



REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ACHIEVING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION: FROM ASSESSMENT TO ACTION

21-22 March 2016

Palais des Nations, room XII, Geneva, Switzerland

INFORMATION NOTICE

I. Background and rationale

The recognition of access to water and to sanitation as human rights, derived from the right to adequate standard of living, by the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in 2010 confirmed the obligation of governments to ensure that water and sanitation services are available, physically accessible, of good quality and safe, acceptable in terms of dignity and privacy and affordable for all without discrimination. Governments therefore have to take concrete steps towards ensuring access to safe water and sanitation for all. Some components of the right to water and sanitation are deemed subject to progressive realization, but obligations such as of non-discrimination are of immediate effect.

Equity considerations are very strong in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, the Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation set ambitious targets in this respect:

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

In the pan-European region, the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health provides a sound framework for translating into practice the human rights to water and sanitation and for achieving SDG6. The Protocol requires its Parties to ensuring access to water and sanitation for everyone, and specifically to promoting equitable access to water and sanitation “for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion”.

Important progress has been achieved under the Protocol over the past 5 years to provide support to countries to improve equitable access to water and sanitation. The publication *No One Left Behind: Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region*¹ presents good practices and lessons learnt from throughout the pan-European region on the policies and measures to be enacted to provide equitable access. An analytic tool, the *Equitable Access Score-card*², already used in 8 countries, supports Governments and other stakeholders to establish a baseline measure of the equity of access, identify priorities and discuss further actions to be taken to address equity gaps.

¹ Available at : www.unece.org/env/water/publications/ece_mp.wh_6.html

² The publication *The Equitable Access Score-card: supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation* is available at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=34032

However, experience shows that countries face difficulties in apprehending the actual situation of access to water and sanitation in terms of equity and in monitoring progress in the various dimensions of the obligations of the human rights to water and sanitation. In addition, countries which have a clear understanding of the gaps in access to water and sanitation encounter challenges in translating the priorities identified into action plans to address the equity gaps and in financing necessary measures to advance towards universal access.

II. Objectives

The workshop will bring together experts working in the water and sanitation sectors as well as other sectors such as environment, education, health, social protection and finance to exchange experiences in achieving equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region.

The objectives of the workshop are:

1. To identify priority gaps and actions needed across the pan-European region to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation, as well as the role of key actors to be engaged for their effective implementation;
2. To discuss how actions to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation can be integrated in water and non-water sectors policy processes and plans;
3. To discuss the financial implications of actions to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation and possible options to finance them;
4. To review progress of the work on assessing equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health, inform the development of the draft *Strategic note on action plans to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation* and guide future activities in this area in the 2017-2019 work programme under the Protocol on Water and Health.

III. Organization of work

During the workshop, a number of case studies will illustrate options for assessing, improving and financing equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region. Case studies from other regions will be presented to provide an opportunity to learn from other relevant experiences.

Plenary presentations and discussions will be combined with interactive working sessions in break-out groups to ensure an optimal sharing of experience.

A special session on Forests for Drinking Water, to celebrate the International Day of Forest, will be held on 21 March 2016 from 5:00 pm till 6:00pm.

IV. Targeted participants

Participants will include primarily country representatives from the pan-European region whose work (in the environment, education, health, social protection, finance and other sectors) is related to equitable access to water and sanitation. It will also include representatives from development agencies and donors, civil society organization and stakeholders engaged in the provision of water and sanitation services.

V. Partners

The workshop is organized by UNECE in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the French Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Hungarian Office of the Chief Medical Officer.

Funding for the workshop is provided by the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) 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, with a particular focus on small-scale water supplies and sanitation in rural areas” and the French Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

VI. Background documentation

The background documents for the workshop are:

- No One Left Behind: Good practices to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region
- The Equitable Access Score-card: supporting policy processes to achieve the human right to water and sanitation
- The Draft Strategic note on action plans to achieve equitable access to water and sanitation.

The workshop programme will be made available at the end of February 2016.

VII. Practical information

The workshop will start on Monday, 21 March 2016 at 10:00 a.m. and will close at 17:00 p.m. on Tuesday 22 March 2016. It will be held in conference room XII of the Palais des Nations, Geneva.

The working languages will be English, French and Russian. All relevant documentation for the workshop will be made available in due course at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42097#/>

In accordance with the United Nations accreditation procedures, participants should register online at <https://www2.unece.org/uncdb/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=qfOTxE> as soon as possible but not later than **1 March 2016**.

Eligible participants from countries with economies in transition may apply for financial support to facilitate their participation in the meeting. Requests for financial support should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat (protocol.water_health@unece.org) **as soon as possible, but no later than 8 February 2016**, using the financial support request form available on the meeting website. No application will be accepted after this deadline due to visa and travel arrangement regulations.

Participants requiring an entry visa should inform the secretariat as soon as possible. Due to the entry of Switzerland in the Schengen Zone, visa procedures have become more complicated. The minimum amount of time needed for obtaining a visa is 15 working days. Participants needing a visa are therefore requested to submit their application as soon as possible and to initiate visa procedures at least three weeks before the meeting.

On their way to the meeting, participants should obtain an identification badge at the Pass and Identification Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva Security and Safety Section located at the

Pregny Gate, 14 Avenue de la Paix (see map on the ECE website). Please allow time for this. In case of difficulty, please contact the secretariat by telephone at +41 22 917 1606.

Practical information on the Palais des Nations, as well as on transport and accommodation in Geneva, is available at: <http://www.unece.org/meetings/practical.html>.