

The voice of the EEAC Network Councils on Health

Taking stock of the existing
work related to health by
EEAC member councils

Working Group on Health

JUNE 2026



The European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils Network (EEAC Network) connects advisory bodies that support national or regional governments and parliaments on sustainability, environment, and climate policy. The Network currently consists of 17 national and regional advisory bodies from 12 European member states. With representatives from academia, civil society, the private sector and public institutions, the EEAC brings together experts from a wide range of different professional backgrounds.

Belgium	Federal Council for Sustainable Development
Catalonia	Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia
Finland	Finnish Expert Panel for Sustainable Development
Flanders	Environment and Nature Council of Flanders
Germany	German Advisory Council on the Environment German Advisory Council on Global Change German Council for Sustainable Development
Hungary	National Council for Sustainable Development National Council on the Environment
Ireland	National Economic and Social Council The Climate Change Advisory Council
Luxembourg	National Council for Sustainable Development
Montenegro	National Council for Sustainable Development and Environment
Portugal	National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development
Romania	Consultative Council for Sustainable Development
The Netherlands	Council for the Environment and Infrastructure The Netherlands Scientific Climate Council



The EEAC Network Working Group on Health (WG Health) was established in October 2024 as a platform for Network members to coordinate their work, exchange ideas, and share expertise on environment-health priorities. Another aim of the WG is to advocate for policies that promote human and planetary well-being and that prioritise health in the context of sustainability.

Among its activities, the WG Health organised a webinar *Advancing Environmental Health: Insights and Actions for a Healthier Europe* on 21 November 2024, featuring speakers from the Lancet Countdown, the European Environment Agency and the European Commission. It also supported the proposal for a COST Action on Planetary Health (TAPAHS) in October 2024, a joint initiative of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Health, and THL Finland.

Planned activities for 2026 include an internal exchange of councils' work and best practices on health, a webinar on EU institutional plans at the climate-health nexus, and a briefing and follow-up session on planetary boundaries.

ENVIRONMENT-HEALTH NEXUS

It has been recognised for a long time that environmental conditions have an impact on human health. The scope of this influence was, however, considered to be limited and focused on specific hazards such as polluted air, contaminated water, noise and toxic chemicals. Over recent years, this limited perspective has shifted. Circumstances such as the rapidly changing climate, the ongoing damage to ecosystems, and the severe health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have shown that these problems are closely linked. They also demonstrate that changes in the natural environment can quickly translate into health risks, sometimes in ways that are unexpected and far-reaching.

This shift and broader understanding are also reflected in recent legislative developments at the EU level. It can be noticed that, particularly over the last few years, the EU has consistently introduced laws and regulations that directly or indirectly recognise the close connection between environmental protection and human health. To start with, a clear reference to human wellbeing at the centre of Europe's transition to a climate-neutral and sustainable economy can be found in the introductory part of the *European Green Deal*. By framing environmental quality as an essential prerequisite for a healthy society, it clearly signals that environmental action is also a means of improving public health. Furthermore, this broader link between environment and health is reflected in the *Zero Pollution Action Plan*, which directly connects environmental protection with better health outcomes by aiming to reduce pollution in air, water and soil to levels that are not harmful to people. Taken together, these developments highlight a shift in the EU policy-making on the environment-health nexus. On the other hand, we need to pay more attention to the positive effects of nature (see figure).

