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### **Economic Commission for Europe**

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

#### **Ninth session**

Geneva, 29 September–1 October 2021

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**Reporting under the Convention and on indicator**

**6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals**

### **Draft decision on reporting**

**Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau and the  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

## *Summary*

At its seventh session (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015, by decision VII/2 (ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2), the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes introduced a regular reporting mechanism under the Convention.

The introduction of the regular reporting mechanism under the Convention coincided with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets in 2015, followed by the adoption of indicator 6.5.2 to measure progress on transboundary water cooperation as part of the Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have been entrusted as “custodian agencies” for the indicator.

In order to maximize synergies and efficiencies, the reporting under the Convention and the reporting on indicator 6.5.2 were combined for Parties to the Convention.

The first and second reporting exercises under the Convention, applicable to Parties, and on indicator 6.5.2, applicable to all countries sharing transboundary waters, were respectively held in the periods 2017–2018 and 2020–2021. In these two reporting rounds, the co-custodian agencies requested countries to submit their reports in PDF format for the signed version and in Word format to facilitate the processing and analysis of information.

The Meeting of the Parties, at its eighth session (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018), requested the secretariat to develop a proposal for an online reporting system. A note on the development of an online reporting system (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.7), prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with UNESCO, was presented to the third joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 26–28 April 2021). The working groups entrusted the secretariat with the task of further developing the proposal for an online reporting system for consideration and endorsement at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

The present document contains the draft decision, which reflects upon the reporting exercises held so far and the future developments in this respect and includes a list of indicative requirements and characteristics for the online reporting system in an annex.

The Meeting of the Parties is invited to consider the draft decision contained herein with a view to its adoption.

## I. Introduction

1. In 2015, decision VII/2 (ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2) of the Meeting of the Parties established a regular reporting mechanism under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), to review and enhance implementation of the Convention and identify needs and gaps in transboundary cooperation. In 2017, the General Assembly adopted the Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including indicator 6.5.2 (proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation), for which the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are co-custodian agencies.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management decided, for Parties to the Convention, to combine the reporting under the Convention with reporting on indicator 6.5.2 in order to increase synergies between the two processes and avoid duplication of efforts.<sup>2</sup>
2. The first and second reporting exercises on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and under the Convention for Parties, were held in the periods 2017–2018 and 2020–2021, respectively. For the second reporting exercise, all countries sharing transboundary waters were invited to report on indicator 6.5.2 and all Parties were invited to report also under the Convention by 30 June 2020. Countries were requested to send their reports to both ECE and UNESCO. As of 30 March 2021, 129 countries have submitted a reply on indicator 6.5.2 and all Parties have submitted a report under the Convention.
3. To support countries in preparing their national reports, ECE and UNESCO developed and revised the relevant guidance documents. Based on the inputs from countries, the co-custodian agencies clarified the step-by-step monitoring methodology for indicator 6.5.2 version “2020”<sup>3</sup> to improve its user-friendliness and include definitions of key terminology. ECE also developed the *Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2* (the Guide),<sup>4</sup> guided by a drafting group including Parties, non-Parties and international organizations from Africa, Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North and South America and South East Asia, which met twice in 2019. The Guide provides detailed advice on preparing national reports by explaining the different sections of the template, clarifying key terminology and giving advice on how to complete the reporting template.
4. The capacity of countries to report in the second exercise was improved by organizing, together 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), five regional workshops (in 2019 and 2020) and direct support provided to countries resulted in an improved understanding by countries of reporting, enhancing the quality of data submitted by countries and increasing the response rate for the second reporting exercise. In addition, extensive communication with countries took place to ensure consistency and validate the information contained in the reports.
5. In the first and second reporting exercises, the co-custodian agencies requested countries to submit their reports in PDF format for the signed version and Word format for the analysis. ECE and UNESCO carried out the analysis by a review of the Word version of the national reports and subsequently manually entered the information into an Excel database.
6. For future reporting exercises, Parties and a number of non-Parties requested the development of an online reporting system,<sup>5</sup> which would greatly facilitate data entry and

<sup>1</sup> See General Assembly resolution 71/313 on work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2031 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/71/313), annex.

