

Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation



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UNITED NATIONS

New York and Geneva, 2016

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ECE/MPWH/15
UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION
eISBN: 978-92-1-058475-3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The joint secretariat sincerely thanks the lead Parties for the work on equitable access to water and sanitation, France and Hungary, for their supervision and inputs to this document's preparation, as well as Roberto Martin-Hurtado, UNECE consultant, the main author.

This publication was financially supported by the French Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

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I – Introduction

A. Background

Access to safe drinking water and access to sanitation have been recognized as human rights by the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. This means that ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all is a legal obligation. In order to comply with this obligation, special attention needs to be paid at an early stage to ensure that access to water and sanitation is equitable for all members of the population.

Three key dimensions should be considered to provide equitable access to water and sanitation: reducing geographical differences in services provided; avoiding discrimination or exclusion in access to services by vulnerable and marginalized groups; and ensuring financial affordability by users. The strong linkages between the provision of drinking water and sanitation services demand a holistic approach to promoting equitable access to water and sanitation.

In the pan-European region¹, the Parties to the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health have committed to ensure equitable access to safe drinking water supply and adequate sanitation through accession to or ratification of the Protocol. While there

¹ For the purposes of this Note, pan-Europe is understood to include the 56 States members of the United Nations Commission for Europe and the 53 States in the WHO European Region.

are currently important differences among countries of the region as regards ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation – as result of differences between countries in terms of availability of water resources, socio-economic development, historic levels of access, and public policies – efforts need to be made in all countries.

As a first step to address inequities in access to water and sanitation, several countries from the pan-European region have carried out self-assessment exercises in order to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access to water and sanitation, identify related priorities and discuss further targets to be set and actions to be taken to improve access and monitor progress over time.

However, experience shows that countries face difficulties to translate the priorities identified through the self-assessment into actions. This has prompted a demand for guidance to support the development of action plans aimed at addressing equity gaps.

B. Aim of the document and target audience

This document aims to respond to that demand by presenting guidance for the development of action plans to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation.

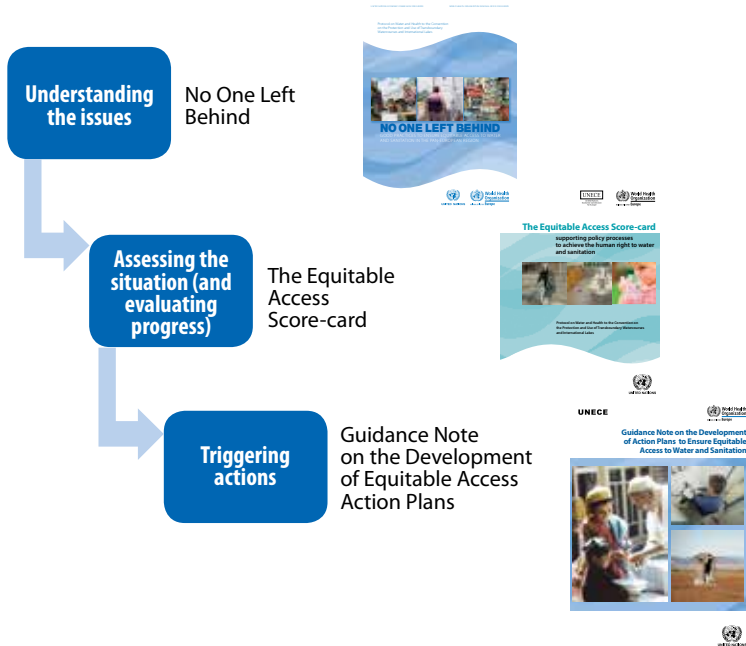
The primary target audience of this document includes government authorities and stakeholders in the water, health, education, social affairs, finance and other relevant sectors that would like to take action to reduce inequities in access to water and sanitation services. This Note is relevant both to countries that have already completed a self-assessment exercise, and to countries that are considering to embark in an integrated exercise that would include a self-assessment phase and an action planning phase. While the work carried out under the Protocol is primarily geared towards countries in the pan-European region, countries from other regions might also find this Note useful.

