World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

30th Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe Catania, Italy, 3 to 7 October 2022

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

1. Following the kind invitation of the Government of Italy, the 30th Conference of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH: founded as OIE) Regional Commission for Europe was held in Catania (Sicily) from 3 to 7 October 2022.

2. A total of 153 participants, comprising WOAH Delegates and representatives of 40 Members of the Region and senior officers from 12 regional and international organisations, attended the Conference. In addition, representatives of the private sector as well as private veterinary organisations from the Region and from the host country were present.

   Members of the Commission: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Rep., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Türkiye, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

   International/regional/national organisations: CReDIMa[1], Council of the European Union, EC[2], EuFMD[3], FAO[4], FESASS[5], FNOVI[6], FVE[7], ICFAW[8], ITCG[9], UNEP[10], and WHO[11].

3. Dr Davide Lecchini, Delegate of Italy, Dr Christianne Bruschke, Vice-President of the World Assembly of Delegates and Delegate of The Netherlands, Dr Monique Eloit, Director General, Dr Maris Balodis, President of the Regional Commission for Europe and Delegate of Latvia, Dr Romano Marabelli, Advisor to the Director General, Dr Budimir Plavšić, Regional Representative, Dr Mereke Taitubayev, Sub-Regional Representative for Central Asia, Dr Estelle Hamelin, Sub-Regional Representative in Brussels, Dr Neo Mapitse, Head of the Regional Activities Department, and Dr Etienne Bonbon, President of the Code Commission, also participated in the Conference. The speakers presenting the two main Technical Items, namely Dr Daniela Morelli, Head of Epidemiology and Veterinary Public Health Department of *the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale* (IZS) *dell'Abruzzo e del Molise*, Teramo, for Technical Item I, and Professor Ian Brown, Head of Virology at Animal and Plant Health Agency, (APHA) and Chairperson of OFFLU, for Technical Item II, honoured the Conference with their presence.

1 CReDIMa : Centro di Referanza Nazionale per le Indagini Diagnostiche sui Mammiferi Marini Spiaggiati

2 EC: European Commission

3 EuFMD: European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease

4 FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

5 FESASS: Féderation Européenne pour la Santé Animale et la Securité Sanitaire

6 FNOVI : Federazione Nazionale Ordini Veterinari Italiani

7 FVE: Federation of Veterinarians of Europe

8 ICFAW: International Coalition for Animal Welfare

9 ITCG : The Italian Coast Guard

10 UNEP : United Nations Environment Programme

11 WHO : World Health Organization

TUESDAY 4 OCTOBER 2022

Opening ceremony

4. The following authorities gave a welcome address:

- Mr Roberto Speranza, Minister of Health of Italy;
- Dr Hugo Federico Idoyaga Benítez, President of the World Assembly of Delegates and Delegate of Paraguay; (video message)
- Dr Maris Balodis, President of the Regional Commission for Europe and Delegate of Latvia; and
- Dr Monique Eloit, Director General.

Approval of the Programme

The Provisional Agenda and Programme were adopted. Final programme available in Annex 1.

Appointment of the Conference Committee

5. The Conference Committee was elected by participants as follows:

Chairperson:	Dr Davide Lecchini (Italy)
Vice-Chairperson:	Dr Abrar Akbarov (Uzbekistan)
Rapporteur General:	Dr Vesna Dakovic, (Montenegro)

Appointment of Session Chairpersons and Rapporteurs

6. Chairpersons and Rapporteurs were designated for the Technical Items and the Analysis of the Animal Health Situation as follows:

Technical Item I:	Dr Martin Blake (Ireland), (Chairperson) Dr Galib Abdulaliyev (Azerbaijan), (Rapporteur)
Technical Item II:	Dr Emmanuelle Soubeyran (France), (Chairperson) Dr Samat Tyulegenov (Kazakhstan), (Rapporteur)
Analysis of the Animal Health : Situation	Dr Nikolche Babovski (North Macedonia (Rep. of)), (Chairperson) Dr Christine Middlemiss (United Kingdom), (Rapporteur)

WOAH:
Improving animal health globally to ensure a better future for all

7. Dr Monique Eloit, WOAH Director General, presented a quick overview regarding WOAH's work in support to its Members.

8. She began by reminding participants of the overarching mission of the Organisation which is to ensure animal health worldwide due to its direct impact on livelihoods of millions of families, on food security and food safety, without forgetting the impact on human health when animal diseases are transmissible to humans.

9. She mentioned that, to support its Members to face obvious challenges such as TADs, emerging diseases, zoonosis and food borne diseases control, as well as new global challenges such as climate and socio economic changes, new consumption patterns, among other challenges that will require the Veterinary Services to adapt, the Organisation was working along several lines including its core mandate activities such as animal disease information collection and standards setting. She also mentioned the development of global strategies as well as ambitious capacity building programmes. Additionally, she highlighted that WOAH was ready to update its strategies as well as revise its standards if necessary to better support its Members to face future challenges. She also recognised the need and willingness of the Organisation to integrate other areas of expertise so that animal health is addressed in a more holistic way.

10. Main conclusions from Dr Eloit's presentation were as follows:

- It is key for WOAH and its Members to take positions regarding current key global challenges in order to ensure that the Organisation has a recognised voice beyond the Veterinary Services sector and to avoid being limited to the field of livestock and trade. We need to be very active in any political fora to ensure our voice is heard and considered in ongoing negotiations for future health governance in which animal health is a key element.
- The first area of engagement of the organisation is related to animal health in the strict sense through strategies and initiatives such as FMD, PPR, Rabies and ASF, many of those addressed under the GF-TADs umbrella.
- Over the years the Organisation has also invested in new areas which are also key for the support of Veterinary Services mainly to respond to new challenges such as animal welfare, AMR, Biothreat reduction, capacity building including distance learning, and also aquatic animal health and wildlife health.
- Animal disease prevention is key however, it is not always about preventing spillover to humans, it is also about actions in the animal health sector to limit the drivers of the emergence.
- It is not about making politicians to understand the veterinary language but about adapting ourselves to the politician's language to clearly communicate and explain the key role of Veterinary Services' work and contribution to global health, the importance of aligning our work to the work of the public health and environmental authorities.

Special Address from his Excellency the Ambassador Carlos Cherniak, Chair of the COAG Livestock Subcommittee

11. His Excellency, Ambassador Carlos Cherniak, Chair of the COAG Livestock Subcommittee, addressed the audience reiterating the willingness of the Subcommittee to cooperate with WOAH promoting synergies and articulations so that we can ensure progress together.

12. He highlighted 4 main points for synergy and collaboration between WOAH, FAO and the Subcommittee as follows:

- The paramount importance of addressing transboundary and zoonotic animal diseases.
- The necessity of strengthening national coordinated capacities and actions to manage the risks of animal diseases and emerging zoonoses through the "One Health" approach, building on its quadripartite structure.
- The prominence of developing technical and policy actions for improved biosecurity along animal value chains.
- The benefit of collecting scientific evidence on alternative feeding practices and promoting the responsible use of antimicrobials.

The Regional Commission for Europe: activities, priorities, and needs assessment

13. Dr Maris Balodis, President of the Regional Commission for Europe, provided participants with brief details on activities carried out in the last two years highlighting the outcomes of the meetings of the RCG, among others, participation of the Region in WOAH standards setting process, animal welfare activities, preparation of the 89th General Session. He also mentioned the work done by the Bureau of the Commission in preparation of the Regional Conference.

14. The President underlined the priority areas of work for the Regional Commission in order to better align and respond to WOAH Seventh Strategic Plan underlining, among others, animal health including aquatic animal health, One Health and GF-TADs related activities.

15. Finally, he thanked the staff from WOAH Regional and Subregional Representations for the support they provided to the Regional Commission and the RCG to facilitate carrying out their role.

ClassyFarm: a useful tool for official controls

16. Dr Francesca Calvetti, Veterinary officer from the Ministry of Health of Italy and Dr Giovanni Loris Alborali, Head of the Diagnostic Unit of the IZS Lomabardia e Emilia Romagna delivered a joint presentation regarding ClassyFarm which an IT tool fully integrated with some of the IT systems for official controls on animal health.

17. The main objective of this tool is to improve animal farming in order to ensure ethical and safe food production to respond to consumers' demands. The tool collects and manages information regarding animal welfare, antimicrobial use, biosecurity and controls at slaughterhouses. It represents a benchmark instrument for operators comparing their results at local, regional or central level, and a useful instrument to be compliant with operators' obligation regarding the Animal Health Law. For Competent Authorities (central, regional, and local) it is a useful instrument for categorisation of holdings based on risk in order to optimise official controls especially in high risk farms.

Technical item I (with questionnaire): Long distance transport of live animals: WOAH's standards and best practices including societal perception and communication aspects

18. Technical Item I, entitled "*Long distance transport of live animals: WOAH's standards and best practices including societal perception and communication aspects*", presented by Dr Daniela Morelli, Head of the Epidemiology and Veterinary Public Health Department from *IZS dell'Abruzzo e del Molise*, Teramo, prompted some discussions among participants, allowing the Regional Commission for Europe to elaborate a recommendation in accordance with the WOAH General Rules. Final recommendation available in Annex 2.

Observatory: Evidence-based approach to address Members' needs and encourage the implementation of international standards

19. Dr Laure Weber-Vintzel, Head of the Data Integration Department, facilitated an interactive session aiming at clarifying questions regarding WOAH Observatory. She explained that this programme aims at monitoring the implementation of WOAH International Standards and will publish its first implementation review report in December 2022. She confirmed that the report will preserve anonymity of WOAH Members by only showing aggregated data, including for data already in the public domain. She also reassured participants that those Members sharing more information, therefore demonstrating higher transparency, would not be penalised, but quite the opposite.

20. Finally, a discussion took place covering the different groups and platform by which the Observatory engages with Members.

WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2022

Analysis of the Animal Health Situation in Member Countries in the Region during 2021/2022

21. Dr Lina Awada, Veterinary Epidemiologist, from the Data Integration Department provided participants with the analysis of reporting provided by Members in the Europe Region during 2021/mid-2022 (report available in Annex 3). Main points presented as follows:

- Exceptionally long submission times were recorded for the 2020 and 2021 six-monthly reports, likely due both to the transition to the new WAHIS and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- By 14 July 2022, submission times had gradually improved since the launch of the new version of WAHIS in March 2021; however, they had not yet reached the same level as before the pandemic.
- Regarding early warning, the median time from confirmation of an event to notification to WOAH was 4 days (whereas Members are required to submit these notifications within one day, in accordance with WOAH standards). Members were reminded about the importance of timely, comprehensive and transparent notification.
- Concerning infection with SARS-CoV-2 in the Europe Region, a significant number of new events (N=42) were reported during the period under study, through WAHIS or using the dispositions provided for in Article 1.1.5 of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. The majority of the outbreaks and cases reported since January 2021 have been linked to infected farmed American mink. In view of the susceptibility of mink to the virus and the demonstrated virus mutation in this species, this may represent an event of public health concern. WOAH is continuing to actively follow the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 in animals, through its network of experts and several Advisory Groups but also through dedicated epidemic intelligence activities to track any potential signal of concern.
- In 2021/2022, the HPAI epidemic continued to threaten animal health in Europe, with 39 countries reporting the disease present. More than 5000 outbreaks were reported and 45 million of poultry died or were killed and disposed of. Although the data for the 2021/2022 wave were still only partial as of 14 July 2022, the figures show that the impact of the disease in the region was higher than in all previous waves since 2005. Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 10.4. on HPAI viruses, which was last updated in 2021, recognises vaccination against AI as an effective complementary control tool when a stamping out policy alone is not sufficient. Whether to vaccinate or not should be decided by the Veterinary Authority on the basis of the AI situation as well as the ability of the Veterinary Services to implement vaccination and the appropriate surveillance strategy.
- The information reported to WOAH on ASF point to a clear, steady and progressive deterioration of the ASF epidemiological situation. The spread of ASF virus to new countries as well as its progression to new areas in countries already affected should stimulate reflections on the human/animal/environmental behaviours that are currently enabling the virus to disseminate. These data demonstrate the importance of human activities in the regional spread of the disease and highlight the importance of early detection and notification, raising awareness among the general public and enforcing strict biosecurity measures along the pig supply chain.
- Since the launch of the new version of WAHIS, WOAH has continued to work with the IT provider to put in place a solid maintenance plan. The focus of the project remains on: 1) stabilising and optimising the existing modules and improving the platform's performance; 2) Developing future evolutions, taking into account feedback from users, and developing remaining functionalities; 3) linking up with the global health community by rolling out public interoperability by mid-2023.
- WOAH must continue to provide its Members with the ability to report easily on animal diseases to facilitate transparency, access and analysis. The knowledge generated should support WOAH, its Members and other stakeholders in the decision-making process and inform efforts to improve system performance.

- Reacting to Dr Awada's presentation, the following points were put forward by EU Delegates and discussed :
    - Increased transparency of WOAH Members, as reflected in the number of early warning reports received each year, is welcomed and further efforts should be made in reporting to improve transparency at regional level.
    - WOAH to consider setting up of a specific *ad hoc* Group to determine whether SARS-CoV-2 meets the criteria for inclusion in the WOAH listed diseases. Consultation with the Specialists Commissions on a proposal whether or not to list the pathogenic agent will continue before being presented for a decision by the World Assembly.
    - WOAH's efforts for the continuous development of WAHIS interface while keeping high in the priority list the interoperability functionality essential for EU ADIS were recognised. WOAH acknowledged the support from the EU.

Technical item II (without questionnaire): Vaccination against HPAI

22. Technical Item II, entitled "Vaccination against HPAI", presented by Prof. Ian Brown, Head of Virology at APHA, UK and Chairperson of OFFLU, prompted some discussions among participants, allowing the Regional Commission for Europe to elaborate a recommendation in accordance with the WOAH General Rules. Final Recommendation available in Annex 4.

23. Considering the importance of this topic in Europe as well as in other regions, the Director General informed the Regional Commission that the technical item of the next General Session (May 2023) will be dedicated to HPAI (title tbd), while the joint FAO-WOAH strategy on Avian Influenza is under revision.

ONE HEALTH SESSION

24. An interactive session on the operationalisation of the One Health concept in the Region was facilitated by Professor Andrea Winkler, senior researcher and co-director of the Centre for Global Health at the Technical University of Munich and Deputy Director of the Centre for Global Health at the University of Oslo.

