

Strengthening water and sanitation regulation

A Global Call to Action

August 2024

The Urgent Need to Strengthen Water and Sanitation Regulatory Systems

The world is off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 targets. Rates of progress need to increase 5-6 fold to achieve safely managed drinking-water and sanitation for all. There is consensus that effective regulatory systems—including institutional frameworks, operational procedures, enforcement mechanisms, and adequate resourcing—are fundamental to service improvement, and sustainability. Countries with a well-resourced and functional regulatory systems are more likely to be on track to achieving national targets for drinking water and sanitation ([GLAAS 2022](#)).

Strengthening regulatory systems supports progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation and helps bring informal services under a regulatory umbrella. An underlying principle of regulation is universal access, and effective regulation is key to ensuring that water and sanitation services are provided safely, sustainably and equitably to all. Yet, many of the 2.2 billion consumers served by non-piped/small water supplies and decentralised sanitation solutions do not have the benefit of regulated services. Additionally, in many countries regulatory systems are under-resourced, both financially and in terms of human capital, or compromised by fragmented institutional or legislative arrangements. The [UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation](#) points, in output 4.5 to poor regulation, *inter alia*, to be at the root of poor water governance. There is, therefore, a clear need to strengthen regulatory systems to cover services currently not regulated, and also to improve the enabling environment for regulation and give it greater resilience.

Improving water and sanitation regulatory systems is urgent and critical for progress. This Call to Action comes at a unique moment, with less than five years to achieve SDG6, for all stakeholders to adopt proactive, flexible, and inclusive approaches to strengthen regulatory systems everywhere.

The Call to Action will contribute to:

- **Increasing political recognition:** strengthen national leadership; define roles, responsibilities, powers and collaborative opportunities for stakeholders; highlight critical role of regulation and empowerment; establish/maintain funding mechanisms; develop national roadmaps.
- **Promoting uptake of good regulatory practices:** working frameworks and approaches that improve service delivery.
- **Promoting enhanced and better coordinated technical assistance:** increase financial and technical support; foster knowledge sharing and collaboration among external support agencies, financing institutions.
- **Monitoring the status of water and sanitation regulation:** establishing robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating; use data and evidence to inform policy adjustments and improvements; regularly publish reports on the status of and progress on water and sanitation regulation.

Above all, effective regulatory systems require adequate funding to build capacity, ensure enforcement, and maintain sustainability. Governments must recognize that investing in regulatory system strengthening is not just a financial obligation but a strategic move to improve public health, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

This initiative seeks to engage:

- **Policy makers:** increase political recognition of the crucial role of regulation in strengthening delivery of water and sanitation services.
- **Regulators, utilities/service providers and policy makers:** increase political recognition and national leadership through development of roadmaps to advance water and sanitation regulation; improve uptake by countries to implement and support regulation as a driver for water and sanitation services.
- **External support agencies, technical cooperation agencies and international financing institutions:** promote enhanced and better coordinated technical assistance on regulation.
- **Governments, regulators and external support agencies:** monitor the state of and trends water and sanitation regulation.

An important component of the Call to Action will also be continued delivery by partners on water and sanitation regulation-related commitments already made through existing mechanisms. Examples include those made through the [Water Action Agenda](#), the [Sanitation and Water for All Mutual Accountability Mechanism](#), the [G20 Call to Action on Strengthening Drinking-water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Services](#), the [Global Coalition for Better Policies and Regulation of Water and Sanitation Services](#) and the [International Network of Drinking-water and Sanitation Regulators \(RegNet\)](#).

What is the Call to Action?

The Call to Action on Strengthening Water and Sanitation Regulatory Systems is a growing coordinated effort by governments, utilities/service providers, regulators and external support agencies aimed at strengthening water and sanitation systems, improving public health, and advancing social equity. Your participation is crucial in creating a future where everyone has access to safe, sustainable, and equitable water and sanitation services. Partners engaged to date include:

Regulators' networks and associations: Asociación de Entes Reguladores de Agua y Saneamiento de las Américas (ADERASA); Eastern and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation (ESAWAS) Regulators' Association; WHO International Network of Drinking-water & Sanitation Regulators (RegNet).

External support agencies: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF); International Water Association (IWA); Lisbon International Centre for Water (LIS-Water); Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI); Sanitation and Water for All (SWA); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); World Health Organization (WHO).

Financing institutions: African Development Bank (AfDB); Asian Development Bank (ADB); Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); World Bank.

How to engage in the Call to Action

Register your interest by emailing wsh@who.int.

Participate in our consultation webinars to learn, share experiences, and collaborate with other stakeholders. Use your platform to advocate for strengthened water and sanitation regulatory systems, push for policy improvements, and ensure regulatory system strengthening is considered in funding discussions for non-WASH programmes.

Consultation Process

In the coming months, a global and regional consultative process will develop the final Call to Action. The roadmap for this consultation will be presented in August 2024 at the IWA Congress in Toronto, with consultations starting in September 2024 with global WASH sector partners, regional associations, and regulators, service providers and utilities. The goal is to publish the Call to Action by the end of 2024, with ongoing coordination on technical assistance, capacity building, legislative advocacy, and cross-sector collaboration thereafter.

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