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# **UNECE : For equitable access to water for all!**

- International Office for Water - Cooperation - International actions - Integrated water resources management (IWRM) -

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Under the aegis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the European Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO EURO), the French Ministry of Health, the Water Academy and IOwater organized a Seminar on Equitable Access to Water, in Paris on 5-6 July, within the Protocol on Water and Health, which came into effect in August 2005, and the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Rivers and International Lakes. This protocol aims to protect human health and well-being by improving water resources management and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases in Europe.

The discussions allowed evaluating the actions carried out in the countries of the European Union, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

However, the objectives are not yet achieved everywhere and sometimes the delay becomes alarming: the risk should be avoided of seeing a gap widening, even in Europe, between urban and rural areas, between rich city centers and marginalized suburbs, between those which have demanding Directives to apply, the required organization, competences and financial resources and the others which must be helped through common cause.

There will be true access for everyone to drinking water supply and sanitation only when there will be performing community services for ensuring investment, the operation, maintenance and renewal of installations, modern and effective management within a suited institutional framework and qualified and trained men at all levels.

Financial mechanisms are needed to ensure, lastingly, the recovery of all operation and investment costs, which would not be covered by subsidies.

As opposed to what is believed, water is very expensive for the poorest: access to community service is possible with equalization mechanisms ensuring common cause between the richest and poorest populations, with progressive pricing or specific social assistance systems.