



Question raised by requestor

What is the recommended space allowance for a mare kept with her foal from birth until weaning?



Answer

EURCAW *Ruminants & Equines* sent a survey to its national contact points to answer the request. Replies from 19 individual Member States were received. Equines are protected by the general requirements in Directive 98/58. In Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Sweden, specific national legislation exists that states space requirements for horses (details provided in the following section). Some countries have no specific legislation or recommendations on horses (Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Spain), but other Member States or the horse sector provides non-binding recommendations (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and the Netherlands).

Scientific knowledge

Scientific knowledge on the ideal size of horse stalls is limited, as it is not sufficiently based on controlled experiments and existing studies have involved few animals. There is a lack of specific studies comparing the behavioural responses and stress levels of horses in stalls of different sizes. However, current evidence suggests that a horse's space requirements should not be considered in isolation. In addition to the size of the horse, it is essential to consider the daily time the horse spends in the box (hours in the box, free or restricted access to paddock) and the resources available. Specifically, these include the opportunity for social interaction, possibility to retract from aggression from neighbours, the availability of roughage, and the type and amount of bedding. All these factors help enable the horse to meet its behavioural and physiological needs during the stabling period. Regarding mares with foals, we found no research regarding recommended space allowances. Currently, EFSA is working on a scientific report on equine welfare, which will consider space allowance. The report is expected to be published by the end of 2026.

Below are the answers from 19 Member States on space requirements for horses.

EU member states with legislation

Austria

Annex 1 of the 1st Animal Husbandry Regulations¹:

Horse size in cm (height at the withers)	Area in m ² per animal single box ¹	Shortest box side in cm
≤ 120	6	180
≤ 135	7.5	200
≤ 150	8.5	220
≤ 165	10	250
> 175	11	260
≤ 185	12	270
> 185	14	290

¹This area also applies to mares with foals until weaning or to two foals up to one year old. Feeding stalls are not to be included in these areas.

¹ Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Gesundheit und Frauen über die Mindestanforderungen für die Haltung von Pferden und Pferdeartigen, Schweinen, Rindern, Schafen, Ziegen, Schalenwild, Lamas, Kaninchen, Hausgeflügel, Straußen und Nutzfischen (1. Tierhaltungsverordnung), Anlage 1



In Austria there are also recommendations for 'welfare friendly housing systems' that provide minimum space requirements when keeping mares with their foals, in a box with access to a paddock:

Foaling boxes, mares with foals

Horse size in cm (height at the withers)	Single box m ² per animal	Shortest box side in cm	Paddock area m ² per animal	Shortest paddock side in cm
≤ 135	9	300	15	300
≤ 150	12	350	18	350
≤ 175	16	350	24	350
> 175	19	350	31	350

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the minimum space requirements for horses are set out in §5, §5a and Annex 3 of the Decree No. 208/2004 on minimum standards for the protection of livestock.

Annex 3

Additional requirements for horse stables

2. Minimum space in a horse box

Individual housing			Foaling box and box for a mare with a foal ²	
Withers height (m)	Area ¹ (m ²)	Shortest side of the box (m)	Area (m ²)	Shortest side of the box (m)
<0.85	3	1.5	3.5	1.6
0.86-1.07	4	1.6	4.5	1.9
1.08-1.30	5	1.9	6.5	2.3
1.31-1.40	6	2.1	7.5	2.5
1.41-1.48	7	2.2	8.5	2.6
1.49-1.60	8	2.35	10	2.8
1.61-1.70	9	2.5	11	3.0
>1.71	10	2.7	13	3.2

1) For short-term housing, the area may be reduced to 85% of the specified dimensions.

2) A mare and her foal may be kept in this shared space until the foal is six months old. After that, they must be housed in an area that meets the requirements for group housing.

Denmark

In Denmark, requirements for horse keeping are regulated in the order of minimum welfare requirements for horse keeping.

Ceiling height of the box:

§5, the minimum requirements for ceiling height of a box are defined by the wither's height of the horse.

- The minimum ceiling height must be at least the withers height plus 75 cm in free space above any bedding. For horses with a wither height above 1.85 m, the ceiling height must be at least 2.60 m in free space above any bedding.
- §5, subsection 2 and 3, the requirement in subsection 1 can be waived in certain percentages of the stable, if the ceiling height is lower due to rafters or beams, or has a slope, as long as the horse will be safe from injuries or harm.



- §5, subsection 4, the ceiling height in the stable must not be lower than 2.10 m in free space above any bedding regardless of the requirements in subsection 1-3.

