



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 August 2016

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

**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

Eighth meeting

Geneva, 21 and 22 October 2015

Report of the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health

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I. Introduction

1. The eighth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held on 21 and 22 October 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland.
2. The main objectives of the meeting were to review the implementation of the programme of work for the period 2014–2016 (ECE/MP.WH/11/Add.1–EUDCE/1206123/3.1/2013/MOP-3/06/Add.1), adopted at the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Oslo, 25–27 November 2013), as well as to provide guidance on its further development, giving particular consideration to the financial situation. The Working Group would also initiate a strategic discussion towards the formulation of the programme of work for 2017–2019 to be adopted at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 14–16 November 2016).

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
4. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication, hosted by the Institute for Hygiene and Public Health at the University of Bonn, were also represented.
5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the meeting: Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment; Association of World Citizens; Earth Forever; European Environment and Health Youth Coalition; Journalists for Human Rights; MAMA-86; the National Water Partnership of Georgia; the National Water Partnership of Kyrgyzstan; “Solidaritate Europeană pentru Apă în Moldova” (Solidarity Water Europe in the Republic of Moldova); Women in Europe for a Common Future; and “Ynanch-Vepa”. A representative of the Steering Committee of the project “Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in the Republic of Moldova” also took part in the meeting.
6. Representatives of the Scientific-Research and Project Institute, Azerbaijan, and Wofford College, United States of America, also attended.
7. In addition, Mr. Veit Koester, Chair of the Protocol’s Compliance Committee, was present at the meeting.
8. The meeting was serviced by the joint secretariat provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe).

B. Organizational matters

9. The Chair of the Working Group on Water and Health, Mr. Kjetil Tveitan (Norway), opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.
10. The Working Group adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.WH/WG.1/2015/1–EUDCE/1408105/1.10/2015/WGWH/03.

II. Progress in the ratification process

11. The Chair noted that there had been no new accessions to the Protocol since the third session of the Meeting of the Parties.

12. The representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia informed the Working Group that the process of accession to the Protocol would intensify once the country had acceded to the Water Convention.

13. The representative of the State Committee of Water Economy of Armenia expressed readiness to support the accession procedure, including coordination with the Armenian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and to cooperate on developing and implementing the national targets set in the context of the Protocol.

14. The representative of Georgia requested support for the national accession process and the formal adoption of targets set in the context of the Protocol. Such support could be carried out in the framework of the National Policy Dialogue operating under the European Union Water Initiative, with priority areas such as the revision of legislation and the development of an action plan to implement the targets set.

III. Setting targets, implementing measures and reporting under the Protocol

A. Setting targets and implementing measures

15. The Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting noted that countries were in different stages of the implementation process. Whereas many countries were already at the stage of implementing the targets, others were still setting or revising their targets.

16. Representatives of countries reported on their progress in setting targets and target dates, as follows (in chronological order):

(a) **Switzerland:** the targets and target dates set some years ago had still not been officially adopted, as that required joint efforts by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Health;

(b) **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:** the country had prepared draft targets under the Environment and Health Action Plan in the context of the national Health 2020 process;

(c) **The Netherlands:** the revision of the national targets and target dates was expected to start in 2016 in order to bring them in line with the national drinking water policy adopted by the parliament as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) **Republic of Moldova:** in the context of a joint ECE-Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation project, a review and revision of national targets had been carried out and an action plan to implement the targets in the form of a National Programme had been sent for an interministerial consultation. It was expected that the National Programme would be submitted to the Government for adoption in early 2016;

(e) **Norway:** targets and target dates had been set and approved by the Government on 22 May 2014, and the action plan for the implementation of the targets was expected to be finalized by end of October 2015. Norway had also used the occasion of yearly reporting on public health issues to inform the parliament about the elaboration of the action plan;

