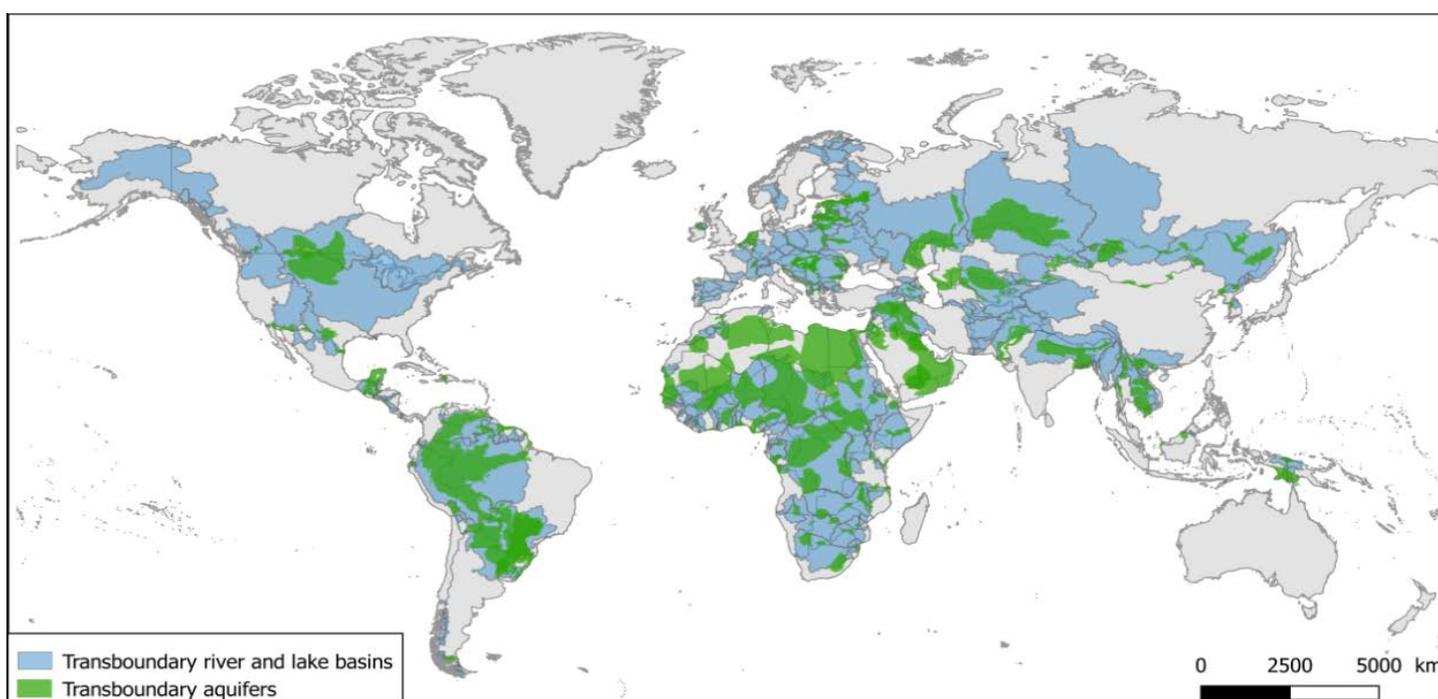


Transboundary Water Cooperation's contribution to the SDGs – key insights from the first SDG6.5.2 reports



Cooperation over transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers is critical to ensuring that water resources are managed in an equitable and sustainable manner, and the achievement of SDG6 (water). Transboundary waters also create social, economic, environmental and political inter-dependencies that make cooperation a precondition to sustainable development, peace and security. As the only target in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that makes explicit reference to transboundary cooperation, target 6.5 can play a catalytic role across multiple SDGs and targets. It can generate multiple benefits for the protection of human health, renewable energy provision, sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation, ecosystem protection, and peace and security.



Across the world, 153 countries share rivers, lakes and aquifers. An estimated 286 river and lakes basins exist, and 592 transboundary aquifers have been inventoried by the UNESCO IHP in 2015. Transboundary basins cover more than half of the Earth's land surface, account for an estimated 60% of global freshwater flow and are home to more than 40 per cent of the world's population.

