Slope and purpose

The Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health will be held in Budapest, Hungary from 5 to 7 July 2023 under the European Environment and Health Process (EHP).¹

The event is organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, in close partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Environment Programme. The Conference is generously hosted by the Government of Hungary under the patronage of the President of Hungary, Ms Katalin Novák.

Despite progress in implementing environment and health policies in the past 30 years since the inception of the EHP, there are still more than 1.4 million premature deaths occurring each year in the WHO European Region due to environmental risk factors. Air pollution is the single most significant environmental risk factor for health, and climate change is rapidly becoming a matter of growing concern for health and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered systemic failures in preventing and addressing environmental factors that increase the risk of zoonotic diseases. It has also highlighted how human health and well-being are intrinsically linked to the health of the environment and affected by environmental crises.

The triple crisis of climate change, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss poses the greatest threat to the health and well-being of current and future generations. These three interlinked issues reinforce each other, amplifying the threats to our health and well-being and calling for urgent action to change course and steer humankind back to safety.

The Conference aims to achieve strong political commitment to accelerate progress in addressing health challenges arising from these issues. It will call for a commitment to transformational change, implying renewed governance, a new workforce with integrated competencies in environment and health, the use of cross-sectoral approaches, support for research and innovation as the main drivers for sustainable development, increased resilience of health systems, and better health and well-being for all.

Over three days, the Conference will assess, at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recent achievements and challenges, launch new action-oriented partnerships, and discuss new strategies and approaches for better prevention, resilience, flexibility

¹ The European Environment and Health Process provides a unique intersectoral platform to shape the environment and health policy landscape in the WHO European Region. The Process supports the development and implementation of effective, evidence-based policies and promotes actions that improve health, well-being and the environment. The First Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health was held in Frankfurt, Germany in 1989, and was followed by conferences in Helsinki, Finland in 1994; London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 1999; Budapest, Hungary in 2004; Parma, Italy in 2010; and Ostrava, Czechia in 2017.
and effectiveness while considering opportunities for a healthy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Conference will emphasize and promote the active engagement of youth representatives in decisions related to health and the environment and further strengthen cooperation among Member States, WHO, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme, other relevant intergovernmental organizations and civil society, including by promoting coordination and coherence at the national, subnational and local levels of decision-making.

The main outcome of the Conference will be a political document, the Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, or the Budapest Declaration, which will be the result of an inclusive and transparent political negotiation process involving Member States and stakeholders.

In particular, the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health aims to:

1. take stock of the most recent developments in understanding the health impact of the triple environmental crisis and of major trends and current and future concerns in the Region, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. enhance the commitment of the health sector to tackle the impacts of climate change, including by making health systems more environmentally sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient;
3. reaffirm the need for urgent efforts to reduce the health effects of pollution, addressing both established and emerging environmental risk factors;
4. integrate nature, biodiversity and health considerations in environment and health policies, and in the implementation of the One Health approach;
5. adopt a roadmap as an integral part of the Budapest Declaration, with a set of concrete actions and commitments to prevent and address the health effects posed by the triple crisis;
6. agree on a series of accelerators for achieving the environment and health-related Sustainable Development Goals, at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, and a transition towards resilient, healthy, equitable and sustainable communities; and
7. launch the EHP Partnerships as a new and flexible mechanism to support the implementation of commitments on specific topics of common interest at the national and international levels.

The Conference will also reaffirm the commitments made at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Ostrava, Czechia, including the development and implementation of National Portfolios of Actions on Environment and Health, and the critical role of essential services such as the provision of clean energy, water, sanitation and hygiene services, and sustainable transport in preventing disease and promoting health.