



QUICK TIPS

INTEGRATING CLIMATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

Environmental changes caused by a range of factors, including **accelerating human pressure on the planet's resources**, **negatively impact human health** in the short and long term. While everyone is affected, vulnerable populations are disproportionately burdened. Notable health risks are created by environmental hazards such as outdoor air pollution, which is a leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and results in 4.2 million premature deaths worldwide. Furthermore, **climate change** negatively impacts the social and environmental determinants of health - such as clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter - and intensifies health risks as people are exposed to more frequent and more intense climate hazards resulting from extreme weather events, such as rising temperatures and heat waves, cyclones, water scarcity, and food insecurity. By affecting dietary, environmental and lifestyle aspects, these climatic factors jointly increase the risk for the spread of **infectious disease, NCD complications**, as well as the rise of **mental health disorders and disability**. At the same time, the climate footprint of health care services can be quite high in some countries, and can account to up to 5% of greenhouse gas emissions at a global level.¹

Healthier environments could prevent almost one quarter of the global burden of disease. Health systems are the main line of defence for populations faced with emerging health threats. **To protect health and avoid widening health inequities, countries must build low carbon health systems that are resilient to environmental degradation and climate change.**

This note presents **practice-oriented “quick tips”** to promote interventions that address environmental degradation and climate change and promote planetary sustainability in order to achieve better direct and indirect health outcomes and have more resilient health systems.

At a global level, the **Paris Agreement** (2015) on climate change represents a strong commitment to protect public health, as it sets ambitious aims to curb greenhouse gas emissions and pushes countries to develop adaptation plans that will protect human health from the worst impacts of climate change. It is estimated that meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement could save about a million lives a year worldwide by 2050 through reductions in air pollution alone. The **Global Biodiversity Framework** (2022) also establishes the ambitious target of reducing pollution and ensuring access to nature with the potential to protect human health and wellbeing. At the same time, EU cooperation and partnerships need to embody the **European Green Deal** and support efforts to transform systems and societies towards climate neutral socioeconomic growth and development. Through the 2022 **EU Global Health Strategy** the Union commits to build stronger and more resilient health systems to deliver on the ambition of universal health coverage (UHC) and to work through the “One Health” approach. While the priorities around health, climate and the environment are tightly interlinked, only 0.5% of multilateral climate finance is dedicated to health adaptation.

¹ https://noharm-global.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/5961/HealthCaresClimateFootprint_092319.pdf

