



Action in partnership
towards Budapest

**Sixth meeting of the European
Environment and Health Committee,
Sofia, 13-14 June 2002**

12 August 2002

Report on the sixth meeting

Major actions/decisions

1. Several major policy outcomes are currently envisaged: a ministerial declaration, a children's health and environment action plan, and possibly a "package" around environment and health indicators
2. An intergovernmental meeting should be held in early 2003 to review a draft children's health and environment action plan.
3. In view of the elections for the EEHC in autumn 2002, current country members will be invited by special invitation to continue participating in the work of the EEHC.
4. The seventh meeting of the EEHC is scheduled for 28-29 November 2002 in Budapest.

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1. Introduction

Heinz Schreiber, Co-chair, opened the meeting. On behalf of Bulgaria, Ms. Dolores Arsenova, Minister of Environment and Waters, and Dr. Hristina Mileva, Head of the Division on Environmental Health at the Ministry of Health, welcomed the participants to Sofia.

The meeting was attended by members and their advisers, presenters of priority issue proposals, and individuals by special invitation. The list of participants is given in Annex 2.

The meeting was chaired in turn by the Co-chairs H. Schreiber and Corrado Clini.

The provisional agenda and provisional programme were approved.

The minutes of the fifth meeting in Istanbul were approved. The meeting report had been sent to the ministers of health and of environment, and other interested bodies and individuals, and posted on the EEHC website.

2. Towards the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest Conference)

The overall objective of the EEHC meeting in Sofia was to agree on a provisional agenda of priority issues for the Budapest Conference, to be presented to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy this autumn for their respective approvals.

H. Schreiber informed the participants that no progress reports on London Conference priority issues would be presented at this meeting as they had been recently reviewed at the special intergovernmental meeting on further developing the agenda for the Budapest Conference, held on 18-19 April in Lucca, Italy. These reports are also available on the EEHC website, and EEHC members who wish to comment or make suggestions should contact the responsible officers. The report on the Lucca meeting had been distributed to participants, Budapest Conference focal points in the ministries of health of environment, the UNECE focal points for environment, and other interested organizations and individuals: it is also available on the EEHC website. The discussions at the Lucca meeting formed on basis on which revised proposals on priority issues for the Budapest Conference had been developed for the current meeting of the EEHC.

Before focusing on the specific priority issues outlined in the working papers EEHC6/1-9, the meeting first considered more general issues of relevance to the development of the Budapest Conference agenda, based on the report of the Budapest Working Group, a presentation by R. Bertollini of the development of the process to date and a report by H. von Meijenfeldt on developments in the *Environment for Europe* process and the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

2.1 Budapest Working Group

Anna Paldy reported on the meeting of Budapest Working Group (BWG) which took place the previous evening. The BWG supported the recommendation of

the Lucca meeting that each priority issue of the Budapest Conference should be closely related to the overarching theme “The future for our children”. Also in keeping with concerns expressed at the Lucca meeting about the large number of issues that were being discussed for the Budapest Conference, the BWG suggested that the Budapest Conference focus on those priority issues supported at the Lucca meeting and on concrete actions.

Discussion

The precise form of the policy outcomes of the Budapest Conference needs to be further considered, but three types are possible: legally binding documents (e.g. conventions, protocols), “soft law” documents (e.g. ministerial declaration, charter, action plan) and government-endorsed documents (e.g. guidelines, methodologies). As no legally binding documents are expected for the Budapest Conference, the policy outcomes should be either soft law or government-endorsed documents. In this regard, at least two substantial policy outcomes are expected: a declaration, including follow up and assessment of the London Conference issues; and a children’s health and environment action plan for Europe.

There was consensus that the various international initiatives in environment and health, and particularly as related to children, must be carefully examined in order to avoid duplication. In this regard coordination is crucial in the preparation of the Budapest Conference which would be an appropriate forum to bring the different initiatives together.

2.2 Development of the Budapest Conference agenda

In his presentation, R. Bertollini noted that several political developments may affect the agenda: (1) EC Sixth Environmental Action Programme in which environment and health is one of the priorities, and the development of EC environmental health strategy; (2) UN Millennium Declaration (items 12,19 and 21) and the recent decision of WHO to strengthen its commitment to achieving its goals; (3) WHO strategy for 2004-2005 where environmental health is again a priority; and (4) the initiative of the Director General of WHO to launch a global programme on children, environment and health. In addition, the outcomes of the WSSD in Johannesburg and the Fifth Ministerial “Environment for Europe” Conference in Kiev must also be taken into account, as well as other relevant activities by, for example, OECD, G8 and the US Environment Protection Agency.

