



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

Regional Committee for Europe

Sixty-third session

Çeşme Izmir, Turkey, 16–19 September 2013

Provisional agenda item 5(j)

EUR/RC63/Inf.Doc./6

9 August 2013

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Progress report on the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health, Bonn, Germany (WHO/ECEH)

This information document contains a progress report on the work of the WHO European Centre on Environment and Health (WHO/ECEH), a geographically dispersed office of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

This report should be read in conjunction with the report of the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (document EUR/RC63/10).

Introduction

1. Member States of the WHO European Region adopted the European Charter on Environment and Health at the first ministerial conference in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1989 and called on WHO to establish the WHO European Centre on Environment and Health (WHO/ECEH), recalling United Nations General Assembly resolutions A/RES/42/186 and A/RES/42/187 and World Health Assembly resolution WHA42.26.

2. Between 1989 and 2012, the WHO/ECEH operated from multiple locations simultaneously (Athens, Bilthoven, Bonn, Helsinki, Nancy and Rome), with a variety of managerial and functional arrangements. Streamlining was achieved in 2007 when the Bonn and Rome offices were integrated into the Division of Health Programmes, and again in 2012, after closure of the Rome office, when the entire area of environment and health was consolidated within the Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment.

3. The new host agreement for the Bonn GDO entered into force on 6 February 2012 through an exchange of letters between the WHO Regional Director for Europe and the German Ambassador to Denmark, superseding the previous agreement of 2001. The new agreement extends the provisions of the 2001 agreement, extends the validity of the agreement from 10 years to indefinitely, increases the financial contribution of the German Government to WHO from €1.023 million to €3.423 million annually and aligns the funding cycle with the biannual programme budget cycle of WHO.

Technical area and structure

4. The expanded Bonn GDO was inaugurated by the German Federal Minister of Health and the Minister for the Environment in February 2012. The number of staff in the Bonn GDO almost tripled, partially by reassignment of existing WHO staff from the Rome office and partially by competitive selection. The current configuration of the Bonn GDO is the result of a well-planned consolidation in 2011, triggered by closure of the Rome GDO, but seen primarily as an opportunity to achieve specific technical, policy, managerial and financial objectives. Expansion of the Bonn GDO also enabled the Regional Office to initiate work in areas that were under-served up to 2012, such as environmental health economics and chemical safety.

5. WHO/ECEH now also more effectively supports the European environment and health process, not only by work in technical areas related to commitments made at the Parma Conference in 2010, but also by direct provision of evidence, knowledge and technical information to the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) and Task Force (EHTF) and by supporting their activities or those of their subsidiary bodies intersessionally.

6. WHO/ECEH is also a source of knowledge and institutional capacity for WHO globally. It represents 35% of all WHO staff working on environment and health at WHO headquarters and all six regional offices and has provided technical support to other regional offices on specific topics and led global work on behalf of the Organization, for example, in developing WHO guidelines on air quality, noise and small-scale water supplies and assessing the impact of, inter alia, black carbon and nanotechnology.

Relationship to the WHO Regional Office for Europe and its work programme

7. The Bonn GDO is the main source of knowledge, assessed evidence and normative guidance on environment and health and is the backbone of work in this area in the WHO European Region. It delivers technical work on priority area 4 of Health 2020 (resilient communities and supportive environments) and priority 5 of category III of the WHO programme budget (Health and environment).

8. A significant proportion of funds under the Bonn agreement is used for the work of the EHMB and the EHTF directly, thus fully supporting the policy role of the WHO Regional Office for Europe and aligning its work with the European environment and health process.

9. Since consolidation of the WHO/ECEH in Bonn, technical areas have been reorganized to strengthen the new strategic directions after the Parma Conference, achieve an economy of scale and optimize the mix of skills, while reducing administrative and overhead costs.

10. Technical areas of work in the Bonn GDO are organized into four technical programmes supervised by the head of the office (Executive Manager), who reports to the Director, Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment through the Coordinator, Environment and Health, on:

- climate change, sustainable development and “green” health services;
- management of natural resources, water and sanitation;
- environment and health intelligence and forecasting; and
- environmental exposures and risks (including air quality, chemicals, noise and occupational health).

