

Strengthening Scientific Excellence through WOA Reference Centres: Purpose, Challenges, and Future Directions

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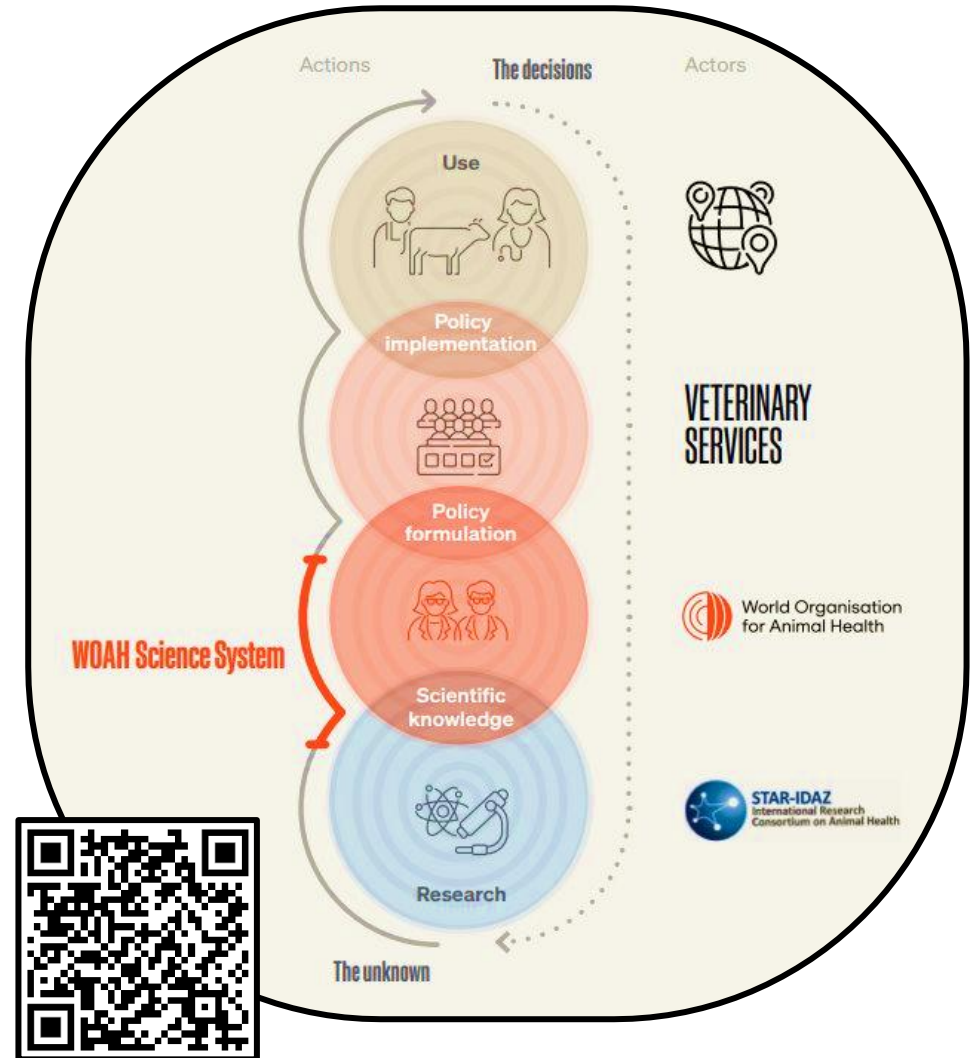
Regional Commission
Conference Middle East