Floor/surface area:

- §6, for horses kept in single boxes, the floor area must be at least $(1.7 \times \text{withers height})^2$, and the shortest side of the box must be at least $1.7 \times \text{withers height}$.
- §7, for horses kept in groups, the surface area must be at least:
 - 1) For the first four horses: $(2.0 \times \text{withers height})^2$ per horse.
 - 2) For every additional horse: $(1.7 \times \text{withers height})^2$ per horse.

Paddock area:

- §15, subsection 2, the paddock must be at least 800 m² whereas the shortest side must be at least 20 m. If four horses or more are using the paddock at the same time, the area must be expanded by 200 m² per horse.

The size of the box should be **2 × the mare's height at withers until the foal is 6 months old**. Foals have to be on pasture for at least 2 h per day for 5 days per week until 1 yr of age.

§8, the floor area in **foaling boxes** must be at least **(2.0 × withers height of the mare)²** and the shortest side of the box must be at least $1.7 \times \text{withers height of the mare}$.

The mare and the foal must be housed in a foaling box or a similar box of equivalent size of subsection 1, until weaning or a maximum of 6 months. However, this does not apply if the mare and the foal are group housed in accordance with the provisions on group housing, cf. §7.

Finland

In Finland the requirements (from 1.1.2026, with transition period of five years) are:

Height of wither (cm)	Required area m ²
< 108	4
> 108-130	5
> 130-140	6
> 140-148	7
> 148-160	8
> 160-170	9
> 170-180	10
> 180	11

When **mares** are kept **with foals**, **the area should be sum of individual requirements**. Minimum weaning age of foals is 6 months (also transition period of five years).

For example, a 155 cm mare with its foal that is 130 cm in withers height, should have area of $8 \text{ m}^2 + 5 \text{ m}^2 = 13 \text{ m}^2$

Hungary

In Hungary there are no specific, legal space requirements for horses kept for private purposes. Only general requirements apply, such as:

- The place where the animal is kept must be of a size that allows the animal's species-specific need for movement to be satisfied. In the case of equines, the need for movement may also be met by exercising the animal; however, even in these cases, efforts must be made to ensure a keeping method that allows the animal to move freely according to its own inclination.



- Animals that are kept tied or otherwise restricted in their movement must also be provided with the opportunity for undisturbed rest and injury-free movement.
- Animals kept outdoors must be provided – taking into account their natural behaviour – with an area or facility where they can find protection in case of danger, as well as shelter from adverse weather conditions and other harmful effects on their health.

However, for horses used for equestrian service activities there is a specific regulation, that also includes minimal space requirements that need to be met.

If the horses are kept in boxes in the stable, the following is required:

- the interior height of the stable is at least 2.5 m
- the floor area of each box is at least 9 m²
- and the shorter side of the box is not less than 2.5 m
- the site must have a resting paddock of at least 150 m², where the rest of the horses used for providing the service is ensured

In the case of free-range horse keeping, it is required to provide:

- a fenced area (paddock) of at least 1,000 m² per horse
- a covered structure enclosed on at least three sides, with a minimum interior height of 2.5 m and a floor area of at least 8 m² per horse, arranged so that one of the side walls of the structure faces the direction of the prevailing wind

For horses kept with foals there is no specific requirement.

Luxembourg

The *Grand Ducal Regulation of 5 December 2018 determining the conditions for keeping animals*, Art.15(3), states that the minimum surface area is calculated using the formula $(2 \times \text{height at the withers})^2$ per horse. The minimum height must be equal to the height at the withers of the largest animal, multiplied by 1.5, but the stables have to have a minimum height of 2.80 m. There is no specific requirements for mares with foals.

Slovenia

According to the Slovenian Rules on the Protection of Farm Animals, the requirements are stated in Appendix 5: SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR HORSES:

5.1 Pen size – calculation formula

The minimum pen size in m² is equal to the square of twice the height at the withers of the animal.

Formula for pen size: $I = \text{no. of animals} \times (2 \times WH)^2$

I – pen [m²]

WH – height at the withers, measured from the ground to the highest point of the wither (m)

no. of animals – the maximum number of animals present in the pen at any one time

5.2 Dimensions of housing areas for equines



Height (WH) of the equine in the pen (cm) measured with a measuring rod	Area of the housing space in m ² /animal	Shortest side in cm/animal
< 120	6	180
120 < 135	7.5	200
135 < 150	8.5	220
150 < 165	10	250
165 < 175	11	260
175 < 185	12	270
>= 185	14	290

5.3 Group housing

Group housing must be arranged in such a way as to provide animals with sufficient space to retreat, to avoid more aggressive animals or to prevent competition between them (related to food, hierarchical behaviour, social interactions).

Passages (openings) in group enclosures must be large enough to allow two equines to pass each other at the same time.

