

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Astana Water Action

Improving Water Management and Strengthening Transboundary Water Cooperation



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.

21 countries and 4 organizations participated in the AWA and committed to a total of 78 actions. The initiative remains active in that countries will continue to work towards the progress of the actions beyond the implementation period.



Participants in AWA



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

2011

78 Actions: 47 in progress,
26 completed (as of 2016)

Develop river basin
management plans

Protect human
health

Improve water
quality

Design and implement
institutional reforms

25 participating countries,
NGOs and international
organizations

Harmonize national
legislation with EU
Directives

Protect
water-related
ecosystems

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 for the special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy in February 2016. Eighteen countries and four organizations responded to the survey in advance of the 2016 session.

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))

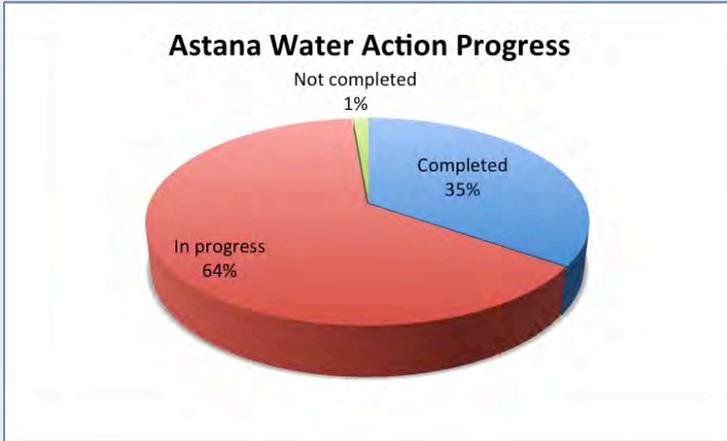
Additional areas of progress include:

- 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)



Progress of AWA in 2016

At the end of the official review period for AWA implementation in 2016, of the 73 actions that were reported on, 26 were completed, 46 remain in progress and 1 was not completed. Given the complexity of some of the actions, success within the review time frame would have been difficult in any case. From the reports of the participating countries and organizations, it is quite clear that those actions that are still in progress will continue to move forward and be completed.



Progress of AWA in 2016

Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems

1. Which policies proved to be effective to value and protect water-related ecosystems, including payment for ecosystem services?

Countries made significant progress in implementing their AWA commitments with regard to sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems through implementation of integrated water resources management, river basin management and planning, protecting and restoring ecosystems and the monitoring, collection and analysis of water-related data and information.

2. What policies proved to be effective in addressing human health issues related to water quality and quantity?

While very few of the actions under the human health segment of the AWA were completed, progress was made through the construction and/or improvement of water supply and wastewater treatment systems, remediation of contaminated sites and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health.



3. What are the priorities/challenges in adapting the management of water and water-related ecosystems to extreme weather events and to climate change?

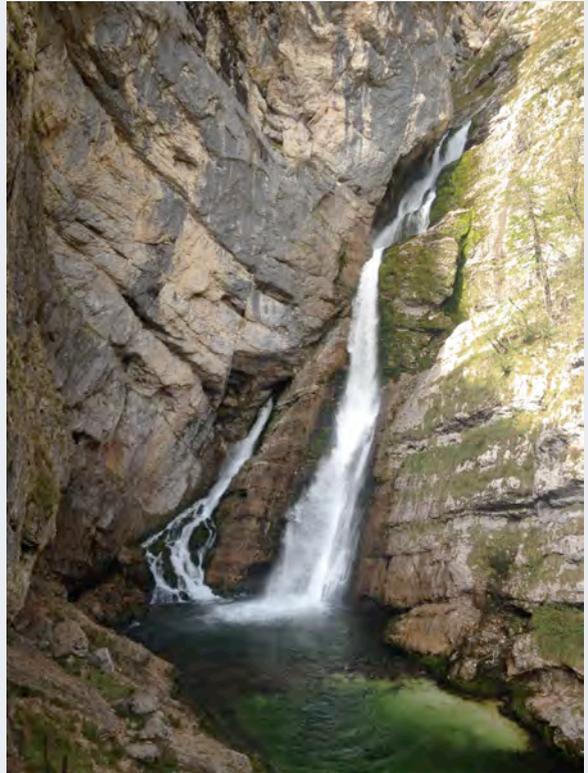
The majority of the actions found under the climate change thematic area of AWA were completed. These focused on climate change adaptation strategies, integrating climate change into integrated water resources management plans and the assessment of the future impacts of climate change.

Progress of AWA in 2016

Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems, cont.

