



REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE REU WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

RI 2: THE VIRTUAL LEARNING CENTRE FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA – FOCUS ON ONE HEALTH

Introduction

Made possible through innovative technology and wider internet access, virtual courses are scalable and sustainable, providing advantages over the traditional face-to-face approach:

- Reduced environmental footprint: Virtual learning removes the need for trainees and trainers to take planes or other means of transport to meet in a physical venue.
- A more customized way of learning: Trainees are allowed to learn at their own pace and time. Tutors and teachers can instruct from anywhere and at any time, and their class is brought to life through a learning platform.
- A means to bridge the distance: Virtual learning helps trainees achieve their learning objectives and foster the creation of the communities, peer groups and collaborative teamwork essential for advancing One Health work.
- A wider reach: Virtual learning makes it possible to reach large and disparate demographics at the same time.
- Greater cost-effectiveness: Virtual learning only requires a working internet and a device, which can be a smartphone, tablet or laptop.

The Virtual Learning Centers (VLCs) are virtual hubs established to develop and improve One Health capacities in all FAO regions. Their mission is to provide trainees with access to inclusive, engaging and high-quality training using a variety of methodologies. The VLCs follow a decentralized model that empowers FAO regions to develop and deliver courses that closely consider regional needs and context. This model makes it possible to scale up the delivery of courses and share resources and good practices between VLCs. There are currently six VLCs, including the VLC in Europe and Central Asia (VLC REU).

Since the establishment of the first hub in Southern Africa, the VLCs have offered courses in three main areas: One Health capacity development; animal health and production; and agroecology. Courses are available in a range of formats, including online tutored courses, blended learning, technical webinars and mobile learning.

The VLCs' training courses target country actors in the areas related to FAO's One Health mandate, including government officials and technical staff, programme and project coordinators, practitioners and professionals working in the field, such as veterinarians, animal health workers, experts in forestry, wildlife, aquaculture and fisheries, in addition to public health experts. Trainees are located around the world and come from a variety of institutions. They include government staff, university students and researchers, and the private sector.

The approach

Most VLC courses are tutored, and therefore they combine convenient self-paced study with a unique opportunity to discuss and network with international experts and regional colleagues. Networking occurs through online discussion forums, live virtual sessions, social media and messaging platforms.

Participants share knowledge on the concepts of the training under the guidance of trainers, linking this knowledge with observations in their home countries. Often colleagues in different countries experience similar challenges and virtual networking allows us to come up with locally appropriate and innovative solutions. The VLCs can therefore work as a platform to facilitate South-South Cooperation.

Many of the VLCs courses are designed to be easy to translate into additional languages. Translation into local languages is vital in allowing our courses to reach as wide an audience as possible. Each regional VLC is also involved in tailoring courses to individual regional needs and courses are developed so that such regionalization can be managed quickly and flexibly.

The VLCs offer online learning courses in a range of different modalities, tailored to particular learning needs: Self-directed courses; Tutored virtual courses for large audiences; In-depth virtual courses; and Blended learning (combining face-to-face and online learning experiences).

Activities undertaken

Even prior its official establishment, the office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) was very active in the development and delivery of interactive online trainings and workshops to build capacity amongst animal health professionals in the region. The VLC has allowed to further expand this capability. The courses offered so far have focused on different diseases and aspects of animal health and One Health, which are delivered in various languages to reach the broadest possible range of participants.

One VLC success initiated by the VLC REU was the development of a course on ASF, which was then adapted by the VLCs in other regions by revising and translating modules, and creating examples more suitable to the local context. As a result, 583 people were reached in Asia (33 countries), 372 in Southern Africa (15 countries), 306 in Europe and Central Asia (12 countries), and 320 in Latin America and the Caribbean (11 countries). A very similar approach took place for the online course on lumpy skin disease preparedness, also developed by VLC REU and then adapted and delivered in several other regions.

The most recent courses include those on [African swine fever \(ASF\)](#) and [lumpy skin disease \(LSD\)](#) preparedness (both in Russian), and the [Global Avian Influenza \(AI\)](#) course, co-lead and in English. Online workshops were organized on the use of the FAO corporate [OUTbreak COSTing Tool \(OutCosT\)](#) and on peste des petits ruminants (PPR), both in English.

Work ahead

The VLC will continue to address the region's needs based on the outcomes of the training needs assessment (TNA) carried out in 2022 and consultations with the network of national animal health focal points. In the last quarter of 2022, two additional one-month courses are currently being implemented. The first on stamping out, on how to practically kill, dispose and clean and disinfect farms following a disease outbreak, while the second will be an adaptation into Russian of the global avian influenza course.

The long-term goal for the REU VLC for 2023 and beyond is to continue developing and delivering online courses under the One Health umbrella, such as on One Health coordination, ruminant biosecurity, brucellosis control, food loss and waste or plant health.