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Progress report on implementation of the European Environment and Health Process

In 2017, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, through resolution EUR/RC67/R4, requested that the Secretariat report annually on the implementation of the European Environment and Health Process.

This report is submitted to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its 70th session in September 2020, in line with resolution EUR/RC67/R4.

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Background

1. This report gives an overview of the progress made under the European Environment and Health Process (EHP) since the 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The report has been drafted in collaboration with the Chair, Co-chair and members of the Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF).
2. Activities carried out in the context of the EHP are contributing to achieving the goals of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13), 2019–2023, in particular the strategic priority of ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages and the target of 1 billion more people enjoying better health and well-being. The Process also supports Member States' efforts to meet the environment- and health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This work is supported by and aligned with the work of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (WHO ECEH) in Bonn, Germany.
3. Through Regional Committee resolution EUR/RC67/R4, Member States endorsed the Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Ostrava, Czechia on 15–17 June 2017. They also committed to participating actively in the EHP, using it as an intersectoral, international and inclusive platform for attaining the environment- and health-related SDGs and their targets. The EHP is thus integral to the roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda in the WHO European Region and will also be an important element in implementing the WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change (document A72/15) and the new WHO European Programme of Work, 2020–2025.
4. The main message of the Ostrava Declaration is of Member States' commitment to attaining visible, measurable and equitable progress in environment and health in the Region by bolstering national and international action. To this end, Member States committed to developing national portfolios of action on environment and health. These portfolios would comprise selected objectives and activities reflecting national specificities, priorities, means and capacities, and would ensure that Member States had well-coordinated, comprehensive and coherent strategies and policies in place to address the persistent burden of diseases attributable to environmental determinants (see Annex 1 of the Ostrava Declaration).
5. In order to monitor and report on progress in implementing the actions agreed at the Ostrava Ministerial Conference, Member States decided that a monitoring system was required, which should be based as far as possible on the indicators used to report on attainment of the SDG targets to which the Ostrava commitments were intended to contribute.
6. Member States also adopted new, streamlined, inclusive and resource-effective governance arrangements for the EHP, to provide robust guidance and increase the involvement of high-level policy-making in the health and environment sectors. These arrangements also give greater weight to Member States' activities under the EHP. The new governance arrangements are intended to:
 - (a) strengthen intersectoral coordination at the national level;
 - (b) provide strong, clear links to the governing bodies of WHO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE);
 - (c) establish a single coordinating body, the EHTF; and
 - (d) establish two long-term working groups, one to facilitate dialogue among Member States and stakeholders in the Region on health in climate change, and the other on

collaboration among subnational and local authorities, Member States, relevant intergovernmental organizations and agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.

7. In addition, between the end of 2018 and mid-2019, the WHO Regional Office for Europe made a strategic operational and managerial shift, consolidating its operations related to environment and health in WHO ECEH in Bonn, Germany. This has strengthened the link between the Regional Office's technical and normative work and the EHP, and has enhanced the support given to Member States in developing and implementing national environment and health policies, and portfolios for action on environment and health.

Implementation of the Ostrava Declaration and Regional Committee resolution EUR/RC67/R4

Development of national portfolios for action

8. Member States are following up on their commitments under the Ostrava Declaration. In 2019, WHO ECEH conducted a survey on the development of national portfolios of action. A total of 40 surveys were collected from 37 Member States. The responses offered valuable information on institutional arrangements for environment and health, work undertaken at the national level on developing national portfolios for action, priorities selected, challenges encountered, and technical support to be requested.

9. Responses to the questions on institutional arrangements indicated that national environment and health focal points are the main channel of communication and coordination for meetings of experts from the environment and health sectors and for providing information for policy-makers. Other ministries, including those responsible for agriculture, economic development, labour, education and emergencies are also involved, along with subnational authorities, civil society, young people and the private sector.

10. Of the Member States that have not yet developed a national portfolio, 68% stated that they intend to do so. The most frequent priorities addressed in national portfolios are air quality, chemical safety, and healthy and sustainable cities. The implementation of national portfolios will be assessed by identifying national indicators and facilitating monitoring and reporting using the SDG Framework. Types of action reported by Member States include policy instruments, workshops, health impact assessments, training and collaboration projects. Respondents indicated several areas where they could provide technical assistance to other countries, in a peer-to-peer exchange. Building on the breadth of experiences shared, WHO ECEH is planning to develop a resource publication showcasing the inspiring experiences of Member States in the development of their national portfolios, showing their priorities in environment and health and sharing their successes and challenges. The publication is due to be released at the next high-level mid-term review meeting of the EHP, tentatively expected to take place in 2021.

