



**EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT
AND HEALTH PROCESS**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR
Europe



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programme

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH PROCESS NEWSLETTER

January – March 2021

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1. EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of the [European Environment and Health Process](#) (EHP) newsletter for 2021! It offers interesting updates on preparations and developments related to implementation of the [Ostrava Declaration](#) towards a green and healthy recovery from COVID-19 for your spring reading.

Best regards,
EHP Secretariat



2. COUNTRY ACTIVITIES

- The WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and the WHO country offices in **Azerbaijan** and **Serbia** are conducting two projects to address the safety of chemicals. In Azerbaijan, the project concerns the chemical impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and possible means for minimizing it through education, awareness-raising and training of health-care staff and the public. In Serbia, the project comprises development of a national road map to increase the engagement and/or contribution of the health sector to sound chemicals management up to 2030.
- On 19–20 January, WHO/Europe organized a virtual workshop for the project “Establishment of key elements of sound chemicals management systems in selected countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia”. The event was attended more than 50 participants, not only in the three countries involved in the project, **Belarus, Georgia and Kazakhstan**, but also experts in other Member States in the WHO European Region. The project was funded by the German Advisory Assistance Programme through the German Federal Environment Agency.



3. ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND COVID-19

- **The European Programme of Work is vital for the COVID-19 response.** Work on environment and health in the context of COVID-19 continued within the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”. For more information on the activities, please see the link below.
- The link: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/regional-director/news/news/2021/02/one-year-on-european-programme-of-work-forms-vital-part-of-covid-19-response>
- **One year since the beginning of COVID-19: reflections from WHO/Europe.** After an unprecedented year for WHO in 2020, WHO/Europe looks ahead to 2021 with a focus on the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of the programme of work.
- The link: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/governance/regional-committee-for-europe/news/news/2021/02/whoeurope-looks-ahead-to-a-busy-2021>

Top story: Results of the survey on WHO European Region Member States' views on emerging implications of COVID-19 on the environment and health

The European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF) Bureau at its fifth meeting, held in June 2020, decided to conduct an online bilingual consultation to identify the issues of greatest relevance and interest for Member States with regard to the COVID-19 crisis and to provide the EHTF with an overview of the latest knowledge. The survey was conducted in October–December 2020.

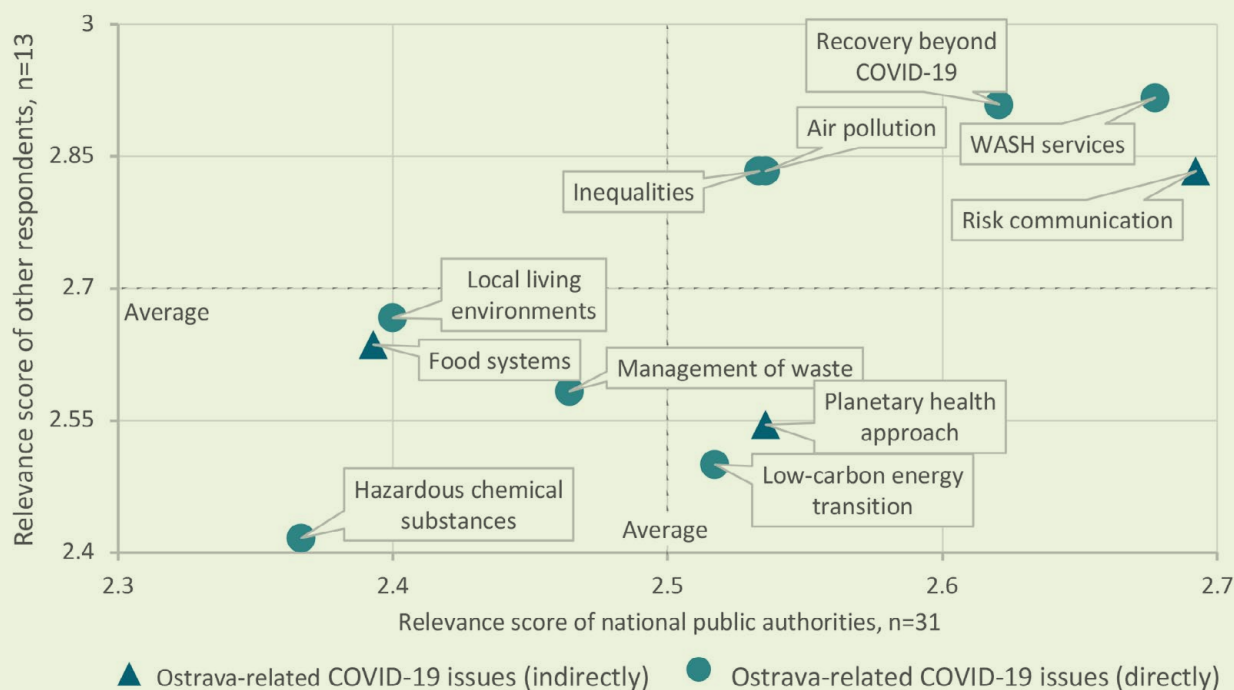
Although the results of the survey are limited by the relatively few responses from Member States (44 respondents in 36 Member States), the following themes related to the Ostrava Declaration and COVID-19 were rated as being of greatest relevance (see Fig. 1):

