

6th Regional Workshop on Dog Population Management for Balkans countries (DPMB6)

5-7 November 2024, Sutomore, Montenegro

Meeting Report

Summary

The sixth WOAHA Regional Workshop on Dog Population Management (SDB6) was organised in the framework of the Dog Population Management (DPM) roadmap for the Balkan countries 5-7 November 2024 in Sutomore, Montenegro.

A total of 32 participants attended the workshop, including representatives of nine roadmap members: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. WOAHA Members were represented by officials working at the central level on dog population management or appointed by other Competent Authorities at the regional and local levels.

The primary objective of the workshop was to support WOAHA Members in achieving the agreed-upon vision of full implementation of WOAHA Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 7.7 on dog population management by 2026. The WOAHA members presented an update on their dog population management situation and the status of implementation of their national road supported by the results of the second self-assessment round conducted using the Self-Assessment and Monitoring for Dog Population Management (SAM4DPM) tool.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with WOAHA members' representatives to discuss self-assessment results and the challenges faced by implementing their national roadmaps. Interviews focused on identifying and discussing key achievements and challenges, resulting in selecting actionable short-term priorities aimed at the full implementation of Chapter 7.7.

The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to expand their knowledge with experts' technical presentations following discussion on:

- foundations of dog population management programs
- humane methods for catching and handling feral and un-owned free-roaming dogs
- tools and methodologies for the assessment of free-roaming dogs' behaviour
- NGOs' role in guiding and supporting government strategies for DPM
- One Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks
- update on the development of the EU policies for the protection of companion animals

In addition, a field visit to the municipal shelter in Sutomore allowed participants to discuss the practical implementation of the local dog population management, with a focus on shelter management and procedures.

The event fostered a dynamic and fruitful exchange among countries, highlighting shared challenges and practical solutions in their efforts to comply with WOAHA Chapter 7.7 by 2026.

The event was organised with financial support by the European Commission and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and was kindly hosted by Montenegro.

1. Introduction

The sixth WOA Regional Workshop on Dog Population Management (DPMB6) was organized in the frame of the dog population management (DPM) roadmap for the Balkan countries on 5 – 7 November 2024 in Sutomore, Montenegro. The detailed agenda of the meeting is available in Annex I.

The dog population management roadmap for the Balkan countries was initiated during the first WOA Regional Workshop on stray dog population management for Balkan countries held in Bucharest, Romania, in 2014. During this first workshop, participants agreed on a common sub-regional Vision to fully comply with Chapter 7.7 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code on dog population management by 2025. The road map activities are conducted with a series of workshops held every two years, accompanied by countries' self-assessment rounds. During the previous meeting held in June 2023, participants agreed that the Vision remains achievable with a proposal to extend this deadline to 2026 to allow a complete pathway with two additional workshops scheduled for 2024 and 2026. More information about previous and future activities of the WOA Roadmap for Balkan countries is available at the WOA Platform website.

A total of 32 participants attended the DPMB6 workshop, including representatives of nine roadmap members: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. WOA Members were represented by officials working at the central level on dog population management or appointed by other Competent Authorities at the regional and local levels. Additionally, recognizing the challenges posed by the growing free-roaming dog population in other WOA regions, representatives from Qatar were invited as observers to facilitate the exchange of experiences and expertise across regions. The full list of participants is available in Annex II.

The primary objective of the workshop was to support WOA Members in achieving the agreed-upon vision of full implementation of WOA Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 7.7 on dog population management by 2026. The specific objectives of the workshop covered :

- Understanding the level implementation of Chapter 7.7 on dog population management through presentation and the outcomes of the second round of assessment with SAM4DPM;
- Understanding and addressing specific challenges in the development and implementation of National Action plans and Dog Population Control Programs through one-to-one semi-structured interviews;
- Building awareness and strengthening the capability to address specific issues and topics (foundations on DPM Programs and humane methods for catching and handling dogs, NGOs' role in supporting government strategies for DPM, tools and methodologies for the assessment of temperament and behaviour, EU policies for the protection of companion animals and One Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks).

The event was organised with financial support by the European Commission and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and kindly hosted by Montenegro.

2. Session 1: Opening

The meeting was opened with a welcome message from WOA National Focal Point on Animal Welfare for Montenegro Dr Ivan Ivanovic, highlighting the relevance of addressing dog population management, especially free-roaming dog issues and sharing key achievements in Montenegro. Dr Paolo Dalla Villa (WOA Standards Department) also welcome participants, presenting the meeting agenda and objectives of the meeting and highlighting countries' commitments and efforts for achieving the agreed vision of full implementation of Chapter 7.7 on dog population management by 2026.

