United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028

Contribution of the European Union and its Member States to the concept papers on the themes of the interactive dialogues

Theme 1: **Water for Health: Access to WASH, including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation[1]**

According to the latest SDG 6 progress report (July 2021): Over 2 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water and 2.3 billion people still lack basic hand washing facilities at home, almost half of the global population (3.6 billion people) lack safe sanitation services. The current rates of progress would need to increase fourfold to reach universal access to drinking water (SDG 6.1[2]), sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6.2[3]) by 2030. Only half (51%) of health care facilities globally have a basic hand hygiene service. Without adequate, safe and affordable water and sanitation, billions of people around the globe are unable to lead healthy lives, to build secure livelihoods, to attend school or to be resilient to climate and other shocks, women and girls being particularly affected.

Accelerating the implementation of SDG 6.1 and 6.2 means to accelerate countries' commitments to promote and protect the human rights to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and to adopt a human rights-based approach that ensures that no one is left behind. The use of instruments, such as the Protocol on Water and Health[4], with well-established frameworks on water and health aspects, may contribute to the solution and achieve an integrated WASH and health approach.

To this end, the interactive dialogue on theme 1 should call on countries to further strengthen and implement the human rights to water and sanitation (as well as related rights) in their national legislation and present plans including targeted and effective financing to accelerate the implementation of these rights through mechanisms for improved accountability, transparency, regulation and performance of duty-bearers, public as well as private, with legal protection of personal and domestic water needs where necessary.

Furthermore, it should call for a re-enforcement of the monitoring and regular analysis of the status of the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and for promoting a sound and reliable methodology to monitor the principles of having sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable access to drinking water (SDG 6.1), and the principles of having physical and affordable, safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable access to sanitation (SDG 6.2, in line with resolution 70/169).

Adequate solutions are urgently needed to fulfil the human rights to water and sanitation worldwide as well as all water-related human rights, including the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

The interactive dialogue on this theme 1 should provide the opportunity to:

- Highlight the role of water in preserving and securing other human rights, beyond the human rights to water and sanitation (such as the right to dignity, food, health, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the right to an adequate standard of living), whilst paying particular attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups including children/youth, persons with disabilities, women and girls, minorities, indigenous peoples, and rural populations.
- Underline the need to ensure a human rights-based approach in water management, and applying all-encompassing, open, inclusive, democratic policy processes to water governance

[1] The rights-based approach should be streamlined across all themes as a cross-cutting dimension.

[2] SDG 6.1 "By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all".

[3] SDG 6.2 "By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situation".

[4] Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. UNECE/WHO Europe

and in the management of freshwater ecosystems, its ecosystem services and biodiversity, as well as transparent, equitable and effective service regulation mechanisms and service provision, to ensure that no one is left behind.

- Highlight the role of adequate and sound public policies established by Governments, as well as transparent service regulation mechanisms and effective service provision, to protect end-user's interest and ensure sustainability and the implementation of the human rights approach.
- Highlight the substantial financing gap still existing in the water and sanitation sector and the need to close this gap through the mobilisation of innovative and inclusive finance from public and private, as well as international and domestic sources. Call for major commitments to be made in the context of the UN Conference.
- Encourage commitments from member states on the following:
    1. Inclusive, non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in public institutions, including healthcare facilities, schools and other public places.
    2. Sustainable management of WASH, including safe menstrual health and hygiene management as well as safe management and disposal of wastewater;
    3. Include WASH in integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) implementation, including social equity, economic efficiency and environmental sustainability.
    4. Promoting healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, including by advancing the implementation of integrated water resources management and promoting sustainable use of water resources, especially from other sectors such as agriculture and industry, and reducing wastewater pollution;
    5. Empowering all citizens and particularly women, girls and marginalized groups to be actively involved in upholding their own and others' rights, and ensuring an inclusive, effective and meaningful participation as well as equal representation of all citizens, particularly of women, girls and marginalized groups in all spheres of life, e.g. via targeted training and education, and capacity development.
    6. Improving professional capacities of duty-bearers through education and vocational training for existing workforces and newly attracted workers particularly young professionals and women;
- Ensure the effective access to WASH by helping the implementation of inclusive and equitable policies, notably by creating adapted tariff structures for water and sanitation that take into account users' social profile.
- Request to systematically include the human rights-based approach with its five working principles (1. applying all rights, 2. participation and access to the decision-making process, 3. non-discrimination and equal access, 4. accountability and rule of law, and 5. transparency and access to information) in projects on safe drinking water and sanitation, water governance, as well as management and preservation of freshwater ecosystems, biodiversity etc. to safeguard all water-related human rights.
- Gather information on access to safe drinking water to identify groups suffering from lack of such access, collect data on water leakages in water distribution systems, and promote use of innovative solutions which increase effectiveness in management of drinking water infrastructure;
- Committing to support the protection and fulfilment of the human rights to water and sanitation in the face of climate change, disasters, conflict and health emergencies, via:

