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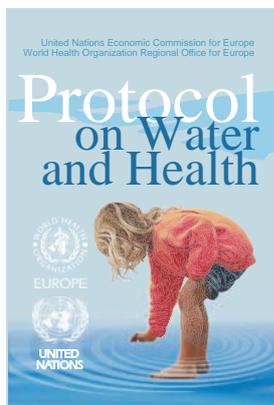
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MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO DISCUSS PROGRESS REGARDING WATER AND HEALTH IN THE PAN-EUROPEAN REGION

At present, nearly 140 million people – 16 percent of Europe's population – still live in homes that are not connected to a drinking-water supply and about 85 million people do not have access to adequate sanitation. According to the best estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 13,000 children under the age of 14 die every year from water-related diarrhoea, mostly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Thus, contrary to common perceptions, access to safe drinking water and to improved sanitation remains a challenge in several countries of the UNECE region, with some of them actually regressing instead of progressing towards the Millennium Development Goals. Mortality and morbidity related to unsafe water and inadequate sanitation remain unacceptably high; and water resources are often used in an inefficient manner. Also in the Western part of the region where access to water and sanitation are of lesser concern, a range of pollutants, including nutrients, metals, pesticides, microbes, industrial chemicals and pharmaceutical products have adverse effects on freshwater ecosystems or raise concerns for public health.



The UNECE/ WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health is the first international legal agreement adopted specifically to protect human health through the prevention, control and reduction of water-related disease, the improvement of water management and the protection of ecosystems. It aims to attain access to safe drinking water and provision of sanitation for everyone.



The second session of the Meeting of the Parties will take place on 23-25 November 2010 in Bucharest, at the invitation of the Government of Romania. Five years after the entry into force of the Protocol, the Meeting will mark an important milestone in the evolution of this instrument and in the improvement of water and health in the pan-European region. It will provide an opportunity to review progress achieved so far and to reflect on and plan for the challenges that lie ahead. A wide variety of topics that have been the focus of work over the past three years will be discussed, including ratification and implementation of the Protocol; equitable access to drinking water; and access to information and public participation under the Protocol.

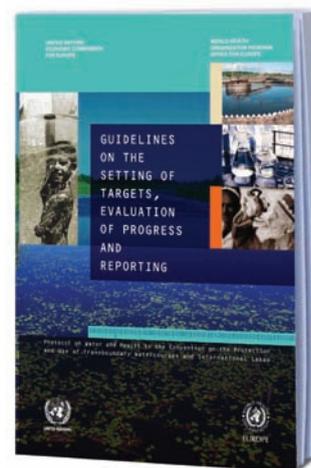
HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

Access to water and sanitation is no longer a purely technical problem. On 28 July 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring that access to clean water and sanitation is a human right. Less than month ago, the UN Human Rights Council has - by consensus - adopted a decision affirming this right. The Protocol on Water and Health embodies the close linkages between human rights, health, environmental protection and sustainable development. The Protocol guides its Parties on how to translate the human right to water into practice, and how safe, acceptable, affordable, accessible and sufficient water can be provided, in accordance with the principles of non-discrimination and of transparency of information. In Bucharest, Parties will discuss future activities to promote the exchange of experience on measures supporting equitable access to water and thus addressing affordability issues and access in remote communities.



TARGET SETTING AND EVALUATION OF PROGRESS AND REPORTING

Implementation of the Protocol requires an integrated approach and the alignment of policies and strategies in different sectors: from health protection to environmental management, to regional development, investment, infrastructures, education, etc. To this end the Protocol requires Parties to set measurable targets in areas covering the entire water cycle, set dates by which these targets will be achieved and report on progress towards achievement of these targets. In Spring 2010, Parties reported for the first time on their targets set as well as planned measures to achieve them. At the Meeting, Parties will review the results of the first reporting exercise under the Protocol. The reporting exercise illustrated how the Protocol is helping to address water and health issues in the region as well as remaining gaps and common challenges. To address these, Guidelines on the Setting of Targets, Evaluation of Progress and Reporting under the Protocol have been developed and it is expected that the Meeting will adopt them.



PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING WATER-RELATED DISEASES

There are more than 170,000 cases of water-related disease in the Pan-European region every year. In order to reduce this much too high number countries should establish surveillance and early-warning systems, as well as contingency and outbreak response plans. To support Parties in these efforts, a Policy and a Technical Guidance on water-related disease surveillance have been developed in the last 3 years and the Meeting of the Parties is expected to adopt them.