Ninth meeting of the EHTF

11. The ninth meeting of the EHTF took place on 9 and 10 December 2019 in Bonn, Germany. The meeting was attended by representatives of 33 Member States and eight institutional stakeholders, who marked the 30th anniversary of the launch of the EHP at the first Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, which was held in Frankfurt on 7 and 8 December 1989. The meeting's primary purpose was to offer support and follow-up on

the work done by Member States to develop and implement national portfolios of action on environment and health. The meeting provided an interactive platform for sharing experiences, challenges encountered and solutions identified. Member States received guidance on the technical resources and support available to them across the seven priority areas and related actions under the Ostrava Declaration. Participants also discussed inspiring examples of country approaches already being applied, and new or emerging environment and health issues, which had been identified ahead of the meeting in an online poll.

12. The EHTF adopted its programme of work for 2020–2021 and its communications strategy. Work will focus on supporting the development and implementation of national and subnational policies and programmes by translating evidence into action and expanding communication and advocacy, providing opportunities and platforms for collaboration, and supporting good governance in countries.

Monitoring progress on environment and health under the EHP

13. At the ninth meeting of the EHTF, a monitoring framework was adopted. The framework is based, as far as possible, on the indicators of the SDG targets to which the commitments made in Ostrava intend to contribute. The overall monitoring framework comprises 34 indicators and is fully aligned with the approach on monitoring progress in the implementation of the SDGs enshrined in the WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change, adopted in 2019. It should, however, be noted that these indicators do not provide a complete picture of progress achieved, and that multisectoral collaboration is still needed to improve the availability of data from multiple sources.

14. The application of the framework will minimize the reporting burden on Member States, thereby enabling efficient use of resources and anchoring the commitments made at the Ostrava conference directly to the SDG implementation mechanism. In this regard, WHO ECEH intends to conduct a desk review of all data submitted thus far by Member States and to prepare a pilot assessment of the status of implementation of the Ostrava commitments for submission to the next EHP high-level mid-term review, or at another time to be decided by the EHTF.

EHTF programme of work 2020–2021

15. The main directions of the EHTF programme of work for 2020–2021, as adopted at the ninth meeting, are aligned with GPW 13 and the WHO biennial business cycle. The programme of work covers five main areas.

- (a) Collaboration among sectors, partners and stakeholders and advice on policy directions: the EHTF is committed to holding a number of statutory meetings of the Task Force itself, its Bureau and its working groups. The Regional Office has also established valuable links with subregional networks and groups of Member States in areas such as capacity-building, air quality and contaminated sites.
- (b) Reporting on progress in the implementation of the Ostrava commitments: the EHTF is committed to reporting annually on EHP progress and achievements to the Regional Committee and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.
- (c) Cooperating and coordinating with other United Nations platforms and multilateral environmental agreements: the EHTF works closely with UNECE and its Environment for Europe Process, and with the United Nations Environment Programme. It also

collaborates with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, all of which are official EHP stakeholders.

- (d) Supporting Member States in developing capacities to address environment and health issues by sharing technical expertise and knowledge: the Regional Office plans to organize more environment and health schools and a series of thematic webinars to complement the existing programme of subregional workshops and training activities and the many bilateral activities conducted with individual Member States under their biennial collaboration agreements with WHO.
- (e) Advocacy and communications – implementing a communications strategy for the EHP post-Ostrava: this covers the efforts of the Regional Office to maximize the political visibility of environment and health issues in the international community and its support for risk communication activities in Member States.

EHTF Working Group on Health in Climate Change

16. The EHTF Working Group on Health in Climate Change, during its sixth and seventh meetings (held in Bonn, Germany on 12–13 June 2018 and 11–12 September 2019, respectively), provided support to Member States in developing the climate change and health component of their national portfolios of action on environment and health. The meetings provided updated evidence on the health impacts of climate change in the Region, and focused on how to strengthen health sector participation in national climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, through tools and guidance for improving the health response to climate-related extreme weather events and making the case for the health co-benefits achieved by improving air quality through carbon emissions reductions. The meetings also served as a regional hub to facilitate exchanges between Member States on effective strategies, policies and practices for adapting to the health effects of climate change. The meeting reports are available on the Regional Office's website.¹

Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities

17. The Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities was established by the EHTF at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. A drafting group of interested parties held two virtual meetings in 2019 to prepare the draft scope and objectives of the Working Group and its proposed workplan. The Working Group is intended predominantly to: facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing and cooperation among subnational, national and international actors in the Region; promote alignment and policy coherence between the various levels of governance; and act as a catalyst and support network for subnational action and leadership. The group will be funded from voluntary contributions and is expected to meet once a year, virtually or back-to-back with other meetings. At its ninth meeting, the EHTF endorsed the proposed scope and objectives of the Working Group, as well as its proposed workplan and the transitional arrangements to be put in place until its first formal meeting in 2020.

