



Online Regional Meeting on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction for Europe

26 September 2024

DRAFT MEETING REPORT

Summary

Following the conclusion of the multiannual pilot program aimed at assisting a group of Balkan Countries in building a culture of natural disaster preparedness, and based on the results of the regional needs assessment on Veterinary Services' level of readiness to address animal welfare emergencies in Europe, a WOAHP meeting on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction was held online on 26 September 2024.

The event targeted all the 53 WOAHP European Members and aimed at informing participants about the WOAHP current engagement in the development of e-learning modules, on the ongoing works for the implementation of an institutional Incident Management System at global level, and to familiarise them with the WOAHP Network on Veterinary Emergencies (EmVetNet) functions, including past activities and future initiatives.

In addition, meeting provide an opportunity for selected WOAHP members to share their experiences with different disasters in their countries, contributing actively to the knowledge and experience sharing, especially regarding coordination between their Veterinary Services and the national disaster management system.

A total of 72 participants attended, representing 30 WOAHP Members.

The event was very well taken by the attendants. It will allow to reinforce the existing structural elements of emergency preparedness and contribute to the extension of the Platform's geographic scope, in the light of the knowledge, skills and experiences gained at regional level. It will also contribute to addressing WOAHP Members' requests for assistance at regional level, building on the need for increasing their Veterinary Services capability to address animal welfare issues during natural disasters in a One-Health perspective, through the activation of sustainable collaboration mechanisms.

Key objectives

The meeting should be considered as milestone for a series of key opportunities for the 53 WOAHP European Members to come together and discuss regional priorities and needs, and to share experiences and good practices on how to address the impacts of natural disasters on animal welfare, including emergency response, recovery assistance, and resilience-building in the veterinary sector.

Key objectives:

- To inform the participants about the WOAHP HQ current engagement in DMRR at the regional level (presentation of the e-module and of the IMS);
- To present the objectives of the WOAHP Network on Veterinary Emergencies (EmVetNet) multiannual years action plan and inform the participants on the past and future initiatives;
- To present the WOAHP Platform regional activities and discuss the approach adopted following WOAHP Members' request for assistance to veterinary emergencies at the regional level.

Content

The workshop covered various aspects of the WOAAH engagement in DMRRs, including:

- The development of an Incident Management System (IMS) and the definition of roles and responsibilities of the WOAAH staff - and stakeholders - in support of the WOAAH European Members impacted by natural disasters;
- The upcoming WOAAH Competency Package on Emergency and Disaster Management (EDM), aiming at straightening the Veterinary and Aquatic Animal Health Services' organisational and individual competencies for the management of animal health and welfare consequences of catastrophic events;
- The EmVetNet role, plans, and level of capability to provide technical assistance to the WOAAH Members,
- Assessment of the participants' active engagement level with Wooclap's interactive questionnaire.

Participants

The workshop targeted all 53 WOAAH members in Europe, with 72 online participants from 30 countries. Speakers from WOAAH (HQ and RR Brussels), the Secretary of the WOAAH Network on Veterinary Emergencies (EmVetNet) and WOAAH members representatives (Greece, Iceland, North Macedonia and Spain), contributed to the work.

Acknowledgements

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Workshop programme

Sessions 1 - Opening remarks and introduction

The meeting was opened by the WOAAH SRR Representative in Brussels, Dr Estelle Hamelin, who welcomed the participants and recalled that veterinary emergencies and disaster management were identified as a new priority topic in 2017 for the 2nd Action Plan of the Platform. This initiative started with a pilot project in the Balkans, but with growing members' interest in this topic, the latter was kept in the 4th Action Plan and broadened to the participation of the whole region.

The Platform organised a workshop at the beginning of this year that allowed the participants to share their knowledge and learn from the experiences of others. This meeting showed that those exchanges of experience are crucial, so we can reiterate our encouragement to take profit out of today's event and participate in our new initiatives to steadily progress in the same direction.

