

Report of the Inaugural Subnational Leaders Delegation to the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress

Assembling expertise to shape the future of subnational conservation leadership, IUCN convened the inaugural Subnational Leaders Delegation at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress, held in Abu Dhabi from 9–15 October. This delegation included IUCN Subnational Government Members, as well as subnational leaders considering IUCN membership, civil society organisations and Commission experts. Curated programming throughout Congress highlighted subnational conservation leadership and tools and resources available to subnational actors at a local and global level. Following Members' adoption of Motion 122, *Increasing the participation of subnational governments across and through the Union*, to include in IUCN's mandate the development of a subnational strategy, members of the Subnational Leaders Delegation participated in a series of programs designed to inform the strategy.

Subnational actors are of vital importance in conserving biodiversity and protecting nature. The vision and action of cities, regions, states, provinces, territories, and other subnational governments is essential in achieving shared global climate and biodiversity goals. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework recognises that a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is critical in achieving the biodiversity targets set forth by Parties of the convention. COP 17 reporting against Global Biodiversity Framework targets and other goals for 2030 within the GBF are rapidly approaching.

Recognising the central role that subnational governments play in conservation leadership, IUCN Members passed a historic resolution at the 2020 IUCN Congress ([WCC 2020 Dec 138](#)) to include subnational governments in the membership of

IUCN. Since its creation, the category has rapidly grown. As of the 2025 IUCN Congress, there were 33 subnational government members of IUCN, with others announcing their intent to join at Congress, including [California and Massachusetts as the first from the United States of America](#).

In addition to Motion 122, subnational government members put forward several motions that were approved by the Members' Assembly and stood for election to the IUCN Council. Congress further served as a platform for IUCN Members to announce or launch new initiatives and garner the support of other Members toward shared priorities.

Participation in the Subnational Leaders Delegation

More than 60 individuals expressed interest in joining the Subnational Leaders Delegation, including municipal and regional governments, civil society organisations, IUCN Commissions, representing IUCN Members and prospective Members, and spanning nearly every region of the globe. Through programming and networking sessions and communications through IUCN Engage and WhatsApp, participants were able to connect to a focused network of subnational leaders for sustained knowledge sharing and partnerships beyond the World Conservation Congress. As a result, this delegate cohort will also remain connected for UNFCCC COP30, CBD COP17, and other upcoming global policy events and negotiations.

For interested parties who were unable to attend the 2025 World Conservation Congress, please contact the IUCN Secretariat team to be connected to this cohort.

Of [IUCN's 33 subnational government members](#), governments represented at Congress included:

- City of Cape Town (South Africa);
- Ministry of Sustainability, Environment and Blue Economy, Regional Government of Andalusia (Spain)

- Cross River State Ministry of Environment (Nigeria);
- Department of Territory, Housing and Ecological Transition, Government of Catalonia (Spain);
- Environmental Management Directorate of the Decentralised Autonomous Government of the Province of Carchi (Ecuador);
- State of Vaud (Switzerland);
- Forest Wildlife & Environment Department, Government of Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan);
- Government of Quebec (Canada);
- Hamilton City Council (New Zealand);
- Inhambane Province (Mozambique);
- Kurdistan Regional Government (Iran);
- Jeju Special Self-Governing Province (Republic of Korea);
- Municipality of Antigua Guatemala (Guatemala);
- City of La Estrella (Colombia);
- Office of Environmental Protection of the Government of Curridabat (Costa Rica);
- Ile de France Regional Council (France);
- Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Mexico City (Mexico);
- Suncheon City (Republic of Korea);
- City of Paris (France);
- Municipality of Yerevan (Armenia);

Others pursuing membership included:

- California Natural Resources Agency (United States)
- Ministry of Forestry and Parks, Government of Alberta (Canada)

Most participating governments were also represented in Forum and Exhibition programming, with opportunities to present success stories and experiences throughout Congress.

