

“Building back better and advancing the SDGs”

Tuesday, 5 July from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. (NY time)

The pandemic forced us to reconsider and revise our views on health. Health should no longer be thought of solely in terms of humans, but rather as a dimension that connects humans, animals, plants, and the environment.

In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the human-animal interface, emphasizing the importance of a coordinated and collaborative multidisciplinary approach, such as One Health, in reducing and preventing the emergence of zoonotic infections. Namely, more than half of known human infectious disease pathogens have an animal source or origin, and they result in over a billion cases globally each year, often imposing high financial and societal costs.

The One Health approach implies a health strategy that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and communication on health at the human-animal-environmental interface. It has also emphasized the urgent need to consider the links between our health and the health of the environment around us when we design strategies for "building back better".

Croatia recognised the importance of OHA as a crucial part of *building back better* and preventing the future pandemics. Namely, in 2019 Croatia co-coordinated, together with Afghanistan, the Resolution on Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This resolution creates the foundation not only for the recovery, but for building back better, and emphasises that the approach underlines the urgent need for continued close work of FAO, OIE, WHO and UNEP, together with other relevant parts of the United Nations system and relevant stakeholders.

Communication, coordination, and collaboration between various sectors such as human health (epidemiologists, virologists, public health experts), animal health (veterinarians) and environmental health (ecologists) are all part of the One Health strategy. For some countries, the collaboration between sectors is already a reality, as is the case in Croatia. Veterinarians have been strongly involved in public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the One Health approach, several seroepidemiological studies were conducted in different population groups after the first and second pandemic wave in Croatia (general population, children/adolescents, professional athletes, healthcare workers, veterinarians) and in immunocompromised patients (hemodialysis patients, liver and kidney transplant recipients). Studies were also conducted on pet animals and wildlife. To analyze the extent of the environmental contamination with SARS-CoV-2, samples were taken from the environment of patients with confirmed COVID-19 in non-healthcare settings. Wastewater SARS-CoV-2 monitoring was performed in Zagreb, two times per week at the Zagreb Wastewater Treatment Plant. To monitor the prevalence and spread of variants of concern, whole-genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 positive samples in Croatia was conducted weekly from February 2021 in collaboration with the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Following such interdisciplinary cooperation and applying it to policy making is especially relevant now, considering the current situation in which we live; emerging and re-emerging diseases we face, and the time in which global and national mechanisms of preparedness and responses to health threats are being reviewed.

Today, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present an unprecedented global challenge, with a plethora of dire socioeconomic consequences that no country can address on its own, Croatia is firmly committed to support the work of the ECOSOC as the key platform for the joint and successful achievement of the post-COVID recovery and the remaining key task of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We stand together in our goal to build more sustainable, greener, inclusive and equitable societies in which no one will be left behind.