25. The session started with a keynote presentation from Dr Chadia Wannous, WOAH One Health Senior Specialist, regarding the Global Quadripartite and Joint Plan of Action. Main points of conclusion were:

- One Health is an integrated unifying approach that mobilises multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at varying levels of society to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems, while addressing the collective need for clean water, energy and air, safe and nutritious food, taking action on climate change, and contributing to sustainable development.
- One Health was already on the international agenda and COVID-19 crisis reiterated the importance of such approach to better address current global challenges.
- Increasing number of multidimensional health, water, energy, food security and biodiversity challenges necessitate One Health collaboration, coordination, communication and capacity building.
- Political commitment and international support are also key to ensure the success of such approach.
- The 27th Tripartite Annual Executive Meeting (TEAM): agreed to jointly develop a strategy and action plan to prevent future zoonotic pandemics through the One Health approach. It is a unique opportunity for FAO, WOAH, WHO and UNEP to stand together as a global coalition to jointly drive change and achieve the transformations desired.

- The One Health Joint Plan of Action is a collaborative, participatory effort among FAO, WOAH, WHO and UNEP supported by One Health High Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP). It uses a One Health approach to strengthen collaboration, communication, capacity building, and coordination equally across all sectors responsible for addressing health concerns at the human-animal-plant-environment interface. It also provides a framework for action and proposes a set of activities the four organisations can provide together to advance and sustainably scale up One Health. Finally, it foresees resource mobilisation and aims to make good use of resources across sectors and stakeholders.
- One Health Joint Plan of Action is key to avoid one size fits for all. It will be officially launched at the coming One Health Global Congress (Singapore- 7-10 November 2022). A stepwise and tailored approach will be key to ensure operationalisation of this approach.
- Regional Quadripartite coordination mechanism ensures alignment and translation of activities at regional and country level.

Operationalisation of One Health Regional Mechanism for Europe: remarks by Regional Representatives of FAO, UNEP, WHO, WOAH and Italy

26. Following Dr Wannous presentation, Doctors Hans Kluge and Peter Sousa Hoejskov from WHO, Nabil Gangi from FAO, Budimir Plavsic from WOAH, Mr Wondwosen Asnake Kibret from UNEP and Dr Pietro Schembri from Italy made interventions summarising the work of the four Organisations contribution to the operationalisation of the One Health approach and regional experience in implementing Sicily One Health Prevention Plan. Interventions prompted interesting interventions under a panel discussion format that allowed the Regional Commission to highlight that:

- The four Organisations reiterated their commitment to fully support Members to advance in the operationalisation of the One Health concept. They also highlighted their willingness to strengthen the collaboration amongst themselves and with other partners in order to maximise support and have a positive impact at country level.
- There is a clear strategy and tools to ensure the operationalisation of the approach at national level, including the “friends of One Health” group which facilitates informal round table discussions and exchanges with key partners regarding the articulation of information to be included in the pandemic treaty to ensure the animal health sector is taken into account and included at all levels of the negotiations.
- Integrating environmental dimensions in One Health approaches is one of the pathways to catalyse the transformative change needed to live in harmony with nature, stabilise the climate and achieve a pollution-free planet.
- National One Health actions are key to better incorporate priorities of the Ministries of Natural Resource Management, Agriculture, Forestry and Environment.
- The Quadripartite and Joint Plan of Action activities facilitate showing that operationalisation of the One Health Concept is possible and therefore, developing a treaty will facilitate the operational inclusion of relevant sectors to better engage relevant high level authorities.
- Increasing visibility at political level as well as presence in the field level are of paramount importance to ensure the sharing of competencies, understanding and awareness regarding the One Health approach as well as to create trust at national level with Government officials, health workers, veterinarians, farmers as well as different civil societies and stakeholders and therefore, facilitate the operationalisation of the One Health approach.
- Implementing the One Health approach and ensuring multisectoral cooperation in an inclusive way is not easy for Members at national level. It requires a lot of follow up mainly with colleagues from the health sector who have a tendency to forget the animal health sector in key discussions and breaking down entrenched cultures.

- WOAH reiterated its engagement in supporting its Members in the implementation and operationalisation of the approach at national level through, among others, information sharing including updates regarding the Quadripartite work, feedback on negotiation process at global level, timeline regarding the different steps of negotiations, key notes providing information and guidance to better address and engage with partners at national level as well as with high level authorities from different Ministries.
- The importance of the Quadripartite as well as the JPA was already recognised by the G20.

Discussion of recommendations

27. Draft Recommendations 1 and 2 on the two Technical Items of the Conference were presented to participants and put forward for discussion. Both draft Recommendations will be submitted for adoption at the Friday session with amendments as per participants' suggestions and discussions.

28. Following adoption by the Regional Commission, the Recommendations will be submitted for endorsement by the World Assembly of Delegates in May 2023. Once endorsed by the Assembly, they will serve as an important guideline for Members of the Regional Commission for Europe, as well as for the Organisation as a whole.

Proposal of date and venue of the 31st Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe

29. The President of the Commission asked Delegates present if any of their countries wished to host the 31st Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe in 2024.

30. The Delegate of Uzbekistan reiterated the wish for his country to host the Conference. A video presenting the town of Samarkand was shown to support the Delegate's statement.

31. The proposal was unanimously accepted.

32. The precise dates of the Conference will be decided on a later stage in coordination with WOAH Director General.

33. This proposal was also unanimously confirmed.

THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022

Cultural visit

34. Participants greatly appreciated the cultural visit organised for the day by the host country. Sincere thanks were extended to the organisers as well as to the Municipality of Catania for their kind hospitality.

FRIDAY 7 OCTOBER 2022

Revision of the Terrestrial Code - Key topics of the cycle 2022-2023 for the Europe region (with main focus on BSE, Rabies, and AMR)

35. Dr Etienne Bonbon, President of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code Commission presented some key topics addressed by the Code Commission following their September meeting. He mentioned that the joint meetings of the Specialists Commissions ensure harmonised work plans and consistency across all *Codes* and *Manuals*. There is an in depth revision of the horizontal Chapters on biosecurity, import and export, and AMR. The *ad hoc* Group on biosecurity and on import/export will meet in November/December. There is a need to strengthen and have provisions to address the capacities of Members on risks of disease spread through trade. The revised AMR chapter includes all domestic animals as well as the environment and considers the linkages with the work done by the CODEX Alimentarius and UNEP. Dr Bonbon asked for Members comments and experiences to enrich the revisions.

36. Dr Bonbon mentioned the huge amount of work on revision of the chapter on animal welfare at slaughter and informed that the draft chapter will be sent to the *ad hoc* Group following Members` comments. There are also preliminary discussions to include “the five freedoms” to assess animal welfare.

37. Regarding the vertical chapters, the of the draft revised FMD chapter is ready for a last round of comments. Key points have been updated, such as case definition, inclusion of extruded dry pet food as a safe commodity, introduction of vaccinated animals and the tests required, time period for the containment zones.. The main changes made on the draft BSE Chapter include the withdrawal of atypical BSE from compulsory notification and risk assessment while keeping its management and monitoring, the importance of feed ban and the list of SRM. The draft FMD and BSE chapters will be presented to the Assembly for adoption in 2023.

38. The 30 day time lapse after rabies vaccination to importation and choice of oral/parenteral vaccinations as part of mass vaccination programmes were explained, while wildlife control programmes is not yet included in the *Terrestrial Code*. The list of equine diseases chapters ready for adoption by the Assembly was presented. The ongoing and future work on equine encephalitis and the trypanosomiasis chapters, and the harmonisation of CBPP and AHS Chapters with the other animal health status related chapters were outlined. Dr Bonbon asked the Members to find a way of dealing with the key issues on the draft Chapter on the welfare of laying hens, which was rejected in 2021.

39. In responding to comments, Dr Bonbon stated that the risk management on rabies has not been lowered but the available data show that rabies cases are due to illegal importations and there is yet to be reported, a case of rabies caused by importation of a correctly vaccinated animal.

Digitalisation of Veterinary Services
Experiences and best practices:
Italy, Georgia, Montenegro, and WOAH Data Management Working Group

40. This session was the opportunity to present some experiences on digitalisation of the Veterinary Services.

41. Dr Luigi Possenti, from IZS dell'Abruzzo e del Molise "G. Caporale" presented on the National Information System for Pharmacosurveillance and electronic veterinary prescription in Italy. This Ministry of Health funded project manages the entire cycle of prescription, dispensing and administration of veterinary medicines and medicated feeds. It is a centralised electronic register with electronic veterinary prescription, thus enabling an effective and efficient pharmacosurveillance action and health risk analysis to combat AMR and to simplify operations.

42. The system includes advanced analysis and reporting system for the competent authorities and allows to plan the official control activities in the structures that manage veterinary drugs. The system allows to verify, record and review remotely, the control activities performed by the competent authority on all livestock farms and other structures including reporting to international organisations such as WOAH and EMA. More than 20,000 users access the system every day

and veterinarians use the system to issue more than 600,000 electronic prescriptions every month.

43. The Delegate of Georgia, Dr Vasili Basiladze presented the new animal identification, registration and traceability system (NAITS) of cattle. He mentioned that the objectives of the system were aligned to EU legislation. The system was upgraded to an easily accessible digital analogue format in 2018 with FAO support. NAITS contains >6 M datasets on veterinary manipulations including vaccination, laboratory results, control and use of veterinary medicinal products, among others. Georgia is piloting a project to use Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) which saves resources and time. NAITS also captures data on migration routes of animals through the various veterinary surveillance stations. NAITS provides animal or husbandry data to the consumer from the carcasses/meat package digitalised labels in real time.

44. The Delegate of Montenegro, Dr Vesna Dakovic presented the Veterinary Information System (VIS). The recommendations of the PVS mission report were used to mobilise resources from the World Bank to develop the VIS. The VIS has 116 modules and includes the Laboratory information and management system. VIS is useful in monitoring the official control system, facilitates timely risk assessments, quality control and decision making. The challenges of the program such as connecting all laboratories and data security and standardisation were mentioned. Dr Dakovic highlighted that this initiative of Montenegro to embark in a digitalisation programme was inspired by Georgia's Electronic Integrated Disease Surveillance System (EIDSS) presented during the 28th Regional Conference.

45. Dr Laure Weber-Vintzel, representing WOAH Data Management Working Group, presented the efforts of the Organisation toward its digital transformation, one of the strategic objectives of the Seventh Strategic Plan being an established data governance. She focused on the importance of a robust and fit-for-purpose data management system that would support the successful digitalisation of WOAH. This translates into tools, service delivery, and also way of working. Highlighting the challenges faced and successes reached, she shared the experience of the group in the development of the WOAH Data Strategy.

46. Due to time constraints, the discussions were shortened but the Regional Commission agreed on the importance of this topic which will merit another session.

Veterinary Paraprofessionals and Workforce Development: experience from projects in Europe, Africa and Middle East

47. Dr Mereke Taitubayev, Sub-Regional Representative for Central Asia, introduced the topic and the speaker, Dr Barbara Alessandrini, Head of the Capacity-Building Department. Member`s experiences were also shared by Georgia Kazakhstan.

48. Dr Alessandrini briefly commented WOAH perspective regarding the Veterinary Workforce highlighting the importance of having sufficient numbers of adequately trained personnel for the proper functioning of a national Veterinary Services.

49. She also detailed WOAH tools to support the veterinary workforce development highlighting the PVS Evaluation and Follow Up as well as the Gap Analysis as tools to support assessment and planning. Additionally, she mentioned the national workshops on workforce development which are in pilot stage and the new workforce assessment tool currently under development.

50. The Veterinary legislation support programme and Veterinary Statutory Body (VSB) Twinning and VSB support mission (also under development) as well as the Veterinary Educational Establishment (VEE) Twinning Programme and the VPP Curriculum support missions (in a pilot phase) were also referred as tools supporting enabling environment for an effective workforce.

51. Finally, the Delegate of Kazakhstan appreciated the programs developed over the last years, and the recommendations formulated, that led them to develop new departments in their Ministry, a network of veterinary focal points, where both specialists and veterinary paraprofessionals work. He informed that Kazakhstan is supporting the VPP project and training has been carried with cooperation of the Ministry of Education. Kyrgyzstan is also starting a similar project.

Adoption of the Draft Final Report and Recommendations

52. Dr Eloit summarised the main conclusions of the Conference highlighting among others the discussions regarding vaccination against HPAI, ASF, animal welfare and the One Health approach. Conference's discussions underlined the current global challenges faced by WOAH and its Members such as climate change, pandemics, changing consumption patterns, the societal demand and expectations in terms of animal welfare and a more environmentally friendly animal production systems, among others. Dr Eloit encouraged Members to give more visibility to data and data management in the Veterinary Services. WOAH is ready to respond to its Members' needs including with new approaches regarding animal health and welfare by, if necessary, rethinking its policies to adapt and keep up-to date with the changing global environment.

53. Finally, Dr Eloit explained the procedures for adopting the report and the recommendations of the Conference. The draft final report will be published in the Conference website and participants will have the opportunity to provide comments until a certain deadline, those comments will be then taken into account before closing the report. However, the recommendations had to be adopted during the current session and could not be changed subsequently, only editing being accepted.

54. The two draft recommendations were unanimously adopted and will be published along with the final report.

Closing ceremony

55. Dr Davide Lecchini, thanked the Extra-ordinary Commissioner of IZS, the Administrative Director, Director of the ISZ Section of Catania, collaborators and the organising team among others, for the successful conference.

56. Dr Monique Eloit thanked and congratulated Dr Lecchini as well as all the Italian colleagues for the excellent work done to ensure the success of such an important event for the region as well as for the exceptional hospitality. She expressed her thanks to H.E. Minister R. Speranza, to the Sicilian authorities and Catania Municipality. She also thanked the Delegates for their participation during the week as well as for their active participation in the poster session and the engagement in discussions. She thanked the speakers for their excellent work done and time devoted to the preparation of their presentations. She concluded that the conference was a great success.

57. Dr Maris Balodis expressed his gratitude to Italy and WOAH colleagues for the outstanding Regional Conference and to the Delegates, speakers for their active participations. He stated that the objectives of the Conference had been achieved.

