

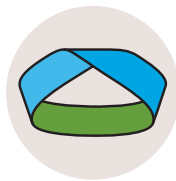
Factsheet 8

Healthy living on a healthy planet

Our lifestyle is making us ill and destroying the natural life-support systems. The vision of “healthy living on a healthy planet”, which the WBGU develops in its report of the same name, focuses on the inseparability of human health and nature, and thus on an extended understanding of health. Human health and the health of all living beings depends on a “healthy” Earth with functioning, resilient and efficient ecosystems and a stable climate. What we must do is explore and implement development pathways that do justice to both humans and nature. This requires international cooperation and a form of global urgency governance. Natural life-support systems must be preserved, and health systems enabled to exploit their transformative potential. Education and science play a key role in making the vision a reality and in planning ahead for overall conditions that make healthy lifestyles possible while simultaneously protecting nature.

Vision

The vision of “healthy living on a healthy planet” can serve as an orientation for politics, business, science and civil society.



Education and science

Education and science promote societal change. They should plan ahead for development pathways that secure the long-term health of humans and nature.



Urgency governance

The vision can only be realized with international cooperation; it requires global urgency governance.



Managing planetary risks

Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution must be stopped in order to preserve the natural life-support systems.



Health systems

Health systems should exploit their transformative potential and prepare for future challenges.



Shaping areas of life

Human areas of life – such as what we eat, how we move and where we live – need overall conditions that make healthy and sustainable behaviour possible.



Health – a systemic view

Health is of existential importance for every human being and depends essentially on a healthy environment. Although human health has improved all over the world in recent decades, not everyone has benefited from this. Moreover, the progress of civilization does not automatically lead to ever better health; rather, we are well on the way to destroying the prerequisites needed for a healthy life for everyone.

On the one hand, gains in prosperity are often accompanied by the spread of unhealthy lifestyles, and this has led to a global increase in chronic, non-communicable diseases. In the meantime, these are responsible for the largest burden of disease globally. On the other hand, resource-intensive lifestyles are leading to a global environmental crisis that threatens the natural life-support systems and thus the health of all people, other living beings and

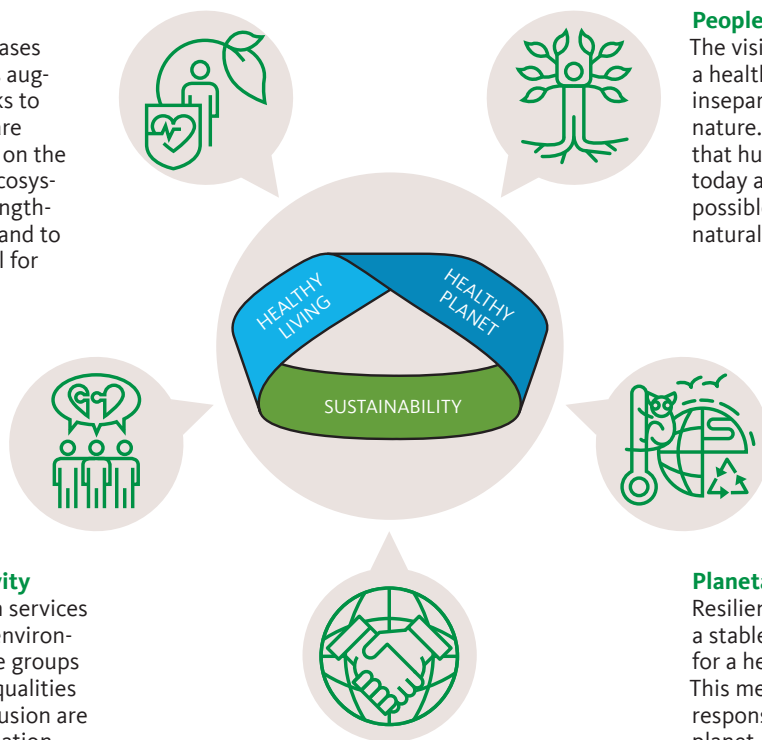
ecosystems. The ever-increasing impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are tangible examples that bring home to us the vulnerability of our societies. It is time to take a new look at civilizational progress: how can the guiding principle of ‘healthy living on a healthy planet’ be implemented? In essence, this is about encouraging a fundamental change of course and pursuing development pathways that do justice to humans and nature.

