

# Exploring the relationship between nature, climate change and mental health

In an era of rapidly changing environmental dynamics, the intricate connections between mental health, nature, and climate change have come into focus like never before. As our planet faces unprecedented ecological challenges, it becomes evident that the well-being of both our natural world and our mental states are intertwined in a complex dynamic. Here, we explore the profound implications of these connections, shedding light on how climate change impacts nature and subsequently shapes our mental health, while also revealing how a harmonious relationship with the natural world can foster resilience and nurture our collective emotional well-being.

## How can climate change affect mental health?

- Climate change affects our surroundings through unpredictable and often extreme weather events, as well as through a general change in local climate. These changes threaten several existing aspects of society, such as the health care system, urban living and well-being, agriculture, and food production.
- Society is facing increasingly frequent and severe threats from floods, heatwaves, ambient air pollution, and noise, which could lead to challenges such as PTSD and emotional distress. A more indirect consequence of climate change on mental health is eco-anxiety, that is becoming more and more frequent for several demographic groups.
- Demography and socio-economic status is important for how severe the consequences of climate change will be for mental health. There is a strong correlation between the impairment of social and economic conditions and emerging mental health challenges.

## How can green space and nature-based solutions affect mental health?

- Nature can provide physical and psychological shelter from extreme weather and climatic changes and contribute to building both ecological and social resilience to climate change, e.g. through climatic regulation and water retention.
- Nature provides a variety of ecosystem services, i.e. the perceived benefits humans receive directly and indirectly from the natural functioning of ecosystems. Examples are recreation and leisure, sense of place and attachment, spaces for community development and activities, sense of wonder, and ecotherapy.
- Nature could serve to relieve stress, contribute to higher levels of recreation, and is being used for such purposes in therapeutic settings.
- The perception of nature and recreational preferences is demographically and socio-economically conditioned. Access and exposure to nature is often not fairly distributed.