Subnational Leaders Delegation Programme

Members of the IUCN Subnational Leader Delegation benefited from a curated and supported track, as well as other urban- and subnational-focused sessions organised throughout Congress. Core delegation programming consisted of:

- A Subnational Leader Delegation Meet and Greet and daily debriefs available each day of the Forum to connect delegation members and share ideas;
- High-profile Exhibition Central Stage announcements of new subnational members and partnerships: [Charting a New Course: Subnational Leadership for a Nature-Positive Future](#);
- Gathering at the Pavillon France to raise visibility among subnational members globally: [Gathering Subnational Members](#);
- Regional dialogues on multilevel governance and implementation:
 - [The Frontlines of Conservation in the Americas: Models for Subnational Leadership to Advance Transformative Collaboration](#);
 - [Subnational leadership amid global uncertainty: innovative solutions for conservation](#);
 - [Leading 30x30 efforts – How are subnational governments responding to the challenges?](#);
- A deep dive on technical elements and forward planning of IUCN's strategy to help subnational actors engage in global policy in the IUCN Programme Pavilion: [Strategy to help Subnational Actors Engage in Global Policy to Conserve Nature and Biodiversity](#);
- Culminating in a co-design workshop to help shape development of IUCN's subnational strategy.

Sessions highlighted the models, partnerships, and ambitions that make subnational governments leaders and innovators on the global stage. As one example, regional natural parks in France, which protect the natural scenery of lived-in working landscapes, categorised as IUCN Category V protected areas, offer a unique contribution to Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Another, Cape Town's Biodiversity Spatial Plan is the first of its kind in Africa. Cross-regional partnerships like the Mediterranean Climate Action Partnership, co-chaired by the governments of Catalonia and California, provide a model for ecologically similar regions to foster collaboration. Quebec is also providing financial leadership as the only subnational government contributing to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund.

A co-design workshop organised on the final day of the Exhibition served as an important first step to help IUCN design its first ever subnational strategy. The session sought to identify goals for the strategy, the needs of subnational governments, and realistic, achievable outcomes. Suggestions ranged from setting goals for subnational participation to identifying operational needs like tools, platforms, programs and membership resources that IUCN can provide. This feedback will help inform the next stages of consultation.

Related Outcomes, Resolutions and Recommendations of the World Conservation Congress

Sessions held during the Forum and Exhibition of the World Conservation Congress served to launch new tools for subnational actors, announce new subnational members and celebrate global recognition of subnational efforts, while the Members' Assembly voted to adopt several subnational-related motions, approve a new four-year program, in which subnational governments are integrated throughout, and elect representatives to the IUCN Council, including the first to represent a subnational government member.

- Forum session "[Nature Meets Cities: IUCN Sectorial Interpretation for Urban Nature-based Solutions](#)" marked the soft launch of the IUCN Urban Sectorial Interpretation of the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Designed to support urban policymakers, planners, and stakeholders, this new resource offers a practical framework for integrating

NbS into urban development to address climate risks, biodiversity loss, and social inequalities.

- [“Cities as Drivers of Change: The Berlin Urban Nature Pact,”](#) presented the Berlin Urban Nature Pact, a global initiative that seeks to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet in cities by 2030.
- The [IUCN Urban Alliance](#), an advisory group comprising IUCN Memberships focusing on the advancement of urban conservation within the Union, held its first in-person meeting. The Alliance is currently being reviewed for the next four-year term and applications from IUCN Membership will open in early 2026. Exhibition Central Stage session [“Charting a New Course: Subnational Leadership for a Nature-Positive Future”](#) highlighted several major developments, including the announcement of new subnational members and membership applicants. The governors of two US states, California and Massachusetts, prepared remarks announcing their respective intentions to join IUCN.
- [The Green List Awards Ceremony](#), held in the IUCN Programme Pavilion, celebrated 24 new Listings, representing more than 120 protected and conserved areas across 13 countries, joining the IUCN Green List, the global benchmark for effective, equitable, and credible conservation. California’s marine protected area network became the first nature network to receive Green List certification.
- IUCN Members approved Motion 122 on e-vote, [Increasing the participation of subnational governments across and through the Union](#), which calls on the Union to design and implement a strategy aimed at embedding subnational government perspectives and inclusion in all activities of IUCN.
- Members approved Motion 006 in plenary, [Promoting the models of regional or sub-national protected natural areas to achieve the global target of 30% protected and conserved areas by 2030](#), calling on the Director General and Commissions to promote examples of regional and subnational contributions to GBF Target 3 and encouraging States and

