Background

Safe water and sanitation are essential for human health and well-being. Effective regulation of drinking-water and sanitation services plays an important role in ensuring the delivery of safe, inclusive and sustainable services that are protective of public health.

However, regulatory frameworks for drinking-water and sanitation services are at varying stages of maturity globally, and significant challenges exist. Often, regulations may have been developed from an operational or economic perspective, and may neglect the public health perspective. Where health-based regulations do exist, in some cases, WHO’s normative guidance has not been adapted for the national context. For sanitation services in particular, the role of the public health sector in service regulation has until recently, not been articulated.

WHO’s approach to addressing these gaps is to accelerate the translation of its normative guidance into appropriate, health-based national drinking-water and sanitation standards and regulations among regulators, and to support countries in implementing these regulations by providing technical assistance and facilitating peer support and sharing of good practice. The WHO International Network of Drinking-water and Sanitation Regulators (RegNet) is a international forum to promote and share good practice in regulation of networked and non-networked drinking-water and sanitation services, for the protection of public health.

The terms of reference herein outline the goal of RegNet, its structure and operational arrangements.

Goal and objectives

The goal of RegNet is to protect public health as it relates to drinking-water and sanitation services, through the promotion of regulatory excellence and the continual improvement of regulatory systems, using good practice from countries and global guidelines as a point of departure. RegNet aims to influence regulatory practices by facilitating knowledge sharing and networking, and as resources allow, targeted technical support. The specific objectives are to:

1 Safe sanitation services are those that provide for safe toilets, on and off-site containment, conveyance, treatment and disposal or use
• support the development of internationally recognized guidance on regulations to protect public health as it relates to drinking-water and sanitation;
• expand regulatory oversight to neglected aspects of service delivery that have highest consequences for public health;
• provide peer support and capacity building to regulators wishing to establish, update or amend their regulatory frameworks;
• facilitate sharing of experience, good practice and innovation in drinking-water and sanitation regulation and the protection of public health; and
• Facilitate establishment of reliable data management systems to support better decision making and stronger accountability and local and national level.

More broadly, RegNet also aims to catalyse the progressive implementation of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, and attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 6.1 and 6.2, which seek to achieve safe and affordable drinking-water for all, and universal access to adequate and equitable sanitation.

Scope

The scope of RegNet’s activities encompasses the protection of public health as it relates to drinking-water and sanitation services. This includes proactive risk assessment and risk management of drinking-water and sanitation safety risks i.e. Water Safety Planning (WSP) and Sanitation Safety Planning (SSP). For drinking-water services, the scope also includes quality, quantity, accessibility, and reliability of drinking-water supply, as well as the identification of and response to potential water-borne illness events. The scope does not include bottled water, as international standards for bottled drinking-water are addressed through the Codex Alimentarius.

With respect to sanitation, the scope covers public health and inter-related service quality aspects of all steps of the sanitation service chain, from safe toilets in all settings and containment through conveyance, treatment (on or off-site) and final disposal or end use, many of which have no or limited regulatory oversight in many countries. Health and service quality aspects pertain to risks for users, workers and communities from exposure caused by unsafe management of faecal waste at all steps of the sanitation service chain.

The scope of RegNet activities also encompasses the implementation of regulations, including how to optimize the structure and function of governments and institutions to enhance effectiveness of regulatory systems. While the core focus of RegNet is the public health aspects of water and sanitation
service regulation, effective and efficient use of resources and inter-sectoral coordination are important aspects in the regulation of these services. As such, the network will pro-actively engage and collaborate with other actors working to address affordability and sustainability aspects of drinking-water and sanitation services, and support economic and/or environmental regulation, as relevant.

**Network structure and functions**

The activities of RegNet include interactions between the Secretariat at WHO, the network members, and key partners and stakeholders.

**Members**

RegNet membership is open to drinking-water and sanitation regulators. For the purpose of RegNet, a regulator is defined as a professional tasked with ensuring the safety of drinking-water production and/or sanitation service provision and quality through setting and/or enforcing appropriate standards and regulations; and independent water quality surveillance at national and sub-national levels.

Members participate as representatives of their institutions, and to ensure a balance in membership composition, a maximum of two to three individuals from each country should be selected as RegNet members. Where regulatory oversight of e.g. networked and non-networked services is by different institutions, members can include a representative from each of these institutions. In addition, where there may be sub-national regulatory institutions in a country, e.g. provincial-/state-level, members may be selected from each sub-national institution.

The roles and responsibilities of RegNet members include the following:

- Provide informed peer guidance and support on specific regulatory matters, as required;
- Provide input to WHO norms/good practice documents in development, and other programmatic activities related to regulation raised by the WHO Secretariat;
- Share information with the Secretariat and other members on drinking-water and sanitation issues that may be of international relevance and beneficial to members, including: risk assessments of emerging contaminants, identified good practices, etc.
- Stimulate and promote activities to fulfil the objectives of RegNet as well as synergies with others, within RegNet and/or amongst their constituencies;
- Advocate for, and support the expansion of the network in other countries; and
- Guide quality improvement through provision of structured feedback and contributing to the development of strategic plans for the network.

**Joining RegNet**
• Interested parties can contact WHO to request membership, who will confirm their roles and request. Notification of new membership will be selected within the network by WHO.

• WHO may also undertake targeted identification of potential members, to ensure a diverse and engaged Network.

• New members will complete a brief survey form outlining the drinking-water and/or sanitation sectors in their country and regulatory framework.

