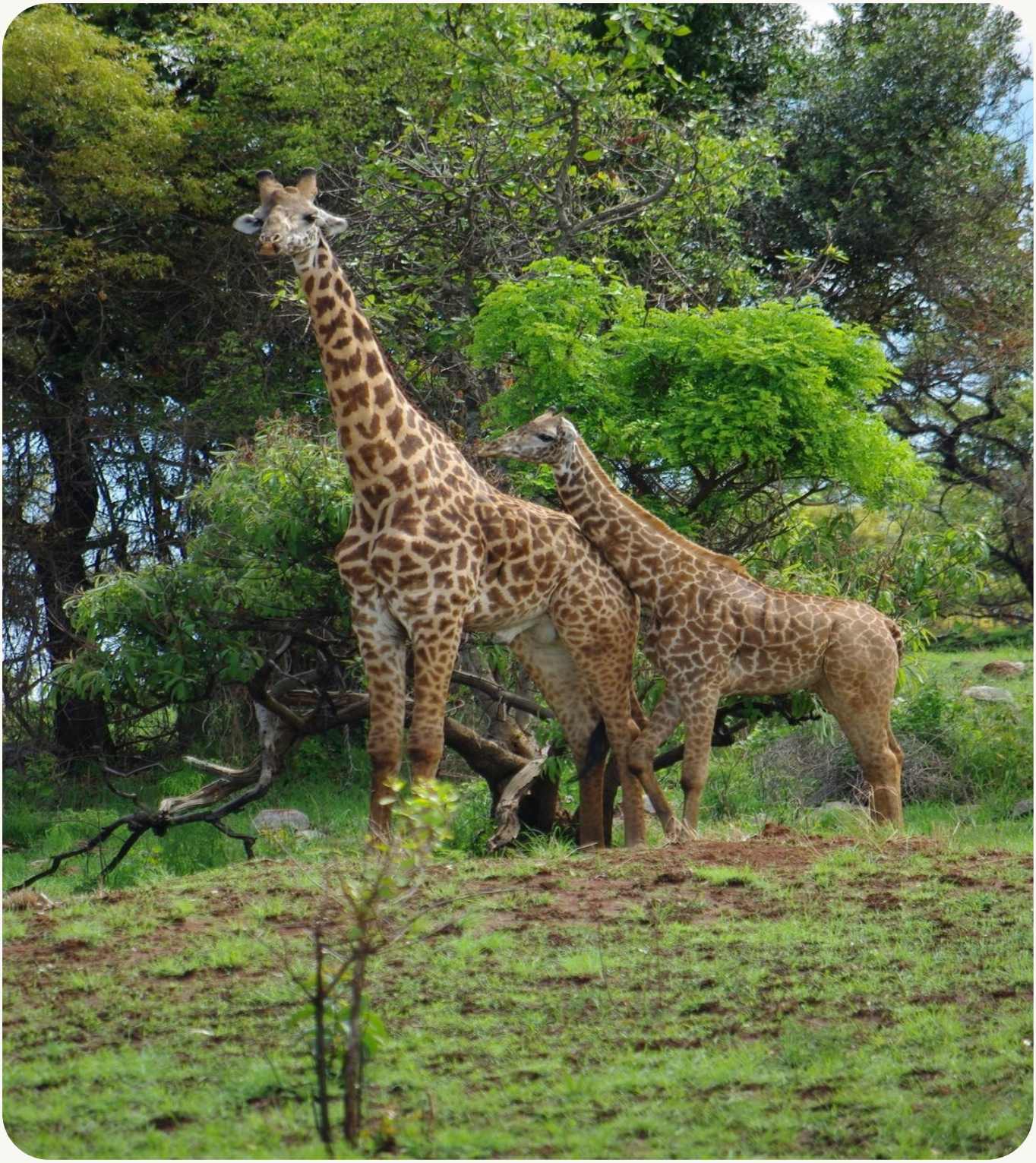
State of Protected and Conserved Areas in Central Africa 2025

An introduction



Download the brochure

Doumenge C., Nchoutpouen C., Briand P., Kalenga Tshingomba U., Palla F. & Djossi D. (Eds.), 2026. **State of Protected and Conserved Areas in Central Africa 2025. An introduction.** OFAC-COMIFAC, Yaoundé, Cameroon: 23 p.

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Maps: Kalenga Tshingomba U./OFAC

Design and layout: Smaïlle Koutchou/CIRAD & Kalenga Tshingomba U./OFAC

Contents

EdAP 2025

The new State of Protected and Conserved Areas in Central Africa (EdAP 2025) will provide an overview of how the countries are strategically positioned to meet the new targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This brochure outlines the topics covered and the main statistics relating to Target 3 of the Global Framework. These are complemented by excerpts from some of the forthcoming chapters.

01 Central Africa and multilateral agreements

This introductory chapter will lay the foundations for the strategic positioning of Central African countries with regard to the new conservation targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and various international conventions and agreements (CITES, World Heritage, Ramsar, etc.).



02 Protected and conserved areas in Central Africa

EdAP 2025 will provide a regional overview of the state of protected and conserved areas in Central Africa, their ecological representativeness and their development since 2020. It will put into perspective the challenges to be met and the opportunities to be seized in order to consolidate current efforts and contribute, in particular, to the 30×30 target.



03 National summaries of protected and conserved areas

For each Central African country, a standardised dashboard will present the state of protected and conserved areas. A short text will comment on the development of these networks and of the related policies.



04 Other effective area-based conservation measures in Central Africa: potential and challenges

This chapter will address the criteria and processes for identifying and recognising other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), as well as progress made and difficulties encountered in applying them in the regional context.



05 Indigenous and community conserved areas: territories of life safeguarding the biocultural diversity of Central Africa

This chapter will present Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs), their characteristics, the number and extent of potential ICCAs, as well as the progress, difficulties and solutions envisaged for their establishment and legal recognition.



06 Conservation and sustainable management of species

This chapter will highlight the issues related to species conservation. It will address measures for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and dwell on the need to monitor and analyse the state of populations over the long term. It will discuss data issues and the prospects offered by new technologies.



07 Management effectiveness of protected and conserved areas in Central Africa

An assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the governance and management systems of protected and conserved areas will be carried out. It will also present the lessons that can be learned from the implementation of conservation and development projects since the 1990s.



Contents

08 **Are today's managers' skills suited to tomorrow's challenges?**

This chapter will highlight the emergence of skills linked to new conservation challenges (participatory approaches, new technologies). It will suggest ways to refocus capacity building in different governance contexts.



09 **Conservation financing**

EdAP 2025 will review funding mechanisms and address ongoing debates on biodiversity offsets, payment for conservation efforts and the emergence of new financing mechanisms. The chapter will also assess financial flows that are harmful to biodiversity conservation.



10 **Human rights, justice and equity in biodiversity conservation**

This chapter will explore the links between biodiversity conservation, respect for human rights, justice and equity. It will outline a review of policies and governance mechanisms relating to the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and suggest ways to improve them.



11 **Green neocolonialism: perceptions and realities**

EdAP 2025 will analyse the notion of green neocolonialism and address the legacy of modern conservation with regard to imported conservation systems. It will highlight the differences between stakeholders' perceptions of realities on the ground and the actual management and management arrangements of protected areas.



12 **Armed conflicts and protected areas in Central Africa**

This chapter will present the protected areas affected by armed conflicts and the effects of these conflicts on ecosystems and species conservation. It will describe the strategies put in place to mitigate these effects and make recommendations in this regard.



13 **Human-wildlife conflicts and biodiversity conservation in Central Africa: a state of play**

This chapter will present the different types of human-wildlife conflicts and the management strategies implemented in and around protected areas, in community forests and by the private sector. It will offer case studies of these conflicts and recommendations for better human-wildlife coexistence.



14 **Contribution of biodiversity conservation to the One Health agenda**

EdAP 2025 will present the initiatives, institutional frameworks and prospects relating to this holistic approach in Central Africa. It will address the health, ecological and socio-economic issues specific to protected and conserved areas, and show the added value of biodiversity conservation for the One Health agenda.

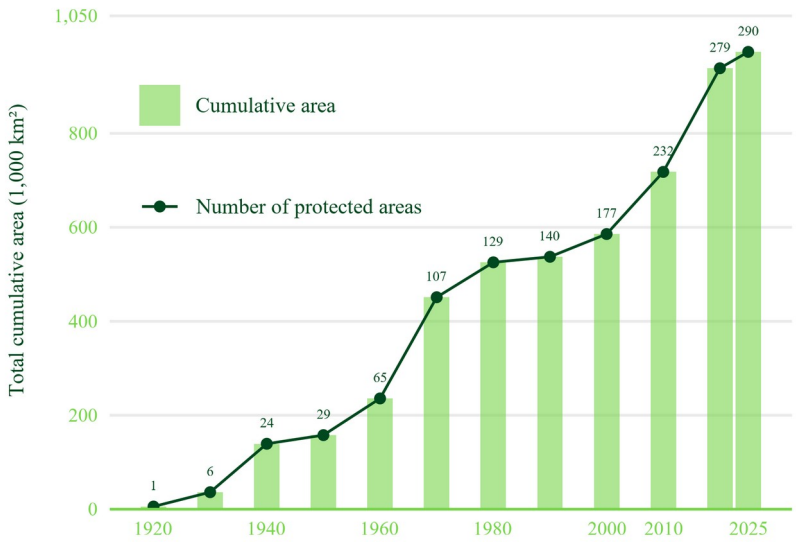


Protected areas in Central Africa

EdAP 2025

COMIFAC region

Protected areas in Central Africa over time



TOTAL

290 protected areas
covering **973,389.8 km²**

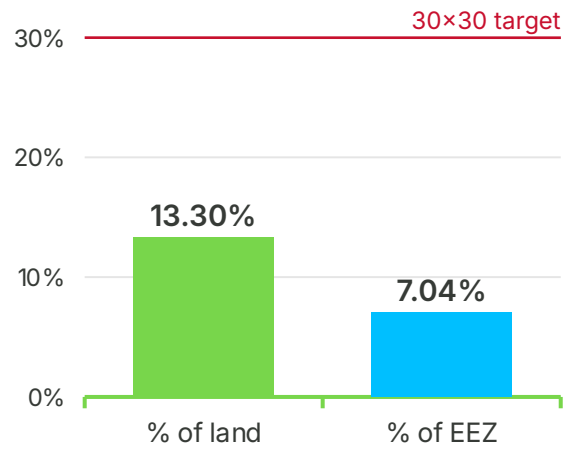
TERRESTRIAL

249 fully
14 partly
covering **886,814.6 km²** of land

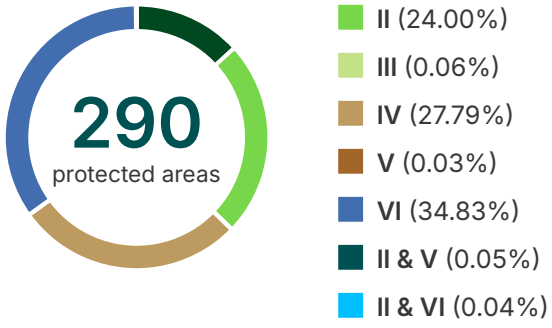
MARINE

27 fully
14 partly
covering **86,575.1 km²** of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