1. Inclusion of water/WASH in energy and water security strategies, and climate change mitigation and adaptation plans, policies and budgets, and vice-versa;
2. Integrated and aligned ways of working between actors in crises and post-crises along the humanitarian-development nexus, with consistent attention to human rights, including the protection of water resources, water personnel and water infrastructure in armed conflicts through advocating for compliance with International humanitarian law and International Human Rights Law. In that regard, the EU wishes to raise the issue of lack of access to water and sanitation in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion and the need for action in supporting Ukraine in the rebuild of water supply and sewage infrastructure;
3. Integration of WASH and water issues into health system strengthening, nutrition, and pandemic preparedness, including via promotion of the Protocol on Water and Health, and One Health approach.

More generally, this interactive dialogue should be the opportunity to:

- Call for countries to further respect, protect and fulfil the human rights to water and sanitation in their national legislation and present plans including adequate financing to accelerate implementation of these rights, including through mechanisms for improving accountability, transparency, regulation and performance of duty-bearers, public as well as private, with legal protection of personal and domestic water needs where necessary.
- Call for a re-enforcement of the monitoring, regular analysis and disaggregation of data concerning of the status of the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and for developing a methodology to monitor the principles of having sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable access to drinking water, and the principles of having physical and affordable safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable access to sanitation (in line with resolution 70/169, its call for monitoring and its definition of access).

Theme 2: Water for Sustainable Development: Valuing Water, Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Sustainable Economic and Urban Development

Global trends such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing number of conflicts are exacerbating food and energy insecurity as well as ecosystem degradation, leading to an increased competition for water among sectors and tensions over scarce water resources. To this end, the water-energy-food-ecosystems (WEFE) nexus must be strengthened to ensure a sustainable supply of water for agriculture and food production, energy, ecosystem services as well as other benefits

This interactive dialogue should highlight the importance of clean and healthy water-related ecosystems and their services for sustainable development, as well as the value of circular economy across the water-energy-food-ecosystem (WEFE) nexus. More generally, it should underscore the need for transformative change towards sustainable consumption and production, for achieving a sustainable and resilient development specifically in all water-related sectors.

The concept paper on theme 2 should recognize resource efficiency and sustainability as a priority objective in the water-context and recommend that water-smart circular economy solutions that take into account local contexts are promoted in the discussions and included in the voluntary commitments under the Water Action Agenda. This includes both circular economy approaches in the water sector itself (for which IWRM and consistency between sectoral public policy objectives are a key tool) and for biological and chemical products to reduce pollution, but also, importantly, water use and re-use of treated.

Resource efficiency and sustainability should be recognized as a priority objective in the water-context and water-smart circular economy solutions that take into account local contexts and should be promoted in the discussions and included in the voluntary commitments under the Water Action Agenda. This includes both circular economy approaches in the water sector itself for which integrated water resources management (IWRM) and consistency between sectoral public policy objectives are a key tool, and for biological and chemical products to reduce pollution, but also, importantly, water use and re-use of treated wastewater and impact in water intensive (industrial/agricultural) sectors and domains.

The interactive dialogue on this theme 2 should be the opportunity to:

- Support circular economy approaches across the water-energy-food-ecosystems (WEFE) nexus at all levels:
    - Design and champion a set of circular economy indicators aligned with relevant SDG targets (e.g., 6.3, 6.4, 7.2, 13.2) to progressively mainstream the concept of circular economy and monitor progress towards decoupling economic growth from resource use, including indicators related to use of natural resources and to pollution (nutrients, pesticides, persistent organic pollutants, metals, (micro)plastics, etc)
    - Implementation of rational water utilisation schemes for the development of surface and ground water-supply sources; potential sources, including non-conventional resources, have to be supported by concurrent water conservation and wastage minimisation measures to prevent depletion.
    - Encourage water efficiency measures backed by equitable and sustainable water accounting and allocation arrangements, in an IWRM framework, including transparent permitting or pricing where appropriate. Examples in agriculture include irrigation scheduling, agro ecological practices, crop selection, precision irrigation, and soil management. In energy, water-smart energy investment strategies (backed

by environmental impact assessments) and low-water footprint power generation options (e.g. wind, solar) are relevant.

