

26 NEW SITES ACROSS 21 COUNTRIES JOIN THE WORLD NETWORK OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES IN 2025

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From 22 to 25 September 2025 in Hangzhou, the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves took place, organized by the [MAB Programme of UNESCO](#) and hosted by the Government of China. With more than 4,000 participants from over 150 UNESCO Member States, the event was addressed by eight government ministers, United Nations agencies and leading environmental organizations, representatives of Biosphere Reserves, as well as scientists, Indigenous peoples and youth organizations.

[The Congress endorsed and approved the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan for the Man and the Biosphere programme for the period 2026-2035.](#) The Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan aims to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, enhance ecosystem resilience and contribute to a positive climate future while promoting just, equitable and sustainable societies with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities at the heart of implementation. The Strategic Action Plan also reinforces the role of biosphere reserves in advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The strategic Action Plan furthermore reinforces the importance of multilateralism to tackle global challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution through collective and coordinated action.

[During the MAB Congress, UNESCO designated 26 new biosphere reserves across 21 countries, the highest number in 20 years.](#)

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves now includes 785 sites in 142 countries, with an additional one million km² of natural areas brought under protection since 2018. In 2025, six countries saw the designation of their first biosphere reserve: Angola, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Iceland, Oman and Tajikistan. In addition to these six, new reserves have also been designated in Albania, China, Ethiopia, France, Greece, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and Sweden. São Tomé and Príncipe became the first State to have its entire territory designated as a biosphere reserve. During the Congress, Audrey Azoulay, General Director of UNESCO, invited every Member State to establish at least one Biosphere Reserve by 2035.

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme has witnessed unprecedented growth in recent years: since 2018, 142 new biosphere reserves have brought an additional one million km² of natural areas under protection. Today, the 785 reserves cover over 8 million km², and directly benefit the nearly 300 million people who live within these areas.



Since 1971, biosphere reserves have played a central role in UNESCO's environmental mission. Alongside natural World Heritage sites and Global Geoparks, they contribute to protecting more than 13 million km² of terrestrial and marine ecosystems under UNESCO's umbrella, advancing the global Kunming-Montreal target of conserving 30% of land and sea by 2030. With the entry into force of the BBNJ Treaty in January 2026, countries will be able to designate and manage protected areas in the high seas, backed by science and robust management plans. Through its marine World Heritage sites, biosphere reserves and marine geoparks, UNESCO already safeguards more than 4.1 million km², an area equivalent to the Mediterranean Sea.

[These new Biosphere Reserves have been designated during the MAB Congress in 2025 :](#)

- Albania. Vjosa Valley Biosphere Reserve
- Angola. Quiçama Biosphere Reserve
- China. Daqingshan Biosphere Reserve
- China. Zhouzhi Biosphere Reserve
- Djibouti. Archipel des Sept Frères – Ras Siyyan – Khor Angar – Godoria Biosphere Reserve
- Equatorial Guinea. Isla de Bioko Biosphere Reserve
- Ethiopia. Anywaa Forest Biosphere Reserve
- France. Lac du Bourget, between the Rhône and the Alps, Biosphere Reserve
- France. Marshes and Tides between the Loire and the Vilaine Biosphere Reserve
- Greece. Mount Parnon. Cape Maleas Biosphere Reserve
- Iceland. Snæfellsnes Biosphere Reserve
- India. Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve
- Indonesia. Raja Ampat Biosphere Reserve
- Jordan. Ajloun Biosphere Reserve
- Jordan. Yarmouk Biosphere Reserve
- Madagascar. Mantadia Biosphere Reserve
- Madagascar. Tsimembo Biosphere Reserve
- Malaysia. Kinabatangan Biosphere Reserve
- Mongolia. Khomyn Tal Biosphere Reserve
- Oman. Al Jabal Al Akhdar Biosphere Reserve
- Oman. Sirrin Biosphere Reserve
- Portugal. Arrábida Biosphere Reserve
- Saudi Arabia. Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Biosphere Reserve
- São Tomé and Príncipe. Ilha de São Tomé Biosphere Reserve
- Sweden. Storkrieket Biosphere Reserve
- Tajikistan. Romit Biosphere Reserve.

Biosphere reserves safeguard some of the planet's richest and most fragile ecosystems. They harbour a significant share of global biodiversity, including more than 60% of terrestrial vertebrate species, 12% of mapped mangroves, 10% of salt marshes and 8% of the world's seagrass meadows. They foster local and community initiatives and serve as learning grounds for younger generations, through educational programmes tailored to schools as well as to local and Indigenous communities. Partnerships with the private sector further strengthen these efforts. For example, the Amazonia Project, deployed across eight biosphere reserves with support from LVMH, combines Indigenous knowledge with modern science. It has already supported more than 40 local initiatives, creating



sustainable green jobs in agroforestry and regenerative agriculture, while strengthening forest and biodiversity protection against wildfires.

[With these new Biosphere Reserves, the World Network now totals 785 sites in 142 countries, including 25 transboundary sites.](#)

Biosphere Reserves involve local communities and all interested stakeholders in planning and management. They integrate three main "functions: conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity; economic development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable; logistic support underpinning development through research, monitoring, education and training.

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) consists of a dynamic and interactive network of the sites. It promotes North-South, South-South and South-North-South collaboration and represents a tool for international cooperation through the exchange of experiences and know-how, capacity-building and the promotion of best practices among Biosphere Reserves.

The new report [*Accelerating the Global Biodiversity Framework by Strengthening Biosphere Reserves*](#) has just been launched by UNESCO highlighting how to accelerate the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through this network of sites working for sustainability and nature conservation.

To know more

[New Biosphere Reserves designated by UNESCO in 2025](#)

[Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan](#)

[Summary Report 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in enb.iisd.org](#)

[Man and the Biosphere MAB Programme](#)

[World Network of Biosphere Reserves](#)

[Designation for new Biosphere Reserves](#)

[MAB regional and thematic Networks](#)

[Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves](#)

[New report shows UNESCO Biosphere Reserves advance biodiversity targets](#)

[Accelerating the Global Biodiversity Framework by Strengthening Biosphere Reserves. pdf](#)

