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Environmental Health Services in Europe

Report on a WHO Consultation Meeting

Institution of Environmental Health
Officers, London, United Kingdom

25 - 27 April 1994

TARGET 18 POLICY ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

By the year 2000, all Member States should have developed, and be implementing, policies on the environment and health that ensure ecologically sustainable development, effective prevention and control of environmental health risks and equitable access to healthy environments.

ABSTRACT

A consultation working group meeting was held at the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, London, United Kingdom, from 25 to 27 April 1994, to discuss the progress and to review the work carried out on environmental health services. Consultants from France, Germany, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, together with two technical staff from the WHO Regional Office for Europe, considered four main issues during the meeting. First, members were asked to consider how the twenty seven individual country environmental health services reports could be best used, given that it was not the intention of the Regional Office to publish them individually. Second, the members were asked to give their opinions on how best the two draft volumes which will be produced could be reviewed by Member States. Third, the group was asked to give their opinions on the style and format of the draft descriptive volume and finally they were requested to review the content of the draft "policy options" volume. It was decided that the individual country reports should be available in an unedited form from the Regional Office upon request. Comments received from the Member States could be attached and a disclaimer made against the accuracy of the information they contain. It was also decided that before the descriptive volume is reviewed it must be translated into Russian. The request for reviews by Member States could be carried out at the Second Ministerial Conference on Environmental and Health in Helsinki in June 1994. It was agreed that the "policy options" volume should be reviewed by experts rather than Member States. Several comments were made on the style, format and content of the two draft volumes.

Keywords

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
HEALTH SERVICES - trends
HEALTH PLANNING

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Background

The first Conference on Environment and Health, held in Frankfurt-am-Main, Federal Republic of Germany on 7 and 8 December 1989, brought together Ministers and other senior representatives from the Environment and Health administrations of 29 European countries and from the Commission of European Communities.

The Charter of Environment and Health which was adopted at the conference, was a further extension of the European Health for All policy and targets adopted by the 32 member states of the European Region of WHO in 1984. In addition to actions by member states of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Charter proposes that Ministers of Environment and Health in Europe should meet again to endorse plans drawn up by WHO and other international organisations for specific action to eliminate the most significant environmental threats to health as rapidly as possible. This conference is to be held in Helsinki in June 1994.

Action to Date

The WHO/ Euro Office has been developing a programme of work on environmental health services, their structure and their management for a number of years. Over the past eighteen months work has been carried out to assess the current position with regard to the provision of environmental health services within the European Region. Twenty seven missions have been carried out by the WHO/ Euro office to obtain a "picture" of how environmental health services are provided. These missions were carried out by international consultants and lasted two weeks per mission. The information which was collected during these missions was set out in a guiding questionnaire developed at WHO/ Euro.

This work has resulted in a collection of a series of comprehensive reports which give a good insight into the ways in which environmental health services operate within the European region. The countries initially selected for this survey were chosen on the basis of their different stages of development and their geographical location. Subsequently other countries have been surveyed which are mainly from the countries of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent states. The subsequent reports are therefore not of a consistent style and the level of information collected varies.

In August 1993 a small working group was held in Salindres in France to consider the development of several "products" from this core material. At this meeting it was decided that two main publications should be produced. The first was to provide a description of environmental health services within the Region based on the information collected. The second was to be a document which set out "policy options" for the development of environmental health services. The working group also felt that to complement each other these two publications should largely follow the same format. It

was decided that six basic questions, Why ? (concepts), How ? (strategy), Where ? (institutional development), What ? (functions), Who ? (capacity building), and What Happened ? (evaluation), should serve as the basic framework for both publications. The first volume describing how services are organised at present and the second outlining how services, following these same subject areas, could be developed according to the local situation.

Work was subsequently undertaken by WHO/ Euro to develop model chapters for these publications. These chapters together with the basic framework for production was then considered by a major consultation meeting, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in October 1993. Representatives from 19 countries attended this meeting mainly from the countries of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent states. This meeting considered the content and format of two draft chapters of the first and second volumes and invited contributions on how they could be improved. Several comments on the contents of the chapters were made during the meeting and were taken into account by WHO/ Euro, however the meeting concluded that there was great value in such publications and that WHO/ Euro should, whilst taking the meetings comments on board, progress with the drafting of the two publications.

Matters for Consideration

Members of the London working group were asked to consider;

- 1) How the twenty seven individual country reports could be utilised for member states.
- 2) How best the two volumes could be externally reviewed and validated.
- 3) The amendments necessary for the first draft of the descriptive volume.
- 4) The amendments necessary for the first draft of the "policy options" volume.

