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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation

Report on the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021

Prepared by the secretariat

Summary

The present document reports on the implementation of the programme of work for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes for the period 2019–2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54.Add.1), 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 for programme implementation are included in a separate document (ECE/MP.WAT/2021/7).

The Meeting of the Parties may wish to:

- (a) Endorse the present report on the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021;
- (b) Commend the members of the Working Groups, the Bureau, other bodies under the Convention and the secretariat for their excellent work in providing support for the implementation of the Convention through assistance and capacity-building activities, pilot projects, reports and publications, and for their assistance in the organization of workshops, conferences, training courses and other meetings;
- (c) Express its gratitude to Parties and non-Parties to the Convention, and especially to the lead Parties of activities, which have provided human and financial resources to implement the programme of work.



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

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 for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Key specific outputs for 2019–2021</i>
1: Countries understand Convention, accede thereto, 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 in 2020 and Guinea-Bissau in 2021 Significant progress on accession in Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq and Togo Identification of benefits of cooperation in 2 basins informed decision-making on strengthening cooperation frameworks	Legal/technical advice provided to 21 countries, 4 national workshops and 5 regional workshops/webinars organized on Convention/transboundary cooperation Presentation of Convention at numerous regional/basin events organized by partners Support provided to developing new or supporting implementation of existing agreements in 5 basins/sub-basins and to 2 regional cooperation processes Global workshop on legal frameworks organized with 200 participants Practical Guide on development of agreements or other arrangements for transboundary water cooperation developed Assessments of benefits of cooperation concluded in 2 basins and recommendations promoted Frequently Asked Questions publication developed First advisory procedure implemented in Implementation Committee
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 improved data exchange by adopting actions in Strategic Action Programme and outlined next steps in exchanging data	Support provided to 2 transboundary basins Comments on the monitoring and assessment guidelines gathered and a vision for updating strategic guidance crystallized Global workshop on data exchange organized

<i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Key specific outcomes for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Key specific outputs for 2019–2021</i>
3: IWRM is implemented at all levels in a changing climate	3: Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels	<p>Value of intersectoral action bolstered by integrating benefits of cooperation and nexus activities in NWSAS</p> <p>Stock taken of experience worldwide of how nexus solutions and investments help address problems in transboundary basins and light shed on financing opportunities</p> <p>Handbook on water allocation developed</p> <p>NPDs served as platforms for intersectoral cooperation and water reform drivers in 9 countries</p>	<p>Nexus assessment methodology translated into 3 additional languages and applied to an aquifer</p> <p>Toolkit publication on renewable energy developed</p> <p>Participatory process involving an expert group and regional events led to development of the Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context</p> <p>Pilot SEAs in water sector finalized in 2 countries</p> <p>Revisions to water laws/codes supported in 3 countries</p> <p>Transboundary water cooperation supported by NPDs in 2 basins</p>
	4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins	<p>Countries and basins better equipped with knowledge and skills to mainstream water and transboundary cooperation into climate-related documents and projects, and climate change adaptation into river basin management planning</p>	<p>Five global events organized, involving up to 500 participants</p> <p>Climate change adaptation integrated into elements and preparations for river basin management plans for 3 pilot basins</p> <p>One global webinar on financing transboundary climate change adaptation</p> <p>Two project proposals on adaptation to climate change in lower Dniester River basin prepared and submitted to funding institutions</p>
4: Transboundary water cooperation is sustainably financed	5: Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation	<p>Over 60 countries received new knowledge on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development</p> <p>Strengthened partnership with key IFIs and</p>	<p>Global workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation organized virtually, with around 200 participants and 6 IFIs as partners</p> <p>Publication on financing and funding transboundary water cooperation and basin development finalized</p>

<i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Key specific outcomes for 2019–2021</i>	<i>Key specific outputs for 2019–2021</i>
		organizations working on the topic	
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	129 of 153 countries approached provided reports on indicator 6.5.2, among them 30 for the first time All Parties to Convention provided reports under Convention 96 reports on indicator 6.5.2 (surface waters) validated during second reporting exercise	Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2 translated and published 700 participants from 130 countries took part in capacity-building activities Second reporting exercise successfully implemented Second report on Progress on transboundary water cooperation: Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs 2021 published Second report on implementation of the Convention published
	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	10 newsletters disseminated to more than 2,800 contacts 610 tweets disseminated Twitter audience increased by 1,954 followers with currently 3,380 followers Facebook and LinkedIn accounts launched UN-Water policy briefs on two global water conventions and on climate change and water finalized Partnership initiatives launched with ECA, ESCWA, others Motion on transboundary cooperation adopted by IUCN members

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; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal; SEA, strategic environmental assessment.

