

Future of the European environment and health process



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Future of the European Environment and Health Process

The WHO Regional Office for Europe held the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Parma, Italy, in March 2010.

The Conference aimed at: a) reviewing the impact of national and international environmental policies on the health status of the population of the WHO European Region over the last 20 years; b) setting Europe's agenda on emerging environmental health challenges for the years to come; and c) renewing and strengthening political commitment through the adoption of a ministerial declaration and the setting a new roadmap for the future of the European environment and health process.

The Parma Declaration was adopted by 53 countries during the Conference and supported by declarations of the European Commission and youth representatives. The Parma Declaration sets measurable targets to be achieved on selected priority issues and focuses on protecting children's health; protecting health and the environment from climate change; involving children, young people and other stakeholders; and developing knowledge and tools for policy-making and implementation.

The Parma Declaration also endorses a new institutional framework to support the implementation of the commitments made by Member States at successive ministerial conferences, as described in the paper *The European Environment and Health Process (2010–2016): institutional framework*.

The Regional Committee's discussion of this item is expected to focus on endorsing the outcomes of the Parma Conference and the proposed new institutional framework.

A draft resolution is attached, for consideration by the Regional Committee.

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Background: the European environment and health process

1. The European environment and health process (EEHP) provides the policy platform through which the WHO Regional Office for Europe develops and aligns its work on addressing the challenges posed by environmental risks to health to the needs and priorities of WHO's European Member States, as expressed by both ministries of health and ministries of environment, and in partnership with relevant intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, young people, the private sector and other stakeholders and partners. Since its inception, the EEHP has been an exemplary form of cross-sectoral international work promoting the inclusion of health in all policies.
2. The EEHP started with the First Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1989 and has provided the framework for advancing the agenda of environment and health in Europe and for ensuring the relevance of WHO's work to the needs of its Member States and of the European Region as a whole over the last 20 years.
3. Subsequent milestones in the EEHP were the ministerial conferences on environment and health that took place in Helsinki (1994), London (1999), Budapest (2004) and Parma (10–12 March 2010). By adopting the respective Conference declarations, Member States have made commitments to address the identified priorities in environment and health in the WHO European Region. Over time, these commitments have included both "soft" political ones as well as internationally binding agreements such as the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.
4. As from the Second Ministerial Conference, the EEHP has been steered by the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC). The EEHC has been a unique coalition that has brought together representatives of health and environment ministries, bodies in the United Nations system and other intergovernmental and civil society organizations, including young people, as well as the European Commission.
5. The EEHC has overseen coordination and follow-up of the outcomes of the EEHP, notably by promoting and monitoring implementation of the commitments made at the Third and Fourth Ministerial Conferences. It has regularly reported on the progress made in development of the EEHP to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The EEHC secretariat has been provided by the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The EEHC also steered the preparations of the Fifth Ministerial Conference.
6. Within the framework of those preparations, the EEHC promoted discussion on how to further strengthen the effectiveness, relevance and impact of the EEHP, taking account of the increasingly complex international policy and implementation context within which the environment and health agenda needs to be fostered amid competing policy priorities, global changes and international financial crises. These discussions were further advanced on the occasion of the Fifth Ministerial Conference, where Member States debated and agreed on a strengthened institutional framework within which the EEHP will continue during the period 2010–2016.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Parma, Italy, 10–12 March 2010)

7. Following the adoption of Regional Committee resolution EUR/RC54/R3 endorsing the results of the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, June 2004) and the outcomes of the Intergovernmental Mid-term Review, hosted by the Austrian Government in Vienna in June 2007, the EEHC prepared the agenda for the Fifth Ministerial Conference in a series of meetings held in 2008 and 2009. Three high-level preparatory meetings were held in Milan, Madrid and Bonn, gathering representatives of all WHO's 53 Member States in the European Region. The specific needs of the newly independent states (NIS) and countries of south-eastern Europe (SEE) were addressed through additional preparatory workshops. Numerous technical meetings facilitated the development of the Conference documents. The annual reports of the EEHC presented to the Regional Committee at its fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth sessions summarize the results of these preparatory activities.¹

8. The Fifth Ministerial Conference, the latest milestone in an intergovernmental process that started in 1989, took place in Parma, Italy, on 10–12 March 2010. The Conference was organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and hosted by the Italian Government. The WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, with its offices in Bonn and Rome, played an important role in the technical and organizational aspects of the Conference preparations.

