



Center for environmental research and information

EKO-SVEST

ANNUAL ACTIVITY

REPORT

2024



2024 Highlights

Eko-svest becomes a member of the large family of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

IUCN is the largest and most diverse environmental network in the world, with more than 1,400 member organizations and 15,000 experts sharing knowledge and resources. This diversity and expertise make IUCN the global authority on monitoring the status of the natural world and creating the measures needed to protect it.



Through its membership in IUCN, Eko-svest will be able to collaborate with various partners from all regions of the world, expand its rich portfolio with activities that combine the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, and actively work on the restoration of degraded habitats, the protection of ecosystems, and the improvement of human well-being.

Grand opening of the Permanent Nature Exhibition for the Vevchani Springs

In cooperation with the Municipality of Vevchani Eko-svest opened the Permanent Nature Exhibition titled “Journey through the Natural Treasures of Vevchani Springs”. The exhibition is located at the Kosta Srbakoski Multicultural Center in Vevchani and aims to promote the natural values of the protected area of the Vevchani Springs Monument of Nature and the Jablanica Mountain, through education and raising public awareness.



Innovation in protecting our environment

Through the project Collect, Recycle, Create - from recycled plastic to innovation - Project supported by the Small Grants Program (Global Environment Facility), we have provided local schools with computer stations, 3D printers and filament extruders. With this equipment, students use selected plastic bottles and create educational aids. This project introduced 3D printing as an innovative way to reuse plastic bottles, which not only contributed to reducing waste, but also educated young people about the importance of recycling when protecting nature.





Report on activities in 2024

During 2024 Eko-svest was supported by 11 donors and implemented 17 different projects and 2 project specific service contracts. Eko-svest was also supported with one core grant to implement internal development activities.

In the Energy Thematic Area, Eko-svest worked with partners to further support the process of decarbonisation, to abandon coal as a fuel, decentralize energy production and stimulate sustainable energy solutions. We implemented the following projects, some of which span over multiple years:

Supported by the European Climate Foundation:

- To empower citizens and enhance the status of prosumers within the energy markets in Macedonia and Serbia.
- To minimize the intake of fossil gas in the Macedonian energy sector
- To eliminate coal as a fuel from the energy sector in North Macedonia
- To provide logistic support to organization of the joint ECF and Bankwatch meeting to be held in Skopje, Macedonia on 15th and 16th of October 2024
- Coal Free Future for Bitola

Supported by CAN Europe

- Beyond Fossil Fuel Campaign

Supported by the University of Manchester:

- GENERATE Gender and Precarity at the Energy Frontier

Supported by the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union:

- Energy Citizens for Inclusive Decarbonisation - ENCLUDE

A service contract with Germanwatch was signed for the implementation of the joint partnership project “Energy transition and decarbonisation in WB, Macedonia”.

Through the implementation of these projects, Eko-svest was able to implement its Strategy and move towards the achievement of its goal:

By 2028, Eko-svest contributes significantly to shaping decarbonization policies, supporting the transformation of key sectors through the promotion of innovations and deployment of appropriate technologies.

In this regard, Eko-svest focused on the following objectives and achieved the following results:

1. Stimulate citizen energy for decentralization and democratization of the energy system.



We created an informative portal [prosumer.mk](http://www.prosumer.mk) and promoted it to raise awareness about the possibilities for citizens to become prosumers and decentralize energy production. The TV series “[Eko-svest investigates](#)” continued with a second season of five episodes during 2024 on the topics of energy citizenship, prosumers and just transition.

Through the Enclude project, we supported the promotion of “A Changemaker’s Guide to the Energy Transition- Citizens designing change one step at a time” [document](#) at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Skopje.

2. Minimise negative and harmful impacts of fossil fuel infrastructure in the country

In the Pelagonija region we worked with the local stakeholders to develop a joint [Vision for Bitola](#), a document that summarises the possibilities and opportunities for the coal-free development of Bitola, after the closure of the thermo-powered plant. The Vision for Bitola was promoted to general public via the Vision Café where citizens could choose from the “menu” what project they find most appropriate and through the engagement of the pupils and teachers from the technical secondary school from Bitola. High school students created their [practical proposals and props](#) and demonstrated them to the public, initiating a general discussion in society about the sustainable energy alternatives.

