



Food and Agriculture  
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World Organisation  
for Animal Health

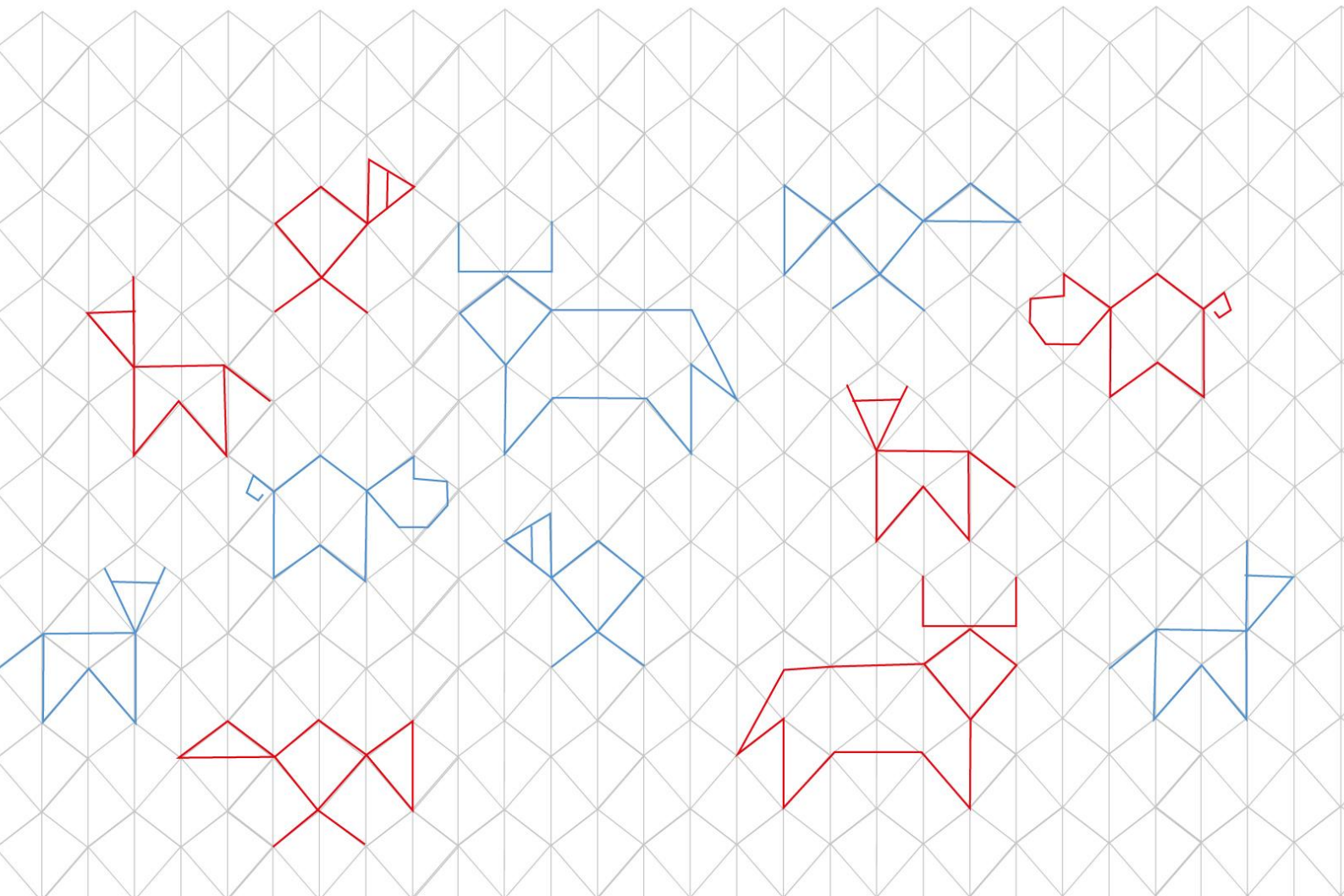
## **Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe (SGE RAB)**

Under the umbrella of  
the Global Framework for the progressive control of  
Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs)

**7<sup>th</sup> meeting (SGE RAB7) 24 September 2025**

**1st GF-TADs Regional Conference of SGEs in the European region  
22-25 September 2025, Belgrade, Serbia**

## **Report**



## Summary

The 7<sup>th</sup> Standing Group of Experts on Rabies for Europe was held in Belgrade, Serbia on the 24<sup>th</sup> September as part of the First GF-TADs Conference of SGEs on Priority Transboundary Animal Diseases in the European region that took place from 22 to 25 September 2025, in Belgrade, Serbia.

