

# UNITED NATIONS WORLD WATER DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2021

## VALUING WATER

Published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water, the [2021 World Water Development Report - Valuing Water](#) assesses the current status of, and challenges to, the valuation of water across different sectors and perspectives, and identifies ways in which valuation can be promoted as a tool to help achieve sustainability.

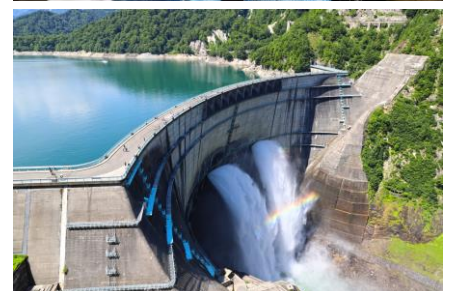
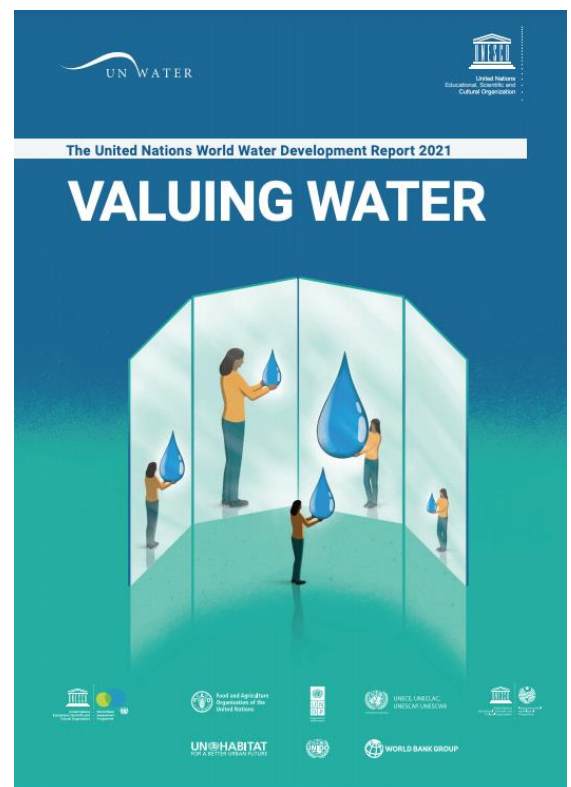
Water is a unique and non-substitutable resource of limited quantity. As the foundation of life, societies and economies, it carries multiple values and benefits. But unlike most other valuable resources, it has proven extremely difficult to determine its true 'value'. Recognizing, measuring and expressing water's multiple values, and incorporating these into decision-making processes, are fundamental to achieving sustainable and equitable water resources management.

The 2021 Report shows that the inability to recognize the value of water is the main cause of water waste and misuse. Despite the difficulty of attributing an objective and indisputable value to a resource which is fundamental to life, it seems necessary to examine water's various dimensions in order to understand the various aspects of its "value". This is especially true in times of growing scarcity and against the backdrop of population growth and climate change.

[The 2021 Report](#) emphasizes the great need to broaden the notion of the "value" of water stressing that we cannot confuse the concepts of "price", "cost" and "value". Although price and cost are potentially quantifiable, the concept of "value" is much wider and includes social and cultural dimensions. Indeed, water is not like other raw materials which can be treated as commodities and openly traded through stock markets. The challenge is to determine a value for a resource whose importance varies in different areas of economic activity, at different times, without forgetting to take into account its social, environmental and cultural dimensions.

The Report groups current methodologies and approaches to the valuation of water into five interrelated perspectives: valuing water sources, in situ water resources and ecosystems; valuing water infrastructure for water storage, use, reuse or supply augmentation; valuing water services, mainly drinking water, sanitation and related human health aspects; valuing water as an input to production and socio-economic activity, such as food and agriculture, energy and industry, business and employment; and other sociocultural values of water, including recreational, cultural and spiritual attributes. These are complemented with experiences from different global regions; opportunities to reconcile multiple values of water through more integrated and holistic approaches to governance; approaches to financing; and methods to address knowledge, research and capacity needs.

The Report is published by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water and its production is coordinated by the [UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme](#). The Report is based on work by members and partners of UN-Water.



Launched in conjunction with World Water Day 2021, the Report provides decision-makers with knowledge and tools to formulate and implement sustainable water policies. It also offers best practice examples and in-depth analyses to stimulate ideas and actions for better stewardship in the water sector and beyond.

The Report 2021 website also illustrates the main concepts and data, in particular for aspects concerning: [Valuing water supply, sanitation services](#); [Valuing water for the economy](#); [Valuing water for the environment](#); [Cultural values of water](#); and [Valuing hydraulic infrastructure](#).

From 2003 through to 2012, the World Water Development Report (WWDR) was produced and released every three years, following a comprehensive approach. As of 2014, the WWDR transformed into an annual, thematic report, focused on a different strategic water issues each year. In the WWDR website, managed by UNESCO, [all the previous Reports are available](#).

### To know more

[2021 World Water Development Report website](#)

[Executive Summary](#)

[Facts and figures](#)

[UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme](#)

[Previous World Water Development Reports](#)

