



The dramatic shortage of water in Cape Town has focused international attention on the water crisis that is threatening livelihoods and health worldwide. How can we manage our precious water supplies as demand soars?

Two billion people in the world have no access to safe water and 4.5 billion lack proper sanitation. Safe water is becoming the most precious commodity in most regions of the world, including Europe. More than half of the world already lives in cities, estimated to increase up to 6 billion urban inhabitants by 2050. Most of this growth will occur in cities within the developing world. As overdevelopment, population growth and a record of droughts, exacerbated by human-induced climate change, are unbalancing the use and supply of water, cities are facing threats of life-threatening water shortages.

Yet, there is hope for all of us to slow down and possibly to prevent further shortages of water.

Today, March 22nd, is annual World Water Day. This year's theme – *'The answer is nature. How can we reduce, droughts and water pollution? By using solutions, we already find in nature.'* – emphasizes how

water challenges of the 21st

century can be overcome by using nature. Against the backdrop that the water crisis springs from environmental damage, nature-based solutions entailing planting new forests, reconnecting rivers and restoring wetlands –will rebalance the water cycle and improve human health and livelihoods.



We, as humans, are at the heart of this water crisis and therefore we are also part of its solution. To stress the urgency of water conservation and management, the United Nations has decided to launch the [Water Action Decade 2018-2028](#) . This new decade will raise awareness about safe water and the importance of water for a sustainable future. Together, each of us, at every level, should change our patterns of consumption and address the current water crisis by effectively managing water resources.

Access to water is a crucial pre-condition for escaping poverty. It is also deeply tied to food, health, socio-economic development and human dignity. Therefore, water is at the heart of sustainable development, being a human right in itself. The Sustainable Development Goals (including Goal 6 on water) has the aim of ensuring that everyone has access to safe water by 2030.

Water scarcity presents a pressing issue in Europe as well. A study, contracted by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, found that 38% of the EU's water demand lies outside its territory. This is because many products consumed by EU citizens are produced in countries facing water scarcity, such as Pakistan or India. Yet, Europe itself also experiences the consequences of draughts and climate change, with an estimated 11% of Europe's population affected by water scarcity. The EU calculates that droughts within Europe have cost about EUR 100 billion over the last 30 years and have a significant impact on agriculture.

The solution lies in nature, as well as within the patterns and behaviours of consumers and citizens. Water is about developing, sharing and conservation and this universal issue can only be realized collectively.

Water is a matter of life and death. Let us respect what so many of us still take for granted. Every drop counts.

Additional links:

- [World Water Day 2018](#)
- [Water Action Decade](#)
- [High-Level Panel on Water \(#HLPWater\)](#)
- [UNESCO World Water Development Report 2018](#)
- [8th World Water Forum 8](#)
- [UN-Water](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 6: Water and Sanitation](#)