WOAH PLATFORM ON ANIMAL WELFARE FOR EUROPE

**EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AW PLATFORM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

## Summary

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# Introduction

The purpose of this report is twofold: first, to evaluate the impact of the communication tools and activities employed by the Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe (the Platform) from its inception in 2013 through to 2024; and second, to propose an upgraded Communication Strategy for the period 2024-2026, aligned with the fourth Action Plan of the Platform. This updated strategy is to be situated within the broader framework of the WOAH's global communication policies, with the overall goal of improving the visibility of the Platform's work and raising awareness about the critical role of animal welfare in animal health.

Key considerations for the evaluation have been to gain an understanding of the quality and consistency of communication content, the frequency and accessibility of outputs, messaging reach and effectiveness, as well as exploring possible avenues toward improving the above. The evaluation also aims to assess the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of past and current communication activities and tools used by the Platform. Additionally, the evaluation has assessed the adequacy of the current manpower dedicated to communication activities in order to determine whether additional resources might be required to achieve the desired communication outcomes. By identifying strengths and weaknesses in the current setup, the evaluation has informed the development of the communication strategy presented in the second part of this report.

The resulting updated strategy aims to identify key operational aspects that can be enhanced to maximise the effectiveness of the Platform's communication efforts. This strategy furthermore takes into account the available resources, including funding and staffing, to ensure that the desired communication outcomes as detailed in the updated communication strategy are achievable; some within current capacities, others through the additional needs.

Overall, the purpose of the strategy is to increase awareness and understanding of animal welfare standards, improve stakeholder engagement and collaboration, and foster a positive public perception and support for animal welfare initiatives. The strategy also focuses on promoting the achievements and impact of the Platform, ensuring that its contributions are recognised and valued by all relevant audiences.

To support this, the report includes a set of actionable recommendations and indicators designed to facilitate the implementation and ongoing evaluation of the strategy, as well as a tentative implementation calendar or framework.

This document uses specific terminology for groups engaged with the Platform. "Stakeholders" includes NGOs, professional organisations, experts, and all collaborating entities. "Members" refers to member countries and their representatives, such as Delegates, Focal Points—who support delegates on specific topics—and contact points. "Focal Points," recognised within WOAH, have roles focused on areas like Animal Welfare or Aquatic Animals across all countries. "Contact Points," a less formal category, were created for Long-Distance Transportation, with each country appointing an individual for this role. While each country also has a Focal Point for Communication, their role here is limited to receiving Platform communications. "Partners" collectively refers to all these categories, representing the full audience of the Platform's communications, occasionally referred to as lower case "stakeholders", for instance in the widely used term "stakeholder engagement", or "interlocutors."

## Executive summary

The Platform's communication objectives, from its inception in 2013, with its first action plan (2014-2016), second action plan (2017-2019), third action plan (2021-2023), and the current, fourth action plan (2024-2026), are centred around raising awareness, disseminating information, and fostering collaboration among the stakeholders involved in animal welfare. The focus of the Platform's communication efforts has been on providing timely and relevant updates through various channels, such as a dedicated website (first as a stand-alone website, then integrated into the WOAH Europe website), newsletters, and social media, while ensuring alignment with WOAH's broader communication strategies and branding guidelines.

Overall, stakeholders are positive in their perception of the impact of the Platform's communication output. The Platform is largely successful in drawing from a broad range of channels, tools, and methods to fit the various needs of its stakeholders, but more can be done.

**Four key recommendations:**

1. The Platform would benefit from **increased autonomy** in the execution of its communication activities.

2. A key component of this increased discretion would consist of a **dedicated social media** presence for the Platform.

3. In order for the Platform to adequately communicate its mission and activities, **additional resources** are required; in a first phase a dedicated communication personnel for a limited period (1 to 3 years) to implement the new communication strategy, in a second phase ad hoc freelance support according to need.

4. **Training of in-house staff** on communication-related skills is needed to complement the above efforts.

**Communication management**

The Platform currently lacks the specialised communication skills and resources needed to fully realise its communication mandate. In line with recommendations made in the June 2019 evaluation report, which underscored the need for an increase in the communication frequency of the Platform, **additional resources** are called for.

This can be a part-time communication officer or freelance support. Ideally, in an initial phase in-house communication personnel would be retained for a limited period, at least one year but preferably three, in order to implement the communication strategy that is the subject of this study. Once all the changes, systems, and procedures are in place, freelance support can be called in when needed.

Overall, the Platform would benefit from **increased autonomy** from headquarter office (HQ) in the implementation of its communication activities. This would allow the Platform to develop and implement communication policies tailored to its specific needs, particularly its subject matter, which differs substantially from that of WOAH. More leeway would also enhance the Platform's agility and responsiveness to events and unforeseen circumstances. For instance, establishing dedicated social media channels would particularly beneficial to ensuring that the Platform's messages are not lost among the broader WOAH communications, thereby improving outreach, stakeholder engagement, and the overall impact of its mission.