Highlights:

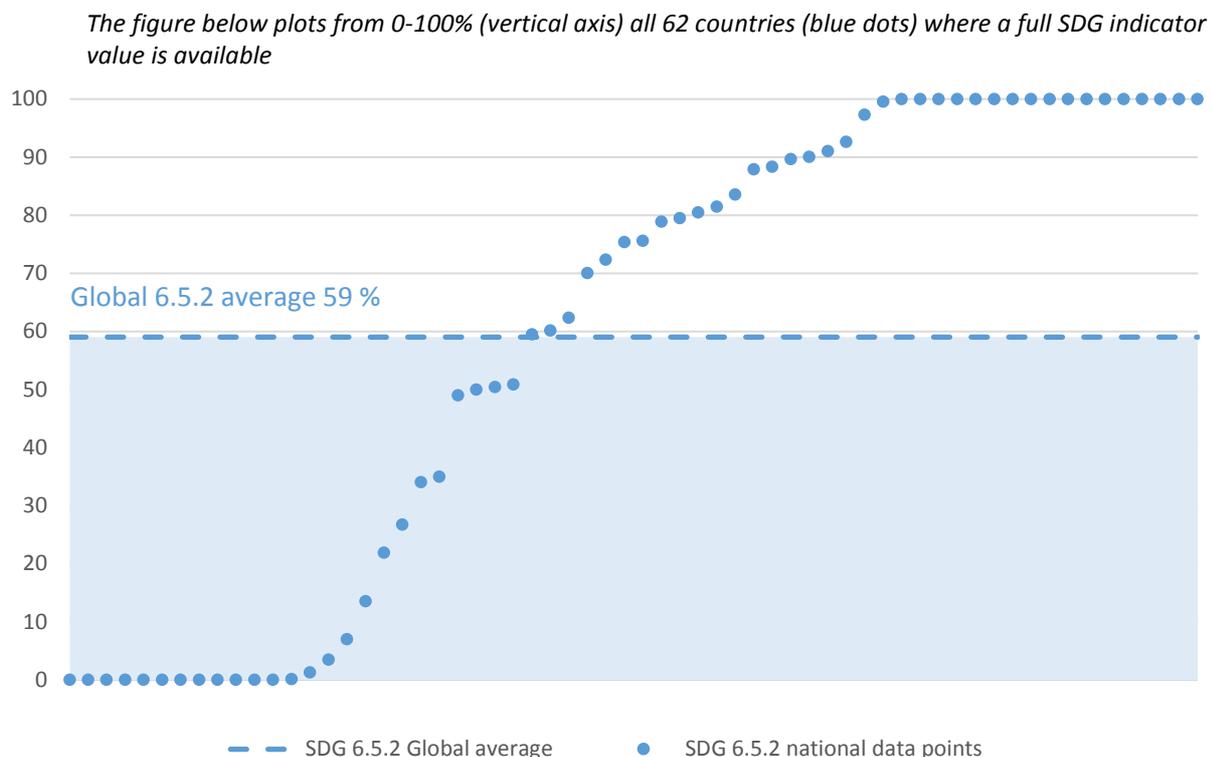
- The introduction of SDG indicator 6.5.2 into the SDG framework, and the high response rate to the first reporting exercise, marks an important step in monitoring transboundary water cooperation.
- However, for the 62 countries where data is available, only 59% of their transboundary basin area is covered by operational arrangements; and only 17 countries have all their transboundary basins covered by operational arrangements.
- If we want to achieve target 6.5 by 2030, and realize the multiple benefits that transboundary water cooperation offers, we must accelerate progress.
- Capitalizing on the momentum in support of global water law instruments can strengthen cooperation worldwide.

Early in 2017, all 153 countries sharing transboundary waters were invited by the custodian agencies for 6.5.2 (UNECE and UNESCO) to report. This invitation resulted in 107 responses from countries sharing transboundary waters, representing a response rate of 70%. This response demonstrates the importance of the topic and the commitment of countries.

What can we learn from the first SDG6.5.2 indicator exercise?

For the first time, a country-based process offers the means by which the coverage of operational arrangements across the world's transboundary basins can be monitored, and efforts to accelerate progress targeted. Through the initial application of SDG indicator 6.5.2, it has proven possible to measure operational arrangements across a diverse range of settings. Inevitably, the first reporting exercise has also highlighted improvements that can be made to the guidance provided to countries on the application of SDG 6.5.2, and the number of countries that reported.

An analysis of the results of the first SDG 6.5.2 national reports provides useful insights into the status of transboundary water cooperation and the efforts needed to support Agenda 2030.



