



Economic Commission for Europe

**World Health Organization
Regional Office for Europe**

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

Working Group on Water and Health

Twelfth meeting

Geneva, 14 and 15 April 2021

**Report of the twelfth meeting of the Working Group on
Water and Health**

I. Introduction

1. The twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held on 14 and 15 April 2021 in Geneva and online.

2. The main objective of the twelfth meeting was to review the implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol for the period 2020–2022 (ECE/MP.WH/19/Add.1-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/06/Add.1), adopted at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Belgrade, 19–21 November 2019), specifically considering the implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic for the current and future programmes of work. The meeting featured two special sessions with keynote presentations on equitable access to water and sanitation and on financing of the water and sanitation sector, with subsequent discussion. Lastly, the meeting also discussed how to raise the resources needed for the implementation of the programme of work.

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan.

4. Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the World Health Organization (WHO) attended the meeting.

5. Representatives of the European Commission also attended the meeting.
6. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated: Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment; Consultdev International; the Country Water Partnership of Kyrgyzstan; Earth Forever; Earthjustice; Ecological Movement “BIOM”; European Federation of National Associations of Water and Waste Water Services; the French Water Partnership; the Global Water Partnership of Ukraine; Human Right 2 Water; IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (Netherlands); Journalists for Human Rights; the National Water Partnership of Georgia; Sanitation and Water for All; Viti Council e Aotearoa; Women Engage for a Common Future; Women’s Youth League; and World Information Transfer.
7. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the Scientific-Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia; and the World Bank.
8. Representatives of the following academic institutions attended the meeting: Deltares (Netherlands); the Management Development Institute of Singapore; Imperial College London (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); the Institute for Urban Public Health, Essen University Hospital (Germany); the International Institute of Humanitarian Law; and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication, University of Bonn (Germany).
9. An independent expert on water and sanitation, the Vice-Chair of the Compliance Committee of the Protocol on Water and Health and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation also attended the meeting.
10. The meeting was serviced by the joint secretariat provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe).

B. Organizational matters

11. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health, Ms. Alena Drazdova (Belarus), opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.
12. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties invited the Working Group to elect its Chair and Vice-Chairs. The Working Group elected Mr. Kjetil Tveitan (Norway) as Chair and Ms. Helena Costa (Portugal) and Mr. Gheorghe Constantin (Romania) as Vice-Chairs.
13. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2021/1-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2021/WGWH/03.¹

II. Progress in the ratification process

14. The Chair noted that the number of Parties to the Protocol had reached 27 with the accession of Montenegro on 22 November 2019. The Chair also noted that the Protocol had 36 signatories overall.
15. The representative of Italy informed the Working Group that a proposal for a national law on ratification of the Protocol had been prepared by the Ministry of Health and was awaiting endorsement by the Ministry for Ecological Transition. Italy was expecting to finalize the national process of ratification shortly.
16. A representative of the ECE secretariat highlighted that the joint secretariat was available for any information or legal requests on the Protocol or the formalities of the ratification and accession processes, including through organizing in-person or virtual briefings on the obligations and benefits of the Protocol. The Working Group was also

¹ Information about the meeting, including meeting documentation, is available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twelfth-meeting-working-group-water-and-health>.

informed that the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, was developing a new promotional brochure on the Protocol.

17. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the fact that Italy was in the process of ratifying the Protocol and encouraged the country to accelerate its efforts;

(b) Called upon other States, in particular signatories, to ratify or accede to the Protocol as soon as possible;

(c) Requested the joint secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to finalize the new promotional brochure on the Protocol, to translate it into French and Russian and to print it in English, French and Russian.

III. Special session on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation

18. Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, delivered a keynote speech analysing the current status of implementation of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in the pan-European region and beyond, and reflecting on the interconnection between human rights, the ecological status of water bodies, climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. He advocated further strengthening public health systems, in particular in relation to water, sanitation and hygiene, including by closing the financial gap. He also referred to the European Union revised Drinking Water Directive,² which had recently entered into force, as an important step forward in guaranteeing access to safe drinking water but also protecting water resources. Lastly, he highlighted the role of the Protocol as an instrument linking public health and the environment and therefore providing an appropriate framework to advance the fulfilment of human rights.

