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Animal welfare in Italian long-term shelters. Benchmark against an “ideal shelter”

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The No-kill policy for Italian sheltered dogs may result in their permanent detention in long-term facilities with the consequences that the animal welfare can be affected.

A sample of 64 shelters along the Italian North-South axis was assessed with the Shelter Quality Protocol (SQP), an ad hoc tool for the evaluation of shelter dogs' welfare.

The aim of this study was to generate a benchmark of the Italian situation based on the assessments' results. A final scoring system of the SQP was created, based on expert opinion, assigning weights to each principle, criterion, measure and categorical variable included within the protocol. Finally, through specific algorithms, a database was built to calculate automatically the final percentage score of each shelter in respect to the “ideal shelter” (100%).

The 64 shelters were classified by type of management (animal protection associations, municipalities and private organizations/companies) and by geographical area (North, Centre and South).

Shelters managed by animal protection association received a higher score (Mean 83%), followed by shelters directly managed by municipalities (Mean 81%) and then by private shelters (Mean 75%). The shelters situated in the Northern and Central Italian regions received a higher score

(North: Mean 82.5%, and Centre: Mean 81.9%) compared with the shelters from South Italy (Mean 78.3%).

Different management systems and geographical areas provided the level of variability of SQP results. South Italy showed a critical situation regarding animal welfare in long-term shelters. Shelters with high score may be a great opportunity for improvement of other shelters within the same region.

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