



## The planetary environmental crisis

### AIDE-MÉMOIRE

#### For enhanced country action on the planetary environmental crisis



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The planetary environmental crisis comprises climate change, pollution of air, water and soil, and the destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems, including desertification and land degradation. This threatens the availability of safe drinking water and nutritious food, increases the risk of extreme weather events, and exacerbates economic instability and social inequalities.

The planetary environmental crisis is impacting on infectious diseases, including the surge in zoonoses, as well as non-communicable diseases. The way in which the planetary environmental crisis is tackled will determine our health, the viability of our planet, and the future of humanity.

Yet efficient solutions exist to overcome this crisis. Furthermore, states have recently agreed through the United Nations General Assembly on their obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment<sup>1</sup>.

### WHO support to countries

- Assesses exposure to and health impacts of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, and provides national and global data.
- Prepares country-specific information on exposures, health impacts and policies in environment, climate change and health.
- Establishes guidance and tools for implementing evidence-based environmental health guidelines and standards, and related policies and legislation.
- Provides a compendium of effective interventions in environment, climate change and health.
- Develops training and capacity building resources on climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss and health.
- Highlights co-benefits of tackling the planetary environmental crisis to other sectors, such as health benefits, progress on sustainable development goals (SDGs), and progress towards carbon neutrality.

### ✓ Checklist

#### Situation assessment

- ☐ Monitoring programmes for harmful exposures established, information accessible to public.
- ☐ Environmental, health and social impacts of all plans and policies assessed.

#### Policies & actions

- ☐ Climate and environmental protection considered in all relevant plans or policies.
- ☐ Collaboration across sectors established for effectively addressing the planetary environmental crisis.
- ☐ Mechanisms in place to prevent private interests to influence policies on health and environment.
- ☐ National plan implemented for phasing out fossil fuels; shifting to sustainable energy, industry, transport, agriculture, buildings, food, and cities; and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.
- ☐ Mechanisms in place to prevent private interests to influence policies on health and environment.

#### Awareness raising & capacity building

- ☐ Adequate information regarding the cause and consequences of the planetary environmental crisis provided to the public.
- ☐ The relevance of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment included in general education curriculum.

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the companion aide mémoire on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

## Key elements for country action

### Governance

- Collaborate across sectors for clean air, clean water, waste and pollution reduction, healthy and sustainably produced food, healthy ecosystems and biodiversity and a safe climate.
- Eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and redirect these resources to support sustainable activities.
- Ensure health gains and climate and environmental protection are considered in relevant policies from energy, industry, transport, agriculture, land use and building sector.
- Strengthen core national capacities to effectively respond to extreme weather events, emerging infectious diseases, and pollution, and manage hazardous chemical.
- Implement the polluter pays principle.
- Use the best available science for policy making.
- Cooperate with other countries to address the planetary environmental crisis.
- Avoid private interests influencing the protection of health and the environment.
- Transform the economic system to avoid profit and economic growth being prioritised over people, nature and human rights.

### Reducing hazards from climate change, toxic environments & nature loss

- Phase out fossil fuels.
- Shift to sustainable and clean energy, industrial technologies and practices, transport options, and agricultural practices, a more plant-based diet, reduced waste generation and food loss, and compact cities.
- Prevent ecosystem loss and degradation; restore degraded land, coasts and seas.
- Implement policies and interventions that simultaneously address climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and health.
- Reduce health vulnerability to climate change and pollution by ensuring appropriate monitoring of risks, food and water security and establishing early warning systems for extreme weather events.
- Prevent exposures through eliminating production, use and release of toxic substances, regulating industries, emissions, chemicals and waste management and promote innovation and acceleration of safe substitutes.

### Empowering communities

- Increase awareness about the health benefits of climate action, environmental protection, pollution abatement, and biodiversity and ecosystem protection among decision makers and the public.
- Include the relevance of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as part of a comprehensive ecological education and human rights curriculum, from kindergarten through university
- Ensure meaningful, informed, inclusive and equitable public participation in climate and environmental decision-making
- Respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in relation to climate and environmental matters
- Actively improve existing situations of climate and environmental injustice.
- Raise awareness about the health and environmental benefits of changing behaviours related to food choices, transportation, and consumption.

### Additional information:



<https://www.who.int/health-topics/environmental-health>

### Main resources:

- [The right to a healthy environment, a user's guide. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner \(OHCHR\), 2024.](#)
- [WHO topic page on climate change](#)
- [WHO topic page on air pollution](#)
- [WHO topic page on chemical safety](#)
- [WHO factsheet on biodiversity](#)
- [WHO EURO factsheet on biodiversity](#)

Please note that this aide mémoire provides summary information on the planetary environmental crisis. More details on environment, climate change and health are provided in various other materials. Furthermore, additional aide mémoires are provided on climate change, air and chemical pollution, the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and other topics in environment, climate change and health.