In follow up to the Lucca meeting, R. Bertollini presented the priority topics so far identified within three major groupings: progress made in Europe on environment and health from Frankfurt to Budapest; strengthening the policy-making base for decision-making; and issues of emerging or increasing importance to environment and health in Europe.

In addition, the conference declaration could provide for more synergy with the *Environment for Europe* process.

Discussion

As noted above, a number of organizations are active in areas of direct relevance to the theme and proposed priority issues of the Budapest Conference and there is a strong need to ensure against duplication of efforts. Towards this goal, a number of the key organizations in environment and health participate in the EEHC and are thus in a position to share information on relevant activities.

In fact, such exchange of information is part of the terms of reference of the EEHC and one of its strengths. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to get an entire picture of environment and health activities in Europe, and specifically those related to children's health and environment, in part due to the lack of participation in the EEHC of relevant organizations such as the ILO, UNICEF and World Bank. Improving the exchange of information on environment and health in Europe should be a priority for the EEHC. Towards this goal, appropriate inter-agency/organization collaboration on the nature of the information to be exchanged and on the possible mechanisms should be explored: the Budapest Conference could offer a good opportunity for agreement of such a mechanism regarding children's health and environment as well as environment and health in general.

2.3. Linking relevant international environmental health processes: Rio+10, Environment for Europe, Environment and Health

H. von Meijenfeldt reported briefly on developments leading to the WSSD in September 2002. The UN Millennium Declaration and Agenda 21 will be two starting points for the WSSD, at which ministers will take two types of decision. Type 1 decisions will be at global policy level and be contained in a ministerial declaration and action programme. Type 2 decisions will focus on more concrete commitments in specific topics, such as children's health and environment, or are geared toward subregions.

He noted that the outcomes of the WSSD will also be followed up at regional level at the Kiev Conference in 2003. One of the major outcomes of the Kiev Conference is expected to be the endorsement of an NIS Environment Strategy. The Conference will also discuss the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for Southeast Europe, which is a good example for other subregions, and review the Pan-European Environmental Assessment Report being prepared by the EEA. Also on the agenda for adoption by ministers are three protocols: on strategic environmental assessment; on pollutant release and transfer registers; and on civil liability for transboundary damage caused by hazardous activities. The issue of environmental education will also be addressed, as well as the issue of regional environmental governance including the future of the *Environment for Europe* process. In regard to the last item, attention was drawn to the document entitled "Pan-European environmental governance: clustering our work to clear the way for leadership". There is a health component in several issues of the Kiev Conference: namely the NIS Environment Strategy, Environmental Assessment Report, and the protocols on strategic environmental assessment and on civil liability.

Discussion

The inclusion of health considerations in the Kiev Conference (for the first time in the *Environment for Europe* series of conferences) was noted, which points in the right direction for bringing that process and the *Environment and Health* process closer together. In this regard, the issue of clustering ministerial conferences on environment-related issues outlined in the environmental governance paper was received with interest. The idea of clustering was, in general, considered favourably. It is also of relevance to the future of the *Environment and Health* process, which will also need to be addressed for the Budapest Conference.

2.4. Development of identified priority issues for Budapest – project proposals

Working papers EEHC6/1-9 are revisions of the priority issue proposals discussed at the Lucca meeting. EEHC6/10 is a proposal called for at the fourth meeting of the EEHC in June 2001 with the conclusion that the issue could be looked at again in the broader context of the Budapest Conference; it had not been ready for discussion at the Lucca meeting.

a) Analysis of environmental health situation in the newly independent states (EEHC 6/1)

The focus on the newly independent states was considered very relevant to the assessment of progress made in Europe over the last 10 to 15 years. In particular the EU TACIS programme might be interested in supporting this project. However, there is also a need to extend this assessment to the rest of Europe, perhaps with a special emphasis on the countries in southeast Europe (Stability Pact countries) to which the REC for Central and Eastern Europe could contribute. Towards this end, a general assessment could be done using existing information, but more in-depth analysis would require additional resources to be identified.