• Other individuals or organizations with specific expertise and experience in drinking-water and/or sanitation oversight and other relevant areas may be invited to join the Network and its meetings as observers or advisors, on an as-needed and case-by-case basis, based on their activities and ability to contribute on a technical/project basis.

• Members leaving their position with the organization they are representing should inform the WHO secretariat in a timely manner, and identify and brief a replacement to assume their role.

Secretariat

WHO hosts RegNet and coordinates network activities. WHO may lead one or more activities (like any other member) or it may be a partner or facilitator for activities initiated by members. The Secretariat at WHO is responsible for the following:

• Operational management of the network, including
  o leading the development of the network strategy and workplan
  o leading resource mobilization efforts
  o maintaining the membership database and communications platform
  o coordinating planning and organization of meetings, webinars and other discussion for a
  o coordinating collaborations / exchanges with partners

• Coordinating the technical activities of the network, including:
  o providing / facilitating technical advice and assistance on specific drinking-water and sanitation related matters. This could be done remotely through email exchanges or webinars, or through organizing national or capacity building workshops, or peer review exchanges;
  o facilitating rapid information exchange in the case of drinking-water- and sanitation-related emergencies or public health incidents;
  o sharing information and / or seeking input on WHO norms in development, and other programmatic activities related to regulation
Key partners

Through RegNet, WHO will work collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders to promote and strengthen regulation of drinking-water and sanitation services. These partners and stakeholders include:

Regional regulators’ networks

Regional regulators’ networks such as the Asociación de Entes Reguladores de Agua Potable y Saneamiento de las Américas (ADERASA) in Latin America; the European Network of Drinking-Water Regulators (ENDWARE); and the East and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation (ESAWAS) Regulators Association are represented in RegNet. Collaboration with these regional networks seeks to accelerate sharing among countries in their regions and ensure that experience and learning from RegNet reach a wide audience.

International agencies and non-governmental organizations

Apart from WHO, other agencies and organizations working to strengthen regulation of water and sanitation services include: the International Water Association (IWA) through the IWA Regulators’ Forum which brings together economic, environmental and quality of service regulators; the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) who are working to strengthen governance and accountability in the water and sanitation sector; and the World Bank, which supports policy and institutional reform in countries, including in economic regulation. Engagement with these organizations, aims to foster complementarity of efforts, particularly in the areas of economic and environmental regulation.

Operation

In order to give regulators a space to discuss and share important issues and to decide the best way forward in particular situations in the interests of public health, there is significant attention to confidentiality. While information, questions and concerns may be shared with WHO staff members and select members of other WHO Networks and expert advisory committees of the Guidelines on Drinking-Water Quality and Sanitation and Health Guidelines for consideration or incorporation into future guidance and supporting materials, detailed, country-specific information will not be released publicly without the express consent of the member concerned.

Meetings

The Network shall endeavour to meet face-to-face at least once a year. Additional meetings may be convened, through video and / or teleconferencing as needed.
Where possible, meetings will be held in conjunction with other international events to minimize travel and other costs. Meetings may also be planned on a regional focus, staggered with global meetings, and optional trainings or side events on relevant focus topics may be organized immediately prior to after the meeting for RegNet members.

Reports of each meeting will be shared by WHO with the network for review and comment, prior to publishing. Sensitive information will not be published without the consent of members concerned.

Participants shall cover the costs of travel and accommodation for meetings. Subject to availability of funds, WHO may cover the cost of travel and provide per diem.

Members may offer to host annual meetings of the Network, and shall be responsible for organizing the meeting in liaison with the Secretariat.

**Workplan**

- RegNet members shall propose a workplan of activities, under the defined Network objectives, for the coming year(s), at annual meetings of the network;
- Any RegNet member may propose a theme or project for inclusion in the workplan;
- Workplan activities are agreed upon, based on a majority consensus by network members, and recommended to WHO for final decision;
- Should an issue arise that needs a rapid response from RegNet to protect public health, it may be added to the workplan;
- Working groups may be formed to coordinate work on specific issues, with a lead and with members selected from among the RegNet members;
- Experts may be invited to join the Network or a working group, as needed, and based on their activities and ability to contribute on a technical basis. Where appropriate, RegNet will collaborate with other networks / players in the sector; and
- Unless specific resources are identified, activities will be undertaken by RegNet members on a voluntary basis. Proposed activities, therefore, should be balanced with available time and capacity of members.

**Communications**

WHO will host and maintain a virtual forum for the Network, providing a secure electronic workspace for members to share information and discuss issues. The virtual forum enables Members to post announcements, create libraries of information, and initiate or participate in discussions. The virtual forum will also act as a repository for documentation and meeting materials.
The virtual forum will be accessible to RegNet members and requires registration and a password, to ensure a secure workspace. In order to ensure Network members have a confidential space to share and discuss issues, network members are asked to identify any confidential issues or materials, and to use discretion when sharing outside of the network.

**Network monitoring and evaluation**

Suggestions, proposals and feedback will be solicited from Network members periodically by WHO on the priorities, operations and organization of RegNet. Periodic reports of activities, outcomes and outputs will be prepared by the Secretariat, with input from network members.

**Resources**

In order to be sustainable, RegNet requires support in order to meet its objectives. The types of support that can be provided include but are not limited to:

- Financing costs related to RegNet meetings, or direct contributions to WHO for running of RegNet;
- Hosting and/or co-hosting meetings of the Network;
- Contributions to support specific activities; and/or
- Expert advice, guidance and contributions