

## **COVID 19 and climate change**

**A document developed by Alliance Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG)**

For some months now the Coronavirus pandemic also known as Covid-19 has been hitting the planet from all angles. Apart from taking away thousands of lives daily, the virus has caused many countries to close their borders, put in place curfews as well as lockdowns to reduce the virus' spread. These measures albeit strict and maybe too ferocious have helped reduce the damages. However, the lockdowns and the massive reduction of movements and activities across the globe has led to a lot of changes in our daily lifestyles. From closing businesses and reducing transportation to the minimum strict, the global economy has taken a huge blow and social life around the globe would have been non existent if not for the internet. Aside the socio-economical and political impacts of the virus on our daily lives, the pandemic has also influenced the environment in several ways.

According to statistics from INRIX, a private research firm which focuses on traffic data, road transportation in the US was reduced by 38% in March while it was almost inexistent in other parts of the world (5% in Paris and 3% in Madrid, Milan and Barcelona according to Citymapper). Concerning flights and aerial transportation, the global transport sphere seems to have collapsed. This can be linked to various countries closing their borders as well as the various lockdowns within countries. While some opinion leaders, environmental activists as well as scientists rejoice on the benefits of these various lockdowns and reduction of economic activities for the planet, it is important to note that the climate change debate is far from over. Even though the greenhouse gases emissions' have considerably reduced, the quantity of gas in the atmosphere doesn't change anything. Reducing the production of toxic gases for a few months does not automatically deplete the already existing gases or accelerate the reduction of the emissions harming the planet. To reduce the emissions, we would have to stay at a low emission level for a long time before we start to see the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere slow their progression and eventually decrease.

On a political frontend, the massive reduction of economic activities which will result in a global economical crisis after the virus is causing a lot of questioning. Will countries across the globe keep their promises on the issue of climate change? Will they focus on bringing up a Green New Deal at the upcoming COP26 meeting in Glasgow to help create a post-carbon economy or will they rather abandon the process and focus on saving the fossils' industry? According to some researchers and climate change experts, a lot of government are likely to reconsider their involvement in the fight against climate change to focus on revamping their economies. Already, in Europe, countries like Poland and the Czech Republic have demanded the abandonment of the European Green Deal to safeguard their internal economies. As it stands now, most countries view the safeguarding of their economies much more important than the fight against climate change.

In terms of individuals and citizens, the various lockdowns and the massive reduction of economic activities that come with it have helped change a few lifestyles. According to different opinions gathered on social media, people are gradually focusing on the necessary and the usually consumerist lifestyle is reducing. People just buy what they need, try to avoid wasting food, prioritise time in nature (maybe less risk of meeting other people and getting contaminated). However, a lot of people- especially young people who think they might just run back to shopping and extravagant lifestyles at the end of the pandemic in an attempt to enjoy their newly gained freedom. Apart from that, there's a fear that transportation percentages might boom to the maximum once the virus is over. This is because, a lot of travels, most specifically flights were cancelled before the lockdowns and now airlines are giving out vouchers and reducing flight costs. This will encourage more people to fly and embark on unnecessary trips. Consequently, the emissions will shoot up again and everything will be as it used to be before the pandemic.

In sum, if coronavirus seems to have succeeded in pushing humans to reduce their activities and consequently slowed down the damage that we're doing to our environment and our planet as a whole, it is worthy to note that the climate change battle is far from won. If we should succeed in this battle, it is primordial to handle the climate change issue with the same energy and urgency that we are giving to the coronavirus pandemic. Governments should put in place drastic measures that will help the fight against climate change and also, private entities and individuals should get involved as much as they have been as for their personal safety in the battle against the virus. According to Belgian researcher at the University of Liege, even though coronavirus and climate change share similarities, the latter is far deadlier as *"climate change is not a crisis: it is an irreversible transformation. There will be no return to normal, no vaccine against climate change. And structural measures are needed, which initiate a real transformation of society and the economy."*