



Building resilience: being young and getting old in a hotter Europe

A new study from Sweco examines the available data on rising temperatures across Europe. The report shows the effect on our most vulnerable citizens and how we might better design our urban environments.

In Europe, the number of people over 65 is rapidly increasing, with those over 80 expected to more than double from 5.6% in 2018 to 12% by 2060. At the same time, urban areas are home to more of us than ever before – while half of Europeans (52%) were urban dwellers in 1950, the numbers swelled to 74% by 2015, with the trend set to continue.

As we see a rise in elderly citizens and an increase in density of urban neighbourhoods, we can also predict an increase in extreme heat events. The frequency, intensity and the duration of raised temperatures and events such as heatwaves threaten the health of not only Europe's elderly but also its infant population.

To build resilience for a hotter future, it can help to look at what the 2050 equivalent of a city feels like, and what the city is doing to increase its ability to cope with the threat of heat.

Many central and northern European cities are not properly prepared for extreme heat. Unlike other climate impacts, such as flooding, this threat is invisible.

Many cities struggle with a lack of data on heat impacts. If there is insufficient data, municipalities cannot demonstrate heat as an important climate adaptation factor in urban planning.

DANGER HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

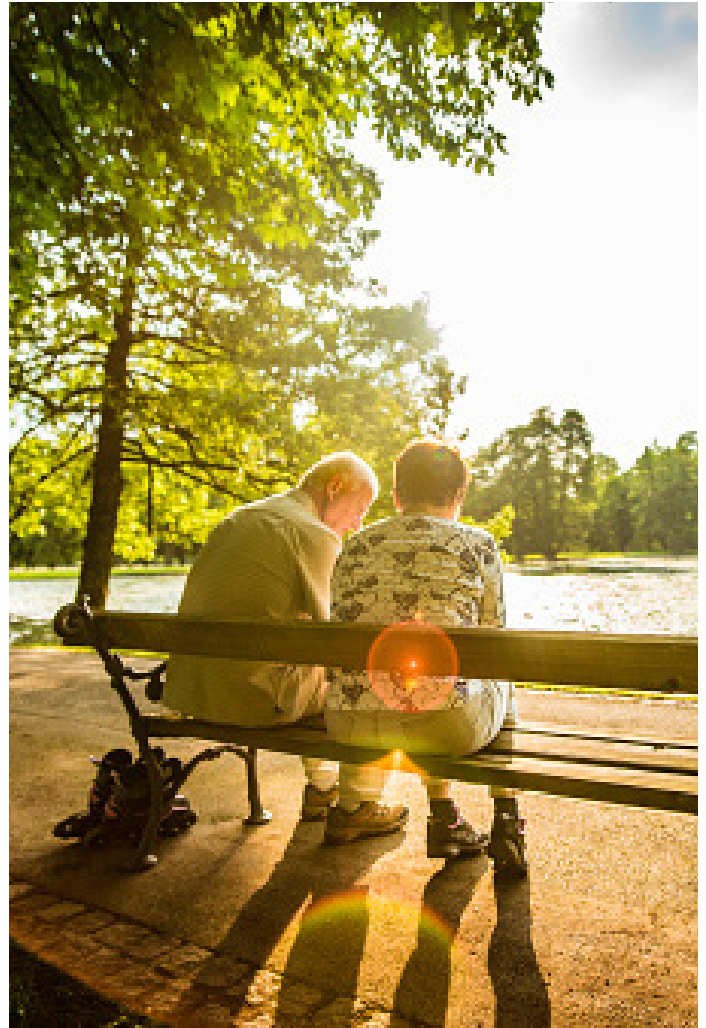
It's a shocking fact that more Europeans die from heatwaves than all other natural hazards combined. From 2000 to 2018, floods – a visible threat that governments spend a lot of money on mitigating – killed over 700 people across Europe. But in comparison, in just one year the death toll due to extreme heat across Europe exceeded 70,000 people. This was in 2003, the deadliest year in recent European history (not including the coronavirus crisis). As well as increasing mortality, heatwaves impact hundreds of millions more every year in the form of health problems, water shortages, power blackouts, wildfires, pollution and infrastructure damage. Furthermore, when temperatures indoors or outdoors exceed 25°C, worker productivity declines by 2% per degree on average. Such declines in productivity can have huge economic impacts.

A RESILIENT CITY

What do we want our future to look like, and the future of our children and future generations?

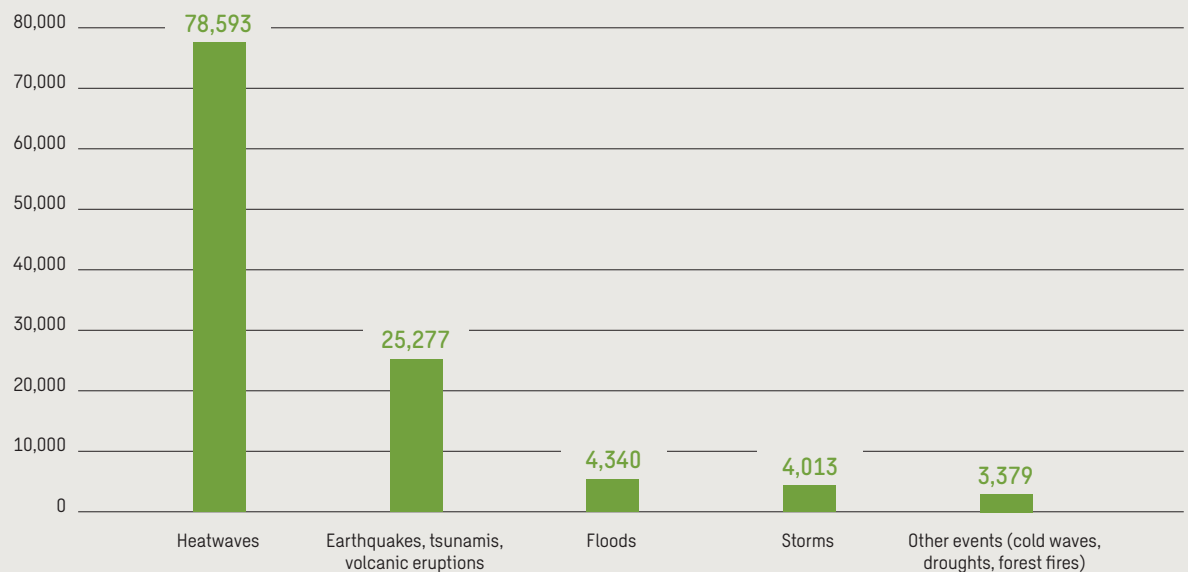
A resilient city focuses on green and blue infrastructure. It offers a wide variety of infrastructures – parks, tree-lined streets, fountains and ponds – that all play an important role in mitigating the impact of heat and urban heat islands (UHIs). Such areas are strategically located, for example as landscaping around a care home, hospital or school, and accessible transport to important amenities.

This Urban Insight Report, Building resilience: being young and getting old in a hotter Europe, aims to put urban heat on the agenda.



FATALITIES FROM NATURAL HAZARDS

Fatalities from natural hazards in 33 European countries during 1980-2017. Fatalities from heatwaves make up 68% of all deaths related to natural hazards.¹⁴



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