

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF LSDV & ASFV

The DEFEND project investigated whether conflicts and human migration play a role in spreading contagious animal disease in target areas. Information was gathered using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Epidemiology (PE) in Romania, Serbia, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Lebanon. Evidence from the Syrian civil war and the conflict in Ukraine were analysed, along with experiences of VSF Italy in two refugee camps (Palanka - Republic of Moldova and Saharawi Refugee camps - Algeria). The case of the Western Balkan Route was also analysed. Based on this research, short and long-term consequences of conflicts, insecurity, and mixed human migration on animal health were formulated, along with recommendations for mitigation and potential influence on policy.

KEY FINDINGS

Long-distance human mixed migration towards Europe had a low impact on the spread of animal transboundary diseases such as lumpy skin disease and African swine fever.

Jungle camps and movements across the forests during long-distance human migration represent a low-grade risk of ASF by causing aggregation of wild boars and damage to hunting ground fences.



Figure 1: Working areas (in green) and conflict areas (in red).

The presence of animals was not reported in refugee camps in Europe and the Balkans, while the evidence from literature and VSF experience shows their presence in long-term camps in other world Regions (Angeloni, 2018; Braam, 2022) as a source of food that contributes to food and nutritional security. Proper veterinary supervision have to be ensured in those cases.

Within conflict areas, strategies to prevent animal infectious diseases should consider all the local conditions. Data collected shown that mixed human migration along the West Balkan Route itself is not a key driver for introducing both diseases. The attention must be posed on civil wars and conflicts (FAO,2022; Farra, 2022) which lead to a breakdown in veterinary public services and official settings, with a disruption of formal trade patterns and the increase of informal cross-border commercial networks which can contribute to the emergence and spread of animal disease. Strategies to prevent and control animal infectious diseases should consider local peculiarities and dynamics to increase their effectiveness. Results indicate the need to include socioeconomic factors and informal human and animal movements in disease prevention and control strategies, especially in conflicts, insecurity, and poverty.

Recent studies and policies on One Health strongly suggest a closer involvement of the local stakeholders and the population facing a disease event to scale up local knowledge to increase the effectiveness of any implemented strategies. Filling these knowledge gaps will be a key element for preventing and controlling diseases in the future.

Presence of ethnic minorities linked to the reshaping of borders in the post-conflict period

Eastern EU borders are populated by many different communities; consider their connections and interrelationships are vital to understanding how livestock production, trade, and consumption systems operate and perform in emergencies and the associated risks for animal health.

Increased risk of animal disease emergence and spread

Fluctuance amongst national currencies make livestock breeding and marketing more or less convenient one side or the other of the border, thus triggering movement across borders.

The migration flow along the West Balkan Route is inconstant

The flow along this route (Frontex data) changed consistently during the last decades and is influenced by international agreements, visa policies, conflicts, crises and natural disasters.

The need to consider socio-economic factors

Animal health measures to contain the spread of diseases must consider the local realities in which they will be applied and include derogation, where necessary, to mitigate the economic impact on citizens.

Recommendations

The WP3 DEFEND experience provides ways and strategies to address the spread and monitoring of animal diseases, particularly in marginal communities, border environments and insecure contexts. In these areas, livestock farming is often central to local livelihoods, but not through the intensive control systems that characterize other parts of Europe (Clemmons et al., 2021; Nori, 2022). Ensuring that external intervention is adapted to local practices requires an individualized understanding of local dynamics and consideration of local needs and interests (Gonzales et al., 2023). The overall results of poorly designed monitoring and control systems, which need to consider the conscious and proactive role of local communities, could generate results opposite to those expected in the medium and long term. The WP3 experience suggests considering some effective and applicable measures that favour collaboration rather than confrontation between external concerns and prevailing local interests, involvement of local communities and consideration of local practices and needs. Moreover, since situations can change rapidly and are influenced by various local and international factors and policies, there is a need for a permanent, multidisciplinary group to monitor the effect of conflicts on animal health continuously to respond effectively

References

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- Farra et al, Qualitative assessment of the probability of introduction and onward transmission of lumpy skin disease in Ukraine (2022);
- Frontex <https://frontex.europa.eu/what-we-do/monitoring-and-risk-analysis/migratory-routes/western-balkan-route/>;
- Gonzales G, et al. External interventions, local realities: what we can learn from (un)lessons learned. EUI, RSC, Policy Paper, 2023/04 (2023).
- Background map indicates Global spread of ASFV. In orange are the countries which had ASF in 2018, and in purple are the countries which have reported their first outbreak since 2018.

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