



## **First OIE regional workshop on the role of Veterinary Services on animal welfare in natural disasters for Balkan countries 26-28 November 2018, Teramo, Italy**

### **Meeting report**

#### **Summary**

The workshop was attended by representatives from central and local Veterinary Services coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, as well as by representatives from civil protection services of the FYR of Macedonia and Romania. Prominent international speakers and animal welfare NGOs' representatives also attended the meeting

The meeting provided an introduction to the necessary information to develop a Veterinary Services – Contingency Plan (VS-CP) with focus on animal welfare issues, via a series of technical lectures on: (i) disaster management cycle; (ii) risk analysis; (iii) available IT tools; (iv) communication strategy; (v) public awareness; and (vi) planning and building capacity for response in emergencies. A panel discussion was also organised to set out the roles and responsibilities of different actors in a flooding scenario and the importance of networking and collaboration for emergency preparedness and management. Working groups exercises ensured discussions on the identification of the main elements of a VS-CP in case of flooding.

Participants noted that contingency planning needs to be considered to improve animal welfare in disaster management. They agreed that several areas will need further reflexion, namely: (i) coordination with civil protection services; (ii) role and position within the system for all relevant actors, including veterinary services, farmers, business operators and other stakeholders; (iii) education, training and simulation exercises; (iv) communication strategies; and (v) possible agreements for mutual assistance with neighbouring countries.

As a follow up, the OIE Platform Secretariat in collaboration with IZSAM will conduct a survey on the present state of implementation of the OIE guidelines on disaster management and risk reduction related to animal health and welfare and veterinary public health. The participating countries committed to draft a VS-CP and to present it during the next meeting proposed for November 2019.

*\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence*

## Introduction

The first OIE regional workshop on the role of Veterinary Services on animal welfare in natural disasters for Balkan countries (DMAW-B1) was held on 26-28 November 2018 in the International Centre for Veterinary Training and Information of IZSAM, Teramo (Italy). Aiming to encourage countries to engage in preparedness as an essential step for adequate rapid response during a natural disaster, the workshop was mostly attended by representatives from central and local Veterinary Services and civil protection services coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. The complete list of participants is available in [Annex 1](#), and its detailed agenda in [Annex 2](#).

Barbara Alessandrini and Fabien Schneegans opened the workshop on behalf of IZSAM and OIE respectively. Paolo Dalla Villa (IZSAM) presented the workshop concept, methodology and objective/expected outcome. ([link](#))

## Session 1 - Introductory session- setting the scene

- **Tomasz Grudnik** (OIE Sub-regional representation in Brussels, OIE Platform for AW in Europe), shortly introduced the OIE, focusing on animal welfare standards, global strategy and the OIE Platform for animal welfare (AW) in Europe. ([link](#))
- **Gary Vroegindewey** (chair of the OIE *ad hoc* group on disaster management and risk reduction in relation to animal health and AW), introduced the OIE guidelines for national veterinary services, in the wider context of global change and its risks, e.g. heat, drought, floods, wildfires, and subsequent consequences in terms of water and food resources, parasites and health, etc. ([link](#))
- **Lena Englund** (DG Santé Directorate F) presented the European Commission's perspective on preparation for natural disaster, an area which is not covered by any EU legislation. A 2-year Commission project 2017-2018 is exploring the level of preparedness / expertise in the veterinary services of the EU member states. While veterinary services are used to contingency planning, natural disaster is a somewhat different story since 1/ they are not in a position of leading operations but just a partner; 2/ the aim is to save animals instead of stamping them out, etc. ([link](#))  
The Commission will soon publish an overview report of this project. Main findings (preliminary) are as follows:
  - Respective responsibilities need to be well established, including veterinary services, practitioners, breeders.
  - The level of preparedness varies: only 6 countries out of 20 contributions appeared to be fairly well prepared.
  - Procedures for reallocating staff and resources to other regions often do not exist or are very complex.
  - Managing volunteers and unwanted donations can be a challenge.
  - Veterinary services have an important role to play in the recovery phase
- **Jimmy Tickle** (Institute for infectious animal diseases in Texas), explained how to conduct a risk analysis prior to a disaster. He insisted on the importance of the costs in emergency preparedness, and the fact that veterinary services should not appear to be competing with the first priority i.e. protection of human lives and main assets. The window of opportunity for veterinary services is usually 3 or 4 days after the event. ([link](#))
- **Evelyn Lobo** (National Center for Animal and Plant Health -CENSA- in Cuba) spoke about disaster risk reduction (vs. risk management) and described the main features of the disaster management system in Cuba ([link](#))
- **Annamaria Conte** and **Diana Palma** (IZSAM Teramo) talked about the IT tools mobilized by the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise "G. Caporale", as the National Reference Centre for Urban Hygiene and Non-Epidemic Emergencies (IUVENE), to face the 2016 earthquake in Italy. On this

