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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

Sixteenth meeting*

Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

Sixteenth meeting*

Geneva, 26–28 April 2021

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda

Report on the implementation of activities under the Water Convention in 2020

Prepared by the secretariat

Summary

The present document reports on the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) for the period 2020, 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 is included in a separate document (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/5-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/5).

The Working Group is invited to:

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

* Third joint meeting of the two working groups.



I. Highlights from 2020 of the work programme for 2019–2021: major outcomes

1. In 2020, the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) continued, with the overall aim of supporting implementation of the Convention and its principles and the overall objective that transboundary waters worldwide be managed in cooperation between riparian countries to promote sustainable development, peace and security. Key highlights by programme area are presented in the table below. A detailed description of activities, including those listed in the table, is presented in section III of the present document.

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic significantly affected the implementation of activities under the Convention in 2020. As of mid-March, intergovernmental meetings under the Convention were held virtually or in a hybrid mode, and some had to be postponed. Project work, largely dependent on national administrations' operations, was affected by the pandemic to a greater extent than intergovernmental work (development of soft law instruments and exchange of experience through global workshops), demonstrating the usefulness of combining both types of action when designing the Convention's programme of work.

3. The secretariat worked primarily from home, learning to organize virtual and hybrid meetings, including with interpretation. Numerous webinars were organized, in cooperation with partners, and the secretariat and Bureau members spoke in countless webinars about the Convention. The table below should be read in the light of this development.

4. Benefits of virtual meetings included reaching out to new audiences, especially in Latin America and from the Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, and improving channels for information dissemination. These new skills will allow for the organization of more virtual events and the better use of such tools as online courses and web platforms. One important example for this was the successful organization of the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva (hybrid), 30 September–2 October 2020) with more than 200 participants. At the same time, significant limitations such as frequent connection issues, difficulties with involvement of participants from different time zones and organizing interactive discussions, the need for special arrangements regarding decision-making and the lack of networking opportunities during online meetings need to be taken into account when planning future Convention activities.

5. Although the pandemic also affected transboundary cooperation in certain basins – rendering the meetings of joint bodies impossible, reducing funding for some basin organizations, etc – it underlined the importance of transboundary water cooperation to provide drinking water and hygiene for all. The Convention set up a webinar (26 May 2020) and a website on the topic,¹ highlighting its importance.

¹ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/covid-19-role-water-convention-and-protocol-water-and-health?accordion=0>.

Selected specific outcomes and outputs by programme area

<i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Key specific outcomes in 2020</i>	<i>Key specific outputs in 2020</i>
1: Countries understand Convention, accede to it, develop agreements and establish joint bodies	1: Increasing awareness of and accession to Convention and application of its principles drawing on benefits of cooperation	Accession by Ghana to the two global water conventions Significant progress on accession in 4 countries Identification of benefits of cooperation in 2 basins to inform decision-making on strengthening of cooperation frameworks	Legal/technical advice provided to 10 countries One national session and four regional workshops/webinars organized on Convention/transboundary cooperation Three promotional webinars organized Presentation of Convention at numerous regional/basin events organized by partners Support provided to developing new or supporting implementation of existing agreements in 4 basins/subbasins Support provided to 2 regional cooperation processes Global workshop on legal frameworks organized with 9 partners in July, attended by 200 participants Draft annotated outline of checklist on agreements developed Conclusions of benefits assessments promoted in 2 basins Frequently asked questions publication developed Advisory procedure launched in Implementation Committee for first time
2: Transboundary water resources in transboundary basins are monitored and assessed, and information is shared among riparian countries	2: Supporting monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins	Drin River basin riparians made headway in data exchange by adopting related actions as part of Strategic Action Programme and outlined next steps in exchanging priority data	Support provided to 2 transboundary basins Comments on monitoring guidelines initiated
3: IWRM is implemented at all levels in a changing climate	3: Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels	Value of intersectoral action bolstered by integrating benefits of cooperation and nexus activities in NWSAS Stock taken of experience worldwide of how nexus solutions and investments help address problems in transboundary basins and light shed on financing opportunities Participatory process involving an expert group and regional events led to	Nexus assessment methodology translated into 3 additional languages and applied to an aquifer Toolkit publication on renewable energy developed More than 40 experts provide inputs, review and feedback on draft of Handbook on Transboundary Water Allocation One regional workshop and 1 regional workshop session on transboundary water allocation, organized to share experiences and collect case studies for Handbook