1. Alongside the bodies supporting the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021, partners played a crucial role in implementing many 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, as well as all other programme areas of work. More information is contained in the document ECE/MP.WAT/2021/4. Furthermore, the lead Parties played a crucial role in guiding and mobilizing political and other support for implementation of activities.

2. 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

3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had an impact on delivery of the programme of work since 2020, notably the format of events, most of which were held in a virtual or hybrid format in the period 2020–2021. Although some events requiring in-person participation, for example, training sessions, were postponed to the next programme of work, the majority of activities were implemented. Rescheduling and reformatting of some activities also helped to reallocate some resources to developing publications, guidance and providing strategic advice to countries. A webinar on transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic was organized on 26 May 2020 as part of the Geneva Environment Dialogue special COVID-19 series. Moreover, the topic of health, including the consequences of and way forward in the face of pandemics, was integrated into the global workshops on designing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation (Geneva, virtual, 28 and 29 July 2020) and on building climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels (Geneva and virtual, 29–31 March 2021). Lastly, a web page¹ on the role of the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health in the face of the pandemic was developed.

4. 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 diversified its means of communication by opening Facebook and LinkedIn accounts in addition to the Twitter account, professional communication support is needed.

5. A major effort in 2019 following decision VIII/2 on the designation and responsibilities of focal points (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2) adopted by the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018) resulted in nearly 100 nominations/renomination. However, changes in focal points affect the Convention's work. Challenges related to frequent institutional changes in some countries required maintaining direct contacts with senior officials and middle managers within ministries. In 2020 and 2021, many focal points benefited from online capacity-building activities on the Convention.

6. The financial situation under the Convention has improved thanks to contributions and to savings resulting from travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021 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-

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

ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/8) should pave the way for improving how work under the Convention is financed.

7. The combination of pilot projects in the various programme areas and global level intergovernmental work has proved useful, as in the past, for cross-fertilization and as a reality check for the guidance developed. However, it can be challenging to find the right balance between project and policy work. Project work is much in demand by countries but also absorbs significant resources, sometimes at the expense of more traditional intergovernmental work.

III. Areas of work and activities

A. Work of the Bureau

8. The Bureau, led by its Chair Mr. Ardak Zebeshev (Kazakhstan), held five meetings (Geneva, 27 and 28 February 2019, and 24 and 25 October 2019, and, hybrid, on 29 and 30 September 2020, 21 and 22 January 2021 and 29 and 30 April 2021) and several telephone conferences.

9. The Bureau discussed and reviewed implementation of the programme of work, particularly in the light of pandemic-related challenges. It focused on strategically important topics such as the Convention's global opening, the second reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention and partnerships.

10. Bureau members supported 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. The Bureau followed up on the request by the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties for more regular budget resources for the Convention² and organized a side event to that effect in New York on 25 June 2019. The Bureau therefore guided and facilitated the Convention's transformation into a global framework for transboundary water cooperation and raised the profile of transboundary water cooperation and the Convention in global processes.

11. The Bureau led the preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, prepared the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024 and guided the development of draft decisions and documents for consideration at the ninth session.

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

12. 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 and developed a national implementation plan launched in May 2021. Guinea-Bissau acceded to the Water Convention on 16 June 2021 by depositing its accession instrument, effective on 12 September 2021, and the Government started discussions on its future implementation. In Togo, the parliament approved the law of accession in May 2021 and, in Côte d'Ivoire, the Government approved the law of accession in February 2020. Understanding of and capacity to accede to and implement the Convention was increased through two national workshops to discuss the benefits of accession organized in Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan, 15 April 2019) and Cameroon (Yaoundé, 5 and 6 November 2019). Subsequently, both countries confirmed their

² ECE/MP.WAT/54, para. 103 (i).

intention to accede to the Convention; however, progress has been slowed down due to political instability within the countries, as well as the pandemic. Several other countries, including Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Gambia and Nigeria, also progressed towards accession or started national initiatives to discuss accession benefits.

13. In the East and Southern Africa regions, progress in accession processes primarily took place in Uganda. A national meeting was organized (Kampala, 15 November 2019) to increase officials' awareness and understanding of the Convention and the accession process. Uganda consequently formed a steering committee for the national accession process, with a view to preparing a national workshop.

14. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, after extensive national discussions³ combined with a regional dialogue,⁴ Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia concluded on the benefits of acceding to the Convention and made major progress in their national processes towards accession. In particular, the Iraqi parliament passed a law on accession to the Convention in October 2020, and started initial discussions on its future implementation. Progress in other countries has been slowed down due to political instability within the countries, as well as the overall political sensitivity of the issue of transboundary waters.

