

Action Plan for the Finnish Water Way – International Water Strategy of Finland 2023

1. Introduction

The *Finnish Water Way – International Water Strategy of Finland* (2018–2030) is a joint guiding strategy of five ministries (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) that stakeholders can also make use of in their activities. The strategy is built on three pillars (I Water for Sustainable Development, II Water for People and III Water for Peace) and their cross-cutting objectives.

The implementation of the strategy is guided by an Action Plan updated annually under the leadership of the national interministerial working group on Finland's international activities on water. The Action Plan describes the implementation of the strategy in the light of the prevailing circumstances and defines new concrete priority actions related to influencing and financing for the coming year, with not everything done every year. The International Water Strategy of Finland is implemented in cooperation between the signatory ministries and stakeholders. The implementation is coordinated and directed by the joint Special Envoy for Water of the ministries in the Political Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the ministries. In particular, the Action Plan describes the work done by the public administration to promote the strategy. The implementation is observed by the national interministerial working group on Finland's international activities on water.

The Action Plan briefly states the main influencing and financing actions taken in 2022 and shows the channelling of financing to each of the strategy pillars, as well as expressing any deficiencies in financing or influencing. The second section of the action plan gives a brief assessment of the previous period. The third section lays out, based on the previous year's conclusions, the influencing and financing priorities for actions in the following year of 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on the implementation of water sector plans in 2020–2021 and as a factor of uncertainty in early 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has made cooperation in the international arena more difficult. The pandemic and Russia's invasion have also had an indirect impact on water issues: for example, water, sanitation and hygiene issues were highlighted in the pandemic response, and Russia's invasion is partly reflected in changes in the focus of development funding.

2. Actions in 2022

The national interministerial working group on Finland's international activities on water actively exchanges information on the activities of public operators and on positions and international participation related to the Finnish water sector. The working group convened three times in 2022. In addition, intersectoral coordination was significantly increased through the preparatory meetings of the UN 2023 Water Conference.

Influencing

Key water-related actions in the field of influencing taken by the ministries in 2022:

- participation in high-level UN water conferences and other important water conferences and their preparation (the ministries participated in an exceptionally large number of international water conferences¹ as part of the preparations for the UN Water Conference; coordinating the participation between the ministries);
- contributing to water themes, in particular the UN resolutions on SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation);
- increasing international water-sector financing, launch of the Growth and Internationalisation of Water Expertise programme, transition to the contractual phase of the first Public Sector Investment Facility (PIF) project in the water sector and start of preparations for a bilateral water project in Nepal;
- stabilising water-sector development funding at current levels;
- promotion of water-sector internationalisation and export (including Minister Kurvinen's Team Finland export promotion trip to Vietnam);
- supporting the work of the Finnish Water Forum (FWF) and activating its members to implement the International Water Strategy of Finland;
- participation of the FWF, water companies and the ministries in the IWA World Water Congress in Copenhagen and the Dubai Expo 2022;
- active participation in the Group of Friends of Water operating in the context of the UN, permanent membership of the Steering Group;
- promotion of the UN-Water SDG 6 Acceleration Framework, including through participation in UN-Water meetings and events;
- promotion of stronger consideration of water issues as part of climate work, for example by supporting the work of Professor Hannele Pokka in the international Water and Climate Leaders panel coordinated by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and participating in the COP27 Climate Change Conference and organising side events (for example, on the role of cooperation on transboundary watercourses in climate security and increasing the effectiveness of climate funding);
- promotion of water stewardship, for example by utilising the results of the VNTEAS project "Finland and Finnish companies to become world leaders in water stewardship by 2030", by creating and implementing an Delivery Plan for the COP26 Glasgow Declaration for Fair Water Footprints and by

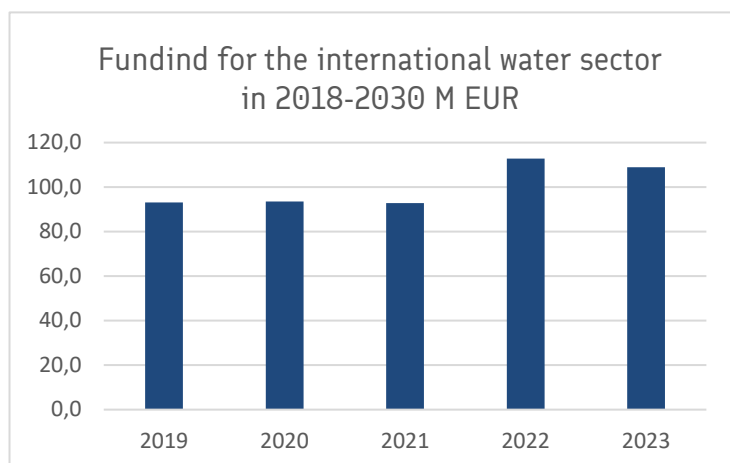
¹ World Water Forum in Senegal (March 2022), World Water Day Event (March 2022), UNECE Preparation Meeting for Water Conference (April 2022), WWF Feedback Event in New York (April 2022), Dushanbe Water Conference (June 2022), Geneva Water Dialogue (June 2022), UN Oceans Conference (June 2022), UNECE Water Conference 30 Years (July 2022), Stockholm World Water Week (August 2022), Preparatory Meeting for UN Water Conference (October 2022), COP27 (November 2022), and UNECE Water and Health Protocol Meeting of the Parties (November 2022), UN-Water Summit on Groundwater (December 2022)

