



Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary  
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management  
Fourteenth meeting  
Geneva, 22-24 October 2019

## **Report on the implementation of the programme of work for 2016-2018 in 2018, including partnerships**

**Note by the secretariat**

### *Summary*

The present document reports on the implementation of the programme of work for 2016-2018 for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes for the period of 2018 (ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.1), including activities undertaken by the subsidiary bodies of the Meeting of the Parties and by the secretariat. Information on financial contributions to the Convention's trust funds and the use of these and other extrabudgetary resources for programme implementation are included in a separate document (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/Inf.9).

While the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties took place in Nur-Sultan in October 2018 and adopted the new programme of work for 2019-2021, all activities until the end of 2018 are still listed in the present document under the old programme of work for 2016-2018.

The Working Group is invited to:

- a) Take note of the present report;
- b) Encourage donors, when appropriate and possible, to accept such reports in the future instead of asking for a separate report on their contribution.

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## I. Highlights from 2018 of the work programme for 2016–2018: major outcomes and developments

1. In 2018, the global opening of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) has become a reality. A major achievement have been the accessions by Chad in February 2018 and by Senegal in August which symbolically marks the Convention's effective global opening. Several countries have made significant progress towards becoming Parties and numerous countries announced their intention to accede. It is expected that with the combined impact of the many years of efforts in this area and Chad's example, other countries will accede in the coming years. For the future work of the Convention, it is essential to support this acceleration of accessions and to demonstrate that acceding to and implementing the Convention makes a real difference.
2. Around 600 participants from around 88 countries gathered in Astana, Kazakhstan for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties, held 10 to 12 October. The meeting, which was co-organized by UNECE and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, was the first MOP to take place in Asia and with Parties from Africa. More than 15 countries from outside the Pan-European region announced their interest to ratify the Water Convention. At the high-level segment, more than 20 high-level representatives (Ministers, deputy Ministers, state secretaries) discussed the role of transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention for people, prosperity and peace as well as challenges such as growing water scarcity and climate change, increasing pollution and pressures from different sectors.
3. The Meeting of the Parties adopted several important decisions, such as on reporting under the Convention and on the designation and responsibilities of focal points. MOP8 also adopted a new strategy for the global implementation of the Convention to reinforce cooperation and partnerships for the management of transboundary waters worldwide in order to promote sustainable development, peace and security. Finally, the meeting adopted the new programme of work for 2019-2021 which had been developed throughout the year in a consultative process with a survey, interviews etc.
4. Political support for the Convention has also increased. Parties – including the European Union, the Russian Federation and the newest Party, Chad – have actively promoted it internationally and through their foreign and development cooperation and interventions. Ministries of foreign affairs and of development cooperation have become more interested in the Convention and, in some cases, begun to fund its programme of work.
5. The pilot reporting exercise under the Convention, which was combined with the baseline reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2, had a 70 per cent response rate: of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters, 107 replied. This response to a newly-introduced indicator is quite remarkable and is largely a result of the strong network of focal points responsible for transboundary water cooperation established under the Convention, as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) contacts and the high attention drawn to reporting during all Convention activities. For the first time, an overview of progress in transboundary water cooperation and implementation of the Convention, based on data officially provided by countries, is now available.
6. The Convention has raised attention at the global level on the importance of water and cooperation for climate action. The role of water and transboundary cooperation has been increasingly recognized since the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015. The *Words into Action – Implementation Guide for Addressing Water-Related Disasters and Transboundary Cooperation*,<sup>1</sup> developed by the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50093>

Convention's Task Force on Water and Climate and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) facilitates implementation of the Sendai framework in shared basins.

7. The work on promoting joint adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins has inspired basins worldwide. Transboundary basins are increasingly adopting basin-wide adaptation strategies, the most advanced example being the Danube River Basin Climate Adaptation Strategy has been updated.<sup>2</sup>

8. With its unique focus on the transboundary and regional dimensions, the Convention's work on the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus has heavily influenced actions by other stakeholders. Growing numbers of development partners (including the European Union in Central Asia and Africa) are supporting the use of a nexus approach in the transboundary context and scientific conferences have highlighted the issue. This work supports implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and is closely aligned with the latter's intersectoral and integrated approach. Cooperation with other sectors that affect water use was strengthened, in particular, the energy sector: this sector was actively involved in the projects in the Drin and Drina River basins and the North-Western Sahara aquifer system contributing to the joint definition of actions for progress in the basins. A policy brief on renewable energy and water was jointly produced with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division.

