



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND SPATIAL PLANNING

GLOBAL WORKSHOP ON FRESHWATER ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION IN TRANSBOUNDARY BASINS

16-17 June 2025

Palais des Nations, Geneva

CONCEPT NOTE



European
Union



This workshop is funded by the European Union, France and the multi-donor trust fund of the Water Convention.

I. Background

Freshwater ecosystems are in a dire state. Freshwater ecosystems are the world's lifelines, providing water, food, and livelihoods, while enabling biodiversity within and around them. They play a buffer role for people and nature against climate change-related impacts, including droughts and floods. However, they have experienced massive deterioration over the past centuries and decades. Since 1970, one third of wetlands have been degraded or destroyed¹ – currently disappearing three times faster than forests. Over the past 50 years, two thirds of large rivers have been heavily altered and lost their free-flowing character. Recent studies highlight that 24% of freshwater animal species are at high risk of extinction².

Freshwater ecosystems are overlooked and under-considered key providers of nature-based solutions to address the triple planetary crisis and built-up resilience. The crucial role of freshwater ecosystems is recognized under important international frameworks and processes, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the 6th UN Environment Assembly (UNEA 6) Resolution on Water, or regional ones, such as the Brazzaville Declaration or the recently adopted Nature Restoration Law and the upcoming Water Resilience Strategy, both of the European Union.

Rich biodiversity provides important socio-economic benefits, poverty alleviation, and inclusive growth. However, healthy freshwater ecosystems remain largely undervalued and overlooked in national, transboundary and regional policies, plans, and investment strategies, and thus also underfunded. Yet, there are currently opportunities to use multiple channels to mobilize financing for ecosystem conservation and restoration, including through innovative means from private sources. Most of the economic value of freshwater ecosystems (estimated at US\$ 50 trillion annually on a global scale) is overlooked because it is in the form of the ecosystem services they provide such as water purification, sediment balance, biodiversity support, food security, and protection from extreme weather events³.

Freshwater ecosystems – whether related to surface water, groundwater, or both – are also typically the neglected element of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. Sectoral policies tend to be developed in isolation, without due consideration of inter-sectoral trade-offs and implications, particularly in relation to ecosystems. Part of the problem is that inter-sectoral

¹ Convention on Wetlands. (2021). Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021. Gland, Switzerland: Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands

² Sayer, C.A., Fernando, E., Jimenez, R.R. et al. One-quarter of freshwater fauna threatened with extinction. *Nature* 638, 138–145 (2025).

³ WWF (2023) High Cost of Cheap Water: The True Value of Water and Freshwater Ecosystems to People and Planet. WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

cooperation is typically underpinned by an assessment of the benefits of such cooperation, which in the case of ecosystems are generally difficult to identify and quantify⁴.

Although freshwater ecosystems are receiving increased attention as nature-based solutions to adapt to climate change and reverse biodiversity loss, much more needs to be done. A more systematic and synergic approach to climate resilience and freshwater conservation and restoration is needed, taking into account the transboundary context of many freshwater ecosystems and considering their connectivity. Freshwater ecosystems need to be mainstreamed into global biodiversity, climate and land degradation agendas. **Transboundary cooperation is crucial to conserve and restore freshwater ecosystems.** With 60 per cent of the world's freshwater flow being transboundary, sound cooperation over those shared waters plays a key role to enable the conservation, sustainable management and restoration of freshwater ecosystems. Ecosystem restoration is an important consideration in planning river basin management and adaptation to climate change as a means to address hydrological extremes.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UN Water Convention) is a unique international legal instrument and intergovernmental platform which aims to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating transboundary cooperation. With the restoration and conservation of freshwater ecosystems as one of its obligations, the UN Water Convention has been a catalyst to promote coordinated and concrete joint actions in a transboundary context.

Already in the early 2000s, the UN Water Convention pioneered work on ecosystem services, including payment for ecosystem services and published its [Recommendations on payment for ecosystem services in integrated water resources management](#)⁵ in 2007. Since 2013, a Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus has functioned as a global platform under the Convention accessible to Parties and other States to gather interested policy makers, practitioners and experts – to exchange knowledge and experience on transboundary nexus issues and solutions, including those related to freshwater ecosystems and related ecosystems services, particularly looking at public policy and regional cooperation.

In light of the triple planetary crisis, the 10th [session of the Meeting of the Parties of the Water Convention](#) (23-25 October 2024, Ljubljana, Slovenia) decided to include in the work programme 2025-2027 a dedicated sub-programme area on the conservation and restoration of transboundary freshwater ecosystems. This global workshop is an essential element of this workstream and will inform, among others, the discussion at the ninth meeting of the Task Force on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (18 June 2025, Geneva).

⁴ IPBES (2024), Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health.

⁵ United Nations (2007), Recommendations on Payments for Ecosystem Services in Integrated Water Resources Management.

II. Objectives and expected outcomes

The overall objective of the workshop is to boost cooperation and thus accelerate the restoration and conservation of transboundary freshwater ecosystems with a view to improve biodiversity status and condition, water and climate resilience.

This workshop will bring together biodiversity and water communities to jointly discuss the latest developments, best practices and lessons learned in the protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystems at transboundary levels. The workshop is meant to inspire and scale-up concrete action on the ground. It will particularly focus on the benefits, challenges and limitations of protecting and restoring transboundary ecosystems, considering that such actions have sometimes served as an entry point to start or strengthen cooperation over shared waters.

The specific objectives of the workshop are to:

1. Highlight the critical ecosystem services provided by healthy freshwater ecosystems – including groundwater ecosystems – for climate resilience, pollution prevention and response, availability and security of water supplies, and to combat biodiversity loss.
2. Inspire Parties, countries and partners to act at policy, administrative and technical levels to better conserve and restore freshwater ecosystems at national and transboundary levels, and to assess possibilities for it in a more informed way, accounting for synergies and different needs.
3. Discuss the specific benefits and challenges of the transboundary context and the role of the Water Convention in synergy with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) in this context. Discuss possible next steps under the Convention, including through the Task Force on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus. The role of other relevant actors (basin organizations, partners, etc.) will also be discussed.
4. Present and promote relevant existing technical and policy tools for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of transboundary freshwater ecosystems. Discuss related good practices, lessons learned and challenges.
5. Discuss how to better mainstream and scale up freshwater ecosystem conservation and restoration in global, regional and national agendas and policy processes.

This global workshop will be also an opportunity to call for more action to further assess, conserve and restore transboundary freshwater ecosystems including through joining initiatives such as the Freshwater Challenge under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and by making use of recognized tools such as the designation of more transboundary Wetlands of International Importance (or Ramsar Sites)..

This workshop would also provide key messages to be carried toward the 2026 Water Conference, on the role of conserving and restoring transboundary freshwater ecosystems.

III. Partners

The global workshop is organized under the auspices of the Water Convention serviced by UNECE, under the leadership of France, Slovenia and Zambia as co-lead Parties of programme area 3.6 on *Promoting conservation and restoration of transboundary freshwater and water-related ecosystems*.

The workshop is organized in partnership with the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

IV. Target audience and organization

The global workshop will be organized at the Palais des Nations, Geneva with interpretation into Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

It will gather experts from – but not limited to - the water, biodiversity and climate communities as well as transboundary basin organizations with the aim to strengthen collaboration, identify linkages and synergies between their activities and share good practices in policy making and implementation. The target audience includes representatives of governments, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations working on water, biodiversity and climate, international financial institutions, academia, the private sector and other experts.

The workshop will consist of a combination of plenary presentations and discussions. It will also include interactive elements.

The workshop will be followed by the 9th meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus under the Water Convention on 18 June 2025. The Task Force provides a platform for discussion about intersectoral issues, including water allocation, and will discuss about possible actions under the Water Convention. The Task Force meeting is open for a broad participation.

For content-related issues regarding the workshop, please contact by e-mail: Mr. Julien Favier (Julien.favier@un.org).

All workshop-related documents will be available on the meeting's webpage in due course: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Water-Convention/events/397534>

V. Practical information

To attend the workshop, please create an account in indico and register for the event using the following link by 9 June 2025: <https://indico.un.org/event/1012055/> -

Please kindly find some links with instructions on:

- 1) How to create an indico account: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeZuft5xQ4U>
- 2) How to register for an online meeting:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaEj3hShn6U>

For assistance with registration and other organizational issues, please contact the secretariat by e-mail: lien.mai-baby@un.org

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition and developing countries may apply for financial support to facilitate their participation in the meeting using the financial support request form attached to the invitation email. Requests for financial support should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat (lien.mai-baby@un.org) as soon as possible, but **not later than 25 April 2025**. No application will be accepted after this deadline. Only limited funding is available, and participants **will be notified by 3 May 2025** whether their application has been accepted or not. Priority will be given to Parties, experts and presenters.

Since Switzerland is part of the Schengen Zone, obtaining a visa might take up to 7 weeks. Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to submit their application as soon as possible and initiate visa procedures **not later than 9 May 2025**. You can also visit the Swiss Government Travel Check Website to verify which entry requirements apply to your entry to Switzerland: <https://travelcheck.admin.ch/home> .

On their way to the meeting, participants should activate their badge (to be sent by Indico once registration is approved) at the “Pregny Gate”. Please allow at least one hour for this.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available online at: <https://unece.org/practical-information-delegates> . You can also find a map of the Palais des Nations here:
<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/practical-information/map> .

For assistance with registration and other organizational issues, please contact Ms. Lien Mai-Baby lien.mai-baby@un.org , phone +41 22 9173231.