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Platform on animal
welfare for Europe

Regional WOA online event on the welfare of working equids

12th September 2023

Meeting report

The event was organised in collaboration with International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE) and European Union Reference Centre for Animal Welfare (EURCAW) Ruminants and Equines.

Summary

The WOA regional online event on the welfare of working equids was held on 12th September 2023. The meeting was organised in collaboration with the International Coalition for Working Equids (ICWE) and the European Union Reference Centre for Animal Welfare Ruminants & Equines. The main objectives of the meeting were to raise awareness on WOA standards on the welfare of working equids, further identify WOA members' needs and discuss how to address WOA members' needs within planned activities of the next action plan of the Platform for 2024 -2026.

The event highlighted the direct and indirect economic value and importance of the welfare of working equids with its sustainability and social/community dimension. In addition, the event was an opportunity to present existing tools and knowledge resources on the welfare of working equids and sharing experience implementation specific ICWE projects.

Participants of the meeting confirmed the need for WOA assistance to its members to support the implementation of WOA standards on the welfare of working equids.

Activities for building awareness and knowledge within Veterinary Services and relevant stakeholders in targeted countries will be proposed in the 4th Action Plan of the Platform, with a focus on supporting the dissemination of available knowledge resources and tools. WOA will continue collaboration with ICWE and other partners in planning and implementing regional activities on working equids' welfare.

Introduction

Background

The Platform on animal welfare for Europe (Platform) is a regional mechanism to improve animal welfare in all 53 countries of Europe and to empower Veterinary Services to take action on animal welfare in compliance with WOA standards. In 2016, WOA adopted standards on welfare of working equids ([Chapter 7.12 on the welfare of working equids of Terrestrial Animal Health Code](#)). The welfare of working equids was identified as one of five priority topics of the 2nd Action Plan (2017-2019) for the Platform and also remains a priority for the 3rd Action Plan (2021-2023). In many countries of the region, equids (horses, mules, and donkeys) are still used as a drafting power for agriculture and transportation, especially in rural areas and have a significant economic role.

As one of the first regional activities to address this topic, the Platform, in collaboration with ICWE, organised an [Awareness Day on the Welfare of Working Equids for West Eurasia](#) countries as part of a three-day WOA Animal Welfare event for West Eurasia countries held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in September 2018.

The baseline survey developed by the Platform Secretariat and ICWE was completed in 2019. The survey targeted eight countries from West Eurasia and addressed the working equids population,

working equids in the local country context, veterinary and para-professional services, health and welfare issues, and stakeholder engagement and awareness.

The 3rd Action Plan of the Platform foreseen organizing an awareness raising campaign on the welfare of working equids targeting selected West Eurasian countries, however no specific activity was defined. The Steering Group of the Platform (SG), following the discussion at its meeting in December 2022 proposed the organisation of an online event aiming at raising awareness, further identification of needs and consultation with countries to define future activities. In addition, the SG suggested extending the list of targeted countries to include Balkan region.

Objectives

The event had the following specific objectives:

- raise awareness on WOAHS standards on welfare of working equids,
- share existing tools and knowledge resources,
- raise awareness on the direct and indirect economic value and societal importance of working equids,
- further identify WOAHS members' needs and discuss how to address WOAHS members' needs in the next action plan of the Platform for 2024 -2026.

Participants

In total 60 participants joined the meeting, with representative from Caucasus, central Asia and Balkans. According to the poll results most participants were from Competent Authorities working at central level 42% and regional level (16%), following non-governmental organization (16%) and education establishment (11%).

Programme

Proposed agenda of the workshops covered:

- spotlight on the World Organisation for Animal Health Global Animal Welfare Strategy and recalling main aspects of the WOAHS standards Chapter 7.12 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code on welfare of working equids,
- presentation/address on the direct and indirect economic value and importance of welfare working equids, including One Health approach, sustainability and social/community dimensions,
- presentation of already existing tools and resources for the welfare of working equids,
- sharing of experience from specific project by ICWE,
- identification of WOAHS Members' needs and future activities of the WOAHS Platform

The detailed agenda of the meeting is available in Annex I.

