

2026 United Nations Water Conference

Interactive Dialogue 2 – Water for Prosperity

I. Introduction (500 words)

Water is a critical resource and a human right. It sustains our way of life, our economy and our food system, Water is a key input for economic production and growth, particularly in the agricultural sector and water is also vital for energy and healthy ecosystems, which provide natural resources and services that support the livelihoods of billions of people.

But today, our water supply is under threat – unsustainable water management undermines our overall water security and competitiveness and increasing climate impacts (e.g. changes in rainfall patterns, extreme heat, catastrophic floods, prolonged droughts and forest fires) cause increasing impacts, disruption of energy and drinking water supply and growing economic losses. If left unaddressed, these have the potential to harm the overall economic, social and territorial cohesion globally.

The focus of this dialogue is on SDG 6 targets 6.3 on wastewater treatment, safe reuse and water quality, 6.4 on water-use efficiency, and 6.5 on integrated water resources management, with interlinkages to SDG 1 on no poverty, SDG 2 on zero hunger, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

II. Status and trends (1000 words)

Worldwide, many watersheds experience increasing levels of degradation, threatening ecosystem health and water availability, and worsened by climate change. Wetlands – nature's most effective water managers – are disappearing three times faster than forests across the globe, increasing the risk of desertification and floods. While agriculture accounts for roughly 70% of freshwater withdrawals, industrial (≈20%) and domestic (≈10%) uses are the main drivers of increasing water demand. As economies industrialize, populations urbanize, and water supply and sanitation systems expand. At the current pace, global water demand is expected to surpass what is available by 40 % in 2030¹. Roughly half of the world's population currently experiences severe water scarcity for at least part of the year. One quarter of the world's population face 'extremely high' levels of

¹ Report of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, 2024.

water stress, using over 80% of their annual renewable freshwater supply². Worldwide competition for dwindling supplies of freshwater exacerbates conflict and displacement; water-related disasters displaced 40 million people and inflicted more than EUR 480 billion in damages in 2024³. Water stress and climate change have the potential to slow down entire economic and trade systems.

Implementation of IWRM is progressing slowly, leaving billions of people in countries with fragmented water management structures, weak cost-recovery mechanisms, and chronically under-funded basin authorities.

Protecting water is key for socio-economic, inclusive and sustainable growth and development. The water cycle is changing, and this is a universal concern that underpins the achievement of all SDGs. Recognizing the interconnectedness with ecosystems, climate, food production and energy systems is essential to managing water sustainably and equitably for both present and future generations.

- III. **Challenges and emerging issues** (2000 words): This section will highlight challenges and opportunities relating to the topics addressed in the interactive dialogue, particularly those that have emerged or become more urgent since the 2023 Water Conference. This section will also identify interlinkages and synergies between the relevant SDG 6 targets and other SDGs.

Disparities in water availability are widespread. Population growth, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change compound these disparities and pose a significant threat to shared prosperity that provides equal opportunities for all to thrive.

Water is a finite resource. Climate change impacts and increased scarcity and droughts create pressure to balance demand from different users with the protection of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Over-abstraction, declining water quality and increasing pollution, seasonal and interannual gaps between demand and availability, and unsustainable practices remain critical challenges.

Water demand also needs to consider the transformation of water uses under the effect of climate change, for instance in agriculture with the augmentation of evapotranspiration due to temperature rise.

Water influences the economy in many ways, and global trade dynamics and market adaptations can have direct repercussions on the water use of regional and local economies.

² [The United Nations World Water Development Report 2024: water for prosperity and peace: executive summary - UNESCO Digital Library](#)

³ Global water monitor: 2024 summary report | PreventionWeb.

- IV. **Solutions** (2000 words): This section will offer action-oriented, innovative, and pragmatic solutions to challenges. It will shine a spotlight on impactful initiatives, programs and projects from around the world that can be scaled up and/or transferred to other contexts. Potential partnerships among Member States and with other stakeholders will feature prominently.

Ensuring water security and resilience for socio-economic uses requires monitoring and improving knowledge of the evolution of the global water cycle and water use. Adapting to these changes requires curbing demand, protecting water quality, diversifying supply sources, safely managing sanitation, and balancing seasonal and interannual gaps of water resources while protecting supporting aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Curbing demand

Curbing demand requires reducing consumption where water abstractions are greater than renewable water availability. Focus must be on fighting leakages and unintended losses, supported by digital tools and by increased water use efficiency.

Sustainable, fair and transparent water allocation systems must be promoted at all levels, and across sectors and value chains. These efforts should be supported by research, innovations, new technologies, and good cross-sectoral governance, notably by applying the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) nexus approach. Managing the WEFE nexus in sectoral policies is essential to reduce pressure on resources by promoting joint, integrated cross-sectoral solutions and investments.

