**20 years of research in occupational and environmental health: outcomes and perspectives**

Among the different sources for research funding in Belgium, BELSPO (Belgian scientific policy) and its previous corresponding research programs are unique in that they were driven by political needs in occupational and environmental health since 1990. With the objective to meet these needs in a European perspective, and on the basis of the scientific potential in Belgium, research programs were established in toxicology, ergonomics and psychosocial risks to develop and validate new methods and assist setting regulations. Recently, the area of “health and environment” (H&E) was covered by a new program named Science for a Sustainable Development (SSD) launched in 2006 that aimed to integrate to the earlier objectives the concepts of sustainable development and environment, multi-disciplinary and international approaches, and a special attention to populations at risk. While programs before 2003 concentrated their priorities on occupational health, SSD projects had a wider impact, particularly dealing with air quality and nanomaterials.

This report provides an overview of the research projects on H&E consecutively supported by the Science Policy Office (SPO), the Federal Office for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs (OSTC) and the Belgian Science Policy (BELSPO). It describes how research programs adapted to international and federal requirements, how they provide better support to regulatory authorities and what are their specificities compared to other research programs, including the follow-up of projects by a multidisciplinary committee of potential users. It also summarizes the results obtained by the H&E projects in the SSD program, their impact in terms of scientific progress, promotion and training, regulations and international integration.

Considering the position and impact of BELSPO projects in H&E on the international and national scenes, perspectives are proposed to maintain the quality of Belgian research in this domain and to improve its visibility. While translational research should remain a priority, it appears essential to further stimulate fundamental research to leave space for innovating ideas and to train future scientists. In addition, the creation of a federal platform for H&E research would clarify the landscape of competent entities, foster a multi-disciplinary approach of the problems and stimulate synergetic projects.