

5th Regional workshop on dog population management for Caucasus and Central Asia

2-4 December 2025 - Almaty, Kazakhstan

Meeting Report

Summary:

The 5th WOAHP Regional Workshop on Dog Population Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from December 2 to 4 2025. The workshop was organized under the WOAHP Regional Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe and brought together a total of 29 participants including representatives of six WOAHP Member Countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) technical experts, national and local NGO representatives, and WOAHP staff.

The main objective of the workshop was to assist WOAHP Members Countries from Central Asia and the Caucasus in achieving the agreed vision of full compliance with Chapter 7.7 of the WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code on dog population management by 2030. The meeting provided an opportunity to review the key provisions of Chapter 7.7 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, present relevant WOAHP activities and available tools, share national plan templates, and provide updates on the proposed EU regulation on welfare of dogs and cats and its implications for non-EU countries. Members reported on their dog population management and rabies control programmes, highlighting progress, challenges, and priorities. The Self-Assessment and Monitoring System for Dog Population Management (SAM4DPM) was presented by the WOAHP Collaborating Centre IZS Teramo, giving the foundations for the next round of self-assessments.

The technical sessions addressed dog behaviour assessment, humane capture methods, and the role of NGOs, and were complemented by case studies and a field visit to a shelter.

The final day focused on One Health aspects, public health risks, and WOAHP tools for the control of dog-mediated rabies.

The working group sessions and discussions outlined the next steps to strengthen national and regional progress towards improved dog population management, free-roaming dogs' control and dog-mediated rabies elimination. Participants identified gaps in stakeholder coordination, funding, legislation, and public awareness as key barriers to implementing WOAHP Chapter 7.7. For dog-mediated rabies, low risk perception, limited reliable data, and weak identification and registration systems remain as the most critical challenges. Strengthening regulatory frameworks was highlighted as the top priority, together with improved monitoring of dog population management, and sustained vaccination efforts. Tailored technical assistance and stronger national commitment are needed to advance responsible dog ownership and effective rabies control.

The workshop was funded by the European Union and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and kindly hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan.

1. Introduction

The 5th WOAHP Regional Workshop on Dog Population Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from December 2 to 4, 2025. (Agenda - Annex 1).

2. Session 1: Opening

The meeting was opened by representatives of the Kazakhstan authorities together with WOAHP Sub-Regional Representative for Central Asia, Mereke Taitubayev, who thanked the host country for its support and hospitality and encouraged the active engagement of all participants throughout the workshop, highlighting the importance of knowledge exchange and coordinated action to strengthen dog population management and rabies control efforts across the Caucasus and Central Asia.

2.1. WOAHP Platform on animal welfare for Europe T. Grudnik (WOAHP SRR Brussels) ([link to the 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 WOAHP 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 WOAHP 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 WOAHP Standards. The Platform continues to empower Veterinary Services to take action on animal welfare in alignment with the 4th Action Plan for 2024-2026.

2.2. Dog population management - Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.7 TAHC - P. Dalla Villa (WOAHP Standards Department) ([link to the presentation](#))

WOAHP plays a strategic role in (a) setting and promoting international animal welfare standards in consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders, and (b) supporting its members and partners in implementing these standards at international, national, and local levels. Based on scientific evidence, WOAHP Standards on dog population management incorporate essential animal welfare principles as prerequisites for adopting sustainable practices. These practices aim to improve the quality of life of animals while minimising the environmental, public health and security impacts of owned and unowned free-roaming dogs, and fostering positive human-animal interactions, particularly when the target dog population in a local community presents public health risks. Dogs are dependent on human communities, and there is an ethical responsibility to ensure their health and welfare, even in the absence of ownership. Therefore, dog population management and the control of free-roaming dogs must be carried out in close cooperation with individual dog owners and the wider community.

