

27-30 October 2025 | Bonn, Germany

# **Solidarity in Action**

## *Stronger Utilities for Thriving Cities*



6TH GLOBAL  
**WATER OPERATORS'  
PARTNERSHIPS**  
CONGRESS

## The 6th Global Water Operators' Partnerships Congress

The Global Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPs) Congress is the flagship networking and knowledge sharing event organized by UN-Habitat through the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA).

Convening every two years, the Global WOPs Congress is the foremost meeting place dedicated to water and sanitation utilities within the UN system. It brings together operators, local and national governments, development partners and a diverse array of stakeholders to exchange knowledge, inspire action, and strengthen capacity to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.

With the support of the Government of Germany, the 6th edition of the Global WOPs Congress will be held from 27–30 October 2025 in Bonn, Germany, under the theme '**Solidarity in Action: Stronger Utilities for Thriving Cities.**' This year, the Congress will be held during Urban October – a month-long initiative led by UN-Habitat, observed every October to promote sustainable urban development and raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

The Congress stands as testimony to GWOPA's strategic objectives and global pledge to advance the UN Water Action Agenda. Its outcomes will directly contribute to several global dialogues, including the 13th session of the World Urban Forum, other UN climate and water initiatives, and to a roadmap for the water and sanitation operators' constituency towards the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, and supporting the implementation of the UN System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation.

### **Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through water and sanitation**

Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is the most basic human right for health and well-being. Currently, 2.2 billion people cannot count on contamination-free water, and 3.5 billion lack sanitation systems that protect them from disease. Water quality is declining, and freshwater ecosystems are degrading, threatening the continued availability of water for basic services.

To build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities – the kind aspired to in SDG 11 – universal access to clean water and safe sanitation services are indispensable. With water and sanitation as prerequisites for achieving virtually every SDG at the local level, ensuring a strong local capacity to deliver these services must be a top priority.

Water and sanitation operators are central to the achieving of SDGs as effective local water and sanitation services underline the Agenda 2030 vision for people, planet, prosperity and peace. Robust utilities are instrumental in advancing SDG 6 – a reality we witness every day. Yet, where utility capacities are lacking, the SDGs cannot be achieved.

GWOPA facilitates Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPS) and Sanitation-focused Water Operators' Partnerships (SWOPs)<sup>1</sup>, which are peer-support partnerships between water and sanitation service providers. WOPs work by harnessing the skills, knowledge and goodwill within a strong utility to build the capacity and improve the performance of another utility that needs assistance or guidance. WOPs make their impact by helping utilities acquire and apply knowledge, establish new practices and implement improved approaches. The resulting capacity and performance improvements contribute to SDG 6 targets and facilitate utilities' access to financing for infrastructural investments, supporting further extensions or improvements in services.

## Congress objectives

The Global WOPs Congress aims to empower operators to expand their role in achieving the SDGs by advancing knowledge, promoting the exchange of experiences and expertise, and mobilising support for WOPs.

As such, the Congress seeks:

- **To scale-up of solidarity-based capacity development approaches:** Recognising and valuing WOPs for operators to share and help each another improve services for all, particularly those who are underserved.
- **To strengthen partnership and collaboration:** Providing a platform for an effective global alliance with regional and national WOP platforms, financing institutions, local and national governments to inspire, mobilise support for, catalyse, guide, monitor and enable more WOPs to be effective and flourish.
- **To advance knowledge and expertise:** Creating spaces to learn and share cutting edge knowledge, efficient and effective service delivery and infrastructure improvement solutions, lessons learned and global trends in providing climate resilient, human rights-based and innovative water and sanitation services.
- **To promote an enabling environment for utilities and WOPs:** Generating support from local governments and other actors for fostering

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, referred to collectively as WOPs

favourable policies, financing and regulatory framework for operators and WOPs, recognising operators as key urban actors in delivering on the SDGs and steering investment priorities for thriving cities.

## **Solidarity in Action: Stronger Utilities for Thriving Cities**

The **6th Global WOPs Congress** will be on the overarching theme of ‘Solidarity in Action: Stronger Utilities for Thriving Cities.’ It will focus on fostering innovation, climate action and resilience, and inclusive service delivery through solidarity-based partnerships in water and sanitation. The Congress will also examine WOP impacts, and fostering a policy, financing and institutional environment that is supportive of utilities in helping cities advance towards the SDGs.