58. The President of the Regional Commission declared the Conference closed at 12:30 p.m.

World Organisation for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

30th Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe
Catania, Sicily, Italy, 3 - 7 October 2022

FINAL PROGRAMME

SUNDAY 2 OCTOBER 2022

7.00 p.m.	Welcome cocktail offered by Italy

MONDAY 3 OCTOBER 2022

09:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Registration of participants
10:00 a.m.	**SIDE EVENT FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS TO THE CONFERENCE (FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS TO THE CONFERENCE) : Seminar on Aquatic Mammals** (WOAH Collaborating Centre for Health of Marine Mammals)
1:00 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 p.m.	**SIDE EVENT: 20th GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever** (Chairperson: Dr Bernard Van-Goethem, EU SANTE)
3:30 p.m.	Break
3:45 p.m.	**SIDE EVENT: 20th GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever** (cont.) (Chairperson: Dr Bernard Van-Goethem, EU SANTE)
6:00 p.m.	End of the Session
7.30 p.m.	Buffet dinner

TUESDAY 4 OCTOBER 2022

9:00 a.m.	Opening ceremony
9:45 a.m.	Group Photo / Break
10:15 a.m.	Approval of the Agenda and Programme (Dr Maris Balodis, President of the Regional Commission and Delegate of Latvia)
	Appointment of the Conference Committee (Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and General Rapporteur)
	Appointment of sessions' chairpersons and rapporteurs (Technical items and Animal Health Situation)
10:30 a.m.	WOAH: Improving animal health globally to ensure a better future for all (Dr Monique Eloit, WOAH Director General)
11:00 a.m.	Discussion
11:15 a.m.	Special Address from his Excellency the Ambassador Carlos Cherniak, Chair of the COAG livestock Subcommittee
11:25 a.m.	The Regional Commission for Europe: activities, priorities, and needs assessment (Dr Maris Balodis and Dr Ulrich Herzog, Vice President of the Regional Commission for Europe and Delegate of Austria)

11:50 a.m. Discussion

12:00 p.m. ClassyFarm: a useful tool for official controls (Dr Francesca Calvetti , Veterinary officer, Ministry of Health, and Dr Giovanni Loris Alborali, Head of the Diagnostic Unit - IZS Lomabrdia e Emilia Romagna)

12:30 p.m. Posters Session

1:00 p.m. Lunch

2:00 p.m. Technical item I (with questionnaire): Long distance transport of live animals: WOAH's standards and best practices including societal perception and communication aspects (Dr Daniela Morelli, Head, Epidemiology and Veterinary Public Health Department, IZS)

2:45 p.m. Discussion

3:15 p.m. Break
Preparation of Recommendation No. 1 by a designated small group

PARTICIPANTS WILL SPLIT IN TWO GROUPS

3:45 p.m. Observatory: Evidence-based approach to address Members' needs and encourage the implementation of international standards (Dr Laure Weber-Vintzel, Programme Manager, Observatory)

4:15 p.m. End of the Session

3:45 p.m. **SIDE EVENT: 10th GF-TADs Regional Steering Committee for Europe**
(Chairperson: Dr Bernard Van Goethem, EU SANTE)

6:00 p.m. End of the Session

7: 30 p.m. Official diner hosted by WOAH

WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2022

9:00 a.m. Analysis of the Animal Health Situation in Member Countries in the Region during 2021/2022 (Dr Lina Awada, Veterinary Epidemiologist, World Animal Health Information and Analysis Department)

9:40 a.m. Discussion

10:00 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. Technical item II (without questionnaire): Vaccination against HPAI (Prof. Ian Brown, Head of Virology at APHA, Chairperson of OFFLU)

11:15 a.m. Discussion

12:00 p.m. Lunch
Preparation of Recommendation No. 2 by designated small group

1:45 p.m. One Health Session

1:50 p.m. Keynote presentation: Global Quadripartite, Joint Plan of Action (Dr Chadia Wannous, Senior Specialist One Health)

2:15 p.m.	Operationalisation of One Health Regional Mechanism for Europe: remarks by Regional Representatives of FAO, UNEP, WHO and WOAH
	Member's experience: Sicily One Health Prevention Plan (Dr Pietro Schembri)
3:30 p.m.	General discussions on One Health
4: 00 p.m.	Break
4:30 p.m.	Discussion of recommendations No. 1 and No. 2.
5:30 p.m.	Proposal of date and venue of the 31st Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe (Dr Maris Balodis)
5:45 p.m.	End of the session
7:30 p.m.	Official dinner hosted by Italy

THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022

Cultural visit organised by Italy

FRIDAY 7 OCTOBER 2022

09:00 a.m.	Revision of the Terrestrial Code - Key topics of the cycle 2022-2023 for the Europe region (with main focus on BSE, Rabies, and AMR) (Dr Etienne Bonbon, President of the Terrestrial Code Commission)
09:45 a.m.	Digitalisation of Veterinary Services Experiences and best practices: Italy, Georgia, Montenegro, and WOAH Data Management Working Group
10:30 a.m.	Discussion
10:45 a.m.	Veterinary Paraprofessionals and Workforce Development: experience from projects in Europe, Africa and Middle East (Dr Barbara Alessandrini, Head of the Capacity-Building Department, Dr Mereke Taitubayev, Sub-Regional Representative for Central Asia)
11:30 a.m.	Break
12:00 p.m.	Adoption of the Draft Final Report and Recommendations
12:30 p.m.	Closing ceremony

30th Conference of the WOAH Regional Commission for Europe

Catania, Italy, 3 to 7 October 2022

Final

Recommendation No. 1

Long distance transport of live animals: WOAH standards and best practices including societal perception and communication aspects

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. One of the core objectives of WOAH is to develop international standards for the facilitation of international safe trade, the prevention and control of animal diseases, including zoonoses, and the promotion of animal health and animal welfare;

2. WOAH global animal welfare strategy provides continuing direction and coordination of the Organisation's actions in the animal welfare area, through the development of animal welfare standards, capacity building and education, communication with governments, organisations and the general public, as well as support for the implementation of animal welfare standards and policies;

3. The Second Global Animal Welfare Forum (April 2019, Paris) has highlighted the need to establish a sense of collective responsibility amongst all participants in the transportation chain of animals, as well as clearly identified individual responsibility at every point of the chain and mechanisms to transfer that responsibility between transportation chain participants; the role of effective communication and coordination among those responsible for reducing the risk of animal welfare failures, the need to develop regulatory frameworks and practices to ensure a strong buy-in from all stakeholders and a commitment to practical implementation, and the importance of having a multidisciplinary approach when developing animal welfare policies including scientific basis, technological progress and socio-economic aspects;

4. There is a growing and strong interest expressed by the civil society towards animal welfare issues during transport and society's increased perception on this matter impacts on consumer choices;

5. The Regional Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe has identified as one of the priority topics of the Action Plans, the application of WOAH Animal Welfare Standards during transport, and is consistently supporting Veterinary Services in implementing those standards;

And considering that, based on the response to the questionnaire provided to the Delegates of the Regional Commission for Europe in preparation of this technical item:

6. The vast majority of the responding Members have a legal basis for the implementation of animal welfare during transport and the legislation generally, but not always completely, reflects WOAH Standards on animal welfare;

7. Awareness campaigns among stakeholders involved in animal welfare issues and capacity building activities are relevant tools for promoting the implementation of animal welfare standards for transport at country and regional levels;

8. Insufficient financial resources and lack of trained personnel are the main factors adversely affecting the ability of Competent Authorities to implement standards and requirements on animal transport control.

THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. Members develop or update where necessary, legislation that establishes a legal basis for complying with WOAH standards for animal welfare during transport, including the supporting regulations and procedures for assessing the fitness to travel of the animals for the journey;

2. Members develop procedures and guidelines that clearly define the individual players and their responsibilities, including training needs, along the animal transportation chain (departure, transit, arrival). These also clearly define the mechanisms to transfer the responsibilities between the different players, and the required competencies to be demonstrated to facilitate the enforcement of legislation and standards for the protection of the transported animals;

3. Members develop procedures for communication between *Competent Authorities* including pre notification of shipment and report back to the sender on significant animal welfare problems which occurred during the journey.

4. WOAH provide targeted capacity building for Members aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the controls, the evaluation and monitoring procedures for the verification of compliance of the official control systems carried out by the *Competent Authorities* and also directly to the key players involved in the transport of animals;

5. Members promote the inclusion of animal welfare courses and welfare-related training in the veterinary school curricula;

6. Members continue collaboration at the regional level, with the involvement of WOAH Regional and Sub-regional Representations to support the development and implementation of strategies to address regional needs and priorities on animal welfare during transport;

7. WOAH advocates and build awareness on the role and responsibilities of the Veterinary Services, including public and private sector veterinarians in the monitoring and enforcement of animal welfare standards, and increasing awareness among stakeholders for the effective implementation of WOAH standards and recommendations on animal welfare during transport;

8. WOAH provides appropriate technical support to Members through the revision and development of standards and recommendations in the *Terrestrial Code* where needed taking into account scientific knowledge and technological progress.

9. WOAH provides relevant tools for the (i) implementation of the WOAH standards; (ii) development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of veterinary legislation; (iii) operation of the network of National Contact Points on long distance transport and (iv) good governance of Veterinary Services.

10. WOAH works closely with regional and international organisations, and donors committed to animal welfare to collaborate and support the *Competent Authorities* and their partners to implement the WOAH standards on animal welfare during transport from place of departure until final destination; and

11. WOAH collaborates and forms partnerships with organisations representing relevant private sector stakeholders to implement WOAH animal welfare standards as the key reference for national, regional and international transport. WOAH urge the private sector to adopt private standards that are consistent with the WOAH standards, to ensure the standards on welfare of animals intended for transport are applied consistently globally.

World Organisation for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

Annex 3

ANALYSIS OF THE ANIMAL HEALTH SITUATION IN MEMBERS IN THE REGION DURING 2021 AND 2022

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22/09/2022

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This report provides a summary of the animal health situation in the Europe Region during the period 1 January 2021 to 14 July 2022. This animal health situation report is based on the information submitted to WOAH by 56 countries and territories[1] in the Europe Region through the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) and includes: i) reporting by WOAH Members in the Region; ii) a summary of the animal cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in the Region reported to WOAH; iii) a summary of the situation in the region regarding infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) viruses; iv) a summary of the situation in the region regarding infection with African swine fever (ASF) virus; and v) an update on WAHIS and interconnectivity with ADIS. The objective of this report is to describe the animal health situation in the region for the selected diseases based on data provided by Members. While these data may have some limitations, being sometimes incomplete and presenting variations in data granularity (depending on the country), they represent the reference official animal health information reported by Veterinary Services, using a standard template and a standard data format.

i. Reporting by Members in the Europe Region

In accordance with Chapter 1.1. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* and *Aquatic Animal Health Code*, Members are required to submit six-monthly reports on the absence or presence and evolution of listed diseases and information of epidemiological significance to other Members. Figure 1 shows the number of countries and territories in the region that submitted their six-monthly reports to WOAH, by semester. For the period between 2005 and 2019, this number was 49 on average for terrestrial animal diseases and 47 for aquatic animal diseases. The numbers then dropped for 2020, 2021 and 2022 due to longer submission times. Indeed, as part of the transition from the previous version of WAHIS to the new version of WAHIS in 2021, WOAH asked its Members to temporarily suspend the submission of their six-monthly reports with effect from June 2020. Although submission of these reports was resumed in March 2021, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic understandably further increased the reporting delays for 2020 and 2021.

For the first semester of 2020, the time for WOAH to collect reports from half of the countries and territories in the region after the end of the semester was 1 year and 4 months for terrestrial animal diseases and 1.5 years for aquatic animal diseases. These figures then decreased to 11 months and 1 year respectively for the second semester of 2020 and 7 months and 8 months respectively for the first semester of 2021 (Table 1).

Table 1. Time (in months) from the end of a given semester before the six-monthly reports of half of the countries and territories in the Europe Region had been collected, by terrestrial report ("Terra") and aquatic report ("Aqua")

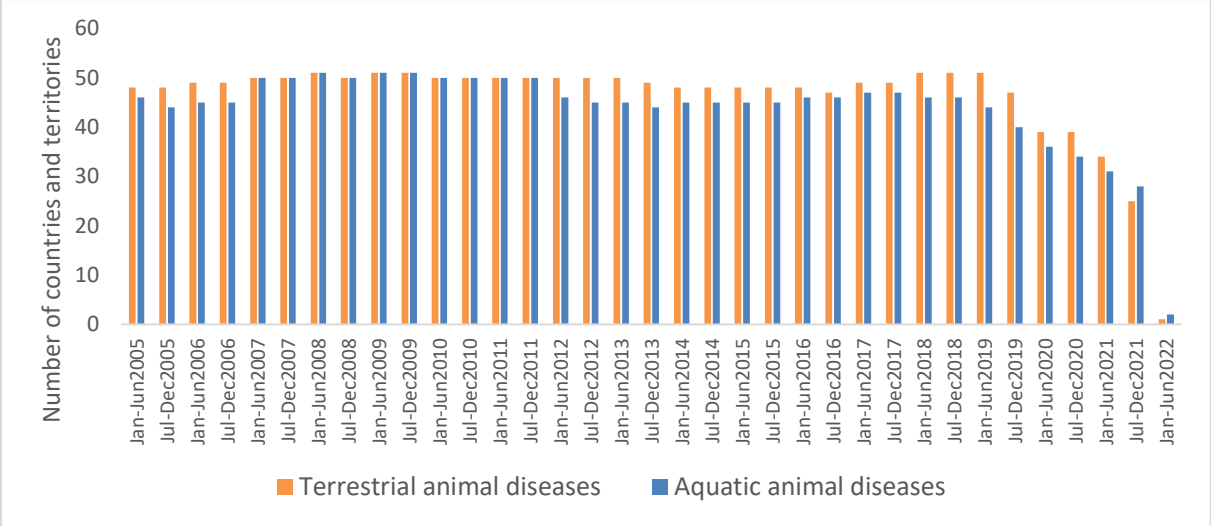
Year	Semester	Terra (months)	Aqua (months)
2020	1st	16	18
2020	2nd	11	12
2021	1st	7	8

As of 14 July 2022, almost 7 months since the end of the second semester of 2021, WOAH had received reports of terrestrial animal diseases from fewer than half of the countries and territories in Europe. This threshold was reached for aquatic animal diseases 6 months after the end of the semester. By comparison, the submission time for half of the Europe Region's reports for the first semester of 2018 was 4 months for terrestrial animal diseases and 3 months for aquatic animal diseases. As of 14 July

[1] This number includes the 53 Members of the WOAH Regional Commission for Europe, as well as Ceuta, the Faroe Islands and Melilla

2022, submission times had gradually improved since the launch of the new version of WAHIS in March 2021 but had not yet reached the same level as before the pandemic.