15. In the South Asia and South East Asia regions, progress towards accession remains slow. There was frequent liaison with representatives of Viet Nam, who are analysing the Convention's compatibility with national laws. A webinar was organized for each region to strengthen awareness of and capacity regarding the Convention (09 November 2020 and 03 February 2021).

16. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, activities focused mostly on increasing knowledge on the Convention and its activities, through contributing to various subregional workshops and webinars. Consequently, several countries further inquired about the value added of becoming party to and implementing the Convention.

17. Promotional efforts at the global level contributed to increasing knowledge and awareness of the Convention. In addition, regional training sessions on international water law were organized, providing useful platforms for discussing the benefits of implementation of the Convention at the regional level, such as the annual pan-African training session on water governance and international water law by the Global Water Partnership (Entebbe, Uganda, 11–14 November 2019). The regional practitioner-to-practitioner training session on the global water conventions (Dakar, 18 and 19 June 2019) enabled regional professionals to strengthen their capacities and find ways to work more effectively and in closer partnership to promote, accede to and implement the two conventions.

18. 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*.⁵ The publication provides responses to over 50 questions and dedicated English- and French-language webinars were organized for its launch (respectively, 17 November 2020 and 17 June 2021) in partnership with the Geneva Environment Network. An interactive version of the frequently asked questions is available on the Convention website.

19. The work on the Water Convention global opening was largely supported by the project "Promoting accession to the Water Convention" funded by the European Union. Partners in this regard included: the Central America Commission for Environment and Development, the Geneva Water Hub, Global Water Partnership (GWP), GWP-Central America, GWP-Mediterranean (GWP-Med), the Ibero-American Water Directors Conference, the Indian Environment Law Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, IUCN, the

³ Interministerial discussions in Iraq and Tunisia following national workshops (respectively, Amman, 13 and 14 January 2016, and Tunis, 21 and 22 September 2016) and a high-level consultation "The Water Convention – an opportunity for Lebanon?" (Beirut, 11 April 2019).

⁴ Regional workshop "Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the MENA region - progress, challenges and opportunities" (Beirut, 3 and 4 March 2020).

⁵ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/59.

Organization of American States, Oxfam Transboundary Rivers of South Asia, regional economic communities such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), United Nations agencies and regional commissions such as United Nations countries teams, ECA, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and ESCWA, joint bodies such as the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (OMVG), the Mekong River Commission, the Mono Basin Authority, the Niger Basin Authority, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) and the Volta Basin Authority, as well as academia.

1.2 Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation

20. Conclusions and recommendations of the assessments of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation, carried out based on the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication*,⁶ were promoted in two transboundary basins:

- In the Cubango-Okavango River basin, shared by Angola, Botswana and Namibia (see policy brief summary⁷ and policy report⁸ “Realizing the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin” (2020)).
- In the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System (NWSAS), shared by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia (see policy brief⁹ “The benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the North- Western Sahara Aquifer System Basin” (2020)).

21. In both basins, the work informed ongoing processes of reflection on possible strengthening of cooperation. It highlighted that existing joint bodies played a key role as platforms to realize benefits of cooperation and emphasized opportunities to deliver more and better distributed benefits.

22. The work on benefits was implemented in partnership with the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission and the NWSAS Consultation Mechanism.

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

23. 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 supported the preparation of a practical guide on the development of agreements or other arrangements for transboundary water cooperation – a new soft law instrument being prepared under the Convention. This guide, to be adopted by the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, will provide a crucial step-by-step tool explaining the added value of different components of transboundary agreements.

24. The secretariat continued to provide support to several initiatives related to negotiating agreements and establishing new basin organizations. In Eastern Europe, the secretariat supported the development of the new bilateral commission 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, and its working groups, in the framework of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project. In the Kura River basin, the secretariat continued facilitating the process of negotiating an agreement between Azerbaijan and Georgia. With support from the United

⁶ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/47.

⁷ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Benefits_cooperation/OKACOM_Policy_Summary_June_2020.pdf.

⁸ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Benefits_cooperation/OKACOM_Policy_Document_June_2020.pdf.

⁹ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Benefits_cooperation/ENG_NWSAS_Brief_BenefitsTransbWatCoop_2020_Web.pdf.

Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF Drin project, implemented by GWP-Med with ECE support, options for upgrading the legal and institutional framework for cooperation have been set out. The Drin Strategic Action Programme (SAP) was developed and launched at a virtual high-level event on 24 April 2020.

