



Economic Commission for Europe

**World Health Organization
Regional Office for Europe**

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

Working Group on Water and Health

Thirteenth meeting

Geneva, 19 and 20 May 2022

**Report of the Working Group on Water and Health on its
thirteenth meeting**

I. Introduction

1. The thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held on 19 and 20 May 2022 in Geneva and online.
2. The main objective of the thirteenth meeting was to review the implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol for the period 2020–2022 (ECE/MP.WH/19/Add.1-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/06/Add.1), adopted at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Belgrade, 19–21 November 2019). Additionally, the Working Group discussed the draft programme of work for 2023–2025 (ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2022/3) and the resources for its implementation, including the outcome of an online survey aimed at prioritizing the activities of the new programme of work, which had previously been circulated among Parties and non-Parties. Furthermore, the Working Group also discussed the preparations for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 16–18 November 2022).
3. The meeting also featured a special session on increasing resilience to climate change and the Protocol on Water and Health, which aimed to discuss future activities in that area of work and review actions taken by countries to address climate-sensitive health and environmental risks.

A. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal,



Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

5. Representatives of UN-Water and the World Health Organization (WHO) attended the meeting.

6. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the meeting: Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment; Centre “Partnership for Development” (Republic of Moldova); Earth Forever; Earthjustice; Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe; Human Right 2 Water; International Network of Liberal Women (Netherlands); Journalists for Human Rights; Women Engage for a Common Future; and Women Water Partnership-Ukraine.

7. Representatives of the following academic institutions attended the meeting: Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (Germany); Deltares (Netherlands); Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology; North-Western State Medical University named after I.I. Mechnikov (Russian Federation); University of Bologna (Italy); University of Bristol (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); and WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication, University of Bonn (Germany).

8. Independent experts on water and sanitation and the Chair of the Compliance Committee of the Protocol on Water and Health attended.

9. The meeting was serviced by the joint secretariat provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe .

B. Organizational matters

10. In the absence of the Chair, the first Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Water and Health, Ms. Helena Costa (Portugal), opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. The second Vice-Chair, Mr. Gheorghe Constantin (Romania), also chaired parts of the meeting.

11. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2022/1-EUCHP/2219533/3.1/2022/WGWH/03.¹

II. Progress in the ratification process

12. A representative of the ECE secretariat reported that the Protocol had 36 signatories and 27 Parties and that there had been no new accessions since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

13. A representative of Italy informed the Working Group that the accession process of Italy was ongoing, but that it would probably not be completed by the time of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

14. A representative of North Macedonia informed the Working Group that his country had made significant progress in acceding to the Protocol, an issue on which the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning and the Ministry of Health had been working in concert through the preparation of an analysis of national legislation and the financial implications of the Protocol’s implementation. The Government of North Macedonia had decided to accede to the Protocol, which had been submitted to parliament through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

15. A representative of Kazakhstan emphasized that the country had worked on accession to the Protocol, particularly within the framework of the National Policy Dialogues, as a part of which the financial, economic and legal aspects of accession to the Protocol had been evaluated, and a national workshop on the experiences of other countries in implementing the Protocol had been organized. Accession to the Protocol had been included in a plan

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

regarding accession to international instruments. Currently, domestic procedures on accession to the Protocol were ongoing in Kazakhstan.

16. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the fact that Italy, Kazakhstan and North Macedonia were either considering or were in the process of ratifying the Protocol and encouraged them to accelerate their efforts in that regard;

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

(c) Took note of the new promotional brochure² on the Protocol and encouraged States to make use of it, including when considering accession to the Protocol.

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

17. A representative of the ECE secretariat informed the Working Group about the process of preparing the draft programme of work for the triennium 2023–2025, including the next steps, such as the final circulation of the document to the Bureau prior to its submission on 7 September 2022 as an official document for adoption at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Additionally, the preparation process included the development and distribution of a survey asking countries to prioritize activities in the draft programme of work to support the document's further development. A representative of the ECE secretariat introduced the survey results, which indicated that capacity-building activities had attracted the most interest, followed by the preparation of publications and guidance documents.

A. Setting targets and implementing measures

18. The Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (Switzerland), also reporting on behalf of the other two lead Parties, Portugal and Romania, on the outcomes of the twelfth meeting of the Task Force (Geneva (hybrid), 17 November 2021), which had focused on reviewing progress by Parties and other States in setting, revising and implementing their targets, in accordance with article 6 of the Protocol. Additionally, the Task Force had encouraged the use of the Consultation Process under the Compliance Committee of the Protocol for Parties requiring assistance in setting, revising and/or implementing their targets.³ The Chair of the Task Force also presented future work under that programme area for the next triennium. Lastly, regarding the survey results on the further development of the draft programme of work, the Chair of the Task Force emphasized that those activities considered to be priorities were the ones with regard to which work would be continued.

