



**OIE Platform**  
on Animal Welfare  
for Europe

*Improving animal welfare in Europe by Empowering Veterinary Services  
to comply with OIE international standards*

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## Fourth OIE Regional Workshop on Stray Dog population management for Balkan countries (SDB4)

30<sup>th</sup> November 2021

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### Workshop Report



## Acknowledgment

The OIE Platform Secretariat would like to acknowledge the commitment and work carried out by countries in the Balkan region to progressively improve their compliance with OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code regarding stray dogs and rabies.

## Introduction

The fourth OIE Regional Workshop on Stray Dog population management (SDB4) was organized in the framework of the stray dog roadmap for the Balkan countries The SDB4, initially planned on 2020 and later postponed due to persistent uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, was held in virtual mode on November the 30<sup>th</sup>. It gathered a total of 19 participants in representation of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Greece including speakers, observers and representatives of the Member Countries invited (Annex 2), with the exception of Albania, Turkey and Kosovo\* that were not able to attend. Countries were represented by their OIE National Focal Point for Animal Welfare, working at central level on the implementation of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (M&E) Chapter 7.7 on stray dog control and in charge of policy and coordination with other stakeholders at regional and local level.

Participants were updated on the state of play of their countries' progress towards the compliance with OIE standard based on the result of their third self-assessment round of the SAM Tool conducted by the Platform Secretariat from 01/10 to 22/11, 2021 in collaboration with the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise "G. Caporale" di Teramo (IZSAM) – OIE Collaborating Centre on Animal Welfare. Aggregate results were presented and provided the basis for an open and constructive discussion on the latest achievements of the roadmap implemented by eight Member Countries (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Greece), without losing the focus on the remaining gaps to be filled in order to achieve the common Vision of becoming fully compliant with OIE Chapter 7.7. by 2025.

This process was initiated during the first OIE Regional Workshop on Stray Dog population management for Balkan countries (SDB1) held in Bucharest, Romania in 2014 , continued in Tirana, Albania in 2016 (SDB2) and then in Belgrade, Serbia in 2018 (SDB3), when country representatives reiterated their willing to periodically run the self-assessment rounds by using the SAM Tool 1.0 – jointly developed by the OIE and the IZSAM/OIE Collaborating Centre in 2015 - to have a better understanding of their Roadmaps progress over time, and to conduct the third one before the SDB4.

On this occasion, participating Countries also committed:

- **To explore the relevance of developing Veterinary Services national plan for dog population control** to support local governmental authorities in the development and implementation of **Dog Population Control Programmes (DP-CPs)**, in compliance with OIE standards, and to ensure monitoring and evaluation of their implementation;
- **To define a list of relevant indicators and monitor implementation of the OIE awareness campaign** on responsible dog ownership in the country.

The SDB4 was also an opportunity to take stock of the situation on the level of involvement into the Global Strategic Plan to Prevent Human Deaths from Dog-Transmitted Rabies by 2030 (Zero by 2030 strategic plan).

## Description

In continuation with the previous workshops, the main objective of the SDB4 was to assist countries in achieving full compliance with OIE standard on stray dog population control (and rabies) by 2025, with a

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\* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

specific focus on how to progress with the activities to be implemented in the 2021-2023 Action Plan of the Platform, in line with specific country needs and sub-regional priorities.

More precisely, participants were meant to gain thorough understanding on specific topics included in the meeting agenda (Annex 1), namely:

- ✓ The OIE Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe new Action Plan 2021-2023;
- ✓ The OIE new developments on Animal Welfare and OIE TAHC Chapter 7.7 revision process;
- ✓ The experience of the Republic of North Macedonia in the development and implementation of the Veterinary Services National Plan (with a rabies component);
- ✓ The Countries' level of adoption of the OIE awareness campaign;
- ✓ The potential role of the Regional Animal Welfare Centre (RAWC)<sup>1</sup> in assisting the Balkan countries and what regional expertise is available to support the implementation of the OIE standards on stray dog control.

The event also offered the occasion to propose and discuss new initiatives in support to the process of building and implementing sustainable strategies for dog population management in the Region.

In particular, the IZSAM/OIE CC presented a proposal for the development of an upgraded SAM Tool 1.0 version (SAM Tool 2.0) that will continue to be a strategic tool offered by the OIE Platform in support to its Members. Over time, by using the SAM Tool 2.0, the Balkan countries will become completely self-sufficient in monitoring and assessing the progresses of their own individual Roadmaps. Such an approach could be easily tailored to other regional or sub regional contexts and used in support to the implementation of different OIE international standards on animal welfare (i.e. slaughter and transport), due to the flexibility of this innovative data sharing collaborative environment.

The group discussions were animated with the results of a set of poll questions, aiming at assessing the current degree of implementation of Veterinary Services National Plans in the sub-region and the possible level of engagement in the SAM Tool 2.0 development process. The current level of adoption of the OIE awareness campaign materials, the concrete interest to plan dog responsible ownership campaigns in the future and the willingness to contribute to the evaluation of these campaigns were also discussed.

Participants were still optimistic about meeting this objective provided the continuous support from OIE and its partners within the framework of the regional stray dog Roadmap.

Based in the information collected, the Platform Secretariat will be supported by the IZSAM to update the short national reports distributed in the occasion of the 3rd workshop held in Belgrade, in which the results of the first (2015) and second (2018) self-assessments have been comparatively analyzed, with the result of the third self- assessment round. These reports to be consistent in following up their national activities and advocate for adequate financial support. Sharing these national reports with public, donors and partners is at discretion of countries.

