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## Economic Commission for Europe

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

### Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

Seventeenth meeting\*

### Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

Seventeenth meeting\*

Tallinn, 28–30 June 2022

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

**Adoption of the agenda**

## Report on the implementation of activities under the Water Convention in 2021

Prepared by the secretariat

### *Summary*

The present document reports on the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) for the period 2021, 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 is included in a separate document (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2022/4–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2022/4).

The Working Group is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the present report;
- (b) Encourage donors, where appropriate and possible, to accept such reports in the future instead of asking for a separate report on their contribution.

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\* Fourth joint meeting of the two working groups.



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

1. In 2021, the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) continued, with the overall aim of supporting implementation of the Convention and its principles and the overall objective that transboundary waters worldwide be managed in cooperation between riparian countries to promote sustainable development, peace and security. Key highlights by programme area are presented in the table below. A detailed description of activities, including those listed in the table, is presented in section III of the present document.

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to affect the implementation of activities under the Convention in 2021, especially during the first semester. Intergovernmental meetings under the Convention were held online or in a hybrid mode. Project work, largely dependent on national administrations' operations, was affected by the pandemic to a greater extent than intergovernmental work (development of soft law instruments and exchange of experience through global meetings), demonstrating the usefulness of combining both types of action when designing the Convention's programme of work. The secretariat and Bureau members spoke in countless webinars about the Convention, its activities and tools. The table below should be read in the light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. In reaction to the pandemic, the ninth session of the Parties was organized as a hybrid event (Geneva (hybrid), 30 September–1 October 2021) with more than 500 participants from more than 100 countries, both Parties and non-Parties to the Convention, as well as from joint bodies, international and non-governmental organizations, academia and youth. This successful session was a milestone in reviewing and accelerating progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 6.5, discussing challenges and good practices related to transboundary water cooperation and the role of the Convention. It confirmed the Convention's growing recognition worldwide. Recent new Parties from Africa were welcomed, and several African and Latin American countries expressed interest in acceding to the Convention or studying its value added.

4. More than 30 high-level participants confirmed the role of transboundary water cooperation in fostering trust, stability and peace in transboundary basins and beyond. This illustrated the contribution to peace of accession to the Water Convention and its implementation. The meeting called for urgent action to accelerate progress to tackle persisting challenges in transboundary water cooperation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals on water and on peace.

5. Prepared through a major consultation process with Parties, non-Parties and partners on priorities for future work, the programme of work of the Convention for 2022–2024 was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties, as a continuation of the 2019–2021 activities.

6. Several new reports were produced. New tools (on financing of cooperation, nexus solutions and investments, water allocation, developing transboundary agreements) to support transboundary water cooperation were adopted/launched, the implementation of which will be fostered through the implementation of the Convention programme of work 2022–2024, among other things.

7. Alongside the bodies supporting the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021, partners played an important role in implementing most activities. The role of partners has been crucial in activities supporting the Convention's globalization and increasing capacity for its implementation, in all areas of its programme of work. Partners' key role was reconfirmed by the adoption of a related decision by the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/63/Add.2 (decision IX/5)). Furthermore, the lead Parties (Finland, France, Germany Hungary and the Netherlands for programme area 1.1, Estonia for programme area 1.2, Hungary for programme area 1.3, Finland and Senegal for programme area 2, Finland for programme area 3.2, Hungary for programme area 3.3, the secretariat, in cooperation with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Romania and the European Commission for programme area 3.4, the Netherlands and Switzerland for

programme areas 4 and 5) played a crucial role in providing effective guidance on and mobilizing political and other support for implementation of activities.

8. The Meeting of the Parties also adopted a decision on targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/63/Add.2), for a fairer share of the burden of financing the implementation of the programme of work, and improved reliability and predictability of funding and increased efficiency.

9. In 2021, 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.

**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 in 2021</i>  | <i>Key specific outputs in 2021</i>  |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1: Countries understand Convention, accede to it, develop agreements and establish joint bodies   | 1: Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation | <p>Accession by Guinea-Bissau and Togo to the Convention</p> <p>Significant progress on accession in 3 countries</p> <p>Awareness of and political support for Convention and to transboundary water cooperation increased</p> <p>Support provided to countries, through projects and development of a tool, in developing and revising transboundary water cooperation agreements and arrangements</p> | <p>Legal/technical advice provided to more than 12 countries</p> <p>1 national workshop and 4 regional workshops/webinars organized on the Convention/transboundary cooperation</p> <p>Presentation of the Convention at numerous regional/basin events and online courses organized by partners</p> <p>Support provided to developing new or supporting implementation of existing agreements in 4 basins/subbasins</p> <p>Support provided to 2 regional cooperation processes</p> <p>Publication <i>Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation</i> finalized and adopted by MOP9, published in English and promoted in various events</p> <p>Frequently Asked Questions publication printed in Arabic, French and Spanish and promoted in 2 webinars</p> <p>Legal and technical advice provided by the Implementation Committee in the very first advisory procedure</p> |
| 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  | Outlook for activities and guidance needed under the Convention to support cooperation on monitoring and exchange of data and information across borders developed  | <p>Comments on monitoring guidelines gathered and future activities on monitoring defined</p> <p>Preliminary study reports developed on SMAB, to inform the basin dialogue process</p>   |
| 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 advancing two previously initiated in-depth transboundary nexus assessments</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>In-depth nexus assessments in the Drin River and Drina River basins supported</p> <p>Publication <i>Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins</i> finalized, launched at MOP9, published in English and promoted</p> <p>Publication <i>Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context</i> adopted by MOP9, published in English and promoted.</p>  |

