EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second issue of the HERA newsletter!

We are now completing the first year of our project “HERA: Integrating Environment and Health Research: a Vision for the EU” and its activities to all stakeholders working in the health, environment and climate nexus and many activities were carried simultaneously this first year. We organized several surveys, held stakeholder consultations as well as working on the draft agenda for future research. We presented our project to numerous audiences at international conferences in the environment and health nexus globally and in Europe. This time, we are providing some insight into our work with stakeholders and on cooperation with intergovernmental organizations.

We wish you a pleasant reading and all the best for 2020.

Kateřina Šebková
on behalf of the HERA Communication team of the HERA project (HERAcommunication@heraresearcheu.eu)

PS — The next issue will be available in first half of 2020.

Making HERA visible at EU conference

A two day conference was held in the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) in Helsinki, Finland 3—4 December 2019 as an official side event of Finland’s EU Presidency. The conference “Europe That Protects: Safeguarding Our Planet, Safeguarding Our Health” focused on how the environment and climate change affect human health and how human behaviour affects the health of the Earth.

Speakers from countries, organizations, research institutes and EU Commission have underlined that decisions and actions are needed now: global warming and biodiversity loss are proceeding faster than anticipated a decade ago. Solutions need to be found to prevent or at least restrain climate change, air pollution and the harms caused by chemicals to people and nature. Food production, responsible use of forests, sustainable urban planning and health benefits of nature are essential themes in this work.

Many HERA partners (INSERM, HMG-MU, RIVM, ISGlobal, SU) spoke at the conference showcasing their work and HERA contribution to the discussions in the session on “Environmental and emerging exposures — for good and bad” and “Towards the healthy and sustainable future”. Main scientific challenges were discussed to enhance the benefits of a sound environment for human health and to overcome environmental threats to human health.
The HERA project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the grant agreement N° 825417.

Why is WHO involved in HERA?

We have asked our consortium members from the World Health Organization to explain their organization’s motivation to be involved in the environment-health and climate nexus and research agenda development:

“Research in environment and health is of crucial strategic importance to contemporary society to effectively prevent risks from environmental exposures and to identify environmental conditions optimally supporting health. It is becoming even more critical given the increasingly fast pace of environmental changes, opportunities and threats. Input from research is also essential for the World Health Organization (WHO) to fulfill its mandate of supporting Member States on environment and health matters, as part of a commitment to strengthening the use of evidence, information and research for policy-making in the WHO European Region. As environment and health research utilizes substantial human and financial resources, it is imperative that society stands to gain from it. In light of the evolving understanding of the complexity of connections and interactions in environment and health, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has always been involving its Member States in identifying contemporary environment-health research needs and priorities.

Moreover, two expert meetings were organized already in 2017 (Cascais, Portugal, and Bonn, Germany) to develop a set of criteria for establishing EH research priorities, which included public health relevance, distribution, policy relevance, innovation and novelty. The newly developed criteria were then applied to specific environment-health domains, including those covered by the Ostrava Declaration: air pollution, water and sanitation, chemicals, waste management and contaminated sites, climate change, cities, and health systems sustainability. These criteria developed by WHO and domains addressed have also informed the HERA work and consultation with different stakeholder groups.

Research on environment and health is expected to support decision-making at all levels and to help attaining the ultimate goals of protecting and improving human health. Hence, WHO involvement in the HERA project is a continuation of its support to its Member States in translating the evidence into action and policies and by adopting holistic, systemic and inclusive approaches in the face of global environmental changes.”

by WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH), Bonn

Inaugural Environment and Health School took place in Bonn

The WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (ECEH) has developed the Environment and Health School to ensure that technical capacities in the environment and health agenda are nurtured in all European countries. The training took place 29-31 October 2019 in ECEH premises in the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany.

The combination of persisting and new or emerging challenges in environment and health together with national commitments to act upon them require Member States and stakeholders to engage in cross-sectoral work, in order to address and respond to complex health determinants as well as specific risk factors. A rich repertoire of technical skills and resources, access to data and evidence, and adequate institutional arrangements are therefore essential ingredients in all countries. Diverse guidance and normative documents developed by ECEH, for example on environmental noise and air quality; technical briefings; and tools, such as for assessing the impact of air pollution on health or the Health Economic Assessment Tool for walking and cycling were made available.

Utilizing a variety of lesson formats and interactive sessions, the programme is designed around the priority areas identified at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Ostrava, Czechia in 2017, and around important cross-cutting and emerging themes in the environment and health arena.

