

Development of an Action Plan for the Provision of Equitable Access to Water Supply and Sanitation in Armenia

Country Report

INTRODUCTION

Background

Access to drinking water and sanitation which are available, accessible, affordable, acceptable and safe are human rights. The rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for all are enshrined in the Constitution, laws and regulations of the Republic of Armenia.

Armenia, while not yet being a Party to the UNECE¹-WHO/Europe² Protocol on Water and Health, has been actively involved in the work carried out under its framework. In particular, Armenia carried out a self-assessment of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation in 2015-2016 by applying the Equitable Access Score-card, an analytic tool developed under the framework of the Protocol on Water and Health. Such assessment highlighted a number of challenges to ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation, in particular an incomplete strategic framework for achieving equitable access to water and sanitation, geographical disparities in access to water and sanitation services, obstacles faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups to access and affordability concerns.

In July 2016, Armenia announced its intention to develop an action plan to ensure equitable access to water supply and sanitation, to be approved by the government and beneficiary ministries.

Objective of the *Equitable Access Action Plan*

The aim of the present *Action Plan 2018-2020 on the Provision of Equitable Access to Water Supply and Sanitation in the Republic of Armenia* is to establish a list of measures/activities directed at ensuring the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation, as well as to establish the evaluation criteria, responsible authorities, partners and the sources of funding for the implementation of the proposed actions.

The logic of the *Action Plan* stems from the legislative, program activities and measures implemented in recent years towards ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation, as well as from the assessment of these measures and lessons learned.

The expected impacts from the *Action Plan* implementation are as follows:

- Improvement of equitable access to water and sanitation management (financing and legal regulations);
- Reduction of geographic disparities in ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation;
- Provision of equitable access to water and sanitation for marginalized and vulnerable groups.

The development of the *2018-2020 Equitable Access Action Plan* builds on the findings of the previous self-assessment of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation in Armenia.

Methodology for the development of the *Action Plan*

The development of the *Action Plan* in 2016-2017 was driven by the State Committee on Water Systems of the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources and the NGO “Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment”, with support from UNECE. The *Action Plan* was drafted by a group of national experts.

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

² World Health Organization – Regional Office for Europe

The draft *Action Plan* was presented and discussed during the 16th meeting of the Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue in the Water Sector of Armenia (Yerevan, 7 April 2017). The Action Plan was then thoroughly discussed at the National Public Consultation Meeting on Equitable Access Action Plan convened by the Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE) NGO in Yerevan, May 12th 2017. Recommendations made by the participants of the meeting to improve the plan were given proper consideration.

Main challenges to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in Armenia

The previous Equitable access self-assessment exercise helped to identify the following gaps in the field of equitable access to water and sanitation:

- Provision of water supply remains one of the biggest problems for around 579 rural communities (out of 993 settlements) that are not serviced by water companies. The problem of equality in access caused by geographical location has been repeatedly discussed and is the center of attention, but the actions directed at overcoming the problems are being implemented at a slow pace.
- Although, during the past ten years, Armenia has recorded significant legislative and institutional achievements in terms of water resources management, access - related gaps are identified for almost all vulnerable and marginalized groups. Thus, legal reforms are needed to improve access to water and sanitation for these groups.
- The information on water supply and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups is almost unavailable from official sources.
- Reports on the implementation of the state budget present in detail the implemented programs, but it is difficult to find out how much money was spent on ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation.
- Water supply is a significant problem for rural educational facilities as well, as these institutions rely on scarce State funds to ensure the operation and maintenance of the infrastructure. The situation is especially worse in rural areas where the drinking water supply and sanitation systems are very often in place, but many of them are not operational.
- Despite some positive steps taken by the Government of Armenia in 2014 and the existence of legislation laying down clear requirements for physical accessibility, the majority of public buildings remain inaccessible to persons with mobility impairments in Yerevan and especially in the provinces of Armenia.
- One of the main factors affecting the efficiency of water supply system is the proper tariff policy.

Priorities of the *Equitable Access Action Plan*

The analysis of Equitable Access self-assessment results showed that there was a need to study the legislative framework and develop a package of regulatory reforms. → The *Action Plan* therefore proposes to develop a draft concept setting responsibilities for the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation as part of legislative reforms.

Information on public spending in the water supply and sanitation sector is mainly contained in the Reports on the Implementation of the State Budget of the Republic of Armenia, but there is no universal approach to program budgeting. → Therefore, the *Action Plan* suggests the inclusion of a section on equitable access to water supply and sanitation in the annual reports of the relevant government bodies, including the assessment of the current situation of equitable access to water supply and sanitation, the implemented and planned activities, as well as funds. It is also proposed to carry out an analysis to assess the financial and logistical resources (funding sources and volumes) necessary for the concept enforcement on equitable access to water supply and sanitation.

Over 570 communities are currently not serviced by the water company. However, there has so far been no information and no analysis with regard to the current situation of equitable access to water and sanitation and the barriers to the delivery of these services. The Republic of Armenia 2014-2025 Strategic Program of Prospective Development approved by Annex to the RA Government Decision N442-N dated from March 27, 2014 and the Water and Sanitation Sector Strategy and Financing Program approved by Annex to the No.38 of Protocol Decision of the RA Government Session of August 13, 2015 envisages negotiations with the water company with a view to including the non-serviced communities in the water company's development and investment programs.

