

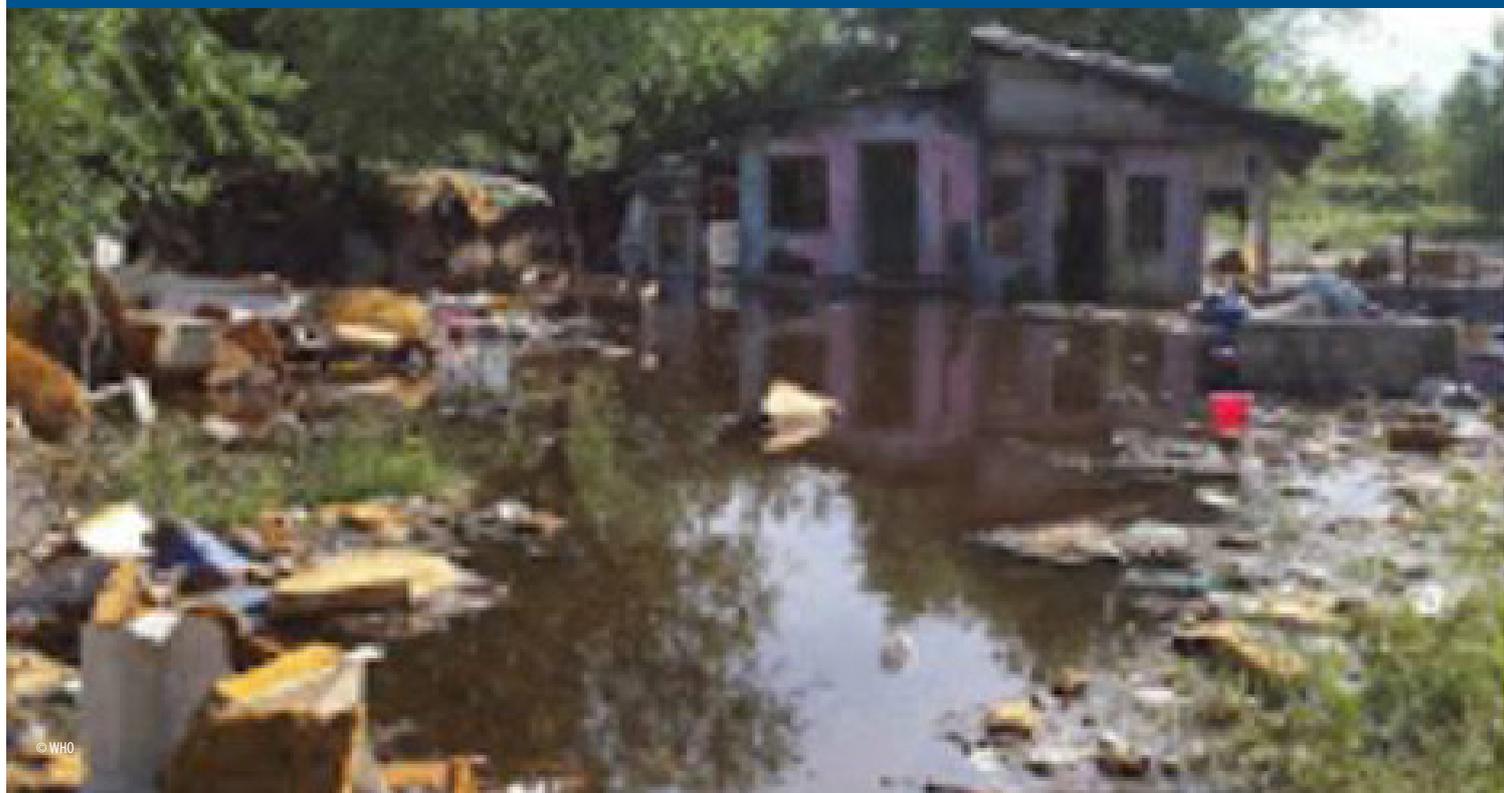


World Health
Organization

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Europe

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Copenhagen, Denmark, 15–18 September 2014



Progress report on the European Environment and Health Process



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Progress on the European Environment and Health Process

In accordance with resolution EUR/RC60/R7, the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) is required to report annually to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC) and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) on achievements and areas requiring greater effort, as well as on the activities, work plans and financial requirements of the EHMB and the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF).

