

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

# Water Convention Programme of Work 2019-2021

Responding to global water challenges in transboundary basins



**UNECE**

## The Water Convention

Transboundary cooperation over shared waters is crucial for ensuring environmental sustainability, economic growth, and conflict prevention. More than forty per cent of the global population relies on shared basins for their livelihoods, creating strong interdependencies between people, economies and ecosystems. Transboundary waters are at risk from rising populations, heightened agricultural and energy needs, and the effects of climate change which further exacerbate the current pressures placed on these basins. However, the majority of the 276 transboundary watercourses worldwide lacks an adequate legal and institutional cooperation framework, which hinders economic and social development, investments and regional integration.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) provides a unique global legal and intergovernmental framework for promoting the sustainable management of transboundary waters through cooperation. Following its global opening in 2016, Chad and Senegal acceded in 2018, many other countries are in the process<sup>1</sup> and more than 120 countries participate in its activities.

The Convention requires Parties to develop agreements and joint bodies, which are crucial for efficient, cooper-

ative management and development of transboundary basins and therefore for the sustainability of investments.

The main pillars of the Water Convention are to:

- Prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts
- Ensure reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters
- Cooperate through agreements and joint bodies

The Convention has strengthened water governance and transboundary and regional cooperation throughout the 25 years of its existence. More than 90 bilateral and basin agreements and arrangements for transboundary water cooperation have entered into force in the pan-European region alone since the entry into force of the Convention in 1996. Moreover, the Convention has offered a neutral platform for dialogue, integrating countries facing diverse challenges regarding water resources management.

The Water Convention is complemented by the Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention, co-serviced by the UNECE and WHO Europe.

## Role of the Water Convention in achieving global and regional commitments

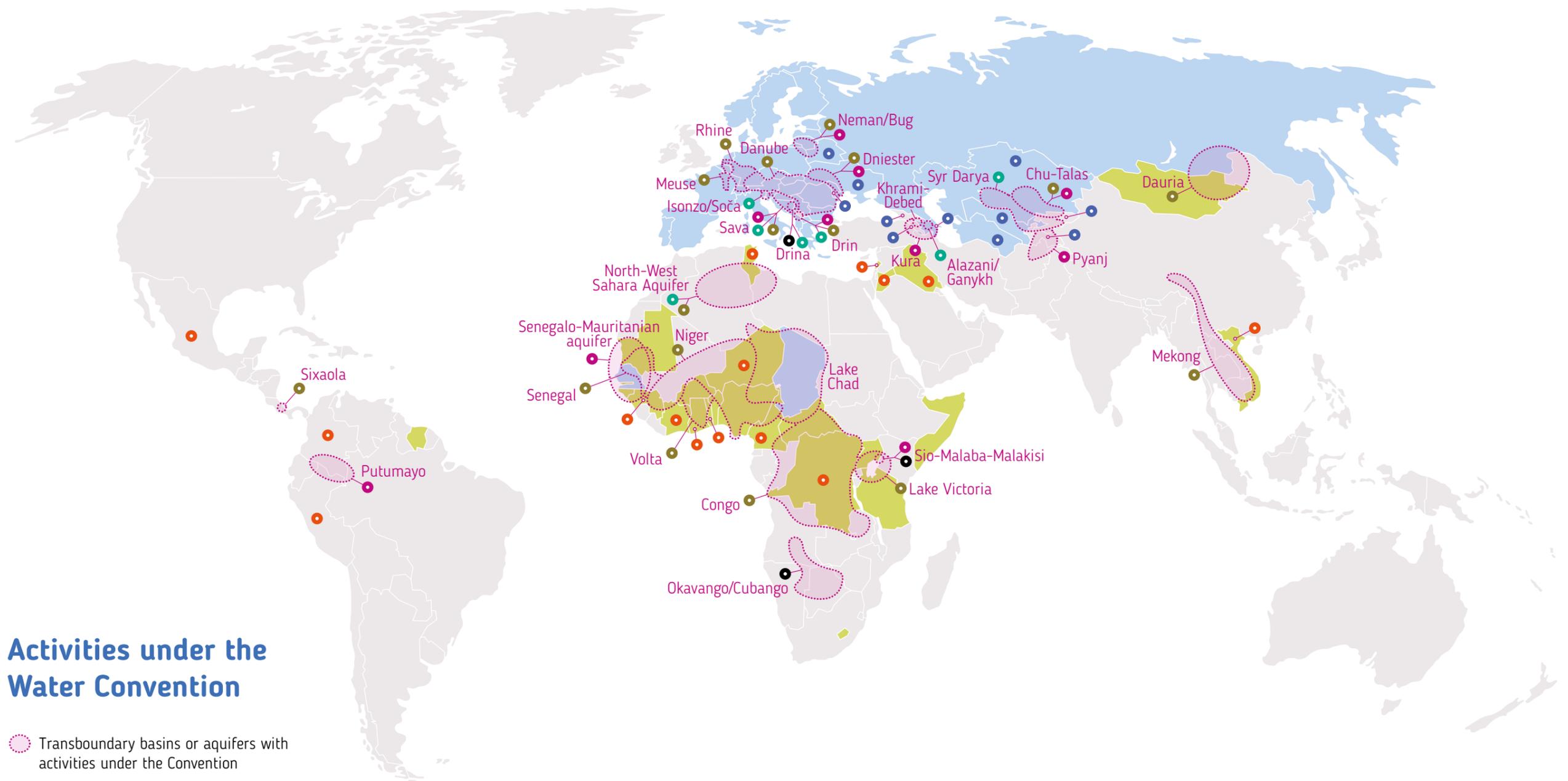
The Water Convention is a powerful tool to operationalize multilateral environmental agreements and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Water Convention and its Programme of Work 2019-2021 support the achievement of numerous multilateral environmental agreements and international commitments including the recently adopted:

- Paris Agreement
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
- Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development "The future we want"



<sup>1</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Mongolia, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Somalia, Suriname and Viet Nam.

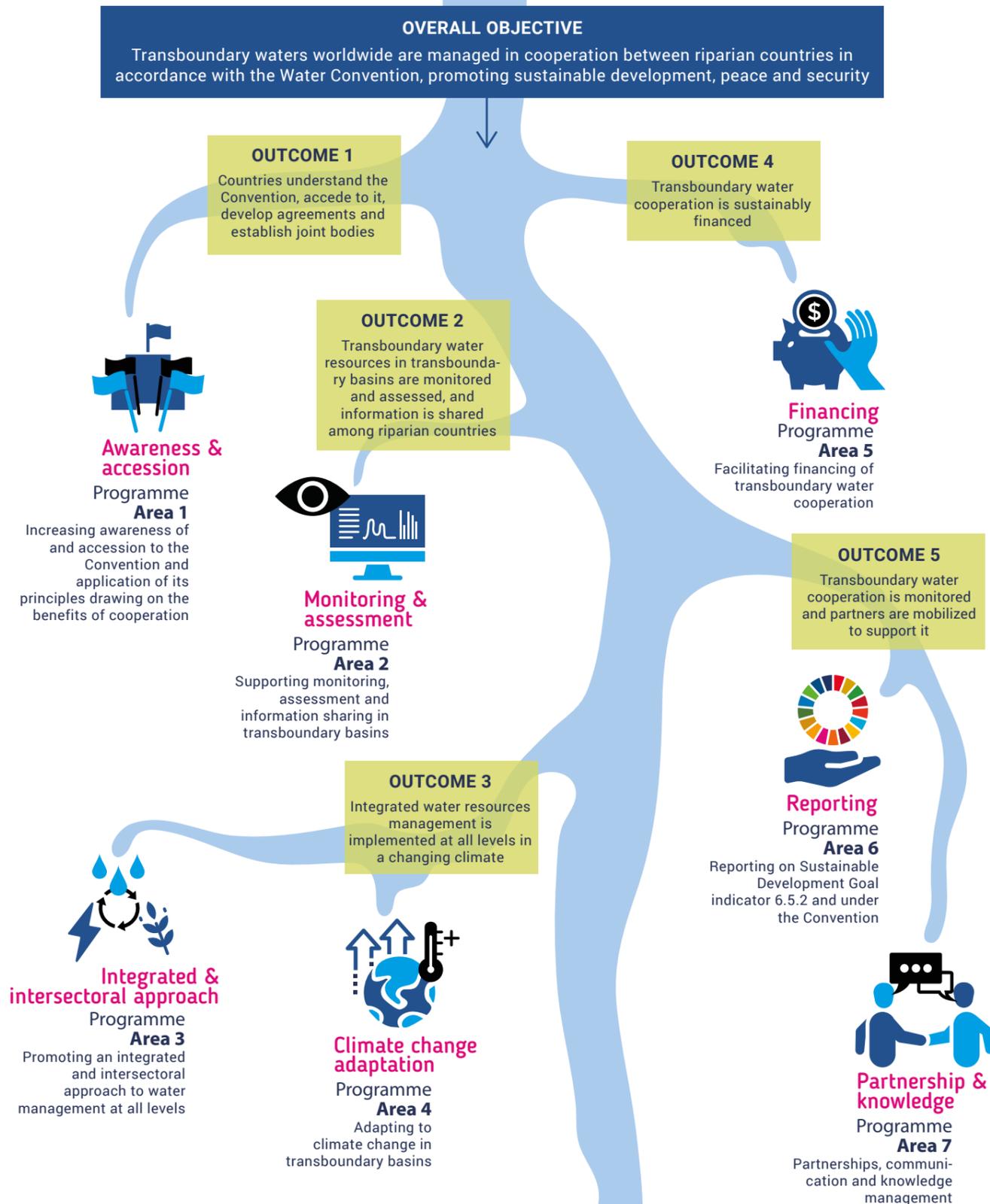




Map produced by Zoi Environment Network, April 2019

## Programme of Work

The main aim of the Programme of Work is to support implementation of the Convention and its principles. The Programme of work is implemented through the institutional framework of the Convention, including the Meeting of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies, the secretariat and the Parties. The governing bodies are regularly reviewing progress in the implementation of the work programme and the Convention.



## Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation

Overall Cost  
**\$2,477,000**

Since the global opening of the Convention an increasing number of countries has requested support for the process of accession. In order to improve the effectiveness of the global opening, raising awareness and knowledge about the Convention at technical and political levels in the countries is required and accession of riparian countries needs to be scaled up along with the implementation of its principles and goals. The development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies is particularly important. Therefore, the programme of work aims to support transboundary water cooperation throughout the accession and implementation processes.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Promote the Water Convention at relevant global and regional meetings and through cooperation with various partners. Training will be conducted to enhance the capacities of key actors and experts to accede to and implement the Convention, including two training events of practitioners to promote and apply the Convention.
- Support accession of countries through the provision of legal and technical advice, tailor-made national workshops, regional, sub-regional and basin events, through exchange of experience and by developing and providing guidance material on the Conventions provisions and its accession process. Exchange of experience will be fostered among others through cooperation between countries in the accession process and those who already acceded to serve as examples and guide through the procedure in joining the Convention.
- Promote and communicate the benefits of transboundary cooperation by applying the policy Guidance note on this topic adopted in 2015 for example in the Cubango-Okavango basin and prepare a brief for policymakers highlighting good practice examples.
- Support the development of agreements, the establishment of joint bodies, and strengthening of institutions through the implementation of basin-level projects<sup>2</sup> in the Kura, Pyanj, Neman, Bug, Dniester, Drin, Chu Talas, Sio-Malaba-Malakisi, and the Senegalo-Mauritanian aquifer and other basins upon request of countries and subject to availability of resources. This will be coupled with support to regional cooperation, including on promotion of dam safety and water quality in the Aral Sea basin or to create regional frameworks for water cooperation specific to African countries.
- Support the development of agreements and establishment of joint bodies through the organization of a glob-

al workshop in 2020 to aid countries in creating and improving transboundary water cooperation agreements.

