

WHO Regional Office for Europe – Statement

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, Geneva, 2-5 June 2014

High-level segment: 10. Statement by ministers and high-level representatives

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognizes with appreciation the valuable work carried out by the Signatories, the secretariat, UNECE, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, the United Nations Development Programme and others. WHO Regional Office for Europe wants to reinforce its commitment to continue working in partnership with the UNECE and other partners in Member States, civil society, other intergovernmental organizations and the academic world to foster the application of SEA as well as EIA and to make sure that significant health effects are taken into account under the Protocol as well as under the Espoo Convention and the Directives on EIA and SEA of the European Union.

WHO considers these multilateral agreements as key instruments to foster and ensure the integration of environment and health considerations into the preparation and adoption of policies, plans, programmes, and projects. Importantly, they can be very powerful instruments to support countries in achieving the ambitious objective of eliminating the most significant environmental threats to human health. A task, which is at the core of WHO's mandate; and a task WHO Member States took on their agendas nearly 25 years ago, launching the European Environment and Health Process (EEHP) on the occasion of the First Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 1989, and established the European Centre on Environment and Health with its office now in Bonn to support them in this endeavour.

Since the first discussions of the opportunities these international instruments create for integration of health concerns into development planning at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in London in 1999, WHO has been supporting UNECE. Adequate coverage of health within environmental assessments is strongly supported by WHO and by the European Environment and Health Process. At the Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, Hungary, 2004) the ministers of environment and the ministers of health, adopting the Conference Declaration, recall the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Protocol on SEA to the Convention on EIA in a Transboundary Context, that acknowledges the benefits to the health and well-being of present and future generations that will follow if the need to protect and improve people's health is taken into account as an integral part of SEA. The Ministers committed themselves to "*taking significant health effects into account in the assessment of strategic proposal under the Protocol*" (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2004).

The issues continue to be a great relevance to WHO in its general mandate on public health and its specific remit on European Environment and Health Process. . One of the pillars in the Health 2020 strategic and policy framework of WHO Regional Office for Europe is to create resilient communities and supportive environments. This can only be achieved through fostering intersectoral action to protect health through supporting action across government and society.

Having that in mind, performing health impact assessments, as the integral part of SEA is one of the imperatives. The review and consultation with Member States revealed a lack of guidance on and resources for the integration of health into environmental and strategic impact assessment. Therefore, WHO is continuing its work on developing further guidance on integrating health in environmental assessments, and seeks support and funding as appropriate. For example, we integrated this work into a project, co-funded by the European Commission, on capacity building in environment and health (CBEH) in 8 Member States (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Poland), with the aim to further integrate health into environmental and strategic impact assessments. Postcards with some information of the outcomes of this project and where to find the reports are on display here at the meeting. Another forthcoming publication in cooperation with IAIA

and EUPHA is a review on the integration of health in different forms of impact assessments including SEA, Sustainability Assessment and Social Impact Assessment developed by lead experts in their field. You can also find a draft of the publication on display and we hope to be able to publish it within the next few weeks.

The opportunities provided by the Convention and the Protocol deserves to be further promoted with many sectors of civil society, including the health sector itself, as until now there is still limited knowledge and experience in the application of environmental and strategic impact assessment within the health sector. For this we also call on your assistance and cooperation to gain more practical experience. We are especially interested in cooperating in concrete assessments at the policy level, and look forward to such interactions. One of our future projects is in this regard the establishment of an international network of environment and health impact assessment experts to further foster the integration of health into environmental impact assessments, through knowledge exchange and assist Member States in capacity building activities. As you can see more work needs to be done, and we look forward to opportunities to do this in partnership with you.

Thank you for your attention!