EDITORIAL

Welcome to the fourth HERA newsletter!

We have just completed our second year of the project and we are happy to say that despite the challenges we were able to progress well in identifying further research needs that should enrich the HERA interim research agenda released in March 2020. In the second half of 2020, we organized five interactive online stakeholder workshops in October and November. Under the current circumstances, it has required significant efforts from both the organizers and participants, but since we all have a strong motivation in providing inputs to and identify potential gaps or new research needs for the upcoming EU research agenda 2020–2030 in the environment, health and climate change nexus, we made it a success with a lot of inputs and positive feedback from participants.

Moreover, we have also been following closely the newly developed and recently released EU strategies such as EU Chemicals Strategy and the corresponding EU Zero Pollution Action Plan and their research dimension. The Action Plan is now open for comments and we will send ours during January. We have already provided HERA consortium views to the Zero Pollution Action Plan Roadmap and we will keep providing inputs to other upcoming EU Green Deal strategies and Horizon Europe implementing documents that will be open for comments in 2021.

Finally, below you can find a contribution from our civil society partner HEAL, the Health and Environment Alliance, on their role and perspectives in HERA. HEAL is the leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the natural and built environments affect health in the European Union.

We have a lot to share with you in 2021 and we look forward to our further cooperations.

Have a pleasant reading!

Kateřina Šebková
on behalf of the HERA Communication team

PS — The next HERA newsletter will be released in June 2021.

HERA opinion paper

The EU consultation to gather views of citizens on the Roadmap to EU Action Plan “Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil” was opened until 29 October 2020 and the HERA consortium used the opportunity to provide EU with its view. We outlined that the upcoming EU Action Plan “Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil” would need a research component essential and integral to an optimal sustainable effort to protect EU citizens. We pointed out that many gaps in our knowledge on assessing effects of policies including technological developments and economic activities implementation on ecosystems, human populations and society remain to date. We agreed that the EU organizes identification of levels and trends of contaminants in air, water and soil via range of monitoring activities, but our understanding of evaluations and analysis of impacts of measures undertaken was far from comprehensive. Research activities could contribute to minimization of the incidence of physical and mental diseases cases caused by pollution in Europe and we also provided references to more detailed sections of the HERA interim research agenda document connected to the action plan topical fields.

To read our entire opinion, please visit this link.

Do you want to be involved in HERA?

You can find us on internet, Facebook and Twitter (@HERAresearch). We are also performing stakeholder surveys and prepare regional workshops, so visit our website to get the news and register to get to our mailing list or fill the stakeholder recruitment form.

In addition, HERA teams are also active in scientific conferences (environment, climate and health) and in policy meetings at national, EU and global levels.

Please contact us if you have any questions or wish to communicate HERA in your meetings.
HERA: involving science into health-protecting and -promoting health and planetary policies

For our climate, environment and health policies to be future proof, they have to be based on and include the latest science.

In the ongoing pandemic, we have seen the benefits of decision-makers listening to scientists, as well as the dangers of falling short on doing just that.

And it is by far not the only health crisis we face: now more than ever scientists have to speak up (and be listened to!) about health, environment and climate change, and the many ways they play into each other. And this is all what HERA is about, and has been even before COVID19.

HEAL's involvement in the HERA project is two-fold:

First, we have helped to get civil society and other key stakeholders involved in setting out the priorities for the EH2030 research agenda through a series of online workshops across Europe to get feedback on HERA’s interim agenda. Many HEAL member organisations and health partners took part and appreciated an opportunity to prioritise key areas for future research as well as reflect on how to integrate and elevate the impact of the pandemic and climate change in this research agenda. HERA’s COVID 19 statement already signals needed key research. The EEA’s most recent briefing illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic has mixed impacts on the environment including some temporary improvements in air quality, noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. It also shows the negative impacts such as increased use of single plastics and the need to reshape our unsustainable production and consumption patterns.

