



Opportunities to coordinate with neighboring countries when completing the SDG indicator 6.5.2 national report

Why coordinate?

While SDG indicator 6.5.2 invites countries to submit national reports, 6.5.2 coordination between countries sharing the same transboundary river(s), lake(s) or aquifer(s) has several benefits, including the following:



Help countries reach a common understanding on basic data or the need to address gaps

Identifying different views on cooperation in a basin, e.g. the operationality criteria, can provide a basis for discussing and agreeing on joint action. This has proven especially beneficial in relation to transboundary aquifers, where commonly agreed data may be absent. Even agreeing nomenclature can help raise the profile of an aquifer, address confusion and in turn help attract external assistance.



Improve the overall quality of 6.5.2 data

Providing consistent data for the entire basin leads to better analysis of 6.5.2 data at basin, regional and global levels and **offers more informed and persuasive policy recommendations.**



Particularly in the absence of a joint body, **evaluate cooperation and its outcomes within a river basin or aquifer, jointly reviewing Section II of the report and using it as a checklist.** This in turn may:

- allow countries to reach a common understanding of the challenges, opportunities and priorities for the river, lake or aquifer; and
- provide an opportunity for countries to set common targets, such as the development of a new or revised agreement, the establishment or reinvigoration of a joint institutional body, or the adoption of a basin management plan.

NOTE!



The SDG indicator 6.5.2 asks countries to report at the national level. While coordination is useful and should be encouraged, countries may ultimately have different views on their transboundary waters and may therefore submit different data and information.

Why the focus on coordination now?

Good examples of co-ordination between countries exist from the 2017 and 2020 data drives such as the experience of Sweden (see text box). Other examples include the countries of the Danube and Rhine where the respective basin commissions played a key role in coordinating inputs of riparian countries. However, in other cases it has been difficult to provide basin level analysis on 6.5.2 due to gaps and discrepancies in the national reports. Common discrepancies include countries not listing the same rivers, lakes or aquifers as shared, countries not listing the same arrangement(s), and countries not agreeing whether or not the four criteria for operationality have been met.¹ These discrepancies arise due to the use of different data sources or calculation methods. The hidden nature of aquifers adds complexity and the identification, delineation and/or recognition of their transboundary nature can vary greatly.

6.5.2 Coordination – the Swedish Experience

Preparation of the Sweden's 2nd national report was coordinated by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SAMWM). Steps taken to co-ordinate includes the completion of the draft questionnaire by a working group at SAMWM; consultative meetings held online with neighbouring countries (Norway and Finland); consultations with administrative boards of counties with transboundary waters on section II; consultations with the Finnish-Swedish transboundary river commission on section II.

¹ For an arrangement for transboundary water cooperation to be **operational** a joint body must be established, data and information must be exchanged, and meetings must take place at least once a year, and a joint or coordinated management plan or similar instrument must be in place.

How can countries coordinate: a checklist

National 6.5.2 focal point / coordinator

- exchange draft reports with neighboring countries sharing transboundary waters
- consult past reports of neighboring countries sharing transboundary waters²
- report on the coordinated actions undertaken in the national report

Secretariat or Country representative of an RBO or joint mechanism, including bilateral commissions

- identify next meeting of RBO or similar where to include 6.5.2 reporting as an agenda item, or convene a dedicated meeting
- review section II of the reporting template for your basin and liaise with countries

Member of a National Geological Survey with information

- enquire about the proper integration of transboundary aquifers in the national reporting, especially when technical projects between countries to characterize transboundary aquifers took place

Member of organization, NGO or other institution involved in transboundary water cooperation

- based on mandate, promote co-ordination amongst countries, particularly where RBOs or similar do not exist, by running workshops or other events on 6.5.2

² All 6.5.2 national reports are available at <https://unece.org/national-country-reports-sdg-indicator-652>.

Transboundary aquifers: a special case

Transboundary aquifers require special attention as they are often more complex than river and lake basins to evaluate. The lack of recognition of their transboundary nature by countries adds further complexity. To effectively assess the indicator in relation to transboundary aquifers, it is necessary to involve specific knowledge, such as through geological surveys or encourage RBOs to better integrate groundwater and aquifers into their work. Global databases can be a useful source of data – see IGRAC and UNESCO-IHP's Transboundary Aquifers of the World map (<https://ggis.un-igrac.org>).

What data and information should coordination focus on?

There are benefits in countries coordinating on all SDG 6.5.2 data and information concerning a particular river, lake and aquifer, i.e., sections I and II of the report. However, even coordinating and consistently presenting **core data and information** will significantly improve opportunities for analysis of SDG indicator 6.5.2 at the basin level.

Basic questions to consider are the following:

- Are the **same transboundary river and lakes basins and aquifers listed** by all countries sharing them?
- Are the **same arrangements for transboundary water cooperation** listed?
- Are national reports consistently reporting on whether a river, lake or aquifer is covered by an **operational arrangement**? Do all relevant national reports agree on whether
 - a joint body has been established?
 - data and information is exchanged annually?
 - meetings take place annually?
 - joint or coordinated management plans or a similar instrument is in place?

NOTE!



National reports also provide an opportunity for countries to include joint statements on the status of cooperation, express their common views on achievements and challenges, or highlight any differences in opinion. These statements can be added in the free text boxes of specific questions, in the *Additional information* of Section I, or in Section IV.

Helpdesk

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Webpages on reporting – Indicator 6.5.2

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Guidance material



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