Following the presentation of the EHMB report (document EUR/RC63/10) to RC63 and the 19th UNECE CEP, the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe requested the Secretariat to draft a report covering progress achieved in the European Environment and Health Process (EHP) since September 2013.

This report highlights progress achieved in aspects related to the governance of the EHP, as well as decisions and activities undertaken by the EHMB and the EHTF as part of their respective intersessional programmes of work. The report also highlights technical progress towards meeting the commitments made in the *Parma Declaration on Environment and Health* and progress on the preparations for the high-level mid-term review meeting of the EHTF. Finally, the report brings to the attention of Member States the need to identify host countries for the meeting of the EHTF in 2015 and for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2016.

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Introduction

1. In accordance with resolution EUR/RC60/R7 on “The future of the European environment and health process”, adopted in 2010, the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) is requested to report annually to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC) and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) on achievements and areas requiring greater effort as well as on the activities, workplans and financial requirements of the EHMB and the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF).
2. The EHMB submitted a full report on progress and activities within the framework of the European Environment and Health Process (EHP) in 2013. The report (document EUR/RC63/10) was presented to and reviewed by RC63 in September 2013 and by the CEP at its 19th session in October 2013. The report took stock of the achievements of the EHP since the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Parma, Italy, in March 2010 and of challenges in fulfilling the commitments made in the *Parma Declaration on Environment and Health*. It identified opportunities for strengthened implementation in the context of the most recent global and regional policy developments and advances in scientific knowledge.
3. The report was accompanied by a background document, which provided a full account of the implementation of the EHP since 2010 and also reflected input from Member States and stakeholders represented in the EHTF.
4. This report covers progress made in the implementation of the EHP since September 2013.

Governance and policy

Feedback from the 19th session of the UNECE CEP October 2013

5. The UNECE CEP took note of the report in document EUR/RC63/10 and invited the CEP Bureau to explore possible synergies between the Environment for Europe and the European Environment and Health ministerial conferences, both of which are scheduled for 2016. Furthermore, the CEP asked the UNECE Secretariat to take the necessary action to appoint four ministers from the environment sector to the EHMB for the period 2015–2016; agreed to hold a panel discussion on the EHP at its next meeting (in 2014) and to invite the chairpersons of the EHMB and the EHTF; and requested the CEP Bureau and the UNECE Secretariat to hold a joint meeting of the CEP Bureau with representatives of the EHMB to discuss issues of common interest.

Follow up to the decisions of the UNECE CEP

6. Synergies between the Environment for Europe and the European Environment and Health Processes and the coordinated planning of the next ministerial conferences will be addressed during 2014–2015. The EHMB reviewed this issue at its fifth meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 1 July 2014 and the EHTF will review the matter at its high-level mid-term review meeting. Relevant recommendations will be developed and brought to the attention of RC65 and the 20th session of the UNECE CEP in 2015.

Work of the EHMB

Intersessional work of the EHMB

7. At its third meeting, in November 2012, the EHMB decided to nominate alternates to members who would follow up on EHMB decisions between meetings and work with the WHO Secretariat in preparing the upcoming meetings of the EHMB. The alternates held a second meeting on 26–27 March 2014 in Bonn, Germany, and a third meeting on 26 May 2014 in Lisbon, Portugal, to prepare for the fifth meeting of the EHMB on 1 July 2014, to review preparations for the mid-term review meeting and to discuss elements of a programme of activities for EHMB members in the intersessional period. The alternates agreed on a number of high-level events at which EHMB members would represent and make statements on behalf of the EHMB.