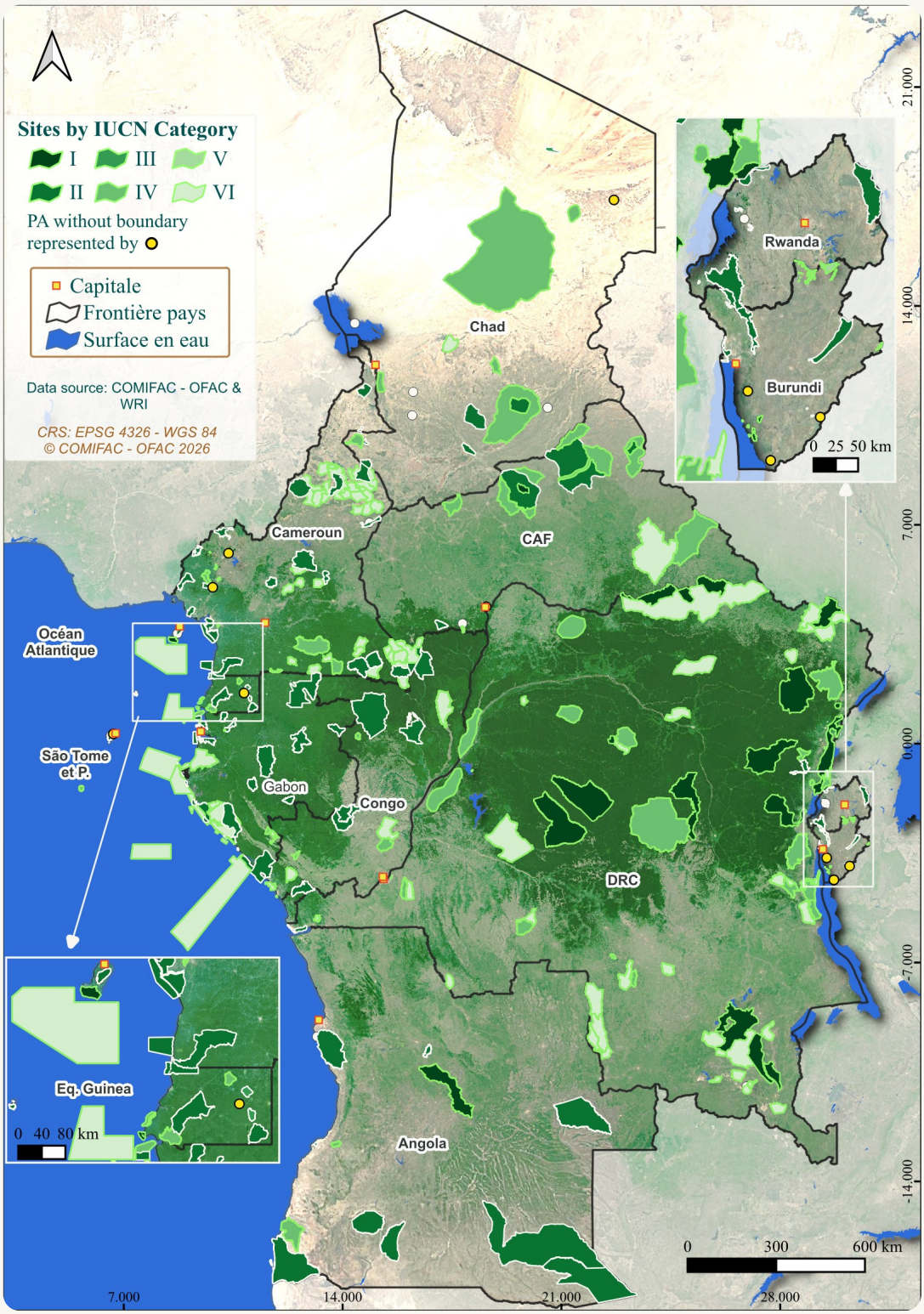
Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)



Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

COMIFAC region

Protected areas in the COMIFAC region by IUCN category, with protected areas without digitised boundaries (dots) and enlargements of Equatorial Guinea and of Rwanda and Burundi.

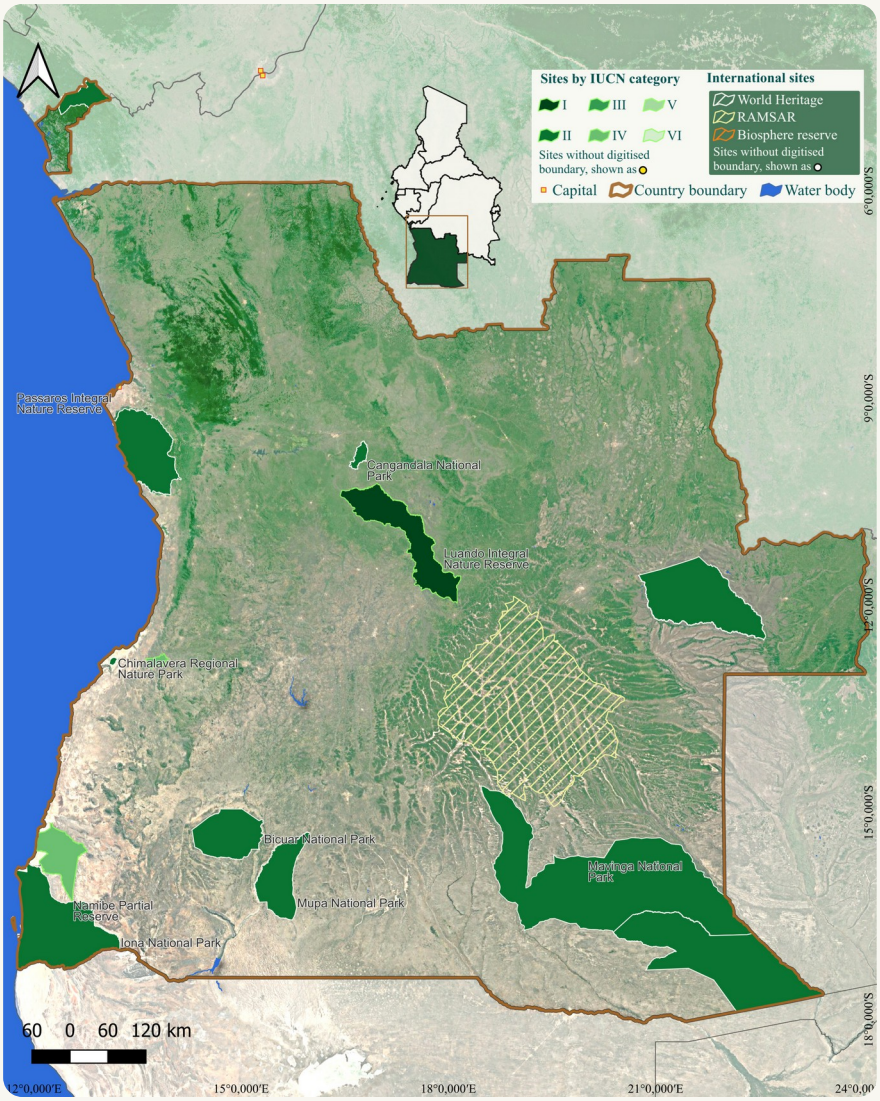


Sources: COMIFAC-OFAC & WRI, 2025.

Angola

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Angola by IUCN category and internationally designated site (Ramsar).



TOTAL

14

protected areas
covering **98,411.7 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

10 fully

4 partly

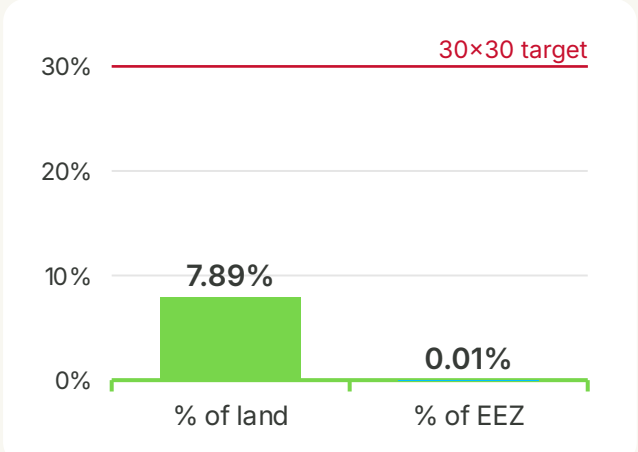
covering **98,356.5 km²**
of land

MARINE

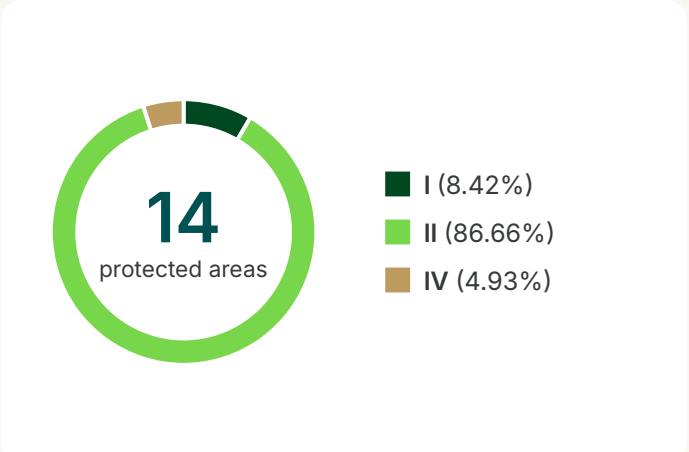
4 partly

covering **55.2 km²**
of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

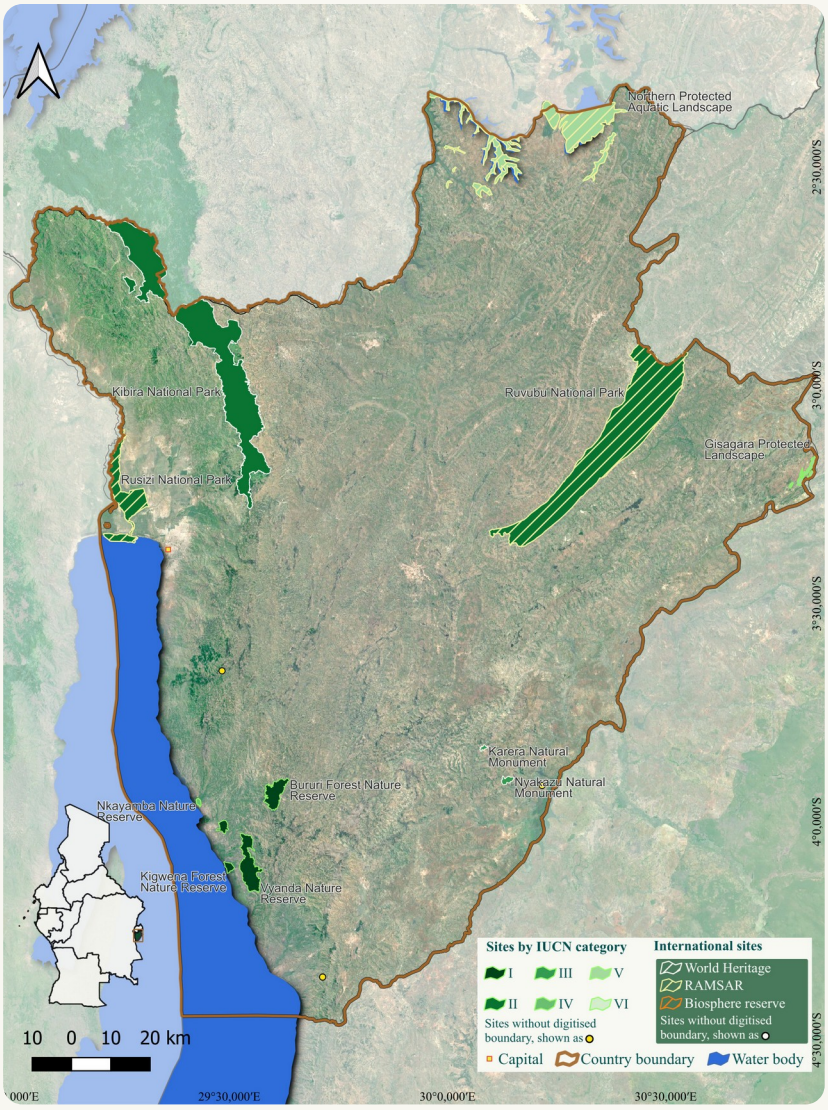


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Burundi

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Burundi by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (Ramsar).