<sup>2</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2016/2, paras. 22, 24 and 26 (a).

<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.unwater.org/publications/step-step-methodology-monitoring-transboundary-cooperation-6-5-2/](http://www.unwater.org/publications/step-step-methodology-monitoring-transboundary-cooperation-6-5-2/).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/60.

<sup>5</sup> See ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2, decision VIII/1, operative para. 16.

improve the reliability of the data reported by countries, as well as enhance the analysis of the reports and reported data by ECE and UNESCO. The online system would allow information to be presented in various output formats, facilitating more effective and efficient comparison, synthesis and analysis of the responses. For these reasons, the development of a concept for an online reporting system for future reporting exercises was part of the workplan on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals under the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6 (IMI-SDG6) for 2021 implemented by ECE and UNESCO, as well as envisaged in the programme of work of the Water Convention for 2019–2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) and foreseen in decision VIII/1 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2).

7. ECE undertook preliminary research on existing reporting systems. As part of this research, ECE contacted several United Nations agencies and multilateral environmental agreements, whose reporting processes are similar to the one on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and under the Water Convention, in order to learn from their experience with different online reporting systems in terms of data gathering, data entry and management, data analysis, etc. In this process, the experiences from the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the World Meteorological Organization, the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the ECE statistics database were reviewed to understand existing online systems and requirements, as well as to learn from their challenges, lessons learned and recommendations and establish the list of indicative requirements and characteristics listed in the annex to the draft decision presented below.

8. A note on options and considerations for the development of an online reporting system (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.7),<sup>6</sup> prepared by the secretariat in cooperation with UNESCO and reporting on the conclusion of this research, was presented to the third joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 26–28 April 2021). The working groups entrusted the secretariat with the task of further developing the proposal for an online reporting system for consideration and endorsement at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.<sup>7</sup>

9. The above-mentioned note highlighted the importance of establishing an online reporting system both tailored for countries to easily input their data and that allowed for straightforward data extraction for subsequent analysis (see annex to draft decision presented below). The technical requirements, in particular related to the management of data coming from member States, imply a direct advantage to capitalize on existing and well-established systems and processes, which would be brought by the institution contracted to do the work, as compared to creating a new system.<sup>8</sup>

10. The research also indicated that the current reporting template may need to be adjusted to respond to the functionalities of the online system to allow and facilitate the filling of the template by countries' representatives. The main content of the template will not be changed.<sup>9</sup>

11. The present document contains the draft decision on reporting and a list of indicative requirements and characteristics for the online reporting system in the annex to that decision.

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<sup>6</sup> See under tab entitled "Item 9 – Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention", available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/water/events/3rd-Joint-meeting-WGIWRM-and-WGMA>.

<sup>7</sup> See Unedited list of decisions, para. 12 (h), under tab entitled "Outcomes of the Meeting", available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/water/events/3rd-Joint-meeting-WGIWRM-and-WGMA>.

<sup>8</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.7, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

## II. Draft decision on reporting

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

*Determined* to facilitate the implementation and application of and compliance with the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention),

*Recalling* article 17, paragraph 2 (f), of the Convention, which states that the Meeting of the Parties shall consider and undertake any additional action that may be required for the achievement of the purposes of the Convention,

*Recalling also* article 17, paragraph 2, of the Convention, which states that, at their meetings, the Parties shall keep under continuous review the implementation of the Convention,

*Recalling further* its decision VII/2,<sup>1</sup> through which it introduced a regular reporting mechanism under the Convention, and its decision VIII/1,<sup>2</sup> through which it adopted a revised reporting template,

*Recognizing* that reporting is key for reviewing and enhancing national implementation of the Convention as well as accession thereto,

*Recognizing also* that reporting provides a means to enhance basin-specific cooperation,

*Noting* that regular reporting may also serve as a means to keep the public informed of measures taken to implement the Convention,

*Underlining* that reporting provides information that helps to identify the specific needs of basins, and thereby supports the mobilization of resources, for example, for capacity-building and technical assistance activities,

