unesco

NEWSLETTER

UNESCO VENICE SCIENCE IN ACTION

Advancing science, technology and innovation for sustainable development in South-East Europe and the Mediterranean

ISSUE 1

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Science Newsletter from the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.
This edition showcases recent initiatives across South-East Europe and the Mediterranean, regions where science, technology and innovation (STI) are driving practical solutions to today's interconnected challenges. We spotlight efforts including impactful pilot work in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks, offering scalable and innovative models for sustainable development; water diplomacy and transboundary aquifer governance; soil literacy; post-earthquake recovery in Türkiye; and climate finance for climate-resilient cultural heritage in the Western Balkans. These stories reflect the mission of our Science Unit to turn knowledge into action through UNESCO's global scientific programmes. By working with governments, researchers, youth, educators and communities, we aim to advance sustainability, regional cooperation, and inclusive development. We hope this newsletter will inspire new ideas, deepen partnerships, and strengthen our shared commitment to science as a force for peace and resilience.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Take the quiz and find out the answer at the end of the Newsletter.

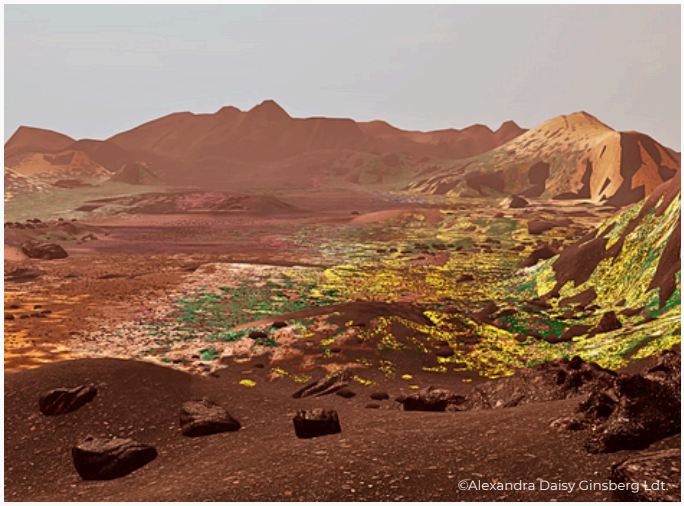
Who are the tiny underground heroes that wiggle through soil, making tunnels that help plants breath?

A) Beetles
B) Earthworms
C) Millipedes

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

INTERDISCIPLINARY

From roots to reach: UNESCO and the EU boost Soil Literacy in Europe and beyond through the SOILSCAPE project



The SOILSCAPE project is a pioneer initiative that brings together soil, art, and society in a shared mission to protect one of Earth's most essential yet overlooked resources: soil.
Funded under the EU's Mission Soil: A Soil Deal for Europe, and co-funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), SOILSCAPE unites 19 partners across 11 countries in a dynamic alliance of artists, scientists, educators, and civil society actors. Together, they embed soil into public awareness through creativity, engagement, and evidence.
SOILSCAPE is more than a project—it's a pan-European movement aimed at concrete results. By supporting national and international initiatives with over €2 million in funding, it aims to involve the community in soil orchestras across Europe and beyond. These guide communities from reflection on soil's invisible roles to active participation in protecting and restoring it. SOILSCAPE contributes directly to the EU's mission of ensuring that 75% of European soils are healthy or on a recovery path by 2030.
By 2028, it will have:

- Launched soil literacy campaigns in multiple languages;
- Created creative pathways for community soil awareness;
- Supported a European network of soil literacy festivals and events;
- Activated thousands of citizens through art-based learning.

At the heart of the initiative are 4 interconnected stages: contemplation, preparation, action, and sustainability. Aligned with the EU Green Deal and the Agenda 2030, it supports:

- Sustainable soil management;
- Lowering of Europe's global soil footprint;
- Public engagement and soil literacy.

In 2025, SOILSCAPE launched an Open Call for 30 projects, kicked off 8 soil orchestras around Europe and participated in high-profile events like the ENSA workshop hosted by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) in Ispra, Italy, on enhancing soil literacy and the "From Ocean to Soil Literacy "workshop held in UNESCO Regional Bureau premises.