25. The secretariat continued supporting the Central Asian region in building human and institutional capacity on safe management of dams. It contributed to the twenty-third session of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment (Tashkent, 2 October 2019) and supported a study tour and a workshop in Slovakia (7–11 October 2019), which exposed experts to hands-on dam operation practices. The secretariat provided support to the Chu-Talas Water Commission in finalizing approval of the SAP developed within the GEF project and endorsed by the riparians on 15 April 2021.

26. In West Africa, the secretariat continues to provide support, in partnership with the Geneva Water Hub and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, to the regional dialogue on the Senegalese Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB) 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 SMAB. The Group held several meetings that led to the development of a joint vision for transboundary cooperation around the aquifer and a 5-year Action Plan. In the Central Africa region, the secretariat provided technical and legal support to an ECCAS-led initiative on the establishment of a new river basin organization between Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

27. As an outcome of the second reporting exercise on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, several countries, especially in Latin America, have launched efforts towards developing new basin or bilateral agreements, in order to progress towards target 6.5 of the Goals.

28. Partners included: ECCAS, Geneva Water Hub, GWP, GWP-Med, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO), IUCN, OMVG, OMVS, UNDP/GEF and academia.

1.4 Implementation Committee

29. The Implementation Committee's work during the intersessional period focused on:

- (a) Advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1 (Montenegro and Albania);
- (b) Exchanges of views on the outcomes of the second reporting exercise under the Convention;
- (c) Helping the secretariat to answer specific questions on the Convention posed by countries considering accession to, and contribution to other activities under, the Convention;
- (d) Raising awareness of the mechanism to support implementation and compliance.

30. The first advisory procedure before the Committee and the facilitative, non-confrontational and results-oriented approach taken by the Committee demonstrated the usefulness of the mechanism to support implementation and compliance and the unique opportunities provided by the advisory procedure as a tool of assistance and facilitation.

31. For further details, see the Committee's report to the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/2021/5).

Challenges, trends and lessons learned

32. Strengthening strategic collaboration with regional and local partners such as United Nations regional agencies, basin organizations, regional economic commissions, United Nations country offices and relevant non-governmental organizations was essential in

maintaining and accelerating momentum towards accession to and implementation of the Convention.

33. Sharing experiences on implementation and accession between countries worked to build momentum. Countries heard from other countries already involved in the formal accession process during regional events and targeted interventions in national meetings. Officials generally responded very positively to such interactions.

34. In the MENA region, appreciation of the potential role of international water law in general, and the Water Convention in particular, in enabling progress and fostering cooperation for improved management of transboundary waters at the national and transboundary levels, significantly increased.

35. Activities in regions to raise understanding of the Convention and promote accession thereto and implementation thereof highlighted the necessity to combine dialogues on the benefits of the Convention both at the regional and national levels. Indeed, countries are often reluctant to progress “alone” towards accession, and a regional or basin level approach can boost progress.

36. The work on benefits of cooperation confirmed the importance of identifying and communicating the broad range of achieved and prospective benefits. Such a focus, through a “benefits lens”, proved a useful approach to start cooperation, and a complementary approach to work on: the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus; the negotiation of agreements; and supporting accession to and implementation of the Convention. In particular, integrating benefits of cooperation and nexus activities made it possible to bolster the value of intersectoral action, as shown in the NWSAS.

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

37. The capacity of countries to initiate or further develop joint or coordinated monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters was increased through a global workshop to exchange experiences, and tailored assistance to projects. The Global workshop on exchange of data and information exchange in transboundary basins (Geneva, 4 and 5 December 2019) and the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6 December 2019), attended by some 70 countries and 140 participants, identified the main financial, technical, political and administrative challenges preventing effective data and information exchange. A background paper “Outlook for developing monitoring cooperation and exchange of data and information across borders” (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2019/INF.1) was developed.¹⁰ The Working Group included strategic discussions by region to refine proposals for possible future activities.

38. Feedback was gathered from experts and potential partner organizations on the strategic and technical guidelines on monitoring and assessment developed under the Convention.

39. On 1 April 2021, an online Expert meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Data Exchange was organized to discuss in detail the proposed activities on monitoring, assessment and data for 2022–2024, gathering more than 100 participants.

40. In the Drin River basin, in the framework of the Expert Working Group on Monitoring and Information Exchange and contributing to the Drin SAP, supported by the UNDP/GEF Drin project, the riparian countries took steps to develop monitoring cooperation. On 11 December 2020, the Group discussed the hydrological situation in Great Prespa Lake and Lesser Prespa Lake and the need to exchange information.

¹⁰ Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fifteenth-meeting-working-group-monitoring-and-assessment>.