| <i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i>  | <i>Programme area</i>   | <i>Key specific outcomes in 2021</i>  | <i>Key specific outputs in 2021</i>  |
|--|---|---|--|
|  |   | <p>Various phases, benefits and challenges of transboundary water allocation and good practices systemized through a participatory process of development of a handbook</p> <p>Awareness raised on global practices in allocation and complementary practices in transboundary basins</p> <p>NPDs served as platforms for intersectoral cooperation and water reform drivers in 9 countries</p> | <p>Pilot SEAs in water sector and respective guidelines finalized in 1 country</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 benefits of transboundary cooperation into climate-, disaster- and health-related documents and projects</p>  | <p>Two global events organized, involving about 500 participants linking transboundary water cooperation, disasters, climate and health</p> <p>The Amazon basin joined the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation</p> <p>Climate change adaptation integrated into the strategic action programmes endorsed for Dniester River and Chu-Talas River basins</p> <p>Importance of water and the benefits of transboundary cooperation promoted at UNFCCC COP26</p> |
| 4: Transboundary water cooperation is sustainably financed                               | 5: Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation                          | <p>Strengthened partnership with key IFIs and organizations working on the topic</p> <p>Comprehensive overview of possible sources of funding and financing to support transboundary water cooperation and activities related to transboundary basins management and development available</p>  | <p>Publication <i>Funding and Financing of Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development</i> finalized, published in English, launched at MOP9, and promoted</p>   |
| 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 the Convention | <p>Second reporting exercise successfully implemented despite COVID-19</p>  | <p>129 of 153 countries sharing transboundary waters provided reports on indicator 6.5.2</p> <p>All Parties to the Convention provided reports on indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention</p> <p>30 countries provided reports on indicator 6.5.2 for first time</p> <p>96 reports (covering surface waters) on indicator 6.5.2 validated as part of second</p>   |

| <i>Outcome of programme of work for 2019–2021</i> | <i>Programme area</i>                                   | <i>Key specific outcomes in 2021</i>  | <i>Key specific outputs in 2021</i>  |
|---|---|---|--|
|   |   | Awareness raised on progress and challenges in transboundary water cooperation, both under the Convention and at the global level   | reporting exercise, 5 of which during 2021<br>Second report on <i>Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Global Status of SDG Indicator 6.5.2 and Acceleration Needs – 2021</i> published with UNESCO in English and promoted  |
|   |   | Acceleration needs for progress on transboundary water cooperation to achieve SDG target 6.5 identified and promoted  | <i>Progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention: Second report on implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, 2017–2020</i> published in English and promoted<br>Outcomes and recommendations emerging from second reporting exercise presented at numerous regional and global events |
|   | 7: Partnerships, communication and knowledge management | Progress/achievements under Convention communicated worldwide via social media<br>Improved knowledge of role of Convention and importance of transboundary water cooperation worldwide<br>Key contributions of partners in the Convention’s implementation and its global opening highlighted at MoP9 | Three newsletters disseminated to 2,275 contacts (December 2021 newsletter viewed 1,556 times)<br>Twitter audience: 4,739 Followers<br>Twitter profile visited 60,111 times<br>358 tweets disseminated<br>LinkedIn account has now 659 followers<br>Facebook account has 725 followers<br>New partnership initiated, e.g., with Barcelona Convention,                                  |

*Abbreviations:* Barcelona Convention, Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean; IFI, international financial institution; IWRM, integrated water resources management; MOP9, ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties; NPD, National Policy Dialogue; SDG, Sustainable Development Goal; SEA, Strategic Environmental Assessment; SMAB, Senegalo Mauritanian Aquifer Basin; UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNFCCC COP26, twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## **II. Challenges, trends and lessons learned for future work specific to some programme areas**

### **A. Global opening of the Convention**

10. In 2021, the community of the Parties to the Water Convention grew, with Guinea-Bissau and Togo acceding to the Convention, reconfirming the growing interest in the Convention as a tool to support transboundary water cooperation.

