



Food and Agriculture
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United Nations



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

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

Twenty first meeting (SGE ASF21)
28/29 September 2023 – conference – Brussels, Belgium

REPORT

List of members¹ present:

Country	Country
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria
Croatia	Czech Republic
Estonia	Germany
Greece	Italy
Hungary	Kosovo ²
Latvia	Lithuania
Moldova	North Macedonia
Poland	Romania
Russia	Serbia
Slovakia	Sweden

List of observer countries, GF-TADs organizations, and associated organizations:

Country or organization	Country or organization
Austria	France

¹ Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo², Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine

² this designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Belgium	Ireland
EFSA	Montenegro
European Commission	Spain
FACE	Switzerland
FAO (Europe and Central Asia)	The Netherlands
FAO (NSAH)	United Kingdom
Finland	WOAH SRR Brussels and RR Moscow

Summary

The twenty first meeting of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever (SGE ASF21) was organised in Brussels by the SGE ASF Secretariat on the 28/29th of September 2023. 20 SGE Member Countries from the European Region participated, for a total of 50 participants.

After an overview of regional activities, the participating member countries of the SGE-ASF for Europe briefly presented their national epidemiological situation regarding ASF, focusing on the changes since the last meeting in October 2022.

Participants gave a presentation of scientific research on carcass detection and disposal that has been recently carried out.

The SGE ASF21 were shown a set of recommendations. Amongst these, it was highlighted that:

- *Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Kosovo² and Sweden should become full members of the SGE ASF, and as such participate in future SGE ASF meetings to share their experience and receive relevant guidance.*
- *Field missions should continue. Interested countries should contact the SGE ASF secretariat.*
- *The correct management of ASF in wild boar populations, in particular of infected wild boar, and the reduction of the environmental viral load due to infected wild boar carcasses, is key to prevent, survey and control ASF. Therefore, wild boar carcass search and safe disposal must be considered a cornerstone for ASF surveillance and control. Best practices conducive to safe carcass management are described in [Annex 2](#) of these recommendations. They should be duly followed.*
- *Awareness campaigns should be carried out using all possible information modalities (e.g., face-to-face and online meetings, mass media, posters, leaflets, radio and TV shows). Different actors should be informed, including hunters and hunting associations, forestry services, the general public through municipalities and non-governmental organizations, veterinary practitioners, forest workers and forest management bodies, to increase the reporting of dead wild boar findings.*

Next meeting

- The twenty second meetings of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever (SGE ASF22) in Europe under GF-TADs is planned to be held in September 2024 in Skopje, North Macedonia.

Report

Presentations are available on the [website](#) of the SGE on ASF of the regional GF-TADs for Europe.

Introduction and objectives of the meeting

The President of the Regional Steering Committee of the GF TADs for Europe, Dr Van Goethem reminded participants that, having established the group ten years ago, it remained the best platform to share experience and fight ASF in Europe. In addition, it has been a model for other regions who grapple with ASF, which have now established SGE ASFs, and there is a steering group at global level.

The objectives of the meeting were announced as:

- a. To provide an update on the epidemiological situation in each country with the details on the measures taken.
- b. To report on the field visit in Bosnia and Herzegovina that took place from 12 to 14 July 2023.
- c. To focus on **wild boar carcass search and safe disposal**, in consideration of the key role of those activities in the ASF virus detection and subsequent control/eradication of infection in wild boar populations.

50 participants attended this 21st meeting of the SGE ASF for Europe organised in Brussels by the SGE ASG Secretariat. Dr Van Goethem, congratulated participants for the quality of the work of this group.

20 members of the SGE ASF for Europe attended the meeting, along with several observer countries, and representatives from the European Commission, FAO, and WOAHA.

Updates from the Global ASF Working Group and regional activities.

Presentations were given by:

- the joint ASF Working group, represented by FAO NSAH

The speaker for the joint WOAHA-FAO ASF Working group introduced a 6-year strategic Global Initiative from 2020 with goals to control, coordinate, and ensure business continuity. He emphasized the challenge of detecting index cases and the importance of post-vaccination surveillance. He reminded participants of practical advances, such as the update of the handbook on wild boar biosecurity. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- the European Commission

A representative of the European Commission reported the current ASF epidemiological situation in the 14 affected EU Member States, emphasizing that the disease is present mainly in the wild boar population and the effectiveness of the EU surveillance activities. Surveillance for early detection, with highest emphasis on passive surveillance, is a key part of any ASF prevention, control and eradication strategy and allow the EU to identify how the ASF

epidemiological situation is evolving and revise the regionalization measures accordingly. The Commission representative acknowledged that wild boar play an important role in the transmission and persistence of ASF virus, representing a constant threat for pig farms. The control and reduction, where relevant, of the wild boar population in Europe is part of the solution in the coordinated management of ASF. Therefore, the Commission adopted a regulation that provides for a legal obligation on the Member States to establish National action plans for wild boar in order to avoid the spread of ASF. Other activities carried out by the Commission were described among which the awareness activities at international level, the Commission mandates for Scientific Opinions and Technical Reports to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the activities of the ASF European Union Reference Laboratory (EURL) and of the European Union Veterinary Emergency team (EUVET). [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- FAO for Europe

