Possible arrangements for a joint secretariat for the
European Environment and Health Process

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The European Environment and Health Process is serviced by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe. Member States participating in the Process have invited the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to provide a joint secretariat together with the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy asked the ECE secretariat in consultation with the Committee Bureau to assess the implications of establishing a joint secretariat for servicing the Environment and Health Process and to prepare a short information note for the Committee’s consideration at its next session.

Pursuant to the Committee’s request, the current document presents the ECE involvement in the Environment and Health Process, examples of a joint secretariat including ECE and three scenarios proposed to support the discussion of the Committee.

The Committee will be invited to consider the document to support its discussion on the possible arrangements for a joint secretariat with a view to reaching an agreement on the matter.
I. Introduction

1. In preparation for the Sixth Environment and Health Ministerial Conference (Ostrava, Czecho, 13-15 June 2017), the European Environment and Health Task Force proposed the creation of a joint secretariat composed of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe to service the European Environment and Health Process. The Committee on Environmental Policy discussed the proposal at its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017).

2. The Committee asked the ECE secretariat in consultation with the Bureau to assess the implications of establishing a joint secretariat between ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe for servicing the European Environment and Health Process and to prepare a short information note for the Committee’s consideration at its next session (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 70 (b)).

3. The current document considers several scenarios for the possible involvement of ECE in the European Environment and Health Process, each of which would have resource implications, except the final scenario of maintaining the status quo. ECE does not have resources available at present to engage fully in a joint secretariat, as described in a first scenario. Even opting for a limited enhancement of participation by ECE in the Process, as described in the second scenario, ECE would need to secure resources to ensure the continuous employment of additional dedicated staff.

4. The present document also highlights that, operationally, the ECE functions differently as a secretariat than the WHO Regional Office for Europe. Consequently, should ECE become part of a joint secretariat, the institutional arrangements for the Environment and Health Process would need to be adjusted to be compatible with ECE practice (see para. 26 below).

5. The Committee will be invited to consider the current document to support its discussion on the possible arrangements for a joint secretariat with a view to reaching an agreement on the matter.

6. The timeline of events related to the future role of ECE in the Process is as follows:

   (a) **13-15 June 2017, Sixth Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in Ostrava.** Annex 2¹ to the Ostrava Declaration² sets out “Institutional Arrangements for the European Environment and Health Process”, including that:

   28. Member States invite the WHO Regional Office for Europe to continue to provide secretariat services to the [European Environment and Health Process]. They also invite the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the [ECE] Executive Committee, through the Committee on Environmental Policy, to consider establishing a joint [European Environment and Health Process] secretariat, supported by adequate human and financial resources. The secretariat will closely collaborate with UNEP through its Europe office;

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(b) 28-29 June 2017, meeting of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The Bureau considered the present document and agreed to submit it to the Committee on Environmental Policy;

(c) 11-14 September 2017, sixty-seventh session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The Regional Committee will discuss the outcome of the Ostrava Conference and is expected to provide the relevant mandate to the WHO Regional Office for Europe;

(d) 14-17 November 2017, twenty-third session of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The Committee is expected to decide on a response to the offer to establish a joint secretariat. Should the Committee decide that a new mandate is needed, it will inform the ECE Executive Committee;

(e) Early 2018, meeting of the ECE Executive Committee, including reporting by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy to the Executive Committee. On the basis of the decision taken by the Committee on Environmental Policy, and subject to the availability of the necessary resources, the ECE Executive Committee could decide on the ECE mandate for the European Environment and Health Process.

II. The European Environment and Health Process

4. European countries initiated the European Environment and Health Process in the late 1980s with the objective of eliminating the most significant environmental threats to human health. Progress towards this goal is driven by ministerial conferences held approximately every five years. The conferences bring together different sectors, mainly the environment and health sectors. The First Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health was held in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1989. The following conferences took place in Helsinki in 1994; London in 1999; Budapest in 2004; and Parma, Italy, in 2010. The Sixth Conference took place in June 2017 in Ostrava, Czechia.

5. ECE has been involved in the institutional framework of the European Environment and Health Process since the Second Ministerial Conference, following which the Committee on Environmental Policy was mandated to nominate four representatives of the former European Environment and Health Committee, which was abolished in 2010 at the Ministerial Conference in Parma. The Committee on Environmental Policy was to receive an annual report on the implementation of the Process.