More information about previous and future activities of the OIE regional stray dog Roadmap for Balkan countries is available at [OIE Platform website](#)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rawc.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://awp.oie.int/index.php?id=115&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=44&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=e2a6f39b1143d8e212e851503c27da88](https://awp.oie.int/index.php?id=115&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=44&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=e2a6f39b1143d8e212e851503c27da88)

## Main outcomes

1

The **participants gained a thorough understanding of** the 2021-2013 OIE Platform Action Plan's objectives and initiatives, the new developments on Animal Welfare and in particular the OIE TAHC Chapter 7.7 revision process, the level of adoption of the OIE awareness campaign in the sub-region, the potential role of the RAWC in assisting the Balkan countries in the implementation of the individual Roadmaps.

2

The **participants gained a thorough** understanding of their **national and regional situation** regarding stray dog population control and measures, **progress achieved since 2018** towards the agreed Vision (compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code on stray dog population control by 2025) and the **remaining challenges**.

3

The **participants confirmed that the Vision (compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code on stray dog population control by 2025) remains achievable**, although considerable efforts are still needed to reach full compliance, mainly in relation to the need for: (1) strengthening the capacity Veterinary Services (VS) to develop and implement National Action plans for dog population control and (2) improving the technical know-how of the personnel carrying out Dog Population Control Programs' activities at municipal/local level;

4

Attendants improved their understanding on the challenges and benefits implementing **Veterinary Services national plan for dog population control** in support to local governmental authorities in the development and implementation of **Dog Population Control Programmes (DP-CPs)**.

5

The feedback received from the SDB4 participants indicated that they:

- (i) Acknowledged the efforts to **maintain and reinforce the interactions between the Platform stakeholders** despite persistent uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (ii) Expressed their **interest in the topics discussed and appreciated the quality of the technical contributions** to the workshop;
- (iii) Found meeting useful to **identify possible (corrective) actions to improve stray dog population control** at national and local level;
- (iv) Remain committed to **support the development of the stray dog Roadmap** process development in the Balkans.

## Next steps

The following steps were agreed:

- 1** [Countries] - **To contribute to the development of the SAM Tool 2.0**, to be used for **conducting the next self-assessment rounds** in order to monitor their Roadmaps progress over time;
- 2** [Countries] - To strengthen the Platform's level of technical assistance by **setting a pool of 'stray dog managers' in the Balkans** and to **expand the range of training and capacity building programs** aiming at increasing: (1) professional skills and capacities of the VSs involved in the development and implementation of the National Action plans and (2) technical know-how of the personnel carrying out carrying out stray dog control activities at Municipal/local level;
- 3** [Countries] -To enhance the opportunities **to access to technical assistance projects/financial measures** with the support of the Platform Secretariat, the OIE Network of CCs on Animal Welfare, RAWC, other sub-regional Academic bodies/Institutions and local/international NGOs;
- 4** [OIE] To **report the outcomes of the SDB4 workshop** to the OIE General Director and to the Steering Group of the OIE Platform on AW for Europe during next SG meeting
- 5** [OIE] **To organize the SDB5 Workshop in 2023** (provided funding is available), to support Balkan Countries in the implementation of their national Roadmaps and to monitor their progressive compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code on stray dog population.

## Workshop report

### Welcome address and agenda overview - *R. Balbo (OIE)*

The fourth OIE Regional Workshop on Stray Dog population management (SDB4) was officially opened by Dr Roberto A. Balbo, OIE Sub-Regional Representative in Brussels, who regretted not having had the possibility to organize the meeting in presence. Unfortunately, the persistent COVID-19 restrictions led to the decision to cancel the face-to-face event and move the SDB4 online, while trying to preserve as much of such long standing collaborative and friendly biennial meetings as possible.

He welcomed all participants and brought them the greetings of Dr Vesna Dakovic recalling her strong personal involvement, both as Chair of the Platform Steering Group and OIE Delegate, in delivering the initiatives undertaken by the OIE Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe for stray dog population control in the Region.

Dr Balbo reminded the outcomes of the last SDB3 held in Serbia in 2018, when participating countries renewed their intention to continue creating the conditions necessary for the Stray dog Roadmap in the Balkans to succeed, being strongly committed to the goal of becoming fully compliant with OIE Chapter 7.7. on stray dog population control by 2025.

The SDB4 will offer a new opportunity to monitor the progresses achieved in order to progressively fulfil the common goal of developing Veterinary Services national plan for dog population control in support to the local governmental authorities involved the development and implementation of dog population control programmes (DP-CPs). Participants will also share their experience in monitoring the implementation of the OIE awareness campaign on responsible dog ownership by using a set of relevant indicators.

The preliminary results of the last SAM Tool 1.0 assessment round will be reported and discussed by the Platform Secretariat, thanks to the contribution of the IZSAM, and this will allow to gather additional information and suggestions on how to develop and strengthen a more tailored support to the Countries, keeping in mind the different capacities to achieve the 2025 deadline and guaranty the sustainability of the process.

### Plenary lecture “OIE Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe new Action Plan 2021-2023” - *T. Grudnik (OIE)*

The OIE Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe was established 2013 with the general objective to improve animal welfare in all 53 countries of Europe and to empower Veterinary Services to take action on animal welfare in compliance with OIE standards. Three priority topics: transport of animals by land, slaughter of animals and stray dog population control were included in the first Action Plan of the OIE Platform for 2014-2016 and retained in the second Action Plan for 2017 – 2019. Two new relevant issues for the region were introduced in the second Action Plan: the welfare of animals in disasters and the welfare of working equids.

