# Religious slaughter of animals in the EU

**SUMMARY** Religious texts set down traditional methods of slaughter; simply using a knife to kill the animal. The right to continue using these methods is strongly contested between members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths and animal rights activists.

Opponents of the practice feel that animals should be stunned before slaughter – standard industry practice worldwide – since this makes them unconscious and reduces the pain as they are cut and bled to death.

However, there is no definitive scientific evidence that an animal does not feel pain whilst unconscious. Indeed, a counter argument put forward is that stunning may only stop an animal displaying pain.

While the Jews accept absolutely no stunning, some Muslims have accepted it as long as it can be shown that the animal could be returned to normal living consciousness.

EU legislation grants exceptions from stunning for religious groups, so long as animals are well treated. Proper and good treatment of animals is a basic element of both the Jewish and Muslim religious texts.

Halal meat (following Muslim practice) is produced in much greater quantities than Kosher meat (Jewish) in the EU. In some countries Halal and Kosher meat production seems to be significantly above the requirements of the respective religious populations; some is exported to other Member States.





Stun Gun and Cutting Knife

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# Context

EU law requires animals for the food chain to be stunned (made unconscious) prior to killing, so that death should be painless.

There are exceptions for religious slaughter, notably for Shechita (the Jewish method of killing animals for food - Kosher meat) and Muslim Halal. The Muslim and Jewish communities, totaling nearly 25% of the world population, have similar philosophies in this regard.

Their slaughter rituals are deemed so important for their religious observance that outlawing them could be considered an attack on their religions.

However, these exceptions are subject to ongoing concern, particularly voiced by animal welfare organisations, that cattle, sheep, goats and poultry die with greater pain and suffering under these methods.

Most data available is incomplete and often old; however it has been used in the briefing to give a picture of the area.

# **Numbers**

#### **Consumers**

Jews and Muslims represent approximately 6% of the EU population, with Muslims





accounting for the far greater proportion. Estimates of numbers in individual Member States (MS) vary significantly particularly for the less numerous Jewish populations, but despite this it is useful to have a rough indicative picture as this should give some idea of religious demand for Kosher and Halal meat.

In 2001 the EU had an estimated <u>Jewish</u> population of just over 1 million:

- Britain's Jewish population of 285 000 in 1995 was considered the fifth largest worldwide,
- France is estimated to have the third largest Jewish population in the world,
- Germany was estimated to have a Jewish population of 98 000, and Spain, Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands around 30-40 000 each, with less in other EU MS.

France is considered to have the largest <u>Muslim</u> population in the EU with some estimates ranging between 3.5 and 6 million people. In Germany the estimate is slightly smaller, perhaps around 3 million.

There is a group of countries (the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and Italy) that are ranged around 1 million each. The UK has the highest estimate at 1.6 million in this grouping and Italy the smallest (0.7 million). The next group consists of Belgium (one estimate is 0.4 million) and Denmark (estimated at 0.28 million) with Greece, Sweden and Austria somewhere between.

The Muslim population proportions also vary considerably from Bulgaria (12% according to a 2009 estimate), France (possibly 6% to 8%), the Netherlands (around 6%), with other MS being 4% and below, according to some rough indications.

### Meat

Since around 2000 Halal meat has had growing sales, including in supermarkets, in the UK in particular (the annex gives further UK data). This reflects a growing Muslim population, changes in consumer tastes and increased meat consumption.

The results of a 2010 European Commission (EC) request for data from MS regarding ritual slaughter showed that MS lacked data. However, it was <u>reported</u> that:

- In Ireland, with 1% of consumers Muslim, 6% of cattle and 34% of sheep were killed without stunning, and
- In France 40% of calves, 25% of bovines (cattle) and 54% of ovines (sheep etc.) were killed without stunning according to a survey done in 2006-07.

The EU market for Kosher meat was estimated to be worth around €5 billion in 2008.