The Platform secretariat will continue to disseminate the available resources even more broadly through quarterly updates, newsletters, articles, and social media, responding to the WOAAH members' expectations within the limits of its capacities. This event also offered the opportunity to catch up on the reiterated proposal to establish a network of contact points on veterinary emergencies, mirroring the successful model already developed for the long transportation of animals, where participants will be free to interact with one another efficiently and timely.

Dr. Paolo Dalla Villa (WOAH SRR in Brussels) introduced the event and reminded WOAAH's long standing involvement with guiding Veterinary Services to get ready for a range of hazards, and increasingly invest in stakeholders' engagement as a way of increasing preparedness. In this vein, there have been several initiatives in recent years, aiming at involving more countries based on different experiences and levels of development and implementation of DMRR operational frameworks.

The European WOAAH Members should be actively engaged in pursuing the objectives of the new Action Plan for 2024-2026, to boost the level of regional collaboration by favouring communication and cooperation between authorities, actors, and stakeholders. At the same time, the Platform should keep the broad scope (livestock, companion animals and wildlife), organize on-field simulation exercises, and offer additional opportunities to share experiences from past events.

Sessions 2 - Presentation of regional activities and experiences

The session was opened by Dr. P. Dalla Villa, who briefly introduced the survey aiming at providing an overview of the [WOAH/LMU survey on Veterinary Services' preparedness to animal welfare emergencies during natural disasters and other non-epidemic events](#) in Europe. Specific objectives of the survey were to assess and quantify the level of the European WOA Members' capacity to respond to natural disasters in general with a focus on animal welfare issues, to determine the types of disasters encountered and the level of education, training, and exercising initiatives taken or available at regional level. The questionnaire also allowed to identify gaps in capacity and specific needs of participating countries. Forty-nine countries responded to the survey for a 92% completion rate. Floods, earthquakes, and fires were the three most common disasters. 52% indicated they incorporated animal welfare into their disaster planning. 31% indicated they had no or limited legal authority to manage animal emergencies in natural disasters. The species covered in the national response plan ranged from laboratory animals at 17% to livestock at 48%. 82% had no or limited standard operating procedures and 73% had no training to respond to animal welfare in disasters. Budgets, trained personnel, equipment/supplies, and legal authority were the most frequently identified gaps. The survey results have been published in Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness Journal.

Therefore, the representatives of Spain, Iceland, Greece, and North Macedonia shared their experiences and demonstrate the level of integration of Veterinary Services into their national Disaster Management and Risk Reduction systems.

Dr. Maria Teresa Villalba started by reporting on activities of the Animal Welfare Unit of the **Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food**, that has been working on four issues to prepare for dealing with animal management in the event of natural disasters. In parallel, Autonomous Communities and the Spanish Veterinary Colleges have developed activities in different areas. At the legislative level, the national legislation on the Basic Civil Protection Standards has been amended to include animals and their protection as a basic element in the planning of civil protection plans. Some Autonomous Communities had previously included this element. The Community of the Canary Islands has worked intensively on this issue, having already a specific Protocol on action measures on animals in its Territorial Plan for Civil Protection Emergencies. For floods, which are the most frequent natural disasters in Spain, self-assessment questionnaires on the degree of resilience of animal farms are already available. In this way, the owner of the farm can identify the aspects on which he has to work to improve the resilience of his farm. The Veterinary Colleges are also making progress in this area. Once again, it has been the Canary Islands that has already signed an agreement with Civil Protection DG to integrate veterinary care for animals when an emergency protocol is activated. In addition, training has been provided to all the Heads of Veterinary colleges to promote agreements elsewhere. Finally, the publicly accessible National Civil Protection Risk Map will help farm veterinarians to include in farm animal welfare plans the assessment of existing risks and thus be prepared for possible natural disasters that may affect them.