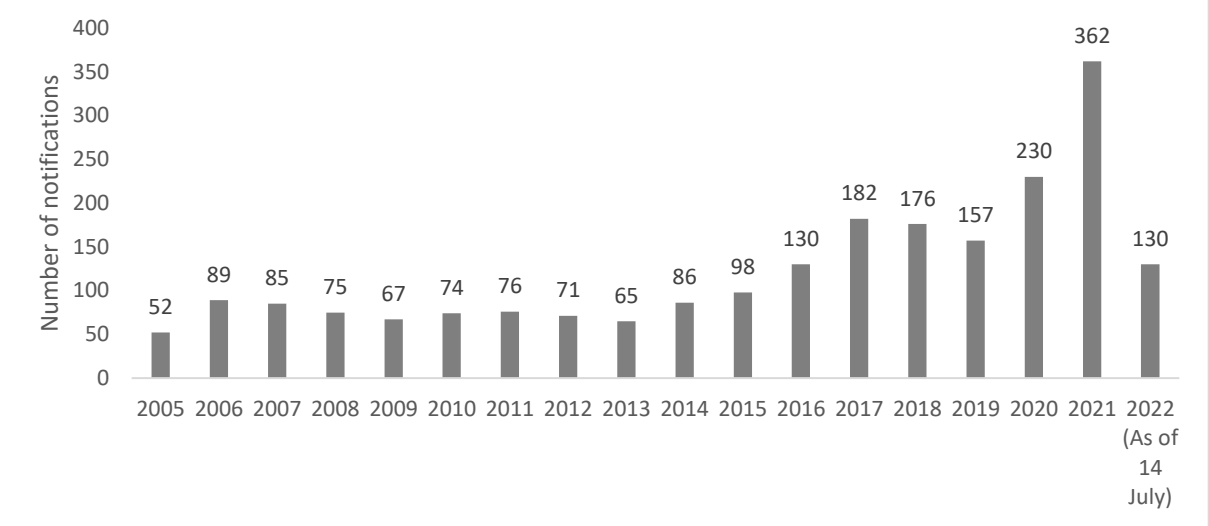
Figure 1. Evolution of the number of countries and territories in the Europe Region having submitted their six-monthly report, by type of animal and by semester, between 2005 and the first semester of 2022 *(reports received by WOAH as of 14 July 2022)*



Also in accordance with Chapter 1.1. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* and *Aquatic Animal Health Code*, Members are required to send to the Headquarters notification within 24 hours of any of the events described in Article 1.1.3. for listed diseases. Figure 2 shows the number of immediate notifications for listed diseases, submitted by year, by countries and territories in the region. The number of notifications submitted in 2021 was higher than in any previous year, due to the HPAI and ASF outbreaks.

For notifications submitted in 2021 and 2022 (up to 14 July), the time between the confirmation of the event by the national authorities and its notification to WOAH has been calculated. The median time was 4 days. Submission time was not found to be significantly different between types of animals (i.e. aquatic vs terrestrial animals) and between reasons for notification (respectively Wilcoxon rank sum test [p value = 0.83] and Kruskal-Wallis test [p value = 0.21]).

Figure 2. Evolution of the number of immediate notifications submitted for listed diseases by countries and territories in Europe between 2005 and 2022 (as of 14 July)



Lastly, in accordance with Chapter 1.1. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* and *Aquatic Animal Health Code*, and subsequent to any immediate notification, Members are required to send a weekly follow-up report to provide further information on the evolution of the event that justified the notification. These follow-up reports should continue until the disease has been eradicated or the situation has become sufficiently stable that six-monthly reporting will satisfy the Member's obligations in this respect. As of 14 July 2022, 165 ongoing events in European countries and territories for listed diseases were registered in WAHIS. For each event, the time since the last submitted report was calculated. The median time since the last report provided was 68 days, with several events for which the last report submitted was more than 3 years before the reference date.

Summary

For the period between 2005 and 2019, the number of countries and territories in the Europe Region submitting —six-monthly reports averaged 49 for terrestrial animal diseases and 47 for aquatic animal diseases (out of the 53 members of the WOAH Regional Commission for Europe, as well as Ceuta, the Faroe Islands and Melilla). Exceptionally long submission times were recorded for the 2020 and 2021 six-monthly reports, due both to the transition to the new WAHIS and the COVID-19 pandemic. By 14 July 2022, submission times had gradually improved since the launch of the new version of WAHIS in March 2021 and were about 7 months after the end of the semester on average; however, they had not yet reached the same level as before the pandemic.

Regarding early warning, the number of immediate notifications submitted in 2021 by European countries and territories was higher than in any previous year due to HPAI and ASF outbreaks. The median time from confirmation of an event to notification to WOAH was 4 days (whereas Members are required to submit these notifications within one day, in accordance with WOAH standards).

In terms of following up on early warning notifications of events in the region, the median time since the last report provided for events involving listed diseases unresolved as of 14 July 2022 was 68 days (whereas Members are required to send follow-up reports weekly, in accordance with WOAH standards).

ii. Infection with SARS-CoV-2 in the Europe Region reported to WOAH

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some of them can infect humans while others specifically affect animals, such as cattle, camels and bats, and are strictly species specific. On the other hand, some coronaviruses that infect animals can "jump" to humans and can spread between people. The latter case, though rare, is what happened with SARS-CoV-2, which was reported in humans in late 2019[2], presumably after animal-to-human transmission of an ancestral viral lineage of the subgenus Sarbecovirus that circulated in bats[3] (even if its proximal origin remains still unresolved). As of 14 February 2022, more than 560 million confirmed human cases had been reported worldwide, with more than 6.3 million human deaths.

SARS-CoV-2 can infect a wide range of mammals. Since its spread in humans, secondary host jumps of SARS-CoV-2 from humans to multiple domestic and wild populations of mammals have been documented. While the main driver of international spread is human-to-human transmission, the number of animal cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 continues to rise, even if such cases can still be considered occasional occurrences. Most of the cases have been reported in pets and zoo animals, while some countries have experienced a high prevalence of outbreaks in mink farms, and variant strains have now been identified in mustelids. The virus has also been identified in free-ranging populations of white-tailed deer, raising concerns about the potential establishment of a wildlife reservoir. Understanding the extent of adaptation to these animal hosts is critical for assessing the threat posed by the spillback of animal-adapted SARS-CoV-2 into humans[4].

In line with the definition in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*, WOAH considers SARS-CoV-2 to be an emerging disease. On that basis, WOAH strongly encourages its Members to report through WAHIS the occurrence of any cases in animals that comply with the case definition provided in the relevant WOAH guidelines[5]. Thanks to official notifications, WOAH has been able to disseminate in a timely manner information of both public health (e.g. the occurrence of the virus in animals and the spillback to humans from mink and hamsters) and animal health relevance (e.g. the establishment of a large circulation of the virus in wildlife, as in the case of white-tailed deer, or the detection of the virus in new species).

This section provides an overview of the regional evolution of the occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 in animals officially reported to WOAH by its Members during the period January 2021 to 14 July 2022. WAHIS is currently one of the most comprehensive databases of SARS-CoV-2 cases in animals and is one of the reference sources for the general public and for the international scientific community[6]. On the other hand, the WAHIS system does not have a sensitivity of 100% as some cases reported in other source of data are not always officially reported to WAHIS. In addition, it is important to note that the cases reported in WAHIS are only those that meet the case definition criteria; consequently, findings such as serological evidence and screening are not included in the system.

Between January 2021 and 14 July 2022, 42 events relating to the occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 in animals were reported to WOAH by 15 Members, either through WAHIS or using the provision described in Article 1.1.5. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. The largest number of events was reported by Spain (16), followed by Poland (4) and the United Kingdom (4). The other Members reporting the

[2] van Dorp, L. et al. Emergence of genomic diversity and recurrent mutations in SARS-CoV-2. Infect. Genet. Evol. 83, 104351 (2020).

[3] Boni, M. F. et al. Evolutionary origins of the SARS-CoV-2 sarbecovirus lineage responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. Nat. Microbiol. 5, 1408–1417 (2020).

[4] Tan, C., Lam, S.D., Richard, D., Owen, C.J., Berchtold, D., Orengo, C., Nair, M.S., Kuchipudi, S.V., Kapur, V., van Dorp, L. and Balloux, F., 2022. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from humans to animals and potential host adaptation. Nature Communications, 13(1), pp.1-13.

[5] https://www.woah.org/app/uploads/2022/08/en-sars-cov-2-surveillance.pdf

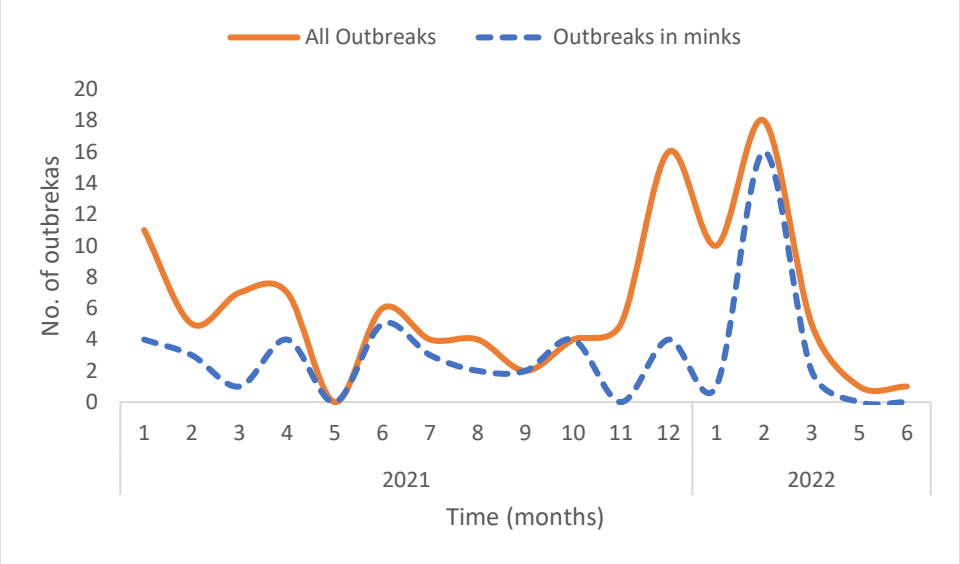
[6] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-022-01543-8

presence of SARS-CoV-2 declared one or two events each. The number of outbreaks reported within these events was highly variable, ranging from one to 28.

A total of 106 outbreaks were reported during this period, the majority in farmed American mink, which accounted for 49% of the reported outbreaks (52/106); 43% of outbreaks were reported in pets (46/106); the remaining 8% of outbreaks were reported in zoo animals, including gorilla, lion, European lynx, tiger and hippopotamus.

From a temporal perspective the majority of the outbreaks (51% [54/106]) were reported to WOAH between November 2021 and March 2022 (Figure 3). The main driver of outbreak dynamics has been the occurrence of the virus in mink farms.

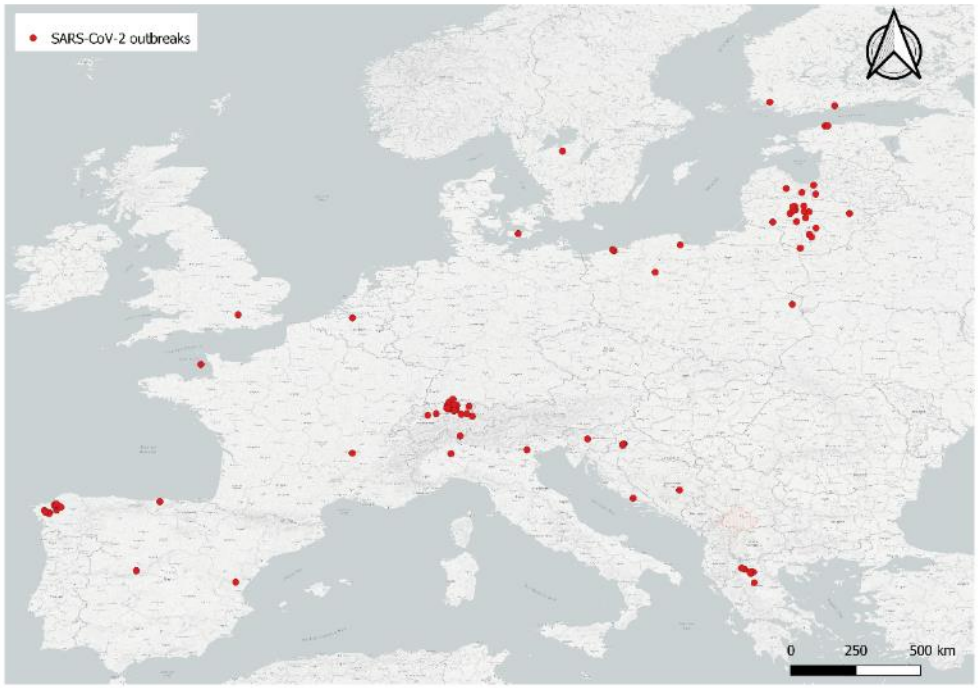
Figure 3. Monthly dynamics of all SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks (orange line), and dynamics in mink farms (blue dotted line) reported to WOAH by Members in the region through the early warning system between 1 January 2021 and 14 July 2022



The occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 in farmed American mink has probably been the most important animal health event linked to SARS-CoV-2 in Europe. The relevance of this event lies in the large extent of the events in several European countries, the observed evolution and viral mutation of SARS-CoV-2 in mink and its spillback to humans. While the acute phase of the occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in American mink was observed in late 2020, during the period covered by this report European countries nevertheless declared more than 11 000 affected mink and more than 220 000 animals were either slaughtered or killed and disposed of.

The outbreaks reported since January 2021 are shown on the map in Figure 4. The main clusters relate to the reporting of SARS-CoV-2 in farmed American mink. The cluster observed in Switzerland relates to the reporting of cases in pets, detected within the framework of a research project on the pet animals of owners who had been infected with SARS-CoV-2. The project is under the responsibility of the Clinical Laboratory of the Vetsuisse Faculty (VSF) of the University of Zurich (UZH). Switzerland alone reported 28 of the 46 outbreaks reported in pets in Europe. As stated in the note provided by the country and in line with WOAH guidelines "*The Swiss government does not recommend currently to test cats or dogs for SARS-CoV-2 but supports research to increase knowledge in the field. For the time being, COVID-19 continues to be treated as a human disease with the main route of transmission between human beings.*" For a better interpretation of the map, please bear in mind that some outbreaks may overlap due to their being reported in the same location or in very close proximity.

