

The WHO Office in Bonn

On the occasion of the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in London in June 1999, the German Minister of Environment, Jürgen Trittin, presented an offer by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany to strengthen the technical capacity of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in the area of environment and health by establishing a new office in Bonn as part of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health. This offer was warmly welcomed by WHO, and the host agreement was signed on 8 March 2001.

Activities

WHO is the specialized agency of the United Nations with primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. Within this remit, the overall mission of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health in Bonn is to serve the European region as a source of technical expertise, offering scientific support for the identification of effective evidence-based environment and health policies. The target of action is the urban environment.

The scientific team of specialists from various countries based in the Bonn Office is concentrating on the areas of

- air quality
- noise
- housing and health
- indicators on environment and health

It is also supporting the work of other divisions of WHO and global programmes.

Air Quality

Clean air is a basic requirement of human health and well-being. However, many human activities in our everyday life and economic development of our society adversely affect air quality, thus increasing

the risk of various diseases. When designing policies and programmes for clean and healthy air, it is crucial to understand the links between air quality and health. For decades, WHO has taken the lead in reviewing the scientific evidence on health aspects of air quality and preparing it for policy applications.

The objectives of the WHO programme on Air Quality are:

- to foster knowledge on the disease burden of air pollution as a basis for environmental policy;
- to review scientific evidence on health aspects of air pollution and the basis for development and update of air quality guidelines;
- to establish partnerships and networks that promote improvement of air quality, with for example, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the European Commission, the European Environment Agency and the World Bank;
- to support capacity building for assessment and management of health risks due to air pollution.

Noise and Health

About 30 % of the total population in Europe suffer from exposure to residential noise at outdoor levels above 65 DBA. These figures the upwards trend are alarming. Knowledge about severe effects of noise on our health is growing: it impedes sleep, disturbs social relations, reduces capacity for learning at school, and generates annoyance. There is evidence that it impacts on blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases. The Bonn Office supports the development of studies, compiles the evidence on dose-effect relationship, and provides guidance for combating noise as well as for preparing legislation on specific topics such as traffic noise, and night.

Housing and Health

In the United Kingdom, more people die from domestic accidents than from car accidents. Pulmonary cancer is caused by excess of Radon in the indoor air of many households. Many details of housing conditions have serious impacts on health status – from the earliest childhood with life-long consequences. Decision makers on housing and physical planning at local level gain and share experience on how to integrate the health dimension: Good housing and health policies contribute to energy saving, to economic development, and to the reduction of poverty. The Bonn Office project provides tools for policies and guidance at national, regional and local government level, aiming at adequate, Health promoting housing conditions across the EURO region.

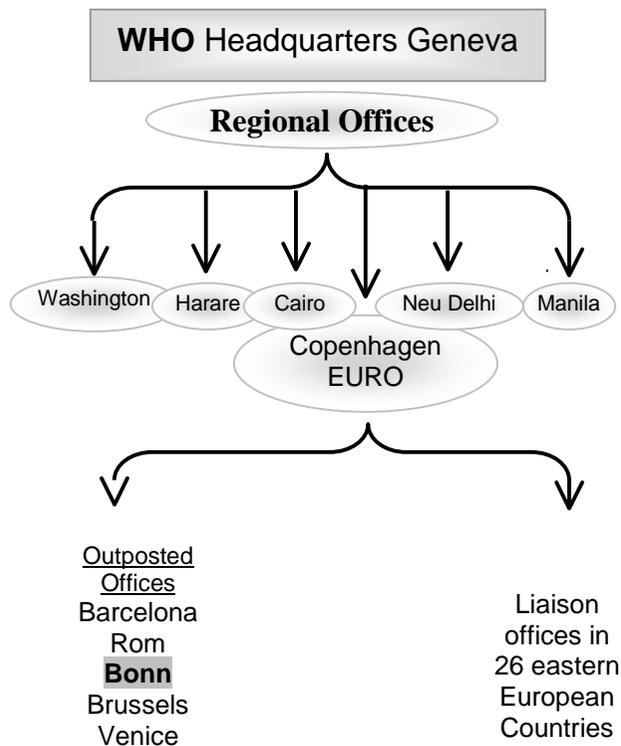
EH Indicators

The Bonn Office is guiding more than 30 Member States through a project to develop and test a pan-European system of environmental health indicators (EHI). This project will facilitate evidence – based policy making and evaluation at local to international scale. It provides Member States with guidelines for producing useful and comparable information, and, while using the existing data collection systems will facilitate the harmonization of EURO - wide actions towards environment policies that are supportive to individual and public Health.

Action in Partnership

The Bonn Office is one of the technical/scientific arms of WHO's programme in environment and health with a clear regional orientation, but on some issues it also leads global programmes.

The Office has been established thanks to financial and logistic resources from the German Federal Ministry of the Environment and support from the Federal Ministry of Health. It is co-operating intensively with the federal ministries and authorities responsible for health, consumer protection and international cooperation, especially in the context of European Union enlargement. Collaborating centres at federal institutes and universities are closely networked with partner institutions in other European countries. The Office attaches particular importance to the implementation of international recommendations at local level, in close co-operation with national bodies.



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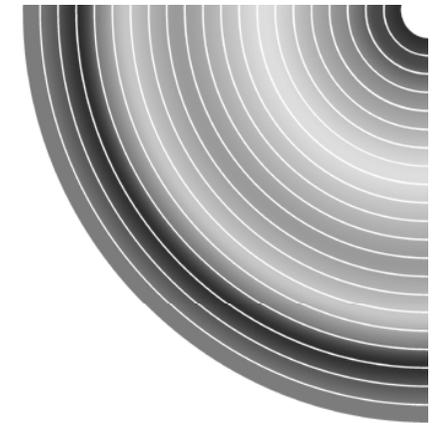
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WHO European Centre for Environment and Health

Health and Urban Environment
 Air Quality, Noise
 Housing and Health
 Evidence for Policy



EUROPE

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