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Parliament  
for Water

LAC YOUTH  
FOR WATER

**DECLARATION**

# Context

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a region with a per capita water endowment of approximately 22,000 cubic meters, tripling the global average of 6,000 cubic meters per person. This highlights that the primary challenge for water resources is not scarcity but rather the integrated management of resources that belong to individual nations and cross borders.

As young people committed to sustainable water management in Latin America and the Caribbean, we express deep concern over the systemic deficiencies affecting this vital resource. Below, we outline our perspectives on critical issues to transform the region's water reality.



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# WORK PROPOSALS

## WATER GOVERNANCE AND INEQUALITIES

Many regions face ineffective water policies, lack of transparency, and weak policy and regulatory development and enforcement, limiting authorities' ability to efficiently manage infrastructure and water resources. Overexploitation of water sources, water conflicts, and the vulnerability of rural communities in Latin America, as well as coastal and island communities in the Caribbean, exacerbate the crisis. Indigenous water rights and the participation of women and marginalized communities in decision-making within the sector remain insufficient.

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water considers that:

- The lack of competent water resource management entities hinders the effective implementation of water policies and the creation of regulatory mechanisms to address transboundary issues.
- Despite existing water resource regulations, their enforcement is limited due to a lack of institutional and financial capacity at the basin level, preventing efficient and equitable water management.
- Remote regions receive less investment in water projects, prioritizing urban and economic centers while excluding indigenous and rural communities.
- Water governance systems do not adequately consider the participation of indigenous peoples, afro-descendant communities, and marginalized groups in decision-making processes, leading to inequitable and unsustainable solutions.
- The lack of effective regulations and awareness strategies has led to the overexploitation of aquifers, reservoirs and reserves, the deterioration of water ecosystems, and intensified socio-environmental conflicts during periods of scarcity.
- There is a deficiency in multisectoral data collection and information for water resource monitoring at the basin level, preventing timely decision-making by stakeholders.



## WATER GOVERNANCE AND INEQUALITIES

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water proposes:

- Promoting the creation and strengthening of watershed councils as inclusive decision-making spaces with active participation from communities, governments, civil society, and other key actors, ensuring youth participation in these processes.
- Establishing community monitoring committees for water use oversight, promoting shared responsibility in resource management.
- Implementing continuous monitoring systems for water quality in surface and groundwater sources, along with transparent digital platforms providing real-time information access.
- Providing technical training to local governments and other responsible institutions to ensure effective policy and regulation enforcement.
- Encouraging the conservation and restoration of ecosystems that provide water, promoting water source regeneration strategies and auditing concessions to prevent overexploitation.
- Ensuring the effective participation of indigenous and afro-descendent peoples, rural communities, and historically excluded groups in water management decision-making.
- Increasing advocacy efforts to improve water governance by demanding greater transparency, accountability, and regulatory compliance from governments.
- Strengthening partnerships between countries and international organizations to share experiences, funding, and innovative technologies that contribute to equitable and sustainable water management.
- Promoting the sustainability of hydraulic infrastructure, ensuring the optimal use of water supply systems, wastewater treatment plants, stormwater management, and rainwater harvesting systems.



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## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

Millions of people still lack reliable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation services, particularly in rural and peri-urban communities in Latin America and island territories in the Caribbean. The lack of resilient infrastructure and technical capacity, combined with exposure to extreme climate events, hampers the sustainable provision of these services.

In this regard, LAC Youth for Water considers that:

- There are deficiencies in technical capacities, a lack of innovation, limited resource mobilization, and insufficient project viability within the region.
- In LAC, there is little coordination among key stakeholders managing access to drinking water and sanitation, including project developers, public utility companies, system operators, and government entities responsible for project approval and resource management.
- There is significant fragmentation in water and sanitation infrastructure management, preventing universal and equitable access. Current policies are based on disconnected systems (potable water distribution, drainage systems) rather than an integrated management approach. Additionally, territorial planning policies do not fully incorporate water and sanitation services into planning instruments, reducing incentives for projects aimed at increasing coverage and maintaining existing infrastructure. As a result, many service providers fail to meet operational indicators, and poor coordination among stakeholders hampers progress toward universal access to quality water and sanitation.
- Governments in LAC have limited technical capacity to address deficiencies in water and sanitation access. These challenges require long-term collaboration across different government administrations and coordination with skilled professionals capable of developing multidisciplinary solutions tailored to the region's complex reality. Additionally, authorities do not actively engage local communities in decision-making processes, leading to a top-down approach that undermines infrastructure ownership and sustainability.
- Water and sanitation policies and regulations in LAC have not sufficiently considered differentiated approaches for indigenous communities, nor have they prioritized technological alternatives when they offer greater benefits than traditional systems. The inequality in water and sanitation access in rural and peri-urban communities is alarming.



## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

- Conservation efforts at the watershed level have been largely neglected in LAC's water governance, exacerbating water stress and activities that disrupt the hydrological cycle. These include mining, industrial pollution, and human settlements that increase greenhouse gas emissions, intensifying climate change. The region has primarily relied on reactive solutions, treating contaminated water instead of adopting a preventive approach that prioritizes the protection of water sources and catchment areas. This reactive focus has increased pressure on water supply and sanitation systems.
- Political obstacles, corruption, and conflicting interests hinder efforts to close the water access gap. There is a lack of transparency in public resource management for the water and sanitation sector, with numerous public entities absorbing project funds without delivering tangible results.
- The sanitation gap in LAC is even more severe than the drinking water access gap. Due to structural issues in the sector, stakeholders focus on expanding potable water supply while neglecting sanitation infrastructure. Sanitation sector offers significant opportunities for innovation, new solutions, and research to bridge existing disparities.
- The region's financial model for water and sanitation infrastructure relies on user tariffs, which have proven insufficient to achieve coverage and access goals. It is crucial to explore successful financial models from other infrastructure sectors, such as concession-based development. Incentives should be established to attract investment in the sector, including tax relief, water bonds, financial incentives for water startups, and regulatory mechanisms that require territorial entities and service providers to demonstrate progress in coverage, water quality, and leakage reduction.
- LAC has very limited funding for water and sanitation. Given the region's vulnerability to climate change—manifested through more intense rainfall and drought extremes—greater resource mobilization is needed to develop resilient infrastructure. This infrastructure should incorporate innovative operational strategies, such as regulating overload conditions, reducing excessive pressures, identifying and correcting leaks, rehabilitating pipelines and critical infrastructure, addressing intermittent water flow scenarios, and adapting to fluctuations in demand over short and long periods due to precipitation and temperature variability.
- There are no clear performance indicators to track water and sanitation access goals in LAC, or when they exist, they are not systematically evaluated. Key indicators that should be regularly monitored include: Non-revenue water (NRW) index, technical losses index, water quality indicators, service coverage rates, service continuity indicators, Institutional capacity indicators for water and sanitation service providers.



## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

To address these issues, the LAC Youth for Water proposes:

- Developing basin-level policies that foster an integrated approach to water management, replacing the current fragmented system. These policies should incentivize regional coordination among stakeholders involved in water and sanitation services. Additionally, innovative project management methodologies such as PMP (Project Management Professional), Agile management, Scrum, Kanban, and Lean Management should be promoted.
- Strengthening technical capacities in project structuring and infrastructure operation to ensure efficient resource management and eliminate inefficiencies. This can be achieved by organizing working groups for knowledge exchange among water sector professionals and requiring territorial authorities to monitor service providers' operational indicators and support institutional strengthening when necessary.
- Developing clear policies for alternative approaches to water and sanitation challenges. Technological solutions are often treated as secondary considerations rather than integral components of decision-making. Sector policies should establish prioritization frameworks that include technological alternatives and develop technical and regulatory standards for their implementation.
- Implementing operational policies that ensure service continuity and quality. These policies should focus on infrastructure rehabilitation, including pipeline replacement programs, mandatory leak detection plans using AI and machine learning or traditional in-line inspection methods, monitoring hydraulic restrictions in networks, and expanding systems when demand exceeds design capacity.
- Creating financial incentives to mobilize resources for the sector by reviewing the current financial model and exploring new funding sources. Possible incentives include regulatory mandates requiring a minimum percentage of investment in rural and indigenous communities, the reception of international funding mechanisms aligned with SDG 6, tax relief for water sector investments, support for water startups, and exploring alternative financing models, such as concessions and water bonds.
- Ensuring long-term continuity of government programs and their execution. This requires robust stakeholder coordination, clear guidelines in territorial planning and regulatory frameworks, expert involvement in decision-making, free from political influence and public pressure, and transparency mechanisms to hold authorities accountable for water sector investments, budget allocation, and management outcomes.



## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

As LAC Youth for Water, we propose creating a youth-led roadmap to address water and sanitation challenges in the region, based on the following actions:

- Research existing basin management organizations in LAC.
- Engage with these organizations or collaborate with communities to document water access and coverage needs at the basin level.
- Develop diagnostic tools to facilitate dialogue with relevant authorities.
- Mobilize youth participation to enhance coordination among stakeholders and influence public policies.
- Assess the scale of the problem, the origin of water resources, and the financial models used to fund water and sanitation services.
- Promote knowledge transfer within LAC Youth for Water to generate innovative strategies through expert dialogue.
- Attract resources from key stakeholders to fund projects and initiatives.
- Develop concrete projects based on market studies to identify opportunities for youth-led solutions in the region.



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## UNDERINVESTMENT IN WATER SECURITY

Watershed conservation, sustainable infrastructure, and water budgets receive insufficient funding, while innovative financial mechanisms to ensure long-term resilience are lacking. Financial planning for water management remains limited in many regions that are highly dependent on vulnerable water sources.

However, despite existing public policies and well-known solutions supported by various stakeholders, we observe a lack of sustainable and sufficiently innovative financial mechanisms to achieve water security goals. The absence of effective financial and economic management remains a major barrier to embedding water security policies into a robust long-term framework.

Given the unequal distribution of water and sanitation infrastructure and the challenges of climate change adaptation and mitigation, it is urgent to prioritize financial solutions that enhance the resilience of socio-hydrological systems.

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water considers:

- It is essential to allocate funds to the most vulnerable territories and ensure proper oversight of funded projects until completion. While financial constraints are a reality, multiple stakeholders (such as the IDB, UN, and the World Bank) are actively investing in projects. The challenge is to establish local mechanisms for sustainable management of funded projects and existing financial resources, preventing unfinished initiatives.
- The lack of sustainable financial mechanisms at the watershed level leads to disorganized water and sanitation infrastructure development (where it exists at all). This situation exacerbates social and economic disparities between communities and territories.



## UNDERINVESTMENT IN WATER SECURITY

To address this issue, the LAC Youth for Water proposes:

Urgently prioritizing discussions on sustainable financial mechanisms for water management, using cross-sectoral, multi-scale, and participatory approaches to develop democratic and inclusive financial solutions.

- Understanding the precise causes of underinvestment in water infrastructure, analyzing these factors through a territorial, socioeconomic, and political lens, and discussing them using a global perspective. It is crucial to explore the interdependent relationships between poor investment in water security and socioeconomic, environmental, and water inequalities—a key issue of social and environmental justice.
- Enhancing youth participation in decision-making processes to contribute to better-designed financing and management projects and advocate for stronger, fairer public policies on water governance.
- Establishing an entity comprised of young experts to monitor water-related decision-making processes at the watershed level.
- Proposing innovations and contributing to capacity-building efforts for watershed conservation and resilient infrastructure development. This includes promoting joint investments between governments, public authorities, and the private sector.
- Strengthening knowledge-sharing through collaborations between youth and academia to document existing financial solutions that can be replicated and adapted to specific climatic, hydrological, socioeconomic, political, and legal contexts. These efforts should also incorporate key performance indicators to quantify success.
- Developing a roadmap based on multi-actor and multi-scale dialogues, prioritizing youth-led actions on water security challenges and presenting these recommendations to decision-makers and key stakeholders.



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## WATER POLLUTION AND DECLINING QUALITY

Groundwater contamination, inadequate monitoring, and outdated wastewater treatment systems threaten water security and public health. In various Latin American regions, intensive agriculture, mining, and unplanned urban expansion have increased water stress. In coastal and island areas of the Caribbean, saltwater intrusion and inefficient waste management further degrade water quality.

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water considers that:

- In LAC, companies engaged in natural resource extraction, especially in mining and metal production, fail to consider environmental and health impacts on nearby communities, as untreated discharges contaminate rivers and aquifers.
- The absence of an automated water quality monitoring network prevents the effective enforcement of existing environmental regulations and standards.
- The current wastewater treatment methodologies are either obsolete or nonexistent in certain areas, leading to severe water pollution.
- The rapid expansion of agricultural land for food production has led to excessive water demand, worsening water stress and increasing contamination due to agrochemical use.
- In some regions of LAC, sea-level rise has become a major contaminant of freshwater sources, reducing water availability.



