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7TH MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH

28-29 May 2024

(2 morning sessions, 9.30 am-12.30 pm CEST on both days)

Virtual Meeting

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Background and rationale

In the pan-European region, the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health provides a sound framework for translating into practice the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and for achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all as required by SDG target 6.2. The Protocol requires its Parties to ensure access to water and sanitation for everyone, specifically to promote equitable access to water and sanitation "for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion", as stipulated under Article 5, I.

The Expert Group on equitable access to water and sanitation, established in 2011 under the Protocol on Water and Health, serves as a platform for countries and stakeholders from the region to exchange experiences and develop guidance on enhancing equitable access to water and sanitation. Under its framework, Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health have developed [several tools](#) to drive action to close the equity gap.

The 7th **meeting of the Expert group on equitable access** to water and sanitation will be an opportunity for countries and stakeholders to exchange experiences on using these tools, identifying priorities for action, and more specifically discuss the final revision of the Equitable Access Score-Card, developed 10 years ago.

Indeed the [Equitable Access Score-Card](#)¹ was adopted in November 2013 to help Governments (at national, regional, and municipal level) and other stakeholders to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access to water and sanitation, as well as to identify related priorities, discuss further actions to be taken and evaluate progress through a process of self-assessment. Since then, pan-European countries have extensively used this practical tool, focusing on four dimensions: governance framework, geographical disparities, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and affordability. To date, 14 countries of the pan-European region have applied the Score-card namely Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, France – Paris Greater Area, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Spain – city of Castello, and Ukraine. Based on the outcomes of such assessments, several countries [have taken concrete measures to improve the equity of access to water and sanitation services](#).

During the 6th [meeting of the Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation](#) (online, March 2021), a general exchange of experience from self-assessment exercises was conducted, in which the

¹ https://unece.org/DAM/env/water/publications/PWH_equitable_access/1324456_ECE_MP_WP_8_Web_Interactif_ENG.pdf



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dimension of affordability was identified as an issue to enrich the quality of information required in the Score-card in future analysis. Emerging issues, such as the adopted revised [EU Drinking Water Directive \(2020\)](#) and lessons learned from COVID-19, thus identifying new dimensions to be addressed in assessing equity. A [policy brief on good practices in ensuring the affordability of water and sanitation services](#) (2022) was then developed and the [the Regional Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation](#) (2022, Geneva) enabled to get feedback and inputs from countries and stakeholders from the region on new parameters such as hygiene-based response or an enhanced accountability framework to include in the revised Score-Card.

After several revision rounds, the joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health published the first draft version of the revised Score-card on its [webpage](#) in September 2022. Subsequently, Montenegro and Albania were the first countries to pilot the draft revised Score-card to identify potential limitations to further feed into the tool's revision.

The 7th meeting of the Expert group on equitable access to water and sanitation will build on these discussions and recent countries' activities to finalize the revision of the equitable access Score-card.

II. Objectives

The main objective of the 7th meeting will be the finalization of the revision of the updated Equitable Access Score-card: an opportunity to include the lessons learned identified by Parties who have completed the self-assessment, those stemming from the pilot application of the draft revised score-card in Montenegro and Albania, as well as to include emerging topics (COVID-19, climate change, inclusion of equity dimensions in the revised EU Directives, etc.) in alignment with the legal framework of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The **specific objectives** of the Expert Group Meeting are:

1. To take stock of recent progress made in the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health;
2. To brainstorm and highlight the new priorities to be addressed by the revised Score-card and possible limitations of the tool, based on the lessons learned from the application of the draft revised Score-card in Montenegro and Albania;
3. To discuss the future needs of countries working in the framework of the Protocol on Water and Health to further improve equitable access to water and sanitation in order to inform the development of the Protocol's programme of work for 2026-2028;
4. To hear and take into account the perspective of partners from outside the pan-European region on the equitable access work under the Protocol.

Organization of work

The Expert Group meeting will take place in a **virtual format**. Plenary presentations will be combined with interactive discussions to ensure optimal sharing of experiences. All participants will be encouraged to contribute actively to the discussions.

IV. Targeted participants

Participation in the Expert Group meeting will be by invitation only.

Participants will primarily include country representatives from the pan-European region whose work (in the environment, education, health, social protection, finance, and other sectors) is related to



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equitable access to water and sanitation. Representatives from countries involved in equitable access self-assessment exercises or have expressed interest in engaging in such exercises will be particularly invited to contribute.

Representatives from development partners, international and regional organizations, civil society, and stakeholders engaged in the provision of water and sanitation services both from the pan-European region and from outside the region will be invited to join and contribute to the meeting.

V. Partners

The Expert Group meeting is organized by UNECE as part of the joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health, in cooperation with and under the guidance of the lead Parties for this area of work: France, Hungary and North Macedonia.

The meeting is funded by the French Ministry of Work, Health and Solidarities.

VI. Background documentation

The background documents for the workshop are:

- [Making water and sanitation affordable for all](#): Policy options and good practices to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation services in the pan-European (UNECE, WHO-Europe, 2022);
- [Environmental health inequalities fact sheet series](#) including two fact sheets on water, sanitation and hygiene (WHO, 2022).
- [The Measurement and Monitoring of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) Affordability](#): A missing element of monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Targets 6.1 and 6.2 (UNICEF, WHO, 2021);
- The revised [Directive 2020/2184](#) of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption;
- [The Human Rights to Water and Sanitation in Practice](#): Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region (UNECE, WHO-Europe, 2019);
- [Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans](#) to Ensure Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation (UNECE, WHO-Europe, 2016);
- [The Equitable Access Score-card](#): supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation (UNECE, WHO-Europe, 2013);
- [No One Left Behind](#): Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region (UNECE, WHO-Europe, 2012);

They can all be found on the equitable access work webpage: <https://unece.org/environment-policy/water/areas-work-protocol/equitable-access-water-and-sanitation> where the final revised scorecard will also be made available in due time.

Please note that the workshop programme will be made available on the event webpage at: <https://unece.org/info/events/event/389977>



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VII. Practical information

Dates and times:

The Expert Group meeting will be held entirely **online** on interactio in the **mornings of 28-29 May 2024**, from **9.30 am to 12.30 pm** on both days.

Working languages :

The working languages of the meeting will be English, Russian, and French.

Registration:

Participants are requested to confirm their attendance at their earliest convenience and **by 17 May 2024** at the latest. Please register online using the following link:

<https://indico.un.org/event/1011330/>

More information on how to create an account on indico to register properly is available on the meeting webpage at: <https://unece.org/info/events/event/389977>

The **link to connect** to the meeting platform will be shared with participants in due time.

Contact in UNECE co-secretariat:

In case you have questions regarding registration or substantial issues, please contact the UNECE co-secretariat:

- Mr. Armin Bigham Ghazani, UNECE: armin.bighamghazani@un.org
- Ms. Diane Guerrier, UNECE : diane.guerrier@un.org