

The Ukrainian refugee crisis: Unpacking the politics of pet exceptionalism

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Abstract

The rescue of pets soon became part of the humanitarian narrative of the attack on Ukraine. The open-door policy on companion animals from Ukraine—a high-risk country for rabies—in terms of regulatory modifications and the provision of services could be described as one of ‘pet exceptionalism’. While the influx of pets and the response to it has significance for the international refugee regime, there has been scant scholarly engagement with the movement of pets across borders during emergencies. To bridge academic knowledge gaps and suggest policy lessons, the article discusses how the management of the Ukraine pet influx fits with existing regulatory regimes and policy priorities governing companion animals, and the tensions involved. Drawing on a 6-month desk study (March–August 2022)—the article considers the events, interactions and policy choices which shape how companion animals are received. Using the UK and Norway as examples, it suggests that the aim of the resources and procedures directed at caring for pets and helping owners is pragmatic—to safeguard biosecurity and enforce regulations while also protecting animal health and psychosocial well-being. The term ‘pet civic consciousness’ is used to consider the notion of pets as family members, and how trust in government and understandings of biosecurity and regulatory requirements are filtered through cultural and linguistic lenses. The article

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identifies biosecurity, juridification, resource allocation and ethical issues of fairness across refugee populations and the intrinsic value of companion animals as central topics for future discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Russia invaded Ukraine 24 February 2022. Six months later, almost 4 million Ukrainians had applied for temporary protection and 6.8 million Ukrainian refugees were recorded in Europe (UNHCR, 2022).¹ Other main destinations were the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. In addition to the human predicament, a striking image of the first 6 months of the war is that of an enormous flow of displaced pets. In Ukraine, as in other countries with high rates of pet ownership, companion animals are seen as family members and many refugees go to great lengths to take them with them.² The rescue and care of animals—both inside the country and in countries receiving refugees—soon became part of the humanitarian narrative of the war. Governments modified entrance regulations for companion animals, waiving documentation and health requirements, changing quarantine rules and allocating money to veterinary care, in the effort to receive, register and care for dogs, cats, ferrets, birds and a host of other animals.³ Animal rights' organizations, volunteer communities organizing through social media, activists and veterinary associations supported by a largely sympathetic public, provided material support, information and counselling. The humanitarian rationale was that, for distressed refugees—overwhelmingly women and children arriving without partners, sons or fathers—bringing companion animals would lessen trauma and enhance well-being. This open-door approach was also animated by the desire to limit smuggling. Many of the countries receiving high numbers of refugee pets are rabies free—while Ukraine is considered a high-risk rabies area where pet health records and certificates are unreliable.

While there has been a balance of solidarity and precaution, this approach may be described as a policy of 'pet exceptionalism' here understood as a series of regulatory modifications and the provision of services. There has been considerable criticism of the exceptional status granted to Ukraine refugees on account of race and proximity (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Hoffmann, 2022). Attention has been drawn to the racist treatment of non-White students fleeing Ukraine at the start of the war, and the rapid adoption of preferential treatment for Ukrainians (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2022). The governance of the movement of Ukrainian companion animals cannot be understood in isolation from these issues. This 'pet exceptionalism' is likely to impact human mobility regimes both directly and indirectly, as well as the regulations governing pets. In this article, I am particularly interested in the implications for the international refugee regime, both in terms of the rights of individual asylum seekers and refugees and the application of durable solutions, for third-country refugee resettlement. The policy on pets has significant and, hitherto, little-discussed financial costs as regards the spread of zoonotic diseases and the strain on veterinary services and quarantine facilities.⁴ It raises questions about fairness vis-à-vis other refugee populations, and potential challenges arising from refugees' expectations in the future. There has been little public debate or critical deliberation about policy and almost no scholarly attention to transborder movement of pets during emergencies that might shed light on the current situation. Disaster studies mostly deal with the plight of companion animals from a national perspective. In humanitarian, migration and refugee studies, there has been little interest in the forced displacement of pets. This area is, broadly speaking, a 'missing story' (Carpi, 2021).

To help bridge this knowledge gap and offer a more active and comparative approach to drawing policy lessons from the impact of the Ukraine companion animal influx, the article explores some preliminary questions: How does the management of the Ukraine pet influx fit with existing regulations and policy priorities governing companion animals and what kind of tensions arise? What events, interactions and policy choices shape the way the animals are received? Drawing on examples from the United Kingdom and Norway, I make the following three points.

