EurSafe News

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Dear EurSafe members,

It is my pleasure to share with you the Spring 2025 edition of the EurSafe newsletter. This edition highlights the significance of peacebuilding and peace studies in both food and environmental contexts.

In *Humanitarian action: From do no harm to promoting peaceful coexistence*, Simone Bunse, Caroline Delgado, Kristina Tschunkert, discuss the complexities in ameliorating food insecurity punctuated by 'escalating climate change impacts, increasing violent conflict, and economic instability'. They remind readers that humanitarian aid cannot lose its ethical core, which includes 'work[ing] across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding-climate nexus, including by promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.'

In *From environmental weaponization to environmental peacebuilding*, Tetiana Gardashuk invites readers to reflect on the weight of war and weapons on not only vulnerable peoples, but also on the ecological systems that they rely on. While highlighting the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, she invites readers to consider how the environment, water and food have and continue to be weaponized during war. Peacebuilding and post-war restoration are framed as a collective action cum coordination problem that must address 'ecocide and urbicide' and environmental rehabilitation, which includes 'all aspects and nuances of post-war environmental degradation, economic decline, social trauma, basic human needs.'

Both essays call for our continued engagement with peacebuilding activities. Ethical persistence, solidarity and radical hope are required to meet this moment of global disquietude.

EurSafe

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This issue also celebrates Marsha Rooijakkers, the winner of the Vonne Lund Junior Research Prize at the 25th anniversary of the EurSafe conference, and Konstantin Deininger, who successfully defended his dissertation titled, *Approaching Questions in (Animal) Ethics from Within: Drawing on Cora Diamond's Moral Philosophy*. Konstantin received his doctorate from the University of Vienna. Readers are treated to excepts from their work.

Congratulations to Bernice Bovenkerk on her VICI grant by the Dutch Research Council for the project *The promise and perils of digital technology for human–animal relationships*.

Don't miss Franck Meijboom's message from the Board and the list of upcoming conferences and events towards the latter half of the newsletter. If you are interested in contributing to a future EurSafe Newsletter, please reach out to any editorial board member.

Best Wishes, Everyone, for a Happy and Fruitful Spring!

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PHOTO CREDITS

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paper

Humanitarian action

From 'do no harm' to promoting peaceful coexistence

Simone Bunse, Caroline Delgado, Kristina Tschunkert



From left to right: Simone Bunse, Caroline Delgado and Kristina Tschunkert.

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Since the introduction of the *Do No Harm* (DNH) framework in the 1990s, humanitarian actors have invested in conflict-sensitive approaches to increase programme quality and accountability in conflict-affected contexts. Adapted from medical ethics, *do no harm* means that humanitarian actors have an ethical responsibility to avoid inadvertently fuelling tensions or creating additional risks for affected people. These may include exacerbating existing conflicts, creating dependencies and distorting local economies.

Though often used interchangeably, 'conflict sensitivity' goes beyond DNH by emphasising how project design can also positively influence conflict dynamics. Beyond avoiding unintentional harm, conflict-sensitive humanitarian interventions can also contribute to building trust, fostering dialogue, and creating conditions for sustainable peace.

Amid rising food insecurity, escalating climate change impacts, increasing violent conflict, and economic instability, this ethical responsibility also entails addressing grievances related to these challenges. It involves finding ways to mitigate food insecurity, climate pressures, declining livelihood opportunities, and economic shocks while fostering peace and easing tensions between communities.

The concept of promoting peace within humanitarian action is moving beyond simply do no harm to actively pursuing peace-positive interventions. This shift in concept, mindset and ambition recognises that humanitarian work can and should contribute to building more peaceful and stable societies without compromising humanitarian principles. It is not only motivated by ethical considerations. It is also based on the realization that: a) food insecurity is driven by multiple overlapping and mutually reinforcing climate, economic and security crises that need to be tackled together to break vicious cycles; and b) there is urgent need to enhance the effectiveness of aid as budgets are shrinking and needs growing.