- promoting the Glasgow Declaration and Finland’s work on water stewardship at a joint event with Austria and Slovenia at the Bled Water Festival;
- active efforts to increase the role of water in the framework of international biodiversity agreements (such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention);
- supporting Finland’s Human Rights Council term (in particular, by drafting a resolution on clean drinking water and sanitation as human rights);
- consolidating the operations of the water diplomacy network and strengthening of its capacity;
- planning and implementation of water diplomacy in selected geographical areas;
- strengthening water diplomacy cooperation with strategic partners;
- supporting the Secretariat servicing the Protocol on Water and Health to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), participating in decision-making as a member of the Steering Committee of the Protocol, contributing to the implementation of the updated national targets of the Protocol, and finalising and implementing the roadmap;
- organising a joint event with Estonia to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the UNECE Water Convention in Tallinn and participating in the event at Permanent Secretary level and with a large delegation;
- supporting the UNECE Secretariat servicing the Water Convention in various ways and actively advancing the work programme in leading roles in the areas of work, including participation in a workshop in Namibia, as well as funding and organising a regional workshop on water distribution in Central Asia;
- participation in the Stockholm World Water Week and organising side events (*Women in Water Diplomacy Global Network meeting, Value of Water at Times of Armed Conflicts and The Value of Transboundary Cooperation for Addressing global changes jointly*);
- funding the education of international journalists on the water theme prior to the World Water Forum and sharing experience in nature-based solutions, the nexus approach and water diplomacy in several side events of the Forum;
- appointment of a joint Special Envoy for Water of the ministries (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of the Environment and Ministry for Social Affairs and Health) at the Centre for Peace Mediation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ Political Department.

Financing

Known financing of the ministries for the implementation of the International Water Strategy of Finland, by pillars, 2018–2030 (MEUR):

Water for Sustainable Development:	Water for People:	Water for Peace:
41,2	63,0	4,7



1 The trend of Finnish water sector funding, 2019 - 2023

International funding for the water sector has been implemented as anticipated, and the ministries' funding for the water sector is at a reasonable level. As a significant share, the funding totals include the EU's delegated funding for Finland's water resource management project in Nepal. The overall funding is currently growing through the impact of recovery instruments related to the COVID-19 crisis.

The ministries continued to support the FWF, whose first three-year programming period ended and was evaluated in 2022. The new three-year programme starts in 2023.

In 2021–2024, the development cooperation of Finland's country strategy for Nepal will focus mainly on improving water supply, sanitation and climate resilience, as well as supporting the education sector and improving gender equality and social inclusion. The following projects promote water supply and sanitation under the country strategy for Nepal.

- Sustainable WASH for All (SUSWA). A water, sanitation and hygiene project funded by Finland and the EU in the remote Karnali province of Nepal in 2022–2027.
- Towards Arsenic Safe Drinking Water in Nepal between 2020 and 2023. The Finnish contributors to the project are the Finnish Environment Institute and the Geological Survey of Finland.
- Green Resilient Agricultural Productive Ecosystems (GRAPE). The value chain project carried out by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) between 2021 and 2024 is jointly funded by Finland, Germany and the European Union and also implements water systems, such as irrigation systems).
- The Local Adaptation to Climate Change (LACC) project is being prepared in the Far Western provinces of Nepal to support municipalities not only with water but also in a variety of other sectors in 2023–2028. According to the plan, the project would be financed with the support of Finland and the EU, and the funding would be a significant addition under the Water for People – pillar.

In Ethiopia, Finland is improving access to water and sanitation through development cooperation and ensuring that people with disabilities and vulnerable groups also benefit from them. Local communities are being trained to maintain the functionality of water points and toilets themselves. The political instability in Ethiopia has affected the implementation of projects, particularly in the Tigray Region and occasionally in parts of the Amhara Region. Infrastructure has been destroyed in conflict zones. Projects to promote water supply and sanitation in Ethiopia include the following.

- Community-based rural water services and sanitation project (COWASH IV) in 2021–2024. The villagers themselves are responsible for the management, implementation and maintenance of the water project.
- The Ethiopian water sector's multi-donor Consolidated WASH Account (CWA). The Consolidated WASH Account supports the Ethiopian Government's One WASH National Programme on water supply, sanitation and hygiene.

6 April 2022, Helsinki

Two water-related Institutional Cooperation Instrument (ICI) projects were implemented in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A water-themed ICI project in Uzbekistan is in the project planning phase. In Colombia, the quality assurance of water laboratories has continued through the Finnish Environment Institute's three-year COFI-Water project (2020–2023).