All these action lines were confirmed in the ongoing third Action Plan 2021-2023, which was adopted by the OIE Regional Commission for Europe on 24 May 2021 at its meeting during 88th OIE General Session. Governance, communication, stakeholders’ coordination and above all monitoring and evaluation - supported by the Theory of Change Result Framework (with defined impact, outcome and output indicators) - will continue to represent fundamental elements aiming at guaranteeing the continuity with the two previous Action Plans by building upon the steady achievements of the Platform collaborative mechanism.

The 2021-2023 OIE Platform activities will have a strong focus on animal welfare during long distance transport of animals. It is foreseen the organization of two whole Journey Scenario Workshops (Europe, the Middle East, North Africa) and the scope will be expanded by including sea transport of animals and the establishment of a regional network of ‘Contact points on animal transport’. Considering the difficulties linked to the organization of physical events, online training resources on animal welfare at slaughter of animals will be developed, based on the existing training materials and the results of previous training of trainers workshops. With reference to the welfare of animals in disasters, the 3-years pilot project on the role of Veterinary Services on animal welfare in natural disasters for Balkan countries was recently completed with

the organization of the virtual Table Top Exercise held in November 2021 with the great participation of all countries in the Region and the essential contribution of the Contingency Plans developed by Bulgaria, Romania and the Republic of North Macedonia. A complementary regional needs assessment is ongoing and it will lead to the development of new activities proposal in this area, in order to enhance VSs preparedness for catastrophic events with a focus on animal welfare issues. An awareness campaign on the welfare for working equids will be launched in 2022, starting from development, preparatory workshop, deployment and evaluation, and based on the results of the baseline survey conducted in 2019.

As the participants are fully aware of, stray dog population control was identified as a priority topic by the OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe since 2014. Two Regional stray dog Roadmaps, one for 11 Balkans countries and territories (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Rep. of North Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Kosovo\*) and another one for 8 West Eurasian ones (Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) were launched respectively on 2014 and 2015 with the objective to achieve the full compliance with OIE standards on stray dog population control by 2025 in the Balkans and by 2030 in West Eurasia. Later on in 2019, four additional Western European (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia) countries joined this Platform initiative. These roadmaps fully integrate the FAO/OIE/WHO "Zero by 30" Global Strategic Plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 and they clearly represent a successful model for One Health collaboration.

In order to help these Countries to better understand their stray dog population situation, and to periodically monitor the progresses of their individual roadmaps, the Platform Secretariat and the IZSAM/OIE Collaborating Centre in Teramo jointly prepared a Self-Assessment and Monitoring Tool (SAM Tool 1.0), under the format of an electronic questionnaire. Over the years, the results of the individual countries' biannual self-assessment rounds with the SAM Tool 1.0 have been analysed and discussed in the occasion of biannual workshops, to discuss progress and bottlenecks experienced by Members in implementing their own national roadmaps.

So far, Balkan countries conducted their 1st self-assessment in 2015/2016 and a second one in 2018. A third one has been completed in preparation to the SDB4 and the preliminary results will be presented in the next sessions. To date, the eight Western European countries have only conducted a first self-assessment round. A second self-assessment for these countries, and the first one for the four Western European new added ones, will be launched in 2022. An upgraded version of the Self-Assessment and Monitoring Tool (SAM Tool 2.0) will be shortly presented by the IZSAM representative, and it will be used in preparation for the next workshops, in order to help countries better understand their stray dog population and rabies situation, and to measure compliance progress over time in the most efficient and user-friendly manner.

Finally, it is important to highlight the main objective of today's workshop, that will be to have the participant's feedback about the relevance of developing the draft National Veterinary Service strategy/plan already discusses in Belgrade in 2016, aiming at supporting local governmental Authorities in the development and implementation of DP-CPs at local level, in compliance with the OIE standards and to ensure monitoring and evaluation of their implementation.

The Platform will continue to rely on the outcomes of the above-mentioned initiatives in order to constantly adjust the methodology used for the implementation of workshops and better tailor the assistance provided in between, by fine tuning targeted support to address specific country needs.

### **Plenary lecture "OIE new developments on Animal Welfare and OIE TAHC Chapter 7.7 revision process" - L. Stuardo (OIE)**

The OIE Animal welfare activities at OIE headquarter level continue to be framed by the OIE Global animal welfare Strategy (GAWS) and its Four Strategic Pillar. Regarding the pillar on the 'Development of animal welfare standards', there are some ongoing review and harmonisation of OIE Terrestrial Code Animal Welfare Chapters. Chapter 7.7. Stray dog population control, now named "Dog population management" was extensively reviewed and it proposed for comments and adoption at the 89th OIE General Session (GS) in May 2022. The review of Chapter 7.5 slaughter of animals, now named "Animal welfare during slaughter" is also in

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the pipeline. In addition, the Code Commission included in its Work Plan the revision of the Terrestrial Code chapters on the welfare of animals during transport by land, sea and air (Chapters 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4). Finally, the OIE continue to discuss the possible different avenues to continue working on the new Chapter on “Animal welfare and laying hen production systems”, that was not adopted during the 88th GS in May 2021. Therefore, the Code Commission has requested the *ad hoc* Group to reconvene and discuss Member Country comments. No mayor activities were conducted over the last year regarding the pillars on ‘Capacity building activities’ and ‘implementation of animal welfare standards and policies’ due the challenges imposed by the pandemic evolutions. Nevertheless, the OIE organized the 3rd OIE Global animal welfare on-line forum on “Animal welfare and the United Nation Sustainable Developing Goals” between April and May 2021, as part of the last pillar on ‘Communication with governments, organisations and the public’ implementation program. This very successful version of the Forum provided a platform for an exchange of views on the linkages between the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and animal welfare.