WOAH's scientific mission

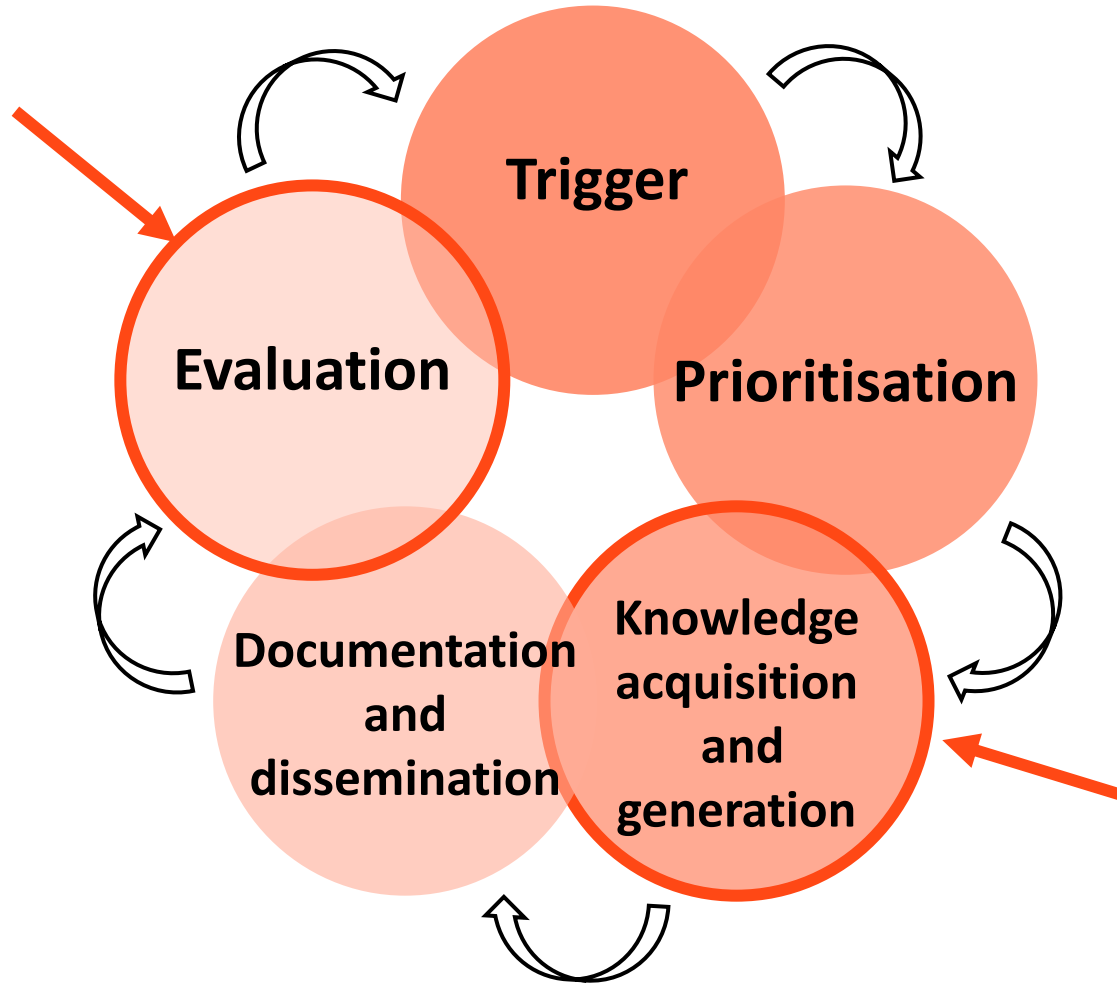
WOAH as a science-policy facilitator

bridging **science** and **policy** to support Members in
animal health and welfare **decision-making**