- Stimulate policies and technological innovation to improve water use efficiency and resource recovery with the appropriate qualitative requirements/ re-use rates in urban environments and water intensive sectors, including agriculture, industry and waste (water) management.
- Encourage the use of remote sensing technologies to monitor and report on agricultural water productivity, such as the Water Productivity Open-Access Portal, developed by FAO.

This interactive dialogue should also be the opportunity to showcase the importance of integrated water resources management in ensuring clean and healthy water-related ecosystems and their services in the context of the WEFE nexus, and from source to sea[5], as a key means to achieve a sustainable development.

The conference enhances understanding about the importance of and steps up the efforts towards Integrated Water Resources Management as an underpinning and holistic policy approach that should be reflected across all key sectors (in particular food production, energy and ecosystems) and for all SDG 6 GAF accelerators – governance, innovation, data and information, financing, and capacity development – between stakeholders from the public and private sectors, and civil society, and from source-to-sea, supported by strengthened water governance at all levels.

Concrete outcomes that should be underlined in the concept paper to reach this objective, include the following:

- Promote a transformative public and political attitude change that recognises opportunities and threats related to water for global prosperity, by fully implementing the four key components of IWRM: 1) enabling environment with an ambitious policy and legal framework, 2) institutional framework which guarantees wide participation; 3) management instruments at basin and national scales which allow for water quality and quantity control, protection of water ecosystems and water allocation, 4) adequate funding for water infrastructure and for water management.
- Support at all levels:
  - Implementation of existing commitments and strategies and as appropriate adoption of new quantitative and qualitative measures or targets related to IWRM, supported by adequate monitoring and evaluation and transboundary cooperation (in the framework of relevant international agreements, such as the UN Water Conventions; and internationally agreed goals, such as the SDGs (especially SDG 6.5), Rio Conventions, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework) for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the New Urban Agenda, among others.
  - The integration of sustainable IWRM within sectoral policies including WASH to protect water sourcing areas, energy, food and agriculture, forestry, health, industry, waste (water) management and protected areas, which assesses externalities and fosters cooperation between relevant ministries (with, at minimum, a do-no-harm approach).
  - Stress the importance of sustainable management and use of water in cities ('sponge cities') and adopt sustainable urban planning practices relating to water, notably favouring the infiltration of water into soils.

[5] Also relevant for themes 3 and 4.

    - Address land-sea interactions and source-to-sea aspects of water management through integrated coastal zone management practices and Maritime Spatial Planning.
    - Effective monitoring to better identify and realise synergies and reduce trade-offs, including through low-cost methods for standardised data collection, analysis and communication, and the development of capacities to gather, monitor, and exchange hydrometeorological and hydrological data (including flow monitoring) in developing countries, with provision to ensure uptake and use of information across sectors.
    - Management of soils and water held in soils ("green water") as a main source of freshwater for rain-fed agriculture, including effective and sustainable soil and water conservation practices, e.g. by promoting agroecology or favouring the use of drip irrigation and reused water in irrigated agriculture.
    - Inclusive, participatory, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral mechanisms of consultation, coordination and decision-making at all levels to implement IWRM, including citizens, particularly women and girls, service providers and others sectors using water resources.
    - Integration of water-related aspects into relevant research and training programs across sectors to increase knowledge and synergy, with special attention given to women and girls.
- Foster better understanding of the impact of land-based activities on coastal and marine ecosystems (e.g., in terms of change of runoff and recharge, downstream flow of nutrients, pesticides, persistent organic pollutants, metals, and (micro) plastics) in the framework of relevant global frameworks (e.g. SDGs 6 and 14; regional seas conventions).
- Ensure that the role of coastal wetlands - marshes, seagrass meadows and mangroves - receives greater attention, stressing their fundamental role as carbons sinks, in protecting coasts and in contributing to the water quality.
- Commit to strengthening water governance at national and all levels, including through effective coordination mechanisms, recognizing that the fragmentation of responsibilities for water resources development among sectoral agencies has proved to be an even greater impediment to promoting IWRM.
- Highlight the role of Governments in IWRM implementation, in view of their responsibility for developing sound participatory process which ensures representation of all stakeholders in an equitable and non-discriminatory basis.
- Promote the use of space observation data for Integrated Water Resources Management and other water-related topics

