

BACKGROUND ON EXISTING POLICIES WITH REGARDS TO DROUGHTS UNDER THE WATER CONVENTION

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) provides a unique global legal and intergovernmental framework for climate change adaptation including flood and drought management in transboundary basins. In particular, flood and drought management is included under the programme area 4 on climate change adaptation of the Program of Work of the Water Convention for 2019-2021 (<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51910>). The Water Convention has been supporting countries and basins in adapting to climate change and managing flood and drought risk for 15 year through capacity building, exchange of experience, sharing knowledge, developing guidance and projects on the ground.

To address drought in transboundary context the following instruments are available:

- **The Task Force on Water and Climate** is responsible for activities related to adaptation to climate change, including flood and drought management, and serves as a venue for the exchange of experience in climate change adaptation between basins and countries across the world. Its next meeting is foreseen for 2nd October 2020 and will include the session on how to mainstream transboundary aspects of water management into climate-related documents such as NDCs, NAPs, national strategies and plans and river basin management planning. More information is available at https://www.unece.org/env/water/water_and_climate.html.
- **Global network of basins** on climate change adaptation was created by the secretariat of the Water Convention in cooperation with the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) in 2013. It aims to promote cooperation on adaptation, including flood and drought management, in transboundary basins, to compare different methodologies and approaches for adapting to climate change and to promote a shared vision between the participating basins. The recent report of the Global Network of basins as of February 2019 is available at https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2019/WAT/02Feb_14_15_Fourth_Global_Network_of_Basins_on_Climate_Change_Adaptation/Global_network_overview_pilot_projects_progress_Feb2019_final_ENGL.pdf.
- **Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Nexus** (<https://www.unece.org/env/water/nexus.html>). The work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins in the framework of the Convention can help countries, basins and regions to identify practical solutions for reconciling the different sectors' needs, having a direct impact on the efficiency of water use and therefore reducing the water stress and drought risk. Within the same area of activities, the Water Convention is also developing the handbook for water allocation in transboundary basins which will provide different approaches, frameworks, tools and case studies in water allocation for government, practitioners and academia. Droughts and water scarcity will be covered by the afore-mentioned handbook as well. More information is available at <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/water/areas-of-work-of-the-convention/water-allocation-in-a-transboundary-context.html>.

Under the Water Convention there is also the **Protocol on Water and Health**, jointly serviced by [UNECE](#) and [WHO-Europe](#). It is a unique legally binding instrument aiming to protect human health by better water management and by reducing water-related diseases. There is some work on climate change under the Protocol which aims at increasing resilience to climate change in the water, sanitation and health sectors and addresses flood and drought management. The relevant guidance is available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=29338>.

The Water Convention has also different **guidances on climate change adaptation, including flood and drought management**, in transboundary basins (available at https://www.unece.org/env/water/water_climate_activ.html).

- Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment, 2020 (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=54348>)
- Implementation Guide for Addressing Water-Related Disasters and Transboundary Cooperation, 2018 (<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50093>)
- Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices, 2015 (<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417>)
- Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change, 2009 (<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=11658>)

The Water Convention has extensive experience in **developing and implementing transboundary climate change adaptation strategies and plans which include flood and drought management**. In particular, the Water Convention is working in such basins as the Chu-Talas shared by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the Dniester shared by Moldova and Ukraine and the Neman shared by Belarus and Lithuania. The example (for the Dniester) of the transboundary adaptation strategies and plan is available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45918> and <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47462>.

UNECE also cooperates with [UNFCCC](#) and [UNDRR](#) to find **coherence and interlinkages between global processes on water, climate change and disaster risks reduction** (including droughts and floods). More information on the involvement of the Water Convention into the 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is available [here](#). UNECE is also co-coordinating together with UNESCO and WMO the Expert Group on Water and Climate Change under the UN-Water (<https://www.unwater.org/>). One of the recent results of the activities of this Expert Group is the UN-Water Policy Brief on Climate Change and Water developed in 2019 (<https://www.unwater.org/unwater-policy-brief-on-climate-change-and-water/>).

The Water Convention Secretariat in cooperation with multilateral development banks, INBO and other partners is working on building capacity of countries, basins and river basin organizations in **developing bankable projects proposals for climate change adaptation in transboundary basins** (incl. global and basin-level trainings and the dedicated publication *Financing Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Preparing Bankable Projects* (2019)).

More information on the activities related to climate change adaptation, including flood and drought management, in transboundary basins is available at https://www.unece.org/env/water/water_climate_activ.html.

The recent decisions of the Task Force related to drought management include (as of its 10th meeting on 1 May 2019)

The Task Force:

- a. invited other basins to consider joining the Global network of basins and noted that future activities could focus on various tools in climate change adaptation e.g. ecosystem-based adaptation, **disaster risk reduction measures** and financing.
- b. emphasized the need for linkages and coordination between different global frameworks and stressed the importance of **close cooperation between the water, climate and disaster risk reduction communities at national and international level**.

- c. stressed the need to and benefits of further **highlighting the importance of water and transboundary issues in global processes on climate and disasters**, such as under UNFCCC, UNDRR, the HLPF and UN Climate Action Summit, considering that the majority of climate change impacts are transmitted through the water cycle and that the water sector has many good adaptation practices available.

The **importance of cooperation with global processes on climate and disasters**, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction was also among the decisions of the Working Group in Integrated Water Resource Management under the Convention (as of 22-24 October 2020).

Would the Water Convention be an efficient instrument for arid or semi-arid regions?

The UNECE region, for which the Water Convention was originally negotiated, is often considered a water abundant region. However, in reality, the UNECE region is very diversified in terms of water availability and the impacts of climate change are likely to change the situation with water availability in the future. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – both Parties to the Water Convention – are among those countries whose level of water stress (SDG indicator 6.4.2) exceeds 100 per cent, along with Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.¹

For arid and semi-arid countries and regions where little water is available and where such water is a shared resource it is even more important for countries to cooperate in order to ensure sustainable, equitable and efficient use of water resources. The Water Convention is useful for such regions as it provides the framework for day-to-day cooperation, including through exchange of information and data, consultations, early warning and alarm systems, mutual assistance and other procedures.

Furthermore, arid and semi-arid countries and regions can benefit from a number of activities and tools under the Water Convention that specifically address water availability and water scarcity:

- **Water and climate change activities.** Since climate change may reduce the availability of water resources in the long term or make certain regions more prone to occurrence of droughts, Parties to the Water Convention work together to identify possible solutions. In 2006, they set up a dedicated Task Force on Water and Climate which helps countries to adapt to climate change, including floods, drought and water scarcity. Since then, activities included exchange of experience, capacity-building and projects on the ground, as well as the development of guidance documents such as the 2009 *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change* and the 2018 *Words into Action Guidelines on addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation*, an official guide for implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. A Global network of basins working on climate change (some with a focus on water scarcity, others on floods) and regular global workshops help countries to develop and implement joint adaptation strategies and exchange experiences. The Convention's pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins strengthen capacity of specific basins to adapt to climate change. For example, in the Chu-Talas River Basin, shared by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan facing water scarcity challenges, the pilot project resulted in a transboundary climate change impact and

¹ The level of water stress is determined as the ratio between total freshwater withdrawn by major economic sectors and total renewable freshwater resources, after taking into account environmental water requirements. See Progress on Level of Water Stress – Global baseline for SDG indicator 6.4.2, FAO and UN-Water, 2018. Available at <https://www.unwater.org/publications/progress-on-level-of-water-stress-642/>

vulnerability assessment as well as proposals for adaptation measures, with a focus on the transboundary level.

- **Aquifer-specific agreements.** Aquifers are especially important for arid countries. Since the Convention covers both surface water and groundwaters and requires the conclusion of specific transboundary water agreements, it can facilitate the development of aquifer-specific agreements in those regions, with the provision of tailored assistance to this end, potentially on the basis of the 2012 Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters developed in the Convention's framework.
- **Nexus activities.** The work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins in the framework of the Convention can help arid and semi-arid countries and regions to identify practical solutions for reconciling the different sectors' needs, having a direct impact on the efficiency of water use and therefore reducing the water stress.
- **Water use efficiency.** The Convention's focus on recycling, recovery and reuse as part of the concept of "best environmental practices" (annex III) promotes water use efficiency which can be particularly relevant for arid and semi-arid countries and regions.

Additional resources:

- Guidance on water and adaptation to climate change (ECE/MP.WAT/30). Available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=11658>
- Water and climate change adaptation in transboundary basins: lessons learned and good practices (ECE/MP.WAT/45). Available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39417>
- Words into Action Guidelines: Implementation Guide for Addressing Water-Related Disasters and Transboundary Cooperation (ECE/MP.WAT/56). Available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50093>
- Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters (ECE/MP.WAT/40). Available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35126>