To enable this, an increase in the communication budget would be desirable, with further investment in both human and financial resources crucial to enhancing the quality and reach of the Platform's communications, for instance to:

- **Provide more frequent updates**, particularly on social media, to complement the existing newsletters and webpage. This will increase a sense of transparency by consistently informing stakeholders about Platform activities, achievements, and ongoing initiatives. Regular posts on social media, particularly using visual assets like photos, video, and infographics will boost the Platform's visibility, attract new stakeholders, and ensure a steady flow of timely information. This approach will reinforce trust and engagement among stakeholders.

- **Maintain quality and consistency**: As a corollary to the above, it is key to ensure the quality and consistency of communication materials by formalising collaboration between Brussels office staff and communication experts, particularly those with a background in journalism.

**Content strategy**

The Platform has effectively aimed to enhance stakeholder engagement, promote transparency, and increase visibility. However, while these objectives have been pursued through various channels such as newsletters and workshops, there is room for improvement in making information more accessible and engaging, delivering more concise and user-friendly content.

The content currently disseminated is informative but often top-down (though efforts have been expended to elicit input from Partners), lacking in storytelling and testimonials that could better illustrate the Platform's impact.

**Address skill gaps through training**:

Enhance the team's communication capabilities by providing targeted training in key areas such as graphic design, photography, storytelling, and social media management. Quick and effective courses are available in the Brussels area to help multi-disciplinary teams build a basic skill set that can be used daily and that complement specialised communication personnel, be they in-house or retained on an ad-hoc basis.

There is also a need for more varied and multimedia-rich content, incorporating testimonials, infographics, and other multimedia to cater to different stakeholder preferences. In addition, the Platform could consider sharing content from other organisations to provide a more holistic view of animal welfare.

Additional improvements can be achieved through:

- **Sharing success stories and testimonials**: Actively collect and integrate stakeholder success stories and testimonials into communication materials to highlight the Platform's positive impact. Utilising past activities and successes can help future outreach efforts. Highlighting previous achievements reinforces the Platform's credibility and encourage broader engagement from diverse stakeholders.
- **Developing general awareness materials**: Create easy-to-understand guides, infographics, and videos focused on raising awareness about animal welfare issues. These materials should be adaptable for use by Platform stakeholders and their constituents.
- **Providing adaptable templates**: Design templates for brochures, posters, and flyers that can be easily customised for different languages and contexts. These materials should educate specific groups like veterinarians, farmers, and transport workers on best practices in animal welfare

- **Comprehensive resource database**: Contingent on additional resources for communication, a number of interlocutors advocated for the development of a database with guidelines, best practices, and technical information on animal welfare, ensuring it is regularly updated and reliable. Overall, complementary to the informal exchanges taking place during the many activities of the Platform, facilitating a more structured exchange of high-level technical information, knowledge, and experiences in-country, among Focal Points would ensure that expertise is consistently shared and utilised, enhancing the Platform's overall effectiveness.

- **Onboarding**: The creation of an "information welcome package" has been proposed for new national Focal Points to ensure efficient onboarding and knowledge continuity. This measure is already being implemented right now, and will include essential documents, guidelines, and other resources to quickly bring new Focal Points up to speed.

- **Clarifying the Platform's 'unique selling proposition'**:

Borrowing an economic term, some interlocutors expressed the need for the Platform to articulate its unique value compared to other regional animal welfare-related efforts and institutions, especially in areas like disaster management and antibiotic resistance. This would highlight the complementarity of the Platform's mission with existing regional initiatives; in other words, answering the question: What does the Platform do that others don't, and vice versa?

> **Brand consistency and brand differentiation**
>
> Consider adhering to a more systematic and distinct use of the 'Animal Welfare Platform' header or hashtag in all relevant social media posts and communications. This will improve the visibility and recognisability of the Platform and its activities, and make it easier for stakeholders to find and engage with Platform-specific content.
>
> Investigate ways to subtly differentiate the Platform's branding from the broader WOAH brand to ensure that stakeholders and prospective stakeholders can easily identify and follow Platform activities. This could involve subtle tweaks that distinguish the Platform's content while maintaining overall alignment with WOAH's brand guidelines.

- **Tailor communication to different stakeholders**: Recognise and address the distinct communication needs of different stakeholder groups, such as NGOs, private veterinarian associations, and transportation company federations, to ensure effective collaboration and information dissemination. This has already been done for some campaigns, but generalising the practice requires a substantial time investment, is also contingent on the Platform's securing additional resources.