## WATER POLLUTION AND DECLINING QUALITY

In this regard, LAC Youth for Water proposes:

- Encouraging and funding academic research to develop innovative, low-cost tools for measuring key water quality parameters.
- Creating accessible digital platforms to track water quality issues from the perspective of affected communities, using water quality models to evaluate financial, social, and public health impacts.
- Developing and unifying new industry-specific regulations at the watershed and national levels, ensuring effective audits and sanctions for companies and sectors that fail to meet water quality standards, particularly regarding critical pollutants.
- Promoting new wastewater treatment infrastructure projects, financed by both the public and private sectors, that optimize treatment processes through more efficient technologies.
- Encouraging the creation of startups focused on automated water monitoring, integrating AI and satellite imagery.
- Raising public awareness through social media and other communication channels to highlight the severity of water pollution.
- Conducting studies on the effects of specific pollutants, such as chemical and pharmaceutical waste.
- Establishing dedicated funding programs to support water decontamination and treatment projects.
- Mobilizing interest from the private sector and government to increase investment in technological solutions for water pollution management.



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## UNSUSTAINABLE WATER USE IN GROWING CITIES

Rapid urbanization leads to exponential increases in water demand and wastewater generation, straining existing water supply and sanitation systems. At the same time, inefficient practices in key sectors such as agriculture and industry contribute to rapid resource depletion, further pressuring aquifers and surface water sources.

In regions already facing water stress, scarcity is worsened by the lack of comprehensive planning strategies that prioritize conservation, reuse, and sustainable management. Although solutions such as decentralized water treatment, irrigation modernization, and urban water efficiency measures have significant potential, their implementation remains limited and fragmented, preventing the scale of impact necessary to ensure long-term water security.

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water considers that:

- In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), data collection and availability on water resources remain insufficient, both in terms of quantity and quality. This lack of information prevents a comprehensive understanding of water-related challenges, leading to inefficient water management in growing cities and the development of policies and strategies that do not address the real needs of each territory.
- Water and sanitation service coverage remains a major challenge in the region. While consolidated cities struggle with water quality issues, in growing cities, universal access is still not guaranteed and is often not prioritized in urban planning.
- There is a lack of integration between potable water distribution systems and urban drainage systems, preventing efficient and sustainable water management.
- Operation and maintenance of distribution and treatment systems require greater attention. Even in cities with functional infrastructure, operational failures due to poor maintenance strategies have led to increasing water losses, both from physical leaks and apparent losses, directly affecting consumers and water sustainability.
- Water scarcity remains a critical issue in the region due to inefficient water management. The lack of effective conservation, reuse, and loss control strategies has increased the vulnerability of supply systems, jeopardizing access to water for millions of people.
- The lack of detailed records on supply infrastructure in many LAC cities limits the inclusion of new connections to serve growing populations. This hinders operational optimization and makes it difficult to plan modernization and expansion strategies.
- Stormwater management remains one of the main challenges in cities with tropical climates due to its impact on flooding and urban infrastructure damage.



## UNSUSTAINABLE WATER USE IN GROWING CITIES

To address this issue, the LAC Youth for Water proposes:

- Developing data collection initiatives and open-access platforms to improve water resource monitoring, with a special focus on areas where no information is currently available. Efforts should also be made to digitize and standardize national and regional data.
- Prioritizing investment in water and sanitation infrastructure in growing cities through sustainable financing models, including subsidy programs for vulnerable communities.
- Designing master water management plans that integrate multifunctional infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and decentralized technologies to optimize water use, reuse, and disposal. These solutions must be incorporated from the initial design stages of urban systems, rather than as an afterthought.
- Implementing mandatory preventive maintenance programs and modernization of distribution networks, including periodic audits and advanced leak detection technologies. Additionally, reducing illegal water connections should be addressed through socially inclusive programs that formalize access while ensuring fair distribution.
- Developing integrated demand management strategies to reduce scarcity risks and enhance water resilience amid increasing stress. This includes incentives for water reuse, public education campaigns, and stricter consumption regulations.
- Conducting detailed and updated assessments of water infrastructure, ensuring its digitization and integration into territorial management platforms to facilitate network expansion and data-driven decision-making.
- Implementing integrated strategies to reduce vulnerability to extreme rainfall events, including green infrastructure solutions (e.g., floodable parks, storage tanks, real-time control systems) and early warning models to mitigate their impact.



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## CLIMATE RISKS AND LACK OF INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

Water systems remain vulnerable to climate change due to weak adaptation strategies, lack of transboundary cooperation, and limited integration of climate modeling, nature-based solutions, and water information systems in decision-making. Exposure to extreme events such as droughts, floods, and tropical storms highlights the need for integrated and resilient water management approaches across the region.