The vision of “healthy living on a healthy planet”

The WBGU counters the threatening future prospects with the vision of “healthy living on a healthy planet” because the issue of health represents a significant opportunity to advance transformations towards sustainability.

Prevention and resilience

Reactive management of diseases and environmental damage is augmented: on the one hand, risks to health and the environment are averted by preventive action; on the other, health resources and ecosystems are maintained and strengthened to make them resilient, and to unfold development potential for well-being.



Inclusion instead of exclusivity

Everyone has access to health services and benefits from improved environmental conditions. Vulnerable groups are protected, and global inequalities in economic and political inclusion are reduced. Countries and population groups with higher incomes live up to their responsibilities.

Cross-system cooperation

The vision forms the basis of ways of living and doing business. It revives national and global cooperation and makes transformative implementation measures possible. This requires a form of global governance that meets major global and critical challenges across systems.

People as part of nature

The vision of “healthy living on a healthy planet” focuses on the inseparability of human health and nature. At its core is the realization that human health and well-being today and in the future are only possible on the basis of a healthy natural environment.

Planetary guard rails are respected

Resilient, efficient ecosystems and a stable climate are prerequisites for a healthy life on a healthy planet. This means that humans have a responsibility for all life on the entire planet. In the vision, anthropogenic climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss are halted.



Global urgency governance

A form of global urgency governance for environmental and health protection is urgently needed. Faced with acute crises

such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and short-term ad-hoc reactions, we currently risk losing sight of medium and long-term sustainability goals. In contrast, implementation of the guiding principle of "healthy living on a healthy planet" requires globally coordinated governance with coherent policy-making across government departments and on all scales. For this, environmental and health governance must be interlinked and substantially accelerated. In doing so, it is important to follow a long-term perspective that shapes the future while, at the same time, being radically effective in the short term and keeping room for manoeuvre open in the medium to long term. Such urgency governance should be developed locally, regionally and nationally according to the respective sustainability challenges, adjusted to the circumstances and designed to be adaptive. It should oblige all policy fields to embed the human right to a healthy environment in every national constitution, and to drive forward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The guiding principle of 'healthy living on a healthy planet' could become a key building block for the further development of the global sustainability agenda after 2030.



Managing planetary risks

Climate change, biodiversity loss and global pollution must be halted in order to maintain the health of people and the

planet. Important, hitherto neglected starting points include stopping the exploration of fossil energy sources and strengthening the biosphere on land, in freshwater and in the sea – also to prevent zoonotic pandemics. In addition, regulated forms of human migration should be developed, and the migration of species facilitated by networking protected areas. Synergies between climate-change mitigation and biodiversity conservation should be used and conflicting goals tackled. Furthermore, pollution should be politically addressed urgently and more strongly. There is a need for an ambitious, global framework convention to combat pollution from hazardous substances that follows the guiding principle of 'zero pollution' and aims to ensure that neither people nor the environment are harmed. Health and environmental risks from emissions and the dumping of persistent wastes and chemicals in the air, soil and water should be prevented with a controlled circular economy and emissions regulations.



Health systems

Further development of global health systems is urgently needed to meet the new challenges posed

by climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Sustainable and resilient health systems can protect and improve health while respecting planetary guard rails. They reduce their consumption of resources and their emissions and are prepared for shocks from environmental change. They also trigger transformations in other sectors by promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and helping to shape healthy living conditions. Key to this is that environmentally sensitive health promotion and disease prevention are implemented in health systems as an important pillar of care. For this, healthy ecosystems must be recognized as a resource and prerequisite for health. Well-developed public health services act as an interface to administration and politics in this context. They use integrated and digitized environmental and health information systems to provide timely warning of health crises. Vulnerable people always receive special attention.