Theme 3: Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and DRR

Climate change is primarily experienced through increased rainfall variability, with greater risks for floods and droughts and reduced predictability of water availability. Since 2000, over 3 billion people worldwide have been affected by water-related natural disasters such as floods and droughts with devastating effects on livelihoods

This interactive dialogue should contribute to underline the role of healthy water-related ecosystems and of sustainable water resources management for climate resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Furthermore, it should catalyse a perception shift to recognise that water is a pivotal, connecting theme and potential driver for transformational change to tackle the triple planetary crisis – climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Equally, the role of healthy water-related ecosystems and their services for achieving not only SDG 6, but the 2030 Agenda in its entirety as well as other global commitments (e.g. Paris Agreement, CBD, UNCCD, Sendai Framework) should be recognized more clearly.

The interactive dialogue on this theme 3 should be the opportunity to:

- Achieve a global commitment about the importance of implementing effectively the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework for achieving the water-related targets, in coordination with the Water Action Agenda.
- Accelerate efforts to protect and sustainably manage ecosystems and natural resources, and promoting the key role that ecosystems and their services play in maintaining water quality and quantity.
- Strengthen the implementation of measures in line with the “do-not-harm principle” to significantly reduce water pollution, and increase water quality and water use efficiency to thereby reduce water losses, as well as promote domestic and industrial wastewater treatment.
- Reinforce the polluter-pays to prevent damage to human health or the environment.
- Support investments aiming at reducing water losses, such as modernization of water supply infrastructure; supporting investments in treated wastewater reuse, in particular in agriculture.
- Support education and training on sustainable use of water, involving society and industry in sustainable management of water resources.
- Promote the adoption and strengthen the implementation of protection, conservation and restoration measures for water-related ecosystems, including wetlands, to ensure their services for the people and the planet with the support of relevant legal instruments including the adoption of a legal definition of terms related to restoration (inter alia remediation, mitigation, recovery), through an international decision or resolution, in the context of International legal frameworks related to nature conservation (e.g. RAMSAR convention).
- Ensure source-to-sea perspectives are adopted in existing policy frameworks and related programmes, including Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), wetlands protection, and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). The holistic approach “from source to sea” is critical to a circular vision of human water use and to create financial, legal, and regulatory instruments that are essential for the implementation of these public policies.

- Highlight the need to continue to promoting dialogue between fresh and salt water communities, in events such as the High Level Symposium on Water "Bridging SDG6 and SDG14" organized during the 2022 UN Ocean Conference.

- Step up efforts to protect and sustainably manage ecosystems and natural resources, and the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), from local to transboundary levels, in its four main components, covering all types of interrelated freshwater bodies, including both surface water and ground water and non-conventional water resources.

- Promote tools to improve strategic planning and policy in the context of climate change, e.g. by using ecosystem services accounting, such as UNSEEA that is linked to National Accounting. Take measures on the water, food ecosystems interface to reduce the impact of agri-environmental measures and development of hydropower, industries, waste (water) management and mining activities on sustainability of water resources and biodiversity, and monitor its effects.

- Use space observation data for the monitoring of water pollution including from illegal mining and fishing.

- Ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation considerations as well as their co-benefits and trade-offs are integrated in medium- and long-term plans and strategies for water, and, vice-versa, ensure that all aspects of integrated water resources management (including WASH), including all aspects related to the risks of water scarcity and droughts, are integrated in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and Disaster Risks Reduction (DRR) strategies, backed by appropriate technical and financial support.

- Accelerate decarbonisation (climate mitigation) in water-related sectors, through the controlled use of treated sewage sludge (biosolids) to replace artificial fertilisers; encouraging nature-based wastewater treatment techniques, such as ponding systems and constructed wetlands; using renewable energy for water and wastewater services; tackling the waste of water and pollution at source to reduce use of energy and resources and associated emissions in water treatment and supply; and safeguarding services of ecosystems, including wetlands, to sequester carbon.