- the essential role of safe, reliable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for preventing infectious disease and ensuring the functionality of health systems;
- sustainable, resilient recovery beyond COVID-19;
- air pollution;
- inequalities in environment and health;
- a healthy transition to low-carbon energy;
- risk communication (indirectly related to Ostrava Declaration commitments); and
- integration of a planetary health approach in policy, research and expertise (indirectly related to Ostrava Declaration commitments).



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Fig. 1. Relevance of emerging COVID-19 issues related to commitments under the Ostrava Declaration by scores given by national public authorities and other respondents*



Note: Survey respondents were asked to assess the relevance of COVID-19 issues directly and indirectly related to the Ostrava Declaration in their country of employment on a scale of 1 to 3, 1 representing no relevance and 3 high or very high relevance. For each issue, the relevance score is the average value of respondents' answers. The average score for all the issues considered is noted by dashed line.

*Subnational and local public authorities, civil society, nongovernmental and youth organizations and research institutions



If you wish to report how your country is responding to the COVID-19 emergency within the environment and health agenda and your priorities and practice, the EHP Secretariat would be happy to discuss how your report can be made as relevant and useful as possible for the EHTF and partners of the EHP. Please contact us at euceh@who.int.



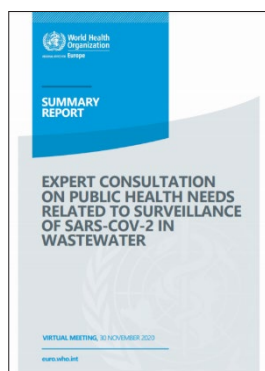
4. RECENT EVENTS

- On 25–26 January, the Netherlands hosted the **Climate Adaptation Summit 2021**. A side event on Climate-resilient water services: supporting action through the Protocol on Water and Health featured contributions by Italy (Deputy Minister of Health), Portugal and the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, in addition to contributions from the United Nations (UN) Commission for Europe (UNECE) and WHO/Europe.
- On 25 January and 2 March, WHO/Europe and UNECE organized a series of **preparatory meetings for the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment**, to be (virtually) hosted by Austria on 17–18 May 2021. Keep calm and get ready to welcome new recommendations for green and healthy sustainable transport and the first ever pan-European master plan for cycling promotion!
- On 27 January, after external review of the draft **WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines** by 48 experts and stakeholder organizations on an online questionnaire in November and December 2020, WHO/Europe organized a virtual consultation with the Guideline Development Group to agree on the responses to external comments and publication and dissemination of the guidelines; 23 participants around the world attended the meeting. The draft was submitted to the WHO Guidelines Review Committee on 23 March as an important milestone towards finalization of the updated guidelines, which are expected to be published in 2021. The guidelines provide up-to-date recommendations for continued protection of populations from the adverse health effects of air pollution.
- On 4–5 March, the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) and UNECE convened the **25th meeting of the Bureau** of the **Protocol on Water and Health**. The Bureau reviewed the status of implementation of the programme of work 2020–2022, the status of and measures to support accession to the Protocol, the financial situation, prioritization of activities according to available resources and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region** (in person and virtual, Geneva, 17–18 March 2021) discussed advancement towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the COVID-19 response and recovery. The Forum addressed concrete policy actions to accelerate progress towards achievement of the SDGs and “building forward better”.
- On 29–30 March, ECEH and UNECE organized a **Global workshop on building climate resilience by improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels**. The workshop took a holistic view of the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on water resource management, both nationally and across boundaries, on water supply and sanitation systems and, ultimately, on people's health.