The regional FAO for Europe covered several activities carried out to help countries fight ASF, including through the Virtual Learning [Center](#) (VLC) activities focusing on both veterinary services and private vets, and presented templates for ASF control and eradication plans. FAO also mentioned EBRD-funded activities, especially in the Balkans, and highlighted efforts in the Western Balkans, tools like the OUTbreak COSTing Tool (OutCost), and biosecurity assessment for hunting grounds. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- WOAHA in Europe

The regional secretariat of the GFTADs for Europe presented past, ongoing and planned activities for the GF-TADs for Europe since October 2022, including country missions, support to countries and the continued development of a training module. Emphasis was put on the campaign of communication, both directly by WOAHA (online) and through the renewal of the website with country awareness material. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- WOAHA Global Headquarters

WOAHA global headquarters also gave a global epidemiological overview, along with reminders on the use of WAHIS. Europe faced significant losses in 2022 but showed improvement with disease control in domestic pigs. Members were reminded about their obligation to report all listed occurrences of the disease. WAHIS is a trusted publisher of validated data, ensuring all information meets validation standards before publishing. The finalisation of interconnectivity between WAHIS and ADIS is ongoing with a view to launching the one portal reporting in the near future.

[\[link to the presentation\]](#)

Overall, it was noted that the situation in Europe was unfortunately deteriorating. The development of common actions and guidelines can be a part of our coordinated response.

Updates from the member countries of the SGE ASF

All the detailed figures are available in the country presentations.

Power-point presentations from 18 members were presented (the list of member countries in attendance is available at the beginning of this report). Those presentations are available following this [link](#).

Technical item: carcass detection and disposal

Participants listened to several presentations on the topic of wild boar carcass detection and disposal, as a way to diminish viral presence in wild boar habitats.

- Introduction to the topic by Dr Alain Licoppe

Dr Licoppe presented the technical topic based on the Belgian experience with ASF in wild boars, and their emphasis on carcass detection from the start. Emphasizing the importance of carcass management, Belgium's proactive approach was highlighted, with elements of cost presented as well. In Wallonia, risk analysis is based on carcass detection, initially through 'emergency' searches, followed by regular, organized searches, especially during early winter. The passive surveillance methods used previously continue today, though natural awareness has decreased. [\[link to presentation\]](#)

- Dr Sandra Blome (Friedrich Loeffler Institut) and Dr Paulius Bušauskas first presented a study carried out on wild boar composting in winter.

The composting concept originated in Vietnam and the goal was to test virus inactivation in colder temperatures. Latvia conducted an ASF trial using positive carcasses in a fenced area with sawdust and straw, in wintertime. The results were positive, as infectivity decreased rapidly and was null after 35 days. Composting could be thus considered as an alternative disposal method. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- Dr Daniel Beltran-Alcrudo presented three studies on aspects of ASF management.

Dr Beltran-Alcrudo (from the regional FAO office for Europe and Central Asia) presented new tools. The first tool aimed at optimizing resources for searching wild boar carcasses based on the analysis of over 22,000 spatial data. The second tool assesses the risk that individual hunting grounds in terms of ASF introduction, spread between hunting grounds, and the capacity to detect the introduction, as well as the feasibility to implement mitigation measures and how risks would decrease. The tool is based on surveys with hunting managers, a scoring system and risk maps, allowing authorities to identify risks and target efforts. The final study introduced the FAO OutCosT tool for estimating costs related to ASF and its control. In addition, FAO conducts a series of face-to-face and online trainings for a range of stakeholders that partially target improved carcass detection and management. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- EFSA gave an overview of the data reporting networks available in Europe for different publics.

EFSA has been addressing ASF in various capacities and is currently focused on a rise in PCR positive wild boars, noting a decrease in active surveillance due to regulatory changes. Discovering deceased carcasses is the most efficient method of detecting the disease and shared their plans to research the effectiveness of barriers and the virus's survival in different conditions. EFSA introduced "Imammalia net," a platform that facilitates data transfer to the GBIF. The tool is gaining traction in some countries for its ASF tracking capabilities. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- Three countries (Germany, Poland and Serbia) gave additional presentations on their experience with carcass detection and disposal.