### Plenary lecture “Country experience on the development and implementation of the Veterinary Services National Plan (with a rabies component)” - D. Terzievski (Republic of North Macedonia)

After 10 years of intensive work in the Republic of North Macedonia, the presence of stray dogs still poses challenging animal welfare and public health issues. A three-year National Animal Welfare and action plan was adopted in 2018 and it covers five priorities: the welfare of animals during transport and slaughter (with a focus on the killing of lambs for human consumption), the welfare of laying hens (in favour of cage-free farming systems), dog population management and the promotion of responsible ownership through the establishment of public awareness campaigns.

To date, there is no specific national dog population control strategy/programme. Nevertheless, fundamental progresses have been made concerning the number of owned and stray dogs on a national level, thanks to the establishment of the National Veterinary Information System and the launching of an electronic ID campaign in September 2018, which brought to a steady increase in the number of microchipped pets. To date, almost 100 000 dogs and more than 5 000 cats are registered in the system, thanks to the contribution of 147 private practitioners which also entered the data related to animal ownership, passport number and rabies vaccination status. Since January 2021 stray dogs must be also registered in the National Veterinary Information System and so far, the data of more than 2 000 unowned animals are available.

According to the current legislative framework, local municipalities should issue DP-CPs based on the results of local dog estimation survey and submit them for approval to the FVA. Thirty-seven programmes have been approved in 2019 by the FVA, 7 in 2020 and 12 in 2021.

In parallel, the basic legislation has been integrated by a series of rule books that contains an official set of criteria to be followed for the establishment of dog shelters, the testing of stray dog socialization level, the training of dangerous dogs’ owners, in the case of euthanasia, and to standardize the data recording procedures.

To date, 17 shelters have been approved but only 44 out of 80 municipalities currently work with the support of these premises and the Trap Neuter Release approach is still therefore used with the priority to possibly rehome the animals collected on the territory. Stray dog should be always tested for their level of socialization, once recognized aggressive by trained personnel (authorized veterinarians, police officers or army dog trainers) shall kept for 30 days and if not adopted they can be euthanized.

Over the time, North Macedonia has also invested relevant resources in public awareness and education campaigns with the objective to significantly limit dog abandonment on the streets, as this was identified as the main source of stray dogs in Balkan countries. A full communication plan that included set of products such as posters, leaflets on good dog ownership, didactic material for children and a guide for teachers to animate events on good dog ownership have been distributed in primary schools. Video clips on the prevention of dog abandonment and the promotion of responsible ownership have been broadcasted at national level along with a video on the protection of working horses.



The ongoing challenges to stray dog control advancement in North Macedonia may be consolidated under three major elements, namely the need:

- To perform stray dog population surveys on more regular basis (once or twice per year), being the basis for the development of DP-CPs at local/municipal level, and the essential instrument to monitor and assess their implementation;
- To reinforce responsible ownership control measures at local level;
- To include the registration of dog breeders into the existing legislation.

Planned next steps for stray dog population control will anyway focus on increasing the number and the frequency of stray dog surveys in the local municipalities. In addition, the FVA will provide technical support to help them establishing Dog Population Control Plans fully in line with the OIE TAHC Chapter 7.7 standards.

### Plenary lecture “Results of the third self-assessment (regional trends) and remaining gaps to achieve “the Vision”” - P. Dalla Villa (OIE)

As part of the first Action Plan of the OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe, the OIE decided to launch medium to long term regional initiatives on stray dog population control in the Balkans and West Eurasia, in the interests of both dogs (animal welfare aspects) and the wider community (public security and health aspects). At the kick-off meeting of the initiative for the Balkans in June 2014 in Bucharest, eleven countries and territories (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Rep. of North Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Kosovo\*) committed to the regional Vision of becoming fully compliant with OIE Chapter 7.7. on stray dog population control by 2025. A robust methodology was therefore set up to address the problem in the long-term. Participating countries supported the idea to hold SDB workshops every two years under the framework of the OIE Platform, to review (i) the advancement in the implementation of their national Roadmap; and (ii) the progress achieved in terms of regional Vision.

A Self-Assessment and Monitoring Tool (SAM Tool), mirroring the provisions of Chapter 7.7 of the OIE TAHC, was jointly developed by the OIE and the IZSAM to help countries establish their baseline situation in terms of compliance with the OIE standards and measure progress achieved overtime and it currently includes 4 sections: (i) understanding the situation; (ii) control measures; (iii) monitoring and evaluation and (iv) conclusions and future needs. At the end of each section, the level of compliance of the country with the OIE Chapter 7.7 can be estimated, having three options: (i) non-compliance; (ii) partial compliance; and (iii) full compliance.

So far, 10 Balkan countries conducted their 1st self-assessment in 2015/2016 and 9 participated to a second one in 2018. Comprehensive national and regional Reports have been produced as key outcomes of these self-assessment rounds. They collate and analyse the results of the self-assessment and are based on the data reported by the countries. Part of these reports were designed as a “book of exercise” in which the experts propose an integrated analysis of the described situation combined with possible paths for the accomplishment of the goals set in their national Roadmap. The booklet includes many “open areas”, with the purpose to facilitate brainstorming, idea sharing, solution thinking to achieve a tentative road map for the immediate future. According to the same methodology, a third self-assessment round has been completed in preparation to the SDB4 and the preliminary results will be presented today, whilst the final report is under preparation by the IZSAM, and it will be distributed in the coming weeks.

Since the last SDB3 held in Serbia in 2018, 8 out of 11 Countries have been able to count the number of owned dogs but only two of them had the means to measure the consistence of the stray dog population. Half of the responding countries identify owned dogs or abandoned animals as the main source of stray dogs, whose presence is still considered a problem for 7 out of eight countries, posing public health and security risks (i.e., dog bites, risk for zoonotic diseases transmission). Veterinary and local governmental Authorities, followed by NGOs, remain the main actors responsible for stray dog control in the region.