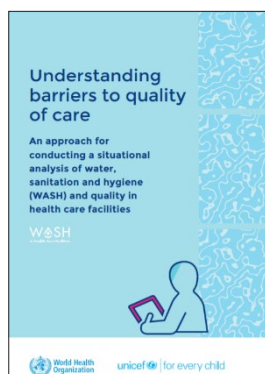
5. LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Publications on WASH:



This report summarizes the findings of an expert consultation on public health and surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater, organized virtually by the ECEH on 30 November 2020. Further work on this subject is being prepared in partnership with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Netherlands).

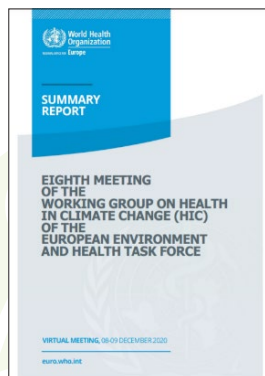
The link: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339487>.



This document describes an approach for a national situational analysis of WASH in health-care facilities as a basis for improving the quality of care, including in several countries in the WHO European Region. The results of the situational analysis provide the basis and rationale for subsequent activities, by identifying needs and priorities, and facilitate evidence-based target-setting.

The link: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/340297/9789240022577-eng.pdf>

Publications on climate change:



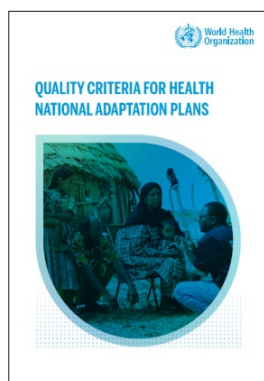
The report of the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Health in Climate Change of the EHTF (8–9 December 2020) presents the main discussion and its outcomes.

The link: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339962>



The report synthesizes the findings of a comprehensive review of evidence on prevention of the health effects of heat waves published since 2008, when WHO/Europe published guidance on heat–health action planning. A Russian version of the document is forthcoming.

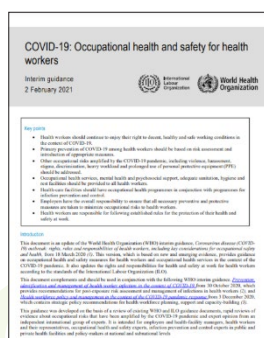
The link: [WHO/Europe | Climate change - Heat and health in the WHO European Region: updated evidence for effective prevention \(2021\)](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-Europe-Climate-change-Heat-and-health-in-the-WHO-European-Region-updated-evidence-for-effective-prevention-2021)



Quality Criteria for Health National Adaptation Plans presents examples of good practice to assist countries in designing a comprehensive, feasible, implementable plan. Case studies from Croatia and Montenegro are included. The Criteria are also intended to guide countries in setting the basis for long-term, iterative preparation of such plans.

The link: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/quality-criteria-health-national-adaptation-plans>

Guidance on occupational health in the context of COVID-19



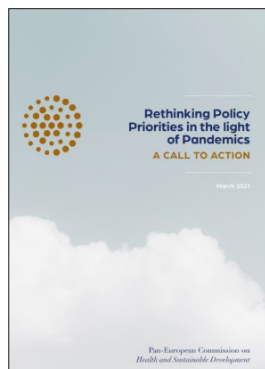
This document describes specific measures to protect the occupational health and safety of health workers and highlights duties, rights and responsibilities for health and safety at work in the context of COVID-19.

The link: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-HCW-advice-2021.1>



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Call for action by the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development



This document provides guidance on prioritizing health and sustainable development to set systems and societies on the right track for generations to come.