2.3. Plenary lecture -Dog population management programmes -P. Dalla Villa ([link to the presentation](#))

The Chapter 7.7 of the WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code, define Dog Population Management (DPM) as “the holistic approach that aims to improve the welfare of dogs, reduce problems they may present, and create harmonious coexistence with people and their environment.” The poor management of dog populations in addition to poor welfare, often results in an increase of public health risks of transmission of zoonotic pathogens or in the number of dog bite injuries and road traffic accidents. Human-related factors further contribute to reducing the Veterinary Services’ capacity to address these problems in a sustainable manner. Different countries may have varying objectives for implementing DPM programmes. These programmes may include raising public awareness about responsible dog ownership and enhancing the health and welfare of both owned and unowned dogs. The WOAHP standards recommend a combination of measures designed to enhance dog care and influence dog population dynamics, which should be identified and implemented following a structured decision-making process to effectively plan and execute tailor-made DPM programmes aimed at

reducing the number of free-roaming dogs, which are a primary source of dog-mediated rabies. This includes detecting, monitoring, and understanding the life cycle of free-roaming dogs and their interaction with the environment. Effective DPM also requires ongoing monitoring to assess outcomes and adjust strategies as necessary, ensuring long-term success rather than just short-term solutions.

2.4. Self-assessment and monitoring tool for dog population management (SAM4DPM) **L. Possenti (IZS-Teramo) ([link to the presentation](#))**

The SAM4DPM presentation introduced web-based self-assessment and monitoring platform, which enables structured evaluation of national and local dog population management systems through guided online surveys and standardized indicators. It supports multiple user profiles -Country Authority, Local Authority, and Administrator- allowing coordinated data entry and oversight across governance levels. The SAM4DPM system automatically generates reports, benchmarking analyses, and country roadmaps. By standardizing data collection and reporting, it serves as a practical decision-support tool for strengthening dog population management programmes in line with WOA guidance.

3. Session 2: Overall situation and tailor made support

3.1. Country reports on current dog population management and rabies situation

Participants were updated by country representatives on progress toward full implementation of WOA standards on dog population management and their ongoing development of National Action Plans. Presentations highlighted advances in identification and registration, sheltering, vaccination, and awareness programmes, as well as remaining gaps in coordination, sterilisation coverage, and technical capacity. Some countries reported ongoing estimation of owned and free-roaming dog and cat populations, expanded rabies vaccination programmes, and increased engagement with NGOs and civil society. Members' presentations:

[Azerbaijan](#), [Georgia](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Tajikistan](#)

Concrete examples include Azerbaijan's development of an institutional framework shared between the Food Safety Agency and Ministry of Agriculture and simulation exercises for rabies prevention contributing to reduced human rabies cases. Georgia representative highlighted its national identification and registration system covering owned and free-roaming dogs, mandatory microchipping, planned compulsory sterilisation of owned dogs, and structured DPM working groups, alongside shelter controls and catch-neuter-return/adoption programmes. Kazakhstan reported wildlife rabies vaccination and a multi-stakeholder DPM coordination group involving authorities, veterinarians, municipalities, and NGOs.

Discussions among participants focused on programme design principles, emphasizing that rabies control depends more on vaccination coverage and population immunity than on dog density. Experts noted that, for rabies control, mass culling is ineffective, while achieving at least 70% vaccination alongside sterilisation and humane management is critical.

3.2. Veterinary Services national plan for dog population management programmes – Template. T. Grudnik (WOAH) ([link to the presentation](#))

The presentation introduced the WOA Veterinary Services National Plan template designed to support local authorities in developing and implementing DPM programmes, highlighting its role as a practical framework for structured national action. It emphasized the central role of Veterinary Services in providing the legal basis for DPM and rabies control, delivering technical expertise on animal health and welfare, coordinating programmes nationally, monitoring implementation, and mobilizing resources. The template is organized into key components, including a comprehensive situation analysis, integration of SAM Tool self-assessment results to identify compliance gaps, and a 3-5 year operational plan covering governance, One Health coordination, legislation, awareness, training, vaccination strategies, surveillance, and bite prevention.