First, the politics of pet exceptionalism is shaped by biosecurity considerations and the effort to guard against the animal health challenges associated with the pet rescue industry, by tightening regulations and bans. This is the background to the regulatory accommodation of the influx of Ukrainian companion animals, but irregular incidents (i.e. unlawful admission) can suddenly have a significant impact on owners, animals and host nations' willingness to accommodate refugee pets.

Second, the Ukraine pet influx is taking place in the context of long-term changes in how people and governments perceive pets and their role in society. This includes increased juridification of pet ownership, with increasing criminalization of animal cruelty and more legal and financial obligations being put on owners, together with litigation on the ethics of breeding, animal rights and so forth. However, while these sentiments, and government responses to them, may be products of the ongoing long-term transformation of the relationship between humans and pets, the policy of pet exceptionalism appears to run counter to increasingly mainstream criticism of anthropomorphic bias and speciesism, whereby only human life is valued. Pet exceptionalism means that companion animals are protected as property and because of their utility to displaced humans—not because of their intrinsic value. This could result in difficult choices for refugees, when they consider a temporary or permanent return to Ukraine, and in ethical challenges for host governments regarding animal welfare.

Third, the politics of pet exceptionalism are not only decided from above: They arise from what I call 'pet civic consciousness'—which is a combination of refugee lay knowledge about animal health and veterinary medicine, experiences with and (dis) trust of government and the views of host societies. The way owners see their pets as family members or refugees in their own right, shapes perceptions and concerns about the legitimacy and purpose of regulations and quarantine, and the standards and practices of animal health interventions. They also wish to visit animals and engage with staff, vets and government about their well-being. These perceptions are filtered through cultural and linguistic lenses, with respect to trust in government, for example, and whether state interventions are perceived as benevolent, meaningful or justified. Resource and logistical constraints limit how far these needs can be met by the host state.

Together, biosecurity, regulation and pet civic consciousness make up a set of hard and soft constraints for future policymaking on refugee companion animals. Beyond these, there are ethical issues regarding fairness across refugee populations and the intrinsic value of companion animals in their own right.

The article draws on a desk study: 6 months of research on the issue of Ukrainian refugee pets (March–August 2022). During the first week of the invasion, I mapped the literature dealing with the humanitarian predicament of Ukraine, past and present (Sandvik & Garnier, 2022). Having previously worked on refugee resettlement and grassroots mobilization for refugees (Lemaitre & Sandvik, 2015; Sandvik, 2010, 2021; Sandvik et al., 2022), my interest in the pet influx was first sparked in mid-March by seeing the volunteer refugee reception arrangements at the Central Station in Berlin. There were signs in Ukrainian, German and English pointing not only to food and drink and a children's corner but also to 'cats and dogs' and animal charity posters offered free care for pets. I then surveyed scholarship on animals, including companion animals, in disaster, humanitarian and refugee studies and animal rights scholarship on displacement. Prominent scholars in these fields have generously shared their work and offered advice. I then formulated initial questions (Sandvik, 2022a, 2022b) about what this might entail for the international refugee regime. I have followed media coverage of the evolving regulatory responses and pet-related events in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway, focusing on interactions between government, refugees, volunteers and animal rights associations. Examples from the United Kingdom and Norway were chosen because of their suitability for exploring the questions and building a research agenda. All translations from Norwegian into English are my own.

In Section 1, a state of the art is presented. Section 2 looks at the United Kingdom and Norway to frame and examine empirical developments. Section 3, the discussion, offers initial reflections on longer term impacts on the management of international migration and refugees, as regards hard and soft constraints on future companion animal policy. Recognizing the dynamic nature of forced displacement—where refugees make exploratory returns and people and animals may be displaced multiple times—the article problematizes fairness and ethics considerations both across refugee populations and for animals.