- Support countries by offering advice on implementation and compliance with the Convention through the Implementation Committee and by promoting the implementation mechanism through communication activities and events.

In 2017, the Convention for the prevention of conflicts related to the management of shared water resources in Central Africa was approved by 11 states. The Convention was negotiated in the framework of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), with the support of the Water Convention secretariat and the African Development Bank. The Central African region encompasses 16 major transboundary rivers, 5 transboundary lakes and 17 transboundary aquifer systems. The process has benefited from the accession of Chad to the Water Convention and other countries are encouraged to follow Chad in acceding to the Water Convention. This could be important given that the majority of the region's shared waters still lacks a solid framework for cooperation which is considered vital in view of existing and emerging pressures including degradation of water resources, increasing water use or the impacts of climate change.

Accession to the Water Convention by Chad and Senegal in 2018 has increased interministerial cooperation and should soon reduce conflict in the countries' basins through further transboundary cooperation. This can particularly help the Lake Chad basin, which hosts a population of over 8 million people. More than 20 other countries interested in ratifying the Convention from Africa, Asia, Middle East, and Latin America will likely see similar impacts upon their accession.

Cooperation on the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi River Basin between Kenya and Uganda, supported by UNECE and IUCN, led to the development of a Joint Basin Investment Framework and a MoU on further sustainable management of the basin. This can yield benefits for over 4 million people and contributes to a fair and sustainable use of shared water resources.

<sup>2</sup> The costs for these projects are not included in the programme of work, and they will only be implemented if dedicated funds can be found. Funding is available for the Neman-Bug, Dniester and Drin basins.



Programme  
Area 2

Overall Cost  
\$422,000

## Supporting monitoring, assessment and information sharing in transboundary basins

Comparable information and harmonization of monitoring and assessment methods across transboundary waters are vital in establishing a common basis for management and decision-making. Transboundary water resources management also requires information exchange and shared information systems including appropriate data management and uniform procedures.

Key obligations under the Convention include joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters and information exchange, which still prove to be challenging.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Organize a global workshop on data and information exchange, to discuss good practices and to craft recommendations on data and information exchange in transboundary waters.
- Organize regional capacity-building events to address region-specific needs regarding monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters.
- Provide tailored assistance to cooperation processes on monitoring and assessment including through studies, analysis of water uses, compari-

son of monitoring systems or expert support and gather experience to provide guidance through updated material to assist with the development of cooperative monitoring processes. Exchanges will be encouraged between experienced parties and river basin management organizations and new and less experienced ones.

- Collect information on common challenges and needs and identify updating needs and gaps in the existing monitoring guidance under the Convention to inform its possible review. Recent technological and other developments in monitoring such as application of remote sensing and citizen science will be considered for the review.



