

Issue Brief:

**Addressing Illegal Logging and
Climate-related Security Risks in
the Shar/Šara Mountains and
Korab Massif Area**

1. Introduction

Large-scale deforestation presents not merely an environmental concern but also a significant challenge to prosperity, stability and security in the area covered by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), including in South-Eastern Europe. Alongside wildfires, forest neglect and authorized logging, such as for mining or use by local communities, illegal logging is an increasingly prominent driver of deforestation in the region and gaining political attention.

This issue brief provides a preliminary observation of drivers and consequences of illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area and provides ideas for collaborative action to reduce related security risks. Developed as part of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security and its broader efforts to address climate-related security risks¹, in line with OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/2021 on Strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change, this paper underscores the scope of the challenge and the opportunity for enhanced co-operation across protected areas in Albania, Kosovo², and North Macedonia to develop effective response strategies.

The findings build on an extensive consultation process in the region, including discussions held at a regional workshop entitled "Prevention of Illegal Logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area", held on 6-7 November, 2024, in Peshkopi, Albania, as well as research conducted by regional experts.³ As reliable data on illegal logging remains limited in the region, this brief should be understood as a contribution to a broader policy discussion, highlighting key trends, risks and opportunities for further analysis and co-operation.

Box 1: OSCE Engagement in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area

The Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area is a biodiversity hotspot of outstanding natural value. The area comprises four protected areas — Korab-Koritnik, Mavrovo, Shar Mountain, and Sharri/Šara — spanning over 240,000 hectares. Established by a joint agreement between Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in 2022, it is one of the largest contiguous and transboundary conservation areas in Europe. Natural resources in the area underpin local economies and rural livelihoods (UNEP 2010). However, climate change threatens the natural and economic value of the area. Combined with unsustainable and illegal human activities, these impacts endanger biodiversity and key economic sectors, undermining livelihoods and increasing security risks for local communities (van Ackern et al. 2023).

The area was identified as a priority hotspot for co-operation on climate security hotspot through a regional consultation process (Rüttinger et al. 2021). The OSCE supported the development of a **Joint co-operation strategy on climate change and security** for the area and has been implementing pilot initiatives in relation to **wild fire risk reduction** and the **prevention of illegal logging**, aimed at enhancing the capacity of local and regional stakeholders to respond to

¹ This paper builds on the OSCE's approach to security as a broad, comprehensive and co-operative issue expressed through its three dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human (OSCE 2009). Climate-related security risks are accordingly defined as those driven by one or more climate stressors that directly and/or indirectly impact human security and thus challenge the stability and security of societies and regions (Rüttinger et al. 2023). In addition to OSCE MC Dec 3/2021, it further contributes to the implementation of other related OSCE Commitments, including the 1997 PC Decision on the Mandate for the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (PC.DEC/194 and the 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security (MC.DOC/4/07).

² All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions, or population, should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

³ The research conducted during 2024 by a team of local and international experts analyzed illegal logging occurrences in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif area and identified legal and policy gaps that need to be addressed to combat them. It served as a basis for the discussions in the workshop and, as such, is unpublished.

transboundary climate-related security risks by fostering cooperation, improving governance, and promoting sustainable resource management.

2. The connection between illegal logging, climate change, and security

The interlinkages between illegal logging, climate change and security are complex and multidirectional. Amplified by socio-economic vulnerabilities and governance challenges, they create a mutually reinforcing spiral that can ultimately undermine regional security.

The accelerating impacts of climate change (e.g., rising temperature, changes in precipitation patterns and water flows, intensified droughts, increasing wildfires) weaken forest ecosystems, making recovery harder and degradation faster (UNECE and FAO 2021). As forests degrade, their ability to retain water is reduced, the ecosystem services on which local communities depend are diminished, and biodiversity suffers (van Ackern et al. 2023). These dynamics, in turn, can disrupt key economic sectors such as agriculture and tourism, with adverse impacts on local livelihoods, especially in areas with limited alternative options. In such contexts, illegal logging may become an attractive coping strategy and source of income for affected communities and disadvantaged groups, further reducing forest cover.

