



EuroHealthNet feedback on the background note for Council Recommendation on addressing the social and labour aspects of the just transition towards climate neutrality

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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. With a long-term commitment to promoting health equity in sustainable development, EuroHealthNet recognises the significant impact the climate crisis has on wellbeing and commends the effort to bring various instruments together to ensure a just and socially fair transition towards climate neutrality, avoiding a fragmented approach.

We welcome the Commission's invitation to provide written comments on the proposed Council Recommendation on addressing the social and labour aspects of the just transition towards climate neutrality. To this end, EuroHealthNet would like to take the opportunity to provide insight into how approaches can be merged to indeed achieve social upward convergence as well as a green transition, as mentioned at the Strategic Dialogue online meeting with civil society organisations on 26 October 2021.

EuroHealthNet's view on the current state of play and challenges

Whilst the Council Recommendation has rightly noted the social co-benefits to achieving climate neutrality, we would like to further recommend the inclusion of the **health co-benefits** to a green transition, to further strengthen public support in reaching the EU climate and energy targets. Framing climate neutrality ambitions within an additional health context, such as linking the health benefits of active transport to the desired climate objective of reducing air pollution, could help drive urgent action. By way of example, a Lancet study on the public health benefits of climate change mitigation¹ estimated potentially 7400 fewer disability-adjusted life years (per million population) with lower carbon and more active transport in the UK.

In addition to this, we feel that the **area of food systems** should be referred to more explicitly, to complement the recommendations made in the important areas of energy and mobility. Global agriculture and food production systems drive a loss of nature and biodiversity, contributing to about 25% of greenhouse gas emissions. Coupled with the increasing challenge of food insecurity faced by about 33 million EU citizens², and inequitable incidence of obesity in lower socio-economic groups, it can be noted that a green transition in food systems also has social consequences. In this regard, EuroHealthNet believes that the Council Recommendation should address the transformation in food production systems - moving towards increased consumption of nutritious food, plant-based food, and a decrease of ultra-processed foods (high in salt, fat and sugar), pointing out to the social and health aspects of sustainable agriculture which benefits farmers and consumers (if ecological food is subsidized). Connecting the work being done through instruments such as the Farm to Fork Strategy, would create another essential dimension to the Council Recommendation.

¹ Lancet (2009) Public health benefits of strategies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions: overview and implications for policy makers, DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61759-1

² Eurostat, EU SILC (2018), https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_mdcs03&lang=en

EuroHealthNet's view on the purpose, scope and elements of the initiative

In addition to the measures outlined in the Council Recommendation to facilitate a just transition towards climate neutrality, EuroHealthNet suggests the following:

- Designing fair tax-benefit and social protection systems, as outlined in *Section 4, Policy Package 1c*, should not only address the progressive taxation of environmentally harmful products but also encourage **subsidies for green and sustainable products**, making them affordable for all.
- Enabling affordable access to essential services for all with a focus on vulnerable groups and regions, as outlined in *Section 4, Policy Package 1d*, needs to further reflect the narrative of mitigating the **'distributional impacts'** of climate change and include people **along the socio-economic gradient**. Whilst it is essential to target services towards the vulnerable and marginalised community, this policy package should also advocate affordable access along a social gradient and through proportionate universalism, to capture the larger population group which lives in sub-optimal conditions but is not considered vulnerable.
- To support the uptake of a just transition towards climate neutrality, we strongly advocate the establishment of **"behavioural and cultural insights units"** at Member State level, to collect data on the key barriers and enablers to behavioural change in different communities and feed such information into the decision-making processes. In some Member States, this infrastructural set-up proved to be very useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, gathering intelligence on the community's behaviour towards different mitigation measures to improve on the effectiveness of policy solutions.
- Moreover, in order to strengthen the monitoring and adaptation of policy actions, it is important to integrate a **foresight analysis** of the impact of climate change and perform **economic assessments** of the social and health co-benefits aimed at reducing such an impact. These tools would support the long-term and intergenerational understanding of the issue at all levels, reducing the pronounced inequalities gap.
- Taking note of the concurrent digital transition, achieving climate neutrality also means that information and **digital solutions must be easy to access, understand and apply**, at varying literacy levels. In line with the Behavioural Change Wheel Model developed by Prof Michie (2011)³, interventions for a green transition should be built on the premise that people need to have the capability, opportunity and motivation to pursue a behavioural change.

EuroHealthNet applauds the emphasis made in the Council Recommendation to involve civil society organisations at all levels and at all stages of policymaking, to maximise the potential of the green transition. In this regard, we additionally stress that in order to co-create a climate neutral era, efforts need to be just and socially fair for all citizens, including addressing the privileges of the (ultra)rich (following the 'polluter pays' principle) and further consolidated through supporting national and EU instruments.

³ Michie S, van Stralen MM, West R. The behaviour change wheel: a new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implement Sci.* 2011 Apr 23;6:42. DOI: 10.1186/1748-5908-6-42. PMID: 21513547; PMCID: PMC3096582.