3.3. Outcomes of the Responsible Pet Ownership event and EU regulation proposal for the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats D. Dubois (WOAH) ([link to the presentation](#))

The presentation summarized the outcomes of a recently held regional event on responsible pet ownership and the upcoming EU regulation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats, and its relevance for dog population management and illegal trade prevention. The proposed regulation sets minimum standards for breeding, housing, and care in professional establishments, including imports from third countries, and introduces stronger traceability requirements through mandatory microchipping, interoperable registration databases, and verification of online advertisements. Expected to be published in 2026 and applied from 2028, the regulation was presented as a key step that must be supported by capacity building, digital tools, cross-border cooperation, enforcement, and public awareness, while addressing challenges such as limited database interoperability and veterinary workforce shortages

3.4. Working Group Session: challenges, needs, and priority activities in Caucasus and Central Asia

During the working group session, country representatives were divided into three groups to discuss achievements and challenges related to legislative frameworks, management of free-roaming dogs, and identification and registration (I&R) systems. Each group presented its conclusions to all participants and experts, enabling constructive discussion, identification of shared gaps, and exchange of lessons learned. Overall, countries reported progress in updating legislation, strengthening rabies vaccination requirements, expanding shelter regulation, and developing electronic registration tools. Across groups, common challenges included animal abandonment, limited sterilisation coverage, resource gaps, and the need to reinforce responsible ownership and interagency coordination.

4. Session 3: Horizontal topics

4.1. Plenary lecture “Tools and methodologies for the assessment of dog behaviour and humane methods for catching and handling free-roaming dogs” - B. Faulkner (Stray Animal Solutions) ([link to the presentation](#)) ([link to the presentation](#))

The technical sessions on humane catching and temperament testing of free-roaming dogs emphasized that effective dog population management must be grounded in animal welfare, staff training, and behaviour-based decision-making. Inhumane outcomes are mainly linked to poor training, inappropriate equipment, and weak oversight. Participants reviewed appropriate capture tools matched to dog socialisation level and the importance of understanding canine body language and reducing fear and stress at all handling stages was strongly highlighted.

The temperament testing session clarified key concepts of temperament and behaviour and explained how genetics, environment, and learning interact to shape dog responses. It stressed that aggression is context-dependent and trigger-based, often adaptive, and particularly relevant for assessing free-roaming dogs considered for release or sheltering. Different assessment approaches were reviewed, including test batteries, observational methods, and adapted shelter protocols, with emphasis on identifying early warning signals through the canine ladder of aggression. Overall, temperament testing was presented as a useful but non-absolute decision-support tool that must be applied carefully and in combination with professional judgement.

4.2. The NGOs’ role in guiding and supporting government strategies for DPM and free-roaming dog's control - A. Hammond-Seaman (RSPCA) (*prerecorded*) ([link to the presentation](#))

The presentation outlined the role of NGOs in supporting government strategies for dog population management, highlighting the work of the ICAM Coalition. Its guidelines, e-learning courses for policy-makers and implementers, and practical tools. Evidence-based, humane, and sustainable DPM programmes needs to be focused on root causes and human behaviour change rather than reactive removal of free-roaming dogs as short-term solutions. The NGO participation in national advisory groups and DPM action plans, as recognised in WOA standards, was strongly encouraged. Tools presented included the monitoring guide *Are We Making a Difference?* and the TALEA web and mobile application for street dog surveys, supporting better data collection and programme impact assessment.

4.3. NGO perspective: Animal Welfare: Current Situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan – L. Sarsenova (INUCOBO) ([link to the presentation](#))

Lillia Sarsenova presented an overview of animal welfare in Kazakhstan, focusing on the Law “On Responsible Attitude to Animals” adopted in December 2021. Although animals are now legally recognized as sentient beings, they remain treated as property under civil law, including unsupervised dogs. The law introduced progressive measures such as registration, vaccination, neutering, shelters, and public oversight, but its implementation has been weak and fragmented. Inconsistent databases, limited neutering, and the continued practice of large-scale culling by local authorities have significantly reduced its effectiveness. Recent parliamentary amendments risk further setbacks by restricting humane population management measures and state-supported vaccination. Overall, the situation highlights a persistent gap between legislative ambition and practical enforcement, threatening the sustainability of animal welfare reforms.

4.4. A pilot project on Humane dog population management in Romania - case study – Luca Secker (German Animal Welfare Federation) (*prerecorded*) ([link to the presentation](#))

Romania adapted a catch & shelter/kill policy after a fatal bite incident involving a 4-year-old boy in 2013, with the new law also prohibiting Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release programs. Such programs were successfully implemented on a local level beforehand in Romania. After years of lobbying, Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V. together with German politicians helped its member organisation Tierhilfe Hoffnung e.V. to sign a cooperation agreement for a pilot project with the national and regional veterinary authorities. The project focuses on fostering responsible ownership practices through the implementation of existing legal obligations for owners of dogs but also allows for the release of sterilized dogs under a special permit. This multi-stakeholder project is rounded off by further contractual agreements with local authorities. Consistent with best practice guidelines, the holistic evaluation of the costs and effects of the project, aims at providing a reliable data basis to hopefully expand the custom-designed humane dog population management methods nationwide.

4.5. State-owned municipal shelter and Almaty’s Stray Animal Control Program – Z. Espanov (Almaty Veterinary Service) ([link to the presentation](#))

The Almaty Veterinary Service presented the results of its humane stray animal control program. The main measures include sterilization, vaccination, and return of animals (CNVR program), prevention of zoonoses, and protection of the population. In 2025, 106 dogs and 203 cats were caught; 1,501 dogs and 108 cats were released under the CNVR program; and 2,617 dogs were revaccinated. The program demonstrates consistent positive results, reduces the risk of zoonoses, enhances public safety, and contributes to improved animal welfare in Almaty.

5. Session 4: On-field activities

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

6. Session 5: Dog population management - public health aspects and next steps

6.1. Plenary lecture: “One - Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks – V. Vuta (Institute for Diagnosis and Animal Health, Romania) ([link to the presentation](#))

The presentation emphasized that while the close relationship between humans and dogs provides health and social benefits, it also poses significant zoonotic risks. Over 70 pathogens can be transmitted from dogs to humans, and increasing dog populations combined with uneven responsible ownership raise concerns about bites and diseases such as rabies, leishmaniosis, and echinococcosis. Most emerging human pathogens originate in animals, reinforcing the need for prevention. A One Health approach is essential, with coordinated action across sectors. Humane dog population management, mass vaccination, improved surveillance, stronger governance, and

greater public awareness are key to reducing risks, improving dog welfare, and achieving effective rabies control.

6.2. WOAHA Tool for rabies control programs R. Tidman (WOAH Global Rabies Coordinator) [\(link to the presentation\)](#)

The presentation outlined the global framework for achieving the 'Zero by 30' goal of eliminating human deaths from dog-mediated rabies and introduced available tools and resources to support national rabies control efforts. Key areas covered included resources for developing and implementing national strategies, improving communication and awareness, strengthening surveillance, and implementing and scaling up dog vaccination. Support is available from WOAHA and the United Against Rabies Forum to help plan, implement, and monitor these activities. Work is also ongoing to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, both of national progress and of collective advancement toward 'Zero by 30'. Many of the tools and resources referenced are available through the United Against Rabies website (www.unitedagainstrabies.org).

6.3. Round table discussion – next steps towards the achieving Sub-Regional vision for dog population management and rabies by 2030

The round table discussion supported by interactive Wooclap polling identified as common challenges to full implementation of WOAHA Chapter 7.7, including insufficient funding, weak communication and public awareness, limited political will, inadequate shelter capacity, and gaps in legislation, particularly regarding reproduction control and commercial turnover, and weak stakeholder collaboration. For dog-mediated rabies control, the most frequently agreed challenges were the lack of reliable data on owned and free-roaming dog populations due to incomplete or basic identification and registration systems, weak surveillance and bite notification, migration and low vaccination coverage of free-roaming dog populations, low risk perception among professionals and the public, and inadequate awareness campaigns.

Participants expressed high level of satisfaction with the content and quality of the technical dissertations. Among attendants, the most impactful workshop messages were related to clearer understanding of dog population management gaps, practical capture and handling of dogs, WOAHA rabies control tools, and the importance of standards-based national programmes and their monitoring and evaluation.

6.4. Closing remarks – Next steps

Participants expressed a strong commitment to continued progress and agreed on the need for tailored WOAHA technical assistance. Priority areas for assistance include strengthening regulatory frameworks, support in revising national plans and developing unified rules, effective alternatives to mass culling, and guidance through the process for achieving rabies-free status.

