

## **EUROPEAN SPECIALIST NURSES ORGANIZATION**

### **ZAGREB DECLARATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPACT OF SPECIALIST NURSES**

Adriano Friganovic, Josefine Declay, Aleksandar Racz, Ljerka Armano, Vedrana Vejzovic,  
Jackie Rowles, Enrique Castro Sachez, Annemarie Bergsma, Fernanda Olive, Ber Oomen,  
Alessandro Stievano, Joris Vugt

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At a time when the effects of climate change have shifted from projection to lived experience, nurses stand at the frontlines of a planetary emergency that now reshapes health, equity, safety and the very conditions for life. Rising temperatures, ecological disruption, and widening social inequalities are converging to redefine what it means to protect health in the twenty-first century.

#### **PREAMBLE**

Recognizing that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a profound and escalating threat to planetary health, equity, and the survival of all beings, including humankind, we, specialist nurses and healthcare professionals - gathered in Zagreb for the 7<sup>th</sup> ESNO congress 30 May 2025, declare our unified commitment to confront this crisis with urgency, evidence-based expertise, and unwavering compassion.

We stand at a pivotal moment in history, when the effects of climate change have moved from projection to lived experience, biodiversity loss and pollution, are no longer future predictions, but present realities. Rising temperatures, ecological disruption, and widening social inequalities are converging to redefine what it means to protect health in the twenty-first century. From intensifying heatwaves and extreme weather events to the rising prevalence of infectious diseases and growing health disparities, the health implications of a warming planet are widespread and accelerating.

We further affirm that the wellbeing of humans is inseparable from the wellbeing of other species and the ecosystems that sustain life on Earth. The degradation of biodiversity, soils, oceans, and forests constitutes not only an ecological tragedy but also a direct threat to global health security and moral responsibility.

As healthcare providers and advocates for vulnerable populations, we affirm that protecting human health must be central to climate action. As we are responsible for providing best health care, and for assuring healthy and safe environments.

Confronting the climate emergency requires however more than adaptation to its consequences. It demands understanding and acting upon the structural determinants (economic, political, industrial, and social) that drive planetary degradation. Nurses must therefore be not only witnesses to ecological and human suffering but agents who understand and influence the upstream systems that sustain human and ecological health.

### **Acknowledging That**

- Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, aggravating existing health inequities and placing disproportionate and unjust burdens on all individuals, marginalized communities, including children, the older adults, migrants, Indigenous peoples, and persons with chronic or mental health conditions.
- Specialist nurses are uniquely positioned at the intersection of clinical care, community engagement, and health system innovation. We witness firsthand the growing burden of climate-sensitive conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, vector-borne illnesses, and mental health disorders linked to eco-anxiety, and displacement. They also observe the cascading ecological effects of a destabilised biosphere, including habitat loss, biodiversity collapse, and disruptions to food and water systems which erode the foundations of public health and planetary resilience.
- The healthcare sector itself is a significant contributor to carbon emissions and must be held accountable for transitioning toward environmentally sustainable practices without compromising the quality or accessibility of care, and sustainability should be considered one of the aspects of quality in healthcare.

- Addressing the health impact of climate change requires robust, interdisciplinary collaboration involving public health, environmental science, education, urban planning, and beyond, in a truly One Health approach.
- We also acknowledge that health outcomes are shaped not only by the direct effects of climate change but by the social, political, and economic systems that perpetuate this crisis. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns, exploitative labour practices, inequitable transport and housing models, and globalised supply chains all contribute to the destabilisation of planetary life-support systems.
- Recognising these interconnections expands our nursing role from clinical adaptation to systemic transformation, demanding engagement with multiple policy arenas, in health care, employment, education, energy, and beyond.

### **We Hereby Declare That**

1. Specialist nurses must be empowered through comprehensive education and training to recognize, assess, and respond to the health consequences of climate change in their clinical roles, including through early detection, prevention, and culturally competent care.
2. Educational frameworks should explicitly incorporate competencies which enable nurses to understand the interdependence of species, ecosystems, and societies, and to advocate for sustainable and equitable practices.
3. This education must also equip nurses with the epistemic and political literacy required to understand the determinants of the climate crisis, and to advocate effectively for policy reform.
4. Nursing organizations, academic institutions, and healthcare employers must integrate climate science, planetary health, and sustainability into nursing curricula, fostering a generation of professionals equipped to lead and contribute to climate-resilient health initiatives at local, national, and global levels.

5. Research must expand to examine what nurses need to know, how they learn it best, and what systems enable them to act. This includes investigating the behavioural, organisational and cultural barriers to influence in climate and sustainability agendas. Evidence should inform the development of climate-related competencies across all levels of professional formation, from undergraduate to postgraduate and continuing professional education.
6. Research agendas should also explore interspecies health linkages, the health co-benefits of ecosystem restoration, and the ethical dimensions of caring within the shared biosphere.
7. Specialist nurses will actively engage in policy and advocacy efforts to promote health system transformation, pushing for low-carbon operations, green procurement, and climate-informed public health strategies that centre community voice, environmental justice, and equity. To achieve this, nurses require not only technical expertise but also political astuteness, essential competencies for exerting influence within institutions and across society.
8. True resilience lies in collective action. We commit to fostering cross-sector partnerships with healthcare providers, governments, researchers, educators, civil society organizations, and communities to co-create robust, adaptive health systems capable of withstanding and mitigating the health effects of a changing climate.
9. We assert, however, that climate-resilient health systems alone are not sufficient. Nurses must engage with the broader determinants of planetary health, collaborating across relevant sectors to influence the structural conditions that shape health for all living beings in the ecosphere. A holistic, society-wide approach is required to align public health goals with planetary boundaries.