- Promote and strengthen public and private investments in nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, including in a transboundary context, via green and ‘hybrid’ (green and grey) infrastructure, including storage capacity (e.g., floodplain restoration, constructed wetlands, groundwater recharge, climate buffers).

- Integrate water-related objectives and outcome monitoring into climate and biodiversity finance, and vice-versa. This includes private as well as public finance. Acknowledge the importance of sustainable finance instruments (e.g. taxonomy) in that context.

- Highlight the role of adequate and safe sanitation services in protection of all ecosystems, including freshwater, land and marine ecosystems.

- Taking into account the close links between human health and the good ecological status of ecosystems, promote a "one health" approach to implement coherent and coordinated policies between the health, biodiversity and water sectors.

This interactive dialogue should encourage member states to take commitments to increase water stress resilience in the context of climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies.

The concept paper should showcase the close link between adaptation to climate change, DRR and sustainable water resources management, particularly through promoting and supporting integrated planning and policy making. Droughts represent a significant challenge to our societies, and should be looked at as a structural challenge that need to be addressed with structural solutions.

Concrete outcomes that should be underlined in the concept paper to reach this objective, include the following:

- Promote integrated planning approaches, addressing both mitigation and adaptation to climate change and the objectives of integrated water resources management, while reconciling it with the objectives of other sectoral planning processes and policies in a sustainable manner. Particularly important is coordination with energy, agriculture and food, and urban planning sectors.
- Promote scarcity and drought/flood risk management, through the development of water scarcity, drought and flood risk management plans, where relevant, which especially include nature-based solutions, including through inter-institutional coordination at different government levels. Coordination with sustainable water resources management, disaster risk reduction planning and other sectoral planning processes is key to avoid maladaptation measures.
- Ensure that water scarcity as well as droughts are managed at the appropriate level, when addressing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and resilience, giving them higher priority in the water political agenda;
- Support the development of prevention and disaster risk reduction plans for water-related natural disasters in countries most exposed to these risks (flooding, drought, coastal aquifer salinization due to rising sea levels, etc.). Support effective early warning systems directed at vulnerable populations and especially women and girls and other vulnerable groups located in high-risk zones, as well as enhance water information services to have reliable data about the hydrological cycle (including water quantity, quality, distribution, access, risks, and use) for effective decision-making.
- Promote adoption and implementation of water-related disaster management plans, which include measures to address floods, droughts and water stress. In addressing the balance between water supply and demand, non-conventional water resources need to be promoted, as appropriate.
- Promote the use of space observation data for disaster management and disaster risk reduction through technical advisory support, assessment, specific recommendations and capacity building.
- Promote and prioritize nature-based solutions as measures providing multiple benefits in mitigation and adaptation to climate change as well as for DRR.
- Enhance regional and cross-border cooperation in mitigation and adaptation to climate change through promoting sustainable and climate resilient water management within river and aquifer basins.
- UNFCCC COP27 took place with water high on the agenda. At the following UNFCCC processes, including COP28, water should continue to be fully integrated in the COP's agenda, and water should be integrated in other fora such as CBD and UNCCD. This will provide an opportunity to promote the relevance of the water agenda and to call for increased financing for climate action in sustainable and climate resilient water resources management as part of climate finance.
- Enhance capacity building and sharing experience on the (long-term) modelling of climate change impacts, including those on hydrologic systems and associated hydrological responses,

projecting of extreme events, the assessment of impacts on water resources availability and risks of extreme events, and adaptation measures.

Theme 4: Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross Sectoral Cooperation, including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda

Transboundary water cooperation

As surface water and groundwater do not know borders, and water scarcity has the potential to affect peace and security, transboundary water cooperation (TBWC) is necessary to sustainably manage water, including the aquifers, to adequately respond to the diverse water-related development needs, and to promote peace, security and stability in the context of global climate change, water scarcity and rising demands. Cooperation on water issues also provides the opportunity for increasing synergies and identifying related co-benefits and trade-offs between water and other areas, including: climate, ecosystems, their biodiversity and the services they provide, ocean and seas, as well as food and nutrition security.

It is important to promote TBWC through the emphasis on sharing benefits of cooperation and dialogue and other concrete implementation activities in order to overcome political and ideological reluctances and develop sustainable and integrated management of water. Moreover, and as TBWC is a tool for peace and security as well conflict prevention, ownership and support for TBWC in different regional contexts through water management and water diplomacy remains critical. Such cooperation enhances regional integration, and pre-empts political instability. Research and innovation should support TBWC by fostering international cooperation to develop and demonstrate innovative solutions for equitable water allocation and benefits sharing models.