9. While many basins worldwide are making progress with regard to transboundary water cooperation, many governments – including those of developed countries – are under severe budgetary pressure. For this reason, there is growing interest in how to finance transboundary water cooperation and transboundary basin development from national, international and private sources. The Convention has supported financing transboundary water cooperation by strengthening collaboration with financial institutions such as the World Bank, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). A high-level workshop on financing transboundary basin development was held on 9 October, back-to-back with the Meeting of the Parties. In addition, the capacity of some transboundary basins to prepare bankable project proposals for climate change adaptation was strengthened through dedicated trainings.

10. The National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), carried out by ECE in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and within the framework of the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI), continue to serve as a crucial link with national processes and governments, promote accession to the Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health and facilitate their implementation. The NPDs have produced several important policy packages and fruitful synergies with activities under various areas of work were established, enriching the dialogues and strengthening the impact of other activities.

## **II. Challenges, trends and lessons learned for future work**

11. As in the past, the combination of pilot projects in the various programme areas and intergovernmental work at the global level (production of guidance materials and exchange of experience through global workshops) has proved useful for cross-fertilization and as a reality check for the guidance developed. At the same time, it can be challenging to find the right balance between project and policy work. Project work is very demanded by the concerned countries, has a direct impact on the ground and is an important source of

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<sup>2</sup> [www.icpdr.org/main/climate-adaptation-strategy-adopted](http://www.icpdr.org/main/climate-adaptation-strategy-adopted).

financing. At the same time, it absorbs many resources, sometimes at the expense of the more traditional intergovernmental work.

12. Work under the Convention must remain flexible in order to respond to new demands and changing situations, such as requests to support the negotiation of agreements. In this regard, the Convention secretariat provided support for the entry into force of the Treaty on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Development of the Dniester River Basin between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine; the negotiation of regional agreements in Central, Western and Eastern Africa; and transboundary cooperation in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Such experiences have shown that negotiation processes take time and are vulnerable to political change. In this regard, the long-term nature of the Convention which goes beyond a single project, the intergovernmental support and exchange of experience that it provides are beneficial.

13. It is crucial that the Convention responds to emerging topics such as water allocation in transboundary basins. These considerations were among others guiding the development of the programme of work for 2019-2021.

14. Different programme areas of the programme of work are closely inter-related. Linkages were reinforced, for example, between the work on the benefits of cooperation and the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. Several field projects combined the nexus and benefits assessment methodologies. Therefore, in the programme of work for 2019–2021, some programme areas have been combined in order to build on synergies.

15. Work on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation confirmed that transboundary water cooperation can be strengthened by adopting a “benefit lens”. Jointly identifying the benefits that cooperation can generate, helps find plausible pathways and opportunities for significant improvement in cooperation. While quantifying the benefits of cooperation is a challenge, evidence on the importance of the benefits of cooperation can support the cooperation process. Communicating the benefits of cooperation is key to ensuring support to and financing of transboundary water cooperation processes, but is often forgotten. Therefore, identifying and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation was mainstreamed in the programme of work for 2019-2021.

16. With regards to promoting accession to the Convention, the experience in the triennium has told many lessons. These include the need for dedicated staff; the importance of understanding the benefits of acceding to and implementing the Convention in the specific context of each country; the importance of working at the regional and basin levels; the need to mobilize high-level political support while building the capacity of technical administrators who will outlast political changes; the advantages of involving Parties, including through their local embassies and development cooperation offices; the usefulness of “champions”, such as Chad and Tunisia, in motivating other countries, particularly their riparian neighbours; and the importance of river basin organizations and regional organizations in initiating dialogue on the benefits of accession. These lessons have informed the approaches used to promote accession and made them more effective.

17. Partners, especially regional partners, are indispensable for implementation of the Convention at the global level. Cooperation with the African Ministers’ Council on Water (AMCOW), the Organization of American States (OAS), the regional economic commissions of the United Nations, regional economic communities and many other stakeholders has been strengthened. In order to strengthen the capacity of regional partners to promote the Convention and use it effectively in their work, a “train the practitioner” event was organized in October 2016. However, cooperation with partners should be further strengthened and the direct benefits for partners of promoting the Convention and using its platform need to be clear.

18. While awareness of the Convention outside the ECE region has grown significantly in recent years, there is still a need to further promote awareness at both the technical and the political levels. Interest in and perceptions of the Convention vary between regions; in some instances, the Convention is still perceived as European and significant additional efforts are needed in order to dispel this misperception.

