

Testimonial: City of Hasselt in ONELAB

The project

The project [ONELAB](#) answered to call [HORIZON-CL3-2021-DRS-01-05](#). Its goal was to develop modular “Rapid Response Mobile Laboratories” (RRML) that can be quickly deployed in various settings for disease monitoring.

These labs are equipped with advanced technologies and satellite connectivity, enabling rapid on-site testing and real-time data sharing. This approach allows for the early detection of infections—even before symptoms appear—and strengthens outbreak response, building on methods proven effective during the COVID-19 pandemic. ONELAB also aimed to create semi-automated systems for discovering new disease markers, enhancing current testing strategies. For long-term impact, the project foresaw to establish global expert networks, share best practices, provide training and a pandemic playbook, and develop educational resources and a citizen’s guide to support mass testing efforts.

City of Hasselt as project partner

The [city of Hasselt](#), particularly its crisis cell responsible for coordinating COVID-19 vaccination centers, participated in ONELAB. As a local authority, the city of Hasselt acted as an end user within the ONELAB consortium and contributed with its practical experience and expertise in operational crisis and health response. This included evaluating existing solutions, needs, and lessons learned from pandemic situations, and validating project results from the perspective of local decision-making and implementation.

The added value lay in the fact that the mobile laboratory developed could be tailored to real urban applications (including deployability, decision-making, and public acceptance), making the solutions not only technologically but also operationally and socially applicable.

Lessons learned

For Hasselt, this was the first experience participating in a Horizon Europe project. The process highlighted the importance of support from an internal EU support office and/or the national contact points (NCPs). Understanding the procedures to become a project beneficiary, such as defining necessary internal roles and grasping the timelines for submission and evaluation, can be challenging for first-time participants.

Being aware of the full scope of the project, its impact on city operations, and ensuring sound planning with adequate resources are crucial for smooth participation and maximizing the project’s added value. This approach also clarifies both the benefits and the efforts required.

As research projects can evolve over time, it is important to remain flexible and adapt to changes in project planning. For a local government this is not always easy. Internal procedures had to be adjusted to better fit a R&D-project.

Benefits of being part of the project

Participation in ONELAB brought several benefits. It provided opportunities to expand the city's network and fostered close collaboration with academia, which proved highly valuable. Both sides learned from each other and gained new perspectives. The project's results contributed to the professionalisation of the city's crisis management, in particular by strengthening evidence-based decision-making, clarifying operational procedures, and enhancing preparedness through validated tools and tested response scenarios that can be integrated into existing pandemic emergency planning frameworks.