
Adaptation guide on the One Health approach for the WHO European Region



Regional priorities for the WHO European Region: advancing the implementation of One Health



One Health

In 2021, the One Health High-level Expert Panel defined One Health as:

An integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. It recognizes that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants and the wider environment (including ecosystems) is closely linked and interdependent.

The approach mobilizes multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change and contributing to sustainable development.

In collaboration with its Quadripartite partners

– the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Organisation for Animal Health, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has given One Health priority as a key approach to supporting Member States and communities in the WHO European Region in addressing health issues at the interface of humans, animals and the environment.

Purpose

→ **The COVID-19 pandemic** has highlighted the urgent need to reconsider public health strategies, prompting WHO Member States to explore innovative approaches to address emerging and recurring challenges. The One Health approach has emerged as a pivotal foundation not only for preventing and preparing for future pandemics but also for reshaping current health-care practices.

→ **At its core**, One Health advocates for the dismantling of disciplinary barriers and nurturing of interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration, coordination, communication and capacity building. In response to the growing recognition and need for an integrated and unified One Health approach, Member States of the WHO European Region have called for comprehensive guidance, including innovative strategies and policies, to foster collaborative partnerships and improve the health of people, animals and the environment.

→ **In response**, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has developed this document to enable and support Member States in tailoring strategies to implement a One Health approach that suits specific priorities and addresses country challenges and gaps in health.

→ **Overall**, this guide underscores the critical need for collaborative efforts and innovative, people-centred and evidence-informed approaches to address complex health challenges comprehensively and effectively. These actions should not only address immediate concerns but also aim to bring about long-lasting, fundamental and positive transformations in how health challenges are understood, managed and prevented.

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Current regional challenges

The WHO European Region encompasses a diverse landscape, including countries with varying income levels. Despite having the highest life expectancy among all WHO regions, significant health challenges remain, including the following.



Health inequity

Despite overall improvements in life expectancy, disparities in access to health care and health outcomes persist within the Region. Certain populations, such as rural communities, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups, still face barriers in accessing essential health and health-related services.



Infectious diseases

Although significant progress has been made in controlling infectious diseases, outbreaks of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases remain a national and cross-border concern. Factors such as globalization, the environment, urbanization, antimicrobial resistance and inadequate health-care infrastructure can exacerbate the spread of infectious diseases.



Environmental drivers

Environmental drivers such as air pollution, water contamination, use of chemicals, land use, biodiversity loss, agricultural practices and extreme weather events resulting from climate change significantly affect people, ecosystems and animal health.



Unsafe food

Every minute, 44 people – more than 23 million per year – become sick from eating contaminated food, and an estimated 4700 lose their lives each year. Globalization of the food chain, adoption of new technologies, climate change, demographic changes and new ways of communicating about food safety risks challenge food safety systems.



Noncommunicable diseases

Noncommunicable diseases account for about 90% of deaths and 85% of years lived with disability in the WHO European Region each year. Noncommunicable diseases, ecosystem degradation and climate change share common anthropogenic drivers including food production systems, land-use change, biodiversity loss, air pollution and transport systems.



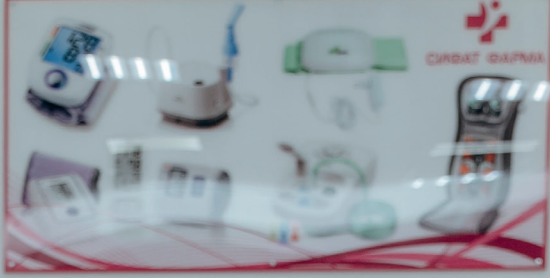
Urbanization

Two thirds of the population in the European Region resides in urban areas. Although cities provide opportunities, they also pose unique health challenges, such as dense traffic, pollution, noise, violence and social isolation, especially affecting older adults and young families.



Health emergencies

The WHO European Region is currently facing multiple concurrent emergencies that underscore the critical importance of public health emergency preparedness, response and resilience. The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, along with ongoing changes to the global health security architecture, have altered citizens' and governments' expectations of health authorities. This is compounded further by the uncertainties presented by outbreaks. Additionally, the Region is enduring conflicts causing humanitarian crises and immense human suffering.



