

Strong participation at the recent seminar for the National Focal Points for Animal Welfare in Europe

National Focal Points for Animal Welfare, representing 43 of the 53 countries in the European region, recently completed a productive training seminar in The Hague, the Netherlands, held from 18 to 20 June 2019. It was the fifth OIE-organised seminar of this type – the first was held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2009 – and it aimed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience at the regional level, as well as enhance the network and reinforce communication channels between the National Focal Points.

Animal welfare during transport is a top priority for Europe

The transportation of animals was extensively discussed at the seminar, with representatives of the Netherlands and the OIE giving presentations on the subject. In addition, participants visited a company which transports animals on long-distance by road. Its lorries are fully equipped for this purpose. The company also offers control post/resting post services (premises where Veterinary Services check livestock movement documentation and where the animals can be unloaded for rest if needed, before continuing the journey). The Government of the Netherlands is currently reviewing the maximum transport time for animals going to slaughter with a view to minimising it, and is also exploring alternatives to long-distance transport when exporting piglets.



From the OIE side, the [OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe](#) has been actively promoting the implementation of relevant OIE standards through providing training on how to explain the topic to others in Train-the-Trainer sessions. After these sessions, the trained participants are expected to organise follow-on activities within their countries to expand the network of veterinarians with knowledge of OIE standards. The Platform now intends to scale up the 'Whole journey scenario' concept with several forthcoming workshops dedicated to specific long-distance routes within Europe and from Europe to the Middle East or North Africa. The objective of this concept is not only to improve the welfare of the animals transported along these cross-border routes, but also to strengthen collaboration between the Competent Authorities of the countries involved.

As a significant outcome of the seminar, participants unanimously supported the creation of a network of OIE contact points along long-distance livestock transportation routes in EU and non-EU countries. The role of these contact points would be to facilitate practical cooperation and communication between national Competent Authorities from point of departure to final destination, including countries of transit. Specifically, this would involve addressing requests for information and assistance, and reporting adverse findings or non-compliances, among other issues.

Addressing the great diversity of animal welfare topics in Europe



A great many other topics were covered during the seminar. For instance, the latest data on the use of animal-based criteria as indicators of animal welfare in pig and laying-hen production systems, as well as during slaughter and culling was presented by prominent experts. In addition, a visit to a pig-breeding farm provided an opportunity to continue discussions on pig housing, tail docking and castration.

Some of the particularly active OIE National Focal Points shared information on the role and the activities that it entailed for them. In the Netherlands, for example, animal welfare has become a key political topic: the Party for the Animals (*Partij voor de Dieren*) currently holds five seats in the Dutch parliament, and therefore animal welfare is now included in the national agenda, and the government is strongly expected to promote it at international level. Elsewhere in Europe, North Macedonia adopted a National Animal Welfare Strategy, including priorities such as welfare during transport, stray dog control with a 'Responsible dog ownership campaign' in schools, welfare at slaughter, welfare of laying hens, and the implementation of a general welfare awareness campaign.

Discussions also took place on *a)* the extensive experience accumulated in Europe on dog population control and monitoring programmes; *b)* tools currently under development to encourage the implementation of Chapter 7.12. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*, adopted in 2016, on the welfare of working equids (including a presentation by a representative of World Horse Welfare); *c)* ISO TS 34700 on animal welfare management and its use by authorities and industry in the food supply chain; *d)* animal welfare during natural disaster situations – the role of Veterinary Services; and *e)* possible support from animal welfare NGOs, such as the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

The participants were also updated on the current activities, developments and plans of the European Union Platform on Animal Welfare, the OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe, and the OIE Global Animal Welfare Strategy (including the OIE Global Animal Welfare Forum).

Finally, the OIE standard-setting process was reviewed and, throughout the seminar, participants were repeatedly encouraged to engage actively in the process, providing drafting proposals and comments. This is particularly expected in the context of the current development of a new chapter dedicated to the laying-hen production system.

Some representatives subsequently expressed their interest in an OIE animal welfare standard on camel breeding (Turkmenistan), and the development of OIE guidance on the acceptable weight that working equids may carry and the reasonable duration of work for equids (Greece and Montenegro).





All documents relating to this seminar can be found and downloaded from the website of the [OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe](#).

■ August 2019