#### **Animals**

Overall, 2012 beef production in the EU is forecast to be 8.1 million tonnes (28 million animals), 0.85 million tonnes of sheep meat and (2010 figures) 8.9 million tonnes of chicken meat. Over 6 000 million birds will go to EU slaughterhouses. No figures for the share of religious meat production within this could be found.

France, Germany and Italy each slaughtered in excess of a million tonnes of cattle in 2010. Beef production is relatively widespread in the EU, but for sheep-meat Spain and the UK accounted for 57% of all production in 2010.

# Slaughter methods



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The process can be similar for both standard and religious slaughter methods, hence the full description below.



#### Conventional

Animals are generally made unconscious by stunning and then killed by cutting their main blood vessels.

Just prior to slaughter, individual animals are separated as they are walked into a stunning box. Within seconds an operator stuns the animal.

There are three different methods of **stunning**, each used for specific animals.

- Captive bolt: a gun-like device delivers a concussive blow to the skull. Usually used for adult cattle and sometimes sheep and calves.
- Electrical:
  - A current applied across a sheep's (or sometimes cattle's) brain rendering it senseless,
  - Waterbath: birds are hung by their feet in metal holders on a belt and their heads are dipped into electrified water,
- Gas: carbon dioxide or other inert gases are used, mainly for poultry.

**Bleeding** comes from having at least both carotid arteries severed ("sticking") to ensure maximum blood loss.

### **Cutting actions required**

In **poultry** and **sheep** the throat is cut behind the jaw.

The knife cut for chicken cuts muscle, trachea, oesophagus, carotid arteries, jugular veins and major nerves.

For **cattle**, the skin is opened at the neck through a 30cm longitudinal cut. A clean knife is then used and inserted at a 45° angle to cut the jugular and carotid blood vessels.

The knife should be very sharp, without blemishes or damage and be at least double the width of the neck. It should be used in a fast, aggressive cut across the throat with the least number of strokes in order to bring about immediate and massive blood loss.

The animals are then inverted, having been shackled by a back leg – attached using a

metal fastener – just after stunning (except poultry which are already inverted), to allow the blood to drain away faster.

### Religious

"Sticking" is carried out, with "stunning and sticking" in some MS. Stunning has not been a traditional practice.

A survey carried out by the <u>Dialrel project</u> looked at slaughtering practices in a number of countries. The survey gives an overview of religious slaughter practices, but the project team notes that their results may not give a full picture because of the low number of questionnaires returned:

# Halal slaughter

- For **cattle** there was no stunning in Italy and most Belgian and French slaughterhouses, unlike in Germany and the UK. Cattle were restrained upright in Italy, the UK and 80% of abattoirs in Belgium, but turned on their back in a pen in Spain. The most common stunning method was the penetrating captive bolt,
- For sheep, there was no stunning in Belgian, Dutch and most of the Italian, French and Spanish abattoirs surveyed, whereas stunning was the most common practice in the UK and Germany. The animals were upright in the UK, on their sides in Belgium, France and Italy and mainly hoisted in Spain. The most common stunning method was head-only electrical stunning,
- Poultry were not stunned in Italian abattoirs surveyed, but stunned in Germany, Spain and the UK. The stunning method used was the waterbath.

### Shechita slaughter

Data from French, Italian, Spanish and UK abattoirs showed that no stunning (pre- or post-cut) was used. For cattle, slaughter was in the upright position in Italy and the UK and with animals on their backs and restrained in Spain and France. For animals

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such as sheep, they were turned on their sides in the UK, but hoisted in Italy.

Of importance for any slaughtering, but more so for Halal and even more for Shechita, is secure restraining. This particularly relates to the head and neck since movement results in a poor cut, slowing death, reducing meat quality and possibly retaining blood and spoiling meat.

The diagram below is a representation of how an animal may be restrained for cutting.

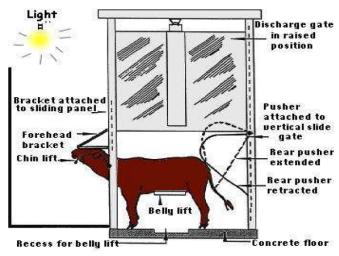


Diagram of ASPCA box for religious slaughter.

