

Astana Water Action

Improving Water Management and Strengthening Transboundary Water Cooperation

Additional resources and links

For questions, or to request more information relating to AWA, please contact the Environment for Europe secretariat at efe@unece.org, or the Water Convention secretariat at water.convention@unece.org.

The following links can provide you with more information about AWA and its supporting secretariats:

UNECE homepage: www.unece.org

UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy homepage:
www.unece.org/env/cep/welcome.html

7th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011):
www.unece.org/env/efe/astana/welcome.html

UNECE Environment for Europe homepage:
www.unece.org/env/efe/welcome.html

UNECE Water Convention homepage:
www.unece.org/env/water.html

Astana Water Action Information Page:
www.unece.org/env/awa



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UNITED NATIONS

About the Astana Water Action

The Astana Water Action (AWA) was developed in 2011 by the Chair of the Bureau of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, along with representatives from 13 countries and 8 international organizations and non-governmental organizations. AWA was endorsed by the Committee on Environmental Policy as one of the Conference outcomes and was subsequently launched at the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Astana in September 2011.

AWA is a collection of suggested actions for improving the status of water and water-related ecosystems through their sustainable management. It seeks to assist Governments in better managing their water resources according to the local, national and regional challenges they face by providing a series of concrete actions they can take, including to tackle issues that are not currently being addressed. Another objective is to provide arguments for improving Government funding for water management from various sources.

AWA can also contribute to the implementation of the water-related commitments expressed in numerous international agendas, including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and the outcome documents of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which focused on water and sanitation-related issues.



Currently, 21 countries and 4 organizations are participating in AWA and have committed to a total of 78 actions. The initiative remains open and active, meaning that additional countries and organizations are welcome to join AWA at any time during its implementation period, which runs from 2011 to 2016.

Participants in AWA

Eco-Tiras UNECE
Switzerland
United States of America
Azerbaijan Estonia
INBO Serbia Bosnia and Herzegovina
Romania Italy Bulgaria
Georgia Austria Portugal
The Republic of Moldova Croatia
Uzbekistan Montenegro
Czech Republic Ukraine
Hungary
EAP Task Force

AWA focus areas

- 1) Which policies proved to be effective to value and protect water-related ecosystems, including payment for ecosystem services? What are the main obstacles or gaps?
- 2) What policies proved to be effective in addressing human health issues related to water quality and quantity? What are the main obstacles and gaps?
- 3) What are the priorities/challenges in adapting management of water and water-related ecosystems to extreme weather events and to climate change?
- 4) What are the experiences and lessons learned from the cooperation in transboundary basins to improve water quality, manage water quantity and protect ecosystems?
- 5) What policy mixes and practical tools, such as integrated water resources management, pricing, standards and water users associations, are most effective in improving water efficiency by different water users, especially in agriculture, households and industrial operators?
- 6) How can we encourage investments to take into account the impacts on water quality and water quantity, energy and resource efficiency, as well as vulnerable populations?

ASTANA WATER ACTION

2011-2016

78 Actions: 47 in progress,
15 completed (as of 2013)

25 participating countries,
NGOs and international
organizations

Design and implement
institutional reforms

Develop river basin
management plans

Protect
water-related
ecosystems

Protect human
health

Harmonize national
legislation with EU
directives

Improve water
quality

Adapt to extreme
events and climate
change

Actions and progress

Participating delegations were invited to report on their progress in implementing the Astana Water Action at the nineteenth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy in October 2013. Fourteen countries and four organizations responded to the survey in advance of the 2013 session. Of the 62 actions described and discussed in the reports, 47 were in progress and 15 had been completed.

AWA actions span the spectrum of water management, including such projects as:

- The development of river basin management plans (e.g., Croatia and Serbia)
- The design and implementation of institutional reforms (e.g., Georgia)
- The harmonization of national legislation with European Union directives (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Serbia)
- Monitoring, information management, assessment and research (e.g., Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Switzerland)

Other actions are cooperative, either between countries, or between countries and organizations. For example:

- The analysis of the impact of global climate change in the Aral Sea Basin (United States of America with Central Asian participating countries)
- The development of integrated water resources management plans for the Dniester River Basin (the International Environmental Association of River Keepers (Eco-TIRAS) with the Republic of Moldova)
- Activities to support transboundary cooperation (e.g., Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, United States, UNECE, Eco-TIRAS and International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO))

Additional areas of progress include:

- The protection of water-related ecosystems (e.g., Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy and Republic of Moldova)
- The improvement of water quality (e.g., Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland)
- Adaptation to extreme events and climate change (e.g., Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Republic of Moldova and United States)



The progress described in the 2013 reports demonstrates the commitment, hard work and enthusiasm of participating countries and organizations. Their actions are helping to emphasize and strengthen the important role of sustainable water management and transboundary water cooperation in protecting and preserving water resources and ecosystems for the future. However, the implementation of these actions is not without its challenges.

Lessons learned

Participants cited difficulties regarding the availability of reliable and coherent data and challenges with sharing data across borders. Several countries also noted inadequate human resources. Despite these obstacles, many of those who submitted progress reports in 2013 stated that they found the Astana Water Action to be a useful tool in fostering a focused exchange of experiences between countries regarding national water management, as well as on transboundary and basin-to-basin cooperation. The ability of AWA to highlight the importance of water resources and improve their status at a high political level was also widely appreciated. However, several suggestions for improvement were made, including increasing the awareness and interaction of decision makers and the public as a means of increasing the political priority of water management projects in the future.



The Future of AWA

A final reporting cycle on the implementation and progress of AWA will take place in 2015 and will be reported on during a future session of the Committee on Environmental Policy. AWA remains open for stakeholders to continue using it in order to actively further the sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems.