How to Implement Health and Wellbeing Policies on Climate Change






Flanders
State of the Art

DEPARTMENT OF CARE

European Committee of the Regions

REGIONS FOR HEALTH NETWORK

15 -17 September 2025 Brussels

departementzorg.be

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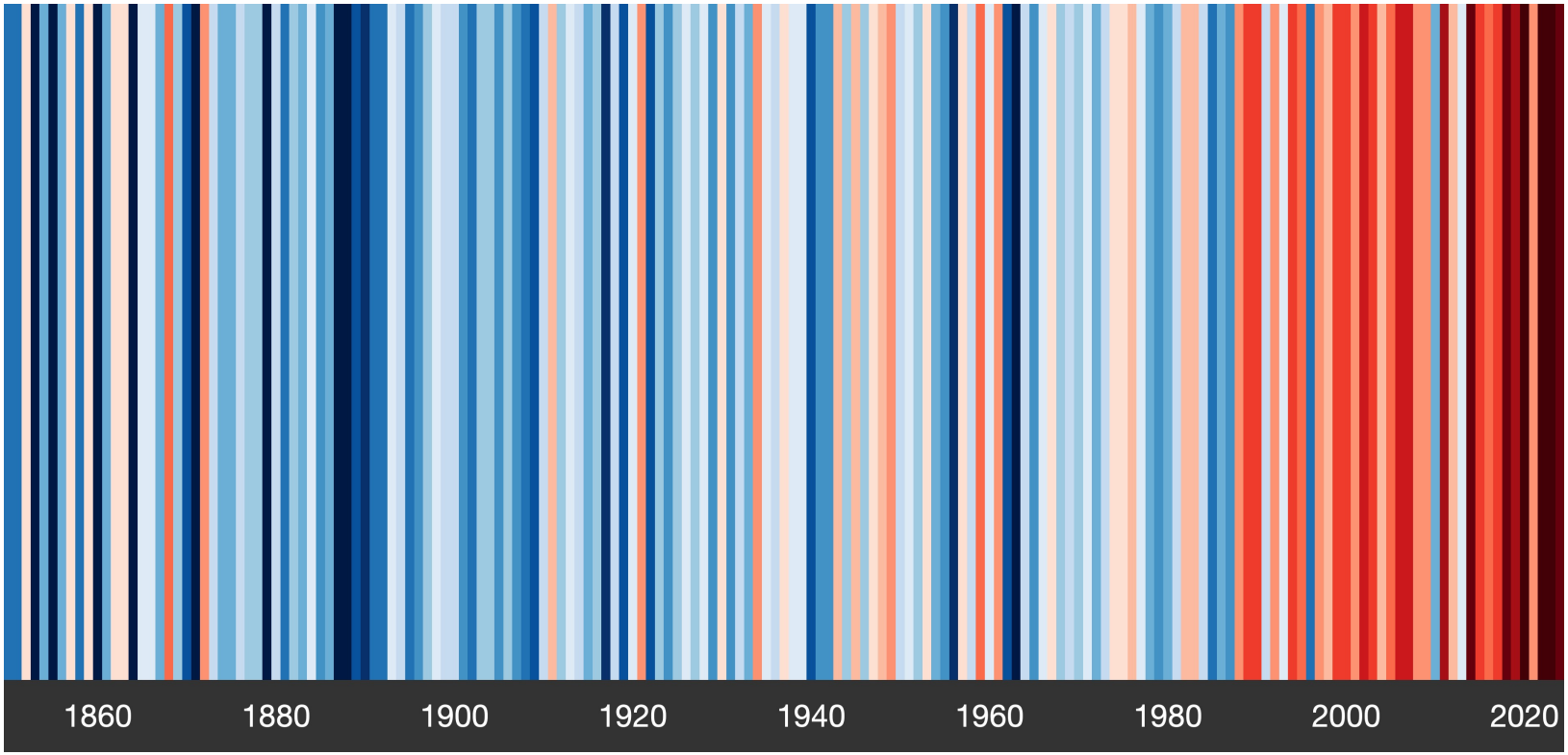
State of the Art

Karine Moykens

Secretary General
Department of Care

Welcome



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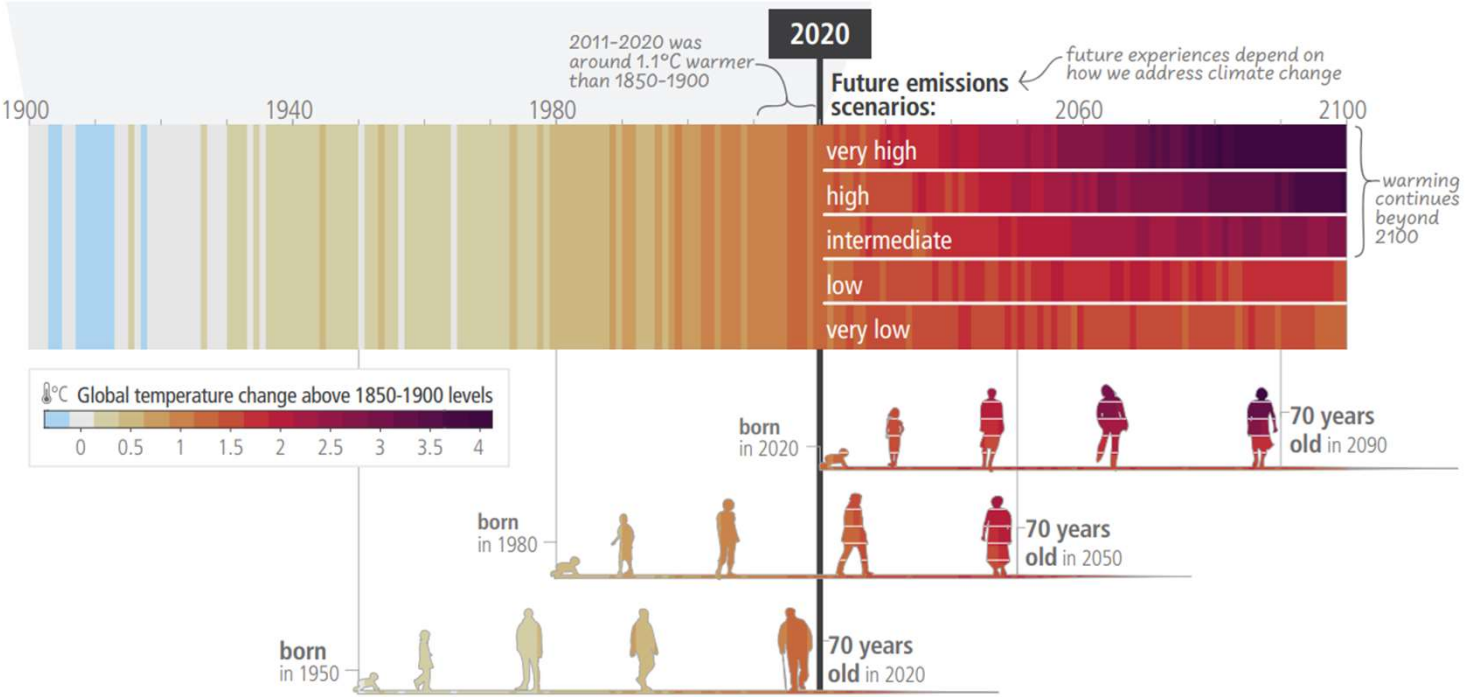
We all know ‘Why’ …

(Ed Hawkins)
‘Warming stripes’ of Belgium
Since 1833

Europe is warming up – fast !

‘A health governance on climate change is needed’ …

(Budapest 2023)



IPCC Climate Change 2023 – synthesis report

The health impact of current and future generations depends on the choices of action today !

Why we host an event on the "how" to tackle climate change as part of the triple planetary Health Crisis

- Origin to this event

2003 → 2005 → 2011 → 2019 → 2021 → 2023 → 2024

- **Purpose**: exchange good practices and align the regional approaches on health and wellbeing.

Think global, Act Local, Act now … for our future

(Britisch NHS – Budapest 2023)

Belgian State Structure

Federal state

3 Communities (person-related matters)

3 Regions (territorial matters)

Flanders

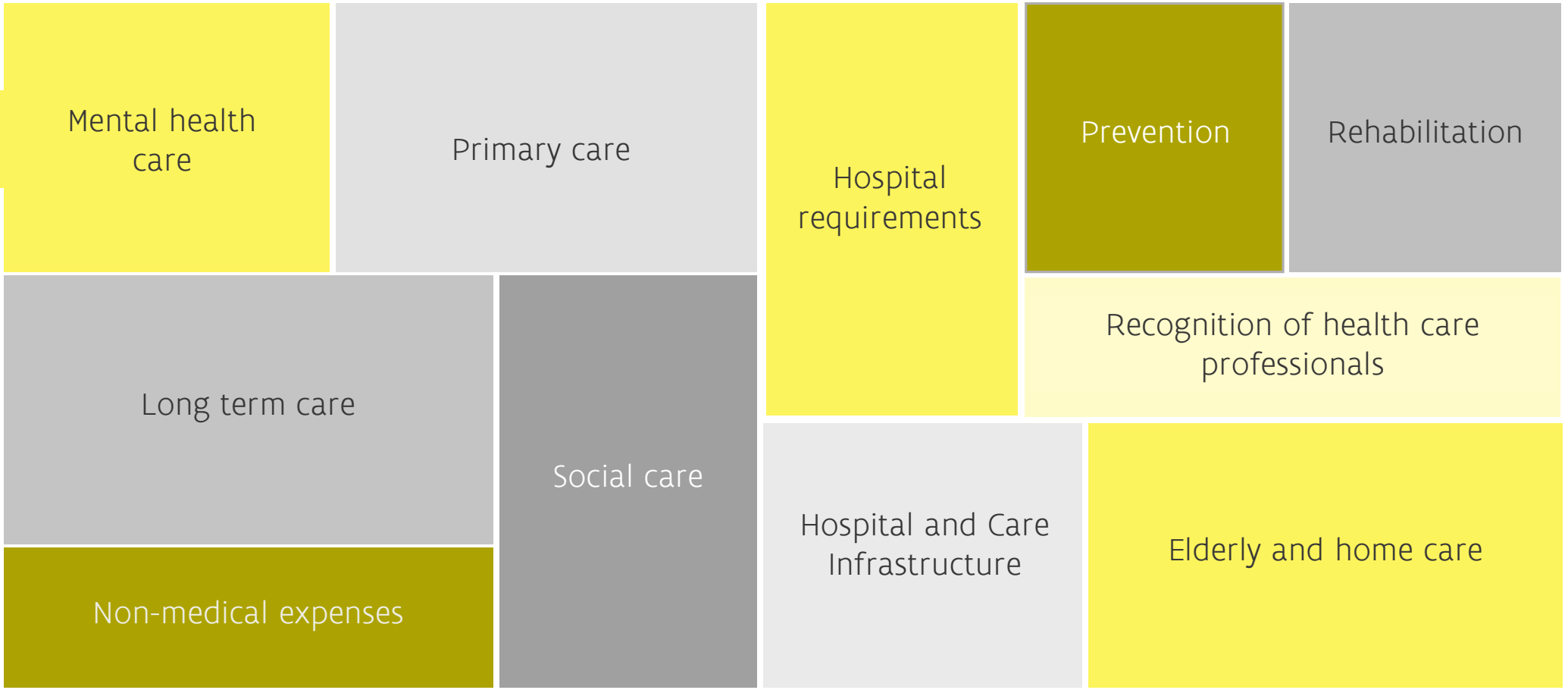
6.8 million Inhabitants

Official language: Dutch

GDP per capita: €38.200

Population below poverty treshold: 8% (2023)

Flanders' Powers in health and care



Our Strategic Goals

- We empower people to improve their health and well-being
- We promote a caring society where everyone can participate
- We ensure a high-quality and accessible range of care services
- We lead by example as a caring organization and a high-performing public service

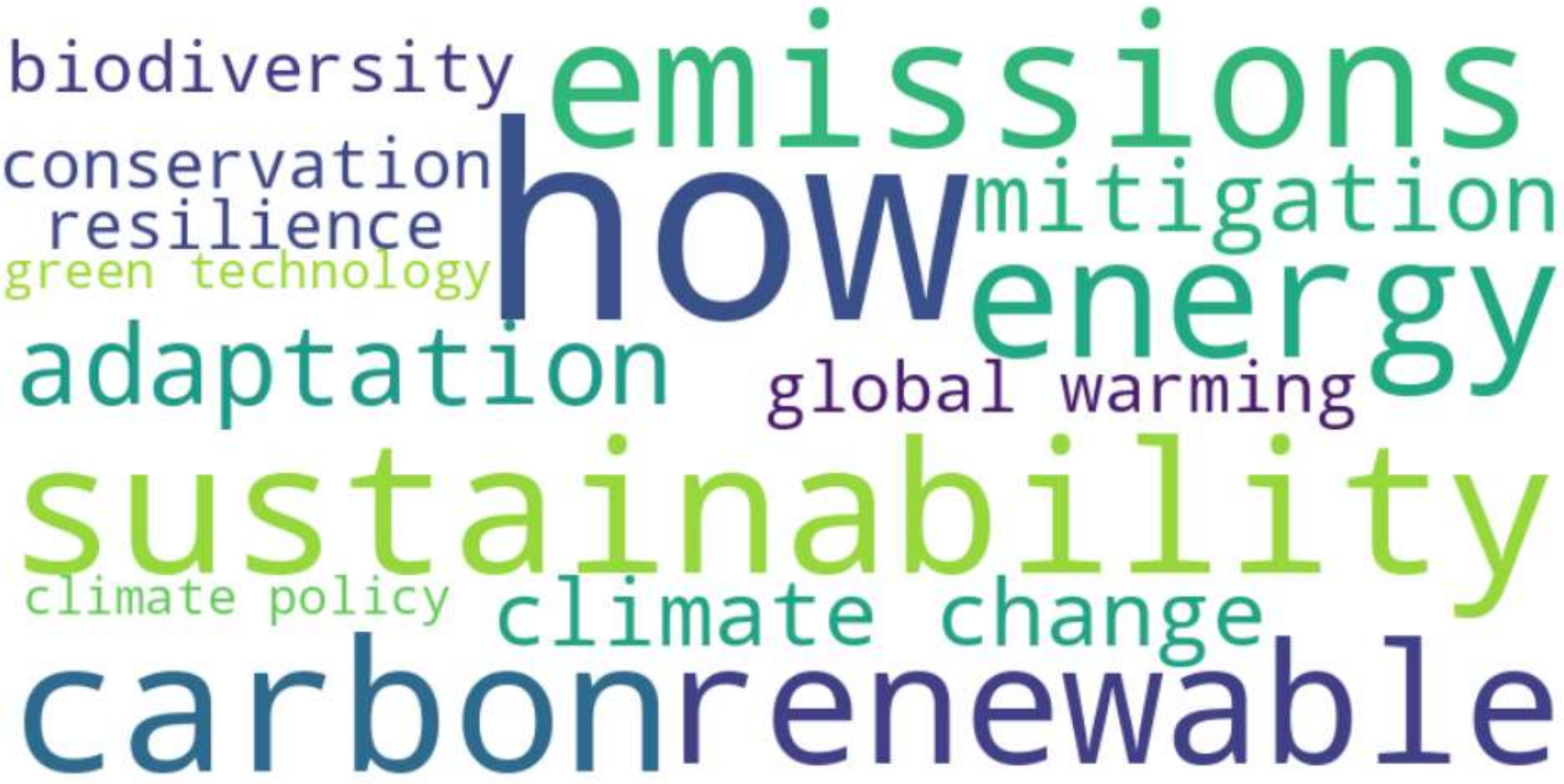
Roadmap to climate resilience and climate neutrality

Agenda – 15 September (1)

- 14.00-15.30: High Level Session
  - → Dept of Care
  - → WHO/Europe
  - → Pan-European Commission on Climate and Health
  - → Committee of the Regions
  - → European Environment and Health Process (EHP)
  - → European Environmental Agency (EEA)
  - → Healthy Settings – WHO/Europe

Agenda – 15 September (2)

- 15.30-16.00 Coffee break
- 16.00-17.00 Setting the scene – examples from Flanders
- 17.00-17.30 The Marie-Elisabeth Belpaire Building
- 17.30-18.00 Wrap up of the first day – overview of the next two days
- 19.00-21.00 Dinner, hosted by the Department of Care


biodiversity
emissions
conservation
how
mitigation
resilience
green technology
energy
adaptation
global warming
sustainability
climate policy
climate change
carbon
renewable

Hans Kluge

WHO Regional Director for Europe

Pre-recorded Video message

Katrín Jakobsdóttir

Former Prime Minister of Iceland and Chair of the Pan-European Commission on Climate and Health

Pre-recorded Video message

Adam Banaszak

member of the Committee of the Regions, Councillor of Inowrocław County (PL)

European Committee of the Regions

How to implement health and wellbeing policies on climate change

15 September 2025

Europe and climate change

→ Europe is the **fastest warming continent** in the world

Climate risks are threatening our:

- energy and food security,
- ecosystems,
- infrastructure,
- water resources,
- financial stability, and
- people's health.

→ Climate risks that are growing faster than our societal preparedness.

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Why cities matter?

Approximately **75% of our health** depends on the environment in which we live. The built environment can encourage or discourage:

- active lifestyles
- car dependency
- social cohesion
- and much more, which affects our health.

Since 2007, **more** people worldwide have been living in cities than in the countryside!

In the EU it is **75 %** [the highest percentages in Spain (83.3 %), the Netherlands (86.5 %) and Malta (96.8 %)]

Urban environmental health impacts (1)

Air pollution

→ **200 000** Europeans die prematurely each year due to air pollution;

→ **97%** of Europe's city dwellers is exposed to unsafe levels of air pollution

Exposure to air pollution can lead to a wide range of diseases, including:

- stroke
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- trachea, bronchus and lung cancers
- aggravated asthma and lower respiratory infections.

There is also evidence of links between exposure to air pollution and type 2 diabetes, obesity, systemic inflammation, Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

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Urban environmental health impacts (2)

Noise pollution

→ Noise leads to **12000** prematurely deaths each year and contribute to 48.000 new cases of ischemic heart disease

→ **20%** of the EU population lives in areas where noise levels are harmful to health

Long-term exposure to environmental noise can:
- disturb heart and metabolism rates,
- reduce cognitive performance in children and
- cause sleep troubles.

NB: Nearly half of Brussels region is exposed to levels exceeding 55 dB (the threshold for "severe disturbance")

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Climate change and health

→ Over the last two decades, heat-related deaths rose by 30% in Europe

→ The number of heatwave days in Europe will double the period 2030 to 2060

Extreme weather event affect mental health of individuals – and psychological traumas from climate-related disasters can exceed those of physical injury by 40 to 1

Traditionally associated with tropical and subtropical regions, infectious diseases such as dengue, chikungunya, West Nile virus, malaria, tularaemia, tick-borne encephalitis, and Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever are now increasingly reported from Europe.

The Rise of the Asian Tiger Mosquito in Belgium

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What role for local and regional authorities?

Cities and regions may:

1. Prioritise health promotion and prevention as the cornerstone of the European Health Union
2. favour urban design strategies that create walking-friendly and cycling-friendly neighbourhoods
3. Invest in frequent public transport, limiting individual car use
4. Maintain existing and create additional green and blue areas, delivering on SDG 11.7
5. Demineralise surfaces, esp. around urban heat island; promote the use of green facades and roofs
6. Guarantee access to drinkable water
7. Provide heat shelters (cooling rooms)
8. Provide health, social and education services with guidelines and support

How the Committee of the Regions contributes?

- Working in collaboration with the UN WHO Office for Europe (10th anniversary soon)
- Building partnerships and alliances
- Acting as a two-way communicator between local level, national governments and EU legislators
- Advising EU law-makers
- Breaking EU laws into deliverable actions and collecting examples of how local communities make real difference
- Providing evidence from European cities, rural areas and regions
- Bringing mayors, councillors and regional presidents together

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Merci
Obrigado
Vă mulțumim
Děkujeme!
Hartelijk dank
Gracias
Tak
Hvala
Благодарим Ви
Paldies!
Ačiū
Thank you
Grazzi
Kiitos
Tack
Σας ευχαριστούμε
Hvala
Ďakujem
Köszönöm!
Aitäh
Vielen Dank
Grazie
Go raibh maith agaibh
Dziękujemy!

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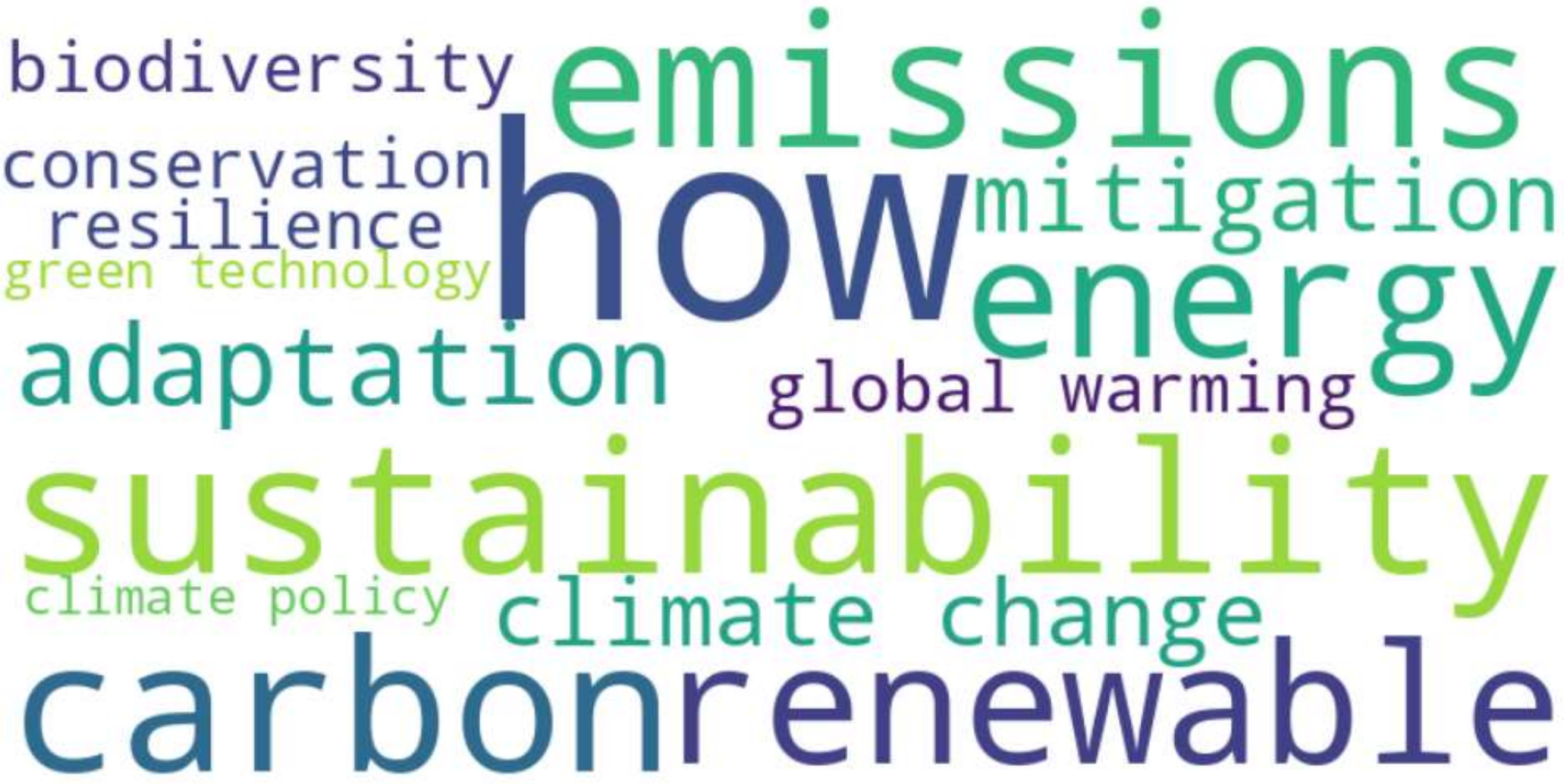
Colin O’Hehir

Climate Change Policy Lead, Department of Health, Ireland - European Environment and Health Process (EHP)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green technology
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adaptation
global warming
sustainability
climate policy
climate change
carbon
renewable

Julie Berckmans

Climate Scientist, European Environmental Agency (EEA)

Climate impacts on health in Europe: From risk assessment to action

Julie Berckmans
European Environment Agency
15 September 2025

Europe is the fastest warming continent

- **Heatwaves** are getting worse
- **Rain patterns** are changing:
  - downpours cause flooding
  - dry spells lead to droughts
- **Water scarcity** affects 34% Europeans annually
- **Wildfires** risk is increasing
- **Sea level rise** is accelerating

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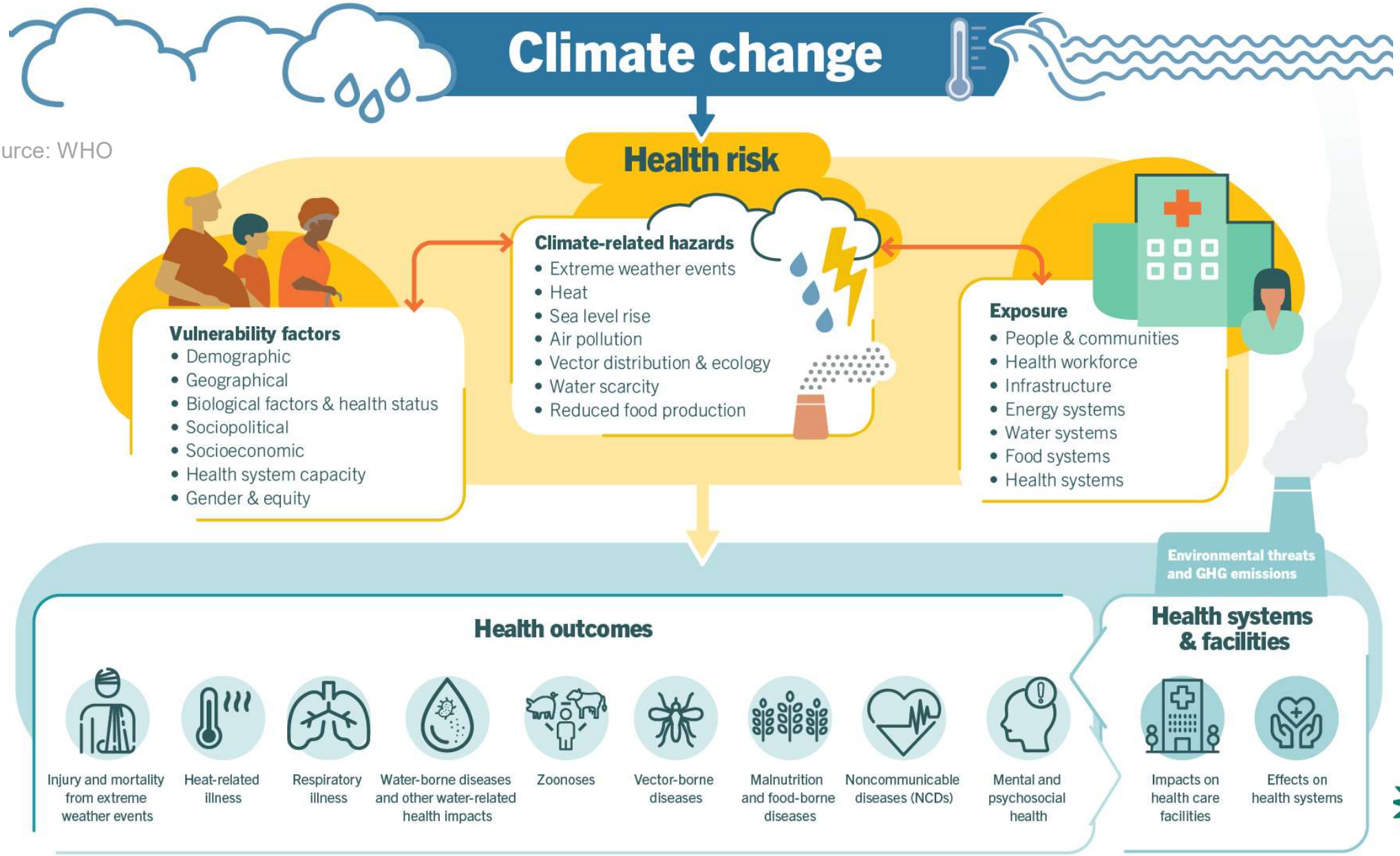

Climate change
Health risk
Vulnerability factors
• Demographic
• Geographical
• Biological factors & health status
• Sociopolitical
• Socioeconomic
• Health system capacity
• Gender & equity
Climate-related hazards
• Extreme weather events
• Heat
• Sea level rise
• Air pollution
• Vector distribution & ecology
• Water scarcity
• Reduced food production
Exposure
• People & communities
• Health workforce
• Infrastructure
• Energy systems
• Water systems
• Food systems
• Health systems
Environmental threats and GHG emissions
Health outcomes
Injury and mortality from extreme weather events
Heat-related illness
Respiratory illness
Water-borne diseases and other water-related health impacts
Zoonoses
Vector-borne diseases
Malnutrition and food-borne diseases
Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)
Mental and psychosocial health
Health systems & facilities
Impacts on health care facilities
Effects on health systems

Source: WHO

Key climate risks to health in European Climate Risk Assessment

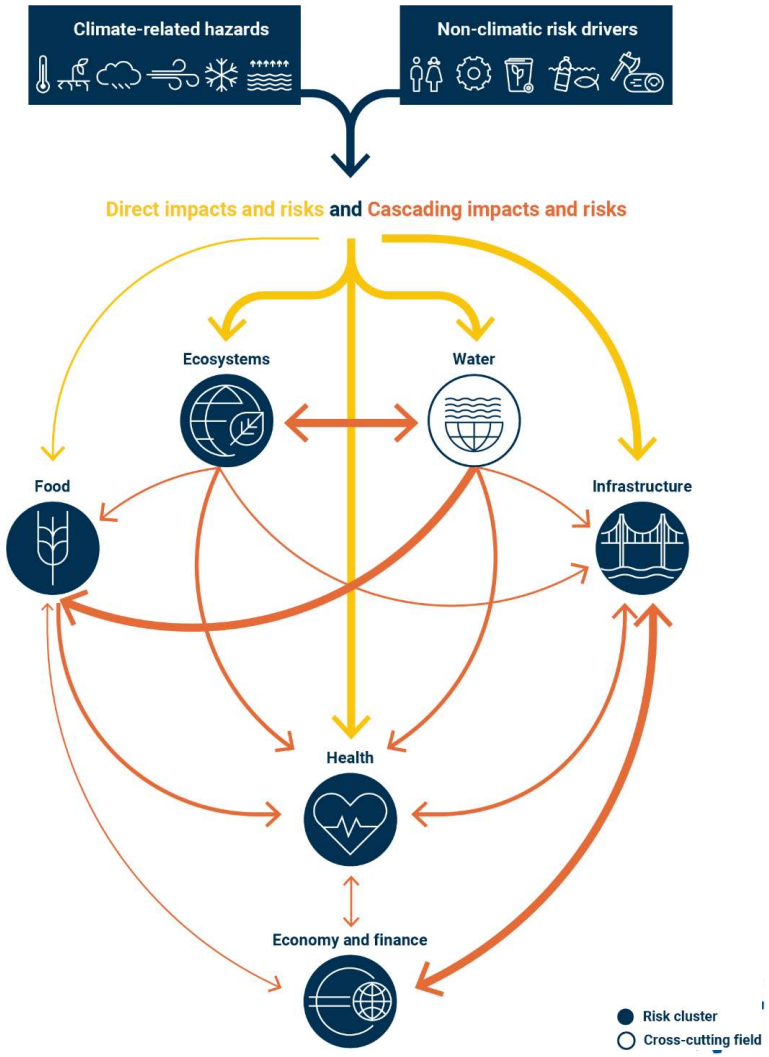
Heat stress
- General population
- Outdoor workers
- Southern Europe

Wildfire impacts
- population
- built environment
- Southern Europe

Health systems and infrastructure

Pathogens in coastal waters

Infectious diseases



Climate risks for health: medium preparedness

Climate risks for 'Health' cluster	Urgency to act	Risk severity			Policy characteristics		
		Current	Mid-century	Late century (low/high warming scenario)	Policy horizon	Policy readiness	Risk ownership
Heat stress — general population		+++	+++	+++	Long	Medium	National
Population/built environment due to wildfires (hotspot region: southern Europe)		+++	+++	+++	Medium	Medium	Co-owned
Population/built environment due to wildfires		+++	++	++	Medium	Medium	Co-owned
Well-being due to non-adapted buildings (*)		++	++	++	Long	Medium	Co-owned
Heat stress — outdoor workers (hotspot region: southern Europe)		+++	+++	+++	Short	Medium	Co-owned
Heat stress — outdoor workers		+++	+++	+++	Short	Medium	Co-owned
Pathogens in coastal waters		+	+	+	Medium	Medium	Co-owned
Health systems and infrastructure		+++	++	++	Medium	Medium	National
Infectious diseases		+++	++	++	Short	Advanced	Co-owned

Legends and notes

Urgency to act
- Urgent action needed
- More action needed
- Further investigation
- Sustain current action
- Watching brief