<i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Key specific outcomes in 2020</i>	<i>Key specific outputs in 2020</i>
		development of first draft of Handbook on Transboundary Water Allocation NPDs served as platforms for intersectoral cooperation and water reform drivers in 9 countries	Pilot SEAs in water sector finalized in 2 countries Revisions to water laws/codes supported in 3 countries Transboundary water cooperation supported by NPDs in 2 basins
	4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins	Countries and basins better equipped with knowledge and skills to mainstream water and benefits of transboundary cooperation into climate-related documents and projects, as well as climate change adaptation into river basin management planning	Two global events organized, involving up to 300 participants Climate change adaptation integrated into elements and preparations for river basin management plans for 3 pilot basins One global event covering financing transboundary climate change adaptation Two project proposals on adaptation to climate change in lower Dniester River basin prepared and submitted to funding institutions
4: Transboundary water cooperation is sustainably financed	5: Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation	Capacity of over 60 countries strengthened on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development Strengthened partnership with key IFIs and organizations working on the topic	Global workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation organized virtually, with around 200 participants and 6 IFIs as partners Background study prepared, translated and disseminated
5: Transboundary water cooperation is monitored and partners are mobilized to support it	6: Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under Convention	128 of 153 countries approached provide reports on indicator 6.5.2 All Parties to Convention provide reports on indicator 6.5.2 and under Convention 30 countries provide reports on indicator 6.5.2 for first time 91 reports on indicator 6.5.2 (surface waters) validated during 2020 as part of second reporting exercise	Guide on reporting translated and published 700 participants from 130 countries took part in capacity-building activities Second reporting exercise successfully implemented despite COVID-19
	7: Partnerships, communication and knowledge management	Progress/achievements under Convention communicated worldwide via social media Improved knowledge of role of Convention and transboundary water cooperation worldwide	Four newsletters disseminated to 2,261 contacts November 2020 newsletter viewed 1,556 times Twitter profile visited 12,651 times 329 tweets disseminated

<i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Key specific outcomes in 2020</i>	<i>Key specific outputs in 2020</i>
			Twitter audience increased by 880 followers
			Facebook and LinkedIn accounts launched
			UN-Water policy brief on two global water conventions prepared
			Partnership initiatives launched with ECA, ESCWA, others
			Motion on transboundary cooperation approved by IUCN

Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; IFI, international financial institution; IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature; IWRM, integrated water resources management; NPD, National Policy Dialogue; NWSAS, North-Western Sahara Aquifer System; SEA, strategic environmental assessment.

6. Alongside the bodies supporting the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021, partners played an important role in implementing most activities. The role of partners has been crucial in activities supporting the Convention’s globalization and increasing capacity for its implementation, developing the new area of work on financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development, strengthening activities on monitoring and assessment, supporting assessments through application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach, conducting assessments of benefits of transboundary cooperation and implementing National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management.

7. Furthermore, the lead Parties played a crucial role in providing effective guidance on and mobilizing political and other support for implementation of activities.

8. In 2020, the Convention continued to serve as a tool for operationalizing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, specifically regarding transboundary water cooperation, and supporting implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

II. Challenges, trends and lessons learned for future work

A. General challenges, trends and lessons learned

9. Partners continued to be indispensable for implementing the Convention at the global level. In 2020, existing cooperation was reinforced, particularly with international financial institutions, and cooperation with new partners was initiated. However, in some regions, the pandemic had a major impact on partner organizations’ capacity.

10. Frequent changes in focal points affect all the Convention’s areas of work. Challenges related to frequent institutional changes in countries required maintaining direct contacts with senior officials and middle managers within ministries. In 2020, many focal points benefited from online capacity-building activities on the Convention.

11. The financial situation under the Convention has improved thanks to donations and to savings resulting from travel restrictions in 2020 but, generally, the way work under the Convention is financed remains a major challenge. Too many secretariat resources are diverted to fundraising and administration of earmarked contributions that still account for the majority of financial support (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/5 and

ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/5-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/5). It is encouraging that more and more Parties are making unearmarked or softly earmarked contributions, which allows for progress across the entire programme of work. Draft targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/8-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/8), prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau in 2020, should pave the way for improving how work under the Convention is financed.

12. The pandemic increased the importance of communication efforts in building capacity for transboundary water cooperation and promoting accession to and implementation of the Convention. Disseminating information through social networks and electronic communications tools has become even more important. While the secretariat has succeeded in diversifying its means of communication by opening Facebook and LinkedIn accounts in addition to an existing Twitter account, limited human resources prevent scaling up of communication activities.

B. Challenges, trends and lessons learned specific to certain programme areas

1. Global opening of the Convention

13. Modalities for national, basin and regional level events were adapted to the circumstances in order to continue progress in raising the Convention's profile and promoting accession. Close collaboration with Governments through remote support, providing legal advice and answering countries' specific questions made it possible to progress towards accession and future implementation of the Convention in several countries and basins.

14. Strengthening strategic collaborations with regional and local partners was also essential for maintaining momentum towards accession to and implementation of the Convention, especially in regions where progress towards accession is slow. For instance, while progress towards accession remains limited in Latin America, the partnership forged in 2020 between organizations with complementary natures and strengths, namely a United Nations platform (the Water Convention), a regional development bank (the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)), a regional political platform (the Organization of American States (OAS)), and a major regional river basin organization (the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)), enabled clarification of possible tools and support for countries in the region to address challenges related to management of transboundary waters. In addition, efforts to increase cooperation with other United Nations regional economic commissions, country teams and resident coordinators were successful.