WH in cm	Enclosure area for the first and second animal in the group in m ² /animal	Enclosure area for each subsequent animal in the group (m ²)
< 120	6	4
120 < 135	7.5	5
135 < 150	8.5	6
150 < 165	10	7
165 < 175	11	7.5
175 < 185	12	8
>= 185	14	9

WH = height of the horse at the withers, measured with a measuring stick

Sweden

According to the Swedish Board of Agriculture's regulations and general recommendations (SJVFS 2019:17) on horse husbandry, last reprinted by SJVFS 2021:30, the stated requirements are as follows:

Table 1. Minimum space for horses when stabled in a box.

Withers height (m)	Individual housing		Foaling box and box for a mare with a foal up to six months old	
	Area ¹ (m ²)	Shortest side of the box (m)	Area (m ²)	Shortest side of the box (m)
< 0.85	3	1.50	3.5	1.6
0.86–1.07	4	1.60	4.5	1.9
1.08–1.30	5	1.90	6.5	2.3
1.31–1.40	6	2.10	7.5	2.5
1.41–1.48	7	2.20	8.5	2.6
1.49–1.60	8	2.35	10	2.8
1.61–1.70	9	2.50	11	3.0
1.71–1.80	10	2.70	13	3.2
1.81–1.90	11	2.80	14	3.4
> 1.90	13	3.00	16	3.7



In addition, in 5th chapter 1§ it is stated that horses should normally be given the opportunity to move freely in their natural gaits outdoors on a daily basis.

EU member states with no binding legislation on space requirements for horses

Belgium

In Flanders, Belgium, there is no national legislation regarding space requirements for horses. Nevertheless, there is a *voluntary labelling scheme* for riding schools, and stables used for boarding, breeding and sport (Equilabel) which mentions **(2 × height at the withers in m)²** as the minimum surface area for a stable. **For mares with foals this minimum area should be multiplied with 1.66.** (For more information see Equilabel).

In the Brussels region, the Animal Welfare Council has published *an opinion on the keeping of horses* in 2018. This opinion also recommends **(2 × height at the withers in m)²** as the minimum surface area in a stable but it recommends that this area should be **multiplied by 2 for mares and foals.**

Estonia

In Estonia there are no special rules for horse keeping and thus no specific space requirements for horses. Nevertheless, the animal protection act states:

“An animal keeper must ensure that an animal, according to its species and age, be provided with:

[...]

3) adequate microclimate, and space or construction works that satisfies the need for movement characteristic of the given species;

[...]

France

No regulations in France. It is recommended that the space allow the horse to turn around and lie down.

Germany

In Germany, general requirements are specified in more detail in the ‘Guidelines for the assessment of horse husbandry from an animal welfare perspective’ developed with experts from stakeholder, veterinarian and animal welfare organisations as well as universities and competent authorities from the federal states and issued by the Federal Ministry (in 2009).

Recommended space for a **mare with a foal** in individual housing at least **(2.3 × withers height)²**, plus a minimum length (1.75 × withers height) of the shorter side of the box and a general minimum height of the ceiling (1.5 × withers height).

State-of-the-art horse husbandry: The national Veterinary Association for Animal Welfare (TVT) position paper on the the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (des Bundesministeriums für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, BMEL) ‘Guidelines for the assessment of horse husbandry from an animal welfare perspective’. In this paper the experts’ recommendation for **a mare with a foal in individual housing is at least (2.6 × withers height)², plus 20% extra if possible.**

Greece

In Greece there is no horse-specific national law with welfare requirements and thus no national specific space requirements for horses kept with foals or national official recommendations regarding this issue.



Italy

In the absence of specific legislation, the Ministry of Health (competent authority), together with the Italian National Olympic Committee, the Italian Paralympic Committee, and the Italian Equestrian Sports Federation, produced a document entitled "Principles for the Protection and Management of Equids", which provides some indications on the space that should be guaranteed to animals with regard to housing conditions.

1.3.12 (p. 27) – Box dimensions states that:

The box must provide sufficient space to allow the equid to lie down, get up easily, and turn around comfortably.

The minimum dimensions are as follows:

- Horses: 3.00 m × 3.00 m (larger dimensions should be adopted for large-sized horses)
- Ponies: 2.80 m × 2.80 m (smaller dimensions may be adopted for small-sized ponies)

For foaling boxes and mares with foals, spaces of not less than 3.00 m × 4.00 m should be provided.

Corridors leading to the boxes should be sufficiently wide to allow comfortable and safe access.

Latvia

Latvia does not have specific welfare requirements for equines. The Ministry of Agriculture is currently working on a draft law that will determine specific welfare requirements for equines, including areas for keeping horses.