Figure 4. Distribution of SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks reported to WOAH by Members in the region through the early warning system between 1 January 2021 and 14 July 2022



In addition to the official reporting provided by countries, and in order to better monitor the occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 in animals and other relevant information, the WOAH Epidemic Intelligence Team created a specific search algorithm using the Epidemic Intelligence from Open Source (EIOS) system[7], to identify and monitor news published in the media and in scientific publications. During the period 1 January 2021 – 14 July 2022 more than 16 000 items of news were detected by the system for screening and analysis. This information is used to contact the country concerned whenever a discrepancy is detected with the official reports, but also to follow in real time recent developments in knowledge of the disease, as well as to track and monitor potential misinformation and disinformation circulating in the media.

In order to communicate to partners, external stakeholders and the general public important updates on the evolving situation of SARS-CoV-2 in animals, WOAH has, since May 2021, been publishing a monthly report that includes major updates on the disease situation at global level with a specific focus on the recent evolution during the previous month. All the situation reports are available on the COVID-19 portal[8]. Each report has been viewed by an average of around 50 people (minimum 1 – maximum 609), with an average visualisation time of 1 minute.

<u>WOAH actions on SARS-CoV-2, guidelines and advisory groups</u>

In addition to the actions undertaken in a reporting perspective, WOAH has been working intensively with its network of experts and liaising closely with its Members to better understand the virus and its emergence and to enhance the capacity of countries to respond to this multifaceted crisis. To this end, WOAH established an **Incident Management System** to coordinate its response to COVID-19 internally and with key external partners. In this framework, several expert Advisory Groups have been established. The outputs of advisory group meetings as well as the relevant WOAH guidance are

[7] https://www.who.int/initiatives/eios
[8] https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-offer/emergency-and-resilience/covid-19/#ui-id-3

published on the WOAH COVID-19 portal[9]. Among the most recent updates on the portal, it is worth mentioning the document "Considerations on monitoring SARS-CoV-2 in animals".

Summary

Official notifications of SARS-CoV-2 occurrence in animals have continued to be reported to WOAH involving several different species.

A significant number of new events (N=42) were reported during the period under study, through WAHIS or using the dispositions provided for in Article 1.1.5 of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*.

In terms of spatial distribution, the reported outbreaks are mainly scattered across the Europe Region, though clusters have occurred in several countries due either to the localisation of mink farms or to specific surveillance activities.

The majority of the outbreaks and cases reported since January 2021 have been linked to infected farmed American mink. In view of the susceptibility of mink to the virus and the demonstrated virus mutation in this species, this may represent an event of public health concern.

WOAH is continuing to actively follow the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 in animals, through its network of experts and several Advisory Groups but also through dedicated epidemic intelligence activities to track any potential signal of concern.

iii. Infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses

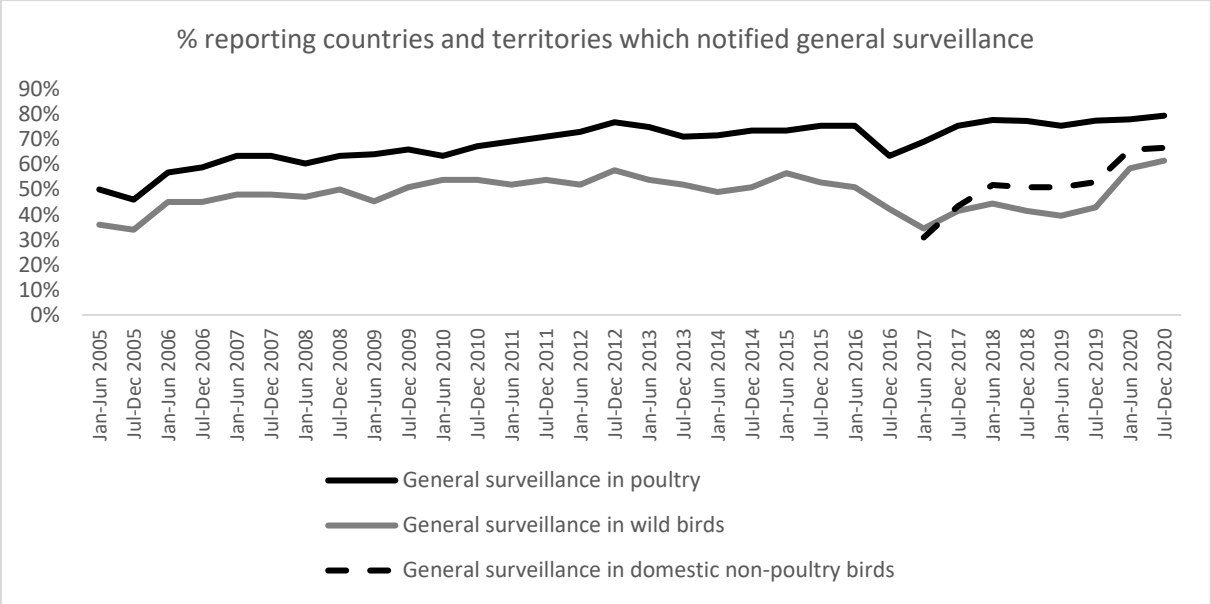
Infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) viruses is caused by influenza A virus in the family *Orthomyxoviridae*. Globally, based on the data reported to WOAH since 2005, HPAI spread in poultry is lowest in September, begins to rise in October and peaks in February[10]. According to WAHIS data, HPAI resulted in the death and culling of more than 109 million poultry within affected farms, backyards and villages in Europe between October 2005 and 14 July 2022. Moreover, preventive killing around outbreaks was also applied in several countries, drastically increasing the economic impact of the disease. In addition, avian influenza (AI) continues to be major public health concern.

Figure 5 presents a summary of reported surveillance activities in Europe between 2005 and 2020 (reports received by WOAH as of 14 July 2022). The figure shows that the percentage of countries and territories in Europe reporting poultry surveillance activities increased over the semesters (significantly positive trends with Spearman rank correlation test). In the second half of 2020, 79% reported general surveillance and 72% reported targeted surveillance. For wild birds, the trend between 2005 and 2020 was inconsistent. In the second half of 2020, 62% reported general surveillance and 44% reported targeted surveillance. Finally, for domestic non-poultry birds, the trend was upward (also significantly positive with the Spearman rank correlation test); in the second half of 2020, 67% reported general surveillance and 63% reported targeted surveillance. These figures show that not all countries and territories in Europe have reported HPAI surveillance. This should be taken into account when analysing reported data for HPAI detection, particularly for HPAI in wild birds, as only 44% of countries and territories in the region reported targeted surveillance activities for the second semester of 2020.

[9] https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-offer/emergency-and-resilience/covid-19/#ui-id-4
[10] WOAH High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) - Situation Report, https://www.woah.org/app/uploads/2022/07/hpai-situation-report-20220707.pdf

Figure 5. Evolution of the percentage of European countries and territories reporting HPAI surveillance activities, by animal group and by semester, between 2005 and 2020 *(reports received by WOAH as of 14 July 2022)*

**Data for 2021 and 2022 are excluded from the analysis because fewer than 70% of the Region's Members had submitted their six-monthly reports for these two years by 14 July 2022. As WOAH started to collect information on surveillance in domestic non-poultry birds in 2017, no information is available for the previous years.*



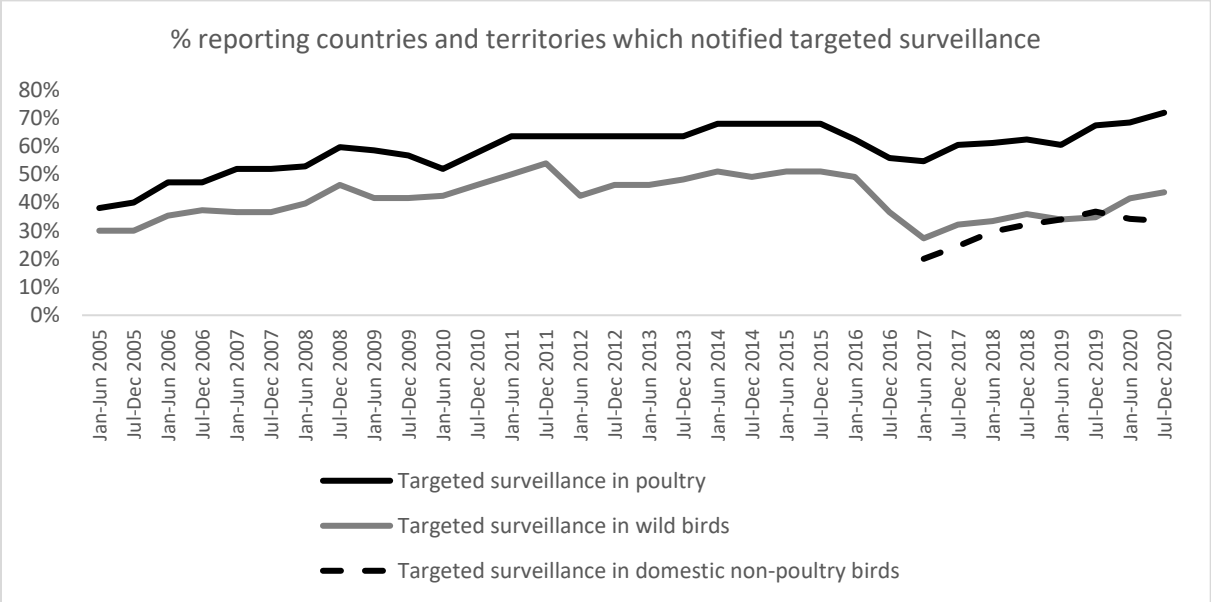
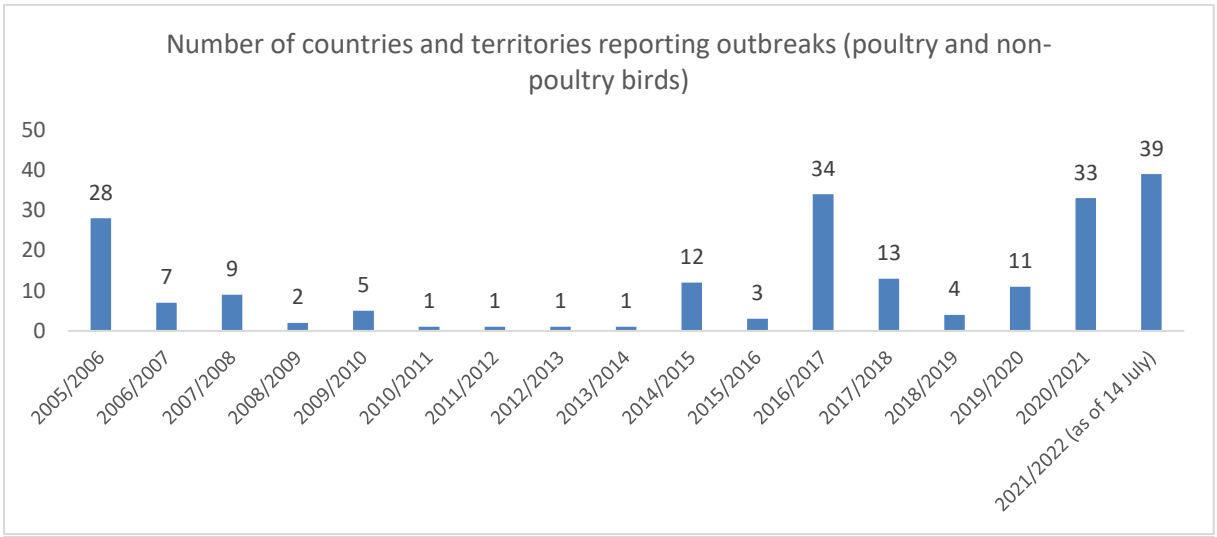


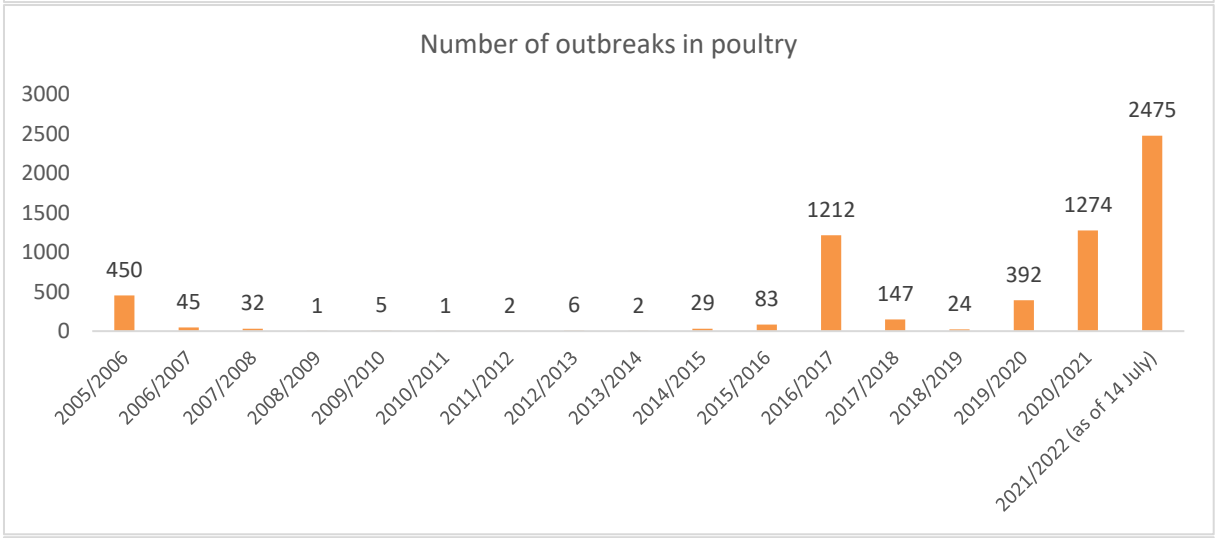
Figure 6 provides a summary of the situation reported through the early warning system during each seasonal wave in Europe, between October 2005 and July 2022, as of 14 July. The number of countries and territories reporting HPAI as well as the number of outbreaks in poultry in 2020/2021 were very high and were comparable to the previous peak observed in 2016/2017. The number of poultry losses[11] in 2020/2021 was higher than in all previous seasonal waves. Although the data for the 2021/2022

[11] Losses are defined as the sum of the number of poultry that died or were killed and disposed of within outbreaks. Preventive killing in surrounding areas is not included in the losses.

wave were still only partial as of 14 July 2022, the figures show that all the numbers were higher than in all previous waves.