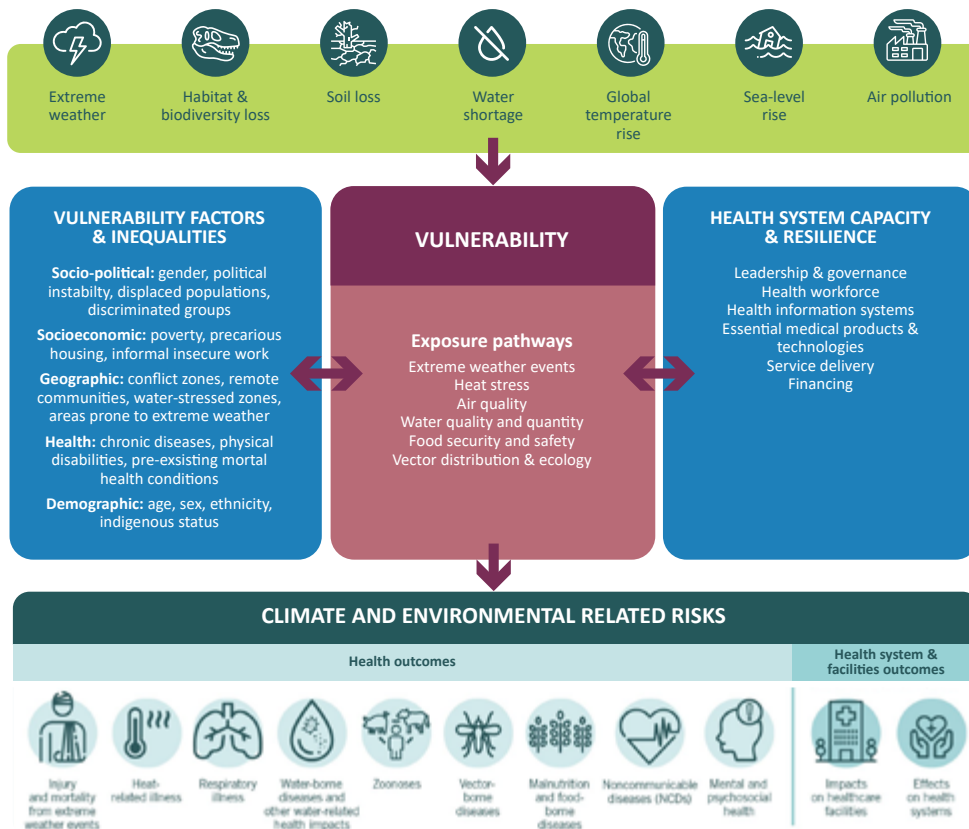


Figure 1: The impacts of climate and environmental changes on health outcomes and health systems. Adapted from: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196\(23\)00022-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanph/article/PIIS2542-5196(23)00022-0/fulltext), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health> & <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1422925/retrieve>

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Align health, environment and climate policies

- ▶ **Ensure alignment across health programmes and climate and environmental frameworks and promote interventions that contribute to their implementation:** Align health programmes with key climate and environmental frameworks such as Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, and National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies. Promote interventions which will implement components with these commitments. Incorporate the use of Health Impact Assessments in climate and environmental policies and programmes.
- ▶ **Facilitate synergies and efficiency gains** among interconnected policies and plans within Ministries covering Health, Agriculture, Environment and Climate and Public Finance to enhance collaboration and impact across sectors. Encourage their participation in discussing and revising national commitments on the environment and climate in order to ensure that health is fully integrated.
- ▶ **Promote “Health in All Policies” and “Health for all Sectors”:** Advocate for systematic action on environmental and climate risks and vulnerabilities to mitigate direct and indirect effects on health outcomes in the short and long term.
- ▶ **Incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem protection into health policies encouraging nature-based solutions for health.** Promote the greening of cities and urban environments (introducing vegetation, reducing car use, creating walking paths and cycling lanes) to reduce air pollution and heat stress while at the same time reduce risk factors for non-communicable diseases and promoting mental and physical health and well being.

Identify and prepare for environmental and climate-related risks

- ▶ **Identify and estimate costs:**
 - Include environmental and climate risk assessments in health policy and planning to identify risks, vulnerability factors and inequalities and address potential climate and environmental hazards to health outcomes and health systems.
 - Incorporate environmental risks into health investment plans, including costs for adaptation, mitigation, and response.
- ▶ **Monitor, mapping and early warning:**
 - Integrate environmental and climate risk indicators in public health risk identification systems.
 - Strengthen disease surveillance systems and develop a harmonized early warning system in compliance with International Health Regulations.



Installation of solar panels for a health centre in Honduras © European Union

► **Adapting to & mitigating risks:**

- Create a Disaster Risk Management Framework for Health to evaluate, prevent, prepare for, and respond to climate and environmental vulnerabilities in health systems.
- Advocate flexibility and responsiveness of health systems and resources to accommodate new patterns of service demand based on climate and environmental risks.
- Develop specific contingency plans to guarantee the resilience of infrastructure and supply chains and sufficiently trained and equipped healthcare workers during acute shocks such as extreme weather events and outbreaks.
- Incorporate climate adaptation and risk mitigation measures based on the findings of environmental and climate risk assessments.

Apply a multisectoral approach to health



- **Increase opportunities for inequality reduction by adopting a One Health approach and focusing on vulnerable populations:** Identify and promote opportunities to enhance the impact of health and climate policies in the most vulnerable populations by collaborating with other sectors through a One Health approach including agriculture, nutrition, water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH), education, employment and social protection.
- **Engage with One Health strategies and stakeholders, or support the creation of a national One Health platform:** Strengthen synergies across national and regional One Health initiatives, fostering collaboration across the health, animal health, and environment sectors.
- **Promote One Health in policy dialogues:** Advocate for the integration of One Health principles in policy discussions, ensuring the inclusion of appropriate performance indicators and conducting joint evaluations to assess the effectiveness of interventions across human, animal, and environmental health.

