

Protocol on Water and Health: crucial for delivering water, sanitation and hygiene for all

Venue: Tempus 1, Palais des Nations, Geneva (*with possibility to connect remotely via Webex*)

Date: Friday, 6 November 2020

Time: 10:00 - 11:30 am

Background

Water, sanitation and health are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and are essential to successfully achieve its aspirations. They are also crucial for addressing disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. Nevertheless, in the pan-European region, over 16 million people still lack access to basic drinking water and more than 31 million people are in need of basic sanitation. Challenges requiring urgent attention and action include gaps in ensuring safely managed and climate-resilient water and sanitation services, providing equitable access to water and sanitation services for all and addressing emerging health concerns, such as legionella prevention and antimicrobial resistance.

The 1999 Protocol on Water and Health, which is jointly serviced by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, is a unique legally binding intergovernmental agreement that brings together the environment and health sectors in order to sustainably manage water resources to prevent, control and reduce water-related diseases. The Protocol provides a mechanism for setting, implementing and monitoring national objectives on water, sanitation, hygiene and health. This mechanism serves as a vehicle to realize the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and to progressively realize the human rights to water and sanitation.

Over the last twenty years, tools and methodologies developed under the Protocol have supported remarkable progress on water and health in the pan-European region, particularly with regard to equity of access, providing access to basic drinking water and sanitation services, improving drinking water quality and reducing the occurrence of water-related disease incidents and outbreaks. Among other factors, due to the work carried out under the Protocol, more than 63 million people gained access to drinking water and 84 million people gained access to sanitation services between 2000 and 2017.

The provision of safe and sufficient water and adequate sanitation and hygiene is also key to protecting human health during infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19. Frequent handwashing according to appropriate hygiene standards requires a continuous supply of safe water and operational sanitation systems available for all in all settings, including in schools, health care facilities and communities. The Protocol provides guidance and tools for countries to prepare, respond to and recover from COVID-19 and other water-related disease outbreaks.

In practice, the Protocol offers:

- A regional coordination platform to exchange experiences, build partnerships and share water, sanitation and hygiene data across sectors;
- A system for improving governance and accountability on water and health through the target setting and reporting mechanism;
- Practical tools and methodologies as well as access to the expert community in order to build capacity on water, sanitation, hygiene and health at community, national and regional levels.

The objective of the information session is to introduce the intergovernmental platform provided by the Protocol, and its activities and tools. Presentations by country representatives will illustrate the role of the Protocol in advancing the national water, sanitation, hygiene and health agenda, stimulating coordinated action on the 2030 Agenda and the human rights to water and sanitation and preparing for and recovering from infectious water-related disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19.

Provisional programme

- Welcome and opening remarks by Mr. Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Chairperson of the UNECE Commission
- Opening remarks by Mr. Martin Zbinden, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to WTO and EFTA (UNECE, UNCTAD, ITC). Switzerland holds the vice-chairmanship of the UNECE Commission
- Introduction to the Protocol by Ms. Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary
- Video address by Mr. Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe
- Video address by Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Keynote video address by Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Chief Executive Officer of Sanitation and Water for All, former Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation
- Presentations by Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health
 - Ms. Alena Drazdova, Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol for 2020-2022, Belarus
 - Mr. Jarkko Rapala, member of the Bureau of the Protocol, Finland
 - Ms. Awilo Ochieng Pernet, Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting, Switzerland
 - Ms. Dragana Jovanovic, Vice-Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, Serbia
 - Mr. Kjetil Tveitan, Chair of the Working Group on Water and Health, Norway
- Discussion, moderated by Mr. Thomas Jemmi, Ambassador, Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Affairs Office, Switzerland
- Conclusions and way forward by UNECE Executive Secretary

Registration

Delegates planning to attend the meeting, whether virtually or in-person, are requested to register by 2 November 2020 using the following link: <https://indico.un.org/event/31123/>. In case of difficulties, please contact the secretariat by email (cammile.marcelo@un.org).

To join the meeting in Webex, please click the link below:
<https://rtce-unog.webex.com/rtce-unog/j.php?MTID=m79cab002368f71936db8449d807e4d7a>

The event will be held in English.

More information on the event is available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=55271>