Education and science

Education and science occupy key positions in implementing the vision of 'healthy living on a healthy planet'. Education

should promote knowledge, perceptions and skills on natural and human health throughout life. In addition, sustainable and healthy behaviour should be put into practice in the educational institutions themselves so that they develop a role-model function. A high level of societal education based on scientific findings can be the foundation for joint communication and action skills worldwide when dealing with global challenges. Education and science in the sense of the guiding principle of 'healthy living on a healthy planet' should be systematically promoted worldwide. Differences between national science systems must be reduced, and transregional partnerships characterized by reciprocity must be promoted. Funding programmes on the environment-health nexus must be expanded and a joint, international funding landscape institutionalized. After all, it is necessary to use science to shape the future of society on a global scale.



Shaping areas of life

How we eat, move around, live, work and spend our leisure time affects our health and, at the same time, has consequences for the environment.

If healthy, environmentally friendly behaviour is to become attractive, easy to practise or even possible in the first place,

the corresponding external conditions must be conducive. What is needed are transformations in the areas of people's lives that both break the trend of increasing lifestyle diseases and contribute to the preservation of the natural life-support systems.

Ways to a healthy diet – for everyone

Transforming environmentally damaging and unhealthy diets leads away from the overconsumption of animal products and highly processed foods towards sustainable, plant-based and varied diets. This is essential to achieve the internationally agreed climate and biodiversity goals. Human health also benefits significantly from this through an improved nutrient supply, the promotion of microbiomes and reduced disease risks. The transformation to healthy and resilient food systems releases land reserves that were previously tied up in the production of animal-based foods. This should benefit human food production, climate-change mitigation and, by restoring ecosystems, biodiversity conservation. At the same time, it ensures food security, food sovereignty and food safety.

Activity-friendly environment – environment-friendly activity

Taking exercise in green environments benefits health, the climate and the environment. Lack of physical activity is a growing problem worldwide, affecting countries from all income groups. Physical exercise should therefore be integrated into all areas of life. Especially through active mobility, exercise can be easily incorporated into everyday life on a larger scale and additionally reduce environmental damage, noise and the consumption of resources and space. The needs of children and young

people are a good design yardstick for cities and mobility systems. This requires adapted infrastructures, regulations and public services, e.g. exercise-friendly public spaces, consistently safe walking and cycling networks and attractive public transport. Negative impacts of car traffic should be contained by appropriate pricing and regulation. The synergies of defossilization and health promotion should be taken up in national mobility strategies as well as in strategies to promote physical activity. The approaches described should also be integrated into international development cooperation and financing, especially for infrastructures.

Housing in health-promoting and sustainable residential areas

The way cities are built offers opportunities to protect against environmental change and to promote healthy living environments. An appropriate structural and spatial design can create opportunities for active mobility and recreation in one's living environment. This requires a 'triple inner development', i.e. a regionally adapted balance between building density, mobility and the creation of green and blue spaces. New settlement areas will need to be built for around 2.5 billion people by the middle of this century, with more than 90% of urban population growth estimated to take place in low- and middle-income countries. This represents a window of opportunity to advance sustainable and healthy construction with environmentally sound building materials on a large scale in a short time. Socio-economically disadvantaged and discriminated population groups tend to be more exposed to health risks such as air pollution, noise and heat due to deprived housing locations. Therefore, affordable, health-promoting and sustainable housing must be guaranteed in the long term, while protecting affected people from displacement.

This fact sheet summarizes key statements of the WBGU report entitled "Healthy living on a healthy planet" (2023). The report is available free of charge at www.wbgu.de/gesundleben.

The WBGU

The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) is an independent scientific advisory body to the German Federal Government that was established in 1992 in the run-up to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The interdisciplinary WBGU develops recommendations for action and research for policy-makers on the basis of scientific analyses.

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