The conference was held in a hybrid format, gathering approximately **110 participants in person** from **42 countries**. An additional 180 online participants were registered.

The SGE RAB 7 provided an analysis of the 2017-2024 Members' progress toward rabies elimination (2017–2024), showing regional coordination in oral rabies vaccination (ORV) despite administrative and pandemic-related setbacks. While most Members have improved significantly and remain free of rabies cases, recent cases in the East highlight the need for stronger passive surveillance and regional cooperation. The SGE RAB Secretariat then presented Members' plans for 2025–2026, noting that most countries will continue ORV campaigns, while also focusing on public awareness and stakeholders training in some cases. Two ANSES experts then addressed rabies re-emergence in Central Europe, underlining infection pressure from the East and the importance of sustained ORV and strategies to prevent resurgence through sustained vaccination, surveillance, and regional effective communication and coordination.

Final part of the session included an interactive discussion highlighting three key areas: strengthening passive surveillance through stakeholder engagement and laboratory capacity; ensuring sustainable funding and regional coordination of ORV campaigns; and improving cross-border coordination via bilateral agreements and regional working groups. The Chair concluded by acknowledging the region's achievements, calling on the EU to support Members struggling with financial and administrative constraints, and reminding participants that maintaining rabies-free status will require ongoing collaboration, investment, and vigilance across all affected regions.

The SGE RAB8 should be held in 2026, in a format ensuring opportunities to share experiences and discuss common issues.

### SGE RAB Members' Vaccination and Rabies Control Progress, 2017-2024 - Anne Meyer, Episystemic

The review highlighted overall good coordination among Members regarding ORV implementation, though it faced interruptions due to administrative, political, budgetary, and pandemic-related challenges. Most rabies cases reported by Members were detected through passive surveillance (93%), while over half of the samples originated from active surveillance, indicating a need to strengthen passive surveillance and awareness efforts. By the end of 2024, rabies had been eliminated from much of the region but remained endemic in the eastern SGE Members' area, where cases have increased since 2023. Some Members also reported disease resurgence and re-incursion events. The presentation concluded with recommendations to strengthen ORV, enhance surveillance (particularly passive surveillance), and improve regional coordination and information sharing. After the presentation, Daniel Beltrán Alcrudo commended the progress achieved by the SGE RAB Members and emphasized the need to address the rabies situation in Central Asia and Türkiye, where dog-mediated rabies remains prevalent and elimination efforts are still at an early stage.

### **2025-2026 Plans of SGE RAB Members - Denise Dubois, WOA**

Denise Dubois summarized the rabies control plans for 2025-2026, reported by 16 SGE RAB Member countries. Thirteen Members plan to conduct ORV campaigns, either nationwide or in selected areas of their territory. Most campaigns will use aerial bait distribution, except for two Members that will apply manual or mixed distribution methods. Active surveillance, linked to ORV monitoring, will be implemented seasonally and focused on vaccinated zones, while passive surveillance is carried out annually across the entire territory. Members also reported plans for complementary actions, including public awareness initiatives, training, and cross-border collaboration. Dr Bernard Van Goethem expressed concern that some Members located in endemic areas have not planned ORV campaigns, urging them to reconsider in order to prevent reinfection and protect neighbouring countries.

### **Sylvatic Rabies re-emergences in Central Europe -Emmanuelle Robardet, ANSES**

The regular phylogenetic analyses have improved the monitoring of the spatial and temporal evolution of rabies cases following major re-emergence events since 2020, involving the Central European (CE), North Eastern Europe (NEE), and C variants. The C variant, first detected in Ukraine and Moldova, was identified for the first time in Poland and Romania in 2024, highlighting continuous infection pressure from the eastern borders. To address this fragile zoonotic situation, countries must strengthen passive surveillance, maintain close regional cooperation, and ensure sustained long-term oral vaccination programmes for foxes, as interruptions can rapidly reduce coverage and facilitate virus spread.

### **Measures to Prevent Rabies Resurgence in the European Union - Florence Cliquet, ANSES**

Florence Cliquet highlighted strategies implemented to maintain rabies-free status in EU Member States. Maintaining a strong general surveillance system for both humans and animals remains essential to preserve rabies-free status. This includes sampling and testing suspected wild or domestic animals and promptly reporting results. Effective coordination among authorities, timely investigation of suspected cases, and sustained veterinary and laboratory capacity are key to preventing further transmission.