6. At the Helsinki Ministerial Conference in 1994, member States requested “the WHO Regional Office for Europe alone or in cooperation with one or more of the other organizations involved”\(^3\) to provide the secretariat for the Process.

7. At the Third Ministerial Conference, in 1999, the links between the Process and ECE became tighter as, during the Ministerial Conference member States adopted the Protocol on Water and Health to the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). The Protocol’s secretariat is jointly provided by ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

8. In addition, ministers at the Third Ministerial Conference adopted the London Charter on Transport, Environment and Health. The Charter was based on the Vienna

Declaration on Transport and Environment (1997), adopted under the auspices of ECE. The Charter was the basis for the establishment of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), which is serviced by a tripartite secretariat represented by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the ECE Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions. The same document also recommended cooperation between the European Environment and Health Process and the Environment for Europe ministerial process.

9. At the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, in 2010, participants endorsed the governance structure for the period up until the next ministerial conference, establishing the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board and the European Environment and Health Task Force. In Ostrava, at the Sixth Ministerial Conference, a new governance structure was adopted, without the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board.

III. Current involvement of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in the European Environment and Health Process

10. The European Environment and Health Ministerial Board was established to serve as a political driving force for the European Environment and Health Process. The Board was composed of eight ministers, or their high-level representatives, with four nominated by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe from the health sector and four by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy from the environmental sector, to ensure balanced sectoral and geographical representation. The Board was accountable to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The WHO Regional Office for Europe provided the secretariat for the Board. The Board was operational in the period between the Fifth and Sixth Ministerial Conferences.

11. The European Environment and Health Task Force is the lead international body for implementation and monitoring of the Process. It serves as a forum to exchange knowledge, review scientific evidence and promote specific initiatives. In accordance with its rules of procedure, the Task Force can establish subsidiary ad hoc working groups and other bodies tasked with certain matters (rule 20.2), and at least one such body has been established in the past.

12. Over the years, the WHO Regional Office for Europe, with the encouragement of member States, has increasingly involved ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in its work, for example, in the preparation of documents for the midterm review (Haifa, Israel, 2015) and in the preparation of the Sixth Ministerial Conference.

13. During the preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference, member States participating in the Process requested ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe to service the Process as a joint secretariat. That request was confirmed at the meeting through the Ostrava Declaration.

IV. Examples of a joint secretariat including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

14. ECE is involved in joint secretariats under different processes. One is a joint secretariat between ECE and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on forestry and timber, first established in 1947. The two organizations formalized
their partnership in 2012 in a partnership agreement to support the implementation of the joint ECE-FAO programme of work for forestry and timber.

15. The text of the agreement between ECE and FAO contains the following elements:
   (a) The objective, which is to identify areas for cooperation and ways to do so;
   (b) Responsibilities, including the servicing of the main bodies (the FAO European Forestry Commission and the ECE Timber Committee), planning, programming and implementing joint activities;
   (c) A non-exhaustive list of possible joint activities;
   (d) The creation of a body — the Steering Committee — to provide oversight of and guidance for the implementation of the joint activities. The Steering Committee is composed of two representatives of each organization. The functions of the Steering Committee include:
      (i) Agreeing on the respective financial contributions of ECE and FAO towards the implementation of joint activities;
      (ii) Making recommendations to the FAO Director General on the appointment of a Secretary for the European Forestry Commission and to the Executive Secretary of ECE on the appointment a Secretary for the ECE Timber Committee;
      (iii) Reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the joint activities;
      (e) Staffing, with ECE and FAO staff working in the same office;
      (f) Organization and administration, including the designation of a chief and deputy chief of the office, and reporting lines;
      (g) Location, with the office of the joint secretariat to be located in Geneva and ECE to provide office space, supplies and other facilities;
      (h) Sources of support (e.g., budget approved by the relevant organs, voluntary contributions, staff made available by third parties, etc.);
      (i) Final provisions covering matters such as dispute settlement, a periodic review of the agreement (every four years or upon request), amendments and termination.

16. Two examples of a joint ECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe secretariat are in the Environment Division: the joint secretariat for the Protocol on Water and Health; and the joint secretariat for THE PEP.

