

NGO Statement on equitable access to water and sanitation

The third Meeting of the Parties

Oslo, November 25, 2013

NGOs working in the water and sanitation sector in the Pan-European region consider that the implemented Protocol on Water and Health provides a sound framework to translate rights to water and sanitation into practice in the full context of the UN Resolutions. These entitle everyone to available, accessible, affordable and safe water and sanitation and urge countries to plan for a progressive realization of these rights. The implementation of the Protocol encourages governments to involve a wide range of stakeholders in their effort to make the right to water and sanitation a reality.

Confirming the commitment to advocate and implement the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health at all levels, the NGOs are part of the main stakeholders group, which has

- accumulated valuable practical knowledge of national and local water and sanitation and related health problems;
- gained experience in good practices for water management, including: equitable access to safe water and sanitation for vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as children (in schools and hospitals, and in rural and urban areas); the introduction of Water and Sanitation Safety plans, especially for rural communities; and water source protection and transboundary cooperation;
- developed expertise in planning and implementing: low-cost, sustainable and efficient solutions for small water supply and sanitation; the introduction of eco-sanitation technologies and a decentralized natural wastewater treatment; and the WASH campaign at national-local levels; and
- strengthened the capacity to mobilize public participation in water management and water sector reform at all levels.

The NGOs working on the ground highlight the following problems and challenges in the pan-European region:

- There is still no reliable data on equitable access to safe water and sanitation in the pan-European region
- Some of the Parties report degradations in the water supply and sanitation infrastructures and decreased access to improved water and sanitation services.
- Geographical disparities in the accessibility of safe water and sanitation services are a common problem in many countries of the region.
- The low quality of water and sanitation services is endangering human health in some countries.
- Outbreaks of intestinal infections, hepatitis A and helminthoses are commonly reported in a number of countries. Cases of methaemoglobinemia (blue-baby syndrome) are persistently reported in certain geographical areas. There was a cholera burst in Ukraine in 2011.
- Children in rural areas and small towns in the EECCA, the Western Balkans and new EU member states have no access to safe water and sanitation in schools and kindergartens and also, often, at home.
- There are no statistics on the ease of access of vulnerable and marginalized consumer groups.
- The aggressively promoted principle of “water pays for water” - involving the privatization of the sector, the commercialization of water and sanitation service and the pursuit of profit by all means - poses significant social and health risks for vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as the general population. In a number of countries, households are disconnected from water supply and sewage systems when they can no longer afford the cost of these services.
- Public participation is not yet identified as a necessity in the implementation of water sector reforms in EECCA countries.
- In many countries of the Region, a rights-oriented approach is not recognized as fundamental to reforms in the water and sanitation sector. UN Resolutions on the Right to water and sanitation remain mere declarations, rather than actual bases for action at national and local levels.

We call upon Parties and Non -Parties of the Protocol on Water and Health

- to prioritize access for all to safe water and sanitation in their national programs, and to earmark adequate human and financial resources to guarantee that the Protocol is utilized as an efficient instrument to guarantee the full implementation of equitable access to Water and Sanitation;
- to incorporate rights-oriented targets and measures into River basin management plans. The Protocol's implementation should be a subject of trans-boundary cooperation between riparian countries. Water and health should be defined as issues of priority for river commissions;
- to join efforts to achieve 100% access to safe drinking water and sanitation for children in schools, kindergartens and at home in the pan-European region, and to build synergies between the Protocol and the Parma Ministerial Declaration;
- to use the document "No One Left Behind", as well as the score-card for self-assessment and baseline study, to monitor progress in achieving equitable access and to make a results-oriented action plan which builds on country-situation analysis and context-specific equity indicators;
- to support NGOs, civil society organizations and regional, national and local initiatives in advocating equitable access to water and sanitation; and to support the development and promotion of good practices on water and sanitation management and water resource protection, saving, recycling and reuse;
- to adopt the Guide to Public Participation under the Protocol on Water and Health to improve public participation within the implementation of the Protocol at all levels;
- to revise project facilitation mechanism and set up new mechanisms to support the NGOs, public initiatives and stakeholder cooperation in ensuring the promotion of equitable rights to water and sanitation in the Region.