Suggested themes for future meetings include shelter design, management and rehoming practices, legislative and regulatory development, free-roaming dog population control, rabies eradication strategies, epidemiological surveillance and laboratory diagnostics, and broader animal care and high-risk disease preparedness.

Upon return, participants plan to prioritise advancing the implementation of WOAHA recommendations within national legislation, revision of rabies and dog population management national plans, development of legal proposals (including dog aggression assessment), expansion of regional shelter capacity, strengthening of monitoring systems, and inclusion of nationwide rabies vaccination measures in action plans.

Next steps include the launch of the new SAM4DPM assessment round and continued roadmap follow-up, with the next regional meeting planned for 2027.

List of annexes

Annex 1 – Agenda

Annex 2 – List of participants

Annex 1 – Agenda

DAY 1: 2nd December 2025

09:00 – 09:15 Registration and welcoming of participants

Session 1: Opening

09:15 – 09:30	Welcome address and agenda overview	Kazakhstan and WOAH representatives
09:30 - 09: 45	WOAH Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe	Tomasz Grudnik WOAH Sub - Regional Representation in Brussels
09:45 - 10:00	Dog population management - Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.7 TAHC	Paolo Dalla Villa WOAH Standards Department
10:00 – 10:30	Plenary lecture - Dog population management programs	Paolo Dalla Villa
10:30 – 10:45	Discussion and Question and Answers	All
10:45 – 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 – 11:15	Self-assessment and monitoring tool for dog population management (SAM4DPM)	IZS Teramo remotely
11:15 - 12:00	Country reports on current dog population management and rabies situation	Country representatives Moderator (WOAH)

Lunch

Session 2: Overall situation and tailor made support

13:00 — 14.00	Country reports on current dog population management and rabies situation	Country representatives Moderator (WOAH)
14.00 – 14.00	Veterinary Services national plan for dog population management programmes – template	Tomasz Grudnik
14.10 – 14:25	Outcomes of the Responsible Pet Ownership event and EU regulation proposal for the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats	Denise Dubois WOAH Sub - Regional Representation in Brussels
14.25 - 16.00	Working Group Session: challenges, needs, and priority activities in Caucasus and Central Asia	All
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee break	
16:15 - 16:30	Working Group Session reporting: challenges, needs, and priority activities in Caucasus and Central Asia	All
19:00	Dinner	

DAY 2: 3rd December 2025

Session 3: Horizontal topics

09:30 — 10:45	Plenary lecture – Tools and methodologies for the assessment dog behaviours and Humane methods for catching and handling free-roaming dogs	Brian Faulkner Stray Animal Solutions
10:45 — 11:00	The NGOs' role in guiding and supporting government strategies for DPM and free-roaming dog's control	Alexandra Hammond-Seaman RSPCA (remote)
11:00 – 11:15	NGO perspective: Animal Welfare: Current Situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan	Lillia Sarsenova INUCOBO
11:15 – 11:30	Coffee break	
11:30 – 11:45	Dog population management project in Romania - case study	Luca Secker German Animal Welfare Federation (remote)
11:45 – 12:00	State-owned municipal shelter enterprise with the right of economic management "Almaty Veterinary Service" Department of Entrepreneurship and Investment of the City of Almaty	
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	

Session 4. On-field activities

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

DAY 3: 4th December 2025

Session 5: Dog population management - public health aspects, and next steps

09:30 - 10:15	Plenary lecture: "One - Health approach to dog-mediated public health risks."	Vlad Vuta, Head of WOAHP Reference Laboratory for Rabies Romania. Institute for Diagnosis and Animal Health
10:15 - 10:45	WOAH tools for rabies control programs	Rachel Tidman, WOAHP Global Rabies Coordinator, Science Department
10:45 – 11:00	Discussion	All
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee break	
11:30 – 12:15	Round table discussion – next steps towards the achieving Sub-Regional vision for dog population management and rabies by 2030 Interactive session	All
12:15 – 12:30	Closing remarks – Next steps	WOAH
12:30	Lunch and departures	



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Annex 2 - List of participants

Available at WOAHSRR Brussels offices