



**Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever in Europe**  
under the GF-TADs umbrella

**Eighteenth meeting (SGE ASF18)**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2021 - Teleconference**

**REPORT**

**List of participants present:**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Name and surname of person attending</b>
<b>SGE member countries</b>	
Belarus	Ivan SMILGHIN Anna SANDUL
Bulgaria	Daniel PAVLOV Anna ZDRAVKOVA
Czech Republic	Petr ŠATRÁN
Estonia	Helen PROMMIK
Germany	Gunda LUBECK
Greece	Chrysoula DILE
Hungary	Lajos BOGNAR
Latvia	Edvīns OĻŠEVSKIS Mārtiņš SERŽANTS
Lithuania	Marius MASULIS Vidamantas PAULAUSKAS
Moldova	Maxim SIRBU, Vitalie CARAUS
Poland	Krzysztof JAŹDŹEWSKI
Romania	Adrian ARDELEAN
Russia	Alexey IGOLKIN
Serbia	Sasa OSTOJIC Boban DURIC
Slovakia	Martin CHUDY
Ukraine	Mykola SONKO
<b>Non SGE member countries</b>	
Albania	Keti MARGARITI Adi LILO
Austria	Christina REINSTALLER SEEBER
Finland	Eero RAUTIAINEN Leena OIVANEN

Ireland	Padraig HYLAND
Israel	Michel BELLAICHE
Luxemburg	Félix WILDSCHUTZ
Malta	Paul PORTELLI
Montenegro	Vesna DAKOVIC
Spain	Sergio BONILLA
Switzerland	Dominique SUTER Alexandra VON BRINER
Tajikistan	Ilhoin ANDAMOV
<b>Speakers</b>	
FAO Asia	Yoomi OH
EC	Susanne RASMUSSEN
EC	Simona FORCELLA
EFSA	Andrea GERVELMEYER
RR OIE America	Luis BARCOS
FAO Europe	Daniel BELTRAN ALCRUDO
<b>Other participants</b>	
European Commission	Bernard VAN GOETHEM Simona FORCELLA Moritz KLEMM Francisco REVIRIEGO GORDEJO Zilvinas ILEVICIUS
OIE Brussels	Roberto BALBO Tomasz GRUDNIK
OIE Moscow	Jean PERCHET
OIE Tokyo	Caitlin HOLLEY
OIE Buenos Aires	Luis BARCOS
OIE Paris	Alexandre FEDIAEVSKY Charmaine CHANG
FAO Bangkok	Yooni OH
FAO Europe	Daniel BELTRAN ALCRUDO Mark HOVARI

## Summary

Due to the sanitary situation of the COVID-19, the eighteenth meeting of the standing group of experts on African Swine Fever (SGE ASF18), took place as a teleconference on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2021. 14 SGE Member Countries from the European Region participated, as well as representatives of the Americas and Asia for a total of over 50 participants.

The participating member countries of the SGE-ASF for Europe briefly presented their national epidemiological situation regarding ASF, focusing on the changes since the last online meeting in June 2021.

The SGE ASF18 were shown a set of recommendations. Amongst these, it was highlighted that:

- Based on science and OIE Standards, Recommendations published by the SGE since 2014 should be considered; helping all countries reach the objectives of this initiative the GFTADs ASF initiative.
- Outdoor pig farms may carry a substantial risk of introducing and spreading ASF in areas affected by ASF.
- Biosecurity is key to prevent and control ASF spread and should be enhanced, because of specific ASF risks for outdoor farms.
- Pig farmers should set up a system to regularly implement independent and objective on-farm biosecurity assessments using comprehensive standard protocols; competent authorities should then perform controls and register or approve outdoor pig farms based on their biosecurity risk. The aim of such system should be to further reduce the risk of ASF introduction and spread related to outdoor pig farms.
- Farmers should be encouraged, where this is not already the case, to implement single solid or double fences on all outdoor pig farms, at least in areas where ASF is present in wild boar and in domestic pigs, to reduce the risk of ASF introduction.