C. Previous work on equitable access under the Protocol on Water and Health

The development of this document relies on previous work under the Protocol on Water and Health, as detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Protocol's tools to support countries in their efforts to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation



In 2012, the publication *No One Left Behind*² was developed and issued under the Protocol. It provides a conceptual framework for understanding the different dimensions of the challenge to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation, a checklist for developing a strategic framework, policy options to address the different challenges faced and a collection of good practices.

In 2013, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health, at its third session (Oslo, 25-27 November 2013), adopted the *Equitable Access Score-card*³, a self-assessment tool that can be used, at national or sub-national level, to establish a baseline of the situation of equity of access and assess progress towards achieving equitable access to water and sanitation. The Score-card combines the gathering of quantitative information

² UNECE and WHO/Europe, *No One Left Behind: Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region* (United Nations, 2012). Available at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=29170

³ UNECE and WHO/Europe, *The Equitable Access Score-card: supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation* (United Nations, 2013). Available at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=34032

Box 1**Key messages from No One Left Behind**

- Upholding the human right to water and sanitation requires paying special attention to geographical differences in access, access by vulnerable and marginalized groups, and affordability issues.
- Specific approaches are needed to redress current inequities in access to water and sanitation.
- Each country has the obligation to provide water and sanitation to all, as well as the possibility to call upon the international community for assistance and cooperation.
- General improvements in water and sanitation governance and management can make major contributions, but applying an “equitable access lens” is also needed in order to speed up progress.
- Access and price gaps between geographical areas can be explained by underlying cost structures but also by political influence and decisions, and thus reducing those gaps requires a combination of political, financial and technical efforts.
- There are many vulnerable and marginalized groups, each with their own needs and facing different barriers to achieving equitable access, and thus requiring differentiated solutions.
- Ensuring that the water bill is affordable for all requires in each country the adoption of a long-term strategy as well as careful selection of in-tariff and out-of-tariff tools.

with a qualitative questionnaire, which guides a systematic self-assessment of existing policy and measures (or lack thereof) to address equitable access challenges.

The development of the Score-Card was informed by three pilot projects implemented in Paris (France), Portugal and Ukraine. Since then, additional equitable access assessments were implemented in the Republic of Moldova, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Hungary, and more are under development or planned in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Serbia, among other countries.

D. The making of this Note

This Note was prepared upon a request by the Protocol's Meeting of the Parties in 2013. The Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation, led by France and Hungary, guided the development of the Note which was also informed by a regional workshop on “Achieving equitable access to water and sanitation: from assessment to action” (Geneva, 21 - 22 March 2016).

Box 2**Key steps of the self-assessment process described in the Equitable Access Score-card**

The Score-card can help Governments to establish a baseline, discuss further actions to be taken, and evaluate progress through a process of self-assessment. Such process of self-assessment should follow the following steps:

1. Clarify the objectives
2. Select a project leader
3. Identify the right partners
4. Ensure wide and continuous multi-stakeholder involvement
5. Plan the workshops carefully
6. Adapt the use of the Score-card to the objectives and needs of the process
7. Use the results of the Score-card for strategic evaluation and priority-setting
8. Present the results in attractive formats
9. Use the results to track progress, not to compare with others



II – Concept, rationale and benefits of Equitable Access Action Plans

A. Concept

In the context of this Note, an Equitable Access Action Plan is a tool that helps a country (or a sub-national entity) to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation by identifying priority actions to be implemented and ways of implementing them.

An Equitable Access Action Plan should build on the findings of a self-assessment exercise. Examples of findings from self-assessment exercises are illustrated in Box 3. An Equitable Access Action Plan should identify and prioritize measures to be adopted to address the identified gaps in equitable access to water and sanitation. It should also identify opportunities for including those priority measures in official plans, programmes and projects.