REC
WHO/EURO

b) Assessing the environmental burden of disease: Access to methods and tools (EEHC 6/2)

c) Environment and health indicators: a pan-European system for policy-oriented reporting and assessment (EEHC 6/3)

d) Observatory on environment and health (EEHC 6/6)

Although the above priority issues were presented individually, the strong consensus of the EEHC was that they should be considered as three parts of one whole and should be combined into one framework document. This document would then cover the impact of environment on health based on evidence on the environmental burden of disease, the need to develop a pan-European system for policy-oriented reporting and assessments (environment and health indicators), and the need to organize and share the information gathered from the assessment, monitoring and reporting. The authors of the three proposals should coordinate preparation of a unified proposal. More specific comments on the three papers are made below.

WHO/EURO,
EEA

Burden of disease: The methodology to be developed will enable a more refined estimate of the environmental burden of disease than was possible when the assessment monograph entitled “Concern for Europe’s Tomorrow” was prepared for the Second Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Helsinki in 1994. The methodology would cover both children and the general population. The OECD is currently working on estimating the environmental share of the burden of disease and would be interested in combining efforts with WHO/EURO. In addition, the role of occupational diseases should be addressed. This topic should also aim at including clear figures on the health impact of the environment and identify priorities for action.

OECD,
WHO/EURO

Environment and health (EH) indicators: The EEHC underlined the importance of internationally agreed upon EH indicators that are workable tools to serve the countries in political decision-making. The need for an appropriate reporting system has been noted in the EEHC and other fora, including mention of an interagency reporting platform. Several initiatives are being undertaken

by, for example, the EC (on environment and health indicators) and in the area of climate change that need to be considered in order to prevent overlap. There was support for pilot studies to be undertaken to test the indicators system to see what works and to select the most appropriate ones. The Budapest Conference would be an appropriate forum in which to present the results of the work on EH indicators and get ministerial commitment to using them. The EC and other EEHC members stressed the need to establish a functional tool and avoiding the creation of new indicators. In addition, the core set will require intergovernmental consultation prior to the Budapest Conference.

EEA,
WHO/EURO

Observatory on environment and health: There was general consensus on the need to improve the exchange of information and general interest in setting up a platform for this exchange, but the precise mechanism for carrying it out should be further developed in close collaboration with relevant organizations (OECD, EC, EEA, ILO, etc.). Detailed consideration of an observatory was premature at this stage. Note was taken of the Topic Centres developed by the EEA, which could be expanded to include health and thus serve the objective: perhaps a pilot project could be undertaken to explore the feasibility of such an approach. A number of participants shared their experiences, underlining the difficulties relating to the operation of a “rapid answer” system. Italy suggested that the mechanism could be a network with one focal point at a relevant organization to gather the information. It was noted that a mechanism to facilitate the exchange of environment and health information would further support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. There was a general feeling that the creation of new structures should be avoided.

It was agreed that a revised proposal, prepared in consultation with relevant organizations and taking into regard the comments made here, should be brought forward at the next EEHC meeting.

WHO/EURO

e) Impact of international environmental health policies (EEHC6/4)

The objective of this proposal is to evaluate the impact of the environment and health process in Europe on national environment and health agenda setting. It is also expected that recommendations will emerge which will help guide the process in the future and improve its impact in countries. A suggestion was made that the evaluation should also look at the impacts on the biophysical environment, as well as on the various stakeholders; however, it was acknowledged that the impact of policies on environmental exposures and resulting diseases was a long-term process that was unlikely to be noticeable over the last 10 to 15 years.

While the proposal includes both stakeholder and external evaluation, more stress needs to be placed on external evaluation. In addition, there should be a link to the evaluation of the impact of policies on environment and health being developed for the WSSD. There also needs to be a clearer picture of how the results of this proposal will be presented at the Budapest Conference.

WHO/EURO

f) Dealing with uncertainty: can the precautionary principle help protect the future of our children? (EEHC6/5)

This proposal is an attempt to strengthen the development of rational and

equitable evidence-based environment and health policies by including in the debate, besides cost-benefit analyses, recently developed criteria and principles on how to take action under scientific uncertainty.

It was acknowledged that the issue addressed here was very complicated: as demonstrated in the preparations for the WSSD, discussions have not made substantial progress and there is no global political agreement. Within Europe, countries are also divided on the issue. Trade issues are of direct relevance, and industry is also split regarding its support of the principle. As the issue is being addressed in other fora, there would seem to be an added value in bringing both health and environment experts together to look at the issue: in this regard, it would be useful to include legal experts as the trade aspects will be of relevance.

