Indicators on children's environment and health are being developed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, in collaboration with the European Commission and a number of Member States in the WHO European Region. They are a key tool for policy-makers: a comprehensive system of information on health and environment.

Why are these indicators needed?

We need to identify problems accurately to be able to solve them.
- What is the quality of the air breathed by children and how many cases of asthma were there last year?
- How many children were killed on the road and do any transport policies exist to reduce that number?
- How big is the problem in our country compared to the country next door?

Reliable and standardized information about the health status of children, its determinants and its trends is essential for guiding policies and interventions to reduce their environmental health risks. The information will also make it possible to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies, and make it easier to communicate and respond to public concerns.

Who decided to develop indicators on children's health and environment?

The 52 Member States in the WHO European Region agreed that a collaborative effort with WHO and the European Commission should be made to develop this comprehensive information system, when they met in Budapest in 2004 at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. Their commitments on this system formed part of the Budapest Declaration. Member States also endorsed the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), for whose implementation the information system will provide vital support. Within the environment and health process in Europe, the establishment of a well-coordinated and effective mechanism for environmental health monitoring and reporting has increasingly become a priority of its own.

Who is doing it?

WHO's environment and health information programme at the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health is working in collaboration with a number of Member States, mostly within the European Union (EU), in an action programme to develop, implement and refine the system, including its methodology and other technical elements. This project, known as ENHIS-2, is co-financed by the European Commission DG Sanco, partner institutions from 18 mainly EU Member States and the WHO. The next step will be its extension to the other Member States and eventually across the whole Region, and the system will finally be known as EHIS.

What is EHIS?

EHIS is the same environment and health information system that is being developed by the ENHIS-2 project, but extended and rolled out across the WHO European Region. ENHIS-2 is the engine for it, and WHO the coordinator. WHO assists countries in building their technical capacities and organizational infrastructure to upgrade and operate existing national systems according to state-of-the art European practices. It assesses and reports on the use of environment and health information at the European Region-wide level.

Countries participating in ENHIS-2.

What are the main functions of the information system?

The idea is that it should help policy-makers in the countries to:

- **monitor** the environment and health situation and its trends in the countries and track and evaluate relevant policy effectiveness;
- **report** regularly on environment and health both internationally and within the country to provide citizens and professionals with information;
- **exchange information**, data and knowledge as well as good practice examples benefiting public health and the environment.

What about Health for All?

There are currently 16 environment and health indicators in the Health for All database, to which countries already contribute, but these are mostly not child-specific. When the pilot-testing in countries is completed, further or different indicators may be recommended. EHIS will select core indicators for the Health for All database, and the Health for All database will refer to EHIS for more in-depth information.

Will this mean that countries will need to do more reporting?

The system is being devised to ensure a minimum of collection of new data, as Member States have made it clear that an increased burden of reporting would not be welcome. The emphasis is on streamlining data processing, mapping what information already exists, and making sure it is comparable and standardized. Whenever possible, the system uses data already reported by the countries to the international data bases, e.g. to WHO, Eurostat or the European Environment Agency.
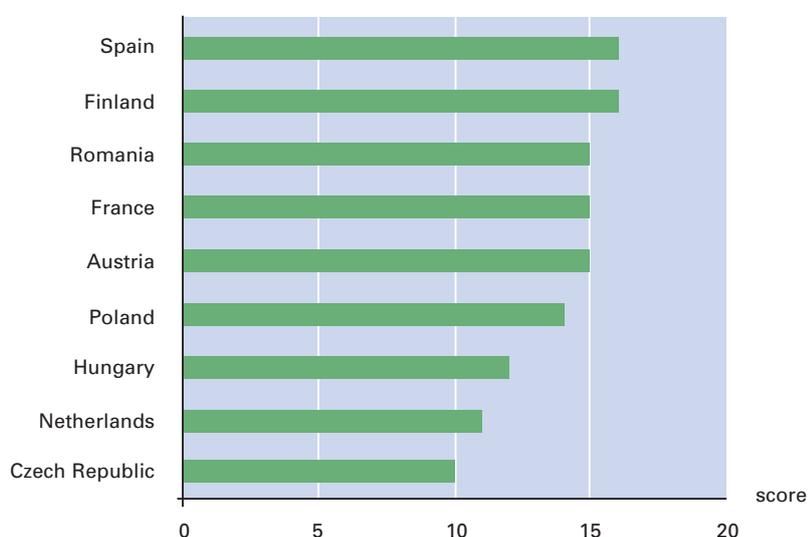
The ENHIS system computes relevant and easy-to-understand indicators based on existing environment and health data. A pilot website already exists at https://webcollect.rivm.nl/enhis%5Fpilot/. The number of indicators computed by the system is gradually being increased. Member States have indicated that they would like a core set to be developed in line with the Regional Priority Goals of the CEHAPE.
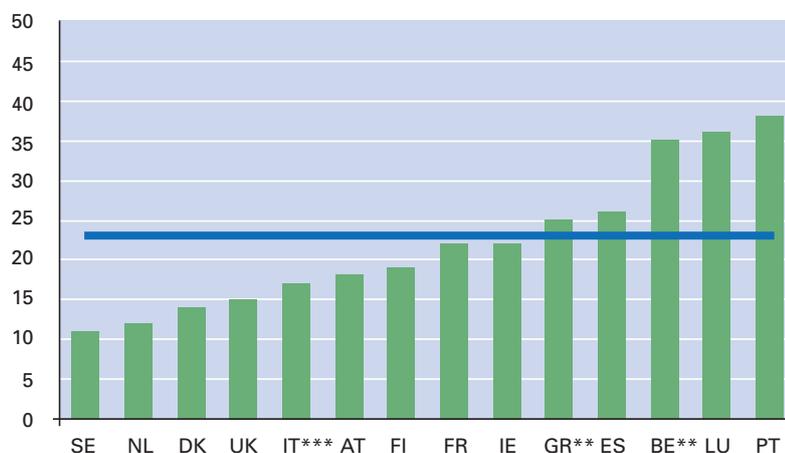
What kind of
indicators are we
talking about?

