

2024 CLIMATE AND HEALTH POLICY PRIORITIES FOR EUROPE

This document summarises key priority areas of focus for Europe*, supported by evidence from indicators in the 2024 Europe Report of the Lancet Countdown.

PREVENT HEAT-RELATED HEALTH IMPACTS

- 1 Countries in Europe should develop comprehensive heat health action plans at national and local levels. These plans should include implementing prevention, early warning and response systems, investing in resilient infrastructure, including housing and green and blue spaces, and developing guidelines and accessible communications to protect vulnerable populations.

Amid record-breaking temperatures, Europe is experiencing unprecedented warming with temperatures rising at twice the global average. More frequent, more intense heatwaves pose substantial health risks, exacerbating cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and increasing premature deaths particularly among at-risk populations.

There were over 60,000 estimated heat-related premature deaths in summer of 2022 (indicator 1.1.4). The mean increase of heat-related deaths was estimated to be around 17.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants when comparing 2013-2022 with 2003-2012 (indicator 1.1.4). Moreover, the increased frequency of heatwaves has negatively impacted labour supply (indicator 4.2.1), and resulted in further heightened socioeconomic strains (section 4 indicators).

Adaptation strategies including enhanced urban planning, green infrastructure, and early warning systems designed to reduce heat stress impacts on human health are vital. These actions should prioritise health and vulnerable populations and integrate climate-resilient health systems, as well as provide adequate financing. Policy responses should be outlined across sectors through a heat action plan, considering health sector expertise.

PRIORITISE REDUCING CLIMATE-RELATED HEALTH INEQUALITIES

- 2 There is a pressing need to reduce health inequalities through targeted policies that ensure climate resilience and health equity are integrated into broader climate mitigation and adaptation action.

Climate change deepens health disparities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Within European countries, those most at risk of being severely affected by climate-related health impacts include ethnic minoritised people, Indigenous people, low-income communities, migrants and displaced people, children, the elderly, those with pre-existing health conditions, sexual and gender minoritised, and people undergoing pregnancy and childbirth.

The report shows that **Southern Europe tends to be more affected by heat-related illnesses, wildfires, food insecurity, drought, and leishmaniasis, whereas Northern Europe is equally or more impacted by Vibrio and ticks.** Inequities are further compounded for marginalised groups: the report shows differences in health impacts among different population groups. **For example, heat-related mortality rates are twice as high among women compared to men, highly deprived areas are more exposed to wildfire smoke, and low-income groups are more likely to suffer from food insecurity exacerbated by an increase in heatwave days and drought months (section 1 indicators).**

These findings underscore the urgent need for equity-focused climate policies that prioritise the health of those most at risk or impacted in the planning, implementation and monitoring of climate-health strategies. Europe should commit to inclusive climate action that not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions but also protects its most at-risk populations, fostering a fair and resilient society.

3

TAKE URGENT ACTION ON CLIMATE AND HEALTH

There should be a coordinated approach across all sectors to promote actions with health co-benefits that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while protecting public health. These sectors include not only the health sector, but also energy, transportation, and agriculture. Such actions include increasing active transport, increasing uptake of renewable energy, and promoting healthier diets.

Europe's climate action is insufficiently robust, lagging in ambition and urgency for both adaptation and mitigation efforts. This delayed action is compromising health within and beyond Europe. The report shows that current trajectories will intensify the health burdens of climate change.

Europe's pace toward mitigating emissions from the energy system is insufficient. **Under current policies, Europe would reach net zero emissions only in 2100, far beyond the goal of 2040. Emissions from fossil fuel combustion amounted to 3.4 billion tonnes (Gt) of CO₂ in 2021, or 5.4 tonnes of CO₂ per person, which is six times higher than African per person emissions and, 2.7 times higher than Central and South American emissions (indicator 3.1.1). The health sector alone contributed 330 megatonnes (Mt) of CO₂-equivalent emissions in 2020, highlighting the need for accelerated transformation to sustainable healthcare systems (indicator 3.5).**

Despite the widely reported negative impacts of climate change on societies, ecosystems and human health, **fossil fuels continue to be subsidised in more than half of WHO European countries, with the total net fossil fuel subsidies amounting to €61.6 billion in 2020 (indicator 4.2.1).**

Immediate and robust climate action is required, to enhance resilience, and dramatically cut European emissions. This should include integrating health into climate adaptation and mitigation action, and a fossil fuel phase out, to steer towards a sustainable and healthy future for all.

Accelerating Action



Europe needs to act now to align climate policies and urgently improve climate mitigation, adaptation and health equity, targeting the escalating threats outlined in the 2024 Europe Report of the Lancet Countdown. It's time for decisive, evidence-based action to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions towards a healthy, sustainable future for all within and beyond Europe.



For more of the latest data at a country-level on health and climate change, you can find our accompanying data sheets by scanning the QR code or visiting lancetcountdown.org

Contributors

The concept for this brief was developed by the **Lancet Countdown in Europe, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)**, the **Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)**, and the **Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER)**.

*A detailed description of the geographical definition of Europe and European subregions for each finding (i.e. indicator) can be found in the 2024 Europe Report's appendix.

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