

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

Fourth session

Geneva, 14–16 November 2016

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Partners in implementation and relevant
global and regional processes and initiatives**

MOP4/WH/2016/INF.15

Preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

Submitted by the joint secretariat

Summary and proposed action by the Meeting of the Parties

The present document summarizes the ongoing process of preparation of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Ostrava, 13–15 June 2017), including its draft outcome document. The current draft of Annex I of the outcome document – the implementation plan of the ministerial declaration – includes a priority area with concrete proposals for commitments on water, sanitation, hygiene and health. These were discussed at the ninth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 29–30 June 2016) and recommended for further consideration.

The Meeting of the Parties is invited to consider the proposed commitments and provide its guidance to the sixth meeting of the European Environment and Health Task Force (Vienna, 29–30 November 2016) which leads the process of preparing the outcome document.

Background

In 1989, the WHO Regional Office for Europe initiated the first-ever international environment and health process, developing a broad-based primary prevention public health approach for addressing environmental determinants of health. The European Environment and Health Process (EHP) is steered by ministerial conferences that bring together different sectors and stakeholders to identify environment and health challenges, set priorities, agree on commitments and shape shared European policies and actions on environment and health.

The Third Ministerial Conference for Environment and Health in London (1999) resulted in the adoption of the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. At the Fourth Conference in Budapest (2004), Member States adopted the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe¹, including a corresponding regional priority goal with the aim “(...) to prevent and significantly reduce the morbidity and mortality (...) by ensuring that

¹ Available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/pages/european-environment-and-health-process-ehp/past-conferences-on-environment-and-health/fourth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health,-budapest,-hungary,-2004/childrens-environment-and-health-action-plan-for-europe>

adequate measures are taken to improve access to safe and affordable water and adequate sanitation for all children.”

For the first time, the EHP adopted time-bound targets to reduce the adverse health impact of environmental threats at the Fifth Conference in Parma (2010). The Parma Declaration on Environment and Health² includes Regional Priority Goal 1 of ensuring public health by improving access to safe water and sanitation through which Member States committed “*to provide each child with access to safe water and sanitation in homes, child care centres, kindergartens, schools, health care institutions and public recreational water settings by 2020, and to revitalize hygiene practices*”.

The Parma Declaration also aims to enhance the level of ratification and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements that are of special relevance for the attainment of the Declaration’s regional priority goals and targets across all European Member States.³ The Declaration refers to the Protocol on Water and Health as the main policy instrument for implementation of Regional Priority Goal 1 by taking “*advantage of the approach and provisions of the Protocol (...) as a rationale and progressive tool to develop integrated policies on water resource management and health, addressing the challenges to safe water services posed by climate change, with clear targets and objectives, working in partnership with all concerned sectors*”. Since the Parma Declaration was adopted in 2010, two more countries ratified the Protocol.

The high-level Mid-Term Review Meeting (Haifa, 29-30 April 2015)⁴ took place to review and assess progress in implementation of the EHP and the commitments made, to review strategic partnerships and to determine future priorities in preparation for the Sixth Ministerial Conference. The Mid-Term Review Meeting broadly confirmed the importance of legal instruments such as the Protocol on Water and Health for setting national targets and as a platform for regional and intersectoral collaboration in the water, sanitation and health domain.

Preparation process towards the Sixth Ministerial Conference

The Sixth Ministerial Conference will take place from 13–15 June 2017 in Ostrava, Czech Republic. The process towards identifying the main thematic priorities to be covered in the draft outcome document has started under the auspices of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF).

The fifth meeting of the EHTF (Skopje, 24-25 November 2015) stressed that the outcome document should focus on a limited number of commitments with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) targets. The commitments need to remain politically relevant in a changing policy, environmental and demographic context and provide clear value added to national policies from both the health and environment perspectives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also provide an appropriate and necessary reference to frame the envisaged outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference. The commitments already agreed to in the Parma Declaration are still relevant, need to be upheld and continue to be pursued.

Building on the outcomes of the Mid-Term Review Meeting in Haifa and the fifth meeting of the EHTF in Skopje, the environment and health priority areas which have become apparent to be of consensus for inclusion in the draft outcome document include air quality/pollution, chemical safety, cities, climate change, environmentally sustainable health systems, waste/industrial contamination, and water and sanitation.

At the fifth meeting of the EHTF, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health presented the current priorities under the programme of work for 2014-2016, as well as the forthcoming priorities for 2017-2019. The EHTF acknowledged that water, sanitation and hygiene remain important areas of unfinished business of the Parma Declaration, the current situation is ethically unacceptable, and thus it should feature as part of the outcome document. The EHTF acknowledged the legally-binding nature of the Protocol on Water and Health and its instrumental role for making progress related to water, sanitation, hygiene and health at the pan-European level.