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The level of human, financial and technical resources remain generally inadequate. In 2021, the total number of rabies cases in the Region was attributable to foxes while the number of rabies vaccinated dogs remained fairly stable over the time, thanks to active involvement of public veterinarians and private practitioners. DP-CPs have been implemented in 7 out of 8 countries and they were made in accordance with the territorial situation related to the local dog population. Training programs for personnel responsible for stray dog management have been implemented in 5 out of 8 countries, whilst both education and legislation for responsible ownership are only in place in 2 out of 8 countries. Dog identification is a legal obligation in all countries, that have centralized databases in place, and normally use ISO approved transponders for animal ID.

Monitoring and evaluation of DPCP is in place in 6 countries, mainly used as a basis for an effective management performance process and to gather evidence that they have met the desired outcomes. Only 2 countries were in the position to declare decrease in the number of stray dogs, which confirms that while some positive developments can be noted in different degrees across countries, stray dog population control is still a low national priority and managed in most cases by local governmental authorities. Despite the evolution perceived, persistent weak points for national control strategies are identified in: (i) the absence of a national stray dog control strategy ; (ii) scarce investments in public awareness and educational programs for responsible owners,(iii) poor communication and coordination between national and local authorities; (iv) limited collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders; (v) shortness in human, technical and financial resources, (vi) lack of essential training and educational opportunities for operators involved in stray dog control activities.

### **Plenary discussion** - *All participants / Moderator (T. Grudnik)*

Attendees to **the first plenary discussion** were asked to give feedback on the previous presentations, comment the outcomes of the last self-assessment round and propose new activities to be included in the new Action plan, in order to be sure that the common Vision will be achieved within the next four years.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) highlighted **the lack of technical know-how at the local level** as one the main criticality and the importance to discuss on how to overcome this gap. Without building a proper level of capacity and expertise on dog population management at Municipality level it will be very difficult to properly implement even the best national strategies and action plans and most of all to make sure that dogs are handled, housed, and cared for consistently, in order to ensure an acceptable level of welfare.

Romanian representative noticed that, according to the last SAM Tool round of assessment, most of the **Balkan countries still have difficulties in estimating the number of stray dogs at national level**. So far, this task has been assigned to local NGOs, but it has still not brought the expected results. This was not really a successful experience. As a matter of fact, Romanian local municipalities do not have always trained personnel able to conduct these counting campaigns in the proper manner. The OIE could play a role in this regard, by offering additional opportunities through the Platform initiatives and reinforcing this technical element in the new Chapter 7.7 under revision.

The Platform Secretariat reminded the presentation made by the RSPCA at the last SDB3 on the RAWC training-of-trainers course held in 2018 in Macedonia and based on the **ICAM Humane Dog Population Management Guidance**, that introduces the importance of initial assessment of the size of the local stray dog population in order to develop suitable interventions at community level. The RSPCA representative stressed the importance of applying this methodology in order to develop suitable interventions at community level, tracking progress, learning and subsequently improving their impact through the use of measurable indicators. In this regard, ICAM offers a dedicated online toolkit which has been recently integrated with the **'Talea' street survey app** that allows to gather and record data on dog population density, welfare and reproductive activity and helps integrating stray dog population dynamics integral into DP-CPs.

The availability of **National Data bases ideally interoperable with other identification, registration and traceability systems** might also contribute to have a thorough understanding of dog population structure, composition and ecology, provided a full integration with other data sources (i.e., public/private dog shelters registers).

North Macedonia is currently considering appointing a **designated person dealing with stray dog control and monitoring activities in each municipality**, vet students and volunteers could be also involved.

Given the persistent shortage of financial and technical resources to be allocated in such an important veterinary public health area of activity. and on the basis of very positive experiences on the use of EU Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programmes and financial instruments in this field, Montenegro would expect **the Platform to facilitate the setting of small projects at national level aiming at setting the conditions for national and local authorities to apply the OIE standards**. According to the Platform Steering Group new ToRs, the OIE can help addressing this need by promoting the Platform activity in order to attract external donors, but the countries representatives should be also proactive and support the OIE Delegates in advocating for the financial and sometimes political) support needed from the government.

Finally, professor Ilesky noted the potentiality of **the Platform in promoting bottom-up approaches to DPM and stray dog control**. RAWC has limited capacities, but it can contribute to a more targeted approach to end users' needs about DPM methodologies and instruments by: (1) increasing the dissemination of technical tools and training opportunities (2) avoiding the duplication of individual efforts addressing relevant issues of common interest (2) sharing best practices already adopted in the region and easily replicable having in mind socio/cultural contexts that are common to the Balkan countries. A good example could be dog shelter SOPs, that can be used to compare the performances of the different premises, on the basis of structural and management requisites and operator's profile.

These kinds of information have been never collected with the SAM Tool but can be reported in the book of exercises. However, in analogy with the introduction of the rabies section, a dedicated module could be easily integrated in the new SAM Tool 2.0

### Plenary lecture "Presentation of the SAM 2.0 Platform" - *S. D'Albenzio (IZSAM)*

As already reminded by the previous speakers, since 2014 stray dog population control was identified as a priority topic by the OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe. In order to help the Balkan countries to better understand their stray dog population situation, and to progressively monitor the progresses of their individual Roadmaps towards the full compliance with OIE standards on stray dog population control by 2025, the OIE and the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise "G. Caporale" (IZSAM) – as OIE multi-national OIE Collaborating Centre for Animal Welfare and OIE Collaborating Centre for: a) Veterinary Training and Capacity Building, b) Epidemiology, modelling and surveillance - jointly prepared a web-based Self-Assessment and Monitoring Tool (SAM Tool 1.0), under the format of an e-questionnaire. The first version of the SAM Tool was developed in 2015 based on Chapter 7.7 and later on a new section on rabies based on Chapter 8.14 was added.

