



Ministry of Infrastructure
and Water Management



National Institute for Public Health
and the Environment
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

CONCEPT NOTE

Strategic Roundtable on Increasing Resilience to Climate Change in the Water and Sanitation Sector

Under the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health

Geneva, 13 November– 14 November (a.m.) 2023

I. Background

In the pan-European region, impacts of climate change on water and sanitation services exacerbate the challenges of achieving universal and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The increasing frequency and severity of climate-induced extreme weather events can significantly impact health. For example, flash floods can cause the overflow of untreated sewerage into water bodies, resulting in outbreaks of waterborne diseases. Equally important, slow-onset, long-term changes, such as droughts, can severely impact health, livelihoods and economic development. These critical challenges have led to the broad recognition of the interplay between climate change and water in international climate negotiations, including under the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In light of the climate-induced challenges, there is a need to establish a community of practice to address common priorities for increasing resilience of water, sanitation and hygiene sectors and services in the pan-European region and ensure that these translate into clear action-oriented policies. Increasing resilience to climate-induced extreme weather events and long-term changes requires due policy attention and consideration in regulatory frameworks at national level, but also a coherent approach with international processes, such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), taking advantage of all relevant means of implementation.

The Protocol on Water and Health, which is jointly serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), is a multilateral environmental agreement to protect human health and well-being through sustainable water management, including protecting water ecosystems and preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases. The Protocol offers a legally binding mechanism through which countries set targets on water, sanitation, hygiene and health, monitor and report on them. Additionally, the Protocol provides an inter-governmental platform for cross-country exchange of experience and is home to technical work on water, sanitation, hygiene and health.

The current programme of work of the Protocol for 2023-2025 foresees various activities that support policymakers in integrating adaptation into water and sanitation policy-making and strategic planning while helping water and sanitation service operators manage climate risks effectively. As the Protocol is an intersectoral instrument by nature, future work intends to establish a community of practice to engage climate change experts in working closely with existing Protocol's focal points responsible for environment, water and health. This intersectoral approach aims to address climate-induced challenges more effectively in a coherent manner and jointly implement relevant legal obligations.



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II. Objectives

The Strategic Regional Roundtable, organized under the leadership of Italy and the Netherlands with the support of UNECE and WHO/Europe, is aimed at:

- (a) Identifying key needs and exchanging good practices in preparing for and responding to extreme weather events and slow-onset, long-term changes in the water and sanitation sector, including through regulatory instruments and utility/provider actions;
- (b) Identify relevant stakeholders, challenges and good practices in intersectoral cooperation on the issues of climate, water and sanitation at national level;
- (c) Identifying strategic directions and priorities for countries of the pan-European region in developing national and regional plans of action, including in connection with target-setting and reporting under the Protocol;
- (d) Reviewing needs and priority actions for the pan-European region that can be pursued under the Protocol, including tools needed to support country-level action, capacity-building activities, and other areas for international cooperation;
- (e) Identifying relevant synergies between the Protocol's framework and other global processes such as NAPs.

III. Target audience

The key target audience for the Strategic Roundtable are government representatives involved in policy work on climate change at national level, such as experts involved in developing NAPs and NDCs. Climate service providers relevant to the water and sanitation sector, e.g., national hydrometeorological services, are also invited.

The target audience also includes national focal points under the Protocol and other government representatives and experts generally working on climate change, water, sanitation, hygiene, and health, as well as relevant international organizations, donor agencies, civil society organizations and stakeholders engaged in these topics.

IV. Practical information

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience and by **3 November 2023** at the latest. Please register online using the following link: <https://indico.un.org/event/1007579/>.

More information on creating an Indico account to effectively register for the event is available on the [meeting webpage](#).

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 to the Strategic Roundtable and Parties to the Protocol.

Requests for financial support should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat (olga.petrova@un.org) as soon as possible, but no later than **9 October 2023**, 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.



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Since Switzerland is part of the Schengen area, **visa applications** might take up to five 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 five weeks in advance**.