

Flagship Initiative

Workstream 1 — Promote human-rights-based approaches to water, sanitation, wastewater, and water quality across all contexts

Interactive Dialogue (a): Water for People

2026 United Nations Water Conference

Part 1 — Submission details

Submitting organisation	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
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Part 2 — Flagship Initiative

Initiative title <i>A short, clear name (maximum 15 words).</i>
Know Your Rights, Meet Your Obligations: Global Campaign on Human Rights to Water and Sanitation
Guiding question(s) addressed <i>Indicate which of the guiding questions above the initiative addresses (state the number(s)). Multiple questions may be selected where relevant.</i>
Guiding Questions 1, 3, 5
Problem <i>Describe the systemic challenge that the initiative seeks to address and explain why a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response is required. Explain why this issue is important for advancing the human rights to water and sanitation. (Maximum 150 words)</i>
Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, yet it remains far from realized for hundreds of millions of people. A critical and persistent driver of this failure is a structural deficit of human rights literacy on both sides: rights holders and duty bearers. Duty bearers (including States, regulators, local governments, and service providers) frequently lack the practical guidance to translate their binding obligations under international human rights law into concrete policies and accountable regulatory standards. Rights holders (including women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants, stateless persons, and communities in informal settlements) are often unaware of what they are legally entitled to and how to seek remedy when those rights are violated. Bridging the gap between legal obligation and lived reality requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response anchored in the normative authority that only OHCHR, as the principal UN human rights body, can provide.
Description <i>Describe the initiative, its overall vision, and the shared objective it seeks to achieve. Explain why the initiative is catalytic, transformational, and capable of mobilising stakeholders around a common goal. (Maximum 250 words)</i>
Know Your Rights, Meet Your Obligations is a multilingual globally coordinated campaign led by OHCHR that develops and disseminates legally grounded, practical tools and guidance

materials for both duty bearers and rights holders, transforming existing international human rights law into actionable knowledge for the people who need it most.

For duty bearers, the campaign will produce:

- A State Compliance Self-Assessment Framework against AAAQ obligations, with remediation pathways;
- Human Rights Checklists for local governments and utilities on non-discrimination, affordability tariff design, grievance mechanisms, and participatory planning;
- A Legislative Review Tool identifying gaps between domestic law and international obligations, with model regulatory language;
- Guidance for Regulators on embedding human rights standards into licensing, tariff-setting, and enforcement.

For rights holders, the campaign will produce:

- Plain-language and audio-visual Know-Your-Rights guides in all UN languages;
- Population-specific guides for Indigenous Peoples, migrants and stateless persons, persons with disabilities, women and girls, and people in informal settlements;
- Guidance on engagement pathways to NHRIs, treaty bodies, and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The initiative operationalises existing universally accepted norms and standards. The campaign does not create additional obligations for governments, but implements the ones they have already made. Launched at the 2026 UN Water Conference with a Duty Bearer Pledge mechanism, it can generate measurable political accountability from day one.

Transformational impact and expected results

Describe how the initiative will drive systemic change at scale. Outline measurable outcomes, expected benefits, and accountability mechanisms. Explain how the initiative moves beyond dialogue and commitments towards concrete action and results. (Maximum 250 words)

The initiative will drive systemic change by addressing the accountability deficit at the root of persistent non-realisation of human rights. Its transformational logic is straightforward: rights cannot be claimed if rights holders do not know what they are entitled to; obligations cannot be met if duty bearers do not understand what the law requires. Legal literacy is the precondition for all other accountability mechanisms to function.

Measurable outcomes will include:

- At least 20 core tools and guidance documents developed and publicly available by 2030, available in different UN languages;
- NHRIs in at least 80 countries implementing duty-bearer tools by 2030;
- At least 100 Member States signed to the Duty Bearer Pledge by 2030;
- At least 2 million rights holders reached through community advocates and civil society networks by 2030.