subnational governments to collaborate, taking IUCN criteria into account, and utilise the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas in identifying and recognising protected areas.

- Three motions were approved relating to integrating biodiversity into urban development and planning, including the protection of urban and peri-urban ecosystems: Motion 100, [Integrating the preservation and recovery of wildlife and plant species into the creation and restoration of buildings](#); Motion 103, [Reinforcing and developing urban and peri-urban forests in line with the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#); and Motion 106, [Promotion of social inclusion and universal accessibility in IUCN practices and in the management of natural areas, parks and green spaces](#).
- Members adopted the [Nature 2030 IUCN Programme 2026–2029](#), which recognises the role of subnational governments in implementing programme outputs, including but not limited to: recognising, respecting and promoting the rights, agency and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including environmental defenders; enhancing effective and equitable protected and conserved areas; conserving freshwater biodiversity; preventing and reducing the spread and impact of invasive alien species; preventing and reducing nature crime; integrating nature into scaled-up global climate policy and action; and promoting nature-based urban development.
- Members elected representatives to the IUCN for the four-year term, including Maude Lelievre, Councillor of Paris and General Delegate of the Association Les Eco Maires, renewed as Councillor for West Europe, and Oscar Mora Altamirano, Proprietary Councillor of the Curridabat City Council, representing Costa Rica within the Meso and South America region.





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Annex I - Local governments and conservation: What has been achieved four years after their recognition as members of the IUCN?

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND CONSERVATION:

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED FOUR YEARS AFTER THEIR RECOGNITION AS MEMBERS OF THE IUCN ?

The indispensable contribution of subnational governments to IUCN

Local and regional authorities play a fundamental role in preserving biodiversity and restoring nature. The French Committee of the IUCN has contributed significantly to the involvement of local authorities in the governance of the IUCN. This dynamic took root in 2007 with the study "Local authorities and biodiversity... the missing link in IUCN's action", which highlighted the challenges and framework for the active participation of local authorities in biodiversity conservation.

In 2012, at the World Conservation Congress in Jeju (Republic of Korea), an ambitious motion, supported by both the French and Spanish committees, laid the foundations for this recognition.

This work culminated in 2021 at the World Conservation Congress in Marseille (France) when the motion to include subnational authorities in IUCN governance was adopted. This historic decision gave local authorities full membership status, highlighting their role in promoting environmental justice.

The actions undertaken by IUCN member communities have focused on five pillars with a clear objective: to preserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable prosperity.

I. Protecting life at all times and in all places

With the IUCN declaring nearly 30% of known species as threatened and listing them on the Red List, local authorities have made it their mission to preserve these species and restore their protected areas.

This commitment is reflected in ambitious plans, such as the 2019-2030 Biodiversity Plan joined by **the State of Vaud**, and the integration of the **City of Fontainebleau** into the European Natura 2000 network, guaranteeing the protection of its remarkable forests. **Cape Town**, for its part, has launched the Biodiversity Spatial Plan, enabling all municipal services to harmonise their environmental responsibilities.

The fundamental commitment from local authorities is reflected in tangible actions such as the reintroduction of the fardet in Andalusia, initiated by **the Consejería de Sostenibilidad, Medio Ambiente y Economía Azul, Junta de Andalucía**. More broadly, these "natural treasures" are now treated with diligence in order to reconcile biodiversity protection with human development.