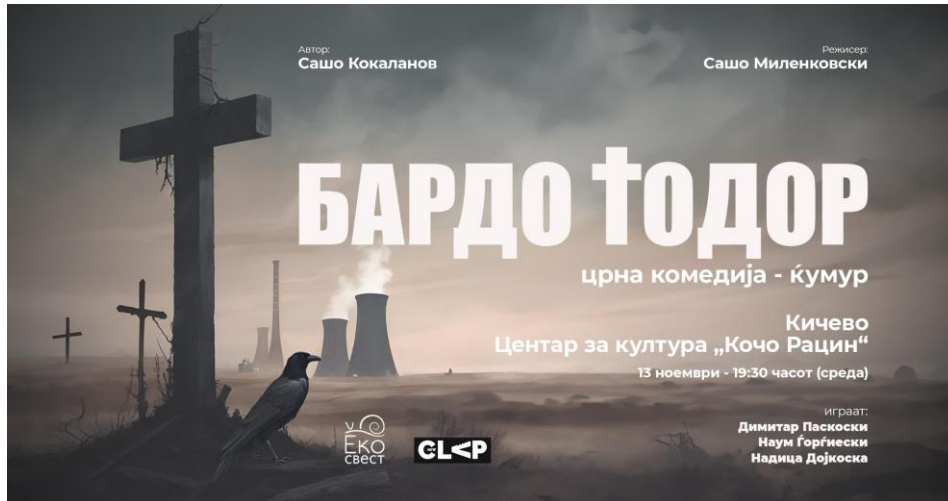


The Vision for Bitola was promoted to the Bitola Municipal Council with the aim to support the municipality in their demands for sustainable projects in the framework of the just transition projects of the Government.

To raise awareness on the health impacts from coal plants in Bitola region we showcased a theater play with a dark script named “Bardo Todor”. It was played in Bitola, Novaci, Mogila, Kicevo and Skopje so far and it drew the interest of the local audiences.

In the southeast region, we worked with local communities to provide legal support to the local inhabitants to protect their rights for a fair land acquisition, due to the gas pipeline infrastructure development. One case was taken to court and the outcome was in favor of the inhabitant. We also raised our concerns about the lack of climate assessment of the gas pipeline project and worked with the accountability mechanism of

the EBRD and the Energy Community Secretariat to follow up on our complaint submitted in 2024. A general social media campaign about the negative impacts to environment, economy and energy transition was launched and reached 2 million viewers.



An [international gas conference](#) was organized with speakers from EU countries to further raise awareness and discuss the facts and arguments against further expansion of gas networks in the Western Balkan countries. A series of informative videos as well as a special webpage toxic.mk was launched to share the knowledge and the ways forward in the energy transition and decarbonisation opportunities for the Western Balkan countries.



In 2024 Eko-svest hosted the organisation of the Balkan coal campaign partnership of civil society organisations and donors from the Western Balkans to update and strategise around key campaigns and activities to speed up energy transition of the region and prevent fossil fuel projects lock-in effect.



In the Climate Thematic Area, Eko-svest worked closely with the Climate Coalition and partner organisations, to implement the CSO Action for Climate Programme, focused on awareness raising, capacity building for CSOs and advocacy for climate policies.

With the support from Sweden, Eko-svest continued implementing this programme in 2024, in order to achieve its Strategic goal:

Climate policies are a high priority of the state, climate action is embedded in all national policies, and the climate goals of the "National Determined Contributions" are achieved.

Throughout the year, Eko-svest focused on the following objectives and implemented various activities to reach the desired results:

1. Advocate for the drafting, adoption and implementation of ambitious climate policies and legal framework

In partnership with other organisations, Eko-svest continued to advocate for ambitious climate laws and regulations. In the [2023 shadow report](#), we analysed the Climate chapter and provided a detailed report with findings on the level of transposition and implementation of climate action. A [public event](#) was organized to promote the findings of this report in all sectors within the Chapter 27 on Environment and climate action.



An innovative approach was applied to work with representatives from various institutions and to raise awareness and create partnerships and inter-institutional support through a specially designed event by a former EU Commissioner from Slovenia, Violeta Bulc. The [event](#) enabled

participants to holistically look at climate change issues from all societal perspectives and to gain understanding of the need to approach climate action in joint cooperation and efforts.

2. Support the implementation of climate action, decarbonization and just transition measures through sub-grantees and own activities in the energy and climate sector

[Nine subgrantees](#) of the Action for climate programme finalized their activities in 2024. The grants were distributed to civil society organisations to implement local climate action, such as independent energy solutions, climate action plans and measures, institutional capacity building and youth and citizen engagement.