Dr. Katerina Marinou (Head of the Directorate of animal welfare, Veterinary Medicines and Veterinary Applications of the **Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food**) continued by focusing on the animal welfare disaster management plan developed by the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food, according to the guidance offered by the WOA during the last years. This plan was published in June 2024 and included information and instructions to organize the regional Veterinary Services' actions in case of a natural disaster. This plan was first implemented in August 2024 especially during a mega fire in Attica Region and northern suburbs of Athens. This incident was an extra challenge since there was an ongoing epidemic of *peste des petits ruminants* in Greece, which included extra restrictions in movements and the provisions for animal depopulation during emergencies. The experience that Greece gained during the last 2 years, and especially this summer with the launch of the implementation of the disaster management program, is extremely valuable and will help improve it in the coming period. WOA members susceptible to natural disasters (hot and dry climate during summertime, flooding during winter) could benefit from WOA guidelines and can be helped assist so that WOA Platform on animal welfare can progress.

Dr Thora Jóhanna Jónasdóttir from the **Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority** took the floor with a thorough description of the level of coordination between Veterinary Services and the National disaster management system. Iceland, a North-Atlantic Island with few inhabitants and harsh nature, faces many challenges of natural disasters. Well known volcanic eruptions occur on average every four years. Recently, the frequency of these emergencies has increased, often affecting populated areas, putting the National Civil Protection under strain. From the perspective of the Veterinary Authority, this highlights significant challenges and opportunities for improvement in Iceland's national disaster management system. Iceland must face natural emergencies of various sorts; volcanic eruptions are typically accompanied by earthquake, ground rupture and risk of glacial floods. In the East, North and West inhabited areas face the threat of avalanches. Snowstorms can occur as early as August or September, when livestock are still in the mountains. Horses, which are kept outdoors year-round, and even indoor livestock may be at risk when winter blizzards strike, as electricity and water supplies may be damaged, and roads blocked. A major challenge in Iceland's disaster management system, is the lack of connection and coordination between the Veterinary Authority and Ministry of Agriculture and other governmental agencies taking part in the disaster management planning. Neither the Minister of Agriculture nor the Chief Veterinary Officer are part of the Civil Protection Council, of which most other ministers and leaders responsible for infrastructure, health and welfare are members. Moreover, in the current legislation defining the roles and tasks of the rescue and disaster management system, animals are classified as "valuables" and have no priority over other valuables. While animal owners are by law responsible for their animal's health and welfare, they are often unable, or not allowed to access their animals that are left behind in context with emergency evacuation, creating a risk for animal suffering during natural disasters. This situation underscores the need for better integration of animal welfare considerations into Iceland's national disaster preparedness and response plans.

Dr. Milenko Simovikj from the **Food and Veterinary Agency (FVA) of the Republic of North Macedonia** closed the session with an overview of the current efforts and challenges in enhancing wildlife health management and emergency response, through collaboration and systematic updates. The ongoing activities aim to improve disease surveillance, communication, and contingency planning. Cooperation with hunters and rangers is being strengthened for reporting dead wild animals and disease surveillance. This partnership will expand through training and awareness programs to better protect wildlife during emergencies. The National and Local Disease Control Centers (NCDC-NOCIS and LCDC-LOCIS) are undergoing updates, with Hydro-meteorological Service representatives involved in NCDC operations. Fire brigade contact lists are being provided to ease effective communication. Meetings are also planned to follow the re-establishment of the NCDC and LCDC, and to propose various communication channels for improved collaboration. More time will be needed to prepare organizational maps outlining responsibilities during emergencies. To this end, existing contingency plans are under revision to enhance their effectiveness, with proposals for improvement and the development of manuals and protocols. A comparative analysis has highlighted areas needing enhancement while ensuring that well-structured elements from earlier versions are not overlooked. Seven operational contingency plans for Category A diseases are currently being updated to reflect the latest findings. Fires are still a significant concern in the Republic of North Macedonia, contributing to air pollution and groundwater contamination, with 3,373 fires in 2024 causing damages exceeding €617,886, while in 2023, based on the calculations made, the damages amounted to €48,780 for firefighting. In 2023, two people lost their lives in the fires, while in 2024, one fatality was recorded. Crisis management center evacuated 3 farms. Three sheep /cattle barns were destroyed by fire. As for the next steps to be taken in this field, future amendments to contingency planning will improve the organization of Local and National Diseases Control Centers. The focus will remain on developing Category A disease plans, ensuring a comprehensive approach to wildlife health and emergency preparedness.