19. A representative of Hungary, co-lead Party for the work on equitable access under the Protocol, reflected on the speech delivered by the Special Rapporteur. She emphasized clear synergies and the relevance of the work on equitable access undertaken in the Protocol's framework since 2011. In particular, she highlighted the guidance documents and tools developed under the Protocol that had proved to be instrumental in translating into practice the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in the pan-European region. She also underlined that the Protocol work could support countries in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting upon lessons learned from the pandemic. She encouraged Protocol Parties and other States to apply and actively promote such equity tools to ensure that no one was left behind when responding to and recovering from the pandemic, but also in the context of the European Union revised Drinking Water Directive.

20. The Working Group:

(a) Acknowledged the synergies and complementarities between the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and the work on equitable access and further activities under the Protocol on Water and Health;

(b) Encouraged further strengthening of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur in order to support the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and invited the Special Rapporteur to promote the Protocol and the use of its tools, as appropriate.

² Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 435 (2020), pp. 1–62.

IV. Protocol on Water and Health and implementation of its programme of work for 2020–2022 in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

21. A representative of the WHO/Europe secretariat emphasized that ensuring adequate water, sanitation and hygiene was the first line of defence against infectious disease transmission and prevention, including COVID-19. He introduced a background document for the agenda item, entitled “The Protocol on Water and Health and the COVID-19 pandemic: Relevance, lessons learned and future perspectives”, prepared by the joint secretariat in cooperation with the Bureau of the Protocol and the countries co-leading different programme areas. The purpose of the document was to highlight the relevance of water, sanitation and hygiene in relation to the pandemic and to reflect on the role of the Protocol in preventing, responding to and recovering from the pandemic. Considering the significant impact of the pandemic on the scope of the activities within the programme of work of the Protocol for 2020–2022, the document also served as an entry point to defining the Protocol’s future programme of work to be adopted at the end of 2022. The discussion paper outlined key considerations in the context of the pandemic in relation to water, sanitation and hygiene, including the surveillance of waste water for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2); highlighted the role of the target setting mechanism and technical priorities of the Protocol in terms of prevention, preparedness and recovery from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, with concrete suggestions for action/targets under every programme area; and, lastly, acknowledged the expansion of the scope of work under the Protocol within its current programme of work for 2020–2022 in order to support country and regional action related to COVID-19 emergency response and post-pandemic recovery. An example of such extended activities was the Protocol Webinar Series – launched in 2020 in order to offer a platform for knowledge and experience sharing on COVID-19-related measures in the area of water, sanitation, hygiene and health. In terms of perspectives for future work of the Protocol, he underlined the need for a greater focus on hand hygiene and building capacity for surveillance of wastewater for SARS-CoV-2.

22. The Chair then invited the Working Group to provide feedback on the draft document. The representative of Italy commended the joint secretariat for developing a holistic overview of what the Protocol offered in terms of prevention and recovery from the pandemic. He specifically underlined the topic of environmental surveillance of wastewater for SARS-CoV-2 and other disease agents as an important approach to preventing and managing future pandemics and suggested that the Protocol platform be actively used for collecting and exchanging experience on that topic. In Italy, retrospective analyses of wastewater samples in 2020 had shown the presence of the coronavirus before the announcement of the outbreak of the disease, which indicated the strength of wastewater-based epidemiology in disease prevention and control. The Chair then invited Protocol Parties and other States to review the draft document and send written comments and case studies by 31 May 2021.

A. Improving governance for water and health: support for setting targets and implementing measures

23. The Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting reported on the outcomes of the eleventh meeting of the Task Force (Geneva (hybrid), 3 November 2020), which had focused on exchanging experiences on measures taken in the area of water, sanitation, hygiene and health in the context of the 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 COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. The meeting also reviewed progress made by Parties in setting, revising and implementing their targets under article 6 of the Protocol, and discussed key highlights from global and regional developments regarding monitoring of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6.

