1. The 11th meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting took place in Geneva, on 3 November 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was organized in hybrid format, with all the delegations attending through a virtual platform.\(^1\)

2. Representatives from the following countries were present: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

3. The event was further attended by representatives from the following international organizations: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Water (UN-Water) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Representatives from the following non-governmental organizations, academia and other institutions were present: Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment, Centre for Advanced Water Research, Delft Centre for Water Information, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Ecoforum of Uzbekistan, Eco-TIRAS International Environmental Association of River Keepers, European Federation of National Associations of Water Services, Journalists for Human Rights, Sava River Watershed Agency in Sarajevo, WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication at the University of Bonn. A member of the Protocol Compliance Committee and several independent experts also participated.

4. The meeting was serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe joint secretariat of the Protocol.

**Item 1: Opening of the meeting**

5. The Chair of the Task Force, represented by Switzerland, opened the meeting and introduced its objectives, namely to:

   (a) Exchange experiences on measures taken in the area of water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including challenges faced, lessons learned and possible ideas for setting COVID-19 sensitive targets under the Protocol in order to increase resilience against the spread of infectious diseases;

   (b) Review progress by Parties in setting, revising and implementing their targets under article 6 of the Protocol;

   (c) Inform about the plans to develop a concept for electronic reporting system under the Protocol;

   (d) Discuss key highlights from the global and regional developments relative to monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.

**Item 2: Adoption of the agenda**


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\(^1\) All information on the meeting is available at [https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eleventh-meeting-task-force-target-setting-and-reporting](https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eleventh-meeting-task-force-target-setting-and-reporting).
Item 3: Exchange of experiences on water, sanitation, hygiene and health-related measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

7. The Chair recalled that a special webinar series had been organized by the Protocol joint secretariat, which addressed several thematic areas of work under the Protocol and covered different aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to WASH and health. Three webinars had been organized so far:

1. Don’t Forget the Small Ones (8 July 2020), which launched the publication “Costing and Financing of small-scale water supply and sanitation services” and showcased examples of action taken by countries in the pan-European region in the area of small systems.

2. Equity in access to WASH (22 July 2020), where participants discussed how tools developed under the Protocol in the area of equitable access to water and sanitation could support governments in achieving inclusive COVID-19 recovery.

3. Surveillance of COVID-19 virus in wastewater (15 October 2020), which introduced the concept of surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater, presented the experience of some countries, and explored the potential benefits and limitations of this surveillance approach when informing the public health response to the pandemic.

8. The Chair further informed that the webinar series would continue in 2021 and would address, among others, the topics of hygiene and the legal framework of the Protocol as it relates to WASH and public health.

9. A representative of the WHO secretariat then informed about the work carried out by WHO in response to the pandemic highlighting the adoption of the World Health Assembly resolution WHA73.1 on COVID-19 response, which calls for safe WASH service provision, improved infection prevention and control and promotion of hygiene in all settings. He presented the key considerations of the technical guidance on Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for SARS-CoV-2 and Recommendations to improve hand hygiene practices to help prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, as well as recent developments on surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater in research and practice.

10. Subsequently, participants exchanged experiences on measures taken in the context of the pandemic as follows (in alphabetical order):

   a) Armenia: Financial support was provided for vulnerable and marginalized groups to cover bills for essential services, including water bills. The NGO community was also strongly engaged in WASH issues and was organizing trainings to improve WASH practices by children and in rural areas.

   b) Azerbaijan: Response actions were coordinated at the Cabinet level and measures were taken to ensure safe operation of water supply and sanitation systems. The COVID-19 outbreak had raised attention to the importance of hand hygiene. The Protocol was considered a framework to increase efficiency in the water and health sectors.

   c) Hungary: Guidance was provided to water suppliers on safely closing and reopening public buildings in order to prevent health risks, including in relation to the spread of Legionella and the installation of automated hand hygiene stations in schools, malls and transport hubs. As regards equity considerations, thanks to the application of the Protocol tools, the country was aware of the special challenges faced by vulnerable and marginalized users, including people living with no access to water at home. Disconnections from water and sanitation services on the ground of non-payment were also prohibited. Environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater was being performed and was informing communications with decision-makers and response measures.

   d) Italy: The response to the pandemic had required multi-sectoral cooperation between stakeholders involved in the whole water cycle. The country continued applying the risk-based management approach to ensure safety of drinking water and recreational water. Retrospective analysis of samples revealed presence of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater two months before detecting before clinical cases in February 2020. Environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater had been undertaken in 19 districts as an early warning tool to detect circulation of the virus in the community, and the country is planning to scale up this method as part of the national surveillance system.