→ The *Action Plan* proposes to compile information on current water supply and sanitation situation in the communities not served by the water company and to create a database, which will serve as a basis for the development of a schedule of activities aimed at further reducing the geographical disparities in equitable access to water and sanitation. The schedule will clarify the specific activities and deadlines for the execution of activities towards the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation.

Based on the above - mentioned strategic programs, the Action Plan proposes to include the criteria for the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation (including the reduction of geographical disparities and provision of equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups) during the implementation of existing and planned development, investment, urban development programs, and programs aimed at improving educational conditions.

Basically, all legal documents include articles / paragraphs on water and sanitation issues with regard to vulnerable or marginalized groups. Thus, for example, Article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Provisions of National Water Policy" sets out the provision of the required quantity and quality water demand to meet the household needs of the population, especially, the provision of affordability of water of required quantity and quality to meet the basic needs of the socially unsecured groups. The Law on the National Water Program (27 November 2006) defines the provision of access to water services for vulnerable consumers as a water supply priority. However, at present, there is no official information³ on equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable groups.

→ The *Action Plan* proposes to create a database on equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups. The database will provide a basis for the involvement of vulnerable and marginalized groups in the system of equitable access to water and sanitation.

Since 1 January 2017, the management of water supply and sanitation systems is implemented by the single operator "Veolia Djur" CJSC, using a common tariff (AMD 180.0) set by the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC). According to the PSRC Resolution N398 - N dated December 9, 2016, the tariff per one cubic meter of potable water is AMD 153.0, including VAT, and the tariff per sanitation service is AMD 27.0 per cubic meter, including VAT. The common tariff for water supply and sanitation services being applied results in the increased need to assess the impact of the current common tariff on vulnerable groups.

→ The *Action Plan* proposes to discuss with all stakeholders the opportunities for the development of water and sanitation tariff's compensation mechanism in order to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Acknowledgements

³ According to National Statistical Service data (2014), safe drinking water is accessible for 98.3% of the population and 99.1% of people of the poorest quintile of the population, while sanitation is accessible for 68.5% of the population and 62.1% of people of the poorest quintile of the population. However, information on individual vulnerable and marginalized groups is either limited or not always available.

The project entitled “Development of an Equitable Access Action Plan in Armenia” was implemented by the NGO “Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment” within the framework of the United Nations Development Account Project “Strengthening Governments’ and water operators’ capacity to ensure equity of access to water and sanitation in countries with economies in transition in the Economic Commission for Europe region”.

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- Nune Bakunts (Ministry of Health, Republic of Armenia)
- Marietta Khurshudyan (National Assembly, Republic of Armenia)
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The development of this *Action Plan* was also made possible thanks to the active participation of the UNECE co-secretariat to the Protocol on Water and Health, in particular Chantal Demilecamps (UNECE, Secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health) and Roberto Martin-Hurtado (international consultant to UNECE).



ACTION PLAN TO ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

Action Plan for 2018-2020 on Provision of Equitable Access to Water Supply and Sanitation in Armenia