This definition does not predetermine the nature of the Action Plan. The Action Plan can be an official document or a non-official document. The case for the Action Plan to be a non-official document is pragmatic. Official documents have a stronger standing than non-official documents. However, if the Action Plan were to become an official document, it would likely require a long process to get it approved. At the same time, most countries already have national water and sanitation plans, plans for equal access to services, non-discrimination plans and other related official documents. The development of official, stand-alone Equitable Access Action Plans would likely divert scarce resources, create confusion, and may result in documents that end up mostly ignored.

Box 3

Examples of findings of Equitable Access Score-card assessment exercises

The outcomes of Score-card exercises include findings regarding the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation, improvements in inter-institutional and inter-stakeholder relations, and lessons learnt about the assessment process. Some examples of findings generated by Score-card exercises are summarized below:

Paris (France)

- Governance frameworks to deliver equitable access exist, as well as specific funds to help the poorest pay their bills
- While there is a very high level of access (over 99%), the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups have only been partially addressed: over 140,000 homeless people did not have access to water in 2013
- Affordability is a key issue: for some people water represents over 3% of their income.



Portugal

- Several initiatives aimed at reducing price disparities are being implemented
- There is a lack of integration of policies (water, social, environmental) as well as a need for practical support to those with special needs
- Better information is needed on financial resources and specific issues, and information has to be better communicated to consumers
- There is a need to improve the awareness and skills of operators' personnel so that they can contribute to the realization of the human right to water and sanitation.

Ukraine

- Ukraine suffers from geographical inequities in access, especially regarding sanitation; and water quality is one of the key core problems
- There is not enough information to assess inequities suffered by most vulnerable and marginalized groups; in particular, there is no disaggregated data about access to water and sanitation for different groups.

Republic of Moldova

- There are disparities in access between the richest and poorest households and the urban and rural areas (especially women led rural households)
- Vulnerable groups are facing barriers to access water and sanitation.

B. Rationale for developing an Equitable Access Action Plan: from assessment to action

An Equitable Access Score-card assessment exercise does not guarantee follow-up action. The work on equitable access under the Protocol on Water and Health has shown that many officials and stakeholders are not aware of the importance, dimensions and difficulties of ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation (or the human rights to water and sanitation more generally). An Equitable Access Score-card exercise can go a long way towards raising awareness, launching a multi-agency and multi-stakeholder discussion, and helping to identify gaps. However, there is a high risk that attention to equitable access issues would be diluted after the exercise has been concluded. While many officials and stakeholders may vow to do what is within their responsibilities to address equitable access challenges, the pressures of day-to-day demands will likely prevent them from doing so. At the same time, ensuring equitable access often requires the concerted intervention of two or more agencies or stakeholders.

The development of an Equitable Access Action Plan would allow officials and other stakeholders to work together to identify priority actions that need to be taken, entry points into official plans and programmes, funding opportunities, and partnerships that need to be established or further developed for those actions to be successfully implemented.

C. Benefits of an Equitable Access Action Plan

An Equitable Access Action Plan would help to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Targets under Goal 6 make specific references to equitable access to water and sanitation. Target 6.1 calls countries to achieve by 2030 universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all. Target 6.2 calls countries to achieve by 2030 access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. It will be very difficult for most countries to achieve those targets unless they carefully prioritize and implement specific actions based on a good understanding of the current situation. Progressively implementing those specific actions will contribute to ensure that countries fulfill their legal obligations to uphold the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

A credible Equitable Access Action Plan can also facilitate dialogue with international partners and attract funds for the implementation of the measures included in the Plan.



III - Content of an Equitable Access Action Plan

The specific content of an Equitable Access Action Plan will vary from country to country, depending on the situation in terms of equitable access as well as what actions would be most appropriate. Nevertheless, an Equitable Access Action Plan would usually include the below listed components.

A. Objectives

An Equitable Access Action Plan should clearly and briefly describe its objectives. Whenever possible, these objectives should be linked to quantitative targets, which monitoring should be regularly reported to all the involved stakeholders. If it is intended as a non-official document, it should clarify that the purpose is to identify specific measures that can be integrated in relevant official documents.

