



Case Study // Round Table SDG 6: Making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the UNECE region

Self-Assessment of the Situation of Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation in Serbia

The Republic of Serbia

Levels: national and local

Summary

Serbia has become a Party to the Protocol on Water and Health in April 2013. According to the Law on Ratification of the Protocol, ministries responsible for health, water management and environmental protection ensure its implementation. Since 2014 Serbia supported programme area on small-scale water supply and sanitation systems, co-leading together with Germany. Serbia took over the presidency of the Bureau of the Protocol at the 4th Meeting of the Parties held in November 2016 in Geneva, for the period 2017-2019. Already in 2015, Serbia fulfilled the main Protocol's obligations by setting national targets and target dates according to the article 6 of the Protocol. In its targets, Serbia clearly recognized decreasing rural and urban disparities as a priority area, in accordance with the findings of the baseline analysis carried out as part of the target setting exercise under the Protocol. **In 2017**, Serbia was encouraged by the support of UNECE to engage in the equitable access score-card self-assessment, in order to provide and comprehensive overview of the situation of equity access in central Serbia, using Equitable access score-card tool, developed by UNECE. The objectives of self-assessment of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation were: to achieve a better understanding of the situation and challenges of equitable access to water and sanitation; to identify relevant stakeholders to contribute to the improvement of equitable access to water and sanitation and raise awareness on equitable access; to develop a comprehensive overview of the existing policy measures to address inequities in access to water and sanitation, and to identify information and policy gaps that need to be filled to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation.

The project, supported by UNECE, was implemented by the Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje (REDASP) with the support of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of and the Ministry of Health, on the territory of the Republic of Serbia - Sumadija and Pomoravlje, Regions with 12 municipalities.

Situation

The Republic of Serbia is a continental country located in southern Europe, in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, occupying an area of 88,499 square kilometers. It is divided into five regions (Belgrade Region, Vojvodina Region, Sumadija and Serbia West Region, Serbia South and East Region and Kosovo-Metohija Region), which include the City of Belgrade as a special territorial unit and 30 administrative districts. According to the results of the 2011 census, reported the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 7,186,862 inhabitants live in Serbia (excluding Kosovo-Metohija). In Serbia 59,44 % of the population lives in urban areas and 40,56 % of the population lives in rural areas (the category “peri-urban area” is not relevant in Serbia). According to the National Employment Service in Serbia, there has been a decrease in the number of unemployed from 745,187 in 2011 to 724,096 in 2015. There was also a positive change in the level of GDP, which in 2011 amounted to 6,240,793 USD per capita and in 2015, 8,410,234 USD per capita. This is a significant increase that should allow to invest more in water supply and sanitation services.

Total accumulated water in Serbia in 2015 was 644.805.000 m³, and total delivered drinking water was 423.195.000 m³. The total dropped wastewater was 408.107.000 m³. The total dropped wastewater in systems for taking away wastewater was 295.543.000 m³ and treated wastewater was 45.126.000 m³.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia collects data on the number of households connected to the water supply and sewerage network. In Serbia in 2015, 2,092,755 households were connected to the water supply, which represents about 85% of the total population; 1,481,513 households were connected to the sewerage network, relatively about 60% of the total population.

Strategy

The realization of the project lasted for six months.

Compliant with the decision of the Joint Working Group, responsible for the implementation of the Protocol Water and Health in Serbia, Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje (REDASP) was elected to implement the project.

Implementation team consisted of twelve members of the following structure:

- Managing („core-team”) with responsibilities of monitoring all the process during the project implementation; counseling (directed towards process improvement) and providing logistics (support in communication with the national stakeholders)
- Implementing (thematic experts, REDASP experts) with the task to create guidelines for collecting data and communicating with stakeholders; analyse the condition of the equitable access on the national level (legal, institutional, strategic). The thematic expert group consisted of four members, each responsible for one thematic section of the score card.

Analysis of the key stakeholders

Thematic and REDASP experts identified more than 80 significant participants of the process using the analysis of national and local stakeholders.

Organization of the first workshop had a purpose of introducing key stakeholders with the goals of the project and their roles in the realization of the process itself. Participation of international experts provided us with new experiences and recommendations for further development.

Guide for data collection, provided instructions for:

- Authorities (national and local level)
- Access to data (desk research, direct communication with responsible institutions)
- Recommendations for communication (written communication, scheduling meetings, organizing focus groups)

Organizing four thematic meetings of the focus group on a local level to provide the possibility of the discussion with the local stakeholders through representation and clarification of four sections and questions as well as completing the information.

The second workshop had a purpose of analysing the results.

Local level, namely 12 local self-government units, has been analysed and represented in summary via charts according to the questions in the each section of the score card.

Results and impact

During the project implementation, especially through direct work with local stakeholders in data collection and realization of four thematic workshops, a change of attitude arose among the key stakeholders in relation to recognizing the importance of the issue of equal access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Discussions and conclusions brought through consensus of stakeholders of Sumadija and Pomoravlje territory, are directed to the following:

1. Access to water and sanitation is a human right, as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. The awareness of implication of legal obligation for the key stakeholders and decision makers to provide the equal access has significantly raised among the participants during the project implementation.
2. Geographical disparities bring rural residents into an unequal position compared to the population in urban areas. In the future, the authorities should take greater care of each individual in rural areas, because their right to water is equal to the rights of urban residents.
3. It is necessary to develop and apply specific technical solutions in rural areas.
4. Representatives of local self-governments and public utility companies in the municipalities where certain measures have already been established to provide better access for vulnerable and marginalized groups, have come to mutual conclusion, that it is recommendable to establish a formal integrated approach between the social welfare and communal activities institutions. This is not only for the favour of beneficiaries, but to their own favour and better efficiency in work.



5. During the implementation of the thematic focus groups, it was noted that there are examples of good practice in the territory of Sumadija and Pomoravlje in some local self-governments, which should be exchanged and applied to the rest of the territory.

6. The previous treatment of the problems of vulnerable and marginalized groups did not include the issue of equitable access to water and sanitation, and the practice needs to be changed. To begin with, issues should be identified as special priorities within sectoral strategies dealing with social issues of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

7. In the process of revision of the existing strategies of sustainable development the issues of equitable access to water and sanitation will be addressed. As the first step, based on the gaps and analysis results, these issues will be taken into account in the revision of national targets and setting the new one with target dates, according to the Protocol Water and Health, **already planned in Serbia for 2018**. Assessment the equity of access to water and sanitation services using UNECE score -card tool, will also lead to the definition of the result oriented Action Plan on equitable access in Serbia.

Challenges and lessons learned

The major challenge was the motivation of the local and national stakeholders to actively participate in the project. The campaign that took place through regular communication and meetings with stakeholders, representatives of local self-governments and relevant institutions, through additional e-mail and telephone communication, as well as meetings with focus group, resulted in the involvement of all relevant parties.

Potential for replication

The experience is easily replicable due to the UNECE developed score card tools, which is universally applicable to various contexts, i.e. Countries on both national and local levels. Besides, the adopted methodology provides guidelines for implementation on other territories and guidelines for broad participation of stakeholders.

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