

Protection of animals during transport

Data on live animal transport

SUMMARY

Each year, millions of live animals are transported by road, sea, rail and air within, and to and from, the European Union, for a number of reasons, such as slaughter, fattening or breeding. To protect their welfare during those journeys, the EU adopted Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport. An evaluation of the regulation showed that, when correctly implemented and enforced, it had a positive impact on animal welfare. However, in some areas weaknesses still persist, largely due to insufficient implementation. In the light of these conclusions, and bearing in mind its 2012-2015 animal welfare strategy, the European Commission announced its intention to revise the animal welfare legislation, including legislation on animal transport. Despite the action taken, however, in recent years, repeated breaches of the rules, resulting in accidents and severe animal welfare crises, have been highlighted by EU and national control bodies and by animal welfare organisations.

On 19 June 2020, the European Parliament set up the Committee of Inquiry on the Protection of Animals during Transport (ANIT). The work of the committee focused on investigating how EU rules laid down in Regulation 1/2005 are being implemented by Member States and enforced by the European Commission. It held public hearings with the participation of stakeholders, representatives of national authorities and experts. Insight from these debates fed into the committee's report and recommendations to Council and the Commission.

This briefing is one of four requested by the ANIT committee to provide research and analysis following the results of a questionnaire sent out by the committee to Member States. It gives an overview of available data on the transport of live animals.



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Background

In 2019, over 1.6 billion live animals (ovines, bovines, poultry and pigs) [were transported](#) across the EU and beyond its borders for trade purposes. Conditions during such journeys vary, depending on many factors, such as the size of the consignment, the means of transport (road, rail, sea or air), the design and equipment of the vehicle; the time of year (temperature), and, in particular, the duration (journeys to third countries can sometimes last days). With insufficient attention and care, the transport of animals, especially over long distances, can cause serious welfare concerns. Evidence, such as [scientific opinions](#) of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), suggests that animals transported alive are exposed to stress at loading and unloading, they can suffer hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and lack of space and rest during transit.

The EU has laws in place to protect animal welfare during transport. [Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport](#), which entered into force in January 2007, applies to all live vertebrate animals transported in connection with an economic activity within, to and from the EU. The regulation lays down conditions and requirements for transport (stocking densities, rest periods etc.), as well as measures to be applied to ensure compliance: inspection and approval of means of transport; transport authorisations; checks by competent authorities before long journeys and at any stage of a long journey; training of staff for competent authorities; training and certificates of competence for transporters and personnel of assembly centres; checks at exit points and border inspection posts; inspections and annual reports by competent authorities; infringement measures and penalties.

Implementation of Regulation 1/2005

An assessment of the impact of the regulation and of its implementation was undertaken by the Commission in 2011 (see [report](#) and [study](#)). The assessment concluded that the regulation had had a beneficial impact on the welfare of animals during transport, but that there was still room for improvement. It noted that enforcement of the regulation remained a major challenge, partly because of differences in interpretation of the requirements by Member States. The report stressed that poor compliance with the rules and lack of enforcement can have a severe negative impact on animal welfare, taking note of available information that showed some recurring examples, such as: transport of unfit animals; overstocking of vehicles; vehicles of inappropriate internal height; animals not receiving enough water during the journey and animals being transported for longer than the maximum allowed travelling time.

Similar observations were put forward by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in its 2018 [special report](#) on the implementation of animal welfare legislation. Regarding animal welfare during transport it concluded that weaknesses still persisted in some areas (in particular compliance with rules on long distance transport and the transport of unfit animals).

The EPRS [European implementation assessment of Regulation 1/2005](#), published in 2018, drew similar conclusions, namely that overall implementation had improved, but that a number of issues remained to be solved.

Despite action taken to improve the situation, significant problems causing the suffering of animals during transport still occur, as reported by [NGOs](#) and the [media](#). The Commission has conducted several [audits](#) in this area in recent years, revealing animal welfare problems and low levels of compliance. In 2020, in the ['farm to fork' strategy](#), it announced its intention to revise the animal welfare legislation, including legislation on animal transport, in order to align it with the latest scientific evidence, broaden its scope, make it easier to enforce and ensure a higher level of animal welfare.

European Parliament position

The European Parliament has expressed serious concern for animal welfare in general and for the welfare of animals during transport in particular. In 2012, it adopted a [resolution](#) on the protection of animals during transport. In another [resolution](#), on the implementation of Regulation 1/2005 (2019), Parliament acknowledged the progress made, but expressed concerns over reported breaches of the rules. It called on the Commission to disseminate and promote best practice for the Member States regarding the transport of livestock to all those involved.

On 19 June 2020, Members [approved](#) the setting up of the Committee of Inquiry on the Protection of Animals during Transport ([ANIT](#)). The Committee was tasked with the investigation of alleged violations in the application of EU law in relation to the implementation by Member States and enforcement by the Commission of Regulation No 1/2005.

