



Fifth Ministerial Conference on **Environment and Health**

*Protecting children's health
in a changing environment*

Parma, Italy, 24-26 February 2010

More than ever, children's health is at risk from a changing environment. Building on 20 years of environment and health action in Europe and on countries' commitment to strengthen health systems, the Conference will set the European agenda on emerging environmental health challenges for years to come.



The health impacts of environmental risk factors – inadequate water and sanitation, unsafe home and recreational environments, lack of spatial planning for physical activity, indoor and outdoor air pollution, and hazardous chemicals – are amplified by recent developments including financial constraints, broader socioeconomic and gender inequalities and more frequent extreme climate events. They pose new challenges for health systems to reduce death and disease through effective environmental health interventions.

At the Fifth Ministerial Conference, ministers of health and of the environment, key partners

and experts, will assess the progress made since the adoption of the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) in 2004. Organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and hosted by the Government of Italy in Parma, the Conference will renew governments' pledges in an era of new global challenges to improve health systems' performance and their collaboration with other sectors to ensure better environments for children's health. As the 2008 Tallinn Charter says: "... health systems are more than health care and include disease prevention, health promotion and efforts to influence other sectors to address health concerns in their policies ..."¹.

Taking the lead in environment and health

In the late 1980s, European countries launched a process to eliminate the most significant environmental threats to human health. Progress towards this goal is driven by a series of five-yearly ministerial conferences coordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Ministerial conferences on environment and health: the pillars of the process

The ministerial conferences are unique, bringing together different sectors to shape European policies and actions on environment and health. The first conference was held in Frankfurt in 1989, followed by Helsinki in 1994 and London in 1999. The most recent conference took place in Budapest in 2004 under the theme "The future for our children".

From Budapest to Parma: children in the spotlight

The Fourth Ministerial Conference centred on the measures countries can take to address the impacts of environmental hazards on children's

health and adopted the CEHAPE to help protect future generations. An intergovernmental mid-term review in 2007 in Vienna noted progress on the Budapest commitments and identified the priorities for the Fifth Ministerial Conference.

Steering the process: the European Environment and Health Committee

This Committee brings together a unique coalition of representatives of health and environment ministries, intergovernmental and civil-society organizations and youth. It monitors and reports on countries' work to implement their commitments and advocates for action by sharing experiences and promoting partnerships among the various stakeholders.



1 The Tallinn Charter: Health Systems for Health and Wealth. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2008.

The road to Parma

In preparation for Parma 2010, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has organized a series of events to shape the Conference agenda, including a process leading to the final declaration that ensured full ownership to countries and partner organizations.

Three high-level meetings discussed the key themes on the Conference agenda:

- protect health through safe water and sanitation, and ensure safety from injury and better health from adequate physical activity (Milan, Italy);
- improve respiratory health through clean air, and safeguard health in chemical-free environments and through strong labour standards (Madrid, Spain);
- protect health from climate change and address socioeconomic and gender inequities (Bonn, Germany).

An international public health symposium on research and policy-making in environment and health, held in Madrid, shared the most recent scientific evidence with policy-makers in preparation for the Conference.

Policy dialogue meetings in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and in Dushanbe, Tajikistan focused on the reform and role of public health services in central and eastern European countries. A similar process for south-eastern European countries was marked by meetings in Montenegro and Serbia. These meetings' conclusions will contribute to the Conference declaration.

A Declaration Drafting Group, composed of 11 Member States, the European Commission, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and official youth representatives, is writing the main committal document for the Conference in broad consultation with countries and partners (through meetings in Brussels, Paris, Luxembourg, Andorra and Copenhagen).

For young people, with young people

Our health cannot be negotiated. It is a precondition of our personal development and happiness. ... We need and deserve a fundamental human right to a clean and healthy environment ...

Budapest Youth Declaration, 24 June 2004

The Fifth Ministerial Conference ensures the participation of all key partners in the process, especially making the voices of young people heard in environment and health policy-making, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The aim is for each country's delegation to include young delegates to provide active input to their future needs.

A World Health Youth (WHY) Environment and Health Communication Network has been established to engage young journalists from major European media outlets early in the process. The WHY Network aims to enhance the quality and quantity of coverage on environment and health themes. WHY journalists are invited to take part in the media award competition for Parma 2010.



A green conference in a healthy city
Safe urban settings, locally sourced food,
and use of ecomaterials will contribute
to the first ever low-carbon-footprint
ministerial conference on environment and
health organized by the WHO Regional
Office for Europe.

Parma provides the ideal setting for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. At the centre of the Italian Food Valley, one hour from Milan and Bologna, this friendly ducal city is a masterpiece of art and town planning. Besides history, music and food, Parma offers a high quality of life, with low levels of noise and air pollution and an environment that promotes healthy transport. All this makes Parma the perfect advocate for healthy environments and a conducive setting for goodwill and commitment.

Just a few steps away from the city centre, the Parma Congress Centre is the venue for the Fifth Ministerial Conference. Situated in a splendid ancient park, it forms part of a successful urban planning project that includes the Auditorium Paganini, a work by the architect Renzo Piano. The Centre is a tangible example of how technology and tradition can co-exist harmoniously.

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