

EPH

Environment and Public Health
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European communities
health and environment
knowledgebase

EPH Brussels Statement

Environment and Public Health

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High Level Expert Meeting on Environment and Public Health (EPH),
hosted by the European Union (Committee of the Regions),
by the end of the Environment and Health Action Plan 2004 – 2010 of the European
Commission

Preamble:

- Near the end of the first Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010 of the European Commission, high level experts have met in Brussels at the European Union Committee of the Regions.

- Continuing efforts have been made since the First Treaty on the European Union and the EPH Declaration (1993), which was made public by EPH on behalf of the European Commission and the World Health Organization, the day before the first Treaty on the European Union came into force, i.e. 1st of November 1993.

- The present 2d High Level Expert Meeting was organised in the context of Agenda 2020 and the Lisbon Treaty and prepared in collaboration with the European Commission services. Both the Plenary Assembly and the EPH Seminars were organised during the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Statement of the Participants representing the EPH Membership that is linked to over 320 Institutions throughout the European Union is as follows:

Art 1. Under the impulse given by the first Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010 (first EHAP), and otherwise, the amount of information and knowledge on environmental & health is increasing rapidly.

Art 2. Issues, already recognised as important regarding health effects due to the environment are such as changing weather conditions, indoor and outdoor air quality, anthropogenic nanoparticles, electromagnetic fields, unsustainable buildings, endocrine disruptors, social inequalities, lack of public transport mobility, urban environment, and regional strategies.

Art 3. The fast development of the fundamental scientific understanding of biology, the ecosphere, and of experimental tools like -omics (research areas) is reinforcing significantly the ability of the research community to understand the effects of a changing environment on human health, the baby and ageing. Insight increases into the mechanisms e.g. of human cancer, foetal development and neurodegenerative diseases (including developmental origins of health and disease – DOHaD). The EPH research community, for example, analyses the molecular effects of the environment at a cellular level of gene proliferation/transcription in the pathogenesis of various diseases. Starting at the pre-conception level and parental gametes, environmental information is transmitted to the embryonic stem cells and hence the baby. Epigenetic elements complement the established treatment protocols for cancers, diabetes and behavioural abnormalities. The priority goal, however, is prevention, by reducing harmful exposures. While likely progress in treatment is welcome, longer, healthy, and high quality life through protection from environmental pollution and other hazards, and through enjoyment of a health-supporting environment, remain the principal objectives. Precaution is essential.

Art 4. This fast growing wealth of available information and knowledge must be made available to policy makers, non-expert professionals and advisors, as well as to others actively engaged in decision making. The expert meeting heard of several examples of how science has helped inform the development of policy. Contrary to weather events currently only limited information is known in the peer-reviewed literature on the health effects of climate change and infectious diseases. Despite rapid developments in the fields significant data gaps remain. Health effects however are likely to be mediated by climate change and changing weather events.

Art 5. The way to do this is strongly supported by the results of scientific research. There is both a lot of scientific research on environment and health which *can be* translated into policy; and there is a lot of knowledge on *how to translate* science into policy. Toxicity/hazard information should be unbiased. Policy makers should take into consideration all the available scientific literature.

In particular there is a strong need to

(1) reinforce the EU capacity to act on environment and health issues as called for by the first cycle of implementation of the Environment and Health Strategy (2003) and the Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010 of the European Commission, to turn the increasing data and evidence on environment and health into knowledge bases that can be implemented and translated into policy action; and

(2) take advantage of the swiftly growing biological understanding about foetal development, human reproduction and metabolism, and of combined epidemiological understanding of risk assessment, achieved to the benefit of the European citizen and communities and delivered by the European Union.

This should be the basis for drafting a second cycle of implementation as a second EU Action Plan on Environment and Health as a matter of good EU management.

Art 6. Making data and knowledge on environment & health accessible and processing it in a way that it has real impact on society is a continuous process. An important instrument to realise this knowledge-base at different levels, includes databases and platforms that assure these functions. To that end it is important to capitalise on the projects and platforms that have currently been organised, such as EPH.

In this context a positive perception of the environment in continuous education must be assured. This includes promoting green areas and physical activity in enjoyable environments. Appropriate training of trainers (ToT) for specific environment, health, and other professionals should have a significant weight in a new Environment and Health Action Plan. Moreover environment and health should not only be a matter of specialists, but also a matter of professions like general practice and architects, journalists, among others.

Art 7. The role of the European Parliament and its relevant committees is emphasised by the EPH Participants, as the Vice-President of the European Parliament made clear at the 2d High Level Expert Meeting. The conference also strongly highlighted, as emphasised by the Committee of the Regions, the role of strategies, models, and projects for local and regional development in environment and health, close to the European citizen. These need further support and development.

Art 8. At the occasion of the High Level Expert Meeting on Environment and Health in Brussels during the EPH Seminar “Translating Science into policy development” a Collaborative and “Federative” Group of “European Professionals on Health and

Environment” (EPHE) was consolidated on 10 November 2010 bringing together for the first time at EU level professional and scientific associations and individual professionals on health and the environment from various Member States and Regions. These Member States and Regions include e.g. Austria, Belgium, Flanders, France, Germany, Haute Normandy, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands.

Art 9. EPH will continue to offer an independent platform for back-up, discussing European environment and health issues as a European EPH Programme/Platform.

Art 10. As witnessed by the calls for “health in all policies” (WHO) and environment in all policies, awareness and knowledge on environment and health is a horizontal (cross sector) concern, also at local level. Its integrative nature calls for reserving a dedicated “policy space” at EU level to develop the required synergies between the various policy actions and allows it to play its role as a catalyst. In particular, it is therefore imperative that environmental health aspects be introduced fully in the EU and Member State development cooperation policy be introduced. Incorporating environment and health issues in other EU policies such as Agenda 2020 is equally necessary. The special role of women and youth in relation to environment and health risks is further emphasised, as in the former EPH Declaration.

As a consequence of these points the EPH Community is calling on the EU to initiate the second cycle of implementation of the EU Environment and Health Action Plan as a matter of sound management to avoid wasting the significant achievement already obtained and exploit the results achieved.

Statement made public in Brussels,
on 16 November 2010,

following 2d European High Level Meeting
in Jacques Delors building
Committee of the Regions,
European Union

Signed,

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