

PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

Despite the many differences between the roles and perceptions of equidae across the European Union, the welfare problems that they face are often remarkably similar.

Background

An equid is as likely to be kept in an unsuitable environment in Bulgaria as it would be in Germany. Ignorance and a lack of knowledge may be reported in Lithuania or in Denmark. Concerns on neglect are just as likely to be raised in the United Kingdom as in Cyprus. It is clear that no Member State is entirely free of welfare issues, and no Member State should be complacent about the welfare of their equines.

Problems

Whilst some Member States face unique challenges, a number of themes have become clear. The most common problems, as identified by Eurogroup are:

- Problems with the keeping of equidae, including a lack of space, long periods of confinement without access to turnout, and a lack of social interaction.
- A lack of knowledge on equine care among equid owners.
- Neglect (failing to meet basic needs such as the need for food or water).

The treatment of working equidae is a cause of concern in a number of Member States, as is a lack of access to professionals such as veterinary surgeons, farriers and saddlers.

Our Objectives

Eurogroup wants to see the dissemination of best practice, information and education on equine ownership throughout the EU, by the European Commission. Guidance for owners of equines should be based around the five freedoms, and the content should be common and applicable to all species. Earmarked funds from the existing EU Animal Welfare Strategy for education should be channelled into transnational campaigns.

Eurogroup will also push for responsible ownership to be recognised and rewarded financially. Rural development funds should be used to incentivise responsible ownership, which should be measured by validated equine welfare indicators.

Furthermore, responsible ownership should not be simply confined to Europe's borders. The review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015 presents an opportunity for animal welfare - specifically equine welfare - to be recognised as a driver of economic development. Given the role of EU level policy makers in these goals, and as the Union is the biggest donor of development aid in the world, it is only right that Eurogroup seeks to anchor animal welfare at the heart of EU development policy, and to highlight that animal welfare and development are mutually reinforcing and beneficial to one another.