The 6th Congress will have three key thematic tracks and two strategic crosscutting tracks.

Previous WOPs Congresses have been held under the following overarching themes:

- 1st Global WOPs Congress in 2011: Global WOP Congress and GWOPA General Assembly
- 2nd Global WOP Congress in 2013: Fostering Cooperation between Water Operators’ Partnerships
- 3rd Global WOPs Congress in 2015: Water Operators’ Partnerships and the Sustainable Development Goals
- 4th Global WOPs Congress in 2021: Together towards Sustainable Water and Sanitation for All
- 5th Global WOP Congress in 2023: Resilience in Challenging Times: Mobilising Collaboration for Future-Ready Water and Sanitation Service Providers

## **Thematic tracks**

### **1. Innovation in water and sanitation services management**

Innovation is critical to ensuring sustainable and equitable access to safe water and adequate sanitation for all. Given the challenges posed by population growth, rapid urbanization, climate change, pollution and resource scarcity, innovative solutions are necessary to address the pressing issues in this sector with a different mindset and different tools. This shift requires integrating digital tools, including geospatial mapping techniques and sensor technologies, to map urban basic service infrastructure, identify service gaps

and optimise service delivery. Digitalization in this sector needs to align with the people-centred smart city approaches as outlined in the international guidelines on People-Centred Smart Cities<sup>2</sup> with emphasising inclusivity, equity and responsiveness to community needs.

This thematic track will showcase how innovations including digitalization is transforming the management of water and sanitation services in low- and middle-income countries. Participants will explore a range of cutting-edge digital solutions, including smart metering, data collection and data analytics, leak detection and water loss management, digital water quality monitoring, digital billing systems, mobile apps for consumer engagement, geographic information systems and asset management. These innovations are helping utilities improve efficiency, reduce costs, enable better customer engagement, and provide tools for decision-making.

Innovations in the evolution of the WOP practice will also be highlighted, including efforts to adapt and improve WOPs to make them more equitable and effective, building on the existing strengths of utilities, and co-creation practices. Expanded efforts to connect WOPs with the broader enabling environment and local actors. The Congress will also highlight how WOPs are being applied to tackle new themes and innovations in areas such as sanitation and waste management that are gaining prominence in response to growing demands.

## **2. Human right to water and sanitation: Leaving no one and no place behind**

This thematic track will highlight access to water and sanitation as fundamental human rights and the role of operators towards achieving these rights.<sup>3</sup> This also entails the provision of adequate sanitation services that protect privacy and ensure dignity. Access to water and sanitation is inextricably linked to other key human rights, such as adequate housing and the promotion of gender equality, diversity and inclusion and as such operators play a key role.

Housing without access to safe water or sanitation is inadequate and fails to meet the minimum standards for a dignified life. The Congress will facilitate exchange and learning on strategies to reach low-income communities living in informal settlements and slums worldwide, in urban and peri-urban areas.

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<sup>2</sup> [People Centred-Smart Cities | UN-Habitat](#)

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly Resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation as well as [Human Rights Council resolution 15/9 on human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation](#).



A focus will also be on the integration of water and sanitation into housing policies to ensure that all people, regardless of their socio-economic status, have access to these basic services. This means ensuring that slum transformation and prevention efforts fully embrace water and sanitation infrastructure and services as fundamental features.

The track will facilitate discussion in the context of how countries are translating their human rights obligations into national framework, and how these commitments can guide financing, regulation and inclusive service delivery. The discussions will provide space to consider how to ensure water and sanitation services are available, accessible, acceptable and affordable for everyone – regardless of their socio-economic status, gender or background.

Participants will also examine how national and local governments can adopt inclusive policies to ensure service provision to underserved communities. This includes equitable tariff and connection policies, low-cost water supply options and affordable sanitation facilities. In many low-income areas, decentralised approaches such as community-managed water systems or small-scale sanitation technologies are providing affordable and sustainable solutions. The track will also highlight community-driven initiatives where local knowledge and needs are incorporated into the design and delivery of services, fostering ownership and accountability.

The Congress will explore the how utilities are building gender equality in water and sanitation service provision and staffing. Participants will hear how gender-sensitive approaches, including separate, safe and clean toilets for women and girls, are being implemented to protect the rights of women and girls, improve education and employment outcomes, while enabling full participation in society. These examples will highlight how the access to water and sanitation can be a powerful approach to inclusion and empowerment with dignity.