To enhance aid effectiveness, address the complexity of crisis drivers and stem chronic food insecurity in fragile contexts, policymakers, aid practitioners and researchers therefore increasingly see integrated approaches that align humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts as a way forward. Humanitarian actors are exploring how to work across the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding-climate nexus, including by promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. Operationalising this aspect necessitates mainstreaming objectives related to fostering peaceful co-existence and social cohesion into all activities and partnerships across humanitarian and development actors.

Why food security is beyond a humanitarian concern

The Sahel is a stark example of food security going beyond a humanitarian concern. The current humanitarian crisis is not only characterized by severe food insecurity, but also by violent conflict related to competition over scarce resources and the exacerbating impacts of climate change and land degradation. In Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger millions of people are grappling with the dire consequences of these interconnected challenges. Violent conflict has led to widespread displacement, regional instability and the rise of extremist groups. In light of this, humanitarian organizations are relying on land and ecosystem restoration combined with climate adaptation and livelihood diversification as powerful entry points, not only to tackle chronic food insecurity, but intentionally to contribute to peace. In practice, this means that food aid or cash assistance – a first line response to alleviate immediate suffering – comes together with a coordinated package of long-term activities that seek to reduce competition within and between communities over scarce natural resources. This can, depending on communities' specific needs, be done by enhancing access to and availability of water, fertile land, and other natural resources and making agricultural production sustainable and climate-smart. This can be bolstered further with insurance schemes, community solidarity mechanisms, and inclusive mechanisms for effective conflict resolution. Yet, no aid organization can be expected to do this alone. Hence, innovative partnerships, are emerging that pool expertise and activities in the same hotspots to address food insecurity, increase capacities to adapt to climate pressures, improve community relations and strengthen social protection systems. The Sahel Resilience Partnership between WFP, UNICEF and GIZ, for example, is such a strategic alliance that pursues 'packaged' programming that aligns humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions in the same areas. More such partnerships are needed and can be incentivized through innovating funding models.

Opportunities and risks of cash assistance

While working through the nexus is, in theory, a systemic approach that aims to enhance interconnections, consider complexity, and promote long-term solutions, cash assistance as an aid modality is a specific example of a less cumbersome way to respond holistically, if deployed with peace objectives and in a conflict sensitive way. Cash assistance as a modality for food security programmes shows promise in responding more holistically. A case in point is Lebanon, where cash assistance effectively addresses basic needs, such as access to food, in times of interconnected crises (refugee response and economic, financial, and political crisis). Shifting smoothly between ATM withdrawals and e-card systems to pay for food in shops as needed ensures

reliable support in times of financial turmoil and liquidity crises, which can turn into an opportunity for stabilisation at scale. However, from a conflict-sensitivity perspective, cash assistance in Lebanon supports negative peace that prevents direct violence but preserves structures of inequality as its economic impacts reinforce existing power imbalances. Despite economic multiplier effects, cash assistance in Lebanon results in narrow economic benefits. Simply put, cash assistance and its effect on the local economy do not automatically result in positive peace, despite assumptions that economic growth leads to it. To move beyond negative peace, cash programming must actively cultivate peacebuilding opportunities. This requires thorough conflict-sensitivity analysis at the community level and a focus on equitable economic distribution. For instance, in Nigeria, a business-to-business initiative addressed the exclusion of small businesses from cash assistance benefits by connecting them with larger wholesalers. This allowed smaller retailers to participate in the supply chain with guaranteed profit margins, fostering growth and mitigating inequality. This approach demonstrates how cash interventions can be structured to promote inclusive economic development and contribute to more sustainable peace, lessons crucial for current and future crisis responses.

Funding

Such holistic programming across humanitarian, development and peace efforts depends on enabling funding structures. However, funding structures present deep ethical dilemmas, exposing contradictions between policy ideals and implementation. While humanitarian aid emphasizes neutrality, development focuses on long-term change, and peacebuilding requires deep local engagement, funding mechanisms often prioritize efficiency, measurable outcomes, and donor interests over ethical commitments to affected populations.