The concept paper should highlight that transboundary surface and ground water cooperation is central for sustainable water management, peace and security and conflict prevention and resolution, and that it should be well reflected as a priority in the outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference and for the Conference itself. Focusing on understanding the root causes of conflict is key. Transboundary water cooperation and the implementation of integrated water resources management (IWRM), as well as the development, as appropriate, of non-conventional, alternative supplies, such a reuse of treated wastewater or desalinisation, offer important tools for sustainable development, as well as for the triple Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

The UN system and UN Member States must accelerate progress on SDG 6.5[6] and strengthen the use of existing international tools by explicitly encouraging and supporting accession, implementation, and compliance with the two global UN Water Conventions (Helsinki 1992; New York 1997) through:

1. Promotion of the policy coherence through IWRM and the shared social, economic, and environmental benefits, including public health, food security, adaptation and resilience to climate change, disaster preparedness, that contributes to regional integration, peace and stability for the riparian countries of a same watershed;
2. Showcasing concrete examples from around the world on transboundary water management (bilateral instrument, actions from basin organizations). For example: cooperation between Portugal and Spain in the context of the Albufeira Convention, dated 1998.
3. Promoting concrete outcomes/actions such as river basin approaches, institutional arrangements for transboundary cooperation, strategies for monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers and, for example, the proposed Team Europe Initiative on transboundary water management in Africa or the basin organizations Dakar

[6] "By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate"

action plan, as well as the EU Water Initiative Plus and its follow-up program and other regional activities;

4. Supporting the conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements between riparian states, in particular agreements covering cross-border river basins, and promoting the establishment of cooperation bodies such as river basin commissions or bilateral commissions on their basis;
5. Promoting the international cooperation on the regional and institutional level;
6. Increasing and strengthening international cooperation for research and innovation (R&I) with a view of developing and implementing innovative solutions;
7. Promoting funding and financing of TBWC, including capacity building, especially to the benefit of women and girls, at the national level, and basin development;
8. Promoting financing projects of water management within the frames of international cooperation to overcome the challenges of the common river basin district by riparian countries;
9. Accelerating digital transformation to enable innovative water and decision information systems, including remote sensing, satellite imagery data etc., which offer new opportunities for reliable and transparent transboundary data and information gathering and sharing that are key for improved knowledge and monitoring.

Concrete outcomes that should be underlined in the concept paper to reach this objective, include the following:

- Support the ratifications on one or the two UN Water Conventions that would be announced at the conference.
- The UN 2023 Water Conference could be the opportunity to present achievements in the work on IWRM, present and showcase examples of river basin approaches, that can be replicated and importance of work on monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers, for achieving SDG 6 targets. It would also be an opportunity to present regional policy dialogues and regional basin-wide capacity building programs in the field on the water-energy-climate change-ecosystems nexus, food and nutrition security, sustainable development and peace and security, as well as lessons learned from relevant Research & Innovation projects. This topic also provides an opportunity to highlight the work on interlinkages between SDGs, by showcasing work on land-based sources of pollution, IWRM and Integrated Coastal Zone Management and work on source-to-sea approaches, linking in particular SDG 6 and SDG 14, taking in due account the results of the High-Level Symposium on Water.
- The UN 2023 Water Conference could serve as a forum to present the accomplishments of the European river basin commissions, showing the importance of establishing cooperation bodies that cover whole river basin district. Examples of best practices in that context include: planning and assessment of boundary waters, monitoring and protection against pollution, flood protection, hydrological and hydrogeological data collection and exchange.
- Accelerate digital transformation enabling innovative water and decision information systems including remote sensing, satellite imagery data etc., which offer new opportunities for neutral, reliable and transparent transboundary data and information gathering and sharing that are key to ensure improved knowledge, monitoring and data sharing, using for example WMO standards, in order to ensure sustainable water management.

Water governance[7]

Addressing water challenges requires integrated and effective multi-level governance and cooperation. The cross-cutting nature of water issues too often results in a fragmented governance. At the multilateral level, despite UN Water's role as a coordination entity, the integration of water-related activities within the UN system remains incomplete and would benefit from the strengthening and increased visibility of UN Water. The strengthening of national and international policies, institutions, legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as integrated water resources management are part of the solution to overcome the gap to reach SDG 6 objectives, contribute to human rights, gender equality, biodiversity, ocean and climate change agendas, to ultimately leave no one behind and contribute to every person's right and opportunity to live a decent life.

