

Statement on the European Green Deal – 7 September 2020

On the **first International Day of Clean Air for blue skies** on 7 September 2020, the European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy & Asthma reminds the importance of air quality for human health and the key role of the European Green Deal in ensuring clean, breathable air for all, reducing the number of deaths and diseases from environmental pollution and mitigating the impact of climate change. As a group of MEPs dedicated to supporting policy actions to address the unmet needs of allergy and asthma at the EU level, we welcome the Deal's objectives including achieving zero pollution, transitioning to clean energy and sustainable mobility, halting loss of biodiversity, reinstating healthy ecosystems and increasing the traceability and sustainability of food from farm to fork.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has required an immediate shift in global and European priorities. Yet, it is encouraging to see many global initiatives for planetary health led by the United Nations system, as well as the European Commission's commitment to deliver the European Green Deal. Coupled with the strong political support demonstrated for a 'Green Recovery' linking COVID-19 exit strategies to green policy, as well as an expanded EU mandate on public health, we are hopeful that Europe is getting closer to adopting a 'One Health' approach.

Healthy environments play a crucial role in the prevention and control of diseases like allergy and asthma, two of the most common chronic diseases. They currently impact more than 150 million citizens and are estimated to affect half of all Europeans by 2025. Environmental factors such as diet and exposure to air pollution, tobacco smoke and chemicals are major 'exposome' elements triggering allergy and asthma.

Below, we highlight key elements of the Green Deal which present an unprecedented opportunity to significantly improve allergy and asthma health while firmly placing Europe's economy on a more sustainable path:

Zero pollution

- Air pollution is the deadliest environmental determinant in the EU, estimated to cause over 400.000 premature deaths each year¹. While air pollution impacts everyone, people with allergies and asthma are particularly affected.
- Polluted urban areas are associated with higher mortality rates from COVID-19^{2,3}.
- In light of the ambition for climate-neutrality for 2050⁴ and the target of 50-55% less greenhouse gas emissions by 2030⁵, the decision to review air quality standards to align with WHO guidelines is crucial, as it is favourable to both planetary and human health.

¹ European Environment Agency, Air Quality in Europe, 2019 report <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2019>

² Y. Ogen, 'Assessing nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels as a contributing factor to coronavirus (COVID-19) fatality', April 2020 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720321215>

³ D. Liang et al. 'Urban Air Pollution May Enhance COVID-19 Case-Fatality and Mortality Rates in the United States', May 2020 <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.04.20090746v1.full.pdf>

⁴ European Climate Law https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/law_en

⁵ European Union, 2030 Climate Target Plan <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12265-2030-Climate-Target-Plan/public-consultation>

- Poor indoor air quality takes a heavy toll especially on vulnerable groups like people with allergy and asthma⁶. Risk factors stemming from unhealthy closed spaces and occupational exposure⁷ should also be deeply embedded in the proposed 'Renovation Wave'. Common standards should be defined through an Indoor Air Quality Certification.
- In addition to their environmental impact, chemicals (including endocrine disruptors) threaten public health. Exposure to these pollutants can cause and exacerbate allergy and asthma. The EU must take ambitious and measurable actions toward a toxic-free environment.

Clean energy

- The goal of further decarbonising the energy system is critical to reach climate objectives as well as to improve allergy and asthma health. Energy performance of buildings is not only a concern for tackling climate change but also a significant public health issue.
- To improve indoor air quality, construction and renovation of buildings should be made with a view to improve energy efficiency and protect human health from chemical pollutants and other kinds of contaminants.

Sustainable mobility

- The objective of reducing emissions from transport is of utmost importance and must be closely monitored to deliver lasting results.
- Switching to more sustainable mobility solutions that reduce fossil fuel dependence will contribute greatly to air quality, especially in urban areas where the occurrence of asthma and allergy is disproportionately high.

Biodiversity

- External environmental biodiversity exposures may have far-reaching effects on human microbiome and immune function that are linked to the development of allergy and asthma.
- The loss of biodiversity affects sources, emissions and main aeroallergens and chemical air pollutants that may influence allergic diseases⁸.
- Halting loss of biodiversity by addressing unsustainable use of resources can be crucial in reversing the current exponential surge in allergic diseases and asthma⁹.
- Through its effects on biodiversity, climate change is contributing to extended seasonal duration and increased pollen load for multiple aero allergenic pollen, heavily impacting human health. Therefore a real-time monitoring of pollen would ensure the timely dissemination of and access to information to citizens with pollen allergies¹⁰.

⁶ A. Asikainen, P. Carrer, S. Kephelopoulou, E. de Oliveira Fernandes, P. Wargocki, O. Hänninen, "Reducing burden of disease from residential indoor air exposures in Europe", March 2018 <https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12940-016-0101-8>

⁷ O. Vandenplas et al., "Severe Occupational Asthma: Insights From a Multicenter European Cohort", 2019 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2213219819302818?via%3Dihub>

⁸ EAACI White Paper <http://webcast.eaaci.cyim.com/mediatheque/media.aspx?mediald=60234&channel=8518>

⁹ T. Haahtela, 'A Biodiversity Hypothesis', March 2019 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/all.13763>

¹⁰ A. Damialis, C. Traindl-Hoffmann, R. Treudler, 'Climate Change and Pollen Allergies', June 2019 https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-02318-8_3

From Farm to Fork Strategy

- We welcome the initiative to increase the traceability and sustainability of food from farm to fork, while addressing unsustainable agricultural practices leading to loss of biodiversity and emissions.
- Food production processes are a key environmental risk factor for allergy and asthma patients¹¹.
- Food additives and artificial flavours may cause severe allergic reactions¹².
- Protecting patients with food allergies should be among the key priorities of the Strategy, because access to accurate food information is crucial for them. In some severe cases, exposure to even traces of some ingredients can be fatal.
 - An EU-wide harmonised approach is needed on Precautionary Allergen Labelling, including on its wording and conditions for use.
 - Scientific and clinical research should be supported in order to establish reference doses for each of the 14 food allergens listed in the EU Food Information to Consumers Regulation.
 - Greater safety in novel foods should be ensured by integrating new scientific evidence on the allergenicity of novel foods from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

About the Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma

The European Parliament Interest Group on Allergy and Asthma is an informal group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) committed to address unmet needs of allergy and asthma at EU level and improve prevention, care and research to the benefit of people living with allergy and asthma in Europe.

More information [here](#).

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¹¹ European Environment Agency, Air Pollution Sources, 2019 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/air-pollution-sources-1/air-pollution-sources>

¹² R. L. Valluzzi, V. Fierro, S. Arasi, M/ Mennini, V. Pecora, A. Fiocchi, 'Allergy to Food Additives' June 2019, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30883393/>