8. A joint meeting of the UNECE CEP and the alternates of EHMB members took place on 27 May 2014 in Lisbon, Portugal. The main purpose of the joint meeting was to establish closer cooperation and greater alignment between the EHP and the work of UNECE CEP, which is the other formal body that governs the EHP from the environment side. The meeting also reviewed the programmes of work of the EHP and the CEP, with a view to identifying possible synergies and areas of common interest and, in particular, greater engagement of the environment sector in the governance of EHP and joint communication plans. The meeting discussed the preparation of the panel discussion on environment and health, which will take place in the context of the 20th session of the UNECE CEP in October 2014. Participants also held an initial brain-storming on possible links between the Environment for Europe and European Environment and Health Processes, considering that both are planning to hold their next ministerial conferences in 2016. In light of important specificities identified for the two processes and of additional considerations of a logistic and political nature, participants agreed that the present conditions are not yet appropriate for holding back-to-back conferences.

9. A communication plan for the EHP, adopted by the EHMB at its fourth meeting in Belgrade, Serbia, in April 2013, was reviewed and endorsed by the EHTF in December 2013. Comprehensive supportive actions for increasing the visibility and impact of the EHP, led by WHO, are supported by a communications working group consisting of communications and public relations officers from health and environment ministries of Member States who have volunteered. The working group met face-to-face in November 2013 and continued its work through regular online collaboration.

Fifth meeting of the EHMB, Vilnius, Lithuania, 30 June–1 July 2014

10. The Government of Lithuania hosted the fifth meeting of the EHMB in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 30 June to 1 July 2014. The EHMB elected the Minister of Health of Lithuania as its Co-Chairperson, representing the health sector.

11. Air pollution, climate change and chemicals were ranked, by members of the EHMB, among the main environmental risks to people's health requiring political action in the coming year in the European Region.

12. EHMB members identified elimination of diseases from asbestos exposure and implementation of the new *Minamata Convention on Mercury* as key actions to reduce health effects from chemicals. These issues will be at the core of the Board's negotiations with European countries in line with the commitment taken at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2010 to eliminate asbestos-related diseases by 2015. The Board will also support the adoption of a global resolution on air quality in 2015, initiated by France and Norway among other countries. The First Global Conference on Climate Change and Health in

Geneva, Switzerland, on 27–29 August 2014 and the 21st Conference of the Parties to the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* in Paris, France, on 30 November to 11 December 2015, will be the focus of action for EHMB as well.

13. Working together with the European Union (EU) and its agencies to achieve these tasks was considered of high strategic importance by members of the EHMB. In particular, they agreed on establishing solid collaboration with the new European Commission, the new European Parliament and the EU presidency countries from 2015 to 2017. In addition, they laid out a plan of action to strengthen relations with multilateral environmental agreements relevant to the implementation of the Parma commitments. Targeted messages will support positioning environment and health high in the post-2015 development agenda.

14. The road map towards the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health is starting to take shape. The EHMB clarified that both the EHMB and the EHTF would have important roles to play in the preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference. The EHMB would guide and advise on the identification of the priorities and the lead themes for the Sixth Ministerial Conference and the EHTF would extend the discussions and the negotiations to the 53 Member States. Air pollution, climate change and chemicals are already identified among the key areas to be addressed. A mid-term review will be a milestone in assessing countries' progress since the Fifth Ministerial Conference in 2010.

15. At the meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, in July 2014 four new members of the EHMB representing the health sector – Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania and Spain – assumed their seats following election by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in September 2013. Dr Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, Minister of Health of Lithuania, was elected as the Co-Chairperson of the EHMB together with Mr Amir Perez, Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel, who had been elected Co-Chairperson of the EHMB at its fourth meeting, held in Belgrade in April 2013. Croatia and Ukraine each offered to host one of the high-level meetings in 2015 and 2016. The sixth meeting of the EHMB will take place in February 2015 in Madrid, Spain.

