

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH: A CHALLENGE FOR URBAN MANAGEMENT IN THE COMING YEARS

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Traditional approaches to environment and health have predominantly focused on individual hazards in compartmentalized natural environments. Today, it is recognized that **the dynamics between the environment, health and well-being are complex**, highlighting the importance of an emerging issue within public health: environmental health.

The pollution of our environment or extreme weather events have great repercussions on our health. The main risks for urban populations include **greater exposure to air pollution, high noise levels or the heat island effect**.

This relevance becomes even more present when the weight of environmental determinants in health is quantified. According to the WHO, it is estimated that in 2012 the **Environmental factors were responsible for 13% of deaths in the EU**, and, according to the OECD, **air pollution in cities will be the main environmental cause of death by 2050**. Some data published by the [EEA](#) make clear the importance of environmental health:

- Air pollution is the main environmental factor contributing to morbidity and mortality, with around 400,000 premature deaths each year in the EU.
- Heat waves are the deadliest extreme weather across Europe, and urban areas are particularly affected by the heat island effect. Under current climate scenarios, additional deaths due to heat waves could reach more than 130,000 per year.
- In Europe an [increase in mortality between 1-4% is estimated for each degree of temperature increasing](#), that is, an increase of more than 30,000 deaths per year in the 2030s.
- Exposure to environmental noise causes 12,000 premature deaths per year and contributes to 48,000 new cases of ischemic heart disease each year.

It is also underlined that **these deaths [could be prevented by reversing environmental degradation and eliminating environmental health risks](#)**.

Green solutions, such as the expansion of high-quality green and blue spaces in urban areas, offer a triple advantage, by mitigating environmental pollution, addressing climate change impacts and fostering biodiversity, improving health and well-being of the population and, in turn, promote social cohesion.

Another noteworthy aspect is that these environmental variables present synergies and relationships among themselves, therefore, **knowing the relationships that exist between the different environmental factors, health and quality of life is essential to develop joint solutions**. Evidence suggests that it is usually a combination of factors that impacts health and intensifies the effects on vulnerable people.

In any case, the approach to health from an environmental perspective shows great potential, which leaves room to continue improving the understanding, study and development of variables and interrelationships. For this analysis of the effect of environmental determinants on people's health **work protocols should be designed that focus on [biomonitoring](#) and the measurement of indicators** such as Disability Adjusted Life Years or DALYs, relative risk, premature mortality or

years of life lost, among others.

With all this, what is sought is to transmit that to fight against the growing data of morbidity and mortality in environmental health, **it is crucial implement an inclusive perspective, defined through policies and action plans** that have the common purpose of protecting the health of citizens and, in particular, of those segments of the population such as children and the elderly, who are more vulnerable.

