

One Health for Cities A European Call to Action



Empowering Cities to Lead the One Health Transition

Executive summary

European cities **call on EU decision-makers to fully integrate the One Health approach**, linking human, animal, plant, and environmental health, into policies, funding, and cooperation, **with cities at the centre**.

Cities are on the frontline of intertwined human, animal, plant, and environmental health challenges, from climate change and biodiversity loss to pollution, chronic diseases and emerging infectious threats. Through the One Health 4 Cities (OH4C) network (co-funded by the EU through the URBACT programme), municipalities have developed tools and policies **that demonstrate the potential of local action and the need for better support**.

Although the **EU has begun embedding One Health** into strategies and frameworks, **cities remain under-recognised**. With 75% of Europeans living in urban areas, municipalities are uniquely positioned to drive systemic change through proximity to citizens, cross-sector competencies, and innovation.

To fully realise the One Health transition, the EU must enable and empower cities by:

1. Positioning One Health as a strategic priority across all EU policies and investment instruments
2. Strengthening city involvement and access to funding, ensuring governance mechanisms and resources that support integrated action
3. Developing local capacity through coordinated scientific support, harmonised data, shared knowledge, technical assistance, and citizen engagement

By empowering cities to lead, the EU can create a healthier, more resilient, and sustainable future for all living beings and ecosystems.

European cities stand ready to co-lead this transition.

This European Call to Action was developed by the nine cities of the OH4C Network, established through the URBACT programme from 2023 to 2025.



A European Call to Action

We, the Mayors and representatives of European cities, **convinced of the urgent need to address the interdependencies between human, animal, plant and environmental health, and committed to the One Health approach, call on the European Union (EU) decision-makers** to fully integrate it into policies, regulations, funding, and cooperation, **with cities at the heart of this transition.**

The EU already recognises the holistic approach to health; now, the time has come to **translate this statement into action** for equity, resilience, and sustainability. This aligns with the Quadripartite One Health Joint Plan of Action (2022–2026), which provides a global framework for coordinated action across sectors. Yet, cities remain the critical missing operational tier to implement these strategies on the ground.

One Health is not optional. It is a necessity to protect all living beings and the planet. Cities are ready to lead, and the EU must enable them.

The One Health perspective is vital

One Health is an **integrated, cross-sectoral approach** that aims to **sustainably balance and optimise the health of people, animals, plants and ecosystems**. It acknowledges that these dimensions are **inextricably linked, interdependant** and require **collaboration across sectors** to:

- **Address climate change and biodiversity loss**
- **Prevent all forms of pollutions** to ensure clean air, water, soil and safe food
- **Prevent pandemics**, and antimicrobial resistance
- **Address the roots of the epidemic of non-communicable and chronic diseases** including physical, mental and social health
- **Address social and health inequalities due to environmental exposure** and unequal access to environmental resources

Key figures illustrating the importance of the One Health approach:

- **75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic** (WHO, 2023), and urbanisation can amplify these risks
- **Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) killed at least 43 million people in 2021**, equivalent to 75% of non-pandemic related deaths globally (WHO, 2025)
- By 2050, **antimicrobial resistance could cause 10 million deaths** each year, \$100 trillion cumulative loss in global production if unaddressed (O'Neill, 2016) and cost €11.7 billion per year in EU/EEA (ECDC, 2024)
- **The average size of wildlife populations has fallen by a staggering 73%** (WWF, 2024)
- **Seven of nine planetary boundaries breached in 2025** (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, 2025)
- **COVID-19 costs the global economy over \$12 trillion** (IMF, 2020)
- **€1 invested in One Health prevention saves €3 in crisis response** (World Bank, 2023)



The EU has taken important steps to embed the One Health approach

- The **EU One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (2017)** laid the groundwork for cross-sectoral collaboration
- The **EU4Health Regulation (2021)** provided a legal definition of One Health as a "multisectoral approach recognizing the connection between human, animal, and environmental health"
- In 2023, five EU agencies - *the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), and the European Medicines Agency (EMA)* - established the **Cross-Agency One Health Task Force** and jointly developed the **2024–2026 Framework for Action**, outlining their shared vision, objectives, and concrete actions to strengthen coordination, research, capacity-building, communication, and partnerships
- Several **EU strategies, plans, and mechanisms** already integrate One Health principles, including the Environment Action Programme to 2030, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and the 2021 Climate Adaptation Strategy
- The **European Commission's mission letter to the Commissioner-designate for Health and Animal Welfare** explicitly anchors One Health as a foundation of EU health policy

These initiatives signal a growing commitment to integrating One Health into EU policies and actions.