Implementing the One Health approach

Global strategies: driving change and transformation for a healthier future

At the global level, the Quadripartite has developed the One Health Joint Plan of Action (2022–2026) (OHJPA) and its implementation Guide. The Joint Plan of Action is based on an overarching theory of change that provides a conceptual framework for implementing the One Health approach and establishes three pathways of change:

- policy, legislation, advocacy and financing
- organizational development, implementation and sectoral integration
- data, evidence and knowledge.

The One Health Joint Plan of Action includes six action tracks:

- 1 enhancing** One Health capacity to strengthen health systems;
- 2 reducing** the risks from emerging and re-emerging zoonotic epidemics and pandemics;
- 3 controlling** and eliminating endemic zoonotic, neglected tropical and vector-borne diseases;
- 4 strengthening** the assessment, management and communication of food safety risks;
- 5 curbing** the silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance; and
- 6 integrating** the environment into One Health.

Implementing the One Health

Regional priorities: advancing the implementation of One Health

Based on the principles outlined in the European Programme of Work 2020–2025: United Action for Better Health, the recommendations made by the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development and national and local specific challenges, the WHO Regional Office for Europe recommends that its Member States operationalize the One Health approach by considering the regional priorities identified with the support of the WHO European One Health Technical Advisory Group established in 2022.

1

Building and strengthening governance, leadership, and partnerships:

Involving national decision-makers and key technical staff in relevant workshops, projects and networks that enhance awareness and ownership of the One Health approach is crucial.

Strengthening cross-cutting capacity and using a systems approach such as One Health are essential for dealing with complex health challenges and can offer a resilient foundation for establishing national institutional frameworks and structures to promote and regulate collaboration mechanisms and foster long-lasting trust-building processes among stakeholders.

4

Building evidence on the effectiveness of One Health requires more data and more research for action:

Sustaining and reinforcing data and research are essential by establishing well-defined legal and governance frameworks for integrated, user-friendly platforms that facilitate data sharing between sectors.

Further, generating evidence on One Health and promoting the effective translation of scientific findings into policy are essential.

approach

2

Strengthening prevention and preparedness capacity for health emergencies:

Prevention strategies that build on the requirements of the International Health Regulations (IHR) and the forthcoming Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord and raise awareness about the significance of ecosystem health are required to prevent disease outbreaks and health emergencies.

This implies actively involving the environmental sector and conducting regional, national and local joint risk assessment using the One Health approach.

5

Facilitating the allocation of sustainable financing:

Investments are secured by fostering partnerships that encourage long-term investments and initiatives aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

3

Promoting and supporting equitable, inclusive and sustainable solutions to tackle inequalities:

Facilitating the participation and representation of all interested stakeholders, including public and private actors and citizens, in the decision-making process through regulated and transparent platforms.

Adopting an equity lens is fundamental in developing policies and strategies to bolster public health.

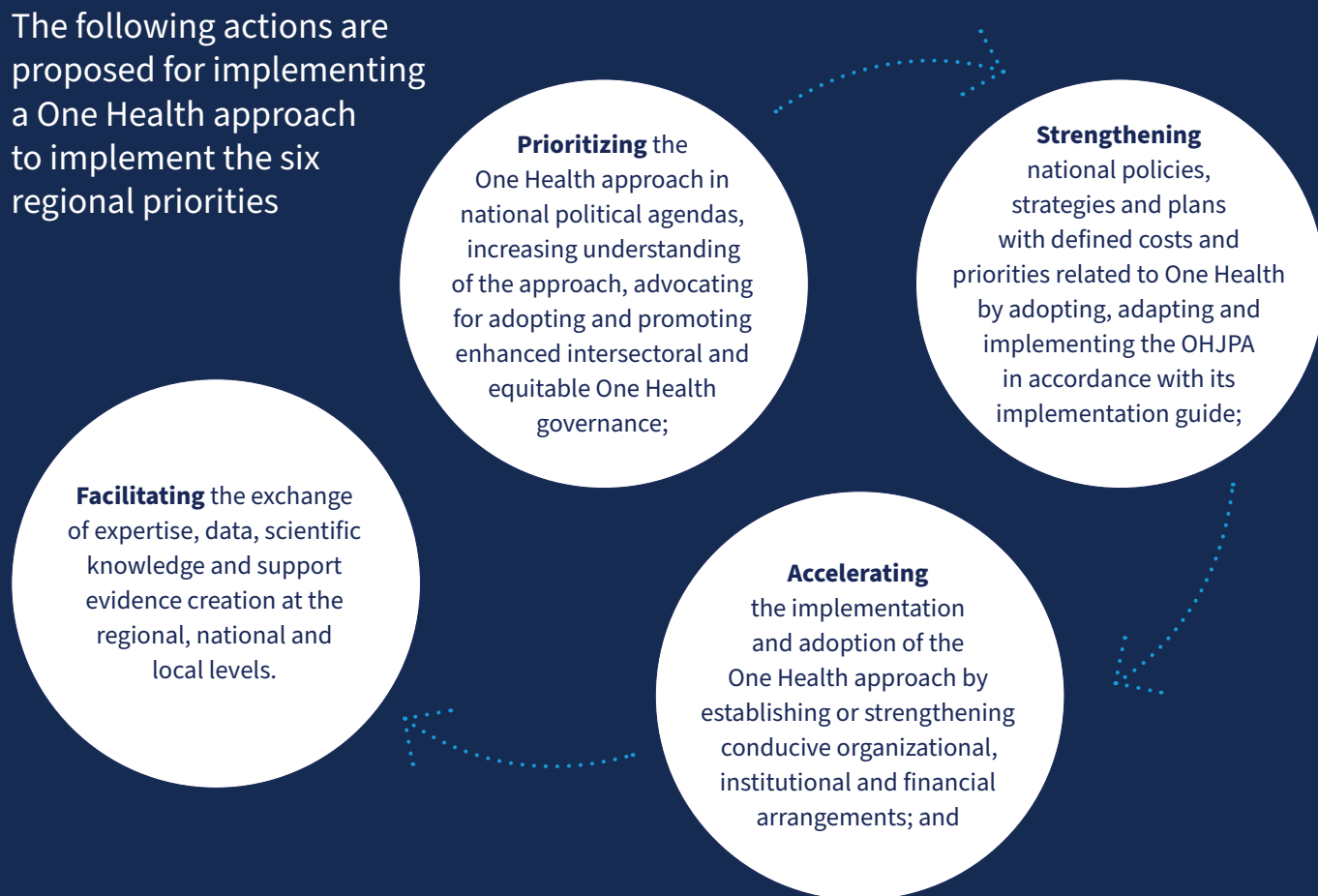
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Cultivating and sustaining core competencies for operationalizing the One Health approach for the workforce:

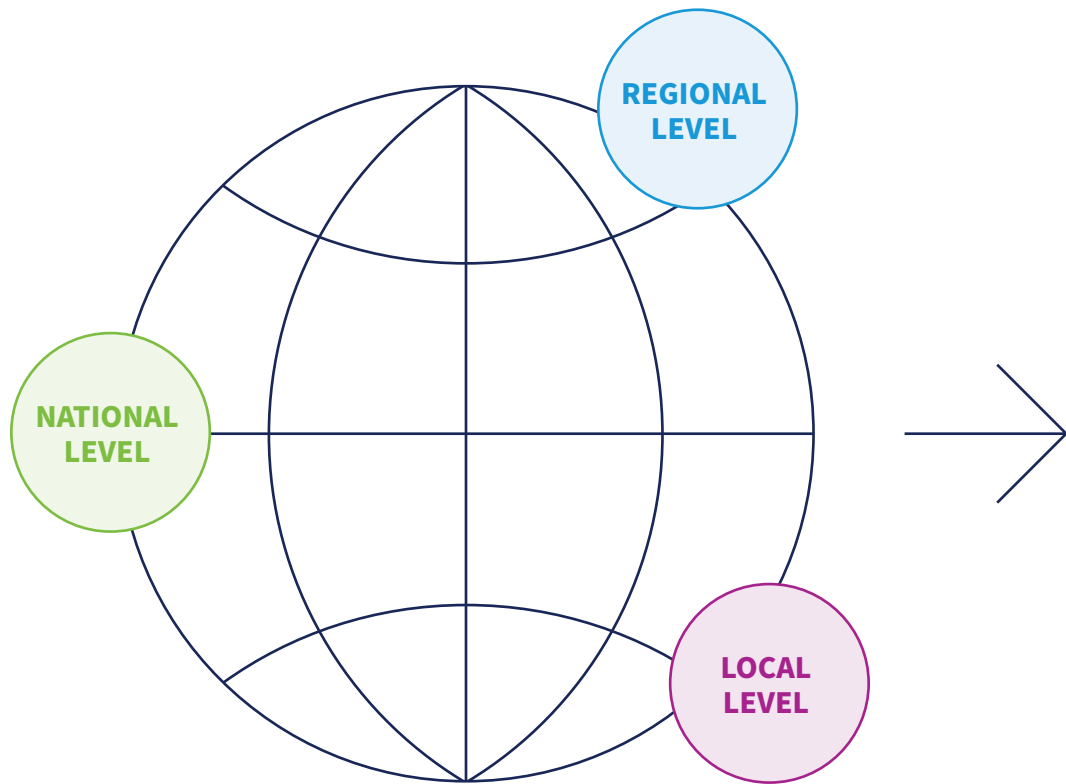
The design of One Health core competencies should give priority to developing training curricula that promote systems thinking to address multidimensional threats in accordance with the WHO-ASPHER Competency Framework and the Roadmap to Strengthen the Public Health Workforce in the WHO European Region.

