

beyond rescue: animals in disasters



executive summary

disasters are becoming more powerful and frequent

As disasters escalate in frequency and severity, they cause massive devastation. [Europe](#) is no exception. Severe flooding hit [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Spain](#) and [Sicily](#) in 2021, and summer heat waves and wildfires scorched [France](#) and other countries in [southern Europe](#) in 2021 and 2022. Climate change creates the conditions that make these disasters more ruinous and frequent.

Such disasters wreak destruction on humans and animals alike. **Companion animals, farm animals and wildlife are all victims when disasters strike, inflicting habitat loss, injury and death.** In [Europe](#), many millions of people own and care for many millions of farm and companion animals. These animals lack the much-needed support mechanisms that human society relies on in response to disasters.

IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) and its [Disaster Response and Risk](#)

[Reduction \(DRRR\)](#) team have stepped in to meet this need. Human and animal communities suddenly in upheaval need a return to a sense of normalcy and to feel hope. IFAW works to rehabilitate injured animals, reintroduce wildlife into the wild and reunite families with their companion animals. Globally since 2000, IFAW and its local partners have rescued, treated, transported and sheltered almost 300,000 animals. From July 2020 to July 2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, IFAW helped 51,499 companion animals, 4,637 farm animals, and 3,805 wild animals facing dire outcomes from climate-related disasters.

including animals in disaster emergency plans: an urgent need

Disasters are economic events, and like it or not, animals are crucial economic 'assets'. They keep the wheels of economies turning and provide important nutrition to billions. Preventing their loss

prevents economic loss. One study of the aftermath of 2012 flooding in India showed that every dollar spent in early-stage intervention for animals secured 96 dollars of economic benefit in livestock production.¹ Failure to include animals in disaster plans has cultural, social, environmental, sanitary and economic impacts.

Sadly, many pet owners refuse orders to evacuate without their animals, or they re-enter dangerous disaster zones to care for their pets. The lives of owners and their pets are at risk from these behaviours, as are the lives of rescue workers, who also expend valuable time on dealing with the situation.

ifaw



Photo: © Stefan Kerker Fotografie en Webdesign

A fox has survived the floods in Limburg in the Netherlands in the summer of 2021.

Wild animal populations suffer from destruction of breeding sites and local food sources, loss of viable habitat patches, spread of disease after disturbances and local extirpation because of mass mortality. Additionally, animals that are injured or searching for food or shelter after extreme events may enter human-populated areas, endangering people and themselves. These incursions can quickly create significant public health problems through zoonotic disease transmission and contamination of drinking water by animal carcasses.

Without integration of animal welfare into disaster management response, Europe risks loss of critical assets and decreased production. Overlooking animal welfare also can impede humanitarian efforts, dampening economic growth and increasing recovery time for vulnerable communities.

the role of IFAW: protect and rescue animals

As one of the only global non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focussed on both conservation and animal rescue, IFAW is well positioned to address a broad range of threats to wildlife and domesticated animals. The aim of IFAW's disaster response program is to prepare communities before a disaster, aid communities during a disaster by dispatching emergency response teams to work with humanitarian relief services wherever animals are in distress, and help communities after a disaster to recover.

To lessen animal suffering and support communities in urgent need, IFAW leads, funds and helps animal rescue groups assess disaster situations, formulate plans and act. IFAW has created animal rescue networks in various regions across the globe and maintains strong working relationships with them. IFAW provides food, equipment and medical supplies, supports vaccination campaigns, and offers emergency expertise to help rescue, care for and safely reunify pets with their families and return wildlife to the wild. Three-quarters of IFAW's resources for disaster response are dedicated to preparedness and risk reduction, including technical training, response planning and risk assessment. The remainder goes towards mobilizing responses when a disaster strikes.

examples of IFAW interventions:

► disaster preparedness in Europe: World Organisation for Animal Health partnership

Between 2018 and 2021, IFAW supported a series of three workshops on 'Animal welfare in natural disasters', focusing on the role of veterinary services in disasters. These workshops were organized in the framework of the [World Organisation for Animal Health \(WOAH; formerly, Office International des Epizooties, or OIE\) Platform on Animal Welfare in Europe](#). Following the meetings, authorities in [Bulgaria](#), [Romania](#) and [North Macedonia](#) included a contingency plan for animals in their

national disaster protection plans or engaged in cooperation agreements with the [Red Cross](#).