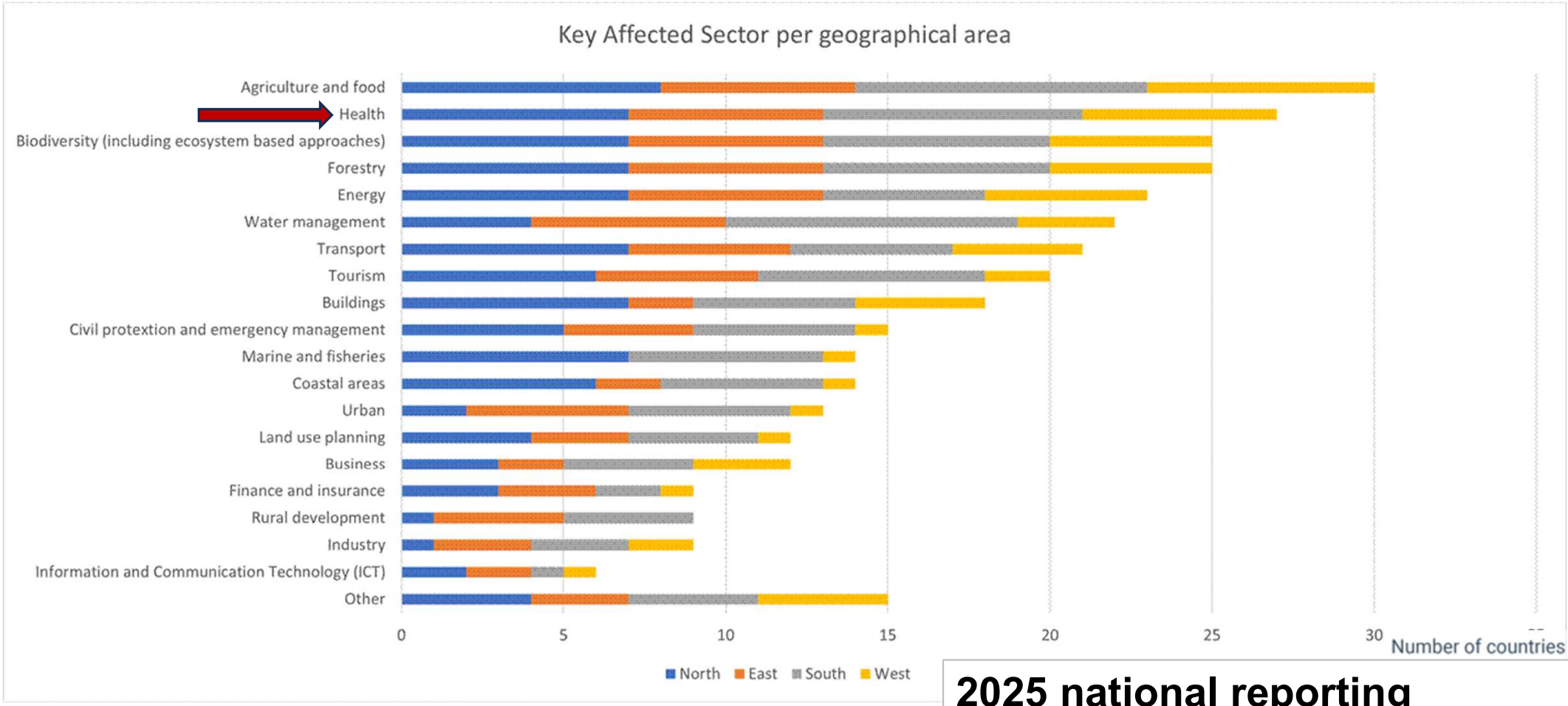
Risk severity
- Catastrophic
- Critical
- Substantial
- Limited

Confidence

Low: +
Medium: ++
High: +++

(*) Urgency based on high warming scenario (late century).

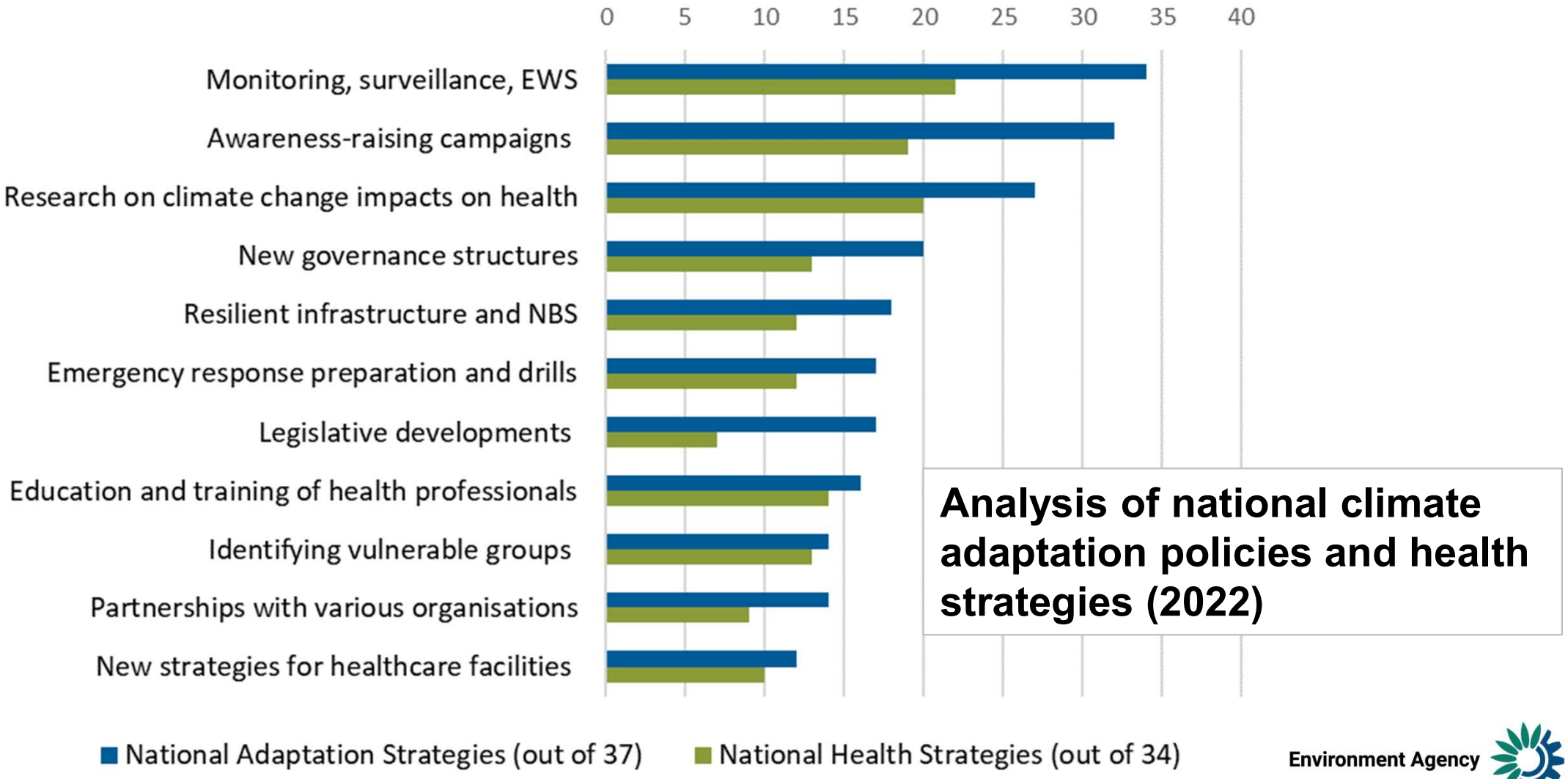
Health sector reported by Member States as second most vulnerable



2025 national reporting under Governance Regulation

Forthcoming, country profiles available under: [Country Profiles | Discover the key services, thematic features and tools of Climate-ADAPT]

