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Applying the One Health Approach in EU Policies: Strengthening Integrated Governance for Health and Sustainability

Key policies: *One Health approach, European Green Deal, General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030, Zero Pollution Action Plan, Animal Health Law, Plant Health Law, EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, EU Biodiversity Strategy, Habitats Directive, Farm to Fork Strategy, EU Marine Environmental Policies, EU Research and Innovation Policy (Horizon Europe)*

At the request of former Commissioner **Stella Kyriakides**, the **Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM)** has issued a set of recommendations on how to **apply the One Health approach more effectively across EU policies**.

The advice is based on an extensive scientific evidence review carried out by **SAPEA** (Science Advice for Policy by European Academies), which examined how human health, animal health, plant health and environmental health are deeply interconnected and must be addressed as a single system.

One Health: an integrated response to complex challenges

First developed in the 1960s and brought into renewed focus at the **World Health Summit 2023**, the **One Health approach** recognises that health challenges — from zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance to food systems and environmental degradation — cannot be tackled in isolation.

The SAPEA review confirms a strong scientific consensus: **integrated, cross-sectoral policymaking delivers multiple co-benefits**, improving outcomes for people, animals, ecosystems and the economy alike.

Existing EU policies and remaining gaps

The evidence review notes that several EU policies already integrate elements of a One Health approach, including:

- The **General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030**
- The **Zero Pollution Action Plan**
- The **Animal Health Law**
- The **EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change**

However, SAPEA also identifies significant opportunities to strengthen One Health integration in other key policy areas, such as:

- The **European Green Deal**
- **Plant Health Law**
- **Habitats Directive** and the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**
- **Farm to Fork Strategy**

- **Marine environmental policies**

Many policies, particularly in food and agriculture, are still designed as **stand-alone instruments**, despite their far-reaching impacts on human health, animal welfare and non-communicable diseases.

Strengthening policy coherence and governance

Building on SAPEA's findings, the **Group of Chief Scientific Advisors** recommends that the EU should move beyond fragmented policymaking and **strengthen policy coherence** by systematically applying the One Health approach from the **earliest stages of policy development**.

Key recommendations include:

- Adopting the **One Health High-Level Expert Panel definition** as the common reference across EU action
- Breaking down **policy silos** and improving coordination at EU, national and local levels
- Promoting **cross-sectoral collaboration** and the exchange of best practices among governments, agencies and stakeholders

This would enable policymakers to design measures that deliver **optimal outcomes across multiple objectives**, rather than focusing narrowly on single policy domains.

Integrating One Health across policy areas

The advisors highlight priority areas where One Health integration is particularly critical, including:

- Human, animal and plant health
- Chemicals, environment and climate policy
- Food systems, agriculture, food safety and nutrition
- Research and innovation
- Trade, regional, urban and rural development
- Education and skills

Embedding One Health thinking early in these areas would significantly improve the effectiveness and resilience of EU policies.

Education, research and innovation as enablers

Applying One Health requires a **fundamental shift in mindset** among citizens, professionals and policymakers. The advisors therefore stress the importance of:

- Integrating One Health perspectives into **education at all levels**
- Strengthening professional training and public awareness

The SAPEA review also identifies **significant research gaps**, calling for more interdisciplinary research on:

- The cost-effectiveness of One Health interventions
- Human behaviours affecting health outcomes, such as wildlife trade, farming practices, water management and vaccination acceptance

Emerging technologies can play a crucial role, including **remote sensing**, environmental monitoring tools, **big data** and **artificial intelligence**, to better understand and manage health risks.

Improving surveillance and monitoring systems

Finally, the advisors underline the need to expand EU **surveillance and monitoring systems**, which are currently largely medically focused, to better detect **emerging threats across species and ecosystems**.

Near real-time data, improved system interoperability and stronger links between existing monitoring frameworks are essential. Initial steps are already underway, with EU agencies responsible for **food safety, health, environment, chemicals and medicines** working together on a joint framework for action.

Background

The **Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM)** provides independent scientific advice to EU institutions on complex and strategic policy challenges. Its recommendations are supported by detailed **Scientific Opinions** and **Evidence Review Reports**, including the SAPEA study on **One Health governance in the European Union**, both available via the SAM website.

Together, these findings highlight that **applying One Health systematically across EU policies is not only possible, but necessary** to address today's interconnected health, environmental and societal challenges.

Source: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/how-can-we-apply-one-health-approach-eu-policies-2025-07-24_en