Figure 6. Evolution in the number of countries and territories in Europe reporting HPAI outbreaks and evolution in the number of outbreaks in poultry and in the corresponding losses[11], by AI seasonal wave, between 1 October 2005 and 14 July 2022





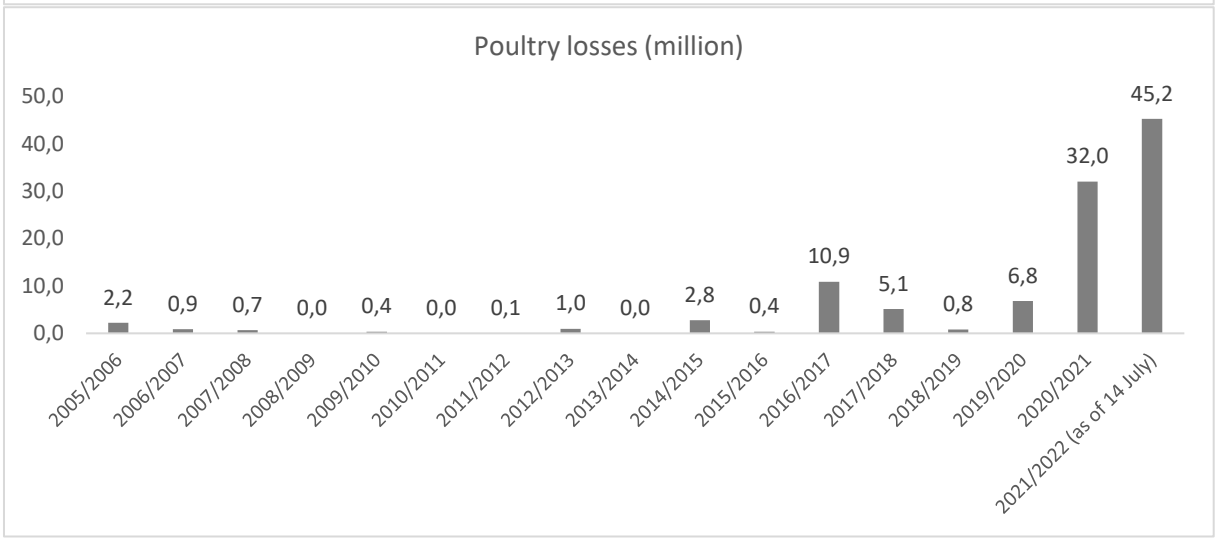


Figure 7 shows the distribution of HPAI outbreaks reported to WOAH by Members in the Europe Region through the early warning system between 1 October 2021 and 14 July 2022 and Table 2 indicates and the corresponding circulating subtypes detected.

Twenty-six countries and territories reported HPAI outbreaks in poultry between 1 October 2021 and 14 July 2022. Moldova reported the first occurrence of the disease in the country in January 2022. In addition, Bulgaria, Russia and Spain each notified that HPAI in poultry had reached new areas of the country, while Norway notified the first occurrence of subtype H5N1, and Poland notified the first occurrence of subtype H5N2. Other events were recurrences.

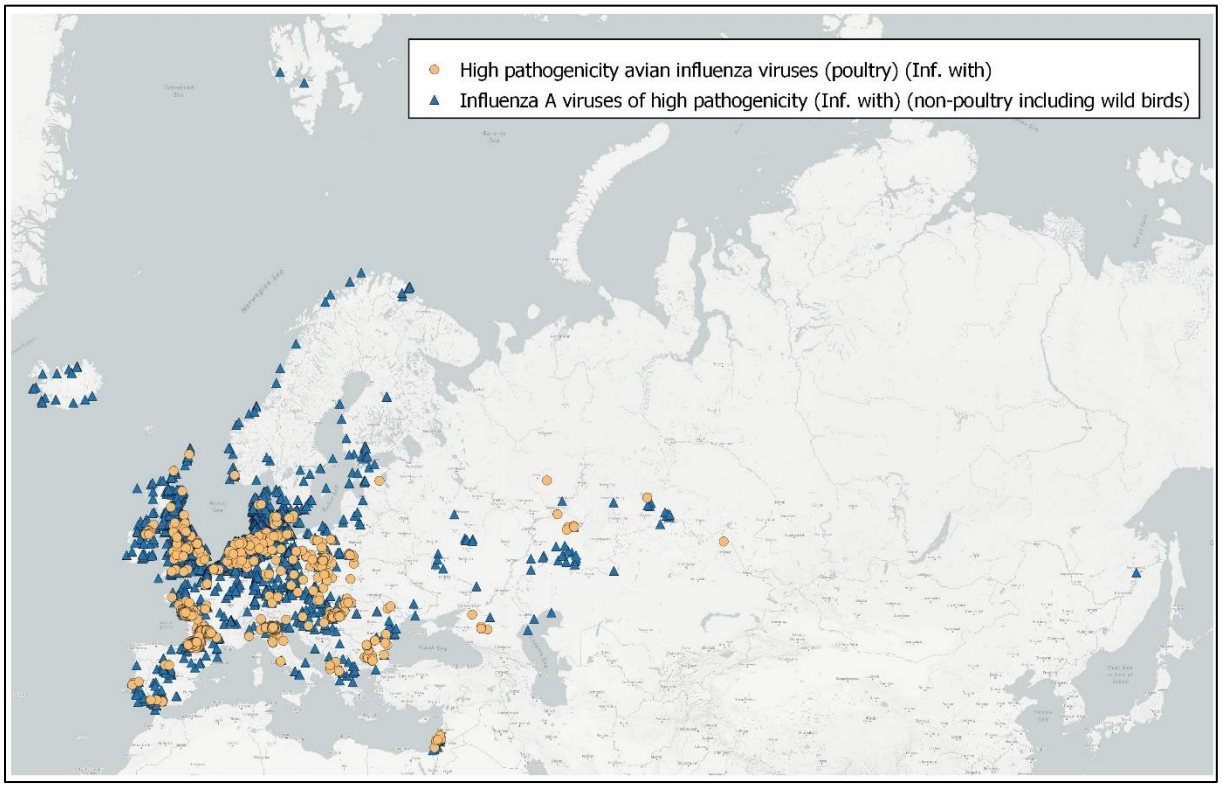
Thirty-eight countries and territories reported HPAI outbreaks in 'birds other than poultry (including wild birds)' between 1 October 2021 and 14 July 2022. Iceland reported the first occurrence of the disease in the country in October 2022. Bulgaria, France, Germany, North Macedonia, Portugal, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom each notified that the disease had reached new areas of the country. In addition, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Norway each notified the first occurrence of subtype H5N1 and Norway notified the first occurrence of subtype H5N5. Other events were for subtypes reaching new areas of countries, recurrences and the detection of HPAI in unusual hosts (red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*).

Concerning, HPAI in wild birds, an unprecedented number of outbreaks killed thousands of wild birds in Israel (more than 8000 common cranes [*Grus grus*], due to H5N1, between November 2021 and January 2022) and the United Kingdom (several hundred birds, due to H5N1, between October 2021 and January 2022). In response to these outbreaks, experts from the WOAH/FAO global network of expertise on animal influenza (OFFLU) exchanged epidemiological and experimental data and diagnostic protocols needed to inform surveillance and control policies and build technical partnerships among laboratories[12].

WOAH has a procedure that enables its Members to make a self-declaration of freedom from HPAI for their country or for a zone or compartment in their country, in accordance with the provisions of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*. These declarations provide the documented evidence of compliance with the relevant provisions of the aforementioned Code, as considered by the submitting country. As of 14 July 2022, 11 Members in the Europe Region[13] had published a self-declaration of freedom from HPAI in poultry[14].

[12] OFFLU Annual Report 2021, https://www.offlu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/OFFLU_Annual_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf
[13] Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine
[14] https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-offer/self-declared-disease-status/

Figure 7. Distribution of HPAI outbreaks reported to WOAH by Members in the region through the early warning system, between 1 October 2021 and 14 July 2022



Details of the subtypes reported in HPAI outbreaks are presented in Table 2. As of 14 July 2022, the predominant subtype observed in the current epidemic season was subtype H5N1, with 98% of the outbreaks reported during this wave being associated with this subtype.

Table 2. Number of outbreaks of HPAI in the Europe Region in poultry, domestic non-poultry birds and wild birds, by subtype, between 1 October 2021 and 14 July 2022

Subtype	Poultry	Domestic non-poultry birds	Wild birds	Total
Not typed	24		2	26
H5	11	25	29	65
H5N1	2433	132	2464	5029
H5N2	1		1	2
H5N3			1	1
H5N5			16	16
H5N8	6		10	16
Total	**2475**	**157**	**2523**	**5155**

WOAH also has a procedure to disseminate via its website announcements received from Members on disease introduction simulation exercises taking place in their countries. In most cases, these simulation exercises are intended to test and practise an existing national contingency plan. Between 1 January 2021 and 14 July 2022, three Members in the Europe Region[15] informed WOAH of simulation exercises conducted on avian influenza. It is worth highlighting that, in a survey conducted in WOAH in 2018, 37 Members in the Europe Region reported having a contingency plan for avian influenza.

[15] Azerbaijan, Czech Republic and Turkey

In 2021, after an assessment of low pathogenicity avian influenza against WOAH criteria for listing, Chapter 1.3 of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* was amended, and "infection of domestic and captive wild birds with low pathogenicity avian influenza viruses having proven natural transmission to humans associated with severe consequences" was adopted for inclusion in the list of diseases. The requirement to notify the disease came into force in January 2022. As of 14 July, no such event had been detected and reported to WOAH.

As of 14 July 2022, the seasonal wave 2021/2022 had also been marked by an increase in the number of humans infected with AI. On 6 January 2022, the United Kingdom notified the World Health Organization (WHO) of the detection of a laboratory-confirmed human case of avian influenza A(H5) in South West England. This was later confirmed as H5N1. The most recently reported case in humans prior to that case was in October 2020 in Laos. The case in the United Kingdom was the first reported case of human infection with influenza A(H5) in the country. The case remained clinically asymptomatic, and the virus was not detected beyond this single case. Fortunately, as of 14 July 2022, no avian influenza virus had demonstrated sustained transmissibility in humans. Nevertheless, the OFFLU network continued to contribute genetic and antigenic data of zoonotic animal influenza viruses reported in 2021 to WHO for pandemic preparedness purposes.

Every three weeks, WOAH produces a situation report to provide Members with an update of the evolving avian influenza situation at global level. On average, each situation report has been viewed by more than 750 people (minimum 1 – maximum 2282), with an average visualisation time of 2 min 46 sec, indicating an overall high interest in the topic.

Conclusion

Not all countries and territories in Europe have reported conducting surveillance for HPAI. This should be taken into account when analysing reported data for HPAI detection, particularly for HPAI in wild birds, as only 44% of countries and territories in the region reported targeted surveillance activities in the second semester report for 2020 (the most recent data analysed).

In 2021/2022, the HPAI epidemic continued to threaten animal health in Europe, with 39 countries reporting the disease, and more than 5000 outbreaks and 45 million of poultry died or were killed and disposed of. Although the data for the 2021/2022 wave were still only partial as of 14 July 2022, the figures show that the impact of the disease in the region was higher than in all previous waves.

Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 10.4. on high pathogenicity AI viruses, which was last updated in 2021, recognises vaccination against AI as an effective complementary control tool when a stamping out policy alone is not sufficient. WOAH Members are reminded that vaccination does not affect the AI status of a free country or zone if surveillance supports the absence of infection. Whether to vaccinate or not should be decided by the Veterinary Authority on the basis of the AI situation as well as the ability of the Veterinary Services to implement vaccination and the appropriate surveillance strategy.

To keep the international community updated with the latest information, WOAH produces regular syntheses of the information reported through WAHIS and publishes them on the WOAH website[10].

iv. *Infection with African swine fever virus*

African swine fever (ASF) was first described in Kenya in 1921, following the importation of European pigs that suffered high mortality rates. Following this first report, ASF was later observed in several Sub-Saharan countries. Since then, the disease spread and it has been reported in several regions of the world (the Americas, Asia, Oceania and Europe). ASF is probably one of the most complex and socio-economically devastating animal diseases, due to its huge impact on animal production and high mortality. In addition, the virus presents several characteristics that facilitate its rapid spread and complicate its eradication after introduction in a previously free area[16].

The very first occurrence of ASF outside its "traditional" range in Africa was reported in Portugal (in 1957 and again in 1960). After the second occurrence in Portugal the disease spread to Spain. Thereafter, ASF was reported in France (1964), Italy (1967), Cuba (1971), Brazil (1978), Dominican Republic (1978), Malta (1978), Haiti (1979), Belgium (1985) and the Netherlands (1986). All these outbreaks were finally eradicated after long, intensive and costly preventive and control activities, with the exception of the island of Sardinia (Italy), where the disease has remained endemic since 1978. In recent decades, the virus continued to circulate and spread in Africa where, since 2005, it has been reported in 32 countries. The most significant change in the disease epidemiology and dynamics took place in 2007, when ASF was confirmed in the Caucasus region, in Georgia. From there, limiting this description to Europe, the ASF virus spread to neighbouring countries (i.e., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Belarus), affecting domestic pigs and wild boar. The first occurrence of ASF in the European Union (EU) was reported in 2014 and, since then, numerous EU Member States have been affected.

Since its spread to Europe, two Members in the region have managed to eradicate the disease: Belgium (event resolved in March 2020) and Czech Republic (event resolved in April 2018), each of these countries subsequently submitting a self-declaration of freedom. Two additional countries have indicated the disease event as closed in WAHIS, without requesting the publication of a self-declaration of ASF freedom. Such a self-declaration would give more visibility to the surveillance they have implemented to substantiate freedom and to their system to prevent the re-introduction of the virus, especially considering the risk posed by the presence of ASF in their neighbouring countries.

During the period 1 January 2021 to 14 July 2022, 117 events were reported to WOAH by 11 Members in the region through the early warning system.

North Macedonia reported the first occurrence of the disease in the country in January 2022 (an event that started on 29 December 2021), in backyard swine. The Member reported that the first clinical signs were noticed on 29 December 2021 and the first dead cases were reported on 1 January 2022 in a small backyard farm located in the east of the country. On 5 January 2022, blood samples, swabs and organs were taken for laboratory examination and positive results were obtained on 6 January, According to the epidemiological investigation, possible patterns of entrance of the disease were contact with wild boar. As of 14 July, the event was still ongoing and a total of four outbreaks had been reported in swine and wild boar.