2. Benefits of cooperation

15. The work on benefits of cooperation confirmed the importance of promoting and communicating the broad range of achieved and prospective benefits. Such a focus, through a "benefits lens", proved a useful complementary approach to work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus and on supporting accession to and implementation of the Convention.

3. Monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins

16. In the field of monitoring and data exchange, there is clearly a need for sharing good experiences and practice. In the light of projects on the ground, the approach to monitoring and assessment developed under the Convention has significant potential to serve countries as a valuable tool for strategic cooperative development of information acquisition. Receiving pertinent feedback to inform possible updating of guidance material on monitoring and assessment previously developed under the Convention is crucial in achieving a fit-for-purpose update.

4. Water allocation in a transboundary context

17. There has been heightened interest in the Handbook on Transboundary Water Allocation, given the topical nature of the subject. Along with the related political

sensitivities and the need for wide-ranging expertise to assist in drafting, this has led to many inquiries into the Handbook's process (which was affected by some delay), content and opportunities to participate in its development. Written contributions played an important role in ensuring quality coverage of the broad scope. Overall, the Handbook became a more complex undertaking than originally envisaged. The Handbook underlines the value of considering different water allocation options, as well as broader approaches such as the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus and the benefits of cooperation.

5. Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins

18. In the nexus dialogues in the Balkans, the engagement of the energy sector, including hydropower operators, demonstrated effects to the broader energy system and in the context of climate action, and helped create a positive dynamic that can assist in revisiting flow regulation issues. The nexus solution packages from basin assessments are, by nature, integrated across sectors; thus, taking action on them may challenge administrations. Insights from stocktaking of cross-sectoral solutions and investments made, including a global survey, can inspire concrete actions.

6. National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management under the European Union Water Initiative

19. Challenges posed by the pandemic have had a negative impact, especially at the early stages, on the work in countries and the National Policy Dialogue (NPD) processes. Therefore, ECE and its partners have maintained close contact with beneficiary ministries and worked to conduct as many activities as possible virtually. Given the prolonged nature of the pandemic, in consultation with partner countries and the European Commission, it was decided to hold the next cycle of NPD meetings mostly virtually. In the mid and long term, the pandemic may provide additional opportunities for work on water resources management and water supply and sanitation in the subregion as the pandemic has underlined the essential role of access to clean water, adequate sanitation and hygiene and the importance of preserving ecosystems for human health. NPDs have a vital role to play in this regard as intersectoral platforms for discussing key water-related challenges, policies and reforms.

7. Adapting to climate change

20. Activities on climate change in 2020 reconfirmed that cooperation on climate change adaptation can foster broader transboundary cooperation in shared basins. For example, previous joint efforts on adaptation served as a basis for developing broader cooperation in the Dniester River basin. The eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva (hybrid), 2 October 2020) confirmed the extreme importance of mainstreaming the central role of water and the benefits of transboundary cooperation into national climate-related documents.

8. Financing transboundary water cooperation

21. Partnering and working closely with international financial institutions is key to understanding the latest developments related to financing transboundary water cooperation. The virtual workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development (online, 16 and 17 December 2020) showed that the private sector offers a potential way to leverage additional funding for cooperation and basin development, but efforts are needed to make the private sector understand the importance of transboundary cooperation. The pandemic underlined how financing for the water sector is crucial for transboundary water cooperation and demonstrated that there is a need to diversify financial resources for transboundary water cooperation and basin development. While a number of activities and training courses on financing in general exist, few of them focus on financing of transboundary water cooperation. Therefore, the Convention should continue to provide a platform for dialogue and facilitate tailored capacity-building and exchange of experience. The engagement of ministries of finance in the discussion will be crucial for the evolution of this programme area.

9. Contribution to global processes

22. The Convention secretariat continued to advocate for transboundary water cooperation in global processes, including on water and in the context of the pandemic. Despite requiring time and effort, contributions to global processes such as UN-Water and the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework are crucial in highlighting the topic within the United Nations and beyond.

III. Areas of work and activities

A. Work of the Bureau

23. The Bureau, led by its Chair, Mr. Ardak Zebeshev (Kazakhstan), held its thirtieth meeting in a hybrid format (Geneva, 29 and 30 September 2020) and several telephone conferences.

24. The Bureau reviewed the programme of work's implementation, in particular in the light of pandemic-related challenges. The Bureau focused on strategic topics, such as promoting accession by new countries to the Convention, partnership with global actors and under the Convention, and preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Tallinn, 29 September–1 October 2021).

25. Bureau members supported the Convention's promotion and the implementation of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), contributed to national, regional and global events to promote the Convention, took steps towards implementing specific Strategy actions, including establishing partnerships, and raised additional funds for Convention activities, including through new donors.

26. The Bureau provided guidance to the secretariat on developing draft targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/8-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/8) and a possible procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/4).

B. Programme area 1: Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation

1.1 Increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession

27. Accession processes were significantly disrupted by the pandemic. However, continuous remote support from the secretariat and close collaboration with regional/local partners ensured progress towards accession in various countries, with European Union financial support through a project promoting accession to the Water Convention.

