

EU Health Forum Workshop:

Policy Recommendations

Integrating Environment and Health policy towards better health outcomes:

- EU environment policies can contribute to improving people's overall health status, and address a number of public health concerns, ranging from obesity, nutrition and food safety to reduction of environment contaminants related to chronic diseases such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, cancer or developmental problems. The mounting body of environment and health information and research provides the evidence basis for understanding environment's impact on these diseases, and identifies significant opportunities for prevention policies and activities given that the majority of environmental policies are set by EU environmental laws. An integrated EU approach on environment and health could also strengthen member states implementation work by providing coherent and coordinated action on environmental determinants of health.
- The first Community Strategy on Environment and Health SCALE and the EU Action Plan EHAP aimed to develop a more integrated approach to tackling the environmental burden of disease. It has also highlighted the overarching objective of better health protection of vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and health affected groups who are more biologically susceptible to environment contaminants (e.g EU Air quality legislation recognizes that vulnerable populations includes people with respiratory disease who need a higher level of protection from pollution).

To continue integrating health concerns in environment policies as part of the wider health in all policies approach, the EU Health Forum workshop has discussed and agreed on the following recommendations.

1. **Support for a second EU Action Plan on Environment and Health.** The EU Action Plan on Environment and Health 2004-2010 has provided added-value and provides a foundation to bring together information, research, and best practice, and to translate it into policy to reduce the environmental burden of disease. It can also serve to highlight the positive benefits to health from a more sustainable and cleaner environment. The workshop welcomes the Commission's Progress Report (March 2010) to continue to consolidate this work and continue discussions with member states and stakeholders to develop a new Action Plan in 2011.
2. **Greater synergies with the 2010 WHO Parma Ministerial Declaration and implementation:** Future environment and health work should ensure synergies and support to EU member states in fulfilling their WHO commitments, such as the time bound targets on improving children's environmental health, related to unclean water and sanitation, poor air quality and tobacco smoke, exposure to hazardous chemicals and accident prevention. This should also include action on the priorities identified by health and environment ministers in the Parma Declaration as the key environment and health challenges of our time: health and environmental impacts of climate change; health risks to vulnerable groups from environment working and living conditions; socioeconomic and gender inequalities; reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases from policies such as environment, transport, urban development; and emerging issues such as persistent, endocrine-disrupting chemicals and nanoparticles.

3. **Increasing health community and youth participation** (public health institutes, patient and disease prevention groups, medical professionals, NGOs) in EU, national and local policy making and implementation would provide additional public health lever for environmental policies. Short and medium-term policy opportunities include:
 - Discussion on a second EU Action Plan on Environment and Health and topics identified as providing added-value such as indoor air quality, human biomonitoring, and environment and health information systems.
 - Ensuring health benefits and cost savings are integrated in the wider EU climate discussions on the greenhouse gas emission reduction target and greening health care systems.
 - Ongoing revisions and implementation of key EU environmental legislation and strategies such as the Air Quality, Biocides Directive, Mercury Strategy, REACH, Pesticides, GMOs as well as other environment and health related forthcoming EU initiatives, for example in transport. Particular attention should be paid to prenatal exposure.
 - Implementation of the European Partnership for Action against Cancer to integrate environmental factors within the prevention working group, and beginning discussions on identifying a second priority disease such as respiratory diseases, and neurodevelopmental diseases for a future EU strategy. Promotion of population-based disease registries should also be encouraged. The EU Health Strategy should include prevention policies which incorporate environmental factors, and care policies should incorporate prevention.
 - Ensuring that the health stakeholder community and citizens have accessible information on EU policy in the field of environment and health and how it can impact their lives – the EU added value.
 - Facilitating greater environment and health education and capacity, particularly for medical students and environmental and health professionals.
4. **Translating research into ambitious action which addresses the urgency of environmental health impacts:** The 6 EU Research Framework programme has provided around 200 million Euros for 2002-2006 for environment and health projects, and the current FP7 continues to spark research projects, many of which will be producing policy relevant results in the next years. The current mechanisms and structures need to be strengthened to ensure research is translated into actions for implementation or further policy revisions on an ongoing basis.

Links:

EU Commission Progress report on the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Environment and Health, March 2010: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st08/st08201.en10.pdf>

Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health of the WHO European Region: Parma Declaration on Environment and Health, March 2010:
http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/78608/E93618.pdf