¹ See: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/Climate-change/policy/working-group-on-health-in-climate-change-hic-of-the-environment-and-health-process-ehp-in-europe>

Implementation of the institutional arrangements for the EHP

Twenty-fifth session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–15 November 2019

18. The UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy discussed the “Environment for Europe” process and welcomed the offer by the Government of Cyprus to host the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Nicosia on 3–5 November 2021. The Committee agreed on two themes for the Conference: greening the economy in the pan-European region – working towards sustainable infrastructure; and applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism. The first theme is related to action (e) of the Compendium of Possible Actions to Advance the Implementation of the Ostrava Declaration, included as Annex 1 to the Ostrava Declaration.

19. The Committee also discussed the EHP and the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), and reconfirmed its commitment to contributing to the EHP and further supporting THE PEP.

Aligning the EHTF with the new institutional arrangements

20. In accordance with Annex 2 of the Ostrava Declaration on Institutional arrangements for the European Environment and Health Process, and pursuant to Regional Committee Resolution EUR/RC67/R4, the EHTF at its ninth meeting reviewed the list of nominations and elected a new Co-chair representing the health constituency from Hungary (Ministry of Health). EHTF Bureau members for the coming year are: Israel (Ministry of Health), the Netherlands (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management), Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection), Serbia (Ministry of Environmental Protection), Ukraine (Ministry of Health) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Department of Health and Social Care). As the outgoing Chair, Armenia (Ministry of Health) will be an ex officio member of the EHTF for one year. The Health and Environment Alliance, the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition and Health Care Without Harm will represent the stakeholders.

Main developments in environment and health in the European Region

21. WHO ECEH has continued to support Member States’ efforts to fulfil global and regional commitments by developing methodologies and tools, conducting assessments and reviews, supporting capacity-building initiatives, and advising on policy options.

Developments under multilateral environmental agreements and policy platforms of direct relevance to the EHP

22. The fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Belgrade, 19–21 November 2019), with high-level engagement from representatives of the health, water and environment sectors from 40 Member States, and multiple international and nongovernmental organizations, reaffirmed the Protocol as the Region’s key to achieving the SDG targets and the Ostrava Declaration on ensuring a safe, equitable and sustainable water

supply, sanitation and hygiene for all in all settings, and realizing the human rights to water and sanitation.

23. The Meeting discussed emerging challenges that will require new thinking and increased attention, such as antimicrobial resistance, climate change and the proliferation of legionella. A new, ambitious programme of work was adopted for 2020–2022, embracing strategic regional priorities and leveraging progress in improving governance for water and health, advancing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities and schools, ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation, strengthening safe and climate-resilient management of WASH services, and building health systems' capacity for surveillance of and response to water-related disease. The Meeting elected Belarus as its Chair for 2020–2022. Montenegro became the 27th Party to the Protocol on 20 February 2020.

24. At the 2018 and 2019 annual meetings of the Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution, established under the UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and chaired by WHO ECEH, representatives of the Parties, experts and stakeholders discussed new research on the health aspects of air pollution, policy developments and communication aspects, WHO tools, such as AirQ+, and capacity-building activities.

25. Under the joint secretariat of THE PEP, WHO ECEH continued to support Member States in promoting safe, healthy and sustainable transport in the Region. The 17th meeting of THE PEP Steering Committee (Geneva, 21–23 October 2019) brought together representatives of 21 Member States to discuss evidence on the health and environmental risks of unsustainable transport, which should be used to inform public debate and policy-making. The Steering Committee held an interactive panel discussion on a key challenge faced by transport, health and environment. WHO ECEH contributed to the preparation of the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion by developing the chapter on health and safety, including recommendations that are in line with the most recent scientific developments.