24. The representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Portugal reported on the official approval of their new targets set under the Protocol. A representative of Germany said that the country was revising its targets in consultation with 16 federal States. A representative of

Czechia said that the country had carried out a second revision of its targets in 2020, COVID-19-related aspects had not been taken into account. Representatives of Armenia and of Belarus reported on finalizing the revision of their targets, with the support of the European Union Water Initiative Plus project, led by ECE in cooperation with other partners. A representative of the Republic of Moldova, also a beneficiary of the above-mentioned project, reported on the ongoing revision of a national programme setting targets under the Protocol in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pandemic. A representative of Azerbaijan reported on the implementation of some of the country's targets under the Protocol, such as the ongoing revision of its drinking water quality standard. The Chair of the Task Force commended the work done by countries on setting, revising and implementing their targets.

25. Subsequently, a representative of the ECE secretariat presented a demonstration version of a possible platform for a future electronic reporting system under the Protocol, explaining that the joint secretariat had already initiated discussions with potential providers.

B. Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases

26. A representative of Norway, co-lead Party of programme area 2, reported that, despite the fact that in-person capacity-building events had been put on hold due to the pandemic, progress had been made in the development of training materials on water-related disease surveillance and on risk-based surveillance of drinking water. She underlined the important lessons learned in the COVID-19 context, in particular the need for maintaining effective monitoring of water supply systems in normal times and during emergencies, surveillance of legionella in building water systems, surveillance of hygiene in different settings, as well as environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater as a part of public health surveillance. Planned activities included the provision of support to Azerbaijan in revising its drinking water quality standard, conducting a subregional workshop on risk-based drinking water surveillance and national and subregional capacity-building workshops on surveillance of water-related diseases and drinking water quality. Estonia confirmed its interest in hosting a subregional meeting on risk-based surveillance of drinking water once the pandemic situation had stabilized.

27. A representative of the WHO/Europe secretariat highlighted that surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 ribonucleic acid in wastewater could provide important information that complemented clinical surveillance of COVID-19 and informed effective public health decision-making in the context of the pandemic. He reported on recent developments and activities in that area, including the organization of an expert consultation on public health needs related to surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater. A virtual expert consultation had been organized by the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health on 30 November 2020³ aimed at supporting countries by facilitating exchange on the use, usefulness and limitations of SARS-CoV-2 surveillance in wastewater from a public health perspective, based on practices and experiences emerging in countries. He underlined that wastewater-based epidemiology was an emerging area of work that could be included in the Protocol's future programme of work.

28. A representative of Hungary confirmed that the work of the programme area supported implementation of public health surveillance and response measures regarding the pandemic. A representative of the Netherlands said that the country had set up a national sewage surveillance programme at the beginning of 2020 and proposed that the topic be included as a priority for action under the forthcoming programme of work. The Netherlands was engaged with WHO in preparing an information document for countries and relevant authorities to improve understanding of the environmental surveillance of wastewater.

³ See World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, *Rapid expert consultation on environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater: Summary report, virtual meeting – 23 July 2020*. Available at www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/water-and-sanitation/publications/2020/rapid-expert-consultation-on-environmental-surveillance-of-sars-cov-2-in-wastewater-summary-report-2020.

29. A representative of Hungary said that, in preparation for an expert meeting on legionella prevention and control later in autumn 2021, the country was supporting a questionnaire/survey on national regulations and existing practices in legionella risk assessment and management in countries across the pan-European region, and invited countries to take part in the online questionnaire planned for June 2021.

C. Institutional water, sanitation and hygiene

30. The representative of Hungary, co-lead Party of programme area 3, informed the Working Group about achievements made, in particular the finalization of training materials on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools, the completion of national baseline analyses of WASH conditions in health-care facilities in Hungary and Tajikistan, and the initiation of such assessments in Georgia and Montenegro, also highlighting that those activities had also increased in a number of countries reporting data on WASH services in schools and health-care facilities for global reporting on targets 4.a, 6.1 and 6.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. A surveillance tool and a regional evidence review of WASH in health-care facilities were planned to be finalized in 2022.

