



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
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World Health
Organization

European Region

TOWARDS MORE LIVEABLE AND HEALTHY CITIES IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

A joint webinar series by the UfM and
the WHO Regional Office for Europe 2021 – 2022



INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the **World Health Organisation** (WHO) and the **Union for the Mediterranean** (UfM) signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** to collaborate across sectors in reinforcing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In general terms, the WHO-UfM partnership aims to support UfM Member States in building capacity and promoting action for health, including through health research, health education and advocacy for health, in all policy domains of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. More specifically, an important area of collaboration is in supporting SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities – to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

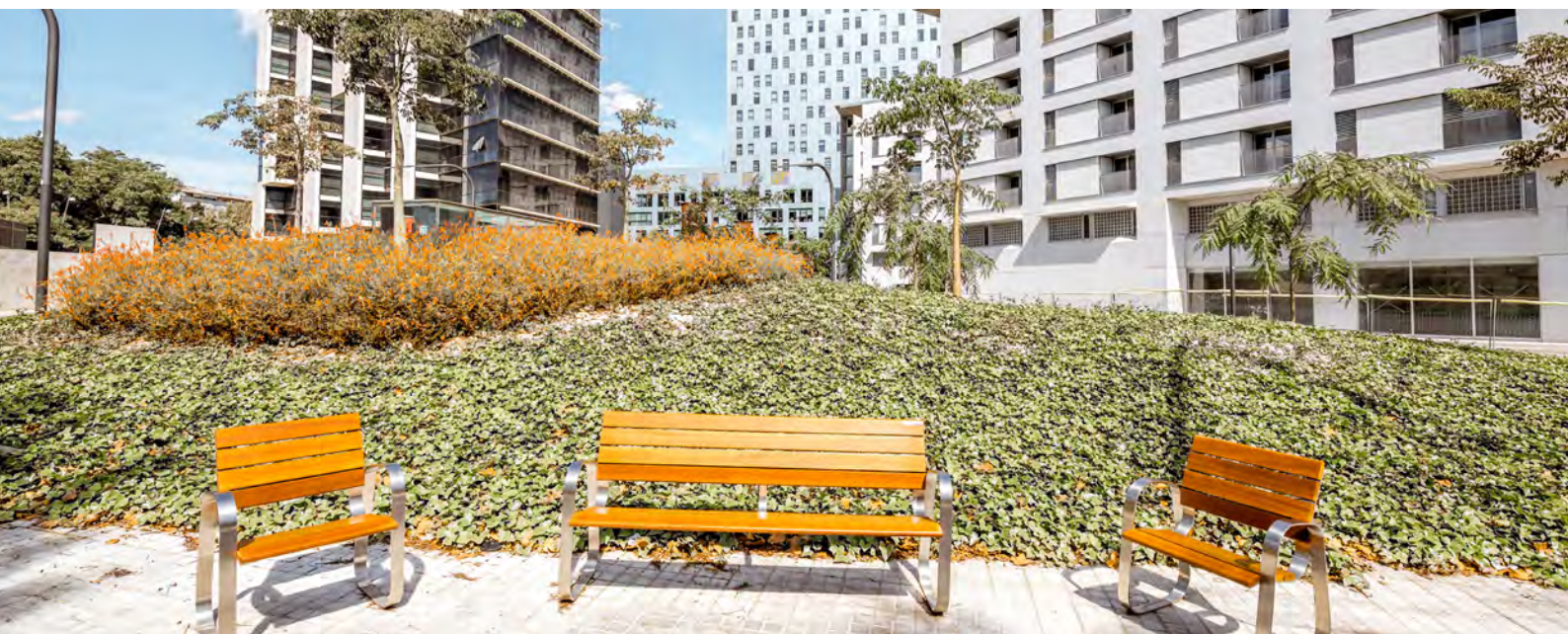
In this regard, the UfM and the **WHO Regional Office for Europe** hosted four joint webinars focusing on the

health impact of urban environments in 2021 and 2022: “Environment and Health in Seaport Cities” (June 2021 and July 2022), “Urban Nature, Green Spaces and Health” (March 2022), and “Protecting Environments and Health by Building Urban Resilience” (October 2022).

