



European Union

Statement

WHO

77th World Health Assembly

(27 May – 1 June 2024)

Item 15.4 - Climate change, pollution and health

Geneva, 30 May 2024

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EU Statement

Chair,
Director General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States.

The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Georgia, the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Armenia align themselves with this statement.

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century.

It impacts human, animal and environmental health as well as human rights. To name but a few of its consequences: (i) it dramatically affects air and water quality, water scarcity, food security, (ii) increases the risk of zoonotic diseases as well as other climate-sensitive infectious diseases, which are projected to further spread and cause a higher disease burden, ranging from Cholera to antimicrobial resistant infections; (iii) and also causes and aggravates non-communicable diseases, which already now are responsible for about 74% of all

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

deaths globally. Heatwaves and other extreme weather events are leading to thousands of deaths and illnesses annually and to rising social inequalities.

We need to act urgently to avert this impending health catastrophe, as well as to achieve universal health coverage and health equity, with gender-responsive and targeted actions keeping in mind that climate change worsens gender inequalities and poses a threat to persons in vulnerable situation. We refer here to our EoP on persons in vulnerable situations.

This calls for global climate neutrality as fast as possible, while enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability to environmental and climate change. Otherwise, climate inaction drives an enormous human cost. In fact, the same investments, on both health and climate, can often address both threats and create co-benefits of broader climate action, in particular actions targeting air pollution and adapting health care systems to climate neutrality, including through the end-to-end supply chain. For example, creating healthy and sustainable nutrition systems may reduce the Greenhouse gas emissions of food systems by 80 percent.

Pollution is another key factor in this challenge as it causes the death of 9 million people per year, and is one of the causes of biodiversity loss and of climate change. The EU reaffirm that the sound management of chemicals and waste is crucial for the protection of human health, animal health and the environment and welcome the establishment of the Global Framework on Chemicals in November 2023. We therefore support ongoing intergovernmental processes on the establishment of a science-policy panel to contribute further to the appropriate management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution, as well as on the establishment of a legally-binding instrument to end plastic pollution. These endeavors contribute massively to improving the lives of millions of people on the planet and shape better living conditions for all.

It is crucial to promote multisectoral collaboration, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. In this regard, we call for the One Health approach and health in all policies approach to be incorporated into national public policy, and to support the role and the implementations of the recommendations of OHHLEP and the Quadripartite.

Moreover, we ask the Secretariat to facilitate synergies between WHO programs, by prioritizing and mainstreaming the climate dimension in the 14th General Program of Work and the work of the various WHO regional offices on this subject, particularly the European office. In this regard, we support the recognition of ATACH as WHO's flagship mechanism and call on countries to join the alliance and to build climate-neutral health systems by latest 2050.

Raising awareness and training health workforce on the connections between climate change and health is an important lever, as well as having multisectoral health professionals act as multipliers for reaching vulnerable groups and for mitigation action. Some instruments can act as a support for the dissemination of best practices, such as the WHO Academy, building on an inclusive link with global health institutes and academics around the world.

Finally, the EU aims to strengthen the political momentum enhanced by COP28 and the Declaration on Climate and Health. As an example, the European Climate and Health Observatory, a partnership of relevant international organisations, including the WHO Regional office for Europe, is dedicated to equipping health systems with the evidence and knowledge to confront the impacts of climate change. Such activities will be key in following up on the commitments made under the COP28 Declaration. We encourage an ambitious health-climate agenda at the next COP29 and in all relevant multilateral fora and wish to explore more opportunities for integrating health into climate negotiations.

We call on the global health ecosystem, especially UN agencies and bilateral and multilateral health actors, to adapt their operating model to climate change and make it more resilient.

Thank you.