11. Progress in raising the Convention's profile and supporting accession processes continued, mostly in a remote format due to the pandemic, in close collaboration with Governments, providing legal advice and answering countries' specific questions. This made it possible to progress towards accession and future implementation of the Convention in several countries and basins.

12. Increased partnerships and synergies with other actors, including through the strengthening of existing partnerships with regional and global financial institutions, the establishment of new partnerships with several regional organization (such as the Central American Commission on Environment and Development and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) and greater coordination and articulation with activities of partners, including with United Nations regional commissions and country offices, was also essential for raising awareness on the Convention, supporting accession to and implementation of the Convention, especially in regions where progress towards accession is slow.

### **B. Implementation Committee**

13. The outcomes of the first advisory procedure in the Implementation Committee showed distinct opportunities provided by the advisory procedure in advancing the objective and purpose of the Convention and preventing water-related disputes. They also proved the value of a facilitative, realistic and result-oriented approach taken by the Committee. Another lesson learned from the advisory procedure referred to the interdisciplinary character of the Committee and the diversity of experience and expertise among its members, which proved essential in providing countries with legal and technical advice in a timely manner.<sup>1</sup>

### **C. Monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins**

14. In the field of monitoring and data exchange, there is clearly a need for sharing good experiences and practices with adequate attention to transboundary cooperation aspects. The planned update of the *Strategies for monitoring and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters*<sup>2</sup> should help countries to strategically develop their related cooperation. Experience of projects on the ground under the Convention shows the crucial importance of joint monitoring, assessment and data exchange for the implementation of other obligations under the Convention.

### **D. Water allocation in a transboundary context**

15. There was considerable interest in the development of the *Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context*.<sup>3</sup> Along with the related political sensitivities and the need for wide-ranging expertise to assist in drafting, this led to many inquiries into the Handbook's content and opportunities to participate in its development.

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<sup>1</sup> See ECE/MP.WAT/2021/5, paras. 29–30.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations publication, sales No. E.06.II.E.15.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations publication, sales No. E.21.II.E.10.

## **E. Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins**

16. The stocktaking of experiences of nexus solutions and investments highlighted several common challenges and opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation in transboundary settings. The survey showed that, beyond technical solutions, the nexus is operationalized through concrete plans and policies, and that transboundary cooperation is the highest-ranking factor of success for the implementation of said solutions and investments in shared basins. The nexus approach is emerging as a means to catalyse financing for water investments through innovative schemes and from outside sources (e.g., from climate and environmental funds, private sources). Project work in the Western Balkans continued, although prolonged travel restrictions meant that all meetings and consultations had to be held online. Central Asia emerged as a priority region for nexus work and ECE work on water-energy issues (in cooperation with the Sustainable Energy Division).

## **F. National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management under the European Union Water Initiative**

17. Challenges posed by the pandemic have had a negative impact on the work in countries and the National Policy Dialogue processes. Therefore, ECE and its partners have maintained close contact with beneficiary ministries and worked to conduct as many activities as possible online. In the mid and long term, the pandemic may provide additional opportunities for work on water resources management and water supply and sanitation in the subregion, as the pandemic has underlined the essential role of access to clean water, adequate sanitation and hygiene and the importance of preserving ecosystems for human health. National Policy Dialogues have a vital role to play in this regard as intersectoral platforms for discussing key water-related challenges, policies and reforms.

## **G. Adapting to climate change**

18. Activities on climate change in 2021 reconfirmed the importance of integrating transboundary water cooperation into the climate change agenda, disaster risk reduction and health protection, as well as the need to combine global activities and more technical on-the-ground ones. For example, capacity-building efforts in financing transboundary climate change adaptation under the Water Convention led to the development of two project proposals on adaptation to climate change in the Lower Dniester River and their integration into regional adaptation plan. Although it is challenging, more cooperation on water and health issues with a view to climate change adaptation can benefit riparian countries, and river basin organizations can substantially support this process.

## **H. Financing transboundary water cooperation**

19. Partnering and working closely with international financial institutions was key to understanding the latest developments related to financing transboundary water cooperation. As demonstrated by several initiatives and events, financing transboundary water cooperation is an increasingly central topic on the global agenda, and the Water Convention provides a key platform for member States and river basin organizations to learn about it and explore opportunities.

## **I. Contribution to global processes**

20. The second reporting exercise on SDG indicator 6.5.2 finalized in 2021 in cooperation with UNESCO as co-custodian agency was a major success, with 129 countries submitting their replies. This has led to increased awareness and political attention to transboundary water cooperation as well as some concrete progress at basin level.

21. The Convention secretariat continued to advocate for transboundary water cooperation in global processes, including on water. Despite requiring time and effort, contributions to global processes such as UN-Water and the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework are crucial in highlighting the topic within the United Nations and beyond.