19. It is a challenge to respond to the growing demands by Parties and non-Parties for support for implementation and compliance, including in the form of field projects and capacity-building. Owing to the significant increase in its workload over the past few years, the secretariat has often struggled to follow up on demands made and events organized. At the same time, the Convention's usefulness will be measured by its capacity to respond to such demands and to promote progress on the ground. The strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session with a view to its adoption, is therefore timely. However, its success will be largely dependent on the mobilization of regional and global partners.

20. The way the work under the Convention is financed continues to remain a major challenge. The secretariat spends remarkable resources not only for fund-raising, but also for the administration of the earmarked contributions that still account for the majority of financial support (see also ECE/MP.WAT/2018/3). Consequently, the activities implemented are not always those that are the most needed, but those for which funding can be mobilized. It is encouraging that some Parties have begun to make unearmarked or softly earmarked contributions, which allow to make progress across the entire programme of work.

### **III. Areas of work and activities**

#### **A. Work of the Bureau**

21. The Bureau, led by its chair Mr. Peter Kovacs (Hungary), held two meetings in Geneva in 2018 (8–9 February 2018 and 31 May–1 June 2018), as well as several phone conferences. At the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties, the chairmanship was handed over to Kazakhstan (Mr. Ardak Zebeshev). One follow-up phone conference was held in December 2018.

22. The Bureau discussed and reviewed the programme of work. In particular, the Bureau focused on strategically important topics such as the global opening of the Convention, the new reporting mechanism, the International Water Assessment Centre, promotion activities and strategic partnerships, particularly with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the European Commission.

23. Bureau members strongly supported the promotion of the Convention outside the pan-European region by developing the draft strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2) and by considering tools, approaches and potential partners for the global opening. Bureau members and their representatives also made a significant contribution to most of the national, regional and global events, promoting the Convention by sharing their national experience. The Bureau thus steered and fostered the transformation of the Convention into a global framework for transboundary water cooperation and the promotion of the importance of transboundary cooperation in global processes.

24. Bureau members also made important efforts to raise additional funds for activities under the Convention, in particular by motivating new donors to contribute.

25. Lastly, the Bureau prepared the future programme of work for 2019–2021 and several other draft decisions for consideration at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

## **B. Programme area 1: Support to implementation and application of the Convention**

### **1.1 Assistance supporting implementation and application of the Convention through projects on the ground and capacity development**

26. Assistance activities included the continuation of ongoing projects in countries with economies in transition in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and the provision of assistance to Parties and non-Parties with a view to improved cooperation on their transboundary waters and ratification and implementation of the Convention.

27. Under the GEF funded project in the Drin River Basin, in 2018 ECE contributed to building knowledge among basin stakeholders in Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus, sectoral cooperation and legal and institutional framework. In particular, the ECE reviewed and finalized the thematic report on Legal and Institutional analysis and prepared the thematic report on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus and contributed to the TDA sections and insights on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus and how the sectoral developments impact on the basin. Furthermore, ECE provided technical and policy advice and input to the draft Strategic Action Program. ECE increased capacity of the basin stakeholders in financing climate change adaptation and joint monitoring by organising the training on how to prepare bankable adaptation projects and by supporting the work of the Expert Working Group (EWG) on Monitoring and Information Exchange including organization of its meeting in February 2018.

28. In another GEF project in the Dniester River basin, together with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), ECE supported the establishment of the bilateral commission under the aforementioned treaty between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, contributed to inter-sectoral dialogue within the countries and provided guidance in developing adaptation project proposals for the Lower Dniester, flood management and river restoration. In the Kura River basin, the development of bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia was supported. Bilateral negotiations between the two countries have led to a draft agreement which is being negotiated.

29. In Central Asia, ECE and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) completed a project aimed at improving cooperation on regional water quality. It led to establishing a regional working group on water quality that is the only venue in which experts can discuss and provide recommendations for improved water quality management at the regional level. The Mandate (ToR) and the Work Programme of the group was also developed and agreed upon. The Work Programme, among others, includes areas on piloting joint monitoring of water quality and application of joint analysis, data and information sharing. Project also supported a study tour on building capacity of national experts in hydrobiological analysis. In another project, cooperation between Central Asian countries and experts on dam safety and management was further developed. More specifically, countries engaged in improving the management of dams on transboundary rivers. Thus, the regional meeting, supported bilateral discussions on strengthening cooperation between on safety issues, capacity building and management of dams located on transboundary rivers between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Finally, countries expressed an interest in developing a region-wide agreement on safe management of small dams. The secretariat also helped the Chu Talas Commission to broaden transboundary cooperation in the Chu and Talas River basins through a GEF-funded project, implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

30. Overall, the projects have contributed to improving transboundary cooperation at the political and technical levels and demonstrated the need for long-term support. Partners in

this work included the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, GEF, GWP-Med, (OSCE), CAREC, UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Zoi Environment Network.