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water considers that:

- There is a lack of integration between climate models, atmospheric data, and water information systems in decision-making processes.
- The absence of transboundary cooperation for coordinated water management hinders the collection of meteorological data, which is essential for calibrating climate change models and implementing effective adaptation strategies.
- The lack of investment in expanding meteorological station networks limits the coverage and resolution of available atmospheric data, reducing its accuracy and usefulness in decision-making.
- The implementation of nature-based solutions (NbS) for climate adaptation remains weak, primarily due to investment systems that fail to account for the long-term economic benefits of such projects.
- The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, and tropical storms, are severely impacting water availability and quality.
- Damage to water infrastructure caused by extreme weather events is worsening the crisis of access to safe drinking water.
- Coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion, resulting from rising sea levels, threaten water availability for populations in affected regions.



## CLIMATE RISKS AND LACK OF INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT

In this regard, the LAC Youth for Water proposes:

- Increasing investment in climate-resilient water infrastructure and watershed conservation projects, developed in collaboration with local communities and incorporating ancestral knowledge of resource conservation.
- Strengthening cross-sectoral communication to enable institutions to develop joint strategies for climate change adaptation.
- Promoting the production, use, and continuous updating of climate data and hydroclimatic models to enhance risk reduction efforts and support the development of timely contingency and prevention plans.
- Implementing quality and availability indicators for water resources to quantify the impacts of climate change.
- Monitoring groundwater, water reservoirs and dam levels as a preventive measure against climate-related water shortages.
- Incorporating climate change projections into the design of hydraulic, road, and urban infrastructure, ensuring long-term resilience.
- Promoting water recycling and reuse, including rainwater harvesting systems and water-saving technologies for households.
- Advocating for policies that regulate responsible water use by industries and communities to reduce waste and inefficiencies.
- Expanding public education initiatives on water conservation and climate adaptation strategies to raise awareness and drive behavioral change.
- Encouraging community-led initiatives for protecting water resources, fostering local engagement in sustainable water management.

As LAC Youth for Water, we propose creating a youth-led roadmap to address climate risks and the lack of integrated management, based on the following principle:

- Developing participatory governance mechanisms that ensure inclusive decision-making processes, integrating social perspectives and recognizing young professionals as experts in the sector. This approach will support the creation of fair and sustainable solutions that reflect local realities.



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# CALL TO ACTION



Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a holistic, multi-level approach that not only strengthens institutional frameworks, financial mechanisms, and technological solutions but also prioritizes equity, sustainability, and resilience. Ensuring universal access to clean water and sanitation, preventing overexploitation, reducing pollution, and preparing for climate risks demands collaborative governance, innovative policies, and effective implementation strategies. However, solutions will remain incomplete unless new voices, fresh perspectives, and youth-driven initiatives are actively included in shaping and executing the water agenda.

Recognizing this, youth across LAC are stepping forward as key actors in transforming water management and governance. Our generation is committed to building sustainable and innovative pathways for water security, engaging in policy-making, research, community action, and innovation solutions to drive meaningful change.

We urgently call on the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean: the best investment for the present and the future is in youth. We are ready and committed to taking action, innovating, and transforming water management in our region. It is imperative to promote integrated governance models, inclusive policies, and technological strategies that ensure universal, safe, and sustainable access to water. Transformation is possible if the potential and commitment of youth are recognized, and if actions are guided by transparency, coordination, and responsibility. Investing in us means investing in a future where water, as a fundamental right, becomes a legacy of equity and resilience for all.



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# OUR VISION

As the World Youth Parliament for Water, we envision a dynamic and collaborative network where country chapters actively engage in regular discussions on regional water challenges, exchanging knowledge and providing peer-driven feedback to develop solutions. Our regional efforts aim to generate research-based insights, fostering a Think Tank approach that translates youth expertise into tangible policy recommendations for water authorities, policymakers, private sector actors, and local communities.

We strive to be the leading youth-driven platform for water governance, offering innovative perspectives and technical expertise to shape decision-making processes. Our goal is not simply to advocate for youth inclusion but to ensure that stakeholders recognize and seek our contributions based on the quality of our research, innovative solutions, and practical engagement in real-world projects. Looking ahead, we aspire to evolve beyond a Think Tank model into concrete youth-led water initiatives and projects in every region, driving meaningful and lasting impact.

Let's keep mobilizing our waves of change in  
the world!

Working in close collaboration and guidance of  
the International Secretariat of Water



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Thirsty for change



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