To date, IZSAM has provided technical support and assistance to the Platform Secretariat at the OIE Sub Regional Representation in Brussels for SAM Tool 1.0 survey launch, management and data collection; data analysis and individual country, regional report drafting; reports editing and publication. The methodological approach used is the "benchmarking analysis" that normally allows organizations to compare their existing performance against "the (existing) best ones" and to adopt corrective measures that fit their overall approach to continuous improvement and culture. This method for dynamic data analysis, also allows countries to compare progressive achievements to short, medium and long-term objectives. Data are owned by the countries and the reports produced are not publicly available unless they are willing to share the data.

However, due to the intrinsic obsolescence of the IT systems, several weaknesses of the SAM Tool 1.0 have been identified over the time:

- Obsolescent platform (LimeSurvey);
- Impossibility for the respondents to use the information and data already provided in previous round(s) of the on-line survey;
- Impossibility to process data 100% electronically at country and multi-country (or multi-regional) level for reporting purposes;
- Staticity (countries cannot update data and information in progress, and consequently the OIE cannot figure out actual scenarios).

The SG15, held in December 2020, offered the occasion to present and discuss new solutions in support to the process of building and implementing sustainable strategies for dog population management and stray dog control in the Region.

On this occasion, the IZSAM representative presented a proposal for the development of an upgraded SAM Tool 1.0 (SAM Tool 2.0). The SG welcomed this initial proposal and called for the development of a detailed proposal for further discussion and explore possible source for funding of the project. The proposed project, as proposed, will allow to re-use the IZSAM web-based platform architecture for self-assessment, reducing costs for IT analysis and system programming which will not require to start from scratch.

It will be needed to readapt the content of the initial questionnaire and the book of exercise to the functions offered by the SAM Tool 2.0, applying the principles of the “benchmarking analysis” to assess the compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the OIE TAHC. This methodological approach has been already used to develop the SAM Tool 1.0 and is a specific type of research that allows organisations to compare their performance against “the (existing) best” ones, and to adopt corrective measures that fit their overall approach to continuous improvement and culture. Such a dynamic data analysis allows countries to compare progressive achievements to short, medium and long-term objectives. In order to do so, data and information obtained by the previous round of the SAM Tool 1.0 will be ingested and migrated to the new SAM Tool 2.0 and this will permit to bridge the past and the future progresses at country and regional level. The IZSAM will continue to provide technical assistance and guarantee SAM Tool 2.0 cloud and maintenance services.

From an OIE perspective, the SAM Tool 2.0 will represent an innovative data sharing collaborative environment offering several advantages:

- It is a permanent and evolutive tool at low risk of obsolescence, easily integrable with additional modules (i.e. other zoonotic diseases, dog shelters structural requisites and SOPs);
- As Platform Administrator (PA), the OIE can figure out the country, multi-country or regional scenarios when proper/necessary, since a multi-country report made of schemes and graphics can be generated by it 100% electronically with a simple process;
- It offers a low-cost localisation of the questionnaire and the report(s) (including right to left languages);
- It can be considered the cornerstone of a topic-based observatory for Animal Welfare (and this activity has already been chosen as a pilot project within the OIE Observatory), easily scalable to other OIE Standards with minor efforts and investments.

From an OIE Member Country perspective:

- Each country will have its own stable and constantly available “profile” accessible by credentials;
- Data and information can be entered and updated on-need by the Country Profile Administrator (CPA);
- When proper/necessary the CPA closes the survey. This allows to generate - 100% electronically - a country report (PDF file) made of schemes and graphics showing the actual level of compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the OIE TAHC;
- After the first round, end-users will be able to use the information and data already provided in previous round(s) of the on-line survey.

This new data sharing collaborative environment will enhance the impact of the Platform initiatives by offering a sustainable support to Veterinary Services for the implementation of the OIE standards on animal welfare and is coherent with the digitalisation strategy of the OIE, the 7th Strategic Plan and the OIE Observatory purposes.

Following to Dr. D’Albenzio presentation, **the first question poll** was launched, and attendants were asked to confirm their availability to contribute to the development of the SAM Tool 2.0.

Seven out of ten countries replied positively and two indicated that they do not know the answer. The Greek representative took the floor and clarified that her negative reply reflects the political decision of the Greek prime Minister to move stray dog control and welfare legal competencies from the Veterinary Services to the

Ministry of Interiors. Veterinary Services will duly inform the current Competent Authority, in order to secure the quality and continuity of the OIE Delegate support to the forthcoming Platform activities, including this one.

Additional comments were made by professor Ilesky about the possibility to collect data from the local authorities. The IZSAM representative confirmed that the SAM Tool 2.0 has the potential to add granular querying for local information retrieval. A more detailed country profile could be made by using a subset of specific questions and this is why it is relevant to involve a variety of experts/officials to be involved in the SAM Tool development, in representation of central and local Competent Authorities. The Platform Secretariat reminded that the SAM Tool data are currently validated by the OIE Delegate. The new SAM Tool could offer a solution to facilitate a rather complex extensive data collection process (i.e. interoperability with other IT systems) in order to improve the efficiency of animal health and welfare data sharing flows across the veterinary and public health (and security) systems and address country specific and OIE informative needs. Finally, Dr Balbo reminded that the SAM Tool has been selected as the first pilot project for the OIE Observatory on the implementation of OIE standards on animal welfare, being considered a very promising model to convert data into information and knowledge, according to a standardized and repeatable methodology.