The old elementary school in the community of Belica, Kichevo region was transformed into an educational and energy independent centre. A photovoltaic plant and storage system was installed to support the revival of the small community and to demonstrate energy community practices in the country. Climate action plans were developed for 6 municipalities and several climate adaptation measures were implemented in the Municipalities of Center- Skopje, Prilep and Demir Kapija. The Gostivar Municipal Council adopted a youth developed climate and environment action plan. Two climatological metering stations were placed in public areas in Belica and Demir Kapija to raise awareness about climate change. Climate education activities were stepped up in Debar, Gostivar, Skopje with youth as well as in climate vulnerable communities and settlements. The topic of climate resilience, sustainable energy, sustainable transport and changing weather conditions were regularly communicated by the implementing partners and reached more than 2 million viewers via social and traditional media.

3. Public pressure and action are utilized by civil society organizations and the public to prioritize climate policies



A series of [public campaigns](#) including award giving campaigns on urban greenery and green infrastructure, sustainable living and women and climate were implemented via social and traditional media. Citizens were stimulated to implement climate measures in their lives and to spread the experience further.

The [Climate Coalition annual meeting](#) made a clear demand to governmental institutions to prioritise climate action funding and to step up the climate ambition at all levels and in all sectors. Representatives from civil society became a part of the Steering committee of the “Implementation of the priority actions in the climate change sector (NEAR/SKP/2022/EA-RP/010) project, taking an active role in advising governmental institutions in project implementation. The members of the Climate Coalition united to jointly demand policy changes and to prevent harmful impacts of policy solutions developed without public participation. [Joint reaction letters](#) were also sent to relevant institutions.





In the **Water Protection Thematic Area**, Eko-svest implemented the following projects:

Supported by the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust

- River protection through establishing monitoring practices and habitats restoration in protected areas

Supported by The Nature Conservancy

- Research Report on the Environmental Impacts of Existing Dams and Structures in Mavrovo and Shar Mountain
- United for Rivers Campaign

Supported by the Open River Foundation

- Barrier removal on Pcinja River 2024-07-597
- Reconnecting rivers in North Macedonia- Developing methodology and identification of priority barriers for removal

The Sigrid Rausing Trust provided its institutional (core) support in the Water Protection Thematic Area and the funding was used to co-finance activities in this area.

The general strategic goal of Eko-svest in this area of intervention is:

Legal and practical socio-ecological protection and restoration of at least 3 rivers in the country and their promotion as "axes" of local sustainable development.

In order to achieve this goal, during 2024 we focused on reaching the following objectives:

1. **Raising public awareness and building active citizenship for the socio-ecological protection of rivers, through outreach, education and applying citizen science.**

In 2024 we launched a social media campaign to communicate main messages about the much needed protection of rivers on national level. In Mavrovo National Park, Shar Mountain National Park and Demir Kapija municipality we worked with experienced educators and artists to stimulate young students to create various content that was later transformed into an educational material (coloring books) for children.



The mobile application Crowdwater was made available in Macedonian and Albanian and its use was initiated in the territories of Mavrovo and Shar Mountain National Park to engage citizens in creating citizen science content and record the status of rivers.

We supported the Flipbook animated video festival by launching an award for the best environmental film broadcasted at the festival. The festival was attended by more than 100 visitors.



2. Cooperation with relevant institutions for establishing and applying the legal framework for water protection and building their capacities.



In collaboration with domestic and foreign experts, we developed a draft methodology for the measurement of ecological flow of rivers. Furthermore, new water metering equipment was obtained and donated to Mavrovo and Shar Mountain National Park authorities and a [tailored trainings](#) were provided to rangers and staff to perform regular river monitoring.

[Wide stakeholder consultations](#) in Mavrovo and Shar Mountain were organized by Eko-svest to gather all relevant institutions and partners to collect inputs for key threats to rivers in these protected areas. The inputs from these meetings were integrated in a new Analysis of threats to rivers.

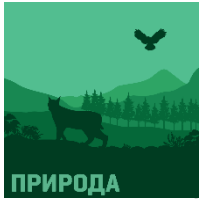
At the Bern Convention Standing Committee meeting, Eko-svest presented the update with the Mavrovo National Park case and as a result, a [new set of actions](#) were requested from the Government.

3. Development of new research methodologies and their application to obtain new knowledge necessary for the protection and restoration of rivers.