### **3. Climate action and resilience**

This thematic track will discuss how climate mitigation, preparedness and resilience in water and sanitation services are critical to safeguarding access to safe water and adequate sanitation amid increasing climate-related challenges. It will address both short-term responses to extreme events and long-term strategies for reducing emissions and enhancing sustainability.

Emissions from the water and sanitation utility operations are often overlooked in national climate strategies, despite their significant mitigation potential.

According to a UN-Water analytical brief,<sup>4</sup> wastewater treatment alone emits greenhouse gases on a scale comparable to the global aviation industry. Key strategies include enhancing energy efficiency, adopting renewable energy, and capturing and reusing emissions during water treatment.

Climate change intensifies water scarcity, increases the frequency of extreme weather events, and places infrastructure under stress. Resilient water and sanitation systems require integrated approaches involving adequate housing, improved asset management, nature-based solutions, and strategic planning to adapt to these hazards.

Effective utilities are prioritising upstream conservation and exploring alternative sources, such as rainwater harvesting, desalination and wastewater reuse, especially in drought-prone regions. These measures not only ensure water availability but also mitigate impacts on sanitation systems and hygiene.

Vulnerable communities, particularly in informal settlements, are disproportionately affected due to poor infrastructure and limited resources. Climate-resilient infrastructure and targeted support are critical to ensuring equitable service delivery.

Operators play a central role in climate adaptation. They need to invest in robust grey infrastructure, such as reinforced pipes, treatment plants and reservoirs, while incorporating blue and green solutions like wetlands and vegetated filters. These nature-based approaches offer cost-effective ways to maintain services during climate shocks and promote ecosystem health.

The Congress will feature examples of how utilities are integrating climate risk assessments, early-warning systems, and contingency planning to ensure continuity of service. It will also explore the role of urban planning in deploying green infrastructure, such as permeable pavements and green roofs, which help manage stormwater and reduce flood risks.

By combining traditional infrastructure with nature-based solutions, climate-smart planning, and inclusive service strategies, communities can build sustainable, adaptable water and sanitation systems. This holistic approach is vital for achieving resilience in the face of a changing climate.

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<sup>4</sup> [UN-Water Analytical Brief on Water for Climate Mitigation \(2024\)](#)

## Strategic tracks

### 1. Water Operators' Partnerships for impact

Strong utilities contribute to the achievement of all SDG 6 and related SDG targets, while a lack of management and institutional capacities of these entities undermine progress.

The power of WOPs and SWOPs lies in their multiplier effect: and each new water operators' partnership has the potential to be scaled up. By focusing on capacity development and institutional anchoring, these partnerships generate long-term benefits, leveraging investment finance and often producing valuable spin-offs that further amplify their impact.

To maximise the effectiveness and sustainability of WOPs, a holistic approach that includes assessments of the most effective modalities, monitoring impacts, leveraging hybrid learning, and promoting diversity and inclusion is essential.

An impactful WOP is rooted in a solid governance structure. This includes timely identifying key roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes, as well as ensuring accountability. Regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms and a clear set of performance indicators are also important to assess the impacts of the partnership, including in water quality improvements, cost savings, increased access to water or better customer satisfaction. Regular risk assessments can help ensure that the partnership can adapt to unforeseen challenges. Experiences highlighting these elements will be showcased and discussed in this track.

Like any successful collaboration, the health of a WOP needs to be actively maintained. This includes regular assessment of communication, trust and goal alignment through tools, such as interviews and feedback sessions. Clear mechanisms for managing disagreements and adapting to evolving contexts help keep partnerships resilient and effective. Flexibility – built into the design through periodic reviews and updates – allows WOPs to remain responsive to changing needs.

Strengthening partnership dynamics also requires a commitment to gender, diversity and inclusion at both project and utility levels. Inclusive hiring, gender-sensitive policies and equitable access to capacity development help ensure that all voices are heard and valued. By embedding these principles, WOPs can achieve greater impact, deliver better services, and advance global sustainability goals.



During the Congress experience will be shared on how methodologies used for knowledge sharing and capacity building can have an influence on the impact of the WOP. Methods that will be presented and explored include blended learning, which uses a combination of online and in-person workshops for training and knowledge exchange and online portals like the Global WOPs Community to facilitate ongoing collaboration and sharing of resources.