**Communication channels**

**Website**

The Platform's webpage serves as a central hub, but faces issues with user navigation, searchability, and content accessibility. While it is informative, the website could benefit from adding interactive features, improving navigation, and better integration with social media.

Though this is likely contingent on WOAH's overall website structure and not subject to easy tweaks, the website's menu system and structure could be improved for easier navigation. For instance, a stepwise information cascade with simple summaries leading to more detailed content, or the integration of a robust search function would allow users to find resources by theme or keyword.

In addition, a clearer demarcation between the Platform-related section and broader WOAH content would improve navigation, for instance, by adjusting the layout and positioning of project menus and navigation buttons. Pending a structural overhaul of the overarching WOAH website, the following tweaks could improve the overall user experience:

- **Remove unnecessary or outdated elements**: Eliminate distracting features such as the yellow dot following the cursor and redundant titles like 'OTHER WEBSITES' in the footer. If possible, integrate this navigation item into a centralised dropdown menu at the top of the page. Keep the website up to date by regularly removing outdated information, for instance, the link to the previous version of the Platform website, while ensuring that old materials are integrated into the current Platform website.

- **Enriched content**: Highlight key achievements of each event more effectively, using brief summaries and graphic elements such as videos, infographics, visual assets, and interactive reports to make the website more engaging and accessible.

- **Integrate a calendar for upcoming events**: Introduce an 'Upcoming Events/Activities' section to provide advance notifications and announcements of events, improving transparency and attracting a broader range of stakeholders.

- **Streamline subscription functionality**: Simplify the newsletter subscription process to ensure users are directly linked to Platform-specific newsletters, avoiding confusion with broader WOAH publications.

- **Enhance social media integration**: Add social media sign-up functions to the website, enabling users to easily subscribe to updates shared on these channels. This will improve reach and increase stakeholder interaction.

> **Newsletters**
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> The current frequency of four quarterly newsletters per year is sufficient for providing comprehensive updates of Platform activities, if complemented by more regular social media snippets.
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> The quality of the content however, could be improved, for instance by employing native-English proof-readers, in-house or otherwise, avoiding typographical errors and awkward phrasing.
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> Though interlocutors indicate that in addition to the Platform's own distribution efforts, the newsletter is shared extensively, to further broaden its reach, to an even wider group of relevant professionals, including private veterinary associations and others, social media can be used.

**Social Media**

Leverage digital tools such as social media, to provide more frequent updates, will create a more dynamic and interactive dialogue, enhancing stakeholder commitment and participation. Ideally, this entails developing a dedicated social media presence for the Platform. This will enhance reach, engagement, and visibility among both current Partners and other relevant stakeholders that are of yet uninvolved in the Platform. This course of action is of course contingent on the provision of additional resources, initially to set up one or, ideally, two complementary social media channels, and to gradually build up a following.

Additional recommendations for a dedicated Platform social media presence:

- **Leverage multimedia content**: Use images, videos, and infographics to make complex information more accessible and engaging, catering to different audience preferences across various social media platforms.

- **Foster two-way communication**: Utilise social media's capacity for interactive dialogue to build a stronger sense of community among Partners, facilitate discussions on animal welfare issues, and increase stakeholder engagement.

- **Enhance visibility and awareness**: Use targeted hashtags and regular posts to increase the Platform's visibility, draw in new stakeholders, and provide timely updates, complementing existing newsletters. This is in any case recommended for Platform-related social media done on the WOAH social media accounts, but also in case a stand-alone Platform social media account is created.

- **Synergies with WOAH and other organisations**: Amplify content produced by WOAH that is relevant to those engaged in the animal welfare topic, as well as relevant content produced by other animal welfare organisations. This will enhance the comprehensiveness of the offered information, situating the Platform within the broader animal welfare landscape.

- **Adopt a dual-platform strategy**: For a potential stand-alone social media presence for the Platform, a minimum of two complementary social media networks are advised. For instance, LinkedIn is well suited for professional networking, while Instagram lends itself more to visual storytelling to maximise the Platform's reach and impact, ensuring both consistency in communication and broader audience engagement.

The 23rd Steering Group meeting of the Platform, held in October 2024, provided an opportunity to present the report. Considering the exchanges during the meeting, it became clear that as part of a larger Organisation, the Platform will continue to use the existing communication channels. It is therefore strongly recommended that a future communication strategy for the Platform includes active involvement of Members, particularly Focal Points for Animal Welfare and for Communication, in outreach efforts. This involvement will be key to enhancing the Platform's reach and improving its external communication. Based on the consultancy findings, the Platform Secretariat will collaborate with other stakeholders to develop a robust communication strategy for the Platform.