2.1. WOAH Platform on animal welfare for Europe - T. Grudnik (WOAH SRR Brussels) ([Link to view presentation](#))

The Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe is a regional mechanism aimed at improving animal welfare in all 53 countries of Europe and empowering Veterinary Services to take action on animal welfare in compliance with WOAH standards. Dog population management has remained one of the priority topics since 2014. The activities of the Platform focus on two regional roadmaps for dog population management. Through these roadmap frameworks, eleven Balkan and eight Caucasus and Central Asian countries continuously work toward a shared vision: to achieve full implementation of the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code (TAHC) Chapter 7.7 on dog population management. The launch of the new self-assessment and monitoring tool for dog population management (SAM4DPM) helps members evaluate their situation and identify what needs to be reinforced to improve their level of compliance with WOAH standards. The Platform continues to empower Veterinary Services to take action on animal welfare in alignment with the recently adopted 4th Action Plan for 2024-2026.

2.2. Members' needs and expected targeted support between workshops - P. Dalla Villa (WOAH Standards Department) ([Link to view presentation](#))

The presentation summarised the progress of the roadmap with a focus on the outcomes of the last meeting held in June 2023. The main points highlighted cover the acknowledgement of the importance of maintaining and enhancing interactions between Platform members and stakeholders, the use of SAM4DPM for self-assessment to track the progress and the necessity for training and capacity building for Veterinary Services involved in National Action Plans and DPM programs. Furthermore, several persistent identified challenges include the lack of a comprehensive National Action Plan, insufficient investment in public awareness and educational initiatives, poor communication and coordination between national and local authorities, limited collaboration with NGOs, resource shortages, and inadequate training opportunities for operators engaged in DPM activities. The identified need for external aid covers several areas, including financial support, the development of national strategies, technical expertise, methodologies for free-roaming dog estimation, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programs, as well as public awareness campaigns and education on responsible dog ownership. Overall, the presentation underscored the need for improved planning, investment, collaboration, and training to enhance dog population management and responsible ownership in the Balkan countries.

2.3. Dog population management programs - John Peaveler (Humane Innovations) ([Link to presentation](#))

The presentation highlighted critical lessons for effective dog population management (DPM) programs, emphasizing that success requires a continuous and holistic approach that extends beyond merely sheltering animals. Drawing from extensive experience, the speaker stressed the importance of balancing humane practices, resource management, and community engagement. Key elements of successful DPM include:

- Engaging communities by building relationships with community leaders and identifying local stakeholders,
- Encouraging active participation from community members,
- Conducting thorough baseline assessments to allocate resources effectively,
- Maintaining a balance between safety, efficacy, and humane practices.

Additionally, collaborating with experts to minimize animal stress during the DPM process and addressing shelter health risks are critical factors. Effective resource management, such as aligning veterinary capacity with the number of captures, is essential for optimizing operations and securing sustainable funding, and no single organization can tackle DPM challenges alone. Collaboration and communication among stakeholders are essential. By prioritizing humane, effective, and resource-balanced strategies, DPM programs can achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes.

In addition, the presentation showcased the application of information technologies for animal disaster response with examples of reunification and data management tools.

3. Session 2: Overall situation and tailor-made support

The session was dedicated to building an understanding level implementation of WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 7.7 on dog population management, progress made by countries since the last meeting and discussion on the next actions towards achieving the agreed vision. The session was composed of WOAH Members' countries presentations followed by a series of one-to-one, semi-structured, tailored interviews.

3.1. Results of the 2nd SAM4DPM self-assessment round and remaining gaps to achieve the Vision

The countries' representatives provided an update on their progress towards the full implementation of the WOAH standards based on the result of the 2nd self-assessment round using SAM4DPM conducted before the meeting:

- **Albania** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** did not attend the meeting; apologies received, the presentation was shared after the meeting ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Bulgaria** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Croatia** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Greece** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Kosovo*** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Montenegro** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **North Macedonia** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Romania** ([Link to presentation](#))
- **Serbia** ([Link to presentation](#))

3.2. Individual countries interviews ([Link to presentation](#))

The interview session was held, with a series of one-to-one, semi-structured tailored interviews with countries' representatives and two panels of interviewers (WOAH staff and DMP experts). The main objectives of the session were:

- to discuss key achievements and weaknesses the country has recognised according to the SAM4DMP questionnaire.
- identify actionable points for improvement by selecting and focusing on two or three key areas or points that can be realistically targeted based on available resources, including personnel, time, and potential/existing funding.

