

## World Health Organization submission on the suggested topics of the Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme in 2024:

### Crucial role of health co-benefits of climate action

This submission is made by the World Health Organization (WHO) to bring attention to the importance of **health co-benefits of climate action** and the need to take them into account in the global response to climate change.

Consideration of the health co-benefits of climate action provides a powerful opportunity to raise global ambition in pursuing the set targets, accelerating mitigation action, and achieving a just transition.

**Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases** through better transport, food and energy use choices **can result in very large gains for health**, particularly through reduced air pollution.<sup>1</sup>

The IPCC has concluded that the value of the direct health gains that would result from meeting the Paris Agreement mitigation goals – from improved air quality alone – would be greater than the cost of implementing the necessary mitigation. Considering the wider health gains of climate change mitigation, for example through more sustainable and healthy food systems, would bring even larger health benefits, and an even stronger health rationale for ambitious mitigation measures.

In addition to the large health cobenefits of low carbon energy, transport, food and urban systems, the damage costs of unmitigated climate change to health (i.e. including the effects of increased malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea etc., but excluding costs in health-determining sectors such as agriculture and water and sanitation) is estimated to be between US\$ 2–4 billion per year by 2030. Areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries – will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond.

The previous submission to the Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme, made by the Global Climate and Health Alliance (GCHA) and partners on 22 May 2023, equally outlined the key principles for maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing negative impacts.<sup>2</sup>

The COP26 special report on climate change and health, produced by WHO in collaboration with the health community, proposed a set of priority actions, calling on the governments and policy makers to act with urgency on the current climate and health crises. The recommendations of the COP26 Special Report included:

- Harness the health benefits of climate action;
- Build health resilience to climate risks;
- Create energy systems that protect and improve climate and health;
- Reimagine urban environments, transport, and mobility;
- Protect and restore nature as the foundation of our health;
- Promote healthy, sustainable, and resilient food systems;
- Finance a healthier, fairer, and greener future to save lives;
- Listen to the health community and prescribe urgent climate action.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Climate change – WHO Factsheet. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202305220009---Global%20Climate%20and%20Health%20Alliance%20and%20Partners\\_Mitigation%20Work%20Programme%20Submission\\_May%202023.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202305220009---Global%20Climate%20and%20Health%20Alliance%20and%20Partners_Mitigation%20Work%20Programme%20Submission_May%202023.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> COP26 special report on climate change and health: the health argument for climate action. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240036727>

## ***Current state of knowledge***

Climate change is directly contributing to humanitarian emergencies from heatwaves, wildfires, floods, tropical storms and hurricanes and they are increasing in scale, frequency and intensity. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year, from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress alone.<sup>4</sup>

The 2023 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change confirms that climate change is increasingly impacting the health and survival of people worldwide, and projections show these risks could worsen steeply with further inaction. For instance, the year 2023 has marked the highest global temperatures in over 100 000 years. On top of the direct health impacts, the economic losses associated with global heating increasingly harm livelihoods, limit resilience, and restrict the funds available to tackle climate change. Economic losses from extreme weather events increased by 23% between 2010–14 and 2018–22, amounting to US\$264 billion in 2022 alone, whereas heat exposure led to global potential income losses worth \$863 billion. Labour capacity loss resulting from heat exposure affected low and medium Human Development Index (HDI) countries the most, exacerbating global inequities, with potential income losses equivalent to 6.1% and 3.8% of their gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) also concludes that climate risks are appearing faster and will become more severe sooner than previously expected, and it will be harder to adapt with increased global heating. The Report reveals that approximately 3.3 to 3.6 billion people already live in the areas highly susceptible to climate change. Despite contributing minimally to global emissions, low-income countries and small island developing states (SIDS) endure the harshest health impacts. In vulnerable regions, the death rate from extreme weather events in the last decade was 15 times higher than in less vulnerable ones.<sup>6</sup>

The IPCC AR6 Working Group III report highlights the co-benefits of climate action for physical and mental health. It confirms that low-emission transitions in various sectors, such as energy and transport, will have multiple co-benefits, including improvements in air quality and health.<sup>7</sup> Global GHG emission reductions aligned with the Paris Agreement would result in 3.3 million fewer deaths from PM2.5 and 9.6 million fewer deaths from unhealthy, carbon intensive diets occurring annually.<sup>8</sup>

Blue and green infrastructure in cities both mitigate climate change through carbon sinks, and also improve the mental and physical health of urban dwellers.<sup>9</sup>

Taken together, considering the health implications of climate change mitigation constitutes a powerful, evidence based – and largely underappreciated – rationale for more ambitious climate change mitigation.

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<sup>4</sup> Climate change – WHO Factsheet. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

<sup>5</sup> The 2023 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: the imperative for a health-centred response in a world facing irreversible harms. Romanello, Marina et al. The Lancet, Volume 402, Issue 10419, 2346 - 2394

<sup>6</sup> IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1–34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

<sup>7</sup> Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change. Working Group III Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-3/>

<sup>8</sup> Romanello et al, 2021. The 2021 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: code red for a healthy future. Lancet 398(10311): 1619–1662 doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01787-6

<sup>9</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022. Sixth Assessment Report: Mitigation of Climate Change, the Working Group III contribution - sections 8.2, 8.4.4.