17. In the Protocol joint secretariat, the ECE Secretary to the Water Convention, a regular budget staff member, serves also as Co-Secretary to the Protocol together with her counterpart in the WHO Regional Office for Europe, while the day-to-day ECE work is largely carried out by two P-3 staff members and part of one programme assistant, who are funded by extrabudgetary, voluntary contributions. In peak periods, such as in the lead up to the triennial session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, additional ECE regular budget and extrabudgetary staff support the work. The WHO Regional Office for Europe provides similar staff resources at its Bonn office. In accordance with the text of the Protocol (article 17), the joint secretariat established a memorandum of understanding to regulate its functioning and implement activities as indicated in an annual workplan.

18. Article 17 (Secretariat) of the Protocol on Water and Health states:

   1. The Executive Secretary of ECE and the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe shall carry out the following secretariat functions for this Protocol:
(a) The convening and preparing of meetings of the Parties;
(b) The transmission to the Parties of reports and other information received in accordance with the provisions of this Protocol;
(c) The performance of such other functions as may be determined by the Meeting of the Parties based on available resources.

2. The Executive Secretary of ECE and the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe shall:
(a) Set out details of their work-sharing arrangements in a Memorandum of Understanding, and inform the Meeting of the Parties accordingly;
(b) Report to the Parties on the elements of, and the modalities for carrying out, the programme of work referred to in article 16, paragraph 3.

19. The memorandum of understanding between ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe addresses:
(a) The scope and objectives of the memorandum;
(b) The designation of responsible officers;
(c) The responsibilities of the joint secretariat;
(d) Work-sharing arrangements, covering:
   (i) Human and financial resources;
   (ii) The annual workplan to carry out the secretariat functions;
   (iii) The drafting, editing and translation of meeting documents and interpretation;
   (iv) Specific arrangements for meetings taking place outside of Geneva and Bonn;
(e) Arrangements related to the communication of information;
(f) Publications;
(g) High-level consultations between ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe;
(h) Final provisions on dispute resolution, entry into force and termination.

20. The WHO Regional Office for Europe and ECE manage separate trust funds used to cover the cost of activities, including the participation of representatives of eligible countries in meetings.

21. In THE PEP joint secretariat, the ECE Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions provide regular budget staff. The Environment side of the secretariat for THE PEP includes a P-3 staff member (65 per cent), a P-5 staff member (15 per cent) and a part-time programme assistant. On the basis of past experience, the secretariat members of the two ECE Divisions and the WHO Regional Office for Europe divide the work between themselves. Current practice is that the annual meetings of THE PEP governing body alternate between ECE headquarters and WHO headquarters in Geneva. The WHO Regional Office for Europe and ECE manage separate trust funds used to cover the cost of activities, again including the participation of representatives of eligible countries in

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meetings and events. There is no written agreement between the organizations regarding their cooperation.

V. Scenarios

22. Following the discussion by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-second session, the secretariat identified possible scenarios for the future involvement of ECE in the European Environment and Health Process.

23. In any of the scenarios described, the Committee might consider the possibility of holding back-to-back Environment for Europe and Environment and Health ministerial conferences, with a joint segment to highlight the strong links between environment and health and the two processes.

A. Scenario 1: a joint secretariat

24. Depending on the projected extent of involvement of ECE in the joint secretariat, scenario 1 is divided into a broader scenario 1 (a) and a narrower scenario 1 (b). In scenario 1 (a), ECE would be part of a joint secretariat and service the political dimension of the European Environment and Health Process and activities for the implementation of ministerial declarations, whereas in scenario 1 (b) ECE would be limited to servicing the political dimension of the Process. In either case, with the current staffing limitations at ECE, it would not be possible to carry out the tasks expected of a joint secretariat. Also, as not all ECE member States are members of WHO Regional Office for Europe, regular budget resources could likely not be used to service the Process.

25. To facilitate the work of the joint secretariat, ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe would need to agree on the precise scope of the joint secretariat, including the shared tasks (e.g., the organization of meetings and preparation of documents) and which bodies would be serviced jointly, and on possible additional tasks to take on board. It might be advisable to follow the example under the Protocol on Water and Health and to establish a memorandum of understanding, together with annual workplans and workplans for the period between ministerial conferences.

