

SDG 6.5.1 Stakeholder Consultation Report

Slovakia

September 15, 2023

Stakeholder Consultation report, SDG6.5.1 IWRM, Slovakia

Executive Summary

In 2023, the third reporting period for SDG6.5.1 was conducted in Slovakia. As previous reporting in 2017 and 2020, the Department of Strategic Water Planning of the Ministry of Environment was in charge to organize the consultation/reporting/monitoring process. The process was supported by a GWP Slovakia/GWP CEE – its role was essential to act as a neutral facilitator to eliminate “sectoral biases”. The consultation process was guided by the IWRM SDG 6 Support Programme support documents.

Slovak consultation process was conducted in the following steps – preparatory phase, national workshop, dissemination/feedback for questionnaire, writing report. Each stage of consultation/monitoring/reporting process was conducted in national language (Slovak). The English version was prepared and validated by the Director General of the Directorate of Water Policy at the Ministry of Environment. The working language of focal point for SDG6 is both English and Slovak. More than 50 respondents were involved in the consultation process representing key stakeholders from the area of water management, agriculture, public health, regional/rural development, research institutions, river basin authorities and non-governmental organizations.

The responses showed that the weakest aspect of the implementation of IWRM is insufficient funding in water management, in all aspects and levels of funding: the state budget for infrastructure funding, funding for soft management tools (eg monitoring, science, education) a final score is 38.

Overall score of IWRM implementation in 2023 was calculated based upon the national workshop consultation and individual questionnaires and reached 57. This is lower compared to previous reporting periods.

The following challenges from the consultation process are summarized:

- Although we tried to invite the same group of stakeholders to the monitoring/reporting process, still the responses are “subjective response and should not be fully compared with previous reporting periods.
- Two extremes in responded “very high” and “very low” score; according to manual, final score is an arithmetic average. This might bring frustration of respondents, that whatever they respond it is not well captured.
- Individual score attached should be considered as “self-assessment” of key stakeholders for individual question and a primary benefit is to provide feedback for policy and decision makers at national level. Respondents’ primary focus was not “to report to UN organizations”.
- Respondents were not able to have qualified responses to all questions as they were not familiar with all aspects of IWRM. Therefore, a role of facilitator is a must.

1. Consultation from facilitated discussions on Section 1 “Enabling Environment”

In year 2022, the Slovak Government has endorsed a national Water Policy till 2030 that has all aspects of IWRM. However, this milestone did not appeared in the score for “enabling environment”. Priorities of Slovak Government in implementation of IWRM are clearly defined in the national Water policy till 2030 adopted in 2022 (Koncepcia vodnej politiky do roku 2030). These priorities are grouped in 10 pillars. This is a new approach as previous policies focused on engineering and infrastructure in water management (water management was considered as “supply” sector to other sectors). These include:

- Water in landscape (coordination with agriculture and forestry sector),
- Water in urban settlements (urban and territorial planning and coordination with municipal levels),
- Sustainable water use (use for hydropower, agriculture, navigation)
- Water for all (safe drinking water for citizens),
- Clean waters (control of pollution and negotiations with industry and business sectors),
- Living rivers (consideration of nature protection and ecological status of rivers, restoration),
- Danube (international cooperation),
- Understand water (education, public awareness),
- Responsible and informed decisions about water (enhance decision making at district levels, information and monitoring systems) and
- Water as strategic investments/effective financing (making water investments high at political agenda).

Most participants responded that there is inconsistent implementation of existing policy/legislation and poor law enforcement. In average, score was 63. This number was “low” because of absence of policies at sub-national level. A reason is that water management policy is designed and endorsed at national level by law and should be transferred to lower levels without a need to process/adopt sub-national policies. This situation is slowly changing, due to adoption of adaptation policies at lower levels that usually include water management aspects as well.

2. Consultation from facilitated discussions on Section 2 “Institutions and Participation”

The area of “institutions” included questions regarding coordination and communication capacity between different sectors and levels. The achieved score ranges from “medium-higher” to “high” - average score for section 2 is 65. The most diverse responses were in question 2.1.a – government authorities’ capacities – it ranged from 30 to 80 (in average of 50). It is obvious that different respondents judged the capacities at national level from their individual experience rather than analysis of what does it mean “capacities”. Critical responses regarded questions 2.1a and 2.1e. The skills and knowledge of national authorities and river basin authorities (at the level of districts and municipalities) are strengthened mainly through methodological guidelines and ad hoc training. However, post-university education is conditional on the availability of financial resources. This also applies to participation in various seminars, workshops, conferences - funds are scarce. In addition, the staff are overburdened with their daily tasks. The level of education for water management is not systematically evaluated.

The low implementation score was attached to question 2.2a (basin organizations for implementing IWRM). The reason/arguments provided by respondents (and river basin organisations themselves) are the following:

- River Basin organization (SWME) has a limited competences - it is in charge to manage the watercourse and not to the catchment area (whole basin). Many competencies in the field of spatial planning and land use are in the competence of local governments and mutual cooperation and coordination differs across Slovakia.
- increased agenda of river basin organization with no increase in staff and no possibilities to build the capacities (training, workshops, etc).

3. Consultation from facilitated discussion on Section 3 “management Instruments”

Average score in this section was 62. It is noted that there was a drop in score from previous reporting processes (score of 66 in 2017 and score of 60 in 2020). Most respondents were frustrated from

insufficient monitoring (question 3.1a) and data information sharing (question 3.2c), due to a dramatic cut of national funds to monitoring and low digitalization. There was a drop in responses for question 3.2a – basin management instruments (from, score of 70 in 2017 to score of 50 in 2023). A reason is that Slovakia is not yet well prepared for climate change impacts in water management, and respondents were highly skeptical on solutions taken by the government (and local governments) to address drought and water scarcity issues.

4. Consultation from facilitated discussion on Section 4 “Financing”

Average score amounts 38 – the lowest score from all responses. There was consolidated consensus among all stakeholders that due to national budget cut insufficient investments in water management bring Slovakia on the “tail of European countries”. Need to finance water management is declared by the government, however, it is rhetoric compared to investments needed to meet requirements of the EU water related directives. Score for each of the question in section 4 was below 50 (except financing of transboundary cooperation). It is obvious that both – national budget allocations and fixing revenues from water uses require utmost attention of the national government. This area requires attention also because over the last 20 years, most investments into water infrastructure was made from the EU funds. This will not be a case in the future and Slovakia needs to prepare for self-financing after phasing out of EU financing sources.

5. Next steps

IWRM implementation is still a challenge in Slovakia. In 2022. A national Water Policy until 2030 has been endorsed by the government, however, its implementation is scheduled on the next 20-30 years. There are several EU directives envisaged to foster IWRM implementation as well. Slovakia as the EU member state has an obligation to transpose the directives into national legislation. In addition, Slovakia also endorsed Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change – key sector where measures are envisaged is water management sector. Some reforms in authorities and river basin organizations is envisaged. The report on SDG6.5.1 is to be submitted to the top management of the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Regional Development and Investments (in charge of Agenda 2030) and to the Government for consideration when making reforms.

Annex:

- List of participants (attached to financial report), key stakeholders listed in the Survey
- Survey (submitted to IWRM SDG6.5.1 on September 5, 2023, waiting for feedback

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