Furthermore, we emphasize the essential role of nature-based interventions, including forest therapy, in integrating green and blue spaces within and around healthcare facilities, thereby strengthening the resilience of health systems to climate change. Such interventions mitigate the impacts of heatwaves by reducing urban heat islands, improving air and water quality, and lowering the risks of floods and waterborne diseases. At the same time, they promote physical activity, support the prevention of chronic diseases, and enhance mental

health and overall well-being. By contributing to biodiversity conservation and the One Health approach, these measures also reduce the risk of emerging infectious diseases. Embedding nature-based solutions into healthcare practice, education, and policy represents a long-term investment in both planetary and human health.

## **CALL TO ACTION**

We call upon governments, regulatory agencies, health institutions, and nursing leadership bodies across Europe and globally to:

- Recognize the vital role of specialist nurses as key actors in climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Invest in nursing education, leadership, and workforce development focused on environmental health and sustainable care.
- Support legislative and institutional reforms that align healthcare practices with planetary boundaries and climate goals, such as those set by the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Foster intersectoral collaboration between healthcare, government structures, and civil society, ensuring that climate and health strategies address the interconnected social and ecological systems that sustain resilience and equity.

Only through decisive, inclusive, and coordinated efforts can we protect public health, reduce inequalities, and secure a viable future for generations to come.

## **CONCLUSION**

As specialist nurses, we feel a professional and ethical duty to protect and promote the health of all people in a rapidly changing world. We embrace this Zagreb Declaration as a call for immediate, united action and as a foundation for long-term leadership, advocacy, and care rooted in equity, sustainability, and justice. We also recognise that compassion and responsibility must extend beyond our own species. The health of humanity is inseparable from the wellbeing of animals, plants, and ecosystems, whose survival conditions our own.

We recognize that to fully realize our commitments, future-oriented action is essential. This includes leveraging technology and digital tools, including artificial intelligence, to support climate-adaptive healthcare in ways that are ethical, sustainable, and resource-conscious, safeguarding the physical and mental well-being of nurses, advancing climate justice for vulnerable populations and future generations, and actively engaging patients, youth, and communities in co-creating strategies.

We affirm the importance of evidence-based updates to clinical protocols/ interventions aimed at improving and protecting planetary health, guided by measurable goals and accountability, ensuring that our declaration remains both visionary and practically actionable.

Our commitment therefore extends beyond the clinic and into the social, political, and ecological systems that sustain life. By combining technical excellence with political awareness and moral courage, specialist nurses can help reimagine the purpose of health systems, not merely as places of treatment, but as drivers of social and ecological repair. Let this declaration mark a turning point: where health systems become champions of climate action, and nurses lead with courage, vision, and care - for both people and the planet.

#### **REFERENCES:**

1. World Health Organization. Climate change and health. 2021: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>
2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Sixth Assessment Report – Summary for Policymakers. 2023: <https://www.ipcc.ch>
3. Hawkins J, Tremblay B, Hawkins RJ, Parrott J. A comparative analysis of relationships among demographics, political affiliation and ideology, climate change, and health perceptions. *Nurs Outlook*. 2025;73(4):102462. doi: 10.1016/j.outlook.2025.102462. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 40561582.

4. Blom IM, Rasheed FN, Singh H, Eckelman MJ, Dhimal M, Hensher M, Guinto RR, McGushin A, Ning X, Prabhakaran P, Romanello M, van Alphen D, Watts N, Yu JC, Zavaleta-Cortijo C, MacNeill AJ, Sherman JD. Evaluating progress and accountability for achieving COP26 Health Programme international ambitions for sustainable, low-carbon, resilient health-care systems. *Lancet Planet Health*. 2024;8(10): e778-e789. doi: 10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00206-7. PMID: 39393379.
5. Romanello M, Beggs PJ, Cai W, Hartinger S, Mabhaudhi T, Murray KA, Rocklöv J. From crisis to opportunity: a united response to Trump's attacks on climate action. *Lancet*. 2025 May 10;405(10490):1647-1650. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00777-9. Epub 2025 Apr 21. PMID: 40273918
6. International Council of Nurses (ICN). Nurses, climate change and health: A call to action. 2023: <https://www.icn.ch>
7. Health Care Without Harm & Arup. Health care's climate footprint: How the health sector contributes to the global climate crisis and opportunities for action. 2019: <https://noharm-global.org/documents/health-care-climate-footprint-report>
8. WHO and UNFCCC. Health and Climate Change Country Profiles. 2021: <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/country-profiles>
9. ANHE (Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments). Nursing Collaborative on Climate Change and Health. 2020: <https://envirn.org>
10. Nursing Now Challenge. Green Nursing Curriculum Guide. 2022: <https://www.nursingnow.org>
11. NHS England. Delivering a Net Zero NHS. 2020: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs>
12. Leffers J, Levy R, Nicholas P, Sweeney C. Mandate for the nursing profession to address climate change through nursing education. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. 2017;49(6):679–687. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.12331>

13. World Health Organization. Operational framework for climate-resilient health systems. 2022: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240061890>
14. UNFCCC. The Paris Agreement. 2015: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>
15. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2015: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
16. Mortimer F, Isherwood J, Wilkinson A, Vaux E. Sustainability in quality improvement: redefining value. *Future healthcare journal*. 2018;5(2):88–93. <https://doi.org/10.7861/futurehosp.5-2-88>

---

*The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation, and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organizations.*

[www.esno.org](http://www.esno.org) [secretariat@esno.org](mailto:secretariat@esno.org) +31-623343086

*ESNO is registered with the European Transparency: Registration 70183498905-52*

*Registration Chamber of Commerce Netherlands number: 32141241*