different flora and fauna species identified so far, out of which 220 are endemic, many glacial lakes and around 40 peaks over 2,500 meters, Shar Mountain has rightfully attracted the interest of scientists, hikers, nature lovers, winter sports aficionados and other for a very long time. It provides home for the critically endangered Balkan Lynx (out of which around 35 have remained). It harbours some 20,000 people of various ethnicities settled in 30 villages and resources that secure the livelihoods of many more.

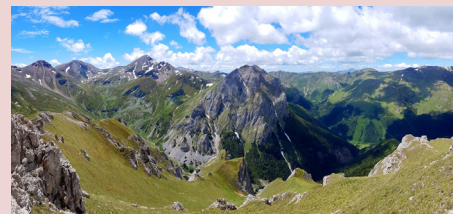
However, intensive and uncontrolled exploitation of the mountain led to habitats being disturbed and even destroyed. Illegal logging and the reckless building plagued the mountain range, resulting in an increased frequency of flash floods. As a result, nature lovers, local people, experts, and various nature-related institutions fought a battle over the course of decades to legally protect the Mountain as a national park, which North Macedonia's parliament did on 1 July 2021.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has supported nature conservation in North Macedonia through various projects over the last 15 years. During this time, UNEP recognized the importance of the initiative for protecting Shar Mountain and actively took part in the process. Over the past five years, UNEP has implemented a Global Environment Facility-funded project aiming at achieving enhanced biodiversity conservation. This project contributes to the accomplishment of the country's post-2020 global biodiversity framework goals under the Convention on Biological Diversity. It also contributes to fulfilling national obligations that came from signing the Sofia Declaration - the so-called EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. But the most important contribution is the one to the people and nature of North Macedonia. One of the project results is the proclamation of Shar Mountain as a national park.

The process: step by step

The process to proclaim Shar Mountain as a national park required extensive research of both natural and socioeconomic values of the Mountain. These were translated into two comprehensive studies. A socioeconomic study, whose development was financially supported by the Italian Ministry of environment, land and sea and which acted as a supplemental document used to fill in the relevant aspects in the main valorisation study - an official document forming the basis of the proclamation process. Around 70 national experts worked on the development of the study, which was submitted along with the initiative to proclaim Shar Mountain as a national park to the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning. After the initiative and study were delivered, MOEPP took the process further, submitting an initiative for the proclamation of Shar Mountain National Park to the Government and all relevant institutions. In May 2020, the Government accepted the initiative and asked for it to be harmonized with the views of all institutions. A negotiation process then followed with all interested parties where MOEPP and UNEP, together with several key experts, discussed all concerns with the stakeholders. After the official public debate, the proposal was adjusted according to the comments received. A public campaign was conducted in two phases, so that the people were aware of the changes and next steps. Ultimately, the decision to proclaim a national park was made by the

Assembly of North Macedonia.



What difference will the National Park bring?

The creation of Shar Mountain National Park in North Macedonia means that the final puzzle piece for one of the largest transboundary protected areas in Europe is now in place. With the approval of the new 627 square-kilometre national park, a transboundary protected area has now been established totalling around 2,400 square kilometres.

Through this decision, besides creating the possibility to protect and preserve the biodiversity and all natural values, a commitment is made to use natural resources sustainably, and new opportunities are opening to develop alternative forms of tourism, and to promote the region.

However, the proclamation itself is not enough to secure nature conservation and sustainable socio-economic prosperity. For the park to be properly managed, there is a need for proper planning. In this sense, and within the scope of the same GEF project, a Management Plan proposal is already being prepared. During its development, UNEP, MOEPP and the expert team led by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature are discussing the future management of natural resources and all economic activities inside the park with stakeholders. The Management plan should give an overall picture of what is allowed and forbidden in the different zones of the Park. However, the parks' newly-formed management body will need additional support in all aspects of governing the territory. Locals living in the park will also need guidance in order to utilize the opportunities that the protected area offers. UNEP currently seeks to secure funds for other projects that will support the management body and help local people and communities to thrive.

The national park's proclamation is a huge step for North Macedonia, as the last national park in the country was formed more than 60 years ago. It is an achievement that should be applauded and celebrated by all involved parties. But it is also an immediate obligation to further strengthen efforts to protect and preserve Shar Mountain's treasures, for the flora, fauna and for all the people that are somehow connected to its natural treasures.

Links:

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/missing-piece-puzzle-shar-mountain-national-park-approved>

<https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/endangered-species/lynx/lynxes-in-europe/projects/balkan-lynx/>

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