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

Working Group on Water and Health

Ninth meeting
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Item 13 of the provisional agenda
Informal document
Preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

INFORMAL DOCUMENT
Preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health

Submitted by the joint secretariat

Summary and proposed action by the Working Group on Water and Health

The present document illustrates the ongoing process of preparation of the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, scheduled to be held in 2017, and in particular its outcome document. It includes a proposal on possible water-, sanitation- and health-related targets/commitments to be included in the outcome’s document implementation/action plan.

The Working Group on Water and Health is invited to comment and further define the proposal and to entrust the Bureau, with the assistance of the joint secretariat, to finalize it for submission to the Ad-Hoc Working Group of the Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF) at its eighth meeting (Frankfurt, 26 September 2016).

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 Europe\(^1\), including a corresponding regional priority

goal with the aim “(...) to prevent and significantly reduce the morbidity and mortality (...) by ensuring that 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), including a Regional Priority Goal (RPG) 1 on 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 on Environment and Health also aims to enhance the level of ratification and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) that are of special relevance for the attainment of the Declaration’s regional priority goals and targets across all European Member States. The Declaration refers to the Protocol on Water and Health as the main policy instrument for implementation for RPG 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”.

The high-level Mid-term Review (MTR) Meeting (Haifa, 29-30 April 2015) 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 MTR 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 is scheduled for 2017. The process towards identifying the main thematic priorities to be covered in the draft outcome document, i.e. the Ministerial Declaration, 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) highlighted the importance that the outcome document should focus on a limited number of commitments with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) targets. They 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 perspective. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an appropriate and necessary reference to frame the envisaged outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference. Also, 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 MTR meeting in Haifa and the EHTF meeting in Skopje, the broad thematic areas which have become apparent to be of preliminary 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 envisaged priorities for 2017-2019, based on the discussion that were held on during the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 21-22 October 2016). 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

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the Protocol on Water and Health as the only legally binding instrument through which progress related to water, sanitation and hygiene could be achieved at the pan-European level.

The outcome document is envisaged to consist of three parts: (i) a political declaration focusing on strategic matters; (ii) an implementation/action plan with SMART targets; and (iii) a document on EHP institutional arrangements.

The Ad-Hoc Working Group of the EHTF⁴ has invited the Working Group on Water and Health to formulate some concrete proposals for SMART targets and commitments under the aforementioned implementation/action plan in relation to water, sanitation and health. The proposal is planned to be considered by the Ad-Hoc Working Group of the EHTF at its eighth meeting (Frankfurt, 26 September 2016).

Draft proposal for consideration by the Working Group on Water and Health

Based on discussions in the framework of the Protocol, in particular related to priority needs identified, as well as the discussions within the EHTF, the following three building blocks could constitute possible water-, sanitation- and health-related targets/commitments under the outcome’s document implementation/action plan:

1. A 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 value added of the Protocol as the prime MEA 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 (such as cities, environmentally sustainable health systems).

2. A vitalizing recall of RPG 1 of the Parma Declaration 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 RPG 1 by 2020. The Protocol’s programme of work for 2017-2019 strongly supports the attainment of RPG 1 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 6 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 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

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⁴ 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.
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 (Goal 2), sustainable and resilient cities and human settlements (Goal 11), combating the impacts of climate change (Goal 13), among others.