TOTAL

16

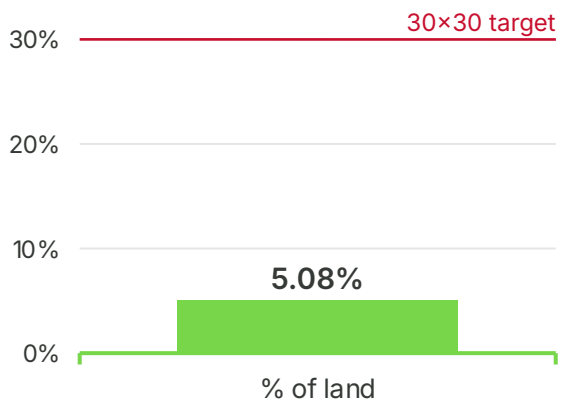
protected areas, all terrestrial

AREA

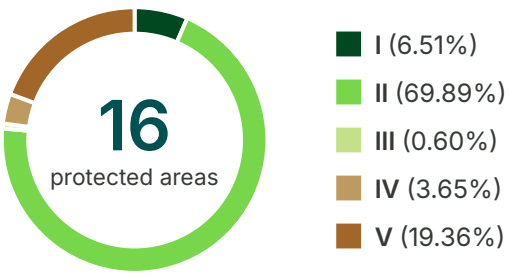
1,413.8 km²

of land

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

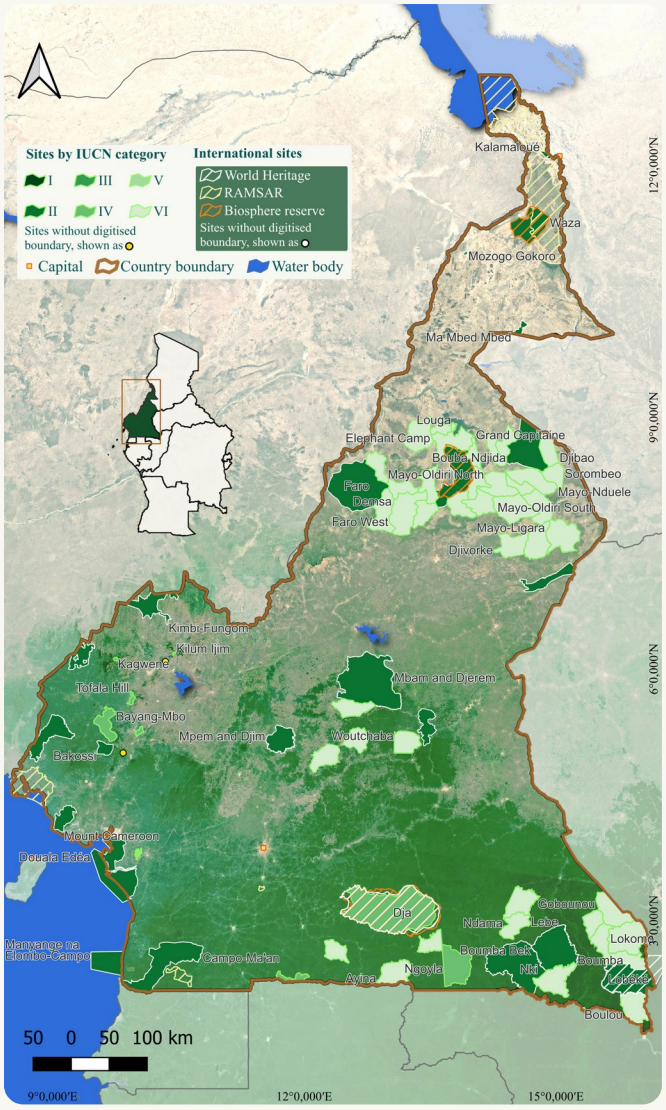


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Cameroon

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Cameroon by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar, biosphere reserve).



TOTAL

75

protected areas
covering **78,308.4 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

73 fully

1 partly

covering **76,105.1 km²**
of land

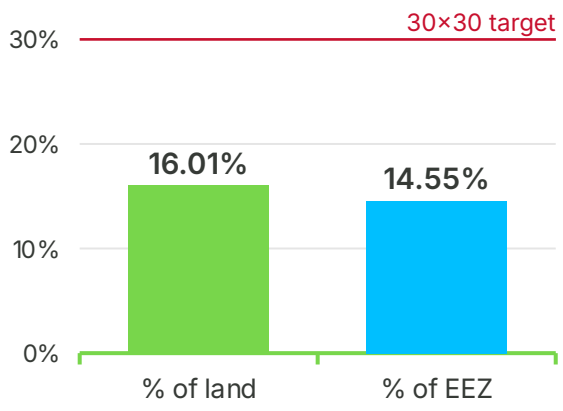
MARINE

1 fully

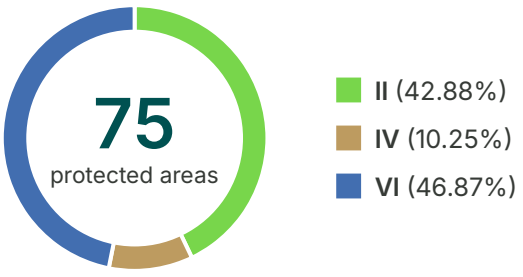
1 partly

covering **2,203.2 km²**
of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

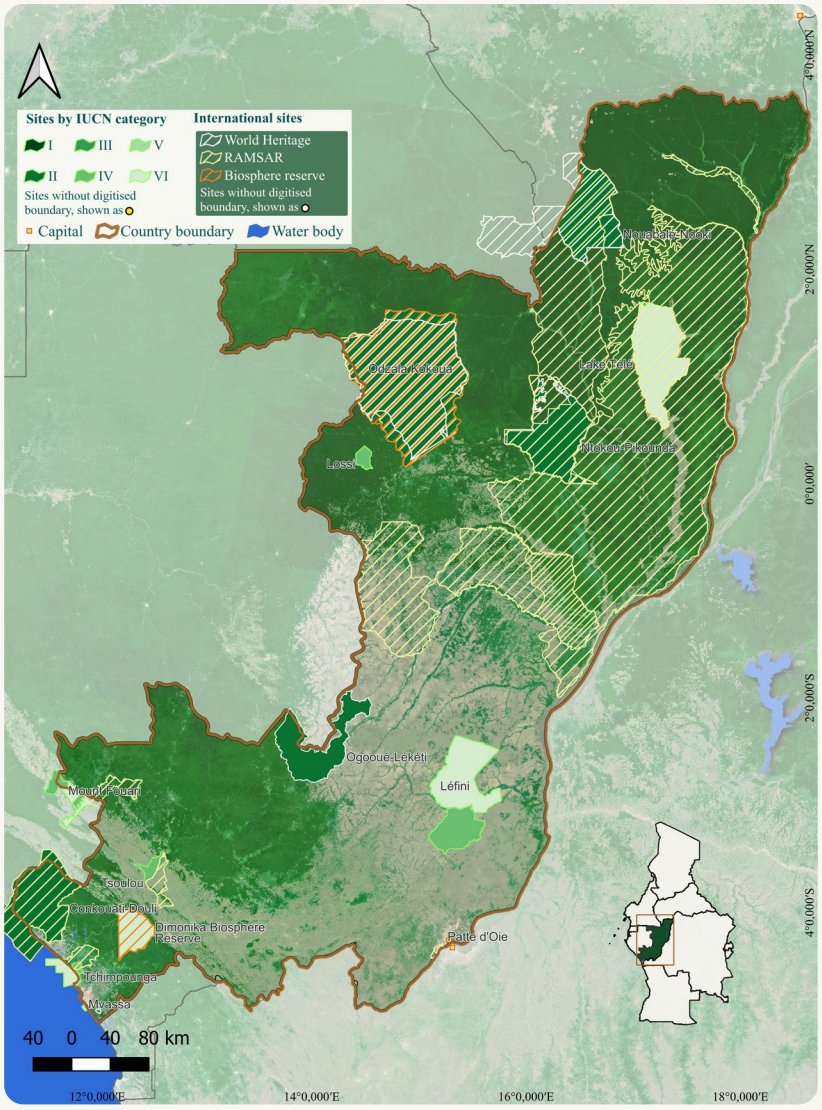


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Congo

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in the Republic of the Congo by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar, biosphere reserve).



TOTAL

19

protected areas
covering **45,788.2 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