- For the 62 countries where data is available, 59% of their transboundary basin area is covered by operational; and only 17 countries report that all their transboundary basins are covered by operational arrangements. A significant effort is therefore needed to strengthen transboundary water cooperation and realize its potential to support SDG6 and the many other water-related SDGs.
- Regional analysis suggests that, while cooperation is evident in all regions, there is significant variation in terms of transboundary basin area covered by operational arrangements. Europe and North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, show the highest levels of coverage for their operational arrangements, particularly in relation to transboundary river and lakes. Progress in other regions

SDG target 6.5 calls for the implementation of integrated water resources management at all levels, including through **transboundary water cooperation** as appropriate

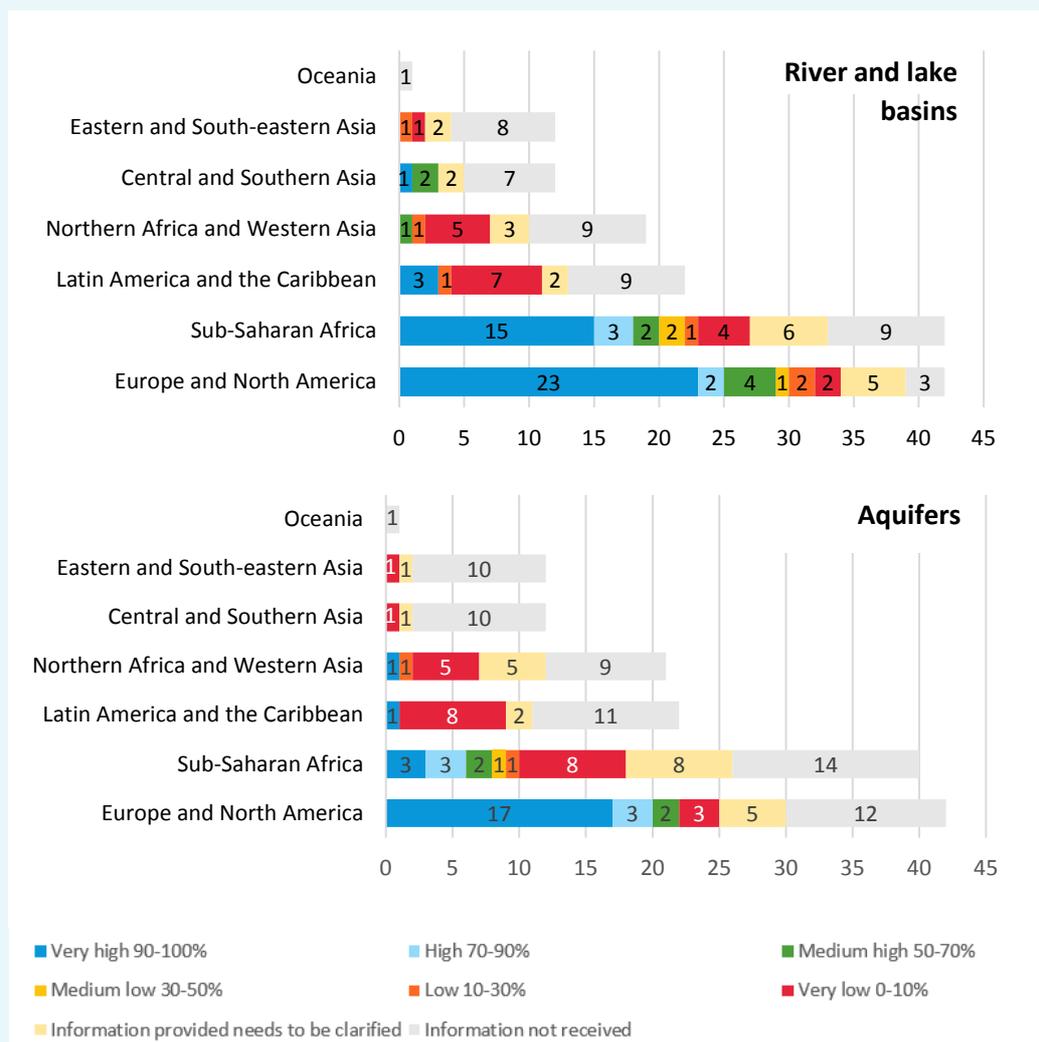
is less advanced. However, there are many instances where countries are making concerted efforts to advance their transboundary water cooperation.