### **Plenary lecture “Specific Country needs raised at the SDB3 and expected targeted support in between workshops” - T. Grudnik**

Based on the results of the SDB3 discussion in 2018, Dr Grudnik provided further elements to feed the discussion around the targeted support provided by the Platform between the workshops and the feasibility of additional technical assistance along the roadmap development, in light of the Countries expectations and the Secretariat mandate. With reference to the persistent need for more funds and budgetary resources, the Platform Secretariat is in the position to indirectly facilitate the interaction with international donors and resources partners, in order to ease the way for accessing to specific programs or economic measures (i.e. wildlife rabies programs funded by EU). The Platform will continue to propose specific technical topics to be addressed by international experts in next workshop's agenda. In addition, the possibility to engage other partners in the development of online training courses on particular topics of common interest (i.e. stray dog counting methods) will be also explored. Assistance to the development/revision of national plans and local dog population control programs require political and economic commitment along with tailor made technical assistance. However, having the opportunity to share experiences gained at regional level and reinforcing the network still remain of utmost importance. In this vein, a strong role can be played by the IZSAM/SCAW OIE CC consortium on Animal Welfare in Europe IZSAM and the RAWC. The Platform Secretariat will be in the position to support this process and contribute as already done by activating the “stray dog task force” upon request and keep promoting twinning/collaboration opportunities at regional level. A strong focus should be maintained on the need to further invest on dog responsible ownership public awareness campaigns. Besides the existing OIE online package, the OIE Countries should make profit out of the OIE experts on public networks and social interaction competencies, and engage the OIE Focal Points on communication.

### **Plenary discussion - All participants / Moderator (P. Dalla Villa)**

According to the result of the first (2015) and the second (2018) self-assessments carried out by Balkan countries, using the OIE Self-Assessment and Monitoring Tool (SAM Tool), municipal authorities have legal responsibility for stray dog population control in most part of the region. The Veterinary Authorities play an essential role at the national level regarding developing a legislative framework, identification and registration system, vaccination programmes. However, they still have a limited role in the DP-CPs managed at local level. Therefore, the control of stray dog population often remains at the level of local, small-scale, unharmonized and uncoordinated interventions across the country.

The Veterinary Authority should play an important role in this regard, by creating an accountable, sustainable and enabling environment for stray dog population control to be implemented by local governmental authorities/municipalities, with the necessary external coordination in place.

In preparation to the SDB3, the stray dog Task Force established by the OIE Platform Secretariat developed a draft template for Veterinary Services national plan to support local governmental authorities in the development and implementation of DP-CPs in compliance with OIE the standards and for maintaining the monitoring and evaluation of their implementation. The proposed template for national plan structure includes following sections: (i) current situation analysis; (ii) results of the first and second self-assessments (iii) three

to five years national VS' Plan; (iv) monitoring and evaluation of impact and implementation; (v) estimated budget; (vi) review. The document proposes a structure of the plan by guiding the identification of potential objectives, activities and associated costs for the next 3 to 5 years.

At the end of the SDB3, participants agreed to start exploring the relevance of developing Veterinary Services national plan for dog population control by using the template proposed by the Platform stray dog Task Force, that might have provided further technical assistance and assess these plans upon request.

Hence, **the second plenary discussion** aimed at gathering more detailed information on the degree of adherence to this commitment at regional level. Seven countries replied to the last question poll, only one confirmed to have implemented a plan based on the OIE template, a second one declared to have a plan not developed according to the OIE proposed model, a third one announced to have a plan under development. Four countries express the intention to develop these plans in the future.

Dr Dalla Villa opened the discussion and asked the countries to indicate potential elements for increasing the draft template possibilities of use, with no reaction on the representatives' side.

Dr Balbo took the floor and urged the country representatives to reinforce their proactive support to the Platform Secretariat, which is basically meant to take good ideas on board and to propose plans to put those ideas into action. Nevertheless, they should strive to set the conditions to secure a constant level of commitment and stay engaged with the Platform initiatives.

Professor Iliesky suggested to balance the Platform decision making mechanism by adopting a bottom-up analytical approach in order to fill the gaps between VSs' expectations and local Authorities' real capacities and eventually increase their ability to deliver effective and sustainable Dog Population Control Programs despite significant resource constraints. Crucial improvements in the welfare of stray animals can be only obtained by making sure that knowledge and expertise on DPM gained by the participants to the Platform activities are filtered down to the tasks of lower level operators. The Platform could therefore strongly contribute to the building of a wider network of stray dog managers to be contacted in case of need as a source of expertise and first hand source of data/information at local level. On the other hand, regional academic bodies and collaborative platforms like RAWC in the position to provide scientific advice in this field (training needs assessment, data analysis, stray dog ecology and dog population dynamics, AW indicators, best practices) could be also involved and play a strategic role in the achievement of the Platform's objective. The Bulgarian representative stressed the need for a more analytical approach in order to identify the elements necessary to solve the problems posed by the implementation of DP-CPs.

Alexandra Hammond warmly invited the attendants to express their views and make suggestions on how they would like the Platform to operate and which kind of initiatives can be proposed to the Steering Group (i.e. bilateral support, development of local technical expertise) to better address country needs in the future.