Country Reports

The meeting considered how the twenty seven individual country reports could be used and made available to the member state countries. It was not the intention of WHO/ Euro to individually publish the country reports as this process would require a disproportionate amount of resources to carry out the validation and editing which would be required. However it was generally held that the amount of work that has been put in

to produce these reports, and the useful source of information they represent, was too valuable to waste.

The group decided that, following a validation process with the appropriate Ministries of Health and Environment, the reports should be made available from the Regional Office in an unpublished format upon request. Any comments received from the member states would be appended to the reports together with a disclaimer regarding the accuracy of the content of the reports.

Review of Documents by Member States and Technical Experts

The meeting considered how the descriptive and the "policy options" volumes could be best reviewed. It was agreed that different procedures were needed for the two documents. It was agreed that the descriptive publication should be presented for review to Ministries of Environment and Health in all countries within the European Region. Furthermore it was recommended that if this process was to be of value the draft would have to be available in Russian as well as English. It was suggested, if timescales allowed, that the second draft of the descriptive publication should be presented to Ministers at the Helsinki conference.

It was suggested that the "policy options" publication should not be subjected to a country review, but should instead be given to technical experts in a number of fields including; a lawyer, a political scientist, an educationalist, and expert in evaluation, a public health management specialist, a representative NGO and an expert in public finance. Additionally it should also be sent to WHO Headquarters, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Union. The meeting also recommended that if possible the draft should be sent to a practitioner in environmental health who has not been involved in the WHO environmental health services project.

First Draft of the Descriptive Volume

The members of the working group were asked to indicate areas of the first draft of the descriptive volume which they believed required further work.

It was highlighted that some of the examples which were used to illustrate individual concepts were duplicated and that additional examples needed to be found or the repeated ones removed.

The need for a comprehensive glossary was highlighted and the meeting was informed that the glossary which would be provided would have to follow the one which is to be produced for the Helsinki Conference and would be incorporated once it

was available. Any additional terms for the glossary were however welcomed and would be forwarded to WHO/ Euro staff who were working on the Conference programme.

Comments were raised regarding chapter 6.0 on the Evaluation of Environmental Health Services. The value of this chapter was questioned given the lack of information currently available on this subject. It was agreed however that the chapter was of value, that should remain and that it should be expanded if possible.

It was highlighted that very often comparative examples from western Europe were not given in the text. It was explained that this was due, to a large extent, to the quality of the data which was contained in the reports from some western countries. Working group members agreed to contribute themselves with suitable examples to assist in maintaining an east / west balance to the document.

Discussions were held regarding the sections on public information and risk communication and it was suggested that these areas should be more heavily emphasised. Specific information on these subject areas was received by the secretariat from the working group members.

The differences in the approaches of the epidemiological services in the west and east of Europe were discussed. It was suggested that these differences should be highlighted in the chapter dealing with epidemiological aspects.

Other editing points were raised by the working group and noted by the secretariat.

First Draft of the "Policy Options" Volume

Members of the working group were asked to review the "policy options" document and to indicate areas where further work was necessary.

Several editorial amendments were required to clarify certain points. These were noted by the secretariat.

Comments were made regarding the style of the language used in the draft in that it was perhaps too prescriptive in places. This point was noted and the secretariat undertook to review this issue.

The meeting suggested that although country examples could not be used in this volume, practical examples should be developed to assist in the understanding of some of the more difficult concepts which were used in the text.

The meeting suggested that the section on privatisation and environmental health services required additional material and practical examples.

It was recommended that a bibliography was required to enable member states to seek further information on the issues discussed in the text.

Further Review Meeting

It was recommended by the working group that a full consultation meeting, similar to that which was held in Sofia in October 1993, would be required to obtain final approval for the publications following the agreed review procedure. It was suggested that such a meeting could be held in November 1994.

It was also recommended that at this meeting consideration could be given to the formulation of further projects on environmental health services which would highlight how the "policy options" document can be used to implement changes in environmental health services. The need for action on education, training and staffing profiles and the evaluation of environmental health services were also indicated as areas where further work was necessary to improve the capacities of environmental health services and that these subjects could also be discussed at such a meeting.

Conclusions

The meeting concluded that;

- The individual country reports, following validation, should be made publically available with a suitable disclaimer.
- That the two draft volumes should undergo separate review processes, The descriptive volume by member states and the "policy options" by an expert panel.
- That subject to the amending issues which were raised, WHO/ EURO should prepare the second drafts of both the descriptive and the "policy options" volumes.
- That a full review meeting with country representatives will be necessary to approve the two volumes before they are finally published, and to consider how the programme on environmental health services can be developed.

Participants

Working Group on Environmental Health Services in Europe

(Institution of Environmental Health Officers, London U.K. 25-27 April 1994)

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