28. In the West and Central Africa regions, Ghana became a Party to the Convention on 20 September 2020, having deposited its accession instrument on 22 June 2020. In Togo, the accession process reached parliament. The Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and of Guinea-Bissau approved accession to the Convention. Several other countries, including Burkina Faso, the Central Africa Republic, the Congo, the Gambia and Nigeria, also progressed towards accession or started national initiatives to discuss accession benefits. The secretariat supported more than 10 countries in their efforts towards accession.

29. In the East and Southern Africa regions, the pandemic halted initial processes towards potential national accession in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. A partnership initiated with UNECA envisages joint promotion of the Convention, including co-convening a regional webinar on transboundary water cooperation in Southern Africa in 2021.

30. Several partners, such as the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), the Gambia River Basin Development Organization and the Economic Community of West African States, initiated actions to promote the Convention and support accession process of their members States.

31. In the South-East Asia region, progress towards accession is slow and was further disrupted by the pandemic.

32. In the South Asia region, progress towards accession is slow and was further disrupted by the pandemic. A South Asia regional webinar on transboundary rivers (online, 9 November 2020) brought together key State, intergovernmental and non-governmental representatives to discuss such topics as the “Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach” and “Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation”, aiming to raise the Convention’s profile and highlight its added value. An online seminar was conducted on 7 September 2020 for young water leaders enrolled in the Oxfam Transboundary Rivers of South Asia Winter School on Inclusive Water Governance.

33. In the Middle East and North Africa region, the regional workshop “Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region: progress, challenges and opportunities” (Beirut, 3 and 4 March 2020) was organized jointly with ESCWA and the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med). A concluding event of the four-year project “Making water cooperation happen in the Mediterranean” supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the workshop confirmed opportunities for countries of the region to accede to the Convention, as detailed by Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia sharing progress in their processes of accession. Major progress was achieved in Iraq, with a draft law for accession to the Convention being approved by parliament in October 2020. The regional workshop also provided a platform for a regional dialogue on challenges faced and opportunities to improve data and information exchange and water allocation, contributing to global work on these topics under the Convention.

34. In the Latin America region, the secretariat contributed to several events presenting the platform and tools the Convention offers to support transboundary water cooperation. This included the webinars “No Amazonia, no water: climate change in the rainforest” (25 August 2020) and “Panel on international waters” (3 September 2020) in partnership with IDB, OAS and ACTO.

35. In support of national processes on accession, the secretariat developed the publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes*.² The publication provides responses to over 50 questions. A webinar was organized in partnership with the Geneva Environment Network on 17 November 2020 to launch the publication. An interactive version of the frequently asked questions is available on the Convention website.³

1.2 Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation

36. Conclusions and recommendations of the assessments of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation, carried out on the basis of the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication*,⁴ were promoted in two transboundary basins:

- In the Cubango-Okavango River basin, shared by Angola, Botswana and Namibia: a policy brief summary⁵ and a policy report⁶ “Realizing the Benefits of Transboundary

² See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/publications/frequently-asked-questions-1992-water-convention>.

³ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/about-the-convention/faqs/1>.

⁴ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/47.

⁵ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Benefits_cooperation/OKACOM_Policy_Summary_June_2020.pdf.

⁶ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Benefits_cooperation/OKACOM_Policy_Document_June_2020.pdf.

Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin” were published in 2020 and promoted during a webinar⁷ (28 October 2020) co-organized with the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM).

- In the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System (NWSAS), shared by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia: a policy brief “The benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the North- Western Sahara Aquifer System Basin” was published in 2020. It complements the work on the assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the basin.

37. In both basins, this work contributed to ongoing processes of reflection on possible strengthening of cooperation. It highlighted that existing joint bodies (OKACOM and the NWSAS Consultation Mechanism, respectively) played a key role as platforms for cooperation to realize past and current benefits of cooperation. It also emphasized opportunities to deliver more and better distributed benefits.

1.3 Supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies

38. A global virtual workshop on designing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation was organized on 28 and 29 July 2020 in support of the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies. The workshop was organized in partnership with Geneva Water Hub/University of Geneva; GWP; the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River; the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO); IUCN; OMVS; and the University of Northumbria. It was attended by more than 200 participants and supported the preparation of a checklist on developing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation – a new soft law instrument being prepared under the Convention.

39. ECE continued to provide support to several initiatives related to the negotiation of agreements and the establishment of new basin organizations. In Eastern Europe, the secretariat provided inputs to the Dniester River basin management plan to be developed under the leadership of the Dniester Commission established under the Treaty between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Development of the Dniester River basin with the support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project. In the Kura River basin, the secretariat continues facilitating the process of negotiating an agreement between Azerbaijan and Georgia. In the Neman River basin – shared by Belarus and Lithuania – and in the Bug River basin – shared by Belarus, Poland and Ukraine – the secretariat contributed to supporting finalization of the approval of the GEF project proposal focused on transboundary cooperation. With the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF Drin project, implemented by GWP-Mediterranean with the support of ECE, options for upgrading the legal and institutional framework for cooperation have been set out at the request of the greater Drin River basin riparians, and are under review. A major achievement of the UNDP/GEF project, the Drin Strategic Action Programme was launched at a virtual high-level event on 24 April 2020.