16 fully

1 partly

covering **40,988.7 km²**
of land

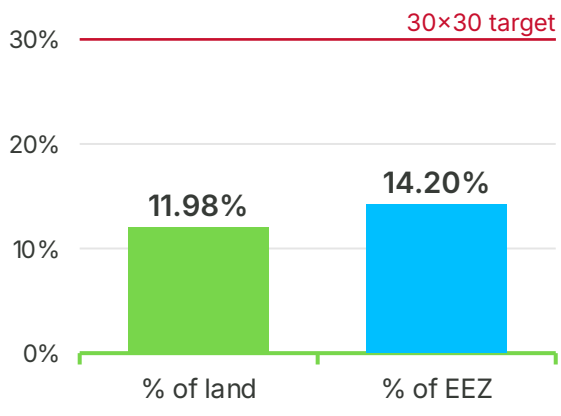
MARINE

2 fully

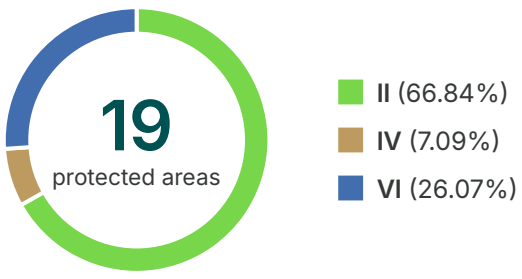
1 partly

covering **4,799.5 km²**
of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

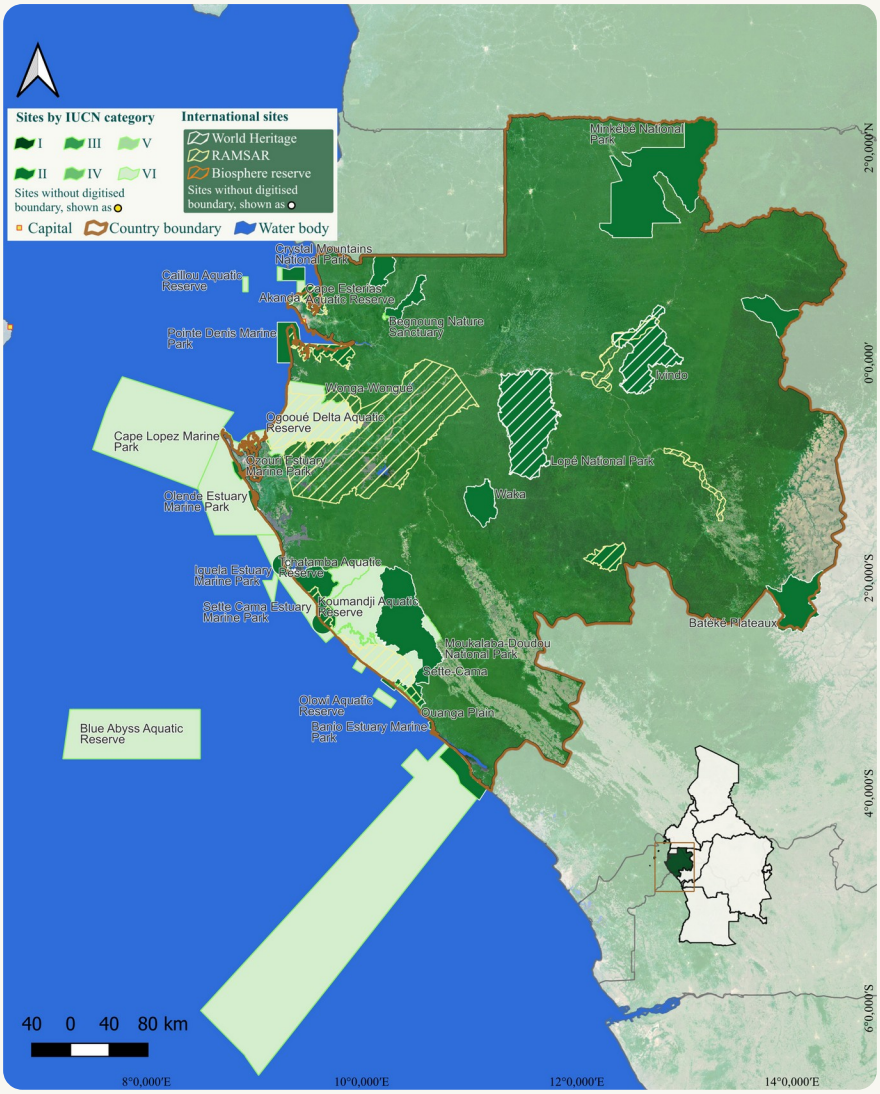


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Gabon

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Gabon by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar).



TOTAL

41

protected areas
covering **92,942.3 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

18 fully

3 partly

covering **38,856.9 km²** of land

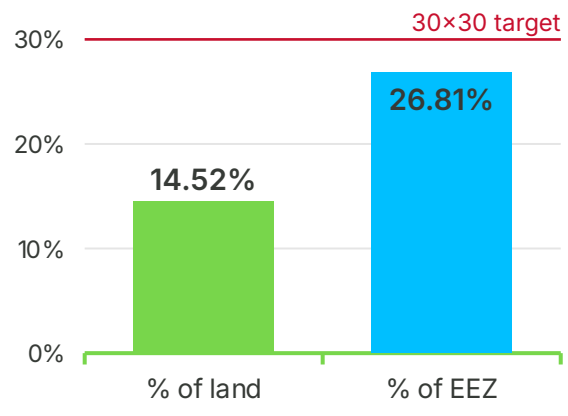
MARINE

20 fully

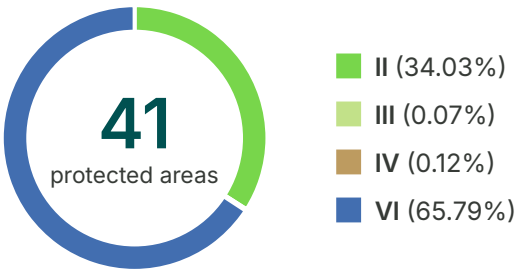
3 partly

covering **54,085.4 km²** of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

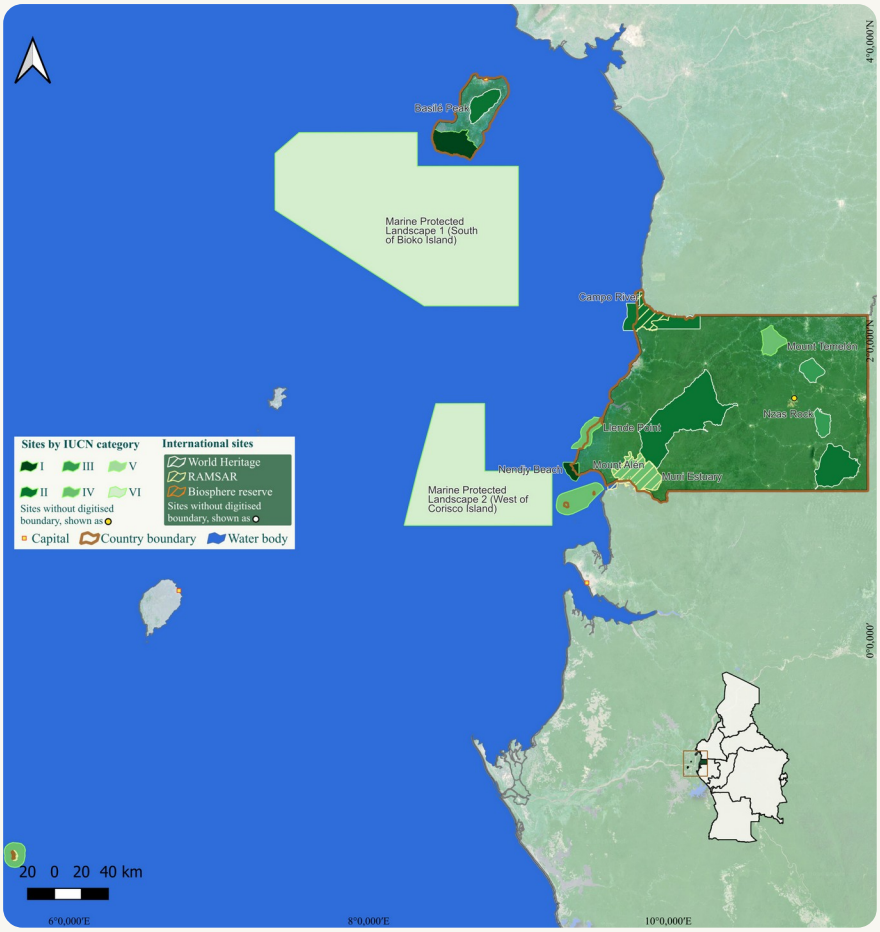


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Equatorial Guinea

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Equatorial Guinea by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (Ramsar).



TOTAL

16

protected areas
covering **31,514.4 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

8 fully

4 partly

covering **6,090.7 km²**
of land

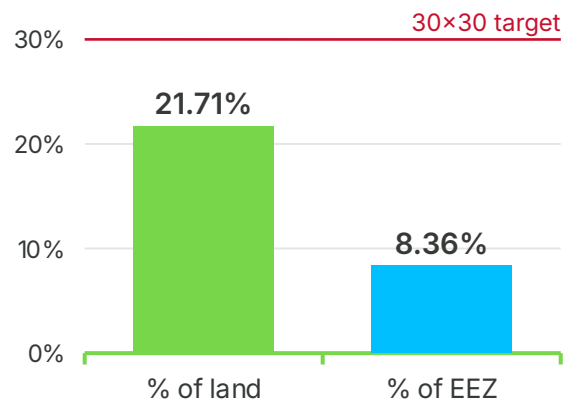
MARINE

4 fully

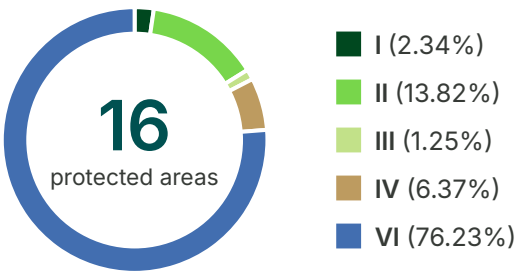
4 partly

covering **25,423.7 km²**
of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

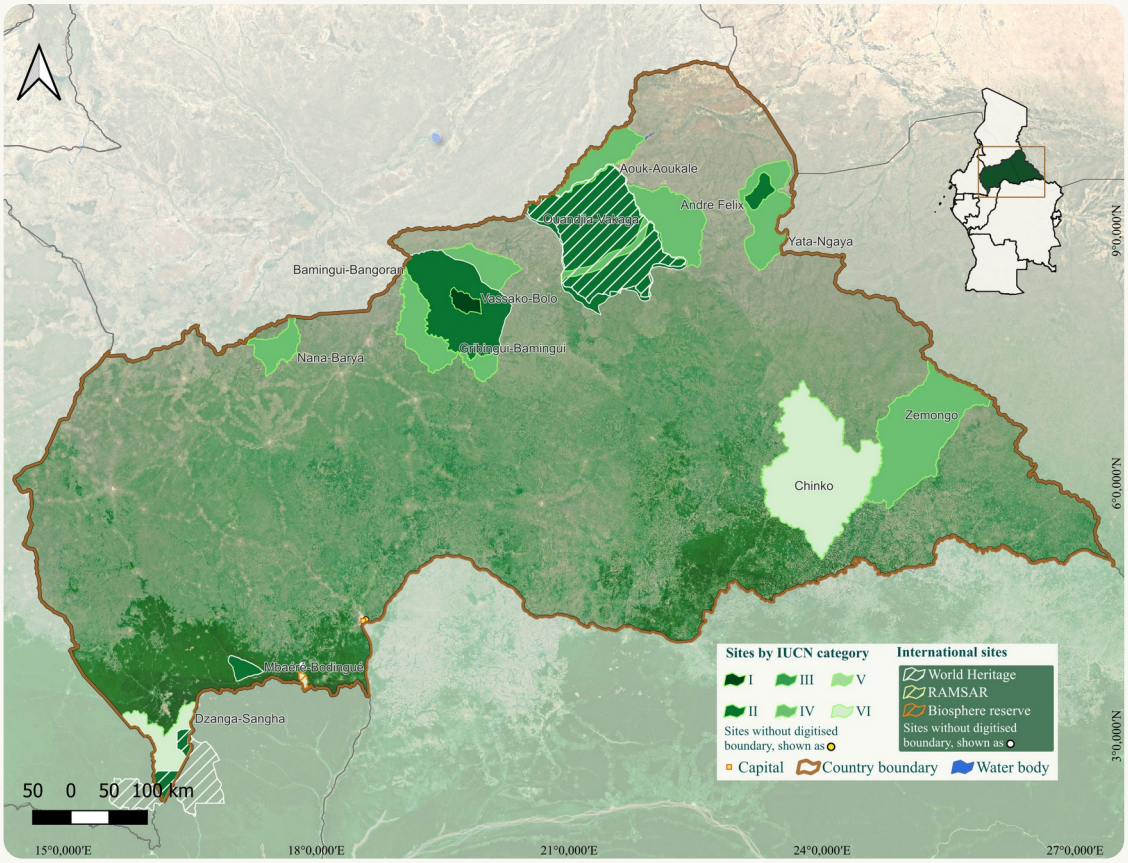


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Central African Republic

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in the Central African Republic by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, biosphere reserve).



