Input to the Concept Papers on each of the six interactive dialogues of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference

This document consolidates inputs from UNECE which provides the Secretariat of the UN Water Convention and services – jointly with the WHO/Europe – the Protocol on Water and Health. It aims to inform the concept papers for the six Interactive Dialogues of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference. The input reflects global trends across regions, synthesizes good practices derived from recent normative, technical and operational outputs of the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health, and identifies priority actions needed to accelerate progress toward SDG 6 and related commitments.

Across regions, the growing variability of water availability, rising pressures on ecosystems, demographic shifts and persistent inequalities in access to services pose significant challenges to sustainable development, public health and environmental stability. Climate-related hydrological extremes are accelerating, while pollution loads, emerging contaminants and aging infrastructure undermine water quality and ecosystem integrity. Transboundary basins—which supply drinking water, enable economic growth and sustain biodiversity—face increasing pressures where governance arrangements, joint monitoring or data exchange remain insufficient to support coordinated responses. These challenges intersect with global policy agendas on climate, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding, underscoring the need for coherent and integrated approaches.

UNECE has prepared a broad suite of practical tools, methodologies and guidance to support countries and basin institutions in strengthening resilience, cooperation and service delivery. Under the Protocol on Water and Health, recent outputs include improved methodologies for equitable access; updated climate-resilient WASH guidance; tools for enhancing water safety planning and disease surveillance; and strengthened assessments for WASH in schools, healthcare settings and small-scale systems. Under the Water Convention, new and updated guidance has supported countries in transboundary climate adaptation planning; integrating nexus approaches into development strategies; improving monitoring, data exchange and risk management; strengthening institutional cooperation; advancing ecosystem restoration; and applying the source-to-sea approach in shared basins.

(1) Water for people

Trends and challenges

Across regions, access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene continues to face intensifying pressures from climate variability, demographic changes and persistent public-health vulnerabilities. Recurrent drought cycles in parts of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Central America strain water availability for rural and small-scale systems, while increasingly severe flooding in Asia, the Americas and Europe disrupts service continuity and contaminates water supplies. Rapid urbanization in many regions, combined with aging or overstretched infrastructure, amplifies inequalities as low-income, remote or informal communities experience declining service reliability and reduced capacity to cope with extreme events.

At the same time, environmental degradation, emerging pollutants and inadequate wastewater treatment increase risks to human health, contributing to the re-emergence and spread of waterborne diseases in multiple regions. Stress on health systems is intensified where WASH services in institutions—particularly schools, healthcare facilities and public places—are under-resourced or poorly maintained. Conflict, fragility and population displacement in several regions further undermine infrastructure and limit access to safe services.

Good practices and solutions

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)-World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health promotes the acceleration of efforts to ensure universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation services for all, across all settings, and the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The practical tools (guidance documents, policy briefs, checklists, training packages, etc.) developed under the Protocol on Water and Health are available to all governments, local authorities and communities to make progress towards reaching SDG6 and ensure that safe, climate-resilient and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene services become a reality for all.

For example, The Equitable Access Score-card 2.0: Shaping Water and Sanitation Policies to Achieve the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation provides governments with a structured and tested methodology to assess inequalities in WASH access and guide targeted reforms. It has been used in more

Examples of other recent tools include:

- Improving quality of care through water, sanitation and hygiene services: highlights and progress in the pan-European region (WHO-Europe)
- Water for All: Embedding Equity in Drinking Water Policies (WHO-Europe)
- Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Drinking Water and Sanitation Sector through the Protocol on Water and Health
- Small-scale sanitation and water supply systems: driving country action towards safer services(WHO-Europe)
- Prevalence of Legionella as a Waterborne Pathogen and its Impacts in the Pan-European Region (WHO-Europe)
- Training package on risk-based drinking-water quality surveillance (WHO-Europe)
- Delivering safe sanitation for all: areas for action to improve the situation in the pan-European region ((WHO-Europe)
- A field guide to improving small drinking-water supplies: water safety planning for rural communities (WHO-Europe)
- Water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities: a practical tool for situation assessment and improvement planning (WHO-Europe)
- Healthy habits, healthy schools: good practices for hand hygiene and menstrual health in schools in the pan-European region (WHO-Europe)
- The water-related disease surveillance training package (WHO-Europe 2023)