26. WHO is an observer to the UNECE Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. Through WHO ECEH, the Organization is engaged in health integration activities and is supporting the development of a guidance document on health in strategic environmental assessment.

Strengthening capacities and providing tools to address environment and health challenges

27. To ensure that technical environment and health capacities are further developed within and across Member States in the Region, WHO ECEH has led capacity-building and training activities, and provided technical expertise and normative guidance on environment and health issues.

28. Environment and Health School, Bonn, Germany: WHO ECEH hosted a four-day seminar in Bonn on 29 October–1 November 2019. Utilizing a variety of lesson formats and interactive sessions, the curriculum was designed around the priority areas identified by the Ostrava Declaration (with a focus on air pollution, climate change and contaminated sites) and selected cross-cutting and emerging themes in the environment and health arena. The school welcomed a total of 61 participants from 33 countries and areas, as well as representatives of international networks and organizations in the Region. Participants agreed

that the format of an environment and health school was a useful contribution to national capacity-building and suggested a continuation of the school, which is planned to be offered to the Member States biannually.

29. WASH: WHO ECEH convened several subregional and regional workshops on WASH, focusing in particular on promoting WHO guidelines, tools and good practices related to safe management of water and sanitation services (water safety plans, sanitation safety plans) and strengthened public health surveillance of such services, with particular emphasis on small-scale systems in rural areas. The Centre led capacity-building efforts in 13 countries, through in-country interventions and several subregional and Region-wide events, leveraging policy developments and in-country action. As a result, an increasing number of countries adopted legal requirements and national targets on WHO-recommended risk-based approaches to ensure safely managed water and sanitation services and effective public health surveillance.

30. In response to World Health Assembly resolution WHA72.7 on WASH in health care facilities, WHO ECEH supported Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan in undertaking in-depth situation assessments, including policy analyses, and integrating WASH considerations in national action plans on antimicrobial resistance and national health strategies.

31. In the context of the Protocol on Water and Health, WHO ECEH has launched four new tools as technical reference for national uptake of risk-based surveillance of water quality, surveillance and response to outbreaks of water-related diseases, and measures to improve WASH in schools.

32. WHO ECEH provided evidence-based advice to the European Commission, resulting in the adoption of the WHO-recommended water safety plan approach and several further recommendations in the recast of the European Union Drinking Water Directive – a major achievement with policy impact in all European Union member countries.

33. Climate change: WHO ECEH supported Member States in identifying adaptation policy options to help prevent, prepare for and respond to the health effects of climate change, and to select and implement the most suitable actions and measures. The Centre supported Montenegro, Turkmenistan and Ukraine in drafting adaptation action programmes for climate change in the health sector.

34. Environmental health inequalities: in response to the Ostrava Declaration and its expression of concern regarding the unequal distribution of environmental hazards, the document Environmental health inequalities in Europe. Second assessment report was launched in mid-2019 at the WHO High-level Conference on Health Equity (Ljubljana, Slovenia) to take stock of the magnitude of inequalities within countries, and trends in that regard. In December 2019, a resource package on tackling environmental health inequalities was launched at the ninth meeting of the EHTF.

35. Health impact of air pollution: at the ninth meeting of the EHTF, the new software tool AirQ+ version 2.0 was also launched.² AirQ+ performs calculations that enable quantification of the health effects of exposure to air pollution, including estimates of reduction in life expectancy. The tool is available in English, French and Russian and with expanded functionality.

²The tool is available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/air-quality/activities/airq-software-tool-for-health-risk-assessment-of-air-pollution>.

36. A national-level assessment of the health impacts of air pollution, using AirQ+, was conducted in collaboration with national counterparts in Serbia. In addition, two subregional training workshops on air quality and health were organized in November 2019: one for experts in the Western Balkans, which was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other for experts from the Caucasus countries, which took place in Tbilisi, Georgia.

37. Chemicals management: measures to strengthen Member States' capacities for promoting sound chemicals management continued, including through multicountry projects. Among others, two subregional training workshops were organized: the first in April 2019, in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan with the participation of representatives of 11 countries, and the second in November 2019, in Minsk, Belarus with participants from three countries. During 2018 and 2019, in cooperation with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Rotterdam Convention Secretariat, country-level training events were organized in Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Hungary and Georgia.

38. To facilitate health sector involvement in the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, standard operating procedures for human biomonitoring of mercury, focusing on prenatal exposure, were developed and published in 2018.

