



Draft strategic note on action plans to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation

Prepared by the secretariat in collaboration with the lead Parties France and Hungary

Background and objective

The Meeting of the Parties at its third session in 2013 decided to include in the Protocol's work programme for 2014–2016 item 5.3 “Developing action plans for equitable access”, which aims to support the development of action plans for equitable access to water and sanitation at the national or local level. These action plans should support addressing inequities in access, based on the outcomes of the baseline analyses of the situation of access to water and sanitation carried out by applying the *Equitable Access Score-card*¹. The Score-card combines the gathering of quantitative information with a qualitative questionnaire which guides a systematic self-assessment of the status of knowledge as well as the identification of existing actions (or lack thereof) to address the equitable access challenges.

Several countries have already finalized such equitable access self-assessment exercises using *the Equitable Access Score-card* (Score-card exercises) when piloting the Score-card in 2012-2013 (France, Portugal and Ukraine) as well as after its adoption by the Meeting of the Parties in 2013 (Republic of Moldova in 2014). An increasing number of countries are currently carrying out such assessments or have expressed their willingness to do so (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). However, experience shows that countries face difficulties to translate the priorities identified thanks to the assessment into the development of action plans to address the equity gaps.

The Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and sanitation at its third meeting (Paris, 11-12 May 2015) shared experiences in carrying out Score-card exercises. Discussions highlighted that Score-card exercises had generated new and relevant information (including a better understanding of what is not known) that could be used to inform the development of “equitable access action plans”. Building on the case study of the Republic of Moldova, the Expert Group discussed elements to be considered for the development of a possible equitable access action plan, including the main processes to be strengthened, the main actors to be involved and the proposed actions to be taken. The Expert Group requested the secretariat to draft a note to be presented during the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health, which would provide strategic guidance on how to use the outcomes of the

¹ 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

Score-card exercise for action planning, based on the outcomes of the discussion during the Expert Group meeting, the main messages of publication *No One Left Behind*², as well as partner's initiatives. This strategic note will inform the development of priority action plans in countries.

The draft strategic note is presented in the present document for discussion during the workshop. The participants are invited to:

- (a) To discuss ways and means to promote the development of equitable access action plans to support the improvement of access to water and sanitation for poor, vulnerable and socially excluded people as specified by the Protocol, and, thereby, contribute to the progressive realization of the human right to water and sanitation.
- (b) To provide written comments on the draft strategic note by 15 April 2016 to the secretariat (Chantal.demilecamps@unece.org).

What is meant by an Equitable Access Action Plan?

An Equitable Access Action Plan can be a document that identifies and prioritizes measures to be adopted to address the identified gaps in equitable access to water and sanitation, as well as opportunities for including those priority measures in official plans, programmes and projects.

This Strategic Note does not advocate for the development of official, stand-alone "Action Plans to Achieve Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation". 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 result in documents that end up mostly ignored. It is therefore rather recommended to consider an Equitable Access Action Plan as a non-official document listing priority areas to improve equitable access and existing or planned policy processes to be influenced.

Why should a country develop an Equitable Access Action Plan?

A Score-card 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). A 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 Score-card exercise has been concluded. While many officials and stakeholders may vow to do what it 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.

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

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.

There is also a clear link to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While equitable access to water and sanitation would contribute to achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals, the targets under Goal 6 make specific references to equitable access to water and sanitation:

- 6.1. By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- 6.2. By 2030, achieve 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.

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

How should an Equitable Access Action Plan be developed?

Box 1. Using the results of the scorecard of strategic evaluation and priority-setting.

The Scorecard is a useful tool for developing a comprehensive overview of the existing policy measures to address inequities in access to water and sanitation. This means that it is particularly strong as an aid in setting priorities, in terms of filling information and policy gaps.

One of the benefits of using the scorecard will be the identification of policy measures and evaluation reports, as well as gaps in the evaluation of policy measures. The results of the self-assessment exercise can be used to design targets and target dates under the Protocol on Water and Health, as well as to identify which individual measures should be prioritized for follow-up and for future evaluation of progress.