31. A representative of the WHO/Europe secretariat gave a briefing on the global progress report on WASH in health-care facilities,⁴ which had revealed critical gaps in WASH services, environmental cleaning and sound management of health-care waste. The report recommended embedding WASH in overall health sector planning and budgeting to deliver quality health services, including COVID-19 response and recovery, and improving monitoring and surveillance. The work conducted in Hungary, Serbia and Tajikistan under the Protocol was presented as a best practice example in the global report, as well as at a side event entitled “Meeting the Challenge of COVID-19: Achieving Sustainable WASH-safe Health-care Facilities in the 2020s” organized during the seventy-third WHO Assembly (21 May 2020).

32. The representative of the WHO/Europe secretariat also reported on a forthcoming webinar on hand hygiene, to be held on 21 April 2021 as part of a series of technical webinars under the Protocol. The webinar aimed to strengthen implementation of the WHO/United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) global “Hand Hygiene for All” initiative and to scale up national and regional actions towards ensuring universal hand hygiene.

33. National delegates informed the Working Group about planned and ongoing activities for improving WASH in health-care facilities and schools and shared experiences of using the tools developed under the Protocol and the WHO/UNICEF technical recommendations related to water, sanitation and hand hygiene in prevention and control of COVID-19. A representative of Belarus confirmed the country’s commitment to hosting a subregional meeting on WASH in schools in July 2021. A representative of Georgia said that the country used the WHO/UNICEF interim guidance on WASH in the context of COVID-19⁵ and had conducted an analysis of the policy framework and a situation assessment of WASH conditions in health-care facilities. A representative of Montenegro said that the country also planned to undertake such an assessment in 2021. A representative of North Macedonia said that an online dashboard on WASH in schools had been developed by adapting the checklist developed by WHO/Europe, collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the inspectorate for educational facilities was advancing and training sessions for teachers had been conducted.

⁴ WHO/United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Global Progress Report on WASH in Health-care Facilities: Fundamentals First* (Geneva, WHO, 2020).

⁵ “Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19”, 29 July 2020. Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC-WASH-2020.4>

D. Small-scale water supplies and sanitation

34. A representative of Germany, co-lead Party of programme area 4, informed the Working Group about achievements and ongoing activities, in particular the finalization and launch of a publication entitled *Costing and financing of small-scale water supply and sanitation services*.⁶ She noted that the pandemic had led to the putting on hold of planned in-person capacity-building activities and the focus had switched to advancing desk-related activities, including an analysis of information related to policies, targets and management of small-scale systems submitted under the fourth reporting cycle; updating the field guide on water safety plans; and developing training materials on such plans.

35. A representative of the Netherlands briefed the Working Group on a 2-year project on integrated water and sanitation safety planning, which supported implementation of programme areas on small-scale water supply and sanitation and safe and efficient management of water and sanitation systems. The project was technically led by the Netherlands, implemented in Serbia, financed by the Advisory Assistance Programme of the German Federal Ministry of Environment, and supported by WHO/Europe

36. A representative of Serbia further informed the Working Group about progress in implementing a project on improving on-site sanitation services, which had been implemented since June 2020, including initial results of the policy analysis that indicated a lack of legislative requirements addressing on-site sanitation facilities (e.g., transport and treatment of faecal sludge) and insufficient capacity for regular monitoring and surveillance. An expert meeting on on-site sanitation in the pan-European region was planned for autumn 2021.

E. Safe and efficient management of water supply and sanitation systems

37. The representatives of the Netherlands, co-lead Party of programme area 5, presented progress made and ongoing activities, including organization of the global workshop on improving climate resilience (in collaboration with programme area 7), the development of a policy brief on sanitation in the pan-European region, and the above-mentioned project on integrated water and sanitation safety planning. Requests for organizing water safety plan capacity-building workshops in several countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Montenegro) had been put on hold and individual follow-up plans would be drawn up at meetings held virtually or in-person depending on the pandemic situation. Further planned activities included the organization of an expert group meeting dedicated to on-site sanitation and the conducting a strategic round table on climate resilience of drinking water supply and sanitation services in the pan-European region, in collaboration with programme area 7.

38. A representative of the WHO secretariat reported on important developments related to the European Union revised Drinking Water Directive, released in December 2020, which currently included specific reference to the Protocol on Water and Health, a mandatory requirement to implement a risk-based management approach for drinking water supplies (such as water safety plans), and new provisions on securing access to drinking water. It was noted that the Protocol was well positioned to assist countries in the uptake of the water safety plan approach, thereby complementing the European Union revised Drinking Water Directive.