At global level, the UN 2023 Water Conference should result in strengthening effective coordination and coherence of the UN's work on water, in particular by reviewing the structure and functioning of UN-Water and the development of a UN system-wide approach to water. The interlinkages between SDGs, such as the link between freshwater and marine waters, considering the full water cycle, must be addressed as part of SDG implementation.

At regional, national and local level, the role of local authorities and communities' management should be recognized in order to strengthen the capacities of local actors and civil society. Integrated water resources management should also be strengthened at the regional river basin level or local level to ensure sustainable and equitable use of water and the protection and restoration of ecosystems. Current fragmentation of fresh water and ocean governance is a risk for both types of ecosystems and to people themselves. To overcome this fragmentation, it is necessary to provide more investment in research into existing interconnections such as land-based sources of marine pollution, for larger-scale replication of "source-to-sea" approaches, and for the inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes. It is crucial that the usual top-down approaches are complemented with bottom-up approaches, to guarantee increasing involvement of local communities and that implemented actions also contribute to erasing existing inequalities and overcoming gender stereotypes.

Concrete outcomes that could be highlighted in the concept paper for this theme, include the following:

- UN-Water's mandate and capacities could be strengthened in 3 areas:
    1. Advocacy role, including at the political level to ensure consistency between different advocacy channels and with others water-related sectors,
    2. Cross sectoral coordination with support of relevant organisations on transboundary issues, including through a stronger role in the development of UN country assessments, the UN resident coordinator system, and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks
    3. Direct support to UN member states or stakeholders, including through the resident coordinator system. and to render UN system support to member states in the delivery on SDG 6 and other water-related SDGs and targets, more efficient might provide better grounds for discussions with UN MS;
- Operationalize the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, including in coordination with the Resident Coordinator/UN Country Teams system to strengthen governance;
- Support a UN SG's Special Envoy for Water as a unified global 'water voice' who ensures that water remains high on the political agenda – both within and outside the water sector, amplifying the role of UN-Water and fostering stronger coherence of water efforts inside and

[7] Relevant across themes as enabler to achieve all water-related goals

outside of the UN. The Special Envoy could also support the mobilization of additional funding and secure the follow-up of the outcomes of the UN 2023 Water Conference.

- Mainstream practices from other processes that can be duplicated and facilitate SDG 6 implementation (for example, the OECD Water Governance Initiative and Water Financing Roundtable has developed significant work on this topic and could foster the implementation of sound water governance practices at global, regional, national, and local levels).
- Highlight the importance of addressing water and climate change and other major environmental challenges, like land degradation and biodiversity loss for peace, stability and security, not limited to armed conflict.
- Support and promote the organization of regular UN conferences on water, on the model of UN Ocean Conference for the implementation of SDG 14, in order to ensure high-level multi-stakeholder and intergovernmental regular dialogue on SDG 6 progresses and rising water issues within the UN.
- Support better integration of IWRM and WASH, both within water sector policy (i.e. across water resources, services and reduction of water-related risks) and within general development strategies and those of other sectors including health, food, energy, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation, especially in the implementation of commitments under the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement;
- Further promote effective, accessible, disaggregated and public data collection and monitoring systems (including civil society and citizen science, with special attention to the gender perspective);
- Support gender mainstreaming in water governance, including water diplomacy, as well as transformative approaches that address the root causes of gender inequality and gender-responsive policies and actions.
- Establish tools to ensure inclusive, informed and effective participation of civil society, i.e. information sharing, recognition of representative organizations, spaces for dialogue and user participation, citizen consultations, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, among others.
- Strengthen global and national capacity to develop and use context specific knowledge and data in planning & decision making, including through additional research, via cooperation with universities, governments and companies and utilising digital and other innovative technologies, for example real-time monitoring of water resources and WASH services, giving special attention to women and girls.
- Highlight the relevance of inter-regional dialogues on water as a tool to foster and strengthen international water governance (For instance: China-Europe Water Platform, China-EU Water Dialogue, India-EU Water Partnership, or the Conference of Ibero-american Water Directors).