Accountability is built into the campaign architecture from the outset. The Duty Bearer Pledge creates a public verifiable record of State commitments that civil society, NHRIs, and treaty bodies can monitor and act upon. Community reports on increased capacity and knowledge as well as impact including promising amendments in law and policies linked to the human rights to water and sanitation feed directly into NHRI reporting cycles and the Universal Periodic Review. OHCHR will report annually to the Human Rights Council on implementation progress. Every tool is designed to produce a concrete accountability outcome.

Human rights and inclusion focus

Explain how the initiative advances the human rights to water and sanitation, including the AAAQ principles, and benefits people in vulnerable situations. (Maximum 150 words)

OHCHR promotes human right-based approach to water and sanitation. As the principal UN human rights body, OHCHR brings a unique normative approach to water and sanitation governance, grounded in binding international human rights law: setting global standards, providing legal guidance, and holding States and duty bearers accountable to their obligations to progressively realize the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for all, without discrimination, with particular attention to those in vulnerable and marginalized situations.

Every tool developed under this initiative is structured around the AAAQ framework (availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and quality) derived from General Comment No. 15 (2002) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and elaborated through successive Human Rights Council resolutions.

The initiative applies a non-discrimination and equality lens throughout, with dedicated materials for individuals and groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Alignment with SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework

Explain how the initiative contributes to one or more SDG 6 accelerators: financing and investment, innovation and technology, capacity development, and data and information systems. (Maximum 150 words)

The initiative directly operationalises the enabling environment accelerator of the [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#) (GAF). It also advances the GAF accelerators linked to:

- capacity development: The initiative builds the legal and institutional literacy of duty bearers and the rights awareness of communities across all governance levels and geographies (the foundational human capacity on which effective WASH delivery depends).
- Data and information: Community scorecards and NHRI monitoring tools generate structured rights-based data on AAAQ compliance, feeding into national reporting cycles, GLAAS, JMP, and the Universal Periodic Review (strengthening the human rights dimension of existing global data systems).
- Innovation: A digital open-source platform enables real-time adaptation and dissemination of tools across legal systems and contexts in different UN languages, building on the [ESCR Knowledge Hub](#) already operational within OHCHR's UN Human Rights Knowledge Gateway.

Evidence Base and Strategic Rationale (Mandatory)

Provide evidence from existing or past projects, programmes, policies, partnerships, or initiatives demonstrating why the proposed approach is likely to succeed. Include measurable results, lessons learned, evaluations, and references. (Maximum 300 words)

Where States have received targeted practical guidance and operational support from OHCHR, including legislative review, model regulatory frameworks, and checklists, there have been documented measurable uptake in policy reform, regulatory revision, and budget allocation.

One example is: OHCHR supported national efforts to reform Mexico's National Water Law and the publication of a new General Water Law, in December 2025, which incorporates several international human rights standards on the human rights to water, sanitation, a healthy environment, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and business responsibilities. It also submitted tailored proposals for an amendment during legislative hearings to strengthen key provisions in the new Water Law.

Additionally, landmark rulings affirming the right to water (including by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (2017) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights) were in

part enabled by communities and civil society organisations equipped with legal literacy materials. These cases demonstrate the direct causal link between rights awareness and accountability outcomes at the highest levels of the international human rights system.

Builds on existing efforts

Describe how the initiative strengthens, complements, or scales existing commitments, platforms, and initiatives. (Maximum 150 words)

OHCHR developed the [UN-Water Policy Brief](#), entitled "Towards a Human Rights-Based Approach to Water, Sanitation and Environmental Action". The brief outlines the legal and policy foundations of the human rights to water and sanitation, alongside the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It identifies structural barriers and policy gaps, draws on promising practices from diverse regions, and provides targeted recommendations for States, local governments, UN entities, civil society and other stakeholders.

OHCHR also published key messages on "[What Human Rights can bring to SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation](#)", offering a rights-based analytical frame to accelerate progress towards universal access in alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

This flagship initiative's tools and guidance documents as well as the wider campaign through this initiative can build upon the existing policy briefs and key messages.