MASS DISPLACEMENT INVOLVING COMPANION ANIMALS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Evacuations of animals in conflict situations are nothing new: Fleeing civilians have often taken livestock and companion animals with them. However, the scale of the influx of Ukrainian pets is unprecedented—in previous conflicts, there has been the mass euthanasia of pets (as in the Second World War, see Kean, 2017) or populations have had fewer pets and/or different perceptions of their status (The Economist, 2022). The UNHCR acknowledges that pets ‘bring refugees comfort and purpose’ (UNHCR, 2021) and studies find they have therapeutic value (Every et al., 2017; Riggs et al., 2017), but resettlement agencies have so far ruled that refugees will not be allowed to take pets to their new home country. The IOM's position is that it is ‘involved in resettling people, not cats’ (Piazza, n.d.). Nonetheless, high-profile evacuations of pets from war zones are now routine. Pets—at least when owned by Western military actors or ‘ordinary people’—are regarded as vulnerable, innocent and worthy of protection. Recently, there has been ‘Operation Baghdad Pups: Worldwide’ (SPCAI, n.d.), dedicated to ‘saving’ ‘patriot pets’ adopted by US personnel in Iraq and elsewhere. Controversially, animals were airlifted from Afghanistan to the United Kingdom during the 2021 evacuations from Kabul (The Week, 2022) and hundreds of dogs were transported from Afghanistan to Canada in early 2022 (Nesbit, 2022).

So far, there has been little academic attention to pets in wars—or in humanitarian responses to wars. The article surveys disaster studies, international humanitarian law (IHL), refugee studies and animal studies, to find pointers to questions that will help unpack the politics of pet exceptionalism. The first issue points precisely to the reasons why so little attention has been paid to this issue. Humanitarian action is humancentric. In most emergencies, civilians lack legal and material protection and when there is mass forced displacement, the refugee regime is under enormous strain. In such circumstances, there is a concern that the protection of pets would get in the way of alleviating the extreme suffering of human beings (de Hemptinne, 2017), or be ‘species treason’ (Merskin, 2021). Yet pet ownership is increasing all over the world, and the Ukrainian experience will impact the expectations of future refugee populations about pets. Policy on pets therefore needs to be engaged with.

One approach to this dilemma is to consider the perspectives addressed in refugee studies, where it is argued that, to understand human displacements, we also need to consider animals (White, 2020). Recent work focuses on historical aspects of animals and refugees (White, 2019); how camps are shaped by the need to accommodate animals as well as humans (White, 2018); the role of working equines (horses, donkeys etc.) in humanitarian emergencies (Clancy et al., 2021); or the devastating impact of prolonged conflict on animal welfare and zoonotic disease risks in refugee and host populations (Braam, 2022). Climate change means animal and human migration need to be seen together (Blattner, 2021). Instead of just dealing with the human/animal dichotomy, much broader issues should be considered.

Meanwhile, in disaster studies, there is a growing focus on pets in the context of emergency planning, evacuation and shelter. In disaster management, public policy around animal welfare is a relatively new field—which has developed in response to events such as the 2005 US Hurricane Katerina (Glasse, 2018). Reforms are motivated by the recognition that people will protect their pets, even at the expense of their own security (e.g. by refusing to evacuate unless they can take their pets). This literature examines a wide range of events (flooding, fires and hurricanes) and such issues as owner responsibility (Gurtner & Parison, 2021), support of vulnerable groups of owners (Thompson et al., 2014), how lack of planning for shelters can obstruct evacuations (Farmer et al., 2016) and the link between human security and the containment of zoonotic diseases (Chadwin, 2017). While these are analyses of peace-time emergencies, they offer ideas for discussing the reception of refugee pets. From a biosecurity perspective, the politics and ethics of excluding pets from preparedness planning and humanitarian programming regarding the interface of animal and human health are paramount: Animal emergencies have a catastrophic impact on groups of animals subject to mass slaughter because of animal–human transmission (Córdoba-Aguilar et al., 2021).

This raises the third issue: the status of pets. In the small but rapidly growing literature in international humanitarian law (IHL), scholars discuss the classification and status of animals as so-called animal soldiers (Nowrot, 2015). IHL largely ignores the protection of animals (de Hemptinne, 2017), but existing protection guarantees classify animals

as living property (Roscini, 2017), a classification contested by scholars arguing against animals being regarded 'as a means to the end to be determined by human property owners', rather than being recognized as legal persons (Favre, 2010; Francione, 2008). Animals cannot, however, be classified as 'protected persons' under IHL, because this status also incurs obligations animals are unable to undertake (Peters & De Hemptinne, 2022).

While it addresses a range of very different topics, this literature involves the increasingly contested issues of speciesism and the anthropocentric bias of law. Categorizing animals according to their utility to humans—as companions, livestock or wild animals—shapes how species are treated (Glasse, 2020), including in disasters (Best, 2021). However, in countries across the world, the status and rights of animals are changing, amid increasingly forceful advocacy for their recognition as legal persons with full rights. A new form of animal activism is to be seen in lawsuits seeking to define some animals as legal persons (Kurki, 2021). There are also proposals to define animals as refugees (Derham & Mathews, 2020). This development is driven by increased concern for other species and 'defaunation in the anthropocene' and increased scientific understanding of animal sentience. This trend towards problematizing the secondary and/or derived status of animals is highly relevant to how we understand pet exceptionalism.