Upcoming regional meetings

In 2020, there will be a number of regional discussions with stakeholders from individual HERA project countries. These regional workshops will be organized in southern Europe (PT, ES, GR), in German speaking countries (AT, DE), in central Europe (CZ, PL, SI), western Europe (FR, BE, NL) and in EU WHO region (WHO countries). These workshops will be instrumental in identifying individual regional differences in understanding research needs and priorities in environment-health-climate nexus on the basis of problem-based, holistic or transformational changes approaches. The workshops will enable HERA consortium to refine the interim EU research agenda that will be presented in end of January 2020.
Useful documents for Health Environment Climate Nexus

We would like to call your attention to three recently released interesting reports from WHO that would be useful when considering the policies, priorities and activities in the health-environment-climate nexus.

Healthy Environments Publication

The WHO has published a new concise guide summarizing key actions for policy-makers to create healthier environments for healthier populations (including chemical safety). Each year, an estimated 12.6 million deaths are attributable to unhealthy environments (1.6 million deaths due to chemicals), as a result of living or working in an unhealthy environment — this is nearly one in four of total global deaths. The guide cuts across environmental health areas, and points to action by relevant sectors. Furthermore, the guide highlights key facts on health impacts from environmental risks for increased awareness, and the support offered by WHO on this agenda.

WHO Health and climate change survey report

Safeguarding human health from climate change impacts is more urgent than ever, yet most countries are not acting fully on their own plans to achieve this, according to the first global snapshot of progress on climate change and health. The new WHO Health and climate change survey report draws on data from 101 countries was launched 3 December 2019. Countries are increasingly prioritising climate change and health, but only about 38% have finances in place to even partially implement their national strategy of plan, and fewer than 10% channel resources to implement it completely.

Environmental Health Inequalities in Europe

Environmental conditions are a major determinant of health and well-being, but they are not shared equally across the population. Higher levels of environmental risk are often found in disadvantaged population subgroups. This assessment report considers the distribution of environmental risks and injuries within countries and shows through 19 inequality indicators that unequal environmental conditions, risk exposures and related health outcomes affect citizens daily in all settings where people live, work and spend their time. It is addition to the report prepared in 2012 and reviewed in 2019.
Prioritizing the knowledge needs with the stakeholder community

The HERA stakeholder questionnaire was made to jointly define knowledge needs and policy priorities related to the environment, climate and health nexus and to lay the ground for future policies and research. It targeted experts in a wider European stakeholder community intending to gain their insights into the nexus. The survey presented global trends relevant for the environment-climate-health nexus and asked the respondents to evaluate different statements of global trends and their impacts on health as contained in the Global Environment Outlook 6 report by UNEP 2019 and Environmental Outlook to 2050 document by OECD(2012). In the subsequent sections of the questionnaire, the respondents prioritized policy areas and estimated what kind of scientific support the chosen policy areas might need.

The survey was meant for stakeholders operating at the EU level as well as stakeholders operating in networks at the national and regional level. The survey was delivered by the HERA partners to EU and national level stakeholders in each HERA consortium country. In addition, respondents were also encouraged to share the survey link within the same organisation and it was also shared via Twitter.

The almost 300 respondents to the survey represented different institutional backgrounds, fields of expertise and nationalities. The respondents representing the EU level stakeholders were mainly from the EU institutions and NGO’s. National level represented a wide range of different institutional backgrounds including governmental organisations, health and environmental NGOs and business sector. Among the respondents there were both environment and health experts but also experts with multidisciplinary background and ordinary citizens.

The results of the survey will be discussed and deliberated within the HERA Consultation Group and in regional HERA workshops. The aim of the regional workshops is to allow the stakeholders to reflect, interpret and elaborate the relevant key topics in policy and practice that need scientific support in the environment, climate and health nexus.

Do you want to be involved in HERA?

You can find us on internet, Facebook and Twitter (@HERAresearch). We are also performing stakeholder surveys and prepare regional workshops, so visit our website to get the news and register to get to our mailing list or fill the stakeholder recruitment form.

In addition, HERA teams are also active in scientific conferences (environment, climate and health) and in policy meetings at national, EU and global levels.

Please contact us if you have any questions or wish to communicate HERA in your meetings.

HERA calendar

7 November 2019, HERA Consultation Group meeting, Brussels
8 November 2019, ExCom face to face meeting, Brussels
14 November 2019, Environment Health Conference, Minsk, Belarus
3 December 2019, The planetary health workshop, Helsinki, Finland
4 December 2019, HERA regional workshop for HERA stakeholders in SE, FI, UK and IE, Helsinki, Finland
23—24 January 2020, HERA consortium annual meeting, Barcelona, Spain
spring/summer 2020, stakeholder workshops for Western, Southern and Central Europe and wider European region