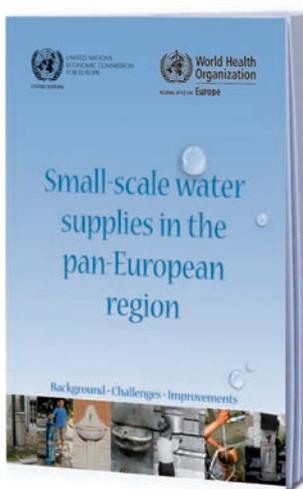


ADAPTING WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS



Between 1998 and 2007 the average number of annual disastrous weather- and climate-related events in Europe increased by about 65% and overall losses caused by such events increased from less than €7.2 billion in 1980–1989 to about €13.7 billion (EEA 2008 and EM-DAT 2009). In the past 20 years, about 40 million people required health assistance and had basic survival needs, such as safe shelter, medical assistance, safe water

supply and sanitation which represented an increase of about 400% compared to the 8 million people affected in the previous two decades (1970–1990). Therefore, the Meeting of the Parties will also discuss the effects of extreme weather events and disasters such as floods and droughts which represent an additional challenge to the sustainable management of water resources and the provision of safe water and adequate sanitation. Climate change amplifies the vulnerability of these services, especially in terms of performance quality, protection against microbial and chemical contamination, adaptation of new technological developments, and uninterrupted protection of human health. Parties recognized these challenges already in 2007 and developed a Guidance on Water Supply and Sanitation in Extreme Weather Events that will be adopted at the meeting.



SUPPORTING SMALL-SCALE WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION SYSTEMS

In the Pan-European Region, approximately 30% of the total population live in rural areas, in which small-scale water supplies prevail and where access to improved drinking-water sources varies between 61% and 100%. Therefore, the specific challenges of small-scale water supply and sanitation systems will also be on the agenda of the Meeting. Based on the outcomes of a workshop on this topic, held 2008 in Germany, awareness-raising material on the specific challenges of such small-scale water supplies was prepared. The Meeting will discuss how to provide further support and the possible assistance for Parties in tackling issues related to small water supplies and sanitation.



IMPROVING COMPLIANCE

Implementing the Protocol is a complex and challenging process, but Parties are not alone in this difficult endeavour. A comprehensive framework for mutual assistance between Parties has been established under the Protocol which also includes the provision of technical and financial assistance, mostly through the Project Facilitation Mechanism, as well as assistance in capacity-building and exchange of experience.

Moreover, to facilitate, promote and aim to secure compliance with the obligations under the Protocol, with a view to preventing disputes, the Parties established a transparent, non-confrontational, non-judicial and consultative arrangement for reviewing compliance. The Compliance Committee will present its first report to the Meeting of the Parties on general issues of compliance. Moreover, Parties will elect 4 of the 9 independent members of the Compliance Committee.

INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

The Protocol on Water and Health puts great emphasis on access to information and public participation, recognizing public involvement as a vital prerequisite for successful implementation of its provisions. At the Meeting in November, Parties will discuss a variety of activities with regard to public participation (trainings, manuals, events) to be carried out under the Protocol, in cooperation with the Aarhus Convention, in the next three years.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In order to assist countries in tackling all these challenges and in joining efforts to implement the Protocol Parties will discuss, finalize and adopt the programme of work for 2011–2013 building on previous activities and successes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SIDE EVENTS

The meeting is open to representatives of governmental authorities, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector. Additional information regarding the meeting, including the agenda, registration form and further documentation can be found on: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/whmop2.htm>

A number of side events will take place at lunchtime during the session which allow for in-depth discussions of important experiences and tools in the Protocol's implementation.

- Promoting best practice to manage drinking water quality effectively
Organizer: Romanian Water Association
- Let's share experience! - Youth involvement in Water and Health projects - How can youth contribute to the Protocol on Water and Health 2011-2013?
Organizer: Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe, (CEHAPE)
- The role of the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management in setting targets under the UNECE-WHO Protocol on Water and Health
Organizer: UNECE and Romania as chair of the EU Water Initiative for EECCA
- The science-policy bridge for a changing climate: water, health, disease
Organizer: The Global Environmental Change and Human Health (GECHH); United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH)
- Needs and ways of financing public participation under the Protocol on Water and Health – linking with EU policy and Aarhus Convention
Organizer: Women in Europe for Common Future, (WECF) and European Eco-Forum
- The toxic sludge disaster in Hungary
Organizer: Hungary/WHO-EURO

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