UNPACKING THE POLITICS OF PET EXCEPTIONALISM: THE UNITED KINGDOM AND NORWAY

This section discusses examples of policy and regulatory dispensations in the United Kingdom and Norway and how, with what rationales, restrictions are imposed, and some of the resultant problems and conflicts. While the reception of Ukrainian pets represents a new development, it is not a 'free flow' and does not operate independently of pre-existing policy priorities—or contestations. Significant resources are devoted to providing veterinary services or rabies vaccines, for example, because of pragmatic biosecurity concerns as well as humanitarian sensibilities. At the same time, everyday cultural differences, linguistic difficulties and perceptions of the state, as well as extraordinary and disruptive events—or 'scandals'—will affect how the refugees, the public and the state perceive and deal with the influx of pets and the attendant challenges.

Both the United Kingdom and Norway are outside the EU: Ukrainians are admitted to the United Kingdom via the Ukraine family visa scheme and the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme. Norway is bound by the ESA agreement, which de facto ties it to EU policy and regulation. In Norway, the pet influx is handled by 'Mattilsynet', the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA, 2022a), while in the United Kingdom, responsibility belongs to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). By March 2022, both governments had set up streamlined processes offering free quarantine, blood tests and rabies vaccinations (and worming tablets). In both countries, animals from Ukraine were subject to a maximum of 4-month quarantine, depending on their vaccination status. Home isolation was allowed under certain conditions (though not in Scotland and Wales, due to control issues), but companion animals were not allowed in refugee reception centres. Biosecurity has high priority in both countries—mainland Norway is rabies free, and the United Kingdom has been rabies free for 100 years. In the United Kingdom, Ukraine is classified as an unlisted country, meaning that a 4-month quarantine applies. The same quarantine period is applicable in Norway, where Ukraine is also considered a high-risk country for rabies. Both countries have major concerns about fraudulent documentation. After 2018, Norway banned *all* imports of stray dogs, while the United Kingdom has suspended commercial imports of dogs, cats and ferrets from many countries, including Ukraine, until September 2022 (UKGov, 2022). By August 2022, some 25,000 Ukrainian refugees had brought 1000 companion animals to Norway (Ørnhaug & Pettersen, 2022).

Biosecurity considerations and knock-on effects of biosecurity incidents

Pre-existing regulatory struggles over biosecurity have important knock-on effects on the reception of refugee pets. Biosecurity means the prevention of disease and pest-causing agents entering or leaving a territory and involves

measures to prevent the introduction or spread of organisms harmful to animals, people and plants. This includes bio-surveillance, regulatory frameworks and policies, a quarantine infrastructure, veterinary health (including checks, treatment and vaccination), proper record keeping and documentation, and, as a last resort, the eradication of specific animal groups. While major concerns of biosecurity are to do with terrorism or economic issues relating to livestock and crops, another important issue is the animal–human transmission of fatal diseases such as rabies. Recently, governments have ramped up their efforts to keep their countries rabies free, banning pet imports from certain countries. False rabies records are now seen as a global problem, exacerbated by increased dog imports during the pandemic. During 2020, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) discovered more than 450 dogs arriving with incomplete, inadequate, falsified or fraudulent rabies certificates—52% more than in the previous 2 years. There were rabies certificates with the wrong breed, sex, age, appearance or microchip information, and with suspicious veterinary stamps, inconsistent signatures, inconsistent vaccination dates or records of vaccines administered after their expiry dates (Stein, 2021). In 2021, the United States banned the importation of *all* dogs from 113 countries, a ban now extended to 2023. Similarly, Canada has imposed a new ban on dogs for resale, adoption, fostering, breeding, exhibition and research from more than 100 countries, including Ukraine (CFIA, 2022).