Programme  
Area 3

Overall Cost  
\$3,801,000

## Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels

Integrated water resources management is a universally recognized best practice and involves coordination among different uses and users of water that ensures that economic and social benefits can be maximized without causing damage to the sustainability of ecosystems. Sustainable water management lies at the core of the Convention and contributes greatly to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG6 and the target 6.5, which highlights the importance of balancing different water sector needs and environmental requirements. By considering intersectoral impacts from policies and other sectoral developments beyond water management and by building on an improved understanding about the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus in transboundary basins, more sustainable and collaborative ways of development can be found.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Organize thematic sessions on different aspects of integrated water resources management to highlight relevant topics, such as the development of transboundary basin management plans, jointly managing transboundary aquifers or the creation of basin councils to promote integrated water resources management in transboundary basins.
- Complete nexus basin assessments in the North-West Sahara Aquifer System and in two transboundary basins in the Western Balkans, namely the Drin and Drina, and provide advice to the nexus dialogue in the Niger basin.
- Develop a synthesis document to summarize nexus-related solutions and good practices to support intersectoral dialogue and assessments through the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus approach. Results of nexus assessments will be shared and experience of application of the nexus methodology will be disseminated.
- Prepare a resource document to encourage the consideration of water and environment related trade-offs and synergies in developing renewable energy.
- Develop a handbook on transboundary water allocation that will serve as a tool and source of information on equitable and sustainable allocation of water in a transboundary context, detailing techni-

cal and legal approaches, relevant considerations, and benefits of allocation agreements.

- Organize two regional workshops on water allocation.
- Continue the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management in Central Asia, Caucasus and Eastern Europe to assist countries in legal, regulatory and institutional reforms in water management and in achieving the water-related Sustainable Development Goals and in setting of targets for sustainable water management, safe drinking water, and adequate sanitation.
- Organize exchanges between Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia through Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management.

The Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus assessments carried out under the Water Convention in 7 basins strengthened the capacity in the administrations of 20 countries in addressing intersectoral issues, such as reconciling the differing objectives of energy, water management and environment protection, and to identify concrete mutually beneficial actions to make resources management more sustainable.

Since 2006, the National Policy Dialogues on IWRM under the European Union Water Initiative, co-led by UNECE, have driven water sector reforms to enhance transboundary cooperation, modernize legal and institutional frameworks and improve water quality for the benefit of millions of citizens in 10 countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.



Programme  
Area 4

Overall Cost  
\$1,807,000

## Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

Climate change impacts on water resources are likely to intensify, for example through an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that will affect the amount of available water, its overall quality, and related ecosystems. Transboundary cooperation on adaptation to climate change in shared basins and transboundary adaptation measures are essential to help prevent negative impacts from climate change and ensure effectiveness of adaptation. Funding for transboundary adaptation is however often difficult to secure due to a lack of capacity and the national orientation of climate change funding.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Promote transboundary cooperation and implement selected projects on the ground on the development of transboundary vulnerability assessments, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, and prioritization of mutually beneficial adaptation measures, including in the Dniester, Chu-Talas, Neman and Sava river basins.
- Foster exchange of experience on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins through the organization of two global workshops on transboundary climate change adaptation. Showcase good practices and lessons learned to encourage collaboration and exchange of experience.
- Organize regular meetings of the global network of basins working on climate change.
- Contribute to global policy processes on climate and disasters such as under the UNFCCC, UNISDR and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to promote the importance of water and transboundary cooperation in adaptation and promote the mainstreaming of water and transboundary adaptation into national and basin planning documents. This will be complemented by the translation and dissemination of the "Words into Action" implementation guide which focuses on

water-related disasters and supports implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

- Support transboundary basins in financing climate change adaptation through the finalization and translation of the publication "Preparing bankable projects for financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins".
- Organize trainings on preparing bankable project proposals for climate change adaptation at basin and regional level, such as in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Asia, or Latin America and at the basin level.
- Increase collaboration with global climate funds to better synergize the relationship between climate funding and transboundary cooperation.

Vulnerability to climate change has been reduced in at least 7 major basins worldwide of the UNECE global network of basins working on climate change adaptation through the development of transboundary adaptation strategies, training for preparing bankable project proposals and other activities.

Vulnerability to flood risks and conflict potential has been reduced in the Dniester basin with a population of 8 million through numerous adaptation measures implemented.



