



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean up to 2026



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and human rights

The human rights focus of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stems from an explicit grounding in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, in addition to other instruments, such as the Declaration on the Right to Development (art. 10).

The SDGs are universal in scope, seeking to “realize the human rights of all” in developed and developing countries alike. The recognition of the need to fight poverty and inequalities in the 2030 Agenda is evident in its focus on reaching the furthest behind first and ensuring that no one is left behind —a principle which underpins the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

Although the SDGs are not specifically framed in human rights terms, many of their targets align with international standards. Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation)¹ is directly related to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and also has links to other human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.²

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The targets include achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, as well as to sanitation and hygiene services; reducing pollution; increasing water-use efficiency; and promoting participatory management of water resources and sanitation.

- **The right to water and sanitation:** International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11).
- **The right to health:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 12).
- **Equal access to water and sanitation for women in rural areas:** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (art. 14, para. 2.h).

The mechanisms that comprise the universal human rights protection system, such as the universal periodic review, human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, make recommendations to each Member State (see Universal Human Rights Index <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>).

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹ Addressing the challenges related to Goal 6 requires a paradigm shift: water must be regarded not only as a natural resource to be managed and used, but as a fundamental human right that all persons must be able to exercise without exception.

² For more information on the human rights to water and sanitation, see <https://www.ohchr.org/es/water-and-sanitation/about-water-and-sanitation>.

> Regional overview

- Latin America and the Caribbean has made modest advances in access to drinking water and hygiene services and in integrated water resources management. However, significant gaps persist in sanitation, wastewater treatment and reuse, and the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, with notable territorial and social inequalities. This performance reflects, in part, fiscal constraints and insufficient institutional capacity to expand water security projects.
- Moreover, investments have not translated into sustained increases in capacity or quality, owing particularly to incomplete sewerage networks, undersized treatment plants and insufficient operational mechanisms to cover energy and maintenance costs. While technical cooperation has been mobilized, instability and insufficient allocation of resources to the sector remain major constraints.

> Key facts on the region

- In 2024, 140 million people in the region (21.1% of the population) lacked access to safely managed drinking water services, 324 million people (48.8% of the population) lacked access to safely managed sanitation services and 34 million people (5.1% of the population) lacked access to handwashing facilities.
- In 2024, the proportion of the population with access to safely managed drinking water services was 83.1% in South America, 58.9% in the Caribbean and 49.2% in Central America.
- In 2024, the proportion of the population with access to safely managed sanitation services was 59.6% in Central America, 48.8% in South America and 41.1% in the Caribbean.
- In 2024, the proportion of wastewater safely treated and reused was 60.9% in South America, 33.8% in the Caribbean and 30.6% in Central America.
- Between 2018 and 2022, water-use efficiency in the Caribbean increased from US\$ 15.02 to US\$ 15.74 per cubic metre; in Central America it decreased from US\$ 14.13 to US\$ 14.09 per cubic metre and in South America it rose from US\$ 12.73 to US\$ 13.34 per cubic metre.
- Between 2017 and 2023, implementation of integrated water resources management increased from 37% to 40% in the Caribbean, from 31% to 39% in Central America and from 35% to 38% in South America.
- From 2017 to 2023, the proportion of water-related ecosystems under protection and restoration decreased from 86.3% to 68.9% in the Caribbean and from 64.5% to 56.6% in South America, while it increased from 43.3% to 59.5% in Central America.
- Between 2018 and 2022, official development assistance for water and sanitation management, expressed in constant dollars at 2022 prices, decreased from US\$ 378 million to US\$ 332 million in South America, increased from US\$ 139 million to US\$ 341 million in Central America and fell from US\$ 167 million to US\$ 95 million in the Caribbean.



> Good practices in the region

- In 2024, Costa Rica, with the support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), sought to improve access to drinking water by advancing towards a national tariff structure with fixed and variable components, consumption-based blocks and a targeted social tariff aimed at households living in poverty.
- In Barbados, a debt-for-climate swap initiative was launched to support the modernization of the South Coast Sewage Treatment Plant and the production of reclaimed water for agricultural irrigation and aquifer recharge.
- In the Sixaola River basin, Costa Rica and Panama have coordinated commissions, workplans, early warning systems and concerted action on water quality, monitoring and riverbank protection.
- Over the past decade, Peru has increased investment in nature-based solutions for water security by a factor of 8.3, incorporating natural infrastructure into the national public investment system.
- In Mexico, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources announced an investment of more than 1.350 billion Mexican pesos for 2026 to support the sanitation and restoration of the Lerma-Santiago River, consolidating its recovery as a State policy aimed at improving water quality and the well-being of communities in the basin.
- The Government of Colombia, with methodological support from ECLAC, is developing a national plan to recover methane from 100 wastewater treatment plants for use as an energy source.
- In 2025, ECLAC organized the Regional Water Week for Latin America and the Caribbean, during which regional authorities were called upon to follow up on the commitments adopted under the Regional Water Action Agenda and key water policy challenges were discussed.