16. The EHMB also drew attention to the need to identify a host country for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2016, which ideally would be achieved by the time of the mid-term review meeting.

Work of the EHTF

Third meeting of the EHTF, December 2013

17. The EHTF held its third meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on 10–11 December 2013, with 32 Member States and 11 stakeholder organizations attending. The EHTF elected Mr Thor-Erik Lindgren (Norway) as the Co-Chairperson for 2013–2014 and the Chairperson for 2014–2015. Mr Robert Thaler (Austria) was elected as the Co-Chairperson for 2014–2015 and the Chairperson for 2015–2016.

18. The EHTF concluded that considerable progress has been achieved in meeting commitments made in the *Parma Declaration on Environment and Health* and that the EHP provides important support to the development of national action plans and inspires collaboration among national authorities. Further implementation would benefit from strengthening implementation at the country level and from greater flexibility and a differentiated approach to address diversity among Member States. In reviewing the governance of the EHP, the EHTF agreed on several practical actions to improve alignment and synergy between the work of the EHMB and the EHTF.

19. In order to better link work on policy and governance with technical implementation of the Parma agenda, the EHTF decided to develop an intersessional workplan covering a full year before its next meeting, to allow better planning by Member States and stakeholders and link various aspects of work related to follow up to the *Parma Declaration on Environment and Health*. It would also incorporate the activities of different stakeholders directly associated with implementation of the Parma commitments and relevant activities in multilateral environmental agreements, conventions, protocols and programmes, such as the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP). The intersessional workplan will also include the activities of the EMHB. The core activities for drawing up the workplan are supported financially by the Government of Germany through the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) in Bonn.

20. A working group of Member States that is following up implementation of the European framework for action on climate change endorsed in Parma was fully incorporated into the Parma implementation process under the EHTF Rules of Procedure at the third meeting of the EHTF in Brussels, Belgium, in December 2013 as the “Health in climate change working group”. The EHTF adopted its terms of reference and endorsed the election of Ms Louise Newport (United Kingdom) and Ms Jutta Litvinovich (Germany) as its chairpersons. The EHTF also endorsed a proposal by the WHO Secretariat that the mid-term progress report be prepared jointly by Member States and stakeholders. An editorial group, led by the ECEH, was established to prepare the report.

21. In order to engage more Member States in preparations for the next high-level mid-term meeting, the EHTF decided to establish an ad hoc working group to support the Chairperson, the Co-Chairperson and the WHO Secretariat in preparing the meeting. The working group consists of representatives of Germany (Chairperson), Norway (Co-Chairperson), Austria, Croatia, Israel, Italy, United Kingdom, UNECE, United Nations Environment Programme and WHO.

High-level mid-term review meeting

22. The ad hoc working group of the EHTF, consisting of national focal points from several Member States supporting the Chairperson and the Co-Chairperson of the Task Force and the Secretariat to prepare the mid-term review meeting, held its first meeting online on 12 June 2014 and its second meeting at the Regional Office in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 15 July 2014. The ad hoc working group made decisions regarding the format and content, participation by partners, meeting documentation and communication aspects of the EHTF mid-term review meeting as well as discussing specific objectives and expected outcomes.

23. Having in mind the need to ensure sustainable conditions for the work of the EHTF, Member States are encouraged to consider hosting future meetings of the EHTF, including the upcoming meeting in 2015.

Technical progress towards meeting the commitments made in the Parma Declaration

Activities in major technical areas

24. The work of the EHP and WHO has focused on the five time-bound targets agreed in Parma in 2010. By 2015, all Member States must have national plans for the elimination of asbestos-related diseases; a meeting in May 2014 completed preparation of the national profiles

that will be presented at the mid-term review meeting. The national profiles will identify areas that must be addressed during the year in order for the first targets to be achieved as planned.