Germany's presentation emphasized the multifaceted approach to ASF measures, highlighting the importance of using all available tools. They utilize drones, human chains, and trained dogs for carcass searches. Efforts are centrally coordinated by each region. Cleanup procedures post-disposal involve quicklime, thorough cleaning of personnel, disinfection of equipment, and shampooing dogs. Efforts also extend to various stakeholders like hunters, farmers, and veterinarians. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

Poland's presentation noted the cost of active patrolling covered by the VS and emphasized the importance of reporting any found dead wild boars. In recent years, Poland has increased its efforts, introducing dogs and drones to the search, yielding better results. Disposal methods range from rendering plants and specific burial conditions to incineration plants. Conditions and protocols are strict, especially when samples test positive for ASF. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

Serbia's discussion highlighted the importance of human training and the extensive size of some hunting grounds. Carcass disposal involves pits lined with sawdust, surrounded by fences, followed by disinfection. Improper disposal has led to increased infection rates. Backyard pigs are disposed of similarly. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- A representative of hunters as stakeholders, the Fédération des Associations des Chasseurs Européens (FACE) shared the vision of a stakeholder representative.

Over time, trust between hunters and other stakeholders has improved, with financial incentives playing a motivational role for hunters. A significant challenge highlighted was the multiple authorities involved and the occasional lack of a coordinated strategy across regions. The overarching recommendation is the integration of national hunters' associations into national action plans for a more effective response. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

- An SGE expert, presented the latest SGE ASF mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Members were reminded of the importance of these missions for countries. While there was limited data on the presence of wild boar in the region, more extensive information was available on domestic pigs. The area experienced multiple outbreaks, putting significant strain on the Veterinary Services (VS). With various transmission pathways identified, one of the key suggestions was to develop incentives to improve reporting. [\[link to the presentation\]](#)

Discussions

In the course of the questions and discussions around country presentations, the varied impact of ASF across the region was underscored, with different dynamics observed in separate areas. Of particular concern were the current speed of propagation in the border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, along with renewed waves of outbreaks in wild boars in Latvia and Lithuania. New outbreaks in wild fauna in Sweden and

the Czech Republic were equally noted, along with the difficult situation regarding domestic pigs in a number of countries, including Kosovo².

The current situation highlighted the significance of coordinated international efforts to manage the disease.

Presentations around the technical theme brought to light current research and innovation in managing the disease, along with country experience in exploring new technologies, raising the question of the cost in time and money associated with different techniques, with Belgium providing a unique analysis of resources spent per carcass found.

Innovations and alternative methods, such as composting, were explored but need to be aligned with existing regulations. Analysis of the location of identified carcass concluded that they are often found where access is simple.

Again, presentations concluded that collaboration and coordination between various entities, including countries, organizations, and stakeholders, are crucial for effective detection as a component of disease control. Three participants mentioned difficulties in managing disinformation concerning ASF, highlighting the need for continued awareness efforts.

Presentation, discussion and adoption of the SGE ASF20 recommendations

Following the discussions, after reviewing the reports on the current epidemiological situation from the SGE Members¹, the draft recommendations of the SGE ASF21 were presented by the President.

The SGE ASF 21 recommends that:

1. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Kosovo³ and Sweden should become full members of the SGE ASF, and as such participate in future SGE ASF meetings to share their experience and receive relevant guidance.
2. Field missions should continue. Interested countries should contact the SGE ASF secretariat.
3. Martins Seržants and Gunda Lubek should be added to the list of experts for GF-TADs missions. The list of experts for GF-TADs missions on ASF attached as Annex 1 is approved.
4. The correct management of wild boar populations, in particular of infected wild boar, and the reduction of the environmental viral load due to infected wild boar carcasses is key to prevent and control ASF. Therefore, wild boar carcass search and safe disposal must be considered a cornerstone for ASF control. Best practices conducive to safe carcass management are described in Annex 2 of these recommendations. They should be duly followed.
5. Awareness campaigns should be carried out using all possible information modalities (e.g. face-to-face meetings, mass media, posters, leaflets, radio and TV shows). Different actors should be informed, including hunters and hunting associations, the general public through municipalities and non-governmental organizations, veterinary practitioners, forest workers and forest management bodies, to increase the reporting of dead wild boar findings.
6. All countries should implement previous SGE ASF recommendations to prevent, control and eradicate ASF.

³ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence

7. The twenty-second meeting (SGE ASF22) of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held **in face-to-face format in Skopje**, in September **2024**.

Closing Remarks

The organizers of the SGE thanked all participants and stressed the importance of collaboration and coordination, including cross-border coordination in the struggle against ASF, all while following science and experience / best practice in the development of our strategies for the eradication of ASF.

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We would like to sincerely thank Belgium, the European Commission, FAO and WOAHA for kindly supporting the organisation of the SGE ASF21 conference.

