**Request of information for the development of a handbook for implementing human right to water and sanitation**

**German contribution**

Regarding the opportunities and challenges faced by Germany in realizing the human rights to water and sanitation, overall access is excellent.

However, as in many countries of the Pan-European region, including the more affluent ones, Germany recognizes two areas of disparities regarding drinking-water quality that – in part – are related to where people live, i.e.

1. rural versus urban settings and
2. homes in larger buildings versus those in houses for one or two families.

Small private and public supplies as well as domestic installations are the two key areas requiring improve­ment with respect to ensuring quality.

**1. Access to high quality also for all those served by small supplies (private and public):**

Drinking-water quality in Germany is generally very good from larger urban supplies serving > 5000 inhabitants. In some rural regions within Germany, quality from small supplies is also very good, but overall these supplies fail the standards set by the German Drinking-water Ordinance significantly more frequently. These differences are not chiefly due to differences in good practice, but rather to geological differences regarding e.g. depth of the aquifer and integrity of protective layers in the underground above it.

1. To develop guidance from best practice examples Germany has therefore – together with the Czech Republic and the non-governmental organisation Women in Europe for a Common Future e.V. (WECF) – taken the lead of an activity on small-scale water supplies and sanitation under the current Programme of Work of the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health. The objective of the Protocol, which covers the European region, is to promote the protection of human health and well-being, and it stipulates that “equitable access to water and sanitation, adequate in terms both of quantity and of quality, should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion”.

A key result is the publication "Small-scale water supplies in the pan-European region: Background. Challenges. Improvements"[[1]](#footnote-1), which developed under the Protocol and provides a range of background information on the status of small systems. Improving the situation of small-scale water supplies and decentralized sanitation can contribute to achieving equitable access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region, to livelihoods and to developing rural areas.

Furthermore, under this activity, a policy guidance document is currently being developed, illustrating how decision makers can improve the situation of these small systems. It will include case examples of how policy instruments (including for example legislation, programmes for financial support of small systems and education and qualification programmes) were applied in countries in the pan-European region. This will include information on success factors and challenges encountered during implementation, thus facilitating the exchange of information on policy instruments and programmes applicable in the region. It will address aspects of water, sanitation and hygiene safety planning in order to support access to safe services from small systems. An outline of this policy guidance document has been presented during the 3rd Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Oslo, 25 -27 November 2013).[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. One element of translating the Protocol targets and activities for small supplies to the national level is the publication of a guidance manual for operators of private wells[[3]](#footnote-3) by the German Federal Environment Agency. This includes a range of checklists, including for sanitary inspection and day-to-day operation and is being well accepted by health authorities and well owners. Unfortunately, this best practice document is available only in German.

Furthermore, currently, the Agency is supporting the federal states in updating a corresponding document providing guidance for health authorities responsible for public surveillance of small private supplies.

**2. Different quality issues in domestic installations of larger buildings versus installations in one- or two-family houses:**

It is well recognized that even in European countries in which drinking-water reaches buildings in excellent quality, installations may cause deterioration, both microbially (i.e. growth of opportunistic pathogens such as Legionella and Pseudomonas) and chemically (through leaching of substances from the installation materials, e.g. lead or copper, but also an increasingly wide range of organic constituents).

These problems tend to be different between types of homes: whereas high levels of Legionella (which can lead to Pneumonia) appear to be rare in 1-2 family homes, they are widespread in the large circulating warm water systems of big buildings with many rental apartments or condominiums. Stagnation enhances both microbial growth and leaching of substances from installations. Stagnation due to lack of water use relates to demographic change and is encountered particularly in poorer areas of small towns suffering depopulation. However, it is also increasingly encountered in affluent housing areas inhabited by frequently travelling mobile professionals, or in homes with little-used sanitary installations in additional “luxury facilities” such as guest bathrooms. Thus, water quality problems caused by installations relate to lifestyle and possibly to income, with both the poor and the rich encountering quality problems, though causes are partially different.

In theory, much good practice guidance for planning, building and managing domestic installations has existed as technical rules and standards for decades, and this has continuously been updated. However, in practice compliance proved unsatisfactory.

A significant step towards better practice regarding installations in Germany are the recent changes of the Drinking-water Ordinance[[4]](#footnote-4) regulating aspects of domestic installations:

1. in 2011monitoring for Legionella was introduced, including the obligation to assess the hazardous conditions in the installation of a technical trigger level (of 100 pfu in 100 ml is exceeded).
2. For improving chemical quality, in 2012 a system of assessing the suitability of materials for contact with drinking-water was introduced.

The implementation of these new regulations to assess and control the proliferation of Legionella and to ensure that materials used for drinking-water installations are fit for this purpose is expected to be a major step towards improving good practice, thus ensuring access to safe drinking-water at the consumer’s tap.

A further activity towards this target is improving collaboration between the different stakeholders involved in domestic installations, i.e. producers of plumbing components, architects and engineers planning installations, plumbers installing them, and inhabitants using them. In April 2013 the German Federal Environment Agency brought together these stakeholders for the first time for a major meeting which developed a plan for improving communication between these groups, harmonizing training courses and jointly developing information materials targeted at specific stakeholder groups.

Further, the Federal Environment Agency is currently launching information campaign targeting the replacement of lead pipes in order to achieve compliance with the low limit for lead of 10 µg/L entering in force on December 1st 2013.

Together with the new regulations in the Drinking-water ordinance activities thus launched are expected to trigger substantial improvements of the quality of drinking-water installations, thus ensuring that water remains safe within the buildings, i.e. access to water fit for human consumption.

1. <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/documents/Small_scale_supplies_e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/wat/MOP3-PWH/information_docs/INF.5_small_supplies_EN.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/publikation/long/4212.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [http://www.bgbl.de/Xaver/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger\_BGBl#\_\_Bundesanzeiger\_BGBl\_\_%2F%2F\*%5B%40attr\_id%3D'bgbl113s2977a.pdf'%5D\_\_1386065411834](http://www.bgbl.de/Xaver/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl#__Bundesanzeiger_BGBl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D'bgbl113s2977a.pdf'%5D__1386065411834) (this version at the moment only available in German) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)