39. A representative of Italy reported on the implementation of the water safety plan approach, a mandatory requirement since 2017, and the specific challenge with implementing it in small-scale systems. Currently, the national regulation was under revision and over 1,000 water safety plan team leaders were being trained up through dedicated programmes.

⁶ WHO Region Office for Europe (WHO/Europe)/United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) (Denmark, WHO/Europe, 2020).

F. Equitable access to water and sanitation

40. The representative of France, co-lead Party for the programme area on equitable access to water and sanitation, presented progress and main achievements since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Belgrade, 19–21 November 2021). In particular, she briefed participants on the outcomes of the sixth meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (online, 24 and 25 March 2021). The meeting had emphasized the relevance and usefulness of the equitable access tools developed under the Protocol for implementing the European Union revised Drinking Water Directive, which referred to the Protocol as a tool to “assess the policy background and the baseline situation on access to water and to define the actions necessary to improve equitable access for all to water intended for human consumption”. The meeting also highlighted the need to continue to address the affordability of water and sanitation in the region.

41. Subsequently, the representative of Belarus reported on follow-up activities to the equitable access self-assessment finalized in 2020, including the consideration of its findings in the new targets set under the Protocol. The representative of Armenia reported on the implementation of its equitable access action plan, including a proposal for specific amendments to water legislation to further integrate equity, which had been submitted to the Government for approval. A project aimed at analysing affordability issues to introduce social tariffs in Armenia had also been implemented thanks to the United Nations Democracy Fund.

42. The representative of Montenegro reported on plans to undertake an equitable access self-assessment exercise by the end of 2021.

43. A representative of the ECE secretariat introduced the annotated outline of the draft brochure “Making water and sanitation affordable for all: Good practices to ensure the affordability of drinking water supply and sanitation services in the pan-European region”, which was expected to be finalized by the end of 2021.

G. Increasing resilience to climate change

44. A representative of Italy, co-lead country for the programme area on increasing resilience to climate change, presented progress made and ongoing activities. In particular, the Working Group was briefed on the conclusions of the Global workshop on building climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels organized in cooperation with the Water Convention (Geneva (hybrid), 29 and 31 March 2021) and plans for organizing a strategic round table on building climate change resilience of drinking water supply and sanitation services in the pan-European region (tentatively scheduled for 31 January–1 February 2022).

45. In that regard, a representative of the ECE secretariat introduced the background note for the above strategic round table, prepared by a consultant with the support of the joint secretariat and reviewed by the lead Parties. The note focused on the impacts of climate change on water and sanitation services in the pan-European region, the relation between the Protocol’s legal provisions and climate change and climate change considerations within the technical areas of work of the Protocol. Lastly, the document reflected on how the Protocol supported global climate frameworks and introduced discussion points for the strategic round table to be held in 2022. The Chair invited the Working Group to review the document and send written comments and input by 31 May 2021.

H. Assistance to support implementation at the national level

46. A representative of the ECE secretariat briefed the Working Group on support for implementation of the Protocol and target setting at the national level provided by the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation under the European Union Water Initiative Plus project in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as on support to accession provided to Kazakhstan under the new National Policy Dialogues project in Central Asia,

also funded by the European Union. The National Policy Dialogues had also supported equitable access self-assessments in several countries, most recently in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

47. The representative of Belarus reported that the targets that had been revised within the framework of the European Union Water Initiative Plus project were to be officially adopted following an interministerial consultation.

48. The WHO secretariat informed the Working Group about technical assistance provided from its regular resources through the biennial collaborative agreements between WHO/Europe and ministries of health. In the period 2020–2021, biennial collaborative agreements had been implemented in over 15 countries in different thematic areas relevant to the Protocol’s work, such as improving WASH in institutional settings, safe management of water and sanitation systems, strengthening surveillance of water quality and water-related diseases, and improving governance on water and sanitation.

I. Compliance procedure

49. The Vice-Chair of the Compliance Committee reported on the activities and progress of the Committee since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, in particular with regard to the review of compliance with the obligation to set targets and target dates under the Protocol, plans for a new Consultation Process with the Russian Federation and awareness-raising on the compliance procedure, including through a dedicated webinar within the Protocol Webinar Series.