### Next meeting

- The nineteenth meeting (SGE ASF19) of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held physically, in the first semester 2022. It will be held in hybrid form to allow participants who are able to travel to attend the event and for those subject to restriction they will be following the meeting online. The proposed venue, to be confirmed, is Brussels.

## Minutes

### Introduction and objectives of the meeting

A large number of participants (45) attended this 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SGE ASF for Europe.

The President of the Regional Steering Committee of the GF TADs for Europe, **Dr Van Goethem**, congratulated participants for the quality of the work of this group.

16 members of the SGE ASF for Europe attended the meeting, along with 14 observer countries, and representatives from the European Commission, the FAO, and the OIE. The invitation has been extended to representatives of the OIE for America and FAO for Asia. OIE Staff from both regions took part in the meeting.

The topics and format of the meeting have been adapted to the situation. The President invited the speakers to focus their presentation on updating the participants with progress of the ASF situation in their country, on the ASF control and eradication.

### **Updates from the member countries of the SGE ASF**

All the detailed figures are available in the country presentations.

#### **Belarus** (Anna Sandul, providing interpretation for Ivan Smilgin, OIE Delegate for Belarus)

- Belarussian Authorities are focusing on biosecurity and on wild boar depopulation.
- Wild boar surveillance is both active with 5245 wild boar hunted and tested, and passive with 41 wild boar found dead; all test results were negative;
- Every domestic pig found dead must be PCR tested for ASF, and there were no suspicions during the reporting period, no positive PCR results on dead pigs, and no positive serologies either (tests carried out on 12250 pigs from public farms, and 2710 pigs from backyard farms).
- Testing is carried out by six laboratories in the provinces and the central laboratory in Minsk.

Dr **Van Goethem** offered his full support to any requests for assistance by the OIE ASF Reference laboratory to the laboratories in Belarus.

#### **Bulgaria** (Anna Zdravkova)

- Bulgaria declared that during passive surveillance, 92% of wild boar that were found dead gave positive results for ASFv.
- The virus is more active in the southern part of the country.
  - Six outbreaks in domestic pigs were registered over the summer. The rest of the outbreaks were in the south, with a farm in a forest area with possible wild boar incursion.
  - In august, an outbreak was detected in a big commercial farm, with clinical signs and increased mortality. Stamping out was carried out in ten days.
- All the recent backyard outbreaks are in a small area.
- Regionalization was revised in the country.

#### **Czech Republic** (Petr Satran asked to present preventive measures, even if the country is currently officially free)

- Due to the situation in Germany, with cases 20 km from the border, Czech authorities are strengthening prevention and early detection measures.
- Passive (more than 1500 boars both found dead and killed by cars) and active (3985 boars hunted) surveillance have returned only negative PCR tests up to now.
- Biosecurity measures have been increased. Import of wild boar trophies is forbidden, import of pig feed is also forbidden from infected areas.
- Covid has an impact because collective hunting is more challenging to organize.

#### **Estonia** (Helen Prommik)

- Surveillance is ongoing; the epidemic is active only in the northern part of Estonia.
- 44% wild boar FD were positive, but only to antibodies, except in the north of Estonia, where virus positives were also found

- In domestic pigs, 2675 animals were tested, included 1508 domestic pigs found dead
- One outbreak in a full cycle commercial farm after detection of symptoms, and one in a backyard farm, both in the area with viral circulation.

### **Germany** (Gunda Lubek)

- Germany had experienced a certain stability until the discovery of a case in Mecklenburg West Pomerania on November 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Surveillance of wild and domestic pigs continues. Wild cases are in Brandenburg and Saxony.
- Three outbreaks in Domestic pigs were also located in Brandenburg, and sequencing showed the virus came indirectly from local WB.
- Surveillance around the fattening farm in Mecklenburg did not show any infected wild boar. Sequencing is being carried out.
- Restricted zones were presented.

### **Greece** (Chrysoula Dile)

- The situation is calm, there has been no positivity identified in wild boar surveillance.
- In domestic pigs, there were suspicions in backyard farms. These were not confirmed as outbreaks.

