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**Annual report of the European Environment and Health  
Committee**

The annual report of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) for 2008–2009 is hereby submitted to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its fifty-ninth session.

Actions within the area of the environment and health are implemented within the overarching framework of the WHO European Country Strategy and its current phase of Strengthening health systems in the European Region, and in accordance with the priorities set out in the biennial collaborative agreements with 33 Member States.

The EEHC report is presented in written form only. Any issues to be taken up on this subject should be raised during the general debate on the first morning of the session.



## Introduction

1. Regional Committee resolution EUR/RC54/R3 and the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, June 2004) called upon the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) to report annually to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy. The elections for new Member States to join the EEHC took place at the fifty-seventh session of the Regional Committee in 2007, and Cyprus, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Norway and the Republic of Moldova were elected to represent the health sector. The other five seats representing the environment sector were elected by the Committee for Environmental Policy and are filled by Austria, Finland, Italy, Netherlands and Uzbekistan. Dr Jon Hilmar Iversen from the Norwegian Health Ministry and Dr Corrado Clini from the Italian Environment Ministry were elected as co-chairpersons of the EEHC.

## Background

2. The EEHC has met four times since the fifty-eighth session of the Regional Committee, in October 2008 in Madrid, in December 2008 in Paris, in January 2009 in Luxembourg and in April 2009 in Bonn.

- The Madrid meeting was held after the International Public Health Symposium on environment and health research and during the Second High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. These events ran from 20 to 24 October and were attended by over 500 public health officials and policy-makers.
- The Paris meeting was held immediately before the second meeting of the drafting group of the Ministerial Conference Declaration and the paper outlining the future of the Environment and Health Process in Europe.
- The Luxembourg meeting was held immediately before the Thematic meeting on healthy environments and the third meeting of the drafting group of the Ministerial Conference Declaration and the paper outlining the future of the Environmental and Health Process in Europe.
- The Bonn meeting was held before and during the Third High-Level Preparatory meeting for the Ministerial Conference.

All these meetings took place thanks to the generosity and support of the host countries. The EEHC and the WHO Secretariat acknowledge and thank the governments of Spain, France, Luxembourg and Germany, and the European Commission (Directorate-General Health and Consumers, Public health and risk assessment, Health determinants (DG Sanco, unit C4)) for their contributions.

3. The EEHC meetings, which were open to all participants in the Ministerial Conference preparatory events, ensured transparency and open discussion. The EEHC also held executive sessions to allow for more intense discussions to be held between the members of the EEHC only, with a view to providing clearer recommendations and guidance to the European Environment and Health Process, the WHO and EEHC Secretariats.

## Progress made since the previous EEHC report

4. The main outcomes of the EEHC meetings and the high-level preparatory meetings for the Ministerial Conference are listed below.

- Decision on the venue and dates of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, which will take place in Parma, Italy from 10 to 12 March 2010.
- Agreement that the theme of the Ministerial Conference should continue to focus on children's health and environment issues.
- Development and endorsement of a provisional agenda for the Conference.
- Discussions with the Member States on the detailed provisional programme of the Ministerial Conference. Technical and political sessions were clearly set out, allowing the WHO Secretariat to work on the documents (information papers, policy briefs, and technical background documentation) that will be required to support the Conference.
- Negotiation of an almost finalized draft declaration, a short concise text that addresses new challenges while referring back to the Budapest Declaration and the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), both of which were endorsed at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in Budapest.
- Discussions on the future of the European Environment and Health Process after the Fifth Ministerial Conference in 2010.

5. The Italian Government, through EEHC co-Chairperson, Dr Corrado Clini, also invited the EEHC secretariat to visit the Ministerial Conference venue. The visit took place in early March 2009 and eventually led to finalization of discussions on the Memorandum of Understanding, as well as to better preparation of the satellite and side events around the plenary discussions of the Conference. The EEHC has also been invited to hold its next EEHC meeting at the venue in Parma, thereby allowing all members of the Committee personally to visit the Conference site. This next EEHC meeting is planned for mid-October, after the fifty-ninth session of the Regional Committee.

## Topic-oriented meetings

6. On the recommendation of the EEHC members, the work of the EEHC secretariat over the past year included further prioritization of certain issues, which are also reflected as cross-cutting themes to be addressed by the Ministerial Conference. They include those shown below.

- Gender inequities.
- Environmental health inequities in relation to socioeconomic determinants of health, especially taking into consideration the impacts of the economic crisis on the environment and health sector.
- Impacts of climate change on health and environment.
- The specific needs of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union (NIS) and the south-eastern European (SEE) countries. These needs were attended to through specific preparatory events that allowed further discussion of the environment and health areas requiring particular attention in these groups of countries, and facilitated the identification of their commitments and goals within the larger framework of the Parma Conference Declaration. The preparatory meetings were made possible by financial contributions from Finland and the EEHC Member States.
  - The first preparatory event for the NIS took place in Kyrgyzstan in November 2008. The second will take place in Tajikistan in autumn 2009.