A key ethical issue is the dominance of a technocratic, liberal peacebuilding model that promotes rule of law, democracy, and market-driven solutions as universal pathways to peace and stability. This approach sidelines locally rooted peace processes, imposing external values while marginalizing non-Western governance and civil society models. Similarly, the professionalization of humanitarian aid has improved coordination but often excludes grassroots actors who lack the capacity to meet rigid donor requirements, reinforcing power imbalances in crisis response.

Geopolitical interests further distort funding priorities, with aid often instrumentalized to serve donor governments' strategic goals rather than the needs of affected communities. Despite rhetoric on local ownership, decision-making power remains concentrated within international agencies, while local actors are relegated to the role of implementers. Knowledge production follows a similar hierarchy, privileging international expertise over community-driven solutions.

The reluctance to provide long-term, predictable funding for peacebuilding exacerbates these challenges. Short-term, results-driven financing pressures organizations to prioritize immediate crises over deeper structural transformation, creating an ethical dilemma between urgent relief and sustainable peace.

Ultimately, funding dilemmas centre on power, agency, and accountability. Addressing these requires a shift from rigid, donor-driven frameworks to approaches that empower local actors. This includes recognizing diverse peacebuilding models, providing the necessary time and resources to foster equitable partnerships, conducting thorough and continuous conflict analysis, and ensuring that aid delivery upholds dignity, justice, and solidarity.

Recent geopolitical developments risk reinforcing these ethical challenges. While humanitarian needs are increasing, humanitarian agencies responding to food crises have been forced to reduce their assistance and even suspend the provision of food assistance in some areas due to scarcity of funding. These developments make the success of this vital endeavour more challenging as funding cuts and re-prioritisation reverse progress and create uncertainty.

In 2024, just under 50 per cent of humanitarian appeals were funded. Since then, the most recent announcements regarding aid spending paint a bleak picture: The UK announced a cut in foreign aid spending from 5 per cent of GDP to 3 per cent. Germany is expected to halve its foreign aid spending in 2025. Most notably, US's development agency USAID, the world's largest foreign aid agency, has been largely dismantled by the government. This has resulted in the termination of awards, amounting to USD 54 billion in cuts. This has stark consequences for people affected by crises worldwide.

Ending this life-saving work now will have immediate and fatal consequences. Essential programmes delivering food, water, shelter, healthcare, and protection are being shut down. Returning to the central humanitarian mandate of preventing death and alleviating immediate suffering might be necessary. This will require making difficult ethical choices about which programmes and populations receive priority.

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paper

From environmental weaponization to environmental peacebuilding

Tetiana Gardashuk

I started to think about the environmental impacts of war and work in this direction after the shock of the first days of the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine (24.02.2022). My involvement in this topic is a consistent part of my beliefs and academic duties, and a sphere of application of my knowledge and experience, as I have been studying ecophilosophy since the 1990s. After the liberation of Kyiv oblast (Kyiv region) (April 2022), we witnessed the terrifying consequences of the Russian aggression on people, civic infrastructure, and the natural environment. For me, it was a turning point for thinking about the strategy of post-war restoration and environmental recovery within the methodological framework of the concept of environmental peacebuilding.

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Analyzing the consequences of the use of poison gas during the First World War, Peter Sloterdijk surmised a trend towards the increasing involvement of the environment in combat. The invention of more and more powerful conventional and non-conventional weapons during the 20th century and especially in the 21st century increased the negative environmental effects of military actions and other conflicts. The environment and 'ecologically de-

Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine, Frontline landscape in the gray zone between Ukrainian and Russian armed forces. Photo: Hernandez Jose Maria.

pendent vital functions' (P. Sloterdijk) are no longer a back-side casualty of a battle but the very target of it. Attacks on the environment aim to weaken the adversary's army and civilians, economic systems, and psychological, moral, and political resilience. Ecocide and urbicide are parts of the new types of hybrid wars. Moreover, the environment itself is converted into weapons.