### **Rabies elimination in Ukraine: One Health approach, communication, and lessons learned -Olena Kuriata-Pavlenko, WHO**

The presentation highlighted Ukraine's progress toward rabies elimination under the Global "Zero by 2030" initiative. Key challenges include surveillance gaps, cross-border transmission, and limited vaccination coverage, all exacerbated by conflict-related disruptions. WHO's support in developing the National Elimination Strategy and promoting a One Health approach was underscored. Innovative communication efforts, including targeted educational materials and multi-stakeholder campaigns, were presented as key drivers of progress toward the 2030 goal. The WHO presentation on Ukraine's progress toward the "Zero by 2030" goal highlighted how conflict-related disruptions have challenged vaccination and surveillance, while showcasing innovative One Health communication and community engagement initiatives that have supported continued progress.

## Interactive discussion

Participants provided their responses to interactive questions via an online platform, which served as a basis for the in-person debate. The discussion was moderated by the SGE Rabies Secretariat and rabies experts from ANSES.

The key highlights from the in-person debate, which focused on three main topics:

1. Passive surveillance:

- the importance of focusing efforts on passive surveillance, noting that already testing dead foxes (e.g., roadkills) offers high detection probability at low cost.
- importance of stakeholders' awareness illustrated by specific country example (88% of participants had selected "encouraging stakeholder awareness" as a top priority).
- The importance of simultaneously strengthening stakeholder engagement in reporting and increasing laboratory capacity to effectively handle the resulting rise in sample submissions.

2. ORV sustainability:

- Funding availability identified as main challenge, followed by the need for better cross-border coordination
- Some Members detailed their current challenges. Cristian Siposean (Romania) explained that procurement delays and budget overruns hindered Romania's 2025 ORV campaigns. Milan Rogosic (Montenegro) acknowledged EU financial support but noted administrative and legal difficulties, including delays in transfers, reimbursements, and securing advance funds across budget cycles.

3. Ideas to improve cross-border cooperation:

- to improve alignment in cross-border vaccination campaigns with the example of the establishment of bilateral agreements by some western European allowing aircraft to cross borders with an overlap zone for bait distribution.
- -Dedicated working group for border coordination inspired by earlier experiences (e.g., between France, Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium).
- Dr Galib Abdulaliyev (CVO, Azerbaijan) emphasized the importance of regional cooperation among Caucasian countries, including coordination with border control, military, and air traffic services to ensure effective vaccine distribution in border areas.

## Closing remarks - Future steps

The Chair closed the session by thanking the moderators and participants and urged the European Union to swiftly convene a meeting with Members facing funding challenges to discuss available options for EU reimbursement. Dr Van Goethem also emphasized the need to promptly reinstate bilateral meetings

between neighbouring SGE RAB Members and stressed that efforts against rabies must continue to also prevent further recurrence in previously disease-free territories.

All presentations of the SGE RAB7 are available on the [webpages dedicated to SGE on Rabies](#).

## Annex:

### Conclusions and recommendations

#### I. CONSIDERING THAT:

- Rabies elimination is a GF-TADs and One Health priority for Europe as a region of 53 WOAHA Members;
- Experience in Europe shows that wildlife rabies can be eliminated through oral rabies vaccination campaigns (ORV), combined with robust surveillance;
- The epidemiological situation mainly in Europe is progressively improving as the number of cases has dramatically decreased in the last years, except in a few areas;
- In certain countries/territories of the region, surveillance remains the weakest point of their rabies eradication programmes, particularly as regards the testing of indicator<sup>1</sup> animals for rabies detection (passive or general surveillance). As a result, in some countries/territories, the number of animals sampled and tested is low and this compromises elimination efforts and overall success achieved during the last decade;
- The implementation of ORV and surveillance entails a considerable administrative burden, encompassing budget allocation, procurement processes for vaccines and diagnostics, and the organization of services for oral vaccine distribution and surveillance programmes. These functions are frequently overseen by different authorities or stakeholders within each country, which may further complicate coordination and efficiency;
- It is necessary to safeguard and consolidate the achievements on rabies control, accomplished so far by the combined efforts of all sectors in all SGE RAB Members in the region of Europe.
- The 8th meeting (SGE RAB8) of the Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held face-to-face in 2026, to ensure opportunities to share experiences and discuss common issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Suspect or indicator animals are animals that show clinical signs or abnormal behaviour suggestive of rabies, animals found dead, road-kills and animals involved in human exposure.