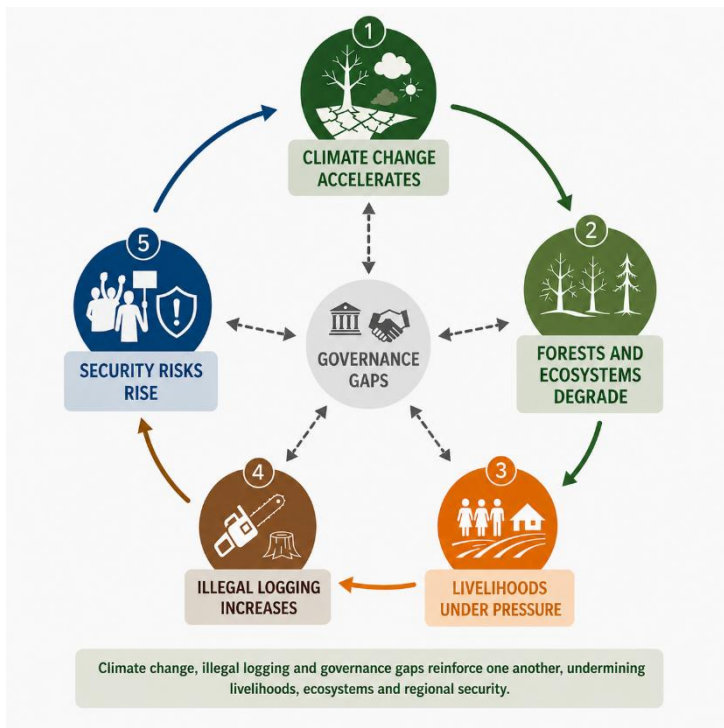
Governance challenges may further exacerbate the situation. Limited institutional capacity, enforcement gaps and limited oversight mechanisms, and the presence of corruption, can create conditions that may be exploited by illegal logging networks (UNODC 2025). Illegal logging is increasingly interlinked with international organized crime, and the most severe and large-scale forest destruction results from cases when organized criminal groups and corrupt companies are involved (UNODC 2025). In some cases,

stakeholders and studies referenced in this brief have highlighted concerns regarding the involvement of organized criminal actors and commercial interests in unauthorized logging at a larger scale (Boletini et al. 2017; UNODC 2023). Such dynamics may increase pressure on access to natural resources, undermine public trust in institutions, and contribute to broader governance and security challenges, potentially diverting attention and resources away from climate action.

As deforestation accelerates, nature's capacity to sequester carbon is reduced and additional greenhouse gases are released (UN n.d.; NRDC 2025). This fuels climate change, which in turn intensifies pressures on livelihoods and governance systems, thus potentially reinforcing a cycle

of environmental degradation, climate stress, and insecurity (as illustrated in Figure 1).

Figure 1: The linkages between illegal logging, climate change and security
(© OSCE/OCEEA, 2026)



3. The drivers, consequences and challenges related to illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area

Forests in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area are critical natural capital for the region, yet they remain under intense pressure from a combination of factors rooted in governance challenges, socio-economic pressures, and limited recognition of the strategic importance of forests for communities and the wider region (van Ackern et al. 2023; EuroNatur 2024).

A modest increase in the recognition of the strategic importance of forests has helped strengthen forest governance in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area in recent years. Measures such as a greater number of forest guards in the Shar Mountain protected area, enhanced monitoring in the Korab-Koritnik protected area, and improved enforcement and prosecution measures in the Sharri/Šara and Mavrovo protected areas have contributed to a reduction in illegal logging. For example, regional data shows that the rate of illegal logging in the Korab-Koritnik protected area fell from 430.7 m³ in 2002 to 17.3 m³ in 2022.⁴ A decline in population in the region may have reinforced this downward trend, as rural communities in the area are experiencing significant out-migration to urban centers (Bogner et al. 2022; Keçi and Krog 2014).

Nevertheless, despite the positive impact of enhanced governance measures, illegal logging remains a challenge in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area, as satellite imagery indicates significant forest pressure in all four protected areas.⁵ Logging activity is most pronounced from April to October, coinciding with favorable weather conditions and more accessible terrain preparations for winter heating.