40. ECE continues supporting the Central Asian region in building human and institutional capacity on the safe management of dams. At the virtual regional meeting on 15 June 2020, countries requested further support to improve regional and bilateral cooperation on dams located on transboundary rivers. The meeting participants also agreed to develop a Central Asia region-wide agreement on dam safety.

41. In West Africa, the secretariat continues to provide support, in partnership with the Geneva Water Hub and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, and the financial support of the European Union, to the regional dialogue on the Senegalese-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin shared by the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal. The implementation phase of this initiative was marked by the establishment, in April 2020, of the Regional Working Group for Transboundary Cooperation on the Senegalese-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin. The design phase of a joint project for the implementation of the concerted management mechanism began in May 2020. Despite pandemic-related

⁷ Additional information available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/webinar-realizing-benefits-transboundary-water-cooperation-cubango>.

difficulties, the Group held several meetings that led to the development of a joint vision for transboundary cooperation around the Senegalese-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin during the online working session hosted by Senegal (1 and 2 December 2020). In the Central Africa region, the secretariat provided technical and legal support to an Economic Community of Central African States-led initiative on the establishment of a new river basin organization between Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

42. In Central America, the secretariat contributed with the experience of the Convention to the second regional workshop on transboundary waters (Tela, Honduras, 17 and 18 February 2020), led by the Central America Commission for Environment and Development and GWP-Central America.

1.4 Implementation Committee

43. In 2020, the mechanism to support implementation of the Convention was used by Montenegro and Albania, who engaged in an advisory procedure with the Committee. The procedure was initiated in response to the request of Montenegro related to its concerns about the possible transboundary impact of the planned construction of additional small hydropower plants on the Cijevna/Cem River in Albania and the subsequent consent of Albania to take part in the procedure.

44. The Committee contributed to several events to promote the Convention and its mechanism to support implementation and compliance.

C. Programme area 2: Supporting monitoring, assessment and information sharing in transboundary basins

45. Following up on the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6 December 2019), the meeting's participants and potential partner organizations were invited to comment on the possible update of the strategic and technical guidelines on monitoring and assessment developed under the Convention.

46. In the Drin River basin, the riparians' (Albania, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo⁸) representatives in the Expert Working Group on Monitoring and Information Exchange reviewed the Expert Working Group's workplan to move forward with exchange of priority data, preparing for monitoring of cooperation actions outlined in the Drin Strategic Action Programme, developed with the lead of GWP-Med in the UNDP/GEF Drin project and adopted in April 2020. Although the pandemic seriously constrained activities, on 11 December 2020, the Group discussed the hydrological situation in Great Prespa Lake and Lesser Prespa Lake and the need to exchange information.

47. A set of preliminary study reports were developed on the status of knowledge on the Senegalese-Mauritanian Aquifer basin, its hydrogeology, pressures on that groundwater resource, as well as monitoring and availability of data. The documentation informed a dialogue process in which directions for cooperation between the four aquifer-sharing States were outlined.

48. Partners in this programme area include: the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) programme for the Eastern Partnership, the Geneva Water Hub, GWP, the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank Group and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

⁸ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

D. Programme area 3: Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels

3.2 Supporting intersectoral dialogues and assessments through the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach

49. This subprogramme area led to concrete increased cooperation between the water and energy sectors in a few countries and at ECE level.

50. In 2020, the activities included: (a) advancing two previously initiated in-depth transboundary basin nexus assessments, as well as finalizing and publishing the first nexus assessment of a transboundary aquifer; (b) synthesizing experiences about nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins worldwide; and (c) promoting consideration of intersectoral effects and synergy between water management and sustainable renewable energy deployment.

51. The project “Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in South-Eastern Europe, through the use of the nexus approach” supports in-depth (phase II) nexus assessments in the Drin River and Drina River basins. The analysis is aimed at supporting implementation of the Drin Strategic Action Programme, in particular actions that require intersectoral cooperation (for example, co-optimizing between hydropower generation and flood protection, reforestation for better water management). The preliminary results of a quantitative energy-water analysis and a study of sustainable forestry-biomass links were presented for discussion to the Drin Core Group at its twentieth meeting (online, 3 December 2020). Zooming in with a parallel national process, a concept for the nexus assessment of Albania was presented for discussion to the Thematic Group on Water Resources of Albania (18 June 2020), and then enriched with contributions from a broad set of stakeholders in a virtual national consultation (14 December 2020).

52. A Steering Committee of senior officials of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in the fields of water, energy and environment protection was formed and convened in a virtual meeting to review the concept of the Drina River Basin Nexus Assessment Phase II, which builds directly on the Drina Nexus Follow-up Project’s activities (2018–2019). An online consultation meeting (21 December 2020) was held for stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the project’s activities, including a water-energy analysis of renewable energy potential and hydropower, as well as a review of formalization options for flow regulation.

