



EUROHEALTHNET ANNUAL SEMINAR 2025 REPORT

Climate change and health

Using the health argument to mitigate and adapt
to the impacts of climate change

11 June 2025, Brussels and online

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EuroHealthNet Annual Seminar 2025

2024 was the warmest year on record globally. Across Europe and the world, communities were devastated by floods and wildfires. People are losing their livelihoods and their lives, with the most vulnerable likely to suffer most and be least able to cope and recover.

The call for urgent action is starting to sound like a broken record. Yet greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and with each passing year, the Paris Agreement goals move further out of reach. What can we do to change course?

The imperative of protecting people from death, disease, and displacement, and of providing everyone with the conditions in which to thrive and live a healthy life, can be a powerful argument for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The 2025 EuroHealthNet Annual Seminar on 'Climate change and health' was hosted by the [Permanent Representation of Spain in the European Union](#) in collaboration with the [Spanish Ministry of Health](#). It began by setting out the evidence of the health and health equity impacts of climate change, including the costs of inaction. Experts explored what difference we can make, as public health professionals and beyond, by asking the question: how can we take action, advocate for, and achieve change, bringing everyone on board? The high-level policy panel discussed how initiatives across sectors and across levels of governance can create a healthier planet and protect everyone's health and wellbeing.

The hybrid seminar brought together over 100 in-person and around 300 online participants, including policymakers, experts and senior officials from national and regional public health bodies. The seminar concluded with a powerful and [urgent call for an 'EU strategy on climate and health'](#) to which the EuroHealthNet Partnership and its over 80 member organisations across Europe are fully committed.

Welcome and introduction

Enrique Terol, Health Counsellor at the [Permanent Representation of Spain to the EU](#), opened the seminar by stressing that for many countries, including Spain, the impact of climate change is noticeable.

The Spanish Ministry of Health is deeply interested in the topic. This is why it has developed the [Spanish Strategy on Global Health](#) and supported this seminar as an opportunity to connect science with policy, promoting cooperation.

Suzanne Costello, President of EuroHealthNet and Chief Executive of the [Institute of Public Health in Ireland](#), stated that it is our responsibility to become more knowledgeable about the connection between climate change and health. While change on the issue can seem slow and dispiriting, we are seeing the consequences and impacts every day. These impacts are difficult to cope with on a personal, physical, and mental level, but also present a difficulty for countries' infrastructure. She emphasised that it is challenging to work in a contested space, where there is an overemphasis on individual action. Still, public health measures can make tremendous progress if we remain vigilant.

Pedro Gullón Tosio, Director General of Public Health and Equity at the [Spanish Ministry of Health](#), outlined that climate change is one of the biggest threats we face, but that we are also faced with increasing inequalities, fascism, and hate, which all have an impact on public health and health equity. It is essential to discuss these determinants, which is why the Spanish Ministry of Health has produced its [Strategy on Global Health](#), with climate change as a central focus, while adopting a cross-sectoral outlook.



Pedro Gullón Tosio highlighted climate and social threats to health, emphasising Spain's cross-sectoral Global Health Strategy.

Pedro emphasised Spain's responsibility to engage collaboratively through a multilateral and multisectoral approach. Having faced the impacts of climate change for years, including recent extreme events in Seville and Valencia, Spain remains acutely aware of the urgency for both mitigation and adaptation. With approximately 3,000 heat-related deaths annually, he underscored the importance of integrating equity into adaptation strategies to address the specific needs of vulnerable populations and urban areas.

At the same time, the government can implement mitigation efforts, and public health has an important role to play as a leader in the climate change response. There are opportunities, also within the health sector, which is one of the largest global emissions contributors. The question now is how to move to a global level, as it is the only way we can move forward on climate change.