These contributions were followed by a **panel discussion supported by interactive polls** aiming at having feedback on the next events to be organized in the frame of the new action plan. Ninety two percent of the responders declared to be interested in having short online meetings on specific thematic like fires and floods. The majority declared to be in the position to share their own experiences, particularly on contingency planning, drafting the legislation, mental health of responders, pasture management and SOPs development. Seventy- nine percent of responders also showed interest in attending a meeting on response plan development and twenty-six percent of them may share stories on the challenges faced in shelter management during emergencies, drafting legislation, use of social

media, animal evacuation and relocation. Eighty percent also affirmed to be interested in joining a network on DMRR with the expectation to learn more from collective experience-sharing and improve the country situation, share best practices and expertise, improve coordination, facilitate info, and experience exchange, and strengthen the collaborative network.

Finally, they agreed to identify the AW Focal Points as the reference persons on such a network, ideally with the involvement of colleagues from their administration actively engaged in DMRR.

Dr Lena Tuominen raised a point about who is responsible for making this decision and who performs euthanasia, treatment, or slaughter in disaster context. In Greece, animal euthanasia is strictly done by vets. In the case of wildfires, farmers are allowed to euthanise their animals under the supervision of the civil protection services. In any case, a vet should be assigned to access the area and oversee these procedures. According to the Icelandic experience, during the latest volcanic eruptions, a decision was made to either save the birds or kill them by exposure to gas mixtures.

Sessions 3 - Global activities with regional importance

The last session was **chaired by P. Dalla Villa** and opened by **Daniel Donachie from the WOAHPreadiness and Resilience Dept**, with a presentation on **“A new Incident Management System (IMS) to improve WOAHP’s preparedness for emergencies”**. In 2024, WOAHP will develop an Incident Management System (IMS) to enhance the organisation’s technical response to incidents. An IMS encompasses policies, procedures, and resources (including personnel) to effectively manage incidents, helping communication, control, and decision-making during emergencies. This system will enable WOAHP to respond more efficiently to international and regional emergencies, supporting its Membership within the organisation’s scope and mandate. The initiative follows recommendations from the COVID-19 After Action Review and was mandated by the Membership under the Emergency Management Technical Item Resolution (General Session, 2022). Ausvet Ltd has been contracted as the service provider for the IMS development. Dr Matthew Stone of Spade Solutions Ltd was also contracted to serve as an independent expert consultant to support WOAHP in reviewing the IMS deliverables. The development will proceed in phases: starting with scoping and design, followed by development, training, and concluding with testing through a simulation exercise and refinement. The IMS is scheduled for completion by May 2025 to be reported back to the Membership during the 2025 General Session.

Barbara Alessandrini and **Hana Abdelsattar** from the WOAHP Capacity-Building Dept. presented the WOAHP Training System with a special focus on the competency-based framework. It includes one competency package dedicated to emergency management (CP6). Four eLearning modules on this domain are under development and will be launched for piloting in Q4 of 2024. After refinement, they will be available in the three official languages. The quality standards adopted to assure the system robustness were also described. The connections between the Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Programme and the Training System were demonstrated through the newly launched PVS Information System that provides the opportunity to carry out quanti-qualitative analyses on Members performances based on the PVS evaluations. The evolving system is therefore an essential tool to develop learning need assessment whose outcomes inform the production for the WOAHP training offer.

Gary Vroegindeway (EmVetNet Secretariat) closed the module with a speech on **“Evidence based support to the WOAHP Members’ DMRR capacities”**. The WOAHP Emergency Veterinary Network (EmVetNet) was established by the WOAHP Director General following the “First OIE regional workshop on the role of Veterinary Services on animal welfare in natural disasters for Balkan countries” held in 2018. The EmVetNet is composed of three centres: Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell’ Abruzzo e del Molise, Teramo, CENSA in Cuba, Texas A&M University Institute for Infectious Animals Diseases. Since that time EmVetNet has been involved in a wide range of emergency support and capacity building activities. These include developing WOAHP’s Emergency Management online course, providing consultation in many disaster events such as the recent wildfires in Chili, surveying member states on disaster capabilities, creating emergency management expert consultant roster, performing research on the impact of COVID-19, creating reference resource repository, and putting on many workshops and seminars. This work will continue to expand the network and engage other stakeholders in emergency and disaster management, relating to animal health and welfare.