22. More than 20 countries highlighted the importance of transboundary water cooperation and 5 countries mentioned the role of the Water Convention in their statements

at the high-level meeting on the “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda” organized by the President of the General Assembly (New York (hybrid), 18 March 2021). This underlined the growing recognition of the importance of transboundary water cooperation, and of the Water Convention, to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

### **III. Areas of work and activities**

#### **A. Work of the Bureau**

23. The Bureau, led by its outgoing Chair, Mr. Ardak Zebeshev (Kazakhstan) and, after the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, its incoming Chair, Mr. Harry Liiv (Estonia), held its thirty-first meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 21 and 22 January 2021) and thirty-second meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 29 and 30 April 2021) and several telephone conferences.

24. The Bureau reviewed the programme of work’s implementation, in particular in the light of pandemic-related challenges. The Bureau led the preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva (hybrid), 29 September–1 October 2021), 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.

25. Bureau members supported the Convention’s promotion and 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 from new donors.

#### **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**

26. Accession processes were partly delayed by the pandemic. However, continuous remote and in-person support from the secretariat and close collaboration with regional and local partners ensured progress towards accession in various countries.

27. In the West and Central Africa regions, Guinea-Bissau and Togo acceded to the Water Convention, respectively, on 16 June 2021 and 28 September 2021, by depositing their accession instruments in New York. Both Governments started discussions on the future implementation of the Convention. Cameroon nearly finalized its national process for acceding to the Convention through the signature of the law of accession by the President of Cameroon in December 2021. Understanding of the Convention and capacity to accede to and implement it was increased through a national workshop in the Gambia to discuss the benefits of accession (Banjul, 13 December 2021). Subsequently, the Gambia confirmed its intention to accede to the Convention. Ghana, which had become a Party to the Convention in September 2020, launched a national plan for the implementation of the Convention in May 2021. Several other countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria, also progressed towards accession or started national initiatives to discuss accession benefits.

28. In East Africa, the pandemic halted initial progresses towards potential accession in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. However, these processes were revived in late 2021 and preparation started for a national workshop in February 2022 in Uganda.

29. In Southern Africa, Namibia formally expressed interest in acceding to the Convention at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties and requested support from the secretariat towards accession. Zambia also expressed its interest in potentially acceding to

the Convention.<sup>4</sup> Both countries started national initiatives to discuss accession benefits and draft preliminary road maps to accession.

30. In Africa, several partners organized activities to promote the Convention and support accession process of their member States. In particular, the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River, the Gambia River Basin Development Organization and the Convention secretariat organized a regional workshop (Banjul (hybrid), 14 December 2021), which raised awareness among Senegal River basin and Gambia River basin countries and facilitated a discussion on the benefits of joining the Convention. Representatives of the river basin countries and organizations concluded that the United Nations water conventions played an important role in supporting transboundary water cooperation and invited all member States to accede to them.

31. In the South-East Asia and South Asia regions, progress towards accession is slow and was significantly disrupted by the pandemic. A South-East Asia regional webinar on transboundary rivers (online, 3 February 2021) entitled “Upholding Mekong Cooperation for Present and Future Challenges: Data- and Information-Sharing for Regional Cooperation” brought together key State, intergovernmental and non-governmental representatives to discuss such topics, raised the Convention’s profile and highlighted its added value.

32. In the Middle East and North Africa region, the Government of Iraq finalized its national process of accession to the Convention through the signature of the accession instrument by the President of the Republic in October 2021 and started initial discussions on its future implementation. The secretariat contributed to several regional and national capacity-building activities on transboundary water cooperation in the region, including a workshop on transboundary water arrangements organized by the Water Diplomacy Centre (Amman, 22–25 November 2021) and an online course for Iraq on cooperation in the management of shared water resources, organized on 31 May – 6 July 2021 by the Geneva Water Hub, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

33. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, activities focused on increasing knowledge on the Convention and its activities, through contributing to various (sub)regional webinars. Such events highlighted how the Convention, with its legal and institutional frameworks as well as its tools, could support progress on transboundary water cooperation in the (sub)region. In particular, the secretariat co-organized:

- The High-level seminar on “Progress and challenges in transboundary water cooperation in Latin America in the framework of the SDGs and their indicator 6.5.2” (online, 23 and 24 February 2021), together with the Ibero-American Water Directors Conference and UNESCO.
- The third Regional workshop on transboundary waters in Central America (online, 23 and 24 June 2021) together with the Global Water Partnership–Central America (GWP-CAM) and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development. The workshop focused on the development of regional guidelines as a mechanism to achieve cooperation in transboundary water management and contributed to the implementation of the 2021–2025 Regional Environmental Strategy Framework of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development.
- The module on transboundary water of the Special course on water governance and water security (online, 31 August–23 September 2021), with GWP-CAM and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences.

34. Consequently, several countries and regional river basin organizations further inquired about the benefits of joining and implementing the Convention and the secretariat organized virtual briefings about the Convention and its activities for those interested countries and organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/63, para. 22. Available at [https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/MOP9\\_Water\\_Convention](https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/MOP9_Water_Convention).

35. In support of national processes on accession, the publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes*,<sup>5</sup> providing responses to over 50 questions, was finalized in Arabic, French and Spanish. A dedicated French-language webinar on the publication was organized (online, 17 June 2021) in partnership with the Geneva Environment Network. The publication was also presented during a webinar co-organized with the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (online, 7 December 2021).

36. 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, and by other donors, including Switzerland.

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

37. In 2021, the development of the *Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation*<sup>6</sup> was finalized with the support of a dedicated expert drafting group. The Practical Guide was then adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session, published in English, translated into French, Russian and Spanish, and disseminated at various events. The publication was recognized as a valuable tool that can support countries in the design and drafting of agreements or other arrangements for transboundary waters, including both surface waters and groundwaters, that are effective, adaptable and sustainable. It constitutes a step-by-step tool explaining the importance of different components of transboundary agreements.

38. The Secretariat continued to provide support to several initiatives related to the negotiation of agreements and the establishment of new basin organizations. In Eastern Europe, the secretariat, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, supported the development of the strategic action programme developed under the leadership of the Commission on Sustainable Use and Protection of the Dniester River Basin (Dniester Commission) established 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, with the support of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) project. The strategic action programme was endorsed on 31 March 2021.

39. In Central Asia, the secretariat supported riparians in finalizing the strategic action programme for the Chu-Talas River basin, which was endorsed by the Chu-Talas Commission on 15 April 2021. ECE continued supporting the Central Asian region in building human and institutional capacity for the safe management of dams under the project “Capacity-building for Cooperation on Dam Safety in Central Asia”. Among other items, the virtual regional meeting on 23 June 2021 discussed a draft agreement on regional cooperation on dam safety, which, if endorsed, would provide a legal platform for the countries to strengthen their efforts to collectively manage transboundary dams in the region. Participants also agreed that the absence of relevant institutional structure impeded efficient regional and transboundary coordination and management of dams, including response measures.

40. In West Africa, the secretariat continued to provide support, in partnership with the Geneva Water Hub and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, to the regional dialogue on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin shared by the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal. In particular, the secretariat facilitated the negotiation and signature of a ministerial declaration on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin on 29 September 2021, on the side lines of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention. In the declaration, the ministers from the four riparian countries endorsed the vision for transboundary cooperation developed by the Regional Working Group from Transboundary Cooperation on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin and agreed to establish a legal and institutional framework for cooperation on the Aquifer Basin.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.34.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.21.II.E.8.

41. In the Central Africa region, the secretariat was invited by the Lake Chad Basin Commission to provide technical and legal support to a regional discussion on the possible revision of a bilateral agreement between Chad and Cameroon on the Logone subbasin.

42. 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.

#### **1.4 Implementation Committee**

43. In 2021, the Implementation Committee provided its legal and technical advice to Montenegro and Albania in the framework of advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1 related to the possible transboundary impact of the planned construction of additional small hydropower plants on the Cijevna/Cem River in Albania. In agreement with the Parties concerned, the Committee's legal and technical advice was made publicly available.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, the Committee took steps to follow up with Montenegro and Albania on progress with implementation of the Committee's advice.

44. Members of the Committee actively contributed to the online conference "The Implementation Committee of the Water Convention", hosted by University College London (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and co-organized with the University of Bologna (Italy), the University of the Pacific (United States of America) and ECE on 22 April 2021 which greatly enhanced the visibility of the Convention and particularly the Committee, for example, among academics.<sup>8</sup> The Committee contributed to several other events and activities under the Convention's programme of work.

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

45. On 1 April 2021, an online Expert meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Data Exchange discussed the existing guidelines on monitoring and assessment under the Convention, analysing the different options for updating and complementing them with a collection of good practices. It also discussed the needs of countries and basins organizations, as well as opportunities for cooperation with partner organizations. The meeting provided input to the elaboration of activities in this programme area of the programme of work for 2022–2024.

46. Partners for this programme area included the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) for Eastern Partnership Countries Programme, the Geneva Water Hub, GWP, the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Water Assessment Centre, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank Group and the World Meteorological Organization.

### **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**

47. In 2021, activities included: advancing two previously initiated in-depth transboundary basin nexus assessments; finalizing and publishing the report on a global stocktaking of experiences about nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins worldwide; preparing a new multi-year project proposal for Central Asia; and, promoting knowledge and experience sharing on the topic.