Source: UNECE and WHO/Europe, The Equitable Access Score-card: Supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation (United Nations, 2013)

The process of implementing 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 implementation of the Score-card.

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 would also include water and sanitation service providers, civil society organisations as well as

academics working on those policy areas. Depending on the geographical scope of the Action Plan, it would 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 where most progress is needed. As a consequence, it is possible that some of the agencies or stakeholders involved in implementing the Score-card 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.

The existing experience in implementing 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 need to be led by one specific governmental institution or a combination of institutions. Civil society organisations should be engaged in the development of the Action Plan, but not in a leading role. Indeed, although 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 Score-card exercise.

The process of developing an Equitable Access Action Plan is likely to involve the set up of a small core group of experts, as well as broader consultations.

The timeframe for developing an Equitable Access Action Plan should be significantly shorter than that of implementing the Score-card. While the process of an equitable access assessment may take about one year – as it involves substantial data gathering, the process of developing an Action Plan may indicatively take about 3 months. Most of the necessary actors should have already been identified and engaged in the Score-card exercise and the assessment carried out. 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 lifecycle of an Equitable Access Action Plan should mirror that of the policy processes where adoption of relevant specific measures will be decided – for example, 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.

What should be the content of an Equitable Access Action Plan?

An Equitable Access Action Plan could incorporate a brief diagnostic of the situation, summarizing the main findings of the equitable access self-assessment.

An Action Plan should identify a *limited number of main priority areas*. Some countries may find that there is one particular dimension of equitable access where they would like to improve their performance. Other countries may find that there are many aspects of equitable access of water and sanitation where they need to make progress, but realistically they will only be able to advance on a few of them during the Action Plan's lifecycle.

An Equitable Access Action Plan should identify the *priority of measures* suggested to be adopted during its lifecycle, and therefore include target dates. These measures could include (i) analysis and evaluation of existing plans, policies and programmes, (ii) legal and institutional reforms, (iii) modifications of existing programmes in different policy areas, (iv) targeted investments, (iv) communication efforts to promote equitable access to water and sanitation. The publication *No One Left Behind* puts forward a large number of measures that could potentially be incorporated into an Equitable Access Action Plan. For each measure, the Action Plan could indicate whether it could be implemented in the short-term, the medium-term or the long-term. It could also indicate the indicative cost of each measure (if any).

An Equitable Access Action Plan should identify the *existing or planned strategies, plans and programmes in which the prioritized equitable access measures will be integrated*. Given the expected non-official nature of the Action Plan, this is a key step. In addition, the Action Plan could briefly describe the process of preparing, updating or reforming those strategies, plans and programmes in order to identify the entry points and relevant timetables. One specific process to be considered is the setting or revision of the targets under the Protocol on Water and Health.

The Action Plan should identify which *governmental institutions* will be *responsible* for making the case for the integration of equitable access measures in the processes of developing, updating or reforming those strategies, plans and programmes. The Action Plans could as well describe how other stakeholders could support those "mainstreaming" efforts.

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

Finally, the Action Plan should include a *resource mobilization strategy*, if needed, estimating the cost of proposed equitable access measures and possible sources of funding for their implementation (national public funding and/or from international financial support).

How can the Equitable Access Expert Group under the Protocol support the development of Equitable Access Action Plans?

The Expert Group on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation could support the development of Equitable Access Action Plans in several ways.

First, it could provide a forum to exchange ideas and experiences in the development of Action Plans (see Box 2).

Second, it could support the organisation of in-country national workshops focused on developing an “outline” of the Action Plan.

Third, it could support the organization of regional or international workshops focused on specific topics that several countries might find particularly challenging – for example on how to address affordability concerns.

Box 2. Moldova’s first steps towards an Equitable Access Action Plan

Based on the outcomes of the Score-card exercise in the Republic of Moldova³, 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 included the national implementation process of the 2014-2028 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 included the ministries of finance, health, environment, education, regional development, labour and social protection, as well as UN agencies (WHO, UNECE, UNICEF) and international development partners (EU, SDC, ADA, GIZ, USAID, Czech and Slovak governments)

Priority actions or measures to be taken referred 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 marginalised 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).

³ 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_ReportMoldova_ENG.pdf