9. The Conference aimed at:

- reviewing the impact of national and international environmental policies on the health status of the population of the WHO European Region over the last 20 years;
- setting Europe's agenda on emerging environmental health challenges for the years to come, focusing in particular on cross-cutting issues such as inequalities in environmental health risks, the effects of climate change on health, the need to invest in stronger partnerships and international cooperation;
- renewing and strengthening political commitment through the adoption of a ministerial declaration and the setting a new roadmap for the future of the European Environment and Health Process.

10. The event brought together over 800 participants from 52 countries across the European Region, including over 30 ministers and deputy ministers of health and of the environment and many other high-level representatives of Member States, the European Commission and European Union institutions, intergovernmental organizations (including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Regional Environmental Centre, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)), as well as nongovernmental stakeholders, scientists and youth delegates. In addition, the conference was attended by approximately 100 journalists.

11. The programme of the Conference consisted of plenary sessions addressing the main themes of the Conference through keynote speeches, panel discussions and interventions from the floor. The programme was enriched by two awards, on the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) (a competition coordinated by nongovernmental organizations and highlighting good practice and political commitment across Europe) and on

¹ The annual reports of the EEHC for 2008 and for 2009 are available respectively at http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/70220/RC58_einfdoc03.pdf and http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/67030/RC59_einfdoc01.pdf.

best examples in journalism related to environment and health. In addition, a programme of pre-conference and side events provided an opportunity for the exchange of experiences and networking on the themes addressed by the Conference. These events included celebration of the tenth anniversary of the UNECE/WHO Protocol on Water and Health, a youth event, a media workshop, 24 symposia, 8 “standing coffee” discussions, and numerous poster sessions. An exhibition space allowed for examples of initiatives, publications and activities from all over Europe to be displayed and featured.

12. The following technical working papers, policy briefs and background papers supported the Conference discussions:

- *Conference Declaration on Environment and Health* (EUR/55934/5)
- *Protecting health in an environment challenged by climate change: European Regional Framework for Action* (EUR/55934/6 Rev.1)
- *Social and gender inequalities in environment and health* (EUR/55934/PB/1)
- *Specific needs of the newly independent states and the countries of south-eastern Europe* (EUR/55934/PB/2)
- *Climate change and health in Europe: opportunities for action in partnership* (EUR/55934/PB/3)
- *The future of the European Environment and Health Process* (EUR/55934/PB/4 Rev.1)
- *Health and environment in Europe. Progress assessment* (EUR/55934/BD/1)
- *The journey to Parma: a tale of 20 years of environment and health action in Europe* (EUR/55934/BD/2)
- *Progress and challenges on water and health: the role of the Protocol on Water and Health* (EUR/55934/BD/3)

13. The entire Conference is documented on the WHO Regional Office for Europe’s website at <http://www.euro.who.int/parma2010>; material accessible there includes the Conference programme, policy briefs, working and background documents, declarations, reports, recordings of the plenary sessions and press events, and other information.

The Parma Declaration on Environment and Health

14. The main document adopted by the Fifth Ministerial Conference is the Parma Declaration on Environment and Health, which has been co-signed by the Italian ministers of health and of environment, as well as by the WHO Regional Director for Europe on behalf of the ministers and representatives of Member States of WHO in the European Region. The Parma Declaration was developed through a series of meetings of the Declaration Drafting Group, chaired by Ms Leen Meulenbergs (Belgium), and discussed at three Declaration Meetings in the period 2008–2010. It identifies key environment and health challenges in the WHO European Region and commits Member States to addressing them by setting up or strengthening existing national mechanisms or structures that can ensure effective implementation, promote local actions and ensure active participation in the EEHP.

15. The “Commitment to act”, which is an integral part of the Declaration, specifies five measurable targets to be achieved on selected priority issues and addresses the following priority areas for action:

- **Protecting children’s health.** It reconfirms the commitment to prioritized actions under the regional priority goals (RPGs) in the CEHAPE. The approaches and provisions of

existing international agreements and conventions are to be used by Member States as appropriate. Several specific actions have been identified, focusing efforts on areas that will yield the most significant health gains.

- **Protecting health and the environment from climate change.** In particular, ministers of health and the environment welcome the regional framework for action entitled *Protecting health in an environment challenged by climate change* (document EUR/55934/6 Rev.1), developed by the European Climate Change and Health Task Force, and recommend that the approaches described in it are used to support action in this area.
- **Involvement of children, young people and other stakeholders**, which is seen as an essential condition for the successful action. Among key stakeholders the document identifies local and subnational authorities, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, the business community, trade unions, professional associations and the scientific community.
- **Development of knowledge and tools for policy-making and implementation**, including the European Environment and Health Information System (ENHIS), tools and guidelines to address the economic impacts of environmental risk factors to health, and human biomonitoring. The importance of interdisciplinary research in line with the policy objectives of the Declaration is acknowledged.

