



UNECE



**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

Fourteenth meeting
Geneva, 16 and 17 April 2024

INFORMAL DOCUMENT

**Draft proposal for targets for financial sustainability of the work
under the Protocol on Water and Health**

Prepared by the Bureau, with support of the joint secretariat

Summary

The Meeting of the Parties, at its sixth session (Geneva 16 - 18 November 2022), entrusted the Bureau, in consultation with the Working Group on Water and Health, to prepare a draft decision on strengthening financial sustainability of the work under the Protocol for consideration by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session (ECE/MP.WH/24-EUChP/2219533/3.1/2022/MOP-6/06, para. 101 (e)). The Protocol's Bureau discussed possible options and considered that it was useful to introduce a system of drivers to address the main challenges encountered in financing the programme of work. A similar system had been introduced under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) at the ninth Meeting of the Parties in 2021. Subsequently, the Protocol Bureau with support of the secretariat, developed a draft proposal, including potential targets for financial sustainability of the work under the Protocol. The Working Group is invited to discuss, and possibly amend, the proposed targets and also guide the way forward towards the submission of a consolidated proposal to the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session (Budapest, November 2025). In addition, countries and other donors are encouraged to consider the financial targets proposed in their financial pledges.

1. Why financing the programme of work of the Protocol is important and useful

There are numerous direct and indirect benefits from financing the programmes of work of the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol: countries benefit from capacity-building in various technical areas and from the exchange of experience offered by the Protocol's intergovernmental framework, the legal and policy advice provided by the joint secretariat, the different intergovernmental bodies such as the Working Group on Water and Health, the Task Force and the Compliance Committee, the wealth of publications, guidance materials and tools developed under the Protocol, as well as a broad spectrum of in-country support in various technical domains. The intergovernmental framework and meetings of the Protocol also provide numerous opportunities for networking, establishment of new partnerships, donor relations and potentially fundraising, among many other indirect benefits.

Except for few regular budget resources currently available to UNECE,¹ mainly covering a share of staff time, costs for some publications and official documents, including translations, as well as official meetings of the Meeting of the Parties, Working Group on Water and Health, Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting and Compliance Committee, including interpretation, the Protocol on Water and Health and the implementation of its programmes of work is mainly funded from extrabudgetary resources (i.e. voluntary contributions).

In its decision I/5, the Meeting of the Parties stated that the need for stable and predictable sources of funding and a fair sharing of the burden, transparency and accountability should be the guiding principles of any financial arrangements established under the Protocol. Parties therefore established two trust funds – one managed by the UNECE secretariat and another one managed by the WHO/Europe – for voluntary contributions from Parties, Signatories, other States, regional economic integration organizations and other partners to support the effective implementation and promotion of the Protocol. Parties also entrusted the Working Group on Water and Health and the Bureau to oversee the management of the funds, taking into account agreed priorities, and the Bureau to take appropriate action to raise resources. Parties, Signatories, other States, regional economic integration organizations and other partners had been invited to make voluntary contributions to the funds or in-kind contributions to support the programme of work.

It is therefore mostly thanks to the voluntary contributions, mainly financial but also in-kind, provided by a number of Parties, that activities of the programmes of work under the Protocol had been possible to implement.

2. Challenges to the financial sustainability of the work under the Protocol on Water and Health

The fact that so far, the Protocol has been financed mainly through voluntary contributions, which are by nature subject to discretionary decisions, pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of the programme of work and the sustainability of secretariat staff. For example, for the programme of work for 2020-2022, less than 40% of the budget estimated necessary and approved by the Meeting of the Parties could be mobilized by Parties' contributions. Numerous efforts have been made by the joint secretariat, the Bureau and the lead Parties to mobilize resources, such as organizing a financing roundtable at the Meeting of the Parties, preparing fundraising proposals etc. These efforts have borne some fruit, such as more Parties contributing. However, despite these efforts, as of 2023, less than two thirds of all Parties contribute financially to the programme of work implementation through contributions to the trust funds, in addition to in-kind contributions by some Parties.

Some contributions are earmarked to specific programme areas or projects. This supports the implementation of the agreed activities, but it may also entail additional administrative procedures, adding to the workload of the already resource-constrained secretariat. In addition to the resources required for standard reporting to the Meeting of the Parties, Working Group on Water and Health and the Bureau, the secretariat also makes significant time and resource investment to fundraise for the implementation of the programme of work, including by preparing project proposals, implementing activities and fulfilling associated reporting requirements of donors.

¹ In consideration of the current UN budgetary crisis, it is not certain that regular budget resources can be made available to support the work of the Protocol on a regular and continuous basis.

3. Proposed targets for financial sustainability of the work under the Protocol on Water and Health

The targets proposed below aim to address the abovementioned issues.

Objective 1: Achieve a fairer share of the burden of financing the implementation of the programme of work

Rationale: Given that it is adopted by the Meeting of the Parties, all Parties should be responsible for financially supporting the programme of work and for its implementation. However, currently, less than two third of the Parties finance the programme of work.