## **2. Enabling WOPs and operators**

The Congress will highlight where supportive policy and regulatory environments, strong institutional capacity, active stakeholder engagement, and a focus on sustainability, inclusivity and innovation, are enabling WOPs and helping utilities thrive. Together, these factors can enhance operators' performances, leading to improved service delivery and contributing to broader water, sanitation and urban development goals.

Even though they are cost effective, WOPs need funding. The Congress will look at traditional – mostly donors and utilities themselves – as well as more unique and innovative sources for funding these partnerships, such as 1% laws, customer contributions and financing by development banks.

Building demand for WOPs by sensitising policy makers and other decision makers to WOPs impact at the local level is also key to scaling the approach. Congress participants will exchange insights and experience embedding WOPs into structured frameworks and linking them to larger infrastructure projects that enhance their scalability and sustainability, ensuring long-term capacity development for utilities. Examples of where financial institutions, UN agencies and stakeholders at country, regional and global levels are embracing WOPs to hold national duty bearers accountable for the progress towards achieving SDG 6 will be shared.

Finally, participants will explore how water and sanitation operators – often the closest institutions to communities within the local government system – are leveraging their proximity to respond effectively to local needs while contributing to broader municipal planning, resilience and governance efforts. Sessions will highlight how the capacity of utilities are being strengthened within local government structures to support cities in achieving their SDGs and the New Urban Agenda commitments.

## **Why participate?**

The Global WOPs Congress is a collective effort by the GWOPA's membership, the Government of Germany and the City of Bonn, development partners, and other operators and partners at global, national and local levels. The Congress

offers a unique window into the wider Alliance and previous participants highlight the following reasons to participate:

**Networking and matchmaking opportunities:** The Congress is an opportunity to network and establish new partnerships, both formal and informal, long-term and short-term.

**Learning and exchange of knowledge and expertise:** The Congress is the world's biggest gathering dedicated to WOPs, bringing together wide range of actors to learn and share cutting edge knowledge, efficient and effective service delivery and infrastructure improvement solutions, challenges and global trends in providing water and sanitation services for all. The Congress will provide opportunities to participate in technical and cultural field trips organized in collaboration with the City of Bonn and focused deep dive learning workshops.

**Advocacy for global recognition:** The Congress helps increase recognition of water and sanitation utilities as important urban actors in delivering SDGs, and the untapped potential of peer-to-peer learning to support one another. Advocating for sustainable enabling environment for WOPs and operators.

**Meet and join the growing community of WOP practitioners:** The Congress provides an opportunity to meet in person the growing global community of practice on WOP focusing on wide range of solutions that water and sanitation operators provide

## Who will be there?

Previous editions have brought together participants from over 80 countries, including public and private water and sanitation operators, their associations, community-based service providers, labour unions, city networks, civil society organizations, I/NGOs, financial institutions, academia, development partners and independent experts.

The event will welcome those practicing, supporting, studying or curious about using not-for-profit peer support between water and sanitation operators to improve global water and sanitation services.

## Where and when?

The Congress will take place from **27 to 30 October 2025** in the [World Conference Center Bonn](#) in the host city of GWOPA, **Bonn, Germany**. The Congress will be hybrid, allowing both in-person and virtual participation with interpretations of English, Spanish and French to maximise accessibility.

The programme will feature:

**High-level opening:** The Congress will begin with insights from policymakers and sector leaders, setting the stage for the discussions to follow.

**Thematic plenary sessions with keynote speakers:** Each day of the Congress will open with a dedicated plenary session, bringing together utility leaders, development experts and policymakers to engage in high-level discussions on the event's core thematic and strategic focus areas. These sessions will be enriched by inspirational keynote speakers and will serve as a unifying forum for all participants. No parallel thematic discussions will take place during the plenaries.

**Thematic sessions:** Building on the day's plenary discussions, the Congress will offer in-depth sessions, delving into priority themes, cross-cutting strategic issues, best practices and emerging issues. Held in both hybrid and in-person formats, these sessions will facilitate rich exchanges and learning. Interpretation will be provided in selected languages to ensure inclusive participation.

**Training sessions and workshops:** Throughout the Congress, participants will have the opportunity to participate in in-person workshops and training sessions tailored to the needs of water and sanitation operators. In addition, a full day dedicated to training and a technical field visit will be offered on 30 October 2025.