TOTAL

18

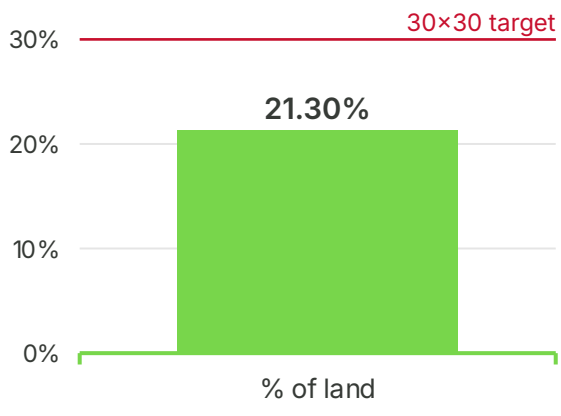
protected areas, all terrestrial

AREA

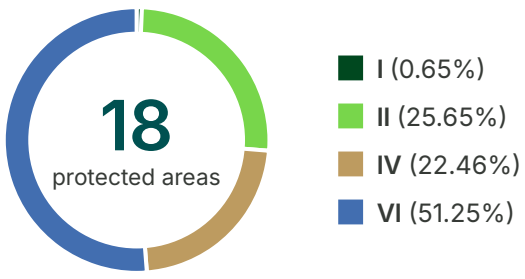
132,716.0 km²

of land

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

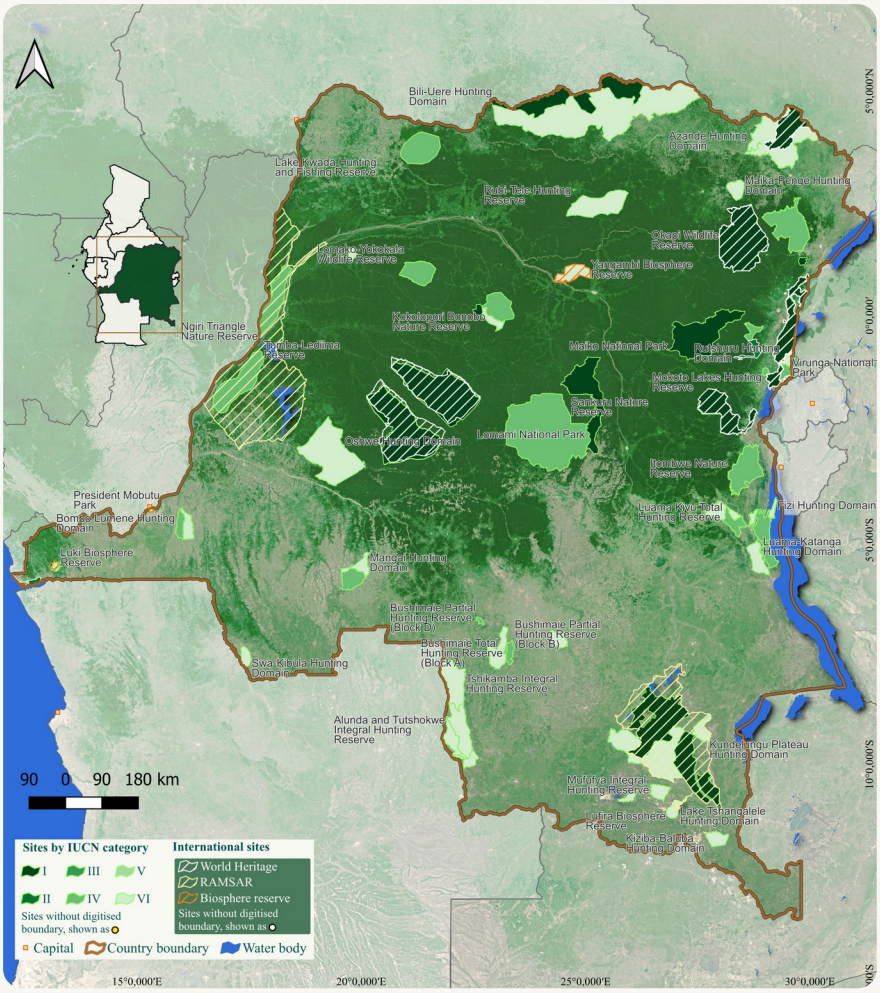


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar, biosphere reserve).



TOTAL

70

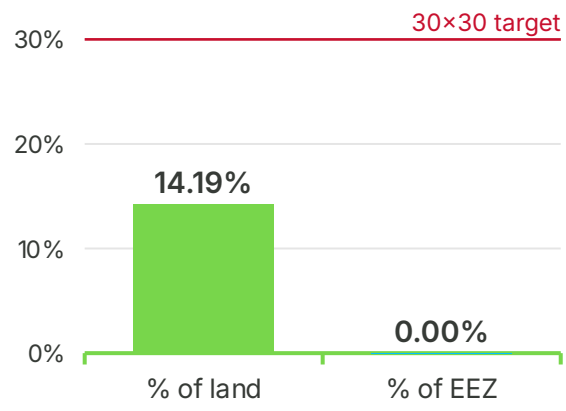
protected areas, all terrestrial

AREA

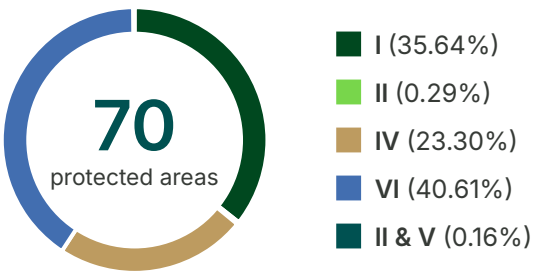
332,728.5 km²

of land

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

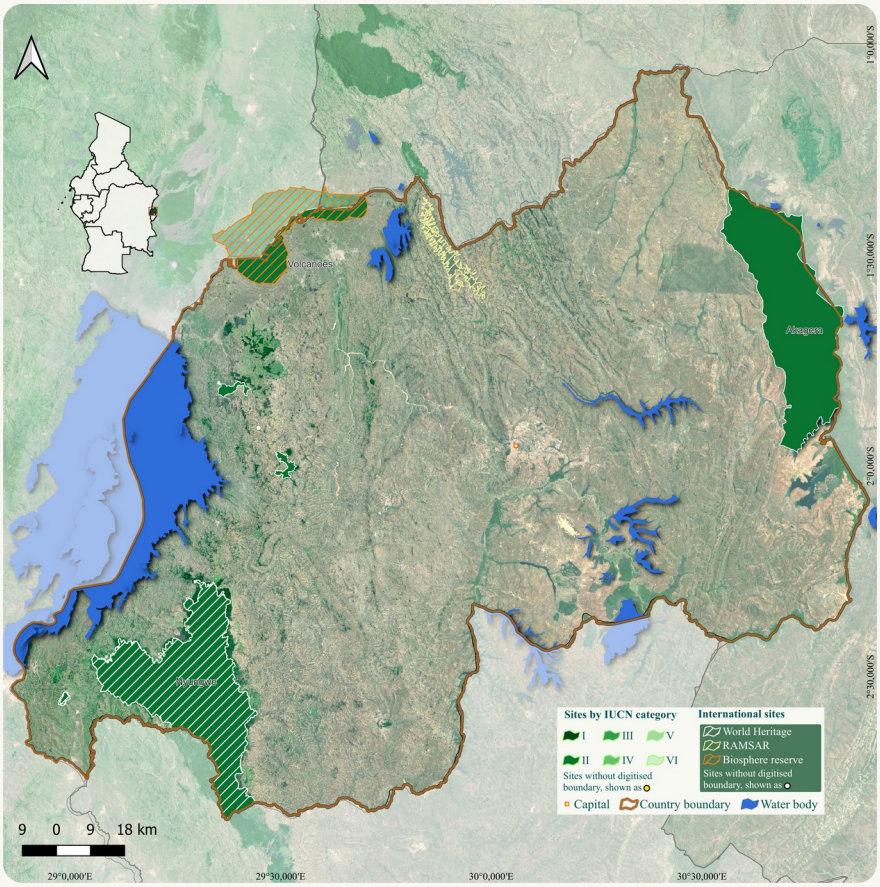


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Rwanda

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Rwanda by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar, biosphere reserve).



TOTAL

4

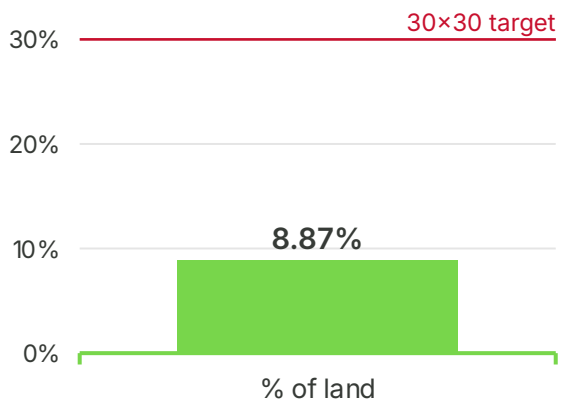
protected areas, all terrestrial

AREA

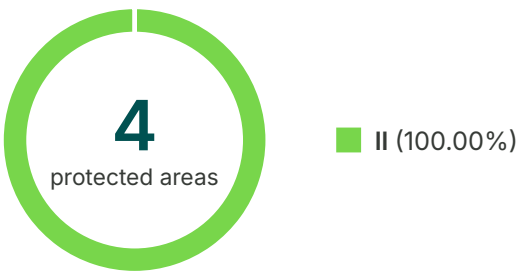
2,336.5 km²

of land

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

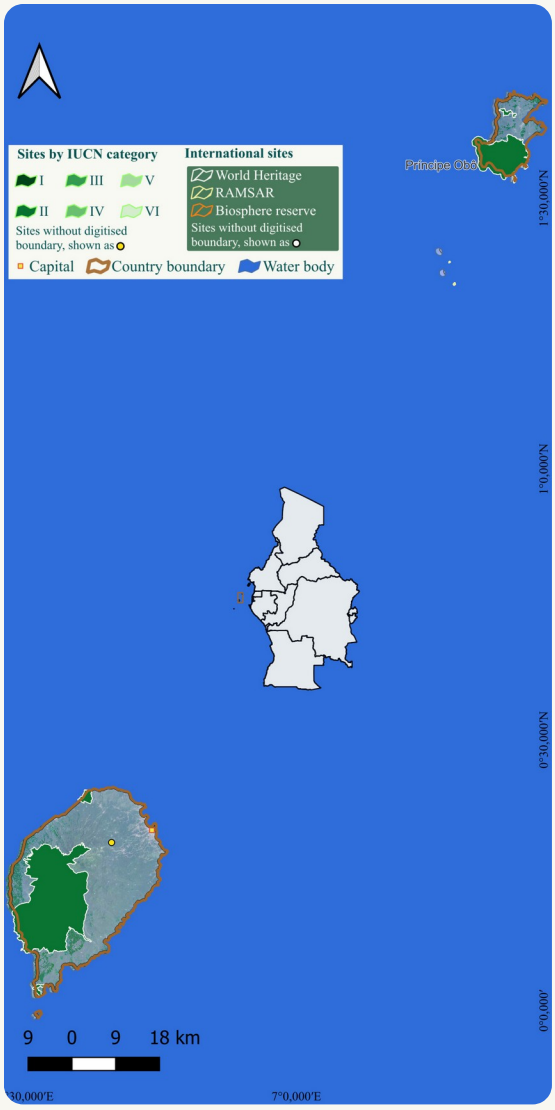


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

São Tomé and Príncipe

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in São Tomé and Príncipe by IUCN category and internationally designated site (Ramsar).



