

UN Water Conference

Concept Paper

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This concept paper is on the theme: Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade, including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan, with an emphasis on SDG 6, SDG 3 and SDG 13.

Climate change poses a risk to human health due to extreme events, the influence on water and sanitation systems, generating health hazards related to the resulting changes in food production, the multiplication of vectors and disease-carrying rodents. Among the countries in the Danube basin, Romania is expected to be the most affected by climate change as a whole. It is expected that climate change will lead to a significant increase in the frequency and magnitude of floods, including floods, throughout the country. Also, an increase in the frequency and magnitude of droughts is expected in several areas of the country, especially in the southeastern area, which has the highest concentration of arable land and irrigation infrastructure in the country. "Water security" will be put at risk by climate change.

I. Overview of the challenge, current status and interlinkages

The River Basin Management Plans are key tools for implementing the Water Framework Directive, having as the main objective, to achieve the protection, improvement, and sustainable use of the water. In the National Management Plan and River Basin Management Plans, many measures are proposed and implemented in order to protect the aquatic ecosystems: measures to maintain the existing good status of all surface water bodies and future preservation of water resources quality, in order to protect the human health and biodiversity; to control wastewater discharge; measures for the protection of the ground waters depending aquatic ecosystems, for protected areas. The RBMP is an important instrument that through the established program of measures also contributes to the implementation of the UNECE / WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health.

In Romania, through ratification and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health, the national targets are established to ensure equal access of citizens to water and sanitation through the implementation of European directives in the field of water, especially those related to the quality of drinking water and the treatment of urban wastewater. Both directives were fully transposed into the Romanian legislation being the base for the implementation of the necessary measures.

At the national level, a number of actions have been implemented to, among other things, ensure drinking water supply in accordance with the Drinking Water Directive (DWD), establish requirements for drinking water, ensure inspection of water systems,



drinking water quality surveillance and monitoring, and disseminate information and reporting.

The implementation of the new Drinking Water Directive (recast DWD) and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWWTD) as the basis for water and sanitation safety planning approaches can accelerate progress on SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 having in view the improvement of the efforts for applying the planned measures for wastewater infrastructures. It should be mentioned that the investments in water and sanitation infrastructures support the improvement of the population's access to proper drinking water and sanitation services, but also achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 6 addresses the entire water cycle, from universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all and water-use efficiency across all sectors to the sustainable and integrated water resources management and improvement of water-related ecosystem status.

In Romania, compliance with the provisions of these Directives needs a huge financial effort, considering that the implementation of the required measures is the costliest in the water management sector. Ensuring affordability and proper water pricing for the operation and maintenance of infrastructures, especially in the rural area are important challenges too.

The art. 13 of the recast of the DWD, has in view the European citizens' initiative 'Right2Water' through the measures necessary to ensure access to drinking water for vulnerable and marginalized groups. This should contribute to the commitment taken under UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the associated target to "achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all". In the same context of the recast DWD, the water safety plan (WSP) approach is a core pillar of the WHO Framework. It provides the most effective means of consistently ensuring the safety of a drinking water supply through the use of a comprehensive risk assessment and risk management approach that encompasses all steps in water supply from catchment to consumer. All of these form the basis for effective management, operation and monitoring of water supplies.

The main objectives of the UWWTD are to protect the environment from the adverse effects of the mentioned wastewater discharges and from certain industrial discharges, but also to assure the access of the population to adequate wastewater services by construction, extension and modernization of the wastewater infrastructures. Along with these objectives, innovative and efficient water management capabilities are envisaged to be developed. Moreover, the recast of UWWTD (very recently published) could positively contribute to the European Union's climate and environmental goals set in the Green Deal, under "Zero pollution" Action Plan. An in-depth REFIT evaluation of the Directive was concluded in 2019 and confirmed that the implementation of this Directive has led to a significant reduction of pollutant releases. The effects on the quality of EU lakes, rivers and seas are visible and tangible, but the evaluation identified three main sets of remaining challenges: remaining pollution from urban sources, alignment of the Directive with the European Green Deal and insufficient and uneven levels of governance.



