



REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

“NEW POLICY DEVELOPMENTS, IMPACTS OF COVID, AND OPTIONS TO ENSURE AFFORDABILITY”

UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH

13-14 June 2022

Hybrid Meeting

Room Tempus 1, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

INFORMATION NOTICE

I. Background and Rationale

In the pan-European region, the UNECE¹-WHO/Europe [Protocol on Water and Health](#) provides a sound framework for translating the human rights to water and sanitation into practice and for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 and other water, sanitation, and hygiene-related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Protocol encourages its Parties to ensure access to water and sanitation for everyone, and it places special emphasis on providing equitable access to water and sanitation “for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion” (article 5, I).

Since 2016, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has driven the work of many countries and development partners in the area of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). To support progress, in March 2016, the “Regional Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation: From Assessment to Action” discussed priority gaps and actions needed across the pan-European region to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation. The Regional Workshop also discussed the role of key actors to be engaged for their effective implementation, possible ways to integrate actions to achieve equitable access into water and non-water sectors’ policy processes and plans, and the financial implications of actions to achieve equitable access and possible options to finance them.

Recent developments have highlighted the importance of equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, thereby strengthening the rationale for accelerating progress in this area of work. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure access to clean water and sanitation, including the promotion of adequate hand hygiene. Indeed, in the absence of a vaccine or effective treatment, frequent handwashing with soap was recommended as a simple but effective intervention to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

In addition to that, applying an equity lens becomes vital in ensuring inclusive recovery of the water sector after the COVID-19 pandemic and enhances its resilience to future shocks, with particular importance for vulnerable communities. Furthermore, due to the interconnectedness of the water, energy, and food sectors, strengthening water access becomes a crucial element in the integrated management of essential resources for socio-economic recovery.

Policymakers will have to take measures by establishing inclusive policy frameworks and leaving no one behind. Consequently, there is an increased awareness of the need to accelerate progress, and action is taking place; The year 2020 marked the 10th anniversary of the recognition of the human rights to safe drinking water and the fifth anniversary of the right to sanitation, and ended with the adoption by the European Parliament of the [revised EU Drinking Water Directive](#)^{2,3}. The revised Drinking Water Directive makes explicit reference to the Protocol by encouraging member states to “make use of the guidance documents developed under the remit of the Protocol”. The application of the Protocol’s guidance documents allows the assessment of the policy background and baseline situation on access to water and the definition of necessary actions to improve the access of water for all intended for human consumption.

Article 16 of the revised Directive states that “Member States shall take the necessary measures to improve or maintain access to water intended for human consumption for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalized groups, as defined by the Member States”. In light of this, Member States shall identify people without, or limited, access to water intended for human consumption and assess possibilities for improving access for such people.

Since 2011, a number of tools have been developed, and country-level activities carried out under the Protocol to support countries in their efforts to improve equitable access to water and sanitation⁴. The current programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2020-2022 includes further support for developing and sharing country experiences. Furthermore, a policy brief on good practices in ensuring affordability of water and sanitation services was developed with the aim to enhance the understanding of how affordability concerns can be addressed, and further actions can be taken to ensure affordability of water and sanitation services for all. Consequently, the new Regional Workshop represents an opportunity to more broadly share lessons learned since the previous one took place in 2016, as well as to discuss practical approaches to face the new context, also in view of the next programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health for the period 2023-2025.

² Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2020/2184/oj>

³ Article 16 of the Directive calls on member States to take the “necessary measures to improve or maintain access to water intended for human consumption for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalized groups”.

⁴ Tools and information about the activities carried out so far available at: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-protocol/equitable-access-water-and-sanitation>

II. Objectives

The overall objective of the Regional Workshop is to bring together experts working in the water and sanitation sectors as well as other sectors such as environment, education, health, social protection, and finance to exchange knowledge and gather lessons learned in achieving equitable access as well as the actions taken in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene in the context of COVID-19.

The **specific objectives** of the workshop are:

1. To discuss to what extent the guidance and tools on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation developed out under the Protocol on Water and Health are still relevant and how they should be revised to take into account lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To review and discuss new policy developments in the area of equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region, including:
 - a. Country-level developments
 - b. The transposition and implementation of the revised EU Drinking Water Directive, particularly in light of the obligations arising from the Directive concerning access to water.
3. To discuss policy options and good practices to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation services in the pan-European region and what further relevant work could be carried out under the Protocol on Water and Health to promote further action.

III. Organization of work

Several case studies will be presented during the workshop, illustrating new policy developments to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation and good practices in addressing affordability concerns.

Plenary presentations and discussions will be combined with interactive working sessions in break-out groups to ensure optimal experience sharing.

IV. Targeted participants

Participants will primarily include country representatives from the pan-European region whose work (in the environment, education, health, social protection, finance, and other sectors) is in the field of equitable access to water and sanitation. Further, the workshop will include representatives from development agencies and donors, civil society organizations and stakeholders engaged in water and sanitation services.

V. Partners

The Regional Workshop is organized under the leadership of UNECE, as part of the joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health, in cooperation with the lead Parties, France and Hungary.

VI. Background documentation

The background documents for the workshop are:

- [No One Left Behind](#): Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region;
- [The Equitable Access Score-card](#): supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation;

- [Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans](#) to Ensure Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation;
- [The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Practice](#): Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region;
- [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;
- The revised [Directive 2020/2184](#) of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption;
- [The Measurement and Monitoring of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) Affordability](#): A missing element of monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Targets 6.1 and 6.2;
- [Environmental health inequalities fact sheet series](#) including two fact sheets on water, sanitation and hygiene.

The workshop programme will be made available on the [meeting webpage](#).

VII. Practical information

Dates and times

The workshop will start on Monday, 13 June 2022, at 10:00 and close at 16:00 on Tuesday, 14 June 2022. It will be held in a hybrid format from room Tempus 1 of the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

Working languages

The working languages of the meeting will be English, Russian, and French.

Registration

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience and **by 27 May 2022** at the latest. Please register online using the following link: <https://indico.un.org/event/1000661/>

More information on how to create an account on Indico to effectively register for the event is available on the meeting webpage at: <https://unece.org/info/events/event/360842>

The link to connect to the meeting platform will share with participants subsequently.

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition may apply for **financial support** to facilitate their participation in the meeting. Please note that financial resources are limited. Priority will be given to country/organization representatives contributing at the Regional Workshop.

Requests for financial support should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat (cammile.marceo@un.org) as soon as possible, but no later than **9 May 2022**, using the financial support request form available on the meeting website. Due to visa and travel arrangement regulations, no applications will be accepted after this deadline.

Since Switzerland is part of the Schengen area, **visa applications** might take up to 5 weeks. Therefore, please indicate clearly in the registration if a personal invitation letter for visa purposes is needed. Participants requiring a visa are encouraged to register as soon as possible and start the visa procedure at least 5 weeks in advance.