occasion, the IUVENE information system has proven to be a fundamental operational tool that guaranteed a coherent and harmonized data collection on the main criticalities notified at farm, food establishments and feed industries level. A 24/7 dedicated Help Desk, various mappings, production of data forms, a farm-search mobile app to help all official vets find each and every registered farm, various reports, webpages, a very powerful geographical information system, allowed to monitor and verify the effectiveness of the different actions, and rapidly put in place corrective measures. ([link](#))

- **Barbara Alessandrini** (IZSAM Teramo) presented the activities of IZSAM on training, communication and public awareness in disaster management. The main message was that communication needs to be considered seriously in any contingency plan, including in terms of funding and staffing. ([link](#))

### **Discussion**

One comment was on the need to take into account the fact that up to 60% of pet owners will not evacuate without their animals. Also farmers need to be assisted by the veterinary services within the first couple of days of a disaster, even before the real window of opportunity opens. It was also pointed out that both the European Commission and the OIE are experiencing the same difficulty in attracting colleagues from the civil protection authorities.

### **Session 2 – Understanding the countries' situation**

[Bosnia-Herzegovina](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Croatia](#), [the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), [Greece](#), [Kosovo](#), [Montenegro](#), [Romania](#) and [Serbia](#) presented their organization for inclusion of veterinary services in case of natural disaster: administrative structure, past experiences, risk mapping, implementation of simulation exercises (only in a few countries).

As regards lessons learned the following was put forward: the lack of rendering plants and other equipment can be a real problem; there's a need for better preparedness; communication and collaboration between institutions is often challenging. Please refer to the presentations (see links above) for the specific details.

A group activity (Opera method) ([link](#)) was organized to discuss lessons learnt and after-action review by the Balkan countries addressing animal welfare issues in natural disaster situations. It resulted in 3 lists of good practises ([link](#)) that need to be implemented or addressed in any contingency plan for natural disaster.

### **Session 3 – Flooding scenario (see the PPTs, except for the panel)**

- **Sasa Ostojic** (veterinary services of Serbia) gave a detailed presentation on the flood experienced in 2014 and how the event was handled by the veterinary services. Among the lessons learned, he stressed the importance to have strong veterinary services in place; that their role in the overall system be clear; and that the veterinary services be aware and conscious of the value of the services they provide. ([link](#))
- **Marco Leonardi** (veterinarian in the Italian Civil Protection HQ) described the Italian organisation. He stressed the fact that animals are mentioned in the civil protection act, and that the health services, including veterinary services, are included at all levels of operational command centers. So far, experience shows that removing the animals is not possible in real situation within the few hours between the alert message and the actual event; emphasis should therefore be put on mitigation measures, e.g. moving the animals locally to higher ground. Also, partnerships must be developed in peace time with private veterinarians, farmers organisations and AW NGOs. ([link](#))
- **Matthew Price** (Animal and Plant Health Agency, DEFRA, UK) presented the work of the Contingency planning division within DEFRA, the general policy and organisation of DEFRA to prepare for a disaster event, mainly outbreaks of contagious diseases. ([link](#))

- **A panel of NGOs** discussed about their possible contribution to the activities of the veterinary services in disaster response:
  - IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare represented by Lois Lelanchon) has developed a guide intended to pet owners in disaster situations, and proposes funds including to help agencies in need. ([link](#))
  - Four Paws (represented by Jackson Zee) role of NGOs in supporting the competent authorities during preparation, response, recovery and mitigation phase ([link](#));
  - Unaltalia (represented by Rossela Pedicone; it covers most of the agrifood industry in Italy): there's been peace time coordination in Italy between the civil protection and international NGOs to specify their respective role ([link](#)).

