



7th Meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health

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European Region

MONTENEGRO's Experience in assessing equitable access to water and sanitation

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1. Equitable-access self assessment process in MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is the first country applying the draft revised version of the Equitable Access Score- Card. The research and analytical work lasted from December 2022 to May 2023. Purpose of the research was to:

1. Consider access to water as a human right;
2. Identify vulnerable and marginalized groups within the existing division into beneficiaries in order to pay attention to their specific needs;
3. Recognize the importance and expand multi-sector cooperation that will not be oriented only to traditional partners, but to recognize and include those partners who currently do not recognize their role in this very important area and are important for the well-being of the entire population;
4. Work on securing financial resources (through lobbying for greater allocations from the budget of Montenegro, as well as using available international support and cooperation to ensure a greater degree of equal access to water and sanitation in Montenegro.



Methodology: partner organizations as sources of collected data

In the process of collecting quantitative information, we have reached out to 151 institutions, local self-governments, public companies, private companies, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and individuals.

Monstat; REGEN, Institute for Public Health, Directorate for Execution of Criminal Sanctions, Red Cross of Montenegro;

Ministries: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health;

22. local governments (covering 84% of total number of municipalities): Podgorica, Cetinje, Danilovgrad, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Bijelo Polje, Berane, Andrijevica, Nikšić, Pljevlja, Rožaje, Plav, Gusinje, Žabljak, Savnik, Budva, Kotor, Tivat, Herceg Novi, Bar and Ulcinj and 60 public companies: waterworks, communal services, markets and marketplaces in the listed cities;

22. bus stations and Railway transport of Montenegro;

State homes for the elderly (5), NGOs (6), International Organizations, Help;

2. Key findings of the assessment

The traditional approach is prevailing in Montenegro, considering water as public good, within the segment of environmental protection. All users are considered equal when it comes to water supply and sanitation, while the sewage system depends in large part on the technical capabilities. Users are classified into those who use the services in urban, peri-urban and rural areas of Montenegro.

Key findings were following:

- The Constitution of Montenegro does not recognize access to water and sanitation as human rights. Legislation of Montenegro does not identify vulnerable and marginalized groups within the current classification of users in order to pay attention to their specific needs. Equitable access to water and sanitation has to be recognized in a new Drinking Water Law complied with Directive DW from 2020.
- Availability in terms of affordability of water resources is not well defined
- WASH sector is not established as such
- Reducing geographical disparities has been recognized as a key component of the project, but although it is legally defined, solving this problem in practice is turning out to be pretty slow.
- The gap between the urban and rural and the availability of water and sanitation infrastructure. Rural areas have significantly lower levels of access to water supply and sanitation services than urban areas.
- One of the biggest challenges is the need to find adequate solutions for supplying water to geographically inaccessible areas in order to provide everyone with equal access to safe water. These are areas where it is not possible to build a central water supply system, or where building such a system is not considered economically viable due to high prices and a relatively small number of users.

2. Key findings of the assessment

- The lack of funds to improve level of access to water supply and sanitation services in rural areas.
- Mapping vulnerable and marginalized communities is one of the major challenges
- Concrete barriers faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups. People who are part of these groups do not enjoy the same kind of access to water and sanitation as the rest of the population. The situation varies from group to group, for example: (a) persons with disabilities; (b) persons who rely on public facilities (e.g., travellers or homeless people); (c) persons who use the facilities in establishments, such as hospitals, schools, prisons or refugee camps or (d) persons who live in unsanitary dwellings. It is also noted that our existing legal and strategic framework fails to clearly define vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Affordability is not defined within our legal system. It should be taken into account that stricter objectives in EU member states in terms of water quality and approaching the full cost-coverage by users also mean that paying for water and sanitation services is becoming an increasingly real problem for low-income households – this is something that awaits us as well and should be addressed on time.
- Lack of statistical data related to measuring access of water and sanitation – the system of data collection needs to be improved upon.
- Finance are the great problem for water and sanitation in rural as well as in urban