The webinars brought together urban practitioners and decision-makers from a variety of countries, cities and organisations, and provided an overview of both challenges and solutions to embed health and wellbeing in the planning and management of urban settings.

Over 1000¹ participants have attended the webinars, which were provided in English, French and Arabic language. The **UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040** is expected to further strengthen UfM-WHO collaboration in the years ahead.

¹Registered participants: June 2021 (197), March 2022 (166), July 2022 (117), October 2022 (536).



FRANCESCA RACIOPPI

HEAD OF THE WHO
EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR
ENVIRONMENT AND
HEALTH

“ This institutional partnership aims to support UfM and WHO Member States in building capacity and promoting action for health, including through health research, health education and advocacy for health, in all policy domains. In this context, the webinar will help to raise awareness about and promote healthy environments through urban development and governance.

SABRI ERGEN

DEPUTY SECRETARY
GENERAL FOR TRANSPORT
AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT,
UNION FOR THE
MEDITERRANEAN

“ As excellent example of collaboration between the UfM and the WHO, the webinars provided the latest evidence on how much the way in which we design our cities has a profound impact on the health of its citizens, and on how the need to act on urban nature is becoming increasingly acute and urgent, including in the Mediterranean region, which is one of the world’s climate change hotspots.



WEBINARS ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH IN SEAPORT CITIES

June 2021 & July 2022



Background

Seaports are vital connecting hubs for international trade, port-related industry, and passenger travel. As such they influence urban spatial planning and development. While seaports and their related activities create employment and contribute to urban economies, they also add to pollution as well as to greenhouse gas emissions, which can potentially have negative consequences for human health and the environment, including through climate change. Port cities vary greatly in terms of the scale and scope of their activity. Therefore, it is difficult to have a single solution that fits all.

Summary

Aimed at National Coordinators and Focal Points of UfM and WHO Member States, and representatives of seaport cities and port authorities, these two webinars presented ongoing work by WHO on the health impacts in seaport cities for comments by interested experts and practitioners. The webinar presented example cases of health impacts of port operations in various seaport cities in the Euro-Mediterra-

nean region, and reviewed how public authorities can assess and manage environmental pollution from port operations and reduce the related health effects.

More information

[WHO European Centre for Environment and Health \(Bonn, Germany\)](#)

Key takeaways

- Some limitations in assessing health burdens from port-related activities derive from the fact that there is no unified source-apportionment modelling approach, and therefore comparison among case studies is difficult.
- There is a critical knowledge gap for decision-makers, due to a

lack of health scientific research/studies on shipping impact on occupational and inhabitants' exposures and on cause-effect relationships.

- There is a need for drawing upon scientific research for evidence-based policies and practices.
- There is a need for a comprehensive approach when looking at a territory that goes beyond the port itself.
- Efforts to address environmental problems are often carried out without consideration for health. Need to better assess population exposure and to gather more evidence on the health benefits of any interventions tackling port- or shipping-related activities.

**CAROLA
HEIN**
TU DELFT



There is a need for drawing upon scientific research for evidence-based policies and practices, as well as for a comprehensive approach when looking at a territory that goes beyond the port itself.



WEBINAR ON URBAN NATURE, GREEN SPACES AND HEALTH

March 2022



SABRI ERGEN

UfM



The way in which we design our cities has a profound impact on the health of its citizens. There is an urgent need to embed nature and green spaces in cities to achieve healthier communities and healthier cities.

FRANCESCA RACIOPPI

WHO



The WHO does not restrict the definition of health to the absence of disease, it embraces the notion of wellbeing. Improving the health of the urban population should be at the core of the strategic political vision at the city level.

MARK NIEUWENHUIJSEN

ISGLOBAL



It is estimated that cities in Europe could prevent up to 43.000 premature deaths each year if they achieved WHO recommendations on access to green space.