The Protocol on Water and Health is currently the main instrument in Romania to implement SDG6. In this context, Romania establishes and publishes approved targets, including their deadlines, which refer to aspects of ensuring people's access to water and sanitation, quality of water resources and drinking water, reduction of water-related disease, control of pollution, water management etc. Implementation of the provisions of the Protocol will contribute to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Objectives, in particular, the SDG6 (people's access to safe water and adequate sanitation) the result of which is to reduce the risk of disease in the population associated with water-related diseases.

The target areas according to Art 6.2 of the PWH are in line with SDGs 6.1 which stipulates that by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all. With many synergies and common characteristics, it is natural to implement the Protocol and the water, sanitation and health-related targets of the 2030 Agenda in an integrated way to support effective implementation at the country level.

II. Overview of opportunities for progress and transformative solutions

1. Financing

Over the past twenty years, the Protocol has supported remarkable progress in water, sanitation, hygiene and health across the region, particularly in ensuring access to safe and equitable drinking water and sanitation services, improving drinking water quality, reducing incidents and outbreaks of water-related diseases and sound management of water resources. The Protocol continues to contribute to advancing and operationalizing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the countries of the region, particularly in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all).

Romania ratified the Protocol on water and health through Ordinance no. 95/2000 for the ratification of the Protocol on water and health, adopted in London on June 17, 1999, to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, adopted in Helsinki on March 17, 1992, approved by Law no. 228/2000. The ministries responsible for the implementation of the Water and Health Protocol are the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests and the Ministry of Health.

On this note, Romania has pledged its commitment for a voluntary contribution to the Protocol. The financing of the activities necessary to implement the activities of the Protocol is carried out on the basis of the voluntary contributions of the Parties, the Signatories to the Protocol, other states and regional economic organizations to the two funds:

- The Financing Fund for Technical Cooperation of the United Nations, administered by the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations, in accordance with the financial rules and regulations established by the United Nations;



- The Voluntary Fund, administered by the Regional Office of the World Health Organization for Europe (WHO - EURO), in accordance with the financial regulations of the World Health Organization.

2. Data and information

To meet the needs of the 2030 Agenda, UN-Water has launched the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, which includes the work of WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), the interagency initiative GEMI and the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS). The objectives of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 are to:

- Develop methodologies and tools to monitor SDG 6 global indicators;
- Raise awareness at national and global levels about SDG 6 monitoring;
- Enhance technical and institutional country capacity for monitoring;
- Compile country data and report on global progress towards SDG 6.

Particularly, the global monitoring of the SDG 6.1 and 6.2 targets needs comparable data available. Besides the national authorities' data, additional data are required for national, regional and global monitoring of SDG 6. The water and health authorities have operational monitoring systems, which can contribute to the reporting under SDG 6.1 and 6.2 targets.

Data and information are also provided as part of the Romania Reporting exercise according to Article 6 and Article 7 of the Protocol on Water and Health.

Also, the Department for Sustainable Development, supports the implementation of the "Global Process for the Analysis and Evaluation of Sanitation and Drinking Water 2021-2022 (UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water - GLAAS)", being the focal point responsible for coordinating the national GLAAS process. GLAAS is part of the UN-Water Initiative for Monitoring SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation. The GLAAS 2021/2022 cycle covers four key areas: governance, monitoring, human resources and finance, and aims to coordinate and facilitate the collection, centralization, validation and transmission of country data to the World Health Organization for the preparation of the GLAAS 2021-2022 Global Report (biennial report). The GLAAS country survey mainly includes questions related to the monitoring process of SDG6 and specifically targets data related to the provision as well as the effectiveness of sanitation and drinking water services.

The last SDG 6.5.2 report (2020) offered an unprecedented opportunity to raise awareness and start to address data gaps, particularly in relation to transboundary aquifers, while also identifying further priorities for national capacity development. 129 out of 153 countries sharing transboundary basins submitted national reports on the status of their cooperative arrangements. It should be mentioned that only 24 countries (including Romania) have met the target as of 2020 (indicator SDG 6.5.2 is 100%). The conclusion is clear, countries should accelerate progress in adopting cooperative



arrangements so as to enable water for all and capitalize on the catalytic role transboundary water cooperation can have across SDG 6.5.2.

