

Required competencies of Veterinary Services in the context of the international trade Opportunities and challenges

4.

Veterinary Services competencies to secure and facilitate international trade

Role of VS in trade and related
competences - description, p.2

Summary of trade 'specific' and
'associated' competences, p.6

Consequences in terms of trade capacity
building, p.8

This document was prepared
in the framework of the
2020 Technical Item by Drs
Nadège Leboucq, Francisco
D'Alessio and Karen Bucher
from the World Organisation
for Animal Health (OIE).

Veterinary Services' competencies to secure and facilitate international trade

The Veterinary Services play an essential role in international trade as they provide the basis for safe and equitable international and domestic trade of animals and animal products. This role, whose complexity and difficulty are described in the document 'Challenges faced by Veterinary Services in the context of international trade and successful practices' (Part III of the 2020 Technical Item Report) –one could argue it is the most difficult role of the Veterinary Services–, requires legal, institutional, technical, collaborative and policy competencies.

Role of VS in trade and related competences – description

1. This role is exercised within a **multifaceted international regulatory framework**, composed of numerous sanitary agreements and standards developed by different international organisations (World Trade Organization [WTO], OIE, Codex Alimentarius Commission, International Plant Protection Convention [IPPC]), many of which are based on complex principles (equivalence, non-discrimination, etc.) and are outcome- rather than input-based: if it offers some flexibility in their application, which, on the other hand, gives free rein to all kinds of interpretations, making consistency with these agreements and standards difficult. In the context of trade, OIE standards are complicated to transpose into national laws as they are organised by diseases and not by commodity. This international regulatory framework is also subject to regular updates and changes (the OIE's two Codes, the Terrestrial Animal Health Code and the Aquatic Animal Health Code, are amended each year), requiring flexible and rapid harmonisation mechanisms at national level. Regulatory transparency is also an obligation of the international regulatory framework.

A good understanding of the international regulatory framework from a legal point of view for adequate and regular transcription into national laws is essential and requires **legal competencies**. The Veterinary Authority must therefore be able to:

- 
- Understand the whole trade framework and see value in the WTO sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) framework to apply its basic principles to trade policies
 - Have a deep understanding of OIE standards to interpret them for their national context
 - Develop and maintain a legal framework compliant with WTO agreements and relevant international standards
 - Ensure and promote transparency of the national animal health situation, trade-related regulations and procedures, and any other information relevant for trade
 - Enforce legislation through a chain of command, a clear definition of roles and responsibilities (including delegation) and the application of penalties and sanctions

The challenges noted in the document 'Challenges faced by Veterinary Services in the context of international trade and successful practices' (Part III of the 2020 Technical Item Report) mention in particular that countries have difficulties in preparing and regularly updating their national trade laws in compliance with the international regulatory framework. Some difficulties can be resolved by capacity-building activities for Veterinary Services, while others require actions at whole government level, such as the application of good regulatory practices.

2. If this role is faulty or poorly achieved, it can **have multiple and sometimes serious consequences**, both from a sanitary (transmission and spread of animal diseases, including zoonoses) and economic (embargoes, temporary or permanent closure of export markets) perspective, potentially damaging the credibility of the exporting country's Veterinary Services in the long term. Some WTO (dispute settlement mechanism) and OIE (informal mediation procedure) tools are available to countries to try and settle trade disputes originating from the misapplication or abusive interpretation of OIE standards. If this role is not fully exploited, the lack of access to potential export markets can also have serious economic consequences, both at national level and for some specific supply chains. It is therefore important for the Veterinary Services to be able to decide and put in place suitable policies and programmes bolstering market access according to national trade priorities.

The Veterinary Services must therefore have **policy competencies**, including the capacity to:

- Define and develop core veterinary policies and programmes in support of national trade priorities



The document 'Challenges faced by Veterinary Services in the context of international trade and successful practices' (Part III of the 2020 Technical Item Report) highlighted political interference that can result in hindering a decision-making process that should remain purely scientifically based.



3. This role requires as a prerequisite the **quality and good governance of the Veterinary Services** to ensure that the trade process takes place according to professional, ethical and impartial principles, essential to establishing the trust of the various interested parties.

