

The European Platform on Health and Social Equity (PHASE) is an advocacy and action oriented body for EuroHealthNet participants and a wider range of partners from relevant fields in public, private and voluntary sectors willing and able to work on addressing the wider determinants of health. PHASE aims to directly support and actively contribute to the EU policy framework for social investment and innovation by bringing new ideas to bear on areas of specific added value with regards to tackling social inequalities in health.

Our *Policy Précis* provide an easy-to-read analysis of a key policy area, outlining where progress can be made to address social and health inequities in Europe. The aim is to inform and help to improve international, national and local policies and practices within and beyond health systems, in order to promote better health and well-being for all.

This series of summaries is updated and expanded with full references online at www.eurohealthnet.eu

EuroHealthNet has worked for many years on building sustainable societies through improving health and equity at EU, national and local levels. Now this has a new global focus, with United Nations decisions imminent on sustainable development goals. WHO Europe is prioritizing actions. In this Policy Précis we highlight needs and possible actions.

Key policy points:

- Reorientate EU 2020 objectives towards sustainable development, equity and wellbeing;
- Integrate European actions within the UN Sustainable Development goals framework;
- Implement learning from promising practices and pathways to sustainable lifestyles

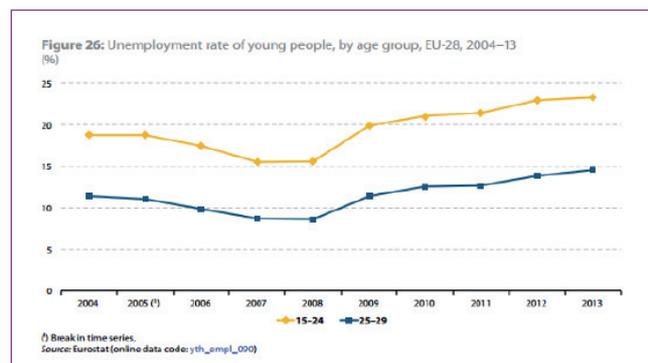
Making the link

The effects of unsustainable policies and practices impact in numerous ways. Factors like extreme weather events, economic instability, social, environmental and economic inequities and increasing chronic diseases are threats to populations, but disadvantaged groups are most affected. For example, evidence points to an unequal distribution of environmental quality. Poorer or socially excluded groups are more likely to live in areas of poorer environmental quality than other groups¹. People in certain groups face multiple vulnerabilities (e.g. those on low income, ethnic migrants², those in poor health) to environmental impacts. Research suggests that future ecological crises will affect the poorest and most vulnerable most severely.



This resembles a vicious circle. Lower land prices can be a factor to locate a hazardous factory in impoverished neighbourhoods. This exposes inhabitants to a higher degree of pollution; likewise, an area that allocates several polluting companies will also have a decreased market value, making it financially attractive for families with lesser means³ and which are more likely to experience unmet healthcare needs due to lower income. Another threat to sustainable societies is the impact of global

Figure 1. © Eurostat 2015



financial and economic crises. High levels of precariousness and uncertainty have become commonplace, and the shortage of long-term employment was particularly felt by young people with a staggering increase on unemployment rates (figure 1). In 2011, 16.7% of young Europeans aged between 18-24 were neither in employment nor in education and training. Bulgaria (26.3 %), Italy (25.2 %), Greece (24.4 %), Ireland (24.0 %) and Spain (23.1 %) are above the EU average.

24.5 % of the EU population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Active participation of adults in life-long learning activities is low: only 8.9 % of the population between 25 and 64 take part in structured lifelong learning courses. These trends have worrying long term impacts on European society.

1 Ferrari, Sylvie, and Alexandre Berthe. "Ecological inequalities among humans: an analysis of the links between justice, ethics and sustainability." In *Colloque de l'Association Charles Gide pour l'histoire de la Pensée Economique*.
 2 Fecht D, Fischer P, Fortunato L, HoekG, de Hoog K, Marra M, Kruize H, Viennau D, Beelen R and Hansell A (2014) *Associations between air pollution and socioeconomic characteristics, ethnicity and age profile of neighbourhoods in England and the Netherlands*, in

Environmental Pollution (2015), Volume 198, pp. 201-210
 May 2002, Vol 92, No. 5
 3 Johnstone N. (2000), *The Distribution of Urban Environmental Impacts and Resources: Objectives, Evidence and Policy*, back report prepared for the OECD Environmental Outlook and Strategy, Paris, in OECD (2001) *Sustainable Development: Critical Issues* https://books.google.be/books?id=GKPWAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_suummary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

