Mid-term review of the European environment and health action plan 2004 - 2010

2007/2252(INI) - 11/06/2007 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a mid-term review of the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010.

BACKGROUND: six out of ten European citizens consider that it is "very" or "fairly likely" that environmental pollution will damage their health and that the European Union is not doing enough. In order to address these concerns, the Commission adopted the European Environment and Health Strategy in June 2003 (see INI/2003/2222) which had 3 key objectives: (i) to reduce the disease burden caused by environmental factors in the EU; (ii) to identify and to prevent new health threats caused by environmental factors; (iii) to strengthen EU capacity for policymaking in this area. The Strategy was followed up by the European Environment and Health**Action Plan**2004-2010 (see INI/2004/2132), which emphasised the need to develop a good information base, including a coordinated approach to human biomonitoring, and the necessity to strengthen research on environment and health with the aim to make the assessment of the environmental impact on human health more efficient.

The new Sustainable Development Strategy adopted by the Council in June 2006 shows that the importance given to the impacts of the environment on public health is incorporated in Europe's vision for the future.

This Communication is part of the overall movement.

CONTENT: the purpose of this Communication is to review and to present the progress achieved at the **mid-term** of the Action Plan, to briefly describe the developments in the relevant policies referred to in the Action Plan such as chemicals, air, water and noise, and to highlight areas that should receive particular attention in the future.

Progress on the implementation of the Action Plan: the Action Plan identified 13 actions with a focus on (1) improving the information chain by developing integrated environment and health information; (2) filling the knowledge gap by strengthening research on environment and health and identifying emerging issues; (3) reviewing and adjusting risk reduction policy and improving communication. In these different areas the Commission notes that:

- **concerning improving the information chain**: there are many EU-wide environment and health monitoring and information systems which aim to improve the level of information and protection. The review aims to increase linkage and integration between existing systems in order to enhance efforts on research and human biomonitoring and improve data collection procedures;
- **concerning filling the knowledge gap**: several Community funded projects were launchedto integrate and strengthen EU environment and health research. Since 2004, the Commission has launchedtargeted research projects on diseases, disorders and exposures. **Community research** has focused on the causes of asthma and allergy, on the causes and mechanisms of neuro-immune disorders, on the health effects of exposure to metals, on the development of EU networks to promote research into uncommon cancers and on the identification of gene-environment interactions involved in the development of cancer. The aims for 2007-2010 are to study the causes of environment-related diseases and to investigate the long-term health impacts of exposure to environmental stressors. These projects will contribute to many EU policies concerning the assessment of risks of exposure to chemicals in particular. A series of other projects were launched

to identify the potential hazards on the environment and health, in the field of climate change, water quality and risk assessment of nanotechnologies. For 2007-2010, the effects of climate change on human and animal health and the potential risks fromnanoparticles to human health will be investigated;

- **in terms of adjusting risk reduction policy and improving communication**: several projects linked to air quality were launched to reduce active and passive smoking. A project on electromagnetic field (EMF) issues built a network of EU policy makers on EMF issues. Educational materials on children's environment were produced to be used by trainers to improve the knowledge of professionals and personnel working in health care (including under the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6)). Other measures have been put in place regarding respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, neurodevelopment disorders and endocrine related impacts. Significant progress has been made in better identification of the mechanisms for coordinating risk reduction measures. However, more work needs to be done in linking research on these priority diseases. At the same time, the Commission mandated the Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER) to deliver an opinion on a possible risk assessment strategy to support policy on the indoor air issue. The SCHER already issued a separate opinion on air fresheners in January 2006. Afterwards, an expert working group was established in October 2006 to follow up the opinions of the Scientific Committee and two FP6 projects focused on issues related to indoor air quality. Measuring campaigns in several European cities were carried out by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) to monitor indoor/outdoor and personal exposure concentrations of selected substances. Lastly, the SCENIHR adopted an opinion on "Possible effects of Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) on Human Health" in March 2007 followed by possible projects under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

Progress on food policies: the Action Plan also envisaged improvements in the following areas:

- **water**: a Water Information System for Europe (WISE) has been further developed by the Commission and should enable further integration of drinking water data. A Commission proposal for revising the Drinking Water Directive is foreseen for the end of 2008;
- **air**: in 2004, the last of the air quality 'daughter' directives was adopted, setting target values for arsenic, nickel, cadmium and benzo(a)pyrene in ambient air. The Commission adopted in 2005 the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and the proposal for the Directive on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe. The Commission proposal for new heavy duty vehicle emission standard EURO VI is scheduled for 2007;
- **chemicals**: further to the Mercury Strategy, a number of proposals have been adopted by the Commission since then with a view to banning mercury for certain uses within the EU. At the same time, the SCHER is working on a request for an opinion on the environmental risks and indirect health effects of mercury in dental amalgam;
- **plant protection products**: the Commission adopted a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides and a proposal for a Framework Directive, which will impose appropriate training for professional users, restrict the use of pesticides in certain areas and start the development of relevant indicators. Regarding chemicals, an important step was reached with the final adoption of the REACH Regulation in December 2006, which will enter into force in June 2007 and impose gathering information on toxicological properties of chemicals;
- **environmental and industrial contaminants in food**: maximum levels are set in EU legislation and sampling and analysis provisions are set out for monitoring compliance with these in order to ensure consumer safety;
- **noise**: the Commission effectively contributed to the WHO Night Time Noise Guidelines project over the last 3 years, from which the results will be used in the framework of Commission activities in 2007 to review the health effects of noise.

Next steps: in the next 3 years, the Commission, in close cooperation with Member States, will continue to implement the various actions foreseen in the Action Plan. To this end, the Commission will maintain

its focus on the integration of environment and health concerns into other policies as well as on the integration of the many actors involved. In order to strengthen EU capacity for policymaking in this area, the Commission will gradually step up its effort to exploit the outcomes of research projects and other information gathering efforts and their **translation into policy**.

In 2010, the Commission will identify the elements to be addressed in the next cycle.