

Tackling pollution and climate change in Europe will improve health and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable

Improving the health and well-being of European citizens is more important than ever, with attention currently focused on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic provides a stark example of the complex links between the environment, our social systems, and our health.

A significant proportion of the burden of disease in Europe continues to be attributed to environmental pollution resulting from human activity, according to the EEA report '[Healthy environment, healthy lives: how the environment influences health and well-being in Europe](#).' The report, which draws extensively on World Health Organization data on the causes of death and disease, highlights how the quality of Europe's environment plays a key role in determining our health and well-being. It shows how social deprivation, unhealthy behaviours and shifting demographics in Europe influence environmental health, with the most vulnerable hardest hit.

'There is a clear link between the state of the environment and the health of our population. Everyone must understand that by taking care of our planet we are not only saving ecosystems, but also lives, especially the ones who are the most vulnerable. The European Union is devoted to this approach and with the new Biodiversity Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan and other forthcoming initiatives we are on the path to build a more resilient and healthier Europe for European citizens and beyond,' said Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries.

'COVID-19 has been yet another wake-up call, making us acutely aware of the relationship between our ecosystems and our health and the need to face the facts – the way we live, consume and produce is detrimental to the climate and impacts negatively on our health. From our Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable and healthy food to Europe's future Beating Cancer Plan, we have made a strong commitment to protect the health of our citizens and our planet,' said Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.

'While we see improvements in the environment in Europe and a clear focus in the Green Deal on a sustainable future, the report indicates that strong action is needed to protect the most vulnerable in our society, as poverty often goes together with living in poor environmental conditions and poor health. Addressing these connections has to be part of an integrated approach towards a more inclusive and sustainable Europe,' said Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director.

Key findings

- Air pollution remains Europe's top environmental threat to health, with more than 400 000 premature deaths driven by air pollution every year in the EU. Noise pollution comes second, contributing to 12 000 premature deaths, followed by the impacts of climate change, notably heatwaves.
- The burden of pollution and climate change varies across Europe, with clear differences between countries in the east and west of Europe. The highest fraction of national deaths (27 %) is attributable to the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the lowest in Iceland and Norway at 9 %.
- Socially deprived communities typically struggle under a triple burden of poverty, poor quality environments and ill health. Poorer communities are often exposed to higher levels of pollution and noise and to high temperatures, while pre-existing health conditions increase vulnerability to environmental health hazards. Targeted measures are needed to improve environmental conditions for the most vulnerable in Europe.
- People are exposed to multiple risks at any time, including air, water and noise pollution, and chemicals, which combine and in some cases act in unison to impact on health. European cities are particularly vulnerable to these multiple threats, while also having less access to green and blue spaces.
- Ongoing research is investigating the links between the current COVID-19 pandemic and environmental dimensions. The virus behind COVID-19 is thought to have "jumped species" from animals to humans, an unforeseen outcome of the pressure that increasing consumption places on our natural systems. Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on communities, early evidence suggests that air pollution and poverty may be linked to higher death rates. Further research is still needed to clarify these interactions, according to an initial assessment in the report.

Better integration of policies, more green, blue spaces key part of solution

The report stresses that an integrated approach to environment and health policies is needed to tackle environmental risks, protect the most vulnerable and fully realise the benefits that nature offers in support of health and well-being.

A healthy nature is a key mechanism in the delivery of public health, reducing disease and fostering good health and well-being. Green solutions offer a triple win for health, society and the environment. Quality green and blue spaces in urban areas support health and well-being, offering venues for physical activity, relaxation and social integration, with major benefits for poor communities. Green and blue spaces cool cities during heatwaves, alleviate flood waters, reduce noise pollution and support urban biodiversity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many commentators have noted a renewed appreciation of the benefits to mental health and well-being

delivered by access to green and blue space, especially in urban areas.

Within the EU, the [European Green Deal](#) represents a critical direction-setting change in the European policy agenda and sets out a sustainable and inclusive strategy to improve people's health and quality of life, care for nature, and leave no one behind.

Belarus: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Jos



We strongly condemn the unabating arbitrary and unexplained arrests and detentions on political grounds in Belarus that have been taking place since the start of the pre-presidential election campaign. Most recently, Maria Kalesnikova, Andrei Yahorau, Irina Sukhiy, Anton Radniankou, and Ivan Krautsou have all been targeted, while 633 people were detained following Sunday's peaceful Unity March. It is clear that the State authorities in Belarus continue to intimidate or allow intimidation of its citizens in an increasingly lawless way and crudely violate both their own domestic laws and international obligations.

The EU expects the Belarusian authorities to ensure the immediate release of all detained on political grounds before and after the falsified 9 August presidential elections.

Civil society and actors engaged in discussions on the future of Belarus, including members of the Coordination Council, must be protected from intimidation, forced exile, arbitrary arrest and violence. The rule of law and justice must prevail and a thorough and transparent investigation into all alleged abuses must take place, in order to hold those responsible to account.

