



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan

COP29 Water for Climate Action initiative

Enhancing ambition and enabling action on climate change and water nexus

Rationale

Climate change is altering important parameters of the global hydrological cycle exacerbating water challenges worldwide. Given its vital role, water is at the heart of climate change, with the majority of climate impacts being experienced through disruptions in the water cycle through floods, droughts, glacier mass loss, landslides, degraded water quality, water scarcity, and changing water availability, as well as other substantial changes in the water cycle at global, regional and local scales.

Climate change intensifies pressure on water resources, affecting water basins, including seas, rivers, lakes, groundwater, and other water-related ecosystems, as well as the overall water cycle, including terrestrial, inland water, and coastal areas connected to freshwater and marine environments.

One-fifth of the world's river basins are experiencing rapid changes in the area covered by surface waters,¹ indicative of flooding and drought events associated with and exacerbated by climate change. Glaciers have suffered the largest mass loss in 50 years.² Around 2.2 billion people still do not have access to safe drinking water, 3.5 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation,³ and at least 50% of the world's population — around 4 billion people — live under highly water-stressed conditions,⁴ with the most vulnerable hit the hardest. Over 90 percent of disaster-affected people and nearly 95 percent of infrastructure loss and damage were impacted by water-related disasters,⁵ while floods are one of the major sources of water pollution, threatening water quality and human health and safety.

¹ UN-Water, 'Summary Progress Update 2021: SDG 6 — Water and Sanitation for All' (2021) <<https://www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-all>>.

² 'State of the Global Climate 2023' (World Meteorological Organization, 15 March 2024) <<https://wmo.int/publication-series/state-of-global-climate-2023>>.

³ 'The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024' (2024) <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/>>.

⁴ 'Water. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change' (IPCC 2022) <<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-4/>>.

⁵ UNDRR, 'Water Risks and Resilience' (2023) <<https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/sendai-framework-action/water-risks-and-resilience>>.

Climate change is projected to increase water pollution incidents, salinisation and eutrophication due to increasing drought and flood events, sea level rise and water temperature rise, respectively, in some local rivers and lakes.⁶

These challenges also contribute to the degradation of water-related ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity. 40% of all plant and animal species live or breed in wetlands, but alarmingly, these ecosystems are disappearing three times faster than forests due to human activities and global warming.⁷ Freshwater biodiversity and species populations have been lost at a rate of 83% since the 1970s, faster than any other ecosystem being monitored.⁸

The economic impacts of climate change on water resources are significant. Some regions could experience GDP declines of up to 6% by 2050 due to water-related impacts on agriculture, health, and incomes.⁹ Without mitigating actions, global GDP could decrease by up to 18% by mid-century if temperatures rise by 3.2°C.¹⁰ These findings underscore the substantial economic risk posed by climate-induced disruptions to the hydrological cycle.

Mainstreaming water in NDCs and NAPs

Integrating water supply, sanitation and transboundary water management and cooperation into national climate policy, such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, is crucial for effective climate adaptation and mitigation. Such integration ensures a coordinated approach to managing shared water resources, enhancing resilience to climate impacts, and promoting sustainable development. It allows countries to address water security, improve public health, and reduce climate-related vulnerabilities comprehensively across water dependent sectors. By incorporating these elements into national climate policies, countries can leverage international cooperation to achieve their climate goals and ensure the provision of essential services.¹¹

⁶ 'Water. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.' (IPCC 2022) <<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-4/>>.

⁷ UNEP, "'Wetlands and Biodiversity' Is the Theme for World Wetlands Day 2020" (30 January 2020) <<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/wetlands-and-biodiversity-theme-world-wetlands-day-2020>>.

⁸ WWF, 'Living Planet Report' (2022) <https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?6574941/WWFs-Living-Planet-Report-reveals-a-devastating-69-drop-in-wildlife-populations-on-average-in-less-than-a-lifetime>.

⁹ World Bank Group, 'High and Dry: Climate Change, Water, and the Economy' (2016) <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/a370e177-5b9d-507c-bcc4-c357f6f97c35>>.

¹⁰ Swiss Re Institute, 'World Economy Set to Lose up to 18% GDP from Climate Change If No Action Taken' (2021) <<http://www.swissre.com/media/press-release/nr-20210422-economics-of-climate-change-risks.html>>.

¹¹ UNECE, 'Mainstreaming Transboundary Water Management and Cooperation into Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans' (22 October 2024) <<https://unece.org/environment/documents/2024/10/working-documents/mainstreaming-transboundary-water-management-and>>.

The Transboundary Nature of Water and Climate Challenges

Water resources, like impacts of climate change, transcend national borders. As such, the scope of climate-induced water challenges demands integrated solutions that extend beyond individual countries and foster cross-border collaboration. Transboundary waters represent 60% of the world's freshwater flows, with 153 countries sharing at least one of the 286 transboundary river and lake basins or one of the 592 transboundary aquifer systems.¹² Remarkably, over 80% of countries are sharing water basins—including rivers, lakes, and aquifers,¹³ while cooperation on managing these resources remains limited.¹⁴

Concerted efforts, such as *the Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action*, are required, and will help strengthen dialogue and partnerships to address human and climate change-induced challenges on water security and the nexus of other global challenges such as the degradation of water-related ecosystems and biodiversity.

With a much deeper understanding of the pressure that climate change places on water resources, water basins, groundwater bodies and water-related ecosystems, as well as, on the water cycle in general, and the critical role that water can play in various climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, water agenda is increasingly taking the centre stage in international processes, including but not limited to:

International Decade for Action: "Water for Sustainable Development" (2018-2028)

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2018-2028 as the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" for greater focus on the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources, to further improve cooperation, partnership and capacity development to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda. The Water Action Decade commenced on World Water Day, 22 March 2018, and will continue through to World Water Day, 22 March 2028.

UN 2023 Water Conference and Water Action Agenda

The UN 2023 Water Conference, formally referred to as the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the 2018-2028 International Decade for Action, and Water Action Agenda saw countries and partners making around 800 voluntary commitments to advance progress on water and sanitation in alignment with SDG 6, many of which are closely linked to the climate agenda. The Conference was the first major UN conference on water in nearly five decades, since the Mar del Plata conference in 1977. The conference also led to the creation of the first ever UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation. One of its main outcomes was the decision to convene the 2026 UN Water Conference to Accelerate the Implementation of SDG 6 and a Conference in 2028 on the Final Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action.

¹² UN-Water (n 3).

¹³ UNECE, 'Second Reporting Exercise, 2020/21, on SDG Indicator 6.5.2' (2023) <<https://unece.org/second-reporting-exercise-202021-sdg-indicator-652>>.

¹⁴ UN-Water (n 3).

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and UNCCD COP16

The goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2022, make an important contribution to the global water agenda, particularly in the area of water-related ecosystem restoration for climate action. At COP15 of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) delegates adopted 38 decisions to improve drought resilience, reduce land degradation, invest in land restoration efforts, and improve synergies with the climate change and biodiversity conventions.

UN Early Warnings for All Initiative

Launched in 2022, the UN's Early Warnings for All initiative aims to ensure everyone is protected from hazardous weather, water, and climate events through life-saving early warning systems by the end of 2027. The initiative is aligned with the priorities of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the SDGs.

Sixth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6)

The 6th UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) adopted comprehensive resolution [6/13](#) on “Effective and inclusive solutions for strengthening water policies to achieve sustainable development in the context of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution”. The resolution called all Member States and members of specialized agencies and invited relevant international organizations and relevant stakeholders, as appropriate, to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate.

Appointment of the UN Special Envoy on Water

On 13 September 2024, the United Nations Secretary-General announced the appointment of the first Special Envoy on Water to take a global lead on water in the run-up to various global water processes and the UN System Wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation. This appointment underscores the global priority of water issues and the need for coordinated efforts.

Pact for the Future

In late September 2024, during the Summit of the Future, UN Member States adopted Resolution A/RES/79/1, an inter-governmentally negotiated, action-oriented “*Pact for the Future*”. This pact represents a commitment by the international community to collaboratively address urgent water and climate challenges among others.

10th Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)

The tenth Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention (Ljubljana, Slovenia, 23-25 October 2024) provided a crucial intergovernmental platform on transboundary waters and climate change, with more than 500 participants from nearly 100 countries. At its high-level special session “Our Waters, Our Future: Transboundary Water Cooperation to Power Climate Resilience” transboundary cooperation was underlined as essential for climate adaptation and mitigation.

Water agenda in UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs)

Previous COP presidencies made several efforts to bring water into focus during annual UN Climate Change Conferences.

- The COP26 hosted the inaugural Water for Climate Pavilion, bringing together the water community to collectively elevate the importance of water in the climate dialogue. The *Glasgow Partnership for Fair Water Footprints* launched at COP26 promotes sustainable water use within global supply chains and calls for adopting fair water practices that reduce environmental impacts, protect water resources, and ensure equitable access for communities. By addressing water use at every stage of production and consumption, the partnership aims to foster responsible water management that supports both environmental sustainability and social equity.
- *The Action for Water Adaptation and Resilience initiative* (AWARe) launched at COP27, called for enhanced adaptation and resilience in water management in climate-vulnerable regions.
- *Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for Accelerated Climate Transformation Partnership* (ENACT) launched at COP27, aims to ensure collaboration and build support for evidence-based policy on nature-based solutions.
- *The Freshwater Challenge*, scaled up at COP28, aims to protect and restore freshwater ecosystems globally, whilst the *Water Resilient Food Systems Dialogue* at COP28 sought to enhance key levers and priorities in building a collective path forward to build sustainable water and food security.

At COP27 the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan (decisions 1/CP.27 and 1/CMA.4), formally recognized *“the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring water systems and water-related ecosystems in delivering climate adaptation benefits and co-benefits, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards”* and emphasized *“the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring water and water-related ecosystems, including river basins, aquifers and lakes,”* and urged *“Parties to further integrate water into adaptation efforts.”*

At COP28, water was further elevated, with the outcome of the first global stocktake (GST) under the Paris Agreement *“recognizing the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring water systems and water-related ecosystems in delivering climate adaptation benefits and co-benefits, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards.”* Additionally, the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, as the continuation of the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation (GGA), highlighted water as one of the critical thematic areas of focus for adaptation action.

The Framework includes water as the first thematic target: *“Significantly reducing climate-induced water scarcity and enhancing climate resilience to water-related hazards towards a climate-resilient water supply, climate-resilient sanitation and towards access to safe and affordable potable water for all”*. Moreover, many of the remaining targets are also linked to water.

Another target of the Framework refers to accelerating the use of ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions, including through the protection of inland water ecosystems.

The UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience also *“recognizes that climate change impacts are often transboundary in nature and may involve complex, cascading risks that can benefit from collective consideration and knowledge-sharing, climate-informed transboundary management and cooperation on global adaptation solutions”*.

Moreover, the decision on the outcome of the first global stocktake *“recognizes the importance of international collaboration, including transboundary cooperation, for addressing climate change impacts and contributing to progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement”*.

Furthermore, The UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience also underlined: *“Reducing climate impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity, and accelerating the use of ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions, including through their management, enhancement, restoration and conservation and the protection of terrestrial, inland water, mountain, marine and coastal ecosystems”*.

These efforts to increase the focus on water-related activities in the context of climate change must be sustained, supported and built upon. This includes enhancing the participation of UN Member States and other stakeholders, ensuring continuity and dedication to water-related discussions from COP-to-COP.

Objective

As COP29 Presidency, Azerbaijan, is determined to craft a stronger water dimension within the global climate ambition. In this regard, Azerbaijan introduces the COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action.

The declaration resolves to:

- (1) promote **dialogue and partnerships** among countries at international, regional, river and basin levels,
- (2) strengthen the generation of **scientific evidence** on the causes and impacts of climate change on water resources, water basins and water-related ecosystems, and
- (3) enhance water-related climate **policy actions**.

To enable the implementation of these actions, the COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action will launch **the Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action** to serve as a COP-to-COP collaboration platform fostering continuity and coherence on water-related climate action, ensuring a consistent focus on water and its interplay with climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and desertification, focusing on actions at the international, regional, river and basin levels.

Scope of the initiative

The Initiative focuses on issues stemming from the climate and water nexus, in particular:

- water scarcity and water security (availability, access and safe use)
- water pollution, water quality and sanitation
- water-related hazards and disasters,
- water-related ecosystems.

In pursuing these objectives, the initiative will:

- cover water resources, basins, such as seas, rivers, lakes, underground waters and aquifers, as well as ponds, marshes, swamps, peatlands, wetlands, and other water-related ecosystems, including in the terrestrial and coastal areas adjacent to freshwater and marine environments, and
- take into account the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, children, youth, migrants, persons with disabilities, and people in vulnerable situations.

The Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action (Baku Dialogue)

The COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action will launch the **Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action** (*Baku Dialogue*) to serve as a COP-to-COP collaboration platform fostering continuity and coherence on water-related climate action, ensuring a consistent focus on water and its interplay with climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and desertification, focusing on actions at the international, regional, river and basin levels.

The Baku Dialogue will serve to strengthen COP-to-COP synergies and facilitate continuous and coherent engagement across COPs on water-related processes of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, ensuring that water is systematically addressed in climate, biodiversity, and desertification agendas.

The platform seeks to strengthen basin-level collaboration and promote basin-wide dialogue among countries. The Baku Dialogue will explore the critical role of water resources, water basins, and water-related ecosystems in climate adaptation and mitigation, including the benefits of restoration, conservation, protection, and sustainable management, and demonstrate how healthy, functioning ecosystems, the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus, and integrated approaches can support climate action and help limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

The initiative builds on the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience where water is the first thematic target, recognizing its central role in climate adaptation, while many of the remaining targets are water-dependent.

The initiative is designed to respond to the key messages emerging from the interactive dialogues conducted under the UN 2023 Water Conference to enhance synergies and coordination among water-related climate and environmental agendas, including three Rio Conventions (the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement,¹⁵ the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification).

The initiative aims to contribute to the strengthening of water policies “to achieve sustainable development in the context of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution”, in line with United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) Resolution 6/13 and support the work of the newly appointed UN Special Envoy on Water.

The initiative aligns with the Paris Agreement, the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The initiative contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 14 (Life below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 17 (Partnerships), as well as other relevant goals.

The initiative was developed with support and contributions from the UNECE, UNEP, and WMO, and consulted with stakeholders through a consultative process.

The Baku Dialogue on Water for Climate Action will be launched through the endorsement of the COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action by national governments and other stakeholders on 21 November 2024 during Nature and Biodiversity Thematic Day at the COP29.

This deliberate choice of the thematic day aims to emphasize the role of water as a fundamental and integral element of nature for healthy water-related ecosystems and the environment.

The Presidency invites countries to support this vital initiative by endorsing the COP29 Declaration on Water for Climate Action.

National governments and other stakeholders can endorse this Declaration through any official written communications (letter, note verbale or other) to the COP29 Presidency and send it by email to water@cop29.az

¹⁵ Adopted under the UNFCCC in FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, decision 1/CP.21.