Diversification of water supplies

Diversification of water supply sources including reuse of wastewater should be considered. The need to integrate water storage, managed groundwater recharge, water reuse, non-conventional resources, such as seawater desalination and new technologies into sustainable water management is urgent. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that solutions are affordable and legally feasible and do not undermine human rights, environmental standards, or equity across sectors and regions.

Non-conventional water resources

Non-conventional water resources should be incorporated into Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) to strengthen resilience and contribute to drought risk management

Safe water reuse in agriculture, environmental and industrial sectors, energy production and industrial processes should be progressively upscaled to improve integrated water resource management. Lessons learnt and good practices on water reuse should be shared and scaled in all levels.

Seawater desalination can provide steady supply when carried out sustainably and combined with measures to develop water reuse and reduce water losses, Innovation should be supported and good practices scaled up, including the use of renewable energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating brine disposal impacts, and increasing recycling and reuse of energy and minerals from brine.

Nature based solutions

Nature-based solutions should be implemented, restoring wetlands and other ecosystems, supporting quality renewable water supplies, while maintaining ecological flows.

Nature-based solutions and hybrid infrastructure offer multiple co-benefits while being often cost-effective alternatives to purely grey infrastructure. We should promote their development and implementation to enhance water resilience, support biodiversity, reduce pollution and disaster risks, and deliver long-term socio-economic gains.

Knowledge

Substantial data and understandable information, based on hydrological and meteorological monitoring, spatial observation, modeling, traditional and indigenous knowledge are necessary for sound decision-making in water. Improved data and monitoring are essential to track the changes in the global water cycle. These changes are affecting water resources in all countries which means we cannot look at the past to manage water resources and ensure water security and resilience.

Effective water management should be based and guided by sound science based on existing platforms and Earth observation products.

Greater knowledge on the costs and benefits of water resilience for the economy and the financial system can help support scaling up actions of national governments.

Inclusive Governance

Strengthening water governance is a prerequisite for achieving water security and resilience for socio economic uses. Inclusive involvement of all stakeholders in IWRM processes and planning is necessary. Advancing inclusive and sustainable governance, integration and coordination across multiple levels, with strong engagement of economic sectors through the WEFE nexus, can unlock synergies and address trade-offs. Such cooperation can improve sustainable water use in agriculture, support the clean energy transition, strengthen resilience to hydrological extremes, and make climate action more effective.

Multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary cooperation, supported by technical, financial and institutional solutions, and followed by coordinated implementation, are critical for IWRM.

Private sector companies' efforts on water disclosure and water stewardship and engagement along international value chains, can support water management objectives and the development of viable solutions.

Planning

River basin management planning is essential for securing sufficient, clean water supplies, protecting ecosystems, mitigating climate change impacts like floods and droughts, and ensuring sustainable water use for economic development. It provides an integrated coordinated framework for managing water resources, integrating ecological needs, socio economics needs and climate resilience across the river basins, guiding investments.

River Basin management planning and management requires close cooperation among all stakeholders and sectors. Coordination and complementarity of all actors and policies are needed to ensure water planning (including for droughts and floods) is effective. We need the development of inclusive and integrated early warning systems, anticipatory approaches, and resilient infrastructure to enhance preparedness.

Financing

The EU and its Member States uphold moving towards comprehensive and sustainable water financing frameworks, based on the recommendations of the Seville 2025 Conference on Finance for Development. Sustainable finance requires implementing adapted tariff structures, reflecting all costs of water services (including scarcity, environmental, operational and investment costs), while applying the polluter pays and do no harm principles, taking account of users' social profiles, and without compromising the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, especially for the most vulnerable.

V. Recommendations and conclusions (2000 words)

Water efficiency and fair allocation	• The Conference should promote a water resilience approach to drive prosperity, reinforcing commitments to sustainable water abstractions and water efficiency. Establish national water roadmaps for sustainable abstractions and planning.
Diversification of water supplies and NbS	• Diversification of water supplies including non-conventional sources and nature-based solutions should be promoted. Including safe water reuse in agriculture, energy production, industrial processes. Desalination, new technologies and digitalization should be shared and scaled up as part of integrated water management. • Nature based solutions and sustainable food systems are a major opportunity for global water resilience. Best