In January 2022, ASF genotype II was notified on the Italian mainland after around 40 years of absence. The disease was reported in Piedmont Region in wild boar. As of 14 July 2022, 167 outbreaks had been reported, all of them in wild boar. In May 2022, Italy submitted a new immediate notification to report the first occurrence of the disease in a new area (Lazio region), with a "jump" of the disease of around 400 kilometres from the closest outbreaks.

[16] Sánchez-Vizcaíno, J.M., Mur, L. and Martínez-López, B., 2012. African swine fever: an epidemiological update. Transboundary and emerging diseases, 59, pp.27-35.

As of 14 July 2022, an additional five Members had reported the first occurrence of the disease in a new zone since January 2021.

Germany reported the disease had spread to three new administrative divisions: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (November 2021), Baden-Württemberg (May 2022), Niedersachsen (July 2022). The spread to the last two areas is of particular concern for the epidemiological situation of ASF in the Europe Region, as the new reported outbreaks are very close to the borders of France and The Netherlands, respectively. In all cases, the new outbreaks were reported in domestic swine.

Hungary reported the first occurrence in Fejér administrative division, in wild boar in August 2021, marking a further spread of the disease to the west.

Moldova reported the first occurrence in two new zones (Dubăsari and Străşeni) in domestic swine, in May and July 2022, respectively.

Poland submitted two immediate notifications, in September 2021 and April 2022, to report newly affected areas (Opolskie, Wielkopolskie and Łódzkie), with outbreaks occurring in both domestic swine and wild boar.

Finally, Russia reported the first occurrence in eight new administrative divisions involving both the European and Asian parts of the country (Bashkortostan, Chelyabinsk, Khanty-Mansiy, Kostroma, Maga Buryatdan, Mariy-El, Perm', Sverdlovsk) during the period March 2021 to January 2022.

This summary of the reporting situation highlights the extremely dynamic ASF situation in the Europe Region since January 2021, following the general trends observed since the reintroduction of ASF in Europe, as clearly shown in Figures 8, 9 and 10. All the trends highlight the progressive expansion of the disease to new countries and to new areas in already affected countries, as well as the increasing tendency for disease recurrence in areas where previous events had been declared resolved.

During the period 2005 to 14 July 2022, the Europe Region reported the first occurrence of the disease in 10 new countries (Figure 8), and 94 new administrative divisions (Figure 9). . During the same period, the recurrence of the disease in a country or in a zone has been reported by means of 233 reports (Figure 10).

Figure 8. Annual trend in the number of Members in the Europe Region, reporting the first occurrence of ASF in the country during the period 2005 to 14 July 2022. *Dotted lines represent the original data, while red lines represent the trend interpolated using the loess approach. Light green areas represent the standard error of the interpolation.*

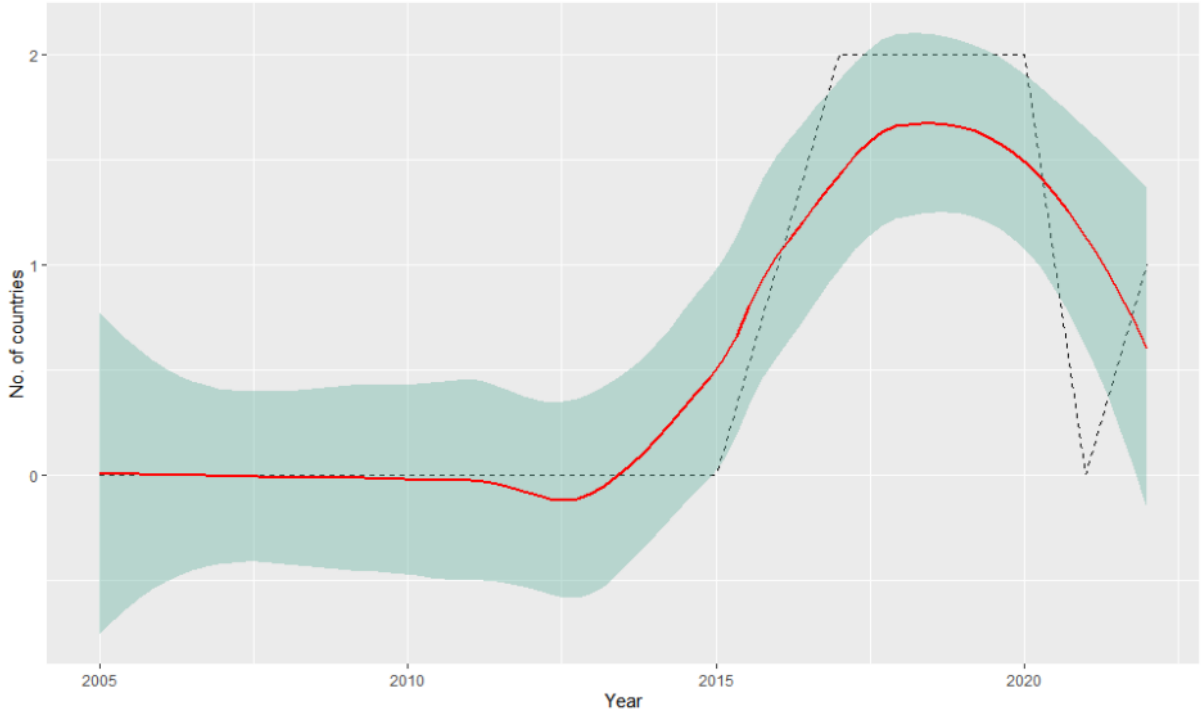


Figure 9. Annual trend in the number of new administrative divisions where the first occurrence of ASF was reported in the Europe Region, during the period 2005 to 14 July 2022. *Dotted lines represent the original data, while red lines represent the trend interpolated using the loess approach. Light green areas represent the standard error of the interpolation.*

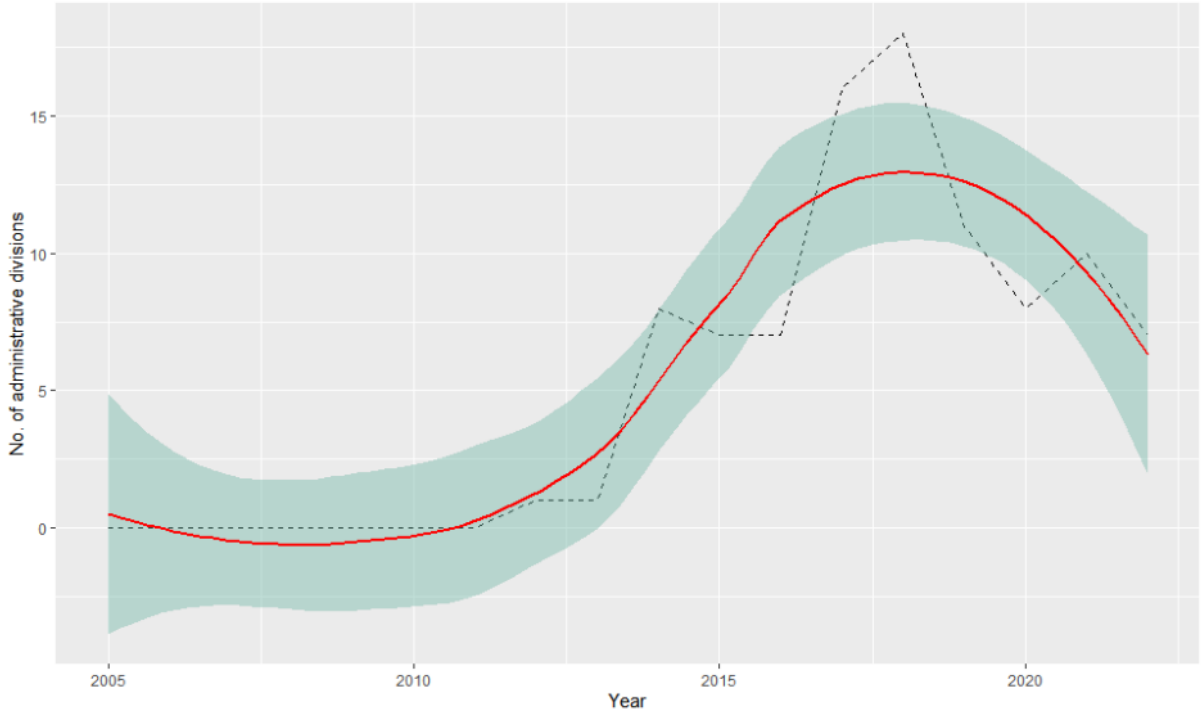
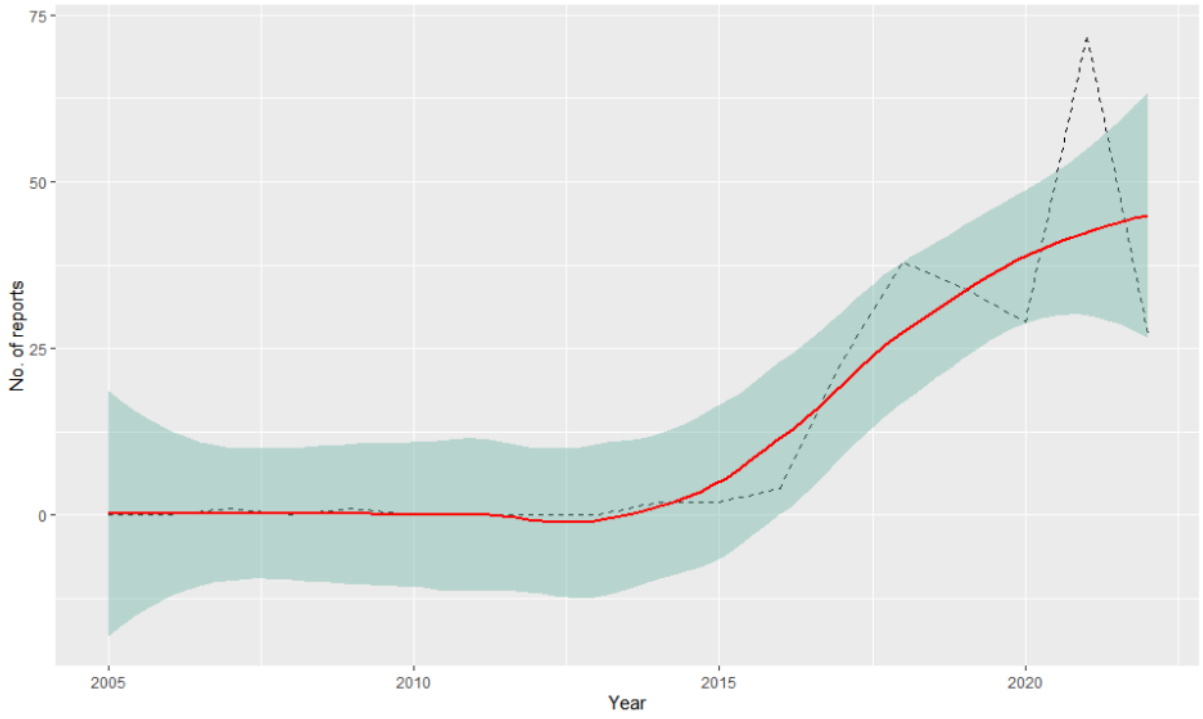
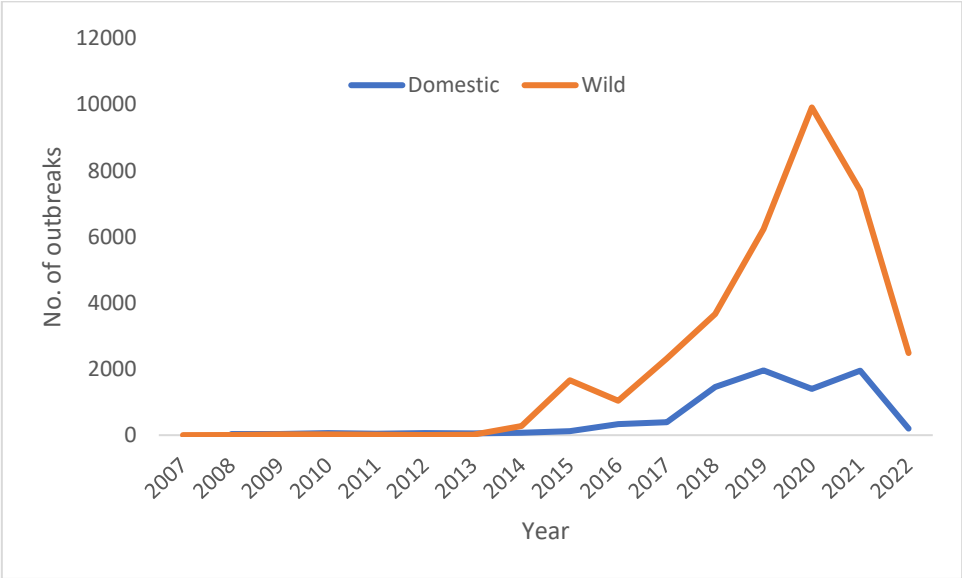


Figure 10. Annual trend in the number of reports submitted for the recurrence of ASF in a country or a zone in the Europe Region during the period 2005 to 14 July 2022. *Dotted lines represent the original data, while red lines represent the trend interpolated using the loess approach. Light green areas represent the standard error of the interpolation.*



The dynamics of the reports received are clearly reflected by the number of outbreaks reported since 2005 in domestic swine and wild boar.

