

Steering Board* Conference Conclusions

Human Biomonitoring in Europe – Science and Policy for Healthy Citizens

Vienna, September 28, 2018

Under the Austrian Presidency of the EU, an international conference entitled *“Human biomonitoring in Europe – science and policy for healthy citizens”* took place on 28 September 2018 in Vienna. The aim of the conference was to highlight the benefits of human biomonitoring for policy making, present the first results of the European HBM4EU joint initiative and start the discussion on the future of human biomonitoring (HBM) in Europe.

Human biomonitoring is about detecting (traces of) chemicals in our bodies and investigate their impact on human health. Since chemicals are widely used in food and consumer products, the exposure to chemicals concerns all citizens and a range of different regulatory areas.

High-level Austrian and European Union representatives attended the conference, as well as representatives from national ministries and agencies, research institutes, NGOs, industry and stakeholder associations.

The following main points captured during the day were presented as conclusions in the closing session:

Added value of human biomonitoring

- HBM data represent the only available measurement of the actual body burden of chemical exposure. They complement the existing and mandatory environment and food monitoring schemes.
- HBM data and their analysis are recognised as valuable for chemical risk assessment and management and to improve EU environment and health policies.
- HBM is an area where synergies between policy areas are well identified and where joint interest foster good collaborations.
- There is recognised benefit of close collaboration between the EU, Member States and other European countries; both in terms of achieving joint objectives as well as efficient use of available resources. It is a good example of the added value of the EU.
- Communication to and with citizens about safety of chemicals encountered in every-day life and risks management possibilities is important and here HBM data are a useful tool for fact based information.
- HBM in the EU is also important for a global outreach, e.g. in terms of effectiveness evaluation of international conventions.
- HBM can help improve occupational safety and plays an important role in responding to environmental contamination.

A sustainable European human biomonitoring initiative

- During the conference, strong and unanimous support for a long-term European human biomonitoring initiative was expressed by the high-level attendees from the EU institutions and member states.
- Efforts and resources devoted to developing EU-wide structuring elements in the current HBM4EU initiative, based on experience acquired in the past, must not be lost. Several countries are reinforcing or developing national hubs with support from their ministries and agencies.
- To ensure sustainability, the need for an EU level regulatory demand for human biomonitoring was expressed. A regulatory demand can then be translated to a mandate for an EU agency with associated resource allocation.
- Data collected should be easily accessible at a central place and usable across regulatory sectors. The IPCHEM platform developed and maintained by the European Commission is an important building block, which should become an intrinsic part of the European chemical regulatory processes.
- The conference participants agreed that EU institutions should play a role in the sustainability to ensure inclusive and transparent procedures and a swift uptake of HBM data in policy processes.
- In addition to a harmonised approach to monitoring data, from sample collection to analysis, joint guidelines for data analysis and interpretation are important to create knowledge to support risk assessment and management.
- Moreover, a strong research component is needed to understand, inter alia, the health impact of chemical exposures.
- Strong engagement from Member States will be essential to ensure national capacity to contribute to an EU initiative is developed and maintained. It will be important countries agree to a joint and efficient European approach.

An Ambassador for human biomonitoring in Europe

- The HBM4EU Governing Board is composed of national programme owners who have mandated programme managers to participate in the initiative. During the GB meeting on 27 September, Thomas Jakl, Deputy Director-General at the Austrian Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, was appointed Ambassador for the HBM4EU initiative. He will have an important role in discussing the long-term vision for human biomonitoring in Europe with the EU Member States and the EU Institutions.

*The Steering Board was composed of representatives from:

- Austrian Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism
- Environment Agency Austria
- German Environment Agency, HBM4EU coordinator
- European Environment Agency
- European Commission, DG Research and Innovation
- European Commission DG Environment