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Integrate public-health and wastewater-based surveillance systems into early-warning mechanisms.
- Scale up risk-based approaches supported by updated Protocol and Water Convention tools.
- Expand joint monitoring networks and preparedness planning in shared basins.
- Mobilize sustainable financing for resilient WASH infrastructure and services.
- Ensure equitable access to water and sanitation for all, particularly those suffering a disadvantage or social exclusion
- Improve WASH systems and services in institutional settings, particularly in schools, healthcare facilities, and other priority settings, including public places

- Support increasing resilience and strengthening preparedness for water-related disasters, extreme events and other climate change-induced effects at the policy, strategic and practitioner levels
- Ensure safe and climate-resilient management of water supply and sanitation services by strengthening national capacities to scale up risk-based management approaches
- Increase attention to small-scale sanitation and water supply systems and implementation of good practice-based approaches in the regulation, management and surveillance of small-scale sanitation and water supply
- Strengthening public health surveillance and prevention of water-related diseases, including by adopting wastewater and environmental surveillance of disease agents of concern as an integral part of public health surveillance and in addressing health emergencies
- Improving governance for water and health through setting targets, implementing measures and reporting

(2) Water for prosperity

Trends and challenges

Water's role as an enabler of economic productivity has become increasingly visible as many regions face intensifying hydrological extremes, growing resource competition and more complex development pressures. Extended droughts in parts of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Latin America and Southern Europe have reduced agricultural yields, strained irrigation systems and lowered hydropower outputs. Meanwhile, recent severe flood events in Europe, South Asia, Southern Africa and regions of the Americas have damaged infrastructure, disrupted supply chains and imposed substantial economic losses. In many transboundary basins, inadequate cross-sector coordination across water, energy, food and environment portfolios limits efficiency and constrains development opportunities.

Demographic growth, changing consumption patterns and rapid urbanization are amplifying pressures on shared water systems. These dynamics, combined with fragmented governance arrangements, hinder efforts to balance competing sectoral demands and to optimize the use of shared resources. Economic risks and uncertainties remain elevated where data on availability, variability and ecosystem conditions are incomplete or inconsistent, reducing the ability of governments and investors to make informed decisions.

Good practices and solutions

- UNECE published in 2015 the nexus assessment methodology: **Reconciling resource uses in transboundary basins: assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus**
- Subsequently, UNECE has prepared Water–food–energy–ecosystems nexus assessments in 7 transboundary basins**,** summarized in publications such as **Reconciling resource uses: Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the North Western Sahara Aquifer System (2020)** which provide an evidence-base for identifying synergies and reducing trade-offs in shared basins.
- The **Methodology for assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins and experiences from its application: synthesis** is a compilation of lessons learned and good practices built on years of concrete experience.
- **Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins** helps quantify development gains and inform cooperative investment planning.
- The **publiucation** on **Identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation (**2018) supports governments in identifying and quantifying socio-economic benefits of cooperative water management.
- UNECE supports **twinning initiatives (2021–ongoing)** to facilitate the exchange of experience between new and experienced Parties notably on monitoring, allocation, data management and governance.
- UNECE **Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context (2021)** and the subsequent **Summary Handbook (2023)** explains the various phases, benefits and challenges of transboundary water allocation and guides interested States through the process of assessing its potential usefulness in their shared basins. Updated Water Convention methodologies on joint monitoring and assessment, such as the **Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Data-sharing in Transboundary Basins,** assist riparian States in harmonizing data collection and developing cross-border early-warning systems.

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Systematize the assessment of benefits linked to transboundary and inter-sectoral cooperation using recognized methodologies and communicate them more widely.

- Integrate nexus-based approaches into national strategies and transboundary basin planning.
- Strengthen institutional and legal frameworks that enable coordinated investment and risk management at transboundary level.
- Expand multi-country investment planning for water, agriculture, energy and ecosystem resilience.
- Apply UNECE benefit-sharing and nexus assessment guidance to improve investment readiness.

(3) Water for planet

Trends and challenges

Impacts of climate change and variability on transboundary basins are evident in many regions in the world and increasing floods and droughts pose a challenge to water managers around the globe. Transboundary cooperation in adaptation is necessary to prevent maladaptation and increase the overall effectiveness of adaptation. The Water Convention and its Task Force on Water and Climate, co-led by Ghana and the Netherlands, support countries in developing transboundary adaptation strategies and implementation of priority adaptation measures though guidance, projects on the ground and exchange of experience.

