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## **Supporting accession to the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health Exchange on benefits of accession and technical work between Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Serbia**

**Belgrade, 26-27 June 2023**

Organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) with support of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and in cooperation with the Government of Serbia

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### **Concept note**

#### **I. Background and Rationale**

Improving water management is a pressing issue that many countries face, particularly in regions where water scarcity is a prevalent concern. Central Asian countries are no exception, as the region is known for its arid climate and limited water resources. The specific challenges in providing the population with safe drinking water and sanitation are due to fragmented policies, limited human and financial resources, and insufficient technical expertise. In this context, the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health offers a powerful legal framework and a wealth of practical tools to take action in addressing these challenges. For over 20 years, the Protocol has been providing a platform for its Parties and other States to ensure universal and equitable access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and hygiene in line with best international practices.

The Protocol contributes to advancing the implementation of global and regional commitments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Environment and Health process. The UN 2023 Water Conference<sup>1</sup> held in March 2023, re-emphasized a need to give priority attention and take accelerated actions to ensure access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene for all, where countries also presented their commitments in respective areas. This sub-regional workshop will provide a platform to explore using the Protocol framework and tools to deliver on these commitments.

In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are currently at the most advanced stages of accession to the Protocol, while Tajikistan has recently expressed interest in understanding better the benefits of the instrument. The workshop will provide an opportunity to define needs and priorities of the Central Asian countries in the area of water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and health and to learn more from one of the Protocol most active Parties – Serbia - about how the Protocol can be instrumental effectively addressing these needs, both at policy and technical level.

The workshop will be organized by the UNECE with support of the WHO/Europe and funded through the UNECE Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, which aims to assist countries in acceding/adopting and implementing UNECE legal instruments, norms, standards, and regulations as means of their integration in the region and global economy, and to support achieving international development goals.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Conference and the voluntary commitments, see <https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023>.

## II. Objectives

The key purpose of the workshop is to support Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in acceding to the Protocol on Water and Health by providing a platform for dialogue on the accession process and knowledge-experience sharing between the Central Asian countries and with the Serbian experts dynamically involved in the work of the Protocol. As a host country, Serbia will showcase its achievements under the Protocol, including setting national targets, regular reporting, and applying Protocol methodologies and tools in addressing priority WASH issues in the country (e.g. in the area of equitable access to water and sanitation, application of integrated water and sanitation safety plans in small systems, WASH in schools and healthcare facilities, etc.)

More specifically, the workshop focuses on the following:

- Introduce the Protocol's main obligations, areas of work and benefits of accession for national context based on experiences from countries in the pan-European region;
- Identify the needs and main priorities of the Central Asian States on water, sanitation, hygiene and health and how the implementation of the Protocol support advancing the work in this area;
- Benefit from the Serbian experience in implementing the Protocol, including through the use and application of its tools;
- Review status and roles of key sectors responsible for the accession to the Protocol in respective countries, and discuss the next steps after becoming a Party to the Protocol;
- Learn experiences from the practical application of Protocol requirements through site visit to the Public Utility Company, treatment unit "Makis" (to get entry access, the list of visitors with detailed information must be provided by 5 June 2023).

## III. Target audience

The workshop is targeted to representatives of water/environment and health ministries from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan that are directly engaged in the processes of accession to the Protocol and the implementation of its obligations.<sup>2</sup>

**For more information about the workshop please visit the [webpage of the event](#).**

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<sup>2</sup> As part of the UN commitment to diversity and inclusivity, the workshop organizers will aim to have a balanced representation of genders among the participants.