The situations in the United Kingdom and Norway illustrate how governments juggle ad hoc humanitarian approaches, existing legal regulations and biosecurity concerns. Because of biosecurity priorities, the UK government has alerted stakeholder groups such as vets to risks, asking them to report ‘suspected illegal pet landings from Ukraine to help maintain the country’s 100-year rabies-free status’. It says the aim is not ‘to identify people for enforcement purposes; our primary aim is to protect UK biosecurity,’ (VetTimes, 2022b). Illegal movements have knock-on effects across the regulatory framework. During spring 2022, 19 dogs imported from Ukraine were discovered to have false paperwork. Paw Help Rescue and Adopt UK collaborated with a rescue centre to bring dogs to the United Kingdom. According to the charity, the dogs had undergone the ‘requisite three-month quarantine period and rabies jabs’ in Ukraine. The charity said ‘blood tests were needed to prove the injections took place, but the conflict meant the groups could not use their normal lab in Ukraine, sending them off to a site in Germany instead, from which they received certificates saying all was well.’ The lab ‘took the animal rescue’s money but gave fake results and can no longer be contacted,’ (Jordan, 2022). The dogs cleared initial border checks and went to new homes before being put into 4-month quarantine across the country when the government challenged the legitimacy of the blood tests. This cost the new owners of the Ukrainian rescue dogs a lot of money: They had to pay thousands of pounds for quarantine (BBC, 2022) or see the animals destroyed. Widely reported in the media, this incident is also referred to in government documents as showing the risks posed by Ukrainian pets (VetTimes, 2022a).

In Norway, the relatively open-door approach and the substantial funding for veterinary care, 50 quarantine stations and vaccinations are motivated by the need to curb smuggling and minimize biosecurity hazards (Hellesnes, 2022). However, the difficult trade-off between precaution and solidarity was made visible by the realities of displacement: Refugees make exploratory returns home, sometimes deciding to stay and sometimes going back to the country of refuge. In June 2022, the NFSA reiterated that the sale or rehoming of pets from Ukraine in Norway is prohibited, even if they are healthy and have correct documentation after being in Norwegian quarantine. Owners returning to Ukraine must take their pets with them, it being ‘a clear condition’ of the dispensations from the regulations made to allow Ukrainians to bring their pets to Norway that the animals are not sold or given away. NFSA emphasizes that this condition ‘also applies after completion of the animal’s quarantine period’. If owners can no longer keep their pets, returning to Ukraine or euthanasia are ‘in principle the only available alternatives’. Only in ‘very special cases’ can exceptions be made. This includes the owner becoming seriously ill or dying. Pets that are given away or sold will retroactively ‘be considered to have been illegally imported into the country’. This precarious status changes when the owner gets permanent residence: Then, the animal can be sold or given away ‘in the same way as Norwegian pets’—and have a ‘Norwegian pet passport’ (NFSA, 2022b). As noted above, Norway has had a total ban on the import of stray animals since 2018. Stray cats and dogs had formerly been declassified from being trade animals and had thus not been subject to the rules for commercial import. The ban came after years of warnings

from the authorities, vets and animal rights advocates—but it has not been effective, as illegal imports continue. In the NAFSA statement, existing policy priorities intersect with the evolving approach to Ukrainian pets.

Pet civic consciousness and contestations over quarantine regulation and animal health

Conflicts and tensions over pets are common between refugees and the authorities. They pertain to communication of regulations and refugee perceptions about trust, state intervention and animal health. For analytical purposes, I here propose the concept of 'pet civic consciousness' which combines lay knowledge of animal health and veterinary medicine, experiences with and (dis) trust of government and understandings of UK and Norwegian society. Pets are family members and 'refugees', which have been 'rescued' by owners. Refugees in both countries expressed considerable frustration about understanding regulations and changing policies and their inability to visit animals, communicate with quarantine stations and the government, choose, or change quarantine locations or get their pet out of quarantine to leave the country. They also expressed concern about conditions for animals in quarantine, its fairness and the reason for its length.

Ukrainian pet owners participating in the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme addressed an open letter to DEFRA and APHA, voicing frustration about the rules for bringing pets to the United Kingdom, and how they are applied. They say, 'We saved the pets only to be separated from them', (Uapets.uk, 2022), and now 'all Ukrainian pet owners are very concerned about poor conditions in the quarantine facilities, the inability to visit their pets, and the scarcity of emergency veterinary care'. Contact with shelter workers is limited or impossible. The letter also criticizes the lack of flexibility: If 'the owner wants to change the quarantine location or get their pet out before the quarantine ends and leave the UK, it is not possible to do so'. While home isolation is the preferred option for pet owners, it is not always feasible, forcing refugees to place their pets in quarantine. According to the letter, these problems and the length of quarantine are causing 'Ukrainians to give up their hopes of seeking refuge in the UK'. What they most want is shorter quarantine times and better communication making rules and procedures more 'clear, open and accessible to Ukrainians'.⁵

