



### Question raised by requestor

In France, a governmental plan to prepare and adapt to production structures, activities and population during natural disasters, which are more frequent due to climate change, is already available. Are there any preparedness plans in other EU countries regarding livestock welfare emergencies during natural disasters?



### Answer

Natural disasters such as floods, forest fires and extreme weather events have been prevalent in Europe, necessitating effective emergency management systems that include animal welfare as a critical component. Actions during destocking, such as removing or humanely destroying animals which are suffering and likely to die and providing veterinary care or prophylaxis, feed, water and shelter, are regarded as “pro-animal welfare” interventions (1). The capacity of European countries to respond to livestock welfare emergencies during natural disasters is a multifaceted issue that encompasses disaster management frameworks, veterinary service preparedness and the integration of animal welfare considerations into emergency response strategies. Recent studies have highlighted significant variations in the capabilities of World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) member countries to manage animal welfare during such crises, with a notable emphasis on the need for improved coordination and capacity development among veterinary services (2).

WOAH has established guidelines on disaster management and risk reduction that are crucial for ensuring animal health and welfare during emergencies, mainly addressed to National Veterinary Services. These guidelines emphasize a comprehensive approach that integrates veterinary public health considerations into disaster preparedness and response frameworks. Moreover, the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, veterinary services, and non-governmental organizations, to effectively manage animal welfare during crises is highlighted. Training and capacity building are also emphasized. An effective disaster response requires that veterinary personnel and other stakeholders are well-prepared to address the unique challenges posed by emergencies. This includes understanding the specific needs of livestock during disasters, as well as the psychological impacts on both animals and their caregivers. WOAH encourages the development of training programs that equip stakeholders with the necessary skills to implement the guidelines effectively (3).

From the 49 European Region Members of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) that participated in a survey, almost 60% (29/49) reported having animal welfare in their Veterinary Service National Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Plan, which is slightly higher than responses given for incorporation of welfare in overall national regulatory frameworks (25/49, 51%). The majority of the member countries reporting a natural disaster event (27/34, 79%) declared that Veterinary Services at the national, regional, or local level were involved in the management of the disaster and that animal welfare was incorporated into the disaster response (21/27, 78%). Despite the number of member countries experiencing natural disasters and the number of member countries involving Veterinary Services in events, less than one third (16/49) indicated that natural disasters were included in Veterinary Services specific contingency plans. Twenty-two of the member countries reported having at least partial standard operating procedures (SOP) to prepare and respond to animal welfare tasks in natural disasters. Multiple respondents (36/49, 73%) indicated that Veterinary Services did not train for animal welfare emergencies in natural disasters and or conduct any simulation exercises (42/49, 86%); however, those reporting training had a high percentage (77%) of joint training with other organizations (veterinary clinics, hospital services, defence agencies, etc.), (2).



We are unable to provide a detailed answer to your question about preparedness plans in EU countries other than France regarding livestock welfare emergencies during natural disasters. We collected information from some EU member states (see below) but not all. If you want us to pursue our efforts to get information, we will approach the MS Competent Authorities. However, this will take considerable time (1-2 months).

### Information on preparedness plans in some EU countries

#### Greece

After Storm Daniel caused flooding in the region of Thessaly and the fire in the Evros region, in which major animal losses were reported, a framework for the protection of live animals in similar situations was created. A Circular Direction (no.223/177764/19-06-2024) was published and sent to all Veterinary Authorities, in accordance with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) standards on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction (3, 4). To improve their level of preparedness and respond to urgencies arising in similar situations, all Greek Veterinary Authorities should have data regarding the exact location, owner's contact details and species reared in farms at risk. Temporary facilities and veterinary care should be provided for the assembly of animals after removal from the farms following a risk assessment, taking into account the current epidemiological situation of the diseases, as well as the health status of each flock. Owners, on the other hand, shall be prepared to ensure the availability of water, food and other necessary supplies, for a period of at least 5-7 days, so that they can meet the animals' needs in case of an emergency that inhibits external assistance. Injured animals should be separated from the others and treated by a veterinarian as soon as possible, while measures to carry out emergency on-site slaughtering of severely injured animals that cannot be cured shall be implemented.

