

UN vaccinates Syrian refugee animals in Lebanon against goat plague

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The UN has launched an emergency vaccination campaign against lumpy skin disease and goat plague among animals brought to Lebanon by refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict, a report said Thursday.

Some of the 1.5 million refugees have brought with them large numbers of unvaccinated sheep, goats, cattle and other animals, raising concerns over the spread of high impact animal diseases, the UN's food agency said.

The Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said it was carrying out the second phase of "a campaign to immunise as much of the country's livestock as possible, with a target of vaccinating all animals."

"As many as 70,000 cows and around 900,000 sheep and goats could be exposed to transboundary diseases if left untreated, according to Lebanon's ministry for agriculture," the report said.

The campaign aims to reduce the number of animals dying from preventable diseases in rural areas in particular, where natural resources are already strained by the spill-over effects from the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Some of the animal diseases are highly contagious and can spread extremely rapidly, causing high mortality and morbidity in animals, with serious socio-economic consequences and possible public health

repercussions, FAO said.

"The three most prevalent animal diseases detected in Lebanon include lumpy skin disease, foot-and-mouth disease and peste des petits ruminants, also known as 'goat plague', which is highly contagious," it said.

FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) pledged earlier this month to eradicate sheep and goat plague—which causes fever, mouth sores, diarrhoea and often leads to a swift death—by 2030.

The stress being placed on Lebanon's "natural resources and food production systems is particularly worrying... with more people than ever before now in need of animal protein and milk," FAO said.

According to the UN, Lebanon now has the highest per capita ratio of refugees in the world, accounting for a quarter of the population—and their arrival has seen unemployment figures double.

The vaccination project—funded by Britain's Department for International Development (DFID)—follows an initial programme last year which was credited with stopping any widespread animal disease outbreaks.

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