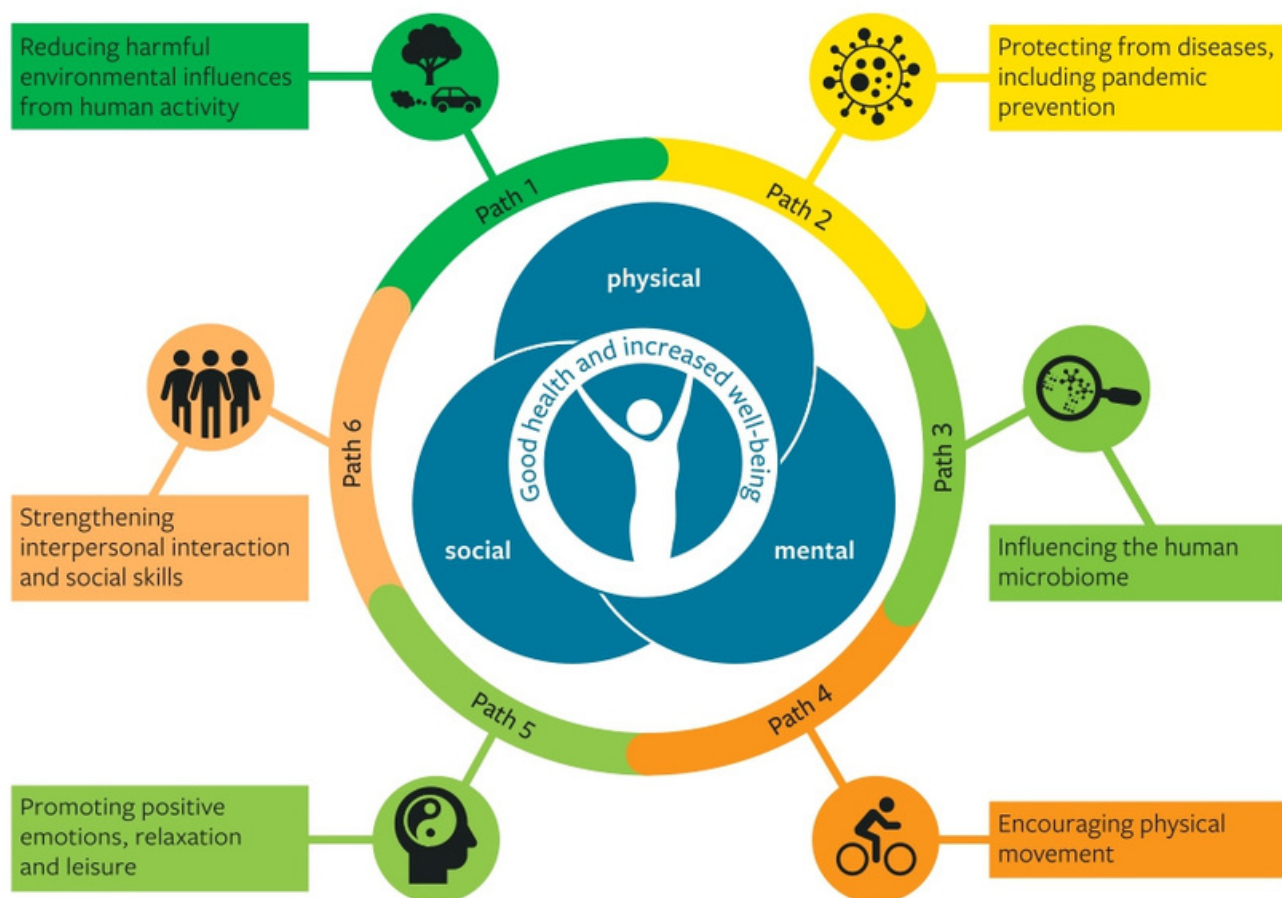


Figure 1: Positive health effects of nature
Source: SRU

ADVICE FROM EEAC MEMBER COUNCILS

The next sections illustrate how the WG Health has begun to address key links between environmental conditions and human health in its recent activities and analyses, and include some common advice emerging from the EEAC member councils' work on health.

1. Integrate health across policy areas

Firstly, several councils noted the need to change current practices in how health and environmental policies are addressed. Rather than following a reactive approach—intervening only after harm occurs—key reports advocate for structural or systemic prevention and highlight the inseparability of environmental health and human health (SRU 2023, WBGU 2023). According to the SRU and the WBGU, therefore, health dimensions must be urgently integrated into decisions and policies across sectors, since choices made in key areas strongly shape public health outcomes. These reports emphasise the need to systematically incorporate health considerations into policy domains such as transport and mobility, energy, agriculture and food systems, chemicals, and urban planning.

Furthermore, other councils, including the Minaraad, frame this shift as a guiding principle for policymaking and call for embracing a *health in all* policies approach, as outlined in the Minaraad's 2024 report.

Food policy is an example of how sustainability goals can align with improved public health outcomes. The advisory report *Sustainable and Healthy* (Rli, 2018) and *Feeding on future* (CADS, 2018) demonstrate that simple measures—such as promoting healthier, more sustainable diets—can simultaneously advance environmental objectives, and reduce health risks. This connection is also reflected, albeit more indirectly, in the report *Let's Decarbonise Catalonia* (CADS, 2025), which highlights the health co-benefits of climate mitigation actions, particularly through reducing air pollution and addressing climate-related health impacts.

It is also worth noting the broader benefits that a healthy and well-protected natural environment can bring to people's health and wellbeing. This link is, for example, mentioned in the report prepared by the CADS and the Nature Protection Council on the implementation of the European Nature Restoration Regulation (2025), which highlights how nature restoration can contribute to wellbeing, resilience, and physical and mental health.

2. Enhance multi-level and policy cooperation

Secondly, linked to the need for integrating health across different sectors, several councils also highlighted the importance of stronger

coordination and better cooperation between different levels of governance. The SRU (2023) and the WBGU (2023) argue that coordination between national, regional, and local levels is not only more effective than isolated approaches, but has become essential in addressing complex and interconnected health, environmental, and climate-related challenges. These councils emphasise that shifting towards more coordinated multi-level action is necessary to create healthier ecosystems, which are a precondition for public health. The SRU (2023), for instance, proposes the Ecosalute Policy Guideline as an orientation for integrated environmental health policy. To support consistent implementation and learning across levels, the Minaraad's 2024 report *Health Objective: Environmental Health* highlights the importance of structured knowledge exchange. This is reinforced in the Minaraad's advice on the legal framework for preventive health policy (Minaraad, 2023), which stresses the need for cooperation and knowledge sharing across different policy areas.