The link: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/press-releases/2021/rethinking-policy-priorities-in-the-light-of-pandemics-a-call-to-action/rethinking-policy-priorities-in-the-light-of-pandemics-a-call-to-action>

Must-read picks for this spring:

The effect of daily active travel in cities on mitigating climate change

Would you like to learn how much CO₂ can be saved by walking, cycling and e-biking in towns and cities? Click on the link below to read more.

The link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1361920921000687?dgcid=author>

The impacts of active travel on mitigating climate change: Evidence from a longitudinal panel study in seven European cities

Did you know that changes in active travel have significant benefits on carbon emissions throughout the life-cycle? For more information, take a look at the first study of the effects of changes in active travel in cities on carbon emissions.

The link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0959378021000030>

Final report – The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta review

The review calls for changes in how we think, act and measure economic success to protect and enhance our prosperity and the natural world.

The link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>



6. EHP CORNER

- Designation of the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#) as a WHO Collaborating Centre on Climate Change, Health and Sustainable Development has been completed. The London School is one of the world's leading academic institutions in the field of climate change, and we are delighted to welcome it as a strong partner in the WHO climate change family!
- On 20 January, ECEH organized the first meeting of the Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities, a body established by the

EHTF to advance implementation of the commitments of the Ostrava Declaration by facilitating exchanges of experience, partnerships, coherence and synergies at various decision-making levels. The meeting was attended by participants from 11 Member States in the WHO European Region and partners from European Union (EU) and UN organizations. The working group discussed experience in promoting, implementing, assessing and monitoring subnational and local implementation of the commitments of the Ostrava Declaration and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In focus: Building blocks of prevention, resilience and socio-economic recovery from COVID-19

The **tenth EHTF meeting** (virtual, 17–18 February) was attended by 96 representatives of 33 Member States and many international stakeholders and partners. The aim was to prepare for the seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, provisionally scheduled for 2023. The meeting was an opportunity not only to take stock of the latest developments in environment and health, share experiences from national policy-making and review progress in meeting commitments but also to draw attention to the major roles of environment and health in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting featured an open dialogue on “Building forward better in the aftermath of COVID-19 – health, environment, nature and climate change”, which was attended by 248 participants. Panellists and speakers from academia, WHO, UNECE, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the European Commission, National Health Service (NHS) England and NHS Improvement and Member States discussed the complex interactions among human activities, policies, the natural environment and health and proposed policy for national action to address the root causes of threats to global health and the environment and “build forward better”.

At the meeting, EHTF members:

- adopted a road map for the next Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health through the Bonn Dialogues and the Campaign for Resilience and Building Forward Better;
- adopted the biennial programme of work for the Working Group on Collaboration of Local and Subnational Authorities in 2021–2022;
- elected a new co-Chair from the environment sector in the Netherlands and a new Chair from Hungary. We thank Dr Tamas Pandics and Ms Brigit Staatsen for their unwavering contributions; and
- adopted revised Rules of Procedure of the EHTF.



7. NEWS FROM EHP STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

European Climate and Health Observatory: providing easy access to a wide range of relevant resources on climate change and human health

The [European Climate and Health Observatory](#) is a joint initiative of the European Commission, the European Environment Agency and many other organizations. WHO/Europe is a [partner of the Observatory](#), with the European Food Safety Authority, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Copernicus and the Lancet Countdown. A pilot version of the Observatory includes resources from partners; new products and further resources will be added over time. The Observatory is one of the deliverables under the new [EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#). On the occasion of the launch of the Observatory, a briefing, [Responding to the health risks of climate change in Europe](#), explores the health impacts of climate change in Europe and suggests opportunities for greater ambition, especially for adaptation.

Launch of UNECE's SDG Progress Report

The annual [SDG Progress Report](#) for the [UNECE](#) region has been officially launched. It was prepared by UNECE's Statistical Division, with contributions from 15 UN organizations and several country teams in the Region for an analysis of real-life perspectives of actions being taken. The report identifies targets towards which overall progress in the Region was good, but shows that progress must be accelerated in most areas before 2030.

Launch of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

In February, the [European Commission](#) launched the highly anticipated Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. The policy objectives, 10 flagship initiatives and many supporting actions, reflect the EU's political commitment to cancer treatment, prevention and care. Please see the official [Communication](#) and [Factsheet](#) for a comprehensive timetable of actions and a more detailed description of the Cancer Plan.