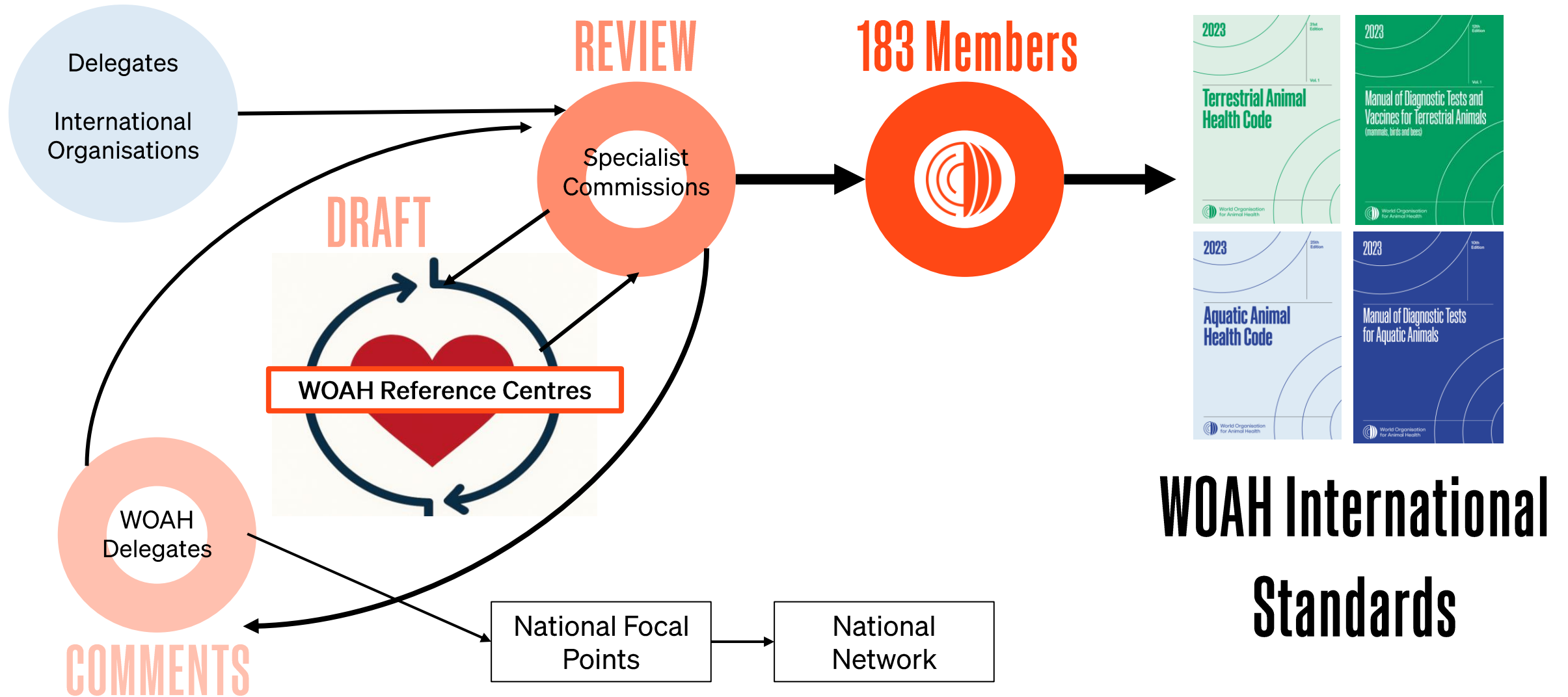


The **role** and **value** of the Reference Centre Network

Role of Reference Centres in WOA's Science Cycle



The Reference Centre network constitutes the core of WOA's scientific expertise and excellence

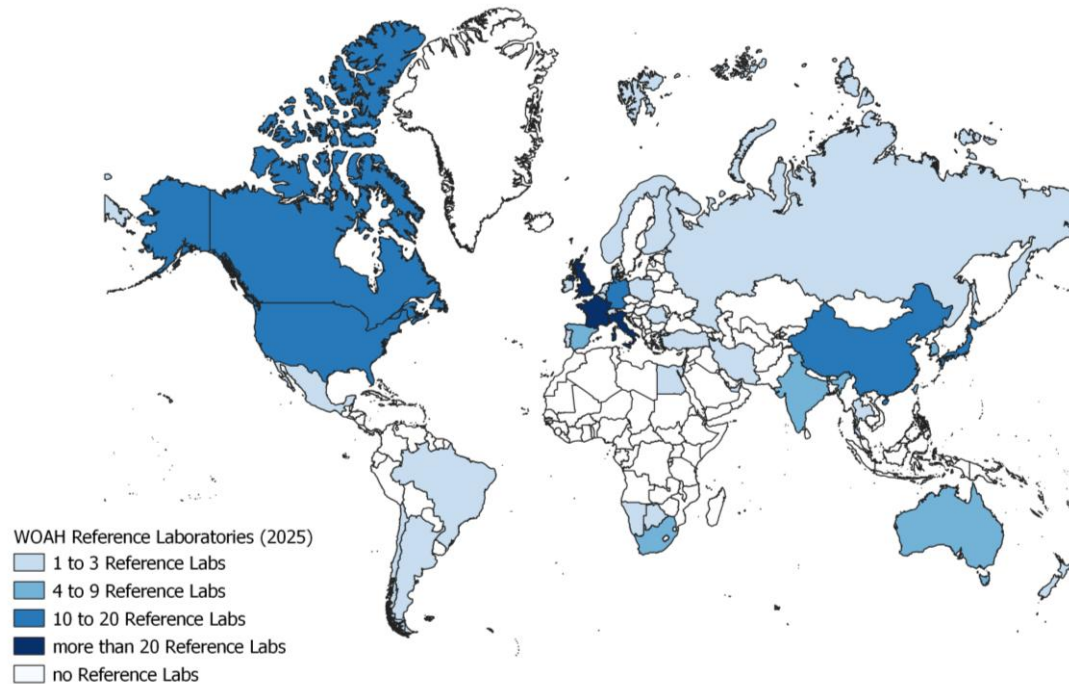


Current WOAH Reference Centre network

- **Reference Laboratories:** are designated to pursue all the scientific and technical problems relating to a named **disease**.
- **Collaborating Centres:** are designated for a specific specialty within a **focus area** relating to the management of general questions on animal health issues.

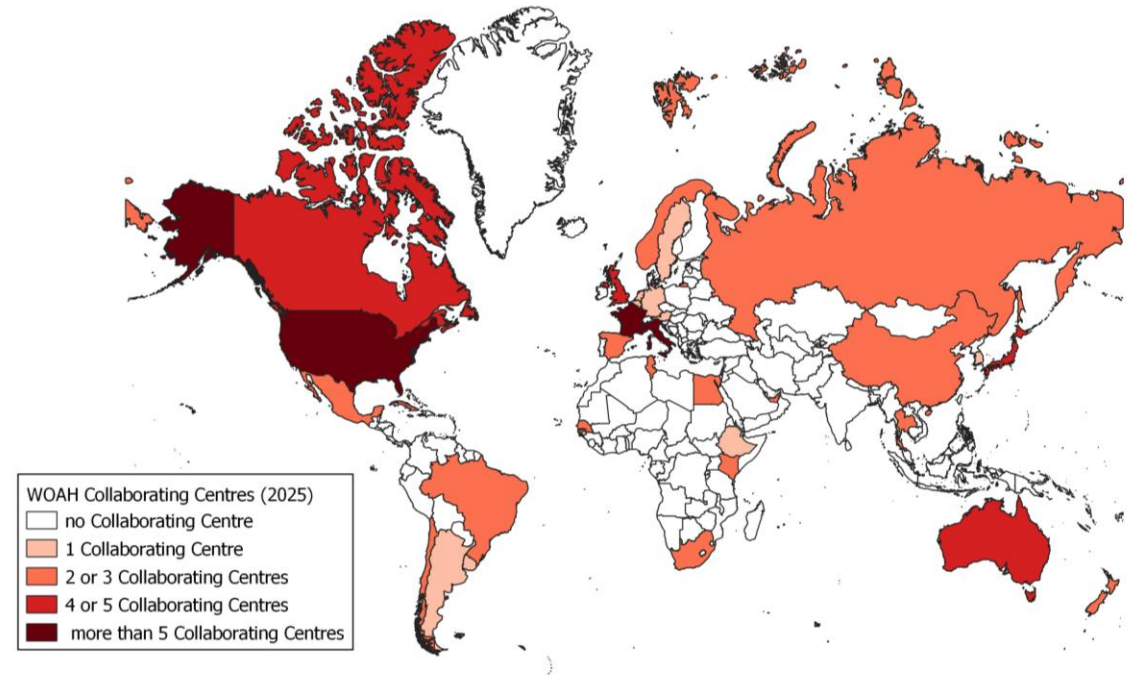
WOAH Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres - May 2025			
	Reference Laboratories	Collaborating Centres	Total
Number	270	80	350
Countries	39	33	48
Diseases/ Topics	109	All six main focus areas: 36 specialties	—
Experts	206	—	—

WOAH Reference Labs - 2025



270 Reference Laboratories
39 Countries
109 Diseases
206 Experts

WOAH Collaborating Centres - 2025



80 Collaborating Centres
33 Countries
6 Main focus areas
36 Specialties

Reference Centres in the Middle East Region

7 Reference Laboratories

- Avian influenza – EGYPT
- Brucellosis – EGYPT
- Sheep pox and goat pox – IRAN
- Glanders – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- Camelpox – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- Brucellosis – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

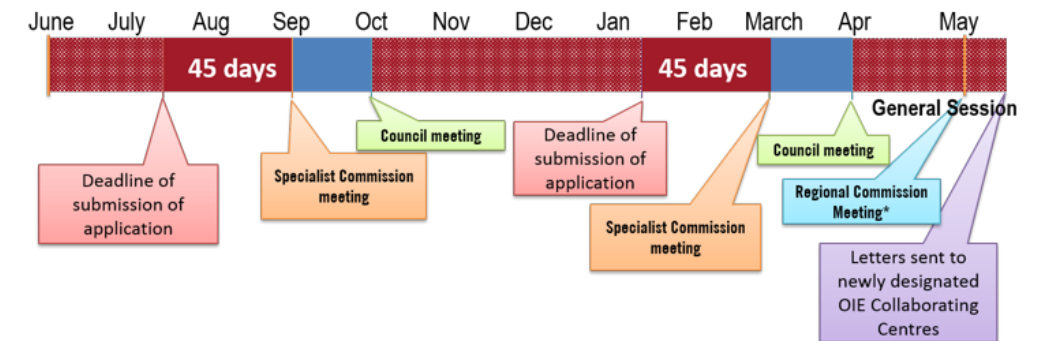
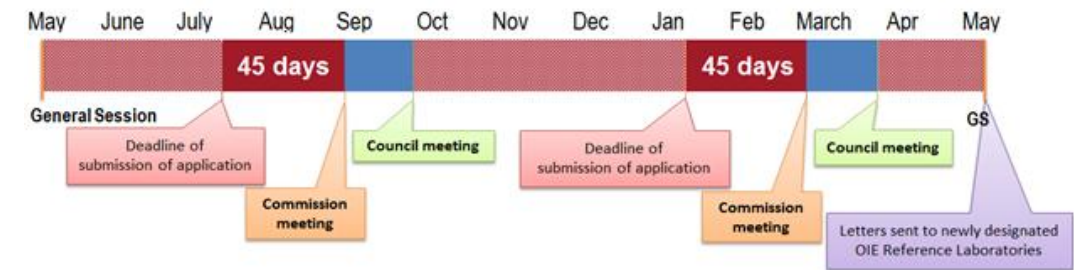
5 Collaborating Centres

- Quality Control of Veterinary Vaccines in the Middle East – EGYPT
- Day-One Veterinary Competencies in the Middle East - EGYPT
- Fish Health Management in the Middle East Region – EGYPT
- Quality Management Systems - UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- Camel Diseases - UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Procedures for designation

0. Informal discussion with WOAHP Regional Representation

1. Select the scope and identify the right experts
2. Submission of an application
3. Preliminary screening of application (BSC/AAC Secretariat)
4. Evaluation by the relevant WOAHP Specialist Commission (Terrestrial-BSC or Aquatic-AAC)
5. *Only for CC* – Endorsement by the relevant Regional Commission
6. Endorsement by the WOAHP Council
7. Designation of WOAHP Reference Centre by the Assembly
8. Annual rigorous performance evaluation



Next deadline for submission: December 2025

Reference Laboratory (RL):

- *Curriculum vitae* (CV) following WOAHA template;
- Letter from the WOAHA Delegate of the country;
- Follow the criteria for the [Guidelines for applicants for RL](#).



Collaborating Centre (CC):

- 5-year work-plan;
- Main focus area and specialty;
- Letter from the WOAHA Delegate of the country;
- Follow the criteria for the [Guidelines for applicants for CC](#).



WOAH REFERENCE LABORATORY QUESTIONNAIRE

During the Biological Standard Commission meeting in September 2022, the Commission decided to ask the Reference Laboratory (RL) experts for feedback on their **experience of being a WOAHL RL for diseases of terrestrial animals**. A questionnaire comprising 19 questions was developed with questions focused on the RL system with a particular emphasis on the point of contact between RL and WOAHL and the Commission.



The questionnaire was divided into six sections:

Role as a WOAHL Reference Laboratory	Resourcing	Awareness	Standardisation of reagents	Contact with WOAHL	Reference Laboratory network activities
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Objectives

The questionnaire presented an opportunity for experts to make suggestions for changes and **improvements to the system**.

Methodology

The questionnaire was finalised in February 2023 and circulated to the 180 RL experts, offering the choice to reply anonymously.

70% submitted their answers to the questionnaire (126/180)

Conclusions and action points

Overall satisfaction observed among RL experts



1. Use the results on the perceived benefits for advocacy to Delegates, Ministers to maintain RL.
2. Ensure succession plans have been prepared for designated RL experts.
3. Conduct a deeper analysis to gather insights about individuals who are not satisfied with different aspects of the RL processes.

Simplify and increase transparency of RL processes



1. Improve the annual report web platform.
2. Provide easier-to-understand information on the process of revising chapters, focusing on transparency.
3. Provide training on WOAHL procedures, user-friendly documents and training on the standardisation of reagents.

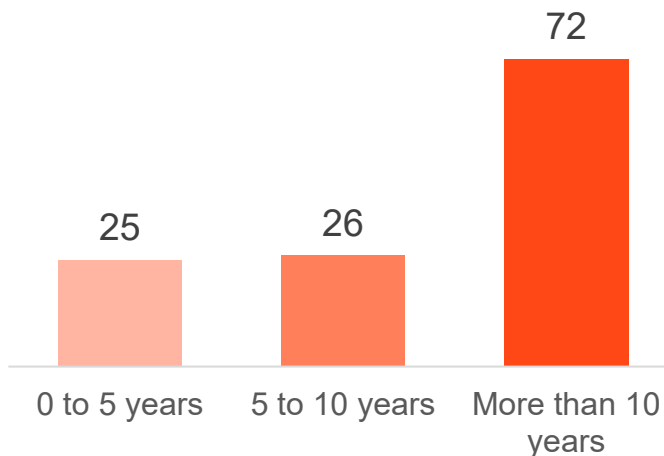
Increase interactions between RLs and the BSC and WOAHL



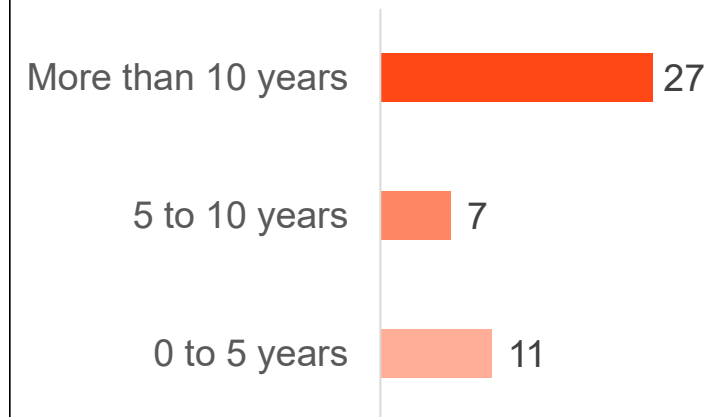
1. Improve the feedback mechanisms.
2. Extending invitations to RL to participate in WOAHL virtual events.
3. Promote networking within specific disease areas or within regions.
4. Explore the possibility of an in-person meeting between all the RL and WOAHL.

- **Overall satisfaction** observed among the RL and CC experts
- More involved in the Ref Labs process and **increase transparency**
- **Increase interactions** between RLs and the BSC/WOAH

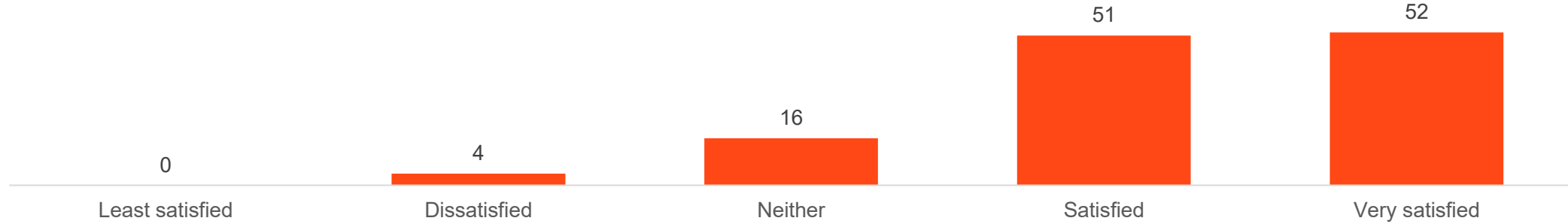
How long has your institution hosted this WOAHL Reference Laboratory



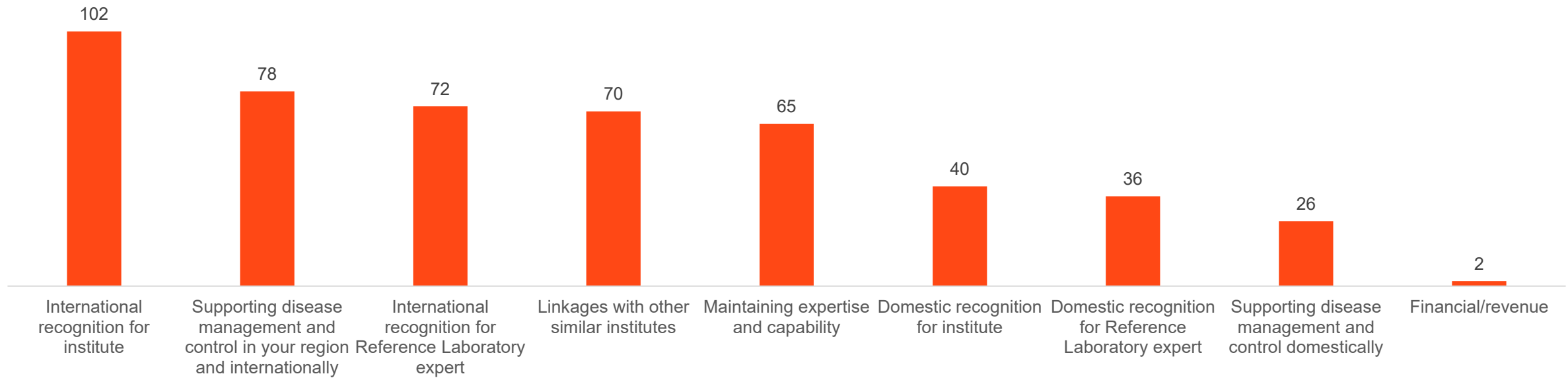
How long has your institution hosted this WOAHL Collaborating Centre?