16. In addition, the Parma Declaration endorses the **institutional framework** described in *The European Environment and Health Process (2010–2016): Institutional framework* (document EUR/55934/7) and concludes with a commitment to hold the Sixth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2016.

17. The Parma Declaration is supported by declarations from the European Commission and youth representatives.

The future of the European environment and health process

18. The working paper entitled *The European Environment and Health Process (2010–2016): Institutional framework* (document EUR/55934/7) was prepared based on the policy brief *The future of the European Environment and Health Process* (document EUR/55934/PB/4), discussion at the EEHC meeting immediately before the opening of the Conference, as well as the ad hoc side sessions organized in Parma on 10 and 11 March 2010. It was further discussed and finalized, together with the Parma Declaration on Environment and Health, at a side session on 11 March 2010.

19. The adopted institutional framework will consist of:

- national mechanisms and structures most appropriate to countries' specific circumstances, to be set up or strengthened by Member States to ensure implementation of the commitments made at the Fifth Ministerial Conference;
- the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF), which will be the leading international body for implementation and monitoring of the EEHP. It will include leading officials from the national implementation mechanisms and structures of the 53 Member States in the WHO European Region, nominated at national level as focal points for the EEHP. It will also include representatives of bodies in the United Nations system and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations;
- the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB), which will be the political face and driving force of international policies in the field of environment and

health for implementation of the commitments made within the EEHP. The EHMB will consist of eight ministers or their high-level representatives appointed by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe for the health sector and by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy for the environment sector, in a way that ensures geographical representation of all parts of the WHO European Region and equal representation of the health and environment sectors. Ministers will serve a two-year term of office. Other members of the Ministerial Board will include the WHO Regional Director for Europe, the Executive Secretary of UNECE, the Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe and the European Commission. The chairperson and co-chairperson of the EHTF will be members of the EHMB, to ensure close links between the two bodies;

- the whole institutional framework will be serviced by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, as the secretariat of the EEHP, in close cooperation with UNECE and the UNEP Regional Office for Europe.

20. The terms of reference and methods of work of both the EHMB and EHTF, including the modality and frequency of their meetings, are specified in document EUR/55934/7.

21. The WHO Regional Committee for Europe, at its sixtieth session in Moscow in September 2010, is requested to endorse the outcomes of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, including the proposed institutional framework for the EEHP, and to appoint four ministers of health as members of the EHMB for a period of two years. The UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, at its meeting in October 2010, will be asked to do the same, including the appointment of four ministers of the environment as members of the EHMB.

Follow-up actions

22. Implementation of the commitments made at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Parma and achievement of the targets set by the Conference will require coordinated action by the Member States, in particular by setting up or strengthening existing national mechanisms or structures and institutional frameworks, assigning the necessary financial and human resources and improving monitoring and evaluation.

23. Creation of the international institutional framework proposed by the Parma Conference, and in particular of the EHMB as the political driving force and the EHTF as the technical body, is the essential component of the follow-up process. The active participation of Member States in these structures will greatly facilitate implementation of the Parma Conference commitments.

24. The actions to be taken by Member States will require support from the international organizations, and in particular from the WHO Regional Office for Europe, which will strengthen its collaboration with the European Commission, UNECE, UNEP and all other partners. Specifically, the WHO Regional Office for Europe will need to:

- continue to support implementation of the decisions taken at previous ministerial conferences on environment and health, and in particular the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, and the Charter on Transport, Environment and Health as developed in the joint WHO-UNECE Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme;
- continue to provide leadership to the EEHP by further promoting the Regional Office's and country offices' activities in relation to environment and health, paying special

attention to vulnerable population groups and particularly addressing the social and gender inequalities in environment and health;

- pay special attention to fostering strategic partnerships and networks, so that environment and health issues are better integrated across the policies of all sectors;
- continue to provide the secretariat of the EEHP as set out in the Parma Declaration and *The European Environment and Health Process (2010–2016): Institutional framework* and, for that purpose, to ensure the necessary human, financial and organizational resources and capacity;
- mobilize international resources to support country implementation of the decisions taken at the Parma Conference.