B. Brief diagnostic of the situation

An Equitable Access Action Plan should generally incorporate a brief diagnostic of the situation of equitable access to water and sanitation. This diagnostic would essentially summarize the main findings of the Equitable Access Score-card exercise, such as which dimensions of Equitable Access are most relevant in the country (or sub-national entity) and why. It should include the key information that justifies the development of the Action Plan, as well as the focus of the Action Plan.

C. Priority areas of action

An Equitable Access Action Plan should clearly identify a limited number of main priority areas of action. The overview of score-card results together with the conclusions of the self-assessment exercise are a good starting point. Some countries may find that there is one particular dimension of equitable access in which they would like to improve their performance. Other countries may find that they need to make progress in many areas of action across the different dimensions of equitable access of water and sanitation, but realistically they will only be able to advance on a few of them during the Action Plan's first lifecycle.

The areas of action identified in the *No One Left Behind* and *Equitable Access Score-card* documents are:

A. Steering governance frameworks to deliver equitable access

- Applying an "equitable access lens" to water governance and management
- Empowering all users and right-holders
- Making operators more responsive to equitable access needs
- Developing a strategic framework for equitable access

B. Reducing geographical disparities

- Addressing disparities in physical access
- Addressing price disparities

C. Ensuring access for vulnerable and marginalized groups

- Ensuring access for persons with special physical needs
- Ensuring access for users of institutional facilities and institutionalized persons
- Ensuring access for persons without private facilities
- Ensuring access for persons living in unsanitary housing

D. Keeping water and sanitation affordable for all

- Addressing affordability concerns through tariff measures
- Addressing affordability concerns through social protection measures

D. Policy context

Given the priority areas identified, an Action Plan should include an overview of relevant policy objectives, policy processes and sectoral strategies.

It is important to understand the linkages between equitable access to water and sanitation services and equitable access to other public services and assess the needs for developing integrated responses to equitable access to public services. For example, if access by users of institutional facilities and institutionalized persons is a priority area of action, the Action Plan should identify which sectoral strategies are relevant (such as an education strategy). The Action Plan should briefly describe to what extent those sectoral strategies include equitable access components or could include them.

The Action Plan should also identify other policy processes that may be relevant – for example, the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health and the process of target setting, a National Policy Dialogue on Water and Sanitation, or a national strategy for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of the information required to describe the policy context will have been analyzed as part of the Equitable Access Score-card exercise.

E. Priority measures and related costs

An Equitable Access Action Plan should identify and formulate a realistic number of priority measures to be implemented during the Action Plan's cycle together with the relevant timeline. The selection of priority measures and the definition of their implementation timeframe should be informed by national priorities as identified in official documents.

A few high-priority measures, to be implemented in the short term, should be described in detail and include an estimate of their implementation costs. In addition, the Action Plan could identify a number of additional measures that could be implemented in the longer term; these measures should be described in more general terms and do not need to include cost estimates.

Types of measures to improve equitable access to water and sanitation include:

- Analysis and evaluation of existing plans, policies and programmes;
- Legal and institutional reforms, setting of specific equitable access targets under the Protocol on Water and Health;
- Modifications of existing programmes in different policy areas;
- Instructions to include equity considerations as a pre-requisite in the formulation of new programmes and projects;
- Introduction of policy reforms (such as targeted financial support schemes to address affordability concerns);

- Targeted investments;
- Communication efforts to promote equitable access to water and sanitation and to raise awareness of users of water and sanitation services on their relevant rights and mechanisms to claim them;
- Capacity-building initiatives to enhance the understanding of the importance and implications of adopting an equitable access lens to the planning and delivery of water and sanitation services by staff in relevant ministries, agencies and utilities.

The publication *No One Left Behind* puts forward a large number of measures that could potentially be incorporated into an Equitable Access Action Plan, as well as examples of how some of those measures have been implemented in countries of the pan-European region.