This section builds on desk research and consultations with authorities, experts, and local communities including workshop discussions. The precise contribution of each of those factors to the overall level of deforestation in the region is difficult to establish and varies between areas (see Challenges section below). While local contexts and circumstances differ across the three jurisdictions, several common issues have been identified and are outlined below.

Drivers

Against this background, research and consultations have highlighted the following key drivers.

Poverty and a lack of alternative livelihood options make small-scale illegal logging attractive to some communities in the Shar/Šara Mountains and the wider region. Many rural communities rely on forests for their survival, using firewood for heating and timber for construction. The high cost of energy and limited access to affordable alternatives exacerbate this dependency, particularly during the region's harsh winters. With few economic opportunities available — further reduced by the impacts of climate change on critical sectors in the region such as tourism and agriculture, households increasingly rely on unauthorized logging, which often are concentrated near villages (KOSID 2020; Stefanovski et al. 2021;

⁴ Data on the occurrence of illegal logging in Korab Koritnik protected area was provided by the Regional Administration of Protected Areas in Diber and Kukes through direct correspondence with experts that inputted into this policy brief.

⁵ Satellite data from [Land Use Change Alerts](#), a global radar-based forest disturbance alert system that utilizes high-resolution imagery from the European Space Agency's Sentinel-1 satellite to detect land cover changes in near real-time, reveal substantial impacts from human activity, affecting 1,135 hectares in Sharri/Šara (2018-2023) and 476 hectares in Korab-Koritnik (2018-2023).

Bjegović 2021). This creates a cycle where some communities are both affected by and, in some cases, involved in forest exploitation, reinforcing unsustainable practices, and making long-term solutions more challenging.⁶

Gaps in forest governance and law enforcement challenges may create conditions that can be exploited by illegal logging networks (van Ackern et al. 2023). Recent improvements in governance systems notwithstanding, stakeholders and studies referenced in this brief have consistently highlighted concerns related to unauthorized timber harvesting, transboundary trade and broader governance vulnerabilities undermining efforts to combat illegal logging. Weaknesses in oversight and enforcement mechanisms can allow illegal loggers to evade penalties (GI-TOC, 2025). Criminal networks involved are often highly organized and adaptive which makes effective institutional response challenging. For example, according to the Kosovo Civil Society Consortium for Sustainable Development (KOSID), forest protection officials have claimed that organized criminal groups track forest guards and police officers in order to facilitate illegal logging operations (Isnqi 2020). Despite reports by media or by local actors regarding large-scale illegal logging activities being identified and prosecuted in parts of the region⁷, official data on the scale and nature of such activities remains limited (see above).

Insufficient resources for park management and enforcement further undermine effective forest protection. Protected areas in the three jurisdictions', including those in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area, often lack sufficient numbers of rangers, vehicles, and modern monitoring tools such as drones or satellite-based systems. Low salaries and limited personal protection equipment for rangers further reduce morale and operational effectiveness (Kosovo Audit Office, 2025).⁸ This limited capacity makes it difficult to detect and prevent unauthorized activities, particularly in remote or transboundary areas, creating opportunities for illegal logging activities, including by organized groups, to continue with limited deterrence (EC, 2023 and Stefanovski et al. 2021).⁹

Additionally, inconsistent legal frameworks, overlapping mandates between relevant agencies, and weak co-ordination between neighboring jurisdictions create loopholes that may be exploited by illegal loggers.¹⁰ Such loopholes include weaknesses or inconsistencies in laws and enforcement systems that allow offenders to evade detection, prosecution, or effective sanctions. The limited inclusion of local communities from forest management decision-making processes can also weaken local ownership and accountability, increasing the risk of neglect and unsustainable practices. Weak sanctions and difficulties to prosecute (GI-TOC, 2025), combined with low public awareness about illegal logging and reporting procedures further undermine efforts to combat illegal logging.¹¹

Consequences

Illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area has significant environmental, economic and social consequences, including on biodiversity, ecosystems, and local communities.

⁶ Workshop discussions.

⁷ For a recent example, see: [Ministry of Interior, Republic of North Macedonia, "Criminal charges filed against eight persons from the Vinica region for offences related to illegal logging and transport of firewood," 11 February 2026.](#)

⁸ Expert consultations and Workshop discussions and Kosovo Audit Office, https://zka-rks.org/cms/ReportFiles/2025_7a67fca3-da00-4edf-9bf7-38de99da97ff.pdf

⁹ Expert consultations and Workshop discussions.

