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## **Progress report on implementation of the European Environment and Health Process**

This report provides an overview of implementation of the European Environment and Health Process, in line with resolution EUR/RC67/R4.

It is submitted to the 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in 2018.

## Background

1. This report provides information on progress in the implementation of the European Environment and Health Process (EHP) since the 67th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC67) in September 2017.
2. Through resolution EUR/RC67/R4, adopted by RC67, Member States endorsed the Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health held in Ostrava, Czech Republic, on 13–15 June 2017 (Ostrava Declaration). They also made the commitment to participate actively in the EHP and to use it as an intersectoral, international and inclusive process and platform for the implementation of the environment- and health-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The EHP therefore represents an integral part of the roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda, building on Health 2020, the European policy framework for health and well-being.
3. The main element of the Ostrava Declaration is the commitment by Member States to attain visible, measurable and equitable progress on environment and health in the WHO European Region by enhancing implementation of action in this area, both domestically and internationally. To this effect, Member States undertook to develop national portfolios of action on environment and health by the end of 2018. The portfolios should respect national circumstances, needs, priorities and capacities in the choice of selected objectives and activities, and ensure that Member States have well-coordinated, comprehensive and coherent strategies and policies in place to address the persistent burden of diseases attributable to environmental determinants (Annex 1 of the Ostrava Declaration).
4. In order to monitor and report on progress in implementation of the actions agreed at the Sixth Ministerial Conference, Member States adopted a monitoring system which, to the greatest extent possible, will be based on the indicators Member States use to report on the implementation of those Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets to which the commitments made in Ostrava intend to contribute. This approach will minimize the reporting burden on Member States, thereby enabling efficient use of resources and anchoring the commitments made at the Sixth Ministerial Conference directly to the SDG implementation mechanism.
5. Member States also adopted new, streamlined, inclusive and resource-effective arrangements for the EHP, which will provide strong guidance and bring about increased engagement of high-level policy-makers in the health and environment sectors. They will also give legitimacy to Member States' work under the EHP, the main elements of which are:
  - (a) strengthened intersectoral coordination at the national level;
  - (b) a strong, clear linkage to the governing bodies of WHO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE);
  - (c) a single coordinating body – the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF); and
  - (d) the establishment of two long-term working groups: the Working Group on Health in Climate Change, and the Working Group for Collaboration Among Subnational and Local Authorities, Member States, Relevant Intergovernmental Organizations and Agencies and Nongovernmental Organizations.

## **Implementation of the commitments of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (2017) and resolution EUR/RC67/R4**

6. The implementation of the Ostrava Declaration started immediately after its endorsement in 2017. In February 2018 WHO piloted a survey related to the development of the portfolios for action. Ten Member States volunteered to test the survey and provide feedback. They offered valuable comments on the feasibility of the process and an informative initial picture of the work undertaken at the national level on development of national portfolios for action, the priorities selected, the challenges encountered, and the technical support to be requested. The pilot survey demonstrated that the Member States are following up on their commitments and are developing national coordinating mechanisms and portfolios for action on environment and health. Based on the feedback received during the pilot phase, the survey will be finalized and conducted at full scale in the first half of 2019 to inform the first substantial report on follow-up to the Ostrava Conference to be submitted to RC69 in 2019.

7. The eighth meeting of the EHTF took place on 20–21 March 2018 in Bonn, Germany. The meeting was attended by 37 Member States and 13 stakeholder organizations. Its primary purpose was to initiate and support the work of Member States on the development of national portfolios for action on environment and health. Member States received guidance on the technical resources and support available to them across the seven priority areas and related actions in the Ostrava Declaration. They also discussed some inspiring examples of country approaches already applied.

8. The EHTF adopted a workplan for the EHP for 2018–2019, requesting the EHTF Bureau to support the development of a communication strategy. The work will focus on supporting the development and implementation of national and subnational policies and programmes through translation of evidence into action and expanded communication and advocacy, providing opportunities and platforms for collaboration and supporting good governance within countries.

9. To support the work of Member States in the development of national portfolios for action, the EHP Secretariat, working in partnership with the Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation at the Regional Office, has developed an online repository of documents containing evidence, guidance, policies and indicators relevant to the thematic areas identified in the Ostrava Declaration. The documents have been fully integrated into the Regional Office's European Health Information Gateway and are available in English and Russian.