*Noting* that reporting also allows for the identification of emerging issues and difficulties in the implementation of the Convention, and so can inform the development of future programmes of work under the Convention and the work of the Implementation Committee,

*Recognizing* that reporting promotes the accumulation and exchange of lessons learned, good practices and experience to enhance implementation of the Convention,

*Recalling* the adoption by the international community of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the establishment of Sustainable Development Goal 6 to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, with a target calling for transboundary cooperation to implement integrated water resources management (target 6.5),

*Recalling also* the adoption by the General Assembly, in July 2017, of the Global indicator framework for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>3</sup> which includes indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation for which the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have been entrusted as custodian agencies,

*Recalling further* that reporting contributes to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework as part of the Secretary-General’s International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030,

*Recognizing* the relevance of the Water Convention as an instrument that can help countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation,

<sup>1</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2.

<sup>2</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2.

<sup>3</sup> See General Assembly resolution 71/313 on work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2031 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/71/313), annex.

*Emphasizing* the role of reporting under the Convention as a useful means for reviewing countries' progress towards achieving target 6.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals,

*Expressing its appreciation* for the outcomes of the first and second reporting exercises under the Water Convention and on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals carried out in 2017–2018 and 2020–2021, respectively,

*Recognizing* the many benefits of the first and second reporting exercises highlighted by countries, such as improved cooperation at the national level, increased political attention to transboundary water cooperation and exchange of experience with other countries and, when templates have been filled out together or in coordination, discussion and agreement on issues and problems with other riparian countries, especially in the framework of existing joint bodies,

1. *Welcomes* the submission of reports by all Parties on the implementation of the Convention during the second reporting exercise;

2. *Also welcomes* the 129 responses by countries in the second reporting exercise on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals;

3. *Further welcomes* the publication *Progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention: Second report on implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes 2017–2020*,<sup>4</sup> prepared by the secretariat, and the second report *Progress on transboundary water cooperation: Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs 2021*,<sup>5</sup> prepared by ECE and UNESCO;

4. *Welcomes* the development and publication of the *Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2*,<sup>6</sup> which provides support for countries in preparing their national reports;

5. *Calls upon* countries to make use of the reports in order to improve their transboundary cooperation, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework, for example by setting national or basin-wide targets or by implementing “quick wins” in order to achieve target 6.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;

6. *Reiterates* the need to set up an online reporting system for future reporting exercises under the Convention and on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to facilitate the filling of the template by countries, and data verification and analysis by the co-custodian agencies;

7. *Takes note* of the indicative requirements and characteristics for the future online reporting system as contained in the annex to the present decision;

8. *Requests* the secretariat, in cooperation with UNESCO, to introduce the online reporting system, to the extent possible, by the third reporting exercise, taking into account the indicative requirements;

9. *Entrusts* the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, with the task of adjusting the reporting template as needed to respond to the functionalities of the online reporting;

10. *Requests* all Parties to submit to the secretariat their completed templates for the third reporting exercise by the set deadline;

11. *Strongly encourages* all countries sharing transboundary waters to report on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals in the third reporting exercise;

12. *Encourages* countries to cooperate when preparing their national reports with riparian neighbours and/or in the framework of joint bodies, for example by coordinating the

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/67.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/65.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/60.

responses to the template, in particular on the identification and sharing of data and information on transboundary aquifers;

13. *Also encourages* countries to prepare their national reports in an inclusive manner in coordination with all relevant national authorities and stakeholders, including youth and indigenous people, and ensuring a gender-balanced participation;

14. *Encourages* the United Nations regional commissions and other partner organizations to promote the findings of the reports, consider preparing regional analysis and make use of the reports in designing their activities in support of transboundary water cooperation, and expresses appreciation to those who have already done so;

15. *Requests* the secretariat to carry out capacity-building activities, pending availability of resources. Such activities should, among other things, promote the findings of the national reports and the setting of national or basin targets, help countries address identified data gaps, such as regarding transboundary aquifers, enhance the quality of future reports, promote broad participation in future reporting exercises, and contribute to the increased role of transboundary water cooperation in policymaking;

16. *Invites* ECE, UNESCO and UN-Water to closely cooperate in the development of the online reporting system and on capacity-building activities;

17. *Invites* ECE and UNESCO to explore opportunities for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the upcoming reporting exercises;

18. *Requests* the secretariat to regularly include exchange of experiences on reporting in the agenda of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment.

