



DAVOS 2026, ACEA LEADS THE ALLIANCE FOR WATER

Chief Executive Officer Fabrizio Palermo presents the Water Manifesto, produced by Acea in collaboration with the WEF and the University of Cambridge

“Bridging the €6.5 Trillion Water Infrastructure Gap”

Rome, 21 January 2026 – Once again this year, the **Acea Group**, Italy's leading water operator and the second largest in Europe, serving 10 million people and a further 10 million abroad, **is participating in the World Economic Forum**, currently taking place in Davos, Switzerland. For the third consecutive year, the Group is attending the WEF with the Chief Executive Officer, **Fabrizio Palermo**, who is speaking on several panels and meeting with companies and institutions, beginning with the European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and the Circular Economy, **Jessika Roswall**. Once again this year, in an increasingly critical international context, the key theme at the heart of Acea's agenda is the protection and enhancement of water, a precious and indispensable resource for life and for the economy. Indeed, CEO Fabrizio Palermo is presenting today the **World Economic Forum Report**, produced in collaboration with Acea and the University of Cambridge, entitled **“Bridging the €6.5 Trillion Water Infrastructure Gap”**.

“In the global economic agenda – said **CEO of Acea Fabrizio Palermo** – water remains a central theme. This year, Acea's contribution is reflected in the Water Manifesto prepared in collaboration with the WEF and the University of Cambridge. We need to resume investment: to improve water infrastructure, drive GDP growth, and generate employment impacts that can reach up to 14 million jobs globally each year.”

The paper provides an overview of the state of the sector worldwide and demonstrates how water infrastructure lies at the heart of global economic growth and climate resilience. The study highlights the need for coordinated action among governments, industry, and finance to **bridge, by 2040, a global €6.5 trillion gap in water infrastructure, which could generate €8.4 trillion in additional GDP** and support **over 206 million full-time jobs**, equivalent to 14 million jobs per year.

To ensure equitable, resilient, sustainable, and technologically advanced water supply systems and sanitation services for all, **the global investment will need to double by 2040**. As regards Europe, **investment needs are estimated at more than €1.7 trillion**, corresponding to a gap of around €695 billion compared with current spending levels, driven mainly by the need to modernise ageing water infrastructure, as well as to upgrade and adapt wastewater treatment plants.

According to the paper, there are key areas on which to focus investment: equitable access to drinking water, infrastructure resilience, circularity – that is, reuse – and, finally, innovation.

The Group's objective is to position itself as a leader in the water transition not only at the national level but also across Europe. In recent years, ACEA has been committed to increasing awareness of the importance and scarcity of water resources, with the aim of building a culture of water protection. At the previous edition of the WEF Annual Meeting, Fabrizio Palermo introduced for the first time the concept of a “single direction for water management”, while through the proposals for change set out in the June paper [“European Water Resilience Strategy”](#), Acea contributed to defining the [European Commission Water Resilience Strategy](#). To implement this strategy, the EIB launched a water resilience programme, with more than €40 billion in investments planned between 2025 and 2027. The objective is to mobilise private capital and strengthen investments in desalination, wastewater reuse, pollution control and nature-based solutions. Finally, within the World Economic Forum, the **Water Industry** was established, a sector-based community dedicated to water and chaired by CEO Fabrizio Palermo, which brings together companies and stakeholders to foster dialogue and define a shared strategy for the protection and enhancement of this precious resource.

More specifically, on Monday 19 January at 4:00 p.m., Fabrizio Palermo spoke at the roundtable entitled “CEO Alliance on Nature Meeting”, where he emphasised the need for countries to pay increasing attention to water resilience strategies. On Tuesday 20, during the panel “Resilient Infrastructure for Growth”, he highlighted how water represents an essential driver for social development and economic growth. Today, the CEO of Acea met the European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and Circular Economy **Jessika Roswall**, and, after taking part in the “Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders” meeting, he will speak this afternoon at two different panels, where he will present, as mentioned, the **Report on the state of water resources** entitled: **“Bridging the €6.5 Trillion Water Infrastructure Gap”**.