(f) **Serbia:** targets had been set in 2015 according to article 6, paragraph 2, of the Protocol. Prior to setting the targets, a systematic revision of the national legal framework and a baseline analysis had been conducted, also relying on the national findings of the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS). In terms of implementation of the targets, the following activities were planned: a project on improving access to water and sanitation in schools in two districts; a rapid assessment of drinking water quality in rural areas to be conducted with support of WHO/Europe; improving the information system on water quality in emergencies; and promotion of the Protocol in three regions within the European Environment and Health Process;

(g) **Belarus:** targets had been set in 2013 following a subregional workshop organized by the joint secretariat. An action plan with concrete measures had been developed in parallel, mostly based on the existing national programmes with the allocated budget, and had been adopted by the Ministry of Health. The targets and target dates were to be revised in 2015;

(h) **Azerbaijan:** although the country had been a Party to the Protocol since 2002 and had been participating in the reporting exercises, no targets had been set yet even if water issues were priority for the country, as reflected in a number of national programmes. The target-setting process had started in 2015 under the National Policy Dialogue in Azerbaijan, coordinated by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Environment. Draft targets had been prepared and the process was expected to be completed in March 2016 with the government approval of the national targets.

17. The Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting briefed the Working Group on the activities carried out by the Task Force since the Working Group's previous meeting, as well as planned future activities. In particular, the Task Force had decided to collect and publish good practices on target setting and reporting and to analyse them in a systematic way. The Working Group discussed the draft outline of the collection of good practices and the process of the preparation of the document presented by the ECE secretariat.

18. The Working Group was also invited to suggest possible good practices. Representatives of Belarus, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia highlighted the importance of establishing intersectoral cooperation for the target setting process. The usefulness of organizing subregional workshops to exchange experience with other countries was also emphasized. The representative of the Netherlands was supportive of the initiative and the Netherlands could share experience on achieving clean drinking water and adequate sanitation. A representative of Solidarity Water Europe in the Republic of Moldova drew attention to the importance of involving the public in the target-setting process. It was agreed that a small drafting group would be established to analyse and summarize inputs provided by Parties and other States.

19. Representatives of Serbia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan presented the outcomes of national workshops jointly organized by ECE and WHO/Europe since the seventh meeting of the Working Group (Geneva, 26 and 27 November 2014). Workshops had been held in Belgrade (9 December 2014), Ashgabat (1 April 2015) and Tashkent (23–24 June 2015). The representative of Serbia highlighted the usefulness of the workshop for the successful and timely completion of the target-setting process. The representative of Turkmenistan confirmed that the workshop had helped national decision makers to understand the obligations under the Protocol, which would be useful for the process of accession. The representative of Uzbekistan said that the country was interested in clarifying the provisions of the Protocol related to transboundary waters.

20. The WHO/Europe secretariat informed the Working Group about the latest developments in the framework of the WHO/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, and presented regional progress, based on findings of the Joint Monitoring Programme's 2015 final Millennium Development Goal assessment report. The Working Group was also informed about the key highlights from the GLAAS report related to the WHO European Region.

21. The Working Group was informed about the outcomes of national capacity-building activities on global monitoring programmes organized in three countries by WHO/Europe. The workshop in Azerbaijan (Baku, 18–19 December 2014) focused on Joint Monitoring Programme methodology and supported validation of country data for the Programme's 2015 global report. The workshop in Serbia (Belgrade, 10–11 December 2014) addressed both GLAAS and Joint Monitoring Programme aspects and the outcomes of the workshop had supported a baseline analysis and the setting of targets under the Protocol. The training in Turkmenistan (Ashgabat, 1 April 2015) had raised awareness on global monitoring programmes and had helped to examine and define the in-country consultation process for data validation.

B. Improving the quality of reporting

22. The Chair of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting informed the Working Group about the editorial changes, clarifications and explanatory notes made to the current reporting template by the informal review group established under the Task Force. In that connection, the Task Force had decided to endorse the suggested explanatory amendments to the template for summary reports and recommended the Working Group to encourage Parties and non-Parties to the Protocol to use the revised template in the third reporting cycle.