39. Environmental noise: in October 2018, environmental noise guidelines for the European Region were issued, providing robust recommendations and public health advice on protecting population health against the adverse impacts of transport noise, wind turbines and leisure noise.

40. Environmentally sustainable health systems: support has continued to be provided to strengthen several aspects contributing to the development of environmentally sustainable health systems, such as improving access to WASH in health care facilities and increasing health systems' resilience to climate change. In addition, opportunities have been afforded to Member States to exchange information on practices and initiatives undertaken, in dedicated interactive sessions during the ninth meeting of the EHTF.

41. Linking global and regional agendas: ECEH has led the regional roll-out of the joint WHO–United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change climate and health country profiles to empower health ministries to engage in climate change processes and advocate and act for health. It also launched the “Policy Brief on Health and Climate Action (SDG 13)” during the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in 2019.

42. Response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic: ECEH has been working with the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and WHO headquarters to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic from an environment and health perspective. Work undertaken to date includes supporting the development of technical guidance and advocacy initiatives to promote WASH, as well as addressing issues related to moving in cities during the outbreak, reducing the risk of heat-health issues for vulnerable populations under lockdown conditions, and promoting a series of thematic webinars addressing selected aspects of the links between various dimensions of environment and health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions and future plans

43. In 2020–2021, the Regional Office will continue to support Member States in implementing their environment and health commitments, notably those taken at the Sixth

Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2017, addressing air pollution, chemical safety, climate change, environmentally sustainable health systems, urban health, WASH, and waste and industrially contaminated sites. It will also contribute to implementing the WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change, and the European Programme of Work.

44. The ECEH will work closely with countries and in countries, using a variety of mechanisms and platforms (including biennial collaborative agreements) through which it will reach 25 countries addressing WASH, air pollution, climate change, chemical safety and health impact assessment. Support will be provided for developing and implementing national policies on environment and health, including portfolios for action. The ECEH will lead capacity-building initiatives, including subregional events to address topics of common interest to Member States, host the Bonn Environment and Health School, and seek opportunities for collaboration with the WHO Academy and other relevant capacity building initiatives in the European Region.

45. In terms of normative function, the ECEH will aim to complete the revision and update of the WHO Air Quality Guidelines, in collaboration with WHO headquarters. It will also aim to develop a roadmap to support Member States in their efforts to implement the environmental noise guidelines and work towards reaching the guideline values, including by identifying potential actions and measures to be recommended.

46. The ECEH will enhance its work in support of healthy urban and subnational policies, working in collaboration with the WHO Healthy Cities and Regions for Health networks and supporting the new Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities.

47. The ECEH will continue to provide Secretariat services to the EHP, the Protocol on Water and Health, and THE PEP. It will continue to chair the Task Force on Health of the United Nations Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution Convention, and collaborate with the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.

48. The ECEH will develop and update tools and methodologies to support health impact assessments of environment and health policies, and will update evidence underpinning decision-making. Notably, it will update the evidence base guiding the development of heat-health action plans.

49. The ECEH will provide technical assistance in the event of environment and health emergencies, including those caused by extreme weather events, working with the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and within the framework of the all-hazards approach of the International Health Regulations (2005).

50. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECEH will continue to support Member States through the recovery phase from an environment and health perspective. It will facilitate analysis of emerging needs, new trends and (re-)emerging priorities (such as the central role of WASH for the prevention of infectious diseases in the community, health care facilities and schools). It will also identify potential risks from Member States deprioritizing their commitments related to environment and health, notably in relation to climate change and air pollution. This could lead to a significant additional burden on health systems, as a result of increases in environment-related diseases, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancers. The ECEH will also advocate post-pandemic recovery policies that can

deliver environment and health co-benefits and support further progress towards achieving the environment and health-related SDGs.

51. The ECEH will remain open to addressing new and emerging issues, such as the circular economy, the environmental sustainability of health systems, the assessment of new technologies, the influence of the green and blue environment on health, and the impacts of land recycling and brownfield conversion. To this end, the ECEH remains engaged in partnerships for updating the priorities of the Environment and Health Research Agenda, notably under the European Union Horizon Europe Framework Programme.

52. From a managerial perspective, WHO ECEH will strive to further strengthen its human resources in critical priority areas, such as air pollution, climate change and sanitation. It will also work towards developing new and enhancing existing partnerships in the United Nations system, as well as with the European Union and its institutions, such as the European Environment Agency and international financial institutions.

Action by the Regional Committee

53. The Regional Committee will be invited to note the progress report.

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