The initial summary of the interview results was presented during the last day of the meeting by P. Dalla Villa, with an overview of key achievements, identified weakness points and proposed actions for improvements.

Key achievements cover significant enhancements in the capacity and visibility of Veterinary Services, alongside a solid understanding of dog population management principles. Significant progress was made in developing and upgrading legislative frameworks in alignment with Chapter 7.7, especially regarding identification, registration, defining key roles and development of national strategies. Furthermore, there has been a progressive increase in public awareness regarding responsible dog ownership and the community's role in addressing the issue of free-roaming dog populations. The main identified remaining challenges and areas for improvement include a lack of comprehensive legislation, low public awareness, shortage of skilled operators and veterinary inspectors, limited financial resources, weak multi-sectoral cooperation, and an ineffective sanctions system. Many municipalities exhibit insufficient commitment to DPM programs, with unclear responsibilities and scarce collaboration with central authorities and NGOs. Issues like uncontrolled breeding and trade, a lack of economic incentives for owners, and lengthy regulatory amendment processes hinder progress, all exacerbated by inadequate political support.

Finally, through interviews, Members proposed actionable points for improvement by selecting and focusing on two or three key areas that can be realistically targeted based on their available resources (personnel, time, and potential/existing funding). Those proposed points include:

- educational programs in schools in collaboration with the Ministry of Education
- integrating DPM topics in primary school curricula through "train-the-teacher" programs
- awareness campaigns focused on dog breeding and reproduction control.
- training initiatives for officials from Competent Authorities, including enforcement agents and police
- developing national strategies in consultation with local authorities (including comprehensive M&E programs)
- promote and train Local Authorities on the use of the SAM4DPM tool
- establishing surveillance programs for dog-mediated zoonotic diseases (rabies, leishmaniosis).

4. Session 3: Horizontal technical topics

4.1. *Tools and methodologies for the assessment of free-roaming dogs' temperament Jenna Kiddie (Dogs Trust, UK) ([Link to presentation](#))*

The lecture focused on tools and methodologies for assessing the temperament of dogs, beginning with an exploration of the factors that influence behaviour in individual dogs. It was noted that individual characteristics have a greater impact on behaviour than breed. Early life experiences, including prenatal stress and the critical socialization period (3 to 14 weeks), play a significant role in shaping behaviour. The importance of habituation to non-threatening, low-intensity, and predictable stimuli for behaviour development was also emphasized.

Building on this foundation, the discussion moved to agonistic behaviour, which includes avoidance, appeasement, and aggressive reactions to social conflict. It was explained how these behaviours could escalate to biting. Recognizing these them, along with other risk factors associated with dog bites, is essential for making decisions about the outcomes of individual dogs in a Dog Population Management program. Various methods for assessing the behaviour of these dogs were discussed, along with the presentation of a new risk assessment tool for evaluating agonistic behaviour.

4.2. *Humane methods for catching and handling feral and un-owned free-roaming dogs - John Peaveler (Humane Innovations) ([Link to presentation](#))*

The lecture focused on minimally invasive and humane techniques for capturing and handling free-roaming dogs, with an emphasis on reducing stress for the animals and ensuring handler safety. The importance of using biting gloves was highlighted to protect handlers from bites, boost their confidence, and improve handling performance.

The methods presented covered minimally invasive capture techniques, including leash capture, Y-pole capture, and snappy snares, as well as more invasive methods, such as net capture, live traps, large cages, and chemical capture, outlining the main uses, advantages, and disadvantages of each approach.

Participants were introduced to strategic capture strategies and area assessments, emphasizing key points for successful captures, such as the necessity of conducting population-level surveys to devise effective capture methods. Overall, the lecture underscored that humane and minimally invasive methods, combined with careful planning and behaviour-informed strategies, are essential for effective and ethical dog population management.

4.3. *NGOs' role in guiding and supporting government strategies for DPM and free-roaming dog control - Alex Hammond (RSPCA) ([Link to presentation](#))*

The speaker presented the International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAM Coalition), outlining its role, purpose, and contributions to managing dog populations. The presentation

emphasized the transition from outdated free-roaming dogs control methods, which often relied on culling and sheltering, to a more sustainable approach that focuses on understanding dog population dynamics and managing future populations. The presentation highlighted the involvement of NGOs in supporting veterinary services. Examples of this support include e-learning platforms that offer courses for policymakers and practitioners on implementing dog population management (DPM). The activities of the Regional Animal Welfare Centre (RAWC) and support provided by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) established DPM exerts within the region. Additionally, the Battersea Academy provides online resources for shelter management, including funding opportunities for training and exchange programs across the globe. The activities of other organizations, such as Four Paws and Dogs Trust, were also showcased, highlighting their e-learning platforms and contributions to DPM efforts.