3. Use SMART goals and evaluate impacts

Thirdly, councils emphasise that to make health integration truly operational, it is essential to set clear objectives supported by indicators and a monitoring system. Some councils, such as the Minaraad in *Health Objective: Environmental Health*, go further and explicitly call for adopting the SMART approach, which involves breaking

ambitious overreaching goals into achievable sub-objectives and supporting them with indicators that ensure accountability and enable effective monitoring. The report also highlights the importance of both ex ante and ex post evaluation, recommending that assessments consider not only health benefits; but also the socio-economic impacts directly and indirectly linked to environmental health actions (Minaraad, 2024).

4. Build resilience for environmental health crises

Additionally, councils underline that accelerating environmental degradation is creating increasingly direct and severe health risks, including heatwaves, floods, and acute pollution episodes. In this context, health policy must strengthen resilience and preparedness. In its *Factsheet No. 9 Health systems* (2024), the WBGU stresses the need for strong public health authorities, particularly at the local level supported by tools such as integrated environment-health data systems, regular exposure and vulnerability assessments, and targeted early-warning and risk-information systems (WBGU, 2024). This perspective is reinforced in the report *Healthy living on a healthy planet* (WBGU, 2023) which emphasises that preparing health systems for these challenges is essential to protect public health in the years ahead.

Similar priorities appear in Romanian evidence on climate-related health risk in *Starea Climei-România* (2025) as well as in the SNASC (2024) *National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change 2024-2030*.

Additionally, councils increasingly recognise that environmental crises affect not only physical health, but also mental well-being. For example, the report *Mental health impacts of flooding in Ireland* commissioned by the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council highlights how flooding events can lead to long-term psychological consequences, including anxiety, stress, and trauma among affected communities. This demonstrates the importance of integrating mental health considerations into resilience planning, preparedness strategies, and post-disaster health responses.

5. Prioritise vulnerable groups through targeted planning

Moreover, councils stress that certain groups are disproportionately affected by environmental health risks and therefore require explicit protection through targeted policies. Advisory reports highlight risks such as heatwaves, floods, ozone pollution, and particulate matter, which tend to impact vulnerable populations most severely (FRDO-CFDD, 2005).

The SRU identifies socially disadvantaged groups as particularly at risk, largely due to their living conditions (SRU, 2023). Similarly, the CCAS's contribution to the draft health-sector adaptation plan underscores the

importance of targeted planning within the health sector to safeguard vulnerable groups. The SRU's Environmental Report *Towards an ambitious environmental policy in Germany and Europe* (2020), further emphasises that addressing these challenges requires collective action, rather than isolated measures.

6. Use a planetary health framing

Lastly, several councils frame the environment–health relationship through a planetary health lens, which emphasises that human health depends fundamentally on the stability and integrity of natural systems. The WBGU Planetary Health: *What we need to talk about factsheet*, for example, warns that current lifestyles can harm both human health and the planet (WBGU, 2021). Likewise, *Healthy living on a healthy planet* (WBGU, 2023) argues that healthy lives are only possible within stable climate and resilient ecosystems.

Under this premise, the SRU (2024) advocates for a societal discussion about sufficiency which may path the way for achieving a good life for all.

COMMON CONCLUSIONS

Based on the reviewed reports by the EEAC member councils, the following common conclusions emerge:

1. **Environmental degradation is increasingly a public-health issue** (WBGU, 2023; FRDO-CFDD, 2005).
2. **Health should be integrated across policy areas and addressed proactively, with a focus on structural prevention** (CADS, 2018; SRU, 2023; Minaraad, 2024).
3. **Effective action requires coordination across governance levels and policy domains** (CADS, 2018; SRU, 2023; WBGU, 2023).
4. **Objectives must be measurable, monitored, and evaluated to ensure accountability and guide implementation** (CCAC, 2025; Minaraad, 2024).
5. **Proactive and targeted protection for vulnerable groups is essential in responding to environmental health risks** (SRU, 2023; WBGU, 2024; CCAC, 2026).

EEAC COUNCILS PLANNED WORK ON HEALTH - 2026

- **CADS**, together with the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), the Mollet Health Foundation, the Planetary Health Development Center, the Open University of Catalonia, and the College of Physicians of Catalonia, is hosting the **Secretariat of the European Planetary Health Alliance** from 2026 until 2028.
- **CSDD** is preparing a report on One Health and SDG 2 & 3.
- **NESC** is working on a review of Ireland's wellbeing framework.
- **Rli** will publish a report on a healthy living environment, in cooperation with the Dutch Health Council and the Council for Public Health & Society.
- **WKR** is working on a report on climate and health.

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CCAC – Climate Change Advisory Council (Ireland)

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CCAC (2026). Mental health impacts of flooding in Ireland.

CCSD – Consultative Council for Sustainable Development (Romania)

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