A good understanding of OIE standards on the quality of Veterinary Services, and on this basis, of the strengths and weaknesses of national Veterinary Services in international trade, requires **institutional competencies**, including the capacity to:

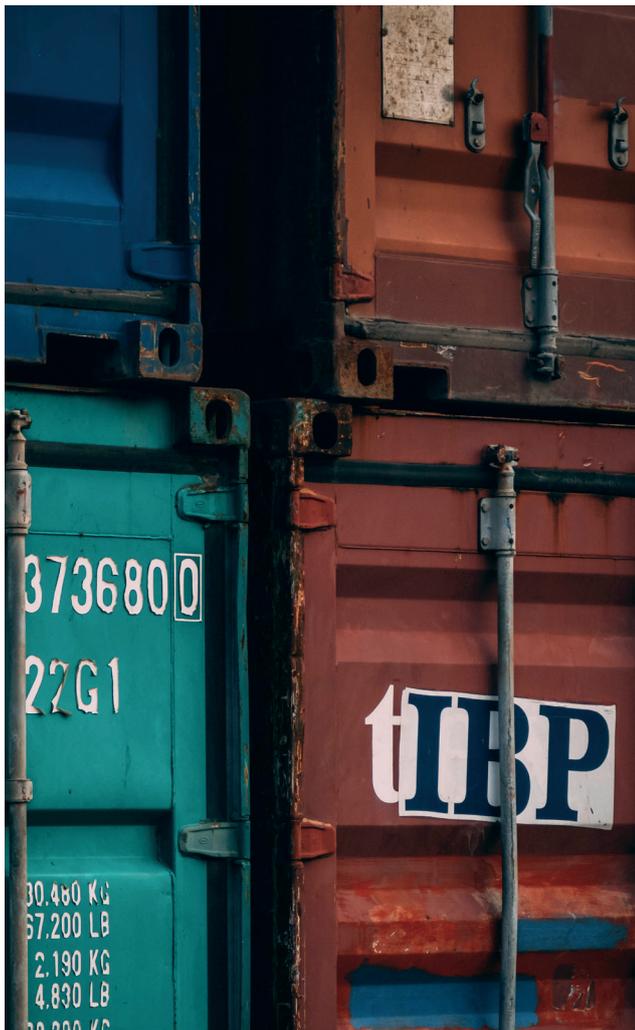
- Implement ethical principles and quality organisational, financial and technical processes at Veterinary Services' level
- Understand, analyse and evaluate how improvements can be made in terms of the trade-related critical competencies listed in the OIE PVS Tool





4. This role in international trade involves the **implementation of numerous technical steps** (see the OIE infographic on trade) to complete the whole trade process (i.e. before and during trade negotiation and during trade implementation), some of which are directly linked to trade (definition of health conditions, certification, controls on goods) and others linked to the establishment of an enabling environment for trade, calling on other roles of the Veterinary Services, in particular in animal health and welfare (animal health surveillance, disease prevention, disease control, conditions for movement control and traceability of animals and animal products, long distance transport of animals, etc.). This clearly demonstrates the technical complexity of trade-related operations.

The implementation of various roles of the Veterinary Services directly or indirectly linked to international trade operations requires a large array of **technical competencies**:



OVERALL

- Understand the whole trade process (respective rights and obligation of exporting and importing countries)
- Characterise commodities for trade

DURING TRADE NEGOTIATION

- Develop national official assurance systems to support certification
- Implement relevant surveillance, control, and eradication programmes
- Put in place and manage an identification and traceability system
- Implement animal welfare programmes, including during international transport and at borders

BEFORE TRADE NEGOTIATION

- Negotiate sanitary measures and international veterinary certification
- Apply risk assessment principles and methods, and apply import risk assessment to mitigate all trade-related risks
- Provide reliable sanitary information (sanitary situation, official status, endorsed control programmes, etc.)

AFTER TRADE NEGOTIATION, IMPLEMENTATION

- Organise pre-export controls
Provide valid laboratory results (using prescribed tests for international trade)
- Certify commodities and related services and processes, and monitor the certification process
- Take corrective action in the case of non-compliance during the trade process
- Implement rapid response to diseases to mitigate trade impacts
- Organise import control at borders and quarantine



The challenges identified in the document ‘Challenges faced by Veterinary Services in the context of international trade and successful practices’ (Part III of the 2020 Technical Item Report) raise a number of technical difficulties regarding risk analysis, the establishment of a surveillance system throughout the country or an identification and traceability system, the delivery of valid laboratory tests, the non-recognition by some countries of OIE official status or self-declarations especially with regard to regionalisation, or even the implementation of an e-certification system.