26. Current governance arrangements under the European Environment and Health Process differ significantly from those under the Protocol, for example, and these might need to be adjusted to accommodate ECE in a joint secretariat. For example, the WHO Regional Office for Europe secretariat, while serving as secretariat, also acts as a stakeholder. As such, it is a member of the European Environment and Health Process bodies and a Bureau member. This does not correspond to ECE practice. When servicing a multilateral process or agreement, the ECE secretariat is not member of the bodies and acts neutrally at the service of parties and member States. The introduction of a joint secretariat could provide an opportunity to review the governance arrangements.

Scenario 1 (a): a broad joint secretariat, for the political platform and activities

30. Under scenario 1 (a) the two organizations would share the secretariat of the entire process: the political dimension and activities organized to implement ministerial declarations. The joint secretariat would function in a similar way to the joint secretariat for THE PEP or the Protocol on Water and Health, where the two organizations would have equal responsibilities concerning the implementation of the Process and the organization of meetings and events.
31. As a first estimation, the need for human resources in ECE would amount to one P-4 and two P-3 posts, together with one programme assistant. The four new staff would ensure:

(a) Servicing of the European Environment and Health Process, including:

(i) Co-organizing and co-servicing annual meetings of the Task Force and its Bureau (preparation of official and informal documents and other materials and logistical arrangements, including travel of eligible Task Force and Bureau members, etc.);

(ii) Co-servicing of annual meetings of up to two ad hoc working groups;

(iii) Preparation and co-servicing of the Task Force when meeting at a high level with the participation of senior government officials.

It is estimated that this workload would be covered by one P-4 (50 per cent), one P-3 (100 per cent) and a programme assistant (50 per cent);

(b) Implementing or overseeing the implementation of activities (including assistance activities) for the implementation of the outcome of the Ostrava Ministerial Conference and subsequent ministerial conferences (supporting the Bureau in identifying needs for activities and assistance activities, preparing programmes and material, liaising with experts, organizing the logistical arrangements). It is estimated that this workload would be covered by one P-4 (30 per cent), one P-3 (100 per cent) and a programme assistant (50 per cent);

(c) Coordination in ECE of issues related to the European Environment and Health Process, thereby including the work carried out in other Divisions. It is estimated that this workload would require one P-4 (20 per cent).

32. Staff costs would amount to approximately $670,000 per annum. Additional costs related to services — such as use of office space and meeting rooms, interpretation and editing, translation and processing of documents — may become payable in the coming years, depending on the evolution of service agreements within the United Nations Secretariat. In addition, funds would be needed to cover financial support for eligible participants. The costs mentioned above do not cover the organization and co-servicing the European Environment and Health Process ministerial conferences. For this, the secretariat would need to be reinforced by two short-term extrabudgetary staff members and additional financial resources.

Scenario 1 (b): a narrow joint secretariat, for the political platform only

27. In scenario 1 (b), ECE would work with the WHO Regional Office for Europe to service the European Environment and Health Process at the policy level, specifically the meetings of the Task Force and its Bureau.

28. As a first estimation, the need for human resources in ECE would amount to one P-3 and 50 per cent of one programme assistant. The two new staff would ensure:

(a) Servicing of the Process, including:

(i) Co-organizing and co-servicing annual meetings of the Task Force and its Bureau (e.g., preparation of official and informal documents and other materials and logistical arrangements including for travel of eligible Task Force and Bureau members);

(ii) Co-servicing the Task Force when meeting at a high level with the participation of senior government officials.
It is estimated that this workload would be covered by one P-3 (90 per cent) and one programme assistant (50 per cent);

(b) Coordination in ECE of issues related to the Process. It is estimated that this would require one P-3 (10 per cent).

29. Staff costs would amount to approximately $240,000 per annum. As noted under scenario 1 (a), additional costs related to services may become payable in the coming years. Funds would be needed to cover financial support for eligible participants. The costs mentioned above do not cover the organization and co-servicing the European Environment and Health Process ministerial conferences. For this, the secretariat would need to be reinforced by two short-term extrabudgetary staff members and additional financial resources.

Additional considerations for scenario 1

33. For the implementation of both versions of scenario 1 the following additional elements should be taken into consideration:

(a) The provision of staff would require securing long-term, sustainable and predictable funding;

(b) To allow ECE to be part of the joint secretariat, a review of the compatibly of the current European Environment and Health Process governance structure with the mandate of ECE should be undertaken;

(c) Under each option in scenario 1, both ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe would need to go through a review of their mandates and ways of functioning. The Committee on Environmental Policy and the ECE Executive Committee could decide to mandate ECE to service the Process as part of a joint secretariat;

(d) The implementation of scenario 1 would take some time and would not cover the short-term implementation of the outcomes of the Ostrava Ministerial Conference.

