

BRUSSELS, 29 APRIL 2020

To: Presidents Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel

CC: EP President, College of Commissioners, ENVI committee MEPs, EU Health ministers, EU Environment ministers

PUT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROTECTION AND EVIDENCE BASED DISEASE PREVENTION AT THE HEART OF THE COVID-19 RECOVERY

Dear President von der Leyen, Dear President Michel,

COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of our health, our healthcare systems and our societies, and the need to ensure greater resilience. Urgent action to reduce environmental pollutionⁱ is needed more than ever, and needs to be central to Europe's recovery plan and investments. This will result in immediate health benefits, such as reduced premature death, less asthma attacks, strokes and cancer.

Our response to the current health crisis will determine whether we succeed in creating health benefits for all in tackling climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and inequality. As a very first step, measures towards lifting COVID-19 containment should not contribute to worsening any pre-existing causes of vulnerability, such as air pollution or chronic diseases.

The recent strategies, a joint *European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures*ⁱⁱ and a *Roadmap for recovery, towards a more resilient, sustainable and fair Europe*ⁱⁱⁱ are welcome as they put public health at their centre, are based on science and the EU founding principles of solidarity, democracy and respect for the rule of law and human dignity.

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organisation working for better health through a healthier environment. With our 80 member organisations across the European region, we are ready to work with you in setting Europe on the path for a healthy, sustainable and just recovery, by ensuring that an ambitious European Green Deal is at the heart of the EU recovery plan.

Below are HEAL's principles we urge you to consider in your discussions on the Commission's revised 2020 work programme, the MFF, and the EU and national recovery plans:

- **Put people's health first, no exceptions, protect the most vulnerable and ensure a just transition for all**^{iv} – this includes resourcing health services, essential public services, ensuring access for all. All recovery plans must put people's well-being at the heart of the crisis response and deliver social benefits and protect workers' rights through a 'just transition for all' that leaves no one behind.
- **Step up science based policy action under Green Deal to deliver immediate health benefits & boost its implementation through the European Recovery Plans** – the leading medical journal The Lancet says the Green Deal is a "major opportunity for health improvement" and "has the potential to achieve major health improvements in the near term while reducing the growing health risks from climate

change. The near-term health benefits can arise through successful policy implementation in sectors, such as the energy, housing, transport, food, industry, and healthcare sectors, that substantially contribute to emissions of carbon dioxide and short-lived climate pollutants like methane and black carbon “.

HEAL is a strong supporter of a Healthy Green Deal, and considers it crucial that the EU air quality standards are aligned with the WHO guidelines and work on this starts this year^{vi}. We welcome the commitments that VP Timmermans reaffirmed to the European Parliament and to HEAL^{vii} in April to deliver soon on:

- the 8th Environmental Action Programme
 - a Farm to Fork Strategy^{viii, ix} in the coming weeks
 - an ambitious 2030 climate proposal
 - a comprehensive chemicals strategy for sustainability including EDCs, food packaging, plastics^x
- **A green recovery fund based on transparency, accountability and community-driven solutions** - Establishment of a sizable green recovery fund backed up by all available EU financial tools (including the MFF and its spending programmes, new funds, the use of the European Stability Mechanism and exploring so-called ‘eurobonds’), to finance the green and just recovery.
 - **Green Deal strategic bailouts** - In high-carbon and other potential polluting sectors such as energy production, chemicals, transport or intensive agriculture, make support to companies conditional on their alignment with the Green Deal’s environmental and climate objectives. No bailouts should be given to unviable or polluting industries that have no future in tomorrow’s economy^{xi}.

HEAL agrees that **state aid, loans, subsidies** and other direct or indirect support to companies must come with strict conditions, monitored and enforced by the EU, and focus on sustainable initiatives and the creation of sustainable jobs.