## **II. THE STANDING GROUP OF EXPERTS ON RABIES FOR EUROPE RECOMMENDS:**

1. To task SGE Secretariat (WOAH Sub-Regional Representation in Brussels) with maintaining regional coordination on Rabies in Europe and organising annual (preferably in-person) SGE RAB meetings, with a view to facilitating the monitoring of the implementation of rabies programmes, in collaboration with FAO, the European Commission and SGE RAB Members, and promoting actions relevant for rabies elimination.
2. SGE RAB Members to develop pathways to facilitate sustainable, and medium to long-term (e.g. multi-annual) planning and implementation of rabies eradication programmes, including administrative components (procurement, capacity building) and disease control activities (e.g. preventive vaccinations, including ORV, surveillance, awareness raising).
3. SGE RAB Members to strengthen their capacities to implement their rabies eradication programmes in close collaboration with relevant national authorities, within the GF-TADs and One Health frameworks, and ensure early preparation and robust project management throughout implementation.
4. SGE RAB Members to regularly and transparently share epidemiological information with GF-TADs partners and One Health stakeholders, using appropriate platforms to guide vaccination decisions and enhance cross-border rabies control.
5. To continue monitoring the epidemiological situation in the region of Europe to be ready to open the membership of the SGE on Rabies in Europe to other countries where the epidemiological situation in wildlife has deteriorated or the risk of spreading of rabies has increased, and to continue inviting observers from other countries and the One Health framework organizations.

### **Recommendations on oral vaccination campaigns against rabies (ORV)**

6. To continue with ORV efforts and ensure ORV campaigns are implemented twice a year and not ceased earlier than two years after the last confirmed case of rabies provided that appropriate passive surveillance and monitoring of vaccination are performed in accordance with international standards and/or best practices.
7. To plan the phase-out of ORV only after careful risk assessment, based on robust surveillance data and preferably within a regional perspective, carefully considering the situation in bordering countries/territories, as the premature cease of vaccination in one country or territory could jeopardise rabies elimination efforts across the region.
8. To consider maintaining ORV activities in buffer zones around endemic areas, where appropriate.
9. To strengthen ORV coordination across borders to enable alignment of vaccination schedules and areas whenever possible. Where this is not feasible, alternatives such as simultaneous vaccination on both sides of a border or other practical strategies should be pursued.

10. To implement specific national arrangements for the sustainable medium to long-term supply of vaccines, ensuring a timely response to any developments in the rabies situation, including emergency vaccination in the event of resurgence.

#### **Recommendations on rabies surveillance**

11. To scale up rabies surveillance and particularly passive surveillance<sup>2</sup>, given its critical role in strengthening confidence in freedom from rabies among SGE RAB Members and in addressing potential resurgence driven by ongoing infection pressure in the eastern part of the region.

In this regard:

- 11.1. To closely monitor the number, origin, and location of negative samples originated from passive surveillance to identify weak surveillance areas or blind spots.
- 11.2. To increase the number of animals sampled within passive surveillance, especially in wildlife, irrespective of the level of active surveillance (ORV monitoring).
  - by boosting awareness among hunters and other wildlife workers, as well as veterinarians, farmers and all other stakeholders
  - by allocating sufficient resources, including trainings, procedures, incentives and effective coordination among stakeholders.
  - by broadening sample sources, including the systematic testing of suspect foxes outside post-vaccination monitoring campaigns, including animals found dead (e.g. road kills).
12. To plan for increased surveillance near any new cases to appropriately estimate the extent of the outbreak and make an informed decision about the area to be vaccinated and to promptly communicate neighbouring countries when the detection happens in an unexpected area close to a border/s.
13. To ensure greater coordination of surveillance activities for Rabies with activities implemented for other TADs (e.g. ASF, HPAI) to ensure cost-effective and complementary work, particularly if these actions involve coordination with hunting associations and other stakeholders, training and awareness raising campaigns, including towards the public.
14. To ensure full implementation of surveillance plans for rabies in wildlife and domestic animals in the current context of habitat disruption and the movement of humans and animals (both wildlife and domestic animals accompanying their owners) due to the military aggression against Ukraine.

#### **Recommendations on SGE RAB Members dataset**

15. To explore the possibility of incorporating additional elements into the dataset provided by SGE RAB Members to the SGE Secretariat, to strengthen the reliability, completeness, and comparability of the information shared within the SGE RAB framework.

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<sup>2</sup> Detection of indicator animals for rabies detection.