New methodologies were explored and established in regards to river protection:

- Analysis of threats to rivers in protected areas
- Designing a methodology for the selection of priority river barrier for removal
- Monitoring methodology for hydrological assessment of rivers in protected areas

The research and analysis performed in cooperation with experts as well as with in-house insights and experience has resulted in the preparation of several studies. This work continues beyond 2024, however, the designed methodologies are replicable to other cases and countries.



In the **Nature Protection Thematic Area** Eko-svest implemented 4 projects with the support of 5 donors:

Supported by the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust

- Supporting the sustainable management of the Monument of nature “Vevcanski Izvori

Supported by the Euronatur Foundation

- Transboundary Brown Bear Conservation in the Southwestern Balkans (TBBC)

Supported by The Nature Conservancy

- United for Rivers Campaign

Supported by the GEF Small Grants Programme of North Macedonia

- Collect, recycle, create - From recycled plastic to innovation

The Sigrid Rausing Trust provided its institutional (core) support in the Nature Protection Thematic Area and the funding was used to co-finance activities in this area.

The strategic goal in the Nature Protection thematic area is:

Support the establishment of an effective mechanism for the protection of nature, ecosystems, wildlife and their habitats by advocating and educating on the best practices and policies for the management and financing of protected areas.

In order to achieve this goal, during 2024 we focused on reaching the following objectives:

1. **Support the processes of designation, management, promotion and networking of protected areas by fostering partnerships with institutions, local communities, civil society organizations and experts.**



In Vevcani, our local office continued to provide active support to the Municipality of Vevcani in the management of the protected area Vevcani springs Monument of Nature. We implemented the education and awareness raising component of the Management plan of the protected area as well as sections from the Monitoring and research, and Visitor management components of the plan.

As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in interest, with over 309 young people from Vevcani and surrounding areas engaged through these educational workshops. Three [educational publications](#) were created and promoted and are now in use by elementary school teachers from the region. A [Permanent nature exhibition](#) titled "Journey through the Natural Treasures of Vevcanski Izvori" was created and installed at the Multicultural Center Kosta

Srbakoski in Vevcani. The exhibition has daily visitors and regular visits by the schools from the region.



A [mountain bike tour](#) called Vevcanska Golina - Lokva 2024 was organized, with over 130 participants from across the country



[Expert analysis on the European chestnut](#) forest was conducted and mitigation measures for the survival of the chestnut trees were designed and proposed for implementation.

Eko-svest initiated the process of declaration of Demir Kapija as a protected area, by working closely with the Municipality and the Ministry of environment and physical planning.



Last, but not least, Eko-svest played an active role in establishing the Brown Bear Intervention Team and in drafting the National Action Plan for the Brown Bear. Furthermore, we worked on creating and implementing measures aimed at minimizing conflicts with this species and organized training sessions for ranger services in protected areas. Monitoring of the species was carried out on Jablanica Mountain using camera traps. Our team is dedicated to enhancing capacities and facilitating the exchange of best practices with partner organizations.

2. Advocate for improved nature protection through the adoption and implementation of sound legal framework

Through our representative, we participated in the work of the Nature Protection Council, the advisory body of the Minister of environment and physical planning and provided comments, directions and led initiatives for improved nature protection and protected area management.

Throughout the year, we used our established contacts and partnerships as well as media relations to speak out about the urgent need to finalise the process of proclamation of Mavrovo as a national park and to adopt a new Management plan for the protected area. The main recommendations from the Roadmap on nature protection developed by Eko-svest in 2023 were communicated to journalists.

3. Promote sustainable management practices in protected areas

In the Monument of nature Vevcani springs, we worked closely with the ranger service. Rangers were trained on various management and monitoring topics with practical demonstration of best practices.



Information boards and signs were installed for informing the visitors about the natural heritage and protection zones of the protected area.

One new nature inspired product was developed and branded with the support of Eko-svest. The women led business will be producing and promoting the Castanea brand of sweet chestnuts in syrup.

Our members from the local office in Vevcani took part in the sessions of the Stakeholder Council for the protected area as well as the youth council of the Municipality of Vevcani, with the aim to bring forward important nature conservation goals and activities and to gain support for such measures by the wider stakeholders in the region.

In Vevcani we also implemented an innovative project by establishing recycling and 3d printing points in the elementary schools. Students and teachers were trained on using the filament extruder and 3d printer and motivated to use PET plastic bottles in the printing of various school materials and tools. In this manner, plastic bottles will be directly recycled in useful and fun objects created by children. This project was also replicated in other municipalities by other civil society organisations and schools.