23. The Working Group also discussed the timeline for the third reporting exercise and agreed on a deadline of 18 April 2016 — i.e., 210 days before the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties — for submission of summary reports for the third reporting cycle.

24. With regard to the informal review group's work to revise the template for summary reports to be adopted at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Chair of the Task Force introduced the key considerations to be taken into account in the future reporting system, such as, inter alia: harmonization with priority areas under the programme of work; reflecting success stories; and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals and other global and regional commitments. The Chair presented the outline of the structure of the future reporting template, highlighting the possible inclusion of a part on response systems in accordance with article 8 of the Protocol.

25. The representative of the Netherlands was supportive of the work on the revision of the template, which would make it possible to bring it into line with other reporting systems. The representative of France considered that it would be important to align reporting under the Protocol with the reporting under the Sustainable Development Goals. The joint secretariat clarified that the development of indicators for the Goals was still ongoing, so such alignment would only be possible after the completion of that exercise. The delegate of the Republic of Moldova supported the inclusion of a separate part on article 8 of the Protocol.

26. The Working Group:

- (a) Recognized the role of the Task Force in advancing target setting and reporting processes under the Protocol;
- (b) Appreciated the usefulness of national workshops in supporting the implementation and application of the Protocol;

(c) Entrusted the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting to develop and finalize the collection of good practices on target setting and reporting for its submission to the Working Group on Water and Health at its ninth meeting (Geneva, 29–30 June 2016), with a view to its subsequent submission to Meeting of the Parties at its fourth session, and invited comments by 30 November 2015;

(d) Commended the work of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting in revising the current reporting template and recommended the use of the revised template for preparing the summary reports in the third reporting cycle;

(e) Entrusted the Task Force to further develop the template for summary reports under the Protocol to be adopted at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, to come into effect for the fourth reporting cycle, and invited comments by 30 November 2015;

(f) Recognized that UN-Water's Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water significantly supported baseline analysis and the setting of national targets under the Protocol;

(g) Acknowledged the usefulness of targeted capacity-building activities in strengthening national monitoring and reporting capacities in the context of global monitoring programmes.

IV. Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases

A. Water-related disease surveillance

27. The representative of Norway, co-lead Party for the programme area on prevention and reduction of water-related diseases, informed the Working Group about the progress of work since its last meeting, highlighting the development of an online tool to define country training needs on water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management and the main findings of the review of available evidence on the situation of water-related diseases in the WHO European Region. The Working Group was invited to provide feedback on the draft review report on water-related diseases.

28. The Working Group was also informed about future activities, which focused on the development of training materials, the organization of capacity-building workshops on water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management in the Czech Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the finalization of the regional evidence review report. A representative of Kyrgyzstan expressed the country's interest in receiving capacity-building assistance and requested support from the WHO/Europe secretariat and lead Parties.

B. Drinking water quality surveillance

29. The representative of Belarus, co-lead Party for activities related to drinking water quality surveillance, reported on new developments in the area, in particular highlighting the main outcomes, conclusions and recommendations of the regional meeting on effective approaches to drinking-water quality surveillance (Oslo, 6–7 May 2015). Participants at the meeting had identified good practices in risk-based water quality surveillance from across the pan-European region, challenges in establishing such approaches and support needs. One of the recommendations from the meeting was to develop a practical guidance tool for decision makers for establishing risk-based drinking-water quality surveillance. The Oslo meeting had been a milestone in shaping the scope of work and making progress in the area. Another planning meeting of the lead Parties (Bonn, 4 September 2015) had further defined the scope and building blocks of the guidance document.

30. The Working Group was also informed about the plans for future activities under the programme area, including the establishment of an expert group to support development of the guidance document on risk-based drinking water quality surveillance and plans for its finalization. Delegates of Hungary and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia confirmed that risk-based thinking was the way to proceed and the need for such a document to support national uptake. The representative of the Republic of Moldova stressed that end-product testing alone was not effective, and suggested that a concise overview of key principles of risk-based approaches and positive examples should be provided. The representative of the Netherlands said the Netherlands would also consider taking part in the development of the document, subject to confirmation.