Promote innovation and research



- **Support the development and update of national One Health research agendas,** based on assessment of vulnerabilities and risks at a local, national, and regional levels and including relevant sectors and disciplines such as human health, animal health, environment, agriculture, WASH, social and behavioural sciences and humanities, etc.
- **Support research** for the prevention, control and eradication of endemic Neglected Tropical Diseases.

Streamline financial resources



- **Leverage funding** across government ministries, donors, and sectors including human health, animal health, environmental protection, planning, social protection, and emergency response to ensure policy and programmatic coherence.
- **Promote comprehensive and flexible financing mechanisms** to quickly reallocate resources to respond to the health systems needs created by climate and environmental hazards.

Monitoring and evaluation



- **Monitor the implementation of national frameworks and actions** aimed at building resilient health systems and improving health outcomes, with a focus on quality of care and inequality reduction.
- **Promote the harmonisation of data collection systems** and indicator use across sectors and donors to assess the impact of climate and environment and health investments.

HEALTH SYSTEMS



Specifications for greener and resilient health facilities, equipment and operations

► **Review of health facility specifications:**

- Promote the revision of specifications for health facility location and construction, considering projected climate risks and hazards while minimizing their carbon footprint.
- Request reporting from environmental impact assessments and health impact assessments to ensure environmental and health considerations are equally addressed in the design of facilities. This can, for example, ensure facility energy sources minimize adverse effects of power cuts e.g. data and digital systems and life-saving equipment, such as ventilators and dialysis machines, lighting for critical services, cold chain maintenance for vaccines, while at the same time promoting bioclimatic design and green facilities where possible.

► **Use renewable energies:**

- Ensure reliable and continuous power supply through a balance reliance on renewable energy sources and implement appropriate backup systems to avoid interruptions on power supply and ensure continuity on quality services. Prioritize resilience of power supply for essential healthcare services during extreme weather events.

► **Promote energy efficiency:**

- Support the transition to energy-efficient infrastructure and equipment e.g. replace refrigeration and heating equipment with energy-efficient alternatives and climate-friendly refrigeration fluids.
- Ensure compliance with energy-efficient building codes and WHO's Harmonised Health Facility Assessment for quality standards.

► **Ensure operational resilience:**

- Ensure continuity of supply chains and uninterrupted access to essential health commodities by strengthening logistics management information systems for effective inventory management and by building capacity in efficient and sustainable procurement practices.



Sound environmental management

► **Minimise and recycle waste:**

- Create or strengthen local recycling and repurposing facilities, to organise their collection, transport and recycling of materials of non-biohazard materials such as batteries, paper, glass, metals and plastic. Support food waste reduction and material repurposing initiatives to reduce excess waste.

► **Proper disposal of biohazard and pharmaceutical waste:**

- Develop plans for hazardous waste disposal and management in accordance with WHO recommendations with local authorities.
- Minimize the risk of water source contamination and development of antimicrobial resistance through proper industrial waste management practices.

► **Use WASH standards:**

- Promote WASH standards in healthcare facilities.
- Maintain water distribution systems to maximise efficient water use and prevent contamination from leaks.
- Encourage use of rainwater harvesting as a supplementary water source, while adhering to WASH standards.



Circular economy

► **Rethink business models for procurement:**

- Explore efficient and innovative business models (pooled procurement, advanced market commitments, appropriate stock forecasting and bulk purchasing where appropriate) for service and commodity procurement in the health sector, while ensuring regulatory and quality standards.
- Create leasing arrangements for energy efficient and capital-intensive equipment to reduce financial burdens of green transition in the health sector.
- Establish return programs to facilitate equipment upgrade and refurbishment.
- Consider sustainability criteria in product assessment and procurement decisions, incl. the prioritisation of quality locally manufactured commodities that comply with regulatory approvals as well as infrastructure and machinery with locally accessible maintenance and repair services without requiring servicing from abroad.