One notable example is the 50-year moratorium on seabed exploration and exploitation introduced by the **Government of New Caledonia**, ensuring the long-term protection of this fragile ecosystem. In the same vein, other cities have stepped up their efforts to protect nature: **Suncheon City** is working to restore Suncheon Bay; **Buenos Aires** is creating ecological reserve ;

Valencia is restoring mining areas; and **the Canary Islands** are taking strong measures to protect Saladar de Jandia.

These multiple actions underscore the determination of local authorities to promote their territories while preserving their unique character.

II. Adapting the territory to tomorrow's climate

Biodiversity conservation is also emerging as a lever for urban resilience. While nearly 60% of the population lives in cities, these spaces are not always adapted to new climate challenges: air pollution, soil artificialization and even water stress. Cities and urban communities must constantly innovate to ensure a healthy and sustainable living environment for their citizens.

This improved land management goes hand in hand with the protection of water resources. Some cities are mobilising their residents, as is the case in the **Municipality of Antigua Guatemala**, which organises river clean-up days. Others prefer to invest in improving their water networks and treatment plants, such as **Xunta de Galicia**.

Forest restoration and carbon capture remain a strategic focus. While **the Ile-de-France region** is investing in urban forests to develop cool islands, **Hamilton City** is seeking to restore its natural vegetation by 2 to 10% by 2050.

Their goal is the same: to reintroduce nature into the city to encourage the return of wildlife, particularly birds.

Some cities, notably **Paris** and **Yerevani Qaghaqapetaran**, are also planning to introduce environmental impact and biodiversity measures to monitor and improve air quality.

Other policies are being implemented to address priority issues, such as plastic pollution in cities. The **Scottish Government** has a recycling rate of 70%, reflecting a proactive and structured policy on urban waste management.

III. Making nature a shared common good

In its manifesto entitled "The Future of Life, Our Values for Action" and published in 2021, the French Committee of the IUCN promotes harmony with living things on all scales. This balance lies in knowledge and understanding of the natural world. Conceiving of nature as a shared common good implies rethinking education and promoting active citizen participation.

Major educational programmes are being rolled out around the world, such as EDUCABOSC, initiated by the **Dirección General de Medio Natural y Evaluación Ambiental, Consejería de Agricultura, Generalitat Valenciana**, the field school for farmers in the province of **Cachi**, and the **Suncheon** Eco-College. To ensure wider access to environmental information, some local authorities are developing digital tools such as Gaia, a citizen portal run by the **Consellería de Medio Ambiente e Ordenación do Territorio, Xunta de Galicia**.

Other initiatives, such as the CITBIO project in **Curridibat**, allocate certain public spaces to the cultivation of native plants, allowing everyone to explore and experiment with a respectful relationship between humans and living things.

Other territories, such as **the region of Murcia**, are structuring their economies around a circular and social system, thereby limiting energy loss and waste production.

IV. Creating a liveable environment for all

For several years, the IUCN has devoted considerable effort to nature-based solutions (NbS) that combine conservation and sustainable ecosystem management to address social, economic and environmental challenges.

The responses by the infranational governments to these challenges are as diverse as the issues themselves. **The Vice Consejería Sostenibilidad Ambiental, Gobierno Vasco** has proposed an ambitious Social Housing Plan for 2036. The objective is clear: to support the Basque population's right to housing by steadily increasing the supply of affordable housing, while integrating accessibility and energy efficiency criteria as structural policies. Similarly, **the Secretaría del Medio Ambiente del Gobierno de la Ciudad de México** has put in place two specific instruments (the Local Climate Action Strategy 2021-2050 and the Climate Action Programme 2021-2030) to promote low-carbon development based on the principles of the circular economy, social inclusion and human rights. a commitment that is also being pursued by the province of **Li Shui Ren Min Zheng Fu**.