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|---|--|---|---|------------|---|--|--|--------------------|
| Section 1. Efficient management to ensure equitable access to water supply and sanitation | | | | | | | | |
| <i>1.1 Legal and policy frameworks for effective implementation of the provision of equitable access to water supply and sanitation</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Analysis of the water legislative framework and identification of legislative barriers to ensure the implementation of the Equitable Access Score-card | Legislative reforms on equitable access to water and sanitation | A package of legislative reform proposals | 01.05.2018 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; State Committee on Urban Development under the RA Government; RA Ministry of Justice; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; private sector | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 25.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|----------|--|--|--|-------------|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| 2 | Implementation of legislative reforms: development of a draft concept defining the responsibilities for the provision of equitable access to water supply and sanitation | Improvement of the legislative framework for equitable access to water supply and sanitation at the national level based on paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well | A Draft Concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation | 15.12.2018 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; RA Ministry of Justice; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; State Committee on Urban Development under the RA Government; private sector; NGOs | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 40.0 mln |
| 3 | Organization of a Roundtable Discussion to provide for the requirements of the Concept of equitable access to water supply and | Multi-disciplinary assessment on the concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation by different | A common opinion shaped by the different departments / organizations | 01.08.2018 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Territorial | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 14.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|---|--|--|---|------------|---|---|---|--------------------|
| | sanitation | departments | | | Infrastructures and Natural Resources | Administration and Development; State Committee on Urban Development under the RA Government; RA Ministry of Justice; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; private sector; NGOs | | |
| 4 | Selection and use of a format for ensuring public participation in the implementation of the concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation | Engagement of public in the implementation of the concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation in accordance with the approved participation format | A selected and applied format for ensuring public participation in the implementation of the concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation | 01.08.2019 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources; | RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Justice; water company (or companies); | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 15.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|---|--|--|--|------------|---|---|--|--------------------|
| | | | | | | private sector; NGOs; stakeholders (penitentiaries, homes for the elderly, and other stakeholders) | | |
| 5 | <p>Inclusion of the “Access to Water Supply and Sanitation” Section (including the water supply and sanitation activities and the finances spent on water supply and sanitation) in the annual reports of responsible authorities to meet the requirements for equitable access to water supply and sanitation</p> <p>Development of appropriate forms of inclusion and representation of stakeholders</p> | <p>Evaluation of individual activities (including funding) carried out by the government agencies to achieve equitable access to water supply and sanitation, taking into account the paragraphs 6.b.1 and 6.a of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well</p> | <p>Application of the reporting forms approved by responsible ministries and local governing bodies to provide equitable access to water supply and sanitation</p> | 01.02.2020 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | <p>RA National Statistical Service; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; RA Ministry of Justice</p> | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 15.0 mln |
| <i>1.2 Funding for the provision of equitable access to water supply and sanitation and logistics support</i> | | | | | | | | |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|------------|---|--|--|--------------------|
| 6 | Assessment of the financial and logistical resources necessary for ensuring the implementation of the concept on equitable access to water supply and sanitation (financial source, volume) | Measures arising from the concept of equitable access to water supply and sanitation | Concept measures estimated (report) | 30.11.2019 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Finance; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; NGOs | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 12.0 mln |
| Section II. Reducing geographic disparities in ensuring equitable access to water supply and sanitation | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Compilation of information about the current situation in the communities not serviced by a specialized water company (or companies) and creation of a database | Reliable and complete information is compiled. The database is created. | Availability of a database | 01.12.2018 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; water company (or companies); NGOs | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 35.0 mln |
| 8 | Development of a plan and timetable of activities to reduce geographical disparities in equitable access to water and sanitation based on | Clarification of specific activities and their implementation schedules to provide equitable access to water supply and | Plan of Activities | 01.07.2019 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural | RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 30.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|----------|---|--|--|-------------|---|--|--|----------------------------|
| | paragraph 6.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals | sanitation | | | Resources | Nature Protection; water company (or companies); NGOs | | |
| 9 | Inclusion of the communities not serviced by a water company in the development and investment programs of the water company (or companies) | An extended geographical area of reliable and uninterrupted water supply and sanitation provision | Increased areas serviced by the water company (or companies) | 01.02.2020 | Water company (or companies) | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development | International organizations; Water company: "Fund for extended maintenance and repair work"; RA Government: in kind contribution | |
| 10 | Inclusion of the criteria related to the provision of equitable access to water supply and sanitation (including the reduction of geographical disparities and provision of equitable access to water supply and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups) | Improved equitable access to water supply and sanitation as a result of implementation of the current development, investment, urban development programs and programs aimed at improving educational conditions | The criteria related to the provision of equitable access to water and sanitation are included in existing development, investment, urban development programs and programs aimed at improving the educational conditions. | 01.02.2020 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resource; NGO | RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Education and Science; RA Ministry of Economic Development and Investment; RA Ministry of Justice; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 15.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|--|---|---|----------------------------|------------|---|--|--|--------------------|
| | in the implementation of existing and planned development, investment, urban development programs, and programs aimed at improving educational conditions | | | | | Development; RA Ministry of Finance; RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; State Committee on Urban Development under the RA Government; private sector | | |
| Section III. Provision of equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups | | | | | | | | |
| 11 | Compilation of information on equitable access to water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups and creation of a database | Reliable and complete information is compiled. The database is created. | Availability of a database | 01.05.2020 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development; water company (or companies); stakeholders (penitentiaries, homes for the elderly, and other stakeholders); | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 35.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|----------|--|---|--|-------------|---|---|---|----------------------------|
| | | | | | | NGOs | | |
| 12 | Assessment of the impact of current water and sanitation tariffs on vulnerable and marginalized groups | Identification of financial problems and gaps in equitable access to water supply and sanitation and affordability for vulnerable and marginalized groups | The impact of current water supply and sanitation tariffs on vulnerable and marginalized groups is assessed (published results). | 01.05.2020 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Health; RA Public Services Regulatory Commission; RA Ministry of Finance; RA Ministry of Nature Protection; stakeholders (penitentiaries, homes for the elderly, and other stakeholders); NGOs | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 5.0 mln |
| 13 | Organization of Roundtable discussion for the development of a tariff compensation mechanism for ensuring equitable access to water supply and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups | Developed recommendations on the compensation mechanism | Presentation of the developed proposals to the Ministry of Finance in order to include them in the draft budget for next year | 01.07.2020 | State Committee of Water Economy of the RA Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources | RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; RA Ministry of Finance; RA Ministry of Health; RA Ministry of Economic Development and Investment; RA Public Services | International organizations; RA Government: in kind contribution | AMD 4.0 mln |

| № | Measures/ Actions | Expected outcome | Performance criterion | Term | Coordinating/ Responsible authority | Partner | Source of funding | Budget estimate |
|---|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------|---|--|----------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | | Regulatory Commission; water company (or companies); stakeholders (penitentiaries, homes for the elderly, and other stakeholders); NGOs | | |