Tensions between refugees and the authorities also arise from logistical constraints and the newness of the situation. In Norway, as in the United Kingdom, there is dissatisfaction about the separation of owners and pets. Geographically, Norway is a large country, with refugee reception centres and quarantine stations distributed throughout its territory, including in the far north, which borders Russia. Many pet owners ended up in refugee centres far away from their pet's quarantine station, which made them anxious and added greatly to the workload of quarantine staff, as owners called, emailed and texted, asking for news and footage of their pet. This problem resulted partly from the ban on bringing animals that are out of quarantine to reception centres and the lack of visiting rights at quarantine facilities. Refugee reception centres do not allow companion animals, partly because there has never been much need to do so before and also because not all refugee populations are accustomed to pets. A manager at a quarantine station said, 'One should try to organize things better, so those with animals can live with them. This would make more sense economically, as well as for the sake of the refugees,' (Rydne, 2022). According to the immigration authorities—Utlendingsdirektoratet (UDI), receiving refugees at reception centres entails complex assessment of needs and priority and allowing animals could be detrimental to other groups needing housing (NOAH, 2022). Some quarantine centres—many of which were set up to cater for the Ukraine pet influx—did not allow visits from owners, because of lack of appropriate infrastructure or capacity. The owner of one quarantine facility pointed out that managing it requires a lot of paperwork and Mattilsynet drops by several times a week to check the documentation (Hellesnes, 2022).

NFSA information is available in English, Norwegian, Russian and Ukrainian, but quarantine procedures are resource intensive, and communication is difficult: The reception of a single dog can take hours, as both communication and routines for registration can be demanding. Owners do not always have the required documentation and making them understand that the animal is not being taken from them permanently takes time (Kristiansen, 2022). Staff have to deal with daily emails, SMS and messenger notifications from owners wanting information and photos of their pets (Hellesnes, 2022). Similarly, communication around animal health requires significant resources. A

statement from NFSA (2022c) in April 2022 describing an outbreak of cat flu provides a useful inventory of costs: It describes efforts to combat the outbreak, including the careful monitoring of all cats, with daily veterinary attention, intensive care of cats with serious symptoms; strict routines for hygiene, washing and disinfection; the vaccination of healthy cats that have not been in contact with sick cats and a temporary halt to taking new arrivals. The statement says NFSA seeks to provide information for cat owners and apologizes for delays in responding, caused by the volume of requests; it says they understand pet owners' concerns and are allocating additional resources to 'handle the situation'; concerned owners should communicate directly with them. Norwegian and Ukrainian volunteers have also played an important role. A Facebook group called 'Help for Ukrainian pet owners in Norway' invites refugees to ask questions, request assistance for equipment and animal foodstuffs, distribute donated food and voice complaints. The volunteer who set up the group says that, even though the government has facilitated the reception of animals and simplified regulations, to many the detailed Norwegian regulatory framework seems rigid and complicated.

Animal health has had a lot of attention. During the spring of 2022, several Ukrainian pet owners posted stories on social media about how their animals—cats in particular—had been mistreated in quarantine facilities. This caused panic among refugees who had been separated from their animals upon arrival (Vestengen, 2022). One cat emerged from quarantine in poor health and in a much-shared social media posting, its owners accused the quarantine station of mistreating it. As a result, the manager of the facility was subjected to threats and harassment. However, according to NFSA, this animal was already ill on arrival, as the staff immediately realized. They called a vet and gave treatment, including for illnesses not covered financially by the government. According to the NFSA, no effort was spared to care for the cat (Vestengen, 2022). Once the cat's health improved, its owner acknowledged that misunderstandings, cultural differences and language barriers had created unnecessary concern, and that the manager could not be blamed, and apologized for the negative fallout resulting from the social media post. NFSA said owners should address questions about their pets to them and promised to communicate this 'more clearly to the owners' (Vestengen, 2022). Other owners thought an animal was very ill and accused the quarantine station and vet of malpractice. They went public, claiming that refugees now warned against going to Norway, because pets were badly treated there. NFSA said neither they nor the vet had found any signs of ill health and that repeated visits to the quarantine station had revealed no problems (Tjøflot & Darrud, 2022). A Ukrainian vet working in Norway suggests that the social media posting was a result of misunderstandings, cultural difference and language difficulties. In Ukraine, she says, there is widespread distrust of vets: People prefer to Google a diagnosis. Norwegian vets (and doctors) think twice before writing prescriptions for antibiotics, and she suggests this makes Ukrainian pet owners feel they are not being taken seriously. The fact services are free may also raise fears that animals are not being properly cared for. A quarantine station manager observed that refugees needed to be told that the state was covering all expenses, as many owners were worried about paying and what would happen to their animal if they were not able to pay (Rydne, 2022).