¹⁰ Workshop discussions and Logging down our future. Models and Forms of Organized Criminal Illegal Logging in North Macedonia. 2021, Eurothink. CIP-FINAL-Izvestaj-Drvokradci-AN.pdf

¹¹ Expert consultations and Workshop discussions.

These impacts both compound and are compounded by climate change, increasing pressure on environmental sustainability and socio-economic development.

Illegal logging contributes to the degradation of forest ecosystems by reducing tree cover, fragmenting habitats, and disrupting ecological processes. Habitat loss and ecosystem degradation may threaten biodiversity and weaken essential ecosystem services provided by forests, such as water retention, soil stabilization, flood prevention and other nature-based solutions for climate adaptation. These dynamics can increase vulnerability to extreme weather events (Collaku 2021). Over time, these ecological losses compromise the very foundation on which both natural systems and human communities depend, undermining the long-term resilience and stability of the region.

Furthermore, illegal logging significantly contributes to climate change. Forests play a critical role in absorbing carbon dioxide (UN n.d.). Deforestation increases greenhouse gas emissions and simultaneously reduces the global sequestration capacity (NRDC 2025). Additionally, deforested areas are more prone to wildfires and other forms of environmental degradation, which risks the release of further carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This feedback loop accelerates climate change, further affecting ecosystems and livelihoods (UNEP 2022).

Illegal logging can also undermine the financial sustainability of protected areas. By depleting forest resources, it reduces the potential income generated through legal timber harvesting, eco-tourism, and other sustainable activities. Reduced revenues diminish the resources available for park management, including enforcement, conservation, and restoration efforts. Without adequate funding, park authorities face limitations in addressing illegal activities and to ensure environmental protection and sustainable resource management.¹²

Forest loss may also have effects on local livelihoods, which are often dependent on the health of forest ecosystems. Communities that rely on forests for essential resources such as firewood, timber, and non-timber forest products face increasing scarcity of these resources, limiting their economic opportunities. Furthermore, illegal logging may have gender-specific impacts on local communities. Women, who tend to be more reliant on forest products for their livelihood are particularly impacted (van Ackern et al. 2023; Merkle and Price 2024).

Illegal logging may contribute to social grievances and governance challenges. Competition over access to valuable resources in protected areas may also contribute to local tensions, governance and law enforcement challenges in certain areas (Reford Center 2024).¹³ The high demand for timber and firewood — both locally and internationally — makes illegal logging a lucrative business for criminal groups, perpetuating environmental harm, cross-financing other illicit activities, and undermining the rule of law more broadly (Stefanovski et al. 2021; Duri 2021). The transboundary nature of these illegal logging activities can further complicate monitoring and enforcement efforts across jurisdictions, and may discourage individuals from reporting or intervening.

Challenges

Efforts to address illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area continue to face several interrelated challenges, as outlined in other sections of this note.

¹² Workshop discussions.

¹³ Workshop discussions, and see for example KoSSev 2014; RTS 2014.

Enforcement and capacity limitations within protected area authorities and forestry agencies continue to constrain capacity building and long-term engagement. Outdated technologies, limited expertise in their use, and a lack of appropriate transportation and equipment further hamper operational capacities. Rangers often face difficulties in accessing remote areas and conducting regular monitoring activities, particularly in geographically challenging terrain, and may also face safety and security risks. Law enforcement agencies in some parts of the region have also reportedly faced threats and physical attacks designed to hinder their effectiveness (Stefanovski et al. 2021).

Limited availability of reliable data and systematic analysis on illegal logging and related governance challenges complicates effective enforcement and policy responses. There is a notable lack of independent reports from research institutes, civil society groups, or international bodies on this issue. Official statistics may not fully capture the scale of these challenges, making it difficult to allocate resources, monitor trends, and develop targeted interventions.¹⁴ This data gap, combined with operational constraints, may further affect the ability of relevant authorities to respond effectively to the scale and complexity of the problem (see Monitoring challenges below).