Source: Grandin

# Religious customs

### Muslim

The Qur'an sets out the rules with respect to animals and slaughter and teaches that animals should be well treated:

- Restraining equipment should be comfortable for the animal,
- Invoking the name of Allah immediately before the slaughter is either compulsory or highly encouraged,
- The cut must sever at least three of the animal's trachea, oesophagus and the two blood vessels on either side of the throat.
- Multiple acts of slaughter on one animal are prohibited, so the knife must not be lifted off the animal during the act of

- slaughter: a single continuous back and forth motion is required, and
- Animals should not be shackled and hoisted before bleeding and further actions on the carcass must wait until there are no more signs of life.

It has been <u>claimed</u> that the Qur'an contains nothing forbidding the consumption of stunned animals. However, there is no single authoritative body that can definitively rule as to the Muslim law on the issue of stunning before slaughter. Some Muslim authorities have approved stunning so long as the animal can regain consciousness and eat within five minutes.

### **Jewish**

Jewish rules are set out in the Talmud and Midrash:

- Shechita slaughter, necessary for orthodox Jews, always requires no prestunning. This reflects a need for animals to be healthy and without injury at the time of slaughter. No pre-stunning for the Shechita method has yet been accepted,
- Appropriate animals must only be slaughtered by a specially trained person, and
- Traditionally slaughter has been with the animal on its back, but an upright position has been approved.

# Animal suffering

Correctly performed conventional slaughter procedures (stun then cut) result in animals rapidly becoming unconscious, and remaining so during cutting, until their death by bleeding.

However, animals can feel stress when being prepared for slaughter, for example during restraining, and in the case of poultry there are concerns about their shackling before stunning.

In large, high-volume slaughterhouses with a focus on fast, cost-effective throughput some personnel can be poorly trained and



animal welfare ignored, with low levels of inspection. Religious slaughter brings extra challenges to these abattoirs since it requires more attention in animal handling, specialised equipment, greater slaughtering skill and overall the process is slower.

In practice, animals may suffer pain, a slower death and stress through procedures in MS not being carried out as laid down:

- Stunning procedures are not always performed correctly,
- Operator and general factory competence is very important,
- A lack of experience or skill may mean that more than the required one or two movements of the arm for cutting. There have been reports of 3.2 cuts being required for Jewish and 5.2 for Halal slaughter,
- Death takes longer where arteries were not correctly severed (reported as occurring for one out of ten animals).

#### **Pain**

The determination of the point when an animal becomes insensible to pain is the key animal-welfare issue. Though it is clear that animals do not lose sensitivity to pain immediately on stunning, the state of consciousness of an animal and its level of insensibility cannot be quantitatively measured.

One side argues that although science cannot provide a definitive position nostunning slaughter is more likely to cause pain given the many nerve receptors in the neck and time taken to bleed whilst the animal is not unconscious.

However, some counter arguments put forward are that stunning:

- May only paralyse an animal, preventing it from displaying pain,
- Does not always work due to operational problems, and
- May be painful and the process cause stress.

Certainly, most people observing the process would suffer less discomfort through seeing animals first stunned.

### Consciousness

A concern is that after stunning, animals regain (some) consciousness. This is particularly so for electrical stunning. Periods of less than one minute are considered desirable for "stun-to-stick", though the UK's <u>Farm Animal Welfare Council</u> considers the maximum legal interval should be 15 seconds.

Non-stunned animals can be conscious after neck-cutting for up to 2 minutes for cattle, 20 seconds for sheep and 2.5 minutes for poultry, according to the <u>European Food Safety Authority</u>.

Properly performed Shechita results in calm cattle collapsing within 10 to 15 seconds. Observation shows in 30% of cases however, that animals remain conscious for more than 30 seconds.

# Legislation and developments

#### **EU level**

Council Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing will apply from 1 January 2013, replacing Directive 93/119.