## **1.2 Implementation and compliance**

31. The Implementation Committee's main task in 2018 was reviewing the sections, timeliness and completeness of national reports on the implementation of the Convention thereby delivering a summary and key messages on reporting at the Meeting of the Parties (MOP), including a recommendation for the development of a guide to reporting for the second cycle. The Committee organised several successful events during this reporting period. In March 2018, the Implementation Committee jointly organized a roundtable event with the Compliance Committee under the UNECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe Protocol for Water and Health which explored the topic of how environmental and human rights NGOs might better engage with compliance committees and human rights treaty bodies in order to enhance the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. The Committee also convened a side event at the MOP on enhancing implementation of the Convention. The following experts were re-elected by the MOP as members of the Implementation Committee: Mr. Kari Kinnunen; Mr. Stephen McCaffrey; and Mr. Ivan Zavadsky. The following experts were elected as new members: Mr. Pedro Cunha Serra; and Mr. Martins Paporinskis.

## **1.3 Reporting under the Convention**

32. At its seventh session, the Meeting of the Parties established a regular reporting mechanism under the Convention, beginning with a pilot reporting exercise to test the reporting template. The introduction of reporting under the Convention coincided with the adoption of target 6.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 6.5 calls for countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. In order to measure progress towards that target, indicator 6.5.2 (Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation) was agreed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016 and adopted by the General Assembly in July 2017 as part of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. ECE and UNESCO have led the development of the step-by-step methodology to calculate indicator 6.5.2 and have been designated as "custodian agencies" for 6.5.2.

33. At its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 18–19 October 2016), the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management decided to combine the reporting under the Convention with reporting on indicator 6.5.2. The pilot reporting exercise was carried out in 2017–2018. The level of participation was high: 38 of the 40 Parties submitted national reports and 107 of the 153 countries that share transboundary waters responded to the request to report on SDG indicator 6.5.2). This high response rate makes the pilot reporting exercise a success and bodes well for future reporting rounds. In 2017 and 2018, extensive communication with countries took place to validate the reports.

34. All reports submitted under the Convention and indicator 6.5.2 have been analysed and the results are being widely disseminated, for example at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2018. In relation to SDG reporting, the analysis of the indicator results featured in the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2018/64), the UN-Water Sustainable Development Goal 6 Synthesis Report 2018 on Water and Sanitation<sup>3</sup> and in a dedicated report on SDG indicator 6.5.2, prepared by ECE and UNESCO, launched in Stockholm World Water Week in 2018.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.unwater.org/publication\\_categories/sdg-6-synthesis-report-2018-on-water-and-sanitation/](http://www.unwater.org/publication_categories/sdg-6-synthesis-report-2018-on-water-and-sanitation/)



35. The introduction of reporting under the Water Convention is a significant milestone in the evolution of the Convention. Reporting offers a means for gather data and information on the Convention's implementation, exchange lessons learned and good practices, identify emerging issues and difficulties, inform and support the mobilization of resources and measure progress across reporting cycles. The results from the first reporting exercise were analysed and consolidated in the first report on implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/51), launched at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 10-12 October 2018).

36. An extensive process of reviewing the process and template of the pilot reporting was also conducted. In 2017, countries sharing transboundary waters were invited to comment on the template and process under the Convention and indicator 6.5.2. On 16–17 January 2018, a technical meeting on the template for reporting under the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention was held in Budapest, Hungary. Feedback from the technical meeting, written comments from countries and discussions during meetings of the Working Groups stressed the relatively robust nature of the reporting template, which proved capable of capturing a broad range of transboundary contexts. Countries also recognized the advantage of ensuring continuity between reporting templates, so that in subsequent reporting cycles they could build upon their earlier submissions. However, it was agreed that a guide to completing the template would facilitate reporting and improve the quality of submissions.