Session 1: The evidence: the health and health equity impact of climate change

Moderator: Suzanne Costello, President of EuroHealthNet and Chief Executive of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland

Setting the scene: the health impacts of climate change

Joacim Rocklöv, Regional Co-Director for Europe of [Lancet Countdown on Climate Change & Health](#), set the scene on the health impacts of climate change. He outlined the work of the Lancet Countdown Europe in developing indicators to address how health impacts are often hidden, with associated effects. The first Lancet Countdown Europe report, published in 2022, took stock of more than 40 indicators in European countries over the past 30 years. It documented responses, mitigation co-benefits, and public engagement on climate change topics including heat, food security, infectious diseases, wildfires and more. The report revealed the progress made on the transition to sustainable systems and identified how public engagement with the scientific research has picked up, whereas it is not as much for political engagement.

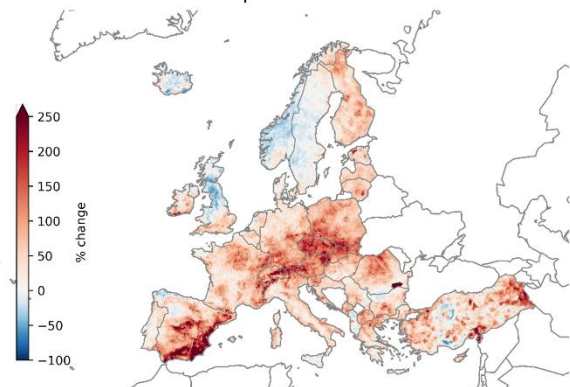


Joacim Rocklöv highlighted Europe's hidden health impacts from climate change

2026 will see the launch of two Lancet reports: one on monitoring trends and one on urban environments. He explained that there is a need to develop more indicators on adaptation and monitoring.

Joacim then outlined different threats Europe faces due to climate change, including an increase in mosquitoes across Europe due to heat, food security trends that are connected to heatwaves and drought days, as well as CO₂ emissions from meat, dairy and egg consumption. Changing food and consumption habits will have a great impact on public health. More information on this

Decadal change in heatwave exposure of over-65s, 2010-2019 compared to 2000-2009



Joacim Rocklöv demonstrated how heatwave exposure nearly doubled from 2000–09 to 2012–21

can be found in the uploaded indicators on climate change and health on the [European Environment Agency Climate and Health Observatory](#) website.

View the [PowerPoint](#)

Putting health equity at the heart of conversations on climate change

Sinaia Netanyahu, Programme Manager, [WHO Regional Office for Europe, European Centre for Environment and Health](#), joined online to present the work of WHO Europe on climate change and health. She emphasised the importance of placing health equity at the centre of climate discussions. When discussing climate change, we are facing a triple crisis involving pollution and environmental biodiversity. As it is influenced by how we live and what we consume, it is more complex than just what we see.



Sinaia Netanyahu stressed WHO Europe's focus on climate, health equity, and the triple crisis of climate, pollution, and biodiversity

Climate change is connected to many health threats, such as infectious diseases, allergies, mental health, as well as maternal and child health. In addition, people are unequally impacted due to socioeconomic factors, including gender, income, age, ethnicity, physical abilities, and more. These impacts are driven by three uneven aspects: exposure, susceptibility or vulnerability, and resilience in coping with and recovering from damages. Sinaia stated that it is important to consider equity as central to climate and health policy, as it is not simply a matter of justice but essential for sustainable and inclusive solutions.

The [WHO Second European Programme of Work 2026-2030](#) will explore how climate change exacerbates health inequalities through the three uneven aspects. However, climate vulnerability is still underreported, as many countries do not include these factors in their reports and without the data, it is difficult to tackle the issues. Netanyahu called the climate crisis a justice crisis, and that we need to tackle both to build healthier and more resilient societies.

