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**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

Special session on increasing resilience to climate change and the Protocol on Water and Health

**Item 4 of the annotated provisional agenda for the thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on
Water and Health (Geneva, 19-20 May 2022)**

Thursday, 19 May, 12.00-13.00

Concept Note

Background

In the pan-European region, impacts of climate change on water and sanitation services, including water supply, sewage, and wastewater treatment, exacerbate the challenges to achieving universal and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation. For example, climate-induced extreme weather events such as heavy precipitation and flooding can lead to the overflow of untreated sewage into water bodies and surface waters, resulting in outbreaks of waterborne diseases. On the other hand, decrease in precipitation can cause a reduction in freshwater availability for drinking water supplies and, consequently, lead to an increased concentration of pollutants in water bodies, posing a threat to human health. Such impacts, amongst others, have already become a reality in the pan-European region, with climate change projections indicating consistent increases in temperature and varying rainfall patterns within the next decades.

At the thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 19-20 May 2022), the joint Secretariat of the Protocol, provided by UNECE and WHO/Europe, is convening a special session on increasing resilience to climate change, aimed at providing an opportunity to reflect on how to use the platforms and tools provided by the Protocol on Water and Health to increase resilience to climate change.

The provisions of the Protocol are highly relevant to adaptation to climate change. The Protocol requires countries to set targets and target dates within two years of becoming a Party to achieve the objectives of access to drinking water and provision of sanitation for everyone. Countries have started making use of this framework and set targets on climate change adaptation in water and sanitation. The Protocol also requires establishing joint or coordinated systems for surveillance and early warning systems, contingency plans, and response capacities, as well as mutual assistance to respond to outbreaks and incidents of water-related disease, especially those caused by extreme weather events, as stated by Article 8.

Objectives and scope

The special session will provide an opportunity to reflect on key actions that countries in the pan-European region have taken to address the impacts of climate change on water and sanitation and how to use the platform and tools provided by the Protocol to increase resilience to climate change. The session will include a panel discussion, where representatives of countries will discuss how States have used the Protocol's framework to strengthen their efforts to increase resilience to climate change at the national and/or local level.

The Working Group will be invited to provide comments, share national experiences, and discuss the proposed activities.

The discussion is suggested to focus on the following questions:

- What is the experience of your country with adapting water and sanitation services to climate change? What challenges are most pressing? Which areas are considered a priority?
- How has your country used the Protocol's framework and tools to strengthen climate resilience?
- What should the programme area on increasing resilience to climate change under the Protocol seek to achieve from your perspective?

Organization of work

The special session on increasing resilience to climate change is compiled as follows:

- A keynote speech given by Guy Howard from the University of Bristol will set the scene for the discussion by explaining the importance of a climate change perspective in the water, sanitation and health sectors, including with reference to the increasing impacts of climate change on water resources and water and sanitation services.
- A representative of Italy will present the progress made in this area and introduce the *Background Paper on increasing resilience to climate change through the Protocol on Water and Health*.
- A panel composed of representatives of countries will discuss how states have used the Protocol's framework to strengthen their efforts to increase resilience to climate change at the national and/or local levels. Potential speakers:
- The Working Group will be invited to provide comments, share national experiences, and discuss the proposed activities.