Cities are uniquely positioned to lead the One Health transition

- **75% of Europeans live in urban areas in 2025**, a figure set to rise to 78% by 2050 (European Commission, 2025)
- Cities, thanks to their **proximity to citizens**, can efficiently identify needs and enable rapid crisis responses, such as testing, vaccination campaigns, and solidarity networks
- Cities have **cross-cutting competencies**, such as health protection and promotion, urban planning, environmental quality, food systems, which influence the health of living beings and ecosystems
- Cities serve as testing grounds for integrated solutions making them **innovation hubs** for systemic change
- **Cities networks** can support experience sharing and knowledge transfer



European cities are already taking action. In February 2022, the **Lyon Declaration** was signed by 25 European cities and metropolitan areas during the meeting of EU health ministers in Lyon. Following this, nine cities led by the City of Lyon created the **One Health 4 Cities network**, committing to experiment with One Health implementation in local public action and policy. Achievements include:

- **Kuopio (FI)** integrated One Health as a cross-cutting theme in their City Strategy
- **Lahti (FI), Munich (DE) and Lyon (FR)** integrated One Health into their health strategies and developed flagship projects
- **Strasbourg (FR)** integrated One Health into policies, and created a roadmap for implementation
- **Benissa (ES), Suceava (RO), Loulé (PT)** developed local resilience strategies for healthy environments and lifestyles
- **Elefsina (GR)** developed community-centred One Health education and neighbourhood action



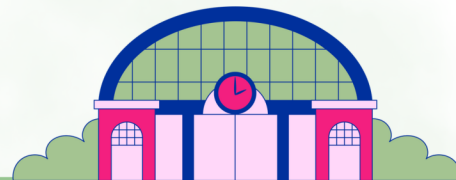
Significant challenges remain

- One Health is inherently integrated, yet implementation occurs in **societies and governance systems that often operate in silos**, making coordination challenging
- **Accessing funding for cross-cutting initiatives is difficult**, as most financial instruments are designed around sectoral priorities
- **Cities are not sufficiently considered or empowered** as key stakeholders in EU funding mechanisms such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, or ERDF
- **A lack of harmonised data, shared indicators, and evidence-based knowledge sharing** hinders cities and regions from measuring and demonstrating impact
- **Implementation is uneven across Member States and cities:** some advance quickly, others lag due to disparities in knowledge, resources, and support

All European cities must adapt equally to the current fast evolving context. The **One Health approach provides the most effective framework** to do so. To implement it successfully, **European cities require coordinated support from the EU.**



We urge the EU to

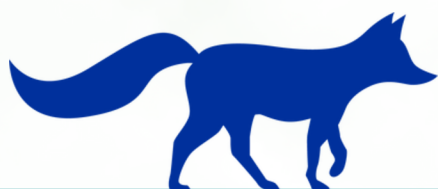


1. Position One Health as a Strategic Priority Across All EU Policies and Investment Instruments

- Ensure One Health is **integrated into future EU legislative and policy frameworks**
- **Integrate One Health as a mandatory evaluation criterion across EU funding programmes**, including measurable indicators
- **Expand incentives and awards for One Health actions in cities**, supporting cross-sector governance, capacity-building, surveillance integration, etc. (e.g., “European Capital of One Health”)
- **Launch an EU-wide One Health Mission / Flagship Initiative**, to empower cities to pilot integrated models and accelerate scaling (such as Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission)

2. Empower Cities through Governance Mechanisms and Direct Funding

- **Strengthen formal involvement of city representatives in EU One Health governance structures** and expert groups
- **Designate a dedicated One Health budget line within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** and ensure coherence with EU Cohesion Policy
- **Increase direct and simplified access for cities to key EU funding** by expanding eligibility and simplifying administrative requirements
- **Introduce performance-based incentives and earmarked calls** rewarding municipalities that implement cross-sector One Health governance
- **Support scaling of city-led innovations through EU platforms and networks**, including cooperation with Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, Urban Agenda Partnerships, and WHO European Healthy Cities Network, ensuring knowledge transfer and uptake across Member States



3. Build Local Capacity through Knowledge Sharing, Scientific Support, Technical Assistance, and Citizen Engagement

- **Enhance the EU science-policy ecosystem for One Health**, reinforcing intersectoral governance, structured scientific advice, and tailored capacity-building for cities
- **Consolidate and disseminate One Health tools and guidance** through EU knowledge platforms such as Urban Agenda Knowledge Hub, EU Health Policy Platform, and Cities Mission Platform
- **Establish operational support and peer-learning schemes**, including technical assistance facilities, mentorships, twinning, and communities of practice
- **Strengthen citizen participation and citizen science** by providing funding, standardized data tools, and pathways to integrate citizen-generated information into early warning, pollutant monitoring, biodiversity assessments, and zoonotic surveillance

European cities stand ready to co-lead this transition with the EU institutions and Member States. The EU must enable cities.



One Health 4 Cities



One Health for Cities

A European Call to Action

Empowering Cities to Lead the One Health Transition

I, _____, representing _____,
hereby endorse the Call to Action “**Empowering Cities to Lead
the One Health Transition**”, affirming our commitment to a
healthier, more sustainable future for all.

Date:

Name of the city / municipality:

Represented by:

Signature and stamp:



One Health 4 cities