Measures included in national policies

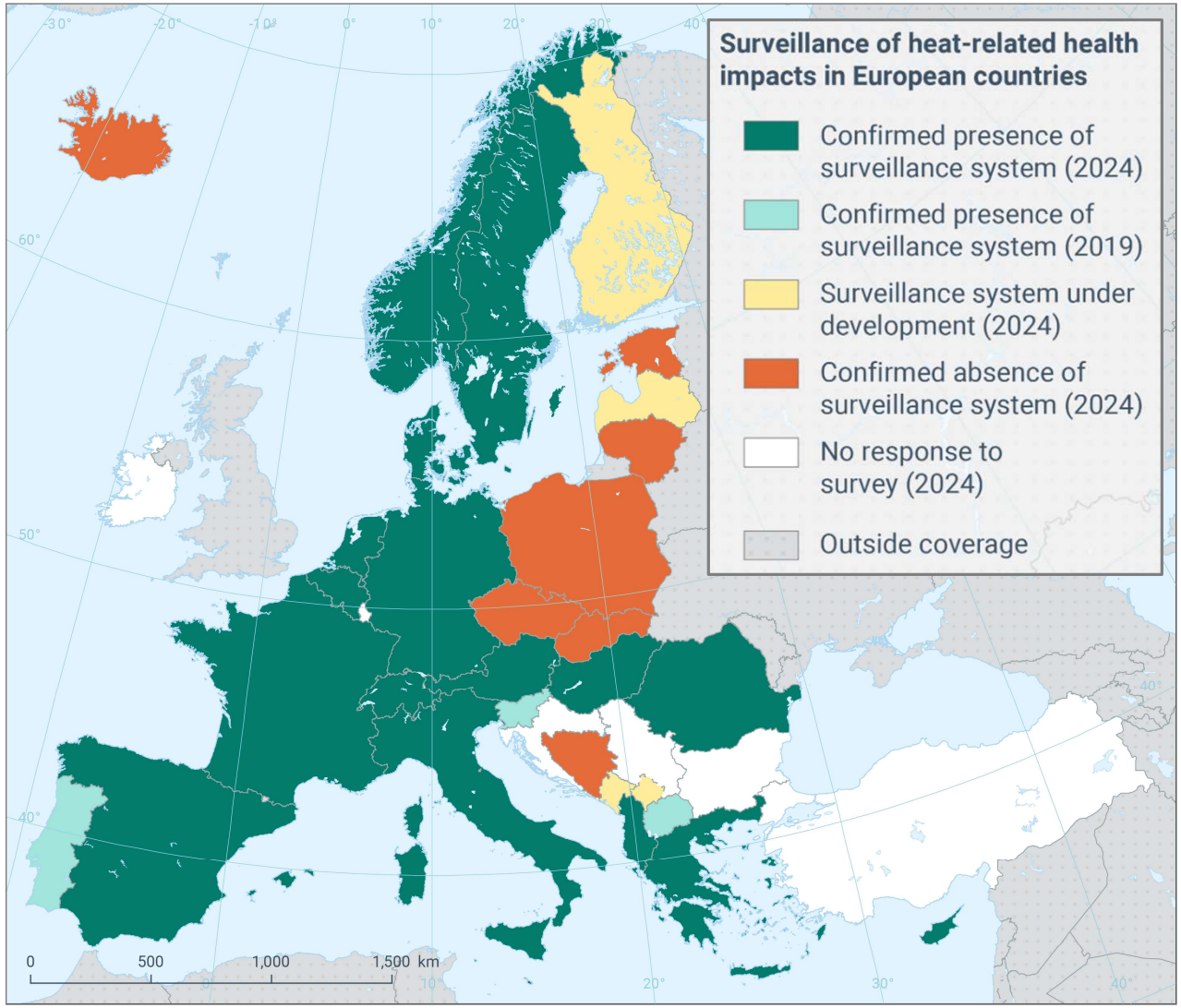


Analysis of national climate adaptation policies and health strategies (2022)

Environment Agency

https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/observatory/policy-context/national-policy-analysis-

Surveillance of heat-related health impacts: 20 countries



European Climate and Health Observatory, 2024, Heat mortality and morbidity surveillance in European countries, 2024,
Casanueva et al., 2019, Overview of Existing Heat-Health Warning Systems in Europe

Heat-health action plans across Europe: 21 countries

Implementation of the Heat-Health Action Plan of North Macedonia

Database › Case studies › Implementation of the Heat-Health Act...

The Heat Health Action Plan (HHAP) of North Macedonia, implemented since 2012, includes a heat health warning system, cross-government coordination, and public awareness strategies. Translating climate health impacts for policymakers,

Operation of the Austrian Heat Protection Plan

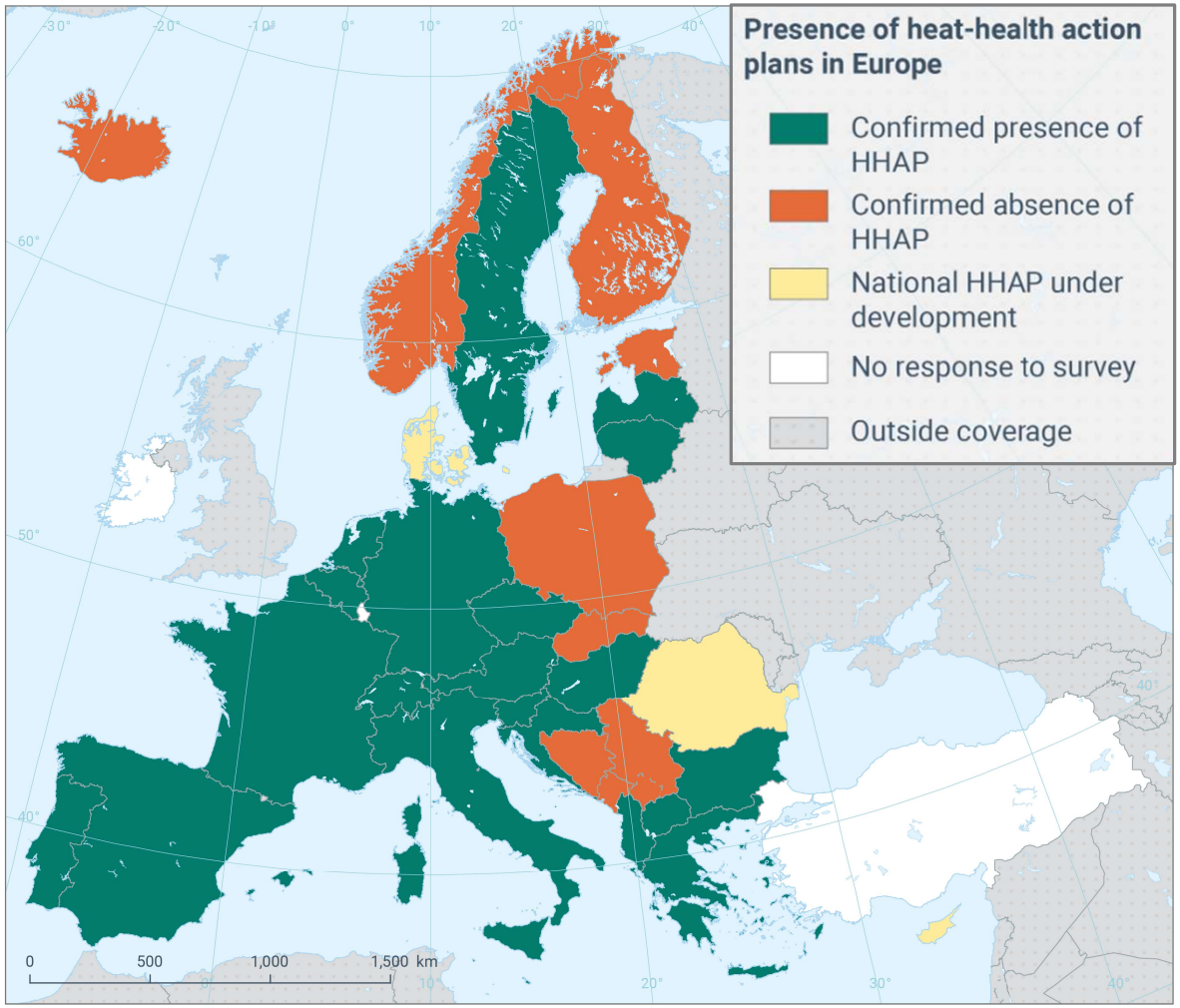
Database › Case studies › Operation of the Austrian Heat Protecti...

Austria's Heat Protection Plan, launched after the 2003 heatwave, aims to reduce heat stress and health risks especially in urban areas. It includes early warnings and tailored protection measures, focuses on vulnerable populations and involves collaboration between national and regional authorities.

Heat Hotline Parasol – Kassel region

Database › Case studies › Heat Hotline Parasol – Kassel region

Launched in 2010, the heat hotline parasol is a free hotline service that provides heat warnings and guidance to citizens, particularly the elderly, to deal with urban heatwaves in the city of Kassel. This prevention service is operated by volunteers and has been well received by the public.