Secondly, we have been involved in supporting a greater science-policy interface and ensuring that HERA is also monitoring and responding to opportunities within the European Green Deal, its zero-pollution strategy and in the context of the EU’s recovery plans. Here are a few highlights where EU environmental health research will need to focus on:

— The European Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability which is a major step forward in the delivery of Europe's Zero Pollution Objective, by insisting that the ability of the strategy to truly minimise people’s exposure to harmful substances and prevent diseases will highly depend on the practical implementation of the proposed initiatives and the commitment to put innovation at the service of protection.
— The European Union’s target on reducing greenhouse gases, by underlining the fact that the science is clear — cuts of at least -65% are needed by 2030.

Protecting every human being from pollution — especially those that are most vulnerable — requires developing and implementing disease preventing policies that build on the latest science, prioritise prevention and precaution (e.g. preventing pollution at source) and are enshrined in binding legislation with clear goals and timelines.

Ending health harm from pollution requires firm preventive and remedial action and needs political will and commitment at all levels of policy making. And coherently expressed scientific voices and policy-relevant research to address these challenges is a major driving force of such a societal and economic transformation that both people and the planet need.

About the author

Génon K. Jensen is the Founder and Executive Director of HEAL, with more than 20 years of experience in environmental health issues.
Useful documents for Health Environment Climate Nexus

We would like to draw your attention to three recently released interesting reports that would be useful for future work in the health-environment-climate nexus.

**EEA Signals 2020 — Towards zero pollution in Europe**

EEA report, October 2020

The report ‘EEA Signals 2020 — Towards zero pollution in Europe’ presents an overview of air, water and soil pollution as well as other angles to the topic, based on previously published EEA information and data. It looks at different types of pollution and their sources and presents measures to improve air quality, which would improve people's health. It shows main pressures on Europe's freshwater bodies and seas, and how soil pollution is still a wide-spread and growing problem. Last but not least, the report brings also an interview with Francesca Racioppi, Head of the World Health Organization's European Centre for Environment and Health.

**COVID-19 and Europe’s environment**

EEA briefing No. 13, November 2020

In November, EEA released a briefing outlining both positive and negative impacts of the anti-pandemic measures over Europe. Data show there were temporary improvements in air quality, lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower levels of noise pollution. However, the assessment also stresses that there have been negative consequences such as increased use of single-use plastics, and that ways out of the pandemic should focus on reshaping our unsustainable production and consumption systems to achieve long-term environmental benefits. 

[link HERE](https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/eeabriefing13-2020)

**Healthy environment, healthy lives: how the environment influences health and well-being in Europe**

EEA Report, September 2020

The report draws extensively on World Health Organization data on the causes of death and disease and highlights how the quality of Europe’s environment plays a key role in determining our health and well-being. 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.

Selected key findings:

- 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.
- 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 first HERA publication

As a follow-up to our first HERA webinar entitled "Research Needs Around the Interlinkages of the COVID-19 Pandemic with Environment Climate and Health" organized on 15 June 2020, we further worked on our findings and we are very pleased to announce that our joint article "The COVID-19 pandemic and global environmental change: emerging research needs" was published in a peer reviewed journal Environment International and is now available online. We invite all of you to read it [at this link].

HERA calendar

13 October 2020, HERA regional workshop — Germany and Austria (online)
20 October 2020, HERA stakeholder workshop — France, Belgium and the Netherlands (online)
3 November 2020, HERA workshop for WHO countries (online)
5 November 2020, Stakeholder workshop — Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (online)
18 November 2020, Southern stakeholder Workshop — Greece, Spain, Italy, Northern Macedonia (online)

February 2021, HERA Consultation group meeting — stakeholder input to research agenda
HERA Green Deal webinars — from February till November 2021

Follow up our website with the most up-to-date plans where you can meet us in the near future (online)!

HERA Consortium wishes you a Healthy and Prosperous 2021!

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