

Concept Paper for 7th ASEM Seminar on Urban Water Management

I. Background

Across Asia and Europe, cities are facing mounting challenges in ensuring sustainable urban water management amid rapid urbanization, climate change, and growing water demand. These challenges call for coordinated actions, knowledge sharing, and joint innovation to strengthen water governance and resilience. At the global level, frameworks such as the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the *Sustainable Development Goal 6* (Clean Water and Sanitation), and the *Water Action Decade (2018–2028)* have collectively underscored the urgent need for science-based, inclusive, and cooperative approaches to sustainable water management.

Across regions, both Asia and Europe have been taking concrete actions to address these challenges. In Asia, countries are advancing integrated water resources management through smart technologies, green infrastructure, and regional initiatives for transboundary water cooperation. China has implemented large-scale river basin governance and sponge city programmes that integrate ecological restoration, flood control, and urban resilience. Singapore's holistic water reuse strategy and Japan's urban water

recycling systems also demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable water use. In Europe, policies such as the *European Green Deal*, the *EU Water Framework Directive*, and the *Nature Restoration Law* have promoted large-scale ecosystem restoration, circular water use, and community participation. As “the Land of a Thousand Lakes,” Finland has been a leader in lake restoration, data-driven governance, and watershed coordination. Together, these regional experiences provide valuable models for cross-learning and collaboration.

The ASEM Seminar on Urban Water Management (hereinafter referred to as “the Seminar”) was established in 2012 under the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) framework as a biennial dialogue platform for government agencies, research institutions, industry experts, and practitioners. The Seminar aims to enhance understanding, cooperation, and innovation between Asia and Europe in areas such as water governance, urban ecology, and sustainable infrastructure. Over six editions, it has fostered high-level exchanges and policy dialogues that connect research outcomes with practical applications in water management and sustainability.

The 7th edition, scheduled for May 2026 in Helsinki, Finland, will continue this mission by deepening cross-regional dialogue and

exploring innovative solutions for sustainable urban water systems. The Seminar will feature keynote sessions, plenary discussions, and a field visit focusing on governance mechanisms, technological innovations, and cooperation opportunities. It will provide a neutral and collaborative platform to share best practices, strengthen policy linkages, and promote actionable partnerships between Asian and European stakeholders.

II. Purpose

The Seminar aims to create a Government–Industry–Academia–Research–Application dialogue platform to foster technological innovation in water resources management and enhance policy coordination among ASEM members. It will feature case studies on ecological restoration, circular economy practices, river protection and management, aquatic ecosystem preservation, and the digital transformation of water resources governance.

The Seminar has three goals. First, to build up an international multi-stakeholder forum and network on sustainable water management from an Asian and European perspective, providing opportunities to discuss the challenges and best practices, exchange experiences, and seek solutions. Second, to facilitate the role of governance, R&D, education and partnership in addressing challenges in water conservation and integrated management of urban water resources. Third, to encourage governments, the private

sector, academia, and the public in Asia and Europe to engage in dialogues on integration and sustainable management of water resources.

III. Time and Theme

May 27-28, 2026, two days of Seminar

Theme: A Community of Life for Water and Urban: Science and Technology Empowering the Sustainability of Blue-Green Economy

IV. Format and Venue

Offline event: Helsinki, Finland

Seminar Venue: University/Hotel (TBC)

V. Organization

1. Organized by

ASEM Water Resources Research and Development Center
(ASEMwater)

2. Supported by

Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

3. Co-organized by

Chinese Association of Science and Technology in Finland (CASTF), Finnish Water Forum, Finnish Water Cluster (FinWater), European Water Association (EWA), Hungarian Water Association, Romanian Sustainable Environment and Ecological Innovation Cluster, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

VI. Program (TBC)

Opening Ceremony

First Thematic Session: Optimal Allocation Practice of Urban Water Resources

Second Thematic Session: Water Environment and Smart Water Resource Management

VII. Participants

Around 150 members:

1. Representatives of UN Agencies (UNEP, UNDP, UN-Water, UNOSSC) and Multilateral Development Banks (AIIB).
2. The representatives from Asia and Europe engaged in water resources, environmental protection, aquatic ecology, sustainable development and other fields, including relevant universities and scientific research institutions, policy research institutions and think tanks, technology enterprises and engineering companies, financial institutions (such as multilateral development banks, green investment and financing institutions), international organizations and industry associations.