37. The eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 10-12 October 2018) adopted the revised reporting template for future reporting under the Convention together with the decision on reporting (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2). The Meeting of the Parties also decided that the frequency of reporting and the deadlines for reporting under the Convention should be every three years with deadlines set triennially on 30 June, starting with 30 June 2020 for next reporting cycle. Moreover, the Meeting of the Parties entrusted the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, with the support of the secretariat, to develop a guide for reporting under the Convention in time for the next reporting cycle.

38. In the last quarter of 2018, the secretariat worked on finalizing the first cycle of reporting under the Water Convention on SDG indicator 6.5.2, including communication, further data validation and stock-taking for the further reporting cycles.

40. The UNECE secretariat coordinated, co-organised and provided inputs to several communication activities. The joint publication by UNECE and UNESCO, as co-custodians for SDG indicator 6.5.2, on behalf of Un-Water, *Progress on transboundary water cooperation: Global baseline for SDG indicator 6.5.2* was translated into Russian, French and Spanish to be printed. The report on the *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation under the Water Convention* was also translated into Russian and French and printed.

41. Under the aegis of the UN-Water Integrated Water Monitoring Initiative (GEMI), the Water Convention Secretariat has been involved in different activities on capacity building and support, monitoring and communication on the baseline exercise and progress towards achieving SDG 6. More specifically, the secretariat contributed actively with comments and ideas in the development of the SDG 6 Data Portal, the inputs to High-level political forum and the communication on the baseline results of the first reporting exercise.

42. In November 2018, the Water Convention co-organized a webinar together with Geneva Water Hub's Platform for International Water law and the Diplo Foundation to share the results of the first reporting exercise on SDG 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention to the public.

43. Further outreach efforts on the results of reporting took place in regional meetings. In December 2018 the UNECE secretariat has contributed to the ESCWA Expert Group

Meeting on Pursuing Improved Shared Water Resources Cooperation within the Framework of Global and Regional Agreements (Beirut, 6-7 December 2018). The results of the first reporting exercise were also presented in the Latin America Symposium in Lima (November, 2018).

44. The finalization of the first reporting cycle also included communication with countries about the posting of their reports online, review of internal and external communication channels, including a lunch briefing on the results of the first reporting cycle in view of possible synergies within the UNECE Environment Division. Furthermore, in view of keeping the institutional knowledge on the first cycle, the Secretariat undertook great documentation efforts and data structure management. This included also exchange with other reporting officers of Geneva-based Convention Secretariats on current practices of online reporting, research on best practices and, at a technical level, on the possibilities of data structure management the transition process towards online reporting.

45. Finally, the UNECE secretariat also provided further support in the validation of 6.5.2 reports from parties and non-parties whose 6.5.2 reports needed further clarification. New data could be validated by the UNECE Secretariat for five countries on transboundary river & lake basins and submitted to the United Nations Statistical Division in February 2019. There is now an SDG indicator 6.5.2 overall value for 67 countries. 91 countries have provided accurate data for transboundary river & lake basins and 68 for transboundary aquifers.

### **C. Programme area 2: Identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation**

46. The application of the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication* (ECE/MP.WAT/47) (Policy Guidance Note) guided further efforts to strengthen transboundary water cooperation in the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi (SMM) River basin, shared by Kenya and Uganda. Two basin stakeholders' consultative workshops<sup>4</sup> were held as part of the Benefit Opportunities Assessment Dialogue. It prompted the creation of the Joint Working Group and the endorsement in December 2018 of the SMM Basin Investment Framework, aiming to promote and guide investments of transboundary significance in the basin. It also informed ongoing reflexion on formalization of the institutional framework for cooperation in the basin.

47. The global workshop Moving forward transboundary water cooperation: Building on its benefits (Geneva, 6–7 February 2018) facilitated an exchange of experiences, good practices, challenges and lessons learned on the understanding, analysis and communication of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation and the cost of inaction. It highlighted the growing awareness that the benefits of cooperation for cooperating countries – including peace, security benefits and the economic benefits of regional integration – are much greater than traditionally believed.

48. The brochure *Identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation: Lessons learned and recommendations* (ECE/MP.WAT/NONE/11), capitalizing the experience gained through the experiences of applying the Policy Guidance Note, was launched at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

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<sup>4</sup> Mbale, Uganda, 6-9 May 2018 and Kisumu, Kenya, 25-26 September 2018

## D. Programme area 3: Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins

49. For the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus area, in 2018 the Secretariat advanced previously initiated transboundary basin nexus assessments, started a new one, and focused on disseminating experience and strengthening cooperation with strategic partners.

