

International interdisciplinary research projects within the frame of the 'International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade': Criteria and Process for awarding funds

Preamble

Zoonotic disease emergence is an important health risk associated with wildlife contact, such as extraction, trade and consumption. To address this issue from a research perspective, the German Research Platform for Zoonoses and the '*International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade*', initiated by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), launch a joint project call focusing on zoonotic pathogen emergence at the human-wildlife interfaces. The knowledge gained in the research project will be incorporated into integrated interventions and strategies with the long-term goal of reducing the risks of pathogen spill-over and subsequent zoonotic disease emergence from wildlife.

The German Research Platform for Zoonoses is an information and service network for all research groups active in Germany in the field of zoonoses research. Its goal is the rapid development of functional, flexible, and sustainable solutions for the research, prevention and control of zoonotic infectious diseases, and the implementation of these solutions in cooperation with the relevant institutions. To achieve this goal, the Zoonoses Platform supports scientific and infrastructural work. This work is intended to provide an incentive for intensive research networking between disciplines on the one hand, and different stakeholders on the other.

The '*International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade*' brings together different actors from international and national governmental organizations, non-governmental and non-profit organizations, civil society stakeholders as well as scientific institutions from the One Health spectrum. The members of the Alliance are committed to 1) unite resources to reduce the risks of zoonotic spillover from wildlife and step-up responses to human health risks posed by the contact with wildlife as well as to 2) enhance international and national awareness, knowledge and policies to narrow the gap between science and implementation.

The process of calling for and evaluating the international interdisciplinary research projects are the responsibility of the Zoonoses Platform. The funds necessary to implement the project are approved within the framework of the German contribution to the '*International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade*' implemented by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) on behalf of the German Government.

Eligibility

All members of the Zoonoses Platform that identify with the above-mentioned goals of the '*International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade*' are entitled to submit project applications themselves or be co-applicants. Persons with guest status are entitled to participate in projects as cooperation partners. All projects must have an international

component and at least one international partner. Applications deadline for short 2-page concept note is the **September 10th 2021 at 23:59 CET**. Funded projects can be implemented internationally.

Type of project

International interdisciplinary research projects are projects that span individual projects, disciplines and institutes, possibly networks; they have a defined financial framework and are jointly applied for and conducted by a minimum of two research actors (at least one of these outside of Germany). Overall, projects should strive for integrative approaches with the long-term goal of reducing the risks of pathogen spill-over and subsequent zoonotic disease emergence from wildlife, specifically focusing on human-wildlife contact primarily in the context of wildlife extraction (i.e. hunting, capture), trade and consumption. The project will ideally include field work in and / or the impact will be directly relevant to a low and middle income country with high biodiversity, namely one that is named by the OECD Development Aid Committee as recipient of official development aid (ODA): [DAC List of ODA Recipients for reporting 2021 flows June 2021.xlsx \(oecd.org\)](#).

In doing so, research projects should aim at answering one or more of the following questions: 1) What do pathogen dynamics at the human-wildlife interface look like in the context of wildlife extraction, trade and consumption, along the entire capture, trade and supply chain? 2) What pathogens circulate in wildlife, and how and why do they succeed in crossing species barriers? 3) What is the actual human exposure to pathogens with spill-over potential in the above-mentioned context, and how can we measure it? 4) What are the critical control points and how can the spill-over risk be reduced?

In concrete terms, research projects might:

- assess zoonotic disease emergence from wildlife, e.g. in the context of wildlife extraction, trade and consumption, along the entire wildlife value chain
- identify and describe spill-over risks and mechanisms and temporal and spatial patterns of zoonotic disease emergence from wildlife
- develop and/or improve field-based methods and applications for pathogen screening in wildlife, including metagenomics
- develop, contribute to, or improve methods which identify and evaluate wildlife pathogens to estimate their zoonotic spill-over and epidemic/pandemic potential
- assess the potential of early-warning/sentinel systems
- analyze pathways and interactions between pathogens and host species across different levels of exposures and vulnerabilities
- identify and characterize risky behaviors and practices as well as socio-ecological factors along the entire wildlife trade and supply chain (e.g. ecological factors, human behavior) which might favor pathogen spill-over
- quantitatively and/or qualitatively assess human-wildlife contact in the context of wildlife trade and consumption, and associated risks of pathogen spill-over / human exposure and vulnerability to pathogens

Preferably, project proposals should be interdisciplinary systems-based approaches which might assess the bio-physical environment (e.g. pathogen dynamics in wildlife and at the human/wildlife interface), the socio-ecosystem (e.g. human behavior and hunting, trade and

consumption practices), governance structures (relevant rights - access and uses-, justice and laws), and/ or consider biodiversity and conservation aspects (for multi-solving approaches). They should generate an added value at the end of the funding phase (at the latest) not only for the grant recipients, but also for all interested zoonoses researchers and members of the 'International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade', contributing to its goals. Duration of the project should not exceed 24 months. Guideline for the maximum sum to be applied for: 200.000,00 Euro (the sum must be justified in a comprehensible way by the project structure and outlay).