41. A set of preliminary study reports were developed on the SMAB, its hydrogeology, pressures on groundwater, as well as monitoring and data. The documentation informed a dialogue process (see described above under point 1.3).

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

Challenges, trends and lessons learned

43. The re-emergence of data and monitoring as an issue on the international water agenda has not necessarily led to adequate consideration of transboundary aspects. There is renewed interest in the monitoring and assessment guidance developed under the Water Convention, and the consultative review confirmed that their approach remains largely valid. The planned update of the *Strategies for monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters*¹¹ should help countries to strategically develop their related cooperation. While technological progress creates opportunities for developing monitoring, strengthening the legal basis and frameworks for data exchange is a crucial accompanying measure.

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

44. The project “Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in South-Eastern Europe, through the use of the nexus approach”, implemented by GWP-Med in partnership with the secretariat, supported in-depth (phase II) nexus assessments in the Drin River and Drina River basins. In the Drin River Basin, the nexus assessment, including a finalized Thematic Report, contributed to the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and supports the SAP. A quantitative energy-water analysis and a study of sustainable forestry-biomass links were developed. A nexus assessment of Albania is in the process of development, informed by a virtual national consultation (14 December 2020).

45. Recommendations proposed by the Drina River Basin Nexus follow-up project were debated at a high-level workshop (Belgrade, 29 October 2019). The project supported the development of a map of erosion potential in the Drina Basin and a technical document on monitoring, and described steps towards a harmonized approach for environmental flows. A Steering Committee of senior officials was convened and three country-level online consultation meetings were held (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia). The scope included a water-energy analysis of renewable energy potential and hydropower, and a review of formalization options for flow regulation.

46. Multi-stakeholder “Hard Talks” on sustainable renewable energy deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia organized with the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy/ECE Sustainable Energy Division led to nexus-relevant recommendations on investment and a joint “toolkit” publication *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment*.¹² The publication was disseminated at a joint webinar on 19 October 2020 and the webinar “Water-Energy Strategic Planning: Opportunities for climate action” (26 August 2020), at the Week on Water for Development 2020 (online, 24–28 August 2020).

47. The publication “Reconciling resource uses: Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the North Western Sahara Aquifer System Part A – ‘Nexus Challenges

¹¹ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/20.

¹² United Nations publication, ECE/ENERGY/127.

and Solutions”¹³ was developed in cooperation with GWP-Med and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) and a policy brief was published. The underlying participatory process included national consultation workshops for Libya and Tunisia and a final regional workshop (respectively, Hammamet, Tunisia, 1–4 April, and 18 and 19 June 2019). The publications were disseminated widely, including at regional webinars.

48. A global stocktaking about nexus solutions and investments was carried out with input from IUCN using an online survey, aiming to clarify benefits of implementing nexus solutions. Cases from the survey, regional experiences and financing options were discussed at the sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Geneva (hybrid), 22 and 23 October 2020). Dedicated online meetings were held on Latin America and the Caribbean, organized with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and IDB on 22 February 2021, and on the Balkans, organized with GWP-Med and the European Investment Bank (EIB) on 26 May 2021.

49. The publication *Natural Resources Nexuses in the ECE Region*¹⁴ proposes a step-by-step process entitled “Pathways to integrative natural resource management”, which is based on the Convention’s Transboundary Nexus Assessment Methodology.

50. Partners included: the Austrian Development Agency, ESCAP, ESCWA, the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the Geneva Water Hub, the German Agency for International Cooperation, GWP, the International Sava River Basin Commission, IUCN, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OSS and UNDP.

3.3 Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context

51. The secretariat, the lead Party, IWAC and partners together supported the development of the Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context.

52. An Expert Group was set up to provide technical guidance at key milestones in the Handbook’s development. Experts were chosen based on key criteria and seeking to achieve a balanced composition across different regions, basins, countries, institutions and sectors globally, drawing upon case studies and presenters at the Global Workshop on Water Allocation (Geneva, 16 and 17 October 2017). The secretariat organized three Expert Group meetings to review and discuss structure and content and solicit targeted feedback and inputs on existing drafts. The Expert Group also regularly reviewed drafts and assisted with developing case studies.

53. In 2020, two regional online workshops were convened to share common challenges and practical solutions for transboundary water allocation and collect content for the Handbook: a “Regional Workshop on Equitable and Sustainable Water Allocation” (5 and 6 October 2020) for European Union member States and the neighbourhood (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Balkans); and a “Regional meeting on water allocation and environmental flow assessment in a transboundary context” in Nur-Sultan/virtually (22 and 23 September 2020) for Central Asia and neighbouring States.