TOTAL

3

protected areas
covering **470.0 km²**

TERRESTRIAL

2 fully

1 partly

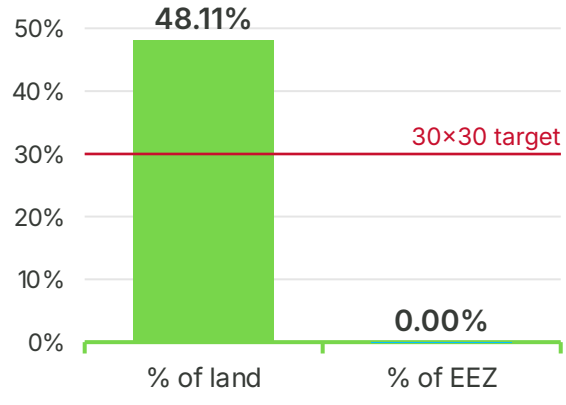
covering **461.9 km²**
of land

MARINE

1 partly

covering **8.1 km²**
of sea (EEZ)

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)

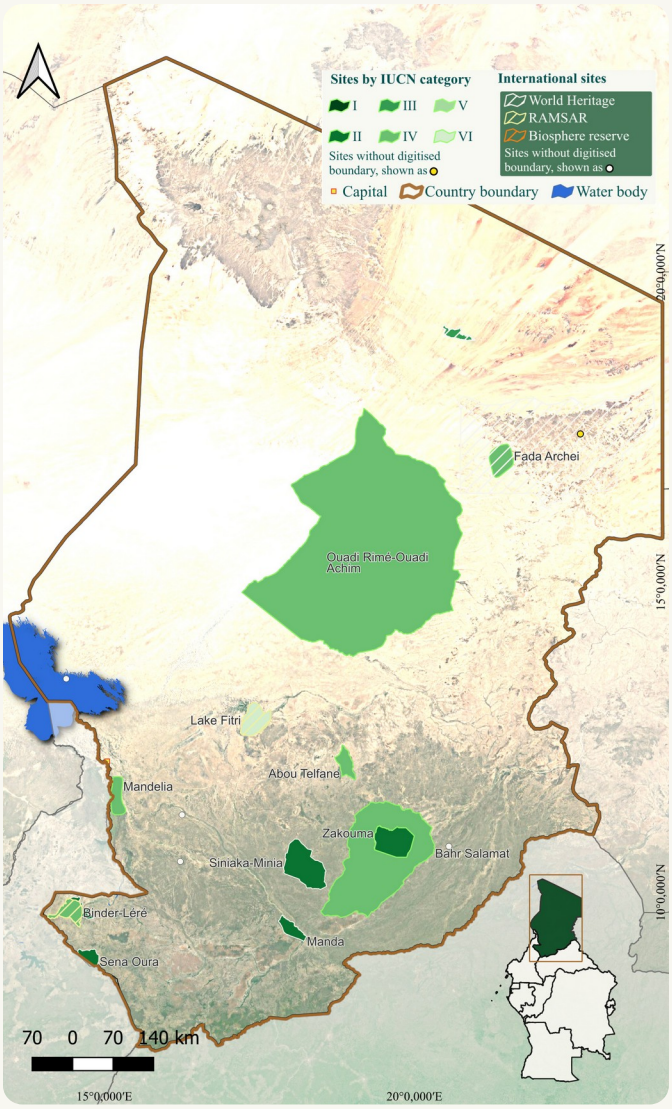


Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

Chad

EdAP 2025

Protected areas in Chad by IUCN category and internationally designated sites (World Heritage, Ramsar).



TOTAL

14

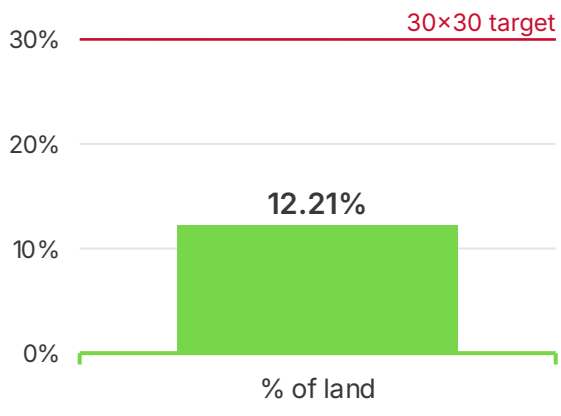
protected areas, all terrestrial

AREA

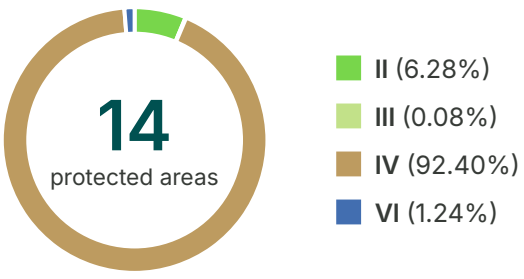
156,759.8 km²

of land

Proportion of land and sea in protected areas (%)



Proportion of protected area surface by IUCN category (%)



Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

05 Indigenous and community conserved areas

Territories of life safeguarding the biocultural diversity of Central Africa

Authors: C. Chatelain, J. Itongwa, M. Sonkoue, P. Kipalu, C. Koagne, G. Moussele Diseke, A. Ebang Mbélé, J. Martial Betoulet

This chapter provides an initial review of the process of identifying and recognising Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs) in Central Africa.

KEY POINTS

ICCAs – or territories of life – represent an opportunity to recognise and legitimise the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in biodiversity management. In Central Africa, these territories display great biological, cultural and governance diversity, and a largely untapped conservation potential.

At the end of 2025, 85 potential or peer-validated ICCAs had been identified in five countries, covering nearly 15,300 km² (Table 1, Figure 1). The DRC accounts for the majority (40 ICCAs, over 8,000 km²), followed by Cameroon (27; 4,000 km²) and Congo (11; 2,600 km²). Around thirty ICCAs have been validated by peers and only seven are legally recognised, mainly through community forest status (in the DRC), but also through a decree recognising customary land (Congo) or a municipal act (CAR).

The main difficulty faced by communities claiming governance of their territories of life is obtaining legal recognition distinct from that of protected areas. Existing legal statuses are poorly suited to traditional forms of governance, and analysis of the applicable legal framework is still in its infancy in most countries. While security, low commercial pressure and social cohesion benefit both communities and biodiversity, poverty undermines community engagement. Developing economic activities (adding value to non-timber forest products or to hunting and fishing products, handicrafts, agroforestry, local tourism, etc.) can partly address this, but may also raise disproportionate expectations and tensions within communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Extend the ICCA registry and atlas initiated by ANAPAC-DRC to the whole of Central Africa, then record these data in the UNEP-WCMC global database (Target 3).
2. Support communities in building their skills on legal issues, sustainable socio-economic development and accountability to State requirements.
3. Establish partnerships between ICCA custodians and scientists, with the support of the CBD technical cooperation centres, including COMIFAC, responsible for certifying the data.
4. Support from States and the international community is vital to provide technical and financial backing for the legal recognition and security of territories of life.

TABLE 1

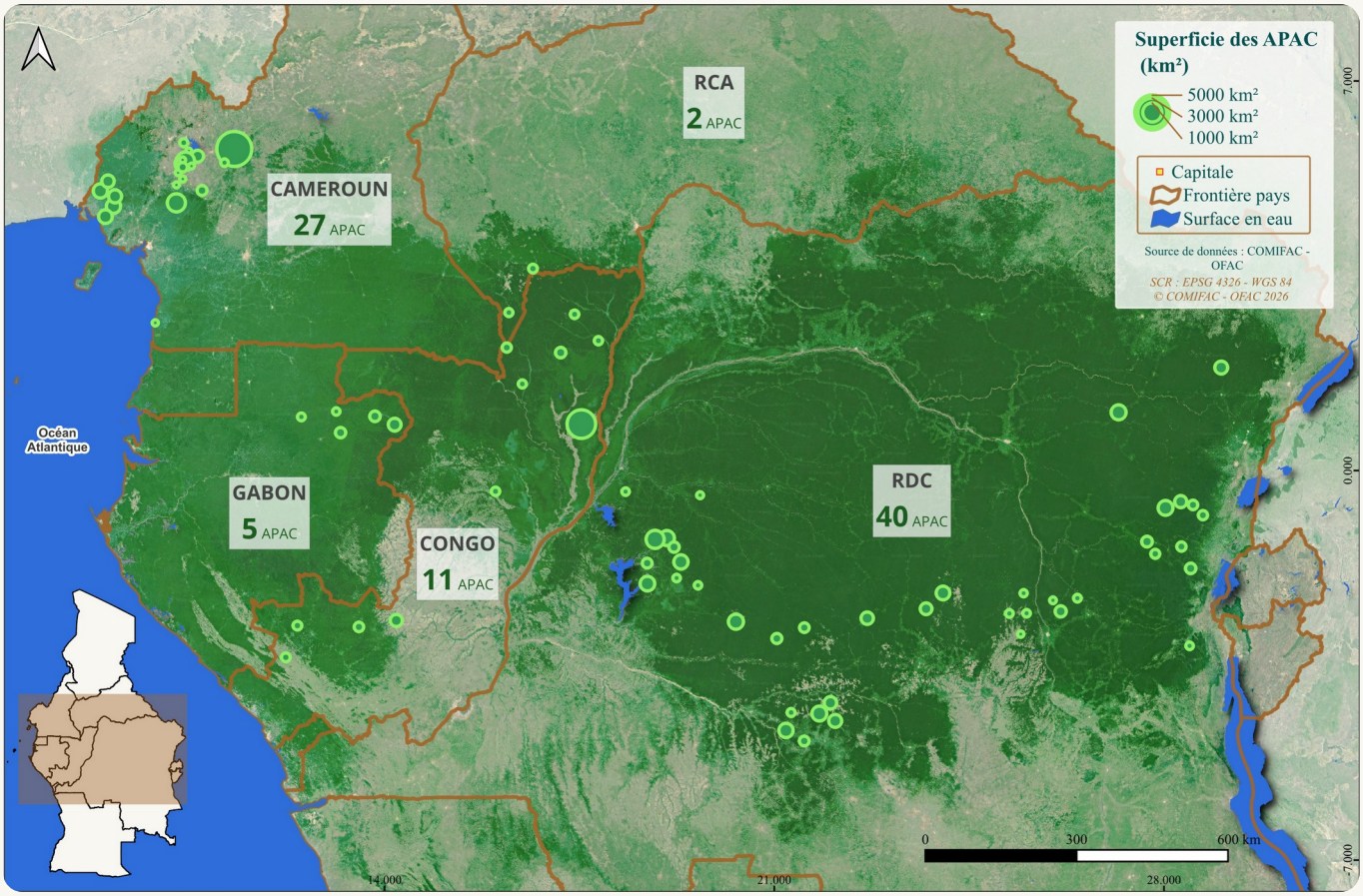
Distribution of ICCAs in Central Africa in 2025 according to their progress in the recognition process.

