



The UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health: supporting progress to set targets and achieve equitable access to water and sanitation in Azerbaijan

Baku, 29 September 2015

Report

The meeting in Baku aimed at supporting progress to set national targets under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) – World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) Protocol on Water and Health and to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation. It was organized by UNECE at the request of the Government of Azerbaijan, with financial support of the European Union Water Initiative and of the United Nations Development Account project. It was co-chaired by Mr. Vaqif Abdullayev, Deputy General Director of the Republican Hygiene and Epidemiology Centre, Ministry of Health, and Mr. Mutallim Abdulhasanov, Head of sector, Ecology and nature protection policy division, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

The workshop was attended by over 40 representatives¹ of different ministries and agencies responsible for water and health related issues covering almost all stakeholders that are relevant in the implementation of the Protocol in Azerbaijan.

Process of setting national targets under the Protocol on Water and Health in the Republic of Azerbaijan

In the first part of the workshop, the UNECE secretariat introduced the Protocol on Water and Health, its provisions and main obligations, focusing on the process of setting targets, including examples of targets set by other countries, and reporting on the achievements and challenges.

The representatives of the ministries of ecology and natural resources and of health informed about the general situation with water and health in the country and the significant progress achieved in the last years, as health and well-being of the population had been a priority for the Government of Azerbaijan. Aiming at further improvement of the situation, the two ministries, with support of a dedicated expert group, carried out a baseline analysis and started the target setting process. The presentation of the 11 target areas prioritized by the country prompted an active discussion on the remaining challenges and issues that would need to be addressed to enhance the current situation.

The following issues, inter alia, were raised by the participants: developing water-related norms and standards that would be harmonized with the relevant European Union legislation, lack of regulatory framework in the area of climate change adaptation and water management in case of emergency situations and extreme weather events, wastewater management and re-use, laboratories equipment, developing river basin management plans and raising awareness of the water and health issues among the population. The transboundary dimension of the Protocol also raised a number of questions. It was agreed that some of the issue discussed would be taken into consideration in the draft targets to the extent possible.

¹ Cf List of participants in Annex 1

The workshop participants discussed and agreed on the timeline and next steps in the target setting process:

Date	Activity
October 2015	Finalization of the baseline analysis and the draft targets by the expert group
November 2015	Informal consultation on the draft targets among the workshop participants and all relevant ministries and agencies – by the Ministry of Health, with support of Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources
December 2015	Possibility to provide comments by the joint secretariat. Possibly comments by WHO Country Office and Compliance Committee
January 2016 – beginning of April 2016	Official consultation of the draft targets among the workshop participants and all relevant ministries and agencies – by the Ministry of Health, with support of Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources
Beginning April 2016 (dates tbc)	NPD Steering Committee meeting (back-to-back with the multi-stakeholders workshop on equitable access) to review the advance drafts of national targets and recommend official approval
June 2016	Official approval of targets (most likely at the level of Cabinet of Ministers – <i>to be confirmed</i>)
June-September 2016	Publication of the national targets set, communication to the joint secretariat, promotion (<i>activities to be confirmed</i>)

The work will be continued with support of the joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health and the National Policy Dialogue in Azerbaijan.

Launch of the self-assessment exercise of equitable access to water and sanitation in Azerbaijan

Access to water and sanitation has been a State priority and progress was made in improving access to water and sanitation in the country, in particular through the rehabilitation of small scale water supply systems in 35 villages by Azersu and the construction of additional water pipelines. Still, many challenges remain, such as the contamination of waters of transboundary rivers used for drinking water, the increasing deficit in water reservoirs due to droughts and the need to revise norms and standards.

The UNECE secretariat presented the international obligations to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation according to the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and to the Protocol on Water and Health. The main inequities faced in access can include geographical disparities, economic disparities with affordability issues and social disparities with barriers in access faced by vulnerable groups.

UNECE introduced the *Equitable Access Score-card*², a self-assessment tool that can be used to establish a detailed diagnosis of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation, and highlighted that this self-assessment was a voluntary exercise; its outcomes (in particular the final scores) shouldn't be used to compare countries but to track progress in one country.

The representative of the Ministry of Health presented the proposed plans for the equitable self-assessment exercise at the national level in Azerbaijan. The participants welcomed the proposed project and agreed with its objectives:

- Achieve a better understanding of the situation and challenges related to equitable access to water and sanitation in Azerbaijan;

² The publication *The Equitable Access Score-card: Supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation* is available at : www.unece.org/index.php?id=34032. Translation into Azerbaijani is planned within the next months.

- Develop a comprehensive overview of the existing policy measures to address inequities in access to water and sanitation and identify possible gaps;
- Inform the target setting process under the Protocol on Water and Health in Azerbaijan on the issue of access to water and sanitation.

The organization of the equitable access self-assessment exercise was approved as detailed below:

- a project core team will implement the project. It will be led by the Republican Hygiene and Epidemiology Centre under the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. An independent expert on water issues as well as representatives of Azersu, BDU and the office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Azerbaijan will also be part of the core team and will ensure the complementarity of expertise. In addition, UNECE will explore the possibility to hire a consultant to compile inputs received;

- a broad number of institutions and stakeholders will be invited to fill specific parts of the Score-card, based on their domain of action. All institutions present at the workshop will be requested to share relevant data and information. In addition, participants advised to invite contributions from the State Agency on Standardization, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Association of Municipalities and an institution (to be defined) supervising migrants (for example seasonal workers) in the country as well as NGOs. Regional centers of Public Health in a limited number of regions, to be selected to represent the variety of possible equity challenges faced, will also be consulted.

Representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and the office of the Ombudsman briefed participants about some existing policies and on-going activities to improve access or challenges faced. Possible synergies were identified: Ministry of Justice - Azersu for the provision of water in penitentiaries, Ministry of Education – Ministry of Health for the monitoring of water quality in schools.

Participants of the countries agreed that the timeline for the equitable access self-assessment exercise should be aligned to the target setting process in order to make it possible that the findings of the equity assessment can influence the setting of targets. Therefore, the schedule of the project was approved as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
By end October 2015	Equitable Access Score-card translated into Azerbaijani
Early November 2015	Invitation sent to different institutions to fill some specific parts of the Equitable Access Score card
By early December 2015	Institutions to send information to project core team
December 2015 – February 2016	Project core team to compile information, request any missing data, draft situation analysis
End March or Beginning April 2016	Multi-stakeholders workshop organized (back-to-back with NPD Steering Committee meeting) to review findings of the self-assessment, identify possible gaps, and discuss possible policy options and action plan to tackle main equity disparities

Annex 1

List of Participants

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