### **Hungary** (Lajos Bognar)

- In some areas, no new cases have been identified for years. African Swine Fever virus (ASFv) circulates in areas with higher densities of wild boar.
- Nonetheless, surveillance is ongoing. 634 wild boards found dead were tested, with 24% of positives.
- There were no new outbreaks in the domestic pig sector.

### **Latvia** (Martins Serzants)

- The “front wave” of the virus is still active in the western part of the country.
- Since the summer, the virus was also found in the east as a cluster along the border with Russia and Belarus.
- In domestic pigs, two outbreaks were detected in each of the regions with active viral spread in wildlife, one in the western part of the country and another one in the east, one commercial and one backyard farm.

### **Lithuania** (Marius Masiulis)

- The disease is still present and surveillance going on.
- 129 WBFD were positive and 71 hunted boars were positive.
- In 2021 no outbreaks were detected in domestic pigs.

### **Moldova** (Maxim Sirbu)

- In Moldova, no wild boar were either found or hunted. It could almost seem that there are no more wild boar in Moldova.

- three suspicions in backyard farms and one in a commercial farm were not confirmed by testing.
- This absence of new detections leads Moldova to think that they are free from ASF.

### **Romania** (Adrian Ardealan)

- All the territory of Romania is considered infected. Most outbreaks are detected in domestic pigs, in back yards (1056), but some outbreaks were also detected in commercial farms (34).
  - There were 46% of PCR positive wild boar carcasses (found dead) out of 162 and seropositivity as 1.85%.
  - Active surveillance gave much lower rates in hunted wild boar (1.8%)
  - Two regions are mainly affected – southeast and northwest.
  - Despite intensifying hunting over the last two months, the percentage of positivity remains low.
- Outbreaks in domestic pigs increased, with more commercial farms affected in the south of the country, where higher farm density may also increase infectivity.

### **Russian Federation** (Nikita Lebedev)

- The situation in Russia had been relatively stable, but is now unfortunately developing again.
- Two main regions are affected: the Far East, and the region between Yaroslavl - Vladimir – Nizhnii-Novgorod (northeast of Moscow).
- 24 cases of ASF in wild boar were notified in the Russian far east, mostly half decomposed WB carcasses, during the first half of the year.
- Over the summer, testing continued, with Wild Boar found dead in Velikii-Novgorod and Pskov regions all negative.
- In zones considered to be previously affected, 495 wild boar found dead were tested, with 21% positive to PCR.
- 167 outbreaks were declared in domestic pigs, with two main clusters in the affected regions (mentioned above). Eight outbreaks were identified in previously free regions and were linked to swill feeding.
- 2022 is considered a high risk year, with human factor as the main risk for spread of the disease in domestic pigs.
- Regionalization is being practiced to help slow down the spread of the disease.
- The Russian Federation has a programme for control measures between the different regions defined in the regionalization process, while the regions have their own programmes to improve their status.

### **Serbia** (Boban Duric)

- In previously free zones: no positives in wild boar found dead.
- In previously affected zones: 136 wild boar found dead and 109 positives PCR.
- Overall, positive cases in wild boar are moving north-west.
- Outbreaks in domestic pigs: in zones considered free, 44 suspicions were investigated but did not receive any confirmation. In other areas, the map of domestic outbreaks is very similar to the location of positive wild boar found dead, with little evolution in terms of geography.

### **Slovakia** (Jozef Bires)

- Free areas remain free. Active surveillance was carried out, with 21014 wild boar were hunted and none tested positive for infection.
- In the infected areas, 65% positives were identified in wild boar found dead, and 0.9% in wild boar hunted (out of a total of 13000)
- Two outbreaks were detected in commercial farms, and six in backyard farms. The cause of the outbreaks could always be linked to lower biosecurity.
- Cases in domestic pigs are generally in the same areas as the positive wild boar found dead.
- The western part of Slovakia is still free.