- The first preparatory event for the SEE countries took place in Montenegro in October 2008 and the second is planned for in Serbia in early September 2009.

7. The drafting group of the Conference Declaration and the paper on the future of the Environment and Health Process in Europe was established by the EEHC at the First High-Level Preparatory Meeting held in Milan in March 2008. Its first meeting took place in Brussels in June 2008 under the auspices of the Belgian Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment. At that meeting, Ms Leen Meulenbergs was elected chairperson of the drafting group. Since then, the drafting group has met in Paris in December 2008, and in Andorra in June 2009. A Region-wide Declaration meeting was held in January 2009 in Luxembourg back-to-back with the Thematic meeting on healthy environments. The support of Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Commission (DG Sanco, unit C4) is acknowledged and appreciated by the EEHC. It is expected that meetings of the Declaration drafting group will continue as required and will also ensure appropriate discussion on the future of the European Environment and Health Process, which will be a topic for plenary discussions on the last day of the Ministerial Conference.

8. The EEHC noted the outcomes of the Third High-Level Meeting on the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) that took place in January 2009 in Amsterdam, bringing together representatives of ministries from the three sectors, together with relevant international organizations and nongovernmental organizations. Thanking the Government of the Netherlands for hosting this important meeting, the EEHC recommended that the meeting outcomes, notably the commitments highlighted in the Amsterdam Declaration, be considered in the preparations for and follow-up to the Ministerial Conference. The Amsterdam Declaration shapes a common vision for the future of sustainable and healthy transport in the Region, particularly in urban areas, and contains action points for policy-makers that help address the key challenges posed by transport, health and environment issues. The EEHC also recognized the need to ensure further synergy and coordination with THE PEP, as a process that, jointly serviced by the WHO and the UNECE, contributes to the implementation of Regional Priority Goal II of the CEHAPE.

9. The EEHC also asked that particular attention be given to encouraging the further ratification and implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, serviced by a joint WHO and UNECE secretariat. The Protocol, which was adopted in 1999 by the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, is the only legally binding instrument that promotes the right to access to safe water and sanitation for all citizens in the European Region, providing technical and policy guidance and support to governments in addressing water-related health issues. The Government of Norway, along with Italy and other Member States and international governmental organizations such as UNECE, and the regional environment centres and nongovernmental organizations such as the Health and Environment Alliance and the European ECO Forum are closely collaborating with the WHO and UNECE secretariat to ensure adequate input from the Protocol on Water and Health into the Ministerial Conference. The EEHC also highlighted the contribution of the Protocol to the achievement of Regional Priority Goal I of the CEHAPE.

10. Of particular importance and relevance to the Parma Ministerial Conference are the World Health Assembly resolutions on climate change and health and the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. The EEHC has called for climate change to be one of the main pillars of the Parma Ministerial Conference and has endorsed the setting up of a task force to develop a policy document for the Conference and to ensure adequate prioritization of this issue. The task force is chaired by the United Kingdom and Serbia and met in Rome in January 2009 and in London in March 2009 to develop the policy and action points.

## **Youth representation and involvement**

11. The Environment and Health Youth Network, which ensures appropriate involvement and participation of young people in political decisions and in implementation at country level, was also greatly assisted by the EEHC and various Member States. The Network has continued to grow, and now works under the guidance of the EEHC, a youth consultant, and a number of leading countries, including Austria, Ireland and Norway, whose support to this process is greatly appreciated. The Youth Network is to hold its first preparatory event to ensure adequate preparation and appropriate input by young people into the Ministerial Conference proceedings.

## **Environment and health performance reviews**

12. As part of the evaluation of country policies and to identify priority areas where Member States require focused attention, the environment and health performance reviews (EHPRs) have continued in a number of countries. In 2009, the last 2 EHPRs of a total of 10 were carried out in Malta and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The following countries have conducted EHPRs since 2006: Belarus, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The reviews allowed senior country officials from all sectors not only to identify, but also to evaluate the public health impact of environmental exposures; to review the policy and institutional framework and the legal framework, and to analyse the degree and structural functioning of intersectoral collaboration.

13. Along with the analysis of the results of the survey on environment and health policies, to which 40 Member States submitted information, the EHPR final reports will contribute to one overall report to be presented at the WHO Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2010. This report will provide an overview, assessment and identification of the needs of environment and health policies in the European Region.

14. A series of workshops were also held to support Member States in their efforts to develop national plans and actions in follow-up of the commitments made at the Budapest Conference. These workshops made use of the results of the EHPRs and were organized with the aim of discussing how best to use the recommendations formulated in the EHPR reports at national level. The workshops facilitated discussion among the stakeholders from different sectors and helped to ensure the stewardship role of the health sector, as well as ownership of the relevant sectors towards the successful implementation of environment and health policy-making. In 2009, workshops were held in Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and Serbia.