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EFFECTIVENESS	Principle 7. Policy coherence
Target group / Relevant stakeholder: National Policy-Makers, Municipal Governments, Regulators	
DESCRIPTION	
Encourage policy coherence through effective cross-sectoral coordination, especially between policies for water and the environment, health, energy, agriculture, industry, spatial planning and land use (OECD, 2024, 26).	
EXPECTED RESULTS	
Outputs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination mechanisms facilitate coherent policies across ministries, public agencies and levels of government, including cross-sectoral plans (OECD, 2024, 26). • Coordinated management of use, protection and clean-up of water resources, considering policies that affect water availability, quality and demand (e.g., agriculture, forestry, mining, energy, fisheries, transportation, recreation, and navigation) as well as risk prevention (OECD, 2024, 26). • Identify, assess, and address the barriers to policy coherence from practices, policies and regulations within and beyond the water sector, using monitoring, reporting and reviews (OECD, 2024, 26). • Incentives and regulations mitigate conflicts among sectoral strategies, bring these strategies into line with water management needs and find solutions that fit with local governance and norms (OECD, 2024, 26). 	
CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-sectoral policy coordination (OECD, 2015; Pahl-Wostl, 2015; Araral and Wang, 2013; Horlemann and Dombrowsky, 2012; Pahl-Wostl et al., 2012): Alignment among interconnected policy areas to maintain policy coherence, as often decisions impacting water resources originate beyond the water sector. • Common goals (MacKay and Ashton, 2004) and coordinated implementation of programmes (Dombrowsky et al., 2022; MacKay and Ashton, 2004). 	
BARRIERS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-level institutional structures and complex governance structures. • Inefficient coordination: Governance incompatibilities and mix of formal and informal structures in the water sector create coordination challenges. • Diverging priorities, including disagreements over the management of water resources or the importance assigned to different goals or objectives (Lukat et al., 2023). • Unequal power dynamics (Lukat et al., 2023) and politics: Competing interests, power imbalances, and ideological divisions can hinder policies' alignment (Lenschow, Bocquillon and Carafa, 2018; de Coning and Friis, 2011; Jordan and Halpin, 2006). • Policies prioritise immediate-term disaster management over long-term adaptation strategies. 	
SOLUTIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive engagement in cross-sectoral planning and coordination platforms, such as cross-ministerial structures. • Collaborative governance approaches can encompass setting-up common goals and designing harmonised interventions (MacKay and Ashton, 2004). • Established legal frameworks. • Effective monitoring mechanisms. • Strengthening institutional frameworks to foresee, mediate, and align competing policy demands (OECD, 2018) requires fostering a cross-sectoral administrative culture aligned with global priorities. This involves integrating sustainable development goals into governance structures and decision-making processes. According to the OECD, key building blocks for achieving this include 	

political commitment and leadership, policy integration, long-term planning, impact assessments, policy and institutional coordination, sub-national and local involvement, stakeholder engagement, and robust monitoring and reporting (OECD, 2018).

EXAMPLES

Transboundary Water Governance between Portugal and Spain in the Tagus Basin

SDGs linked



Water risks



The Tagus River basin exemplifies the challenges of transboundary water governance in Europe, as it is shared between Portugal and Spain. The severe drought of 1991-95 exposed weaknesses in bilateral water management, leading to disputes over water availability. This period coincided with the development of the EU Water Framework Directive (2000) and negotiations that resulted in the Albufeira Convention (1998). The Convention aimed to improve cooperation by establishing minimum flow requirements and promoting integrated management. However, challenges such as climate change, which has particularly increased hydrological variability, competing national water priorities, and governance complexities have hindered full implementation. Despite these difficulties, ongoing bilateral commissions and civil society advocacy have played an essential role in advancing sustainable water management. This case illustrates the persistent gap between legal frameworks and effective coordination in European transboundary water governance.

Linkages to Governance Principles

The initiative reinforced policy coherence by aligning national water policies with EU directives and transboundary agreements. Appropriate scales within basin systems were addressed through basin-wide management strategies, but national interests still strongly influence decision-making. Stakeholder engagement has been key in mobilising social and environmental movements advocating for water demand management. Integrated strategies and local empowerment have supported legal agreements and collaborative water management efforts.

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