There was support for the development of guidance on the practical application of the precautionary principle, perhaps in guidelines, in environment and health with special reference to children. Furthermore, the problem of presenting scientific data under uncertainty should also be considered.

WHO/EURO

g) Housing and health (EEHC6/7)

This is a broad-ranging proposal covering a number of important aspects of housing-related health aspects. The general consensus was that the proposal needed refocusing, with clear outcomes identified for the Budapest Conference. Several participants favoured a focus on indoor environment. It was suggested that most of the activities planned under this topic were relevant for the children's health and environment action plan for Europe, while other activities would contribute to the development of environment and health indicators when they relate to housing conditions. The subproposal on schools and health was considered particularly relevant to the theme of the Budapest Conference as the school is where children spend most of their time and acquire most of their future behaviors. The school issue needs to be undertaken in close cooperation with other potential actors; it is also at present very loosely linked with the rest of the proposal and either needs to be better integrated or perhaps developed as a "background document" to the children's health and environment action plan for Europe.

WHO/EURO

h) Health and global changes: what will the future of our children look like? (EEHC6/8)

This issue, which was addressed at the London Conference, is further developed in this proposal which looks at the relationship between poverty, environment and health and the issue of energy. Although the environment sector addresses the issue of climate change, the health sector has been marginally involved in it. This project seeks to raise the profile of the issue in the health sector by looking at aspects such as adaptation and early warning systems which are very relevant to the competencies of ministries of health.

It is not expected that this proposal would result in policy decisions by the Budapest Conference, but could serve an important function by raising the awareness of the health sector of the health effects of global change and the role it can play in addressing these effects.

i) Environmental health effects in young tourists – setting up a regional surveillance system (EEHC6/9)

This proposal was developed jointly by Malta and WHO/EURO. There was general consensus that this proposal, instead of focusing on tourists, should be more strongly linked to sustainable development and in doing so, should emphasize the environmental health impact of tourism on the local population. In this regard the relevance of child safety measures in tourism and of creating child-friendly recreational activities was noted. The proposal could also provide the opportunity to look at tourism as a driver for development and the positive role that it can play in achieving the goals of sustainable development. UNEP has performed some work on sustainable tourism, and local authorities could also address the issue of impact in the community through local environment and health action plans. In addition, impact at local level is also of direct relevance to environment and health professionals, who could provide input on the issue of tourism, environment and health. The EC suggested that such an initiative could develop synergy with the EU Mediterranean strategy. An action plan on tourism, health and environment, as suggested by Turkey at the 5th meeting of the EEHC, was also a possibility. The proposal to establish an international centre on tourism, environment and health, should be discussed with other interested countries; it is possible that such a centre could in reality be a network of centres in various countries.

**WHO/EURO,
Malta**

j) The health and environment impacts of mobile/wireless devices: exploring opportunities for multi-stakeholder dialogue and access to information (EEHC6/10)

This proposal was developed jointly by the REC for Central and Eastern Europe and the IFEH and refs mainly to public participation in the decision-making process. The EEHC took note of this proposal but the lack of time prevented any substantive discussion on the issue. It should be tabled for discussion at the next EEHC meeting.

REC, IFEH

2.5 Children’s health and environment action plan (EEHC6/12)

There was strong consensus that a children’s health and environment action plan should be one of the core policy outcomes of the Budapest Conference. As a cross-ministerial, pan-European event, the Budapest Conference offers a unique opportunity to focus attention on the pertinent issues and to commit to addressing them. The action plan could also serve as a model for other regions. Although not legally binding, its adoption by the ministers of health and of the environment would signal the importance with which the issue was viewed and constitute a strong regional commitment and could possibly lead to a more binding instrument. While the idea of some type of legally binding instrument, such as a protocol to the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child, might be explored in the future to ascertain the interest of countries, there was insufficient time to take up such negotiations before the Budapest Conference.

It was agreed that the action plan should be action oriented, concrete and evidence based and within the framework of sustainable development; indicators specific for children’s health and environment should be developed, and specific targets to be reached by countries should be considered, as well as the issue of education.

WHO/EURO

the issue of education.

It should also draw together the initiatives on children's health and environment being taken by various organizations to form a comprehensive whole. It is vital that the action plan build upon and complement existing experience and initiatives in the area and not duplicate them. In order to help ensure this and considering that one of the roles of the EEHC is to help coordinate environment and health policy in Europe, the EEHC considered that an informal meeting of relevant organizations/agencies with activities in children's health and environment be held at the earliest possible date and requested the Secretariat to take the necessary steps.