Lithuania

The current Lithuanian national legislation does not establish specific space requirements for horses. Similarly, there are no specific legal provisions regulating space requirements for horses kept together with foals. The main legal act regulating animal welfare in Lithuania is the Law on Animal Welfare and Protection of the Republic of Lithuania.

Guidelines for horse keeping including recommendations on space allowances for horses have been developed by the Animal Welfare Centre of a Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (LSMU), based on scientific knowledge and best practices. For example, the Requirements for the Welfare of Farm Animals, approved by the Order of the Director of the State Food and Veterinary Service of 20 September 2019 No. B1-690 "On the Approval of the Requirements for the Welfare of Farm Animals", provide that the competent authorities assess, in each specific case, whether the movement of horses is unduly restricted.

In particular, the following provisions apply:

12. The freedom of movement of farm animals, taking into account their species, established experience and scientific knowledge, must not be restricted in such a way that the animals suffer unnecessary pain, distress, or injury. If a farm animal is tethered or kept in equipment that restricts its freedom of movement, it must be provided with sufficient space, considering its species, established experience and scientific knowledge, to meet its physiological and ethological needs.

13. Materials used for the construction of housing for farm animals and for equipment with which animals may come into contact must not be harmful to the animals and must be easy to clean and disinfect.

14. Animal housing and facilities used to confine animals must be constructed and maintained in such a way that there are no sharp edges or protrusions that could cause injury to farm animals.



Netherlands

The Dutch horse sector has a practice guide that contains advice on this topic. The Dutch guidelines states that a **foaling box/mare with foal should be at least 16 m² if the wither height is 100–140 cm, and 20 m² for a larger horse**. The ceiling height should be at least 3 m.

In Gids-voor-goede-praktijken:

2. Advice for horse owners

Sufficient space

European guidelines state that for new construction, the floor area of a stall should be at least twice the horse's height at the withers squared. The horse must be able to turn around easily (the narrow side should therefore be at least 1.5 times the height at the withers). In new construction projects, it is desirable that new stables have a minimum stall area of 20 m² for pregnant horses and 15 m² for pregnant ponies. (...) In group housing, there must be sufficient space for all horses to lie down and consume sufficient (rough) feed. A pasture or paddock should be large enough for horses to avoid each other (see also Chapter 7 Natural Behaviour).

5. Good environment

- According to European guidelines, the floor area of the stall should be at least twice the horse's height squared (see table 1 on page 18 [in Gids-voor-goede-praktijken or below] for the stall area relative to height). For new construction projects, it is recommended that all new stables have a stall area of at least 12 m².
- The lowest point of the ceiling above the entire stall area is at least the withers height plus 1 meter.
- The stall **area for pregnant mares before, during, and after foaling is at least 12 m²**. It is also recommended that they be allowed at least 8 hours of free exercise per day.
- For new construction projects, it is desirable that new stables have a stall area of at least 20 m² for pregnant horses and 15 m² for pregnant ponies.

Height at the withers (in cm)	Minimum surface area in m ²	Shortest side in cm	Height in cm from ground	Minimum area with open hatch (in m ²)	Not acceptable
≤ 100	4	150	200	4.0	< 4.0
≤ 105	4.4	157.5	205	4.0	< 4.0
≤ 110	4.8	165	210	4.0	< 4.0
≤ 115	5.3	172.5	215	4.0	< 4.0
≤ 120	5.8	180	220	4.3	< 4.3
≤ 125	6.3	187.5	225	4.8	< 4.8
≤ 130	6.8	195	230	5.3	< 5.3
≤ 135	7.3	202.5	235	5.8	< 5.8
≤ 140	7.8	210	240	6.3	< 6.3
≤ 145	8.4	217.5	245	6.9	< 6.7
≤ 150	9.0	225	250	7.5	< 7.2
≤ 155	9.6	232.5	255	8.1	< 7.7
≤ 160	10.2	240	260	8.7	< 8.2
≤ 165	10.9	247.5	265	9.4	< 8.7
≤ 170	11.6	255	270	10.1	< 9.2
≤ 175	12.3	262.5	275	10.8	< 9.8
≤ 180	13.0	270	280	11.5	< 10.4
≤ 185	13.7	277.5	285	12.2	< 11.0
≤ 190	14.4	285	290	12.9	< 11.6



Romania

There are no specific requirements on this issue in Romania.

Spain

There are no specific requirements on this issue in Spain.

Additional information regarding non-EU member states

Great Britain recommends 18 m² for a mare with a foal.

Switzerland: 10.5 m² + 30% for the foal.



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