### **Plenary discussion with survey "Countries' adoption of the OIE awareness campaign for the Balkans"** *All participants / Moderator (T. Grudnik)*

Dr Grudnik opened this session on the countries' implementation of the OIE awareness campaign for the Balkans by recalling that the OIE "Be His Hero" communication campaign was developed in 2016 and strongly supported by the DG as part of OIE Regional stray dog Roadmap for Balkans activities, with the objective to significantly limit dog abandonment and support a sustainable dog population management approach in the region.

The campaign package included a set of products such as posters, a leaflet on good dog ownership, a questionnaire for responsible dog acquisition, a press release, a game book for children and a guide for teachers to animate half-a-day on good dog ownership accompanied by a manual on 'How to run a successful Campaign'. In this guiding booklet it was proposed to identify and collect indicators which can allow to assess the campaigns. Successful initiatives took place in Bulgaria, Montenegro and North Macedonia and the OIE "Be His Hero" information package have proven to be sufficiently flexible to be adjusted to extra regional contexts and adopted by the five overseas Departments of France.

The presentation was followed by the third question poll addressing the activities conducted at Country level to define a list of relevant indicators and to monitor the implementation of the OIE awareness campaign on responsible dog ownership. Attendants were invited to provide suggestions on how to proceed with the assessment of the different campaigns. Country representatives were also asked to report on the number of public awareness campaign for the promotion of dog responsible ownership conducted since 2018 by using the OIE information material. One country conducted a campaign in 2018, two of them held it in 2019 and only one country in 2020. Some countries are still using the informative material, but no mayor public awareness initiatives were implemented in 2021 at national level. However, six countries are planning to run again similar initiatives and use the OIE “Be His Hero” information package in the future, whilst the majority of them have monitored the activities but not their impact. Finally, three countries declared their availability to contribute to the evaluation of the OIE Awareness Campaign. Two of them offered to participate by sharing successful stories and one does not know. In addition, the Romanian representative reported the very successful adoption of the OIE “Be His Hero” public awareness campaign communication package by the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (NSVSA) in 2018. The national campaign started with the distribution of the information leaflets on responsible dog ownership to private veterinarians, in collaboration with the national Veterinary College. A second part of the initiative was launched on the NSVSA website, where all the awareness-raising material along with the list of dog shelters and NGOs offering spay/neuter services, are still available. The last part of the program has been conducted in collaboration with the private and NGOs shelters, mainly targeting less affluent regions with a high dog abandonment rate. Although ideally, monitoring and evaluation should be embedded from the very start of the planning phase of public awareness campaigns, Dr D’Albenzio offered the support of the IZSAM/OIE CC in defining common indicators that can be applied to measure the impact of these various initiatives in a retrospective manner.

### **Plenary lecture - How RAWC could assist the Balkan countries and what regional expertise is available to support the implementation of the OIE standards on stray dog control - *Professor Vlatko Ilieski (RAWC)***

The Regional Animal Welfare Center (RAWC) was founded in 2012 by the RSPCA. It provides a unique platform for the advancement of animal welfare through education, research and professional training and it aims at facilitating a closer collaboration between key stakeholders in the Western Balkans (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Rep. of North Macedonia and Kosovo\*). RAWC works with a wide range of bodies and institutions to actively share knowledge and expertise related to the implementation of animal welfare international standards, national/local legislative measures and best practices. Special attention is given to development knowledge management strategies tailored to the local needs and challenges, and to assist with implementation of legislation on the protection of livestock and companion animals. Within this context, RAWC has prioritized public awareness and education initiatives on dog population management (DPM) in order to support the development of sustainable and effective stray dog control interventions a regional level and share best practice amongst the interested Countries. RAWC runs a training of trainers program (ToT) on DPM and so far, it relies of a core group of five experts from Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and North Macedonia. A new ToT course is planned on Q2/2022 with the aim of widening the core group composition and the range of technical expertise (i.e., surveying, policy development, public engagement). New RAWC initiatives will be also focused on providing scientific and technical assistance for: the development of technical capacities for DPM intervention design and planning at country level; the transfer of knowledge on data collection methodologies (population surveys, demographic surveys); the development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks and related evidence based DPM indicators. In addition, RAWC can support the OIE Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe as required by coordinating assistance at sub-regional regional level, supporting the development of the new SAM 2.0 and providing technical assistance to countries to strengthen capacities for DPM at the local level.

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\* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

### **Conclusions and closing remarks** - *All participants / Moderator - R. Balbo*

During the closing session, participants highlighted the importance to strengthen the capacity of VSs to develop and implement National Action plans for dog population control and to improve the technical know-how of the personnel carrying out stray dog control activities at Municipal/local level. A stronger and proactive interaction with the Platform Secretariat, the OIE Network of CCs on Animal Welfare, the Regional Animal Welfare Center (RAWC), other sub-regional Academic bodies/Institutions and local/international NGOs engagement was also advocated, in order to enhance the possibilities to receiving tailor made, long-term technical assistance and having access to projects funds or dedicated financial measures.

Dr. Balbo closed the meeting by reminding the Country representatives about the importance of openness, transparency and accountability in the development and the implementation of OIE standards, in order to address societal expectations animal welfare and guarantee the sustainability of livestock production sectors and veterinary public health programs. He also emphasized the role of the IZSAM/SCAW OIE CC multinational consortium on animal welfare in Europe in support to the 2021-2023 Action Plan and announced the organization of an international online event for the animation of the OIE Collaborating Centre's global network, in the framework of the OIE transregional strategic actions on animal welfare.

On behalf of the Platform Secretariat, he finally expressed gratitude to all participants, speakers and IZSAM, RAWC and RSPCA representatives for their engagement during the workshop and in preparation to the event.

### **Annexes:**

Annex 1 - AGENDA

Annex 2 -PARTICIPANTS LIST