Paolo Dalla Villa opened the final panel discussion by asking for comments about the challenges posed by the cultural and linguistic barriers in promoting the alignment of standards and practices at international level. **Barbara Alessandrini** reminded that the WOAHA trainings are normally developed in the three WOAHA official languages. In addition, recent advancements in AI have made it easier than ever to get reliable translations and support easy and “on-time” translations of technical content. This strongly reinforces the learning localization process of adapting digital educational content to suit the linguistic and cultural preferences of target audiences. **Daniel Donachie** also pointed out the importance of cultural and social components. When developing guidance, the WOAHA is always careful to involve groups of people from different regions and balance the challenges posed by regional variabilities. Hence, it is also important to consider a wide range of topics for a more comprehensive approach. **Professor Vroegindewey** recalled the persistent, significant gaps at the global level and suggested harnessing the collective support of other experts to speed up the educational process. **Rebeca Garcia** stressed the importance of relying on scientific evidence when approaching technical issues (i.e., animals handling during disasters), as rescue operators should work according to evidence-based protocols. **Paolo Dalla Villa** also highlighted the importance of SOPs and Daniel Donachie suggested to organize a meeting on this topic. Informed decisions should be taken based on validated information from reliable sources. Once collected they should be made public, along with the official data distributed by the Competent Authorities, so that scientific conclusions can be crafted objectively.

Closing remarks and conclusions

Dr. Hamelin closed the meeting by highlighting the level of contributions and the dynamic exchange of feedback and ideas stimulated by the interactive sessions, with the introduction of new interesting concepts, like the importance of leveraging “*collective power*”, the increasing availability of various tools (e.g. training modules) to match the Member's needs.

The countries' presentations were extremely informative and recalled the importance of being prepared and adaptable to navigate uncertainty and manage conflicting priorities and unexpected situations.

As various speakers highlighted, the Platform also offers the possibility of collecting relevant data and evidence for advocacy purposes. There is still a long way to go, but the WOAHA is strongly motivated to continue supporting its members in this pathway for adaptive and integrated disaster resilience.

Online meeting on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction (DMRR) for Europe

26 September 2024

Meeting agenda

11:45 – 12:00	Registration and welcoming of participants	
Session 1: Opening		
12:00 – 12:10	Opening remarks	E. Hamelin (SRR Brussels)
12:10 – 12:20	Introduction and objectives of the meeting	P. Dalla Villa (SRR Brussels)
Session 2: Regional activities and experience (Chaired by E. Hamelin)		
12:20 – 12:35	Results of the WOAHP survey on “Veterinary Services’ preparedness for dealing with animal welfare emergencies during natural disasters “	P. Dalla Villa (SRR Brussels)
12:35 – 13:15	Country experiences to be shared on integration of Veterinary Services into your national Disaster Management and Risk Reduction system	Greece Iceland Spain North Macedonia
13.15 – 13.30	Discussion	All participants
13:30 – 13:40	Pause	
Session 3: Global activities with regional importance (Chaired by P. Dalla Villa)		
13:40 – 14:00	A new Incident Management System (IMS) to improve WOAHP’s preparedness for emergencies	D.Donachie (WOAH Preparedness and Resilience Department)
14:00 – 14:20	An overview of the WAOH Online course on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction	B. Alessandrini (WOAH Capacity-Building Department)
14:20 – 14:40	Evidence-based support to the WOAHP Members’ DMRR capacities	G. Vroegindewey (EmVetNet Secretariat)
14:40 – 15:00	Discussion	All participants
15:00 – 15:10	<i>Closing remarks and conclusions</i>	E. Hamelin
15:10	<i>End of the meeting</i>	