

## UNESCO raises global alarm on the rapid degradation of soils

**Agadir/Paris, 1 July 2024 – UNESCO is warning that 90% of the planet's land surface could be degraded by 2050, with major risks for biodiversity and human life. At an international conference in Agadir (Morocco), Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, appealed to the Organization's 194 Member States to improve soil protection and rehabilitation. UNESCO is also undertaking a number of actions to fill the scientific knowledge gaps in this field.**

*"Soil plays a crucial role in sustaining life on Earth. Yet it is still often neglected or poorly managed. UNESCO is calling on the international community to make this a priority. With sixty years of experience in soil science, our Organization will help States to advance knowledge and train professionals so that the necessary measures can be taken", announced **Audrey Azoulay** at the UNESCO International Conference on Soils, which is being held today.*

Healthy soils are essential for maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity, regulating the climate, producing food and purifying water. However, according to the [World Atlas of Desertification](#), 75% of them are already degraded, directly impacting 3.2 billion people. And if current trends continue, this proportion will rise to 90% by 2050.

Against this worrying backdrop, UNESCO and the Kingdom of Morocco's National Agency for the Development of Oasis and Argan Zones (ANDZOA) organized the international conference on soil on Monday 1<sup>er</sup> July in Agadir, bringing together experts and representatives from over thirty countries. The discussions have led to an action plan based on three key objectives: improving soil protection and rehabilitation, filling the scientific knowledge gaps in this field, and strengthening the commitment of young people and communities through education and training programmes.

### **A soil health index and a pilot programme**

UNESCO will support its Member States by establishing a "world soil health index" in coordination with its international partners. This index will be a standardized measure for assessing and comparing soil quality across different regions and ecosystems. It will allow the identification of trends showing degradation or improvement, reveal which areas are most at risk, and enable better understanding the effectiveness of soil management practices.

In addition to this index, UNESCO will launch a pilot initiative for the sustainable management of soils and landscapes in around ten natural sites that it helps to protect under its Biosphere Reserves programme. The goal will be twofold: to assess the effectiveness of the management methods implemented in these sites, and to work to ensure that the best of these methods can be deployed in other regions of the world.

Site managers will be encouraged to develop innovative soil conservation and land management projects. Training will be provided for them, as well as for members of government agencies, conservation organizations and indigenous communities, to give them as many tools as possible to protect this essential resource. This initiative will also include an educational component through which UNESCO will raise awareness and involve the younger generations.

### More information

- [UNESCO's International Geoscience Programme \(IGCP\)](#)
- [UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere \(MAB\) Programme](#)
- [Natural World Heritage of UNESCO](#)

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### About UNESCO

*With 194 Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes to peace and security by leading multilateral cooperation on education, science, culture, communication and information. Headquartered in Paris, UNESCO has offices in 54 countries and employs over 2300 people. UNESCO oversees more than 2000 World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks; networks of Creative, Learning, Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; and over 13 000 associated schools, university chairs, training and research institutions. Its Director-General is Audrey Azoulay.*

*"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" – UNESCO Constitution, 1945.*

More information: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

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