3. LESSONS LEARNT

The challenges faced by Montenegro expert team were:

- Harmonization of attitudes between the established, traditional concept of general use of water and the emerging concept of the human right to water, within the team;
- The problem with finding the contacts of certain partners (this mostly applies to bus stations, of which only two have their own website and visibly displayed email addresses, while at numerous bus stations we received private email addresses, from which we were not even answered later...);
- Certain questions from the Score-card relating to finance were not clear to the partners; thus, the answers we received were incomplete in most cases;
- Lack of statistical data;
- We underestimated the scope of obligations (number of partners and documents) and the time frame in which it all had to be completed, including the fact of the complexity of the political moment in Montenegro.
- Some partners were passive, as witnessed by the number of the Score-card answers but we received answers from 84% of municipalities, or 21 municipalities out of the 25.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1- Governance

- Improve legislation in order to adequately govern equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
- At the level of local self-government units, adequately govern equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
- Improve mechanisms to develop institutional plans that integrate equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
- Improve the system of informing the citizens on the right to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation and the manner of exercising those rights with competent authorities through gathering civic and business initiatives for exercising the right to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, develop information guides and implementing the programmes of citizen education on those rights and the ways to exercise them.

SECTION 2 - Reducing geographical disparities

- Improve public policies at the national level that address drinking water quality, especially in rural areas;
- Improve public policies at the local self-government level that address the reducing of disparities in access to water and sanitation among geographical areas;
- Improve governance framework for water supply to rural areas, aimed at raising the quality of life through safe access to drinking water;
- Improve the status of access to sanitation in rural areas.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 3- Ensuring access for vulnerable and marginalized groups

- Define human right to water and conduct a comparative analysis of international documents, experiences of countries that have introduced this human right into their legislation and the status in the Montenegrin legislative and institutional framework;
- Define vulnerable and marginalized groups of population in terms of water supply and sanitation and include them into public policies and institutional framework addressing access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
- Organize meetings with the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, in order to identify what can be done at the moment to enhance equitable access to water and sanitation by vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Organize trainings for the representatives of the Parliament of Montenegro, ministries in charge of this issue and representatives of local self-governments on ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation by vulnerable and marginalized groups;
- Create a media campaign for raising awareness of citizens on the importance of equitable access to water, human right to water, through prior education of journalists on this topic, in order to develop the Media Plan and to constantly report on the topic accordingly.

SECTION 4 - Keeping safe WASH affordable for all

- Improve water and sanitation tariff system with a view to upgrading the sanitary technical conditions for water supply and sanitation and the quality and protection of water ecosystems;
- Improve policies for ensuring accessibility at the national and local level;
- Introduce social protection measures;

NEW PROTOCOL TARGETS



Article 6	Target	Indicator	Time frame	Source for Indicator	Implementation body
6.1.a Equitable access to water for everyone	1. Updating Law on Providing Safe Water Intended for Human Consumption “Off. Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 80/2017 in a frame of gender sensitivity (compliance with 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) including Annex II & III 2015/1787.	1.1 Law on provision of healthy water for human use “Off. Gazette of Montenegro”, No. 80/2017 updated	Q IV 2025	Action Plan for closing the final benchmarks in Chapter 27 - Environment and Climate Change.	IPHMNE, MoH
	2. Implementation of Gender and Equity Considerations and Implications in decision-making processes	2.1 Intersectoral coordination mechanism established.	Q I 2027	Draft National plan of adaptation to climate change (NAP)	Ministry of Agriculture (Directorate for Water Management), Water Administration Directorate for Spatial Planning (Ministry of Ecology) Directorate for hazards (Ministry of Interior Affairs) Target municipalities Institute for Hydrometeorology and Seismology, UNDP
		2.2 Capacity building program developed	QII-QIV 2027		
		2.3 Identified, developed and implemented a pilot project (flood risk) in two municipalities (Gusinje, Berane) taking into consideration the specific impacts on women, men and vulnerable groups.	QII-QIV 2027		



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THANK YOU

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