The Action Plan could also include as two specific measures an evaluation of the Action Plan implementation as well as a new Score-card-based self-assessment exercise.

Box 4

Examples of measures to improve equitable access to water and sanitation identified in countries that have undertaken an equitable access self-assessment

In **France**, the 2015-2019 National Plan on Health and Environment includes a specific action to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation. As part of Action 101, the tools on equitable access to water and sanitation developed under the Protocol on Water and Health will be promoted in the French regions and an instruction will be sent to regional health agencies so that they include specific measures in the regional plans on health and environment, such as implementing Equitable Access Score-card assessments at regional or local level and raising-awareness on equitable access issues among decision-makers and operators. Furthermore, this national plan includes several sectoral actions to improve the safety of water.

Other measures adopted in France include:

- The inclusion in the second National Plan on Household Sanitation 2015-2019 of zero-rate ecological loans (combined with tax credits) to address the financial difficulties faced by households that rely on on-site sanitation solutions, and
- The piloting of social pricing in 50 municipalities as a way to implement the human right to water and sanitation.

In addition, there is recognition that overseas regions such as Mayotte and French Guiana have specific needs regarding the development of their water and sanitation sectors and a proposal for sector reform is under discussion.

In **Portugal**, ERSAR (Water and Waste Services Regulation Authority) has developed a recommendation addressed to water and sanitation operators on good practices in ensuring the human right to water and sanitation, including equitable access. ERSAR is also developing a simulator of social tariffs for water and waste services, which aims to help Portuguese water and waste utilities to identify the best adjusted solutions regarding the mandatory adoption of social tariff by these utilities. Finally, in cooperation with two operators, ERSAR has also studied the effectiveness of two alternative mechanisms to avoid water cut-offs due to unpaid bills: through the installation of flow restrictors (which limit service to 200 l/day) or informal contact to remind users that their bills are due. The conclusions of these works will support future policies regarding water and sanitation services.



In **Ukraine**, actions have focused on communicating the outcomes of the self-assessment exercise to different audiences through workshops, press events, communications to relevant government departments, publications and websites. NGOs have used the results of the self-assessment exercise to design projects and fundraise for them.

In the **Republic of Moldova**, two specific targets to contribute to the improvement of access to water and sanitation by vulnerable and marginalized groups were included in the 2016-2025 National Program for the Implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health:

- Development of the legal and institutional framework for equitable access to water and sanitation;
- Creation of the Solidarity Fund.

In addition, the following target was included in the 2016-2020 Action Plan to support the Roma population: “to connect 100% of households of Roma people to water supply system by 2020”.

In **Hungary**, the priorities identified thanks to the Equitable Access Score-card exercise are taken into consideration for the development of the Hungarian Water Strategy. One of the recommendations of the Self-Assessment was to include the equity aspect as a prerequisite for all drinking water or sanitation related projects and policies.

F. Opportunities for integrating priority measures in existing plans, programmes and projects

Given the policy context described earlier, an Equitable Access Action Plan should identify the existing or planned plans and programmes and projects in which the priority measures could be integrated. For example, in France the authorities identified the third National Plan on Health and Environment as a key plan to be targeted for mainstreaming equitable access concerns (see Box 4).

This section of the Action Plan should also describe briefly the process of preparing, updating or reforming those plans, programmes and projects in order to identify the entry points and relevant timetables.

One particular opportunity is the process of target-setting under the Protocol on Water and Health. The results of the self-assessment should inform the general design of targets. The development of the Action Plan would provide more specific proposals for targets and target dates to be set under the Protocol. Moreover, given that the target-setting process is an official process that covers equitable access (in accordance with article 5.1 of the Protocol), it could constitute a natural avenue for presenting and discussing the draft Action Plan.

G. Implementation arrangements, including timeline

An Action Plan should identify which governmental institutions will be responsible for:

- implementing the priority measures
- making the case for the integration of equitable access measures in the processes of developing, updating or reforming plans, programmes and actions.

