

Increasing climate resilience of water and sanitation sector in the Mediterranean Region: workshop under the Protocol on Water and Health

Lisbon, 4-5 June 2024
Ministry of the Environment and Energy

#WaterWiseEU

Summary of workshop proceedings and key conclusions

Workshop proceedings

The workshop [Increasing climate resilience of water and sanitation sector in the Mediterranean Region](#) under the UNECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe Protocol on Water and Health was held in Lisbon on 4-5 June 2024 with the objective to discuss common approaches to increase climate resilience in the Mediterranean by taking stock of main challenges and priorities of the countries but also highlighting and exchanging on the existing good practices and solutions from both institutional/policy and technical perspectives.

The workshop was hosted by Portugal, in cooperation with UNECE and WHO Regional Office for Europe, and organized as a partner event under the [EU Green Week](#). It was held back-to-back with the [14th meeting of the Regional Platform on Water under the Union for Mediterranean](#), also hosted by Portugal, on 5-6 June 2024, in order to allow synergies and maximize opportunities for participation, including by the Mediterranean countries from outside the pan-European region.

The workshop specifically aimed at:

- Identifying good practices in increasing resilience of water and sanitation sectors among Mediterranean countries;
- Responding to key challenges in the Mediterranean region by promoting setting of climate-sensitive targets and by building on other tools and activities implemented in the framework of the Protocol on Water and Health;
- Formulating future needs and directions for the work under the Protocol on Water and Health to further support work on climate resilience and raise awareness of the Protocol among Mediterranean countries, including both Parties and other States.

The event brought together government representatives and experts from 13 Mediterranean countries from the UNECE region but also beyond, namely Albania, Croatia, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Türkiye. The meeting was also attended by representatives of Romania and Switzerland as representatives of co-lead Parties under the Protocol for the programme area on improving governance for water and health. Several partner organizations also attended: Aqua Publica Europea, Climate and Health Observatory under the European Commission and European Environment Agency (EEA), European Commission (EC), European Water Regulators (WAREG) Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) and Union for Mediterranean (UfM). The meeting was also attended by representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, including youth, and private companies: Entremed, iCatalist, Intermediaries of Change Center for Sustainable Development, and Pathfinder International Jordan. In total, 43 participants took part in the meeting: 38 in-person and 5 remotely.

The meeting was opened by Ms. Vera Eiró, President of the Portuguese Water and Wastewater Regulatory Authority (ERSAR) – an agency that serves as official focal point under the Protocol – and Mr. Emidio Sousa, Secretary of State for Environment of Portugal who stressed that water and increasing climate resilience were of high priority for the country. UNECE and WHO Regional Office for Europe outlined the objectives of the workshop and set the scene for the event, including by presenting main findings and conclusions from the forthcoming *Strategic paper on strengthening climate resilience in the drinking-water and sanitation sector through the Protocol on Water and Health* (to be published in the second half of 2024). The keynote speech by Ms. Aleksandra Kazmierczak, EEA, highlighted the key messages and data from the recently launched report [Responding to climate change impacts on human health in Europe: focus on floods, droughts and water quality](#).

The meeting continued with the roundtable of the Mediterranean countries focusing on priorities, needs and existing solutions in the area of building climate resilience. While in terms of common challenges, participants mentioned increasing water scarcity, alternating extreme weather events such as for example droughts followed by floods, saline intrusion, heatwaves, water losses, ageing infrastructure and rise of climate-sensitive water-related diseases.

The priorities for action and solutions presented included the need to translate climate policy considerations into concrete action at national and local level (Albania), raising awareness of communities on the conscious and efficient use of water (Croatia, Italy, Malta, Spain) and rapid relief plans after an extreme weather event (Slovenia), addressing water losses (Croatia, Italy), digitalization and use of artificial intelligence in monitoring and analyzing data (Italy), wastewater reuse, including for agriculture and aquifer recharge (Greece, Italy, Portugal), desalination (Israel, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain), ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions approach (Portugal, Slovenia), risk-based management approaches such as Water Safety Plans (Italy), diversification of water sources (Malta, Italy), strong nexus between water and energy needed for production and distribution (Malta), climate-smart and green infrastructure (Portugal), climate projections and vulnerability and sectoral risk assessments (Turkiye). The perspective of the public water operators on strategies to tackle water scarcity and droughts was also presented by Aqua Publica Europea and WAREG.

In the following session the joint UNECE and WHO Regional Office for Europe secretariat introduced the Protocol as a framework to increase climate resilience of water and sanitation, and Portugal presented the target setting and reporting tools under the Protocol. These presentations were illustrated by examples of climate-sensitive targets set under the Protocol in Montenegro, Portugal and Romania. Consequently, participants engaged in an interactive group exercise aimed at translating identified national and regional priorities into intersectoral targets on water, sanitation and health that address climate change impacts following the target setting methodology developed under the Protocol. Working in small groups allowed participants to further debate on priority actions and to get a feel for the process of intersectoral target setting at national level.

Finally, presentations by partners focused on specific climate and environment changes in the Mediterranean (MedECC), trends of climate finance for water and sanitation (IRC), EU action for climate resilience in the water and sanitation sector under the Green Deal (EC), insights on the newly established Global Water-Sanitation Resilience Target (SWA), and the work on water and climate under UfM. The UfM Deputy Secretary-General also delivered a speech in order to make a transition to the back-to-back event.

Key conclusions

The workshop concluded that main challenges and priorities are indeed common for the Mediterranean region, but that more strategic and systematic climate action is needed across sectors with policies and concrete measures targeting not only the national but also regional and local levels. Such structured and systematic action plans would also attract the needed financial resources, while highlighting that strong political will is needed to finance climate resilience.

Participants agreed that there is a need to further define the concept of climate resilience when it comes to water and to sanitation sectors.

The water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus came up strongly in countries' presentations and it was discussed that future work under the Protocol needs to focus on unpacking this concept in relation to climate.

The roundtable of Mediterranean country presentations also highlighted a wealth of effective policy examples and innovative technological solutions, and it was discussed that these could be integrated in a compendium of adaptation actions to be possibly produced under the Protocol in the future.

The meeting also triggered opportunities for further bilateral exchange and peer-to-peer learning and support. Participants agreed to explore the opportunity of establishing a network of Mediterranean countries under the Protocol



on Water and Health, with climate resilience being a common denominator and trigger for future cooperation. In this relation, further opportunities for cooperation with UfM could be explored.

The meeting was closed by Ms. Ana Povo, Secretary of State for Health.

Technical visit

On 5 June, participants undertook a visit to the Alcantara Water Factory, a cutting-edge wastewater treatment plant, managed by Aguas do Tejo Atlântico (Aguas de Portugal Group), which collects and treats, including for reuse, wastewater from 800,000 households in Lisbon and its surroundings. The facility is one of Europe's largest green roofs, a feat of engineering and architecture, seamlessly blending with its surrounding urban environment.

Specific ideas for cooperation emerged from the visit (e.g. Italy is about to engage in a similar project and the Italian focal point asked for contacts at Aguas de Portugal Group in order to exchange technical expertise and communication strategies).

More information about the event

Presentations: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/390301>

Photos of the event: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/98046700@N04/sets/72177720317782118/>

List of participants: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/LOP%20to%20be%20shared.pdf>

Press release: <https://unece.org/climate-change/news/mediterranean-countries-come-together-increase-climate-resilience-water-and>



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