4. What are the experiences and lessons learned from the cooperation in transboundary basins to improve water quality, manage water quantity and protect ecosystems?

Transboundary water management is a long process that is both political and technical in nature and the actions within the AWA framework, 20 of them that will go on for many years beyond the AWA, focused on developing transboundary management plans, negotiating agreements and engaging stakeholders.



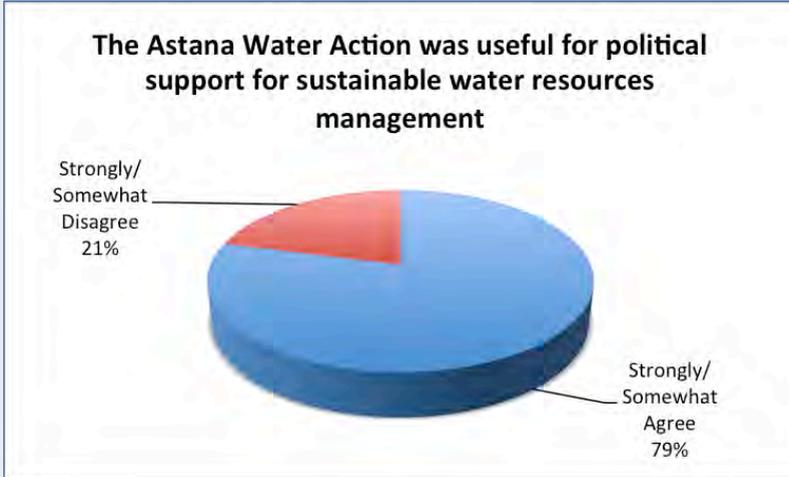
Sustainable management of water and greening the economy.

1. What policy mixes and practical tools, such as integrated water resources management, pricing, standards and water users associations, can be most effective to improve water efficiency by different water users, especially in agriculture, households and industrial operations?

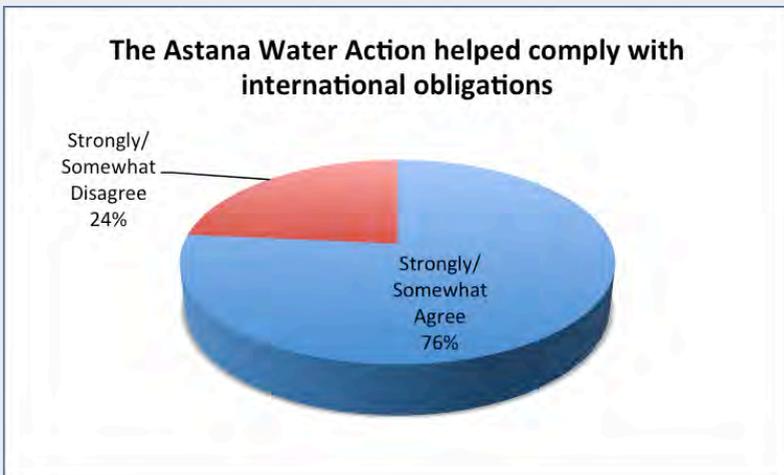
For both thematic areas under the greening the economy thematic rubric of AWA, five actions were carried out, most of them completed, with a focus on increasing water efficiency, developing climate change adaptation strategies and implementing cost-recovery models in water resources services provision.

Usefulness of AWA

More than three-quarters of the responding participants viewed the AWA in a positive light, the main reasons being that it helped elevate the status of water bodies, it provided political support for water-related actions and reinforced ongoing processes within the scope of the European Union Water Framework Directive.



Some 75 per cent of stakeholders believed that AWA helped them to comply with international obligations by providing the basis for harmonization of national legislation with the European Union Water Framework Directive, the implementation of the ECE Water Convention and carrying out bilateral agreements between basin States.





The progress described in the 2016 final report 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 has been not without its challenges.

Lessons learned

- Cooperation and coordination between stakeholders at the national level was a key to the success of the activities within AWA.
- Collection of and analysis of data is still a major hurdle in some countries where resources and capacities are not available to carry out those tasks.
- Lack of financial resources inhibited progress of some actions within the AWA framework.
- Prolonged political and social engagement related to actions proved to be a positive factor in ensuring the success of AWA activities.
- Political challenges, as well as reform processes, were sometimes a stumbling block to the success of AWA actions.



The Future of AWA

While the final reporting has been complete of the AWA, the actions that were started through this initiative do not end with the end of the AWA framework period. The great majority of the actions that were initiated through AWA will continue on beyond the end date using the momentum generated over the implementation period to continue to promote the sustainable management of water resources and water-related ecosystems.

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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