19. A representative of Ukraine informed the Working Group about the impacts of the Russian aggression against Ukraine on the water sector and the deriving need to revise national targets as a basis to reconstruct access to safe WASH for all in the country. A representative of the Russian Federation made a statement in reply.⁴

20. A representative of Montenegro stated that Montenegro had been a Party to the Protocol since 2020 and had defined priority targets under article 6 thereof and submitted all relevant reports. However, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and political considerations had made it more challenging to meet those targets. Time constraints caused by the pandemic meant that there was insufficient capacity to implement planned activities. Consequently, there would be a public debate concerning the targets, which parliament would

² *The Protocol on Water and Health: Driving Action on Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Health* (United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/21).

³ Report of the twelfth meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (WH/TFTSR 12-02), para. 10 (b), available at <https://unece.org/info/events/event/358476>.

⁴ The statements made by the representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine are available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/thirteenth-meeting-working-group-water-and-health>.

subsequently adopt. A clear priority for Montenegro was improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools and health-care facilities, as well as implementing water safety plans.

21. A representative of Uzbekistan stated that ministries and agencies were working together to introduce structural changes. One of the main goals was to improve water supply systems to increase coverage, especially in rural areas; consequently, a new programme had been elaborated to improve access to water and sanitation in rural areas.

22. A representative of the Republic of Moldova said that, over the past three years, with the support of the European Union Water Initiative, the country had revised both the National Programme for Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in the Republic of Moldova for 2016–2025 and its National Targets. Consequently, at the end of 2020, the country had held public debates on revising its National Programme, with 11 additional targets being added to its scope. Unfortunately, the country had not been able to approve the revised National Programme for political reasons but had restarted the process. In the coming years, the country would benefit from the European Union for Environment (EU4Environment) Programme, which would include support in implementing the Protocol.

23. A representative of Germany said that the country had set new targets in 2021 after having initiated a national dialogue in November 2019 engaging 16 federal States, which had been coordinated by the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection and the Federal Ministry of Health, with the assistance of the German Environment Agency and the Robert-Koch Institute. Particular consideration had been given to requirements arising from the revised European Union Drinking Water Directive,⁵ as all European Union member States must implement it by January 2023, as well as wastewater, pool water safety and reduction of legionellosis. In the light of the above, Germany had defined 13 new targets.

24. A representative of Kyrgyzstan informed the Working Group that her country was not yet a Party to the Protocol, but that it wished to improve its water quality and sewerage management, which was considered a priority. In addition, she emphasized that Kyrgyzstan had launched a national development programme for drinking water provision systems. Currently, the country was developing a new draft law on drinking water supply and sanitary norms, which was being considered by the relevant bodies and ministries. Furthermore, several decrees had been signed addressing environmental security and climate resilience, focusing on sanitation issues.

25. A representative of Georgia emphasized that, despite not being a Party to the Protocol, Georgia had prioritized improving sanitation and water supply services in priority areas, including for internally displaced persons. The representative further stressed that a significant number of people did not have decentralized access to water in many regions of the country. Furthermore, a council had been set up to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and the respective thematic groups, as well as an online reporting system.

B. Fifth reporting cycle

26. A representative of the ECE secretariat thanked the countries that had participated in the fifth reporting cycle, recalling that reporting exercises were aimed at assessing progress achieved in each country while also identifying relevant regional developments related to the implementation of the Protocol. National summary reports had been submitted by 25 Parties and 8 non-Parties.⁶

27. A representative of UN-Water reminded the Working Group that, in March 2021, the *Summary Progress Update 2021: SDG 6 – Water and Sanitation for All*⁷ had been published,

⁵ 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.

⁶ See https://unece.org/fifth-reporting-exercise-under-protocol-water-and-health-november-2021-april-2022#accordion_1.

⁷ Geneva, UN-Water, July 2021 (latest version).

which confirmed that efforts to meet targets were off track. He also referred to the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework,⁸ which aimed to accelerate – and, in some cases, quadruple – the speed of progress regarding Sustainable Development Goal 6. Additionally, he reported that the 2023 Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the United Nations Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (United Nations 2023 Water Conference) – the second global online stakeholder consultation – was scheduled to be held in New York on 22–24 March 2023. The Pan-European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference had been organized by ECE in Geneva, in a hybrid format, on 12–13 April 2022. Additionally, the President of the General Assembly would host one last preparatory meeting in New York by November 2022. The representative also stated that five interactive dialogues would structure the Water Conference.

28. A representative of the WHO secretariat stated that countries' engagement in and commitment to the WHO/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) and the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) had been increasing in the pan-European region. In the latest JMP data consultation processes,⁹ over 30 countries had provided WASH data for schools, and over 10 countries had provided data on health-care facilities. She also emphasized that the work under the Protocol significantly contributed to increasing focus on action in those areas. Based on the data from JMP, GLAAS and other relevant sources, regional WASH highlights¹⁰ had been developed to provide an overview of the current situation, progress, gaps and key action areas to advance in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal WASH commitments.

29. A representative of Romania stated that the country was strengthening cooperation between the different ministries involved in the reporting process. Additionally, the feedback received on the reporting cycle was that the report was very comprehensive and good. In general, there had been good collaboration between institutions and ministries. Furthermore, the report had been disseminated to water operators and five targets had been modified, whereas eleven had been maintained.

30. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to Portugal, Romania and Switzerland for their leadership of the programme area and to Switzerland for its continuous support;

(b) Welcomed the progress made by Georgia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Uzbekistan on setting or revising their national targets;

(c) Commended the role of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting in advancing the target setting and reporting process under the Protocol;

(d) Reiterated the importance of timely reporting under article 7 of the Protocol, as emphasized in paragraph 18 of decision V/1 on general issues of compliance (ECE/MP.WH/19/Add.2-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/06/Add.2);

(e) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the regional report on the implementation of the Protocol, for submission to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(f) Took note of the relevant developments regarding global water and health processes, including the preparations for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference, and encouraged participants to actively promote the Protocol in the preparatory process;

⁸ See www.unwater.org/our-work/sdg-6-global-acceleration-framework#:~:text=The%20SDG%20Global%20Acceleration,sanitation%20for%20all%20by%202030.

⁹ See <https://washdata.org/how-we-work/jmp-country-consultation>.

¹⁰ *Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in the WHO European Region: Highlights and Progress Towards Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6* (Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2022).

(g) Commended countries for participating in the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6 and encouraged them to use data arising therefrom in WASH policymaking, in particular in target setting and reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health;

(h) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

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

31. Mr. Guy Howard (Director, Cabot Institute for the Environment, University of Bristol, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) gave a keynote speech stressing the impacts of climate change on water resources and water and sanitation services, as well as its implications for water-related infectious and non-communicable diseases. He also emphasized that, in the context of increasing resilience to climate change, it was essential to look beyond floods and droughts to emerging issues such as wildfires, melting permafrost and algal blooms. Resilience could be increased through infrastructural or technological changes, especially adaptive management extending to economic and regulatory instruments, environment and end-user behaviour. He also emphasized the importance of strong risk management approaches, stating that the Protocol's programme of work could be a solid basis for action in that regard and on which to build capacity.

32. A representative of Italy, the lead country in the programme area, presented the progress made in the area, including the Global Workshop on building climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels (Geneva (hybrid), 29–31 March 2021), which had been conducted in cooperation with the Water Convention. The representative also presented the Background Note on Increasing Resilience to Climate Change through the Protocol on Water and Health, which analysed the legal provisions of the Protocol in the context of enhanced climate resilience, as well as proposed future work in the area contained in the draft work programme.

33. A representative of Luxembourg stated that, with the increased frequency of intense precipitation, floods and tornadoes, the country had decided to focus on the impacts of climate change. The strategy for increasing resilience to climate change was to consider the entire water cycle, urban and natural cycle, as well as "green" and "blue" infrastructures. Additionally, measures to minimize the effects of heavy rain and ensure that the water table remained stable were taken. Measures were also being taken to address increasing algal blooms in the country. Investment in new infrastructure, such as stormwater management infrastructure, was essential in increasing resilience against climate change.

34. A representative of Serbia said that Serbia had ratified the Protocol in 2013 and had fulfilled its main provisions by setting national targets taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 3 and 6. It was noted that, as climate change and climate-resilient WASH services had not been explicitly referred to in the Protocol's legal text at the time of its drafting, the national Protocol targets set in 2015 did not consider climate change aspects in water and sanitation. Currently, the priorities for Serbia were to revise the targets by addressing climate change challenges and aligning the targets with the Protocol and the European Union Drinking Water Directive. The representative also stressed the challenges of setting new targets in the context of climate resilience due to divided responsibilities in the water sector.

35. A representative of Spain stated that the country had reported in the fifth cycle that it had a national plan for adapting to climate change, building on climate models projecting a significant reduction in availability of fresh water in the country. That issue had been addressed through a river basin management process in line with the European Union Water Framework Directive. Spain was currently adapting its legal framework to improve governance for better wastewater management and improved reuse. Moreover, the Government had established a digitalization strategy to improve water supply and monitor consumption and wastewater discharge to water bodies.

36. The Working Group:

(a) Recognized that climate change created significant additional pressure on water, sanitation and health and the need for urgent action in addressing the effects of climate change;

(b) Encouraged countries to use the Protocol's framework and the tools developed under the Protocol to increase the resilience of water and sanitation systems to climate change, including through the target setting mechanism under article 6 of the Protocol and the establishment of effective early warning, surveillance and response systems, as stipulated under article 8 of the Protocol;

(c) Expressed appreciation to Italy for its leadership of the programme area;

(d) Welcomed the Background Note on Increasing Resilience to Climate Change through the Protocol on Water and Health, and requested the secretariat to finalize the document for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(e) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

V. Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases

37. A representative of Norway, co-lead Party for the work on prevention and reduction of water-related diseases, presented the progress and achievements in the programme area, including the development of training materials on risk-based surveillance of drinking water and the surveillance and outbreak management of water-related infectious diseases, based on the technical guidance developed under the Protocol. Progress also included supporting the revision of the drinking water quality standard in Azerbaijan, as well as organization of the Expert meeting on prevention and control of legionellosis in the pan-European region (online, 30 November–2 December 2021). He also presented the lessons learned for future work, and the suggested future activities for the period 2023–2025.

38. A representative of the WHO secretariat stated that the surveillance of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in wastewater was a rapidly emerging topic not foreseen under the current programme of work at the time of its drafting four years previously. Despite that, as part of a webinar series under the Protocol, a dedicated webinar had been organized focusing on the topic to foster the exchange of countries' experiences. Additionally, he reported that WHO had released a publication entitled *Environmental Surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 to Complement Public Health Surveillance: Interim Guidance*¹¹ and, in partnership with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment of the Netherlands, a publication entitled *Wastewater Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2: Questions and Answers (Q&A)*,¹² which had been developed to address critical questions on how the approach could be applied and how data could be used. The experiences gathered indicated a need for action in the area in the upcoming programme of work for the period 2023–2025 for capacity-building purposes.

39. A representative of Azerbaijan stated that, with the support of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Government had been prioritizing the revision of the drinking water standard in accordance with the principles and recommendations of the WHO *Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality*.¹³ Baseline analysis of water and health had been undertaken by a national working group and the scope of the standard and a set of health-based water quality parameters were being discussed.

40. A representative of Czechia reported that the publication *Surveillance and Outbreak Management of Water-related Infectious Diseases Associated with Water-supply Systems*¹⁴ provided conceptual guidance for countries in improving existing systems. It had been

¹¹ Geneva, World Health Organization (WHO), 2022.

¹² Geneva, WHO, 2022.

¹³ Geneva, WHO, 2011.

¹⁴ Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019.

translated into Czech and the translation was currently at the proofreading stage. The Czech authorities would complement the translation with a toolkit for practical application, which they aimed to finalize by the end of 2022.

41. A representative of the Republic of Moldova stated that a new law on drinking water quality had entered into force in 2021. Additionally, the country had developed regional and national capacities for drinking water quality monitoring, as well as training for national public health agency laboratory staff on the analysis of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater in the framework of a European Union-supported project. In addition, a protocol for setting up a wastewater surveillance system and monitoring plan was under development.

42. A representative of Austria stated that, under the framework of the EU4Environment Programme, Austria supported several countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, including the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, in monitoring SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater and sharing knowledge and experiences.

43. A representative of Uzbekistan informed the Working Group that preparatory measures had been undertaken for analysis of SARS-COV-2 wastewater, such as training of experts from *oblasts* (administrative districts) and identification of sampling points for wastewater monitoring.

44. A representative of Norway presented the country's pilot involving the biggest municipality for SARS-CoV-2 monitoring, noting the usefulness of wastewater analysis considering the reduction of clinical testing. He also noted the high relevance of the topic to the work under programme area 2.

45. A representative of Romania stated that the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, was implementing a pilot project for SARS-CoV-2 monitoring and would use the guidance document and tools developed by WHO on the topic.

46. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to Norway and Belarus for their leadership in advancing the work under the programme area, and to Norway for its continuous financial support;

(b) Acknowledged the country activities to strengthen risk-based surveillance of drinking water quality and water-related disease surveillance and outbreak response systems in accordance with article 8 of the Protocol;

(c) Welcomed the recent developments in the environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater and encouraged countries to make use of the WHO guidance in improving the work in the area;

(d) Took note of the draft training modules on water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management, as well as risk-based water quality surveillance, invited the Working Group to provide feedback on the draft training materials by 10 June 2022, and requested the secretariat to finalize the materials for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(e) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

VI. Institutional water, sanitation and hygiene

47. A representative of Hungary, also speaking on behalf of the lead countries Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, presented the progress made and the suggested future activities in the programme area. Communication materials and capacity-building packages had been developed for health and education decision-makers in the subprogramme area of WASH in schools. Additionally, two online subregional workshops, one for Eastern Europe (6–8 July 2021) and one for South-Eastern Europe (4–6 April 2022) had been organized, in which 15 countries had participated. National data collection and reporting for Sustainable Development Goal 6 had been improved since 2020, with 30 countries reporting data to track

progress for WASH in schools and over 10 countries reporting for WASH in health-care facilities. Two publications on WASH in health-care facilities were in the final stage of development. Plans for future work in the programme area included expanding the scope of work to other priority settings such as workplaces and public places and increased focus on hand hygiene considering the needs and lessons learned from the pandemic.

48. A representative of Georgia stated a willingness and commitment to continue co-leading the programme area in the next triennium. Moreover, the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health, with the support of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, had conducted a national assessment of WASH health-care facilities in 2021, collecting data from 240 health-care facilities. A report of the assessment was currently under preparation and would be finalized soon. The assessment results would serve as a basis for improving the situation, particularly for achieving the goal of universal access to WASH, including universal health coverage, preparation for future pandemics, and improving the environmental sustainability of health systems.

49. A representative of North Macedonia stated that a checklist developed under the Protocol had been disseminated to municipalities and used in conducting assessments of WASH and infection prevention control in schools. A checklist for cleaning toilets had been developed, the implementation of which was mandatory for schools and public facilities. Additionally, a self-assessment tool on WASH and infection prevention and control in schools had been developed in 2020/21 with the support of UNICEF. Online training had been provided to primary schools by the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Educational Inspectorate and public health centres in 2021. Additionally, a hygiene improvement plan had been developed and public health measures organized for schools reopening after temporary closure due to the pandemic.

50. A representative of Montenegro reported on a national assessment of WASH in health-care facilities, supported by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, which had identified gaps and needs, in particular regarding improving cleaning and wastewater disposal, and had set targets addressing shortcomings. A national baseline analysis on WASH in schools would be conducted with the support of UNICEF.

51. A representative of Lithuania supported proposed future work and expressed the willingness of the country to become a co-leading Party in the programme area, supporting the work on schools. Discussions on menstrual hygiene had been initiated at a high level, indicating positive developments.

52. A representative of the Republic of Moldova reported on a pilot survey on WASH covering 28 health-care facilities. The country intended to complete a national survey postponed as a result of the pandemic. The Republic of Moldova remained a co-leading country in the programme area and was willing to lead, inter alia, the activities related to WASH in public places.

53. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to Georgia, Hungary and the Republic of Moldova for their leadership in advancing the work under the programme area, and to Hungary for its continuous financial support;

(b) Took note of the draft publications entitled *Regional Report on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Health-care Facilities* and *Survey Tool/Checklist on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Health-care Facilities*, invited the Working Group to provide feedback on the draft publications by 10 June 2022, and requested the secretariat to finalize the documents for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(c) Took note of the subregional capacity-building events on WASH in schools, and encouraged countries to follow up on the recommendations in accordance with the guidance documents developed under the Protocol;

(d) Commended the actions taken by countries in undertaking situational analyses and improving WASH in health-care facilities and schools in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health;

- (e) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

VII. Small-scale water supplies and sanitation

54. A representative of Serbia, also speaking on behalf of Germany, the co-lead Party, presented the main achievements and the lessons learned under the programme area, including the analysis of information on small-scale systems from past reporting under the Protocol and implementation of a project on integration of water and sanitation safety planning in Serbia. The speaker also presented future activities for the period 2023–2025.

55. A representative of the WHO secretariat provided an update on the status of the revision of the publication *Water Safety Plan: A Field Guide to Improving Drinking Water Safety in Small Communities*¹⁵ and outcomes of the online expert meeting on on-site sanitation (5–7 October 2021) (organized jointly with programme area 5) in reviewing the situation of such systems in the pan-European region and defining actions in the context of the Protocol.

56. A representative of the Republic of Moldova reported on the development of an electronic registry of small-scale systems as the first phase, with the next phase covering all systems. National regulations and construction norms for small-scale water supply systems had been adopted. He noted a need to develop a strategy for managing small-scale sanitation systems. Under a new law on drinking water, all water suppliers must implement water safety plans and enforcement should start with capacity-building and the piloting of that approach.

57. A representative of the Netherlands underlined the importance of building country capacities in managing on-site sanitation systems and implementing integrated water and sanitation planning approaches, and noted that the Netherlands would continue to provide support and collaborate as a co-lead Party of programme area 5.

58. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to Germany and Serbia for their leadership in advancing the work under the programme area and for their continuous in-kind and direct support;

(b) Took note of the draft publication *Water Safety Plan: A Field Guide to Improving Drinking Water Safety in Small Communities* and the draft report on small-scale water supply and sanitation systems: country activities towards safe and equitable access in the pan-European region, invited the Working Group to provide feedback on the draft publication and draft report by 10 June 2022, and requested the secretariat to finalize the documents for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(c) Commended Germany, the Netherlands and Serbia for initiating the work on integrated water and sanitation safety planning in small-scale systems;

(d) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

VIII. Assistance to support implementation at the national level

59. A representative of ECE provided an overview of progress regarding the National Policy Dialogues, within the scope of which projects were currently being carried out in 10 countries, including 4 countries of Central Asia. The National Policy Dialogues had supported the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health by improving overall policy and strategies on water and health in countries. Specifically, the National Policy Dialogues had supported target setting and/or revision and reporting of targets in 5 countries. Concerning accession to the Protocol, the National Policy Dialogues had provided overall support to Kazakhstan. The representative also introduced the new EU4Environment Water

¹⁵ Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2014.

Resources and Data Programme, which promoted, among other things, the implementation of water and health goals

60. A representative of the WHO secretariat stated that, through its Biennial Collaborative Agreements and Country Cooperation Strategies, the WHO Regional Office for Europe provided technical support to 20 countries. The activities involved supported implementation of the Protocol at the national level in different programme areas, such as prevention and reduction of water-related diseases, WASH in institutional settings, uptake of risk-based management approach, and technical advice on COVID-19 emergency and response.

61. A representative of the joint secretariat introduced suggested future activities for the period 2023–2025.

62. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the support provided by the ECE/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-led National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation regarding the implementation of the Protocol at the national level in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia with funding from the European Union;

(b) Also expressed appreciation for the support provided to countries through the WHO Biennial Collaborative Agreements and Country Cooperation Strategies regarding the implementation of the programme of work;

(c) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

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

63. A representative of the Netherlands, also speaking on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the co-lead Party, informed the Working Group about the progress and achievements made in the programme area, including the development of a *Sanitation policy brief*, the organization of the Global workshop on improving climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels (Geneva (hybrid), 29–31 March 2021) (in cooperation with programme area 7), the online expert consultation on on-site sanitation in the pan-European region (5–7 October 2021) and a capacity-building workshop on integrated water and sanitation safety planning in Serbia, in cooperation with programme area 4. He noted that it had not been possible to pursue several planned capacity-building workshops on water safety plans and sanitation safety plans due to the pandemic. Furthermore, he presented suggested future activities for the period 2023–2025. A representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed the intention to continue co-leading the programme area and to support its implementation.

64. A representative of the WHO Collaborating Centre at the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology informed the Working Group about the status of development of a policy brief on sanitation and provided an overview of the current situation regarding sanitation and wastewater management, WASH-related disease burden, emerging challenges and policy actions to improve sanitation governance.

65. Subsequently, several countries reported on relevant developments. A representative of Croatia reported on measures being undertaken such as setting national targets, including implementation of water safety plans in large and small systems; transposition of the European Union Drinking Water Directive into national legislation; and conducting training for water supply network experts.

66. A representative of Hungary noted that a legal obligation to establish a water safety plan had been introduced a decade previously, starting with large-scale systems. In the framework of a Biennial Collaborative Agreement with WHO, a national guideline on water safety plans had been revised, but capacity-building training was on hold due to the pandemic.

67. A representative of Italy reported that implementation of a water safety plan would be a mandatory requirement for water suppliers by 2029 and a national guideline was under development. Italy was also taking measures to transpose the requirements of the revised European Union Drinking Water Directive.

68. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to the Netherlands and Bosnia and Herzegovina for their leadership in strengthening implementation of the programme area, and to the Netherlands for continuously providing financial support;

(b) Took note of the draft publication *Sanitation policy brief*; invited the Working Group to provide feedback on the draft publication by 10 June 2022, and requested the secretariat to finalize the document for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(c) Acknowledged the efforts made by countries in adopting and scaling up application of water safety plans and sanitation safety planning approaches, and prioritizing actions for safe management of on-site sanitation systems;

(d) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

X. Equitable access to water and sanitation

69. A representative of France, also speaking on behalf of the co-lead Party Hungary, presented the progress made since the last Working Group meeting (Geneva, 14–15 April 2021), including the main outcomes of the sixth meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (online, 24–25 March 2021), which provided an opportunity to share experiences from pan-European countries on how to further align their national legislation with the new European Union Drinking Water Directive and its equity dimension. Additionally, she introduced a new policy brief entitled *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*,¹⁶ which would officially be launched at the Regional Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (Geneva (hybrid), 13–14 June 2022). The workshop would also discuss to what extent the Equitable Access Scorecard¹⁷ should be revised to increase water sector resilience in the context of the pandemic and other potential emergencies. The representative of France also presented future work in the programme area for the upcoming triennium.

70. A representative of Albania expressed the country's willingness to be a pilot country for the revised Equitable Access Scorecard self-assessment, promising to identify the main actors responsible for coordinating efforts in that regard.

71. A representative of Georgia said that ensuring access to water for all, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized communities, had been integrated into its policies and strategies. He also stated that considering equity had helped the country to streamline its policies. Consequently, the number of people with access to safe water had increased by 15 per cent. Georgia intended to carry out an Equitable Access Scorecard self-assessment nationally and to. The country also planned to establish a working group on that issue and wished to request financial support from ECE to carry out said self-assessment.

72. A representative of Serbia stated that the Equitable Access Scorecard had been applied in 2017 to 15 municipalities in central Serbia, and an action plan to address the equity gaps identified had been developed. Since that activity had been limited to one specific region, Serbia requested support in revising the self-assessment due to the impact of the pandemic and other risks. That could be a good practice example for countries intending to conduct the same self-assessment. Additional regional workshops to raise awareness and exchange good

¹⁶ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/20.

¹⁷ *The Equitable Access Scorecard: Supporting Policy Processes to Achieve the Human Right to Water and Sanitation* (United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/8).

practices would be highly beneficial for the countries of the region, as Serbia could share its lessons learned.

73. A representative of Ukraine expressed renewed interest in applying the Scorecard due to the war, which required conducting a new baseline study of the situation and would require a revision of the targets. Therefore, the country requested specific assistance to assess the current situation in the WASH context and revise its targets.

74. A representative of Montenegro stated that her country would conduct the equitable access self-assessment from June to December 2022. The objective of the self-assessment was to better understand the situation and challenges of equitable access to water and sanitation in order to develop a comprehensive picture of policy measures to address any gaps.

75. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to France and Hungary for their leadership in advancing the work under the programme area and for their continuous financial support;

(b) Welcomed the policy brief entitled *Making Water and Sanitation Affordable for All* and encouraged countries to make use of it when developing appropriate policies and measures to ensure the affordability of water and sanitation services;

(c) Acknowledged the efforts made by countries to enhance equitable access to water and sanitation, especially in the context of the pandemic;

(d) Welcomed the intention expressed by the representatives of Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine to engage in equitable access self-assessment exercises, with the support of the ECE secretariat;

(e) Endorsed the plans for future work in the programme area for the period 2023–2025.

XI. Compliance procedure

76. The Chair of the Compliance Committee highlighted three main aspects from its twenty-second meeting (Geneva (hybrid), 16 November 2021). The first aspect concerned matters of compliance in general: the Committee had not received any submissions or communications.¹⁸ Additionally, the Committee had begun contacting certain Parties to assist them with implementation issues such as target setting. During its twenty-first (Geneva, 15–16 June 2021) and twenty-second meetings, the Committee had looked more closely at Albania, Belgium and Portugal.¹⁹ The second aspect concerned the Consultation Process held with the Russian Federation in 2021.²⁰ The third aspect of the work of the Compliance Committee concerned the preparation of the report for the Meeting of the Parties based on the Protocol's fifth reporting cycle. The Chair reported that 25 reports from Parties had been submitted so far, including 8 from non-Parties. The report would be prepared in the summer of 2022, alongside the draft decision on general issues of compliance.

77. A representative of the ECE secretariat provided updates on the elections of the Compliance Committee members, which would take place at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Nominations must be submitted by 24 August 2022. Currently, there were 6 Committee members to be elected or re-elected. Parties might consider any proposal for candidates made by signatories or NGOs qualified in the fields to which the Protocol related. Additionally, she emphasized that Committee members should serve in their personal capacity and act independently and impartially.²¹ As a part of the election process,

¹⁸ ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2021/4–EUCHP/2018917/4.1/2021/CC2/06, para. 5.

¹⁹ See ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2021/2–EUCHP/2018917/4.1/2021/06, paras. 7–9; and ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2021/4–EUCHP/2018917/4.1/2021/CC2/06, paras. 6–9.

²⁰ ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2021/2–EUCHP/2018917/4.1/2021/06, paras. 10–13; and ECE/MP.WH/C.1/2021/4 EUCHP/2018917/4.1/2021/CC2/06, paras. 12–18.

²¹ Rules of procedure of the Compliance Committee, para. 1. Available at

consideration should be given to the geographical distribution of membership, as well as to diversity of experience and expertise.²²

78. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the information provided about the work of the Compliance Committee, including the outcomes of the Committee's twenty-first and twenty-second meetings;

(b) Commended the role of the Committee in supporting the implementation of and compliance with the Protocol;

(c) Requested the Compliance Committee to prepare its report to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(d) Recalled that Parties were invited to nominate, by 24 August 2022, candidates for the Compliance Committee for election and/or re-election at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Encouraged Parties to consider gender-balanced nominations for membership of the Compliance Committee.

XII. Implementation of the programme of work for 2020–2022

79. A representative of the joint secretariat stated that significant progress had been made in the implementation of the programme of work. However, it had not been possible to implement certain activities in some areas due to the pandemic and other reasons, such as changes in Government. The biggest challenge was implementing and supporting countries on-site due to pandemic-related restrictions. One of the strengths of the Protocol was dissemination of the guidance and tools developed thereunder and their translation at the country level through technical work, which had been restricted in the recent past due to the pandemic. The joint secretariat had made efforts regarding alternative modes of operation, for example, by organizing a series of five webinars under the Protocol that had not been included in the programme of work. Most of the activities that it had not been possible to implement had been shifted to the draft programme of work for 2023–2025, as their implementation remained relevant. Additionally, the joint secretariat would try to reinforce the linkages between the different programme areas and scale up certain activities on climate change.

80. A representative of North Macedonia stated his country's willingness to become a co-lead country for the programme area of institutional WASH, and to contribute through its experience in that field.

81. A representative of the ECE secretariat emphasized the importance of contributions by Parties and informed the Working Group about the serious financial situation regarding implementation of the Protocol, in particular the contributions received from Parties and expenditures within the reporting period, which had been insufficient to implement all work programme activities. For the year 2022, only one small contribution had been received so far. Having adequate funding was essential for extending staff contracts and implementing the programme of work.

82. A representative of the WHO Regional Office for Europe secretariat noted that the WHO trust fund had received a limited share of contributions by Parties, but had mobilized resources from other sources, such as the German Federal Ministry of Health and the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, and had benefited from a range of in-kind contributions by WHO Collaborating Centres, as well as direct contributions by Germany for programme area 4. Regarding general trends of contributions to the Protocol trust funds, it was promising that some new countries (Belgium, Czechia, Luxembourg) had contributed since the fifth session of the Meeting of

<https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/protocol-on-water-and-health/protocol-bodies/compliance-committee>.