The Regulation allows the existing slaughter methods with no stunning for religious reasons to continue (as in most developed and many developing countries) but MS can impose stricter rules if they wish, including refusing to exempt religious slaughter from pre-stunning regulations. This flexibility for religious practice is considered to be in accordance with Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Countries exporting meat to the EU must also comply with similar standards.

### **National level**

Slaughter of animals without stunning is banned in Sweden, (as well as in Norway, Switzerland and Iceland). Several MS allow slaughter without pre-stunning, but under

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conditions such as "immediate" post-cut stunning. Latvia, which exports meat to Sweden, applies post-cut stunning. Germany gives no-stunning permissions to abattoirs, but only if they show they have local religious customers for the request. Very few are in fact given. However, it imports no-stunning meat from Belgium, France and Poland. The EC reported in 2010 that Ireland also exports non-stunned meat to other MS.

The Dutch parliament (lower house) voted strongly in favour of banning "no stunning" in June 2011 following a law introduced by the Animal Rights Party (PvdD). The Jewish community strongly condemned it and in June 2012, rejecting the bill, the Senate (upper house) of the parliament proposed a compromise whereby a veterinarian had to be present during slaughter and the animal should die within 40 seconds.

The main purpose of the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter is harmonised and more humane methods of slaughter in Europe. It includes provisions for the proper care and treatment of animals in abattoirs and stipulations on the slaughter operation.

The European Court of Human Rights has stated that ritual slaughter is a religious act covered by Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

At international level, the <u>World Organisation</u> <u>for Animal Health</u> has guidelines on animal welfare.

### **EU-funded DIALREL** project

It aims through dialogue to improve knowledge and expertise in MS about the welfare, legislation and socio-economic aspects of religious slaughter.

#### Labelling

Production volumes of Halal and Kosher meat indicate that much is sold to the general public, who are not able to see the slaughter method used in its production as there are no labelling laws.

There is no EU legal requirement for meat from un-stunned animals to be labelled as such; indeed EC proposals for such labelling have always been strongly resisted. One reason given is practical difficulties in identifying the method of slaughter used at the point of labelling.

The 2011 Food Information for Consumers Regulation passed in the EP with an amendment to make labelling of non-stunned meat compulsory. Later, between the institutions, a compromise was reached agreeing that the EC would look at this in the context of the EU welfare strategy. The February 2012 EC document entitled Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012-15 takes this up.

# Main references

- Contemporary and Religious Slaughter Regulation; Immeasurable Pain for Economic Gain, S. Sims, 2011.
- 2. Dialrel: reports and factsheets.
- 3. Schechita EU, website.
- 4. Halal Food Council of Europe, website.

### <u>Annex</u>

The Annex gives greater analytical data for one country as an example of possible further considerations for MS.

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## Annex: Focus on the UK

2011 meat production							
	Head million	Tonnes '000					
Poultry	855.0	1560					
Sheep	12.4	290					
Cattle	2.8	937					

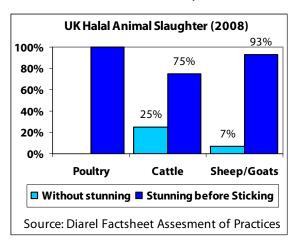
Over 800 million cattle, calves, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry are killed every year in the UK, in approximately 400 abattoirs.

#### **UK law**

This requires pre-cut stunning of animals except for religious slaughter.

This dates back to the *Slaughter of Animals* (Scotland) Act 1928 and the *Slaughter of Animals Act 1933*, for England and Wales. In current legislation, Schedule 12 of <u>The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995</u> (WASK) lays down the provisions for slaughter by a religious method additional to EU law.

These provisions say that religious slaughter is a method of slaughter producing meat for people of the religion, done by someone of the faith holding an appropriate licence. But using a 'religious' method does not leave room for unnecessary animal suffering. Cattle killed with no pre-cut stunning must be restrained, have their throat cut immediately and not be moved until they are unconscious. There is no requirement under UK law for the meat from animals slaughtered without stunning to be labelled as such. A private member's bill to introduce such a requirement failed to gain support in the House of Commons in April 2012.