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<sup>7</sup> See ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2021/1, annex.

<sup>8</sup> A video recording of the event, presentations delivered thereat and a bibliography of works related to the Convention are available at [www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/events/2021/apr/implementation-committee-water-convention](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/events/2021/apr/implementation-committee-water-convention).

48. The project “Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in South-Eastern Europe, through the use of the nexus approach” supported in-depth (phase II) nexus assessments in the Drin River and Drina River basins. The Drina assessment advanced towards the development of an assessment report, with focus on flow regulation and sustainable energy, as well as a draft nexus road map to guide future cross-sectoral cooperation efforts in the basin. The Drin process also advanced towards an assessment report (main focus on hydropower and floods, and forestry and biomass) and a road map (to support the cross-sectoral implement of the Drin Strategic Action Programme), led by Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med).

49. A steering committee of senior officials of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in the fields of water, energy and environment protection met online to review the draft of the Drina River Basin Nexus Assessment Phase II and the Drina Nexus Road Map. Two online consultation meetings were held for stakeholders in Serbia and Montenegro on the project’s activities, which included a water-energy analysis of renewable energy potential and hydropower, as well as a review of formalization options for flow regulation. The technical studies “Hydropower and Floods” and “Forestry and Biomass” (core chapters of the upcoming Drin River Basin Nexus Assessment Phase II) were presented to the Drin Core Group at its meeting in November 2021.

50. The insights from the global stocktaking exercise on experiences about nexus (intersectoral) solutions and investments, including from nexus assessments and dialogues carried out in 2020, were discussed in two virtual regional expert dialogues on nexus solutions and investments: for the Latin America and the Caribbean region, co-organized with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on 22 February 2021; and for the Western Balkans, co-organized with GWP-Med and the European Investment Bank (EIB) on 26 May 2021.

51. The publication *Solutions and Investments in the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus: A Synthesis of Experiences in Transboundary Basins*<sup>9</sup> was finalized and launched at ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, published in English and promoted.

52. Promotion of the nexus work continued, by sharing the experiences of different basins and regions, for example, at an event entitled “From risks to returns: WEF E Nexus solutions for climate resilience”, co-organized with IDB and the German Agency for International Cooperation during World Water Week 2022 (online, 24 August 2021); at a capacity-building event for energy and climate planners “Regional Meeting on Social, Economic and Environmental Implications of Energy and Climate Strategies” (online, 12 November 2021) organized by the International Atomic Energy Agency; at the International Forum on Innovating and Modernizing Energy and Water in Central Asia organized by the ECE Sustainable Energy Division (Almaty, Kazakhstan (hybrid), 1–3 November 2021); and at two events organized by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization for the Amazon River basin in July and November 2021.

53. The secretariat contributed to the preparation of a five-year nexus project in Central Asia, expected to start in October 2022, to be financed by the International Climate Initiative of Germany and implemented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ECE, the Scientific-Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The project’s preparations included the organization of a high-level event (Tashkent, 14 October 2021).

54. Partners included the GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the Geneva Water Hub, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, OECD, the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, GWP, GWP-Med, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory, the International Sava River Basin Commission, the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission

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<sup>9</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/66.

for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Austrian Development Agency and the German Agency for International Cooperation.

### 3.3 Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context

55. In 2021, the development of the *Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context*<sup>10</sup> was finalized by a drafting group and reviewed by the Expert Group on the Handbook, which provided technical guidance. The publication was then adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session, published in English and translated into French and Russian. The Handbook provides an overview of the key elements, frameworks and modalities to consider in the application of transboundary water allocation, as well as a compendium of different dimensions of transboundary water allocation.

56. Partners included: the University of Eastern Finland, Oregon State University (United States of America), IHE Delft Institute for Water Education (Netherlands), the International Water Assessment Centre, OECD, EUWI+ and the Finnish Environment Institute.

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

57. In 2021, ECE continued implementing National Policy Dialogues under EUWI, with the aim of strengthening water governance and the application of integrated water resources management, particularly through intersectoral cooperation in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in line with the Convention, its Protocol on Water and Health, the European Union Water Framework Directive<sup>11</sup> and other instruments. Activities were carried out in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

58. European Union funding through the EUWI+ programme made it possible to continue work in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Neighbourhood countries), working closely with the other implementing partners (OECD, Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water of France). Work under the EUWI+ project was successfully finalized in July 2021 and programmatic planning started for the next phase.

59. In Georgia, a strategic environmental assessment for the Alazani-Iori River basin management plan was finalized and submitted for final approval. In addition, strategic environmental assessment guidelines for the river basin management plan were submitted to the Government.