The weaponization (that is the use as a weapon of something that is not conceived under the usual meaning of this word) of the environment, natural resources, and livelihoods is deeply rooted in the past. Historically, the biophysical environment played ambivalent roles for people in different types of inter-state and civil wars, inter-communal, and social conflicts. For instance, rivers, marshes, and mountains were natural barriers that protected communities from their enemies. At the same time, the attacker used these properties of the environment to weaken those who were attacked.

Contemporary wars more intensively weaponize the environment, all kinds of natural resources, and the civic infrastructure related to them (dams, irrigation and water supply systems, agricultural facilities, etc.). This conclusion follows from the evidence of the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and the wars in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and the Balkans. The current Russo-Ukrainian War can be defined as the most 'ecologized war' given the scale of its environmental impacts and its cumulative spatial and temporal consequences. This war also demonstrates the highest level of weaponization of environments, resources, and civilian infrastructure.

The analysis of the consequences of the Vietnam War shows that the effects of deliberate alteration of ecosystems due to military activities are most noticeable in regions where the majority of the population is involved in and dependent on agriculture. It is also true for the current Russo-Ukrainian War. A large territory of farmlands mostly concentrated in the East and South of Ukraine are used for the production of many commodities not only for internal consumption but also for export. Agriculture plays a significant role in the economic welfare and food safety of the country, GDP share, employment, self-employment, and livelihoods of many people, as well as food sustainability and safety in Europe and the whole world. The agricultural sector is weaponized through direct occupation of farmlands in the South and East of Ukraine; exclusion of farmlands due to military actions, mining, pollution, fires, etc.; water weaponization and destruction of water supply systems, etc. Military actions trigger negative changes in the climatic system which affect agricultural production and food safety as well.

Since different forms and stages of water and food weaponization have substantial impacts on the environment (for instance, mining of farmlands), it can also be considered as the methods of 'environmental modification techniques having widespread, long-lasting or severe effects as the means of destruction, damage or injury' which are prohibited by the ENMOD (Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques, Article1, entry into force 5.10.1978). The weaponization of these resources neglects the vital values of water and food and can be considered not only as a form of terrorism or war crime but also as a crime against the very foundations of life. The war violates 'Nature's inherent right to exist'. It also violates the principle of biophilia as our natural affinity for life is the very essence of our humanity and binds us to all other living beings (Kellert 1997; Wilson 1995).

Thus, environmental rehabilitation should be a consistent part of the post-war restoration in Ukraine. This approach corresponds to the contemporary peace theory, which presumes the absence of direct and indirect human violence against nature and the environment. Natural resources need to be rethought as sources of cooperation and peace, or environmental peacebuilding, aiming to build sustainability in war-torn communities and society.

Since the current Russo-Ukrainian war has direct and indirect transboundary impacts, the main topics for environmental peacebuilding in the European context are climate change, energy, water resources, trust-building, education, social and environmental justice, and communication. At the domestic level, the post-war restoration should take into account all aspects and nuances of post-war environmental degradation, economic decline, social trauma, basic human needs, etc. In addition, the adverse effects of climate change also need to be taken into account. Another key challenge is to understand the impact of the competing interests of different actors on reconstruction and peacebuilding, and how to coordinate them more effectively.

The post-war rebuilding is an extremely resource-consuming process, that asks for non-standard (non-conventional) innovative approaches based on appropriate methodology of needs assessment. This follows from the experiences of other post-war countries and a critical estimation of how those experiences can be adapted to Ukraine in terms of recovery living needs for both humans and non-human species.

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Since land, water, and agroecosystems are severely affected by hostilities, one of the key tasks is cleaning them from all types of contaminations, restoration of ecosystem integrity and soil fertility, etc. Like people, land needs recovery after the stress of wartime. From this follows the need to redefine the share of the agricultural sector in the national economy and the role of Ukraine as a bread basket for other parts of the planet.

