



6TH MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH

24-25 March 2021
(10.00 am-1.00 pm CET on both days)

Virtual Meeting

INFORMATION NOTICE

I. Background and rationale

In the pan-European region, the UNECE¹-WHO/Europe [Protocol on Water and Health](#) provides a sound framework for translating into practice the human rights to water and sanitation and for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 and other water, sanitation and hygiene related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Protocol requires its Parties to ensure access to water and sanitation for everyone, and specifically to promote equitable access to water and sanitation “for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion”.

The Expert Group on equitable access to water and sanitation, established in 2011 under the Protocol on Water and Health, serves as a platform for countries and stakeholders from the region to exchange experiences and develop guidance on enhancing equitable access to water and sanitation.

Since June 2018, when the [5th meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation](#)² took place, new milestones have been reached and new developments have unfolded in this area.

While the 2030 Agenda has continued to drive the work of many countries and development partners in the area of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, 2020 witnessed the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world and putting a spotlight on the need for continuous water supply and improved hygiene practices to reduce the transmission of the virus, particularly in light of the need for frequent handwashing. Regular hygiene according to adequate standards requires providing access for everyone, including the most vulnerable, to sufficient quantities of safe water in the first place, a right which unfortunately 140 million persons in the UNECE region still do not enjoy. Ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation becomes a key strategy to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and help avert future pandemics. In July 2020, the 10th anniversary of the recognition of the human rights to safe drinking water and the 5th anniversary of the right to sanitation were celebrated and the year finally ended with the adoption by the European Parliament of the [revised EU Drinking Water Directive](#),³ which includes increased attention to the equity dimension⁴.

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

² Information about the 5th meeting of the Expert group on equitable access to water and sanitation available at: <https://bit.ly/3jCfoBb>

³ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2020/2184/oj>

⁴ Article 16 of the Directive calls on member States to take the “necessary measures to improve or maintain access to water intended for human consumption for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalized groups”.

Since 2011, the Protocol on Water and Health has developed several tools, under the guidance of the Expert Group on equitable access; and carried out a number of country-level activities to support countries in their efforts to improve equitable access to water and sanitation.

The publication [No One Left Behind: Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region](#)⁵ presents good practices and lessons learnt from throughout the pan-European region on the policies and measures to be enacted to provide equitable access.

An analytic tool, the [Equitable Access Score-card](#)⁶ supports governments (at national, regional and municipal level) and other stakeholders to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access, identify priorities and discuss further actions to be taken to address equity gaps. It has already been applied in 12 countries of the pan-European region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, France – Paris Greater Area, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain – city of Castello, and Ukraine) and additional countries have expressed interest in applying it. Based on the outcomes of such assessments, a number of countries⁷ [have taken concrete measures to improve the equity of access to water and sanitation services](#). In France, for example, social pricing of water was subject to an experimental scheme provided by law.

The publication [Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation](#),⁸ so far applied in 3 countries (Armenia, North Macedonia, and Serbia), helps governments to take a structured approach to the identification and implementation of actions to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation.

[The Human rights to water and sanitation in practice: Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region](#)⁹ capitalizes on the experiences in the region between 2012 and 2019. The publication maps out the lessons learnt from the Equitable Access Score-card based assessments, presents concrete technical and policy actions taken by these countries and examines national experiences with the development of Equitable Access Action Plans, considering the practical steps that can be taken to improve the planning and financing of specific measures to improve equity.

Over the years the membership of the Expert Group has increased, as additional countries have expressed interest in moving forward with ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation and taking advantage of the tools and experience sharing in the framework of the Expert Group. At the same time, there is a need to progressively deepen the analysis and guidance on the different dimensions of ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation. Countries in the pan-European region are at different stages of understanding the challenges faced to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation and of translating the human rights to water and sanitation into practice. In addition, experience from other regions can also provide inspiration for actions to address the equity gaps.

The current programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2020-2022 foresees further support for developing and sharing country experiences, as well as the development of a brochure on good practices in ensuring affordability of water and sanitation services.

⁵ Available at: <http://bit.ly/3qaTuap>

⁶ Available at: <https://bit.ly/3aT34sd>

⁷ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Ukraine. Overview at: <https://bit.ly/3tHcLCN>

⁸ Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Z3H1JZ>

⁹ Available at : <https://bit.ly/2NlfbGA>

II. Objectives

The **overall objective** of the 6th Expert Group meeting is to support countries in their efforts to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation by providing a platform to exchange experiences in developing situational analyses, defining action plans and implementing concrete measures.

As in past meetings, this platform will also be used by Expert Group members and other stakeholders to present relevant experiences, tools and initiatives, such as new guidance documents and projects, and to report on progress in global and regional programmes related to equitable access to water and sanitation.

This meeting of the Expert Group will also enable a deeper exchange about the equity dimension of the revised EU Drinking Water Directive as well as about good practices on ensuring affordability of water and sanitation services.

The **specific objectives** of the Expert Group Meeting are:

1. To take stock of the implementation of the current programme of work on equitable access to water and sanitation.
2. To exchange experiences and lessons learned from self-assessments of equitable access to water and sanitation, and the development and implementation of Equitable Access Action Plans and measures.
3. To share information about actions taken to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the new COVID-19 context.
4. To exchange information on related topics, in particular the equity dimension in the revised EU Drinking Water Directive, which entered into force in January 2021.
5. To launch the preparation of the brochure on good practices to ensure affordability of water and sanitation issues and start gathering inputs for its completion.

III. Organization of work

The Expert Group meeting will take place in a virtual format. Plenary presentations will be combined with interactive discussions to ensure an optimal sharing of experience. All participants will be encouraged to contribute actively to the discussions.

IV. Targeted participants

Participation in the Expert Group meeting will be by invitation only.

Participants will include primarily country representatives from the pan-European region whose work (in the environment, education, health, social protection, finance and other sectors) whose work is related to equitable access to water and sanitation. Representatives from countries that have been involved in equitable access self-assessment exercises or have expressed interest to engage in such exercise will particularly be invited to contribute.

Representatives from development partners, international and regional organizations, civil society and stakeholders engaged in the provision of water and sanitation services will be invited to join and contribute to the meeting.

V. Partners

The Expert Group meeting is organized by UNECE, as part of the joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health, in cooperation with the lead Parties for this area of work the French Ministry of Solidarities and Health and the Hungarian National Public Health Institute.

The meeting is funded by the French Ministry of Solidarities and Health.

VI. Background documentation

All relevant documentation for the Expert Group Meeting, including the programme of the meeting, will be made available in due course at: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/sixth-meeting-expert-group-equitable-access-water-and-sanitation>

VII. Practical information

Dates and times

The Expert Group meeting will be held in the mornings of 24-25 March 2021:

- Wednesday 24 March 2021: 10.00 am-1.00 pm (CET)
- Thursday 25 March 2021: 10.00 am-1.00 pm (CET).

Working languages

The working languages of the meeting will be English, Russian and French.

Registration

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience and **by 1 March 2021** at the latest. Please register online using the following link: <https://indico.un.org/event/35717/>

More information on how to create an account on indico to register properly is available on the meeting webpage at: <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/sixth-meeting-expert-group-equitable-access-water-and-sanitation>

The link to connect to the meeting platform will share with participants subsequently.