# Reducing pollution is key to overcome health inequalities across the EU

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The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, a joint initiative of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission (EC), held its second meeting on 25 April with a focus on health and the Zero Pollution Action Plan as a key driver for the reduction of water, air and soil pollution and of health inequalities in the EU.

Health inequalities in the EU can and must be urgently addressed, in particular through the Zero Pollution Action Plan and its dedicated flagship initiative focusing on "Reducing health inequalities through zero pollution". This was one of the key messages shared by the participants of the second Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform on 25 April, who underlined the dramatic impact that environmental pollution has on human health – as 17% of lung cancer deaths are linked to air pollution and 11% of premature deaths in the EU are due to environmental pollution. In addition to reducing water, air and soil pollution, a key objective of the newly created platform is therefore to contribute to improving public health and to reducing health inequalities, as specific groups of citizens are more exposed or vulnerable to pollution and its impact on health.

Marieke Schouten (NL/Greens), Co-Chair of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform and Alderman of the municipality of Nieuwegein, said: " The Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform is a crucial step towards achieving the Green Deal ambitions of the European Union. Ensuring equal access to health for all EU citizens through zero pollution is essential to work towards more resilience and an environmentally friendly Europe. Science and innovation are innovative tools and important inputs for concrete actions to fight pollution." Marieke Schouten, CoR rapporteur on zero pollution further emphasized that the different thematic areas and activities on zero pollution are coherent with the CoR's Green Deal Going Local flagship

initiative.

Patrick Child, Deputy Director General of DG Environment of the European Commission and Co-Chair of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, said: "The European Green Deal including the work that we are doing on zero pollution is even more necessary against the background of the present crisis and the Russian invasion in Ukraine. The challenge of energy security addressed in the Commission's RePowerEU strategy calls for rapid acceleration of decarbonisation and deployment of renewable energy, which should have direct benefits for the EU's zero pollution goals. This platform ensures we advance hand in hand with vital partners and stakeholders to secure the fullest possible benefits to citizens in term of environmental protection and public health."

The Executive Director of the European Environment Agency Hans Bruyninckx stressed that: " There is a slow but continuous process towards the zero pollution ambition. We need to improve health across the European Union while reducing inequalities. " He further highlighted the need to prevent diseases provoked or made worse by pollution, including through the Zero Pollution Action Plan, so as to provide a better quality of life to EU citizens, while protecting the environment.

Members of the platform also discussed the Commission proposals under the Sustainable Products Initiative and for a revised Industrial Emissions Directive. These initiatives aim to reduce pollution and to ensure more circular production and consumption cycles, in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. Participants pointed out that science and innovation offer new solutions to tackle environmental pollution and that these innovations need to be deployed and implemented, in particular, at the local and regional level.

Presenting his CoR opinion on Horizon Europe Missions , the President of the Helsinki Region, Markku Markkula (FI/EPP) underlined that the 'Missions' are a new and vital instrument that can have a strong impact on reaching the zero pollution target. He stressed that "we must build a new working culture based on knowledge sharing in order to reduce the gap between academia, industrial experts and policymakers". The former CoR president concluded by recalling that "Foresight activities are important to

understand large flows of information and to implement shared knowledge by combining culture, learning, capacity building and research. There is a need for more investment in Research and Innovation to develop our carbon handprint – that is able to counterbalance pollution and our carbon footprint. For that we must involve industrial partners and business actors."

The meeting was also the occasion to discuss the adoption of the Platform's Work Programme 2022-2024. The 3rd meeting of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform is scheduled in October 2022.The invitation for the next meeting and information on workshops and other events are available on the Platform's web page.

The first meeting of the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform took place on 16 December 2021 with the presence of the Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries Virginijus Sinkevičius and the President of the European Committee of the Regions and Governor of the Region of Central Macedonia in Greece, Apostolos Tzitzikostas. You can read the press release here and watch the session here.

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