Freshwater ecosystems worldwide are experiencing increased stress due to climate-driven hydrological variability, pollution loads, land-use change and ecosystem fragmentation. Many regions in have experienced more frequent and intense droughts and floods, altering river regimes and affecting ecological integrity. In low-lying coastal and deltaic areas, salinity intrusion driven by sea-level rise is affecting freshwater availability and ecosystem resilience. Pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial discharges and untreated wastewater remains a persistent challenge in several regions, with growing concerns about emerging contaminants and cumulative basin-scale impacts.

These pressures intersect with limited ecosystem monitoring capacity, fragmented governance and insufficient integration of biodiversity and ecological considerations into water management. **Transboundary basins**, where ecological processes cross borders and pressures accumulate across large areas, are particularly vulnerable. However, UNECE's experience demonstrates that **effective transboundary cooperation can enhance ecological outcomes**. In turn, conserving, sustainably managing and restoring

freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity can be an entry point for transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation. Case studies from across the globe shared during the **Global workshop on ecosystems conservation and restoration in transboundary basins (2025)** –show that transboundary ecosystems benefit from joint management. This requires five (5) main pillars: adequate policy and institutions, community engagement, effective management approaches and innovative tools, sustainable financing, and cross sectoral cooperation.

Good practices and solutions

- The **Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters (2011)** provides a comprehensive overview of the status of transboundary waters in the European and Asian parts of the UNECE region, covering more than 140 transboundary rivers, 25 transboundary lakes, about 200 transboundary groundwaters and 25 Ramsar Sites or other wetlands of transboundary importance.
- The **Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change (2009)** provides a unique methodology for basin-level vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning.
- The **Global Network of Basins Working on Climate Change Adaptation (since 2012–ongoing)** promotes knowledge exchange and supports coordinated adaptation measures.
- Cooperation between the Water Convention and the **Industrial Accidents Convention (1998–2025)**, notably through the **Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents**, offers updated tools for disaster risk reduction
- UNECE-supported nature-based solutions case studies demonstrate practical approaches for wetland restoration, floodplain reconnection and river-corridor management.
- The **Guidance Note on Applying a Source-to-Sea Approach in Transboundary Basins (2025)** helps countries understand and manage upstream–downstream linkages affecting freshwater and marine environments.
- The process and **conclusions f**rom the **Global workshop on ecosystems conservation and restoration in transboundary basins (2025)** support the acceleration of the restoration and conservation of transboundary freshwater ecosystems with a view to improve biodiversity status and condition, water and climate resilience.
- **Mainstreaming water supply, sanitation, transboundary water management and cooperation into Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation**

Plans offers insights and best practices on how to reconnect water and climate in policies at multiple levels.

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Scale up implementation of nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration in shared basins.
- Strengthen joint early-warning and preparedness systems for extreme events and Natech risks.
- Integrate the ecosystem approach into basin agreements and management plans.
- Mobilize climate and biodiversity finance to support transboundary ecosystem conservation, restoration and sustainable management.
- Mainstream water supply, sanitation, transboundary water management and cooperation into Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

(4) Water for cooperation

Trends and challenges

A total of 153 Member States have territory within at least one of the world's 313 transboundary river and lake basins, and/or at least one of the 468 currently inventoried transboundary aquifers and transboundary aquifer systems (IGRAC and UNESCO-IHP 2025; UNECE and UNESCO 2024). Approximately 40 per cent of the world's population lives in river and lake basins that comprise two or more countries, and perhaps even more significantly, over 90 per cent of the world's population live in countries that share basins. These basins cover nearly one half of the Earth's land surface and account for an estimated 60 per cent of global freshwater flow (UNECE and UNESCO 2024).

Transboundary waters (rivers, lakes and aquifers) link populations of different countries and support the incomes and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people worldwide. They create cultural, economic, environmental, hydrological, political and social interdependencies between societies. These waters are vital for economic development, reducing poverty and sustaining ecosystems. However, many transboundary waters face increasing pressure from pollution, over-abstraction, ecosystem degradation and climate

change. In particular, water quality deterioration and the loss of freshwater biodiversity are escalating concerns, directly affecting human health, food security and ecosystem services. These issues are closely linked to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Addressing them requires coordinated monitoring, data sharing, and joint action across borders.