Application process

Applications for project funding are to be made in accordance with the following procedures.

1. Two-step submission of research outline and project application to administrative office

The application process is divided into three different parts:

- A) In a first step a research outline/ **concept note (max. 2 pages)** is to be submitted to the office of the German Research Platform for Zoonoses until **September 10th, 2021 at 23:59 CET**. The research outline should outline briefly the planned research work and how it fits the project format. It should include a short presentation of the research topic and its background, the study design and its intended results as well as the target groups and added value for the goals of the Zoonoses Platform and the 'International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade'. Applications can be submitted in electronic form to info@zoonosen.net. Contact persons are Dr. Friederike Jansen (friederike.jansen@ukmuenster.de) and Dr. Dana Thal (dana.thal@fli.de)
- B) The most promising research outlines are selected by the Internal Advisory Board of the Zoonoses Platform and a representative of the Alliance's secretariat, by the end of September 2021. For the selected outlines applicants are asked to hand in a more **detailed project application** (max. 11 pages) by **October 26th, 2021**. An application template can be obtained from the administrative office or from the website www.zoonosen.net. The project application should describe the project in more detail. It should also present the research question to be addressed, its scientific innovativeness, the added value for already existing zoonoses research, as well as its interdisciplinarity and contribution to the goals of the 'International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade' as mentioned above. The application is limited to eleven pages (without appendices). A letter of support is to be attached from all cooperation partners. The administrative office checks the documents for formal correctness. The administrative office is entitled to reject formally incorrect applications.
- C) Appraisal by the Internal Advisory Board (see point 2).

2. Appraisal by the Internal Advisory Board and a representative of the Alliance's secretariat

In a third and central evaluation step, **selected applicants** are invited to **present their applications in person** at a meeting of the Internal Advisory Board of the Zoonoses Platform, including a representative of the Alliance's secretariat, on **November 9th or 10th 2021**. The

applications are evaluated comparatively, and one project is recommended for funding. The following criteria will be decisive for international interdisciplinary research projects:

- Research expertise and track record of the applicants, both in general and regarding the specific project idea, necessary prior knowledge beyond the project idea, and networking competence
- Scientific novelty and originality of the proposed research project, existence of a conclusive hypothesis on the object of research
- Added value and applicability of the project or the project results for interdisciplinary and international zoonoses research
- Added value and applicability of the project or project results to the 'International Alliance against Health Risks in Wildlife Trade'
- Feasibility of the project and appropriateness of the timeline and budgetary framework presented
- International networking between different research institutions and between at least two different disciplines within the project
- Thematical focus on the areas of emerging zoonoses, emerging pathogens, pathogen discovery, disease spill-over risks, human/wildlife/livestock interface, health risks / hazards, prediction and prevention, One Health, public health

After examining the project application in terms of content and form, the Internal Advisory Board, together with a representative of the Alliance's secretariat, can decide as follows:

- a) The project proposal is evaluated positively.
- b) The applicant is requested to incorporate the recommended modifications to the project and to resubmit the application.
- c) The project application is rejected.

The project application is recommended for funding or rejected by a simple majority of the Internal Advisory Board and the Alliance representative. All members of the Internal Advisory Board are entitled to vote, provided that they do not have a conflict of interests. The representative of the Alliance's secretariat will acknowledge the Internal Advisory Board's vote and take a final decision.

Nota Bene: Conflict of interests

A member of the Internal Advisory Board is deemed to have a conflict of interests if she or he is involved financially or substantively in a submitted project proposal, or if she or he is a member of the same institute or working group as the applicant. In addition, members of the Internal Advisory Board are requested to give truthful declaration of close cooperation with the applicants in thematically similar projects or of competition, and where relevant to identify a conflict of interests. Employment in the same superordinate institution alone does not constitute a conflict of interests. If members of the Internal Advisory Board have a conflict of interests, they must declare it and leave the room during discussion and voting.

3. Final review by GIZ

Upon funding recommendation by the Zoonoses Platform's Internal Advisory Board, GIZ will additionally complete its mandatory 'commercial and legal eligibility check' before drafting the grant agreement, checking that the recipient qualifies as non-profit organization and whether

the potential recipient is commercially, administratively and legally qualified to assume responsibility for implementing the project correctly.

A binding approval for funding can only be issued after this final review of the documents by the GIZ. Funding is granted in the form of a financing agreement between GIZ and the project coordinating institution.

4. Duty to report

There is an obligation to report to GIZ and the International Alliance, as will be indicated in the respective financial agreement. The Internal Advisory Board is entitled to request written or oral interim or final reports on the projects, which will be shared with the Alliance's secretariat. It is desirable that short project reports are given as part of the International Symposium on Zoonoses Research. Furthermore, a joint workshop of the Zoonoses Platform and the International Alliance with different stakeholders is envisioned for the end of the project to support the transfer and integration of research results into the broader agenda of the Alliance.