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**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

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Item 13 of the provisional agenda

**Programme of work for 2023–2025, terms of reference
for the bodies established to implement it and resources
needed for its implementation**

Draft programme of work for 2023–2025

Prepared by the Bureau with the support of the secretariat

Summary

The present document sets out a draft programme of work for 2023–2025 for the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, summarizing the overarching objectives and the proposed activities for 2023–2025 and indicating bodies to support their implementation. Estimates of the human and financial resources needed to implement the draft programme of work will be presented in a complementary informal document, to be read in conjunction with the present document.

By its terms of reference, the Working Group on Water and Health to the Protocol is mandated, inter alia, to provide guidance on the implementation of the programme of work and to advise the Meeting of the Parties in respect of the further development of the programme of work and its adaptation to changing circumstances (see ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.2-EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.2). The present draft programme of work for the period 2023–2025 was prepared by the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, for consideration by the Working Group at its thirteenth session.

This document builds on the achievements and lessons learned in implementing the past programmes of work and on discussions in the Bureau, the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting, and other Protocol-related bodies and expert meetings.

The Working Group on Water and Health is invited to:



(a) Examine the proposals contained in the present document, critically review them, and reflect on the sufficiency of available resources for the implementation of the proposed activities;

(b) Further elaborate on the elements that should become part of the draft programme of work, including the structure, bodies, partnerships, cooperation and synergies;

(c) Report on the willingness of Parties and other States to lead, contribute to, financially and technically, or to participate in the implementation of the various elements of the draft programme of work;

(d) Also report on the willingness of other stakeholders, such as international financial institutions, non-governmental and international organizations, donors and development agencies, to become partners and/or to provide financial resources and/or in-kind contributions to the implementation of the various elements of the draft programme of work;

(e) Agree on future steps for finalizing the draft programme of work, and entrust the Bureau, with the assistance of the secretariat, to submit it to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session (Geneva, 16–18 November 2022).

I. Background and overarching objectives

1. Improving water, sanitation, hygiene and health remains a priority in the pan-European region, as it is a matter of human rights and dignity, sustainability and social development. Substantial progress has been made over the past decades towards provision of safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene and sound water resource management across the region. However, gaps persist in the provision of basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and the region continues to experience water-related disease outbreaks, impairing health, well-being and the productivity of individuals and communities. Continued and strengthened efforts are required to close these gaps, while accelerating efforts towards the provision of safely managed water and sanitation services across the region to protect human health and the environment. Ensuring universal and equitable access to safe and affordable water, sanitation and hygiene for all and in all settings requires the provision of such services in places such as schools, health-care facilities, workplaces and public places, and it also means addressing the special needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

2. Driving forces, such as population growth, urbanization, environmental pollution, loss of biodiversity and climate change, are expected to exacerbate the impacts associated with changes in the availability and quality of freshwater resources and challenge access to WASH services. The consequences of climate change, such as water quality changes, water scarcity, floods and sea level rise, together with their social, economic and environmental impacts, are a shared concern across the region and a key priority that requires the attention of policymakers, scientists and practitioners. Other emerging risks and concerns include the important role of WASH in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the role that WASH and wastewater management play in the environmental dispersal and transmission of antimicrobial resistance, and hazards posed for freshwater resources (e.g., by microplastics). Intersectoral and multi-stakeholder action among numerous relevant sectors, including health, environment and water, is vital in tackling these emerging challenges.

3. Government leadership and partnership are important for progressively attaining universal, equitable and safe access to water, as well as sanitation and hygiene for all in all settings, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) offers a powerful legal instrument in the pan-European region to pursue Goal 6.

4. The overall objective of the programme of work for 2023–2025 of the Protocol is to support Parties in the implementation of and compliance with the Protocol's provisions, and to assist other States in acceding to and applying the Protocol. Activities address persisting gaps and emerging challenges in the pan-European region and support countries in pursuing their national priorities in the areas of water, sanitation, hygiene and health. The programme of work further aligns with global and regional commitments in the areas of water, environment, sanitation, hygiene and health, including the 2030 Agenda, the Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Ostrava Declaration), global environmental commitments and global health commitments as expressed in World Health Assembly resolutions (see subsection C below for more information).

A. Protocol as a tool for coronavirus disease pandemic recovery and for the prevention and control of future epidemics

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of WASH services as the first line of defence in preventing and controlling the spread of infectious disease. Investment in such services is a central policy prescription for a healthy and green recovery from the pandemic. Such “no-regrets” investments pay a rich dividend in health, human rights and inclusive economic growth.

6. World Health Assembly resolution 73.1 on COVID-19 response identifies WASH as a central component and calls upon countries: “to take measures to support access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and infection prevention and control, ensuring that adequate attention is paid to the promotion of personal hygienic measures in all settings, including

humanitarian settings, and particularly in health facilities”. The World Health Organization (WHO)/United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative (2020) calls for countries to develop comprehensive road maps linked with national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans and to ensure that hand hygiene in public spaces, health-care facilities, schools and workplaces is a mainstay beyond the pandemic.

7. Through its target setting and accountability framework, the Protocol on Water and Health can play an important role in building forward better and fairer from the pandemic. It can support a recovery process towards a more resilient post-COVID-19 world by placing access to essential services, such as safe, universal and equitable access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all in all settings, centre stage. The Protocol’s objectives and programmatic priorities strongly support strengthening national and local responses and prevention and preparedness capacities for infectious disease emergencies and pandemics.

8. The programme of work for 2023–2025 aims to support countries in setting or revising their national targets and action plans, considering lessons learned in the response to and recovery from the pandemic. The thematic programme areas support the uptake of evidence-based technical guidance and recommendations related to WASH for prevention, preparedness and response to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, as well as policy action to address inequities, promote an inclusive pandemic recovery and strengthen resilience against future pandemics and shocks, which hit the most vulnerable and marginalized disproportionately.

9. The Protocol continues to offer an operational pan-European platform for the exchange of policy interventions and good practices to: (a) improve water and sanitation services and hand hygiene in critical settings and institutions in the context of COVID-19; and (b) to address inequities in the water and sanitation sector – again in the context of COVID-19 – by establishing a baseline measure of the situation and improving the knowledge base to inform policy and technical interventions. The platform of the Protocol further allows for mutual support across countries, which is instrumental in the time of the pandemic and beyond.

B. Protocol as a tool to increase resilience to climate change

10. Climate change and the threats it poses are an unprecedented challenge of the twenty-first century. These threats come from both extreme events (climate shocks) and slower-onset changes (climate stress). Changes in climate are increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme events, such as floods, droughts, wildfires and storm surges, and longer-term changes in average temperature and precipitation patterns and rising sea levels. The impact of these changes on WASH services and behaviours and on water resources is multifaceted and can have significant public health and environmental consequences by exacerbating water-related diseases and environmental degradation.

11. Changes in climate come with a broad array of consequences, ranging from damage to water supply and sewerage infrastructure, degradation of catchments and source water quality, spillage of human waste to the environment, reduction of water availability and contamination of water supplies to change of consumption requirements to maintain hydration. Loss of services will result in people using unsafe water sources or being unable to maintain good hygiene practices. Changes in source water quality and quantity will increase exposure to pathogens and harmful chemicals, and lead to less reliable water supplies. Damage to sanitation systems will lead to increased environmental exposure to pathogens.

12. Action to support communities, societies and economies in adapting to climate change and building resilience in the face of uncertain and changing risks is critical to protect health, well-being and the environment. WASH – as one of the cornerstones of public health – and the protection of water resources are critical components in the formulation of climate change response and adaptation strategies. As water and sanitation facilities and services themselves are substantially threatened by the effects of climate change, efforts need to be made to reduce their vulnerability and improve their adaptive capacity.

13. The Protocol on Water and Health provides a clear framework for climate action in the areas of water, sanitation, hygiene and health. It seeks to support policymakers in integrating adaptation to climate change impacts into water and sanitation policy and strategic planning, while helping water and sanitation service operators to effectively manage climate risks. The programme of work for 2023–2025 takes an integrated approach and addresses responses and adaptation to a changing climate across all thematic programme areas. Overall, activities aim to strengthen the adaptive capacity of countries and communities by promoting the setting of climate-sensitive targets (under art. 6), strengthening the resilience of water and sanitation services to extreme weather events and other climate risks, supporting the adoption of climate-resilient water and sanitation planning, promoting the safe use of wastewater, and establishing systems for surveillance and response to water-related diseases triggered by a changing climate (under art. 8).

C. Protocol as a mechanism for putting global and regional commitments into action

14. The objectives, principles and approaches of the Protocol are strategically aligned with key global and regional frameworks and are thus mutually reinforcing.

15. The Protocol promotes the acceleration of efforts to ensure universal and equitable access to safe water and sanitation services for all, across all settings, and the progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation, first recognized by the Human Rights Council in 2010 in its resolution 15/9 on human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

16. The 2030 Agenda, with its strong call for action on water, sanitation, hygiene and health under Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 6 and across several other Goals, continues to provide significant momentum for further strengthening the role of the Protocol. The Protocol provides an operational intergovernmental regional platform, a sound governance approach, a wealth of knowledge and experience and practical tools to translate the aspirations of the Goals into tangible national actions. While the Protocol specifically focuses on Goals 3 and 6, the instrument, as well as the programme of work for 2023–2025, also support the implementation of additional Goals and targets, given the cross-cutting nature of water and sanitation (see figure I below).

Figure I
Sustainable Development Goals focused on by the Protocol and its programme of work for 2023–2025



Source: Based on *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide for Joint Implementation*, figure 2, p. 6 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.15).

17. Countries can reap the benefits of this alignment by jointly implementing the Protocol and the Sustainable Development Goals, making use of the targeted guidance developed to support them in this effort (see *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide for Joint Implementation*).¹ The Protocol offers a unique platform for strengthening national capacities and promoting exchange of experience and good practices to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals related to water, sanitation, hygiene and health.

18. The programme of work will also support translating other important global policy frameworks and initiatives into national and regional action by:

- (a) Supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- (b) Supporting also the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030;
- (c) Contributing to advancing the Secretary-General’s plan “Our Common Agenda”;²
- (d) Contributing also to the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 71/222³ and to related activities at the regional level;
- (e) Concretizing the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20–22 June 2012), “The future we want”;⁴

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.15.

² Available at www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/.

³ A/RES/71/222.

⁴ A/RES/66/288, annex.

(f) Contributing to the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework as part of the Secretary-General's Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;⁵

(g) Supporting the implementation of the International Health Regulations,⁶ in particular strengthening the national core capacities for surveillance, response and communication;

(h) Intensifying the delivery of the Secretary-General's call to provide WASH to all health-care facilities by 2030⁷ and World Health Assembly resolution 72.7 on water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities,⁸ which emphasizes the fundamental role of safe WASH services in ensuring universal health coverage and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 6;

(i) Scaling up the uptake of World Health Assembly resolution 73.1, in particular to strengthen national health systems to respond to the pandemic and to maintain the safe provision of all other essential public health functions, including the provision of WASH services;

(j) Advancing regional implementation of the *WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate Change: The transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments*;⁹

(k) Promoting the Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative to ensure that all communities and institutional settings have the resources and are able to practice hand hygiene habitually.

19. The objectives and provisions of the Protocol are also consistent with existing regional commitments addressing water, sanitation, hygiene and health and will strategically support the achievement of the forthcoming regional priorities put forward by the countries. The programme of work for 2023–2025 will advance the implementation of:

(a) Commitments made as a part of the Ostrava Declaration, which reaffirmed WASH and health as a political priority in the pan-European region;

(b) The Ministerial Declaration of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016);¹⁰

(c) *The European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”*,¹¹ in particular core priority 3 on promoting health and well-being, which prioritizes ensuring basic services, including WASH;

(d) The Iceland Statement “Ensuring Safe and Climate-resilient Water and Sanitation” (2018),¹² including a commitment to ratify or accede to the Protocol by member countries of the WHO Small Countries Initiative;

(e) The European Union revised Drinking Water Directive,¹³ requiring European Union member States to improve or maintain access to water for all, in particular for

⁵ The programme of work mainly supports the following accelerators: governance, data and information, finance and capacity-building.

⁶ Available at www.who.int/health-topics/international-health-regulations#tab=tab_1.

⁷ United Nations, “Secretary-General's remarks at Launch of International Decade for Action ‘Water for Sustainable Development’ 2018–2028 [as delivered]”, New York, 22 March 2018. Available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-03-22/secretary-generals-remarks-launch-international-decade-action-water.

⁸ WHA72.7, available at https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72-REC1/A72_2019_REC1-en.pdf#page=1.

⁹ World Health Organization (WHO) (n.p., 2020).

¹⁰ Available at <https://unece.org/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/ece.batumi.conf.2016.2.add.1.e.pdf>.

¹¹ WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) (Copenhagen, 2021).

¹² Available at www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/375963/iceland-manifesto-20180703-h1015.pdf.

¹³ 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 (recast), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 435 (2020), pp. 1–62.

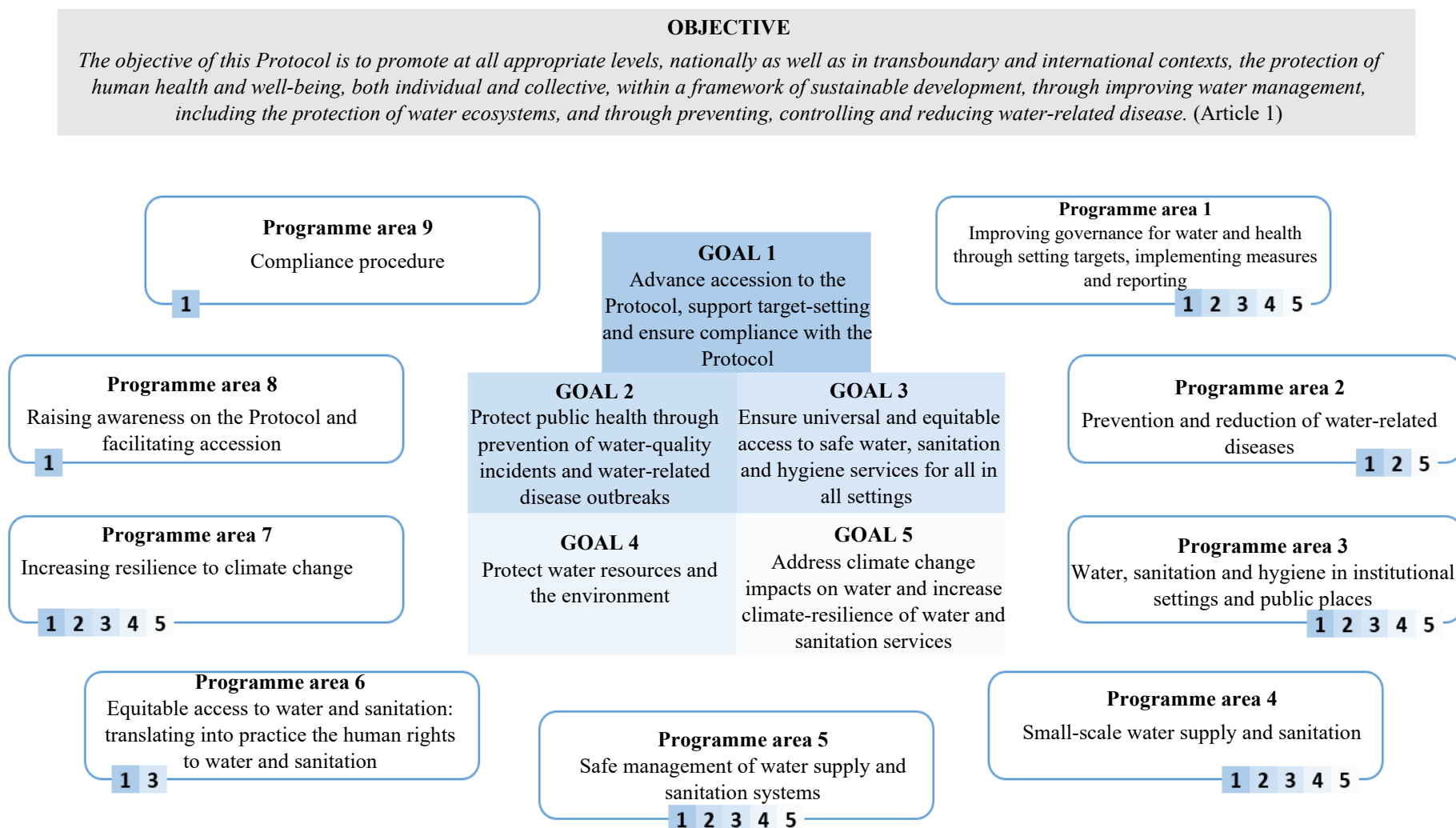
vulnerable and marginalized groups, and to implement a risk-based approach in drinking water service provision, as well as the European Union Water Framework Directive.¹⁴

D. Structure of the programme of work

20. The programme of work reflects the priorities, needs and areas of common concern for countries in the pan-European region. Activities are structured around nine programme areas, including technical areas on water, sanitation, hygiene and health, a programme area on raising awareness on the Protocol and facilitating accession and one programme area dedicated to the work of the Compliance Committee. The programme areas contribute to the achievement of five specific goals under the Protocol. These, in turn, contribute to the attainment of the overall objective of the instrument (see figure II below).

¹⁴ 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. 1–73.

Figure II
Structure and logic of the programme of work



21. The mainstreaming of gender-related considerations and gender aspects within the relevant technical areas of work is very welcome.

II. Bodies to implement the programme of work

22. The Meeting of the Parties is the highest governing body of the Protocol; it meets every three years and exercises the functions specified in article 16 of the Protocol.

23. The Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties, in accordance with rule 20 (4) of the rules of procedure of the Meeting of the Parties,¹⁵ exercises the following functions:

(a) Making arrangements to further develop the programme of work, adapt it to changing circumstances and avoid duplication of efforts with water- and health-related activities of other United Nations bodies and other international organizations;

(b) Taking initiatives to strengthen the application of the Protocol; maintaining liaison with the bureaux of governing bodies of other environmental conventions, including the Water Convention, and with international organizations, financial institutions environmental and health policymaking bodies and non-governmental organizations to improve the implementation of the Protocol, and taking other appropriate measures to facilitate the implementation of the programme of work;

(c) Carrying out other tasks entrusted to it by the Meeting of the Parties.

24. The Working Group on Water and Health is a subsidiary body of the Meeting of the Parties responsible for the implementation of the programme of work. In accordance with its terms of reference (ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.2-EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.2), it exercises the following functions:

(a) Preparing the meetings of the Parties;

(b) Overseeing and directing the activities of other subsidiary bodies established by the Meeting of the Parties and any other activities carried out under the programme of work;

(c) Keeping under review the need to amend the Protocol and preparing proposals to this end for the Meeting of the Parties;

(d) Making such proposals and recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties as it considers necessary for the achievement of the purposes of the Protocol;

(e) Undertaking any other duties requested by the Meeting of the Parties.

25. In between the ordinary meetings of the Meeting of the Parties, the Working Group provides guidance on the implementation of the programme of work and may advise the Meeting of the Parties in respect of the further development of the programme of work and its adaptation to changing circumstances.

26. The Compliance Committee, in accordance with article 15 of the Protocol and decision I/2 on review of compliance (ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.3-EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.3), has the following functions:

(a) Considering any submission, referral or communication relating to specific issues of compliance;

(b) Preparing, at the request of the Meeting of the Parties, a report on compliance with or implementation of specific provisions of the Protocol;

(c) Monitoring, assessing and facilitating the implementation of and compliance with the reporting requirements under article 7 of the Protocol.

27. The Committee may also make recommendations or take measures, if and as appropriate.

¹⁵ ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.1-EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.1.

28. The Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting was established at the first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 17–19 January 2007) as an open-ended body.¹⁶ The work of the Task Force has been a core component of different programmes of work under the Protocol in view of its function in facilitating and supporting implementation of articles 6 and 7 of the Protocol, also with the aim of translating global and regional commitments into national targets and action and facilitating the monitoring of progress.¹⁷

29. In addition to the above-mentioned bodies, expert groups have been established and/or convened to support the implementation of the programme of work. Such groups typically work on priority thematic issues relevant to the programme of work and may be convened regularly (for details on expert groups, refer to the respective programme areas in section IV below).

30. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) joint secretariat, generally assists the Protocol's governing and working bodies and provides technical and organizational support in the implementation of activities under the programme of work, on the basis of available resources and in accordance with the provisions of the ECE/WHO Regional Office for Europe memorandum of understanding¹⁸ (developed in pursuance of article 17 of the Protocol).

III. Partnerships, cooperation and synergies

31. The effective implementation of the programme of work for 2023–2025 requires whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approaches that involve sectors other than water, environment and health, such as the education, agriculture, infrastructure, finance, urban and rural development sectors. Likewise, the success of the Protocol depends on strategic cooperation with a multitude of partners who share joint goals and agendas, such as international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia. The Protocol provides a strong convening platform for mutual cooperation, capitalizing on the comparative advantages of the partners involved and synergies in the implementation of the programme of work.

32. Youth and gender-balanced participation in the work of the Meeting of the Parties, the subsidiary bodies and the implementation of the programme of work is very welcome.

33. The following non-exhaustive and non-exclusive list of partners includes those who have a proven track record of cooperation under the Protocol or who may have an interest in such cooperation:

- *United Nations agencies*: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UN-Water, WHO, the World Meteorological Organization
- *Other intergovernmental organizations, agencies and platforms*: the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Nordic-Baltic Network for Water and Health
- *International financial institutions and development partners*: the German Agency for International Cooperation, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- *WHO Collaborating Centres*: the WHO Collaborating Centre on Water Quality and Health at the KWR Water Cycle Research Institute, the Netherlands; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Risk Assessment of Pathogens in Food and Water at the National Institute for Public Health and the

¹⁶ ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.5–EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.5, paras. 5 (b) and 38.

¹⁷ Initially established as the “Task Force on Indicators and Reporting”, the body was renamed the “Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting” by the Meeting of the Parties at its second session (see ECE/MP.WH/4–EUDHP1003944/4.2/1/06, para. 27 (h)).

¹⁸ Available at www.unece.org/env/water/pwh_text/text_protocol.html.

- Environment, the Netherlands; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research on Drinking Water Hygiene at the German Environment Agency; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication at the University of Bonn, Germany; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Drinking Water Safety at the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Protection of Water Quality and Human Health at the University of Surrey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the WHO Collaborating Centre for Sanitation and Water in Developing Countries at the Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology, Switzerland
- *International, regional or national non-governmental organizations and other organizations*: the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition, the European Federation of National Associations of Water Services, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, the International Water Association, Sanitation and Water for All, WaterAid, Women Engage for a Common Future
 - *Private sector*: the International Federation of Private Water Operators
 - *Academia*: University of Geneva
 - Implementation and compliance bodies under other multilateral environmental agreements

IV. Areas of work and activities

Programme area 1 — Improving governance for water and health through setting targets, implementing measures and reporting

Responsible bodies: Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting and the joint secretariat

Lead Parties: Portugal, Romania, Switzerland

Objectives: Reinforce the implementation of the core provisions of the Protocol on target setting and reporting under articles 6 and 7 and support related action at the national level

Activities:

1. Setting targets and implementing measures

- (a) Organize meetings of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (up to two meetings) focusing on:
 - (i) Discussing implementation of targets set by Parties to the Protocol and other States and their impact at the national level;
 - (ii) Supporting the setting of new or revision of existing targets, in accordance with the emerging and current thematic priorities and in synergy with programme areas 2–7 to build and capitalize on the outcomes of the substantive work. Special consideration will be given to COVID-19-sensitive and other targets aimed at the prevention and control of other infectious diseases, and climate-sensitive targets, with the aim of supporting the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
 - (iii) Financing and implementation of targets;
- (b) Organizing up to three national and/or subregional workshops to support target setting and implementation;
- (c) Developing a publication on financial and economic aspects of target setting and target implementation.

2. Strengthening capacity to monitor progress and reporting

- (a) Promote, based on the publication *Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide for Joint Implementation*, the strengthening of synergies with processes related to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals by encouraging contributions to the Voluntary National Reviews and, at the regional and global levels, by providing input to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, the high-level political forum on sustainable

development and the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development” (2023), as well as by strengthening linkages between the reporting system under the Protocol and the 2030 Agenda monitoring framework;

(b) Facilitate reporting by Parties and other States, in accordance with article 7, and support data analysis at the regional level through the full deployment of an online reporting system for the sixth reporting cycle under the Protocol;

(c) Guide the secretariat in preparing the regional implementation report oriented towards communicating the findings and showcasing the progress made and achievements at the regional level based on national summary reports.

3. Improving governance on water and health at the national level

Assist Parties and other States in setting targets, establishing action plans and implementing measures to achieve them through providing, upon demand and subject to the availability of resources, tailor-made support through relevant processes and projects. Such on-the-ground support for implementation of the Protocol is provided through:

(a) “EU4Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data” for the Eastern Partnership;

(b) Other projects, including: “Improving water, sanitation, hygiene and health through the implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health”, with beneficiary countries in Central Asia; and the United Nations Development Account projects “Food-water-energy nexus support to post-COVID-19 recovery in Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa” and “Equitable access to water and sanitation services for all and in all settings and strengthened climate resilience in the water and sanitation sector” (provisional title);

(c) WHO Biennial Collaborative Agreements and Country Cooperation Strategies concluded between ministries of health and WHO/Europe.

Programme area 2 — Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases

Lead Parties: Belarus and Norway

Objectives: Support Parties and other States in implementing article 8 of the Protocol, specifically by supporting countries in:

(a) Strengthening national and local capacities with regard to improving, maintaining and sustaining surveillance and early warning systems for water-related disease, preparedness and contingency planning, and response to outbreaks and water quality incidents;

(b) Building national capacities for risk-based surveillance of drinking water supply and quality;

(c) Improving environmental surveillance of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and other disease agents of concern in wastewater as an integral part of public health surveillance.

Activities in programme area 2 will substantiate and foster the setting of targets for preventing and reducing water-related disease and improving surveillance systems according to article 6 of the Protocol. They will also reinforce implementation of article 12 of the Protocol on joint and coordinated international action and thereby support implementation of the International Health Regulations, in particular strengthening national core capacities for surveillance and response and implementation of World Health Assembly resolution 73.1 on COVID-19 response.

Activities of this programme will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 4 and 5.

Activities:

1. Strengthen national capacities for surveillance and outbreak management of water-related diseases

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Support up to three subregional and/or in-country capacity-building activities on water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management using the guidance and training modules developed in previous programme periods. These activities will address the key principles as well as specific issues, common challenges and action steps for strengthening surveillance and outbreak management of water-related disease. Activities can be organized as stand-alone training and/or as integrated training jointly with sub-area 2.2 on surveillance of drinking-water quality, depending on country needs;

(b) Undertake and publish an evidence review on legionellosis control and prevention for the pan-European region, including case studies on investigation and response to legionellosis outbreaks;

(c) Organize up to three capacity-building events at the national and/or subregional level to: (i) foster networking and experience sharing; (ii) support formulation of context-specific legionellosis targets; (iii) develop procedures and tools for prevention and control of legionellosis in building water systems, including risks resulting from temporary closure of building systems (e.g., due to COVID-19); and (iv) improve surveillance systems for legionellosis.

2. Strengthen national capacities for risk-based surveillance of drinking water supply and quality

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Conduct up to three subregional and/or national capacity-building and networking activities to support exchange of country experiences and promote best practices and the adoption of risk-based surveillance approaches in regulations and practice, based on the guidance and training modules developed in previous programme periods. These activities will be implemented in collaboration with programme areas 4 and 5 and sub-area 2.1 on water-related disease surveillance;

(b) Support countries – upon request – in establishing national regulations and standards for drinking water quality and the application of risk-based approaches in surveillance. This activity will support implementation of the WHO *Guidelines for drinking-water quality: Fourth edition incorporating the first addendum*¹⁹ and aligns with other international frameworks (such as the European Union Drinking Water Directive).

3. Improve capacity for environmental surveillance of wastewater

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Organize an expert meeting to exchange scientific developments and country best practices, challenges and barriers in undertaking environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater. This activity also includes the development of a background document on wastewater surveillance in cooperation with programme area 5;

(b) Support countries – upon request – in developing procedures and/or regulations for setting up environmental surveillance programmes for SARS-CoV-2 and other disease agents (e.g., for enteric viruses, poliovirus, or antimicrobial resistant organisms) in wastewater of communities and vulnerable settings to support public health decision-making for preparedness and response actions. These activities will be implemented in cooperation with programme area 5.

¹⁹ WHO (Geneva, 2017).

Programme area 3 — Water, sanitation and hygiene in institutional settings and public places

Lead Parties and country: Georgia, Hungary and Republic of Moldova [to be confirmed]

Objectives: Improve WASH services in institutional settings, particularly in schools, health-care facilities, and other priority settings, including workplaces and public places, by assisting Parties and other States to:

- (a) Prioritize, improve and monitor WASH services in these settings;
- (b) Promote effective cooperation with the education and health system sectors to foster improved health and educational outcomes and higher quality of health-care services;
- (c) Support translating regional and global commitments addressing these settings into national targets and actions in accordance with article 6 of the Protocol;
- (d) Foster implementation of the global recommendations for WASH and hand hygiene to prevent and control COVID-19 in these settings.

Work under this programme area complements efforts under other initiatives and programmes, such as health-promoting and child-friendly schools, quality health-care services, maternal care and childcare, hand hygiene for all, infection prevention and control, prevention and control of antimicrobial resistance and environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient health systems. The programme area will support implementation of World Health Assembly resolutions 72.7 on water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities and 73.1 on COVID-19 response, as well as the WHO/UNICEF Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative.

Activities of this programme will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 4 and 6.

Activities:

1. Improving water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities

Work will be undertaken to:

- (a) Conduct a regional and/or up to two subregional workshops to disseminate evidence-based guidance and recommendations and regional evidence on WASH in health-care facilities and facilitate the sharing of good practices from countries to support target setting and policy actions towards improving WASH conditions in health-care settings, thereby promoting quality of care and prevention and control of infectious diseases, including COVID-19;
- (b) Support up to two countries – upon request – in undertaking a national assessment of WASH in health-care facilities to provide a comprehensive baseline and inform national target setting and action planning. The analysis will include, inter alia, review of national regulations and standards, assessment of WASH conditions in different types and levels of health-care facilities and identification of bottlenecks and priority needs;
- (c) Assist up to two countries – upon request – in strengthening management, monitoring and surveillance of WASH services in health-care facilities, including through the application of the WHO risk-based Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool²⁰ and the development of national definitions and indicators for an advanced WASH service level.

2. Improving water, sanitation and hygiene in schools

Work will be undertaken to:

²⁰ *Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool (WASH FIT): A practical guide for improving quality of care through water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities* (Geneva, WHO, 2017).

(a) Organize up to two subregional workshops to foster dissemination of available evidence, recommendations and tools on WASH in schools, promote leadership and cooperation between the education and health sectors, facilitate the sharing of good practices, and support target setting and action planning on WASH in schools, including school-based measures for prevention and control of COVID-19;

(b) Collate best practices related to hand hygiene, menstrual hygiene and on-site sanitation in schools in the region and organize an expert group meeting to share respective country experiences and challenges. These activities will be implemented in collaboration with programme areas 4 and 6.

3. Scaling up action for hand hygiene in institutions, public places and workplaces

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Support up to two countries – upon request – to respond to the WHO/UNICEF Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative through the development and implementation of a national road map/strategy on hand hygiene, including schools, health-care facilities, public space and workplaces. This activity will be closely linked to programme area 6;

(b) Collate best practices on national policies, standards, monitoring, implementation programmes, financing and behaviour change approaches and activities for promoting and sustaining hand hygiene practices in public places.

Programme area 4 — Small-scale water supply and sanitation

Lead Parties: Germany and Serbia

Objectives: Support Parties and other States to

(a) Increase policy attention to small-scale water supply and sanitation systems;

(b) Support policy uptake and implementation of good practice-based approaches in the regulation, management and surveillance of small-scale water supply and sanitation at the national and local levels;

(c) Assist with improving access to safe, sustainable and equitable drinking water and sanitation services in rural areas, small towns and peri-urban areas.

Activities under this programme area will further substantiate and foster consideration of small-scale water supply and sanitation in target setting under article 6, including at the local level. Complementary field activities will contribute to improving the in-country evidence base on small-scale systems and to scaling up water safety and sanitation safety planning approaches in policy and practice.

Activities of this programme will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 2, 5 and 6.

Activities:

1. Supporting an enabling environment for small-scale systems

Work will be undertaken to organize up to three subregional and/or national capacity-building events to promote good practices and tools developed under the Protocol, as well as the recommendations of the WHO *Guidelines for drinking-water quality* and the WHO *Guidelines on sanitation and health*²¹ that support formulation of national road maps, policies, regulations and programmes and aim to improve the situation of small-scale water supply and sanitation.

²¹ WHO (Geneva, 2018).

2. Strengthen policy uptake and application of approaches to safe management of small-scale systems

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Develop a tool/templates for integrated water and sanitation safety planning for application in rural areas. Such integrated tools will facilitate a holistic approach to managing drinking water and sanitation safety of small-scale systems together in rural areas;

(b) Also develop training materials for the application of water safety plans with a particular focus on small-scale water supplies in the pan-European region. In order to facilitate reaching operators and surveillance agencies in remote areas, options for dissemination through e-learning platforms will be investigated, once the training materials have been developed;

(c) Conduct up to three subregional and/or national workshops to build capacities on uptake of sanitation safety plan and water safety plan principles and integrated approaches for small-scale drinking water and sanitation systems. This activity will be implemented in cooperation with programme area 5;

(d) Support field projects – upon demand by countries and subject to the availability of resources – on improved planning, operation and management of small-scale water supply and sanitation systems, with a particular focus on capacity development and implementation of integrated water and sanitation safety plans in rural areas. Such field projects are expected to establish a valuable link between policy action at the national level and action at the local level, which may also form a basis for Parties to develop subnational targets.

3. Improving the evidence base and supporting policy action on small-scale sanitation

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Undertake a region-wide survey to explore the coverage, regulation and status of small-scale sanitation systems, including on-site systems;

(b) Develop a publication on good practices in regulation, management and surveillance of small-scale sanitation systems, including on-site systems, also containing supportive case studies from across the pan-European region;

(c) Conduct up to two national and/or subregional workshops to build capacities among concerned stakeholders on the uptake of the WHO *Guidelines on sanitation and health* with focus on small-scale sanitation systems, including on-site systems, and to support the development of appropriate regulations, and surveillance schemes.

Programme area 5 — Safe management of water supply and sanitation systems

Lead Parties: Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Netherlands [both to be confirmed]

Objectives: Support Parties and other States to ensure safe and climate-resilient management of water supply and sanitation services by strengthening national capacities regarding scaling up risk-based management approaches. Activities will aim to enable regulators and managers to adopt approaches and tools towards safely managed water supply and sanitation services and to promote cooperation and exchange of experiences. Activities will also focus on sanitation, including support to establishing effective sanitation policies and regulations, attention to water reuse and managing emerging challenges in wastewater. All activities will substantiate and foster the setting of targets towards ensuring the safe management of water and sanitation services in accordance with article 6 of the Protocol.

Activities of this programme will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 2, 4 and 7.

Activities:

1. Support safe and climate-resilient management of water and sanitation services

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Build capacity at the national and/or subregional level through up to three events on risk assessment and risk management approaches, such as water safety plans, sanitation safety plans and integrated water and sanitation planning in policy and practice on the basis of the WHO *Guidelines for drinking water quality* and the WHO *Guidelines on sanitation and health* and supporting technical tools, including those developed under the Protocol. Capacity-building and assistance will focus on strengthening uptake of water safety plans and sanitation safety plans in national policies and legislation and supporting development of country road maps towards long-term scaling up of these approaches. This includes building capacities on good practices in strengthening climate-resilience, on water safety plan auditing and on risk-based approaches to drinking water quality surveillance in cooperation with programme area 2, 4 and 7;

(b) Build capacity at the subregional level through up to two events on quantitative microbial risk assessment as a tool to support water safety management. This includes the use of supporting technical tools;

(c) Organize a strategic regional meeting on climate resilience of drinking water supply and sanitation services, including preparing for and responding to extreme weather events. This activity will be implemented in close cooperation with programme areas 4 and 7;

(d) Develop a document or tool on financing climate-resilient drinking water and sanitation services, including in relation to investment planning.

2. Strengthen attention to sanitation, wastewater reuse and wastewater quality

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Provide support to up to two countries – upon request – on sanitation policy development related to effective regulations, sustainable technical interventions and financial approaches, based on the recommendations of the WHO *Guidelines on sanitation and health*, including consideration of risks to health and the environment as well as challenges arising from global pressures, such as climate change, urbanization, migration and inequalities in access;

(b) Build capacity and awareness at the national and/or subregional level through up to two events on use and reuse of (waste)water for fit-for-purpose applications. This includes sharing technical expertise and knowledge of the microbiological and chemical profile of reusable water sources associated with fit-for-purpose application(s) and technologies;

(c) Organize a regional workshop to raise awareness on (re-)emerging challenges in wastewater, such as antimicrobial resistance, SARS-CoV-2, micropollutants, microplastics and drug residues, as well as on sewage surveillance applications, to identify emerging challenges in wastewater. This activity also includes the development of a background document on wastewater surveillance in cooperation with programme area 2.

Programme area 6 — Equitable access to water and sanitation: translating into practice the human rights to water and sanitation

Lead Parties: France and Hungary

Objectives: Activities will support the implementation of the Protocol's requirement to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation for all members of the population, particularly those suffering a disadvantage or social exclusion, as emphasized in article 5 (l). The activities under this programme of work also promote the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in the pan-European region.

Countries will be supported in addressing equity aspects in policymaking processes related to the provision of water and sanitation services and in identifying and implementing solutions to ensure equitable access. Additionally, activities will further substantiate and advance the consideration of equity aspects when developing targets under article 6 of the Protocol (in coordination with programme area 1) and complement activities under programme areas 3, 4 and 5. Furthermore, promoting political awareness on existing inequities in the pan-European region at regional and international events will be central to the work in this programme area. In the light of previous and ongoing revisions of European Union directives, promotion of the tools developed by the Protocol on Water and Health can contribute to meeting and implementing the respective obligations.

Activities:

1. Support assessments of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation

Work will be undertaken to:

- (a) Revise the Equitable Access Score-card²² to complement the tool with a specific focus on COVID-19 and other potential epidemics;
- (b) Support up to four self-assessments on the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation in countries using the Equitable Access Score-card.

2. Foster the adoption and implementation of measures to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation

Work will be undertaken to:

- (a) Support the development of equitable access action plans and/or related policy recommendations in up to two countries. Furthermore, this item supports the development of equity-related targets under the Protocol;
- (b) Organize up to two meetings of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation to facilitate the exchange of experiences;
- (c) Promote the importance of affordability in ensuring equitable water and sanitation services, including by promoting the publication "*Making water and sanitation affordable for all: Policy options and good practices to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation services in the pan-European region*".²³

3. Promote awareness on equitable access to water and sanitation, as well as synergies with relevant global and regional processes, policies and instruments

Work will be undertaken to:

- (a) Promote the use of the Protocol tools on equitable access to meet and implement obligations arising from relevant European Union directives on water and sanitation. This item could include targeted capacity-building activities in cooperation with the relevant European Union institutions and the European Network of Drinking Water Regulators, possibly through a subregional workshop for European Union member States on how to use the Protocol tools on equitable access to meet their new obligations concerning access to water;
- (b) Promote the strengthening of efforts on equitable access to sanitation, including in the context of the ongoing revision of the European Union Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.²⁴ The activity will be implemented in cooperation with activities on the provision of WASH services in institutions and small systems in programme areas 3 and 4;

²² *The Equitable Access Score-card: Supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation* (United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/8).

²³ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/20.

²⁴ Council Directive 91/271/EEC of 21 May 1991 concerning urban waste-water treatment, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 135 (1991), pp. 40–52.

(c) Promote political awareness on existing inequities in regional and international events, including through strengthening cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Programme area 7 — Increasing resilience to climate change

Lead country: Italy

Objectives: Activities will support strengthening resilience and preparedness to water-related disasters, extreme events and other climate change-induced effects at the policy, strategic and practitioner levels. This programme area will specifically focus on building awareness, collecting evidence, preparing guidance and strengthening capacities in addressing climate change impacts on water resources and water supply and sanitation services, as well as promoting linkages with global climate processes and related national planning documents.

Activities:

Work will be undertaken to:

(a) Exchange experience and promote good practices at the regional and subregional levels on strengthening the climate resilience of the water and sanitation sectors through round tables and workshops (including one organized together with the Water Convention). These events will also explore interlinkages with other sectors and the benefits of integrated action across sectors. The activity will be implemented in cooperation with programme area 5;

(b) On the basis of the findings and good practices identified and discussed in the events under point (a) above, develop guidelines/collection of good practices on strengthening the climate resilience of the water and sanitation sector and across other relevant sectors. This work will build on the *Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events*.²⁵ The activity will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 4 and 5;

(c) Build capacity to promote the adoption of good practices in strengthening the climate resilience of the water and sanitation sector, including in relation to climate adaptation planning and global climate processes. The activity will be implemented in cooperation with programme areas 2, 4 and 5;

(d) Analyse the relation between Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and Protocol targets and the development of recommendations on how to increase those linkages.

Programme area 8 — Raising awareness on the Protocol and facilitating accession

Responsible body: Joint secretariat, with the support of the Bureau and national focal points

Objectives: Raising awareness on the Protocol in the pan-European region and providing support to countries in raising government commitment and ownership regarding accession to the Protocol, including through assisting them in assessing their challenges, priorities and benefits of accession and providing advice on accession procedures.

Activities:

(a) Foster communication and promotion of the Protocol through different activities, including website update, networking on social media, participation in major international events and production of promotional materials;

²⁵ L. Sinisi and R. Aertgeerts, eds. (Copenhagen, WHO/Europe, 2011).

- (b) Organize – upon demand – national and/or subregional workshops to promote accession;
- (c) Provide technical and legal advice related to accession to the Protocol, upon demand, including through the development of a targeted publication, if needed.

Programme area 9 — Compliance procedure

Responsible body: Compliance Committee

Objectives and work to be undertaken: The Compliance Committee will perform its activities as set out in decision I/2 of the Meeting of the Parties on compliance, and will monitor and facilitate implementation of and compliance with the Protocol. Moreover, the Committee will provide assistance to Parties under the Consultation Process in accordance with its terms of reference, as amended by the Committee at its tenth meeting (Geneva, 25 November 2014).²⁶

Activities:

- (a) Compliance Committee meetings (five meetings);
- (b) Consultation Process (two processes);
- (c) Awareness-raising on the compliance procedure and the legal dimension of the Protocol.

V. Overview of resource requirements

34. Regular budget resources available to the joint secretariat are not sufficient to cover the costs of the programme of work, including staff costs. Therefore, the implementation of the programme of work and its activities depends on the availability of extrabudgetary resources. In cases in which such resources do not become available or do not suffice, activities will have to be prioritized, revised, postponed or cancelled, in consultation with the Bureau and responsible lead Parties.

35. The overview of resource requirements for the programme of work for 2023–2025 will be presented as a separate informal document to the Working Group on Water and Health and is to be read in conjunction with the present document.

²⁶ ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2014/2–EUDCE/1408105/1.10/2014/CC/06, para. 15 and annex.