



JOINT STATEMENT


Leading Innovators Call on EU Policymakers to Foster Uptake of Digitalisation for a Water Resilient Europe

The undersigned organisations strongly support President von der Leyen’s announcement that a European Water Resilience Strategy will be adopted during the 2024-29 EU political cycle, as well as the recognition that water is an indispensable resource that is increasingly under stress¹. Compounding this challenge, the EU water management ecosystem remains highly fragmented, with competences and responsibilities often spread among Member State, regional and local public authorities, and a wide variety of private actors. This complex landscape makes implementation of EU water policy highly challenging – from the landmark Water Framework Directive, to the Drinking Water, Urban Wastewater, Industrial Emission or Floods Directives.

Part of the solution to this challenge lies in the ability to gather, analyse, and share trustworthy data, leading to better decisions by all relevant stakeholders throughout the water cycle, including in the drinking water, groundwater, stormwater, and wastewater fields. Yet there is currently a shortage of reliable data and lack of measurement at EU level, for example on issues such as water leakage – which in turn leads to a lack of insights on which specific actions to pursue. Moreover, data management and analytics are critical to help inform decisions on e.g. pollution and leakage prevention, energy efficiency, water/wastewater management, or water rights allocation. Deployment of monitoring/modelling technologies is still lagging in many Member States, and the digitalisation of the sector is much too slow.

To achieve a Water Resilient Europe, EU policymakers should develop an ambitious and holistic strategy, supported by dedicated EU funding, which promotes adoption of digitalisation and data-centric solutions across the entire water value chain. This is critical to foster a “One Water” approach and enhance the link between the green and digital transitions, as well as ensure EU energy security and resilience, strengthen industrial competitiveness, uphold nature restoration and biodiversity, and take the decisive steps needed toward a more sustainable future.

¹ See “Europe’s Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029”, page 22.



We therefore look forward to contributing to the future European Commission proposals to digitalise water management, cycles and utilities, as well as the work to facilitate public and private investment in technology and cross-border water infrastructure – announced in the Mission Letter of the new Commissioner-designate for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economyⁱ.

To support a Water Resilient Europe and help realise the full potential of the twin green and digital transition, the undersigned organisations – representing leading innovators from across the water management ecosystem – jointly call on EU and national policymakers to adopt the following actions as a matter of priority during the new political cycle (2024-29):

01 Urgently develop an EU-wide Action Plan on digitalisation in the water sector with key proposals, recommendations, best practices, and knowledge-sharing programmes to accelerate uptake of data-driven innovation across the entire water value chain at municipal, industrial and consumer levels, including both engineered and nature-based infrastructures. Digital twins and digital solutions for drinking water, groundwater, stormwater, and wastewater monitoring/analytics/management remain largely underexplored tools in Europe.

02 Set up dedicated EU funding and incentives to support the water sector in its digitalisation efforts, particularly in the context of discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. For instance, EU funding of specific projects could be linked to data-centric deliverables on e.g. water leakage, drinking water/wastewater management, groundwater monitoring, or energy efficiency, operating costs, and asset management of new and existing infrastructure. Water should be prioritised in existing funding frameworks, including the Cohesion Fund and the National Climate and Energy Plans (and corresponding funds).

03 Accelerate implementation of existing EU water legislation at national level with the support of digitalisation. Knowledge-sharing on how digital water technologies can support these objectives should be promoted between and among Member States, as should capacity building at local, regional, and national level (e.g. on monitoring and modelling, interoperability of data formats/standards, leakage reduction, and energy efficiency).

04 Expand digital skills and research and development programmes targeting water, including through collaboration with universities, research centres, and small and medium enterprises. While many industries currently suffer from skills shortages, the need is particularly acute in water and exacerbated by cyber security threats to water systems. The sector will need to attract more tech- and cyber-savvy graduates to a field that is not traditionally considered technological.

05 Communicate the value of water through dedicated campaigns, making full use of digital tools and social media platforms, as well as transparency towards consumers. Spreading the message to younger generations is a key element in attracting talent to the water sector – including those with a technology background. We strongly support the European Commission’s ongoing communication efforts in this regard and encourage these to be further developed during the new EU political cycle.

ⁱ See https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10a1fd18-2f1b-4363-828e-bb72851f1fce1_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20ROSWALL.pdf – page 6