Adapting to climate change – EU strategy
EPHA feedback
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12381-EU-Strategy-on-Adaptation-to-Climate-Change/F535622

The **_European Public Health Alliance_** (EPHA) is the largest European public health NGO advocating for better health. Our 82 member organisations encompasses public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, disease groups, academia and population group representatives working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe.

Summary

There is a need **to develop a comprehensive approach** for tackling the effects of the climate emergency. Especially considering the **consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic**, the European Union needs a public health driven, green recovery to help fight the climate crisis. To this end, **the _European Green Deal_ shall be strengthened** to lead the European transition to a **sustainable** and **healthy continent.**

EPHA's position

The climate emergency is a major threat to public health. According to the 2015 _The Lancet_ report, systemic changes in ecological conditions and social dynamics will have far-reaching effects on human health and well-being, including via air pollution, heat waves, floods, water shortages, infectious diseases, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, under-nutrition and mental ill-health. Therefore, the climate emergency is undermining the foundations of good health. However, the response to the climate emergency could also be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century and **no one should be left behind**.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated that **the current economic model is not sustainable**, and that the coronavirus outbreak is linked to climate and biodiversity. By lowering GHG emissions and air pollution levels, we can help the most vulnerable in their fight against COVID-19 and any other future pandemics. In many Member-states, the lockdown has significantly reduced GHG emissions. However, to prevent going back to pre-pandemics GHG emission levels, sustainable

policies should be put in place to achieve low level emissions on the long-term. These goals could be achieved by ambitious *European Green Deal* targets.

There is a need for an ambitious plan at European level to reduce EU emissions and to become a climate-neutral continent. The [Special Report (2018) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on Global Warming of 1.5°C](#) explained that "any increase in global temperature is projected to affect human health, with primarily negative consequences". Missing the 1.5°C temperature target would increase heatwaves and ozone-related mortality. Some vector-borne diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever, West Nile virus and Lyme disease, "are projected to increase with warming from 1.5°C to 2°C, including potential shifts in their geographic range."

[2019 *The Lancet* Countdown on Health and Climate Change](#) report proves that the life of every child born today will be profoundly affected by the climate emergency. Without accelerated intervention, this new era will come to define the health of people at every stage of their lives.

The IPCC 2018 report identifies "low GHG-intensive food consumption" as a main pathway towards not exceeding a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures. The [IPCC 2019 Report on Climate and Land](#) emphasises the role of public health policies in advancing a transition to sustainable and healthy diets which can bring significant co-benefits for economy, climate and health. It can also create space to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and other food systems challenges, including biodiversity loss. Reducing GHG intensive consumption can contribute to lower agriculture-related air pollution.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) underlined the consequences for health of the link between climate change and air pollution, identifying it as the [greatest environmental risk to global health](#). Tackling the climate crisis and improving air quality in Europe could unlock benefits for both our environment and our health. Synergies can be achieved from integrated prevention strategies, given that the drivers of both climate change and air pollution often overlap. Healthcare costs of transport pollution are another indicator of health co-benefits of climate mitigating measures.

A [2018 report](#) identifies concrete policy measures which the EU can promote by legislation, funding and promotion of good practices. The opportunities for climate

and health of phasing out coal or using the reform of the *Common Agricultural Policy* (CAP) and the new *Farm to Fork Strategy* to tackle emissions from the agricultural sector, while contributing to a resilient food system able to achieve sustainable food and nutrition security, are immense. Coherence needed with the *Zero Pollution strategy* as well as to the *European Beating Cancer Plan* stressing that GHG emitting activities also emit carcinogenic substances. Likewise, mainstreaming climate adaptation into cohesion policy will enable countries to contribute to reach the targets of the 2030 UN Agenda for *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

Ambitious climate targets go hand in hand with **lowering health-harmful substances emission and thus decreasing the indirect health impacts of the climate crisis**. GHG emissions usually contribute to air pollution. Air pollution increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, cancers, dementia, and diabetes, causes new asthma cases in children, and damages nearly every organ in the human body. It is estimated to cause about 16% of lung cancer deaths, 25% of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) deaths, about 17% of heart disease and stroke, and about 26% of respiratory infection deaths.

Europe needs to phase out the sale of diesel and petrol cars by 2028 if it wants to meet its commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement. Countries resolved to limit the rise in global average temperatures to 1.5°C. In order to have a high (66%) chance of achieving this, the EU will need to end all sales of conventional fossil fuel-powered cars by 2028 and phase out all petrol and diesel cars by 2045.

EPHA policy recommendations

To this end, EPHA suggests including the following elements into the EU proposal to contribute to **mitigating the negative public health impacts of the climate crisis**.

As an overarching principle, the European Commission shall :

Recognise that the climate crisis has a negative impact on human health and biodiversity, which will endanger the well-being and the future of new generations;

Acknowledge that immediate and concerted actions, engaging diverse policy areas and actors across society in enabling systemic change.

The new EU strategy must:

Include a climate impact assessment in all future EU policies, including health and well-being impacts; the Lancet Countdown Climate Change and health indicators provide a good basis from which the EU can draw inspiration;

Include a calculation on how much will the initiative contribute to prevent cancer therefore contribute effectively to the *European Beating cancer plan*;

Add a legally binding target for GHG emission reductions from agriculture because the global food system is responsible for up to 30% of anthropogenic GHG emissions;

Commit to mobilise its resources to invest in walking, cycling and improve public transport infrastructures, to achieve the shift in mobility;

Explore and support the legal, financial, coordination or promotion tools the development of ambitious policies, such as:

·   revision of climate and health harmful air pollutant limits,

·   expand zero emission vehicles,

·   urban policies, e.g. ultra-low emission zones, congestion charging parking policies, tax measures and incentives, encourage car-free days and car-sharing;

Aim to end all sales of conventional fossil fuel-powered cars by 2028 and phase out all petrol and diesel cars by 2045.

The Group of Chief Scientific Advisors published a useful report on "Adaptation to climate change-related health effects". Their report contains recommendations on how the EU can help to make the health sector, and our societies, better prepared and more resilient with respect to impacts from climate change on health.

Decisively, tackling the climate crisis by keeping global warming below 1.5°C is one of the greatest health challenges of the 21st century. The highest level of ambition in the European strategy is needed to ensure a transformation towards sustainability of all sectors of Europe's economy and society. With health at the heart of

policymaking, the new strategy has the potential to improve all our lives, and those of our children.