



Ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss increase the risk of emerging and spreading infectious diseases affecting wildlife, domestic animals, and humans. Land-use change transforms diverse habitats into homogeneous and impoverished landscapes, where generalist species and vectors of zoonotic diseases thrive.

The **ZOE project**, with 7 European and 4 Latin American partners, aims to understand how deforestation and biodiversity loss influence the emergence of zoonoses and vector-borne diseases, while highlighting the protective role of forest ecosystem restoration. The consortium follows a **One Health** approach, integrating human, animal, and environmental health.

## Social sciences and zoonoses

This part of ZOE investigates the social, cultural, and economic factors influencing the emergence, spread, and prevention of diseases in communities located near forest areas. The team, led by **Adina Dumitru (Universidade da Coruña)** and **Kerstin Krellenberg (University of Vienna)**, includes experts in psychology, geography, sociology, and anthropology. Multiple methodologies will be applied to explore **knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors** around zoonotic diseases and their links to environmental change.

### Case studies:

- Petén National Park, Tikal (Guatemala)
- El Rodeo Protected Area, Cantón de Mora (Costa Rica)
- Puuc Biocultural Reserve, Yucatán Peninsula (Mexico)
- Zahorské Pomoravie Protected Area (Slovakia)
- Green Karst Protected Area (Slovenia)

# Research stages (2025–2027)

## 1. Workshops with experts and key informants 2025

Identifying social, cultural, and behavioral factors that drive environmental degradation and zoonotic risk.

## 2. Surveys and observations 2026

Fieldwork in forest areas and adjacent communities to assess local perceptions, practices, and strategies to cope with disease risks.

## 3. Workshops with communities 2027

Sharing and discussing preliminary results. Co-developing strategies to strengthen livelihoods and reduce risks.

## 4. International conference 2027

Gathering representatives from public institutions, NGOs, communities, academia, and nature-based enterprises. Goal: disseminate results and build networks for biodiversity–health action.

## Interested in joining the research?

Get in touch and be part of this collaborative effort for the health of people, animals, and ecosystems.



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