These proposals are far from isolated. Many local authorities are adopting restrictive measures to protect natural and landscape heritage, such as the **State of Vaud**, which adopted the LPrNP law in 2023. **The Forest Wildlife & Environment Department of the Government of Gilgit Baltistan** has created many protected areas with the aim of subjecting 70% of the territory to sustainable management, including the development of agricultural forestry.

Finally, with the rise of tourism, global ecosystems are increasingly under threat. To counter this phenomenon, **the Department of Territory, Housing, and Ecological Transition, Government of Catalonia** is focusing on the development of sustainable ecotourism. It is even preparing to host the Global Ecotourism Forum at the end of October 2025, bringing together international experts and leaders to discuss the major trends in ecotourism.

V. Local alliances for global action

To structure their actions and strengthen their influence, some local authorities are joining forces and coordinating around common projects. This set of initiatives reflects a shared desire to integrate biodiversity into public policy at all levels.

With this in mind, **the Cape Town Biodiversity Spatial Plan** builds on the Bioregional Plan adopted in 2015 and extends to all cities in the department, promoting the sharing of environmental responsibilities. For its part, **the Cross River State Ministry of Environment** has joined the Great Green Wall to combat degradation, desertification and food insecurity.

In France, this approach to cooperation is being rolled out at regional level with a number of networks (SESAME, NextGen, PRTR) led in particular by **the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region** and **the Bouches-du-Rhône Department**. To protect the South Region from fires and raise public awareness of fire prevention, the region is funding a Regional Forest Guard programme. In addition, in the Bouches-du-Rhône, the SESAME tool is the result of collaboration between Cerema, INRAE and the Department, with the aim of coordinating vegetation restoration actions linked to ecosystem services.

Internationally, **the government of Quebec** with the close collaboration of **the government of Catalogne and Regions4** is fervently supporting Motion 122 on e-vote. In this regard, they want to promote a strategy of including subnational authorities in all IUCN activities, highlighting the importance of these actors in the quest for resilience.

Finally, UNESCO remains a key player in this multi-stakeholder alliance, with, among other things, the development of its network of biosphere reserves in **the Canary Islands** and **Fontainebleau**.

Source: IUCN French Committee



Annex II – Results of the subnational strategy co-design workshop

Aiming to inform a subnational strategy, in line with Motion 122, that can better integrate subnational governments within IUCN and help subnational government members engage in global policy to conserve nature and biodiversity, the subnational strategy co-design workshop sought feedback from Subnational Leaders Delegation participants on three questions: identifying ideals and outcomes for the strategy, indicating what would be needed from IUCN, and defining success in terms that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. To answer these questions, participants divided into five breakout groups, wherein several broad themes emerged consistently:

- Providing flexibility and adaptiveness to different local, regional and national contexts and alignment with timelines for meeting global targets;
- Promoting IUCN membership, including in underrepresented areas;
- Integrating subnational actors into all facets of IUCN, including the Secretariat, Commissions, Council, and Members;
- Recognising and promoting subnational contributions to global goals; and
- Supporting subnational engagement in global policy and implementation with tools and knowledge, including training and communications.

In addition to secretariat staff facilitating discussion, 22 participants in the Subnational Leaders Delegation took part in the workshop:

- Municipalidad de Antigua Guatemala (Guatemala)
- Government of Catalonia (Spain)
- Gouvernement du Québec (Canada)
- Francisco Pagula, Province of Inhambane (Mozambique)
- City of Cape Town (South Africa)
- Cross River State Ministry of Environment (Nigeria)
- Hikûmeta Herêma Kurdistanê (Iraq)
- California Natural Resources Agency (USA)
- Ministry of Forestry and Parks of Alberta (Canada)
- Cornell Botanic Gardens (USA)

- International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (Hungary)
- New Mexico BioPark Society (USA)
- Point Blue Conservation (USA)
- WildSpaces (USA)
- National Caucus of Environmental Legislators (USA)
- Les Offices jeunesse internationaux du Québec (Canada)



Annex III – IUCN Subnational Government Members