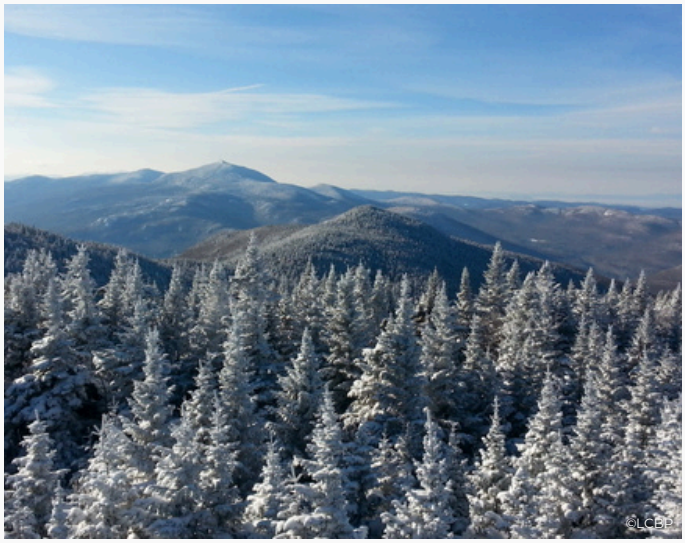
SDGs addressed:

Tags: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | EU-FUNDED | SOIL | CULTURE

UNESCO expands global sustainability efforts through abrdn's third cycle

In September 2024, UNESCO and the abrdn Charitable Foundation (aCF) launched the third-year cycle of the joint project "Promoting sustainable development through UNESCO's programmes and sites" at the UNESCO Regional Bureau in Venice. The event unveiled five new third-cycle sites and showcased tangible results from the prior two cycles. Newly selected third-cycle projects include:

- Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve, Bulgaria: monitoring forest and water catchments in the Cherni Osam River to inform watershed management.
- Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Reserve, Canada: enhancing climate literacy and resilience through collaboration in the biosphere reserve.
- Vis Archipelago Geopark, Croatia: investigating karst aquifers to address drinking water scarcity on Biševo Island.
- Bükk Geopark, Hungary: reconstructing the evolution of climate change via cave monitoring to improve future environmental projections.
- Estrela Geopark, Portugal: engaging youth and communities in digital monitoring of geosites and ecosystem services.



Second-cycle initiatives include karst river monitoring in France's Causses Du Quercy, fire early-warning systems in Montenegro's Durmitor Park, water quality assessment through citizen science in Romania's Hațeg Geopark, farm resilience guidelines in UK's Galloway & Southern Ayrshire Reserve, and climate and environmental atlas in USA's Champlain Adirondack Reserve.
Additionally, the first-cycle sites demonstrated impactful pilot work, offering scalable and innovative models for sustainable development.
Overall, the event fostered peer learning, highlighted local impacts, and emphasised the value of collaborative knowledge exchange to support the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development.

SDGs addressed:

Tags: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | MAB | IHP | WHS | UGGP

INTERDISCIPLINARY

Rebuilding for resilience: UNESCO steps in after 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye

UNESCO has launched a recovery initiative to help rebuild Türkiye's educational infrastructure and strengthen resilience following the devastating earthquakes in February 2023. The UNESCO's Immediate Recovery Response to the Earthquakes in Türkiye project is funded by the Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT), in collaboration with UNESCO and the Republic of Türkiye's Ministry of National Education. This initiative aims to support Turkish education authorities using an innovative R&D methodology in restoring damaged school infrastructure and enhancing disaster risk reduction policies and capacities. The project is implemented through the Science unit at the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe as part of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) framework, aimed at reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and reduce the causal factors of disasters. A key outcome of this joint effort is the development and implementation of an enhanced School Building Disaster Risk Assessment System. This system equips national and local stakeholders with the tools needed to identify vulnerabilities in educational infrastructure and prioritize interventions effectively. Alongside this, the project has introduced a Sustainable Retrofitting Engineering Methodology—an innovative, cost-effective approach that offers practical solutions for reinforcing existing school buildings, making them safer and more resilient to future seismic events. Equally important, the initiative significantly raises awareness around the importance of safe school construction among decision-makers and practitioners. By fostering collaboration between technical experts, education authorities, and international partners, UNESCO is promoting a more risk-informed approach to school infrastructure planning, rooted in sustainability and inclusivity. This recovery initiative aligns closely with UNESCO's global mandate to protect the right to education in emergencies.