Communication: A common path to safe and sustained re-opening

The EC's [Communication: A common path to safe and sustained re-opening](#), released in March, describes surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater as an important tool for surveillance. An associated recommendation is to support EU Member States in establishing wastewater surveillance systems, with reference to the work of ECEH, particularly the recent expert consultation organized in collaboration with the European Commission.

Evidence from 2020 and Pathways for Inclusive Green Recovery Spending by Oxford's Economic Recovery Project and UNEP

One year after the onset of the pandemic, spending on recovery has fallen short of countries' commitments to build back more sustainably. An analysis of spending by



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leading economies, led by Oxford's Economic Recovery Project and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), indicated that only 18.0% of the announced recovery spending can be considered "green".

The report [Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways for Inclusive Green Recovery Spending](#) calls for governments to invest more sustainably and to tackle inequalities when they stimulate growth in the wake of the pandemic.

The [Health and Environment Alliance](#) launches a briefing on One Health

In the One Health approach, the health of the ecosystem cannot be separated from the health of all humans, animals, plants and their living environments. A briefing on the [One Health Approach to Climate Change and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) launched in Turkey guides the reader through the transdisciplinary approach of One Health. The [Health and Environment Alliance](#) also published a [new Chronic Coal Pollution Turkey report](#), to quantify the health burden of Turkey's 28 large coal power plants that were in operation in 2019, which burn lignite, hard coal or asphaltite.

The [European Environment Agency Eionet](#) Strategy 2021-2030

The [European Environment Agency](#) and its [European Information and Observation Network](#)

are developing a joint strategy for 2021–2030, the decade that will define and steer Europe towards sustainability. The aim of the [Strategy](#) is to seize opportunities to ensure that Europe's policy-makers and the public have the best available knowledge on Europe's environment in order to make informed decisions.

UN Habitat launched a report on Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future

Building on the many hard lessons of the pandemic and the inspiring, creative responses to contain it, the UN-Habitat Report on [Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future](#) examines the most important impacts of COVID-19 on cities and the forces that shape their future: urban form and function, poverty and socioeconomic inequality, the urban economy and governance structures.

Zero pollution webinar recording and questions now available online

The [HERA](#) (Health Environment Research Agenda for Europe) Consortium organized the first online webinar in the series Research for EU Green Deal. All questions are now available, with a recording of the webinar. Please visit the event web page for more information: <https://www.heraresearch.eu/hera-webinars-research-for-the-green-deal>



8. UPCOMING EVENTS

12th meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (virtual, 14–15 April 2021);

Symposium on Urban Design for Health (virtual, 14–16 April 2021). For registration: <https://who.zoom.us/j/92454608859>;

4th edition of the webinar series for the Protocol on Water and Health: “Universal access to hand hygiene: How to make it a reality?” (virtual, 21 April 2021). For registration: <https://who.zoom.us/j/92454608859>;

World Hand Hygiene Day (5 May 2021). Join the campaign “Save Lives: Clean Your Hands”. For more information about the campaign, activities and resources, please visit: <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hand-hygiene-day/2021>;

24th meeting of the Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution (virtual, 10–11 May 2021);

5th High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (virtual, hosted by Austria, 17–18 May 2021). For more information, please visit: <https://thepep.unece.org/events/fifth-high-level-meeting-transport-health-and-environment-0>;

6th UN Global Road Safety Week 2021, which calls for a 30 km/h (20 mph) speed limit as the norm in cities, towns and villages worldwide (17–23 May 2021);

9th meeting of the Health in Climate Change working group (virtual, 19–20 May 2021) on regional preparations for the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change;

webinar to launch the WHO/ECEH Nature and Health report on the occasion of International Biological Diversity Day (22 May 2021). For registration please visit (in English with simultaneous Russian translation): https://who.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_NeljVx6FQuq6EXo_DOJ05g;

Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly (24 May–1 June 2021);

EU Green Week 2021: Zero Pollution for Healthier People and Planet (virtual, 1–4 June 2021). For more information, please visit: www.eugreenweek.eu;

sub-regional workshop on WASH in schools organized under the Protocol on Water and Health (virtual, 22–24 June 2021); and

the Bonn Environmental Health School will be held virtually during October 2021. More information will follow.



9. CONTACT US

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