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Report from INTERCAMBIO webinar November 4, 2025: Climate change and Worker Health: What Research Matters Most? / Prepared by: M Albin (KI) November 6, 2025

Summary of input to priorities for the research agenda

From scheduled presentations

Rita Araujo from DG Research emphasized the dedication of the EC to Climate research within the Health part of the upcoming framework programs. As to concerns that the funds would be mainly allocated to ERC, and not sufficient for challenge-driven research she did not see this as a problem as it would have a place in the Health program. Regarding a question on why worker health in relation to the transition to the green economy was not included in the Strategic Research Agenda, this was a deliberate choice since it was felt that it would make it too broad.

Kurt Straif presented the living review on the Construction sector and climate change, demonstrating this as a resource freely available on the INTERCAMBIO website, as well as highlighting the research gaps on mitigating effects on worker health, especially regarding higher levels of hierarchy of controls and multidimensional interventions, and involving women and populations in low- and middle-income countries.

Karin Broberg described knowledge gaps identified in a review of the waste sector (available at the INTERCAMBIO web-page) which is a key factor in the transition to a circular economy. There are clear research gaps on exposures in the different streams of recycling, and even more so on health effects, with virtually no longitudinal information or information on long-term effects. She exemplified concerns by showing data on high dust exposures, and exposure to multiple toxic metals from recycling of metals in Sweden.

Sara Svensson shared preliminary conclusions on the importance of norms and values for policy in the context of protecting construction workers from outdoor heat exposure. It emerged from the interviews that there is uncertainty about what measures of these are most efficient, for whom (e.g. age) and how to convey them, with prevalence of subcontractors as an important challenge. Given examples of norm conflicts were earlier (cooler) start of work *vs* sleep disturbance in the neighborhood, and prolonged breaks during mid-day vs family time.

Alex Burdorf described the knowledge gap of potential challenges to working conditions (especially work pressure) from implementing more sustainable work practices with a reduced carbon footprint. Using the example of the health care sector, which has a large carbon footprint, sustainability is now a new domain described in the quality of the care, and work practices are changing. Sustainable practices may both have positive and negative effects on worker health, especially mental health, as they may promote work satisfaction, and decrease climate anxiety, while on the other hand also increase organizational and administrative demands, and thus increase work pressure.

Mary Njoroge shared main results from the INTERCAMBIO Stakeholder Survey. Most answers were obtained from researchers (70%). Identified top risks were heat, disasters and mental health disorders, with outdoor workers, women (including pregnant workers), and migrant workers as key vulnerable groups. There was a strong call for implementation research, strengthening knowledge exchange and cross-sector collaboration. Highlighted gaps were mental health, biodiversity, climate justice and links between climate change and antimicrobial resistance. New chemicals/processes, urbanization, biodiversity loss and shift work, were seen as emerging risks.

Manolis Kogevinas described the SPHERA network which is formed by research institutions. Its work to contribute to the European research agenda emerged from the highly successful HERA

project. The goal is to Advance a unified Single Planet Health framework for research and policy, and acts as a think-tank to promote a robust research-policy interface through: identifying emerging issues including wider issues, e.g. attacks on science (a petition for signing is currently available), setting-up disease specific priorities on environment and climate change; advocating for new funding opportunities – action on plans for FP10; facilitating education and training programs; and facilitating research infrastructure networks. New members are welcome to the network.

From the discussion in break-out rooms

The groups were given two questions as a point of departure:

- What did you agree or disagree with regarding research needs as presented today?
- How can stakeholders be more involved in research agenda setting?

Overall messages were

- Challenge-driven research (not only excellence) is essential, in previous surveys workers expressed concern about how their jobs and tasks may be affected by climate change.
- Just transition is a framework everyone can agree on.
- Involve social partners in the research, extend outreach for participation to companies and workers.

The following themes emerged

Sectors

- Construction
- Green transition, including non-fossil energy (e.g. wind-, including accidents)
- Health care (responding to climate change, and direct effect on workers)
- Green transition: Mining (expanding), non-fossil energy (e.g. wind-, incl accidents, battery workers), recycling

Topics

- Heat stress
- Cold stress
- Extreme weather events (including storms)
- Mental health

Type of research

Intervention studies, including suggestions of:

- Bottom up-design
- Workers can select their own outcome measure to evaluate interventions
- Increase in worker agency to find solutions
- Development of easy-to-use tools
- Help to decide on mitigation strategy and control measures
- Implementation of hierarchy of controls
- Dissemination (including subcontracted workers)
- Use of fair transitioning agreements, and inclusion of stakeholder consultations in public contracts for green jobs
- Effects on pregnant workers (see also https://www.high-horizons.eu/)

Cross-cutting themes

Involve key stakeholders and extend reach-out for research projects, including suggestions of:

- Include social partners in suggesting solutions
- Worker is key stakeholder, including worker representatives

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- Good companies like to participate in new research, ideas need to reach all companies and workers
- Leverage the ETUI network, include many trade unionists who want to contribute
- Engage the EU-OSHA network to broaden collaboration
- Include workers without a voice
- Include nuance regarding regional differences
- Heat stress as an episodic (non-acclimatized) versus long-time (acclimatized) phenomenon)
- Cold stress as accentuated phenomenon
- Climate justice- climate equity: Those who are most affected by climate change are often also most vulnerable