



World Health
Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe



Participatory approaches to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals: MONTENEGRO

Working towards SDG 6 and ratification of
the Protocol on Water and Health



Key messages

Montenegro's experience in working towards achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1) and ratification of the Protocol on Water and Health (2) indicates the importance of the following.

- **Water, sanitation and health (WASH) matters should be integrated within existing national policies and considered within the EU integration process.**

In Montenegro, the planning and accountability approach of the Protocol on Water and Health (2) offers a practical framework for translation of the SDGs (1) and the *Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health* (3) into tangible national targets and actions, taking the national circumstances into account.

- **An inclusive multisectoral approach is essential to advancing WASH agendas at the national level.**

In Montenegro, the Protocol framework (2) provides a national platform for bringing sectors together, as well as national and international stakeholders (such as the United Nations), all of which share responsibility in the water and sanitation domain.

- **Political commitment is an important ingredient for progress.**

The engagement of parliamentary representatives will be critical for a broad acceptance and the success of the Protocol (2) in Montenegro.

- **International technical support and networks have spearheaded the Protocol ratification process.**

The international support provided by the Iceland Statement of the Small Countries Initiative, *Ensuring safe and climate-resilient water and sanitation* (2018), provides an additional boost to the process towards ratification of the Protocol (2).

Summary

In 2018, Montenegro took an important step towards ratification of the *Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* (hereafter, "the Protocol" (2)). A multisectoral national consultation was held with the overall aim of facilitating the process towards Montenegro's accession to the Protocol (2). This provided a forum where national stakeholders could assist in related decision-making. The consultation was triggered by the *Iceland Statement. Ensuring safe and climate-resilient water and sanitation* (2018), according to which the small countries committed to acceding to the Protocol by 2022 (2,3).

The Protocol (2) is the first and only multilateral legal agreement linking sustainable water management and the prevention, control and reduction of water-related diseases in the pan-European region. It was adopted in 1999 at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in London and entered into force in 2005, becoming legally binding for the ratifying countries. To date, 26 countries have ratified it, covering about 60% of the population of the pan-European region. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe provide the joint secretariat of the Protocol. Montenegro is on the way to becoming the next country to ratify it (2).

The Protocol is recognized as an instrument for use in strengthening national action towards progressively reaching regional and global WASH-related commitments, specifically in relation to SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and the *Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health* (2017) (1,2,4). It stipulates the importance of formulating national priority targets and implementation plans, while promoting a whole-of-government approach to and coordinated intersectoral action in doing so (2).

Motivation

Water scarcity, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation negatively impact food security, livelihood choices and educational opportunities in the WHO European Region. In Montenegro, about 96% of the total population use at least basic sanitation services (which means improved sanitation facilities that are not shared with other households) and 97% use basic and safely

managed drinking-water services. No data are available, however, on how many of the people living in rural areas use safely managed drinking-water and sanitation (5).

Urban drinking-water and sanitation policies and plans are in place; however, policies and plans addressing rural drinking-water and sanitation are lacking. Interim results from the 2018–2019 Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) country survey (6) highlights the presence of an important type of inequity in Montenegro, indicating the need to improve the governance of water and sanitation and make it accessible to all, paying special attention to the rural areas. They also point to the necessity to strengthen national capacity for monitoring progress towards the SDG-6 targets (1) related to the provision of safely managed services to ensure no one is left behind.

The WHO *Roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on Health 2020, the European policy for health and well-being* (7) places national multisectoral action and international cooperation for health at its centre. The implementation of multilateral environment agreements, such as the Protocol (2), will pave the way for action to achieve the SDGs (1).

Description of action

As already mentioned, the *Iceland Statement. Ensuring safe and climate-resilient water and sanitation* (2018) (3), which focuses on ensuring safe and climate-resilient water and sanitation, was an important trigger in initiating the process towards ratifying the Protocol (2). The Statement (3) motivated Montenegro to initiate an inclusive consultative process in which representatives of different key ministries, the Parliament and civil society – all of which share responsibility for WASH – are actively engaged. The process has provided an ideal opportunity to introduce the policy context relating to the Protocol (2) (the SDGs, the Ostrava Declaration (1,4)), as well as its requirements, and to compare related experiences from neighboring countries. The ministries for health, agriculture, sustainable development and tourism are represented in the consultative process, which is led by the Ministry of Health.

A key outcome of the consultative process is the agreement to establish a national Protocol working group responsible for: baselining; setting and revising targets and defining indicators; planning action, including timing, responsibilities and budgeting; communicating with the

general public; overseeing and tracking progress towards achievement of the targets; and coordinating mandatory reporting exercises as specified in the Protocol (2).

It is envisaged that the working group will comprise representatives of ministries/institutions responsible for water, sanitation, health, education, finance, environmental protection, sustainable development, tourism, agriculture, sanitary inspection, human rights and climate change, as well as service providers, civil society and municipalities.

Additional steps in Montenegro's progress towards ratification of the Protocol (2) will include:

- establishing a national baseline analysis of the situation pertaining to WASH;
- setting national priority targets aligned with SDGs 3 and 6 (1), the *Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health* (4), and the commitments of the Iceland Statement (3), and supporting action towards the accession of Montenegro to the European Union (EU) (targets set under the Protocol should reflect the national socioeconomic and environmental health conditions and priorities for improving needs in the WASH domain);
- formulating an action plan towards implementation of the national targets and leveraging opportunities for mobilizing resources to support it;
- engaging with civil society in setting targets and implementing action towards their achievement by ensuring that appropriate provisions for public participation are included in a transparent and fair framework and that the outcome of public participation is taken into consideration.

One of Montenegro's targets will pay special attention to tackling the persisting inequalities in access to water and sanitation services, and particularly to closing the rural–urban gap in access to safely managed and climate–resilient water and sanitation services. It will also focus on the provision of safe and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services in schools with a view to achieving better health and educational outcomes. Reaching this target area will call for strengthening national WASH surveillance systems in schools and establishing national indicators in accordance with SDGs 4 and 6 (1), as recommended by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (5).

Impact

The consultation process is still underway. The responsible ministries have agreed on a roadmap of key steps towards accession to the Protocol, which include defining the lead ministry, establishing a multisectoral national working group on the Protocol, setting timelines and delegating responsibilities.

It was agreed that the Ministry of Health would lead the Protocol accession process in accordance with established procedures. The text of the Protocol (2) has been submitted to the Secreariat for Legislation. Once approved, an interministerial consultation will gather input on the text and a revised version will be submitted to the Government and Parliament for approval upon completion of the respective government procedures. It is expected that the accession process will be complete by the end of the first quarter of 2019 (latest by the end of the second quarter) and that Montenegro's ratification of the Protocol (2) will be announced at the Fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Belgrade, Serbia, 19–21 November 2019).

Lessons learnt

The Protocol (2) has provided Montenegro with a practical framework for delivery of action towards achievement of the various SDGs related to WASH (1). This includes practical tools for use in addressing inequalities in access to safely managed and climate resilient water and sanitation services for all in all settings, especially schools and health-care facilities. Parallel processes should be avoided. It is also important that water, sanitation and health matters to be dealt with within the framework of the Protocol (2) become fully integrated in existing national processes (for example, EU integration). A strong coordination platform is needed to guide implementation of the Protocol (2) and action towards achievement of the WASH-related SDGs (1). The establishment of a national working group on the Protocol will help ensure coherence in this respect.

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¹ All URLs accessed 12 March 2019.

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