3. Capacity development

The UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health provides inspiration and also a guide for the national authorities. Actions to take include a rigorous appraisal of the current levels of service used by people in the country, as well as the capacity to extend and improve these services.

Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, are fundamental aspirations of citizens. This objective includes various themes, from the protection of aquatic ecosystems to increasing the efficiency of water management and providing drinking water for the population.

Romania has taken important steps in the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development was revised in 2018, being in accordance with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Romania, through the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania (SNDDR2030), aims to increase the quality of life by developing infrastructure and public water supply and sewerage services, aligning Romania with EU requirements and standards on drinking water, waste management and water efficiency in all sectors.

In terms of human capital development, Romania is the first country in the European Union to have developed a new occupational standard entitled "Sustainable Development Expert". The sustainable development expert will act in the medium and long term as an agent of paradigm change in the construction of projects, public policies, programs and strategies related to the specific activity of the central and local public administration. In this sense, the expert will develop, implement, verify and promote at the level of each authority where he will carry out his activity the sustainable development objectives provided for in the 2030 Strategy, adapted to the specific competences of the respective authority.

4. Innovation

Romania, through its National Resilience and Recovery Plan has pledged its commitment to innovation and investment in the water sector. More exactly, in order to facilitate equal access to safe water, Romania will strengthen the regulatory framework for the sustainable management of the water and wastewater sector and for accelerating the population's access to quality services. The National Resilience and Recovery Plan has allocated 1.4 billions euros for the components associated with water, in order to achieve all targets of SDG 6.

The reform will contribute to the realization of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in that the actions taken will improve effective access to essential services of sufficient quality (principle 20). This reform starts from the premise that access to basic utility services, such as clean and high-quality drinking water and sanitation, is



essential to achieving sustainable development goals. The specific actions of this reform aim to improve at the national level the indicator related to the additional costs for housing, as defined in the revised social scoreboard. Thus, through the measures taken within this reform, water consumption will be able to be monitored and become more cost-effective, in line with global climate objectives. Also, over time, the effects of the reform will aim at improving living conditions and quality indoor living environment, as well as improving hygiene, health and well-being at the level of beneficiary communities/households.

This reform will be financed with 968 mil. Euros and is expected to be fulfilled by 2026.

Furthermore, Romania is also looking at adapting to climate change by automating and digitizing water evacuation and storage equipment at existing reservoirs to ensure ecological flow and increase the security of water supply to the population and reduce the risk of floods. As Romania is already one of the countries who will experience significant damage because of climate change, it has developed a reform through the National Resilience and Recovery Plan meant to tackle the challenges associated with climate change.

This reform, for which 386 mil. Euros are allocated, is targeting:

- The Rehabilitation of existing defense lines in accordance with the Floods Directive and the National Flood Risk Management Strategy: Areas with the most spills and breaches in flood defense lines over the last 7 years will be considered, also correlated with the average annual economic damage caused by adverse hydrological events. The efforts will be prioritized based on prevention and protection plans and the mitigation of the effects of flooding and will consist of fillings from local materials extracted from the embankment areas followed by covering with a grassy vegetation layer. These interventions address the flood risks analyzed in the River Basin Management Plans and Flood Risk Management Plans, which are currently being updated as required by the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive. These strategies will also identify complementary measures to ensure the sustainability of investments to reduce flood risks. The investment also includes an important digital dimension by installing a fiber optic system to perform dynamic and static measurements. The system will measure the level of deformation, temperature, tilting pressure in the body of the defense line / dike. Therefore, the fiber optic system is an essential component that allows flood prevention through early detection of potential breaches.
- The Rehabilitation of existing accumulations that require emergency interventions for safe operation: the reservoir rehabilitation program has the objective of ensuring the safe operation of dams and reducing the risk of floods in order to protect people, infrastructure and socio-economic objectives located in risk areas, as well as the objective of protecting the environment and biodiversity through measures ecologically relevant, especially those concerning fish migration, and through measures to ensure the ecological flow.