Differences between countries, such as their socio-economic circumstances, water management and infrastructure capacities, and legal, institutional and political orientations, can challenge the effective and coordinated development and protection of transboundary waters. At the heart of this challenge lies the need to build and sustain trust between countries. Trust is the cornerstone of long-term cooperation.

Climate change adds a further dimension to transboundary water cooperation, particularly in terms of greater fluctuations and unpredictability in water availability and increased threats to water quality. However, climate change also offer new opportunities for cooperation through the development of shared adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Ot of 153 UN Member States sharing transboundary waters, 43 reported in 2023 that 90% or more of their transboundary basin areas are covered by operational arrangements (UNECE and UNESCO, 2024). Although this accounts for less than a third of countries sharing transboundary waters, it marks an increase of 13 countries since 2020 and 20 more than in 2017. Most changes in SDG indicator 6.5.2 values are attributed to better data availability, reflecting the dedication and involvement of countries in improving their SDG indicator 6.5.2 data through ongoing efforts, particularly in relation to aquifers. However, the data also highlights that operational arrangements are lacking in many basins and a major effort is needed to accelerate progress towards SDG target 6.5 and SDG 6.

While cooperation over transboundary surface waters has a long history, the same cannot be said of transboundary aquifers. Recently, concerted steps have been taken to help advance cooperation over this “hidden” resource. As of 2024, thirteen transboundary arrangements specifically dedicated to aquifers have been identified (UNESCO and UNECE 2024), although not all of them are currently operational.

Good practices and solutions

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. It is a unique legally binding instrument promoting the sustainable management of shared water resources, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the prevention of conflicts, and the promotion of peace

and regional integration.

The Water Convention requires Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way and ensure their sustainable management. Parties bordering the same transboundary waters have to cooperate by entering into specific agreements and establishing joint bodies. As a framework agreement, the Convention does not replace bilateral and multilateral agreements for specific basins or aquifers; instead, it fosters their establishment and implementation, as well as further development.

The Convention was originally negotiated as a regional framework for the pan-European region. Following an amendment procedure, since March 2016 all UN Member States can accede to it. Since then 16 countries from outside the Pan-European region, namely (Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America) have joined the Convention. The accession of these countries offers new prospects for: enhanced transboundary cooperation globally, conflict prevention; and regional stability.

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Accelerate accessions to and implementation of the Water Convention
- Increase capacity in transboundary water cooperation and water diplomacy
- Expand exchange of information and joint monitoring and assessment
- Accelerate development of operational cooperation frameworks in shared basins.
- Strengthen national capacities for SDG 6.5.2 reporting and transboundary monitoring.
- Create and Reinforce basin organizations as platforms for joint planning, monitoring and adaptation.
- Expand use of Water Convention tools for dialogue, confidence-building and preventive diplomacy.
- Ensure adequate funding and financing for transboundary water cooperation and basin development

(5) Water in multilateral processes

Trends and challenges

Water's central role in achieving climate, biodiversity, disaster-risk-reduction and peacebuilding goals is increasingly recognized across global policy processes, yet integration remains uneven. While many regions have updated climate adaptation plans, biodiversity frameworks and DRR strategies, transboundary water considerations are often only partially addressed. Regions experiencing rapid climatic shifts—such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the South Pacific and parts of Latin America—face escalating multi-sector water risks that surpass national boundaries. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions in a number of regions have underscored the importance of neutral, rules-based mechanisms for maintaining dialogue and preventing water-related disputes.

Progress toward SDG 6 remains uneven, and challenges persist in linking global commitments with basin-level implementation. Fragmented coordination across sectors and across borders limits the effectiveness of national measures aimed at meeting global targets.

Good practices and solutions

Reinforcing the SDGs through transboundary water cooperation

Cooperation at the transboundary level is not only vital for ensuring water for all, but also for supporting progress across other SDGs. Examples include:[1]

SDG3 (Good Health and Wellbeing): Cooperation between Czechia and Germany in the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe River enabled a marked improvement in the water quality of the Elbe, for ex ample a decrease in the concentration of mercury in the sediments from more than 8 mg/kg in 1996 to less than 0.5 mg/kg in 2013.

SDG5 (Gender Equality): The Volta Basin Water Charter commits Volta riparians (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo) and the Volta Basin Authority to give special consideration to the interests and contributions of women, men and vulnerable people in decision-making about water and the environment, the right to water and sanitation, capacity-building, and investment operations in the water sector.

SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy): Implementation of jointly-owned and managed projects, such as the Manantali and Diama dams, has been recognized among the major cooperation achievements within the framework of the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River.

[1] See more details in *UNECE, UNESCO and UN-Water (2024). Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Mid-term status of SDG Indicator 6.5.2, with a special focus on Climate Change – 2024*.

The Water Convention facilitates the achievement of Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) and target 6.5 through an integrated and intersectoral approach and attention to the prevention and reduction of water pollution, the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, and water use efficiency. The Convention's implementation and cooperation through its institutional platform also support the achievement of other SDGs. Examples include:[2]

SDG 13 (Climate action): Climate change adaptation was incorporated into river basin management through the adoption of a joint statement on the Chu Talas Strategic Action Programme by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in December 2023, which facilitated funding for its implementation, including from the GEF.

SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions): Following a request from Montenegro, in 2021 the Water Convention Implementation Committee provided advice to Albania and Montenegro on how to improve cooperation in the shared Cijevna/Cem River basin as part of an advisory procedure, a unique tool which enables this body to engage with countries seeking to resolve water tensions in a non-confrontational manner.

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals): In 2023–2024, two twinning initiatives were developed under the Water Convention between Finland and Namibia; and between Ghana, Hungary and Zambia. These initiatives aim to enable the transfer of practical experience and lessons learned between experienced and incoming/new Parties on thematic topics related to implementation of the Convention. For example, the twinning initiative between Finland and Namibia focuses on monitoring and assessment, water allocation and capacity-building of institutional mechanisms for transboundary water cooperation.

UNECE-WHO Europe Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: benefits of joint implementation

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)-World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health is a powerful tool to accomplish the 2030 Agenda by providing a sound approach and concrete tools for the implementation and monitoring.

Not only are the goals and principles of the Protocol and the 2030 Agenda fully aligned, but the target areas under the Protocol are also closely linked to the targets under SDGs 3 and

[2] See more details in *UNECE, 2024. PROGRESS ON TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION UNDER THE WATER CONVENTION. THIRD REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES, 2020–2023.*

6 and other targets related to water, sanitation and health. Using the Protocol framework and its process of target setting, including carrying out an in-depth baseline analysis, is therefore highly beneficial for establishing national SDG targets.

The Protocol provides tools and guidance, facilitates sharing of best practices and offers technical capacity-building at all levels, all of which facilitates the identification of appropriate and achievable national targets and indicators, and the monitoring of progress.

All countries can use and benefit from the tools developed under the Protocol, irrespective of whether they are Parties to the Protocol or not. The tools, methodologies and approaches promoted by the Protocol, such as the Water Safety Plan (WSP) and Sanitation Safety Planning (SSP) approaches and the methodology for equitable access self-assessment can be used to identify priorities and gaps to improve water, sanitation and health in accordance with the aspirations of the SDGs while raising awareness of their crucial importance for sustainable development.

Reporting under the Protocol supports the monitoring of water, sanitation and health related SDGs, while allowing to go beyond globally agreed SDG indicators to enable in-depth tracking tailored to country priorities. Countries may use the data collected under the Protocol's mandatory reporting system to monitor progress under the SDGs.

Dedicated practical guide for joint implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda has been developed to highlight the benefits of and provide step-by-step guidance for coordinated action (see *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide for Joint Implementation*, ECE/MP.WH/16, 2019).

Examples of joint implementation include:[3]

Using targets under the Protocol to implement SDGs in the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova has considerable experience with target setting under the Protocol. The process was initiated in 2008, culminating with the adoption of 34 targets in 2010. While there was some progress in the implementation of the targets, not all of them were successfully implemented, so the Government decided to develop a stand-alone National Programme for the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2016–2025. The National Programme, that forms an integral part of the national legislation, contains revised targets for almost all Protocol target areas. At the moment of adoption of the Programme by the Government, the national authorities initiated a dialogue for SDG transposition into national policies. The National Programme was used as a framework for

[3] See more details in *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide for Joint Implementation*, ECE/MP.WH/16, 2019.

defining SDG targets on water and sanitation. Among the adopted national targets and indicators, five SDG indicators coincided with indicators of the National Programme, which is considered the best platform for achieving progress on existing gaps in water, sanitation and health.