Indicator: Percentage of Parties financing the programme of work.

Baseline in the period 2020-2024²: 62 per cent of the Parties financed the programme of work (18 out of 29 Parties).

Proposed targets:

By 2028, at least 75 per cent of all Parties finance the programme of work.

By 2031, at least 85 per cent of all Parties finance the programme of work.

By 2034, 100 per cent of all Parties finance the programme of work.

Objective 2: Improve reliability and predictability of funding

Rationale: The Parties leading programme areas of the Protocol's programme of work and the joint secretariat desire a regular, reliable and predictable cash flow in order to plan activities and to secure funding for secretariat staff. In the absence of a system of mandatory contributions to the Protocol, it is therefore important that Parties contribute regularly, normally annually (see exceptions in the next paragraph), to the implementation of the programme of work. It is also important that to the extent possible they announce such contributions at the beginning of the triennium, ideally at or before the session of the Meeting of the Parties at which the programme of work is adopted.

Indicator: Percentage of Parties contributing regularly (normally every year, see exceptions above) to the implementation of the programme of work.

Baseline in the period 2020-2024: 48 per cent of the Parties regularly contributed (14 out of 29 Parties).

Proposed targets:

By 2028, 60 per cent of all Parties contribute regularly to the implementation of the programme of work.

By 2031, 75 per cent of all Parties contribute regularly to the implementation of the programme of work.

By 2034, 90 per cent of all Parties contribute regularly to the implementation of the programme of work.

Objective 3: Ensure full mobilization of financial resources in an equitable manner

Rationale: To be able to implement all activities in the programme of work, it is not only important that all Parties contribute but also that the level of contribution is such that the full approved budget is covered and fairly shared between Parties. In the absence of a mandatory system of contributions, it is difficult to impose a specific level of contribution; however, the adjusted UN scale of assessment³ provides a fair reference against which Parties could determine their level of contribution.

Indicator: Percentage of Parties contributing according to the adjusted UN scale of assessment or more.

² In the present version of the document, all the baselines are calculated using data covering the period 1 January 2020 – 29 February 2024.

³ The UN's regular budget is financed by member states. By its resolution 76/238 of 24 December 2021, the General Assembly adopted the scale of assessments for the contributions of Member States to the regular budget of the United Nations for 2022, 2023, and 2024. This scale apportions the financial burden among countries based on their economic capacity and it is prepared strictly on the basis of reliable, verifiable and comparable data.

Baseline in the period 2020-2024: 14 per cent of the Parties contributed according to the UN scale of assessment or more (4 out of 29 Parties).

Proposed targets:

By 2028, 30 per cent of all Parties contribute to the programme of work according to the UN scale of assessment or more.

By 2031, 40 per cent of all Parties contribute to the programme of work according to the UN scale of assessment or more.

By 2034, 50 per cent of all Parties contribute to the programme of work according to the UN scale of assessment or more.

Objective 4: Support a balanced implementation of all programme areas and simplify donors' requirements to increase efficiency

Rationale: A number of financial contributions to the Protocol's trust fund are earmarked for programme areas, specific activities or projects. While this actively supports the implementation of the programme of work, it may also imply a risk of unbalanced implementation, depending on funds received, and may entail additional administrative procedures for the secretariat, for example related to financial planning and financial reporting. It is therefore important to increase the share of overall funding that is unearmarked, i.e. which can be used in a flexible way for all programme areas, as needed. Recently, more and more donors have agreed to provide unearmarked funding.

Parties are also encouraged to simplify reporting requirements on the use of specific contributions by increasing the acceptance for their internal accounting of reports on the progress of activities and on contributions and expenditures from the trust funds, which are regularly submitted to the Working Group on Water and Health and the Meeting of the Parties.

Indicator: Percentage of contributions that are unearmarked.

Baseline in the period 2020–2024: 52 per cent of all contributions were unearmarked.

Proposed targets:

By 2028, 60 per cent of all contributions are unearmarked.

By 2031, 70 per cent of all contributions are unearmarked.

By 2034, 80 per cent of all contributions are unearmarked.

Recognizing that effective implementation of the Protocol depends, inter alia, on the availability of human resources working for the joint secretariat and that only a small share of staff time is financed by regular budget resources, in addition to the targets proposed above, the direct in-kind support to the secretariat staff from Parties (e.g. through the provision of Junior Professional Officers (JPOs)⁴ and secondments or similar arrangements) is highly valued.

⁴ The UN JPO Programme recruits Junior Professional Officers for the UN Secretariat and associated entities, including WHO. JPOs are recruited under bilateral agreements between the UN and donor countries. JPO positions are generally at the P2 level. The number of sponsored positions varies from year to year and by donor country. The assignment is intended for a minimum duration of 2 years. At present, the following Protocol Parties have a valid bilateral agreement with the United Nations for participation in the UN JPO Programme: Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Spain, Switzerland. So far, France and Germany have sponsored JPO positions for the UNECE secretariat.