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Safeguarding the right to healthy water



Water from the tap is taken for granted in the developed world, but the reality is that over 100 million Europeans still do not have access to safe drinking water. More worrying is that in the pan-European region 37 children die of diarrhoea each day due to the lack of access to safe water. The basic human right of access to safe and healthy water clearly continues to be a problem in the pan-European region.

A special independent body has started work under the auspices of UNECE and the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization. The Compliance Committee was created to supervise and ensure compliance with the London Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The Protocol aims to improve access to safe water as a fundamental human right in the pan-European region, which covers 56 countries.

The environmental authorities involved in this effort are now working to expand participation to the global level. The Committee, composed of nine independent experts, scientists and environmental lawyers, held its first meeting on 12 March. As a first step, it adopted rules allowing for communications from the general public – be they NGOs or individual citizens – concerning failures by Governments and their administrations to meet the requirements of the Protocol.



The Compliance Committee will ensure prevention, control and reduction of water-related diseases and hence will increase the number of European citizens with access to safe drinking-water and adequate sanitation. The incidence of infectious diseases caused by poor-quality drinking water is often highest in children aged 6 to 11 months. More than 170,000 cases of water-related diseases were reported in 2006, including over 120,000 cases of viral hepatitis A.

The spread of water-transmitted diseases is especially common in Eastern Europe, where 16% of the population still do not have access to drinking water in their homes. The situation is even more severe in rural areas, where more than half of the population lacks a reliable supply of safe water and/or adequate sanitation systems.

In Western Europe, there is a growing awareness of the importance of emerging diseases and the new challenges posed by global climate change. With more frequent and heavy rainfall projected, as well as increased periods of drought in the Mediterranean region and water stress in other areas, and rising global temperatures in lakes, rivers and seas, water quality and quantity will be affected more than before.

This should lead to unexpected outbreaks of water-borne diseases, increased harmful algal bloom, and the creation of environmental niches for previously unknown disease-transmitting organisms.



New trends in coal mine methane recovery and use

Methane explosions are the leading cause of major coal mining accidents worldwide, and there have been several notable accidents in the UNECE region in the last 18 months. To ensure greater safety, coal mines must remove the methane from the mining environment. Once emitted to the atmosphere, however, the methane becomes a greenhouse gas with a potency over 20 times that of CO₂. Thus the capture and use of the methane has many co-benefits including mine safety, mitigation of greenhouse gases, and use of a wasted energy resource. With a very large and active coal industry, this is a very important issue for many member States in the UNECE region

A workshop held in Szczyrk, Poland on 27-29 February served primarily as a forum for information exchange on the latest technical, market and policy developments affecting the coal and CMM industries in Poland and around the world. Among the general conclusions reached, participants noted that continuing improvements in drilling technology will be more effective in removing methane while also improving the quality of the methane produced, thus making it easier and more efficient to use.

Technologies are also evolving to provide additional opportunities for using the methane beyond the traditional uses of power generation and natural gas pipeline injection. Especially notable is the commercialization of a technology to use mine ventilation air. The ventilation air contains less than 1% methane, but these sources account for 3/4 of all methane emissions from the mining sector. The world's first commercial project is running in Australia and producing 6 MW of



Participants from the workshop on mine tour at Pniowek Mine standing with Saint Barbara, patron saint of miners.

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Implementation of the London Protocol, reinforced by the Compliance Committee, will make a decisive contribution to achieving two of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, namely Goal 4 (halving by 2015 the proportion of the population not having access to improved water supply and adequate sanitation) and Goal 7 (reducing child mortality in the under-five population by two thirds). ❖

More information on the Protocol is available on websites of UNECE (http://www.unece.org/env/water/text/text_protocol.htm) and WHO/Europe (<http://www.euro.who.int/watsan>).

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electricity. However, a number of barriers to further utilization still remain and participants noted that these projects are frequently outside the core business of a coal mining operation and often present challenging project economics at current electricity and carbon prices. There was a strong sense, though, that these hurdles will be overcome as electricity and natural gas markets liberalize and prices rise, carbon markets mature and stabilize, and new mine construction in the future will integrate CMM utilization into the design and construction of the mine from the outset.