Moreover, for the 2021-2027 timeframe, Romania will invest in the water-canal projects, who will be financed through the Sustainable Development Operational Program (EU funds), the sum of <u>3.5 billion euros for water and wastewater infrastructure and the transition to a circular economy.</u>

5. Governance

Transboundary water cooperation plays a crucial role in supporting wider regional integration, peace and sustainable development, as well as in tackling regional security challenges or in supporting climate change adaptation. SDG 6.5 Implement Integrated Water Resources Management has as a global target that by 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels (100%), including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.

From this point of view, the national water resources policy includes unitary integrated management of the surface and groundwater resources, equitable allocation of water between users including environmental needs, management of water risks (floods, droughts and water shortage) proper planning and public participation. Recently the policy included the effects of climate change and the need for adaptation in the water management sector. So, referring to the indicator SDG 6.5.1 Romania participated in the second round of data collection and reports the degree of integrated water resources management implementation.

One of the achievement targets refers to SDG 6.5.2 - Proportion of transboundary basin area, with an operational arrangement for water cooperation, as an indicator for covering the transboundary cooperation. Indicator 6.5.2 looks at the area of a country within transboundary basins and assesses the extent to which that area is covered by operational cooperation arrangements. Transboundary basins are river, lake and aquifer systems shared between two or more countries. Arrangements are "operational" when there is a joint body, meetings between countries take place and information is exchanged at least once per year, and joint or coordinated management plans or objectives for the basin(s) have been set.

Furthermore, Romania was involved in solving the water problem in Central Asia, initiated in 2007, as the president of the EU Working Group for the water problem in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Romania's constant support for solving the water problem in Central Asia is also confirmed by the three voluntary contributions offered for the realization of projects regarding the management of water resources in the Aral Sea basin conducted by the UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia - UNRCCA - from Ashgabat.

III. Recommendations

The Protocol on Water and Health is a powerful legally binding tool to progressively realize the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, increase resilience



to climate change and prepare for future pandemics, while protecting human health, the environment and water resources. The Protocol has been a key governance framework to support recovery processes towards a more resilient post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic world and has provided reliable approaches in this regard, such as its target setting mechanism. It is an effective pan-European intergovernmental platform for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Ostrava commitments on environment and health, while "leaving no one behind".

The impact of climate change on WASH services and water resources has significant consequences for public health and the environment. Vulnerabilities to climate change lead to qualitative and quantitative deterioration of water resources, which affects water supply for the population. Domestic water demand and supply will feel the same effect. Domestic water treatment is affected in case of floods, for example, due to infiltration of rainwater into sewage systems and also due to direct flooding of treatment plants, it being known that Romania is among the EU countries that are most exposed to large floods. About 13% of the country's surface is floodplain.

In addition to the plans and programs currently underway in Romania, the Water and Health Protocol is the legal instrument that, in the last twenty years, has supported activities in the field of water, sanitation, hygiene and health, ensuring access to safe and fair drinking water and to sewage services, as well as improving the quality of drinking water.

As the Protocol serves the three principles of the UN Water Conference 2023: it is inclusive, it is cross-sectoral and it's action orientated, Romania has pledged its commitment to advance the work done by the Protocol through voluntary commitments that will definitely deliver great results in addressing global water challenges.

V. Guiding Questions

As dialogue no. 5 is broader in approach, it can address issues that are on the long term spectrum. The guiding question proposed are the following:

- 1. Considering that 2023 is the year in which we approach the midterm review of the 2030 Agenda, in which stage is the implementation of SDG 6 and of SDGs related to water and what can nations do during the decade of action?
- 2. What are the concrete actions that need to be developed globally, regionally, nationally and sub-nationally for the coming years to reach the agreed targets in terms of:
- Financial opportunities;
- Partnerships and transboundary collaboration;
- Technical possibilities;
- Digital possibilities.
- 3. Which innovative actions can prevent the effects of climate change on SDG 6 and its implementation and how can nations better prevent natural disasters caused by the effects of climate change on water?