Communication and co-ordination gaps weaken the responses to illegal logging. Limited information-sharing within and between jurisdictions, regions, municipalities, park administrations - particularly among park authorities and municipalities in the protected areas — as well as with international actors, can reduce the effectiveness of efforts to address the issue¹⁵. Centralized administrative structures, can delay local responses, while bureaucratic hurdles and institutional responsibilities may delay timely action. Although initiatives exist, regional co-operation remains limited, with insufficient resources allocated to fostering collaboration across the region.

Governance and legal challenges, including differences in legal frameworks and level of penalties across the four protected areas, may create inconsistencies in enforcement approaches, which can be exploited by illegal loggers¹⁶. Limited institutional capacities, the presence of corruption, and the complexity of distinguishing between legal and illegal logging activities can hinder effective prosecution (WWF 2021; Radosavljevic et al. 2024). Even where illegal logging cases are identified and prosecuted, administrative and judicial follow-up may remain challenging and further weakening deterrence (GI-TOC 2025).

Monitoring challenges

Monitoring illegal logging in the region is fraught with data-related challenges. Satellite data provides insights into ongoing forest pressure but distinguishing between legal and illegal logging is challenging. Indirect assessment methods such as comparing local population needs with reported timber harvests, reveal significant gaps. Reported legal harvests fall far short of demand for firewood (with no imports to fill the gap) which may suggest the occurrence of illegal logging (KOHA 2019; Georgievski 2021; Pasholli 2024; expert consultations). Reports of illegal logging have decreased in the region, but this is likely at least partly due to underreporting rather than a genuine reduction in activity (Stefanovski et al. 2021 and GI-TOC, 2025).

¹⁴ In addition, tracking and linking financial flows to illegal logging poses a major challenge, as organized crime networks use cash transactions, complex supply chains, and informal channels to hide profits. Data gaps, fragmented reporting, and mixing of legal and illegal revenues make it hard for authorities to detect, investigate and prosecute these crimes.

¹⁵ Workshop discussions.

¹⁶ Workshop discussions.

The following challenges have been highlighted by regional experts and workshop stakeholders:

- **Data gaps:** Official reports on illegal logging and independent sources for verification remain limited. While park authorities provide data on illegal logging incidents, it can be incomplete or inconsistent due to challenges in data collection and management. Such inaccuracies can result in misinterpretations and may prevent informed decision-making.
- **Historical data:** Historical data on illegal logging is often unavailable, making it challenging to assess long-term trends or evaluate the effectiveness of past interventions.
- **Discrepancies between administrative systems:** Different administrative systems manage protected areas, resulting in variations in how data is collected, reported, and interpreted. These discrepancies create inconsistencies that complicate regional comparisons and collaborative efforts.
- **Socio-economic data limitations:** Detailed socio-economic data on local communities in the region remain limited, complicating efforts to better understand the underlying drivers of illegal logging and to design targeted interventions that address the root causes of the issue.
- **Limitations of satellite data:** While satellite imagery highlights forest cover changes and ongoing pressure on forest ecosystems, i.e. it cannot always distinguish the cause of the forest loss.¹⁷ Indirect methods, such as comparing population needs with reported legal timber harvests, are necessary but often imprecise.
- **Limited data and information sharing:** Limited exchange of information among institutions and enforcement agencies in the region may affect timely responses, weaken monitoring, and reporting mechanisms, and reduce the effectiveness of co-ordinated efforts to combat illegal logging.

4. Institutional and legal context

Each protected area operates under a set of institutional and legal frameworks designed to regulate forest use and protect biodiversity (see Annex). Relevant ministries and agencies are tasked with drafting and implementing legislation aimed at curbing illegal logging, such as penalties for unauthorized logging, and regulations for sustainable forest use. However, weak enforcement of forestry and environmental regulation remains a challenge due to limited resources and capacity gaps (GI-TOC, 2025),¹⁸

Protected areas in the region, including the Korab-Koritnik, Sharri/Šara, Mavrovo, and Shar Mountain, have developed management plans to guide conservation and sustainable use (see Annex). These plans outline strategies for biodiversity protection, forest restoration, and community