SDGs addressed:

Tags: DRR EDUCATION YOUTH

INTERDISCIPLINARY

Unlocking Climate finance for cultural heritage, water, and biodiversity in South-East Europe

UNESCO has set a new benchmark for actionable progress in the region's climate adaptation efforts, convening experts and government representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, working together to transform national priorities into investment-ready project concepts. During this collaborative effort, national teams developed concrete project pipelines that integrate cultural heritage, biodiversity conservation, water security, and food systems into climate adaptation strategies. Several of these project concepts are now being prepared for submission to major funding mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund, with the goal of achieving real, on-the-ground improvements. Participants also reported a strengthened understanding of climate finance eligibility and proposal development; for example, Moldova's delegation formed enhanced cross-ministerial partnerships to better position the country for funding climate-smart agro-biodiversity initiatives. The initiative also sparked new regional partnerships and cross-border knowledge exchanges, empowering countries to launch joint project pipelines and scale up coordinated climate action across the region.

SDGs addressed:

Tags: SOUTH-EAST EUROPE | REGIONAL COOPERATION | CLIMATE ACTION

INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Groundwater unites the Western Balkans: DIKTAS II advances cross-border cooperation

The second phase of the DIKTAS (Dinaric Karst Transboundary Aquifer System) project is accelerating regional collaboration and delivering tangible progress in one of the world's most ecologically and hydrologically significant aquifer systems. Implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by UNESCO through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe and the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), DIKTAS II is part of a broader effort funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to transform groundwater governance across South-East Europe.

Building on the legacy of the original DIKTAS I and the "Groundwater Governance" global initiative, DIKTAS II is translating recommendations from the Global Framework for Action into concrete, on-the-ground strategies for sustainable, cooperative groundwater management. The project enables Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro to jointly safeguard the Dinaric Karst aquifer—a lifeline for millions and a critical component of the region's biodiversity and water security.

A major milestone was reached during the project's second Steering Committee and first in-person expert meeting, held in Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina from 8 to 10 July 2025. UNESCO and UNDP convened national authorities, water experts, and environmental stakeholders to refine country-led strategies and foster alignment with broader regional environmental goals.

The meeting resulted in strengthened technical cooperation, a roadmap for policy harmonization, and identification of joint opportunities to leverage complementary initiatives across the region.

DIKTAS II is not just a scientific or policy effort—it is a powerful platform for regional diplomacy, community resilience, and sustainable development. By enhancing shared governance mechanisms, building institutional capacity, and aligning national priorities, the project is paving the way for integrated aquifer management that can serve as a model for transboundary water cooperation globally.

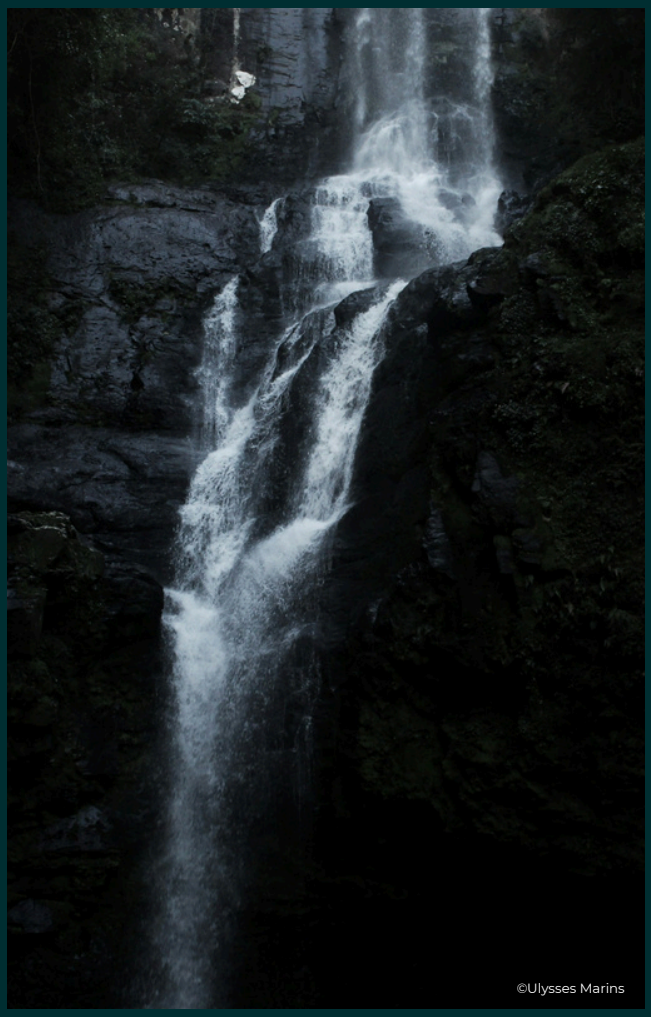
SDGs addressed:

Tags: WATER | SOUTH-EAST EUROPE | REGIONAL COOPERATION

©Unsplash

FIELD STORIES

From Source to Sea: experts and youth unite at high-altitude water summit


©Ulysses Marins

The fourth edition of the workshop “The water resource: from the Dolomites to the sea. Glaciers and their conservation” united local governments, scientists, European experts, and youth representatives from 9 to 12 July at Rifugio Galassi, in Italy. By bringing together diverse actors across sectors, especially empowering young voices, the event created a dynamic platform for collaboration on actionable water management and glacier preservation strategies.


©UNESCO

This summit not only strengthens cross-sectoral partnerships but also equips youth with the tools and networks to drive sustainable water stewardship. Ultimately, this collective effort accelerates meaningful impact toward securing Veneto region’s water resources—connecting mountain glaciers to the sea—for resilient, long-term water sustainability.

In this year edition youth from UNESCO Chair of Ca' Foscari University, UNESCO IOC and UNESCO Science unit joined efforts and co-created with workshop participants recommendations for the Ocean Decade and the Cryosphere Decade. The Source-to-sea approach and the water summit are deeply interconnected in their objectives and methodology. Source-to-sea is a holistic framework that recognizes the deep interconnections between land, freshwater, and marine systems, considering them as part of a single, dynamic continuum.
This methodology supports cooperation among diverse stakeholders—spanning freshwater and marine sectors—and enables integrated governance from the headwaters of rivers to the ocean. By considering flows of water, sediment, pollution, biota, materials, and ecosystem services across the entire system, this approach helps addressing upstream-downstream impacts and fosters cross-sectoral solutions for sustainable resource management.

SDGs addressed:

Tags: WATER YOUTH

"UNESCO works to develop the scientific knowledge base to help countries manage their water resources in a sustainable way, collaborating to build a water-secure future. More specifically, through its Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC)."
Magdalena Landry, Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

POLICY AND DIPLOMACY

A look into Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

On the 20 and 21 November 2024, the Central European Initiative (CEI) hosted the 1st Conference on Science Diplomacy in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe at their Executive Secretariat premises in Trieste, Italy. The conference focused on exploring Science Diplomacy governance and capacity building in the target region. Representatives from institutions, research centers and ambassies participated in a dynamic multi-stakeholder discussion aimed at fostering greater regional collaboration. The UNESCO Regional Bureau contributed to the thematic panel on multi-stakeholder partnerships for effective Science Diplomacy, underscoring its pivotal role in fostering and facilitating the diffusion of Science Diplomacy at international level. In fact, UNESCO has experience in fostering science-driven international collaboration, particularly in transboundary contexts. Initiatives like the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme exemplify UNESCO's commitment to leverage science for sustainable development and cross-border collaboration in the region.

SDGs addressed:

Tags: WATER | CLIMATE ACTION | REGIONAL COOPERATION

Shaping water futures: Science Diplomacy at the heart of World Water Day 2025

On 22 March 2025, World Water Day placed “Glacier Preservation” at the forefront of the global agenda, highlighting the urgent need to protect Earth’s natural freshwater reservoirs. This year’s campaign, supported by the UN World Water Development Report 2025, draws attention to results and evidence-based action that are helping secure a sustainable water future.
As part of the World Water Day celebrations, the high-level event "The Role of Science Diplomacy in Water Supplies" brought together leading scientists and policymakers at UNESCO’s premises in Venice, highlighting how scientific collaboration and international partnerships are actively enabling positive, practical change for water management worldwide. Together, participants examined existing frameworks, models, and best practices, identifying the most effective approaches. The event strengthened science-policy dialogues, narrowing the gap between research and decision-making, and outlined practical steps to advance water diplomacy. By also highlighting the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration—including art and culture—the event helped cultivate new partnerships committed to the sustainable and inclusive management of vital water resources.