Meeting was opened by Dr. Mereke Taitubayev, WOAHS Sub-Regional Representative for Central Asia, highlighting the importance of addressing challenges for the welfare of working equids topic and recalling already completed WOAHS activities.

World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) Global Animal Welfare Strategy (GAWS) and WOAHS Terrestrial Code Chapter 7.12 Welfare of working equids [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Leopoldo Stuardo, WOAHS global coordinator on Animal Welfare, presented WOAHS Global Strategy on animal welfare and its 4 pillars: development of animal welfare standards, capacity building and education, communication with governments, organisations and the public, and implementation of animal welfare standards and policies. The standard on working equids was adopted in 2016 and was developed due to the important of working equids contribution to the livelihoods of many people and the need to ensure their welfare is taken into account. The Chapter 7.12 was build establishing the scope, the responsibilities, the criteria that needs to be taking into account to assess the welfare of working equids and recommendations related to the criteria.

Short poll exercise shows that the participants of the meeting are familiar with concept and definition of the animal welfare, and they are familiar (or at least are aware) with WOA standards on welfare of working equids.

The importance of welfare of working equids, including one health, economic, sustainability and social/community dimension

Working equids in EU ([link to the presentation](#))

Joe Collins (the Donkey Sanctuary) presented the importance of working equids in many domains of rural and urban activities and explained how they can fit in a more sustainable approach. The working equids present several assets: green assets (agricultural and horticultural draught power), forestry and environmental management, complementary assets, urban management (waste, natural spaces, transport, policing) and recreation (trekking and agri-tourism transport).

The legislation related to working equids is usually in a grey or gap area because they are used in many areas and don't have a specific regulation applying to them. It is important to recognise working equids' role and relevance within sustainable practice. The ensuring welfare of working equids builds win-win situation, as they deserve proper level of welfare and it also benefits livelihoods and society.

The contribution of working equids towards sustainable development ([link to the presentation](#))

Sandra Zafra (World Horses Welfare) shortly introduced ICWE (the International Coalition for Working Equids) that comprised by Brooke, The Donkey Sanctuary, SPANA and World Horse Welfare as well as its role and activities. The presentation highlighted role of working equids in today's society with an estimate of 112 million working equids supporting the livelihoods of around 600 million people, mostly in low to middle-income countries and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs call for action to end poverty, improve education and health, reduce inequality and economic growth, and some of most urgent SDGs can be achieved by cost-effective and simple solutions with the welfare of working equids behind one of those solutions. Working animals contribute hugely to the reduction of poverty and hunger, improving access to food and water, empowering women, and enhancing climate resilience, amongst others. Yet their pivotal role is not fully recognised.

The following discussion raise a question about 'fit to work' criteria that could be used as a checklist by official inspectors. For now, standards do not include models of checklists, but in general Veterinary Authorities can develop this kind of tool which should be in line with their legislation. Possibility for developing this kind of tools, should be further explore, as that could be helpful to support the implementation of the standards, and it's also already use for other topics (e.g., transport of animals by land and sea).

In the following poll exercise participants indicated that in their countries working equids are mostly use for transport of good/materials/crops, transport of people, racing, cultural events and agricultural work. In the poll, participants indicated that the civil society in their country have low (43%) or medium (43%) level of awareness regarding welfare of working equids. The business operators (farmers, transporters, tour operators etc.), according to the meeting poll, have medium (76%) or low-level (24%) awareness towards their role and responsibilities to protect welfare of working equids.

Tools and knowledge resources

Already existing and available tools, and knowledge resources on welfare of working equids were presented following short interactive exercise on the use and dissemination of those materials.

ICWE's Working Equids Standards Library on information (WESLI) ([link to the presentation](#))

Amy Barstow (Brooke) provided information about their work, website and online knowledge library (WESLI) available at <https://www.icweworkingequids.org/wesli/>.