Ukrainians have to shift their instrumental attitude to Nature and the biophysical environment as a storehouse of natural resources toward recognition of the intrinsic and non-material value of Nature. The valuation of all forms of life should be one of the responses to destructive consequences of the war. On the one hand, the restoration of natural ecosystems and land should take an equal position in the national strategy of peacebuilding. On the other hand, the role of nature as a means of rehabilitating people's mental, psychological, and physical health cannot be underestimated.

Material well-being in a war-torn society should not be achieved at the expense of worsening the environment, and neither should environmental improvements be gained at the expense of people. Finding a balance between the former and the latter is a big challenge that Ukrainian society faces and a task for all groups of interest.

members

Vonne Lund Junior Researcher Prize 2024

Marsha Rooijakkers

I have a background in consumer sciences and when I was writing my paper, I was only a few months on my way with learning about animal ethics. When I read about the harmful practices against nonhuman animals in intensive animal farming, I felt the urge to do something. I had heard about a dialogical method called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) through one of my supervisors and thought this could serve as an intervention method to raise awareness among consumers about the origin of the meat they consume.

To underpin my idea, I searched for guidance in established animal ethical theories and found that care ethics, especially the book by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams on the feminist care tradition in animal ethics, provided me with the best support.

According to this approach, our sympathy, defined as our emotional and intellectual understanding of the experiences of animals, should give us guidance on how we should act. How? By restoring the connection between the living animal and the dead meat and by exposing their suffering. Most animals live and suffer behind closed doors in factory farms and so we forget about the animal as an once present, independent (id)entity. Paul McCartney once said: 'If slaughterhouses had glass walls everybody would be vegetarian'. However, a Dutch slaughterhouse actually tried this and had to remove the glass in the walls after recurrent comments by the public. It turns out that consumers do not want to be reminded that animals have to die for meat to exist.

And so, I learned about the meat paradox: even though consumers care about animals and do not want them to get hurt, they override their sympathy by (un)consciously applying coping strategies to continue their meat-eating behaviour. They, for example, fool themselves into believing that the animals have lived a good life, deny that animals can suffer or strategically ignore and avoid information about the origin of their meat. With this knowledge I went back to the drawing board and found that, at least in theory, my initial feeling was right.

I think VTS can educate sympathy and raise awareness about and challenge coping strategies. In VTS dialogue, images and three open-ended questions are used as an invitation to pay attention to and reflect on a subject, which in my case could either be the suffering of the animal or a specific coping strategy. Animal ethical theories are often very normative and abstract. With VTS I found a way to apply them and that is why I titled my paper 'Implementing Animal Care Ethics through the Arts of Visual Thinking Strategies'. Next steps in my research will be to further develop VTS as an intervention method and to conduct empirical research to test whether VTS enhances sympathy and challenges coping strategies.

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PhD project completed

Konstantin Deininger

In my dissertation at the University of Vienna (supervisor: Herwig Grimm, reviewers: Gary Steiner, Markus Wild), I explored Cora Diamond's moral philosophy as a holistic, practice-oriented approach to animal ethics. While Diamond is best known for her early critique of pioneers in animal ethics such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, her positive contribution to the field has largely been overlooked—with a few notable exceptions, such as the work of Hannah Winther.

Departing from a critique of the rationalist tradition of moral individualism, I argue that Diamond's approach offers a more compelling account of how moral concerns with animals arise in ordinary moral life. Combining Diamond's work with Wittgensteinian ideas, I suggest that moral thinking emerges not from abstract principles, but from our shared, lived experience as vulnerable beings entangled in relationships with others. Central to this approach is the defense of the idea that moral thinking is always situated: it depends on our practices, our concepts, and the ways we live with others—including animals—without taking these aspects as unchangeable and given. Rather than limiting moral critique of animal treatment norms, a practice-oriented approach inspired by Diamond and Wittgenstein offers rich resources for rethinking and changing how we treat animals. Key topics of my dissertation include emotional responses, the concept of animals as fellow creatures, the moral significance of being human, and the limits of moral reasoning.