   e) North Macedonia: Special attention was paid to the provision of menstrual hygiene products to families facing financial difficulties due to the pandemic.
f) **Portugal**: A law was passed to prohibit the suspension of essential WASH services and measures were taken to ensure the continuity of water and sanitation services, including monitoring of service continuity on a weekly basis since 22 March 2020. The country further acted to tackle WASH-related inequities and support vulnerable and marginalized groups, for instance by providing shelters where homeless people could have access to water in safe conditions.

g) **Republic of Moldova**: Guidance was developed for health care facilities focusing on WASH and specific rules were adopted for the safe reopening of schools and kindergartens, particularly considering the challenges in rural areas. The country had introduced mandatory requirements of installing hand hygiene stations in schools and had developed educational material for school and kindergarten managers on hygiene promotion. A sub-regional meeting was also held on water and COVID-19, focusing on the importance of WASH in daily life. An increasing number of targets related to WASH was being set under the Protocol, taking into account the lessons learned from the pandemic.

h) **Romania**: Advice was provided on the provision of safe drinking-water, bathing water safety, and legislative decisions were taken on general and specific recommendations on WASH to prevent COVID-19. Some targets previously set under the Protocol were particularly useful to prepare for and respond to COVID-19, including targets on increasing access to drinking water and sanitation and reducing outbreaks of water-related diseases.

11. The Chair thanked participants for the rich exchange, which provided a comprehensive overview of the measures taken at national level and highlighted the role of the Protocol as a framework to strengthen resilience against infectious diseases.

**Item 4: Review of the general progress in setting and/or revising and implementing targets under the Protocol on Water and Health**

12. Representatives of Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic and Finland informed about the progress made with setting and/or revising their targets under the Protocol, focusing on the process followed, including with regard to public participation, and the relationship with relevant European Union Directives and the SDG targets pertinent to WASH and health.

13. Country representatives further informed about relevant national developments as follow:

a) **Belgium**: The Brussels Capital Region had set its targets under the Protocol, linking the objectives to several European Union Directives. Progress was also made in Belgium in a number of target areas, including good practices for the management of water supply, where risk-based management approaches (i.e. water safety plans) were being applied in the drinking water supply chain. In general, the regional and federal authorities had been engaging more actively in implementing the Protocol.

b) **Republic of Moldova**: Targets were embedded in the National Program for implementing the Protocol in the Republic of Moldova (2016-2025), which was extended until 2030. In 2019-2020, targets had been under revision in order to align them with the 2030 Agenda.

c) **Romania**: Existing targets were analysed to assess their relevance to the national context. While some targets were deemed still relevant, others were updated to reflect the latest developments.

d) **Spain**: The targets initially developed in 2015 were updated and communicated to the joint secretariat in September 2020. Targets were streamlined with existing national obligations and with the relevant European Union Directives, including the recast of the Drinking Water Directive. Aspects relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic were also considered, particularly with regard to surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater.

14. The joint secretariat commended the efforts made by countries when setting and/or revising their targets. It also highlighted the role played by the Compliance Committee in establishing contact and following up with Parties that had yet to set their targets and targets dates, and in providing tailored advice and assistance on target setting through the Consultation Process.

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15. It was highlighted that several countries had set their targets within the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) for the Eastern Partnership programme, implemented by UNECE, thanks to the financial support provided by the European Union and with the assistance of the joint secretariat.

Item 5: Key highlights of the global and regional developments in monitoring the implementation of the SDG 6

16. The Chair reminded that the aim of the session was to maintain operational linkages between the developments under the Protocol and global efforts in monitoring progress with SDG 6, to review the most recent developments with the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) and the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 and to discuss in how far these global monitoring instruments can be adopted in the national context.

17. A representative of WHO informed about the status of implementation of the SDG targets related to WASH in communities, health care facilities and schools, explained JMP planning and country data consultation cycles and encouraged countries to participate in global SDG 6 reporting efforts. He stressed the need for taking substantial efforts to achieve universal access to basic water and sanitation and that hand hygiene has a relatively low profile in COVID-19 response actions and financing, despite its crucial role in preventing spread of infectious disease. He also underlined the uncertainties related to the long-term impact of COVID-19 on WASH service provision and on SDG progress. The global progress report on WASH in health care facilities to be released in the end of 2020 will present a range of best practice examples of several countries of the European Region and highlight, inter alia, the work undertaken in the context of the Protocol. This report will also be an important input to the next World Health Assembly session in 2021.