#### Italy

In the event of disasters, Veterinary Services and other bodies of the National Health Service are integrated into the National Civil Protection System. Since 2018, the protection of animals has also been included in the National Code which defines the tasks and purposes of Civil Protection, together with the protection of life, physical integrity, property, settlements and the environment from damage or the danger of damage resulting from natural disasters or those caused by human activities (5) (Art. 1 of Legislative Decree no. 1 of 2018 – Civil Protection Code).

Veterinary actions are managed in coordination with the Civil Protection Support Functions and the operational involvement of the Veterinary Services of the Local Health Units (LHU), based on specific emergency plans and regional guidelines as provided for by the ministerial decree of 13 February 2001, concerning "General criteria for the organization of health relief in disasters".

Starting in 2016, the Regional Health Representative ensures the integration of the Regional Health Services in the Civil Protection System, and the coordination of urgent health relief is entrusted to a Remote Operations Center for the Organization of Health Relief (CROSS). In some regions, regional veterinary action plans in non-epidemic emergencies are available that include the management methods of the animals involved.

The National Reference Centre for Veterinary Urban Hygiene and Non-Epidemic Emergencies, established on 19 March 2013 at the IZS Teramo by Decree of the Ministry of Health, developed guidelines for the management of Animal Health and Welfare and Food Safety in the event of major emergencies, and an Information System for the management of veterinary activities in non-epidemic emergencies (SIVENE).

#### Romania

For Romania, the flood risk assessment was carried out in the framework of the Project "National Disaster Risk Assessment (RO-RISK)", through the Flood Hazard Analysis Stage Report, developed at the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests in 2016. This project aimed to materialize the provisions of the Council Directive 2007/60/EC on



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Flood Risk Assessment and Management which requires Member States, in the second stage of implementation, to develop flood hazard and risk maps for areas identified in the first stage as potentially at significant risk of flooding (6).

In case of a flood, the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority advises and monitors whether identified shelters meet the minimum conditions for housing animals in terms of animal health and welfare and feeding hygiene; it also identifies, where appropriate, means of rendering dead animals. The County Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Directorate issues press releases on the dangers that flooding events may pose to the health and welfare of animals and to public health, as well as on the measures to be taken to limit them.

The materials used for the shelters must not be harmful to animals and must be rigorously cleaned and disinfected. Moreover, animals kept in shelters must not be kept in constant darkness or exposed to uninterrupted artificial light. Equipment used for restraining and transporting animals must be designed, constructed, maintained and used in such a way as to avoid injury and suffering to the animals and to ensure their safety. Kicking or hitting animals, applying pressure to a sensitive area of the animal's body, causing unnecessary pain or suffering to the animal, suspending animals by mechanical means, lifting or dragging animals by the head, ears, horns, feet, tail or fur or handling them in a way that causes them unnecessary pain or suffering, should be avoided. The transport of rescued animals must be done without delay to the place of destination. If the duration of the journey to the place of destination is long, the conditions for the protection of the animals during transport shall be checked, providing them with water, food and rest appropriate to the species and size of the animals. For safety reasons, the loading of animals of different species, animals which differ considerably in size and age, and animals which are hostile to each other should be avoided in the same means of transport. At the same time, pregnant females will be transported separately, along with other vulnerable categories of animals (very young or old, sick animals, animals that cannot move alone).

#### *Portugal*

The Ministry of Agriculture, the National Authority for Civil Protection and the Municipal Councils have published a list of recommendations to ensure the protection of livestock and companion animals in fire situations (7).

At the onset of an incident, the Municipal Veterinarian or designated municipal staff must identify the population to be evacuated and suitable shelter locations, based on their accessibility, ease of transportation and basic health conditions (water, ventilation, appropriate feeding areas, etc.). The Municipal Councils are responsible for proposing municipal or private spaces that can be used as shelters in the case of such emergency (e.g. schools, parking lots, sports fields, open grounds, markets, etc.). Coordinated efforts with the Civil Protection and local authorities (through their veterinary body) are necessary to identify voluntary employees and veterinarians to assist in animal care. Municipal Staff and Volunteers are responsible to supply gates, fences, water dispensers, feeders, ropes, and other containment materials, as well as electronic identification readers, shade tents, lighting, security, euthanasia equipment, etc.

During the evacuation phase, animals that can move without pain or distress should be directed for transport. Animals in need of treatment should be taken to a designated location for examination and care by a veterinarian; those deemed beyond recovery must be euthanized. Animals must be identified upon entry to facilitate their return to their original location. Daily care must include observation, provision of water and food, cleaning, and security.





## References

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