How satisfied are you with being the WOA Reference Centre expert?



What are the three most important benefits of being a WOA Reference Centre



Current challenges and opportunities



Member demands not always reach Ref Centres



Clear 'ASK'

Ref Centre not always supported by host country



Involve Experts in
your activities

Ref Centre experts not aware of WOAHA activities



Involve Experts in
WOAH activities

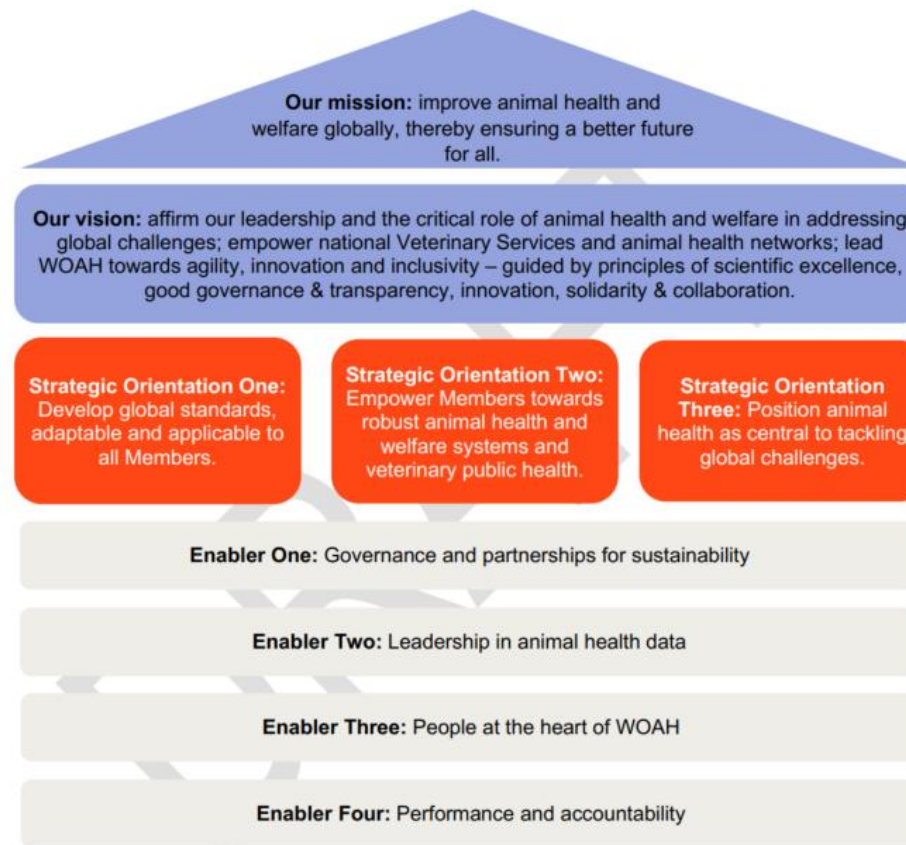
Member solidarity, Member international scientific pride