Decisions

50. The Working Group summarized the decisions for agenda item 4 thus:

(a) Acknowledged efforts made by Parties and other States in advancing WASH-related actions for preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring that no one was left behind, and encouraged them to continue and further strengthen such efforts by using the Protocol on Water and Health, its tools, national mechanisms set up to implement it and regional platform to promote exchange of experience on the matter;

(b) Noted the timeliness and usefulness of the document “The Protocol on Water and Health and the COVID-19 pandemic: Relevance, lessons learned and future perspectives”, invited participants and other stakeholders to send comments and possible case studies by 31 May 2021, and entrusted the joint secretariat, with the support of the Bureau, to finalize the document;

(c) Decided to broaden the scope of the programme of work of the Protocol to support the response to, recovery from and prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic and requested the joint secretariat to make related arrangements, as relevant;

(d) Expressed its appreciation to all lead countries for their leadership, the achievements made and continued support in implementing the activities under the respective programme areas;

(e) Commended the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting, as well as the Compliance Committee for their role in advancing target setting and reporting processes under the Protocol, and congratulated Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal and Spain on the setting of their targets and Armenia, Belarus and Czechia on the revision of targets under the Protocol. It also welcomed the significant progress made by Germany and the Republic of Moldova in revising their targets;

(f) Endorsed the proposal for an online reporting system presented by the secretariat and entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to work on the establishment of such a system;

(g) Welcomed the progress in implementation of the Protocol at the national level within the National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, expressed appreciation for the support provided by the European Union, and encouraged the

European Union and other donors to continue supporting financially the work of the National Policy Dialogues in those regions;

(h) Expressed appreciation for the continuous support provided through the WHO biennial collaborative agreements to the implementation of the programme of work and assistance to countries;

(i) Called upon countries to maintain and intensify the WASH-related measures of World Health Assembly resolution 73.1 on COVID-19 response⁷ and the WHO/UNICEF global “Hand Hygiene for All” initiative;

(j) Noted that environmental surveillance of wastewater for SARS-CoV-2 and other disease agents was an emerging area of work under the Protocol, specifically in relation to its article 8;

(k) Recognized that the integration of water and sanitation into climate adaptation policies was crucial for strengthening the resilience of economies and societies, health and well-being;

(l) Welcomed the conclusions of the Global workshop on building climate resilience through improved water management at national and transboundary levels (Geneva (hybrid), 29 and 31 March 2021) and requested the joint secretariat to transmit those conclusions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a view to their presentation at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021);

(m) Endorsed the proposed plans for future work on different programme areas for the period 2021–2022.

V. Special session on financing of water and sanitation

51. The special session on financing of water and sanitation provided an opportunity to reflect on ways to attract investments and close the financing gap for the water and sanitation sector in the pan-European region and beyond.

52. Mr. Stef Smits (IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (Netherlands)) delivered a keynote speech on the main strategies and elements that formed a sustainable approach to the financing of water, sanitation and hygiene services. The financial gap to be addressed in order to reach water and sanitation targets was estimated to be high in many countries, and thus there was a need to put in place enabling foundational elements, including an appropriate national strategy and regulations, adequate performance by service providers and provision for required finance and investments. An effective sector finance strategy should be based on an assessment of the current costs and financing sources of drinking water and sanitation services and an analysis of the financial gap and should identify possible ways to narrow the financial gap and lower costs.

53. A panel discussion was organised on perspectives for analysing funding needs and mobilizing funding taking into account the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and the pandemic. A WHO representative introduced the TrackFin initiative, which aimed to develop WASH accounts that tracked financing for WASH at the national level and facilitated evidence-based decision-making. The panellist from the Ministry of Health and Social Development of Kyrgyzstan shared experience of applying WHO TrackFin methodology, which had resulted in obtaining an overview of the key stakeholders and financial flows in the WASH sector and the development of the WASH accounts for the first time in the country. A representative of OECD underlined the importance of setting realistic and robust financing strategies, investing in performance of services and having stable revenue streams. A representative of the World Bank highlighted the policy implications and main challenges faced by south-eastern European countries in mobilizing adequate financing for the WASH sector and the need to ensure delivery of targeted action for reaching universal access to water, sanitation

⁷ WHA73.1.

and wastewater management services, which required an increase in sector financing. She also noted the importance of undertaking a systematic assessment to understand WASH financing flows and funding sources, as well as establishing government-led strategic financial planning.