Proposed actions for countries to implement a One Health approach

The following actions are proposed for implementing a One Health approach to implement the six regional priorities



One Health implementation at the regional, national and local levels



REGIONAL LEVEL

Regionally, collaboration among neighbouring countries for monitoring and controlling any potential health threat represents essential best practices. Examples in the WHO European Region include, but are not limited to, the following.

One Health European Joint Programme

The One Health European Joint Programme was launched in 2018 as a unique European network of 43 public institutions and the Med-Vet-Net Association (now European One Health Association), spanning 22 European countries and involving nearly 1600 scientists in the fields of foodborne zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance and emerging threats.

Across seven work packages, the One Health European Joint Programme represents excellent examples of scientific collaboration between the medical, veterinary and food safety sectors.

It ended in 2023, but its legacy is being taken forward by the European One Health Association, which is dedicated to promoting the One Health approach to combating zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance and supporting a healthy and sustainable food supply chain across Europe (and beyond).

MediLabSecure

MediLabSecure is a network of 111 national laboratories and public health institutions in 22 countries across the Balkans, Black Sea, Sahel, Maghreb and Middle East regions. Now in its 10th year, the project aims to prevent vector-borne diseases in these regions.

Activities include multisectoral risk assessment exercises to improve preparedness for shared risks at the regional level.

NATIONAL LEVEL

At the national level, governments establish either interministerial committees or task forces or ensure that One Health principles are integrated into national strategies and plans to coordinate efforts effectively. Examples in the WHO European Region include the following.

→ **Belgium**

Sciensano is a public health institution established in 2018 through the amalgamation of two institutions— the Scientific Institute of Public Health and the Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre. Sciensano is working through an interdisciplinary approach to public health that recognizes the relationship between human, animal and environmental health, encapsulated in the One Health approach.

Currently, Sciensano is dedicated to addressing key health challenges, including antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic diseases encompassing respiratory pathogens, foodborne and vector-borne infections and conducting risk assessment related to various environmental factors, such as the correlation between infections and air pollution.

→ **Denmark**

Denmark's Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and Ministry of Health established the Danish Integrated Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring and Research Programme in 1995.

It provides scientific data on the use of antimicrobial agents in animals and humans and monitors the prevalence of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria isolated from food-producing animals, food of animal origin (meat) and humans. Denmark's approach is based on unique methods, in which scientific data creates the basis for action and cross-sector collaboration between scientists and public authorities.

→ Georgia

Georgia approved its first national One Health action plan for 2023–2025 in 2023, following the One Health Joint Plan of Action (2022–2026).

The development of the national plan was led by the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health and the National Food Agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

→ Ireland

The second One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021–2025 (iNAP2) was published by the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in November 2021. Building on the previous National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017–2020 (iNAP1), this second National Action Plan is in accordance with the Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (2020). Recognizing that antimicrobial resistance is a One Health issue affecting human health, animal health and welfare, and the environment, the second National Action Plan sustains the multistakeholder collaborative approach across these three sectors.

Through this plan, Ireland advocates for One Health One Welfare, which highlights a whole-of-society perspective acknowledging the interconnectedness of human health and well-being with animal health and welfare, biodiversity and the environment.

→ Italy

Italy played a key role during the G20 Italian Presidency in 2021 to highlight the crucial role of the One Health approach in calling G20 members for more concerted action to address health challenges at the interface of humans, animals and the environment. In 2023, the Ministry of Health established a One Health Department that contains the Directorate of Hygiene and Food Safety, Directorate of Animal Health and Directorate of Healthy Lifestyles and Ecosystems. In 2023, a One Health Parliamentary Inter-group was established, supported by a technical-scientific committee composed of experts from various disciplines. This committee is tasked with proposing topics for discussion and in-depth analysis and promoting thorough evaluation of the state of the art of the One Health approach in terms of legislative, socioeconomic, cultural, scientific and technological aspects.