The knowledge library provides detailed information for specific animals (horses, mules and donkey) and specific welfare issues (water, nutrition, shelter, diseases and injuries, handling and management

behaviour, end of life end of life, appropriate workloads, harnessing and farriery). This tool provides supplementary reference information on articles and lists of resources.

EURCAW Ruminants and Equids: Activities to promote the welfare of working equids in EU Countries [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Dr Sossidou (EURCAW for Ruminants and Equines) presented role, work and activities of the reference centre. The centre is built as a consortium of six institutions and is constituted of over 100 experts. The remit of the EURCAW is to support the Competent Authorities in EU member states with the implementation of current regulations on animal welfare. The Centre provides scientific and technical expertise on the development and application of animal welfare indicators and methods of assessment of animal welfare to competent authorities and policy workers in animal welfare. The activities of the EURCAW Ruminants & Equines are set out in a work programme in consultation with the European Commission. Scientific reviews are developed under standard operating procedures, and they can be found in the EURCAW website. Current work covers a scientific review on physical and occupational enrichment, and on sensory and feeding enrichment in ruminants and equines.

Discussion suggested adding specific consideration for the welfare of working equids at the end of their careers, as it remains a neglected issue to be addressed.

EU guides on keeping horses and donkeys and related factsheets [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Joe Collins provided information about the voluntary initiative in the framework of the European Union Platform on animal welfare.

The guidebook about good animal welfare practices for the keeping, care, training and use of horses have been produced with the support of some EU member countries, business and professional organisations, civil society organisations and academia experts (not only on working equids but also experts on equestrian sports). Based on the guidebook document, seven single paged factsheets have been created and translated in different languages, pointing out the key points for the welfare of equids. All factsheets have a QR codes linking them to the full guide, where essential information can be found.

Additionally, the Guidance for competent authorities and tourism operators to ensure the welfare of working equids in tourism was developed. Besides existing EU-legislation the document describes the specific welfare issues affecting equids used in tourism and the provides specific recommendation for ensuring welfare of this category of working equids.

Identification and registration of equids as well as relevant legislation on working equids are essential elements for ensuring welfare of working equids.

Through the polls most participants indicated that their countries have in place national legislation that could partially serve as a basis to implement WOA standards on working equids, and they have an animal identification and registration system used for equids with central national database. Still, there are countries with no relevant legislation (11%) and no identification and registration system in place (21%).

The participants, with the poll, confirmed that the presented materials are useful in supporting the implementation of standards on working equids in their countries (extremely useful 23%, very useful 38% and moderately useful 31%). For the different options how disseminate the presented materials (Tools and knowledge resources), participants suggested to use them for developing educational materials to support in-person training (71%), building answers on resources available online (59%), and dissemination through social media (47%).

Sharing of experience

Two presentations were dedicated to sharing experience form specific project implemented by ICWE members.

Partnership case study Brooke Pakistan and the Livestock and Dairy Development Department [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Javed Iqbal Gondal (Brook Pakistan) presented a case study on the partnership between Brooke and The Livestock and Dairy Development Department (L&DD). The project aimed to strengthen local

animal health systems and improve animal welfare by increasing the knowledge and skill of local animal health practitioners, increasing quality animal health care and implementing legislation to safeguard animal welfare. The L&DD had established infrastructure throughout all of Pakistan's provinces, including veterinary hospitals, veterinary dispensaries, diagnostic laboratories, and a network of animal health practitioners. A series of collaborative communications and activities were implemented, including training of veterinarians and paraprofessionals, community engagement activities for improving the welfare of working equids.

Vet Partnerships - Case Studies (ICWE) [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Isabella Wild (World Horse Welfare) presented case studies of project implemented by the World Horse Welfare and different partners and NGOs across the globe. Each project has different agendas tailored to the different needs. Due to the diverse situation of each area, local animal care workers play a very important part in providing support and care.