50. The Drin River Basin (Albania, Kosovo<sup>5</sup>, Montenegro, and North Macedonia) nexus assessment was initiated, in cooperation with GWP-Med in the framework of a GEF funded project. A “Nexus Thematic Report” was included in the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) of the basin and is now informing the development the Strategic Action Programme - a political document providing the basis for deepening of the transboundary cooperation. The nexus was the main topic of the 6th Drin Stakeholders Conference and a key item of the agenda of the 16th Drin Core Group Meeting (Ohrid, 14-15-16 November 2018). The nexus work under the Water Convention also provided key inputs to the capacity building workshop preceding the 9th GEF International Waters Conference in Marrakech (3-4 November 2018), suggesting that the nexus approach has potential to complement the GEF TDA beyond the Drin.

51. Results from the assessment of the Drina River basin<sup>6</sup> (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), were widely disseminated, including at the Roundtable on “The path towards Water, Energy, Food and Ecosystems Nexus in Southeastern Europe (SEE)” (23-24 October 2018, Skopje). A concerted communication effort was made through regional energy-focused channels. A follow-up project initiated in 2018, focusing on activities on sedimentation, flow regulation, monitoring and renewable energy, was also initiated.

52. The analytical supporting the North-West Sahara Aquifer System (NWSAS) (Algeria, Libya, Tunisia) assessment (launched in 2017 in cooperation with GWP-Med and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory in 2017), was initiated together with local and international experts.

53. In 2018 the Water Convention continued working together with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division and its Group of Experts on Renewable Energy<sup>7</sup> to promote an increased consideration of cross-cutting issues, such as the environment and water, in energy policy and investments. As a result of this cooperation, UNECE will soon publish a tool for policy-makers to sustainably deploy renewable energy (by the end of 2019).

54. The methodology developed in 2013–2015 for participatory assessment of nexus issues in transboundary basins was further developed to account for lessons learned from applications. The consolidated methodology, enhanced on the aspects of governance analysis and participatory methods, and experience with its application so far, were summarised in a synthesis document published in September 2018<sup>8</sup>. These experiences were presented at the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 1–2 March 2018).

55. Partners in this programme area included the GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the Geneva Water Hub, IUCN, OECD, the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),

<sup>5</sup> United Nations administered territory under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

<sup>6</sup> See [www.unece.org/index.php?id=47750](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47750), and [www.unece.org/index.php?id=46164](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=46164).

<sup>7</sup> *Deployment of Renewable Energy: The Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus Approach to Support the Sustainable Development Goals*, available at [www.unece.org/index.php?id=46026](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=46026).

<sup>8</sup> [www.unece.org/index.php?id=41736](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41736) and

[www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2017/WAT/10Oct\\_18\\_TF\\_Nexus/Report\\_Global\\_Stoctaking\\_Nexus-TF\\_2017\\_doc4.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2017/WAT/10Oct_18_TF_Nexus/Report_Global_Stoctaking_Nexus-TF_2017_doc4.pdf).

the Global Water Partnership and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

## **E. Programme area 4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins**

56. In accordance with the strategy for future work on climate change under the Convention,<sup>9</sup> work in this area in 2018 moved towards supporting upscaling and mainstreaming of developed transboundary adaptation strategies and emerging topics such as financing climate change adaptation.

57. One of the major achievements in 2018 was improved cooperation with the disaster risk reduction community, namely through the preparation, finalizing and publishing of the *Words into Action Guidelines Implementation Guide for Addressing Water-Related Disasters and Transboundary Cooperation (ECE/MP.WAT/56)*. This guide was prepared in cooperation with UNDRR as an official guide to support implementation of the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction in the water sector. It was launched at the eighth Meeting of the Parties to the Convention.

58. The programme of pilot projects led to concrete basin-wide cooperation in addressing climate change through strategies and measures. In the Dniester and Chu Talas River basins, adaptive capacity was increased by implementing adaptation measures that are beneficial from a transboundary perspective, such as tree-planting, training in water efficiency, awareness-raising and improvement of flood management under changing climate. Within the framework of a GEF-funded projects, climate change adaptation was mainstreamed into the strategic action programme in the Chu Talas River basin and into the transboundary diagnostic analysis in the Dniester basin. In addition, climate change adaptation was included into the activities of the newly established Dniester Commission under its Working Group on River Basin Management Planning. In the Sava River basin, an extended outline of an adaptation strategy was finalized by ISRBC with support from the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) and ECE.

