



| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|----------|--------|---------------|------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| About UNECE | Our work | Themes | Where we work | Open UNECE | Events | Publications | Media |
|-------------|----------|--------|---------------|------------|--------|--------------|-------|

UNECE **INFO** MEDIA / PRESS RELEASES / ENVIRONMENT / 2018 / **UNECE AND UNESCO SDG INDICATOR REPORT SHOWS NEED TO STRENGTHEN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION WORLDWIDE**

> News

> Press Releases

> Speeches

> Stories

> UNECE Weekly

> Videos

Press Releases

PROGRAMME

TOPIC

YEAR

LANGUAGE

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UNECE and UNESCO SDG indicator report shows need to strengthen transboundary water cooperation worldwide

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Across the world, 153 countries share rivers, lakes and aquifers. Transboundary basins cover more than half of the Earth's land surface, account for an estimated 60 per cent of global freshwater flow and are home to more than 40 per cent of the world's population. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore not only key for water management, but more generally for sustainable development, regional integration and peace.

Today in Stockholm, in the framework of World Water Week, UNECE and UNESCO launched the report on "Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation 2018 - Global baseline for SDG indicator 6.5.2". This is the first ever global report on the status of transboundary water cooperation based on official data from countries.

The report is based on countries' reports on SDG indicator 6.5.2, measuring transboundary water cooperation, for which UNECE and UNESCO are co-custodians. Out of the 153 countries sharing transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers, 107 responded to the invitation to report. This very high response rate reflects the importance of the issue and provides a solid foundation for future reporting.

The report shows that for the 62 countries where the SDG indicator 6.5.2 can be calculated only 59% of their transboundary basin area is covered by operational arrangements. And only 17 of those countries have all their transboundary basins covered. This falls far short of having all transboundary basins covered by operational arrangements by 2030, in line with the ambition set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As the only indicator that is exclusively dedicated to transboundary cooperation, which is also fundamental for the achievement of other SDGs, indicator 6.5.2 can provide an important driver for progress on other related SDGs, on poverty, hunger, human health and well-being, energy, climate action, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and peace.

The results also show that, while cooperation is evident in all regions, there is significant regional variation in terms of progress. Europe and North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, show the highest



levels of coverage for their operational arrangements, particularly in relation to transboundary river and lakes.

Results also show the different level of advancement of cooperation on surface waters (rivers and lakes) and cooperation on transboundary aquifers (groundwater reserves). Cooperation on transboundary aquifers poses a particular challenge and is lagging behind. Operational arrangements for transboundary aquifers are still rare around the world and cooperation on aquifers is not integrated enough in the cooperation on surface waters.

The fact that it was possible to calculate full indicator for 62 of the 107 countries that responded to the request to report is reflective of a broader challenge - namely that in many instances, it has proven difficult for countries to provide sufficient data, particularly on the transboundary aquifers that they share.

At the current rate of progress, with on average three cooperation agreements put in place per year, we are not on track to achieve target 6.5 by 2030. The report therefore calls for an acceleration of progress, making some recommendations on how to do so.

In particular, it encourages countries to capitalize on the results of the 6.5.2 baseline to set national and basin-specific targets related to transboundary water cooperation. It also incites countries to build on the Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the International Law Commission's Draft Articles on Transboundary Aquifers. Where operational arrangements are lacking these instruments offer the tools upon which new arrangements can be negotiated or existing arrangements can be strengthened.

"Besides serving as a strong legal basis for transboundary agreements, the Water Convention, which is serviced by UNECE, has a key role to play in promoting transboundary water cooperation. It provides a multilateral framework that supports countries' efforts by building capacity and promoting the exchange of experiences; an intergovernmental framework to develop common policy responses to emerging challenges; and a political platform to strengthen political will towards cooperation, monitoring and to foster continuous progress. As more countries join the Convention and benefit from its activities, this offers great opportunities to accelerate efforts towards transboundary water cooperation in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", underlined Ms. Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary.

The report will be reviewed at the forthcoming eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Astana, 10-12 October 2018).

The report is available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=49605>

Note to editors

The report was jointly prepared by UNECE and UNESCO as co-custodians for SDG indicator 6.5.2.

SDG indicator 6.5.2 assesses level of progress towards target 6.5, which calls for the implementation of integrated water

SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures the proportion of a transboundary basin area (river, lake or aquifer) within a country with an operational arrangement for water cooperation in place. An "arrangement" might include a bilateral or multilateral treaty, convention, agreement or other formal arrangement among countries that provides a framework for cooperation on transboundary basins.

Four criteria must be satisfied for an arrangement to be considered 'operational':

- A joint body or other institutional mechanism must be in place;
- There must be at least one annual (political or technical) meeting between riparian countries;
- There must be at least an annual exchange of data and information
- Riparian countries have adopted joint or coordinated management plans, or joint objectives.

SDG indicator 6.5.2 offers a complement to SDG indicator 6.5.1, which tracks the degree of integrated water resources management (IWRM) implementation at all levels, including transboundary, by assessing four components of IWRM: enabling environment; institutions and participation; management instruments and financing.

The Global baseline for SDG indicator 6.5.2 was prepared on behalf of UN-Water as part of a series of reports that track progress towards the various targets set out in SDG 6 using the SDG global indicators, prepared by the respective custodians.

Through the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, the United Nations seeks to support countries in monitoring water- and sanitation-related issues within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in compiling country data to report on global progress towards SDG 6 (see www.sdg6monitoring.org).

To review overall progress towards SDG 6 and identify interlinkages and ways to accelerate progress, UN-Water produced the SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation.

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