

EU'S 2040 CLIMATE TARGET: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR A HEALTHIER, MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

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The European Commission's 2040 climate target communication, **published on the 6th of February**, marks a decisive moment in the EU's commitment to combat climate change, yet regrettably fails to convey the urgency of the climate crisis. By continuing a significant dependence on oil and gas, the use of insufficient technologies, and poorly leveraging health co-benefits, the plan stands in the way of a large-scale system transformation needed to not only guarantee climate neutrality by 2050 but also to remove pressures on all planetary boundaries.

INSUFFICIENT AMBITION TOWARDS CLIMATE NEUTRALITY:

The Commission's proposed target of a 90% reduction in net emissions by 2040, compared with 1990, although significant, falls short of the potential to transition towards climate neutrality within this timeframe. The 90-95% range advised by the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, in **January 2024**, reflects the Commission's cautious approach. Additionally, the communication's lack of sector-specific emission reduction targets and plan for the phase-out of oil and gas, underscores a critical gap. This omission is particularly concerning given the global consensus, as reflected in the outcomes of the Global Stocktake at COP28, on the necessity to transition away from unabated fossil fuels. EPHA calls for the immediate, rapid, long-term reductions in emissions to mitigate climate change, even above what is already set out in the EU Green Deal to reconcile current missed targets.

The proposed 90% net emissions reduction is also set to over-rely on carbon sinks and technologies, including carbon capture and removals, which raises concerns about the integrity of the EU's climate ambition, potentially obscuring inaction. Additionally, the plan indicates that oil and gas networks may largely shift towards biofuels and hydrogen, which whilst marketed as having the potential to remedy some of the effects of climate change, have widely disputed health and climate impacts and **are not a solution to the current crisis**.



OVERLOOKING THE PROTECTION OF THOSE MOST VULNERABLE:

EPHA welcomes the communication's recognition of the need for effective social dialogue and strong involvement of citizens, in the context of a just transition. However, the proposal falls short in outlining concrete frameworks for safeguarding vulnerable or marginalised populations, notably in concrete measures to support energy poor households in the energy transition, and in recognising the importance of dedicated health services amidst escalating climate hazards. This oversight is critical, as it fails to address the essential need to diminish the disease burden and secure uninterrupted access to healthcare to those most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change, and simultaneously the ones most likely to be left behind in the green transition. The absence of environmental justice and equity principles further exacerbates this gap, underscoring the missed opportunity to address the disproportionate effects of climate change on disadvantaged groups. EPHA encourages the Commission to guarantee that the most marginalised across the European region are considered, collaborated with, and aided in heavy financing, health and climate change mitigation and adaptation. A true Just Transition should prioritise mitigation of the negative effects of climate change on the health of the most vulnerable and marginalised, and on ensuring nobody is left behind in the green transition; this is not currently reflected in the 2040 Climate Target communication.

UNDERMINING HEALTH AND HEALTH CO-BENEFITS:

The proposal recognises the co-benefits of the three target options, including better air quality, healthier ecosystems, and lower healthcare costs, alongside a demonstrated commitment to improving resilience through the interconnection of healthy natural environments and biodiversity. However, the proposal could have more robustly underscored the critical role of integrating health co-benefits across all policy domains as essential for transformative systems change. Albeit the role of 'food environments' as a driver is explicitly mentioned, the Commission fails to set specific targets for agriculture, which dilutes any possible effort. The agriculture and food sectors have significant **capacity to facilitate such dietary shifts**, to not only reduce GHG emissions but also to enhance human and animal health, thereby mitigating the antimicrobial resistance threat and improving food security. Similarly, the European transport systems should be fully decarbonised, with no allowances for biofuels, and a strong implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), which stands to positively impact air quality and health harm. For this purpose, funding should be explicitly tied to achieving health co-benefits, highlighting the expansive benefits of a holistic approach to policy formulation.

EPHA considers climate policies a cornerstone of public health policy in Europe, emphasising the need for an immediate fossil fuel phase-out, engagement with civil society and vulnerable groups, and fully leveraging health co-benefits to set a global precedent in addressing climate change. To this end, EPHA develops these **key priority areas with recommendations** based on current and predicted public health issues, as well as the proposed trajectory of policy, science and technology to date.

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