→ **Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan began exploring the One Health approach to address zoonotic diseases in 2018 through the IHR-PVS National Bridging Workshop. As a result, a comprehensive long-term national roadmap was developed. Following this roadmap, an action plan was created to implement the One Health approach, extending beyond zoonotic diseases to include food safety and biosafety, with implementation set for 2025.

A coordinated One Health government platform was established to facilitate regular interaction among ministries, improving preparedness and response to health challenges at the interface of animals, humans and the environment.

Concurrently, efforts were made to promote One Health actions, such as developing a legislative basis for enhanced collaboration and establishing a cross-sectoral research programme, integrated into the National Project Healthy Nation. Responsibility for these actions is shared among the health, agriculture and environment sectors.

→ **Ukraine**

Ukraine has intensified its advocacy for the One Health approach by promoting the One Health Mural board game, developed by the World Organisation for Animal Health Collaboration Centre and the National School of Veterinary Services.

Ukraine has initiated collaborations with universities to integrate the One Health approach into veterinary and public health programmes. Ukraine supported its first one health zoonotic prioritization workshop and developed a national strategy and operational plan for eliminating rabies by 2030. To address rabies, a task force has been established to create public awareness materials and provide training to veterinary laboratory specialists.

In June 2024, Ukraine organized a World Food Safety Day webinar, attracting more than 800 participants from public health, veterinary and food technology faculties. Recently, a national bridging workshop was facilitated with the participation of key stakeholders from various sectors, significantly advancing the One Health agenda.

LOCAL LEVEL

Locally, communities across the Region have led One Health initiatives to address health issues at the grassroots level. These actions not only improve health outcomes but also empower communities to take ownership of their well-being.

→ **The political statement of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network on local-level policy recommendations: operationalizing a One Health approach**

On 22–24 November 2022, mayors and senior political representatives reaffirmed their commitment to the Healthy Cities movement and One Health through the political statement on local-level policy recommendations: operationalizing a One Health approach, which integrates human, animal and environmental health. The statement outlines 10 concrete local-level policy recommendations related to prevention, preparation, promotion and transformation.

Acknowledging the crucial role of local governments in implementing the One Health approach, the recommendations urge cities to strengthen policies, enhance surveillance, invest in research and foster partnerships to improve resilience, equity and sustainability, aligning with the WHO European Healthy Cities Network's six key themes in the Copenhagen Consensus of Mayors to ensure healthier, safer and happier cities for all.

→ **Togher Community Garden**

The Togher Community Garden in Cork City (part of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network), Ireland uses the One Health approach by using permaculture design. Established in October 2021, the Garden emphasizes sustainable practices through the principles of earth care, people care and fair share.

Key features include soil and water management to enhance soil health, a manually dug pond serving as a carbon sink and community project and plant cultivation from seed to harvest.

An outdoor classroom hosts educational events such as cookery workshops, seed saving, foraging and biodiversity activities, promoting sustainable food systems and community engagement.

Overall, these examples highlight the versatility and effectiveness of the One Health approach across various scales – from the global and regional levels to the local level – demonstrating its potential to comprehensively and sustainably address current and future health challenges.

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A thriving community is essential for the long-term sustainability of any permaculture system, as it encourages collective action and shared responsibility

Resources

Relevant regional frameworks, strategies and action plans related to One Health

- Seventy-third Regional Committee for Europe: Astana, 24–26 October 2023: roadmap on antimicrobial resistance for the WHO European Region 2023–2030. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2023 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/372503>, accessed 3 October 2024).
- Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health: Budapest, Hungary 5–7 July 2023. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2023 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/371461>, accessed 3 October 2024).
- Annual business meeting and technical conference 2022: local-level policy recommendations: operationalizing a One Health approach: political statement of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/366322>, accessed 3 October 2024).
- OHHLEP inventory of One Health tools and resources. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/ohhlepe-inventory-of-one-health-tools>, accessed 3 October 2024).
- Seventy-third Regional Committee for Europe: Astana, 24–26 October 2023: health emergency preparedness, response and resilience in the WHO European Region 2024–2029. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/378414>, accessed 3 October 2024).

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World Health Organization

Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51,

DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00

Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

Email: eurocontact@who.int

Website: www.who.int/europe