60. A draft cooperation agreement on joint monitoring activities in the transboundary Khrami-Debed River basin between Armenia and Georgia was prepared and submitted to the relevant agencies for finalization and possible approval. ECE also continued to work with Azerbaijan and Georgia to discuss options for the continuation of negotiations on a draft cooperation agreement on the Kura River basin.

61. The National Policy Dialogues process continued to promote accession to and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. In Belarus, the revised national targets in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health were adopted. In Armenia, revised national targets and an analysis of legislative barriers to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation were finalized and submitted for adoption. In the Republic of Moldova, the revised national implementation programme under the Protocol was finalized and submitted for adoption.

62. Activities in Central Asia were carried out under the regional project within the European Union–Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation project,<sup>12</sup> in cooperation with OECD. A preparatory meeting for the seventh Interagency Coordination Council of the National Policy Dialogue took place in Kazakhstan in hybrid

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<sup>10</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/64.

<sup>11</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327 (2000), pp. 1–72.

<sup>12</sup> For additional information, see <https://wecoop.eu/>.

format on 25 November 2021. An expert workshop under the National Policy Dialogue umbrella was held in Kyrgyzstan on 11 June 2021, and a number of policy packages in support of water reform were discussed. An activity in support of the implementation of the newly adopted revised Water Code produced a new methodology for water balances calculations that was presented at an expert round table in Tajikistan on 2 February 2021.

63. The sustainability and stable institutional frameworks of the National Policy Dialogues processes and the strong partnerships with the European Union and OECD, as strategic partner for National Policy Dialogues, enabled support to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion and continued to play an important role during the pandemic. Good cooperation between ECE, OECD and the European Union member States consortium of Austria (Environment Agency Austria) and France (International Office for Water) has played a key role in effectively implementing the EUWI+ programme and in preparing the next programme (EU4Environment: Water Resources and Environmental Data), which will be launched in January 2022.

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

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

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

65. The fifth meeting of the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation (Geneva (hybrid), 26 February 2021) and the twelfth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva (hybrid), 31 March 2021) confirmed the importance of mainstreaming water and transboundary cooperation in national climate- and disaster-related documents, for example, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans. As a result of previous cooperation, the Amazon basin joined the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation in September 2021.

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

67. 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 strategic action programme endorsed by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on 31 March 2021 and the activities of the Dniester Commission. In addition, the strategic action programme for the Chu-Talas River basin integrated adaptation measures and was endorsed in April 2021.

68. The Convention contributed to raising awareness of the role of water and transboundary cooperation in global processes, for example, to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021) with the first-ever Water and Climate Pavilion, where ECE co-organized a cooperation day, World Water Week (Stockholm, 23–27 August 2021) and the activities under the Water and Climate Coalition and the Global Commission on Adaptation, including during the Climate Adaptation Summit 2021 (online, 25 and 26 January 2021).

#### **4.2 Supporting transboundary basins in financing climate change adaptation**

69. In 2021, the Convention supported capacity-building activities on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins through organizing dedicated sessions at some global meetings and events. In addition, the Convention supported the finalization of project proposals on adaptation to climate change in the lower Dniester River basin and their inclusion in the adaptation plan for the Odessa region (Ukraine) for 2021–2023. Such activities helped countries and basins acquire knowledge and skills in mobilizing financing for transboundary climate change adaptation.

70. 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, the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Stockholm International Water Institute, the United Nations Development Programme, UNESCO, UNFCCC, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Bank Group, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Wildlife Fund, Zoï Environment Network and several joint bodies.

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

71. Drawing on the outcomes of the virtual global workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development organized in 2020 and on the input of various partners – including several international financial institutions – the publication *Funding and Financing of Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development*<sup>13</sup> was finalized in cooperation with the World Bank, GEF and other international financial institutions, launched at the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session and published in English. The publication provides an overview of the financial aspects of transboundary cooperation in terms of key opportunities and challenges, needs for the development and operations of joint bodies and basin development projects, and possible sources available – private and public.

72. The findings from the work on financing under the Convention were presented during the Fourth Mediterranean Water Forum (Malta (hybrid), 6 to 8 December 2021) as well as at other capacity-building events.

73. Partners included: AfDB, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), EIB, GEF, GEF IW:LEARN, IDB, OECD, the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the World Bank.

### **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**

74. Thanks to the active engagement of member States, the second reporting cycle, finalized in 2021, was a success; 129 out of 153 countries that share transboundary waters responded to the request to report on Sustainable Development indicator 6.5.2. All Parties to the Convention submitted national reports. Such a high response rate despite the pandemic demonstrated countries' strong commitment to reporting data and information on the status of transboundary water cooperation.

75. In 2021, ECE, together with UNESCO, continued consultations with countries to validate indicator 6.5.2 national values. The data reported by countries was submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division in February 2021.