59. The focus on implementation of adaptation strategies has triggered work on financing adaptation to climate change in the transboundary context. Effectively adapting water management to climate change will require the allocation of additional funds for transboundary and regional projects, or at least taking transboundary aspects into consideration in national projects where relevant. In response to the recommendations of the previous global workshops and trainings on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins two regional trainings on preparing bankable project proposals for climate change adaptation were organised for the Lake Chad and Drin basins in cooperation with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean which increased the capacity of river basin organizations in raising funds for adapting to climate change (N'Djamena, 19 and 20 November 2018, and Tirana, 25 and 26 November 2018, respectively). A publication on preparing bankable project proposals for climate change adaptation was finalized in cooperation with the World Bank in 2018 as a result of the previous training in Dakar on 21–23 June 2017.

60. The Convention also contributed to raising awareness of the role of water and transboundary cooperation in global processes, e.g. under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, by contributing to the 24<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Katowice, Poland.

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<sup>9</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/2015/4.

61. The Convention's climate change activities were promoted at various events, such as the World Water Forum and World Water Week. Numerous partners were involved in the implementation of activities, such as the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, GIZ, GWP, INBO, OSCE, UNDP, the Stockholm International Water Institute, UNESCO, WMO and Zoi Environment Network.

## **F. Programme area 5: Opening of the Convention, promotion and partnerships**

62. In West and Central Africa region, significant progress in accession processes took place in Chad, Senegal, Ghana, Togo and Cameroon. Two national workshops to discuss benefits to accede to the Water Convention were organized in Ghana (25 January 2018) and Senegal (15 February 2018). Chad and Senegal finalized their accession processes to the Water Convention respectively in February 2018 and August 2018, thus turning the Convention's opening into reality. Following Chad's accession, a celebration event was organized, including also a training on how to prepare bankable projects (see area 4) and a regional workshop on the Water Convention were organized in Chad (N'Djamena, 19-21 November 2018) with the support of Germany, the African Development Bank and Lake Chad Basin Commission. The events brought together representatives of the five riparian countries of Chad (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Niger and Sudan) and provided an important platform for discussion on the benefits offered by the implementation of the Convention at regional level.

63. At the national level, support was also provided to 10 countries in the process of accession, namely Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Togo. This support included legal and technical guidance to understand the Convention's provisions and obligations, answering questions, sending relevant materials, clarification on the different steps to accede to the Water Convention.

64. Support was also provided to initiatives related to agreement negotiation processes and establishment of new river basin organisations in Africa. This support aimed to increase awareness and capacity on the Convention and to demonstrate concrete benefits for water governance that could be retrieved from the implementation of the Convention. In West Africa, the secretariat supported the establishment of the Comoe-Bia-Tanoé Basin Authority (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali). In particular, the Water Convention contributed to the Constitutive meeting of the Council of Ministers of the newly establish Basin Authority (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 25-26 April 2018) and a formal request came from countries for continuous support based on Convention experiences. In the IGAD region, previous activities on capacity building and negotiation skills supported by the secretariat resulted in the recognition of the value of international water law in the ongoing process of negotiation of the IGAD Water Resources Protocol.

65. In the Middle East and North Africa region, slight progress in the accession processes took place in Iraq and Tunisia. The opportunities offered by the Convention and its activities in the region were discussed during the Conference on hydrodiplomacy and climate change for peace in Mesopotamia (Paris, 10 December 2018). However, progress towards accession is slow in the region. It was also recognized that involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the beginning into the accession process is a key factor of success.

66. In Latin America, the secretariat supported the organisation of the First symposium on transboundary waters in Latin America organized by Peru (Lima, 8-9 November 2018) and contributed to the first meeting of the dialogue between Peru and Colombia on the development of a bilateral plan for integrated water resources management of the Putumayo River (Leticia, Colombia, April 2018). Combination of awareness raising at the regional level and basin support proved useful in increasing the understanding of the possible added value

of the Convention for the region. It was suggested to focus on a more sub-regional approach, to better respond to the specificities and dynamics in each sub-region.

67. The strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2)) was developed by the Bureau and many other stakeholders and adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session.

68. Many promotional efforts have increased knowledge and awareness of the Convention at the global level. The promotional materials include such publications as *Progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention*, *The Water Convention: responding to global water challenges* and others, newsletters, USBs, etc.