► disaster response in Haiti: 2010 and 2021 earthquakes

IFAW intervened in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 and 2020 earthquakes in [Haiti](#). In 2010, IFAW partnered with [World Animal Protection](#) to create and lead the [Animal Relief Coalition for Haiti](#). The effort eventually helped more than 68,000 animals through delivery of a highly effective rabies and anthrax vaccination campaign in the stray animal population, protecting the public from epidemics. In 2021, IFAW set up several veterinary care stations in the hardest hit area and other locations, which benefitted thousands more animals.

► disaster resilience in Myanmar: cyclones and floods

In [Myanmar](#), floods and the resulting loss of farm animals can devastate entire communities and local economies. In 2015, IFAW partnered with local [NGOs](#) and the country's veterinary and livestock department. Together, they assisted farmers with emergency veterinary care and supported recovery of local communities by erecting safe earthen platforms to serve as flood refuges for cows.



Photo: © Paulo M.F. Pires - stock.adobe.com

Forest fire near houses in Portugal.

► emergency grants in Germany and France: floods and fires

In July 2021, [Germany](#), [Belgium](#) and the [Netherlands](#) experienced exceptional floods. IFAW offered an emergency grant to [Tierrettung Essen](#) (a German animal rescue organization) for an all-terrain vehicle for them to access remote areas and rescue impacted animals. In August 2021, southeast [France](#) was hit by the most extensive fire in mainland [France](#) in the last 31 years. IFAW jumped in to help and granted emergency financial aid to the [Station d'Observation et de Protection des Tortues et de leurs Milieux](#) (i.e., [SOPTOM](#)) to support rescue of the endangered Hermann tortoise. In addition, IFAW liaised with local authorities and organizations in [France](#) to offer support during the 2022 summer fires (this assistance is not covered in the report, having occurred after the report was finalised).

opportunities for improvement within Europe

As animals and humans living near and with them are exposed to and become victims of disasters, more voices call for consistent and coordinated inclusion of animal welfare in European disaster management plans.

IFAW recognizes the impact of policy in establishing a framework for helping animals in disasters and recommends including animal welfare in disaster management in the [European Union \(EU\)](#) and within [EU funding](#) via the following principles:

1. Improving knowledge about what animals need in emergencies and improving human skills in management and responding to these needs.
2. Providing resources to handle animal welfare in an integrated manner within humanitarian emergencies, both for (a) [EU member states](#) and (b) humanitarian crisis response efforts outside the EU.
3. Improving recognition and communication of the need to protect animals when interdependency with people is high.
4. Clearly allocating responsibility for animal welfare in emergencies.
5. Integrating animal welfare into emergency management.
6. Better organizing the farming sector and municipalities with emergency planners to improve disaster management.

Although the legal status and position of animals in a disaster scenario vary among countries, under [EU Treaties](#), animals are recognized as sentient beings.² Consequently, the [EU](#) and its [Member States](#) must attend to the welfare requirements of animals when preparing and implementing [EU policies](#).³ Moreover, including animal welfare in the [European Commission's](#) priorities for disaster management opens the way to ensuring alignment and delivery on [OIE](#) (newly [WOAH](#)) [Guidelines for Disaster Management](#) and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#). Without this

provision, the [Commission](#) is not likely to deliver fully on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

conclusion

Animals are inseparable from us in so many ways, and we have responsibilities as guardians and managers of ecosystems. As we prepare for and respond to disasters, the safety and well-being of animals must be a key consideration. In [Europe](#), we need to scale up from personal preparedness measures to functional systems across all layers of government. Disaster management is an ongoing and complex exercise in which outcomes can never be fully controlled, but countless paths are available for making a meaningful difference for individuals and communities. We must be ready to save lives.

Note: Since the writing of the report in 2021, additional disasters have occurred.

1 https://onlineasdma.assam.gov.in/kmp/pdf/1491459716livestock_disaster_economics.pdf
 2 https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare_en
 3 <https://www.fondation-droit-animal.org/%20proceedings-aw/the-european-union-%20legislation-on-animal-welfare/>



International Fund for Animal Welfare

Beyond Rescue:

Animals in Disasters – Europe

Executive Summary

About IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) - IFAW is a global non-profit helping animal and people thrive together. We are experts and everyday people, working across seas, oceans and in more than 40 countries around the world. We rescue, rehabilitate and release animals, and we restore and protect their natural habitats. The problems we're up against are urgent and complicated. To solve them, we match fresh thinking with bold action. We partner with local communities, governments, non-governmental organizations and businesses. Together, we pioneer new and innovative ways to help all species flourish. See how at ifaw.org

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Cover photo: Melanie Mahoney / © IFAW
Water rescue operations during Hurricane Ida in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, U.S.

Back cover photo: © IFAW
An IFAW responder conducts an animal search and rescue assignment in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian.

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