¹⁷ Modern satellite technology, such as data from the Landsat, Sentinel, or MODIS programs, provides high-resolution, regularly updated imagery that can detect changes in forest cover over time. These tools can reveal patterns of deforestation, including clear-cutting, selective logging, and degradation, regardless of the legal status of the area. In protected areas where logging is prohibited, satellite monitoring can be especially valuable for enforcement and early detection. By comparing time-series images, authorities and researchers can pinpoint when and where forest loss occurs, helping to distinguish between permitted activities (such as natural disturbances) and illegal logging. However, while satellite data is highly effective at detecting changes in canopy cover, it may not always distinguish the cause of the loss (e.g., illegal logging vs. fire or disease) without additional ground verification. Sources: [Satellite remote sensing for environmental sustainable development goals: A review of applications for terrestrial and marine protected areas - ScienceDirect](#) and [Remote Sensing Applications in Monitoring of Protected Areas](#).

¹⁸ GI-TOC, 2025, experts consultations and workshop discussions.

engagement. For example, the management plan for the Sharri/Šara protected area includes measures to regulate timber harvesting, promote eco-tourism, and enhance monitoring through ranger patrols. While these plans provide a framework for action, their implementation is often hindered by financial constraints and insufficient technical capacity.¹⁹

Reforestation and forest restoration efforts in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif area have gained momentum in recent years, driven by the urgent need to address the significant forest loss and landscape degradation. Regional co-operation projects, such as those supported by the [Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust \(PONT\)](#) and local CSOs, have focused on both preventing further net loss of forests and actively restoring degraded areas in North Macedonia and Albania.²⁰ These initiatives include direct grants to local communities for tree planting, sustainable pasture management, and the rehabilitation of forest habitats, especially in and around protected areas like Korab-Koritnik and Shar Mountain Protected Areas²¹ (see Box 2 for examples of relevant international co-operation projects).

Despite these positive steps, challenges remain — including the need for greater enforcement, long-term funding, and stronger community engagement — to ensure the success and sustainability of reforestation across this transboundary landscape (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania n.d.).

Box 2: Other international projects addressing illegal logging in the region

Several international projects and initiatives are actively working to address illegal logging and its associated challenges in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area. These efforts complement local and regional initiatives, providing critical resources, expertise, and co-ordination, to tackle the complex issue of illegal logging. They largely focus on improving governance, fostering regional collaboration, and promoting sustainable forest management. While not exhaustive, the list below includes notable examples.

- **[EU IPA \(Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance\)](#)**: The EU's IPA program supports environmental protection and governance reforms in South-Eastern Europe. It funds projects aimed at harmonizing legal frameworks, improving enforcement, and enhancing regional co-operation, inter alia, to combat illegal logging.²²
- **[Interpol – Forestry Crime](#)**: Interpol addresses illegal logging through its environmental crime initiatives, focusing on its impacts, such as deforestation and habitat loss. The organization collaborates with law enforcement agencies to disrupt international criminal networks involved in forestry crimes, providing support for intelligence sharing and cross-border operations.
- **[Global Forest Watch \(GFW\)](#)**: GFW provides satellite-based monitoring tools to track deforestation and forest degradation. These tools are used by ministries, NGOs, and park authorities in the region to identify illegal activities and improve enforcement.
- **[U.S. Forest Service](#)**: In the region, USFS programs has implemented sustainable forest management practices and combat illegal activities that threaten forest ecosystems.

¹⁹ Workshop discussions.

²⁰ For example, through the initiative "[Conserving the Shar Mountain National Park Natural Values](#)," PONT has supported the Public Institution Shar Mountain Protected Area to develop and use the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool to evaluate management practices in the Shar Mountain Protected Area, as well as to organize regular communication with local residents to inform them about park boundaries, protection zones and permissible activities. Another example is the project [Strengthening Co-Management for Transboundary Nature Protection in the Sharr-Korab Region - Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust](#) implemented by the Albanian Local Capacity Development Foundation (ALCDF).

²¹ See above.

²² For example, [a IPA-funded project](#) in Montenegro supported the National Action Plan on Combating Illegal Activities in Forestry, with specific components such as improving control of tree marking, harvesting requests, and overall forest management to combat illegal logging. Similarly, in Kosovo, [IPA funding](#) has been used to develop sound forest management structures, with a particular emphasis on combating illegal logging and forest fires.