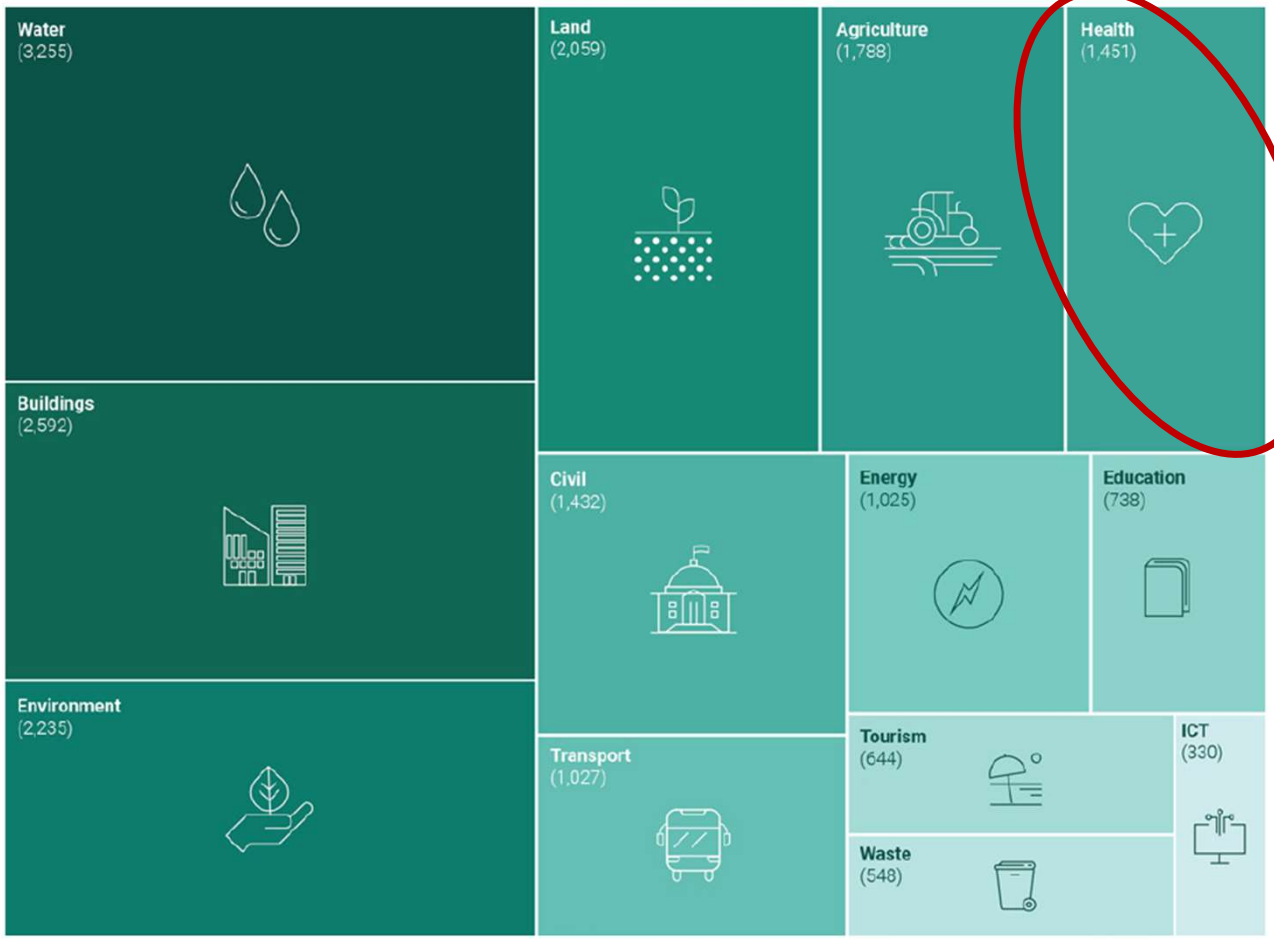


Reference data: © EuroGeographics, © FAO (UN), © TurkStat Source: European Commision – Eurostat/GISCO

European Climate and Health Observatory, 2024, Heat mortality and morbidity surveillance in European countries
WHO Europe, 2021, Heat and health in the WHO European region: updated evidence for effective prevention

Climate-health gap at subnational level

Adaptation actions planned by the Covenant of Mayors signatories in 2022 *(EEA, 2024)*



Municipality barriers to working on public health:

- Budgets
- Knowledge and expertise
- Low political priority
- No direct responsibility for healthcare *(CDP, 2022)*

European Environment Agency

Need for solutions across spatial scales and sectors

Level

EU

National

Regional

Local

Measure type

Governance and institutional measures

Nature-based solutions

Physical and technological measures

Knowledge and behaviour change

Economic and financial measures

Sector

Health

Water management

Spatial planning

Built environment

Insurance

European Environment Agency

Examples of responses and resilience measures: health sector

Health facility level

New Førde Hospital: Measures for flood protection

Database › Case studies › New Førde Hospital: Measures for floo...

Førde Hospital

Førde Central Hospital is highly exposed to flooding. This is due to its riverside location and the increasing likelihood of intense rainfall and rapid snowmelt under a changing climate. Although a 2014 flood caused damage across the entire site, regulations only required flood protection for newly constructed buildings, leaving older buildings exposed to future impacts. Flood protection measures

New North Zealand Hospital: A resilient acute care hospital for the future, Hillerød Denmark

Database › Case studies › New North Zealand Hospital: A resilien...

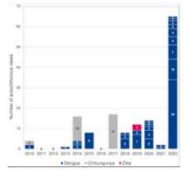
© Herzog & de Meuron

The new North Zealand Hospital in Hillerød aims to enhance resilience against climate-related impacts by incorporating a climate-informed design, innovative solutions for flood risk reduction and flexible organisation. It sets a blueprint for future hospitals of the country.

Climate change is increasing the frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events and creates risks that will impact health care facilities. Exposure of hospitals and other health facilities to heatwaves, flooding

Disease surveillance and control

Reducing the risk of local dengue transmission in France

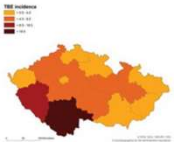


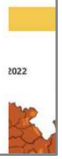
© Amandine Cochet

To curb the spread of dengue, chikungunya, and Zika, enhanced surveillance, mandatory reporting, epidemiological investigations, and preventive measures are implemented in France. Although no quantitative estimates exist about saved lives, the system is expected to significantly reduce the risks of disease transmission, due to early detection of cases.

The risk of local outbreaks of dengue is growing in many areas across Europe due to increasing urbanisation and globalisation. In addition, the global warming increases climatic suitability in Europe for *Aedes*

Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) surveillance in Czechia





Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) causes neuroinvasive illness, with increasing incidence attributed to global changes. The comprehensive national surveillance system in Czechia focusses on forecasting, reporting, and prevention. Its success relies on effective coordination, public awareness, and economic support for vaccination.

Being endemic in 27 European countries, tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) is

Education of workforce

Nurses Climate Challenge Europe: A campaign to engage health professionals on the impacts of climate change on health

Database › Case studies › Nurses Climate Challenge Europe: A ca...

Launched in 2021, the Nurses Climate Challenge Europe provides free online resources, and fosters networking among nurses to integrate climate knowledge into their practice, leveraging success from a previously established US-based counterpart.

Online training in climate change and health for the public health and wider health workforce in Europe

Database › Case studies › Online training in climate change and h...

European Environment Agency

Examples of responses and resilience measures: urban planning and built environment

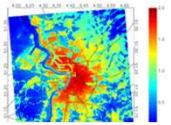
Stuttgart: combating the heat island effect and poor air quality with ventilation corridors and green-blue infrastructure

Database › Case studies › Stuttgart: combating the heat island ef...

Stuttgart, prone to air pollution and urban heat island effect, used a Climate Atlas to develop zoning regulations. Preserving open space, expanding green areas, and implementing measures like green roofs enhances resilience to heatwaves and improve urban air quality.

Adapting to heat stress in Antwerp (Belgium) based on detailed thermal mapping

Database › Case studies › Adapting to heat stress in Antwerp (Be...



The city of Antwerp, facing increasing heat stress, has adopted adaptation measures at the city-wide, local and citizen scale. This includes the development of a heat forecast and warning system, which has raised awareness at the political level. However, challenges remain for communication and technical integration.

Paris Oasis Schoolyard Programme, France

Database › Case studies › Paris Oasis Schoolyard Programme, Fr...

©Marie Konstantinovich

To address heatwave vulnerabilities, the city of Paris initiated the "OASIS" program, transforming schoolyards into green spaces accessible to vulnerable groups. Through co-design and coordination, ten pilot schoolyards showcase success, guiding the program's citywide expansion.

Nature-Based Solutions in schools: a green way to adapt buildings to climate change in Solana de los Barros, Extremadura (Spain)

Database › Case studies › Nature-Based Solutions in schools: a g...

Different types of green roofs, green facades, permeable paving and ventilation systems have been tested in a school building of Spain to address increasing temperatures and water scarcity. The implementation of a detailed monitoring scheme revealed positive results indicating high replication potential and possible incorporation of nature-based solutions in the national building code.

