



Better Health. Better Environment. Sustainable Choices.

**Sixth Ministerial Conference
on Environment and Health**

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DECLARATION OF THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

In the WHO European Region, environmental factors that could be avoided and/or eliminated cause 1.4 million deaths per year. The major health impacts of environmental determinants in the Region are related to noncommunicable diseases, disabilities and unintentional injuries, with growing concern about the impact of climate change and biodiversity loss on changing patterns of existing and emerging communicable diseases, and about adverse reproductive outcomes. Addressing the existing and emerging challenges requires additional, strong joint action.

We, the ministers and representatives of Member States in the European Region of the World Health Organization (WHO) responsible for health and the environment, with the WHO Regional Director for Europe, in the presence of the Regional Director for Europe of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and of high-level representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and of the European Union, other United Nations and intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations

Have come together at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health – generously hosted by the Czech Republic, jointly organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, UNECE and UNEP, and held on 13–15 June 2017 in Ostrava, Czech Republic – to shape future common actions to decrease the burden of diseases caused by environmental factors for current and the future generations and to promote synergies between our two sectors and stakeholders as the key to achieving health and well-being objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We:

1. *Recognize* that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights critical and inseparable links between development, environment, human health and well-being, and the economy as central to the attainment of a wide range of human rights, including: the rights to life; the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; an adequate standard of living; safe food, drinking-water and sanitation; safety; and clean soil, waters and air, which are key to promoting just, peaceful, inclusive and prosperous societies today and in the future;



2. *Acknowledge* that sound environment and health policies have greatly contributed to the overall increase in life expectancy and well-being in the WHO European Region over the past decades, and that health gains are among the most socially and economically desirable benefits of adequate environmental protection;
3. *Note with concern* that environmental degradation and pollution, climate change, exposure to harmful chemicals and the destabilization of ecosystems threaten the right to health, and disproportionately affect socially disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups, thereby exacerbating inequalities;
4. *Recognize* the health benefits of addressing climate change, and support the Paris Agreement in its acknowledgment of the importance of the right to health in the actions to be taken to address climate change;
5. *Emphasize* that every government and public authority at all levels of governance shares the common responsibility for safeguarding the global environment through intersectoral collaboration and citizens' participation, and for promoting and protecting human health for all from environmental hazards across generations and in all policies. For this reason, governments and public authorities should be aware that their decisions, actions and operations may affect environment and human health, both within and across the borders of each country;
6. *Recognize* that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Health 2020, the European policy for health and well-being, commit us to coherent multisectoral strategies that emphasize system-wide and equitable preventive policies to improve environmental health conditions, and keep in mind the consequences for the social determinants of health, particularly amongst the least privileged in the Region;
7. *Reaffirm* the European Charter on Environment and Health of 1989, the principles laid down therein, and our decisions from previous ministerial conferences;
8. *Note with concern that* the three time-bound targets for 2015 and two targets for 2020 from the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health have yet to be achieved.
9. **We therefore resolve:**
 - a. to protect and promote the health and well-being of all our people and to prevent premature deaths, diseases and inequalities related to environmental pollution and degradation;
 - b. to consider equity, social inclusion and gender equality in our policies on the environment and health, also with respect to access to natural resources and to the benefits of ecosystems;
 - c. to advocate the health benefits of sustainable production and consumption, a transition from fossil to renewable energy in an appropriate time frame, the use of clean and safe technologies, and a shift to low-emission and energy-efficient transport and mobility integrated with urban and spatial planning;
 - d. to work towards communities, infrastructures and health systems that are resilient, particularly to climate change;
 - e. to strive to fulfil the vision of a healthy planet and healthy people through our work in the WHO European Region, by working in partnership with all relevant sectors and stakeholders;

- f. to strengthen the implementation of our existing international obligations and voluntary commitments related to promoting our environment and health agenda;
- g. to maintain and further develop adequate mechanisms to gather and analyse relevant evidence on health and environment as a basis for our decisions, taking into account the precautionary principle;
- h. to actively support open, transparent and relevant research on established and emerging environment and health risks in order to strengthen the evidence-base to guide policy-making and preventive action.

10. We will use the European environment and health process as an established intersectoral and inclusive process and platform for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for contributions to the strategic planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring and reporting of progress made towards the objectives of this Declaration.

11. In particular, while strengthening the public health functions of the health systems, we will expand our capacities to work across all sectors, levels of government and stakeholders to reduce environment-related health risks for our citizens, and will promote public participation, and access to information and justice on environment and health.