4.4. EU policies for the protection of companion animals - Ana Maria Popa (EU Commission, DG SANTE,-Animal Welfare Unit) ([Link to presentation](#))

The European Parliament and Council are currently discussing the EU's proposed regulation on companion animal welfare. This proposal addresses the lack of comprehensive EU and national welfare standards for pets, public demand for improved protection, and challenges related to traceability, including illegal trade. The regulation aims to improve the welfare of dogs and cats by setting standards for breeders, pet shops, and shelters, mandating proper care, regular veterinary visits with documented records, and the provision of information on responsible ownership. It also addresses specific needs regarding feeding, housing, health, and behaviour and prohibits painful practices, including cosmetic mutilation. Furthermore, it outlines breeding standards and approval procedures and ensures that companion animals entering the EU from third countries meet equivalent welfare standards.

4.5. One - Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks - Florence Cliquet (ANSES, France) ([Link to presentation](#))

The presentation introduced the One Health approach as an integrated framework that links human, animal, and ecosystem health, with pets positioned at the centre as a potential bridge connecting wildlife, livestock, and people. Dogs, in particular, are used as sentinels for diseases, such as in tick surveys and serosurveys to monitor emerging Lyme disease. The presentation also covered the quadripartite collaboration for One Health and the global strategy to combat rabies, including the "Zero by 30" plan, which focuses on three main objectives: efficient control through vaccination, the development of effective policies, and the establishment of sustainable programs. Dr Cliquet also provided an overview of the current global epidemiological situation on rabies, including the Balkan and other regions, highlighting progress and ongoing challenges. She emphasized the intersection between DPM and rabies control, highlighting the importance of vaccination and surveillance activities in both areas.

5. Session 4: Field visit

The field visit to the municipal shelter in Sutomore allowed participants to discuss the practical implementation of the local dog population management program, with a focus on communication with the community, shelter management and shelter procedures.

Session 5: Platform transregional influence and roadmap next steps.

5.1. The WOAHA Collaborating Center's on animal welfare support to the science-based decision-making process; the African experience - Luigi Iannetti (IZS/, Teramo) ([Link to presentation](#))

The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of various initiatives and activities related to dog population management and animal welfare organised by the WOAHA Collaborating Centre. The particular focus of the presentation was on the twinning project between WOAHA Collaborating Centre

on animal welfare with the University of Pretoria in the Republic of South Africa and the National School of Veterinary Medicine of Sidi Thabet in Tunisia. The activities cover training sessions to enhance the knowledge and skills of personnel from universities, ministries, inspection services, and NGOs, field visits, support to develop new legislative frameworks, support for building systems for dog identification and registration, and activities aiming at community engagement. Future plans include the establishment of a new WOAAH Collaborating Centre for Animal Welfare at the University of Pretoria. The provided examples highlight the importance of the multifaceted approach to dog population management and animal welfare, involving training, legislation, community engagement, and international collaboration to achieve sustainable and effective outcomes.

5.2. Community-based approach to DPM in Tunisia – Ouajdi Souilem (ENMV, Tunis) ([Link to presentation](#))

The presentation covered an overview of the dog population management situation in Tunisia and various initiatives and collaborations aimed at managing the free-roaming dog population with a focus on animal welfare, rabies prevention and community engagement.

The growing number of free-roaming dogs in the country poses multiple serious health and socioeconomic challenges. The public health implications are significant, as evidenced by a rise in human rabies cases reported alongside a concerning number of rabies cases in animals. The current management strategies rely on dog culling as a measure to control rabies, which may result in poor animal welfare without solving the underlying issues. There are a series of initiatives in Tunisia working on addressing free-roaming dog management, covering establishing sterilization and vaccination centres, mobilization of civil society actors, non-governmental organizations, animal welfare associations, coordination with veterinary services and public-private partnerships (municipality and private veterinarian). In addition, civil society associations and animal protection NGOs are actively involved in rescuing and caring for free-roaming dogs, advocating for animal rights, and raising public awareness about animal welfare issues. These initiatives collectively aim to enhance animal welfare and public health through humane and effective dog population management.

The presentation emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive dog population management strategy in Tunisia that aligns with global standards and addresses both public health and animal welfare concerns.