Session 2: The tools and practices: getting everyone on board and taking action

Moderator: Sumina Azam, Vice-President of EuroHealthNet & National Director of Policy and International Health at Public Health Wales, together with Alba Godfrey, EuroHealthNet Senior Project Coordinator on Climate and Health

Sumina Azam, Vice-President of EuroHealthNet & National Director of Policy and International Health at [Public Health Wales](#), opened the session by commenting on the starkness of what was presented. Climate change is a clear threat to everyone, especially to the most vulnerable populations. This session aimed to provide concrete ideas and initiatives for public health professionals and beyond on how to take action, advocate for, and achieve change, bringing a wide range of policymakers, practitioners, and communities on board.

Alba Godfrey, EuroHealthNet Senior Project Coordinator on Climate and Health, presented the video on a climate-friendly hospital in Vienna developed with the Climate and Health Competence Centre of EuroHealthNet's member, the [Austrian National Public Health Institute](#), with funding from the European Climate Foundation. The video is part of a series to show the impact of climate and built environments on health and social inequalities.



Video shown to the seminar participants about a climate-friendly hospital in Vienna

Each video was developed with a different EuroHealthNet member across European countries, and the topics are:

- Sustainable healthcare facilities in Austria
- Just transition from solid fuels in Ireland
- Indoor air quality and women's health in Bulgaria
- Heat waves and schools in Spain

The video series will be published on the EuroHealthNet channels soon.

Getting healthcare on board: liaising with health systems to take action on climate change

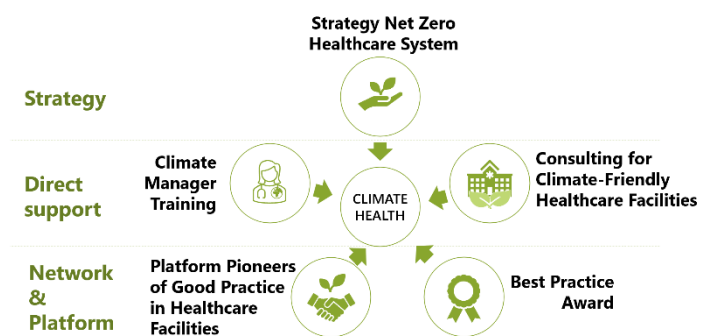
Christoph Csoklich, Senior Expert Climate Protection, Climate and Health Competence Centre, Austrian National Public Health Institute, presented efforts to work with health systems to take action on climate change. He highlighted three important takeaways from the video:

- Climate change impacts public health
- Healthcare systems are a large contributor to climate change
- Examples of healthcare facilities taking action

There are also three common challenges we face:

- Awareness and commitment among stakeholders
- Suitable frameworks and financing
- Knowledge on how to make the sector more sustainable

To create awareness, it is important to communicate openly and directly about health-promoting effects and the direct positive impact on public health that measures can have for patients, employees, and the local population. To address the complexity of the topic, a tailored and holistic framework can help create a strategy for a climate-neutral healthcare system in Austria.



The strategy for a net-zero healthcare system of the Austrian National Public Health Institute

To create knowledge within healthcare facilities and support them in action, the Austrian National Public Health Institute created a consulting project to guide facilities in becoming climate-friendly and to act as a bridge between policymakers and public health administration.

View the [PowerPoint](#)

Getting public health practitioners on board: what difference can we make and how can we advocate for and take action on climate change?

Brigit Staatsen, Senior Researcher, Healthy Living Environments at RIVM, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment of the Netherlands, presented how to engage public health practitioners in climate efforts. She stated that it is important to stimulate action, and that public health experts need to advise practitioners.

To achieve this, it first needs evidence-based reports to highlight the benefits of climate adaptation and mitigation on health. Second, guidelines and tools must be provided for local public health practitioners. Thirdly, one needs to implement national policies. A recent example from the Netherlands is heat action built around three thematic areas: habitat, housing, and health. Since its implementation, mortality rates from hot days have reduced. For successful implementation, awareness-raising campaigns are also important. Fourth, fostering partnerships in the health sector to take climate action can strengthen the responses to climate change. Fifth, it is important for public health practitioners to have fun when involving interested citizens. For example, RIVM [created a film](#) on managing heat waves to spark discussions on action. Finally, it is important to use tools that are already available and to use education.