11. The Copenhagen-based Coordinator reports to the Director of the Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment and, under his overall supervision, provides strategic direction, leads on policy issues and provides the secretariat to the European environment and health process, the EHMB and the EHTF, while all technical areas of the WHO/ECEH are consolidated in the Bonn GDO. Together, they cover all work on category III priority 5 (Health and environment) of the WHO General Programme of Work. Distribution of portfolios between Bonn GDO and Copenhagen ensures that policy development and strategic leadership for the entire area of work on environment and health are provided by the Regional Office in Copenhagen.

12. As of June 2013, 31 staff members work in the Bonn GDO. The head of Bonn GDO (Executive Manager) is being selected, and the post is expected to be filled by September 2013. Of the staff, 21 are international professional officers, and 10 are general service staff. The Copenhagen-based environment and health team consists of four professional and one general service staff. The Bonn GDO hosted 23 interns and three visiting scholars and volunteers between January 2012 and June 2013, each of whom spent 2 to 6 months working in WHO/ECEH.

Achievements

13. The Bonn GDO, with the Rome GDO until 2011, provides scientific evidence for developing and implementing policies through national and European Union legislation, ministerial conferences and multilateral environmental agreements. It is an internationally recognized centre of excellence in this area, and much of its scientific work is used as evidence

for developing policies and legislation in Member States and the European Union. Seventeen Member States have biennial collaborative agreements for environment and health, and 20 Member States in western Europe collaborate directly with WHO/ECEH in these areas. The Bonn GDO has close links with most of the 69 global and Regional WHO collaborating centres working on environment and health. The office implements several important multilateral health or environmental agreements, including the areas of chemical and nuclear safety within the *International Health Regulations (2005)* and the Protocol on Water and Health.

14. The work of the Bonn GDO has a high impact. For example, over the past two years, it has increased the general awareness and interest of policy-makers on important issues such as environment and health inequalities,¹ the burden of disease due to black carbon,² inadequate housing,³ environmental noise⁴ and the importance of dampness and mould.⁵ Extensive work on climate change and health resulted in a series of assessments of climate change and health vulnerability in the Russian Federation and in Member States in, Central Asia and south-eastern Europe, which support the development of national adaptation policies; a systematic review on the health effects and prevention of floods in the European Region;⁶ a toolkit to estimate health and adaptation costs related to climate change⁷ and a number of supportive tools, used widely by Member States to address challenges such as extreme weather events.⁸ The main findings of the WHO Europe project on climate, environment and health underpin the health component of the new European Union policy on climate change launched in April 2013.⁹ The review of evidence on health impact of air quality undertaken in 2012–2013 will underpin the revision of WHO air quality guidelines and of the European Union Clean Air Directive.¹⁰ The Bonn GDO also supported national efforts to eliminate asbestos-related diseases by assisting Member States in using methods for estimating the burden of disease and for developing national policies. The Bonn GDO also conducts capacity-building for core *International Health Regulations (2005)*

¹ *Environmental health inequalities in Europe – Assessment report*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/157969/e96194.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

² *Health effects of black carbon*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/162535/e96541.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

³ *Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing – A method guide to the quantification of health effects of selected housing risks in the WHO European Region*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2011 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/142077/e95004.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁴ *Burden of disease from environmental noise – Quantification of healthy life years lost in Europe*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2011 (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/burden-of-disease-from-environmental-noise.-quantification-of-healthy-life-years-lost-in-europe>, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁵ *Technical and policy recommendations to reduce health risks due to dampness and mould – Project report*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2010 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/121425/E92998.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁶ *Floods in the WHO European Region: health effects and prevention*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/189020/e96853.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁷ *Climate change and health: a tool to estimate health and adaptation costs*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/190404/WHO_Content_Climate_change_health_DruckII.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁸ *Guidance on water supply and sanitation in extreme weather events*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe 2011 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/160018/WHOGuidanceFVLR.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

⁹ Overview of the results of “Climate, Environment and Health Action Plan and Information System” (CEHAPIS) [webpage]. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environment-and-health/Climate-change/policy/overview-of-the-results-of-climate,-environment-and-health-action-plan-and-information-system-cehapis2>, accessed 9 August 2013).