Category	N	A (km²)
Potential	54	8,084.45
Validated	24	3,694.48
Recognised	7	3,501.04
Total	**85**	**15,279.97**

Note: areas are indicative, as the areas of some ICCAs are unknown or uncertain and around thirty others have been estimated.
N: number; **A:** area (km²).
Potential: self-declared ICCA considered as a candidate ICCA by the Consortium.
Validated: ICCA approved as such by peers.
Recognised: ICCA recognised by the State and enjoying legal status.
Source: ICCA Consortium regional coordination.

FIGURE 1

Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs) identified in Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, CAR and DRC: number of ICCAs per country and area of each ICCA. Dots are placed in the smallest documented geographical unit and do not necessarily reflect the actual location of ICCAs.



Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

07 Management effectiveness of protected and conserved areas in Central Africa

Authors: P. Roggeri, L.B. Sagang, D. Djossi, C. Fotie, S. Lippi

This chapter provides an overview of management effectiveness assessments of protected areas in Central Africa, one of the key elements in ensuring that Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is effectively met.

KEY POINTS

Following a workshop of the Central African Protected Areas Network (RAPAC), held in Brazzaville (Congo) in 2009, which found that only 13 of 155 protected areas had an operational management plan, protected area management has gradually become more structured. The management effectiveness of these protected areas depends on their interactions with their environment: high pressures, competing land uses, transboundary issues, human-wildlife conflicts, insufficient resources, etc. A lack of resources does not automatically explain low effectiveness: a relative reading, comparing results with the resources mobilised, is needed.

Various management effectiveness assessment tools have been developed and, currently, nearly 70% of protected areas in the region have undergone at least one assessment, except in the DRC and Equatorial Guinea, where the rate is lower, at less than 50%. The IMET (Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool) has become the most widely used tool. It links context analysis to planning, inputs, processes and results (Figure 1d).

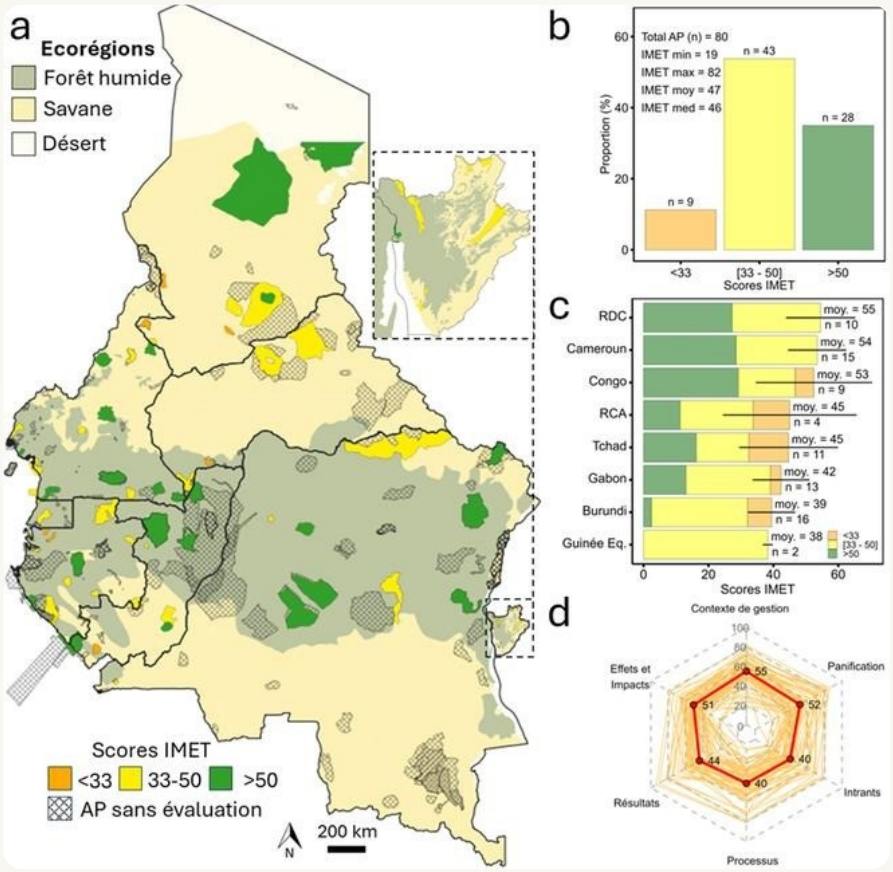
Of 80 protected areas that have used IMET, only 35% exceed a score of 50, considered to indicate a generally acceptable level of management effectiveness (Figure 1a to c). However, this score does not directly measure the state of biodiversity or the impact of actions. What matters is the process of implementing the tool, as it provides a decision-oriented basis for analysis, making it possible to act on the most important and strategic aspects for the protected area, or on those where management efforts need to be strengthened. The score itself is mainly useful for monitoring whether management effectiveness is maintained over time, in line with management conditions, available resources and results achieved. Nevertheless, protected areas under co-management or delegated management generally score better than those under entirely State management (Figure 2).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regularly adapt resources (staff, equipment, funding) to the context and objectives, and strengthen the training of managers.
2. Make targeted use of co-management and delegated management for important, exposed or vulnerable sites.
3. Strengthen the role of States and their monitoring, evaluation and planning capacities through protected area management effectiveness assessment and an adaptive approach.
4. Repeat management effectiveness assessments and integrate them into annual work plans.

FIGURE 1

IMET assessment scores in protected areas in Central Africa.



a: geographical distribution of assessments by score class;

b: frequency of scores at regional level;

c: average scores by country;

d: regional averages of the different elements of the IMET assessment.

Notes: IMET scores range from 0 to 100.

< 33: very low effectiveness;

33-50: insufficient effectiveness;

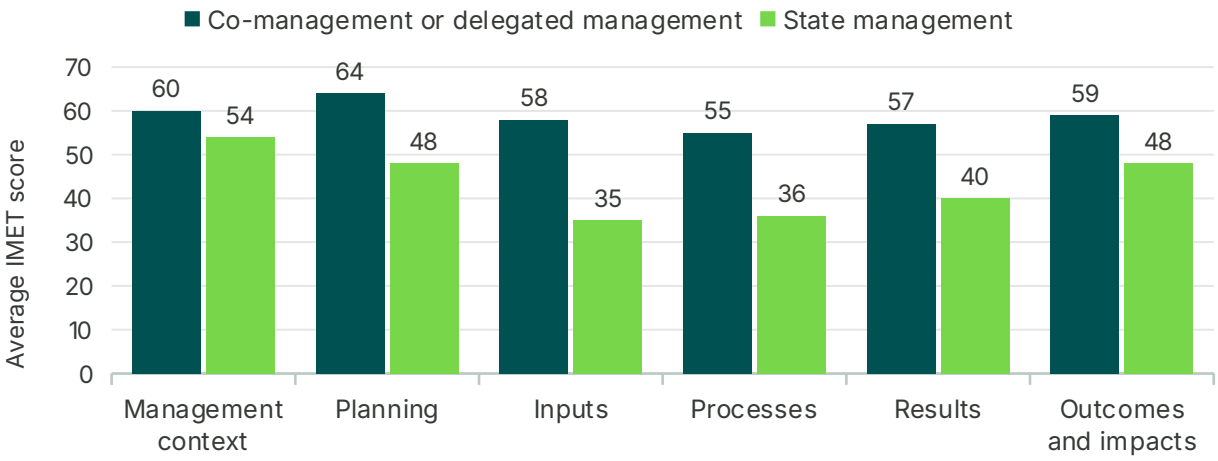
> 50: sufficient to good effectiveness.

Figure 1d: orange curves show the variability of individual protected area scores and the red curve the regional average.

Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

FIGURE 2

Variability of IMET component scores by governance model.



Source: COMIFAC-OFAC, 2025.

12 Armed conflicts and protected areas in Central Africa

Authors: F. O. Simpson, A. Awono, L. Collart, L.B. Sagang, J. Masselink, F. Nghobuoche, P. Scholte, N. Stoop, R. Sufo, K. Titeca, M. Verpoorten

This chapter analyses the overlaps and interactions between armed conflicts and conservation efforts, particularly in protected areas, in Central Africa.

KEY POINTS

Between 1997 and 2025, 28.7% of the 307,778 conflict-related deaths in Central Africa occurred inside or within 20 km of a protected area; the DRC accounts for nearly half of them (Figure 1). The overlap between conflicts and protected areas is highly uneven (Figures 1 and 2) and varies between countries and over time. Between 1946 and 2010, armed conflict was the strongest predictor of wildlife decline in Africa, even at very low levels. However, this generally negative impact masks a complex and variable relationship between insecurity and the environment, which depends on the nature, intensity and duration of violence, as well as on the actors involved.

Conflicts affect biodiversity conservation through military tactics, resource exploitation by armed groups, institutional dysfunction, population displacement and the disruption of livelihoods. These mechanisms reinforce or offset each other in space and time, so that a gain in one place may coincide with a loss elsewhere.

Conflicts harm nature conservation when armed groups kill rangers and attack protected area infrastructure, while governments and donors withdraw funding and tourism collapses. However, some parks, such as Virunga, defy this fate.

The effect of conservation on security remains context-dependent and ambivalent. Many conservation organisations highlight the security "co-benefits" of protected areas, but the evidence is mixed. Protected areas can host displaced people, strengthen State presence through patrols and foster cooperation and dialogue. They can also serve as rebel bases, and the use of militarised coercive measures can exacerbate armed conflicts. Furthermore, restrictions imposed by parks can aggravate local tensions that armed groups exploit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Examine together the mechanisms through which conflicts affect conservation, rather than considering them in isolation.
2. Remain neutral towards belligerents, while coordinating with those who hold effective power.
3. Invest in sustainable socio-economic development and maintain institutional and financial support during periods of instability.
4. Establish strict rules of engagement for security forces to limit the risks associated with militarisation.
5. Give the post-conflict period at least as much importance as the conflict itself.