View the [PowerPoint](#)

Getting citizens on board: shaping an engaging narrative and navigating backlash

Dorothea Baltruks, Director of the Centre for Planetary Health Policy, which is part of EuroHealthNet's member, the German Alliance for Climate Change and Health ([KLUG](#)), described efforts to shape an engaging narrative and navigate backlash while involving citizens in climate and health efforts. In Germany, the healthcare system is largely fragmented, with national policy having little influence compared to the 16 German Federal states. CPHP's approach is to work with the healthcare sector as change agents on climate action, as it is a trusted presence, to reach citizens more broadly.

It was stressed that working directly with organisations requires asking them what they want and need to know about climate change. Examples of relevant topics mentioned by self-help organisations to CPHP included heat resilience, healthy diets, and inclusive climate action. CPHP also works with schools, the general public and the health system on mental health and climate resilience. In addition, CPHP tries to work in settings where people tend towards climate change denial and to have honest and constructive conversations. Surprisingly, one of the biggest allies is health insurance companies, as they have the long-term vision of the impacts of climate change and the resulting health costs.



Dorothea Baltruks highlights how the healthcare sector helps engage people in climate action

View the [PowerPoint](#)

Connecting research with policymakers: tools for advocating for policy action from a public health perspective

Brecht Devleesschauwer, Head of Service Health Information at [Sciensano](#), the Belgian Institute for Health, presented tools for advocating for policy action from a public health perspective. He said that the main tool public health institutes and the research community can use is monitoring. Through monitoring, we can produce neutral and objective data to highlight impact and solutions, and to hold governments accountable. In Belgium, [Sciensano](#) uses the [Belgian National Burden of Disease Study](#) to quantify the public health impact of various health threats, including air pollution, tobacco, and heat stress.

Brecht also emphasised that it is not just about understanding health indicators, but how health impacts translate into economic impacts. This is a factor which speaks more to many policymakers. In the [BEST-COST](#) project that Sciensano is working on with EuroHealthNet, health impacts are translated into economic impacts.

Moreover, even effective policy messages often only have a small window of opportunity as policymakers focus on short-term gains. It is also important to remember that policymakers do not work in isolation but as part of a government, and that public health experts are not the only actors influencing policy.

View the [PowerPoint](#)

Q&A Session

In-person participants reflected on the different areas for collaboration between sectors, including building quality and the EU's Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). There is increasing recognition to act on transforming healthcare facilities to reduce their carbon footprint. The speakers stressed that the link between buildings and health is becoming increasingly recognised, including the transfer of outdoor to indoor exposures, and that people are acknowledging a need for a health in all policies approach. To have stronger action, however, a greater investment is needed. Participants also commented on identifying allies in climate and health action, and the added value the EU brings to initiatives. Speakers highlighted the positive impact EU legislation has had in areas such as air quality, and can allow for an equal level playing field across Member States. They also stressed that EU support is crucial to encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration.



Participants highlighted the link between buildings and health, the need for greener healthcare, and the importance of EU support for collaboration and action

Session 3: The policies: promoting the health and wellbeing of all people and our planet across sectors and levels of governance

Moderator: Mojca Gabrijelčič Blenkuš, Honorary Advisor of EuroHealthNet & Head of the Healthy Lifestyle Department at the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ), Slovenia, together with Silvia Ganzerla, EuroHealthNet Policy Manager

Mojca Gabrijelčič Blenkuš, Honorary Advisor of EuroHealthNet and Head of the Healthy Lifestyle Department at the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ), Slovenia, opened the panel discussion by stating that the climate crisis is also a social crisis, and that climate protection is also health protection.