53. A joint “toolkit” publication with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division entitled *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment*⁹ was developed as a spin-off from the “Hard Talks” organized in cooperation with the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy and drawing upon the Convention’s wider nexus work. With the Division’s lead, a capacity-building webinar was organized on 19 October 2020 to promote the publication.

54. On the nexus assessment of the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System, carried out in cooperation with GWP-Mediterranean and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, an assessment report and a policy brief were published in English and French, and disseminated widely via the media and through the “Technical Webinar on Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus in Practice – Technical Solutions in the Mediterranean: Experience and Opportunities” organized by GWP-Med and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (21 July 2020) and the European Union-Egypt-UfM Water Investment Forum at Cairo Water Week (18–22 October 2020).

55. A global stocktaking exercise of experiences about nexus (intersectoral) solutions and investments, including from nexus assessments and dialogues, was carried out with IUCN using an online survey, aiming to provide clarity on the benefits and added value of implementing nexus solutions to solve problems affecting transboundary basins. Cases from the survey, regional experiences about nexus solutions, as well as financing options were

⁹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.17.

discussed at the sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Geneva (hybrid), 22 and 23 October 2020).

56. The Task Force provided for experience sharing on addressing nexus issues in transboundary basins. The Convention's work was also among key content covered in webinars organized jointly with partners, for example on the topic "Water-Energy Strategic Planning: Opportunities for climate action" (26 August 2020) at the Week on Water for Development with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and Deltares (Netherlands) (online, 24–28 August 2020).

57. Partners in this programme area included the GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the Geneva Water Hub, IUCN, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, GWP, GWP-Med, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, the International Sava River Basin Commission, UNDP, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), ESCWA, the Austrian Development Agency and GIZ.

3.3 Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context

58. The first draft of the handbook on water allocation in a transboundary context was prepared by a drafting group.

59. The Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook, which provides technical guidance in developing the handbook, at its second meeting (online, 30 and 31 March 2020) provided feedback on the outline of the handbook.

60. The Expert Group, at its third meeting (online, 20 and 21 October 2020) provided feedback on the draft text of chapters from the first half of the handbook and detailed chapter outlines from the second half. It also reviewed the main messages.

61. A global review of transboundary water allocation agreements was integrated into the handbook.

62. A "Regional Workshop on Equitable and Sustainable Water Allocation" (online, 5 and 6 October 2020) convened water allocation experts from European Union member States and the neighbourhood (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Balkans). Participants presented their national experiences, case studies and lessons learned.

63. IWAC, which, with Kazakh partners, led a parallel regional project for Central Asia and neighbouring States on transboundary water allocation, drafted two technical reports: on water allocation in a transboundary context; and on environmental flow assessment. A draft brochure was developed for dissemination. The main conclusions and selected case studies are integrated, where relevant, into the handbook. IWAC convened two online meetings for Central Asian States as part of the regional projects to discuss case studies and lessons learned: the "Technical Meeting of Experts on Water Allocation and Environmental Flow Assessment in the Transboundary Context" (15 May 2020); and the "Regional meeting on water allocation and environmental flow assessment in a transboundary context" (22 and 23 September 2020).

64. Partners in this programme area included: the University of Eastern Finland, Oregon State University, the International Institute for Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering Delft; IWAC, OECD, EUWI+ and the Finnish Environment Institute.

3.4 Supporting National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management under the European Union Water Initiative

65. In 2020, ECE continued implementing NPDs under EUWI, with the aim of strengthening water governance and the application of integrated water resources management, particularly through intersectoral cooperation in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in line with the Convention, its Protocol on Water and Health,

the European Union Water Framework Directive¹⁰ and other instruments. Activities were carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

66. European Union 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), working closely with the other implementing partners (OECD, Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water of France).

67. In Armenia, draft amendments to the Water Code and the Law on the National Water Programme were finalized. On 10 July 2020, a Ministry of Environment decree was adopted on ensuring the implementation of the water quality and resources management area of the road map of implementation of the European Union-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. In Belarus, work on the strategic environmental assessment of the draft water strategy was completed, including a series of online consultations and a training workshop (Minsk, 26 March 2020). In Georgia, a strategic environmental assessment for the Alazani-Iori River Basin Management Plan was also finalized and the draft report presented to key stakeholders on 21 October 2020. The work on the strategic environmental assessments was conducted in consultation with the secretariat of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.

68. Joint monitoring activities for the transboundary Khrami-Debed River basin between Armenia and Georgia included drafting a guidance document for the joint transboundary water quality monitoring programme and conducting simultaneous pilot monitoring samplings in September 2020. ECE also continued to work with Azerbaijan and Georgia to discuss options for continuation of negotiations on the draft cooperation agreement on the Kura River basin. All countries of the subregion received methodological support on reporting on indicator 6.5.2 through a subregional webinar (28 May 2020).