C. Water, sanitation and hygiene in schools

31. A representative of Hungary, co-lead country for activities on water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, reported on progress in the programme area, highlighting the outcomes of two expert group meetings on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools (Budapest, 16–17 April 2015; and Bonn, Germany, 8–9 October 2015).

32. The Hungarian delegation also presented the status of development of two reports: a landscape report providing a regional overview of the evidence related to the situation on WASH in schools in the WHO European Region; and an advocacy document on WASH in schools to trigger national decision-making and support target setting. The main findings of the landscape review were presented as well as the building blocks of the advocacy document. The Working Group was requested to review and comment the two draft documents.

33. A representative of the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition, a partner for the work in the programme area, updated the Working Group on the scope, main activities and outcomes of the WASH in schools project it implemented. The Coalition had launched its youth-friendly brochure “Hygiene Much” to sensitize students about hygiene and sanitation-related matters in the school context. The brochure had been developed and published in the English, Russian and German languages under the Protocol’s programme of work with the support of the WHO/Europe secretariat.

34. A representative of Hungary presented the plans for future activities in the programme area, which would focus on the development of practical tools for school management and public health surveillance authorities to improve WASH in schools. The representative of Women in Europe for a Common Future confirmed the relevance and importance of those activities under the Protocol and highlighted the increased recognition of the topic under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Parma Declaration on Environment and Health.

35. The Working Group:

(a) Acknowledged the substantial efforts and achievements made by the lead Parties and the WHO/Europe secretariat in scaling up the scope and implementation of work on the various thematic priority areas under programme area 2, in particular the surveillance of drinking water quality, the surveillance of water-related diseases and WASH in schools;

(b) Conveyed its appreciation to Belarus, Georgia, Hungary and Norway for their effective leadership and provision of financial and in-kind support in implementing the activities under that programme area;

(c) Appreciated the work and contributions made by the members of the expert group on WASH in schools, the WHO Collaborating Centre on Health Promoting Water Management and Risk Communication at the University of Bonn and the European

Environment and Health Youth Coalition in advancing activities under programme area 2.4;

(d) Endorsed the future plans under the programme area, specifically the establishment of an expert group on water quality surveillance, country capacity-building workshops on water-related disease surveillance, the development of a surveillance tool on WASH in schools for public health authorities and a toolbox for school management;

(e) Invited all delegates to review the draft report on water-related diseases in the WHO European Region and to provide comments and/or suggestions for improvement by 30 November 2015;

(f) Entrusted the lead Parties, with the support of the WHO/Europe secretariat, to address the comments received from the Working Group and from peer review, and endorsed finalization of the report on water-related diseases in the WHO European Region;

(g) Took a note of request made by the representative of Kyrgyzstan to support a national capacity-building training on water-related disease surveillance;

(h) Requested all delegates to review the draft landscape report on the situation of WASH in schools in the WHO European Region and to provide comments and/or suggestions for improvement by 30 November 2015;

(i) Invited all delegates to review the draft advocacy document on WASH in schools and to provide comments and/or suggestions for improvement by 30 November 2015;

(j) Entrusted the lead Parties and the WHO/Europe secretariat, through the expert group on WASH in schools, to address the comments received from the Working Group. It further endorsed finalization of the landscape report and the advocacy document on WASH in schools.

V. Small-scale water supplies and sanitation

36. The representative of Germany, co-lead Party for the programme area on small-scale water supplies and sanitation, updated the Working Group on new achievements, in particular regarding the preparation of the report on the survey on small-scale water supplies in the pan-European region and the good practice document for policymakers. The WHO/Europe secretariat noted resource constraints on the secretariat side that had led to a delay in finalizing the draft documents, and stressed the need for the active engagement of the Working Group in reviewing and improving the quality of draft documents prepared under the Protocol in order to ensure their relevance for countries and their needs.