18. WHO secretariat noted the increase in the number of countries in the pan-European region that report data on WASH in health care facilities and schools. Reported data indicate challenges related to lack of disaggregated data and inadequacy in service provision, such as the lack of hand hygiene stations, the lack of soap in schools and poor waste management and environmental cleaning practices in health care facilities. There is a need to escalate country actions to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, in particular to align national WASH monitoring indicators with SDG 6 indicators, to define additional criteria for advanced WASH service levels tailored to country context and to improve public health surveillance capacities for WASH in communities, schools and health care facilities.

19. Representative of WHO introduced the main findings of the GLAAS 2019 global report. She highlighted the positive steps that have been made in countries to align with the SDGs; about half of the countries participating in GLAAS have set coverage targets more ambitious than basic WASH service provision, and several countries set targets on safely managed sanitation. On the other hand, the report highlights the large gap in funding to reach the set targets. The first global and regional highlights on hand hygiene (2020) indicate insufficient government funding, high household expenditures compared to government expenditure and the lack of an internationally agreed definition of hygiene which presents challenges for reporting on and comparing data across countries. The plans for GLAAS reporting for 2021/2022 were presented and countries were invited to participate in this new cycle. In addition, a brief overview was provided on the TrackFin initiative as a methodology for analysing financial flows and expenditures in WASH and for developing national WASH accounts.

20. In the pan-European region, data from 15 countries that participated in the 2018-2019 GLAAS cycle revealed substantial discrepancy between policy aspirations and available financing for WASH with only one third of countries reporting availability of sufficient resources. The findings also indicate an overall lack of measures to extend services to vulnerable groups, the need to establish financial plans on hygiene provision and WASH in schools and health care facilities. Overall, available data indicate a need to improve enforcement of national WASH policies and targets by allocating sufficient funds and resources.

21. Country representatives informed about experiences of SDG 6 reporting through JMP and GLAAS and relevant national developments as follows (in alphabetical order):

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3 All the presentations made in this session are also available at: https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/eleventh-meeting-task-force-target-setting-and-reporting.
a) **Belarus**: Data obtained from the GLAAS country survey helped to prepare the 2019 national summary report and was used in the baseline analysis for setting/revising targets under the Protocol, and in defining measures to improve WASH in schools and health care facilities and on personal hygiene. JMP and GLAAS relevant indicators were integrated into the national monitoring and statistical mechanism to support reporting for WASH-related SDG targets.

b) **Hungary**: Participation in the GLAAS high income country survey was very useful in analysing WASH sector policies, financing and human resources and helped to reveal strengths, shortcomings and knowledge gaps. Informed by the needs identified, a comprehensive policy analysis and assessment of the WASH situation in hospitals was carried out. Hungary expressed commitment to participate in the next round of GLAAS survey.

c) **Serbia**: Experience and outcomes of JMP and GLAAS work in the country over the past several years led to aligning national WASH indicators with international indicators, defining criteria for advanced services levels for WASH in health care facilities and to WASH policy improvements.

22. Representative of UN-Water informed about recent developments related to the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6. He reported of the launch of the global data drive, the creation of focal point information for different targets, translation of the SDG 6 Data Portal into all UN languages and individual outreach activities to 35 countries. He also noted that COVID-19 led to some delays in reporting and a need to continue regular data collection and consultation to improve robustness of data and further capacity development. Guidance materials on data collection and reporting, face-to-face and online platforms are available to support countries in participating SDG 6 monitoring and reporting.

**Item 6: Closing of the meeting**

23. The Task Force agreed to hold its next meeting in Geneva on 17-18 November 2021 in hybrid or physical format, depending on the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic.

24. The joint secretariat also informed about the upcoming meetings under the Protocol in 2021, particularly the 12th meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health, scheduled to take place in Geneva on 14-15 April 2021 in hybrid or virtual format.

25. The Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting
   a) Welcomed the progress made by several Parties in setting and revising their national targets under the Protocol, despite the COVID-19 pandemic;
   b) Encouraged those Parties that have not yet set targets to finalize the process as soon as possible;
   c) Expressed appreciation for the planned development of a concept for electronic reporting under the Protocol as foreseen in the programme of work, requesting the secretariat to report on progress at its next meeting as well as the meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health in April 2021;
   d) Encouraged countries to use the Protocol as an operational tool to strengthen the national and local capacities to respond to and recover from the ongoing pandemic and to improve prevention and preparedness measures with regards to WASH, in particular by setting and implementing COVID-19 sensitive targets under the Protocol;
   e) Encouraged countries to harmonize national WASH monitoring with SDG 6 indicators, define advanced WASH service levels for schools and health care facilities and actively engage in the global monitoring efforts;
   f) Encouraged countries to capitalize on the synergies between the global instruments for monitoring WASH-related SDGs, in particular in support to undertaking baseline analyses, setting targets and reporting under the Protocol.

26. The meeting was closed at 16:00 on 3 November 2020.

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