- **Shift from polluting to green and healthy sectors** - Public and private investment throughout the recovery should be guided by the EU’s taxonomy to accelerate the shift from polluting into green sectors; similarly the European Investment Bank should bring its lending policies in line with the European Green Deal objectives by end 2020. In addition, sustainable finance policies should be accelerated and a taxonomy of unsustainable practices to be excluded agreed^{xii}.

HEAL’s key principles have been drawn from our joint work with other civil society organisations in putting forward a number of statements, letters and petitions^{xiii} to bring our members voices and unique health expertise and engagement to turn the unprecedented COVID-19 and economic crisis into a public health opportunity to speed up Green Deal policies and the just transition.

Two recent joint initiatives are a statement and EU-wide petition, **TIME TO INVEST IN A HEALTHY FUTURE: TIME FOR A GREEN & JUST RECOVERY**^{xiv}. We will use these tools to raise awareness with our health constituencies and increase their engagement in building this healthy green future and recovery plan for all, one that not only prevents diseases but promotes health and contributes to healthier ecosystems and economies.

Making the recovery a healthy, just and green one will contribute immensely to HEAL's vision of a healthy planet for healthy people. It is also one that will truly put Europe's economy on the path for climate, environment, health promotion and protection. HEAL and its members are ready to work with you in this transformational time.

Sincerely,



Genon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 80 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.

HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96

ⁱ 1 in 5 of all deaths in Europe are related to environmental factors <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health>, 400 000 premature deaths each year are linked to air pollution in Europe <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/cutting-air-pollution-in-europe>, and 74% of chemicals produced in the EU in 2018 were hazardous to health https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Chemicals_production_and_consumption_statistics#Production_of_chemicals_hazardous_to_health

ⁱⁱ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ A Roadmap for Recovery <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf>

^{iv} 26 March 2020: Joint open letter: Principles for a #JustRecovery from COVID-19, a 350.org initiative <https://www.env-health.org/joint-open-letter-principles-for-a-justrecovery-from-covid-19/>

^v The Lancet [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30109-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30109-4/fulltext)

^{vi} 4 December 2019: HEAL letter: Zero pollution and health protection at the core of the European Green Deal <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HEAL-letter-Zero-pollution-and-health-protection-at-the-core-of-the-European-Green-Deal-1.pdf>

^{vii} 23 April 2020: VP Timmermans' reply to HEAL letter (ref VI) <https://www.env-health.org/executive-vice-president-timmermans-reply-to-heals-letter-on-zero-pollution-and-health-protection/>

^{viii} 15 April 2020: CSOs open letter on the importance and urgency of publishing the Farm to Fork strategy by end April 2020 <https://www.env-health.org/csos-open-letter-on-the-importance-and-urgency-of-publishing-the-farm-to-fork-strategy-by-end-april-2020/>

^{ix} 31 March 2020: Open letter: The European Green Deal needs to cut pesticides and switch to agroecology <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/F2F-Biodiversity-strategies-ECI-Bees-letter.pdf>

^x 24 April 2020: A post COVID-19 world - Enabling lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis for a more resilient economy – [Break Free From Plastic coalition](https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BreakFreeFromPlastic-Open-Letter.pdf) <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BreakFreeFromPlastic-Open-Letter.pdf>

^{xi} 23 April 2020: Time to invest in a healthy future: time for a green & just recovery – Green 10 statement <https://www.env-health.org/joint-public-appeal-for-investment-in-a-healthy-future-a-green-and-just-recovery/> and WeMove petition <https://act.wemove.eu/campaigns/recovery>

^{xii} 23 April 2020: Time to invest in a healthy future: time for a green & just recovery – Green 10 statement <https://www.env-health.org/joint-public-appeal-for-investment-in-a-healthy-future-a-green-and-just-recovery/> and WeMove petition <https://act.wemove.eu/campaigns/recovery>

^{xiii} HEAL Green and Healthy Recovery Statements <https://www.env-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/list-of-statements-and-letters.pdf>

^{xiv} <https://act.wemove.eu/campaigns/recovery>