Preparation of the Voluntary National Review on SDG 6 using the Protocol framework in Romania

In Romania, the Protocol on Water and Health has proved to be an important mechanism to implement SDG 6 and to review progress. The setting of national targets for SDG 6 and other water, sanitation and health related targets capitalized on the targets set under the Protocol. Similarly, the Protocol has been useful in the process of developing the Romanian 2018 Voluntary National Review on SDG 6. The elaboration of the Romanian VNR started in 2017 within an Open Working Group coordinated by the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Waters and Forests is part of this working group and has contributed to the matrix for the review of data on the progress in implementing targets under the Protocol collected within the 2016 reporting cycle. During this process, the national SDG focal points and the Protocol focal points worked together to develop the narrative report with a focus on SDG 6. Concurrently, the VNR process contributed to the preparation of the Romanian report under the Protocol.

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Build on and reinforce existing legal and intergovernmental platforms and frameworks such as the Water Convention and Protocol on water and health
- Utilize Water Convention and Protocol tools to operationalize global commitments.
- Mainstream water into UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD
- Integrate water and transboundary water considerations more fully across climate, biodiversity, DRR and peacebuilding processes.
- Enhance regional and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms.
- Use existing reporting frameworks to support SDG follow-up and review.

(6) Investments for water

Trends and challenges

Significant financing gaps persist for water infrastructure, ecosystem restoration and climate adaptation across regions, especially in transboundary settings. Intensifying hydrological extremes have increased demands for investment in risk reduction, early-warning systems, climate-resilient green and grey infrastructure and environmental remediation. Many regions across the world continue to experience major economic losses linked to floods, droughts and water-related disruptions. These pressures create growing financial needs for both national and transboundary initiatives.

However, challenges remain in preparing bankable, climate-resilient and transboundary-appropriate projects due to limited data, weak cross-border coordination and the absence of clear cost-sharing or benefit-sharing mechanisms. Uncertainty in governance frameworks can deter investment and limit access to climate funds or private finance.

Good practices and solutions

- The **publication on** **Funding and financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development** **(2021)** provides structured approaches to improving the investment environment, strengthening governance conditions and preparing bankable projects.
- The action-oriented summary version of the 2021 publication entitled **How to accelerate the Funding and Financing of Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development? Opportunities and Challenges,** was published in March 2023 to offer a shorter, more user-friendly tool.
- **Financing Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins** (led by the world Bank, 2018) supports transboundary basins in preparing bankable project proposals for climate change adaptation.
- UNECE supports **joint bodies and basin organizations** to help create predictable, transparent frameworks that attract investment.
- Nexus and benefit-sharing methodologies detailed in **Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins** enhance understanding of economic gains, risk reduction and co-benefits, improving investor confidence.
- Peer-learning and capacity-building activities such as the **Virtual workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development (2020)** and the **Global workshop on Funding and Financing Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development (2023)** assisted countries and joint bodies in

structuring partnerships with development banks, climate funds and the private sector.

- The event on "Accelerating transboundary cooperation and the implementation of the Water Convention in new Parties through increased support and partnership", also referred to as the **Match-making event (2024)** supported new Parties and those close to accession in implementing the Water Convention and accelerating transboundary water cooperation by identifying partners and resources before and during the event to further support implementation plans and related projects.

Actions needed

The following areas of action are proposed to support accelerated progress:

- Leverage existing international legal frameworks focusing on transboundary water cooperation, such as the Water Convention, to strengthen institutional capacity and governance conditions and ultimately de-risk investments and create investment-friendly environments.
- Elevate Transboundary Water in National Agendas in order to mobilize national financing for transboundary cooperation: Governments should integrate transboundary water management into national development, climate, and financing strategies and increase national financing for transboundary water management. Recognizing water, and transboundary waters, as a cross-cutting priority in NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, and national budgets will facilitate access to climate and nature finance and bilateral funding.
- Support basin organizations and national authorities in developing joint or coordinated investment plans with clear climate-resilience and ecosystem-recovery objectives.
- Expand use of benefit-sharing tools to identify co-financing opportunities and reduce investor risk.
- Explore and scale innovative financing solutions: countries and basin/aquifer organizations should consider adopting innovative financing solutions such as nature and climate finance, establishing basket funds or other joint financing mechanisms to align donor efforts, reduce duplication, and ensure long-term commitment.