To support the investigation, the ANIT committee launched a questionnaire directed at Member States, in which they were asked, among other questions relating to the implementation of Regulation 1/2005, to provide data on live animal transport from their national records. By the end of June 2021, eight Member States had replied to the questionnaire, representing slightly under 30 % of EU Member States. The responses varied significantly in terms of the information provided.

Survey among Member States

In the questionnaire sent out by the ANIT committee, Member States were asked to provide data on live animal transport, namely:

- how many consignments took place between 2018 and 2020, including domestic transport (transport covered by Regulation (EC) 1/2005), and how the number was recorded;
- how many live animals are transported from the country by each means of transport;
- what species of animals does the country export;
- how many live animals, and what species, transit the country.

Among the eight Member States that replied (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden), the responses varied significantly in terms of the information provided. Some Member States indicated no available data for one or more of the questions (in particular regarding domestic transport); some referred to the TRACES database (see below) for answer, without providing the data recorded there. Responses that provided data varied as well: some gave detailed numbers, some only a general overview. For the purpose of this briefing, the small sample of replies did not give sufficient comparable information to present the findings of the survey in a comprehensive overview.

Sources of data on live animal transport

The main databases that collect data on the transport of live animals are listed in this section.

TRACES

[TRACES](#) (Trade Control and Expert System) is an online platform for the certification and tracking of consignments of animals or animal products. The operators must enter data about the animals, the itinerary and the vehicle to get permission for the transport of live animals within the EU and to third countries. The platform is managed by the European Commission and used in about 90 countries and by more than 55 000 users worldwide. An integrated statistical tool allows the extraction of data about imports into the EU, exports from the EU and intra-Union trade. However, the database is accessible only to registered users (traders and competent authorities), therefore data are not publicly available. Not all transport is recorded in TRACES: there are no data about movements within individual Member States (such as transporting animals between farms for fattening or for slaughter), although domestic transport accounts for the majority of the transport of live animals.

Comext

[Comext](#) is Eurostat's database for detailed statistics on international trade in goods. It provides access to recent and historical data for the EU and its individual Member States, and also for a significant number of non-EU countries. Data are recorded (inter alia) by Common Nomenclature (CN) codes, allowing a detailed level of research.

FAOSTAT

[FAOSTAT](#) is the database of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It provides access to food and agriculture data for over 245 countries and territories. Data are received mainly from the national statistical offices. It has a [section](#) with data on trade in live animals.

Animal transport in numbers

Data presented in this section were obtained from queries in the Comext database, as well as from literature, in particular the publication by [Eurogroup for Animals](#) (January 2021).

Intra-EU trade

Table 1 – Intra-EU trade of live terrestrial animals in 2019

Species	Heads
Poultry	1 345 468 799
<i>Gallus domesticus</i> (chickens, hens)	784 816 948
Turkey	63 243 787
Ducks	29 635 073
Geese	1 070 527
Pigs	35 360 290
Cattle	4 184 059
Sheep and goats	3 364 081
Horses	60 404

Data source: Comext, June 2021.

Poultry is the most traded species across Member States (about 97 % of total intra-EU trade). The top players are Germany and the Netherlands, which together generated 44 % of intra-EU trade in poultry in 2019 (see Table 2).

Cattle, pigs and ovines (sheep and goats) are in the majority of cases transported for non-breeding purposes, such as fattening or slaughter. Intra-EU trade in horses is dominated by horses for slaughter (43 %) and pure-bred breeding horses (30 %).

Table 2 – Top exporters in intra-EU trade in live animals in 2019

Poultry	Bovines	Ovines	Pigs	Horses	
				for breeding	for slaughter
Germany 23 % Netherlands 21 %	France 35 % Germany 17 % Netherlands 9 %	Romania 32 % Spain 19 % Hungary 16 %	Denmark 42 % Netherlands 28 %	Netherlands 23 % Poland 22 % France 20 % Romania 13 %	Belgium 46 % Denmark 21 %

Data source: [Eurogroup for Animals](#), 2021.

Data available on the live transport of fish are limited; there is only partial reporting for cross-border trade and none for transport within individual countries. Traded fish are reported by weight and not by heads and, as they come in different sizes, it is impossible to estimate the headcount.

Table 3 – Intra-EU trade in live fish in 2019

Species	Tonnes
Fish	45 817
Trout	22 640
Carp	12 413
Eel	2 724
Bluefin tuna	2 310

Data source: Comext, June 2021.

The main fish species traded between Member States are trout, carp, eel and bluefin tuna. See Table 4 for the main traders for each species and for direction of trade.

Table 4 – Top traders in intra-EU trade in fish in 2019 (thousand tonnes)

	Trout		Carp		Eel		Bluefin tuna	
Main exporters	Denmark	6.3	Czechia	9.0	Netherlands	1.0	France	1.6
	France	5.6	Hungary	2.1	Germany	0.4		
	Italy	4.5			France	0.4		
	Spain	4.3			Denmark	0.3		
Main importers	Germany	7.1	Germany	2.5	Netherlands	1.1	Malta	3.5
	France	4.1	Romania	1.8	Italy	0.3		
	Austria	3.8	Poland	1.3				

Data source: Comext; [Eurogroup for Animals](#), 2021.