DISCUSSION

These examples provide a basis for thinking about what type of events and policy choices might impact the international migration and refugee regime in the long term. They show how the management of the influx of Ukrainian pets interacts with existing companion animal regimes and some of the tensions that arise. Clearly, much of the regulatory activity is to do with biosecurity, rather than controlling Ukrainian pet admissions—or how refugees bring in their companion animals. The resources, regulations and procedures put in place to care for pets and help owners in a difficult situation seek to balance solidarity and precaution. The aim is to guard biosecurity and enforce regulatory agendas, while also protecting animal health and refugees' psychosocial well-being. It is a precarious balancing act. If, for example, rabies was found to have been brought in by Ukrainian pets, there would probably be policy restrictions—and a shift in public attitudes. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see the politics of pet exceptionalism as anything other than a broad liberalization of rules on pets for refugees.

As regards policy outcomes, the case of Ukrainian pets indicates that, in principle, resettlement schemes could include companion animals. The IOM says it is not in the business of resettling cats, but why not? As regards fairness,

it does not seem unreasonable that non-Ukrainian asylum seekers should also be able to bring their pets. However, the special dispensation granted to Ukrainian pet owners should not only be read as a progress narrative: there are acute ethical dilemmas regarding fairness across refugee populations, the use of resources and speciesism. In the light of what has been said about biosecurity and pet civic consciousness, I would suggest that it makes sense to distinguish between 'practical' hard and soft constraints on the one hand, and ethical constraints on the other hand, when reflecting on the implications for international migration management.

Hard constraints involve biosecurity and the juridification of companion animal welfare issues. Issues regarding public health, security and the economy are likely to supersede humanitarian considerations. If pets are to be seen as family members or even refugees in their own right, someone has to assume institutional responsibility for them. This in itself is a severe constraint: unless the UNHCR develops a policy that fits pets and people with pets into their resettlement selection processes, unless the IOM is willing to include pets when resettled refugees cross countries, and unless host countries are willing to provide the regulatory and financial resources to receive pets, it is difficult to imagine that resettlement will eventually include designated pathways for family animals. Similar financial and legal considerations arise if individual refugees arrive on the UK or Norwegian border with pets whose health status is unclear. At that point, costs are a hard constraint, including the distribution of costs between agencies, and national budgetary constraints. As we have seen, refugees' pets require a host of different resources. Families with one or more pets need appropriate accommodation and incur extra expenses for animal food and health checks. Who should pay for this? What are the implications for fairness vis-à-vis the domestic population and forced migrants with no animals? What type of pets should be permitted? The legal category of 'pet' varies cross-culturally: Norway, for example, limits the range of accepted pets, by banning certain breeds of dog (so far, the Norwegian authorities have granted applications for exceptions).

'Soft constraints' include crisis communication in appropriate languages and formats about regulations, rights, restrictions and obligations regarding pets, as well as the facilitation of communication between refugees and the animal health authorities, vets and quarantine stations. While biosecurity policies and legal regimes are hard constraints, policy priorities and the law must be clearly explained, in a way that takes into account the refugee population's own perceptions of regulations, authorities, animal health and veterinary treatments. This requires there to be mediators with cultural, linguistic, regulatory and veterinary knowledge, who can explain the rights and duties of pet owners, the details of the quarantine process and the reason behind the policy on visiting.

Clearly, ethical constraints are a key issue in the politics of pet exceptionalism: There is no neat progress narrative about inclusion. Costs and trade-offs are real. Host countries strive to balance solidarity with precaution. Solidarity raises the questions of fairness across refugee populations, and what consequences a designated pet policy might have. Scholars are already grappling with uncomfortable questions regarding the potential moral pitfalls of racialized preferences combined with 'humanizing' animal ownership. Will human beings be seen as 'protectable' because they own dogs or cats? To put it bluntly, there is a risk that refugees with cute animals might appeal more to domestic constituencies in resettlement countries and that this could impact protection and integration assessments.