Background

Urbanization, competing land usages, global trade and industrialization have led to profound and negative impacts on nature, biodiversity and ecosystems across the world. The ongoing depletion of natural resources not only affects environmental conditions but also has an enormous impact on the health, mental well-being and security of societies. At the same time, the demand for green and blue spaces in the urban environment by city residents is growing, and the need to act on urban nature is becoming increasingly acute and urgent.

Summary

The webinar on urban nature provided the latest evidence on the impacts of green spaces on human health, including both physical, mental and social dimensions of health and well-being. It also presented opportunities and good practices to design and implement policies that promote health through investments into nature and green spaces in urban settings, and highlighted urban tools on nature and health in support of policy-making.

More information

[WHO report “Green and Blue Spaces and Mental Health: New Evidence and Perspectives for Action”](#)

[WHO report “Urban green spaces: a brief for action”](#)

Key takeaways

- Increasing green space improves urban health and reduces morbidity and mortality.
- Better urban and transport planning practices and greening cities play a crucial role in preserving the health and well-being of the urban population.
- Cities in Europe could prevent up to 43.000 premature deaths each year if they offered adequate access to green space.
- The role of urban development in embedding nature and green spaces in cities is key to achieving healthier communities and healthier cities since green spaces mitigate air pollution, the heat island effect and noise levels.
- Several WHO reports have shown evidence of the interrelation between environment and health, concretely on the positive impact of urban green and blue spaces and biodiversity on the health of urban populations and the environment.
- The latest scientific evidence increasingly shows that urban green and blue spaces have a positive impact on the health of individuals in many different ways, in addition to helping address environmental and climate challenges.



PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTS AND HEALTH BY BUILDING URBAN RESILIENCE

October 2022



Background

Urban and spatial planning needs to increasingly consider preparedness and resilience as a determinant of public health at the local level. Climate change, inadequate urbanization patterns and environmental degradation have left many cities vulnerable to disasters such as extreme weather events, floods, earthquakes or forest fires. Much can be done at the city level to apply urban planning and design as an instrument to reduce risks and vulnerabilities and to build resilience.

This webinar was open to the UfM as well as the WHO European Healthy Cities network, and cities engaged in the Making Cities Resilient 2030 campaign by UNDRR.

Summary

The webinar examined the different dimensions of local preparedness and resilience, and presented the summary report and key messages of a WHO project on protecting health through urban resilience measures. Representatives of cities and city networks discussed local experiences and lessons learned, presenting potential actions that can be taken by national and local governments to establish and support preparedness and resilience at local level.

More information

WHO report “Protecting environments and health by building urban resilience”

- The first technical report “Urban planning, design and management approaches to building resilience – an evidence review”, explores how local-level urban planning, management and design interventions can contribute to improving preparedness and building resilience in cities.
- The second technical report “Urban Planning for health – experiences of building resilience in 12 cities” collects case studies and lessons learned on practical challenges ex-

perienced during a crisis situation and policies, and interventions to foster local preparedness and urban resilience, from cities across Europe

CAROLYNE DAHER
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR URBAN HEALTH

“It is important to further localise international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework to help cities share knowledge and learn from each other, as well as to look for tools to integrate health into the urban model and as a public health intervention.”

- The third technical report “Review of indicator frameworks supporting urban planning for resilience and health” prepared together with UN-Habitat, analyses the coverage, relevance and applicability of existing indicator frameworks for resilient and healthy cities.
- The Summary Report “Urban planning for resilience and health” includes the key messages of the three technical reports, identifies action

Key takeaways

- The connection between climate change, disaster preparedness and health needs to be emphasized.
- Disasters have immediate, long-term, direct and indirect impacts and cascading effects, which are tied to the ways in which cities are planned and managed.
- There is a need for a dual-track approach encompassing both, the immediate response and the long-term response, as well as extreme events vs ongoing risks such as air pollution.
- While there is greater funding for disaster response, it is more efficient to invest in prevention.
- There is a need for data availability, collection and analysis capacity, especially as it regards small and mid-size cities.

The UfM Working Groups on Urban Transformation and the UfM Working Group on Affordable and Sustainable Housing will continue to address urban health in the coming years, in cooperation with WHO and other key partners.



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