



Serbia

# STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CHEMICAL RISK-ASSESSMENT CAPACITIES TO GUIDE RISK-REDUCTION DECISION-MAKING

Implementing institution: Institute of Public Health of Serbia

## Overview

Serbia aims to increase capacity for chemical risk assessment, which is identified as a priority in strategic documents including the WHO Chemicals Road Map, World Health Assembly resolutions (67.11, 69.4, 70/36), the International Health Regulations (2005), the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), and the Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health.

## Objective

The project set out to strengthen the methodological basis and human capacities for assessment of health risks from exposure to chemicals and their mixtures.

## Activities

- Raising awareness, increasing knowledge and training public health professionals in the area of chemical risk assessment
- Prioritizing chemicals (arsenic and phthalates) for risk assessment and mapping associated health risks
- Organizing a high-level meeting to discuss further risk assessment

## Engagement of partners/stakeholders

The project engaged six experts from the Institute of Public Health of Serbia; two experts from the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Pharmacy, Department of Toxicology and Centre for Toxicological Risk Assessment; and two experts from the Ministry of Environmental Protection's Department for Chemicals Management.



### Outcomes

- The implemented training increased knowledge and capacities and raised awareness among national and local public health experts, all of whom supported the project in recognition of the importance of risk assessment using harmonized methodologies.
- Multisectoral cooperation was established for future risk assessments.
- Priorities for future risk assessments to ensure the health of exposed populations were identified.
- The mapping model proved to be an effective method for quick orientation in risk management/risk communication. It demonstrated the benefits of improving the reporting methodology within Ministry of Health programmes that are implemented and coordinated by the Institute of Public Health's network, as well as other programmes.

### Acknowledgements

The WHO European Centre for Environment and Health kindly acknowledges national project coordinator Dr Branislava Matić Savićević for leading implementation of the project in Serbia, and national and international experts and other partners for their contributions.

The project was implemented with financial support from the Federal Ministry of Health of Germany.

### Key achievements

- Arsenic and phthalates were prioritized for further risk assessment.
- Public health specialists and laboratory experts from the Institute of Public Health's network were trained using WHO materials adapted to the national context.
- National methodological documents on chemical risk assessment were revised and updated (for both individual chemicals and chemical mixtures).
- Health risks from prioritized chemicals were mapped.

### Lessons learned

- The use of WHO training materials adapted to national standards and needs, especially in the field of toxicological approaches to risk assessment, allowed for the development of trainings for public health specialists and laboratory experts of the Institute of Public Health's network within a short timeframe. Trainings focus on all aspects of the health sector's role in the complex processes of chemical risk assessment.
- The high-level meeting helped to bring the implementation of chemical risk-assessment methods closer to decision-makers.

### Key messages

- Joining all relevant stakeholders at the national level is critical to success.
- Establishing multisectoral cooperation in chemicals management allows for the identification of all chemicals of public health concern.
- Training as many experts as possible at the local level is key to ensuring capacities for risk assessment throughout the network of the Institute of Public Health.

### Steps forward

- Further synergy and cooperation among the health and environmental protection sectors in the field of chemicals is needed.
- More action should be taken to raise public awareness of the exposure of vulnerable groups to priority chemicals and on chemical risk-reduction measures.