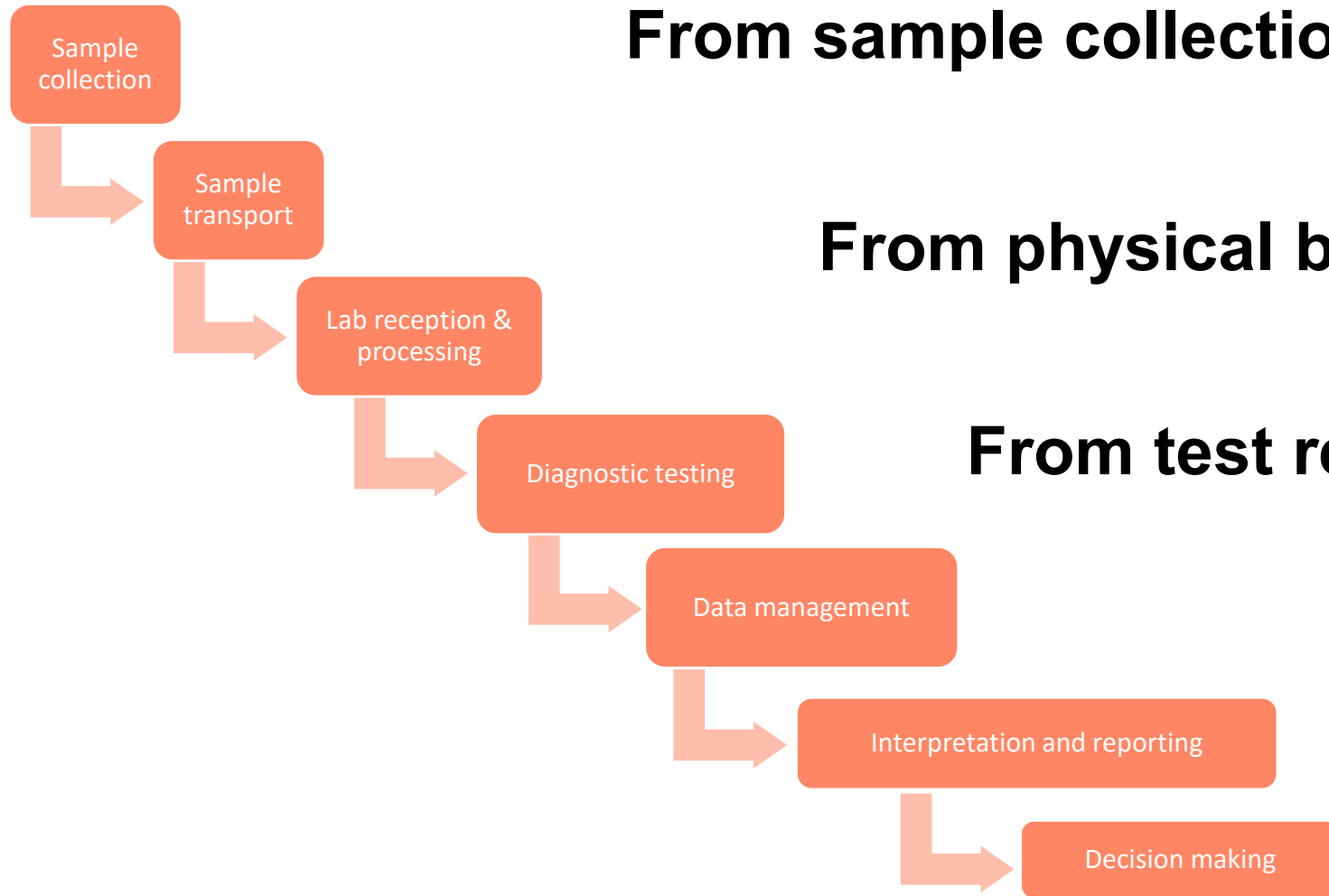
Geographical unbalanced

Type of Centre	Disease/ Area	Region
Ref. Laboratory	Equine encephalitides	All
Ref. Laboratory	Glanders	Americas & Asia and the Pacific
Ref. Laboratory	Caprine arthritis/encephalitis and maedi Visna	All
Ref. Laboratory	Lumpy skin disease	All
Ref. Laboratory	ASF	South East Asia
Ref. Laboratory	PPR	South East Asia
Ref. Laboratory	Mammalian tuberculosis	Africa
Collaborating Centre	Artificial Intelligence	All

8th Strategic Plan

Reference Centres as a hub of Scientific Excellence





From sample collection to decision

From physical building to system

From test results to disease intelligence

WOAH Reference Centre Network of the Future

- Beyond diagnostic excellence
- Quality, technical support, research
- Effective data management
- Regional Integration Centres:
 - Diagnostic, surveillance, disease management
 - Data and action
 - Centralised expertise and decentralised capacity

Not only a Network of diagnostic expertise but a hub of global health intelligence

Thank you