	practices and positive investment and business cases should be promoted and shared, highlighting cross-sector positive impacts and alignment with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
WRM based on sound knowledge	• Effective water management should be based and guided by sound science. The work of policy platforms, such as IPBES (notably the recent nexus report), the IPCC, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme the World Water Assessment Programme and the newly established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution, should be promoted. • Earth Observation products have been used to forecast droughts and floods and need to be promoted for use in water management to be able to adapt to the changes in the global water cycle. Access to this water-related data, products, and tools needs to be facilitated ensuring that Copernicus products respond to the needs of users and policy makers • Hydrological observatory systems, based on resilient digital public infrastructures (DPI) and partnerships should be advanced with initiatives such as the Global Climate Observing System, Global Drought Observatory, the Global Flood Awareness System, HydroSOS, the One Water Vision, GEMS/Water and others
Planning	• River Basin Management Plans including Drought and Flood Management Plans and sustainable, fair and transparent allocation models should be promoted. • On disaster risk reduction, countries should reiterate their commitments and support to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the UN Secretary-General's Early Warning for All by 2027 initiative, especially for droughts and floods. • Essential aspects of water resources management should be integrated into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies, backed by appropriate technical and financial support.
Inclusive governance	• Promote the OECD Water Governance principles, including inclusive involvement of all stakeholders in IWRM and planning, engagement of economic sectors through the WEFE nexus, • Scale up private sector companies' efforts on water disclosure and water stewardship

Economics and Finance	• Improve knowledge on the economic and financial impacts of water resilience and the role of financial institutions and the private sector in promoting water resilience. • Comprehensive and sustainable water finance frameworks at both global and national level should be developed and implemented to ensure resilient, inclusive and equitable water management.
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VI. Guiding questions (1000 words)

- How are the changes in the water cycle affecting your country and water management policies and practices?
- Do you have enough information on how extreme events are affecting your country and how they will be in the future in the different scenarios of CC? Would a Global international report on the state of Water Resources management and use be useful to guide national action?
- How is water availability affecting your agricultural and energy sectors? How are uses such as tourism and data centers affected? How are you expecting they will be affected in the future? Are your economic Ministers and Financial institutions aware?
- What are the main measures for improving planning and investment on water supplies that you are taking at national level and how are you preparing to increase resilience? Are you including them in the NDCs and NAPs?
- What role can River Basin Management Plans play in securing long-term water availability while delivering on economic and social priorities?
- What role can National Water Roadmaps have in promoting river basin management planning, the establishing of national financial frameworks for water resources management and promoting efficiency and sustainability of water abstractions.
- What regulatory or economic instruments have proven particularly successful in reducing water consumption and enhancing water resilience while maintaining or enhancing economic growth?
- How can wastewater treatment, rainwater harvesting and storage solutions contribute to sustaining economic activities despite increasing climate pressures and extreme weather events?
- How can digitization (such as smart meters, remote sensing, AI) be deployed to enhance water efficiency of operators and industries.
- How can the resilience of infrastructures be enhanced? How best can successful examples be shared and replicated?

- What are the most successful examples of Nature-based Solutions strengthening the resilience of infrastructures while enhancing cost-effectiveness?

Annex 1 Proposal for the composition of the panel

The panel needs to include four types of participants

- Governments
- Stakeholders
- Experts
- Civil society

This needs to be from the water and the non-water sector and specifically from the economic sectors emphasizing good practice policies.

The panel needs to include global and regional economic organizations including:

- The UN regional economic commissions
- FAO
- UN Energy
- UN Economics and trade

Water prosperity needs to reflect the specific differences and challenges of the different regions of the world. There needs to be a balance of participants, so these differences are reflected.

Annex 2: Proposed work schedule

Date	Event	Place	Objectives
1-23 January 2026	World Economic Forum	Davos-Klosters, Switzerland	To place water on the Davos climate agenda.
26-27 January 2026	Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference	Dakar	To define the scope of concept papers and contributors.

February-September 2026	Thematic stakeholder webinars, and side events taking advantage of the meetings of the different UN regional economic commissions • Africa • Europe • Latin America • Asia	Different regional meetings	To incorporate proposals from stakeholders.
March	39th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC39)	Brasilia, Brasil	To incorporate food security
April	Latinosan: Sanitation Conference for Latin America.	Dominican Republic	To discuss proposal with Latin American countries
April	World Summit on Renewable and Non-Renewable Energy	Frankfurt, germany	To incorporate proposals from stakeholders.
To be defined	Energy Transition and Sustainable Development Summit	Zaragoza, Spain	To incorporate proposals from stakeholders.
May	Meeting of OCDE and central banks on the impact of water risks on the financial system	Spain	To incorporate proposals from central banks.
May/June	Asia-Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the 2026 UN Water Conference (ESCAP)	Dushambe (Tayikistan)	To incorporate proposals from stakeholders.
August	World Water Week	Stockholm	To incorporate proposals from stakeholders.
Octobre 2026	Online	Online	Final wrapping up solutions webinar