An Action Plan should also describe how other stakeholders could support those efforts. For example, the Portuguese water regulator has identified operators as responsible actors for some actions (see Box 4).

The Action Plan should ideally include an implementation timeline or chronogram. This timeline could include both the short term and long term measures that would contribute to the achievement of the planned objectives. The implementation period described in the timeline will vary from country to country, according to the nature of their planning cycles, but it is likely to be between 3 and 8 years. In the case of more extended timelines, more details would be provided for the first period (short term actions) and less for the second period (long term actions).

H. Mapping potential funding sources

It may be too ambitious to include a full resource mobilization strategy in an Equitable Access Action Plan. However, an Action Plan could include a mapping of potential sources of finance. The mapping exercise should look for opportunities in user contributions, national public funding and international financial support (from small to large-scale schemes).

Equitable access components could be included in projects financed by development banks in different sectors. It is common to find projects focused on rural or peri-urban areas to try to close access gaps with urban areas. Affordability concerns are already being integrated in project preparation in many water sector projects. However, the equitable access dimension related to vulnerable and marginalized groups is rarely considered (with maybe the exception of schools and healthcare centers). This would require a clear articulation of the demand by the borrowing countries.



IV - Process of developing an Equitable Access Action Plan

A. Overview

Building on the successful experience of carrying out Equitable Access Score-card exercises, the process of developing an Equitable Access Action Plan could include the following steps:

1. Identification of one or two leading government agencies. Key candidates would be the agency leading the implementation of the Protocol and the agency responsible for water and sanitation.
2. Set up of an inter-sectoral working group, based on the participants in the self-assessment exercise and, if needed and possible, supported by a national consultant.
3. Engage a broader number of contributing agencies and stakeholders through bilateral consultations and requests for information.
4. Draft the Action Plan.
5. Organize a consultation workshop.
6. Develop the final version of the Action Plan.

B. Leading agencies

The existing experience in applying the Equitable Access Score-card shows that, in several cases, the process has been co-led by a governmental institution and a civil society organization. The development of an Equitable Access Action Plan would however need to be led by one specific governmental institution or a combination of government institutions.

One of the key tasks of the leading agency(ies) is to ensure that the plan is aligned with the strategic plans for the sector, to gain political backing and facilitate implementation.

Civil society organizations should be engaged in the development of the Action Plan, but not in a leading role. Indeed, even if the Action Plan is expected to be a non-official document, it already requires decision-making and will demand a certain level of official commitment. Thus, the nature of an Action Plan is fundamentally different from the nature of a self-assessment.

C. Contributing agencies and stakeholders

The process of applying the Equitable Access Score-card would have generally allowed for the identification of key ministries, agencies and departments as well as other stakeholders that would need to be involved in the development of the Equitable Access Action Plan. In fact, most of those key agencies and stakeholders would have been involved in the equitable access assessment.

Key agencies and stakeholders that might need to be involved in the development of the Action Plan include the ministry of finance as well as ministries, agencies and departments involved in water supply and sanitation, environment, health, education, housing, social protection, social equality, justice, regional development, gender, minorities, etc. It should also include water and sanitation service providers, human rights institutions, civil society organizations as well as academics working on those policy areas. Depending on the geographical scope of the Action Plan, it could also include specific municipalities or other sub-national governments.

Not all those agencies and stakeholders need to be necessarily involved in the development of the Action Plan. The results of the Score-card exercise might have highlighted a limited number of issues on which most progress is needed. As a consequence, it is possible that some of the agencies or stakeholders involved in the Score-card exercise do not need to be involved in developing the Action Plan. For example, if it turns out that access to water and sanitation in schools is not an issue, then the ministry of education as well as education-focused NGOs may not need to be involved in developing the Action Plan.