Many of these difficulties stem from a lack of competencies (qualitative aspects of human resources), which can be solved by implementing an appropriate training plan; others stem from a chronic shortage of personnel in the Veterinary Services (quantitative aspect of human resources). Certain difficulties may also be linked to problems of a more technological (setting up an animal health database, an identification and traceability system or a technical solution for e-certification) or even political nature, both going beyond the competencies expected from the Veterinary Services.

5. This role connects **a multitude of actors from the public and private sectors** throughout the trade process. These include, at national level, the OIE Delegate – who has a specific role to play in trade – and various categories of Veterinary Services’ personnel, whether they belong to central or decentralised offices (includes personnel in border inspection posts), the various competent authorities involved in defining national priorities or in implementing border controls, and private business operators (producers, transporters, traders, etc.). It will also involve the Veterinary Authority of the trading partner country, which may have different laws, organisation or language.

In order for all these actors to be able to collaborate effectively in a trade context, the Veterinary Services should have the following **collaborative competencies**:

- With trading partners: Ensure efficient communication before and during trade negotiations and throughout trade operations, including risk communication in the event of a sanitary crisis
- With other government authorities: Implement coordinated border management with SPS authorities and customs
- With private stakeholders: Develop, maintain and strengthen partnerships with private stakeholders within or outside the Veterinary Services who can provide information and support in all trade steps

The challenges identified in the document ‘Challenges faced by Veterinary Services in the context of international trade and successful practices’ (Part III of the 2020 Technical Item Report) include the following: difficulties in coordinating management at the borders between competent authorities, particularly for e-certification implementation; the lack of effective public–private partnerships (PPPs) both within the Veterinary Services (delegation of official tasks to private veterinarians) and between the Veterinary Services and private business operators, especially for the establishment of zones and compartments; the lack of private operator consultation in a context where private operators are rarely organised in associations or federations and therefore cannot speak on behalf of their entire professions. Most of these difficulties can be solved with capacity-building activities.

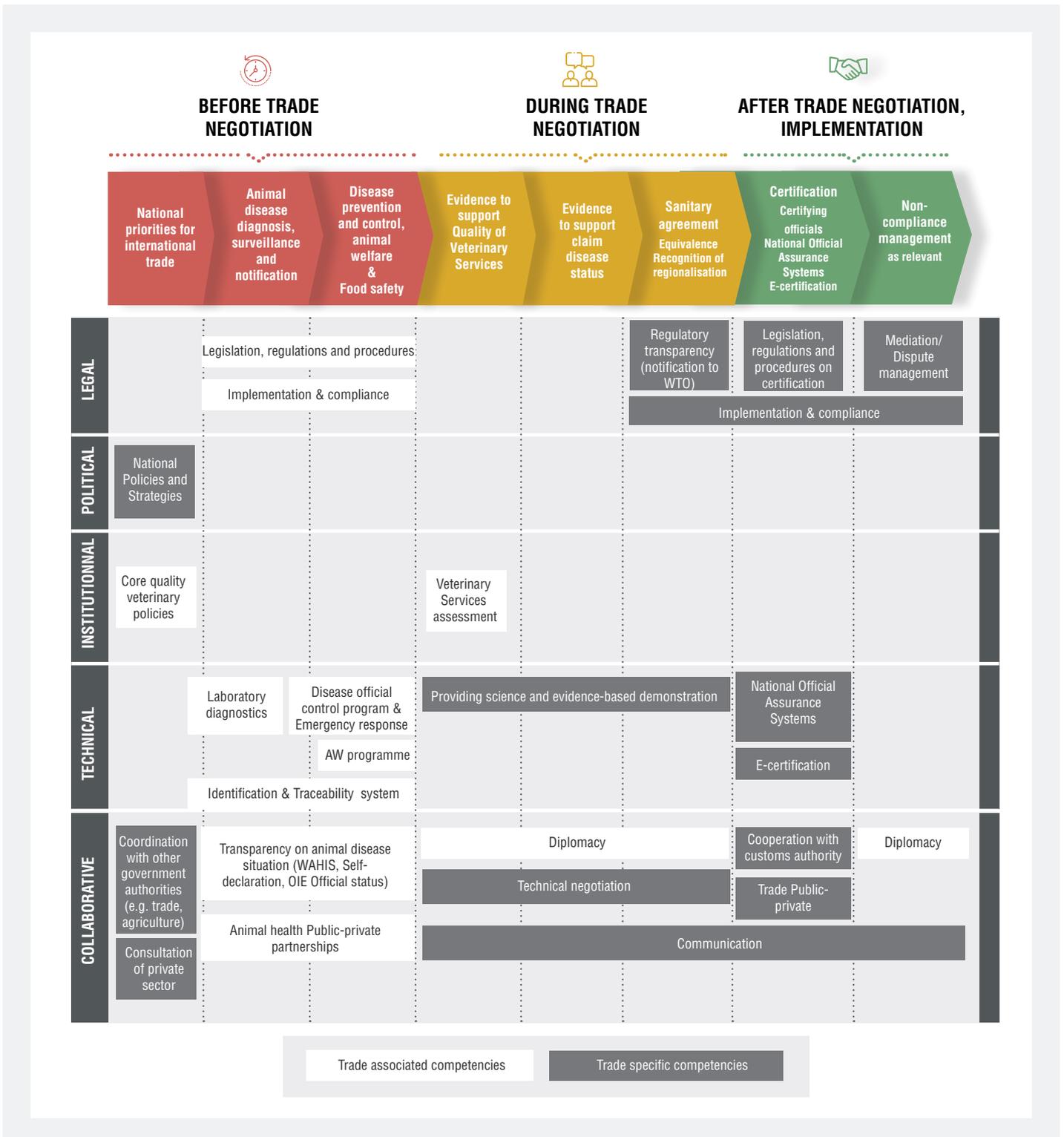


Summary of trade 'specific' and 'associated' competences

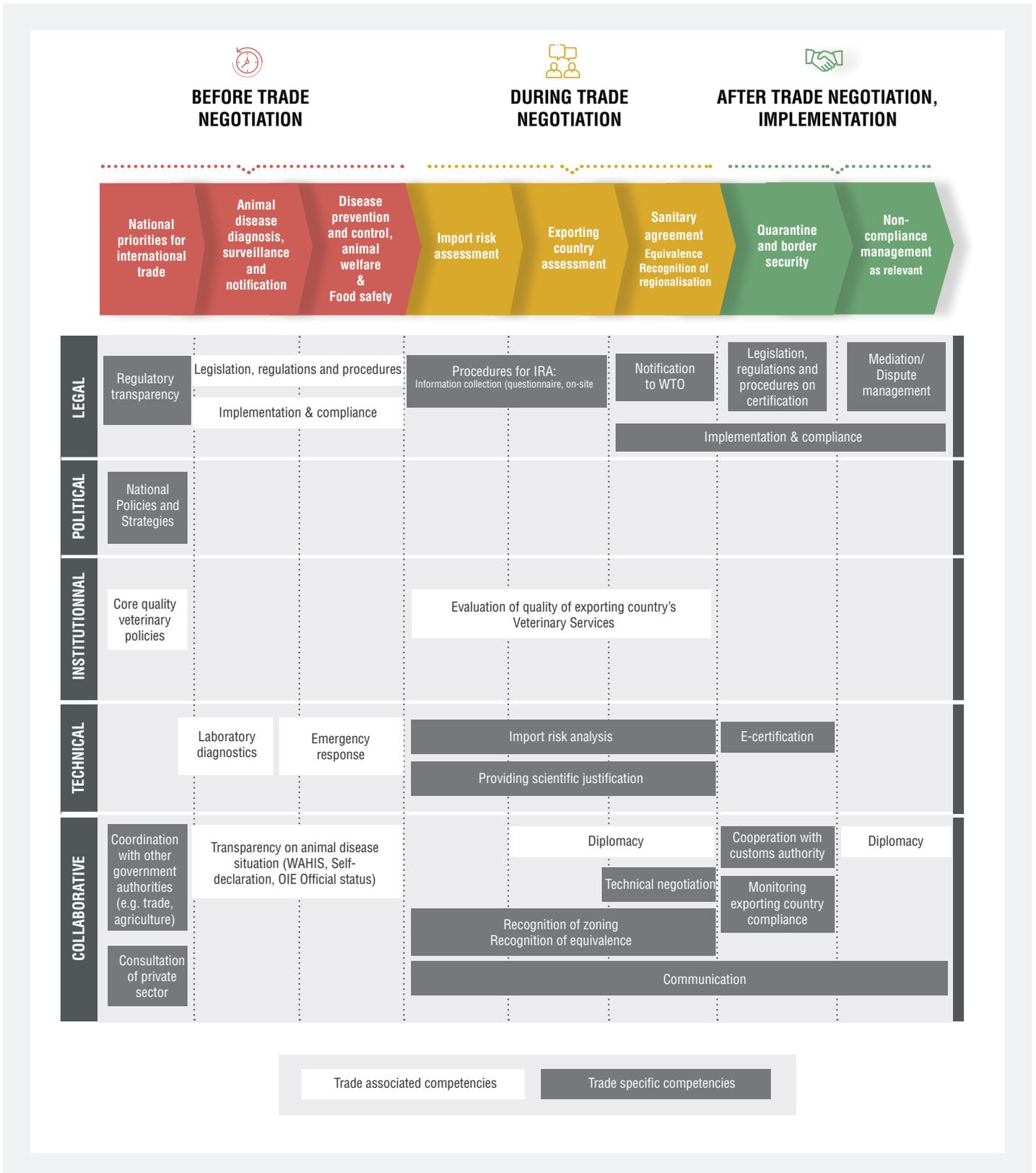
The following figures summarise the necessary competencies for the Veterinary Services to carry out their role in the international trade of animals and their products in compliance with the international trade regulatory framework. They have been separated into two clusters: competencies that relate directly and exclusively to a trade related operation such as