The Situation



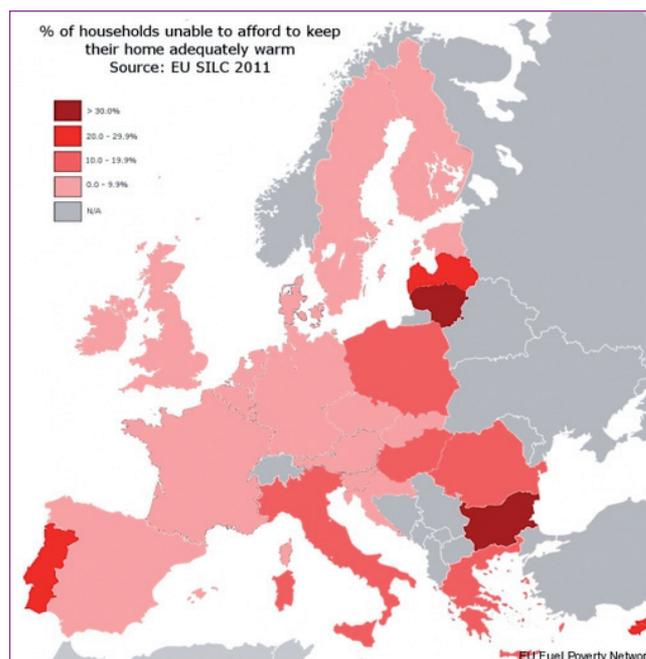
Environmental health stressors have direct and indirect health impacts. Urban congestion and air pollution⁴ can prevent people from getting enough physical activity and can lead to more car accidents. There is also evidence that children in low socio-economic status (SES) neighbourhoods are less physically active, due to the limited availability of green spaces and social safety. Children with lower SES are also more heavily exposed to traffic and annoyed by traffic noise⁵. For example, children in the most deprived ten per cent of areas in England are four times as likely to be hit by a car⁶.

Around one-quarter of the global disease burden is caused by modifiable environmental factors, which include physical, chemical and biological hazards⁷. In a recent WHO report on the cost of health impact and air pollution in Europe, the overall annual economic cost of health impacts and mortality from air pollution for this world region reached US\$ 1.575 trillion. Smog and fine-particle matter in particular are the air pollutants with the riskiest long-term health effect⁸.

Unsustainable consumption patterns, such as excess consumption saturated fat, trans-fat, sugar and salt and low consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits are risk factors for diet-related diseases. Consumption patterns also play a role in climate change, food security, limited land and water resources. Non-communicable diseases are a risk to sustainable development, by increasing probability of poverty through reduced incomes and early retirement⁹.

One area where the impacts of the crisis and environmental sustainability intersect is fuel poverty, meaning that families can not afford to keep their house insulated from the cold and other elements by paying energy bills (figure 2). Studies suggest there are correlations between health outcomes and fuel poverty - indoor cold and mortality; indoor dampness, mould problems and childhood asthma; and mental health. In addition, vulnerable groups such as sick, elderly, and unemployed people who also tend to spend large amounts of time at home are the most exposed to cold indoor climate¹⁰.

Figure 2. Wand, C.R. (2013). % of households unable to keep their home adequately warm. Available: <http://fuelpoverty.eu>.



4 Perlin SA, Wong D, Sexton K. (2001) *Residential proximity to industrial sources of air pollution: interrelationships among race, poverty, and age*, J Air Waste Manage Assoc., 51, pp. 406–421, in Kriger J and Higgins DL (2002) *Public Health Matters. Housing and Health: Time Again for Public Health Action*, American Journal of Public Health, Vol 92, No. 5, pp.758-768

5 EEA, 2010, *The European environment - state and outlook: synthesis 2010*, European Environment Agency, Copenhagen.

6 Department for transport, 2009, *A Safer Way – Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World*.

7 World Health Organization. "Environmental health inequalities in Europe: Assessment report." (2012).

8 World Health Organization (2015) "Economic cost of health impact of air Pollution in Europe"

9 WHO Regional Office for Europe (2014) *Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in the European Region: A Progress Report*. http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/235975/Prevention-and-control-of-noncommunicable-diseases-in-the-European-Region-A-progress-report-Eng.pdf