Theme 5: **Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan.**

The Water Action Decade provides a unique framework to support efforts of the international community to overcome water related challenges. To this end, the interactive dialogue on the Water Action Decade should provide the opportunity to discuss progress, existing gaps as well as means and best practices to accelerate efforts to reach SDG 6 and other water-related goals and targets, including those in the 2030 Agenda.

The Concept paper should put into perspective the efforts that are still needed to reach a universal access to water and sanitation by 2030, and the initiatives and partnerships established in the frame of the Water Action Decade. The Water Action Decade provides an important framework to support efforts of the international community to overcome water related challenges.

Concrete outcome that can be highlighted in the concept paper:

- Scaling up existing initiatives in accordance with the UN SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, promoting (voluntary) commitments through the Water Action Agenda, as well as deploying transformative and cross-sectoral solutions that go beyond business-as-usual.

Financing as a crosscutting issue

Besides governance challenges, there is a huge financing gap for water and sanitation infrastructures and services. To reach SDG 6 targets by 2030, a quadrupling of funds in the water sector is needed.

The scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires a financing paradigm shift to close the water funding gap through sustainable, innovative and inclusive additional and new sources of funding (from both private and public, international and domestic sources), improved targeted and effective use of existing funding, as well as novel economic and financial instruments and approaches.

Concrete outcomes that could be achieved in the run up to, during, and the follow up of the UN 2023 Water Conference to reach this objective, include the following:

- Strengthening the capacities of national and local institutions is essential for enabling a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, coherent policymaking, establishment and enforcement of legal frameworks and regulations, investment planning and implementation. Further invest in human capacity in the water sector, giving special attention to women and girls, together with governance of the sector to attract private sector. Possible options:
    - Promote more systematic due diligence on the sustainability of the investments in the water sector, including the capacities to monitor, and to finance the life-cycle of water and sanitation infrastructures (from operation to maintenance, rehabilitation and re-investments), to limit non-revenue water (physical and financial), promote water reuse and biosolids as a resource, and to manage water through a IWRM framework and a multi-stakeholder approach;
    - Ensure comprehensive and sustainable water financing, reflecting the state of macroeconomic indicators, such as inflation, the cost of water, including water scarcity costs, environmental costs, operational costs and investment costs for new and rehabilitated assets;
    - Develop funding of the development of capacities for assessing household affordability of the services for the most vulnerable population, including women and girls, and for, consequently, elaborating realistic, financially and environmentally sustainable and consensus-based financing strategies for the water and sanitation services;
    - Develop capacities for public-private-partnerships, notably through increased transparency of operations and better regulation of the sector;
    - Mainstream water in the ECOSOC report with a specific part in the next report on water;
    - Increase partnerships between local development banks, water operators and basins organization to share best practices and see how to develop the capacities of those organization to support investments in the water sector;
    - Ensure funding for capacity building, education and vocational and training for the governance, and management of water, as well as the preparation of projects for funding and operation and maintenance of WASH services giving special attention to women and girls. This can be applied as required complements for all water/ WASH infrastructure investments as well as via standalone investments to support the current and future workforce, with gender-related targets.
- Incorporate and mainstream sustainable finance principles, into all water-related interventions and develop cross-financing opportunities:

    - Apply a do no harm approach in all projects impacting to water;
    - Commit to a balance in investments in the water sector between water management, access, and sanitation, and a balance within countries to ensure that no one is left behind – supported by accountability mechanisms such as monitoring and reporting of the proportion of spend and related outcomes;
    - Call to have more water-related finance in climate and biodiversity funding by developing common guidelines;
    - Promote cross-sectoral combined funding mechanisms (e.g. combined funding of electricity and water infrastructure or of health and water infrastructure).
    - Increase the share of funding dedicated to nature-based solutions.
- Improve the capacities and conditions for involving private funding to a greater extent, where appropriate, while reaffirming the importance of treating water as a common good and ensuring universal access, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Diversify the source of financing by promoting effective use of existing funding, mobilizing domestic resources, and attracting additional investments from private and public sources. Innovative finance models such as the Urban Water Catalyst Fund or the climate investor fund are key to ensure resilient water and sanitation services, and sustainably managed water resources.
- Encourage the private sector and financial institutions to disclose their impact and the impacts of their products on water (e.g. via the use of the water footprint index) and their exposure to risk resulting from extreme water events, water scarcity, droughts or pollution.