Health workforce capacity

- ▶ **Develop comprehensive capacity building plans** for healthcare workers and laboratory facility personnel, guided by capacity needs assessments that take into account environmental and climate risks and skills related to mitigation and adaptation practice, local disease burden, epidemiological surveillance, and early warning systems.
- ▶ **Enhance diagnostic and reporting capabilities:**
 - Strengthen the health workforce's ability to diagnose and report emerging diseases, including vector-borne and water borne diseases.
 - Equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills to identify changing infectious disease patterns and respond accordingly.
- ▶ **Strengthen professional training:**
 - Equip healthcare professionals to ensure the continuation of the treatment of NCDs and injuries during extreme weather events, preventing excess mortality, morbidity the risk of permanent disability;
 - Equip healthcare professionals to offer mental health and psychosocial support to vulnerable individuals affected by the effects of climate change resulting in the loss of homes and livelihoods, disruptions on social capital, community and school disruptions, risk of intra-family violence and eco-anxiety.



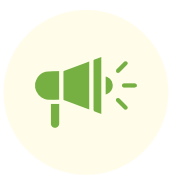
Figure 2: Operational framework for climate resilient and low carbon health systems.
Source: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240081888>

POPULATION



Raise awareness and knowledge

- ▶ **Raise awareness** at population level of the health implications of environmental and climate risks linked to air, water and soil pollution, wastewater, rising temperatures, deforestation, antimicrobial resistance, etc. Increase knowledge of the public about response options under emergencies.
- ▶ **Promote adapted behavioural change interventions** with a focus on climate change and environmental adaptation and mitigation while improving health outcomes such as: swapping wood and coal for indoor heating or cooking purposes to improve respiratory health and reduced deforestation; improving WASH practices to decrease transmission of water borne illnesses; adapted construction for extreme rain and heat events with environmentally friendly materials.



Community engagement

- ▶ **Promote engagement and feedback mechanisms** to support participation, dialogue and information exchange, to empower civil society and community groups to respond to emergencies and to guide future development of disaster monitoring and warning systems.



Improved risk communication

- ▶ **Strengthen communication mechanisms to engage** decision-makers, the media, community leaders and the population based on a comprehensive understanding of local context and understanding of risk, with a strong emphasis on vulnerable populations.



Further information and support

Additional support is available through the Green Deal Knowledge Hub.

- ▶ [Green Deal Knowledge Hub](#)
- ▶ [Quick tips to integrate environment and climate change into sectoral programming](#)
- ▶ [Health in Nationally Determined Contributions \(NCDs\): A WHO review](#)
- ▶ [2023 Healthy NDC Scorecard](#)
- ▶ [Health in National Adaptation Plans: WHO guidance](#)
- ▶ [Quality Criteria for Health National Adaptation Plans](#)
- ▶ [Health: Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework](#)
- ▶ [Climate change and health: vulnerability and adaptation assessment](#)
- ▶ [Lessons on health adaptation to climate variability and change: experiences across LMICs](#)
- ▶ [Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework for Health](#)
- ▶ [Mental health and climate change policy brief](#)
- ▶ [One Health Joint Plan of Action \(2022-2026\)](#)
- ▶ [IHR-PVS National Bridging Workshops](#)
- ▶ [Towards a global One Health index: a potential assessment tool for One Health performance](#)
- ▶ [Operational tools and approaches for zoonotic diseases](#)
- ▶ [Mental health and Climate change](#)
- ▶ [Climate Resilient and Environmentally Sustainable Health Care Facilities](#)
- ▶ [Harmonised Health Facility Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Health Impact Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Environmental sustainability of health systems: time to act](#)
- ▶ [Building climate resilient health systems: WHO Operational Framework](#)
- ▶ [WHO trainings and educational materials on climate change and human health](#)
- ▶ [International Health Regulations](#)
- ▶ [Quality Criteria for the evaluation of climate-informed early warning systems for infectious diseases](#)
- ▶ [Climate change and health research: current trends, gaps, and perspectives for the future](#)
- ▶ [Protecting health from climate change: global research priorities](#)
- ▶ [Water, sanitation, hygiene, waste and electricity services in health care facilities: progress on the fundamentals](#)

All documents are available on capacity4dev (public group: [Environment, Climate Change and Green Economy](#))



GreeningEUCOOPERATION
Integrating environment & climate change

Contact the EU Greening Facility:

INTPA-GREENING-FACILITY@ec.europa.eu |

MENA-GREENING-FACILITY@ec.europa.eu |

ENEST-GREENING-FACILITY@ec.europa.eu



HISP
KNOWLEDGE HUB ON HEALTH,
INEQUALITIES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S DG
FOR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Knowledge Hub on Health, Inequalities and Social Protection (HISP)

HISP@hera.eu