**Exhibition and networking space:** A dedicated area will foster exchange within the Global WOPs Community of Practice, offering space for GWOPA member interaction, a photo exhibition, and a WOP Library Corner featuring partners' knowledge products. Poster presentations will spotlight good practices and innovations from across the sector.

## Timeline for the 6th Global WOPs Congress

### May 2025

- Launch call for engagement
- Initiate co-creation of the agenda
- Establish communication and advocacy plan
- Form Congress Taskforce

### June 2025

- 16 June 2025 deadline for submission of thematic session event applications

- 30 June 2025 confirmation of the sessions

## July 2025

- Elaborating programme

## August – September 2025

- Finalise the programme and session logistics
- Coordinate venue, speakers and technical arrangements

## October 2025

- 6th Global WOPs Congress

## How to submit proposals

The **call for submitting session proposals** for thematic and strategic focus areas will **open on 2 June 2025** and **close on 16 June 2025**.

To **prepare your submission**, please **use the online form** as guidance to develop your session proposal and **upload to the Congress platforms** once the call for application is open.

For more information, visit [6th Global WOP Congress webpage](#) or contact GWOPA Secretariat at [unhabitat-gwopa@un.org](mailto:unhabitat-gwopa@un.org)

## Annex

### Call for session proposals

#### Offline form – for reference only

6th Global WOPs Congress

Theme: Solidarity in Action: Stronger Utilities for Thriving Cities

The call for session proposals for thematic and strategic focus areas will open on **2 June 2025** and close on **16 June 2025, 23:59 CEST**.

This offline form is to assist in co-creating the session with potential partners.

You **must apply online** through UN-Habitat's Global Event Management System, GEMS, at <https://events.unhabitat.org/>

**Note:** If the event is selected, the event organizer is required to attend in person in Bonn, Germany

#### How would you like to contribute to Congress?

- As a speaker
- As an organizer or co-organizer for a thematic session

#### Session Type (select one)

- Thematic session
- Training event
- Poster session presentation (good practices and/or innovation)

#### Event Model

- In-person
- Hybrid
- 

Note: Training events are only available in person.

#### Details

##### Title of event

(Character count: **250**)

##### Event summary

(Character count: **3000**)



## **Key objectives**

(Character count: **1500**)

Key objectives of this event are:

## **Relevance**

Select the theme or strategic focus relevant to your event. (The event could tag both thematic and strategic tracks of the congress so that we can visualise the programme too.)

## **Thematic Track**

1. Innovation in water and sanitation services management
2. Human right to water and sanitation: Leaving no one and no place behind
3. Climate action and resilience

## **Strategic Track**

1. WOP impacts
2. Enabling WOPs and utilities

**Describe briefly why your event should be selected and what makes it both relevant and impactful**

(Character count: **2500**)

**Are you committing to having a Gold Standard Event?**

Select Yes/No

**Note:** Gold standard events being promoted by GWOPA will expect the panel to have a gender balance and at least one youth speaker.

## **Promotion and monitoring**

**What is your outreach strategy to promote attendance at this event?**

(Character count: **500**)

**How do you plan to promote the event?**

X/Twitter

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

WhatsApp Groups

Mass mailing to partners



**What is your monitoring strategy for following up on the outcome of the event?**

(Character count: 500)

**Partners**

All organizations hosting the event must be reflected below.

Kindly note that your event must be co-organized with a minimum of one and a maximum of three organizations.

**First organization**

Name

Country

Website

**Second organization**

Name

Country

Website

**Third organization**

Name

Country

Website

**Fourth organization**

Name

Country

Website

**Panellists**

Please indicate the prospective moderator and panellist(s) you intend to feature with a maximum of five participants in total. The composition should, to the greatest extent possible, ensure youth representation and gender balance.

**Title:**

Mr

Ms

Prefer not to say



**Moderator:**

Yes

No

**Moderator:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:

**Panellist 1:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:

**Panellist 2:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:

**Panellist 3:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:

**Panellist 4:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:



**Panellist 5:**

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Official title:

Country:

Organization:

**Languages and other information**

**Which is the primary language of presentation?**

**Do you require interpretation for your event?**

**Note:** For now, only thematic sessions will have interpretation in Spanish and English.

Yes

No

**Have you ever hosted an event at a previous Global WOPs Congress?**

Not applicable

1st Global WOPs Congress

2nd Global WOPs Congress

3rd Global WOPs Congress

4th Global WOPs Congress

5th Global WOPs Congress