In a video addressing the seminar, **Robb Butler**, Director of the Division of Communicable Diseases, Environment and Health, WHO Europe, commented that their message is clear: much more needs to be done to prevent deaths, diseases and shocking tragedies. Robb also noted that there is still hope that change may and must be possible, and that the seminar is an indication of existing political will and resolve. He described how WHO Europe is convening a Pan-European Commission on Climate and Health to bring together 11 leaders to produce a clear, action-oriented call to action for governments, health authorities, communities and the public. The WHO European Programme of Work's main priority is climate change and health, to focus on implementation of climate resilience, adaptation, resilience and response, and capacity building in the health workforce. These will be vital steps towards a healthier and more equitable future.



Robb Butler announcing the establishment of a Pan-European Commission on Climate and Health

View the [video recording](#).

Following the video message, the moderators asked the panellist to share examples of current policies, actions or initiatives to deal with the impact of climate change on health that your organisation is leading on.

Antonio Parenti, Director for Public Health, Cancer and Health Security at the [European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety](#), began by acknowledging that the climate crisis is one of the major threats to health throughout Europe, while the EU is a strong proponent of prevention, fairness and response. To support work on this, the [European Climate and Health Observatory](#) is aligning science with policy and action where it matters most and delivering on 63 initiatives around climate risks. One example is the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) supporting countries to set up health threat responses.

He also acknowledged that a One Health approach recognises the connections between human, animal and environmental health. It is necessary to position Europe as a global leader in cross-sectoral health policy. Therefore, the EU fully stands behind the COP28 declaration on climate and health, and the WHO Budapest declaration pushing action to enhance the environment and health. He finished by saying that Europe needs to be better prepared for adaptation and to avoid certain threats.

Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director General Head of the [Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority](#), commented that currently, climate change and its costs are not sufficiently factored in. HERA's responsibility is to ensure that the EU and Member States are ready to prevent, detect and rapidly respond to cross-border health emergencies, including those potentially exacerbated by climate change. From HERA's perspective, we are no longer in climate mitigation but on the adaptation side. HERA is also working to improve the threat analysis for antimicrobial resistance (AMR), vector-borne diseases, and mass casualties. HERA is preparing for a counter response and to buy time, and to do this, they have invested in research and innovation. Florika also noted that disease spread is connected to energy and poverty, while stressing the importance of awareness.



Florika Fink-Hooijer stressed HERA's role in preparing the EU to adapt to climate-related health emergencies and address linked threats like antimicrobial resistance and disease spread

Dirk Ramaekers, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the [Belgian Federal Public Service \(FPS\) Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment](#), said that continuing to do what we have done for the last 20 years is not giving us the results we are wishing for. Creating major socio-economic change is challenging, partly due to widespread inaction or lack of awareness. The key question is how to drive more action and speed up progress. The first step is to keep the

issue visible and build a stronger sense of urgency. He also emphasised the significant environmental impact of war.

At the Belgian level, in response to the most devastating floods in modern Belgian history in 2021, and in light of the multiplication of climate and environment hazards, a new independent [Climate Risk Assessment Center](#) (CERAC) was created.

Belgium is not ready for heat waves, and must be ready for an increase in zoonotic diseases, for which it has already established a specific governance structure. He also stressed that decarbonising healthcare sounds easy and logical, but it will require heavy investments to succeed.



EU and national health leaders called for urgent, united action to tackle climate-related health threats through investment, collaboration, and stronger climate-health policies

In a second round of questions, **Silvia Ganzerla**, EuroHealthNet Policy Manager, asked the panellists what policy actions or initiatives are needed to ensure Europe is better prepared for the future.

Antonio Parenti answered that the EU has given a sense of direction. We now need to implement climate and health considerations in national and European plans. To achieve this, we need to create stronger capacity at the European and Member State levels and to maintain leadership at the international level.

Florika Fink-Hooijer said that we need to invest. She noted that at the upcoming COP30 in Brazil, there will be a health day and a health special advisor, but the thematic days at COP reveal that the system is interacting with separate parts, while there needs to be more of a cross-sectoral approach. She gave the example that addressing heatwaves cannot only be done by the health sector alone, but needs a general improvement of infrastructure with special attention to inequalities. She noted that many economic activities rely on natural resources like water and nature, raising concerns about funding healthcare if these are lost. She also stressed the need to understand what climate-proofing healthcare truly involves.