We expect the authorities to stop political persecution and engage in an inclusive national dialogue, in full respect of the Belarusian people's

democratic and fundamental rights.

The EU will impose sanctions on individuals responsible for violence, repression and falsification of election results.

[Press release – COVID-19: MEPs want safe vaccines, full transparency and liability for companies](#)



The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety today debated the EU vaccines strategy, including the state of play on the Vaccines Advance Purchase Agreements, with Sandra Gallina, Deputy Director-General of the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety.

The Chair underlined the need for transparency to achieve trust in future COVID-19 vaccines and regretted that more information on the Commission's work related to the purchase agreements for COVID-19 vaccines had not been shared proactively by the Commission.

Ms. Gallina highlighted that a good vaccine must be efficient, safe, affordable, developed quickly and able to achieve EU market authorisation. She particularly underlined that the EU is fully committed to a global approach where vaccines must be available to all including in low-income countries as we will not be safe until everybody is safe.

COVID-vaccines: when and for whom?

Several MEPs wanted to know from Ms. Gallina when vaccines will be available as well as who will be vaccinated first. Ms. Gallina said that the first

vaccinations should start already towards the end of this year and a significant number of vaccines should become available in the first part of 2021. Vaccines would be distributed to member states based on population size. The combined portfolio of the different vaccines will be enough to vaccinate all citizens that need or want to be vaccinated. However, she said it would be up to member states to decide who will receive the vaccination first which she admitted could lead to disparities across borders. She said prices for the vaccinations would be between 5-15 EUR per dose in order to assure affordability for all member states.

Some MEPs asked for confirmation that results of clinical trials would be made public. Ms. Gallina answered that the [European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#) would provide overall data of the clinical trials – albeit not all raw data. As a general point on this, she said that access to clinical trial data would improve once the clinical trial regulation enters into force late 2021.

Civil liability for vaccine producers

Many MEPs raised the issue of liability for medical companies producing vaccines and underlined that there should be no exceptions from current rules.

Ms. Gallina stressed negotiations with companies had been difficult but underlined that those companies developing and manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines would indeed be liable according to current laws and if something goes wrong they could be taken to court. This also goes for compensation for hidden defects.

Background

Developing and deploying an effective and safe vaccine against the virus is the most likely permanent solution to stop the pandemic. To this end, the Commission has proposed an [EU vaccines strategy for COVID-19](#).

On 22 September, the European Parliament will organise a public hearing in Brussels entitled “How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens: clinical trials, production and distribution challenges”, with participation of CEOs of some of the involved companies together with representatives from civil society and the research community.

[Article – Democracy Week: how democracy is dealing with Covid-19](#)

Democracy Week

14-17 September 2020

Overcoming Adversity,
Innovating Democracy



The spread of the coronavirus in 2020 has not only put people's lives in danger, but also transformed how they work, communicate and make political decisions.

On the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on 15 September, the European Parliament is organising, together with non-governmental organisations, a conference focusing on the repercussions of the crisis on democracy and fundamental freedoms.

MEPs, representatives from other EU institutions and NGOs will discuss how to counter restrictions to democratic checks and balances and civic participation and support the functioning of democratic systems.

Digital trends, virtual parliaments and Belarus

A series of discussions will focus on the various ways Covid-19 affects democratic institutions.

A political discussion on Monday 14 September will consider the state of global democracy during the pandemic.

The following day various speakers will present their vision for the future of democracy after the pandemic: European Parliament President, David Sassoli; Vice-President Heidi Hautala; Commission vice-president Věra Jourová; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet; as well as Kevin Casas-Zamora, the secretary-general of The International Institute for

Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

The conference will host panel discussions on (all times are CET):

- How digital technologies are changing the political landscape (Tuesday, 18.00)
- The impact of Covid-19 on the media and the rise of disinformation (Wednesday, 15.00)
- How political parties are operating in the pandemic (Wednesday, 17.00)
- The protests in Belarus (Thursday, 10.30)
- How parliaments are going online to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic (Thursday, 15.00)

ESMA ISSUES LATEST DOUBLE VOLUME CAP DATA

Today's updates include DVC data and calculations for the period 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020 as well as updates to already published DVC periods.

The number of new breaches is 37: 26 equities for the 8% cap, applicable to all trading venues, and 11 equities for the 4% cap, that applies to individual trading venues. Trading under the waivers for all new instruments in breach of the DVC thresholds should be suspended from 11 September 2020 to 10 March 2021. The instruments for which caps already existed from previous periods will continue to be suspended.

In addition, ESMA highlights that none of the previously identified breaches of the caps proved to be incorrect thus no previously identified suspensions of trading under the waivers had to be lifted.

As of 7 September 2020, there is a total of 288 instruments suspended.

ESMA does not update DVC files older than 6 months.