

**National One World One Health Vision in support of the PREZODE initiative
(Preventing Zoonotic Disease Emergence) Workshop Report
8th March 2023**

Location: FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment of Belgium, Galileelaan 5/2, 1210 Brussels.

The Belgian PREZODE Expert Group (created by the Interministerial Conference of the Environment enlarged to relevant other ministerial portfolios) with support from the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment and Sciensano held a first workshop to discuss a national One World One Health Vision for Belgium on the prevention of the emergence of zoonotic diseases. The aim of this workshop was to start setting up recommendations to be submitted at ministerial level by the end of 2023. 58 experts from across sectors including biodiversity, human health, veterinary science, climate change, science policy, and scientific research attended the workshop and contributed towards this One World One Health vision.

To add diagrams with participants and affiliation (see appended)?

The workshop was opened by Pierre Kerkhofs, General Director of the Directorate General Environment at the FPS Health who underlined that the prevention of zoonotic diseases is one of the most challenging topics our society must face in a post-pandemic phase. See speech in appendix of this report.

The morning consisted of an information session which introduced the PREZODE initiative and its strategic agenda, provided an overview of current negotiations for a Pandemic Treaty at international level, set the scene for One Health scientific research in Belgium, presented concrete examples on the link between zoonotic disease emergence and the environment and how to tackle it, and finally gave information on how the Netherlands are addressing this issue through their action plan for the Strengthening of the Zoonotic Disease Policy.

You can find the presentations [here](#).

Feedback from participants about the morning session included the following statements:

- It was a good and multidisciplinary overview on current actions and challenges identified at international and national level and what is needed at Belgian level.
- This was a good opportunity to have such an initiative and to learn about the various initiatives in Belgium.

- Going forward it is important to focus on specific concrete actions.
- International collaboration is important (for e.g., Belgium and the Netherlands, Belgium and the EU).

During the afternoon session we welcomed participants to take part in breakout sessions addressing starting questions that will produce recommendations on what is needed for a One World One Health vision for Belgium and how this can happen.

General questions presented at each breakout session with a summary of responses from different sessions.

1. What is needed for a Belgian One World One Health vision (OWOH) – within the framework of zoonoses prevention?

- A **shift of paradigm** is needed as OWOH needs to be taken seriously on a global level, including environmental health, which is often put aside. In consequence, the need for a global vision should encompass in an equal way all OWOH dimensions (human health, animal health and environmental health) and be made a priority by policy makers at national, European, and international level.
- **Deep prevention** should be the core of the approach as current policies mainly focus on preparedness and response; this would imply i.e., a better understanding of the origin of zoonoses, the associated risks, the areas of spillover, the host-pathogen interaction, and a robust integrated active and passive surveillance.
- **Transversality** should be the working dynamic and increased and better collaboration is needed amongst relevant actors in Belgium who could contribute to set up a OWOH framework and spread the preventative approach across relevant domains. A mapping of activities, tools and stakeholders is needed.
- Developing a **realistic scope with key topics** is important not only for budgetary reasons but also for purposes of implementation. A clear definition of needs should be addressed to ensure the long-term involvement of all partners.
- A **transparent decision-making procedure** should be put in place to ensure a long-term collaborative effort with relevant identified stakeholders; to that end positive lobbying and interdisciplinary OH language would be needed.
- **Awareness-raising and communication** are important to make the vision known and applicable.

2. What are the gaps / challenges that are preventing us from reaching this vision?

- The **lack of funding and budget for research**, which is often scattered and short-term planning, is undermining a good knowledge and operationalization of preventative actions linked to the emergence of zoonoses.
- The **complex institutional governance** linked to the lack of concrete actions taken or willingness by policy makers is an important obstacle.
- The **lack in time associated with rapid turnover in skills** makes it difficult for researchers to invest on the long-term.
- The **lack of scientific information** associated with the absence of common tools and centralized open access databases implies that the research communities are not well connected and sometimes, even isolated as the prevention of zoonoses is not always considered as a priority for some research fields.
- The **lack of communication** between institutions and the **implication of civil society** are challenges that need to be addressed. A dynamic participatory process is needed but the way to implement it is not straightforward and would probably need a balanced mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches. Communication across stakeholders is challenging as silos need to be brought down.

3. How can we bring people together (break the silos) and address some of these issues?

- Consider the creation of a **governmental framework at national level** which is fit for purpose and could help break the silos from e.g., an institutional and legislative perspectives.
- Set up a **OWOH strategy/roadmap at national level** with key recommendations to policy makers.
- **Raise awareness, increase communication, and stimulate interaction** between stakeholders. There needs to be an active Belgian One World One Health community encompassing the already established Belgian One Health Network. This engagement can be in the form of workshops, webinars, seminars, annual/biannual meetings etc.
- **Integrate OWOH** in relevant university programs.
- **Increase funding** towards collaborative and multidisciplinary initiatives. Funding can also be towards engagement, to mobilize experts in knowledge exchange events and contribute to developing common tools like open-source and data sharing.
- A formal structure for an action plan/road map is needed as a tool for decision makers.

4. What are the One World One Health/Prevention priorities for the future?

- Define a **precise scope of intervention with concrete actions** that can be effectively implemented and regularly assessed.
- Establish a **good communication strategy and network** across sectors which is needed to achieve synergies, including a good communication with policymakers in a view of making them aware of the results and recommendations arisen from the scientific research.
- Decide on **priority themes** by listing topics of interest and ranking them. For every theme, set out some key recommendations for policy makers. Possible topics could be:
 - Drivers (land-use change, urban planning/artificialization of soil, wildlife trade, climate change, deforestation,)
 - (Re)emerging diseases & endemic diseases
 - Vector borne diseases
 - Food borne-diseases
 - Interaction host-pathogens
 - Linked topics like Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) & biosecurity
 - Cooperation of development (zoonoses & poverty)
 - Identify risks, areas of spillover and the need for extended integrated active and passive surveillance.

Conclusion of the breakout sessions:

The Belgian society needs to tackle the prevention of the emergence of priority zoonotic diseases in a transparent, well-prepared, well-funded, effective, collaborative, and preventive manner by using the One World One Health approach safeguarding ecosystem, animal and human health, within Belgium and abroad. The road to this approach includes transversality amongst Belgian actors leading to transparent decision making and strengthening communication across One Health networks. Simultaneously gaps and challenges that have been identified need to be addressed and a concrete action plan must be put in place.

Closing remarks were given by Hein Imberechts from Sciensano. He thanked all participants for their participation and stressed the fact that the work has just started and would continue in the coming months.

Going forward the FPS Health as acting chair of the Belgian Expert Group for PREZODE will be organizing a follow up workshop in Brussels on 30 June and on 6 October 2023. In the meantime, some preparatory seminars will be organized to keep the momentum going.