Some of them illustrate policies and countries are being asked to provide relevant information on what is being put in place. Others are based on routine statistics that will be retrieved from international databases where appropriate.

The graphs below are examples of the information that will be available from the system.

Policies to promote safe mobility for children. Year 2005

Child mortality in traffic accidents per million children population in selected countries, 2002

Child mortality per million children   Average for these countries   ** Data 2001   *** Data 1998

Source; Care Database/EC · Source of population data: IRTAD Database · Date of query: November 2004

What is the current timetable?

The mid-term objective is to establish the technical and organizational infrastructure to allow monitoring of the implementation of national and European environmental health policies, in particular those related to the CEHAPE.

The progress so far will be summarized by an indicators-based assessment report prepared for the Intergovernmental Mid-term Review in 2007. This forms one of the project outcomes of ENHIS-2. WHO will involve other countries in the report and system preparation through their participation in EHIS network and its meetings.

What has been achieved already?

The project has developed methodological and technical elements of a comprehensive information system for monitoring and evaluating the environmental health risks and effects of interventions focusing on children's health. This includes:

- Methodological guidelines for information generation, health impact assessments (HIA), policy-oriented analysis and reporting;
- a core set of children's environmental health indicators developed and implemented on a pilot basis;
- a network of collaborating centres created to strengthen environment and health information capacities in Europe and to maintain the system's relevance for the Member States;
- health impact assessments of outdoor air and drinking water pollution;
- policy analysis and fact-sheets on indicator-based reporting; and
- a web site for dissemination of the information collected by the system.

The results of the first phase of ENHIS were published in December 2005 in the ENHIS Final Technical Report, 1 June 2004 – 31 October 2005. See
http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_projects/2003/action1/action1_2003_28_en.html

Where does this fit into the European Union context?

Creating a sustainable health information and knowledge system is a key priority of the European Community Public Health Programme (2003–2008). Providing reliable, targeted and timely information about environmental hazards and their health effects, as well as the actions taken to reduce or mitigate the risks, enables key health determinants to be addressed as an integral part of the overall evidence base for public policies in Europe. The European Union Action Plan on Environment and Health (the SCALE process) puts a special emphasis on children's environment and health and its key action focus on improving the information chain.

How does this serve the needs of the eastern part of the WHO European Region?

The use of solid information and evidence is a key foundation for the effectiveness of all public health systems. Support for institutional development in the countries of eastern Europe was requested by the Member States at the Budapest conference and is reflected in the Budapest Declaration. Working together on the European system, the countries of eastern Europe profit from the international expertise involved in developing the system methodology and experiences of other countries. As a result, they will be able to use the best available knowledge to establish their national systems.

Additional information can be found on the EHIS website:
http://www.euro.who.int/EHindicators/

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