Interventions of EEHYC during the European Environment and Health Task Force high-level Mid-Term Review meeting 28-30 April 2015, Haifa, Israel

Session 2 – Report on progress

Thank you Mr. Chair. Dear distinguish audience,

As most of you probably know, in Parma Declaration on Environment and Health it is stated that there is a need for a stronger and meaningful youth participation in EEHP. Since it's signing in 2010, we as young people have organized ourselves in a legal entity that has come to be known as EEHYC to represent European youth in the Process. Our mission is to support, legitimize and give visibility to young people’s participation from all across Europe in processes aimed at achieving a healthy and sustainable environment. The Coalition is now a member of the Task Force and an observer in the Ministerial Board, and we are grateful to everyone that has helped in achieving this.

Moreover, to meaningfully contribute to implementing actions under Parma priorities, we have become partners of the Transport, Health, Environment Pan-European Program, and the WHO/UNECE Protocol on Water and Health. We are currently conducting projects under both of them.

Namely, under the WHO/UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, we as a Coalition are currently carrying out 2 projects in 5 European countries in the program area on advancing water, sanitation and hygiene in schools. One, the project „Survey on Hygiene Knowledge, Attitude and Practice” implemented in Lithuania, Moldova, Poland and Romania, aims to get a better insight about the level of awareness and explore knowledge on hygiene among high school and university students, as well as to encourage correct practices, while the second „How to make it complicated?”, in Austria, aims at both motivating young people to think more about the importance of proper hygiene and raising awareness about the role that hand washing and clean, well functioning sanitary facilities play in everyday life.
In the framework of the Program on Transport, Health and Environment in the Pan-European countries, Youth coalition organized the photo and video competition called City in motion: people first, aimed at making young people sensitive to the EH problems related to transport. The competition featured 90 entries from 19 countries, reaching out to more than 5000 actively engaged people. During EHP meetings we also organize a pedometer competition to promote walking as a healthy, clean and sustainable means of transportation. We are doing this activity in this meeting, too, so we warmly invite you to join it.

We look forward to being partners under other Program areas, such as protecting health and the environment from climate change, as well.

The Coalition has also become a member of Global Partnership for Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Of course, youth activities are not limited at working directly as part of the program of work. As a Coalition, we have been working to integrate youth activities in European countries under Parma objectives by encouraging the young to align their activities to Parma priorities.

In 2013, EEHYC published the booklet: “Promoting the Participation of Young People in the European Environment and Health Process”. The booklet highlights examples of youth-led projects on environment, health and education in the pan-European region.

To ensure representativeness of the young in the process at European level, the Coalition built a network of NYC in 17 countries of the WHO European region and has been working to strengthen their capacity to develop national structures involving national and local policymakers and youth. At this point, EEHYC is proud to announce that National Coalitions have been established in Italy, Moldova, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

To conclude with, we believe youth participation progress in the EHP is encouraging. Now, we call upon the Member States and all other stakeholders to increase support for youth participation and extend youth representativeness in not just 17 but all 53 European countries.
Session 3: Challenges and lessons learned

Dear chair, distinguished colleagues,

It was in Parma Youth Declaration where we, young people, stated our readiness to follow the outcomes of the Parma Ministerial Conference, undertake activities and fulfil the Parma objectives through mobilising young people to actively participate in decision-making and implementation.

One of the major challenges that we want to address today is the ‘‘joint involvement of the health and environment sectors as well as of other relevant stakeholders as the most effective way forward’’. Regarding this, it is concerning that out of the 28 European Region Member States that responded to the policy survey questions related to youth engagement in the process, only 60% reported involving youth and 50% reported the existence of a policy to support it. Even more, since Parma, only three countries have initiated policies to engage young people. The findings of the survey indicate that there is still a long way to go to strengthening youth involvement in decision making as well as in implementation.

We, youth from the European Region, have repeatedly expressed our support for tackling Environment and Health as an integral process that impacts all layers of nations and societies, irrespective of social, economic, cultural or religious contexts. For example, Israeli youth organisation that we have been working together in anticipation of the MTR, Green Course, is empowering young leaders to take action, identify community needs and lead change. Green course vision is to build a country where environmental, social, economic, and cultural policies all reflect the element of sustainability and ensuring social and environmental justice.

When it comes to lessons learned, as you may have previously heard in the EEHYC intervention, we have success stories to share:
- the booklet “Promoting the Participation of Young People in the European Environment and Health Process”, highlights 26 projects across Europe as practical examples of meaningful participation.
The photo and video competition “City in Motion: People first!” encouraged young people to reflect on the best ways of promoting zero-emission mobility, alleviate congestion and encourage physical activity in order to combat obesity and non-communicable diseases.

More recent, understanding the importance of this sector, we have joined efforts with those working on the WASH in Schools, part of the Programme of Work 2014-16 of the WHO/UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, and EEHYC is implementing 2 ongoing projects, in 5 countries.

These are but few examples of the role that young people can play in education and awareness raising as well as in sending a message about the importance of EHP. We have to thank WHO efforts for this, but in order to achieve the set goals, these efforts need to be matched by practical support of the Member States, without further delay.