69. Sessions on the Water Convention and transboundary water cooperation more broadly were organized during the Stockholm World Water Week and at the 2018 World Water Forum (at which ECE was the thematic coordinator for transboundary water cooperation). The Convention was also promoted during the 9th World Water Forum Strategy Meeting (25 June 2018, Dakar, Senegal). Reinforcement of partnerships at the regional level is one of the key components of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level. In this respect, the Water Convention secretariat was invited by the Executive Secretariat of the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) and presented the Convention at the AMCOW Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting (26th - 27th October 2018). The Water Convention also contributed to the Seventh African Water Week notably by organizing a session on “How legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary water cooperation support governance and development” (1 November 2018, Libreville, Gabon). The sessions provided opportunity for discussions with countries and regional partners on the practical benefits of implementing and acceding to the global water Conventions for the region. A strong consensus emerged on the use of Conventions in strengthening transboundary cooperation and the need for further awareness and capacities building to equip regional and national actors with the knowledge and skills required to promote and apply the Conventions.

#### **D. Programme area 6: European Union Water Initiative and National Policy Dialogues**

70. In 2018, ECE has continued implementing NPDs under the EUWI with the aim of strengthening water governance and the application of IWRM, particularly through intersectoral cooperation in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in line with the provisions of the Convention, its Protocol on Water and Health and the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive and other ECE and European Union instruments. Activities were carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. Activities in Belarus have been launched gradually and in December 2018, the first meeting of the National Interagency Steering Committee of the EUWI+ took place. The NPD process has been on hold in Turkmenistan also in 2018 following administrative reforms in the relevant ministries in early 2016.

71. In 2018, EU funding through the EUWI+ programme made it possible to continue and expand work in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Neighbourhood countries). Support from Finland and from the EU-funded Green Economy project in Kazakhstan made it possible to continue, to a limited extent, some activities on NPDs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The EU-funded Regional Coordination and Support for the EU-Central Asia enhanced Regional Cooperation on Environment, Climate Change and Water (WECOOP2) project has provided logistical support for national NPD Steering Committee meetings.

72. To advance implementation of IWRM principles, support has been provided for drafting of new legislation and the development of policy packages. In Georgia, the NPD helped for example to complete the draft law on water resources management and a review of the existing draft normative act on “Water Quality Ecological Standards” and the existing draft decree on “Monitoring of water resources” to ensure their compliance with the draft law on water resources management and EU legislation was conducted. In Armenia, assistance was provided to finalize a roadmap for harmonization of national water legislation with five relevant EU water directives. In the Republic of Moldova, support was provided to drafting of amendments to the water law which were adopted in 2018 and methodological support within the context of the reporting under SDG indicator 6.5.2 was provided.

73. Support for transboundary cooperation between beneficiary countries and beyond has increased. In 2018, a series of meetings between national delegations of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries were supported in order to foster transboundary water cooperation; these included meetings between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (on the Dniester River), Belarus and Latvia (on the Western Dvina/Daugava River) and Belarus and Lithuania (on the Neman River). The work on the International River Basin Management Plan for the Neman River basin was completed by Belorussian and Lithuanian experts and the final report was presented at a bilateral meeting in Minsk in May 2018. Support was provided to the participation of Ukrainian experts in key thematic expert group and task forces meetings under the ICPDR.

74. Strengthening linkages with other programme areas under the Convention, including nexus work and other ECE multilateral environmental agreements such as the Espoo Convention, has also been a priority. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine, the NPD process has promoted accession to and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. In 2018, in Azerbaijan the national targets under the Protocol that were set with support of the EUWI+ were adopted. In Armenia and Ukraine, the revision of national targets was finalized and in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova the revision of targets or the national implementation programme have commenced.

75. The sustainability and stable institutional frameworks of the NPD process as well as the strong partnerships with the EU and the OECD, as strategic partner for water supply and sanitation, have enabled support to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion. From the outset of the EUWI+ programme, good cooperation has continued between ECE, OECD and the EU member States consortium of Austria and France to effectively implement the EUWI+ programme.<sup>10</sup> Two EUWI+ regional progress and steering group meetings for key stakeholders were organized in 2018 in order to steer the NPD process in the target countries. In all target countries, except in Ukraine, multi-stakeholder steering committees met regularly to provide guidance and oversight to NPD processes at the national level.

76. During the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in Astana in October 2018, a side event on NPDs under the EUWI was organized. The EU and EUWI partners took stock of recent achievements and shared good practices and lessons learned with other Parties to the Convention.

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<sup>10</sup> For details, see the project website, <http://euwipluseast.eu/> and [www.unece.org/env/water/npd.html](http://www.unece.org/env/water/npd.html).