12. Through enhancing national implementation, we will strive to make a difference for our citizens. To this effect, we will develop national portfolios of actions on environment and health by the end of 2018, as stand-alone policy documents or parts of others, respecting differences in countries' circumstances, needs, priorities and capacities. These portfolios will draw on Annex 1 to this Declaration, which is a compendium of possible actions to facilitate its implementation, focusing on the following areas:

- a. improving indoor and outdoor air quality for all, as one of the most important environmental risk factors in the Region, through actions to meet the values of the WHO air quality guidelines in a continuous process of improvement;
- b. ensuring universal, equitable and sustainable access to safe drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene for all and in all settings, while promoting integrated management of water resources and reuse of safely treated wastewater, where appropriate;
- c. minimizing the adverse effects of chemicals on human health and the environment by: replacing hazardous chemicals with safer alternatives, including non-chemical ones; reducing the exposure of vulnerable groups to hazardous chemicals, particularly during the early stages of human development; strengthening capacities for risk assessment and research to secure a better understanding of human exposure to chemicals and the associated burden of disease; and applying the precautionary principle where appropriate;
- d. preventing and eliminating the adverse environmental and health effects, costs and inequalities related to waste management and contaminated sites, by advancing towards the elimination of uncontrolled and illegal waste disposal and trafficking, and sound management of waste and contaminated sites in the context of transition to a circular economy;
- e. strengthening adaptive capacity and resilience to health risks related to climate change and supporting measures to mitigate climate change and achieve health co-benefits in line with the Paris Agreement;

- f. supporting the efforts of European cities and regions to become healthier and more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable through an integrated, smart and health-promoting approach to urban and spatial planning, mobility management, the implementation of effective and coherent policies across multiple levels of governance, stronger accountability mechanisms and the exchange of experience and best practices in line with the shared vision established by the New Urban Agenda;
- g. building the environmental sustainability of health systems, and reducing their environmental impacts through such means as efficiency in the use of energy and resources, sound management of medical products and chemicals throughout their life-cycle and reduced pollution through safely managed waste and wastewater, without prejudice to the sanitary mission of health services.

13. Through our national portfolios for action, we will also pursue, until their achievement, the five time-bound targets of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health on: ensuring tobacco smoke-free environments for children, developing national programmes to eliminate asbestos-related diseases, and identifying the risks posed by exposures to harmful substances and preparations and eliminating them as far as possible by 2015; and addressing water, sanitation and hygiene in settings used by children, and safe environments that support physical activity of children by 2020.

14. To address those priorities effectively, we will:

- a. engage in national implementation, sharing knowledge and providing a platform for collaboration and communication;
- b. mobilize resources and build or pool capacities, which may include bilateral or multilateral international collaboration;
- c. promote policy coherence and convergence between the European environment and health process, the “Environment for Europe” process, UNEP, the governing bodies of the relevant multilateral agreements on environment and health, and intersectoral programmes, processes and policies;
- d. advance the implementation of existing commitments and instruments, particularly those resulting from the European environment and health process (the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, and the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme – THE PEP), relevant resolutions of the World Health Assembly and WHO Regional Committee for Europe, and conventions and related instruments jointly implemented by environment and health sectors;
- e. strengthen the knowledge and capacity of health and environment professionals for health impact assessment through further education and training;
- f. increase the role of formal and informal education in the public’s understanding of complex environment and health issues and effective measures to address them;
- g. continue and expand key strategic and institutional partnerships, while ensuring the appropriate participation of all relevant intergovernmental and non-state actors;

- h. encourage the European Environment and Health Youth Coalition (EEHYC) to continue being an active partner in the European environment and health process, and commit ourselves to supporting the creation of national youth platforms in our countries and continuing to work with the EEHYC.
15. We will measure and report on progress towards the implementation of our commitments using national reporting on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets.
16. To sustain the European environment and health process, we will support and participate in the institutional arrangements that are necessary for the realization of the commitments of this Declaration, which are elaborated in Annex 2.
17. We call upon the governing bodies of WHO and UNECE to support these commitments, including by making every effort to mobilize the necessary resources.
18. We resolve to support the attainment of our commitments at the national and international levels, and the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe and UNECE in environment and health, in close collaboration with UNEP, according to our financial means and budgetary possibilities.

Signed on 15 June 2017 in Ostrava, Czech Republic

(Symbolic signatures by the representatives of the host country and the United Nations)