37. The Working Group was informed about the outcomes of national consultations and workshops on small-scale water supply and sanitation held in Serbia (Belgrade, 8 December 2014), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Skopje, 17 June 2015) and Kyrgyzstan (Bulan Sogottu, 21–22 September 2015). The meetings had been held to review the country situations with respect to small-scale water supply and sanitation, identify needs for improving such systems and provide recommendations for short- and long-term actions to improve their regulation, management and surveillance in the respective countries.

38. The representative of Serbia, co-lead Party for the programme area, presented the plans for future activities, including the finalization of the two documents mentioned earlier, further capacity-building activities to improve the management of small-scale water supply and sanitation systems at the national and subregional levels and undertaking a rapid assessment of drinking water quality in rural Serbia using WHO methodology. The WHO/Europe secretariat invited countries to express interest in organizing national and/or

subregional workshops on small-scale water supply and sanitation. The representative of the Republic of Moldova indicated interest in organizing a subregional workshop on the topic in 2017.

39. The Working Group:

(a) Acknowledged the significant progress being made on small-scale water supplies and sanitation and conveyed its appreciation to Germany, Serbia, Women in Europe for a Common Future and the joint secretariat for their leadership and proactive support in advancing work in that programme area;

(b) Endorsed the future plans, specifically the national and subregional capacity-building workshops, the finalization and publication of the good practice document for policymakers and the report on the survey on small-scale water supply systems, country consultations in three countries and the rapid situation assessment of drinking water quality in Serbia;

(c) Invited eligible countries to contact the joint secretariat to express interest in national consultations and capacity-building workshops on small scale water supply and sanitation or to express interest in hosting a subregional capacity-building workshop.

VI. Safe and efficient management of water supply and sanitation systems

40. The WHO/Europe secretariat, on behalf of the lead Party, Portugal, and the lead organization, the International Water Association, informed the Working Group about the country activities on water safety plans that had been implemented and coordinated by the joint secretariat. Capacity-building workshops on water safety plans had been organized in Ukraine (Kyiv, 11 August 2015) and Uzbekistan (Tashkent, 24 June 2015). The representatives of the two countries briefed the Working Group on the outcomes of the trainings. To implement the recommendations of the workshop, the Ukrainian NGO MAMA-86 had been supporting water safety plan development in eight villages, targeting schools and small rural systems. In addition, water safety plans had been introduced into the curriculum of the technical university. The workshop in Uzbekistan had recognized the importance of risk-based approaches in ensuring drinking water quality and the need for a country-specific approach for water safety plan uptake. The representative of the Republic of Moldova briefed the Working Group about planned capacity-building training for public health authorities (Chisinau, 5–6 November 2015) to introduce key principles of the risk assessment and risk management approaches of water supply systems.

41. The WHO/Europe secretariat informed the Working Group about planned future activities under the programme area, as well as challenges encountered in their implementation. There was a need to review the modality of work under the programme area and to improve leadership and engagement by the lead country and organization. There had been a gap in the implementation of the planned activity related to the scoping study on sanitation due to (human and financial) resource constraints. The representative of the Netherlands indicated that the country was considering co-leading the programme area and supporting implementation of the activities. The Netherlands planned to hold a workshop on water safety plans in 2016.

42. The Working Group:

(a) Appreciated the technical and financial support provided by the joint secretariat for capacity-building on the water safety plan approach;

(b) Endorsed the future plans under the programme area, specifically further in-country capacity-building workshops on water safety plans and undertaking a wastewater scoping study;

(c) Recognized a critical need to improve engagement and leadership of the lead Party (Portugal) and lead organization (the International Water Association), as well as support from other countries and partners to advance the work on safe and efficient management of water supply and sanitation systems.