> ECLAC recommendations

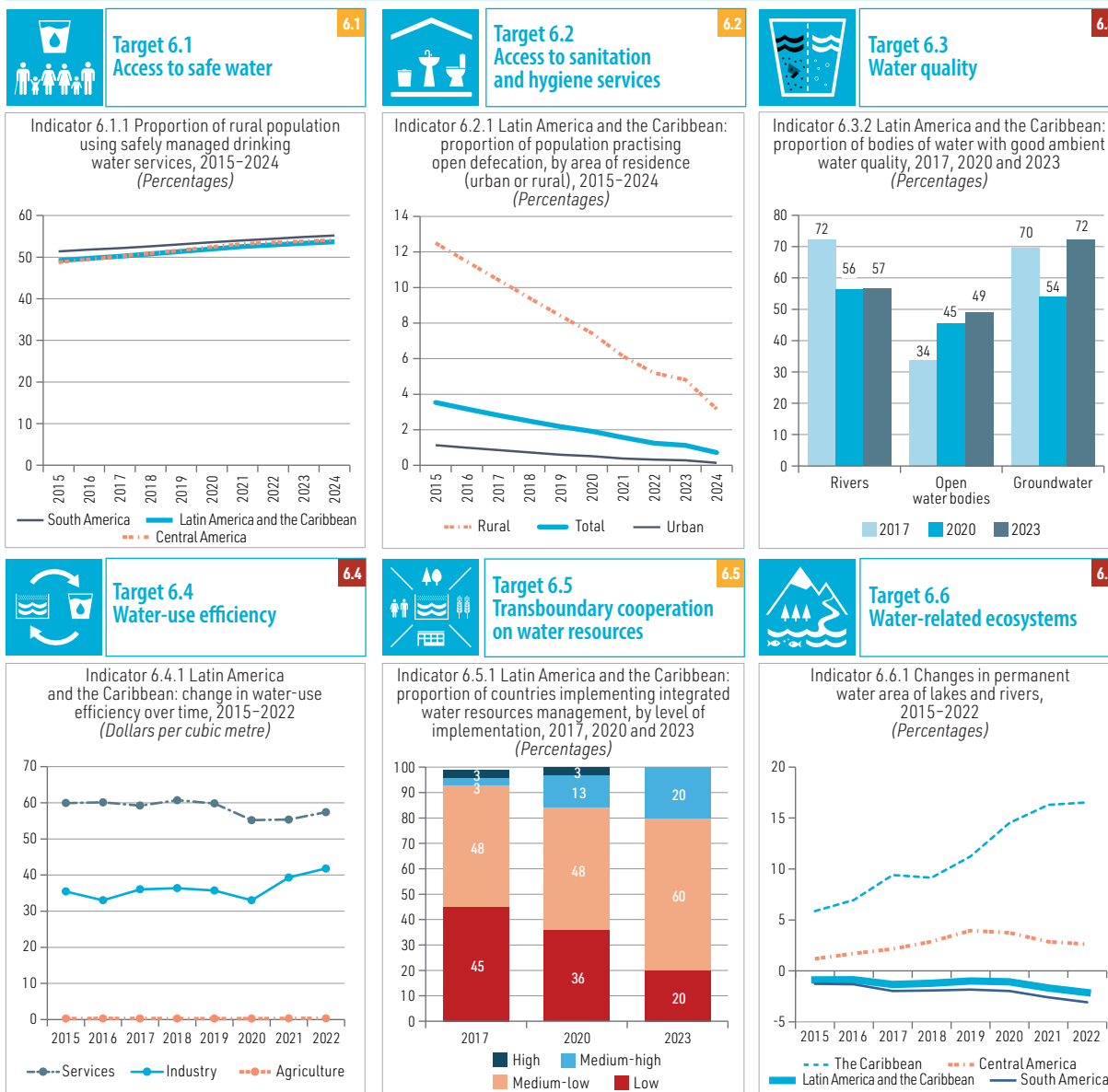
- Progress towards universal access to safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services requires policies that support the expansion and maintenance of networks, strengthen governance and community participation, and ensure adequate financing and culturally appropriate technical assistance.
- Ensuring that access to water and sanitation is financially sustainable and socially equitable requires the adoption of progressive tariff structures, targeted social tariffs and periodic adjustments based on operating and infrastructure costs, complemented by water abstraction and effluent discharge fees that include affordability safeguards.
- Charges for water use rights can serve as a strategic mechanism to highlight the economic, social, cultural and environmental value of water, discourage waste, finance conservation and equitably distribute management costs, thereby aligning private incentives with public water security objectives.
- Advancing integrated water resources management calls for further strengthening of technical and regulatory frameworks and addressing gaps such as the lack of clear mandates, financing and data interoperability.
- To strengthen cooperation in transboundary basins, there is a need for updated legal instruments, multinational bodies with stable budgets and shared data systems that ensure continuous monitoring and results-based policy adjustment.
- To reverse setbacks and consolidate progress in the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, it is essential to institutionalize natural infrastructure in public investment and tariff frameworks and ensure adequate financing mechanisms.
- Enhancing international cooperation for capacity-building and strengthening local community participation requires linking cooperation to national programmes with territorial portfolios and standardized projects, supported by coordinated financing windows that pool resources and reduce risk. In parallel, co-management with Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendent populations and local organizations should be institutionalized by strengthening basin committees and councils with the mandate, budget and authority required to operate effectively.

Key regional statistics

Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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■ The trend has stalled or is moving away from the target
 ■ The trend is in the right direction, but progress is too slow for the target to be met
 ■ Target already reached or likely to be reached on the current trend
 ■ Insufficient data

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of United Nations. (n.d.). *SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean: statistical knowledge management hub*. Regional Knowledge Management Platform for the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/index.html>.

Note: Each indicator comprises one or more statistical series, which partially or fully cover the corresponding indicator. In the figures presented here, one or more statistical series were used for the respective indicator.

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