Dirk Ramaekers spoke to say that more leadership is needed. As we have learnt in recent years, there is an enormous added value of being united at the European level, with Member States collaborating, and this needs to be invested more in. Currently, there is still too much fragmentation, but tackling climate change as a health emergency requires collaboration.

Q&A Session

In the second Q&A discussion, participants considered how a legislative component on climate and health could protect citizens and ensure the necessary financing. The speakers responded that European-level investment is effective and can have an impact on citizens. While the EU has less power in health than in other areas, a certain level of investment should be maintained.

Participants also inquired about initiatives to support EU candidate countries in building resilient health systems, and speakers confirmed the high relevance of capacity-building in these countries. Finally, speakers reflected on the role of civil society in preparedness and protection, and who can act as trust-builders.

Closing and reflections

MEP Leire Pajín, S&D, member of the [Committee on Public Health and the Committee on the Environment, Climate and Food Safety in the European Parliament](#), began the reflections by stating that the public health community has the responsibility and power to act. There are many tools available to bring about change, but it is systemic change we need to see. She stressed we need to tell the story of climate change not only as a global crisis, but something directly affecting people's lives and health. To achieve this, we need to make the facts more personal and local, giving the example of her region of Valencia, where devastating floods occurred. Six months since the floods, the local population is still feeling the health impacts from the disaster, including mental health, where children struggle to concentrate in schools.



MEP Leire Pajín urged systemic change by linking climate action to local health impacts, citing floods in Valencia as a clear example

Dramatic disasters are not needed to see the impact of climate change on health, she continued. By looking at air pollution, we can see the need to link health equity with the fight against climate change based on clear objectives. She pointed at the [Ambient Air Quality Directive](#) (AAQD) as one of the most important investments in public health, and highlighted the Spanish Strategy on Global Health as an important tool. Currently, the European Parliament is debating an [EU Preparedness Union Strategy](#), which will be crucial and should strengthen the EU's readiness to address challenges in health, migration, technology security, climate, defence or the economy.

Pedro Gullón Tosio, Director General of Public Health and Equity, Spanish Ministry of Health, called climate change the biggest health risk in the 21st century. It can feel overwhelming, but every action counts. He underscored that it is not just important for policymakers to listen to researchers, but for researchers to understand how policies are made. He emphasised two principles: acting on climate change should be acting on health equity, and that it is not just a health problem, but a whole-of-society problem.

Caroline Costongs, Director of EuroHealthNet, summarised the discussions with an [urgent call for an EU strategy on climate and health](#). Welcoming the WHO's Pan-European Committee on Climate and Health, she stressed that there is clear momentum to push for such a strategy and that working with the European Parliament and the other EU institutions will be important.

EuroHealthNet's seminar presented several concrete tools and policies to act on climate adaptation and mitigation that can inform the development of an '[EU strategy on climate and health](#)'. Additionally, ongoing policy initiatives in areas like housing, child poverty, and sustainable food, which may currently appear fragmented, could be unified under a comprehensive climate and health strategy.

Caroline concluded by saying that the [EuroHealthNet Partnership](#) and its over 80 member organisations across Europe will further work towards this strategy.



Caroline Costongs called for a unified EU Strategy on Climate and Health



EuroHealthNet

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Our mission is to help build healthier communities and tackle health inequalities within and between European States.

EuroHealthNet is a not-for-profit partnership of organisations, agencies and statutory bodies working on public health, promoting health, preventing disease, and reducing inequalities.

EuroHealthNet supports members' work through policy and project development, knowledge and expertise exchange, research, networking, and communications.

EuroHealthNet's work is spread across three collaborating platforms that focus on practice, policy, and research. Core and cross-cutting activities unite and amplify the partnership's activities.

The partnership is made up of members, associate members, and observers. It is governed by a General Council and Executive Board.

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