VII. Equitable access to water and sanitation

43. The secretariat reported on the progress on programme area 5 on equitable access to water and sanitation. Activities to raise awareness about the necessity of adopting an equity-focused approach to ensure equitable access had been carried out, for example with the organization of a dedicated session during the Seventh World Water Forum (Daegu and Gyeongbuk, Republic of Korea, 12–17 April 2015). Progress in assessing the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation based on the Equitable Access Score-card had been achieved in several countries, and experience in carrying out such assessments had been shared during the third meeting of the expert group on equitable access to water and sanitation (Paris, 11–12 May 2015). The expert group had also initiated the elaboration of a strategic note on the development of action plans to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation, which was introduced to the Working Group.

44. The representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia reported on progress achieved in assessing the situation of equitable access in three municipalities, after translating the Equitable Access Score-card into Macedonian and Albanian. The representative of Solidarity Water Europe in the Republic of Moldova informed the Working Group about the finalization of the assessment in the Republic of Moldova in December 2014 and highlighted its usefulness, but also the complexity of the exercise. The representative of the Republic of Moldova confirmed that an additional target focusing on equity of access had been set as result of the assessment. The representative of the Ukrainian NGO MAMA-86 highlighted the usefulness of the findings of the assessment to prepare project proposals: a Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency-funded project had been started in 12 regions of Ukraine to improve access for vulnerable and marginalized groups. The representatives of Azerbaijan and Hungary also reported on the progress of equity assessments in their countries. The representative of France also mentioned several measures taken to improve equitable access to water and sanitation in France.

45. The representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights informed the Working Group about the publication by the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation of the online handbook, *Realizing the human rights to water and sanitation*,¹ as well as about the report on affordability of water and sanitation services (A/HRC/30/39), which had been presented to the Human Right Council at its thirtieth session (Geneva, (14 September–2 October 2015).

46. The Working Group:

(a) Acknowledged the significant progress made on equitable access to water and sanitation;

¹ Available from
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/Handbook.aspx>.

(b) Entrusted the lead Parties, in cooperation with the joint secretariat, to further develop the draft strategic note on the development of equitable access action plans, taking into consideration comments by the Working Group to be sent by 30 November 2015;

(c) Conveyed its appreciation to France for the provision of financial support to implement the activities under the programme area.

VIII. Assistance to support implementation at the national level

47. With regard to activities related to assistance to support implementation at the national level, the ECE secretariat informed the Working Group about the processes and outcomes of the ECE-led National Policy Dialogues operating under the European Union Water Initiative in those countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia where support had been provided to the implementation or application of the Protocol. Interventions were made by the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan highlighting the value of the National Policy Dialogues for improving intersectoral coordination at the national level and requesting the continuation of the work on the application of the Protocol in the framework of Dialogues in their respective countries.

48. The Working Group was briefed about the status of implementation of the United Nations Development Account project to support in-country situation assessments and capacity-building related to small-scale water supply and sanitation systems, as well as the strengthening of capacity to ensure the equity of access to water and sanitation in eligible countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (for details, see sects. V and VII above).

49. The Working Group was also informed that an agreement to support implementation of the Protocol in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had been signed by Finland's Water Sector Support Programme, ECE and WHO/Europe (Tajikistan only), and that the planning of activities had already started. The representative of Tajikistan provided an update on the drinking water and water supply situation in the country. Also, a representative of the Women in Europe for a Common Future expressed the interest of that NGO in collaborating on water safety plan implementation in Tajikistan.

50. The Working Group:

(a) Appreciated the significant support provided by the ECE-led National Policy Dialogues on Water Supply and Sanitation operating under the European Union Water Initiative to the implementation and application of the Protocol at the national level in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;

(b) Acknowledged the progress made in the implementation of activities planned in the framework of the United Nation Development Account project to strengthen the capacity of Governments and water operators to ensure equity of access to water and sanitation, in particular focusing on small-scale water supplies and sanitation systems in rural areas;

(c) Appreciated the efforts made by the joint secretariat for resource mobilization from Finland's Water Sector Support Programme programme and other partners to support Protocol implementation in the target countries.