Programme  
Area 5

Overall Cost  
\$288,000

## Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation

A key aspect for ensuring sustainable transboundary basin development and cooperation is funding. Funding requirements and sources depend on the scope, mandate, objectives and ambition of the transboundary cooperation arrangement. The lack of sustainable funding models however often prevents countries from deepening their cooperation. Many countries also face difficulties in financing transboundary water cooperation from national sources since often the benefits of transboundary cooperation are not always known and funding is often targeted to national and local water projects. Sustainable financing models for joint bodies and cooperation processes as well as transboundary basin development are therefore crucial.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Highlight the importance of funding transboundary water cooperation and basin development at the global level.
- Offer support to national authorities and joint bodies to secure funding and work toward developing new funding strategies, for example by organizing a global workshop in 2020 with partners to showcase existing sources of funding, seek cooperation with min-

istries of finance and relevant financial institutions and discuss challenges, good practices with financing transboundary basin development, including from national sources, through investment plans etc.

- Produce a publication on challenges and approaches to financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development.
- Increase collaboration with financial institutions like the ADB, AFDB, EIB, GEF, the World Bank, and bilateral development agencies.





Overall Cost  
\$740,000

## Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

In 2015, a regular reporting mechanism was introduced under the Convention to review and enhance the implementation of the Convention, which coincided with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. Target 6.5 calls on countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels and indicator 6.5.2 was introduced, with UNECE as designated co-custodian agency, to measure progress on transboundary water cooperation. To maximize synergies and efficiencies, the reporting under the Convention and the reporting under 6.5.2 were coupled for Parties of the Convention through the use of one reporting template. Other countries were invited to report on indicator 6.5.2 by using a questionnaire also based on the reporting template under the Convention. The first reporting exercise has shown that reporting offers a variety of benefits such as improved national cooperation between water actors, enhanced political attention to cooperation and exchange of experience and identification of gaps.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Prepare a guide on reporting under the Convention to clarify terminology, instructions for reporting, and, potentially, good practice examples.
- Carry out in 2020-2021 the second reporting exercise under the Convention and indicator 6.5.2 of the SDGs.
- Work to improve countries' ability to report and the

overall quality of reports by offering trainings at regional level and opportunities to share experiences, such as at the meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management.

- Develop a proposal for an online reporting system and database to ease the reporting process and offer analysis.
- Organize regional workshops to support countries in the next reporting cycle.



Overall Cost  
\$208,000

## Partnerships, communication and knowledge management

Strong partnerships and effective communication are key for the implementation, globalization, and overall success of the Convention. In order to enhance the impacts of activities under the Convention, strengthened cooperation and synergies with partners at the global and regional level, enhanced dissemination of information on the activities under the Convention and advancing the knowledge management are therefore crucial.

In 2019-2021, the following activities are being carried out under the Water Convention:

- Enhance cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements in order to increase awareness of the Convention beyond the ECE region and increase the exchange of information.
- Co-service the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Wa-

ter and Industrial Accidents, among other to promote and support the implementation of the Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for the Management and Retention of Firefighting Water.

- Improve communication and knowledge management through preparing communication materials on the Convention, media work, interviews and press releases, the updating of the Convention website, and offering regular updates to stakeholders via newsletters.



## Institutional Framework

The implementation of the programme of work is supported by the following bodies under the Convention, which review and provide guidance to the implementation of the Convention:



International Water Management Institute (IWMI)  
 League of Arab States (LAS)  
 Mekong River Commission (MRC)  
 Niger Basin Authority (NBA)  
 Oregon State University (OSU)  
 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)  
 Organization of American States (OAS)  
 Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention)  
 Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC)  
 Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)  
 Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)  
 Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS)  
 Scientific-Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (SIC-ICWC)  
 Southern African Development Community (SADC)  
 Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)  
 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)  
 United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)  
 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP)  
 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESWCA)  
 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)  
 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)  
 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)  
 United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSD)  
 United Nations University Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES)  
 UN-Water  
 World Bank (WB)  
 World Health Organization (WHO)  
 World Meteorological Organization (WMO)  
 World Water Council  
 World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)  
 Zoï Environment Network.

