



# Innovative water governance practices Insights from Horizon Europe projects

Seminar

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# Setting the scene for innovative water governance in the EU context

Europe is increasingly experiencing severe droughts and floods due to climate change, and despite decades of efforts to curb pollution, the health of water ecosystems continues to decline

- **Water resilience is rising on the EU agenda**

**Water resilience** consists of the capacity of our socio-ecological systems to manage with change—either by resisting, adapting, or transforming in response to it

**Water governance** is a critical enabling factor for water resilience, i.e., regulatory and policy frameworks and their implementation, collaboration among different sectors and actors, information sharing, and monitoring and evaluation, across sectors, and at multiple levels from local to national to regional and international





## Water resilience is built with better water governance

Europe is increasingly experiencing severe droughts and floods due to climate change, and despite decades of efforts to curb pollution, the health of water ecosystems continues to decline. Addressing water resilience should be a priority for the new European Parliament, the new Commission, and the Member States. Water resilience consist of the capacity of our socio-ecological systems, especially aquatic ecosystems and the communities that rely on high-quality and sufficient water supplies, to manage change—either by resisting, adapting, or transforming in response to it.

Strengthening of Europe’s water resilience requires improved water governance. The institutional frameworks of today and the interaction between different sectors and actors have to be enhanced as the use, development and protection of waters demand our careful consideration. Recent research has identified governance practices and innovative instruments, approaches and arrangements that can support water resilience, with EU-wide scaling up potential.

### Key messages

- Water resilience is critical for the core aims of the EU. Water should be a strategic priority in the work of the new European Parliament, the Commission, and the Member States.
- Water resilience requires a cross-sectoral regulatory approach. More attention should be paid to water use and impacts in the agriculture, industry and energy production sectors and their water-intensive value chains to reach the Water Framework Directive’s water status objectives and to advance systemic adaptation to climate change. Regulation should be able to impose requirements not only on new but also on existing activities impacting waters.
- Water resilience is founded on collaboration between the public sector, private sector, civil society and research and education. Participatory and collaborative approaches support vertical integration across multiple levels of governance and horizontal coherence and coordination across policy sectors. Power and capacity of actors, diversity of knowledge systems and coordination across jurisdictional and geographical boundaries are critical factors in their effectiveness. Social innovation and digital solutions facilitate data exchange, streamline decision-making, and promote inclusive participation from all stakeholders.
- Water resilience is best financed with a diversity of funding sources, consolidating water charges and tariffs that incentivise efficient water use, and leveraging private finance through public-private partnerships or blended finance solutions.
- Increasing Europe’s water resilience requires reflective approaches, such as greater use of monitoring and evaluation of policies and their implementation. Incorporating the trade-offs and synergies among water, food, energy and ecosystems in monitoring and evaluation enable better understanding of the impacts of management decisions. Commonly agreed indicators, supporting data, and the use of open and accessible digital platforms can improve the flow of information to a wide range of decision-making actors including the wider public. It can also help holding decision makers accountable, and raise awareness, acceptance, and uptake of more sustainable water use and management practices.

# Policy brief: Water resilience is built with better water governance

- The existing water governance instruments, approaches, and arrangements in place in Europe need to be carefully evaluated, whether they serve the purpose of enhancing water resilience
- The three projects of the WaterGovernance2027 Synergy group have identified cutting-edge governance practices that can support water resilience, with EU-wide scaling





# Key messages I

## Water resilience requires a cross-sectoral regulatory approach

- Attention needed to water use and impacts in the agriculture, industry and energy production sectors and their water-intensive value chains to reach WFD objectives and to advance systemic adaptation to climate change
- Regulation should be able to impose requirements not only on new but also on existing activities impacting waters

## Water resilience requires new economic and financing instruments

- It is best financed with a diversity of funding sources, consolidating water charges and tariffs that incentivize efficient water use, and leveraging private finance through public-private partnerships or blended finance solutions



# Key messages II

**Water resilience is founded on collaboration between the public sector, private sector, civil society and research and education**

- Participatory and collaborative approaches support vertical integration across multiple levels of governance and horizontal coherence and coordination across policy sectors



# Key messages III

## **Water resilience requires reflective approaches, such as greater use of monitoring and evaluation of policies and their implementation**

- Incorporating the trade-offs and synergies among water, food, energy and ecosystems in monitoring and evaluation enable better understanding of the impacts of management decisions
- Commonly agreed indicators, supporting data, and the use of open and accessible digital platforms can improve the flow of information to a wide range of decision-making actors including the wider public
- Accessible digital platforms help holding decision makers accountable, and raising awareness, acceptance, and uptake of more sustainable water use and management practices



# Policy brief: Building water resilience : Towards better implementation of ecological flows and water allocation in Europe



## Building water resilience: towards better implementation of ecological flows and water allocation in Europe

The importance of building water resilience is becoming more and more clear to politicians and citizens as Europe is facing another summer of severe droughts leading to disruptions of water supply, damages to crop production and severe water stress in vulnerable aquatic ecosystems.

Strengthening Europe's water resilience requires better strategies to tackle water scarcity and droughts, which are being intensified by climate change. The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy under the European Green Deal have set priorities to urge Member States to take action. These EU strategies ask EU Member States to strengthen the implementation of ecological flows and to improve water allocation systems.

European research delivers key insights on the design and implementation of regulations being used for water allocation and ecological flows in different countries and highlights areas where actions need to be strengthened.

### Key messages

- Regulatory frameworks for ecological flows should be fully elaborated and implemented, incorporating provisions for defining, implementing and monitoring ecological flows in national water policy and river basin management plans.
- A common understanding of the role of water allocation in the Water Framework Directive should be developed and regulatory barriers for reallocating water addressed. Lessons can be learned from European countries with more advanced water allocation decision-making frameworks, such as Spain, France and England.
- Comprehensive strategies are needed to address trade-offs with sectors when implementing ecological flows and planning water allocation. More attention should be paid to stakeholder engagement in planning and implementation, to coordination with sectoral planning processes and compensation mechanisms for water users.
- Knowledge and information systems must be strengthened to improve the definition and implementation of ecological flows and decision making for water allocation.
- Resources of authorities for monitoring and enforcement and legal and financial deterrents on non-compliance with water permit conditions must increase.