

WCS EU Response to EC Call for Evidence on the EU Global Health Resilience Initiative

The Wildlife Conservation Society EU office (WCS EU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the [EU global health resilience initiative](#). WCS EU is a Belgian NGO supporting the conservation of landscapes and seascapes globally. Our response is also submitted on behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the world's largest field-based conservation organization, with which we are affiliated. WCS has over 120 years of experience in conserving wildlife, landscapes and seascapes, and natural resources. WCS's mission is to save wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. WCS works closely with government, civil society, academia, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities in 50+ countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific.

WCS initiated and remains a global leader on One Health, with more than 100 years of hands-on veterinary expertise, including disease and pathogen surveillance, and groundbreaking scientific research on the health-environment nexus. In 2004, with the publication of the [Manhattan Principles](#), WCS, together with partners, launched the modern One Health approach during the first-ever "One World, One Health" symposium in New York City. In 2019, the Climate and Environmental Foreign Policy Division at the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO) partnered with WCS to convene the "One Planet, One Health, One Future" conference, at which a follow-up to the Manhattan Principles, the [Berlin Principles](#), were issued.

The environment sector and the protection and restoration of ecological integrity are foundational to One Health. Ecological integrity includes the function, composition, and structure of an ecosystem; high-integrity ecosystems are more resilient, regulate climate, sustain biodiversity, secure water and food systems, and buffer human and animal populations from environmental and health hazards. Conversely, ecological degradation erodes these protective functions and amplifies systemic risk.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and other disease outbreaks of animal origin such as Ebola, SARS, Mpox, and high pathogenicity avian influenza, have engendered massive loss of human life and suffering with severe societal and economic costs, and highlight the urgent need to apply a cross-sectoral One Health approach. The rising risk of epidemics and pandemics of zoonotic origin is directly related to expanding interfaces among wildlife, livestock, and humans. These dynamics are primarily driven by anthropogenic pressures, including land-use change,

particularly the destruction of high-integrity ecosystems, deforestation, and forest degradation; and the extraction and exploitation of wildlife for urban markets, live trade, and farming. Poor animal welfare along these trade chains further increases susceptibility to infection, disease severity, and pathogen shedding, thereby amplifying the risk of transmission across wildlife, livestock, and human populations.

The science is clear: pandemic prevention at source, or primary prevention, is the single most effective and cost-effective way to prevent pandemics, by avoiding pathogen spillover among humans, wildlife, and other animals in the first place.

Against this backdrop, the EU Global Health Resilience Initiative represents a critical opportunity to realign global health policy with the best available science. To be effective, the Initiative must:

- **Substantially scale up investment in One Health**, with a balanced allocation across human, animal, and environmental health pillars;
- **Prioritise pandemic prevention at source** within EU external action, including through Global Gateway, and global financing mechanisms, including the Pandemic Fund;
- **Support organisations and actors delivering on-the-ground conservation and health action**, particularly in biodiversity-rich regions where spillover risks are highest.
- **Direct significantly increased funding toward *in-situ* conservation and high-integrity ecosystem protection and restoration**, recognising these as essential public health interventions;
- **Recognise and integrate ecosystems as foundational health infrastructure within resilience frameworks**, given their role in regulating climate, securing water and food systems, and reducing environmentally mediated health risks;
- **Embed ecosystem protection and restoration within broader health risk reduction strategies**, including for climate-related, nutritional, AMR and pollution-driven health impacts, thereby strengthening overall societal resilience beyond infectious disease threats.

Furthermore, WCS EU calls for the development of a comprehensive and ambitious **EU One Health Strategy**. Such a strategy should move beyond internal coordination and articulate a clear external dimension, positioning the EU as a global leader in preventing pathogen spillovers and emerging infectious diseases, and reducing systemic health risks through environmental stewardship, ecosystem protection and restoration, and the integration of healthy ecosystems as core health infrastructure. It should include measurable targets, dedicated financing, and policy coherence across sectors, including environment, health, agriculture, trade, economic development, security, and international cooperation. The urgency

of this need is underscored by the [January 2025 Open Letter](#) endorsed by 42 organisations calling for decisive EU leadership in this space.

Integrating the environment sector as a central pillar of One Health is not optional, it is indispensable. A failure to do so will perpetuate reactive, high-cost crisis responses.

Embedding ecological integrity at the heart of health policy offers a systemic pathway to resilience, delivering co-benefits for climate stability, biodiversity conservation, economic security, and human and animal health and well-being.

Contact information:

Arnaud Goessens

Director of Policy and External Affairs

Wildlife Conservation Society EU Office (WCS EU)

agoessens@wcs.org