

Your Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

The WHO Regional Office for Europe remains firmly committed to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol and to supporting implementation of SEA in its Member States. At the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, based on Bonn, Germany, we have been working many years towards promoting full inclusion of human health in SEA implementation on the ground, developing resources and guidance to this effect, for example contributing to the UNECE Resource Manual on SEA.

Full inclusion of human health consideration in environmental assessments is nowadays more important than ever. Like all UN agencies, WHO is guided by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its framework of goals and targets, calling for integration across different areas. Our specific policy frameworks in environment and health go in the same direction: the 2017 Ostrava Declaration on environment and health includes priorities ranging from air and water quality to chemical safety, from climate change to waste and contaminated sites, to action at city and local level. Impact assessment is a key approach to address the technical and policy challenges in these domains.

Impact assessments such as SEA provide a very important opportunity to address strong health determinants in the best way we know: preventing them. While the opportunity is well understood, and remarkable progress has been made, its potential is still under-exploited. Much more remains to be done, beginning with promoting a closer dialogue between the environment and the health sector – something the WHO, the UNECE and many others have been doing since the late 1980s, through the so-called European Environment and Health Process and its 6 Ministerial Conferences since.

At present, WHO is engaged, with the UNECE and the European Investment Bank, in the development of further guidance and support for SEA practitioners, on how to ensure full consideration of human health. Also, similar work is underway with regards to health consideration in EIA. It is hoped that these and other initiatives can result in stronger, health-minded SEA practice on the ground, to the benefit of the health and environment of all citizens in the region.

Thank you for your attention.