## **Implementation of the institutional arrangements for the EHP**

### ***Twenty-third session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, Geneva, Switzerland, 14–17 November 2017***

10. The outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health were presented to the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-third session, held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 14–17 November 2017.

11. The Committee welcomed the information provided and recognized the close interlinkages between environment and health. It concluded that the wider engagement of environment ministries in the EHP will be essential for tackling environment and health challenges in the Region in a more effective and integrated manner. The Committee requested the UNECE Secretariat to send letters to those environment ministers who had expressed an interest in serving on the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board in 2017–2018, to inform them about the new institutional arrangements under the EHP that no longer include the Board. The Committee took note of the invitation to nominate national environment focal points for the EHTF and encouraged its members to liaise with their health counterparts engaged in the EHP to avoid potential contradictions between future decisions taken within the EHP and those taken by the Committee.

12. The Committee also welcomed the document prepared by the UNECE Secretariat in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee on possible arrangements for a joint secretariat for the EHP (document ECE/CEP/2017/18) and decided to maintain the status quo, with UNECE remaining a strong partner of the EHP without the creation of a joint secretariat at present. It was agreed that the issue would be considered again should extrabudgetary resources be made available by interested countries to enable additional engagement by UNECE in the EHP.

### ***Aligning the EHTF with the new institutional arrangements***

13. At its eighth meeting, held on 20–21 March 2018 in Bonn, Germany, the EHTF constituted itself in line with the new institutional arrangements adopted at the Ostrava Conference and endorsed by RC67.

14. The EHTF reviewed the list of nominations for its Bureau and elected the following members for the next three years: Armenia (Ministry of Healthcare), Israel (Ministry of Health), the Netherlands (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management), Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Healthcare), Serbia (Ministry of Environmental Protection), Ukraine (Ministry of Health) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Department of Health and Social Care). Austria (Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism) will be an ex-officio member for one year as the outgoing EHTF Chair. The Health and Environment Alliance and the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition will represent the stakeholders in 2018–2021. The EHTF elected Ms Nune Bakunts (Armenia) as its new Chair for one year and Ms Biljana Filipovic (Serbia) and Ms Brigit Staatsen (Netherlands) as co-Chairs, and accepted Health Care Without Harm as a new official stakeholder in the EHP.

### **Conclusions and future plans**

15. WHO has biennial collaborative agreements with 26 Member States in 2018–2019; bilateral collaboration on environment and health in the context of these agreements will focus on supporting priority actions to advance the implementation of the Ostrava Declaration.

16. The EHTF Working Group on Health in Climate Change will continue its work and the Working Group on Environment and Health in Cities will be activated in 2018.

17. The Working Group on Health in Climate Change met on 12–13 June 2018 at the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health in Bonn, Germany. Twenty-five Member States of the WHO European Region sent nominated representatives. The meeting was an opportunity to further support the work of Member States in the development of their national portfolios of action on environment and health, to provide an update on policy developments, to facilitate the exchange of experience, and to identify priority themes and actions to advance implementation of the Ostrava commitments on climate change and health.

18. The meeting also served as a venue for informing Member States of the outcomes of the joint WHO–European Commission project on addressing the impacts of climate change and health, to launch the joint WHO–United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change initiative on developing climate and health country profiles, and to drive forward the ongoing update of WHO guidance on heat–health action planning.

19. Representatives at the meeting welcomed a new co-chair, Dr Luc Tsachoua from the Belgian Federal Public Service for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment. Dr Tsachoua joined incumbent Dr Jutta Litvinovitch from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. The representatives thanked outgoing co-chair Professor Patrick Rampal from the Scientific Centre of Monaco for his years of dedication representing the group in international forums.

20. The Working Group on Environment and Health in Cities plans to hold its first meeting in the context of the International Heathy Cities Conference, which will take place in Belfast, United Kingdom, on 1–4 October 2018.

21. A survey of all WHO European Member States will be conducted to assess the implementation of the commitment to develop national portfolios for action; a report will be prepared for RC69 in 2019.

22. Through its work at the country and regional levels, the Regional Office will continue to support the follow-up to the Ostrava Declaration in the coming years. In collaboration with partners, the Regional Office will also work towards implementation of United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions relating to health and environment and will continue to support the work of relevant multilateral environmental agreements and programmes.

23. The Regional Office is also actively participating in the development of the new global WHO strategy on climate, environment and health, which is expected to be discussed and adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2019, and will seek to align the EHP with global developments.

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