## Annex

### List of indicative requirements and characteristics for the online reporting system

The development of an online platform seeks to support the long-term sustainability of reporting as an important means by which to help advance transboundary water cooperation. For the system to be used efficiently, a number of aspects are important, such as the type of functions the system should have, the types of analysis planned, interoperability with other platforms, data access, as well as the modalities of data entry. The most important aspects, which should guide the development of an effective system, are set out below:

#### A. Technical requirements:

- The system should allow country representatives to enter the responses directly into the online system interface; to account for different capacities, countries could still have the option to submit responses in Word/PDF formats.
- The system should entail a delegation function, which would allow different country representatives to access the system to split the work among themselves during the filling process, to coordinate among different authorities, or to use the system for demonstration purposes to explain the methodology.
- The system should support all types of questions present in the reporting template (for example, multiple choice, tables, yes/no questions) and allow direct connection between cells with related answers, to avoid inconsistencies (see point below). The system should also provide for the possibility to include attachments or weblinks with relevant supporting information.
- The system should allow respondents to submit draft versions and preliminary submissions of the report to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- There should be the possibility to download draft and final versions in Word and PDF formats for sharing outside the platform (especially to allow national coordination when countries work on draft versions).
- As countries can submit their national reports in English, French, Russian and Spanish, the system interface should be available these four languages of the United Nations.
- The system interface should include the possibility to make references to the guidance documents to facilitate the input of the information by countries, for example, by providing links to reference documents, or through pop-up explanatory text, such as definitions.
- It should be easy to extract data from the data-collection system in frequently used formats (extensions) for further analysis by country, basin, agreement, reporting exercise or question.
- Any future changes and redevelopments of the provider of the online platform should come with a guarantee that new and old reporting systems will remain compatible for future analysis.

#### B. Organizational requirements:

- The organization/software developer contracted for the provision of an online reporting system should ideally be a reliable and well-established institution, with a good reputation for delivering similar online systems, and should be able to demonstrate the potential to support the reporting process over the next 10 to 20 years.
- The software developer should assist with the adaptation of the reporting template to the online format.



- The developer should provide ongoing assistance to countries, ECE and UNESCO after the initial setting up of the system.
- In case some aspects of the system need to be reworked, the developer should assist in implementing these changes.

**C. Additional useful characteristics:**

- To facilitate the input of the information by countries and the validation, review and analysis of the reports by ECE and UNESCO, the system should allow for automatic checks and controls. For instance, the system should include in-built prompts to provide an answer to an empty field (where appropriate), or auto-generate sums, such as in the calculation of the Sustainable Development Goal indicator value, or criteria for operationality.
  - The system should allow ECE and UNESCO to provide comments and suggestions for countries and highlight areas for improvement directly in the system.
  - The system should provide an overview of the status of the responses received, allowing ECE and UNESCO to monitor the progress of countries in their reporting efforts.
  - The system should be accessible with a limited bandwidth and be mobile-friendly to allow for the entry of responses from a smartphone or tablet.
  - The system should allow countries to choose basins and agreements from an indicative lists compiled by ECE and UNESCO, to facilitate the entry of the information by countries and to facilitate the analysis of responses and support validation of the reports by ECE and UNESCO, ensuring that countries respond regarding all relevant basins.
  - The developer should provide data analysis and visualization tools, for example, via an application programme interface, to allow for the presentation of the collected data and its analysis.
  - The data should be compatible with the UN-Water Sustainable Development Goal 6 Data Portal and be able to feed information to the United Nations Statistical Division Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database, the UN-Water Sustainable Development Goal 6 Data Portal and other regional or global databases.
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