While my dissertation was rather theoretical in its outlook, I am now focusing on more practical issues in the early phase of my postdoctoral work. I will look into the normativity of personal human–animal relationships, how emerging biotechnologies such as organoids shape our form of life, and how we can find hope in relationships with urban animals.

VICI grant

Bernice Bovenkerk

Bernice Bovenkerk, Wageningen University and Research, was awarded a VICI grant by the Dutch Research Council for the project *The promise and perils of digital technology for human–animal relationships*. In this project, she critically explores the conditions under which digital technology can make human–animal relationships more just and meaningful. She will be studying different cases: the use of VR to make people more aware of the way animals experience the world; finding ways to develop Large Language Models in a non-speciest manner; the use of AI in Precision Lifestock Farming; Interspecies Translation Platforms; and the synergy between AI and biotechnology to help adapt animals to challenges in the wild.

updates

EurSafe Executive Committee

Franck Meijboom

On March 21st we met as a board for our annual spring meeting. The main items on the agenda were the next EurSafe Congress, finances and membership and a discussion on how to make the EurSafe strategy operational.

Regarding the latter, we discussed the issues of communication, early career researchers and the role of interdisciplinary collaboration and non-academic professionals. As a result, we decided to create a EurSafe LinkedIn page and to discontinue our account on platform X. Furthermore, the website will be updated, but will remain as a steady state entry point for information about EurSafe, while the LinkedIn page can be used to announce items on a more regular basis and also allow members to link to this page in their own messages, if applicable. The EurSafe LinkedIn page is available here.

We will also do a short survey among younger colleagues to see how EurSafe can be (more) attractive for them. We will start reaching out to them through research groups in Vienna, Wageningen and Utrecht among others, but if you have ideas and are interested in participating in one of these sessions, please let me know!

Finally, we discussed the update on the EurSafe 2026 conference together with Sinan Akilli from the Cappadocia University. The congress is planned for 9-12 September 2026 in Cappadocia and has as its main theme 'Agriculture and Food Systems: The Role of AI and Digitalization'. The organization is well underway and in a few weeks the Call for Abstracts will be published on the website of EurSafe 2026. We hope that many of you will submit your abstracts!

On behalf of the Executive Board,

Best regards,

Franck Meijboom
25 March 2025

conferences

2-4 JUNE 2025
Rational Animals? Developmental, comparative, philosophical and methodological perspectives
The University of Stirling, Scotland, UK
website

2-5 JUNE 2025
16th FELASA Congress: Reducing severity in animal research
Athens, Greece
website

3 JUNE 2025
Animals, Nature and Society PhD Workshop
Centre for Human Rights, Birmingham, City University
website

4-5 JUNE 2025
Animal Liberation, 1975-2025 and Beyond
Rennes, France
website

19-20 JUNE 2025
International Conference on applied animal behaviour
NH Vienna Airport Conference Center, Vienna, Austria
website

1-3 JULY 2025
AI and Animals: Ethical Impacts of Artificial Intelligence on Non-humans Symposium
University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands
website

2-5 JULY 2025
Animal advocacy conference 2025
University of Edinburgh, Scotland
website

4-7 AUGUST 2025
Oxford animal ethics summer school 2025: The ethics of captivity
Merton College, Oxford, UK
website

12-13 SEPTEMBER 2025
Human-animal-studies in classics: Emotions
University of Zurich, Switzerland
website

Sunset in Cappadocia, Turkey.

17-18 SEPTEMBER 2025

Asia Pacific Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (APSAFE)

Seoul, Korea
website

25-26 SEPTEMBER 2025

Conference for Practical Philosophy

University of Passau, Germany
website

22-23 OCTOBER 2025

Blue Aesthetics / Blue Animal Studies

Hochschule für Musik Nürnberg, Germany
website

ON-GOING

Seminar on Non-Human Minds: Science, Metaphysics, and Ethics

website

ON-GOING

Vienna Animal Studies Group

website

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