54. Partners included: EUWI+, Finnish Environment Institute, the International Institute for Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering Delft (Netherlands), IWAC, OECD, Oregon State University (United States of America) and the University of Eastern Finland.

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

55. Since 2006, ECE, jointly with OECD, has been implementing NPDs under the EUWI with the aim of strengthening water governance and the application of IWRM in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in line with the provisions of the Convention,

¹³ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/NONE/16.

¹⁴ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.42.

its Protocol on Water and Health, the Water Framework Directive¹⁵ and other ECE and European Union instruments.

56. In 2016–2021, European Union funding through the EUWI+ project made it possible to continue and expand work in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Neighbourhood countries) with OECD, the Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water (France).¹⁶

57. In Central Asia, since 2016 the organization of NPD meetings has been supported by the European Union-Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation¹⁷ programme with a new phase, launched in 2019, aiming to enhance IWRM and intersectoral coordination for water security at the national level in Central Asian countries. Enhancing water policies at the national level, approximating them to European Union standards and promoting green investments in the water sector are specific objectives of the NPDs in Central Asia.

58. To assist in implementing IWRM principles, support has been provided for drafting of new legislation and development of policy packages through the NPDs. In Georgia, such support helped to finalize the draft water law for submission for adoption. In Armenia, a road map for harmonization of national water legislation with five relevant European Union directives, in line with a European Union partnership agreement, was adopted in 2020. In Tajikistan, support was provided to the development of a methodology for calculating water balances in line with a new Water Code. Strategic environmental assessments in the field of water were finalized in Belarus and Georgia.

59. Support for transboundary cooperation between beneficiary countries continued to be a priority in NPD activities, including between Azerbaijan and Georgia on the draft cooperation agreement on the Kura River basin and Armenia and Georgia on joint monitoring activities for the transboundary Ktsia/Khrami-Debed River basin. Support was also provided to countries on reporting under Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary cooperation through a regional workshop in May 2020, methodology advice for all countries and online/hybrid workshops.

60. Strengthening linkages with other programme areas under the Convention, including nexus work and other ECE multilateral environmental agreements, has also been a priority. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine, the NPD process has promoted accession to and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. Consequently, revised national water and health targets were adopted in Azerbaijan and Belarus and finalized for adoption in Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

61. The regularity and stable institutional frameworks of the NPD process were key to success. In all target countries, multi-stakeholder steering committees met regularly to provide guidance to NPD processes; more than 15 such high-level meetings were held in 2019–2021.

Challenges, trends and lessons learned

62. Effective involvement of economic sectors beyond water (energy, agriculture, etc.) in basin nexus dialogues is a major challenge. Cooperation with partners with sectoral mandates, such as the energy sector, and focusing on cross-sectoral solutions and investments can improve the situation and increase support for the development of concrete actions. The stock-taking of nexus solutions undertaken in 2020–2021 provides some relevant insights and experiences about implementing and financing cross-sectoral solutions, and can help water managers to capitalize on opportunities. Awareness needs to be raised among high-level decision-makers and “non-line” ministries of the value of a nexus approach to

¹⁵ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32000L0060>.

¹⁶ See https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-convention_protocol/country-dialogues and <https://euwipluseast.eu>.

¹⁷ See <https://wecoop.eu/>.

sustainable development, in order to better address trade-offs, synergy creation and mobilization of resources for implementation of measures by sectors that bring water resource and environmental benefits across borders.

63. Work on the Handbook on Transboundary Water Allocation attracted great interest and many inquiries into the process, content and opportunities to participate in its development. Overall, the Handbook became a much more complex undertaking than originally envisaged, with many written contributions, comments, etc. 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, so as not to be viewed as promoting allocation as a single approach or being more important than others. This emphasis will be crucial for future work whereby allocation (and the Handbook as a tool) are promoted as part of an integrated suite of tools and approaches under the Convention to support transboundary water cooperation.

64. The sustainability and stable institutional frameworks of the NPD processes, effective functioning of the multi-stakeholder steering committees and strong partnerships between national, regional and international actors enabled solid policy advice for necessary water sector reforms and support to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion and continued to play an important role during the pandemic.

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

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

65. In 2019–2021, work under the Convention enabled increased adaptive capacity through exchange of experience and knowledge-sharing, contributing to global policy processes on climate and disasters and projects on the ground.

66. The meetings of the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation (Geneva, 14 and 15 February 2019, and Geneva, hybrid, 26 February 2021) and of the Task Force on Water and Climate (respectively, Geneva, 1 May 2019, hybrid, 2 October 2020, and hybrid, 31 March 2021) confirmed the importance of mainstreaming water and transboundary cooperation into national climate- and disaster-related documents, for example, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans.