²² ECE/MP.WH/2/Add.3 EUR/06/5069385/1/Add.3, decision I/2, annex, para. 7.

the Parties – a positive trend that needed to be sustained. Nevertheless, noting more than half of the Parties were not contributing, the joint secretariat called upon all Parties to make a regular financial contribution to the Protocol trust funds to share the burden with other contributing Parties and ensure sustainable and predictable funding of the Protocol work and the joint secretariat.

83. A representative of the ECE secretariat stated that there was currently a core budget shortfall of \$260,000 regarding the funding of participant travel, reception, staff time and interpretation for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties. She therefore stressed the importance of sufficient financial contributions to ensure a successful meeting.

84. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress made in implementing the Protocol's programme of work for 2020–2022;

(b) Took note of the report on the contributions and expenditures;

(c) Acknowledged that, due to the circumstances caused by the pandemic and other reasons, it had not been possible to implement certain activities included in the programme of work for 2020–2022 and some of them had therefore been shifted to the future programme of work for 2023–2025, based on consultations with respective lead Parties and countries;

(d) Expressed gratitude to all Parties that had provided financial (earmarked and un-earmarked) and in-kind contributions to support the implementation of the programme of work for 2020–2022;

(e) Expressed concern about the fact that numerous Parties had not yet been able to contribute to the implementation of the programme of work, and called upon all Parties to contribute to the ECE and WHO Protocol trust funds, including by providing financial support for the organization of the upcoming sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(f) Entrusted the secretariat, in consultation with lead Parties and countries, to prepare a report on the progress achieved for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session.

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

85. A representative of the joint secretariat presented the overall work programme, which addressed lessons learned in the context of the pandemic and, at the same time, the challenges presented by climate change. The speaker noted that the programme of work also reflected the outcomes of various expert meetings and subregional/regional events conducted under the Protocol. The speaker also emphasized the linkages and interconnectedness between the various programme areas and that the structure of the bodies responsible for implementing the Protocol would remain the same.

86. A representative of the ECE secretariat presented a graph depicting the linkages between the goals and programme areas under the Protocol and explained that the Working Group was invited to provide comments by 10 June 2022 and the confirmation of lead Parties by July 2022. Following its revision by the Bureau and the joint secretariat, the draft programme of work would be submitted as an official document to the Meeting of the Parties by early September 2022.

87. A representative of Portugal stated that her country would continue to work closely with Romania and Switzerland in programme area 1. Concerning financial support, Portugal had not been able to contribute financially to the Protocol but had made some in-kind contributions. Nevertheless, the representative would try to mobilize support from ministries.

88. The Chair of the financing core group within the Bureau (Switzerland) explained that the Bureau had set up a core group on financing to secure sustainable financing for the

Protocol. Given the complexities of that crucial subject, the core group could not deal with it satisfactorily and had therefore handed it back to the entire Bureau. At the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, there would be a financial round table, where all countries would be invited to express how they could support the Protocol work, and options for securing sustainable financing of the Protocol would be discussed. Subsequently, the Bureau would work to prepare a decision to be submitted to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2025.

89. The Working Group:

(a) Endorsed the draft programme of work, including the relevant institutional structure and associated costs, and invited Parties, other States and relevant stakeholders to provide any additional comments to the draft programme of work for 2023–2025 by 10 June 2022;

(b) Entrusted the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to finalize the draft programme of work 2023–2025, including the overview of resource requirements for its implementation, for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session;

(c) Called on Parties, other States and donor institutions to contribute to the activities contained in the draft programme of work, including through financial and in-kind contributions, in order to ensure predictable and stable funding allowing for reliable secretariat services and support to the implementation of activities;

(d) Invited Parties, other States and donor institutions to indicate such pledges at the latest at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Welcomed the intention to organize a round table discussion on the financing of the Protocol on Water and Health at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(f) Recommended that the Meeting of the Parties entrust the Bureau, in consultation with the Working Group on Water and Health, with preparing a draft decision on strengthening the financial sustainability of the work under the Protocol, for consideration by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session.

XIV. Preparations for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties

90. A representative of the ECE secretariat presented preparations for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties and emphasized that participants should, as much as possible, attend the session in-person due to its importance in the build-up to the United Nations 2023 Water Conference and the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, July 2023). The sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties would include a high-level session focusing on climate change and the pandemic.

91. A representative of the WHO secretariat introduced the promotion and communication strategy, which included a meeting flyer to mobilize high-level and country participation, as well as the use of websites and social media posts. Additionally, short videos would be shown at the meeting to introduce all programme areas.

92. A representative of Serbia stated that the country would send a high-level delegation to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties and that the draft programme of work had been well prepared. Additionally, Serbia was ready to organize a side event on the impact of poorly managed sanitation on women.

93. The Working Group entrusted the Bureau and the secretariat with the finalization of the preparations for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

XV. Date and venue of the fourteenth meeting

94. The Working Group on Water and Health decided to hold its next meeting in early 2024.