10 RENOVATION, INVESTING IN HOME, and A. SUSTAINABLE. "ALLEVIATING FUEL POVERTY IN THE EU." (2014).

Leading by example

National

Long-term vision for Sustainable Development



Belgium's recent *Long-term vision for Sustainable Development* outlines its objectives until 2050. The strategy combines elements from different policy areas in an interdisciplinary way to achieve goals such as:

- Social inclusion through equal opportunities and access to services;
- Addressing health inequities including public health and chronic diseases;
- Improve health through full implementation the *precautionary and polluter pays principles*;
- Optimisation of employment standards with adaptation throughout one's life;
- An integrated agricultural model offering nutritional food options.

www.bit.ly/1Qi460x

International

SPREAD Project



The "SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyles 2050" project sought to create scenarios of sustainable lifestyles in 2050 as well as a timeline to achieve them. By focusing on housing, food, society and transport, SPREAD raised awareness for promising practices while recommending sustainable new courses of action.

www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu

PTP-CYCLE



Personalised Travel Planning for Cycling (PTP-CYCLE) seeks to change people's transportation behaviour by promoting the use of bicycles on citizens' daily commutes. At the same time, this project hopes to achieve "cleaner air, healthier citizens and reduced CO₂" emissions. This project has a volunteering component it is aimed at three different targets – households, universities and workplaces. It has been implemented in cities/locations with a higher propensity for cycling such as Antwerp (Belgium), Riga (Latvia), London (United Kingdom), Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Burgos (Spain) – thus having a true European scope.

www.ptpcycle-europe.eu

Local

Hungry for Success (Scotland)



The East Ayrshire Council in Scotland implemented the Hungry for Success Initiative in the Council's fifty-three schools. The aim was to "reduce the environmental impact of school meals". By targeting school meals, products offered by vending machines, nutritional education in the classroom and further guidance outside school through parental support the project was able to:

- Reduce carbon emissions by granting tenders to local producers and farmers;
- Offer healthier meal choices to pupils and promote healthy consumption habits, while actively contributing towards the fight against obesity;
- Reduce the negative "stigma attached to taking free school meals" (associated with peer pressure);
- Return 6£ to local communities on employment, health, environmental and social benefits for each 1£ spent.

www.gov.scot/Publications/2003/02/16273/17567

Pathways to Progress

Global

Sustainable Development Goals

At the UN General Assembly, Heads of State and Government will agree a new Sustainable Development Goals framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The goals will be applicable to all countries. The EU noted that health contributes to many goals and targets. "Policy measures that help create and promote access to decent jobs with sustainable and adequate social protection for all, as well as those that facilitate investment in human capital via education, skilling and training, are of critical importance" reads the EU communication. The number of goals proposed by the Open Working Group include ending poverty; promoting health for all; decent work; reduced inequality; and sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Europe

Besides its work on the Sustainable Development Goals, the EU has been implementing its own Sustainable Development strategy since 2001. Devised to address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of Sustainable Development, it targets environmental threats to public health as one of its main points of action.

EU 2030 Package

EU leaders agreed on 23 October 2014 the domestic 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target of at least 40% compared to 1990 as well as the initial steps towards 2030 policy framework for climate and energy. With a binding target of at least 27% for renewable energy and energy savings by 2030, the framework aims to build a secure energy system that ensures affordable energy for all consumers.

EU mobility package

The Communication *Together towards competitive and resource-efficient urban mobility* (2013) provides a comprehensive framework for EU support to local action for tackling urban mobility challenges. One of the mechanisms, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, promotes func-

tional urban area and integrates urban mobility into other policy areas. These plans aim to ensure urban mobility:

- Is accessible and meets the basic mobility needs of all users;
- Meets the requirements of sustainability, balancing the need for economic viability, social equity, health and environmental quality;
- Reduces air and noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy consumption;

The Communication argues for EU Structural Funds to be used to fund integrated packages of measures, such as a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan and appropriate actions.

Social Investment Package

The EU Social Investment Package (SIP) (2013) seeks to help member states implement "adequate and sustainable social protection". The SIP document suggests a strategy supporting effective, integrated, equitable and universal health and social systems. Equitable health outcomes are crucial in the fight against poverty, to increase the inclusion of people across the social gradient and to meet EU goals of cohesion, wellbeing, economic sustainability and social progress.