69. The NPD process continued to promote accession to and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. In Belarus, the revised national targets for were submitted for adoption by the Council of Ministers. In the Republic of Moldova, the drafting of the revised national implementation programme under the Protocol was finalized and corresponding public consultations were held.

70. Activities in Central Asia were carried out under a new regional project within the European Union–Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation project,¹¹ in cooperation with OECD. An NPD Steering Committee meeting was held in a hybrid mode in Kazakhstan on 20 November 2020. Support was provided to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in producing their national reports under indicator 6.5.2. An activity in support of the implementation of the newly adopted revised Water Code was launched in Tajikistan. At the regional level, the work on NPDs was presented at the ninth meeting of the European Union–Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (Brussels, 12 and 13 February 2020).

71. The sustainability and stable institutional frameworks of the NPD processes and the strong partnerships with the European Union and OECD, as strategic partner for NPDs, enabled support to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion and continued to play an important role during the pandemic. Good cooperation between ECE, OECD and the European Union member States consortium of Austria (Environment Agency Austria) and France (International Office for Water) has played a key role in effectively implementing the EUWI+ programme.

¹⁰ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327 (2000), pp. 1–72.

¹¹ For additional information see <https://wecoop.eu/>.

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

4.1 Supporting development of transboundary adaptation strategies and implementation of priority measures

72. In 2020, work under the Convention enabled increased capacity through exchange of experience and knowledge-sharing, contributing to global policy processes on climate and disasters and projects on the ground.

73. The eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva (hybrid), 2 October 2020) encouraged countries to mainstream transboundary aspects of water management into their national climate-related documents – for example, revised Nationally Determined Contributions in 2020 and National Adaptation Plans under the Paris Agreement – on the basis of a background paper entitled “Mainstreaming water and transboundary cooperation into climate-related documents”.¹²

74. The Convention integrated climate change adaptation into the river basin management planning of several pilot transboundary basins. In the Dniester River basin, adaptive capacity was increased by including climate change as a cross-cutting issue in the Strategic Action Programme and in development of the flood management plan, as well as through finalization of the bankable adaptation projects proposals for the lower Dniester River. In addition, the Convention supported the process of approval of the Strategic Action Programme for the Chu-Talas River basin.

75. The Convention contributed to raising awareness of the role of water and transboundary cooperation in global processes, for example, by contributing to two virtual meetings of the Adaptation Committee under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (24–27 March and 9–12 November 2020) and the activities under the Global Commission on Adaptation, including the Climate Adaptation Summit (online, 25 and 26 January 2021). The Convention’s climate change activities were also presented at World Water Week at Home (online, 24–28 August 2020). As co-coordinator of the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate Change, ECE co-organized activities for the World Water Day “Water and Climate Change” (22 March 2020) and contributed to the UN-Water publication *World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change*.¹³

4.2 Supporting transboundary basins in financing climate change adaptation

76. In 2020, the Convention supported capacity-building activities on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins through organizing a dedicated side event entitled “How to finance climate change adaptation in transboundary basins?” together with partners at World Water Week at Home (24 August 2020), a workshop on the economic implications of climate change and water scarcity in the Mashreq region (1–3 December 2020) and other events. Such activities helped countries and basins acquire knowledge and skills in receiving financing for transboundary climate change adaptation.

77. Numerous partners were involved in the implementation of activities, such as: the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the Adaptation Fund, the African Development Bank (AfDB), GEF, GWP, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB), ESCWA, IDB, INBO, IUCN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Stockholm International Water Institute, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFCCC, the World Bank Group, WMO, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Zoï Environment Network and several joint bodies.

¹² Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eleventh-meeting-task-force-water-and-climate-change>.

¹³ (Paris, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2020).

F. Programme area 5: Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation

78. The secretariat, in collaboration with the lead Parties and partners, and with the support of consultants, developed a background study providing a comprehensive overview of sources of funding and financing potentially available to support the management and development of transboundary basins.¹⁴ This study served as a background paper for the virtual workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development (16 and 17 December 2020).

79. The workshop, organized in cooperation with AfDB, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), EIB, GEF, GEF IW:LEARN, IDB, OECD, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the World Bank Group and WWF, was attended by more than 200 participants from countries, river basin organizations and international financial institutions. High-level speakers included Mr. Carlos Manuel Rodriguez (Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson, GEF) and Ms. Jennifer Sara (Global Director, World Bank Group Water Global Practice). The workshop highlighted the importance for countries, basin institutions and financial partners to improve the sustainability of financial mechanisms available for transboundary basins. It increased awareness on financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development and enabled the sharing of good practices in mobilizing financial resources.

80. The secretariat also coordinated development of the finance for transboundary water security module of the GWP/GEF IW:LEARN Massive Online Open Course on governance for transboundary freshwater security (launched August 2020).

G. Programme area 6: Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

6.1 Supporting reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

81. The *Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2*¹⁵ was translated into Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish.