Cooperation between Vietnam and Finland is shifting from traditional development cooperation to commercial cooperation, in line with the growth of the Vietnamese economy. Cooperation in the water sector will continue through private sector projects, for example by means of the new PIF instrument. In addition, the need to provide expert assistance to Vietnam in relation to water legislation will be investigated.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is also funding several NGO development cooperation projects, some of which include water themes, such as the dry sanitation programme of the Global Dry Toilet Association of Finland in Zambia.

3. Measures and action points for 2023

Influencing

The key influencing priorities for the water sector in 2023 are measures aimed at influencing international water policy globally and in Finland more extensively. The strategy's objectives are grouped under the three pillars: Water for Sustainable Development, Water for People and Water for Peace.

The most important water event of 2023 will be the UN Water Conference in New York on 23 and 24 March 2023, the first of its kind since 1977 (Mar del Plata, Argentina). The conference will focus on five interactive dialogues and the Water Action Agenda. Different parties can make voluntary commitments to the Water Action Agenda, and Finnish operators are encouraged to do so. The conference will not release a negotiated resolution. Finland will seek an active role at the conference and will also organise side events.

In 2023, Finland will play a larger role at the Stockholm World Water Week than before. For the first time, Finland will act as one of the convenors of the seminar series of the World Water Week. Finland will also continue its activities in the Group of Friends of Water operating in the UN context as a member of the Steering Group.

The internationalisation of the Finnish water sector and the promotion of exports will be promoted in international contexts as a significant entity. Support for the work of the FWF will be continued and its members will be activated to implement the *International Water Strategy of Finland*.

Finland will leverage potential synergies in the water sector and water policy with the upcoming EU presidencies (Sweden and Spain) in 2023. On the financing side, the operators will seek to influence the increase of international funding in the water sector. The aim is to maintain water-focused development funding at its current level or to increase it, and to divide activities more strategically between the different pillars of the International Water Strategy of Finland.

Water for Sustainable Development:

- contributing to the review of the SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) at the UN High Level Political Forum 2023
- promotion of the UN-Water SDG 6 Acceleration Framework, including through participation in UN-Water meetings and events cooperation with other operators;
- raising water issues, water management tools and monitoring/knowledge in climate initiatives and debates, for example by supporting Professor Hannele Pokka in the WMO-coordinated group of Water and Climate Leaders and synergies in water-related ICI projects in Central Asia;
- influencing the measures of the next Government Programme with regard to the priorities of the International Water Strategy of Finland, the principles of development policy across parliamentary terms and the EU and Finland's strategies for Africa;
- promotion of water stewardship, where Finland will continue to play an active role in the implementation of the Fair Water Footprints initiative and in expanding the initiative to new signatories;
- participation in the China-Europe Water Platform (CEWP);
- active efforts to increase the role of water in the framework of international biodiversity agreements (such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention);
- participation in the OECD Water Governance Initiative.

Water for People:

- supporting Finland's Human Rights Council term as needed;
- supporting the Secretariat servicing the Protocol on Water and Health to the UNECE Water Convention, participating in decision-making as a member of the Bureau of the Protocol and contributing to the implementation of the updated national targets of the Protocol on Water and Health;
- systematic strengthening of water and sanitation activities and infrastructure, as well as the growth and internationalisation of water expertise in pandemic recovery and reconstruction activities;
- enabling Finnish operators to participate in the reconstruction of Ukraine;
- participation in the seventh WHO *Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health*.

Water for Peace:

- prioritising the measures of the joint project on water diplomacy and further strengthening the capacity to be able to commit more professionals to water diplomacy processes due to the significant demand for water diplomacy and the activities of the water diplomacy network;
- water diplomacy activities in selected geographical areas;
- continuing to strengthen water diplomacy cooperation with strategic partners (in particular the African Union, Senegal, Switzerland, Sweden and Slovenia);
- initiating the development of cooperation toward the European Commission, in particular in regard to water diplomacy, taking into account opportunities for a Team Europe initiative on water-energy-climate change in Central Asia and possible follow-up to the 2022 regional meeting, and exploring the possibility of participating in the Team Europe initiative on transboundary water cooperation in Africa;

6 April 2022, Helsinki

- supporting the UNECE Secretariat servicing the Water Convention and actively advancing the work programme in leading roles in the areas of work (monitoring and assessment, integrated water resources management, water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus);
- active participation in the UNECE Water Convention Working Groups: Co-Chair of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, lead Party of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus, and Member of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management;
- promotion of transboundary water cooperation through the *Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition*;
- establishing bilateral cooperation in Namibia to ratify and implement the Water Convention.

Financing

Financing priorities for 2023:

- implementation of the second funding round of the Growth and Internationalisation of Water Expertise programme for Finland and implementation of projects of the first funding round;
- maintaining the funding of the UNECE Water Convention;
- implementation of the Water Diplomacy Project and continuation of support;
- extension of the support of the FWF for a new three-year period;
- continued implementation of the country programmes for Nepal and Ethiopia in the water sector;
- preparation of PIF projects on water and sanitation (Kenya and Vietnam);
- preparation of the Finnish Environment Institute's ICI project in Uzbekistan.