### **Ukraine** (Anna Antonenko)

- Surveillance is ongoing. In previously free areas, one positive wild boar was found dead (out of eight found). One hunted boar was also tested positive for ASFv.
- Surveillance in domestic pigs found five new outbreaks in backyard farms, including four in previously free areas.

### **Poland** was presented by Roberto Balbo;

- Quite a fluid situation, with substantial testing being conducted in previously free and affected zones, with PCR positivity present in both areas.
- The map shows three areas with high concentration of cases, including one area in the west of Poland, not very far from the Czech Republic and Germany.
- The situation is unfortunately not evolving favourably, and possible outcomes are worrying.
- The situation in domestic pigs is geographically similar to the one in Wild boar geographically.

**Dr JAŻDŹEWSKI** who joined at a later stage, did not have additional comments.

**Dr Van Goethem** thanked participants for their input. There were no questions and the SGE carried on with the agenda.

Questions and answers – no question

### **ASF in Americas: standing group of experts under the umbrella of the GF-TADs for Americas**

**Dr Barcos** (OIE Representation Americas) shared information about the current situation in the Caribbean. ASF is currently present in the Dominican Republic and in Haiti.

- Brief summary: after the outbreak in June, further testing and investigation revealed that the virus had probably started circulating in February.
- An ad hoc group has been created, aiming for proper coordination in the American region. A field mission has been carried out.
- The Dominican Republic received support from different organizations and members of the GF-TADs. For the moment, they are working in emergency mode and fighting outbreaks. As of today, there are no concrete plans for eradication of the disease from

the island, apart from stamping out measures after each outbreak. The laboratory in the Dominican Republic has good capacity for testing.

- In Haiti, the situation is complicated. A hurricane occurred shortly after the outbreak was discovered, and the political situation is not stable. 90% of the pig production comes from backyard farms, the level of biosecurity is insufficient, there is no compensation mechanism, there is no contingency planning, and little political will. In addition, there is important migration from Haiti to Mexico, creating a risk for spread.
- Trainings were organized in several relevant fields including for laboratory testing.
- For the moment, there are no notifications from the other countries in the region.

**Dr Van Goethem** expressed concern over the situation, and he reminded participants of the availability of experts and help from the European Region.

### **ASF in Asia: situation and new standing group of experts with the GF-TADs for Asia**

**Dr Oh**, from FAO Asia, gave an overview of the latest developments in Asia on behalf of the OIE Regional Representation for Asia and the Pacific.

- The geographic situation is still evolving. In total, 15 countries have reported ASF. The GFTADs Asia for ASF is updated every two weeks. Wild pigs are now starting to be affected in the region, with this taking on two very different forms:
  - one similar to the issue with infected wild boar in Europe,
  - one with indigenous species that are unique resources, and where control is more difficult.
- The ASF SGE is active. Two subgroups have been created:
  - one on wild pigs
  - one on atypical strains

The disease situation in Asia is starting to be endemic, in a region with more than half of the world's pig population and where more than 60% are owned by smallholders.

- Different strains have been identified in the region. This could be linked to vaccine strains; GFTADs Asia has created communication materials on the risks associated with unlicensed vaccines. There is work on updating laboratory protocols for the detection of atypical strains.
- There is ongoing activity in the Tripartite plus framework, engaging WHO, OIE, FAO and the IUCN. The objective is to reinforce responses across sectors.
- In addition, practical guidelines and communication material have been developed. This year, the price of pig meat started going back down in China and on world markets, and the price for live pigs is also going down. It is only slightly above pre-crisis levels.

## **Discussion**

### **Moderation by Dr Balbo / Dr Perchet**

Dr Duric asked Dr Oh what illegal vaccines were used. Dr Oh replied that, since these vaccines were illegal, it was not easy to identify them precisely, but that different options were being tested from the evidence available. In addition, it is possible that the genotype 1 strain that was recently found in China could originate with unlicensed vaccines.



