

EuroHealthNet Feedback on the EU Action Plan Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil

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EuroHealthNet is a not-for-profit partnership of organisations, agencies and statutory bodies working on public health, disease prevention, promoting health, and reducing inequalities. EuroHealthNet has long been committed to sustainable development in Europe and globally. We welcome the European Green Deal and EU Action Plan Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil in principle as crucial steps towards ensuring a transition to a more sustainable future.

In the Zero Pollution Action Plan Roadmap, we particularly welcome the Commission's recognition of the inextricable links between a healthy planet and healthy people, and the fact that "pollution often affects the most vulnerable people most seriously". **The recent H2020 INHERIT initiative, which EuroHealthNet coordinated, highlighted exactly this issue, and drew attention to the need to enact policies and processes that jointly benefit the environment, health and equity – "triple-wins"**. The INHERIT Policy Brief attached to this feedback provides a few indications on how this can be done, and further responses to the Commission's Roadmap are included below.

EuroHealthNet agrees with the need for binding health and environmental standards, to ensure that the public and private sector implement EU rules on air, water and soil pollution, and we also welcome the inclusion of the much-needed polluter pays principle. Legislation should aim to ensure a just transition, in which those who are more vulnerable are not disproportionately harmed by new measures. Shifting to intersectoral governance will ensure that all potential impacts of legislative initiatives are considered; not just environmental but also health and social (equity) impacts. INHERIT's findings include recommendations for how to create institutional cultures that value and foster collaboration.

In order to successfully achieve the zero pollution ambitions, it is critical that citizens are enabled and encouraged to make sustainable changes through effective policies, which identify barriers and build a social and physical environment that facilitates these changes. We also know that people can be motivated to take action through concern for their health. Providing more information on how pollution is affecting health – including through citizen science approaches – can be a powerful lever for change. INHERIT research demonstrated that involving all communities in policies that affect them helps to ensure policies address real needs, is empowering and gives them a vested interest in their success. We urge the Commission to encourage such approaches, in particular initiatives that involve citizens and communities who are most affected by pollution and the green transition, and whose voices are not always heard in public debates.

EuroHealthNet notes the Commission's reference to digital solutions as a driver of societal change, and would like to highlight that this should be accompanied by investments in improving digital literacy and enabling infrastructures across population groups, while always safeguarding individual privacy. Information and solutions must be easy to access, understand and apply by all; the more complex the information the harder it is for the general population to act on.

Finally, the Roadmap mentions the need to "further decouple economic growth from the increase of pollution". EuroHealthNet would like to suggest a focus away from economic growth, and towards a



regenerative and redistributive economy of “wellbeing”, which is good for people and good for the planet. Kate Raworth’s Doughnut Economy is an essential model in this respect, which the Commission could use to further build on the Finnish Presidency’s Council Conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing.

Further INHERIT recommendations and tools applicable to the Zero Pollution ambition and European Green Deal as a whole can be found in a policy toolkit: <https://inherit.eu/policy-toolkit/>.

Attached: INHERIT Policy Brief on PUTTING HEALTH EQUITY AT THE HEART OF SUSTAINABLE TRANSITIONS