Partners, governance and stakeholder engagement

Describe the stakeholders involved and explain governance arrangements, leadership structures, and accountability mechanisms. (Maximum 150 words)

OHCHR has several partnerships that could be built on, to support this initiative.

- 1- OHCHR engages substantively as a member of UN-Water, a 'coordination mechanism' comprised of United Nations entities (Members) and international organizations (Partners) working on water and sanitation.
- 2- OHCHR is part of the *UN-Water Expert Group on WASH*, the *Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health*, and the *FAO Water Tenure Expert Group*.
- 3- OHCHR leads the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation Roadmap, an effort for mainstreaming human rights in the work of all UN-Water members.
- 4- OHCHR also works in coordination with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation as well as other relevant partners, including for the Water Action Decade and the UN 2026 Water Conference.

Existing Member State / stakeholder support

Identify Member States, organisations, or stakeholders that currently support, participate in, or have endorsed the initiative. (Maximum 100 words)

In regard to human rights council resolutions on water and sanitation, supported and co-sponsored by Member States, we can count on Germany and Spain as the main co-sponsor of the HRC resolution on human rights to water and sanitation.

Potential Member State / stakeholder support

Identify potential Member States, organisations, or stakeholders that could support, champion, finance, or participate in the initiative. (Maximum 100 words)

The initiative may be supported by Member States which sponsored the latest Human Rights Council resolution on human rights to water and sanitation ([A/HRC/RES/60/9](#)), including but not limited to Germany, Spain, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland,

Marshall Islands, Mexico, Netherlands, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Switzerland, Thailand and Ukraine.

Additionally, several organizations which contributed to the [UN-Water Policy Brief "Towards a Human Rights-Based Approach to Water, Sanitation and Environmental Action"](#) may be interested in supporting, championing or financing this initiative, such as: UN Women, WHO, IOM, ILO, UNHCR, IUCN, GCF, WaterAid, and Human Right 2 Water (HR2W).

Existing financing / resource mobilisation

Describe any existing funding, investments, technical assistance, partnerships, or resource-mobilisation mechanisms that currently support the initiative. (Maximum 130 words)

- 1- OHCHR's regular budget and extra-budgetary resources fund the existing normative work and mandate that underpin this initiative, providing a funded institutional base from which to launch.
- 2- OHCHR's existing [UN Human Rights Knowledge Gateway](#), particularly the [ESCR Knowledge Hub](#), can serve as the open-source digital space to access the existing and new human rights to water and sanitation knowledge, including promising, good and innovative practices, to support rights holders and duty bearers in implementing international human rights norms, standards and recommendations of international human rights mechanisms.
- 3- The UN-Water Human Rights to Water and Sanitation Roadmap offers an administrative and partnership platform at no additional overhead cost.
- 4- Several NHRI networks in target regions already receive ODA from bilateral donors for governance and accountability programming.

Potential financing / resource mobilisation and financing strategy

Describe how the initiative will mobilise the financial resources, investments, technical assistance, innovation, partnerships, and political support required for implementation and scale-up. Identify potential funding sources, financing mechanisms, investment opportunities, and strategic partnerships over the medium to long term, including how it could leverage existing programmes, financing facilities, donor commitments, public budgets, private-sector engagement, or blended finance. (Maximum 300 words)

In addition to the mentioned existing financing and resource mobilization possibilities, this campaign can adopt a financing model designed to minimize upfront costs and to maximize outcomes and benefits.

Where additional financing is needed, funding from states with existing strong human rights-based WASH portfolios and priorities may be mobilized. Human rights-based public-private partnerships and blended financing can also be mobilized to fund this flagship initiative.

Implementation horizon

The medium- to longer-term timeframe for delivery beyond the 2026 Conference. (Maximum 70 words)

The initiative launches at the 2026 UN Water Conference and is structured in three phases: seed and tool development (2026-2027); scale-up through NHRI networks and civil society channels (2027-2028); and institutional embedding for sustainability (2029 onwards). The campaign is designed to remain relevant into and beyond the post-2030 development agenda, anchored in the human rights framework rather than any specific SDG architecture.