

Third International Conference on Health and Biodiversity (Cohab 3)

Partnerships for People and Planet

Galway, Ireland, 14th – 17th September 2026

Preliminary conference outline

1. Introduction

The third International Conference on Health and Biodiversity (Cohab 3) will bring national and local governments, IGOs, NGOs, academia, businesses, and indigenous peoples and local communities together to discuss the interlinkages between the global health and biodiversity crises.

Over four days in Galway city in the west of Ireland, attendees will share research, stories and perspectives on how these intersecting global priorities can be addressed in a spirit of partnership, placing planetary health at the heart of solutions for a more sustainable future.

The conference will form a key part of a five-year process of partnership development, knowledge exchange and capacity building, running from 2026 to 2030, which will provide scientific, technical and community-level support for actions in support of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Overarching theme of the conference

The theme of the conference is **Partnerships for People and Planet**. Cohab 3 will highlight the importance of multilateral partnerships and collaboration across disciplines, sectors, borders and communities for addressing interlinked global challenges. Examples of effective partnerships for sustainable development from around the world will be highlighted in the conference sessions, including policy dialogues, real-world interventions, and research initiatives. This will include consideration of nexus approaches which place health and biodiversity at the heart of other global priorities including climate action, poverty reduction, food and nutrition security, and humanitarian assistance. Particular attention will be given to how these approaches can best secure and promote human rights and address inequalities in health outcomes and environmental risk.

Convening a conference to bring together a diverse audience to share perspectives on a common theme requires that all participants can unite around a clear framework for discussion; the theme of partnership will form the narrative thread connecting each session, highlighting the need for international dialogues, the importance of multilateral agreements, of community-led initiatives, and “whole-of-government, whole-of-society” approaches.

3. Conference Objectives

The conference will promote and support partnerships for the development and delivery of integrated plans, policies and programmes on biodiversity and health at global, national and sub-national levels. This will be supported in the months before the conference by a programme of outreach, engagement and dialogues with partners and other organisations, aimed at capacity building, experience sharing and knowledge exchange.

Conference discussions will explore synergies and paths of integration between existing international policy instruments on biodiversity and health, as well as other interlinked areas such as international development, food and nutrition security, climate change, and humanitarian assistance, promoting holistic approaches at global, national and subnational levels. Key policy drivers to be considered include the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health adopted at the 16th Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP16, in Cali, Colombia, November 2024), WHO Global Pandemic Agreement (May, 2025), recommendations from the CBD SBSTTA27 meeting in Panama in October 2025, the 79th World Health Assembly in May 2026, and the CBD COP17 meeting scheduled for Yerevan, Armenia, in October 2026. Cohab 3 will also explore how the connections between health and biodiversity present opportunities to enhance synergies between the Rio Conventions (the CBD, the UNFCCC and the UNCCD), and other relevant multilateral processes. Particular attention will be given to the engagement of marginalised and under-represented groups, including women, youth, and indigenous peoples.

It is intended that outputs from the conference will serve as a resource for decisions makers and other actors engaged in relevant multilateral processes on health, biodiversity, climate change and other inter-linked global priorities, and in implementing the SDGs.

4. Outputs

Lessons learned from the preparatory process for Cohab 3, including outputs of partner dialogues, evidence-gathering and capacity building will provide the basis of a set of policy briefs which will be published online in the months preceding the conference, and which will help outline the core concepts and narrative thread for Cohab 3.

A summary report on conference proceedings and key messages will be prepared for presentation at the CBD COP17 meeting in Armenia in October 2026. It is intended that the report will help to inform discussions at that meeting and support the development and implementation of the CBD's Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health. The report will also be presented at the UNFCCC COP31 at the end of 2026, and the 80th World Health Assembly in May 2027.

A detailed scientific and technical report will be prepared prior to that WHA meeting, along with a compendium of papers based on selected conference presentations and discussions, to be published as an open-access resource in collaboration with a selected scientific publisher.

The reports will also be available for presentation and discussion at other multilateral fora, subject to resource availability. Partners and participants will also be encouraged to use and build-upon the reports through their own networks, and via delegations and engagement at other meetings.

5. Thematic framework

The conference sessions will each consider three sub-themes which will support the overarching theme of partnership:

1. The current state of knowledge on interlinkages between health and biodiversity

Each session will first look at the current evidence base on relationships between health and biodiversity in the context of the main session topic, including outputs from scientific research, the knowledge and experiences of indigenous peoples and local communities (with recognition of Afro-descendent communities), and outcomes of major policy initiatives. Discussions will also consider emerging issues at the interface of health and biodiversity, including impacts of plastic pollution, issues in synthetic biology, and the growing importance of nexus approaches. A particular emphasis will be placed on diverse values and different forms of knowledge relating to biodiversity and health.

2. Policy integration across relevant health, biodiversity and related sectors

Sessions will next consider synergies between international policies on health, biodiversity, climate change and other interlinked issues, with a particular focus on prevention and on the co-benefits of greater coherence and harmonisation. Key policy instruments for consideration will include *inter alia* the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the WHO Pandemic Agreement, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the International Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the SDGs. Discussions will also explore novel approaches to integration and mainstreaming at international and national level, including integrated science-based indicators, nature-based solutions for health, health-biodiversity cofinancing, economic accounting of health-related ecosystem services, and conservation as a tool in conflict resolution and post-crisis recovery. In addition to top-down approaches, sessions will also highlight the importance of bottom-up responses based on multi-partner collaboration.

3. The importance of human rights-based approaches to health and biodiversity

Finally, each session will discuss how integrated health-biodiversity policies and interventions should actively promote human rights, ensuring that rights-holders, especially Indigenous peoples and local communities, are empowered to claim their rights, manage their local ecosystems, and participate in science and decision making. Sessions will also explore the differential contributions which nature makes to health and well-being across different communities, sections of society and marginalised or vulnerable groups. This will include consideration of the influence of biocultural diversity to health status and health outcomes,

and culturally competent approaches to health that recognise the diverse ways in which people relate to, care for, manage and utilise biodiversity. Each session will hear stories from indigenous peoples and people of African descent, women, youth and local communities which illustrate their needs, perspectives and approaches to health-biodiversity linkages.

Each of these topics will form the basis of discussions on specific subject areas at the interface of biodiversity and health which will be explored across plenary and parallel sessions, in order to promote coherence and continuity between each subject and to tie in with the overarching theme of partnership. Provisionally, the selected subject areas for detailed discussion during parallel sessions are:

- Dietary diversity and nutrition security
- Oceans and health
- Disaster risk reduction, relief and recovery
- Reducing health inequality for women and youth
- Pandemic prevention
- Urban community health and well-being.

Additional lines of integration will be incorporated into the conference programme, including exploration of how nature-based solutions can promote health through conservation and ecosystem restoration, and the value of One Health strategies in the design and implementation of policies and interventions for the health of people and the planet.

6. Conference format

The conference will open with a one-day plenary session during which conference partners will report on their own activities in science, policy and action on building partnerships for people and planet. This will set the scene for discussions over the following days.

On days two, three and four, parallel sessions will include a mixture of invited and offered presentations addressing the conference's core topics (the current state of knowledge, opportunities for integrated policy approaches, and human-rights based approaches) in the context of each of the main subject areas (dietary diversity and nutrition security; oceans and health; disaster risk reduction, relief and recovery; reducing health inequality for women and youth; pandemic prevention; and urban community health and well-being). Sessions will provide space for voices from academia, civil society organisations, decision makers, and indigenous and local communities.

Attendees will also be offered an opportunity to host side-events in the morning, during lunch breaks and at the end of each day, to further share their own perspectives and solutions. The venue has capacity to run up to eight side events simultaneously.

The final day of the conference will reconvene in plenary, to review discussions over the previous days, and to highlight additional perspectives on cross-cutting and emerging issues at the interface of health and biodiversity.

The conference venue has additional capacity for smaller, focused workshops on a fifth day, which may be used by partners to prepare an initial outline for the conference report, and / or to further explore specific themes.

7. Venue

The conference will take place in Galway City in western Ireland from Monday 14th to Thursday 17th September 2026. Galway is renowned for its thriving and cosmopolitan city centre and as a hub of Irish cultural heritage, from its ancient cobble-stoned streets and city walls to colourful shop fronts and a lively traditional music scene. It marks the half-way point of Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, a 2,500km tourism and heritage route along Ireland's Atlantic coast. Galway is also famous for its unique biocultural diversity, with habitats, species and landscapes intertwined with archaeology, the Irish language, food systems, and the arts. Excursions to some of Ireland's most important areas of biocultural diversity will be offered to participants during the week, highlighting local collaborative approaches to biodiversity conservation that promote health and social well-being.

Cohab Initiative Secretariat

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<https://cohabinitiative.org>