- **Cooperation is shaped by the particular historical, legal, and political context and existing arrangements vary considerably in terms of scope and intensity of cooperation.** They all reflect a tangible commitment by the countries involved to manage water resources at transboundary level and are founded upon customary international law principles. Basin-specific arrangements are greatly supported by regional and global frameworks such as the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Rivers and International Lakes (Water Convention), the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention), the EU Water Framework Directive and the Revised SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourse Systems.
- **Cooperation on transboundary aquifers needs to be strengthened in many regions of the world.** Despite numerous services provided by groundwater for both humans and ecosystems, operational arrangements for transboundary aquifers are still rare around the world. Key issues that pose obstacles in realizing a commitment to coordinated or joint management of the ‘invisible resource’ include a lack of adequate groundwater monitoring at national levels and detailed transboundary aquifer assessments.

Analysing SDG indicator 6.5.2 at the regional level, and between river and lake basins, and

The figure to the right shows the SDG 6.5.2 indicator value for each region, and according to thresholds of basin area in each country covered by operational arrangements. While Europe, North America and Sub-Saharan Africa show the highest levels of operational arrangements (dark blue), the graphs also show that reporting across Asia on SDG6.5.2 is low.

The two figures separate the SDG indicator 6.5.2 into a value for both river and lake basins and one or aquifers. The SDG6.5.2 value for transboundary river and lakes basins is 64% (based on 84 countries), and the value for transboundary aquifers is 47% (based on 61 countries). While this supports the conclusion that cooperation over transboundary aquifers falls behind that of river and lakes basins, the advantages of conjunctive management of both surface water and groundwaters, where appropriate, should be considered.



Where do we go from here?

- **Accelerate progress if we want to achieve target 6.5 by 2030 and ensure that all transboundary basins are covered by an operational arrangement.** At the current rate of progress, with on average three agreements entered into per year (Giordano, *et al* 2014), we are not on track to achieve target 6.5.
- **Capitalize on the experience and outputs of the first SDG indicator 6.5.2 reporting exercise.** The first reporting exercise has demonstrated that SDG indicator 6.5.2 operationality criteria and its associated reporting template offer a robust methodology by which to monitor transboundary water cooperation across a diverse range of settings. SDG indicator 6.5.2 reports should be used to set national and basin-specific targets related to transboundary water cooperation.
- **It is important that countries and regions where reporting levels are currently low engage in reporting exercises, and guidance on SDG6.5.2 reporting methodology is enhanced.** Through regional workshops and targeted guidance materials the custodian agencies will draw from the experience of the first reporting exercise to strengthen the application of SDG6.5.2.
- **We must build upon the momentum in support of the Watercourses Convention (which entered into force in 2014), the Water Convention (which is since 2016 open to accession by all UN Member States) and the ILC Draft Articles on Transboundary Aquifers.** Where operational arrangements are lacking these instruments offer the tools upon which new arrangements can be negotiated or existing arrangements can be strengthened.
- **Couple efforts to enhance transboundary water cooperation with other critical issues related to sustainability, climate change, poverty alleviation, and peace and security.** Transboundary water cooperation offers multiple benefits that go beyond water. Coupling efforts and fostering synergies between linked issues, such as sustainability, climate change, poverty alleviation and peace and security offers an important means by which to most effectively advance transboundary water cooperation.

What does SDG indicator 6.5.2 measure?

SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures the proportion of a **transboundary basin area** (river, lake or aquifer) within a country with an **arrangement for water cooperation** in place. An 'arrangement' might include a **bilateral or multilateral treaty, convention, agreement, memorandum of understanding, exchange of information or any other formal commitment among countries.**

Four criteria must be satisfied for an arrangement to be considered '**operational**':

- A **joint body** or other institutional mechanism must be in place;
- There must be at least one annual (political or technical) **meeting between riparian countries**;
- There must be at least an **annual exchange of data and information**
- Riparian countries have adopted **joint or coordinated management plans, or joint objectives.**

For more information

Secretariat of the Water Convention
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

<https://www.unece.org/env/water/>

[Transboundary Water Cooperation Reporting@un.org](mailto:Transboundary_Water_Cooperation_Reporting@un.org)

International Hydrological Programme
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/water-security/hydrology>

[Transboundary Water Cooperation Reporting@unesco.org](mailto:Transboundary_Water_Cooperation_Reporting@unesco.org)

SDG6.5.2 forms part of the wider goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (SDG6); which is supported by UN-Water's Integrated Monitoring Initiative - www.sdg6monitoring.org/



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