1.1. Closing remarks – Next steps

The workshop fostered a dynamic exchange of knowledge and best practices among participants. The significant progress toward implementing WOAAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code Chapter 7.7 was highlighted, with countries showcasing achievements and identifying areas requiring further attention. The workshop facilitated collaborative problem-solving, emphasizing the importance of multi-sectoral partnerships and sustainable funding mechanisms to achieve the shared vision of effective and humane dog population management by 2026. The participants confirmed their commitment to continue collaboration and implementation of identified strategies, ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of these efforts.

The next meeting for the roadmap is planned for 2026. The Platform will continue to support and follow up on action points identified by WOAAH members.¹

List of annexes

Annex I – Agenda

Annex II – List of participants

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

Annex I

Sixth regional workshop on Dog Population Management for Balkans countries (DPMB6)

5-7 November 2024 - Montenegro

Programme

DAY 1: 5th November 2024

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|---|---|---|
| 09:00 – 09:15 | Registration and welcoming of participants | |
| Session 1: Opening | | |
| 09:15 – 09:30 | Welcome address and agenda overview - | WOAH NFP animal welfare for Montenegro WOAH |
| 09:30 - 09: 45 | The WOAHP Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe | T. Grudnik (WOAH) |
| 09:45 - 10:00 | Specific Country needs and expected targeted support in between workshops | P. Dalla Villa (WOAH) |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Plenary lecture - Dog population management programs | John Peaveler |
| 10:45 – 11:00 | Coffee break | |
| Session 2: Overall situation and tailor made support | | |
| 11:00 — 12:00 | ROUND 1 - Results of the 2 nd SAM4DPM self-assessment round and remaining gaps to achieve “the Vision” (12/15 mins x 4 Countries) | 4 Country representatives Moderator (WOAH) |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Lunch | |
| 13:00 — 14:00 | ROUND 2 - Results of the 2 nd SAM4DPM self-assessment round and remaining gaps to achieve “the Vision” (12/15 mins x 4 Countries) | 4 Country representatives Moderator (WOAH) |
| 14.00 — 16.00 | One-to-One, semi-structured tailored interviews with the Balkan countries' representatives (40 mins x 6 Countries) + in parallel exercise for other the countries | One-to-One, semi-structured tailored interviews with countries' representatives (40 mins x 6 Countries) made by two panels of interviewers composed by WOAHP Staff +/DPM Experts |
| 16:00 – 16:15 | Coffee break | |
| 16:15 - 18:15 | One-to-One, semi-structured interviews with the Balkan countries' representatives (40 mins x 6 Countries) + in parallel exercise for other the countries | One-to-One, semi-structured tailored interviews with the Balkan countries' representatives (40 mins x 6 Countries) made by two panels of interviewers composed of WOAHP Staff and DPM Experts |
| 19:00 | Dinner | |

DAY 2: 6th November, 2024

Session 3: Horizontal topics

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|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 09:15 — 10:00 | Plenary lecture – Tools and methodologies for the assessment of free-roaming dogs' temperament | Jenna Kiddie (Dogs Trust, UK) |
| 10.00 — 10.45 | Humane methods for catching and handling feral and un-owned free-roaming dogs | John Peaveler (Humane Innovations) |
| 10:45 – 11:00 | Coffee break | |
| 11:00– 11:30 | The NGOs' role in guiding and supporting government strategies for DPM and free-roaming dog's control | Alex Hammond (RSPCA) |
| 11:30 - 12:00 | EU policies for the protection of companion animals | Ana Maria Popa (EU Commission) |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | Lunch | |

Session 4. On-field activities

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|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| 13:00 – 18:00 | Visit to the shelter/adoption center |
| 19:00 | Dinner |

DAY 3: 7th November 2024

Session 5: The Platform transregional influence

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|---------------|---|---|
| 09:30 - 10.15 | Plenary lecture: <i>“One - Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks.”</i> | F. Cliquet (ANSES, France) |
| 10:15- 10:45 | The WOAAH CC on AW support to the science-based decision-making process; the African experience | Dr. I. Iannetti (IZS/WOAH CC on AW, Teramo) - remote |
| 10:45 - 11:00 | Community-based approach to DPM in Tunisia | Prof. Ouajdi Souilem (ENMV, Tunis) remote |
| 11:00 - 11:15 | Coffee break | |
| 11:15 - 11:45 | Preliminary outcomes of the One-to-One semi-structured tailored interviews with the Balkan countries' representatives | P. Dalla Villa (WOAH) |
| 12:00 – 12:15 | Closing remarks – Next steps | WOAH |
| 12:30 | Lunch and departures | |