



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

HUNGARY'S WATER DIPLOMACY HARNESSES INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Key messages

Hungary is a champion for global sustainable water management, promoting international collaboration and action. It hosts high-level events, mobilises the expertise of its water sector in multilateral fora and has benefited from the active involvement of the country's President. Its water diplomacy has supported international commitments, co-operation and sharing of experiences. Linking diplomacy, development co-operation and domestic expertise has been mutually reinforcing, although its diverse efforts require strong co-ordination.

Keywords

Global goods and challenges | Multilateral institutions | Environment and climate

Key partner

Hungary

Challenge

Access to water and sanitation, as well as sustainable water resource management, are critical development challenges. But at current rates of progress, basic standards will not be met for billions of people by 2030, while climate change is putting even more pressure on water resources. Collaboration between countries is important, not only to mobilise greater action and exchange experiences, but also to promote co-operation where water resources are shared across borders. Water diplomacy has been one of Hungary's international priorities since 2010, through which it boosts international action, showcases its own experience and promotes international engagement by its private sector.

Approach

Hungary's water diplomacy relies on several features:

- **Hosting high-level international events:** Hungary organised three dedicated [water summits](#) from 2013 to 2019 with global participation, and a [sustainability summit in 2021](#).
- **Promoting water across multilateral fora:** Hungary consistently advocates for water in the United Nations, World Bank and European Union, taking lead roles (such as in the [Transboundary Water](#)

[Convention Bureau](#) and [UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme](#)) and sharing its knowledge in international expert discussions such as on meteorology and transboundary water allocation. It also actively supports the global multi-stakeholder [Water Resources Group](#).

- **Institutional leadership:** Hungary's former President János Áder was personally invested throughout his tenure; he was a member of the [High Level Panel on Water](#) and now serves on the High-level Leaders' Panel of the [Water and Climate Coalition](#). A Department for Water Diplomacy and Tied Aid Credits within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade oversees Hungary's international efforts.
- **Mobilising national expertise:** The Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for domestic water management, participates actively in international expert discussions and informs Hungary's international positions. The Ministry of Technology and Innovation, with primary responsibility for the domestic implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as the Agricultural Ministry, also contribute to the thematic professional discussions. Water diplomacy is part of Hungary's National Water Strategy. Since 2020, a dedicated Master's course in International Water Governance and Water Diplomacy at the University of Public Service Ludovika helps maintain Hungary's expertise in the area.
- **Linking the domestic water sector to development co-operation:** The government provides seed funding to support international engagement by its domestic water sector, and its official development assistance (ODA) loans to developing countries are [tied](#) to Hungarian providers in the water sector (amounting to more than EUR 750 million since 2009).

Results

In collaboration with other “water champions”, Hungary has succeeded in advancing international recognition of water at various levels:

- **Water is a global goal.** Hungary's advocacy contributed to a dedicated [sustainable development goal on water](#) in the 2030 Agenda, providing a strong basis for rallying international action on water.
- **Water remains on the international agenda.** The 2019 water summit brought together representatives from 118 countries, who adopted the “[Budapest Appeal](#)” for better water management.
- **Practical advice on transboundary water management is available at global level:** Under Hungary and Finland's co-leadership, experts developed a [Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context](#) in 2021, which shares numerous practical insights that emerged during the three-year elaboration process.
- **Regional co-operation on water has been enhanced:** The [European Union's Strategy for the Danube Region](#), adopted under the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2011, provides a forum for regular high-level political as well as professional exchange on water quality, one of the strategy's priority areas.
- **Hungary's private sector is increasingly active abroad and domestic demand for tied ODA is decreasing.** More and more Hungarian water sector companies are succeeding internationally, relying on export credits and commercial financing instead of on ODA. This could allow Hungary to make progress against its international commitment to untie ODA.

Lessons learnt

- **High-level political leadership is critical for external and internal visibility.** The personal involvement of President Áder and his office, notably H.E. Csaba Kőrösi (President of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly and Director for Environmental Sustainability at the time), ensured water was a clear priority across Hungary's institutions and internationally.
- **Development co-operation, domestic expertise and water diplomacy are mutually reinforcing.** Existing development co-operation partnerships allowed Hungary to join forces with partner countries in international fora and to also share practical experiences from its work. Meanwhile, diplomacy efforts also created the momentum and interest among Hungarian actors to become more engaged.
- **Co-ordination challenges require a strategic focus.** The wealth of activities across government has made co-ordination challenging. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade aims to appoint a focal point for its multilateral water engagement to improve the definition of priority objectives and messages, ensure co-ordination concentrates on key issues and make the most of limited resources.

Further information

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To learn more about Hungary's development co-operation, see:

OECD, "Hungary", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a80b014d-en>.

See more *In Practice* examples from Hungary here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/?tag-key+partner=hungary&submodel=in+practice#search>.

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