54. The Working Group:

(a) Acknowledged challenges and gaps in WASH financing that required attention in the future programmes of work under the Protocol on Water and Health;

(b) Called upon countries to take concrete measures, including systematic assessments of financing of the WASH sector and developing and implementing strategies and innovative approaches to strengthen WASH financing;

(c) Called upon donors to increase their financial support to the water sector in the pan-European region, considering the huge financial gap to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 and in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework;

(d) Encouraged countries to use tools and guidance documents developed under the Protocol on Water and Health, in particular *Costing and financing of small-scale water supply and sanitation services* and other tools made available by relevant partners.

VI. Financial resources needed to implement the programme of work for 2020–2022

55. The joint secretariat informed the Working Group about the financial situation regarding implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol, in particular the contributions received from Parties and expenditures within the reporting period. The Working Group was also provided with an overview of resource requirements until the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (tentatively scheduled for 15–17 November 2022).

56. It was stressed that, while the overall trend was positive, with several new Parties contributing and some savings made due to the pandemic, the financial resources provided for the Protocol were clearly insufficient to secure the human resources needed in the joint secretariat to adequately support all activities carried out under the Protocol. The achievements under the programme of work had been made possible thanks to contributions by Parties and cross-funding from other sources.

57. The Chair of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol acknowledged that a few more Parties were currently contributing to the implementation of the programme of work and invited other Parties to contribute financially and in-kind. She also reported that the Bureau of the Protocol was discussing how to mobilize adequate financial support for activities under the Protocol, including by attracting donors to support work on water, sanitation, hygiene and health.

58. Subsequently, the Director of the ECE Environment Division informed the Working Group that, due to the lack of strong support in the ECE Executive Committee and a zero growth approach to the United Nations regular budget favoured by some ECE member States, the request by the fifth Meeting of the Parties for additional United Nations regular budget resources for the Protocol⁸ had not been approved by the Executive Committee at its 112th meeting (Geneva, 14 December 2020) and therefore would not be taken forward. He proposed that, given the current situation, the only solution would be to fund the P-4 post foreseen in the programme of work of the Protocol from extrabudgetary resources to be provided by the Protocol Parties.

59. The representative of the WHO/Europe Secretariat informed the Working Group that, in addition to contributions made by Parties, WHO/Europe had mobilized substantial additional voluntary funding from the biennial collaborative agreements, Germany and WHO

⁸ ECE/MP.WH/19-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/06, para. 97 (d).

headquarters to cover staff costs and several activities planned under the Protocol's work programme.

60. A representative of Germany confirmed that the country would finance a Junior Professional Officer post at the ECE secretariat in order to support its staff and would continue to provide financial and in-kind contributions to support programme area 4. A representative of Luxembourg expressed regret that the request for regular budget resources had not been approved and confirmed the intention to continue to provide an unearmarked contribution to the Protocol trust fund. A representative of Norway also confirmed the continuation of its regular financial contribution to the work under the Protocol. Lastly, a representative Romania said that the country would also to try mobilize a contribution for the Protocol, which it considered to be an instrument for recovery from the pandemic.

61. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the reports on the contributions, expenditures and the resources required to implement the programme of work for 2020–2022;

(b) Expressed its gratitude to Parties and other States that had provided financial, direct and in-kind contributions to implement the programme of work;

(c) Expressed regret that the request for additional United Nations regular budget resources had not been approved;

(d) Called upon all Parties, other States and relevant organizations to close the gaps in funding and financially contribute to the implementation of the activities of the programme of work for 2020–2022 and ensure stable and reliable funding for the staff costs of the joint secretariat.

VII. Date and venue of the thirteenth meeting

62. The secretariat announced that the thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health was tentatively scheduled to be held on 26 and 27 April 2022.