Adapting to the impacts of heatwaves in a changing climate in Botkyrka, Sweden

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Database › Case studies › Adapting to the impacts of heatwaves ...

Botkyrka responded to increased heatwaves by Climatools program project, creating checklists for homes and schools during heatwaves, enhancing warning systems, distributing targeted information, and establishing 'cool spots' for public use, effectively mitigating health risks during extreme heat.

European Environment Agency

European Climate and Health Observatory

European Commission | European Environment Agency

efsa European Food Safety Authority

ecdc European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Eurofound

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

IOM UN Migration

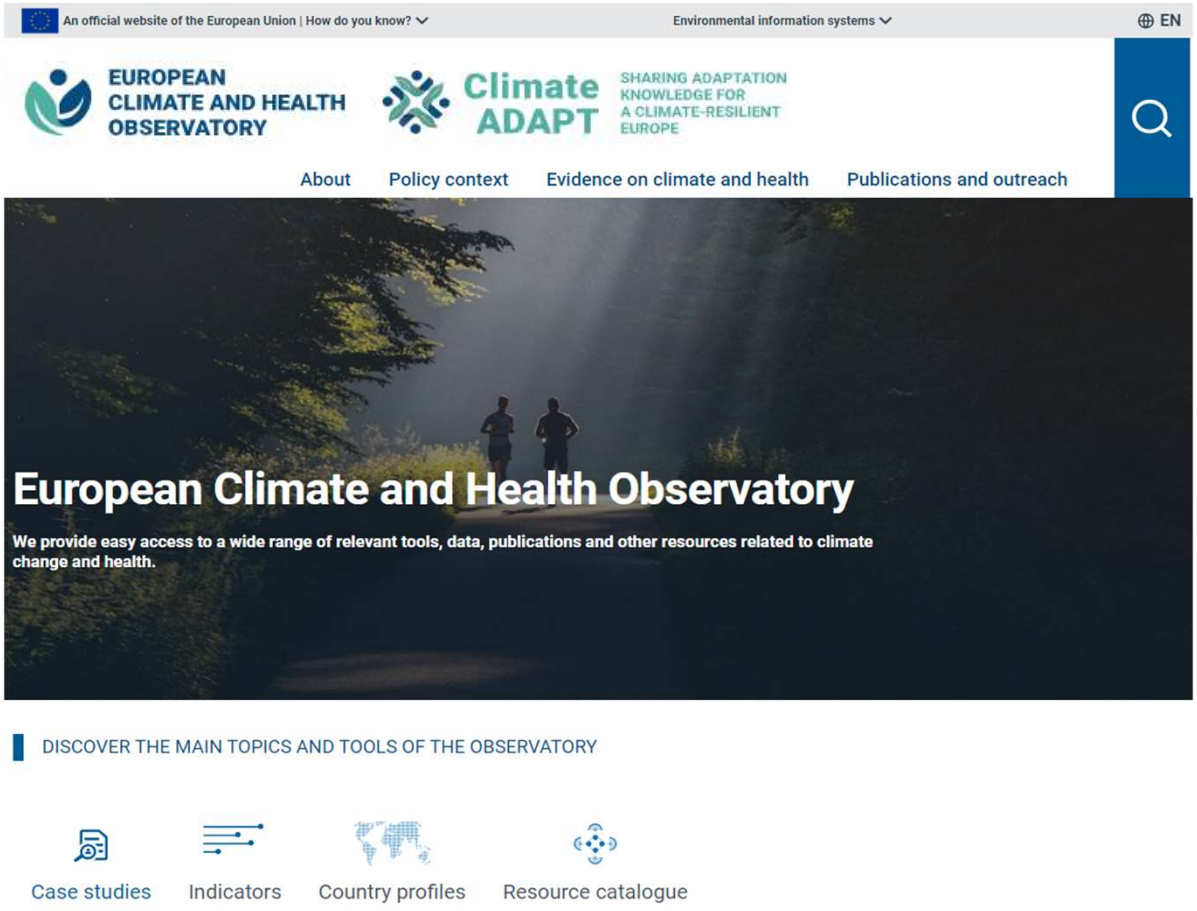
WMO

Copernicus Europe's eyes on Earth

Lancet Countdown: Health and Climate Change in Europe

ASPHER The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region

Public Health Institutes of the World IANPHI



European Environment Agency

Thank you

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Bettina Menne

Senior Policy Advisor on Healthy Settings – WHO/Europe

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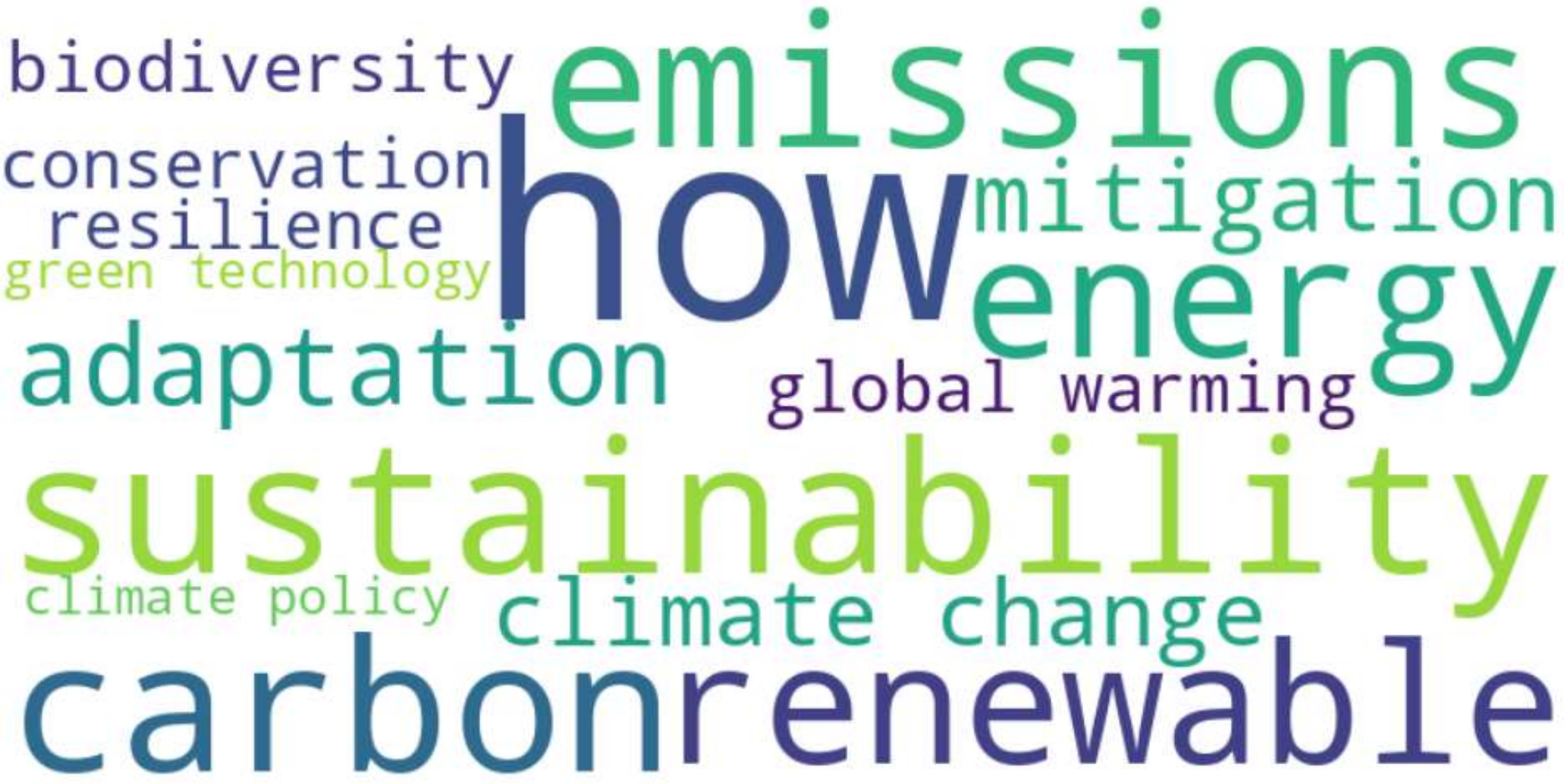
biodiversity
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resilience
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energy
adaptation
global warming
sustainability
climate policy
climate change
carbon
renewable

Coffee Break

Reception area coffee bar – 01.B.010

Setting the scene – examples from Flanders

→ 16h00