**EEHC
Secretariat**

2.6 Overall considerations of the agenda and the way forward

Comments on the specific priority issues covered under section 2.4 and on the children's health and environment action plan under section 2.5 are included in those respective sections.

There was strong consensus that reporting on progress made in Europe on environment and health since the Frankfurt Conference in 1989 was very important. This would encompass two major parts: assessment of the situation with an emphasis on the NIS; and reporting on progress made on implementing the decisions taken at the London Conference. Follow up on the London Conference issues was considered very important, and should include not only what was implemented or not implemented but also recommendations for continued work on the issues where needed.

At this point, two to three major policy outcomes are envisaged: the ministerial declaration, the children's health and environment action plan for Europe, and possibly the "package" around the environment and health indicators.

Issues could be considered at two levels of priority. The first level would comprise high-priority issues with an important policy outcome, supported by a sound evidence base; the second level would comprise issues with a more technical outcome (e.g. guidelines, tools). Each high-priority issue should have direct input into the action plan. Priority issues may also have more general policy outcomes that should be contained in the declaration.

There was also general consensus that there were too many priority issues on the agenda. The decision to combine the proposals on the burden of disease, environment and health indicators, and a mechanism for exchange of information was one step towards a more focused agenda. The issue of further consolidating the agenda should be looked at again at the next EEHC meeting.

The substantive involvement of the countries, as well as relevant organizations, in the Budapest Conference process is crucial. Intergovernmental meetings will be needed in which to debate and negotiate the policy outcomes of the Conference. The EEHC agreed that the first such meeting should be held in early 2003 to discuss a draft children's health and environment action plan. One option is to hold this meeting back-to-back with the UNECE CEP meeting in mid-February 2003, although this may be too early.

WHO/EURO

Work should begin on the various priority issues, taking into full account the comments made at this meeting.

**All
Responsible
Coordinators**

Based on these discussions, a draft provisional agenda is given in Annex 2.

3. EEHC membership changes in autumn 2002 (EEHC6/11)

The EEHC took note of the elections to be held in autumn 2002 of country members. It was agreed that current country members would be invited to continue to participate in future EEHC meetings, as outlined in the working paper.

The EEHC further noted the importance of business involvement in the preparations for the Budapest Conference and considered that representation of the business sector on the Committee should be reviewed. The EEHC Secretariat was asked to follow up on this issue with a view towards securing participation of an interested relevant body.

**EEHC
Secretariat**

The continued absence of the International Labour Organization (ILO), a member of the EEHC, was also noted. The participation of the ILO in the work of the EEHC and the upcoming Budapest Conference would be welcomed, and the EEHC Secretariat was asked to follow up on this issue.

**EEHC
Secretariat**

4. Reports by members on relevant environment and health activities of their countries/organizations

This agenda item was very brief due to the shortage of time. A report was made on the project on rapid environment and health risk assessment, initiated by the EEHC in follow up to the pollution episodes of the Danube and its tributaries in 2000 and coordinated by WHO/EURO in collaboration with and support from Italy. Results of the project in Bulgaria and Romania were presented by Carmen-Stefania Toader and Silvia Kirova, respectively. The Italian Ministry of Environment will organize a meeting in Trieste to discuss possible follow-up steps.

Annex 1

Draft provisional agenda of Budapest Conference

| Progress made on environment and health in Europe, Frankfurt to Budapest | Strengthening the policy-making base | Emerging priority issues, awareness raising issues | The way forward |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>A. Situation analysis of environment and health in Europe – an overview with emphasis on the NIS</p> <p>B. Evaluation of impact of environment and health policies</p> <p>C. Follow up on the London decisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol on Water and Health • Transport, environment and health • Climate change and health • NEHAPs and local action • Children’s health and the environment • Environment and health research • Access to information, public participation and access to justice in environment and health matters • Economic perspective on environment and health • Good practice in health, environment and safety management in enterprises | <p>A. Framework for information provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessing the burden of disease - Environment and health indicators: a pan-European system for policy-oriented reporting and assessments - Platform for exchange of information <p>B. Dealing with uncertainty – the precautionary principle</p> | <p>A. Housing and health</p> <p>B. Global change, energy and health</p> <p>C. Impact of tourism on environment and health</p> <p>D. (Possible new issues from the World Summit on Sustainable Development)</p> | <p>A. Children’s health and environment action plan</p> <p>B. Conference Declaration</p> |

Annex 2

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