These programs have operated through participatory data and information collection, engagement and capacity development of key stakeholders, and awareness-raising campaigns regarding the environmental and economic consequences of illegal logging and encouraging institutional accountability and action.²³

- **WWF Dinaric Arc Initiative:** This regional program focuses on preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable development in the Dinaric Alps, including parts of the Shar/Šara Mountains. It addresses illegal logging by strengthening governance, engaging local communities, and promoting eco-tourism as an alternative livelihood.
- **UNDP Climate Adaptation Projects:** The United Nations Development Program supports climate adaptation initiatives in the region, including efforts to strengthen forest management and reduce the vulnerability of ecosystems and communities to climate impacts.
- **EU4Nature:** This project, funded by the European Union and Sida, and implemented by UNDP and the Italian Agency for Development and Cooperation, the project, started in 2025. It will contribute to the protection and conservation of at least 25% of the Albanian territory by 2030 through the establishment and effective management of a system of Protected Areas.
- **European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX):** While its explicit mandate might not be environmental protection, EULEX's core mission is to monitor, mentor, and advise the Kosovo authorities on rule of law, including in the areas of police and justice.
- **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA):** JICA has a project on capacity building for disaster risk reduction in the region (2021-2026), which aims to strengthen the capacity of government officials in the prevention and mitigation of forest fires and other natural disasters through the establishment of the National Forest Fire Information System and Eco-DRR.
- **The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)**²⁴: supports Kosovo's Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI) in strengthening the legal framework for environmental illicit activities, including evaluating judicial and administrative capacities to align national legislation with the EU Environmental Crime Directive (2024/1203).

5. Opportunities for co-operation to reduce illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area

Addressing the challenges posed by illegal logging in the region requires a comprehensive approach that not only strengthens judiciary framework and enforcement capacities but also provides sustainable economic alternatives for local communities and actively targets organized crime. As environmental and climate-related risks affect societies unevenly, lasting solutions depend on tackling the root causes of illegal logging while ensuring robust governance and inclusive development.

To this end, **strengthened co-operation between authorities, park management, and local communities within protected areas, is essential.** Such co-ordinated action is crucial for building resilient forest landscapes, improving livelihoods, and safeguarding the region's natural heritage. Importantly, these efforts may also contribute to climate resilience and help reduce broader climate and security risks, supporting both environmental sustainability and regional stability.

²³ Personal communication with USFS personnel.

²⁴ <https://www.giz.de/en/regions/europe/kosovo/news/strengthening-legal-framework-and-aligning-eu-environmental-crime>

The following outline **opportunities for enhanced co-operation**²⁵ between local and regional authorities in close partnership with park managers, enforcement and judicial bodies, citizens, and civil society organizations, with the continued support of international donors and partners:

- **Data, communication, capacity building and resources:** Strong, co-ordinated, and sufficiently resourced systems are vital for an effective response to illegal logging.
 - **Regional Data Task Force:** consider establishing a task force to enhance data collection and analysis on illegal logging, developing harmonized reporting systems, and integrating socio-economic indicators. This would help improve the availability, accuracy, and comparability of data, enabling evidence-based policy and management decisions.
 - **Formal Communication Protocols:** consider creating platforms for regular information exchange between ministries, park authorities, enforcement agencies, and local governments, to ensure timely and co-ordinated responses to illicit activities.
 - **Capacity Building Initiatives:** Implement targeted regional programmes to strengthen ranger training and enforcement capacity, provide vehicles and modern monitoring equipment, and facilitate joint, standardized enforcement and data sharing.
 - **Strengthen Donor Co-ordination Mechanism:** further align funding priorities to avoid duplication and ensure that resources are channeled efficiently to urgent needs and high-impact interventions.
- **Legal and institutional frameworks:** Strengthened mechanisms are essential to create a unified, effective approach:
 - Conduct regular reviews and audits of legislation, enforcement practices, and protected area management plans to identify implementation gaps, strengthen accountability and enhance cooperation among forestry, environmental, law enforcement, and judicial authorities.,
 - Harmonize penalties, regulatory frameworks and enforcement actions across the region to close legal loopholes exploited by illegal loggers, including strengthening the confiscation of equipment used by perpetrators
 - Leverage the EU accession-related frameworks and mechanisms to accelerate regional legal harmonization, strengthen governance, and adopt best practices in forest management.
 - Develop and implement co-ordinated, targeted management strategies to address illegal logging, improve responses to shared challenges, and strengthen transboundary collaboration among enforcement and forestry authorities to address illegal logging.
- **Awareness, education, and community engagement:** Engaging and educating local communities is vital for long-term conservation success:
 - Launch public awareness campaigns highlighting the ecological, economic, and security impacts of illegal logging, and integrate environmental education into school curricula at all levels.