OPPORTUNITIES AND EVENTS

From ideas to impact: how UNESCO's STEM Workshop is transforming classrooms across the Mediterranean

The UNESCO Venice Office's workshop on revitalising STEM education in March 2025 has delivered concrete results, reshaping the future for learners and educators across Europe and the Mediterranean. Focused on practical advances rather than theory, the workshop empowered teachers with new resources to boost digital and scientific skills among students. Notably, the "Classroom Champions" pilot—profiled during the event—demonstrated measurable growth in problem-solving and digital literacy, particularly for girls and those from underserved communities. One impact story comes from a rural school in Albania, where practical STEM modules led to a 30% rise in student schoosing science-based careers. Teachers from six countries forged a peer-support network, enabling shared lesson plans and mentoring, with 80% reporting improved classroom engagement. Participants also co-developed an "Inclusive STEM Toolkit", now adopted in partner schools, that offers all children—regardless of background—practical routes into science and technology.

SOILSCAPE is establishing Artistic and Cultural Soil Orchestras in eight EU countries

The SOILSCAPE project is creating a network of eight Artistic and Cultural Soil Orchestras (ACSOs) that unite artists, scientists, educators, and policymakers to co-create projects, soil festivals, and exhibitions. This network will creatively promote soil literacy and inspire societal action through artistic expression, connecting EU citizens and professionals with the importance of soil health. If you or your organization are interested in becoming part of one of the Orchestras, please contact the SOILSCAPE project.

BEHIND THE SCIENCE UNIT

Meet the young professionals in our team

In the very first edition of our newsletter, we would like to introduce the interns whose valuable contributions made it possible. All of them recently completed a six-month internship at the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, contributing across various areas of our work.

Corinthe Delavande, from France, is currently pursuing a dual master's degree in Environmental Sciences at Sorbonne University and Environmental Policy at Sciences Po Paris. During her internship, she supported the team on the SOILSCAPE project, IHP, Asterousia Hybrid University, and MAB by assisting in initiatives that advance sustainable development. She also worked on the project "Revitalizing STEM Education to Equip Next Generations with STEM Competencies". Corinthe aims to continue bridging science and policy, placing natural and technological sciences at the core of sustainable action.

Armagan Sena Atasayar, from Türkiye with a background in communications and European studies at the College of Europe, has been key to mediate between the Science unit and the Turkish Ministry of Education in the disaster risk reduction framework. She also contributed to projects and initiatives in the fields of science diplomacy, and cultural mediation in Southeast Europe, with a focus on science, policy, and regional cooperation. Going forward, she aims to engage more deeply in the fields of diplomacy and regional cooperation to foster sustainable development.

Alexandra Goed, joining from Austria, holds a MSc in Environmental Sciences from BOKU University in Vienna, with a focus on climate science. During her internship she organized and actively participated in five thematic workshops covering seismic risk assessment and retrofitting, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, science and water diplomacy, soil literacy, and climate finance. She continues to promote science in the interest of peace, sustainable development and human security and well-being beyond her internship.

UNESCO VENICE SCIENCE IN ACTION

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

The correct answer is..

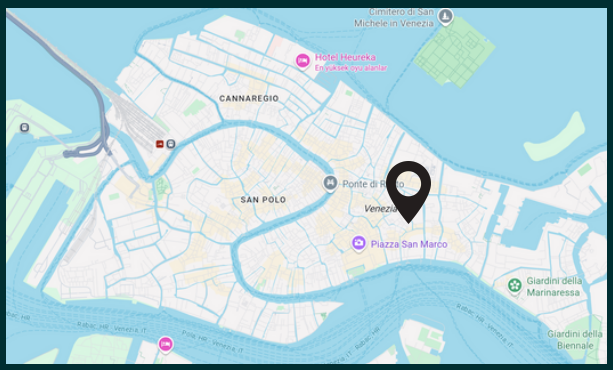
A) Beetles
B) Earthworms!
C) Millipedes

THE BUREAU

UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe

Address
Palazzo Zorzi, Salizada Zorzi, Castello 4930, 30122 Venice, Italy

Contact
Regional.Bureau-SC@unesco.org
+39 041 260 15 11



Follow us on: