

SIWI 's contribution to the call for evidence for the EU initiative

European water resilience strategy

Deadline 3.03.2025

The world, including the European Union member states , is entering a period with a multitude of crises (geopolitical, economic, social, health, environmental, etc.). From an environmental point of view alone, which is the foundation of EU's economy and well-being, the climate crisis and its impacts, including an increased frequency of extreme events (drought, violent storms, flooding) overlaps with the crisis of biodiversity loss (-73% globally between 1970 and 2020). Locally, threats to water-related ecosystems result in increased risks to local communities and adjacent urban areas that rely on functional ecosystems and ecosystem services for their livelihoods. Globally, six (6) out of nine (9) planetary boundaries (PBs) have been transgressed, including the freshwater PB for blue and green water.

The Planetary Boundaries are the safe limits for human pressure on the nine critical processes which together maintain a stable and resilient Earth ([DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.adh2458](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458)). Similar to our ambition to achieve all the SDGs by 2030, securing that the way communities live on Earth and in Europe within the 9 planetary boundaries depends on how they manage, and at which pace they restore the water cycle, at local, national, regional and global levels.

The water cycle does not consider any local administrative, national, nor regional boundaries. As we stand at the crossroads of the multiple crisis the world is facing, EU 's regional and global leadership in championing the robustness restoration of our most precious resource – water and the global hydrological cycle - is not just a necessity; it's an urgent call for the future of our planet and its people.

Each corner of Europe is increasingly affected by either too much, too little, too polluted water, or a combination thereof. These water challenges constitute a water crisis that is finally coming to the attention of the public and European decision-makers in the public and private sector, as it puts at risk the availability of a resource that is essential to our society, economy, and environment.

The call for an EU Blue Deal and an action plan by the EU Economic and Social Committee as well as EU Committee of the Regions, the recent European Environment Agency (EEA) report Europe's state of water 2024 all highlight the urgent need for a European Water Resilience Strategy. Water also connects the different SDGs. However, SDG 6 on water doesn't integrate the already transgressed freshwater planetary boundaries. For the remaining 5 years of 2030 Agenda delivery and as part of the definition of the post-2030 Agenda, the global community needs an integrated system change approach to be more efficient and proactive in reaching shared common goals, with planetary boundaries as foundations. For the freshwater planetary boundary this means integrating the full hydrological cycle, adding green water and related evapotranspiration- and precipitation-sheds. The EU is paving the way with a strong focus on Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy in order to provide a social, environmental and just economic transition for its citizens and external partners. Yet, such a transition cannot happen without overarching and holistic actions in close cooperation within all the College of Commissioners and the different European institutions; each entity should

value water in their respective portfolio and operate in a concerted and cooperative manner, leveraging each other's goals.

The EU needs “robust” freshwater systems on which ecosystems, and socio-economic development can thrive in an unstable world. If the European Water Resilience Strategy is to integrate “robustness of water systems” and of water related ecosystems, SIWI recommends prioritizing investments in water for urban resilience and Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Holistic water governance and land management, that encompass landscape, blue-green water cycle and river basin management within a Source-to-Sea approach will deliver multiple benefits for people, environment, economies and climate. Prioritising and valuing the entire water cycle, at the core of any resilience strategy, enables to also respond to the adaptation and mitigation targets laid out in the Paris Agreement and helps us respond to the risks and threats posed by climate change. Recommended literature: [The essential drop to Net-Zero: Unpacking freshwater's role in climate change mitigation | https://siwi.org/publications/essential-drop-to-net-zero/](https://siwi.org/publications/essential-drop-to-net-zero/)

EU decision-makers (EU parliament, council and commission) and water practitioners need to find ways to understand, plan, and account for the water needed for prosperous societies and healthy ecosystems, supporting nature and its restoration. Climate action, recovering ecosystem services and halting the dramatic biodiversity decline, will only work if including water resource management. Multifunctional forest landscapes and ecosystems play a crucial role in building robust water systems that provide water security. Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR), as a holistic approach, unites competing societal interests across sectors and scales. It needs to be water-smart and integrate hydrological aspects to be successful. SIWI can help inspire the development of the European Water Resilience Strategy with its Water-smart FLR tool that links science, policy and practice to build water resilience of mosaic landscapes. Recommended literature: https://siwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/w-flr-tool-handbook_beta-version_feb-24.pdf

While the EU has established strong regulatory frameworks for pollution prevention, wastewater treatment, and monitoring of emerging pollutants, SIWI can play a key role in bridging science, policy, and local implementation. The RAMP (Responsible Antibiotics Manufacturing Platform) led by SIWI, is an example of how multi-stakeholder collaboration can drive action by strengthening knowledge, capacity, and governance frameworks to tackle Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) in the environment.

Furthermore, in developing the European Water Resilience Strategy, SIWI also recommends that:

- the Strategy is fully integrated into other initiatives, such as the Clean Industrial Deal, the Circular Economy Act, and the Vision for Agriculture and Food, the EU Climate Adaptation.
- in the multilateral governance space, it is of utmost importance that the EU engages and supports strongly, at the UN level, the different Water and Sanitation related processes. That there is a strong multistakeholder inclusive process towards the UN Water Conference 2026 and a prioritisation to deliver the EU commitments made at the UN 2023 Water Conference, and those defined in the EU Water Vision 2050. A strong alignment towards the UN SDG agenda will ensure to deliver on the 2030 Agenda process and create the foundations for the post 2030. Supporting a water vision across the Rio trio conventions (UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD) and the

Ramsar convention would also increase efficiency in implementing these multilateral environmental agreements.

- EU water policy be integrated in inclusive decision-making and implementation dialogues and the reporting on this policy be done in annual progress report on enforcement and implementation across different sectors that are water dependent. It would be of added value that this be done in support and within the framework of the SDGs within the EU's domestic and international portfolio.
- there is a collaborative approach to deliver the full water-energy-food-environment nexus potential, engaging institutions, Member States, industry, research institutes and civil society;
- the implementation of the Zero-pollution ambition and the Water Framework Directive and other legislation of the water acquis be accelerated.
- the financial support to deliver the required investment across the value chain and related infrastructure to implement and comply with the European water acquis, including public and private finance investment, and ensuring smaller scale local projects are funded as well and reconcile environmental sustainability, social equity and economic efficiency; This needs to be undertaken within the EU's domestic and international portfolios.
- the recognition and incentivisation of nature-based solutions and urban green infrastructures are considered as benefits for multiple European strategies (e.g. water retention and recycling, storm water management, alleviation of urban heat island effect and increased biodiversity).

Achieving water resilience through cooperation and diplomacy

Building on the 2018 EU Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy and reaffirming these commitments in 2021, the European Union should take a leading role in strengthening transboundary water cooperation as a strategic instrument for security, sustainability, and climate resilience. Recognizing the fundamental importance of water in ensuring human security, fostering peace, and promoting regional stability, the EU should include a reference to water diplomacy in its water resilience strategy.

To reinforce its role as a global leader in water resilience, the EU should provide political and institutional support on water cooperation as part of its water resilience strategy. This includes establishing and reinforcing platforms for diplomatic engagement, mediation, and conflict prevention related to shared water resources. Closer cooperation between different EU institutions should be pursued to identify opportunities for improved water cooperation.

The EU should also promote data sharing and joint risk management beyond its borders, with a focus on the European neighbourhood. Encouraging collaborative early warning systems, shared monitoring frameworks, and open data initiatives will improve responses to floods, droughts, and waterborne diseases. Additionally, fostering financial and technical cooperation in the European neighbourhood is essential. The EU should mobilize its funding instruments, including climate finance mechanisms, to support infrastructure development, capacity-building programs, and nature-based solutions in transboundary water basins both within and beyond the EU.

Addressing climate and water security challenges requires strengthening communication resilience by countering misinformation and disinformation campaigns that target climate,

water—especially water quality—and water cooperation issues. These campaigns are designed to undermine scientific work and data-based decision-making. The EU must enhance efforts to counter disinformation, promote transparent communication, and support public trust in science-driven water governance.

As climate change exacerbates water-related risks, the EU must prioritize transboundary adaptation strategies that promote coordinated disaster risk reduction and adaptation planning among riparian states. Integrated water resource management should be facilitated through the promotion of nature-based solutions, sustainable agriculture practices, and resilient urban water systems. Furthermore, the EU should utilize its research and innovation programmes to drive innovation and knowledge exchange, developing cutting-edge solutions for water scarcity and pollution control.

In supporting the elaboration, implementation, communication and reporting back on the European Water Resilience Strategy, SIWI can convene, in partnership with the EU, different spaces and opportunities for dialogues and multi-stakeholder engagements within:

[Water for Climate Pavilion](#) that we chair and coordinate each year within the framework of the UNFCCC COP

[World Water Week](#), the biggest annual event on global water issues that is hosted by SIWI in Stockholm every year in August.

[Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition](#) – both SIWI and EU (EEAS) are members, the coalition is an important platform for dialogue and knowledge sharing on the benefits of water cooperation, including the importance of cooperation on shared waters for resilience and stability.