¹⁰ *Review of evidence on health aspects of air pollution – REVIHAAP*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013 (http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/182432/e96762-final.pdf, accessed 9 August 2013).

capacity with regard to chemical safety. Establishment of two scientific networks – the environment and health economics network (2012) and the European chemical safety network (2012) – will facilitate regional collaboration in two important technical areas.

15. Between 2002 and 2010, the Bonn GDO produced 244 scientific publications and the Rome GDO office produced 403, including global and regional guidelines, assessments, evidence reviews, peer-reviewed articles and databases. Another 77 publications have been produced since 2010.

Financing, budgets and expenditure

16. With the redistribution of roles and functions between Copenhagen and Bonn, assessed contributions and core voluntary contributions are used only to cover the cost of leadership and governance functions in the WHO Regional Office in Copenhagen and in countries to implement biennial collaborative agreements with Member States.

17. Since 2010, the WHO/ECEH GDOs in both Bonn and Rome have been funded exclusively from voluntary contributions. Assessed contributions were exceptionally used to cover the expenditures related to closure of the Rome GDO in 2011.

18. The income of the Bonn GDO in 2012–2013, consisting entirely of voluntary contributions from various sources, represented 77% of the total funds for environment and health in the WHO European Region and 16.4% of total WHO funds for environment and health.

Bonn GDO host agreement funds

19. The Government of Germany provides €3.423 million annually to WHO for the work of the Bonn GDO, representing about 40% of the Regional Office's total budget for environment and health and about 55% of Bonn GDO funding in the current biennium, ensuring generous, sustainable, predictable core funding for this area of work. In addition, the German Government provides free premises for WHO/ECEH on the United Nations Campus in Bonn.

20. Funds for the 2012–2013 biennium in the amount of US\$ 9 054 085 have been distributed for technical work, the running costs of the Bonn GDO office and salaries and the mandatory programme support costs, as follows:

Technical work:	US\$ 1 938 019
Running costs:	US\$ 400 000
Salaries:	US\$ 5 746 141
Total for WHO/Europe:	US\$ 8 084 160
Programme support costs (PSC):	US\$ 1 281 810
Total Bonn agreement funds:	US\$ 9 365 970

Other sources of funding

21. A further US\$ 7.6 million were raised and used by the Bonn GDO in the current biennium. Of these, US\$ 1.740 million were used for salaries and the remaining funds for country and intercountry activities. The main donors were the European Commission, Germany (other than the Bonn agreement), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Kingdom National Health Service, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Hungary, Italy, the Region of Sicily and Health Canada.

Outstanding issues

22. The only outstanding issue since consolidation of the Bonn GDO is the appointment of the Head, which should be completed by September 2013. The main challenges addressed during the consolidation period were: ensuring good integration of technical areas; establishing cross-programme collaboration; full integration of the new structure of the Bonn GDO into the Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment; and training and coaching new staff and existing staff who assumed new responsibilities.

Conclusions

23. The Bonn GDO is a sizeable, well-established, well-respected centre of excellence. It represents a significant asset for the Regional Office and for WHO. The Bonn GDO now works as a fully integrated group of programmes of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, with a clear mandate, scope of work and purpose, which complements the policy and governance work on environment and health provided by Copenhagen.

24. The Bonn GDO has a sustainable, predictable, long-term financing perspective, with significant core support provided by the host country. It produces the largest volume of work in the area of environment and health in the WHO European Region. Stable voluntary contributions ensure that the Regional Office can deliver the results mandated by WHO governing bodies and provide a solid basis for the mobilization of other resources for work on environment and health.

Annex 1. Funding of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health by source and location

