

Dear Commissioner Hansen,
Dear Commissioner Séjourné,
Dear Commissioner Serafin,
Dear Commissioner Hoekstra,
Dear Commissioner Várhelyi,



Berlin, 15.12.2025

Realising the potential of the EU Cardiovascular Health Plan for health, climate and economic stability

We are writing to you on the eve of your decision on the EU Cardiovascular Health Plan, which we believe has enormous potential for improving European's health, reducing the burden on the health systems and the public purse, and providing co-benefits for climate and environmental protection.

We, the German Alliance Climate Change and Health (KLUG), are a network of more than 800 individuals, organisations and professional associations from across the health sector, founded in 2017. Grounded in the Planetary Health concept, KLUG raises awareness of the health impacts of the ecological crisis and empowers health professionals as key actors in the socio-ecological transformation. KLUG works on an evidence-based foundation and is nationally and internationally connected with scientific institutions. Through diverse partnerships and transformative projects, KLUG has become a central actor for Planetary Health in Germany, strengthening climate and environmental action by integrating health perspectives. KLUG is supported by public and philanthropic institutions and is based in Berlin.

As Europe's leading cause of death, cardiovascular disease (CVD) require bold, systemic action grounded in robust public-health evidence. The **EU Cardiovascular Health Plan** can and should be an ambitious, people-centred strategy capable of reversing the rising burden of diet-related CVD with substantial co-benefits for environmental and climate protection and the public purse. One area is particularly decisive: the promotion of healthy, predominantly plant-based diets—an area strongly shaped by EU agricultural, environmental and fiscal policies.

According to the Global Burden of Disease study, in the European Union in 2019 more than 800,000 deaths and over 14 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) were attributable to dietary risks. These reflect diets characterised by insufficient intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts, alongside excessive consumption of salt, saturated fats, red and processed meat, and ultra-processed foods. The scale of the problem is underscored by data from the WHO European Regional Obesity Report (2022), which shows that nearly one in three children in the WHO European Region is affected by overweight or obesity.

The FAO estimates that the hidden costs of global agrifood systems amount to USD 8.1 trillion (PPP) in health-related costs, USD 0.6 trillion in social costs, and USD 3.0 trillion in environmental costs. Of these, in high-income countries, around 70% of health-related costs are attributable to unhealthy

diets. In line with these findings, the Food Systems Economics Commission (2024) concludes that the costs of current food systems far exceed their contribution to global prosperity.

Healthy, predominantly plant-based diets—such as the **Planetary Health Diet**—are associated with substantial reductions in cardiovascular risk while delivering major co-benefits: lower land and water use and greenhouse-gas emissions, reduced pesticide and fertiliser use, protection of biodiversity and improved food security. They represent a highly effective and cost-efficient strategy to reduce CVD while strengthening long-term resilience, ecosystem health and economic stability.

Dietary patterns in the EU are deeply shaped by agricultural and food policy. The Common Agricultural Policy influences what food is produced, its price and availability, while intensive agricultural practices contribute significantly to climate change and air pollution. These dynamics exacerbate dietary inequalities and cardiovascular risk, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The EU's objectives on "Sustainable Food Systems" should be central to the new CAP period.

The EU should:

- Create incentives for healthier consumption patterns
Implement policy measures that shift demand and consumption away from ultra-processed and health-damaging products towards healthy, fresh and sustainably produced foods.
- Protect children from unhealthy food environments
Introduce binding measures to protect children from exposure to unhealthy foods, including restrictions on marketing, clear nutrition standards in public settings, and supportive food environments.
- Reorient agricultural subsidies towards health, climate and sustainability outcomes
Move away from untargeted area-based payments towards performance-based support that rewards environmental protection, climate action and positive public health impacts of food production.
- Strengthen agroecological and fair food systems
Provide increased financial support for agroecological practices, organic farming and extensive livestock systems, and ensure fair prices that reflect the true environmental, social and health costs of food production.

The recently leaked draft of the Cardiovascular Health Plan has prompted criticism from commercial actors whose business models rely on high consumption of red and processed meat and ultra-processed foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). This underlines the importance of robust, evidence-based regulation in the public interest, including product reformulation, stronger rules on food marketing and advertising to children, fiscal measures, public food procurement standards and other policies that make healthier choices the easier choice.

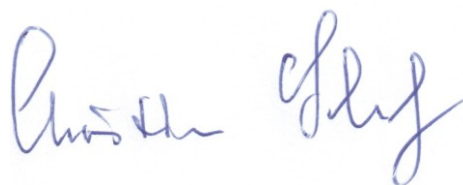
As the recent study on health taxes by DG TAXUD showed, a harmonised **EU-wide nutrient-based tax framework for HFSS** products can have significant health benefits, especially when part of a broader range of measures to promote healthy food environments. Crucially, such a tax should be accompanied by suspending VAT on vegetables, fruits and other plant-based wholefoods to combat food poverty, strengthen acceptance for HFSS taxes and strengthen the incentive for healthier, more sustainable diets.

Addressing unhealthy diets is therefore essential for public health, for the ecosystems on which we depend, and for the EU's economic resilience and food sovereignty. As the Commission finalises the Cardiovascular Health Plan, we urge you to deliver on the ambition set by the Commission to improve citizens' health and well-being and reduce the economic burden associated with the current burden of non-communicable diseases, which requires cross-sectoral action across food, agricultural, fiscal and environmental policy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dorothea Baltruks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dorothea" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Baltruks".

Dorothea Baltruks

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Prof. Dr. Christian Schulz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christian" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Schulz".

Prof. Dr. Christian Schulz