² Available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2010/03/fifth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health/documentation/parma-declaration-on-environment-and-health>

³ Since the Parma Declaration was adopted in 2010, two more countries ratified the Protocol with now 26 Parties in total.

⁴ Meeting report available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2015/04/ehp-mid-term-review/publications/high-level-mid-term-review-meeting-of-the-european-environment-and-health-process>

The outcome document is envisaged to consist of three parts: (i) a ministerial declaration focusing on strategic matters and commitments; (ii) an implementation plan of the ministerial declaration which identifies a set of concrete objectives and actions that would contribute to achieving the high-level commitments in the declaration and which were identified by the Member States through a consultative process; and (iii) a document on future EHP arrangements.

Draft proposal for consideration by the Member States

The ninth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 29–30 June 2016) considered and discussed concrete proposals for objectives and commitments in relation to water, sanitation and health to be considered for inclusion in the aforementioned implementation plan.

Based on these consultations and specifically considering the priorities laid down in the Protocol's programme of work for 2017–2019, the Working Group on Water and Health recommended the following commitments under the priority area "Ensuring integrated, sustainable and safe water use, sanitation and hygiene for all":

1. Commitment towards ratification of the Protocol on Water and Health by all Member States that have not yet done so.

This commitment will reinstate the importance of the Protocol as the prime multilateral environmental agreement in the pan-European Region to progressively achieve regional and global commitments pertinent to water, sanitation and health. The Protocol's planning and accountability approach offers a regional policy platform to translate and operationalize the ambitions of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into specific national targets and action plans, specifically SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and SDG 6 to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, among others.

The commitment should make reference to the substantive priorities identified under the programme of work for 2017-2019, notably those which offer opportunities and synergies with other proposed future EHP priorities/commitments (such as resilient cities, environmentally sustainable health systems). It would contain also specific time-bound numeric targets for the number of Parties to the Protocol in the future years.

2. Commitment to achieve the outstanding Parma Declaration for Environment and Health to provide each child with access to safe water and sanitation at home and all institutional settings, such as health care and educational facilities.

The recall should strongly encourage all Member States to accelerate their efforts towards meeting Regional Priority Goal 1 by 2020. The Protocol's programme of work for 2017-2019 strongly supports the attainment of the Goal with its emphasis on safe water, sanitation and hygiene in schools and health-care facilities, on safe management of water and sanitation services and on equitable access to such services, among others. This commitment will contribute in achieving SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2 for universal and equitable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all, SDG target 4a to provide safe and effective learning environments for all and the WHO/UNICEF global action plan on water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities.

3. A new regional commitment to address the strategic importance of sustainability of water resources and climate resilience of water and sanitation services.

The commitment responds to global change such as urbanization and climate change that may impact availability and quality of freshwater resources and thereby the provision of sufficient amounts of safe drinking-water, especially in (already) water-stressed regions with high-usage patterns and competing demands. It will need to take stock of emerging solutions in water resource management (such as increased uptake of wastewater reuse for agricultural production and sanitation safety planning) and technology options (such as desalination), emphasizing opportunities for other sectors (such as agricultural production and food safety) and looking at their implications for human health and the water environment (such as antimicrobial resistance, accumulation of trace chemicals in soil and water bodies).

The commitment roots in the water-food-energy climate change nexus. It contributes to the building of resilient communities, including focus on sensitive management of water and sanitation in cities/urban areas – a setting where, by 2030, more than 80% of the European population is expected to live. The

commitment would be closely linked with the aspirations of the targets under SDGs 3 and 6 but also strongly interplays with and contributes to several further SDGs concerned with food security and sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), sustainable and resilient cities and human settlements (SDG 11), combating the impacts of climate change (SDG 13), among others. It would also include a target related to the number of Member States implementing sanitation safety plans and safe reuse of wastewater.

The proposed commitments were considered by the Ad-Hoc Working Group of the EHTF at its eighth meeting (Frankfurt, 26 September 2016).⁵ It agreed on the priority areas proposed in the implementation plan, and discussed the specific objectives and actions proposed to articulate them in drafting of the implementation plan. The draft implementation plan will be further discussed at the sixth meeting of the EHTF (Vienna, 29–30 November 2016), including the aforementioned proposals for commitments in water, sanitation and health.

⁵ The Ad Hoc Working Group of the EHTF was established to support the Chair, Co-Chair of the EHTF and the Secretariat in preparations of the Sixth Ministerial Conference and the implementation of the EHTF inter-sessional workplan.