In the discussion, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia colleagues reported some difficult experience in the coordination with NGOs and volunteers, ending up in making the situation on the ground even more complex. E.g. involvement of unauthorized veterinarians, or donation of prohibited veterinary products.

The represented NGOs clearly expressed their will to engage in peace time with civil protection systems in order to be tasked in case of an event and participate in a coordinated way to the national efforts, bringing in their experience and capacities in relocation of animals for example. Four Paws has already engaged in peace time with some of the countries of the Balkan region.

Emphasis was also put on the relevance of identifying farms build in areas at particular risk of flooding to better prepare for an event.

- **Zaklin Acinger-Rogic** (veterinary services of Croatia) presented reflections on cascading effects in flooding. Based on the Croatian experience, she focused on the cross-border dimension. Transportation, communication means, water and feed availability, energy, etc. might be affected simultaneously or as a domino effect. In terms of cross-border activities, she mainly insisted on disinfection of vehicles for fear of classical swine fever, and movement of ABP (animal by-products).([link](#))
- **Group exercise 1:** Disaster management in case of flooding scenarios – preparedness phase. As an introduction to the group exercise, Gary Vroegindewey refreshed the audience on the “OIE guidelines on disaster management and risk reduction in relation to animal health and welfare and veterinary public health”, particularly to address the preparedness phase. A particular focus was put on communication – horizontal and vertical, including paying special attention to developments in social media (see also Chapter 3.3 of the OIE Code for guidelines on communication). 3 different groups then met and discussed separately.

*Group exercise 1 reporting ([link](#))*

- Group 1: will use a contingency plan for animal disease as a basis. The first step will be to identify the farmers, the second the organisation of a conference call. This plan will address natural hazard, main resources available, communication flow, internal organisation, coordination with the general disaster response system and procedures to involve them, actions to be taken in alert and emergency phases and responsibilities.
- Group 2: will established a crisis team chaired by the CVO, with clear responsibilities assigned to various participants (data information, finance, farm animals, etc.). It will also establish of a hot line. The person responsible for communication in the crisis team will call various groups by to deliver initial preparedness messages and inform about the establishment of a hotline.
- Group 3: 1/ to establish disaster and scale (mapping); 2/ to map animal population at risk (use of existing database, movement information, local check if necessary); 3/ to put in place a system for rapid situational risk assessment; 4/ to establish a description of legal obligations of all involved; 5/ to clearly define the chain of command; 6/ to address collaboration and communication needs; 7/ to plan financial aspects (advised/mandatory, compensated/not compensated); 8/ to reflect on the human resources available in veterinary services, NGOs, volunteers; 9/ to establish a communication plan with a lead spokesperson, pre-prepared messages and FAQs; 10/ to start preparing for continuity of veterinary services in crisis time.

Perspective of the Civil Protection colleagues present at the meeting:

- In Romania the necessary legislation is in place to take into account in the general system the veterinary services. However, the role of the veterinary services still needs to be clarified. Generally speaking, the discussion in the workshop appeared relevant to the colleague from the Romanian Civil Protection.
- In FYROM the legislation is also in place; the communication between veterinary services and civil protection exists at national level but is lacking at local level; there is no contingency plan (CP) today for natural disasters but large parts of existing CP can probably be used as a basis for CP in disaster events.
- An IT representative reminded that the first priority of the response is to address human lives but considered that animals come next (companion animals should follow their owners).

Some countries expressed the need for OIE to continue pushing for their continued involvement and active participation in the next phase. They need support in the development of their draft contingency plans.

- **Group exercise 2:** Disaster management in case of flooding scenarios – response and recovery phases. The same 3 groups met to discuss separately about the response and recovery phases.

