

EQUITABLE ACCESS COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS:

ARMENIA

Section I: Country setting

Basic information

POPULATION	3 million (2017)
AREA	29,743 km ²
GDP	US\$ 11.6 billion
GDP PER CAPITA	US\$ 3,813
ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER (2017)	Total: 97.3% Urban: 99.9% Rural: 93.3%
ACCESS TO SANITATION (2017)	Total: 69.8% Urban: 97.8% Rural: 25.3%

Protocol on Water and Health. Armenia signed the Protocol in 1999, but it is not yet ratified. Nevertheless, the country has taken steps at the national level to implement the Protocol's provisions, with draft targets developed under Article 6, as well as actions related to the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation in accordance with Article 5.

Water sector. The protection and management of water resources is dealt with by the Ministry of Nature Protection. The Water Committee under the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources is responsible for the management and safe use of state-owned water systems, including aspects related to their safety and protection. Since 1 January 2017, water supply and sanitation (wastewater treatment) services have been provided by Veolia Djur CJSC. Tariff policy is implemented by the Public Services Regulatory Commission.

Section II: Self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation

II.A. Key findings¹⁶

Geographical disparities. The country identified the challenge of guaranteeing water supply to 579 rural communities that were neither connected to the centralized water supply system nor serviced by water companies. Water supply was found to be a particular issue for rural educational institutions as these rely on limited State funds for the operation and maintenance of water and sanitation-related infrastructure.

Vulnerable and marginalized groups. The information gap was a major challenge. Data on the situation of the rural communities were found to be limited, and information on access to water and sanitation by vulnerable and marginalized groups, for example data on access for homeless people, was scarcely available or lacking from official sources. Persons with special physical needs face major challenges to access water and sanitation as most public buildings remain inaccessible for them in Yerevan and even more so in provinces. The legal framework does not define the term "vulnerable and marginalized groups" and there are no public policies to sufficiently help improve access for the various groups.

Affordability. Since 2017, one company operates under a lease and a single tariff rate has been set.

II.B Process of self-assessment

Brief description. To gain an overall understanding of the country situation, the self-assessment exercise was carried out at the national level for a period of 11 months from November 2015 to October 2016 by identifying challenges related to equitable access to water and sanitation and areas of action to be considered in the process of setting targets under the Protocol. Several public authorities were involved in the process, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, the Public Services Regulatory Commission of Armenia, the Ministry of Nature Protection, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Office of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia was a partner in the exercise. Stakeholders from the private sector and civil society also participated. The project

¹⁶ For more information on the findings of the self-assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation, see the country report available at <https://bit.ly/2mPXzoS>

was implemented by the NGO Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment under the coordination of the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources.

Two workshops were organized. The first one took place in December 2015, which helped identify additional stakeholders who then participated in the self-assessment. At the second workshop in July 2016, provisional results of the assessment were presented, and it helped identify the actions to be implemented to improve equitable access to water and sanitation.

Lesson learned. The self-assessment process revealed that equitable access aspects are covered under the jurisdiction of various ministries, and thus interministerial collaboration is crucial in addressing these issues.

Section III: Actions taken to improve equitable access to water and sanitation

III.A. Main elements of the Equitable Access Action Plan¹⁷

The findings of the self-assessment were instrumental in developing the Action Plan on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (2018–2020), which has a national and regional scale. It is structured around three priority areas of action, namely: i) efficient management to ensure equitable access to water supply and sanitation, including legal and policy frameworks; ii) the reduction of geographical disparities; and iii) the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups. In each of these areas, the following was identified: i) a set of measures and/or activities to be carried out and their expected outcomes; ii) evaluation criteria; iii) responsible authorities and relevant partners; iv) sources of funding; and v) budgetary implications.

As part of the work on legal and policy frameworks, the Action Plan envisages the development of a draft concept allocating responsibilities in the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation. This will be part of a process of legislative reform, which was set in motion by the results of the self-assessment. Furthermore, information gaps were addressed by collecting information on the situation of vulnerable groups and rural communities that are not serviced by water companies, including through the creation of databases.

The Action Plan is currently being implemented and progress is regularly reported at meetings of the Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue in the Water Sector in Armenia. A legal analysis of the legislative framework has been carried out to identify regulatory obstacles to the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation and to develop proposals for reforms, which were presented at a meeting in February 2019.

III.B. Process of development of the Equitable Access Action Plan

Brief description. The Action Plan was developed over five months from December 2016 to May 2017 under the guidance of the State Committee for Water Economy¹⁸ at the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources and the NGO Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment. A variety of stakeholders contributed to the development of the Action Plan, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Nature Protection, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Office of the Human Rights Defender. Independent experts, stakeholders from the private sector and civil society were also involved in the process. The draft action plan was communicated and circulated for comments at a meeting of the Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue in April 2017. Furthermore, a national public consultation was held in May 2017 to present and discuss the draft action plan, and the feedback provided was duly considered. The final Action Plan was then officially approved in August 2017 by the State Committee.

Key lessons learned from the process:

- A multi-stakeholder approach to equitable access to water and sanitation allows for diverse perspectives to be considered, including on how to overcome the issues identified.
- The process enhances awareness and access to information, while avoiding duplication.
- It was however observed that not all stakeholders perceived themselves as having a stake in equity issues related to water and sanitation. In this respect, it is important to ensure equal involvement from all participants.

¹⁷ For more information on the Equitable Access Action Plan, see <https://bit.ly/2nu7Ffx>

¹⁸ The structure of all the departments has been changed by Decision No. 580-A of the Government of the Republic of Armenia "On the Subordination of Subordinate Bodies to the Ministry" dated 22 May 2018. The State Committee for Water Economy of the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources of the Republic of Armenia was renamed into the Water Committee of the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources of the Republic of Armenia (Order of the Minister of the RA EINR No. 62-L of 11 June 2018).

Section IV: Financing equitable access to water and sanitation

The 2018–2020 Action Plan for Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation indicates both the potential sources of funding and the budgetary implications of measures to be taken under each area of action. The overall budgetary estimate for the Action Plan is 24,5¹⁹ million dram (~US\$51 million). Main sources of funding should come from international organizations, as well as from the Armenian Government through the in-kind provision of expertise, data, and so on.

Drinking water systems are also part of the Long-Term Development Strategy Programme for Armenia (2014–2025). The strategy includes reforms aimed at improving the quality of the water supply and sanitation services, as well as enhancing their operational effectiveness and reliability. Regional disparities are also considered. The Armenian Government has indicated that investment policy will adopt a special approach with regard to the rural communities that are not being serviced by water and sanitation companies.

Finally, the Republic of Armenia cooperates with international organizations and international financial institutions in water and sanitation related projects, such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.



¹⁹ Note, however, that in certain areas the budgetary estimate is absent.