The workshop concluded with a tour of the Pniowek Mine of the Jastrzebie Coal Company to view its impressive CMM operation, which includes 10 MW of electricity generation and an evaporative cooling system for the mine. ❖

For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/ie/se/coal/cmm.html> or contact Clark Talkington (info.energy@unece.org).

Ratifications ... Accessions ...

European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN), of 19 January 1996

Accession: **Bosnia and Herzegovina (10 March 2008)**

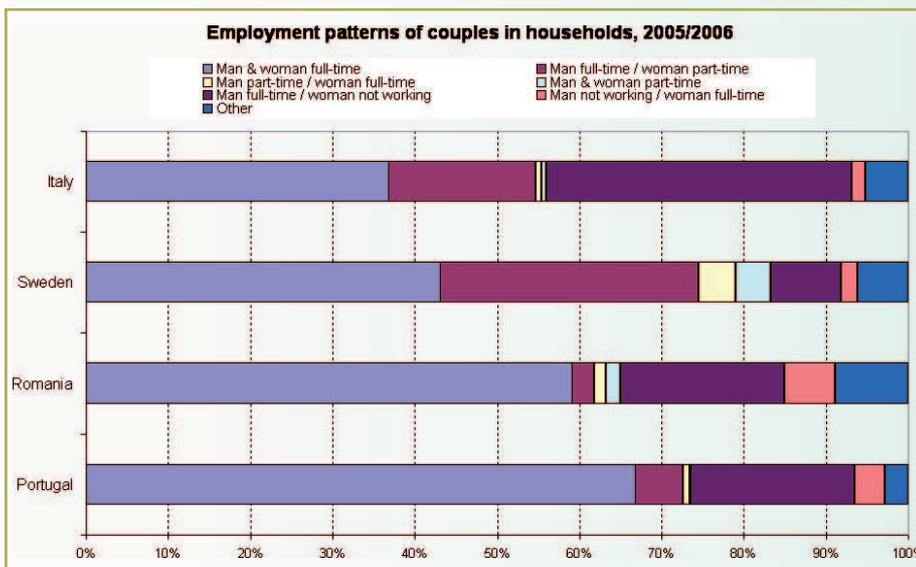
Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) concerning the electronic consignment note, Geneva, 20 February 2008

Opening for signature: **Geneva 27 May 2008**

The above Protocol was adopted during the 70th session of the Inland Transport Committee on 20 February 2008. In accordance with its article 7, the Protocol shall be opened for signature by States that are signatories to or parties to the Convention and are either members of the Economic Commission for Europe or have been admitted to the Commission in a consultative capacity, from 27 May 2008 to 30 May 2008, in Geneva, and, after this date, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, until 30 June 2009.

Facts and Figures

Dual-earner couples prevail in European households



Source: UNECE Gender statistics database (www.unece.org/stats/data).

Note: Data refer to couples where both partners are in the age range of 25-49 and live in a household with or without dependent children.

Over the past several decades, the pattern of employment among men and women, particularly those living as a couple in a household, has changed markedly. In the EU, for instance, the employment rate of women rose by a full seven percentage points in 1997-2006, while that of men increased only by one. Many European countries have experienced an important influx of mothers into the labour force, indicating a strong move from the traditional male breadwinner to the dual-earner (full- or part-time) household type.

The level of dominance of such household employment patterns differs, however, across countries. It clearly depends on what the institutional setup supports (provision of affordable childcare or parental leave entitlement, for instance), what the socio-economic conditions allow (employment accessibility, income levels), and what the gender cultural environment presses for.

In the small sample of countries, with the notable exception of Italy, the dual full-time earner pattern is the most common among households. The highest share of dual full-time earners are found in Portugal; however, if both full- and part-time dual-earner couples with or without dependent children are taken into account, Sweden, with a share close to 85%, clearly leads. ❖

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