25. Climate change, air quality, transport and health, industrial contamination, chemical safety and water safety have been identified by the EHTF as priorities for action in implementing the Parma commitments. Several tools for use in these areas have been made available to Member States, such as guidance for developing national water safety plans and national action plans on transport, health and environment.

26. Particular attention has been given to collecting knowledge and tools on the economics of environment and health. Through its environmental health economics network, WHO has developed some of the first estimates of the economic impact of the environmental burden of disease in the WHO European Region. An overview of evidence on the economic burden of air pollution on health is being considered for possible presentation at the mid-term review meeting in 2014, pending final decisions regarding the detailed agenda of the meeting.

National policy development and implementation of Health 2020

27. In close coordination with and as part of implementation of the Health 2020 policy framework, WHO supported interested Member States in developing and implementing sectoral policies addressing environment and health and supporting good governance in this area. For example, since the end of 2013, WHO has been supporting The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in preparing a national action plan on environment and health; two biennial collaborative agreements in 2014–2015 also include institutional support to national intersectoral committees on environment and health. In a number of Member States, WHO also supports the development and implementation of national climate change adaptation plans and strategies for the health sector.

Normative work

28. The WHO Regional Office for Europe has been engaged in normative work on environment and health in close collaboration with WHO headquarters. The ECEH in Bonn, Germany, has significant capacity in certain technical areas and has been leading global normative work in some of those areas. Currently, work is under way on revision of the 2006 WHO guidelines on air quality on the basis of two evidence reviews undertaken by the ECEH in 2013. The ECEH is also leading the development of several components of the global guidelines on housing and health and is supporting WHO headquarters in an interagency project led by the United Nations Development Programme to prepare global guidelines for “green procurement” in the health sector.

Technical support to Member States

29. One or more areas of environment and health are included in the biennial collaborative agreements of 19 Member States and implementation is ongoing. WHO also provides technical support to several Member States without such agreements, to others by request on an ad hoc basis, through multilateral agreements and platforms (in particular, the *Protocol on Health and Water to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*, the *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution* and THE PEP), in the framework for implementation of the *International Health Regulations (2005)* and in the alert and response operations of the Regional Office.

Multilateral environmental agreements and other partnership platforms

30. Together with the UNECE, the Regional Office provides the joint secretariat of the *Protocol on Health and Water* and of THE PEP. In addition, WHO leads the health working group of the *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution* and the European Regional working group of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management programme on chemical safety and collaborates with a number of other legally binding instruments relevant to the *Parma Declaration on Environment and Health*. The EHMB and the EHTF consider that multilateral agreements are important mechanisms for implementing the *Parma Declaration* and WHO was encouraged to further increase its involvement in such mechanisms. The Regional Office will also provide support, with WHO headquarters, for implementation of the *Minamata Convention on Mercury* adopted in 2013.

Major events linked to the EHP

31. The third meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health was hosted by the Government of Norway in Oslo in November 2013. The Parties noted significant progress in the implementation of the Protocol since their meeting in 2010 and adopted a programme of work for the coming three years. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia had ratified the Protocol since the previous meeting and Armenia is in the process of ratification, while Kazakhstan is considering acceding to the Protocol. A special session on equitable access to water in the UNECE and the WHO European Region was held at the meeting, which endorsed use of a “score-card” for monitoring equitable access to water. A new Bureau was elected, with Switzerland as the Chairperson and Norway and Hungary as the Vice-Chairpersons.

High-level meeting on transport, health and environment, Paris, April 2014

32. The Regional Committee is invited to take note of the report of the Fourth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment, which was hosted by the Government of France in Paris on 14–16 April 2014. The main outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the Paris Declaration “City in motion – People First!” through which Member States articulated a new vision of green and healthy mobility and transport to ensure sustainable livelihoods for all, linking the promotion of health and sustainability to socioeconomic justice.

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