

CONCEPT NOTE

Strategic Business Workshop on Water under Global Gateway

First brainstorming: Building the way forward

Brussels, 18 March 2026

Venue: Royal Library of Belgium

What?

This Strategic Business Workshop with the European water industry - from water production to wastewater treatment - serves to unlock private investments in the water sector in Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean and in the MENA region.

- Wednesday, 18 March 2026, 09h30-17h30 (incl. coffee and lunch),
- In-person at the Royal Library of Belgium - <https://www.kbr.be/en/how-to-get-here>
- Organised by the European Commission (Directorate-General for International Partnerships - INTPA),
- Co-chaired with the Cyprus presidency of the Council of the European Union and co-hosted with [Water Europe](#), [EurEau](#) and the European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations ([EFCA](#)),
- With the participation of the Directorate-General for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

This workshop will provide a space for open discussions, following Chatham House rules.

Why?

Investments in water security are anticipated to nearly double globally from EUR 2,643 billion to EUR 5,023 billion between 2024 and 2034 (GWI 2024). As water infrastructures are increasingly recognised as a strategic asset for the energy and digital transitions, cities resilience, agriculture and industries, opportunities in project finance and water utility operations are expected to grow sixfold from EUR 264 billion to EUR 1,586 billion (GWI, 2025).

The EU private sector with its world-class water industry is in a good position to harness such opportunities.

Today, private investments only account for 3% of water sector investments, in stark contrast to 54% in the energy sector and 39% in transport (WB, 2024). Hence, there is a need and space for additional financial means, beyond public funding.

Some challenges in the sector include perceived risks, unclear regulatory frameworks, low margins, high management inefficiencies, inadequate pricing, and shortage of professional expertise. This situation often leads to poor maintenance, low performance and frequent political interference (WB, 2024).

The workshop is an effort to move from ad hoc to structured conversations with the European private sector. This conversation aims at capturing collective intelligence by comparing notes on: opportunities, business models that are successful, challenges, and the support needed to make them work at a larger scale. It will seek to build on the [Global Gateway strategy](#) and its [Investment Hub](#).

How?

This first workshop seeks to:

- **Present opportunities under Global Gateway** (illustrative project cases) to inform and generate appetite from the European private sector.
- **Collect inputs from the European private sector** on international investment opportunities and challenges in the water sector (from production to wastewater treatment). To collect actionable inputs, the dialogue will be based on a market analysis that identifies existing successful Business Models in developing countries (from project initiation to financial close). It will focus on models with a significant growth potential. Some business models will be illustrated with concrete EU project opportunities. Trade will not be covered. Pre-identified business models include:
 - i. Unsolicited proposals;
 - ii. Concessions and Licenses;
 - iii. Operation & Maintenance and Service improvement Contracts;
 - iv. Engineering, Procurement and Construction tenders;
 - v. Independent water producers and/or wastewater treatment operations with offtake agreements.
- **Compare** available instruments with private sector's support expectations and needs.
- **Exchange views on potential collaborative actions with the European Commission** to unlock the development of market opportunities for EU companies in line with these business models.

In parallel, a **‘Meet the EU’ opportunity** will be given to the private companies. A pipeline of five to ten EU funded projects in developing countries of Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East will be shared ahead of the meeting. Private sector participants will have the opportunity to engage in a 20-minute meeting with EU representatives to: i) express interest in one of the projects identified in the pipeline (to be soon shared); ii) present one of their projects and receive initial insights on potential support and suggested next steps.

A limited number of bilateral meetings with DG INTPA senior management will be offered to CEOs, in parallel to the session.

Companies taking part in the ‘Meet the EU’ sessions are required to register in the [Transparency Register of the European Union](#) and indicate their interest by email.

What for?

- To foster understanding and interest within the private sector to encourage submission of future proposals via the Investment Hub;
- To establish a communication channel with the European private sector entities active in water industry;
- To gain insight into specific water industry needs to more effectively customise EU support.

Who?

We aim for the participation of 50 EU private sector representatives at a strategic decision-making level (senior investments and operations managers). A number of CEOs from large companies are expected to shape the discussion alongside EU senior management and the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The participation of a maximum of 30 EU public sector representatives (European Commission, European Development Finance Institutions and Member States) will further contribute to providing a Team Europe orientation. The workshop is anticipated to result in further engagement with the private sector on particular projects and potentially the formation of working groups focused on specific topics.

More information

Contact: EU Water Facility (Isidora ZERVA: I.zerva@lp.gr)



Strategic Business Workshop on Water under Global Gateway

Programme

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

9:00-9:30

Welcome coffee and registration

9:30-10:00

OPENING REMARKS | SETTING THE SCENE

Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA), European Commission - The EU Global Gateway Strategy
Dr Costas Constantinou, Permanent Secretary – Director General of the Department of Environment, Cyprus – A Mediterranean perspective

10:00-10:45

PRIVATE PARTICIPATION IN THE WATER SECTOR: AN INTRODUCTION

Kick off discussion on investments with the European private sector in water: **Marjeta Jager**, Deputy Director-General, INTPA, moderator; **Bruno Hervet** CEO SUEZ Europe, acting CEO SUEZ Engineering & Construction, Executive Chairman SUEZ Consulting; two other CEOs (tbc); Research and innovation centre of excellence (Cyprus) (Tbc)

10:45-11:45

BUSINESS WORKSHOP INTRODUCTION

- Introduction to the Global Gateway toolbox, the investment hub and investments under the pact for the Mediterranean
Rigo Belpaire, acting Head of Unit, Private Sector Engagement & Employment, INTPA Unit Pact for the Mediterranean and Egypt, DG MENA
- Q&A
- Presentation of the Business Models and framing of the discussion
Michael Ball, Senior Expert – INTPA Business Advisory Group Facility

11:45-12:45

BUSINESS WORKSHOP DISCUSSION – PART 1

World coffee style sessions with rotating discussion on the business models

One table per business model. Each table is chaired by an EU company and attended by at least one EC representative

Guiding questions:

- What are the opportunities to further develop investments under this business model?
- What are the challenges you face from early initiation to financial close?

Meet the EU Sessions

Bilateral meetings with DG INTPA and DG MENA - 5 x 20 min sessions:

- EU pipeline opportunities
- Private Sector projects proposals

12:45-14:00

Lunch break

14:00-16:00	BUSINESS WORKSHOP DISCUSSION – PART 2
	<p>World coffee style sessions with rotating discussion on the business models</p> <p>One table per business model. Each table is chaired by an EU company and attended by at least one EC representative</p> <p><u>Guiding questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What potential support from the European Commission do you envision to unlock opportunities within this business model, from initiation to financial closure? ▪ What next steps would you suggest? ▪ How would you prefer to be kept informed?
	<p>Meet the EU Sessions (continuation)</p> <p>Bilateral meetings with DG INTPA and DG MENA - 5 x 20 min sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EU pipeline opportunities ▪ Private Sector projects proposals
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break
16:30-17:15	DEBRIEF OF THE DISCUSSION
	<p>Feedback from the discussion on Business Models moderated by: Durk Krol, Executive Director of Water Europe; Oliver Loebel, Secretary General of EurEau, and Sue Arundale, Director General of the European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations</p>
17:15-17:30	CLOSING REMARKS
	<p>Erica Gerretsen, Director Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, and Acting Director Green Deal, Digital Agenda, INTPA</p>
18:00-19:30	COCKTAIL CO-HOSTED BY THE CYPRUS PRESIDENCY AND INTPA