D. Timeframe

The timeframe for developing an Equitable Access Action Plan should be shorter than that of applying the Score-card. While the process of the equitable access assessment may take up to one year (as it involves substantial data gathering), the process of developing an Action Plan may indicatively take about 6-9 months once mandate and funding have been secured. Most of the necessary actors should have already been identified and engaged in the Score-card exercise. Some additional analytical work might be needed to be able to estimate the costs and benefits of potential measures in order to prioritize them. Time will be necessary to develop, consult and agree on a draft Action Plan among different governmental institutions and to consult with other stakeholders.

The timeframe for developing an Equitable Access Action Plan should aim to match that of the policy processes where adoption of relevant specific measures will be decided (e.g., national water and sanitation sector plan, national plan on environment and health, social inclusion strategy, regional development plans, or national plans for schools or prisons).

E. Towards a single process

This Guidance Note is framed under the assumption that an Equitable Access Score-card exercise has already taken place, as it has already been the case with a number of countries.

However, given the efforts involved in implementing a self-assessment and the logical progression into developing an Action Plan, it is recommended that countries plan from the start to carry out both the Score-card exercise and the development of the Action Plan as a single project. This would save time and resources, and would make the project clearer and appealing to the different government agencies and stakeholders, including development partners.

Box 5

The Republic of Moldova first steps towards an Equitable Access Action Plan

Based on the outcomes of the Score-card exercise in the Republic of Moldova⁴, a reflection on which policy processes could be influenced, which actors would need to be involved, and which measures could be prioritized has been initiated.

Processes where the equitable access dimension could be integrated include the national implementation process of the 2014-2018 strategy for water supply and sanitation; the national programme for the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health; and the National Policy Dialogue on Water.

Actors to be engaged include the ministries of finance, health, environment, education, regional development, labour and social protection, as well as UN agencies (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, and the World Health Organization) and international development partners (the European Union, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, the German Agency for International Cooperation, the United States Agency for International Development, Czech and Slovak governments).

Priority actions or measures to be taken refer to the strategic framework (including the human right to water and sanitation in the national legislation, adopting targets on equitable access to water and sanitation), financial policies (taking into account equitable access measures in the financing strategy for the water and sanitation sector), geographical disparities (implementing projects in rural areas), and vulnerable and marginalized groups (implementing projects targeting access in schools and retirement homes as well as by disadvantaged Roma populations, and launching a public awareness and education campaign on the human rights to water and sanitation in order to empower the participation of civil society).



⁴ Self-assessment Score-card, Equitable access to water and sanitation, Moldova country report (Solidarity Water Europe in Moldova, 2014). Available at: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/activities/Equitable_access/Equitable_Access_Country_report_RepMoldova_ENG.pdf

Guidance Note on the Development of Action Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation

The Protocol on Water and Health specifies that in pursuing the aims of access to drinking water and provision of sanitation for everyone, special consideration should be paid to ensure equitable access to these services for all members of the population.

The publication No one left behind: good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation identified three critical factors in ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation: reducing geographical disparities; overcoming the barriers faced by vulnerable and marginalized groups; and addressing affordability concerns.

The Equitable Access Score-card was built upon these three policy concerns. It is an analytical tool designed to help Governments and other stakeholders to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access to water and sanitation, identify related priorities, discuss further actions to be taken and evaluate progress through a process of self-assessment.

The Guidance Note on the development of action plans aims to help countries in translating the priorities identified through the self-assessment into actions. Specific Equitable Access Action Plans are needed to guide country (or sub-national entity) efforts to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation by identifying priority actions to be implemented and ways of implementing them. The Note describes the content of Action Plans and their process of development.

This Note is mostly intended for government authorities and stakeholders in the water, health, education, social affairs, finance and other relevant sectors that would like to take action to reduce inequities in access to water and sanitation services. It is relevant both to countries that have already completed a self-assessment exercise, and to countries that are considering to embark in an integrated exercise that would include a self-assessment phase and an action planning phase. While the work carried out under the Protocol is primarily geared towards countries in the pan-European region, countries from other regions might also find this Note useful.

More information concerning the Protocol on Water and Health and its work on equitable access is available on the website: <http://www.unece.org/env/water>

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