34. While having a significant cost, the participation of ECE in the European Environment and Health Process secretariat could also have advantages, such as:

(a) Sharing ECE environmental expertise. With the ECE Environment Division serving as part of the joint secretariat, there would be more possibilities to bring environmental expertise into the Process and to promote ECE environmental instruments in a more consistent way;

(b) Sharing ECE secretariat services. The way the ECE secretariat functions, for instance in servicing the Protocol on Water and Health, follows the functioning of the United Nations Secretariat. There would therefore be more coherence between the European Environment and Health Process and other international process, such as the Environment for Europe ministerial process;

(c) ECE convening power. With ECE being part of a joint secretariat, the Process could fully benefit from the convening power of ECE in the region.

B. Scenario 2: enhanced cooperation between the two organizations

35. Under scenario 2, the WHO Regional Office for Europe would maintain the role of secretariat, while ECE would add tasks to its portfolio. The allocation of tasks could be done on a yearly basis through a workplan that could be adopted with a memorandum, as in the case of the Protocol on Water and Health.

36. This option, while leaving the main tasks of the secretariat to the WHO Regional Office for Europe, would strengthen the links between the two organizations and the role of
ECE as a partner in the Process. As such, ECE could have a coordinating role for monitoring and supporting the implementation of Ostrava commitments (e.g., those linked to the ECE multilateral environmental agreements).

37. In this function, ECE could organize and support events and workshops on areas linked to its current programmes and activities. Additionally, such events could cover emerging issues not yet covered by ECE, such as environment and health in cities. This would be possible only if sustainable financial resources are provided in the intersessional period.

38. At the same time, WHO would keep the majority of the tasks related to servicing the Process (e.g., convening meetings of Task Force and Bureau and the preparation of documents). If so agreed in the annual workplan, ECE could take the lead for specific environment-related documents or in convening ad hoc meetings related to the tasks above.

39. To allow the implementation of this scenario, at the next ministerial conference ECE should be invited to have a strengthened role in the Process. Furthermore, the Committee on Environmental Policy and the ECE Executive Committee would need to provide a mandate including the new functions.

40. In addition, the following elements are prerequisites for the effective functioning of this scenario:

   (a) Should the ECE secretariat receive the mandate to enhance its role in the Process, the secretariat would need additional human resources that would amount, at a minimum, to a P-3 post and 50 per cent of a programme assistant. The estimated amount of resources needed would be $240,000 per annum. Additional resources would be needed to finance activities and the participation of experts from eligible countries;

   (b) The continuity of ECE contribution to the Process would not be possible without certain, long-term, sustainable and predictable resources to cover the new tasks and the staff implementing them.

Additional considerations for scenarios 1 and 2

41. Under both scenarios 1 and 2, even if resources for ECE participating in a joint secretariat were to be provided from extrabudgetary funds, ECE would also need to provide a percentage of the time of regular budget staff (percentage to vary from 10 to 20 per cent, according to the scenario and depending on the degree of coordination needed) for overseeing the ECE secretariat services.

42. To implement the possible new activities and for ECE to act according to the possible new mandate, the Committee on Environmental Policy might wish to establish a dedicated trust fund for the European Environment and Health Process secretariat. The trust fund could be used for supporting environmental representatives in meetings under the Process and to implement specific, ad hoc activities in connection with ECE instruments and processes (e.g., commitments made under the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air), and also for the necessary extrabudgetary staff.

C. Scenario 3: status quo

43. Under scenario 3, there would be no change compared with the current situation. ECE would remain a strong partner in the European Environment and Health Process and would continue to play a substantial role in the Process. As member of the Task Force and its Bureau, ECE would have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making on and implementation of follow-up to the Sixth Ministerial Conference and in the preparation of future conferences.
44. Scenario 3 would present the following benefits and challenges:

(a) ECE would not need to raise financial resources to cover the costs of staff and activities to be implemented;

(b) Since ECE would continue its work as now, there would be no need for the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Executive Committee to provide a mandate for additional activities and subsequently monitor them;

(c) ECE might lose the opportunity of using the additional leverage of health concerns in promoting environmental policy.
**Summary of scenarios**

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