negotiation, certification and export control (= **'trade specific competencies'** linked to other Veterinary Services roles – that are not specific to trade but contribute to an enabling trade environment (= **'trade associated competencies'**). This dichotomy is important for the organisation of the future OIE training offer.

- **'Specific' and 'associated' trade competences (exporting countries)**



• ‘Specific’ and ‘associated’ trade competences (importing countries)



• OIE Delegate specific competencies on trade

It is important to bear in mind that the OIE Delegate is the official OIE contact person in the country and in this capacity has specific and iterative tasks to conduct around the year, some of which are directly or indirectly connected to trade. As part of their specific role, Delegates have to be able to:

- Represent their country actively and regularly in the formulation, negotiation and adoption of international standards
- Make available to other Member Countries, through the OIE and in compliance with OIE standards, whatever information is necessary to minimise the spread of important animal diseases, and their pathogenic agents, and to assist in achieving better worldwide control of these diseases
- Understand the mechanisms that OIE Member Countries may use to resolve differences and formal disputes affecting international trade (OIE informal mediation procedures), and use them as relevant



They should therefore benefit from dedicated OIE training tools and resources to build and maintain those competencies.



This tentative list of 26 trade ‘specific’ and ‘associated’ competencies will be workshopped on the occasion of the OIE Training Think Tank Forum to be organised in 2021 as well as in different OIE arenas as relevant.

Consequences in terms of trade capacity-building

As a result of the above description of the complex role of the Veterinary Services in trade, the OIE’s future Capacity-Building framework to enhance the Veterinary Services’ competencies on trade should have the following features:

- 1 Be accessible to **all Veterinary Services staff** involved in trade-related operations, whether they belong to central or decentralised services (includes personnel at border inspection posts). Specific training programmes should also be designed for OIE Delegates. The accessibility of online courses to operators outside the Veterinary Services would be a ‘plus’ for a better mutual understanding of respective responsibilities and constraints.
- 2 Be ‘competence-based’ (rather than knowledge-based) and aim at **reinforcing trade ‘specific’ and ‘associated’ competencies** as both are needed for the full and safe completion of any trade operation. This requires a large and comprehensive training offer on trade and on all other topics indirectly relevant to trade.
- 3 Offer **more than just technical veterinary content**, to also enhance policy, institutional and other needed competences (e.g. good regulatory practices) and soft skills, particularly important in trade negotiations.
- 4 Consider, in terms of learning objectives, both **knowledge and skills acquisition**, which will require various **pedagogical methods**: for instance, practical case studies and situational exercises will be of paramount importance for Veterinary Services to learn how to solve trade issues.
- 5 Propose a **wide array of capacity-building tools and resources**, including the OIE PVS Pathway, to evaluate and reinforce Veterinary Services’ trade related capacity in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.