All presentations are available on the GF-TADs page of WOAHA of the Europe website:

[21st Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe \(SGE-ASF21\) - WOAHA – Europe](#)

Annex 1 – list of experts for SGE GF-TADs missions.

Name	Approval	Country of origin
Silvia Bellini	SGE ASF2, Tallinn, Estonia - February 2015	Italy
Klaus Depner	SGE ASF2, Tallinn, Estonia - February 2015	Germany
Vittorio Guberti	SGE ASF2, Tallinn, Estonia - February 2015	Italy
Sergei Khomenko	SGE ASF2, Tallinn, Estonia - February 2015	Ukraine
Konstantin Gruzdev	SGE ASF2, Tallinn, Estonia - February 2015	Russian Federation
Marius Masiulis	SGE ASF6, Vilnius, Lithuania - November 2016	Lithuania
Edvīns Oļševskis	SGE ASF6, Vilnius, Lithuania - November 2016	Latvia
Ago Partel	SGE ASF6, Vilnius, Lithuania - November 2016	Estonia
Alexey Igolkin	SGE ASF8, Chisinau, Moldova – September 2017	Russian Federation
Krzysztof Jażdżewski	SGE ASF12, Prague, Czech Republic – March 2019	Poland
Petr Šatrán	SGE ASF12, Prague, Czech Republic – March 2019	Czech Republic
Annick Linden	SGE ASF 20, Catania, Italy – October 2022	Belgium
Maxim Sirbu	SGE ASF 20, Catania, Italy – October 2022	Moldova
Martins Serzants	SGE ASF 21, Bruxelles, Belgium – September 2023	Latvia
Gunda Lubek	SGE ASF 21, Brussels, Belgium – September 2023	Germany

Annex 2 – carcass search and carcass removal best practices

1. Any individual who could potentially find a dead wild boar should know the basic rules on how to behave around the carcass:
 - a. Do not touch the carcass.
 - b. Ensure that the spot where the carcass has been found is clearly visually identified or communicate exact coordinates of its location (any smartphone can be used).
 - c. Inform the authority in charge of carcass management, without delay.
2. In each infected territory, the active search for carcasses should be intensified during the periods when it can be most productive in terms of effort/benefit. In particular, considering wild boar population dynamics (preferring periods of low density) and climatic conditions (cold periods).
3. Any methodology applied to the search for carcasses (people, molecular dogs, drones, etc.) must be used and planned appropriately in advance, above all assessing its feasibility and quantifying the effort in relation to the extent of the infected area.
4. In large, infected areas, it is necessary for the competent authorities to maintain an effective system of notification, testing and safe disposal of every carcass found in the territory (including through economic incentives, where relevant).
5. In small, infected areas, especially where eradication is attempted in the short term, a careful active search for carcasses must be planned taking into account the size of the infected area and the biological cycle of the disease.
6. Specific carcasses collection points should be set up within the infected area for sampling, and after the carcasses should be sent rendering plants.
7. If it is not possible to send the carcasses to rendering plants, different methods of disposal should be available and authorised by the competent authority to reduce the viral load of the environment.
8. On-site burial of carcasses has several advantages (cost, reduced likelihood of contamination of non-infected areas, effective destruction of the virus) and can be practised with attention to the amount of soil covering the carcass (80-100 cm) to avoid scavengers, and the possibility of leachates contaminating groundwater.
9. On-site incineration of carcasses by fire should be banned to protect the environment.
10. The use of carcasses for composting and biogas production has yet to be fully developed, however, their application must be perceived as a resource to be promoted especially considering the protection of the environment.
11. All countries, including free countries, should plan a system for searching for, collecting and disposal of carcasses considering the availability of rendering plants, the hydro-geological characteristics of the different areas and their ecology.
12. Logistics and biosecurity measures should be identified and implemented to ensure the safe removal of carcasses from the infected area. The movement of carcasses within the infected area, from the spot they are found to a designated carcass collection point, must be carried out to prevent further spread of the virus. Vehicles (particularly the underside or the bed, if carcasses are transported in the cab) and personnel (shoes, equipment) should be cleaned and disinfected before leaving the infected area. An easy and likely already largely applied measure is the use of different clothes and boots while visiting an infected or at-risk area that should be changed before leaving the area. Boots should be placed in a robust plastic bag to avoid any contamination of cars while driving home and then brushed and washed with soap and hot water until the soles are clean.

13. The carcass and the spot where the carcass was found should be disinfected to minimize the ASF viral load. These procedures are easy to implement in all seasons with the exception of winter when carcasses are frozen, are often covered with snow and temperatures are below 0 °C and the disinfectant freezes. In such situations, anti-freezing agent is added to the disinfectant to stop it from freezing. Propylene glycol can be used as a diluent. Each country has approved and/or authorized a list of biocides that are effective against ASFV; only these authorized biocides should be used and in accordance with the producer's instructions.