

European Climate and Health Observatory

- Strategic priorities and key actions for 2021 and 2022 -

30 June 2021

The climate crisis is also an impending health emergency

The EU's key goal of being climate neutral by 2050 will deliver direct and near-term health benefits arising from the switch to clean energy sources and to a decarbonised economy.

However, even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions today, climate change will occur and will accelerate throughout this century. Robust projections indicate an increasingly negative balance of its effects on our health and significant strains on our health systems caused by growing heat stress, emerging infectious disease threats, food and water safety and security problems, the rise of new allergens, mental health effects, and wildfire and flood risks.

Policy-makers and decision-makers in both public authorities and the private sector need to become more aware of these risks and need to understand them better. We must invest more in prevention and preparedness in order to keep Europeans healthy and European health facilities operational in a warming world.

Many solutions are within reach; much can be done to reduce risks, and the economic benefits of actions addressing the prospective health effects of climate change are likely to be substantial. However, more effort is needed to gather, share and spread knowledge about cost-effective and customisable adaptation solutions.

The European Climate and Health Observatory provides much-needed support

Launched in February 2021, the European Climate and Health Observatory allows policy- and decision-makers to **visualise climate change-related health risks** and it helps them to **take action and respond** to these risks.

The EU and Member States' national administrations, as well as sub-national authorities, can benefit from the pooling and exchanging of knowledge and solutions across borders, and from close collaboration and cooperation. Climate and health policy making needs solid projections of possible health outcomes to design effective responses. The Observatory helps to provide the necessary preconditions and instruments, creating synergy with ongoing initiatives and facilitating implementation of more comprehensive and more efficient measures.

The Observatory supports the policy making process through a step-by-step approach, by prioritising key actions and linking them to ongoing strategies and activities. This implies the development of knowledge, early warnings and predictions and practical responses related to selected themes. Work is planned and carried out in cooperation with national authorities competent for health and climate and with civil society.

Concretely, the Observatory aims to deliver its purpose by:

- mobilising the active contribution of its partners
- linking with EU initiatives and programmes supporting health preparedness (Copernicus, European Health Union, HERA Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe including Mission on adaptation, LIFE)
- maintaining a high-quality online portal (hosted on the Climate-ADAPT portal, managed by the EEA)
- developing early warning, surveillance and modelling tools (Observatory partners, e.g. the Joint Research Centre (JRC), Mission on adaptation)
- a pro-active communications and outreach programme (including notably the planned joint reports with the Lancet Countdown and/or other partners)
- linking with Member States' authorities (Steering Group on Prevention and Promotion (SGPP), EEA National Focal Points and National Reference Centres, Working Group 6 of the Climate Change Committee)
- Linking with civil society (EU Health Policy Platform)

Main focus for 2021 and 2022

Following the Observatory launch in early 2021, work on the Observatory during the remainder of the year and in 2022 will concentrate on the development of its first **European climate and health report** and predominantly on two major climate related health risks:

- **Climate-sensitive infectious disease threats** (such as posed by vector-borne and water-borne diseases)
This links the work of the Observatory to the development of the European Health Union, the setup of the European Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA), and the work of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) with support of the Copernicus Climate Change Service.
- **Heat stress** (leading to death, ill health and reduced work capacity; and exacerbated by air pollution and the projected increase of pollen and other allergens)
This links the Observatory to ongoing work in the field of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Copernicus Climate Change Service and Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, and the JRC.

For each of these risks, the observatory will identify, develop and make available:

- Meaningful risk indicators (combining information on hazards, exposure, vulnerability and —if available— response capacity to e.g. heat exposure of elderly populations and availability of hospital beds)
- Risk assessment tools (e.g. interactive scenario maps like in the new [European Climate Data Explorer](#)) and monitoring and surveillance tools (graphs with timelines, like for Covid-19)
- Useful background knowledge (key sources, studies, reports, experts, organisations)
- Actionable solutions and good practices, including links to ongoing Horizon2020 actions, Horizon Europe, Mission on Adaptation and Steering Group on Prevention and Promotion

The focus on these two key risks sets the strategic direction for the Observatory's work in the short term. However, it does not exclude activities on other topics that the partners are able to contribute in 2021–22.

Key actions for 2021 and 2022

Key action/area	Expected results and action leader
European climate and health report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First full report in 2022 (Lancet Countdown)
Heat health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations and e-tools for the public under the 'European climate code' (SANTE) • Updated WHO guidance on Heat Health Action Plans (WHO/Europe) • European-scale data on heat waves, urban heat island and thermal comfort indices based on climate re-analysis and projections (C3S) • European-scale data on UV, selected pollens, and regulatory air pollutants in the context of climate change and heat stress in particular (CAMS) • Revised WHO Air Quality Guidelines in relation to heat stress (WHO/Europe) • Links to existing European climate warning systems (EEA)
Climate-sensitive infectious disease threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant findings of the 'intelligence gathering' preparatory action for the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) • Web-based tool for near-real-time prediction of <i>Aedes</i>-borne disease outbreak risk in Europe based on recent weather patterns and predictions (ECDC) • C3S driven datasets and applications on vector-borne diseases and lessons learned from related user consultations (C3S)
Observatory web portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlarged indicator section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indicators as per the planned 2022 report (Lancet Countdown, EEA) ○ Air pollutants and pollen (CAMS) ○ UV radiation (CAMS; to be decided) ○ Healthcare service location, capacity and accessibility (ESTAT) and healthcare facilities exposure to climate hazards (EEA) ○ Accessibility of urban green space to vulnerable groups (EEA) • Updated country profiles (EEA), including updated WHO Health and Climate Change Country Profiles (WHO) • Enhanced health effects section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emerging risks for food, feed safety, plant animal health and nutritional quality (EFSA) ○ Impacts on mental health (EEA, SANTE) ○ Impacts on occupational health and safety (EEA) • Enlarged resource catalogue (EEA) • New case studies (EEA) • Regular maintenance (EEA)
Outreach and user engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) webinars (EEA) • Steering Group on Prevention and Promotion - SGPP (SANTE) • HIC working group meetings (WHO/Europe) • European Health Policy Platform webinar (SANTE) • Climate-ADAPT newsletter (EEA) • KE4CAP project (CLIMA) • DG DEFIS Workshop on Copernicus and Public Health (C3S, CAMS) • Copernicus Thematic Hub on Health (implemented by CAMS) • WHO Global Conference on Health and Climate Change (WHO and partners) • European Public Health Conference (EEA) • COP26 side event (EEA and partners) • Outreach through European research projects in the field (CINEA) • Engagement with Belmont Forum (CINEA)