## ASF: European Commission Activities

**(Simona Forcella, DG Sante, European Commission)**

Since 2014, the situation has evolved considerably in Europe and in the surrounding areas, with regionalisation applied based on risk assessment. The Commission supported member states through various initiatives in the latest months. **Dr Forcella** presented the following points:

- General situation in the world, where the disease has been spreading with a fast pace if compared to the EU.
- General situation in the EU, country by country.
- Control measures and different types of restricted zones.
- Awareness campaigns and research are ongoing
- Direct financial support to EU and neighbouring countries, including for national programs and vaccine research

Seven years after the first case in the EU, the situation is still being managed. ASF has been eradicated in two countries (Belgium and Czech Republic).

## FAO activities on ASF in Europe

**(Daniel Beltran Alcrudo, FAO Europe and Central Asia)**

FAO activities on ASF focused on two programmes for prevention and preparedness in the Western Balkans, but support is also provided to other countries. **Dr Beltran Alcrudo** gave explanations on the activities carried out since SGE17:

- Two twin projects were started in 2018 to increase preparedness, but then also help with control when Serbia became infected. These programs are adapted to ASF dynamics.
  - Achievements in regulatory and general preparedness were presented. Follow up of assessment missions was carried out by exercises, some online, some face to face. The general feedback was positive, countries have the plans and procedures in place. SOPs were overall fit for purpose. The most difficult to perfect is always overall management.
  - Regional and national trainings were carried out.
  - Outbreak cost tool has been developed and tested
    - Analyse where wild boar carcasses are found.
    - Has a lot to do with types of vegetation and human activity.
- Development of different tools and methods for risk assessment and analysis.
- Awareness raising and translating posters from the FAO OIE communication material already available.
  - Technical materials for ASF detection and diagnosis were developed; other guidelines and manuals are being validated. One is a guide on humane killing for disease control purposes.

**Dr Van Goethem** thanked FAO for its support to countries.

## Regional action on animal disease eradication in the western Balkans

**Dr Rasmussen** from the European Commission gave details on the programme:

- This programme was born from a cooperation between DG NEAR and DG SANTE.
- Actions were designed to ensure that countries in the Western Balkans are ready for EU accession from an SPS perspective, and to ensure that the region has good cooperation.
- Presentation of activities, including the CVO forum.
- Future three-year projects are being considered.

Replying to a question from Dr Beltran Alcrudo, Dr Rasmussen explained that the CVO forum is a two-yearly meeting for and by the CVOs, and that they are the ones who can decide if they want to expand the forum.

**Dr Duric** added that the forum is interesting, that it is very good to collaborate and exchange information. The last forum was organized ten days ago in Sarajevo, and the next one is planned in North Macedonia. These activities are very fruitful and are welcome in, the future.

**Dr Van Goethem** thanked participants for their presentations and welcomed the presentation by EFSA on outdoor farming.

### EFSA biosecurity outdoor farms (A Gervelmayer, EFSA)

**Dr Gervelmayer** presented the work of the EFSA assessment on the risk for ASF introduction and spread associated to outdoor pig farms and proposals for improved biosecurity and control measures for outdoor pig farms, from the animal health and welfare panel.

Presentation of ToRs from the EC, with objectives being:

- Characterizing keeping of pigs outdoors in the European union.
- Describe what biosecurity measures are implemented

Outdoor farms are defined as places where pigs are kept outdoors, not going any more into detail. This was refined by EFSA.

Two **different types of farms** were defined (“mainly in forest” and “mainly in pens”).

The focus was solely on infection pathways that were specific to outdoor farms. The risk questions addressed to member states were focused only on these pathways. Risk of spread for ASF was also characterized, both through direct and indirect contact.

Developed a questionnaire survey for national veterinary authorities and for veterinary associations.