## Partners

The Convention is working with the following partners in implementing the programme of work:

Adaptation Fund  
 African Development Bank (AfDB)  
 African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW)  
 African Network of Basin Organizations (ANBO)  
 Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA)  
 Asian Development Bank (ADB)  
 Conference of Ibero-American Water Directors (CODIA)  
 Development Bank of Latin America (CAF)  
 Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)  
 European Commission  
 European Environment Agency (EEA)  
 European Investment Bank (EIB)  
 Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC IFAS)  
 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
 Geneva Water Hub  
 German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)  
 Global Environment Facility and its International Waters Learning, Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN) project  
 Global Water Partnership (GWP)  
 Green Climate Fund (GCF)  
 Green Cross International (GCI)  
 Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)  
 International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)  
 International Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin (CICOS)  
 International Commission for the Protection of the Danube (ICPDR)  
 International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)  
 International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC)  
 International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)  
 International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)  
 International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC)  
 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)  
 Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

## Acknowledgement of donors

The Water Convention would like to thank its current donors:

African Development Bank, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, European Investment Bank, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Global Environment Facility, Hungary, Italy, IW:LEARN, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, University of Geneva.

## Invitation to donors

The Water Convention's work is mostly funded by voluntary contributions; there is no mandatory assessed contribution scheme.

As of March 2019, around one quarter (about 3 million USD) of the programme of work for 2019-2021 is still unfunded. Funds are particularly needed for programme areas 2 on monitoring and assessment, 3.3. on water allocation, 5 on facilitating financing for transboundary water cooperation, 6 on reporting under the Convention and on SDG indicator 6.5.2 and 7 on partnerships, communication and knowledge management.

Donors are invited to contribute, ideally without earmarking to particular programme areas and events so that the funds can be used where most needed.

From a donor perspective, contributing to the implementation of the Water Convention's work has many benefits. It means joining forces with other actors to support a need driven programme, which is regularly evaluated. Contributing to the Convention's programme of work also means addressing, in a comprehensive manner, the variety of transboundary water cooperation challenges and acting at both technical and political levels. Given the long-term nature of the Convention's work, being a Convention's donor also guarantees that efforts undertaken are sustained and thus durable.

For more information or for any question, please refer to:

[www.unece.org/env/water](http://www.unece.org/env/water)  
[water.convention@un.org](mailto:water.convention@un.org)  
 The full programme of work is available at <https://bit.ly/2F4EvdF>

# Water Convention Programme of Work 2019-2021

Responding to global water challenges in transboundary basins

Transboundary river and lake basins account for nearly half of the earth's land surface and generate roughly 60 per cent of global freshwater flow. There are also more than 600 shared aquifers. Forty percent of the world's population lives in shared basins. These shared waters create environmental, social, economic and political interdependencies.

Transboundary waters in many areas of the world are however not used sustainably and cooperation in many transboundary basins is not adequate to tackle the existing and emerging challenges. The situation is projected to aggravate in the coming decades owing to increasing pressures from population growth, agriculture, energy production and the impacts of climate change.

Transboundary water cooperation is therefore increasingly vital to prevent conflicts and ensure effective and sustainable management of shared resources.

The Water Convention provides a key legal and intergovernmental framework for promoting transboundary water cooperation, the sustainable management of shared water resources and has proven its effectiveness over the past 25 years. The Convention, which became available for accession by all United Nations Member States in 2016, fosters the implementation of integrated water resources management, particularly through the basin approach, and is a powerful tool to promote and operationalize the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. It supports in particular the implementation of SDG6 and other related Goals such as SDG2, SDG3, SDG7, SDG13, SDG15, SDG16 and SDG17.

This brochure summarizes the Programme of Work for 2019-2021 under the Water Convention adopted at the eighth Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Astana, 10-12 October 2018). The programme of work is intended to support the implementation of the Convention and its principles, with the overall objective that transboundary waters worldwide are managed in cooperation between riparian countries to promote sustainable development, peace and security.

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