



SEVENTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE PROTOCOL ON WATER AND HEALTH BUDAPEST, HUNGARY | 5–7 NOVEMBER 2025

High-level segment:

Resilient water and sanitation systems for a safer and healthier future

Wednesday, 5 November, 10.45 a.m.–1 p.m.

CONCEPT NOTE

Background and overall objective

The year 2025 marks the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Protocol on Water and Health. From its adoption, the Protocol has offered countries in the pan-European region a robust institutional and legal framework supporting them in meeting their national and international commitments regarding water, sanitation, hygiene and health, including those set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, 5–7 July 2023). The Protocol has also steered the progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation as recognized by the General Assembly in its resolutions 64/292 (2010) and 70/169 (2015).

Continuing the priorities set out in previous programmes of work, the overarching theme of the proposed programme of work for 2026–2028 is: *Building sustainable and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene systems and services through strategic action under the Protocol on Water and Health*.¹ This focus reflects the understanding that the resilience of communities and societies is deeply dependent on the availability and sustainable management of essential services and water resources. Strengthening their resilience is a fundamental pillar in enhancing the broader resilience and health security of the pan-European region.

The **overarching objective** of the high-level segment is to celebrate and take stock of 20 years of collective pan-European action on water, sanitation, hygiene and health under the Protocol on Water and Health, while inspiring future action and sharing experiences to build sustainable and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene systems and services, and to ensure the protection and sustainable management of water resources.

The outcomes of the high-level segment will inform the preparatory process for the United Nations 2026 Water Conference.

The high-level segment will be structured into three distinct parts:

Part 1: Welcoming ceremony for new Parties

The high-level segment will commence with a ceremony welcoming new Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health that have acceded since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 16–18 November 2022).

Part 2: Celebrating 20 years of the Protocol on Water and Health

Objective: To celebrate 20 years of collective pan-European action on water, sanitation, hygiene and health under the Protocol on Water and Health.

This part will take stock of the significant progress and impacts catalysed by the Protocol in the past two decades. The protection and sustainable management of water resources has progressed. Access to safely

¹ The draft programme of work for 2026–2028 is available at: https://unece.org/MOP7_Protocol (see Documentation).

managed drinking water and sanitation services has improved markedly across the region. Strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change on water and sanitation service provision has moved to the forefront of policy and planning. Equitable access to water and sanitation has gained increased policy traction, and health systems have been further strengthened to prevent and respond to water-related disease incidents and outbreaks.

Looking ahead, the segment will also seek to inspire action for the future, recognizing the visionary elements of the Protocol at its time of negotiation, ensuring that the next decades build on past achievements when addressing current and emerging challenges.

Run of show

The session will open with testimonials highlighting insights into the historical development of the Protocol and its present-day value and impact.

This will be followed by a high-level panel featuring representatives from countries, international organizations and non-governmental partners, reflecting on the Protocol's past and future role in shaping the national, regional and global agendas on water, sanitation, hygiene and health.

Guiding questions

Proposed guiding questions for discussion:

- Over the past 20 years, what have been the Protocol's most significant achievements and tangible impacts on the ground?
- How has the Protocol shaped national and regional policies and investments on water, sanitation and health?
- In what ways has the Protocol supported countries in integrating water, sanitation and hygiene into national health strategies and programming? And in turn, how has the Protocol supported the integration of health into national water strategies and basin management plans?
- What key lessons from two decades of implementation experience can inspire and guide future action under the Protocol?

Interactive discussion

The interactive discussion will provide an open platform for Parties, other States, international organizations and stakeholders to share perspectives, experiences and proposals from the floor. Delegations are invited to make brief interventions, not exceeding three minutes, to allow for a broad range of views.

Part 3: Enhancing resilience to emerging challenges in water, sanitation, hygiene and health

Objective: To inspire action and share experiences in building sustainable and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene systems and services.

This part will examine the role of water, sanitation and hygiene systems and services as foundational pillars of resilience and health security in the face of mounting global challenges. As the impacts of climate change intensify, health emergencies become more frequent, environmental degradation accelerates, demographic shifts put an increasing pressure and new threats such as cybersecurity threats emerge, the ability of communities, health systems, infrastructure and economies to withstand and recover from shocks is under increasing pressure. Investing in safe, resilient and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems, including the management and protection of water resources, is essential for protecting public health, ensuring continuity of essential services, preserving ecosystems, and reducing vulnerability across sectors.

The deliberations aim to foster the exchange of experiences and perspectives, strengthen partnerships and promote integrated approaches that embed water, sanitation and hygiene in wider policies for climate adaptation, emergency preparedness, protection of water resources and health system strengthening.

Run of show

The session will begin with a keynote address unpacking the multiple dimensions of resilience and their relevance to the water, sanitation and health agenda, including in the context of emerging challenges.

The keynote will be followed by a high-level panel discussion with representatives from countries, international organizations and non-governmental partners. Panellists will be invited to examine the diverse risks and challenges affecting the resilience of water and sanitation systems – ranging from natural disasters and health emergencies to climate change impacts– and explore solutions to safeguard the continuity and safety of these essential services.

Guiding questions

Proposed guiding questions for discussion:

- In your context, what are the main current and emerging risks, shocks and vulnerabilities, undermining the resilience of water, sanitation and hygiene systems?
- What role do resilient water, sanitation and hygiene systems play in strengthening national health systems and health security in the face of climate change, pandemics and other crises?
- What solutions—whether policies, investments or innovations—have proven effective in strengthening the resilience of water, sanitation and hygiene services amid these complex challenges?
- How can integrated planning across sectors (e.g. health, environment, infrastructure) support resilient, safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems capable of addressing emerging threats?
- What role should the Protocol play in accelerating country-level action on climate change and health through the water, sanitation and hygiene agenda?

Interactive discussion

The interactive discussion will provide an open platform for Parties, other States, international organizations and stakeholders to share perspectives, experiences and proposals from the floor. Delegations are invited to make brief interventions, not exceeding three minutes, to allow for a broad range of views.

Practical information

To help shape the final programme of the high-level segment, delegations are asked to inform the joint secretariat of any high-level participants as soon as possible. Priority will be given to high-level speakers, such as ministers, deputy ministers, state secretaries, permanent secretaries and heads of agencies.

Delegations planning to deliver a high-level statement from the floor during the interactive discussion are invited to inform the joint secretariat **by 22 October 2025**, indicating the panel after which they wish to intervene. Statements should address some of the guiding questions listed above. Statements should not exceed three minutes.

Delegations planning to deliver a high-level statement are invited to submit a picture, photo, painting, drawing or other image in advance to the joint secretariat that illustrates or complements their statement. Such image should be submitted by email (protocol.water_health@un.org) **by 29 October 2025**. The image will then be projected on the screen during the delivery of the high-level statement.