76. ECE and UNESCO developed the second progress report on indicator 6.5.2 *Progress on transboundary water cooperation: Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration*

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<sup>13</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/61.

*needs – 2021*,<sup>14</sup> which was presented at World Water Week 2021 and published in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish. The official launch took place at a dedicated webinar on 14 September 2021, with more than 500 participants.

77. The national reports informed policy processes, such as the preparations of Voluntary National Reviews and the high-level meeting on the “Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda”,<sup>15</sup> as well as activities under the Convention. The analysis of indicator 6.5.2 features in the Secretary-General’s yearly report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>16</sup> the UN-Water *Summary Progress Update 2021: SDG 6 — water and sanitation for all*<sup>17</sup> and several other reports. These activities led to increased awareness and capacity in transboundary water cooperation.

78. Based on the information provided by Parties, the secretariat developed the *Progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention: Second report on implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, 2017–2020*,<sup>18</sup> which was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session and was published in English.

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

79. The national reports have informed policy processes related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such as the preparations of Voluntary National Reviews and deliberations at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (New York, July 2021), and activities under the Convention.

80. Under the aegis of the UN-Water Integrated Water Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6, ECE was involved in different activities on capacity-building and support, monitoring and communication on the baseline exercise.

81. The above-mentioned activities highlighted the benefits of reporting. ECE also presented the reporting exercise at an Ibero-American Water Directors Conference meeting in early November, national events/workshops in Mexico and Turkmenistan in November 2021, as well as numerous other events. On those occasions, ECE highlighted the importance of compatibility of data and encouraged States to coordinate reporting across indicators 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 and across riparian countries in the same basin, and to use the reporting process as a catalyst for improved cooperation.

82. Partners in this programme area included the Economic Commission for Africa, ESCWA, ESCAP, the European Union, GWP, GWP-Asia, GWP-Central Africa, GWP-Central America, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, OECD, United Nations Environment Programme-DHI, UNESCO, UNESCO Almaty Office, UNESCO Jakarta Office and UN-Water.

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

### **7.1 Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements**

83. The secretariat contributed to UN-Water inter-agency cooperation efforts, for example by continuing to co-lead the UN-Water Expert Groups on Water and Climate Change and on Transboundary Waters. For example, this included finalization of the UN-Water policy brief *The United Nations global water conventions: Fostering sustainable*

<sup>14</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/65.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.un.org/pga/75/high-level-meeting-on-water/](http://www.un.org/pga/75/high-level-meeting-on-water/).

<sup>16</sup> See E/2021/58.

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-for-all/>.

<sup>18</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/67.

*development and peace*<sup>19</sup> in January 2021, contribution to the Water Pavilion at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC, etc.

84. Cooperation was strengthened with numerous global and regional partners, such as regional economic communities, regional economic commissions and international financial institutions. Cooperation with United Nations Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams was strengthened who played a crucial role in promoting accession and implementation. The importance of cooperation with partners for the implementation of the Convention worldwide was recognized and highlighted with the adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session of decision IX/5 on partnerships for the global implementation of the Water Convention.<sup>20</sup>

85. The secretariat contributed to numerous global events to promote transboundary water cooperation. The Convention's position as a global platform and reference 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 led the action group on transboundary cooperation.

## **7.2 Activities of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents**

86. 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, activities on preventing accidental water pollution were presented at meetings with water authorities and river basin organizations and the relevant guidelines were promoted for further application on the ground. A draft workplan for 2021–2024 for the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group was developed and subsequently adopted by the Meeting of the Parties and new members of the Group were appointed.

## **7.3 Communication and knowledge management**

87. In 2021, the secretariat disseminated information on the Convention's activities, particularly through the newsletter of the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health. The secretariat also published news releases and articles on the ECE website. Two films were produced, one on the Water Convention<sup>21</sup> and one on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer basin project.<sup>22</sup>

88. Regular updates on activities under the Convention were shared on social media, Twitter account (@UNECE\_Water), Facebook (@UNECEWater) and LinkedIn,<sup>23</sup> raising interest from an increasing number of followers.

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<sup>19</sup> See [www.unwater.org/the-united-nations-global-water-conventions-fostering-sustainable-development-and-peace/?msclkid=5ffe434fbbc611eca482bdffa80c4e98](http://www.unwater.org/the-united-nations-global-water-conventions-fostering-sustainable-development-and-peace/?msclkid=5ffe434fbbc611eca482bdffa80c4e98).

<sup>20</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/63/Add.2, forthcoming.

<sup>21</sup> The video is available at <https://youtu.be/tcEP8CQPk4U>.

<sup>22</sup> The video is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSQecUAUptA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSQecUAUptA).

<sup>23</sup> Available at [www.linkedin.com/company/water-convention-protocol-on-water-health](http://www.linkedin.com/company/water-convention-protocol-on-water-health).