IX. Compliance procedure

51. The Chair of the Compliance Committee under the Protocol informed the Working Group about the outcomes of the Committee's twelfth meeting (Geneva, 19–20 October 2015).² The Committee had discussed the preparation of its report to the Meeting of the Parties at its fourth session, and had decided that it would not consider any national summary reports submitted later than 1 May 2016. The preliminary outcomes of the analysis of the report would be presented to the Working Group at its next meeting.

52. At its tenth meeting (Geneva, 25 November 2014), the Committee had decided to initiate a case regarding possible non-compliance by Portugal with its obligation to report under article 7, as that Party had failed to submit its summary report within the second reporting exercise. At its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 24–25 March 2015), the Compliance Committee had prepared draft findings with regard to the case. The Committee had proceeded to finalize its findings on 8 June 2015, with all Committee members giving their agreement by e-mail by 15 July 2015. The Committee had confirmed the adoption of the findings and had agreed that they would be annexed to the report of the twelfth meeting. The Committee had also decided to close its consideration of the communication regarding possible non-compliance by Portugal with its reporting obligations as it considered that the allegations of the communication would be addressed within the case that the Committee had initiated.

53. The Committee had invited Albania, Azerbaijan and Croatia to engage in a consultation under the Consultation Process. Taking into account the request for assistance submitted to the secretariat by Bosnia and Herzegovina, that country had been invited to join the consultation as an observer. Albania and Azerbaijan had accepted the invitation to engage and Bosnia and Herzegovina had agreed to participate as an observer. No response had been received from Croatia. Consultations with Parties had been carried out as an open process, with country presentations, follow-up questions and discussion by the Committee. The advice provided by the Committee on a provisional basis at the end of the consultations had been positively received by the two Parties and the observer. The Committee had requested the secretariat to finalize the advice, to send it to the countries in a letter on behalf of the Committee and to subsequently make the advice publicly available. The Chair also noted that a longer process of consultation would be required to ensure provision of informed advice to Parties. The Committee would look into inviting other Parties to participate in the Consultation Process after the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties. The Netherlands indicated that the recommendations from the Compliance Committee would be considered in revising the targets.

54. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the information provided by the Chair of the Compliance Committee about the main decisions taken by the Committee at its twelfth meeting;

(b) Encouraged Parties to the Protocol to take part in the Consultation Process under the Compliance Committee.

X. Implementation of and prospects for the programme of work for 2014–2016

55. Further to the discussions under previous agenda items, the Working Group reviewed progress made with regard to the implementation of the Protocol's programme of

² See <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38171#/>.

work for 2014–2016 and debated prospects for its further implementation. The joint secretariat highlighted the growing number of requests for technical activities and different tools developed under the Protocol, while the financial and staff capacity of the secretariat to fulfil such demands was not increasing. Overall, the implementation of the programme of work had so far been successful thanks to its scope and structure and the commitment of lead Parties and organizations. It was emphasized, however, that being a lead Party or organization entailed important duties.

56. The representative of the Netherlands highlighted that safe and efficient management of water supply and sanitation was a priority issue for the country. Together with Hungary, the Netherlands had undertaken a number of efforts to promote accession to the Protocol by the European Union, which would be considered as an important step forward for the Protocol. European Union member States were encouraged to actively support that initiative. The representative of Finland also confirmed that Finland would continue its support to the Protocol's programme of work.

57. The Chair reminded the Working Group that the implementation of planned activities was subject to the availability of resources, and that the Bureau had been mandated by the Meeting of the Parties to prioritize activities accordingly.

58. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress report on the implementation of the programme of work for 2014–2016 since the third session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) Commended Parties, other cooperating States and partners, in particular the lead countries and organizations, for their work and support to date towards the implementation of the programme of work for 2014–2016.

XI. Strategic discussion on priorities for the programme of work for 2017–2019

59. The joint secretariat introduced the background and objectives of the strategic discussion on the priorities for the new programme work for 2017–2019, as well as the water and sanitation-related targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global and regional commitments of relevance for future work under the Protocol. Participants were invited to discuss in groups in order to reflect upon the strategic objectives and possible priorities for the programme of work for 2017–2019.