*Group exercise 2 reporting ([link](#))*

- Group 1: there is a need to have standard operating procedures for critical response actions following to the activation of the contingency plan, and on communication. In crisis times, particular attention should be paid by the senior management to personal resilience of staff and of the veterinary services in general. Accurate records should be kept. In recovery phase cascading risks must be envisaged (e.g. anthrax, land mines, etc.) and some thoughts given to what to do with stray/unidentified animals.
- Group 2 listed the tasks / issues to be considered during the response phase, e.g. structure private veterinarians, daily briefs and debriefs, prepare for compensation, etc. The activities were then prioritized and grouped within the organizational chart of the crisis management team established during the preparedness phase.
- Group 3 proposed to establish an animal reception point where triage and other activities can take place, organise veterinarian help. It came up with a list of activities to be addressed during the recovery phase, paying special attention to financial issues and communication.

#### **Session 4 – Towards developing Veterinary Services Contingency Plan**

This session took the form of a round table. Gary Vroegindewey and Jimmy Tickel emphasized the value of sharing and working together, as proven by the quality of the work accomplished during the 2 group exercises. Paolo Dalla Villa advocated the need for veterinary services to be on the front line on animal welfare and to build a reputation so as to be able to ask for support from pre-established networks, when necessary.

Paolo Dalla Villa also presented the work done in parallel to the DMAW-B1 on establishing an OIE collaborating centres' network in veterinary emergencies, including bioterrorism events, involving Collaborating centres in Cuba, United States and Italy. An OIE ad hoc group on emergency response is also to be proposed ([link](#)).

#### **Conclusion**

Fabien Schneegans (OIE sub-regional representation in Brussels) outlined the main conclusions of this workshop ([link](#)). These conclusions were supported by the group.

- Positive points included a real interest for the topic, as confirmed by the active participation of the delegations; they already have a lot of experience with past flooding events, where they have proven that the Veterinary services are responsive in case of emergency situations, including natural disasters; there

is solid knowledge in Veterinary services on contingency planning, as plans already exist for animal health; the OIE guidelines can help structure future work.

- Topics where further reflection appears to be needed included: articulation / coordination with Civil Protection services in order to better define the role of veterinary services in the national disaster management system; the role and place in the system of private veterinarians and paraprofessionals, farmers, business operators and other stakeholders including NGOs; specific education, training and simulation exercises; communication; possible mutual assistance agreements within country and with neighbouring countries.
- Proposed next steps:

April or May 2019	the launching of a survey on the present state of implementation of the OIE guidelines in the Balkan countries. This survey aims at establishing a precise baseline for the region and providing support to countries with the identification of any existing gap.
June or July 2019	the distribution to the countries of a template presentation to help prepare the next workshop.
October or November 2019	the preparation of the next workshop, where the countries will be encouraged to share on the first draft of their contingency plan – <i>hosting country still to be confirmed</i> .
October or November 2020	the last workshop of this initiative, with a possible simulation exercise – <i>hosting country still to be confirmed</i> .

- Commitments:  
The participants were expected to
  - remain committed;
  - attend the next workshop while also disseminating the message at home;
  - start engaging with Civil Protection;
  - prepare a draft Veterinary Services Contingency Plan with regards to animal welfare in case of a flood event, in view of the 2019 workshop.On the other hand, the OIE Platform secretariat and the OIE Collaborating Centre on Veterinary Training, Epidemiology, Food safety and Animal Welfare in Teramo committed to follow up and provide support when necessary.

Finally, a **customer satisfaction assessment** was conducted at the end of the training, using a specific form addressed to the group of direct beneficiaries. This tool was designed ad hoc for the workshop. Twenty-one questionnaires were analysed. In general terms, the results revealed a very high level of appreciation of the workshop's content, methodology and organisation (see [Annex 3](#)).

## List of annexes

[Annex 1](#) – DMAW-B1 List of participants

[Annex 2](#) – DMAW-B1 Agenda

[Annex 3](#) – DMAW-satisfaction assessment