67. The Global workshop on ecosystem-based adaptation in transboundary basins (Geneva, 29 and 30 April 2019) concluded that a growing number of tools, guidance materials and assessment methodologies were available; however, more efforts were needed to include a transboundary perspective when developing and applying ecosystem-based approaches.

68. The Global workshop on building climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels, organized in cooperation with the Protocol on Water and Health, including the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and other partners (Geneva and online, 29–31 March 2021) concluded that integrating water and sanitation and the benefits of transboundary cooperation, into national climate policies is crucial for strengthening the resilience of our economies, societies, health and well-being, and for reducing disaster risks and preventing maladaptation.

69. The programme of pilot projects under the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation led to concrete basin-wide cooperation in addressing climate change. In the Dniester River Basin, climate change was included as a cross-cutting issue in the TDA, SAP endorsed by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on 31 March 2021 and the activities of the Commission on Sustainable Use and Protection of the Dniester River Basin (Dniester Commission). In addition, the SAP for the Chu-Talas River basin integrated adaptation measures.

70. The Convention contributed to raising awareness of the role of water and transboundary cooperation in global processes, for example, to the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Madrid, 2–15 December 2019), the sixth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, 13–17 May 2019), the seventeenth and eighteenth meetings of the Adaptation Committee under the UNFCCC (virtual, 24–27 March and 9–12 November 2020), World Water Weeks in 2020 and 2021 and the activities under the Water and Climate Coalition and the Global Commission on Adaptation, including the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021 (online, 25 and 26 January 2021). 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), coordinated preparation of the *UN-Water Policy Brief on Climate Change and Water*¹⁸ and contributed to the UN-Water publication *World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change*.¹⁹

4.2 Supporting transboundary basins in financing climate change adaptation

71. In 2019, the publication *Financing Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Preparing Bankable Projects*,²⁰ developed by the World Bank in cooperation with ECE, was published in English, French, Russian and Spanish and disseminated at regional and global events to help countries and river basin organizations to identify funding opportunities. Sessions on financing were organized during Convention meetings and workshops in 2019–2021, including the World Water Week 2020 side event “How to finance climate change adaptation in transboundary basins?”

72. Partners included: the Adaptation Fund, the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the European Commission, EIB, ESCWA, the Global Commission on Adaptation, GEF, GWP, IDB, INBO, IUCN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Stockholm International Water Institute, UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNFCCC, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Bank Group, WMO, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Zoï Environment Network and several joint bodies.

Challenges, trends and lessons learned

73. Activities on climate change showcased that cooperation on ecosystem-based adaptation can foster broader transboundary cooperation in shared basins and bring win-win solutions at both transboundary and local levels. For example, joint efforts on adaptation helped to develop broader cooperation in the Dniester River basin, including operationalizing the Dniester Commission.

74. The climate change global workshop in 2021 highlighted that some basin organizations, for example, in the Amazon, Chu Talas and Senegal River basins and the Lake Victoria basin, had integrated health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) issues into their integrated water resources management and climate change adaptation.

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

75. To strengthen collaborations with financial institutions, the secretariat organized missions to GEF and the World Bank (Washington, D.C., 21 March 2019) and AfDB (Abidjan, 12 April 2019) and advanced cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), IDB, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), EIB and OECD.

¹⁸ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/un-water-policy-brief-on-climate-change-and-water/.

¹⁹ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/world-water-development-report-2020/.

²⁰ Available at <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/172091548959875335/financing-climate-change-adaptation-in-transboundary-basins-preparing-bankable-projects>.

76. Capacity in financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development was increased by organizing dedicated sessions on financing with partners, including at the fifth targeted regional workshop for GEF IW projects in Africa (Gaborone, 28–31 May 2019); and at World Water Week (Stockholm, 28 August 2019), which highlighted the necessity for shared basins to accede to more sustainable financial mechanisms. The secretariat also coordinated the development of the finance for the transboundary water security module of the GWP/GEF IW:LEARN massive open online course on governance for transboundary freshwater security.

77. The virtual workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development, organized on 16 and 17 December 2020 in cooperation with the partners mentioned below, including IFIs, was attended by more than 200 participants including high-level speakers, such as 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 for transboundary basins, and enabled sharing of good practices and lessons learned in mobilizing financial resources for transboundary basins.

78. The secretariat, the lead Parties and partners together developed a background study for the workshop providing a comprehensive overview of sources of funding and financing to support transboundary water cooperation and basin development, which was turned into a publication in 2021 based on the workshop's main outcomes.