The **Active Citizenship Thematic Area** is a cross-cutting area for Eko-svest as we consider the access to information, public participation and access to justice as rights which are integrated in all our thematic areas. The strategic goal for this area is:

Eko-svest pursues its vision and mission by creating allies and sharing its knowledge with organizations, citizens and communities so that they actively participate in the decision-making processes in the field of environment.

In order to achieve this goal, during 2024 we focused on reaching the following objective:

1. Support public participation in environmental decision making and strengthen environmental justice

In our projects throughout the year we focused on actively sharing knowledge by providing public, civil society and decision makers with relevant data and information from our research and analysis. Using our webpages, via social media and with direct communication we managed to communicate relevant information from 2 new research papers, 2 new analyses, 5 new educational toolkits and many infographics and videos.

The webtools such as ekomapa.mk and eko.net.mk were updated with new data and information. New pages such as toxic.mk, prosumer.mk and klimatskaakcija.mk were actively developed to serve as informational and educational platforms.

Using the iNaturalist and Crowdwater mobile applications, we worked with young people to stimulate citizen science and map environmental conditions in the areas where we are working.

We provided legal support to citizens in order to protect their environmental rights. For that purpose, a legal team was initiated within Eko-svest.

In cooperation with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the implementation of the REAL DEAL project financed by the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union, Eko-svest implemented a new participatory approach, using the Delphi Expert Group. The results from the work of the expert group were shared with the organisers of the first Citizen Assembly in Skopje, focused on air pollution. The results were used as inputs to the discussions that took place during the sessions of the Citizen Assembly, offering expert opinions and data to citizens for their informed deliberations.

Publications in 2024



Vision for the development of Bitola



A new energy vision for Bitola - student projects and technical illustrations



Urban greenery and architecture



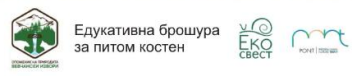
Chapter 27 Shadow Report

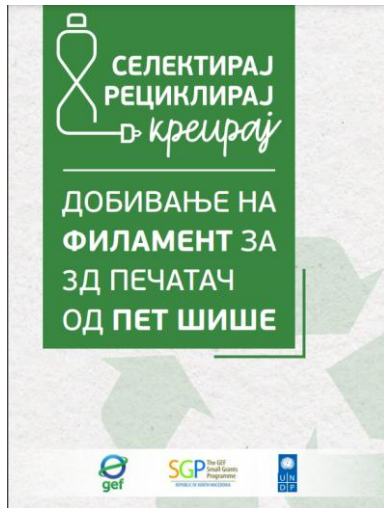


Research of the health condition of European chestnut in the Monument of Nature Vevcani springs



The numerous values of the sweet chestnut





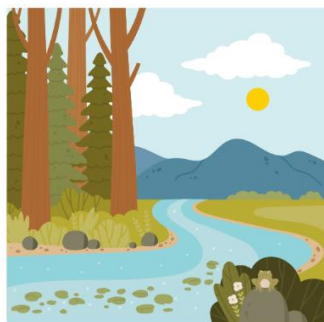
Toolkit: How to create filament from plastic PET bottles for 3D printing

СПОМЕНИК НА ПРИРОДАТА ВЕВЧАЊСКИ ИЗВОРИ
ПРИРОДАТА ВО ОЧИТЕ НА ДЕЦАТА



Toolkit: Nature in the eyes of children

СПОМЕНИК НА ПРИРОДАТА ВЕВЧАЊСКИ ИЗВОРИ
ИГРАЛИШТЕ ЗА МЛАДИ ИСТРАЖУВАЧИ



Toolkit: A playground for young researchers

СПОМЕНИК НА ПРИРОДАТА ВЕРѢАНСКИ ИЗВОРИ
ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛНО ПОЛЕ ЗА МЛАДИ НАУЧНИЦИ



Проектът е финансиран от Министерството на околната среда и горите



Toolkit: Experimenting grounds for young scientists

Eko-svest Team in 2024

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Simona Trajkovska, Nature Program Coordinator

Deana Blazheska, Project Coordinator

External interns in 2024

Indrajith Kamalanathan, Master student, ETH Zürich, Switzerland

Juliette, Galatoire, Master student, ETH Zürich, Switzerland

Governing Board of Eko-svest in 2024

Fidanka McGrath, president of Eko-svest

Toni Popovski, member of the Governing Board

Metodija Minoski, member of the Governing Board

Igor Kambovski, member of the Governing Board

Dejan Zrmanovski, member of the Governing Board