60. Participants specifically discussed experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the programme of work for 2014–2016, and identified thematic gaps that required policy attention and action under the Protocol. The Working Group noted that the objectives of the Protocol and the current programme areas remained relevant and already, to a large extent, addressed and were aligned with regional and global policy priorities stipulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Parma Declaration on Environment and Health.

61. To further strengthen that alignment and take stock of the prevailing challenges and needs in the water, sanitation and health domains in the pan-European region, the Working Group identified a range of additional thematic areas to be considered in further discussions towards identifying priorities for the future programme of work for 2017–2019. Specifically, the Working Group called for more attention to, inter alia:

(a) The entire sanitation chain, including the quality of wastewater discharges and reuse of wastewater in agriculture;

(b) Climate change-related issues, including disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness and response planning for extreme weather conditions;

- (c) Water resource management and protection;
- (d) Water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities.

62. The joint secretariat elaborated the road map towards finalization of the programme of work for 2017–2019, including the organization of a strategic workshop on the future priorities under the Protocol in the first quarter 2016. The secretariat also highlighted the interlinkages and complementarity between the European Environment and Health Process and the Protocol. The Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, to be held in 2017, would adopt a new Ministerial Declaration. Thus, the outcomes of the strategic discussion would also be relevant to inform policy commitments to be adopted at the Sixth Ministerial Conference.

63. The Working Group:

- (a) Entrusted the Bureau, with the support of the joint secretariat, to develop a draft programme of work for 2017–2019, also based on the outcomes of the strategic workshop and a broad consultative process with Parties, other States and partners;

- (b) Entrusted the Bureau to submit a draft programme of work for 2017–2019 to the Working Group at its ninth meeting for review and endorsement, with a view to its subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its fourth session for adoption.

XII. Financial arrangements to support the implementation of the Protocol

64. The Working Group was informed about the financial status of the ECE Technical Cooperation Trust Fund and the WHO/Europe Voluntary Fund, including the contributions received, the funds used and the resources required for the implementation of the programme of work for 2014–2016.³ The joint secretariat emphasized that earmarked contributions and the need of putting aside staff costs made it challenging to ensure smooth implementation of activities under the Protocol. It was noted that contributions did not meet ambitions and needs, as expressed by the programme of work for 2014–2016, and the scope and number of Protocol activities had significantly increased while the staffing situation had remained unchanged. The Chair thanked the Parties for the funds contributed or pledged, as well as for their in-kind contributions.

65. The ECE secretariat introduced the document “Draft proposal for a financial mechanism”.⁴ The Working Group was invited to review the document with a view to entrusting the Bureau to prepare a draft decision on a sustainable financing mechanism to be submitted to the ninth meeting of the Working Group and subsequently to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its fourth session for adoption. However, following a discussion, the Working Group concluded that, while the document presented was useful for guiding the provision of support to the work of the Protocol, and for sharing it with other stakeholders at the country level, there was not enough consensus at present to introduce a sustainable financial mechanism under the Protocol.

66. The Working Group:

- (a) Took note of the reports on the contributions, expenditures and the funding gaps;

³ See “Overview of contributions and expenditures related to the Protocol and resources required up to the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties” (informal document).

⁴ See “Draft proposal for a financial mechanism” (informal document).

(b) Expressed its gratitude to Parties and other cooperating States, especially to the lead countries and organizations that had provided financial and in-kind contributions to implement the programme of work for 2014–2016;

(c) Called on Parties, other States and relevant organizations to actively contribute to the activities contained in the programme of work, including through financial and in-kind contributions, to ensure predictable and stable funding allowing for reliable secretariat services and support for the implementation of activities;

(d) Entrusted the Bureau to prepare an informal document that would provide an overview and consolidation of financial arrangements to be submitted to the Working Group at its ninth meeting and subsequently to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its fourth session.

XIII. Date and venue of the ninth meeting

67. The secretariat announced that the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health was tentatively scheduled to be held in Geneva on 29 and 30 June 2016.