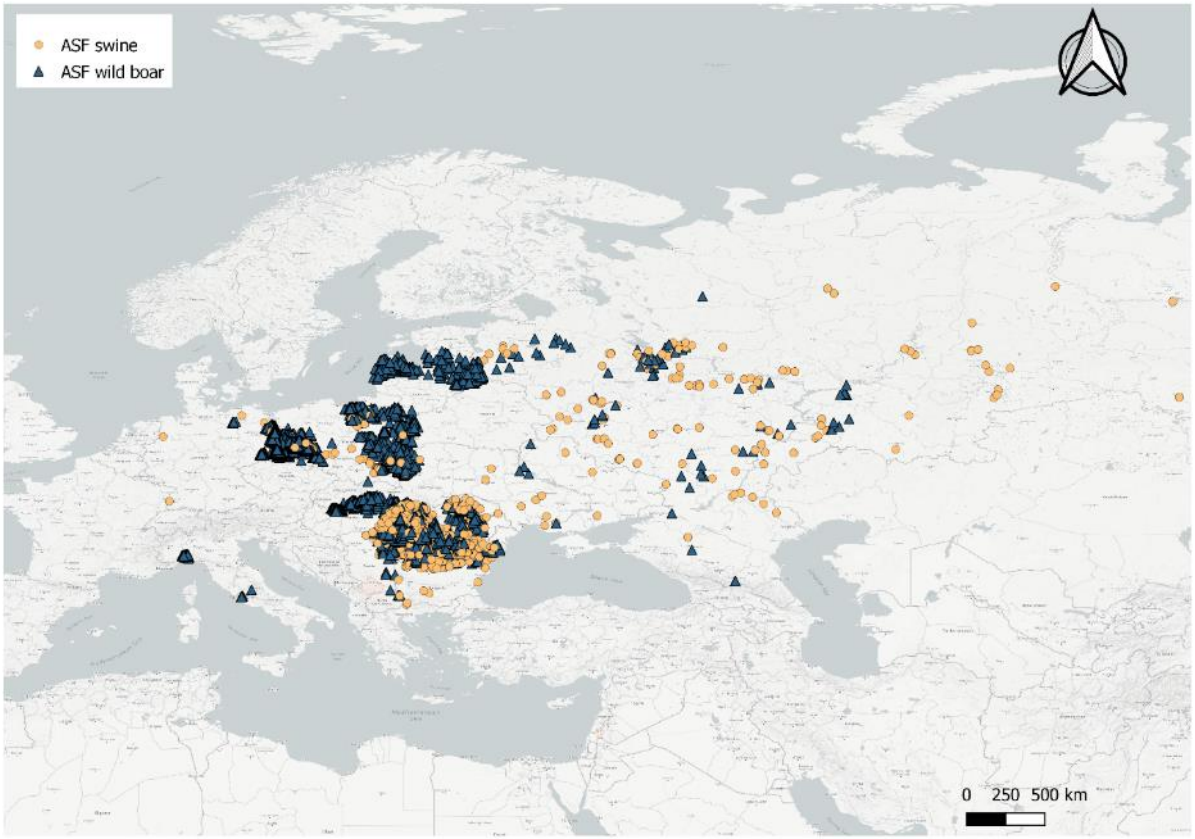
Figure 11. Dynamics of ASF outbreaks reported to WOAH by Members in the Europe Region through the early warning system, in domestic swine and wild boar, between 1 January 2005 and 14 July 2022[17]



[17] For a better interpretation of the graph, please note that outbreaks in wildlife refer to a single positive wild boar, while an outbreak in domestic swine may refer to several cases belonging to the same epidemiological unit (e.g. backyard, farm, etc.)

ASF distribution in Europe during the period 1 January 2021 – 14 July 2022 is presented in Figure 12. A total of 15 333 outbreaks were reported during the period through the early warning system, with 2 249 reported in domestic swine and 13 084 in wild boar. Poland reported the highest number of outbreaks (N=6953, of which 138 were in domestic swine and 6815 in wild boar), followed by Romania (N=3256 of which 1873 were in domestic swine and 1383 in wild boar) and Hungary (N=3162, all of which were in wild boar).

Figure 12. Distribution of ASF outbreaks reported to WOAH by Members in the region through the early warning system between 1 January 2021 and 14 July 2022



During the period 1 January 2021 – 14 July 2022, no new self-declarations of freedom from ASF were submitted to WOAH by Members in the Europe Region. Self-declarations of freedom are still active for Belgium (*Self-declaration of Belgium's African swine fever-free status in all swine species* – published in October 2020), Czech Republic (*Self-declaration of the recovery of freedom from African swine fever in all suids* – published in April 2019) and Estonia (*Self-declaration by Estonia as a country free from African swine fever in domestic and captive wild pigs* – published in September 2018).

Disease simulation exercises may be conducted by countries with the aim of testing and practising an existing national contingency plan. Since January 2021, several countries in the region have conducted simulation exercises for ASF: Czech Republic (August to September 2021, and May 2022), Italy (September 2021), Switzerland (September and November 2021) and United Kingdom (July to September 2021). Details of all the simulation exercises are published and available on the WOAH website[18].

[18] https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/animal-health-and-welfare/disease-data-collection/simulation-exercises/#ui-id-1

As mentioned for SARS-CoV-2, epidemic intelligence activities are conducted on several diseases of interest to WOAH. A specific search algorithm has been implemented in the EIOS[19] system to detect relevant information related to ASF. During the period 1 January 2021 – 14 July 2022, more than 9000 items of news were detected by the system for screening and analysis. For 41 of these items it was considered relevant to contact the Members concerned for information/clarification. The purpose of epidemic intelligence activities on ASF is not only to obtain confirmation of news on disease events circulating in the media, but also to track any other relevant information and combat misinformation and disinformation.

Scientific knowledge / other activities

WOAH collects and analyses the latest scientific information on animal disease control, and works closely with its network of scientific expertise, including WOAH Collaborating Centres and Reference Laboratories, to provide its Members with information and guidelines to help them improve the methods they use to control and eradicate animal diseases. Recently, the WOAH Reference Network for ASF published an overview of point-of-care tests available commercially to allow the rapid detection of ASF. WOAH also collaborates with FAO under the FAO/WOAH Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) to assist countries in the prevention and control of ASF, and to minimise the adverse impacts of the disease on the health and welfare of pigs and on international trade.

In line with this central role, WOAH has prepared, and made available in a dedicated repository on its website, a wide range of resources, such as communication material and training tools. These resources may be found on the WOAH ASF portal[20].

To ensure that Members, non-Members, other stakeholders and the international community are kept as fully informed as possible on the global ASF situation, a bi-weekly update is produced by WOAH and made available on its website. These reports provide an update on the recent reporting situation (i.e., the previous 2 weeks), followed by a summary of the main data relating to the period 2020–2022. The disease situation and dynamics are commented on, with a brief epidemiological interpretation and recommendations. On average each report has been viewed by more than 600 people (minimum 63 – maximum 1846), with an average visualisation time of 2 min 46 sec, indicating an overall high interest in the topic. It is worth highlighting that the African swine fever page, including the ASF situation report, is one of the most visited pages on the WOAH website, with more than 2000 visits/week.

[19] EIOS: Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources
[20] https://www.woah.org/en/disease/african-swine-fever/#ui-id-5

Summary

All the data presented in this section point to a clear, steady and progressive deterioration of the ASF epidemiological situation at regional level. The trend observed in Europe is comparable to and mainly coincides with the deteriorating epidemiological situation of the disease at global level.

The spread of the virus to new countries as well as its progression to new areas in countries already affected should stimulate reflections on the human/animal/environmental behaviours that are currently enabling the virus to disseminate in new populations.

The data indicate the capacity of the virus to make "jumps" and suddenly appear in areas far away from its known range, as demonstrated by the appearance of the disease in Italy and North Macedonia, or the appearance of the virus in unaffected areas far from any other outbreaks (e.g., in Germany). Improved investigation of the origin of the outbreaks is needed to better understand the current dynamics and reduce the probability of further expansion.

These data demonstrate the importance of human activities in the regional spread of the disease and highlight the importance of early detection and notification, raising awareness among the general public and enforcing strict biosecurity measures along the pig supply chain.

v. Update on WAHIS and interconnectivity with ADIS

Since the launch of the new version of WAHIS, WOAH has continued to work with the IT provider to put in place a solid maintenance plan for the live platform and to fix important bugs of the existing functionalities. The focus of the project remains on:

(1) Stabilising and optimising the existing modules and improving the platform's performance:

- ✓ as a first priority, the optimised immediate notification/follow-up report module is foreseen to go live in September 2022. This will vastly improve user experience and the performance of the platform.
- ✓ As a second priority this module will interconnect with the EU's Animal Disease Information System (ADIS) by the end of 2022. The goal is to simplify the animal disease notification process to allow EU Member States to fulfil their legal obligations in terms of EU and WOAH notifications via one-time entry. Prior to interconnection, joint WAHIS/ADIS training will be organised focusing on interconnectivity. The link with ADIS is already in place as the reference tables from WAHIS are already transferred to ADIS via an automated webservice; however, this needs to be reinforced to optimise the two-way communication between WAHIS and ADIS. To ensure the solidity of the framework of this exchange, a standard operating procedure (SOP) between WOAH and the European Commission (EC) is being currently being developed.
- ✓ Next, the focus will move to optimising the Six-monthly reporting module by the beginning of 2023.

(2) Developing future evolutions, taking into account feedback from users, and developing remaining functionalities:

- ✓ annual report by 2023

- ✓ alert app by mid-2023
- ✓ developing and improving the dashboards (ongoing)
- ✓ mapping feature evolutions (ongoing)

(3) Linking up with the global health community by rolling out public interoperability by mid-2023

A quality data platform is essential to enable WOAH to enhance its role of data steward and is inextricably linked to the rolling out of the WOAH digital transformation strategy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role and contribution of WOAH in providing a platform interconnecting with other international organisations have become increasingly relevant. WOAH must continue to provide its Members with the ability to report easily on animal diseases to facilitate transparency, access and analysis. The knowledge generated should support WOAH, its Members and other stakeholders in the decision-making process and inform efforts to improve system performance.

For any support for WAHIS please contact https://wahis-support.woah.org/

We are grateful for the continuing support and collaboration from the European Commission in the development of WAHIS. To maintain the relevance of WAHIS over time, continuous investment is needed to enable WAHIS to evolve and align with the needs of its Members and public users.

30th Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe

Catania, Italy, 3 to 7 October 2022

Final

Recommendation No. 2

Highly pathogenic avian influenza and vaccination

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. Over the last years, there has been substantive increased risk to the Region from annual waves of HPAI leading to large epidemics. Exceptional changes in risk profile for the Region from HPAI necessitates review of disease prevention and control options;

2. Spread to domestic poultry being initially introduced and mediated via migratory birds, and domestic poultry in turn can be a source of infection, the viruses are continuing to evolve in these populations and present an annual cyclical threat and continuous risk to poultry production and an existing challenge to identify protective vaccines;

3. HPAI has captured the attention of the international community due to the devastating consequences for the health and welfare of poultry in infected establishments, poultry industry, farmer's livelihoods, international trade, health of wild birds, and potential threat to human health. Furthermore the death and culling of millions of birds incurs huge cost to government and industry and have major impacts on society;

4. Conventional control strategies based on surveillance, stamping-out, movement restriction and biosecurity measures whilst achieving success in eliminating infection and return to freedom from infection may not now be sustainable and additional tools and options to prevent and mitigate infection may be required;

5. The *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (*Terrestrial Code*) recognises that vaccination can be used as an effective complementary control tool, part of a disease control programme and provides guidance on HPAI surveillance in vaccinated birds, to demonstrate freedom from HPAI and gathering evidence for the effectiveness of the vaccination program. Moreover, the standards on the requirements for vaccines are available in the *Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals* (*Terrestrial Manual*), and on the surveillance methods for detecting infection in vaccinated flocks and vaccinated birds, as well as standards for surveillance and vaccination in the *Terrestrial Code*;

6. Experiences of large-scale vaccination to control and prevent HPAI at population level are limited, and a few Members apply different approaches to protection by vaccination with varying results, such as the routine vaccination of poultry targeting certain productions systems, protection of susceptible animals in zoological collections or emergency vaccination in response to outbreaks as an adjunct control measure;

7. Existing vaccines to HPAI have the potential to reduce disease, increase resistance to infection, limit virus shedding and reduce transmission but rarely are able to induce extended sterilising immunity in poultry. Moreover, several Members in the Region are currently undertaking vaccine discovery, using next generation vaccines, and efficacy studies covering a range of vaccine types to explore vaccine efficacy and response in different susceptible poultry species. Currently available vaccines lack proven effectiveness to cover all the needs in particular the capacity to match circulating viruses, protection of the main poultry species, and vaccines compatible with Differentiating Infected from Vaccinated Animals (DIVA) strategy; and

8. HPAI is identified as a regional 'priority disease' and regional and global initiatives are being developed such as under the GF-TADs to develop diseases strategies taking into account the evolution of diseases and Members` needs. The strategies must be based on the latest available scientific information and answer to several different criteria, including safety, efficiency, and economic viability.

THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. WOAH, Members' Veterinary Authorities and WOAH Reference Laboratories for avian influenza exchange information related to the development, testing and use of vaccines against HPAI and modelling activities that inform collective assessment of possible vaccination strategies and policy;

2. Members' Veterinary Authorities continue to review their HPAI prevention and control options that include strengthening biosecurity and surveillance which remain the cornerstone, and consider vaccination programmes to be part of an overarching control strategy and integrated in emergency plans, in compliance with the *Terrestrial Code* and the *Terrestrial Manual*;

3. Members maintain their surveillance efforts, the biosecurity measures at farm level, and continue timely reporting of avian influenza outbreaks in both poultry and non-poultry species. High quality of information is key to support early detection and rapid response to potential threats to both animal and public health;

4. Members' Veterinary Authorities ensure that surveillance in vaccinated populations is conducted to detect infection with wild type viruses, and have further interventions to stamp out to control infection in these vaccinated flocks;

5. Members encourage research institutions and vaccine manufacturers to invest and collaborate on research and development of new HPAI vaccines, in particular, in new generation vaccines that offer improved outcomes whilst enabling the application of DIVA programmes, adapted to different species of poultry and conduct vaccines quality controls in accordance with the standards in the *Terrestrial Manual*;

6. Members require careful selection of candidate vaccines informed by local factors (including risk assessments and implementation conditions) and local requirements. Vaccines used need to have assurance of efficacy on the bird species, against a diverse family of HPAI viruses (currently predominated by H5 HPAI viruses) with formal systems for regular review, appropriate regulatory control and licensing, together with flexibility to update as required;

7. WOAH through the OFFLU (WOAH-FAO network of expertise on animal influenza) develop a platform to provide up to date information to the Members, poultry sector, and poultry vaccine manufacturers on antigenic characteristic of circulating avian influenza viruses including comparison with vaccine antigens and to enhance capacity to collect information on surveillance data associated to vaccination programmes. This information will facilitate the selection of appropriate vaccines for poultry and updating of poultry vaccine antigens;

8. WOAH assess the requirements and challenges for the establishment a WOAH managed HPAI vaccine bank in the long term to support its Members in the control of HPAI;

9. FAO and WOAH urgently revise the HPAI global strategy to support the regional efforts in the control and prevention of avian influenza viruses of high pathogenicity, including communication to relevant stakeholders and the general public; and

10. WOAH to review standards on HPAI vaccination in the *Terrestrial Code* and *Terrestrial Manual* with a view to facilitate safe international trade of vaccinated animals and products thereof taking into account the latest scientific information available and the revised FAO/WOAH Global HPAI Strategy.