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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  
Item 11 of the provisional agenda  
**Strategic discussion on priorities for  
the programme of work for 2017–2019**

**POST-SESSION INFORMAL DOCUMENT**

**Summary of the strategic discussion on priorities for the programme of work for 2017–2019**

*Prepared by the secretariat*

**General considerations**

- *Alignment with international and regional agenda.* The future programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2017–2019 needs to be aligned and harmonized with international and regional priorities, commitments and principles. This includes alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The linkage to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will help implementation of the Protocol in terms of accountability and position the Protocol as regional tool for implementation of global commitments. Alignment also concerns strengthening the complementary roles of and the linkages to further Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Water Convention and the Aarhus Convention, current and forthcoming Regional Priority Goals under the European Environment and Health Process, as well as Directives and policies of the European Union. Thematic workshops on strengthening these linkages with global and regional commitments were suggested.
- *Strengthening the environment side.* The future Protocol agenda needs to better reflect the holistic approach of the Protocol, and its focus on prevention, and therefore strengthen alignment with the agenda of the environmental sector, for example in the thematic areas of water resource management, wastewater management and the effects of climate change on the water cycle.
- *Access to water and sanitation.* It was noted that ensuring basic access to safe water and sanitation for all is still an unfinished agenda in the pan-European Region. The deterioration of existing systems and distribution networks is of concern, among others. Many rural areas do not have access to centralized water and sanitation services and many existing ones are poorly managed, maintained and financed.

- *Partnerships*. Partners from relevant sectors beyond water, sanitation and health need to be involved in the Protocol's work to the extent possible, e.g. financing and education. Also, donors, international financing institutions, academia and public-private partnerships need to be engaged.

### **Confirmed priorities and related programme areas**

- *Programme area 1* on target setting and reporting continues to be at the core of the programme of work. It remains crucial to provide further assistance to countries in acceding to the Protocol and/or setting and implementing national targets. Further capacity building on reporting is also needed. Targets and common indicators need to be increasingly aligned with the SDGs and countries require assistance in this regard.
- *Programme area 2* on prevention of water-related disease (WRD) should be kept in the future programme of work. Many countries have set targets and established national programs towards improving water quality and reducing WRD. Maintaining and improving effective surveillance and response systems remains relevant, specifically the work on WRD surveillance and risk-based water quality surveillance, with emphasis on effective enforcement mechanisms. The need for developing tools and capacity building to support their implementation at country level was highlighted.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) conditions in educational facilities remain of concern across the pan-European region. Activities under the Protocol contributed to filling the "MDG gap" in the pan-European region. The Parma Regional Priority Goal 1 is unlikely to be met. It has been suggested to elevate the topic on WaSH in educational facilities to a separate programme area due to its emerging importance and opportunities.

- *Programme area 3* on small-scale systems should be kept in the future programme of work, however, with increased focus on sanitation. Challenges related to infrastructure deterioration, financing, management and surveillance of small-scale water supply and sanitation in rural areas, including in small towns and peri-urban areas, remain relevant across the pan-European region. The need for enhancing efforts in building capacities of water and sanitation operators on safe management, maintenance and sustainable financing, as well as health sector staff on risk-based surveillance of small-scale systems was emphasized.
- *Programme area 4* on safe and efficient management should be kept in the future programme of work with increased emphasis on sanitation safety. Activities should support further uptake of risk management approaches, such as water safety plans (WSP) and sanitation safety plans (SSP), in policy, regulations and practice at national level. It was noted that in several countries the legislative basis is "out of date" in terms of reflecting risk-based safe approaches. The need to focus on wastewater treatment and reuse was also highlighted as a growing priority. Safe and efficient management of water distribution networks requires attention.
- *Programme area 5* on equitable access to water and sanitation should be kept in the future programme of work. Persisting inequities in ensuring universal access to safe water and sanitation services for all were highlighted. Access of refugees and migrants is of growing concern in the pan-European region. There is a need to accelerate advocacy and activities in supporting countries in assessing and appreciating existing inequalities. The usefulness of the Score-card was broadly noted.

In relation to all programme areas, the usefulness of the various national and sub-regional events aiming at policy support, technical capacity building and exchange of experiences was broadly confirmed. The usefulness of the different new tools and guidance documents

developed under the Protocol, combined with support to their application at the country level, was also highlighted.

### **Emerging priorities**

- Attention to the entire sanitation chain, including quality of wastewater discharges and reuse of wastewater in agriculture, has not been the focus of Protocol's activities in the past. This thematic area is, however, of growing concern for both urban and rural areas, also in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Future attention may focus on urban wastewater flows, safe disposal of human waste, safe reuse of wastewater and introduction of SSPs. Systematic analyses of the situation of wastewater treatment and reuse in countries of the pan-European region is needed. It has been strongly recommended to establish or mainstream activities on sanitation, wastewater and reuse in the future programme of work.
  - Also linked to wastewater treatment, more emphasis on chemical pollution of water was suggested, with particular emphasis on assessing micro-pollutants in the water cycle.
  - In general, little attention is presently given to the water resource management and protection. This includes linkages to transboundary aspects and the Water Convention. The protection of water at source from pollution should be given more attention in the future programme of work. Reduction of pollution in cities was mentioned as important to sustain urban development, housing and land management. The linkage to appropriate waste management and prevention of leakage from landfills was noted.
  - More attention is also to be paid to climate change related issues, including disaster prevention, emergency preparedness and response planning to extreme weather conditions (i.e. torrential rains, floods, draughts), changes in freshwater quality and availability, as well as increasing resilience of water supply and sanitation services. There was support to "reactivate" this thematic area in the future programme of work.
  - More consideration is to be given to WaSH in health care facilities as an emerging global topic in line with the SDG impetus. This could address issues related to basic access to safely managed WaSH services but also expands to safe disposal of hospital wastewater. WaSH in health care facilities could potentially be integrated with WaSH in schools.
  - Sustainable financing of water and sanitation services was another key topic highlighted. The need for renewal of old or disrupted infrastructure is significant across the pan-European region and the lack of access to sustainable financing is frequently a bottleneck.
  - Other highlights where more attention was needed included:
    - Promotion of and education on hygiene practices;
    - WaSH and migrants;
    - Anti-microbial resistance;
    - Radioactive pollution.
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