²⁵ As identified by regional stakeholders in the 2024 Peshkopi workshop.

- Strengthen participatory governance structures that actively involve local stakeholders -including women, minority communities, and marginalized groups - in forest protection, monitoring, and decision-making processes.
- Support the development of sustainable non-timber forest products (such as medicinal plants) and eco-tourism initiatives, promoting joint economic and cultural activities to foster regional solidarity, and reduce reliance on logging.
- **Energy transition:** Transitioning to renewable energy is a key step in reducing pressure on forests:
 - Facilitate joint technical assistance and capacity building to help local communities adopt renewable energy solutions — such as solar panels and biomass — for heating and cooking.
 - Promote the widespread use of energy-efficient stoves and home insulation to reduce firewood consumption, especially during the region’s cold winters.

This issue brief has outlined that illegal logging in the Shar/Šara Mountains and Korab Massif Area is driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and structural factors. Building on existing partnerships and opportunities outlined above, addressing illegal logging and associated climate security risks provides clear opportunities to enhance transboundary dialogue, support sustainable livelihoods, enhance transparency and law-enforcement co-operation, and advance more inclusive governance. Given the transboundary nature of the challenge, co-operation contributes both to improved livelihoods and resilience in protected areas while strengthening trust and good-neighbourly relations. Sustained multi-stakeholder engagement around these issues will be key to fostering regional climate resilience, long-term stability, and security across the region.

This paper is an output of the extra-budgetary project [“Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia”](#), implemented by the OSCE, in partnership with the Berlin-based think-tank adelphi and in close collaboration with OSCE Field Operations. In support of implementing the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/2021 on Strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change](#), and other related joint commitments²⁶, the project aims to enhance the understanding of climate-related security risks in these regions and increase awareness, capacities and co-operation among regional stakeholders to jointly address them. It further aims to implement climate change adaptation measures in the geographic areas that are most vulnerable to climate change.

²⁶ In addition to OSCE MC Dec 3/2021, it further contributes to the implementation of other related OSCE Commitments, including the 1997 PC Decision on the Mandate for the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (PC.DEC/194 and the 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security (MC.DOC/4/07).

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Annex

Table 1: Overview of institutional and legal frameworks

| Framework | <u>Mavrovo</u> | Shar Mountain | <u>Korab-Kortinik</u> | <u>Sharri/Šara</u> |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Ministries | <p>Ministry of Environment & Physical Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Nature <p>Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Water Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forestry Police State Inspectorate for Forestry & Hunting <p>Public Enterprise "National Forests"</p> | | <p>Ministry of Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency for Protected Areas Environmental Agency <p>Ministry of Interior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspectorate for Territorial Management | <p>Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning & Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency for Environmental Protection <p>Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Rural Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forestry Agency Forest guards |
| Protected area management | Mavrovo Park Management | Shar Mountain Park Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAPA Dibër RAPA Kükës | Sharri/Šara Park Management |
| Legal framework | Law on Nature Protection No. 67/04, 14/06, 84/07, 35/10, 47/11, 148/11, 59/12, 13/13, 163/13, 41/14, 146/15, 39/16, 63/16, and 42/20 | | Law on protected areas No. 81/2017 and amended by the Law on 21/2024 | Law on Environmental Protection No. 03/L-025, Law on Climate Change No. 08/L-250, Law on Environmental Impact Assessment No. 03/L-024, Law on Forests No. 08/L-137, Law on Agriculture and Rural Development No. 08/L-072 |
| Management plan | Draft Management Plan | Management Plan for Shar Mountains National Park for the Period 2022-2031 | Korab - Kortinik Natural Park Management Plan 2015-2025 | Sharri Protected Area 10-Year Management Strategy 2015-2024 |

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