An approach carefully designed to achieve a fair and balanced inclusion of pets in refugee reception and resettlement schemes does not, however, resolve important questions about how they affect animals themselves. In Norway, regardless of the humanitarian sentiment underpinning the reception of pets, the policies as currently applied are incapable of dealing with the dynamics of displacement. Norway's policy ties the animal's legal status to that of the owner: The pet may be documented and healthy, but if the owner leaves, the animal must leave too—or die. This raises the question of fairness across species. As regards pet exceptionalism, what needs to be discussed is not only 'solidarity versus precaution' but also precaution versus the ethical treatment of animals.

CONCLUSION

This article is an invitation to debate and an attempt to open up a broader research agenda. The admission of Ukrainian pets opens the door for other populations to expect that they too will be able to migrate, flee or be resettled with

their companion animals. The events of 2022 have also normalized the reception of so-called 'refugee pets' within hosts societies, engendering a minimum of controversies. While rights and obligations may not have been impacted, public expectations have shifted along with perspectives on what will constitute unfair or discriminatory treatment. Organizations involved in international migration should take these considerations seriously.

To that end, the objective of this article is to unpack the politics of pet exceptionalism, and identify issues that may impact the international refugee regime in the long term. In most emergencies, humans lack protection. The refugee regime is in crisis and aid agencies are unable to provide sufficient food aid to ever growing numbers of displaced persons worldwide. The story of pet exceptionalism is not a linear progress narrative, nor is it morally uncomplicated: Recognition of the intrinsic value of animals and the problems of anthropocentric bias must be coupled with a keen awareness of the difficult issues that need to be addressed when considering how humanitarian actors and governments should deal with companion animals. Attempts to reorder or balance the relationship between humans and animals can quickly become a legitimization of the practice of ranking humans beings, with some people getting to decide that animals should be prioritized over other groups of humans. At the same time—regardless of whether the temporary protection now offered to Ukrainians become more or less permanent—the de facto and de jure dispensation granted to Ukrainian pet owners raises issues about the expectations of future refugee populations that they will be able to take for animals with them.

The influx of Ukrainian pets illustrates the need for more policy engagement around pet displacement. I tentatively suggest the constraints involved should be categorized as hard and soft, and ethical ones. More knowledge is needed. While the initial reception of pets was ad hoc, the policy of pet exceptionalism developed from humanitarian and pragmatic considerations (solidarity vs. Precaution) and the desire to enhance refugee well-being while maintaining domestic biosecurity and regulatory control. Failing to plan and excluding pets from refugee policy making, planning and programming are problematic, both from a humanitarian and a biosecurity perspective. To support policy development on the national and international level, a careful survey of host country experiences should be undertaken. This would include stakeholder mapping (including by volunteers and on social media platforms); analysis of the regulatory approach and a timeline of policy initiatives; an evaluation of how the animal health authorities, veterinary health-care system and refugee reception system have responded and adapted (including crisis communication to refugees and the general public and unexpected events and conflicts); and qualitative research with Ukrainian refugee communities to understand how they have perceived and adapted to domestic law. It should also include an assessment of animal welfare and refugee returns.

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- ² Seeking to bring the animal rights perspective to the attention of a refugee and migration studies audience, this article uses the terms 'pets' and 'companion animals' interchangeably. The term 'Non-human animals' is not used.
- ³ The EU uses a special derogation in Regulation 2013/576, which allows refugees from Ukraine to import their pets into the EU without meeting standard requirements (EurLex, 2022).

- ⁴ This pet exceptionalism has sparked little public debate. A rare example of scepticism is voiced by Japanese vets criticizing authorities for allowing dogs brought by Ukrainians to be kept outside quarantine stations and trusting government-issued quarantine certificates. The critics note that Ukraine is high risk for rabies and has a fledgling veterinary health-care system which has suspended oral rabies vaccination since 2014 for economic and military–political reasons. In addition, the vaccination rate for pet dogs is less than half at 46.7%, and in 2019, there were 1829 reported cases in animals, making it the only rabies endemic country in Europe for both humans and animals (Kaneda et al., 2022).
- ⁵ Considerations around Ukrainian pets are inevitably deeply political: A petition for Ukraine to be made a listed country on the UK pet entry list protests that Russia is a listed country under the UK scheme: It says, 'This is disgraceful, and Ukraine should replace Russia as a listed country on the pet entry list' (Change.org., 2022).

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