

## **Report of EEN side event during the Ministerial Conference: Increasing Young Peoples' Participation in Environmental Health issues**

On Thursday 24 June 2004, during the Budapest Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, EPHA Environment Network (EEN) organised a side event entitled "IT'S OUR WORLD, OUR FUTURE TOO - Increasing Young People's Participation in Environmental Health issues. It was subtitled: "Perspectives, good practice and structures for change". The event was co-hosted by the UK Department of Health and chaired by Tamsin Rose, EPHA's General Secretary.

"IT'S OUR WORLD, OUR FUTURE TOO" aimed to showcase some of the participatory approaches allowing young people's ideas and concerns to be brought to the policy-making agenda in Europe. The side event also aimed at giving young people an opportunity to share with a wider audience their experiences and perspectives on involvement in policy making.

Young students from the United Kingdom and Russia took part actively in the event. These young people were in Budapest in the framework of EEN video project, and they had already had the opportunity to meet a group of Roma students during a workshop on using video to get their environmental messages across.

During the first part of the event, European Commissioner for Environment, Margot Wallström was introduced to the students and then she briefly presented the European Commission's activities and initiatives on environmental policy. After this short introduction, Commissioner Wallström listened to the kids' concerns on environmental problems and the inaction of adults. The UK students emphasized the importance of communications and information. Increasing basic knowledge on what causes environmental problems and making people more aware of the long term effects of air pollution, for example, are some of the immediate and effective actions that politicians and decision makers could and should take to make people change their behaviour, according to the UK students.



Commissioner Wallström suggested that Ken Livingston's initiative of introducing a tax for all cars driving into London represents another good example of how you can encourage people to change their behaviour. One of the UK students did not fully agree saying: "Soon people will be fed up of paying more and more". Commissioner Wallström admitted that, besides taxes, positive incentives were important like tax reductions to encourage positive behaviour, such as using their bikes instead of cars.

Commissioner Wallström was also very interested in knowing more about the students' experience of sharing ideas with other young people from different countries, and in particular with the Roma kids. Irina, from Russia, said she was very happy to see that young people from other countries feel the same about the environment and about how it was necessary to change things. She optimistically concluded that: "We will make it!"

A young woman from the UK asked Commissioner Wallström whether the students' video project would make a difference. For example, would it affect her decision making in the future. Commissioner Wallström replied that their work would surely help her taking into greater and better consideration young people's

needs and concerns. She stressed the importance of personal meetings and personal contact for politicians and decision makers, encouraging students to raise their voice especially at local level.

Katerina Klímová, a youth representative from the Czech republic, asked Commissioner Wallström what the next steps the EC would take to involve young people in the decision making process. Commissioner Wallström replied that a lot is already being done in the area of information and consultation with young people at European level. However, actions need to be implemented by Member States. She said that the most important job has to be done locally or nationally.

Finally, Commissioner Wallström watched the EEN video clip with the audience. Entitled "IT'S OUR WORLD, OUR FUTURE TOO: Young people's voices on environment and health priorities", the video is part of a participatory pilot project raising the concerns of young people from disadvantaged communities in the UK, Belgium, Hungary and Russia. Commissioner Wallstrom, who is also interviewed in the video, was very impressed and requested a copy. She said she would show it at the Environment Council meeting in Luxembourg on 28 June 2004.



#### **UK agency focuses on children**

The second speaker was Professor Pat Troop from the UK Health Protection Agency<sup>1</sup>, a national organisation for England and Wales dedicated to protecting people's health and reducing the impact of infectious diseases, chemical hazards, poisons and radiation hazards. Professor Troop explained the main functions of the Agency, i.e. information to professionals and to the public, advice to government, rapid response to new threats, research and training. In particular, she underlined that among the HPA's objectives and targets for 2004-2005, there is a specific goal to protect and improve the health of children. In particular, the Agency aims to identify and develop appropriate responses to childhood diseases associated with infections, chemical or radiation hazards<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpa/publications/corporateplan2003\\_8.pdf](http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpa/publications/corporateplan2003_8.pdf)