



Key messages from joint meeting

Air Pollution and Health: Recent Advances to Inform the European Green Deal January 21-22, 2020, Brussels, Belgium



The Health Effects Institute, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE), and the European Respiratory Society (ERS) were pleased to organize a joint meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on January 21-22. The event was also supported by the European Commission.

At the meeting, “Air Pollution and Health: Recent Advances to Inform the European Green Deal,” participants reviewed the latest science on major pollutants, such as particulate matter 2.5 μm or less in diameter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), as a key step in evaluating whether to update Europe’s air quality policies.

Updated Evidence on Health Effects

Ambient air pollution continues to be a major public health risk in Europe, leading to increased hospitalizations for many diseases, reduced birth weight, and early death. Although air pollution levels are declining in most European countries, new studies have reported strong associations with health effects at levels below current standards, with no observable thresholds. New studies also strengthen the evidence on the health effects of NO_2 . This updated evidence raises questions about the need for lower standards to improve public health even further.

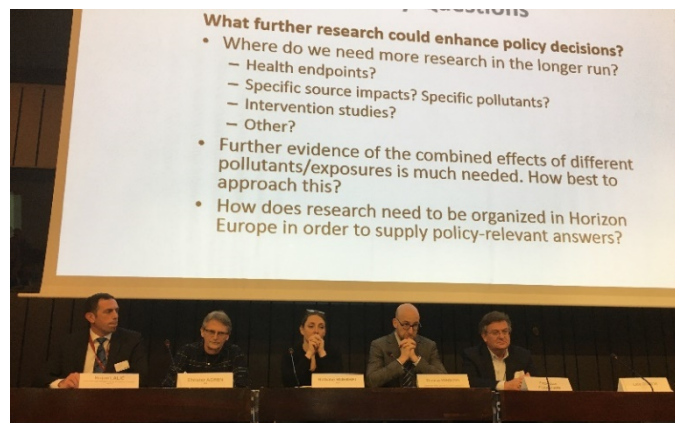
Role of WHO Guidelines

Regular assessments of the latest science, as well as accountability studies on air pollution and health effects, are crucial to inform Europe’s air quality policies. The WHO Air Quality Guidelines, and the current update, will play an important role when Europe further develops the European Green Deal. Current air quality standards are instrumental, but only partially



effective in curbing air pollution levels. As recently mentioned by Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans, and Fisheries, the Commission is considering revising air quality standards to align them more closely with the WHO guidelines.

The estimated health benefits outweigh by far the implementation costs of air quality actions.



Systemic Approach Needed

To maximize health benefits, it is important to implement measures that would reduce peak exposures in specific hotspots as well as the average exposure of *all* EU citizens. To tackle the health effects of air pollution, bold air quality actions are needed at all levels (international, national, local) and across all sectors (e.g., transport, energy, agriculture).

The estimated health benefits outweigh by far the implementation costs of air quality actions. As there are key co-benefits between air quality and climate actions, a systemic approach, which also takes equity issues into account, will be needed to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The European Green Deal and the Commission's pollution action plan for air, water, and soil to be adopted by 2021 will provide a unique opportunity to implement fundamental changes and build upon the synergies between air quality and climate actions.

For more information on the meeting, click [here](#) or contact [Hanna Boogaard](#).

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Pictured above: "What's Next for the Green Deal?" panelists, from left: Bojan Lalić, diplomatic counselor for environment, Croatia; Christer Ågren, Air Pollution and Climate Secretariat, Sweden; Nathalie Roebbel, World Health Organization; Thomas Henrichs, European Commission Directorate-General for Environment; and Francesco Forastiere, King's College London. (Photo by Roberta Sadauskaite)