Thinking back, it was of medium difficulty to involve young people from cities and developed areas. A bigger challenge it is going to be working with people from rural and poor urban areas. To further strengthen the role of youth, we need your support in being able to work much closer with Ministries of Environment, Health, Youth, Ministries of Education, with schools and universities.

I feel important to reiterate the willingness of young people to actively participate in the EHP. We are dedicated to reaching the set goals and to contribute to increasing the quality of human life. For this reason, we have assumed to be equal and responsible partners in the decisions on the environment and health, taken by policy makers and by those dealing with policy implementation.

Our world today contains threats that we know about, and some that we don’t know. Likewise, the young people of today are the yet undiscovered decision makers and leaders of tomorrow.

Now, allow me to share a short personal experience. After landing in Ben Gurion airport, in Tel Aviv, I’ve boarded a train to Haifa. And in every station that the train stopped, I have seen young people, in their 20s, dressed in military uniforms. And I thought: how come we prepare them, trust them to fight our battles, and to defend our lives, and yet, we find it so hard to involve them and to support their participation in building the world that we all want to live in?

Let us build true partnerships for mutual benefit and the achievement of common goals: health and safe environment for all.
Session 5 - Implementation priorities until the 6th Ministerial Conference

Distinguished audience,

We would like to draw member states attention to what we believe is a priority in terms of youth involvement in the European Environment and Health Process (EEHP).

To begin with, we kindly ask for the member states and other stakeholders, to work together to establish national coalitions in all 53 WHO European region countries and help us to get the ministries of education and youth on board. This will ensure a better representativeness of youth in the task force and all EEHP.

Moreover, we see the way we work under the Protocol on Water and Health as well as under the Transport, health and environment pan European programs as something to build upon. We seek of having at least one project implemented in partnership with member states under each regional priority goals of the Parma declaration starting with protecting EH from climate change.

A third priority for us is to have a meaningful contribution to and during the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. We would like to remind you that youth participation in the fifth ministerial conference was also prepared in advance. However, there have been many challenges arising from the fact that there was little time for preparation. This time we would like to make it better. To do so, we offer our availability of joining the ad-hoc working group for the preparation of the conference.

As we were mentioning yesterday, youth participation in the process since 2010 is, indeed, encouraging, so we invite us all to keep this positive trend continue.
Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Respected audience, the fact that the EEHYC is standing today at this table is of course a merit of the work undertaken by the young. But the biggest merit of it belongs to the trust and partnership built between us, the WHO Regional Office for Europe, UNECE, UNEP and the few Member States that supported us so far. It is thanks to you, your advice, your experience, your critiques, your insights, and your money :D that we have come such a long way since 2010, and especially since 2004 when we first started to promote youth participation.

There is still a long way to go though to ensure truly representative and meaningful youth participation in the process across all Member States. And we see it full of challenges and opportunities. But we don’t see ourselves going through them alone. We see us walking through them together.

As a priority we call upon all Member States to share contact details or take our phone numbers, e-mail addresses and Facebook accounts :D to update and upgrade our communication. We are especially calling upon the 25 of those countries that answered the questionnaire mentioned yesterday who did not yet introduce new policies for youth involvement in the EH process after Parma. And even more especially - those 25 of the Member States who did not answer the questionnaire at all. We’d like to remind us all that by signing the Parma Declaration our Ministers signed up to not only invite youth to meetings and give us the opportunity to get involved, but actually to provide us with assistance, adequate resources and the training required for that.

Secondly, we are really happy to see that the number of international environmental and health agreements, policy documents, initiatives has been increasing. It gives us hope that even those who will not be around in 50 years’ time DO care about the fact that the children and youth of today have quite a big chance to still be. But we do believe it is important to mainstream the joint efforts by creating synergies there, where priorities, objectives and most importantly desired impacts are common.
Such synergies should focus on the way we are integrating, for example our work under Parma commitments with the work under Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. We particularly think about how the focus on youth involvement in the two endeavors can be brought together and harnessed most without dubbing the efforts and dissipating the investments. An avenue that still needs to be better explored is the synergies we can create with UNEP’s TUNZA program, European Youth Forum’s policy, advocacy and engagement programs, and others.

Thirdly, we were listening with admiration the honesty with which in many of your statements, dear policy makers, you admitted that you need more research, more help to understand how you can increase the quality and impact of your work. We feel we don’t have to invent topics for our research projects as students in universities. We just need to know better what it is you as policy makers need. But we do understand money is an issue and we cannot keep putting all financial burden on some countries only. That is why we encourage us to work together: Member states, NGO networks and international partners to tap into the opportunities created by the Research funding programs such as European Commission’s Horizon 2020. You might be happy to know that H2020 is not dedicated only to academics. It actually places great weight on connecting research activity with policy needs.

Other opportunities can be the funding programs for youth engagement and active citizenship, such as EC’s Erasmus+, Council of Europe’s Youth programs, etc.

To make a first step towards this, we hereby launch the invitation to come together in a workshop, as partners, and explore what joint projects we can and need to develop together so we can make use of these funding opportunities for our joint benefit. We also express our willingness to follow up on this invitation with the Secretariat of the process.

As the saying goes, if you want to go fast - go alone, if you want to go far - go together.

It might be not easy, it might be not quick, but it is certainly a ride we’d like to share together.