### **Scotland**

In 2011, roughly <u>9 million chickens</u>, <u>1.5 million sheep and half a million cattle</u> were killed for the production of meat.

The Scottish government reports that "no slaughter without stunning currently occurs in Scotland", though the right of members of religious communities to eat meat prepared in accordance to their beliefs is clearly accepted.

The new Council Regulation (1099/2009) will be reflected in UK law from 1 January 2013.

There has been a lot of opposition to religion-based exemptions mostly due to concerns on animal welfare. However, the Government confirmed in November 2010 that it had no plans to ban religious animal slaughter.

### The meat market

The level of concern has also risen, reflecting the considerable growth of Halal and Kosher meat supply over the past decade.

Jews and Muslims combined represent about 3% of the UK population. Though the Muslim population is rising somewhat, Halal meat supply has gone from an 11% share of meat sales in 2001 to an estimated 25% in 2008, according to the Halal Food Authority, a certification body. Farmers Weekly, a magazine for farmers, reported in 2010 that 40% of poultry and 25-30% of lamb consumed meets Halal specifications. The overall value of the Halal market in the UK is estimated to be between £1 and £2 billion (€1.3-€2.6 billion).

This meat may be being sold on the UK market to non-religious customers and as non-Halal meat. Equally, according to some <u>estimations</u> 70% of Kosher meat is eaten by non-Jews.

However, the Jewish and Muslim communities consider these numbers unrepresentative and that a large part of



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this reportedly Halal or Kosher meat is just regular meat.

These differences are a reflection of the lack of solid data. The government is considering requiring labelling of Halal and Kosher meat, in the context of EU action, which would go some way to overcoming the problem.

# **Detailed slaughter estimations**

Though they are exempted from mandatory stunning of animals, the <u>Muslim community</u> in the UK has over time increased the use of pre-stunning. In 2008 an estimated 75% of cattle, 93% of sheep and 100% of poultry killed to produce Halal meat were stunned before sticking.

The <u>Jewish community</u> however is maintaining the traditional method, which means no stunning prior to cutting.

Jewish dietary law requires meat to be marked to indicate its Kosher status. The London and Manchester Jewish law courts (Beth Dins) certify most UK Kosher meat. They recently supervised an annual slaughter of 90 000 cattle, 90 000 sheep and 1.5 million poultry.

With no UK Kosher-only abattoirs, wholesalers contract abattoirs for batches of animals.

There have been no official statistics on religious slaughter in the UK since 2003. However, in 2007 it was estimated that:

- 114 million animals were slaughtered annually using Halal methods,
- The London Board of Shechita estimated that 2.1 million animals were slaughtered in one year for Kosher meat.

In 2012, The UK <u>Food Standards Agency</u> produced a report based on a survey of abattoirs in September 2011. The aim of this survey was:

- To assess compliance, and obtain some benchmarks in anticipation of the new EU Regulation,
- Obtain data on slaughter capacity and methods of slaughter over a typical week in the UK,
- Establish the level of compliance with WASK.

It is a snapshot of activity during the week of the survey:

UK Slaughterhouse Survey												
	Tota	al UK	K Halal				Shechita					
Survey conducted during September 2011	Number killed Abattoirs ('000)		Number	0/0	Stunned		No.	Number killed ('000)			No. Abattoirs	
		Killed	total	before cut	after cut							
Cattle	44	194	1.7	4%	84%	1%	16	1.3	3%	10%	4	
Poultry	16 102	73	4 766	30%	88%	0%	29	71.2	<1%	0%	5	
Sheep/Goats	308	202	154.8	50%	81%	1%	39	1.9	<1%	0%	4	
Source: Food Standards Agency, 2011 FSA animal welfare survey in Great Britain, May 2012												

# Main references

- 1. Religious Slaughter, House of Commons Library, C. Barclay, June 2012.
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