82. The capacity of countries to report in the second exercise was improved by organizing, in collaboration with UNESCO and other partners, several capacity-building activities to raise awareness about reporting and foster high-quality reporting and coordination of reports at the basin level. A series of five webinars (12 May–4 June 2020) and workshops for the Arab and Asia regions (respectively, Beirut, 5 March, and online, 17 September 2020), as well as direct support provided to countries, resulted in an improved understanding by countries of reporting on indicator 6.5.2, enhancing the quality of data submitted by countries and increasing the response rate for the second reporting exercise.

83. In February 2020, ECE and UNESCO, as co-custodian agencies for indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation, invited 153 countries sharing transboundary rivers, lakes and/or aquifers to participate in the second reporting exercise and submit their voluntary national reports on indicator 6.5.2 by 30 June 2020. For Parties to the Convention, reporting thereunder is combined with reporting on indicator 6.5.2.

84. Thanks to the active engagement of member States, the second reporting exercise was a success, with 128 out of 153 countries approached reporting on indicator 6.5.2 and all Parties to the Convention submitting national reports. Such a high response rate despite the pandemic demonstrates countries' strong commitment to reporting data and information on the status of transboundary water cooperation. ECE, together with UNESCO, engaged in consultations with countries for validating indicator 6.5.2 national values before submitting the data to the United Nations Statistics Division in February 2021. Results were included in the Sustainable Development Goal 6 brief "Summary Progress Update 2021– SDG 6 - water

¹⁴ Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/water/events/virtual-workshop-financing-transboundary-water-cooperation-and-basin>.

¹⁵ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/60.

and sanitation for all”. Additionally, work to elaborate the second progress reports on indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention has started.

6.2 Promoting the use of the reports for identifying and addressing gaps in transboundary water cooperation

85. The national reports have informed policy processes related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such as the preparations of Voluntary National Reviews and deliberations at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (New York, 7–16 July 2020), and activities under the Convention.

86. Under the aegis of the UN-Water Integrated Water Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6, ECE was involved in different activities on capacity-building and support, monitoring and communication on the baseline exercise and on the 2020 Data Drive.¹⁶

87. The above-mentioned activities highlighted the benefits of reporting. ECE also presented the reporting exercise in regional events for the Central American region (Tela, Honduras, 17 and 18 February 2020) and for the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region (online, 23 and 24 November 2020). On those occasions, ECE highlighted the importance of compatibility of data and encouraged States to coordinate reporting across indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 and across riparian countries in the same basin and to use the reporting process as a catalyst for improved cooperation.

88. Partners in this programme area included ECA, ESCWA, ESCAP, the European Union, GWP, GWP-Asia, GWP-Central Africa, GWP-Central America, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, OECD, UNEP-DHI, UNESCO, UNESCO Almaty Office, UNESCO Jakarta Office and UN-Water.

H. Programme area 7: Partnerships, communication and knowledge management

7.1 Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements

89. The secretariat contributed to UN-Water inter-agency cooperation efforts by continuing to co-lead the UN-Water Expert Groups on Water and Climate Change and on Transboundary Waters. A UN-Water Policy Brief “The United Nations global water conventions: Fostering sustainable development and peace”¹⁷ was prepared.

90. ECE joined the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework – launched by UN-Water at a virtual high-level political forum special event on 9 July 2020. ECE contributes to the Global Acceleration Framework through several commitments, particularly to the governance, data and information and capacity-building accelerators.

91. Cooperation was strengthened with global and regional partners, such as regional economic communities, regional economic commissions and international financial institutions. The motion “Cooperation on transboundary fresh waters to ensure ecosystem conservation, climate resilience and sustainable development”, submitted to the IUCN World Conservation Congress in August 2019, was adopted by the IUCN members in October 2020.

92. The secretariat contributed to numerous global events to promote transboundary water cooperation. The Convention’s position as a global platform and reference for transboundary water cooperation was reconfirmed, for example, during the preparations for the Ninth World Water Forum (Dakar, 21–26 March 2022), where ECE leads the action group on transboundary cooperation.

¹⁶ See www.sdg6monitoring.org/2020-data-drive/.

¹⁷ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/the-united-nations-global-water-conventions-fostering-sustainable-development-and-peace/?fbclid=IwAR3ejUGUeWFMzu4OLIAau9VasVcA-G3q2qyxJQglB68kMxcOyriFFhYOKVY.

7.2 Activities of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents

93. In the framework of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, mainly supported by the secretariat of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the activities on preventing accidental water pollution were presented at meetings with the river basin organizations and the relevant guidelines were translated into local languages and promoted for further application on the ground. A draft workplan for the group for 2021–2024 was developed.

7.3 Communication and knowledge management

94. In 2020, the secretariat disseminated information on the Convention's activities, particularly through the newsletter of the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health. The secretariat also published news releases and articles on the ECE website. In addition to the existing Twitter account (@UNECE_Water), Facebook (@UNECEWater) and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/water-convention-protocol-on-water-health>) accounts were created. Messages on ongoing activities were shared on social media, raising interest from an increasing number of followers.

95. The Convention's website was migrated to a new web platform (Drupal) as part of an overall ECE web migration.