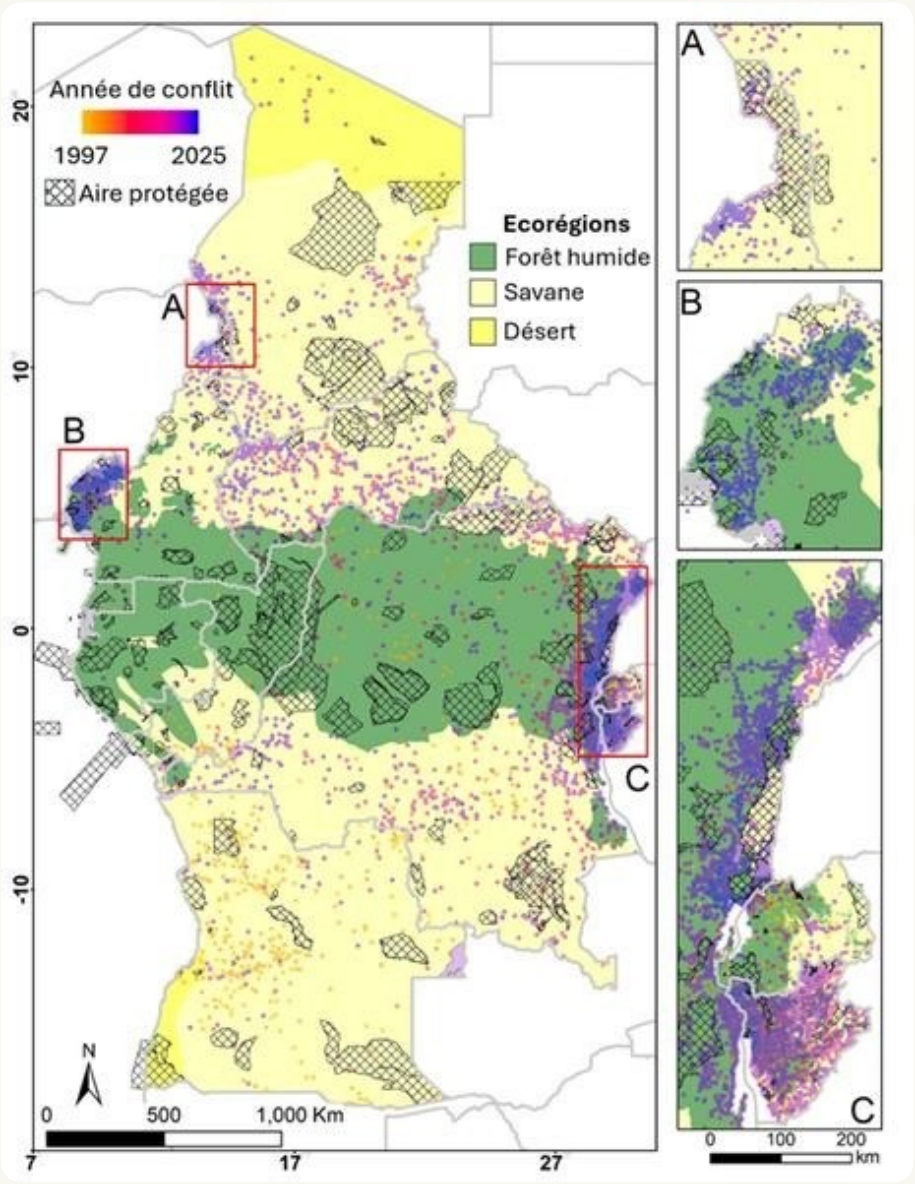


FIGURE 1

Conflict-related deaths and protected areas in Central Africa, 1997-2025.

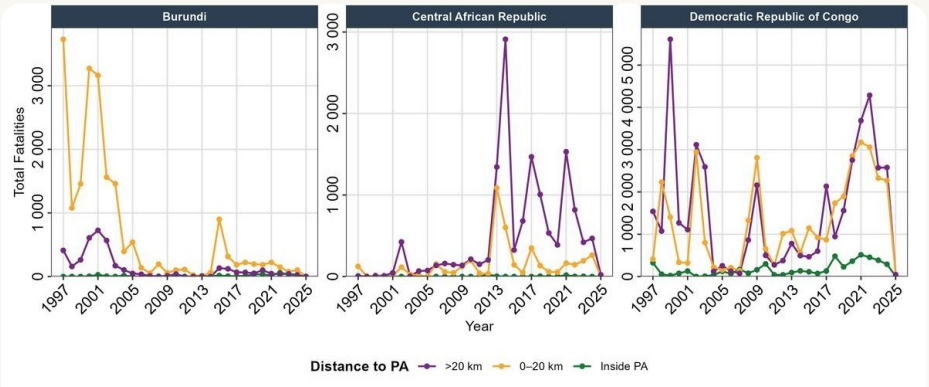
A, B, C: enlargements of the areas outlined in red on the main map.

Notes: based on ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data).

Source: ACLED, 2025.

FIGURE 2

Annual conflict-related deaths by distance from protected areas in Central Africa, 1997-2025.



Notes: deaths are grouped into three mutually exclusive categories: inside protected areas; outside protected areas but within 20 km of their boundaries; and more than 20 km from protected areas. Deaths are expressed in hundreds.

Source: ACLED, 2025.

13 Human-wildlife conflicts and biodiversity conservation in Central Africa

A state of play

Authors: S. Ngama, T. D'haijère, S. Ndong Ze, L.L. Moukagni, S. Dang Evang, C. Tranchand, S. Ratiarison, D.M. Mulume, A.S. Mibambani Ndimba, I. Dapsia, L. Mabesimo, J.F. Nzomba, F. Nabintu Ntugulo, W. Mbamy, U. Kalenga Tshingomba, T. Breuer, C. Vermeulen

This chapter reviews the state of human-wildlife conflicts in Central Africa and recommends actions to manage them.

KEY POINTS

Human-wildlife conflicts are among the main threats to biodiversity and to the development of local communities. They result less from wildlife "overpopulation" than from agricultural expansion and habitat fragmentation. Besides carnivores, the main animals involved are large herbivores whose range lies largely outside protected areas and which cause significant damage (Figure 1). Rodents, suids and primates are less often highlighted, although their damage is more widespread and frequent, but less significant in immediate quantitative terms.

Resentment leads to retaliatory killings, which remain ineffective. Local traditions and perceptions can be an obstacle to managing these conflicts. Emergency actions still prevail over integrated strategies, whereas planning and participatory, adaptive approaches are key to effective conflict mitigation. By giving a voice to all stakeholders, it is possible to develop shared, feasible and sustainable solutions.

Around Rusizi National Park in Burundi, priority solutions to limit and remedy the impacts of hippopotamuses have been identified collectively, including fencing, a buffer zone and an early warning system, community patrols, awareness-raising and a fair compensation scheme. Each set of measures must be adapted both to the species involved and to the local socio-ecological context.

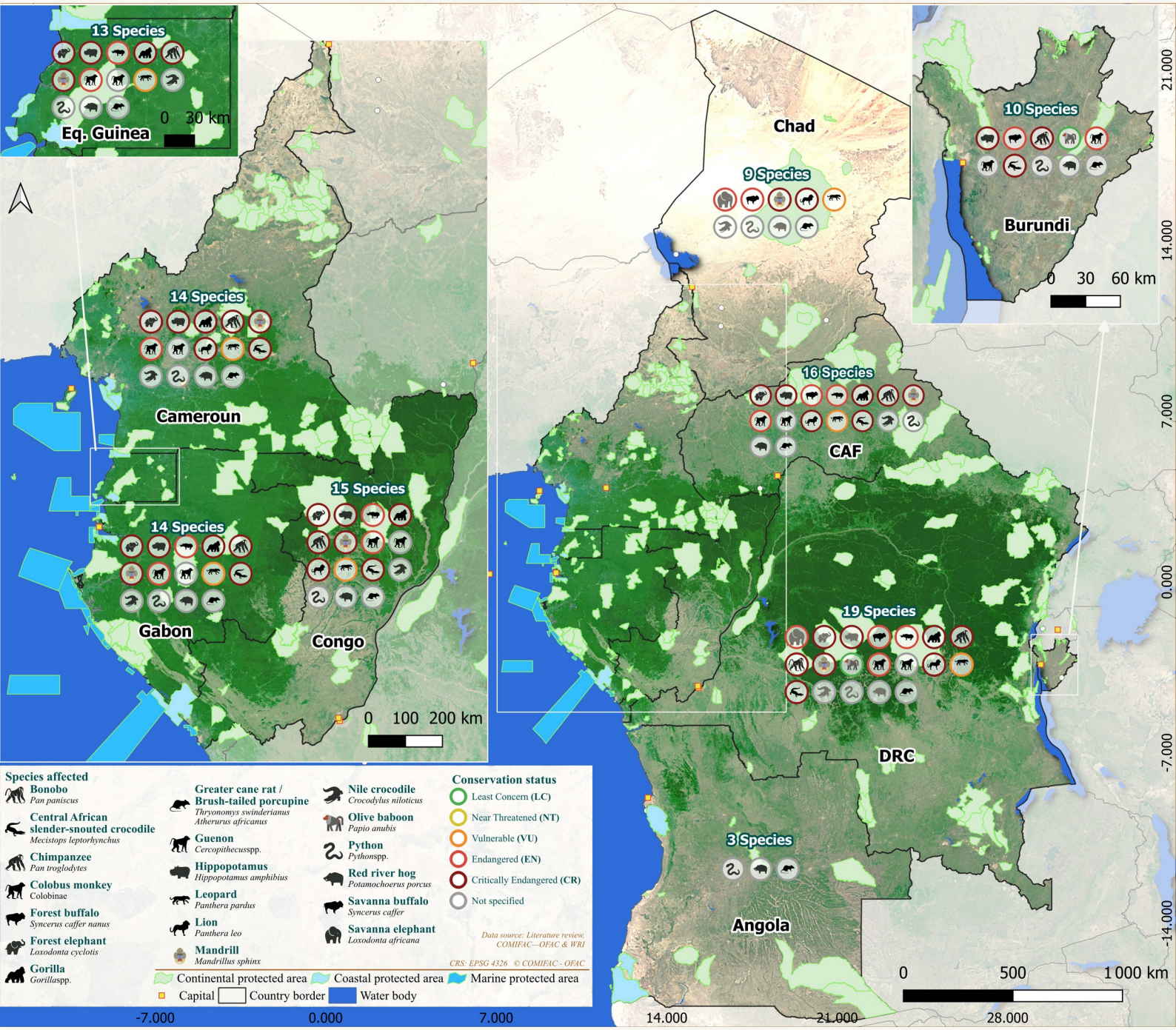
In Central Africa, since 2008, only Gabon and Cameroon have begun developing a human-wildlife conflict management strategy. However, Cameroon's initiative does not appear to have been completed. In Gabon, after a first strategy that was not implemented, the country has a revised strategy, which has not yet been adopted by the Government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop in each country a human-wildlife conflict management strategy and action plan (HWC-SAP), led by the State and revised at least every ten years.
2. Adopt integrated, adaptive and participatory approaches, with species-appropriate deterrent measures and proven compensation schemes.
3. Enshrine human-wildlife conflict management in law and not only in ad hoc decrees.
4. Collect and update national and regional data to guide decision-making.
5. Raise public awareness and aim for genuine co-management of species and forest areas (SAFE-type approaches).

FIGURE 1

Animal species involved in human-wildlife conflicts by country and their IUCN conservation status, against the backdrop of continental, coastal and marine protected areas in the COMIFAC region. Enlargements of Cameroon, Gabon and Congo, of Equatorial Guinea and of Burundi.



Sources: literature review, COMIFAC-OFAC & WRI, 2025.

Number of species involved in human-wildlife conflicts, by country

19	16	15	14	14	13	10	9	3
DRC	CAR	Congo	Cameroon	Gabon	Eq. Guinea	Burundi	Chad	Angola

30%

of land and sea by 2030: the target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.






Ten years after the first edition in 2015, the State of Protected and Conserved Areas in Central Africa 2025 offers an updated reading of conservation networks and their place in international commitments, notably the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its target of conserving 30% of land and sea by 2030.

Through a regional synthesis, national dashboards and thematic analyses, the publication examines the issues shaping the future of conservation.

It focuses on major challenges such as the recognition and deployment of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs), the effects of armed conflicts, coexistence between people and wildlife, and financing issues. A particular perspective that addresses questions that are structuring for the future of the region.

? What progress has been made, what difficulties remain and what prospects are emerging for the region's protected and conserved areas? How can biodiversity conservation in Central Africa be strengthened while meeting the requirements of effectiveness, justice and sustainable development?

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