79. Partners included: AfDB, ADB, EIB, GEF, GEF IW:LEARN, IDB, OECD, UNCDF, the World Bank and WWF.

Challenges, trends and lessons learned

80. Partnering and working closely with IFIs is key to improving financing transboundary water cooperation. The virtual workshop showed that the private sector can sometimes 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 water sector financing is crucial for transboundary water cooperation and demonstrated the need to diversify the relevant financial resources. While some activities and training courses on financing in general exist, few focus on transboundary aspects. 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 will be crucial for the evolution of this programme area.

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 second reporting exercise on indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention was prepared by developing or revising guidance documents. UNECE and UNESCO included clarification in the template regarding the calculation of indicator 6.5.2 and clarified the step-by-step monitoring methodology for indicator 6.5.2 version "2020"²¹ to improve user-friendliness and define key terms.

82. The *Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2*²² was prepared by the secretariat, guided by a drafting group including Parties, non-Parties and international organizations, which met twice in 2019. The Guide provides

²¹ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/step-step-methodology-monitoring-transboundary-cooperation-6-5-2/.

²² United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/60.

detailed advice on preparing national reports by explaining the template's different sections, clarifying key terminology and explaining how to complete the reporting template.

83. The capacity of countries to report was improved by organizing, 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. Five webinars (12 May–4 June 2020), five regional workshops (in 2019 and 2020) and direct support provided to countries improved understanding of reporting, enhanced the quality of data submitted and increased the response rate for the second reporting exercise.

84. The second reporting exercise was carried out in 2020–2021. All Parties submitted national reports and 129 of the 153 countries that share transboundary waters responded to the request to report on indicator 6.5.2, – a positive sign of country commitment to transboundary water cooperation. In 2020 and 2021, extensive communication with countries took place to validate the reports.

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

85. All reports submitted under the Convention and indicator 6.5.2 have been analysed. Based on the information provided by Parties, the secretariat developed 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*²³ to be launched at the ninth Meeting of the Parties. The results on indicator 6.5.2 were submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2021. ECE and UNESCO developed the second report *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs 2021* launched at Stockholm World Water Week 2021.

86. The national reports informed policy processes, such as the preparations of Voluntary National Reviews, deliberations at the annual high-level political forum on sustainable development, and the High-level meeting on Water “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda” (New York, hybrid, 18 March 2021),²⁴ as well as activities under the Convention. The analysis of indicator 6.5.2 features in the Secretary-General's yearly reports on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,²⁵ the UN-Water *Summary Progress Update 2021: SDG 6 — water and sanitation for all*²⁶ and a dedicated report on indicator 6.5.2.

87. These activities highlighted the benefits of reporting. ECE also presented the reporting exercise in many global and regional events, highlighting the importance of data compatibility and encouraging States to coordinate reporting across same basin riparian countries and to use the reporting process as a catalyst for improved cooperation.

88. Partners included: CODIA, ECCAS, ECA, ESCWA, ESCAP, the European Union, GWP, GWP-Asia, GWP-Central Africa, GWP-Central America, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, OECD, the Regional Centre for Groundwater Management for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNEP-DHI, UNESCO and UN-Water.

²³ ECE/MP.WAT/67.

²⁴ See www.un.org/pga/75/high-level-meeting-on-water/.

²⁵ See E/2019/68, E/2020/57 and E/2021/58.

²⁶ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-for-all/.

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

7.1 Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral 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”²⁷ 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 – and contributed 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 IFIs. 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 for transboundary water cooperation was reconfirmed, for example, during the preparations for the Ninth World Water Forum (Diamniadio, Senegal, 21–26 March 2022), where ECE leads the action group on transboundary cooperation.

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, guidelines were translated into local languages and promoted and the Group’s activities were presented at meetings with basin organizations. A brochure and several postcards on the products were prepared.²⁸ A seminar on accidental transboundary water pollution prevention – contingency planning, early warning, mitigation was organised (Budapest, 4 and 5 November 2019).

7.3 Communication and knowledge management

94. The secretariat disseminated information on the Convention’s activities, particularly through the Water Convention/Protocol on Water and Health newsletter. In addition to the existing Twitter account (@UNECE_Water), the Facebook (@UNECEWater) and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/water-convention-protocol-on-water-health>) accounts were created in 2020. 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 and a film on the Convention was produced.

²⁷ Available at www.unwater.org/publications/the-united-nations-global-water-conventions-fostering-sustainable-development-and-peace/.

²⁸ See <https://unece.org/joint-expert-group-water-and-industrial-accidents>.