Main conclusions:

- Outdoor pig farms are present in the EU, but no harmonized system to define or categorized different types of pig farms. No harmonized data is available at the EU level on these outdoor farms.
- If outdoor pig farms were present in ASF affected areas without additional biosecurity measures, an estimated 20% would have new outbreaks within a year.
- Fences: defined several types of fences: single row of fencing, single row solid fence, double row solid fence. These are the most important biosecurity measures specific to outdoor farms. If single or double solid fences were present in all the farms above, it would reduce outbreaks by about 50%, single row simple fences for only 30%.
- Regular assessments of biosecurity can again reduce the risk of introduction by 50%.
- The panel recommends that a harmonized registration system is developed for pig farms with outdoor access and different types; that wild boar are registered; and confirmed that specific biosecurity risk factors are presented by backyard farms.

**Dr Van Goethem** thanked EFSA for these very important conclusions and hoped all these recommendations would be put in practice, including for registration.

## Discussion

**Dr Balbo** asked EFSA how it could be possible to define outdoor farming, and whether it would be useful for member states to have this definition?

**Dr Gervelmayer** confirmed that to improve understanding, it is important to have a common definition. She noted that outdoor farms often receive additional attention from authorities of member states.

Dr Duric, responding to a question by Dr Forcella to non-EU countries, explained that in non-EU countries, these outdoor farms were also considered differently, but that there was no unique combined answer.

## Presentation, discussion, and adoption of SGE ASF18 recommendations

The draft recommendations of the SGE ASF18 were presented by the President and participants had 2 weeks to submit comments on these recommendations, before they were considered agreed by the SGE ASF18 participants.

1. The Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever (SGE ASF) should remain as the platform to discuss regional activities, to share experiences and best practices related to ASF prevention, control, and eradication in Europe.
2. The SGE ASF should continue contributing to global discussions on ASF in particular through the close collaboration and sharing of best practices with the SGE ASF of other Regions (Americas and Asia).
3. It is essential to ensure transparency and full cooperation among countries and within the Standing Group. Cross-border cooperation between neighbouring countries should be enhanced to prevent, control, and eradicate ASF. Countries should share with full transparency the relevant information and coordinate an implementation of ASF related measures at the borders.

4. The SGE ASF acknowledges that, even in the absence of a vaccine, science based tools for the prevention, control and eradication of ASF exist and all countries should fully implement them to fight this deadly disease. In addition, the GF-TADs initiative for the Global control of ASF aims to strengthen the capability of countries to control (prevent, respond, eradicate) ASF using OIE standards and best practices that are based on latest scientific evidence. All countries should contribute to reach the objectives of this initiative.
5. All countries should actively share best practices, guidelines, and other relevant tools on the management of ASF in the framework of the Covid-19 crisis in the specific section of the e-depository on the GF-TADs page of the OIE Europe website, to make them available to other countries.
6. SGE Missions should restart once travelling will be allowed, based on relevant national restrictions due to Covid-19.

#### On outdoor farming biosecurity:

1. Outdoor pig farms may carry a substantial risk of introducing and spreading ASF in areas affected by ASF.
2. Biosecurity is key to prevent and control ASF spread and should be enhanced, because of specific ASF risks for outdoor farms.
3. Pig farmers should set up a system to regularly implement independent and objective on-farm biosecurity assessments using comprehensive standard protocols; competent authorities should then perform controls and register or approve outdoor pig farms based on their biosecurity risk. The aim of such system should be to further reduce the risk of ASF introduction and spread related to outdoor pig farms.
4. Farmers should be encouraged, where this is not already the case, to implement single solid or double fences on all outdoor pig farms, at least in areas where ASF is present in wild boar and in domestic pigs, to reduce the risk of ASF introduction.

#### Next meeting

5. The nineteenth meeting (SGE ASF19 of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held physically, in the first semester 2022. It will be held in hybrid form to allow participants who are able to travel to attend the event and for those subject to restriction they will be following the meeting online. The proposed venue, to be confirmed, is Brussels.

<sup>[1]</sup> Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine

## Closing REMARKS –

**Dr Van Goethem**, President of the Steering Committee of the GF TADs for Europe, stressed the importance of following science in the creation of our strategies for the eradication of ASF.



We would like to sincerely thank the European Union and the OIE for kindly supporting the organisation of the SGE ASF18 teleconference.

All presentations are available on the GF-TADs page of the OIE of the Europe website.