Vet Partnerships - Case Studies (ICWE) [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

Isabella Wild (World Horse Welfare) presented case studies as examples of the WHW's work aiming to alleviate the suffering of working equids and improve human livelihoods by sharing skills and knowledge with horse-owning communities working with local partner organisations in sixteen countries.

Presented projects use participatory approach including training activities to engage owners and key stakeholders to promote good animal welfare. Each project has tailored approach to the address specific needs. Due to the diverse situation of each area, local animal care workers play a very important part in providing support and care.

The first case study presented was collaboration with Cambodia Pony Welfare Organization in relation to outbreaks of African Horse Sickness reported in Thailand in 2020. Due to outbreaks close to Cambodia border, the prevention programme was implemented including awareness activities and distribution of insecticide laced nets and insect repellents. Another case study presented was collaboration with the Animal Nepal in relation to confirmed presence of Glanders' 2021 in Nepal. Trainings and experience were shared to create awareness and management techniques to establish surveillance and combat the disease. As a result, the government, based on the actions and case studies of the FAO, have allocated grants to improve the worker's task.

The last case study presented the partnership of Costa Rica Equine Welfare (CREW) and National Animal Health Service (SENASA) in Costa Rica, that successfully created a support mechanism focused on welfare of working equids, including resources and expertise e.g., assistance with welfare inspections and training.

Discussions highlighted the importance of the involvement of local communities and working with local expertise and the local workforce in the implantation of specific projects aiming to directly improve the welfare of working equids. The improvements might not come quickly but built awareness and local engagement leads to change and improvement of the health and welfare of working equids.

Identification of WOAHA members needs and future activities of the WOAHA platform [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

The last session of the event was dedicated to identifying WOAHA members needs and discuss how to address WOAHA members' needs in the next action plan of the Platform for 2024-2026. Tomasz Grudnik shortly presented WOAHA Platform on animal welfare for Europe focusing on the implemented activities on welfare of working equids and the development of the next action plan of the Platform.

The poll results shows that welfare of working is rather medium and low high priority topic for Competent Authorities (high priority (23%), medium priority (23), low priority (38%) very low priority (15%)). In addition, working equids are not always included in daily work of Competent Authorities (53%). The veterinary services teams currently have the knowledge and resources (21%) have the knowledge no resources (36%) or no knowledge and no resources (36%) to assess the welfare of working equids.

The participants through the poll confirmed the need for WOAHA to assist members in implementing WOAHA standards on the welfare of working equids (71%).

The most relevant WOAHA actions and activities to support the Competent Authority in the implementation of standards and requirements on welfare of working equids suggested by participants were: to develop training programmes (60%), to provide additional guidance through other WOAHA documents (guidelines, handbooks, ...)(53%), to facilitate incorporation of the topic into veterinary

education (44%), to support for dissemination of existing materials (40%) and to develop awareness raising campaigns or tools (40%).

Closing remarks and main conclusions

- There is a need for WOAHA assistance to its members to support the implementation of WOAHA standards on the welfare of working equids.
- WOAHA should continue collaboration with ICWE and other stakeholders on the welfare of working equids.
- There is an interest expressed by participated in the event Balkans countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania) to be involved in the Platform activities on the welfare of working equids, in addition to the initially targeted eight members in Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- The involvement of local expertise, local partners and communities is of great importance for implementing the in-country project, to understand specific challenges (barriers analyses) and efforts to support implementation. They are key to success in-country projects.

Follow-up action

- Propose activities for the 4th Action Plan of the Platform to build awareness and knowledge within Veterinary Services and relevant stakeholders in targeted countries. The activities will focus on supporting the dissemination of available knowledge resources and tools with all relevant stakeholders.
- Continue collaborating with ICWE and other partners and stakeholders in planning and implementing regional activities on working equids' welfare.
- Explore possibilities to develop additional WOAHA guidance documents and tools (e.g., checklist for fit-to-work).

List of annexes

Annex 1 – Agenda

Annex 2 – List of participants