Extra-EU trade

EU trade in live animals with non-EU countries represents less than 10 % of all movements of animals within the EU.

Table 5 – Extra-EU trade in live terrestrial animals in 2019

Species	Export (heads)	Import (heads)
Poultry	232 226 657	1 683 601
<i>Gallus domesticus</i> (chickens, hens)	211 692 188	1 528 359
Turkey	11 332 509	125 930
Ducks	7 782 051	29 312
Geese	11 975	
Sheep	3 038 090	1 046
Cattle	987 505	619
Pigs	292 338	2 066
Horses	26 437	6 989
Goats	16 850	19

Data source: Comext, June 2021.

As is the case for intra-EU trade, in extra-EU trade, poultry is the most traded species (98 % of total exports). Among mammals, ovines are the most exported animals, followed by bovines and pigs. Table 6 below shows the biggest EU exporters of these species to non-EU countries.

Table 6 – Top exporters in extra-EU trade in terrestrial animals in 2019

Poultry (million head)		Bovines (thousand head)		Sheep (thousand head)		Pigs (thousand head)		Horses (thousand head)	
Poland	61.9	Spain	193.1	Romania	1831.3	Croatia	124.4	United Kingdom	8.1
Hungary	35.6	Romania	141.9	Spain	762.3	Greece	92.1	Netherlands	6.5
Netherlands	29.8	France	124.2	Portugal	328.4	Germany	71.5	Germany	2.9

Data source: Comext; [Eurogroup for Animals](#), 2021.

The biggest trading partners for the EU are Ukraine, Belarus, Ghana, Egypt, Morocco, and Albania. These countries are major importers of poultry, which accounts for a high share in extra-EU trade. When subtracting poultry from the statistics, the EU's main trading partners are Libya, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Extra-EU trade in fish is much smaller than intra-EU trade. The most exported species in 2019 was carp (main exporters: Hungary, Czechia, Croatia, and Bulgaria). The main exporters of trout were France and Germany, tuna was exported from Malta. The bulk of imports from third countries consisted of bluefin tuna imported into Malta.

Table 7 – Extra-EU trade in live fish in 2019

Species	Export (tonnes)	Import (tonnes)
Fish	2 148	2 981
Trout	545	5
Carp	1 191	65
Eel	0.02	155
Bluefin tuna	388	2 753

Data source: Comext, June 2021.

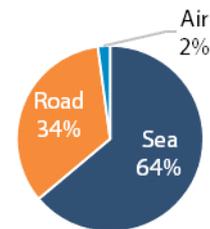
Means of transport

The Comext database provides data on means of transport used to export animals to third countries. The data are recorded at higher levels of the nomenclature, therefore – unlike in previous compilations – they can be retrieved only in weight units, not in heads.

Animals are transported primarily by sea and by road. Table 8 gives an overview of the means of transport used by species.

Table 8 – Exports to third countries by species and means of transport in 2019 (tonnes)

	Poultry	Cattle	Sheep and goats	Pigs	Horses
Sea	1 163	240 973	121 974	5	834
Road	8 967	152 126	9 945	20 515	2 799
Air	3 519	1 688	461	248	6 111

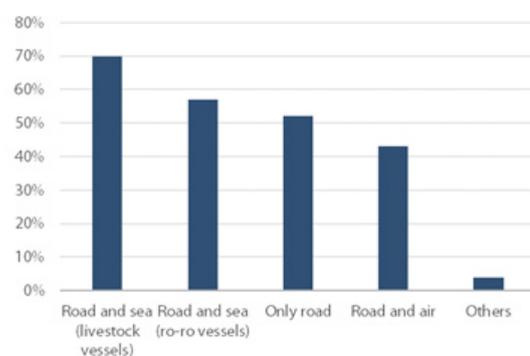


Data source: Comext, June 2021.

In 2021, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council launched a [questionnaire](#) to Member States regarding the long-distance transport of farm animals to third countries, with a special focus on sea transport on livestock vessels, in order to provide suggestions for the planned revision of Regulation 1/2005.

The vast majority of Member States (23 of 27) confirmed that they do carry out long-distance transport of farm animals to third countries. These journeys involve mainly road and sea transport on livestock vessels; road and sea transport on roll-on roll-off vessels; road-only transport; and road and air transport (see Figure 1). Most Member States identified more than one option for the means of transport.

Figure 1 – Means of transport involved in long journeys to third countries



Source: [Council](#) of the EU.

Conclusion

Data on the transport of live animals are difficult to obtain; this fact was noted by the Court of Auditors in its [report](#) on animal welfare, as well as by the European Parliament in its 2019 [resolution](#) on the implementation of Regulation 1/2005. In this resolution, Parliament regretted the 'difficulty of carrying out a coherent analysis of the implementation of the Regulation that exists owing to differing approaches to data collection between Member States', and called on the Commission to set common minimum standards for tracing systems regarding all journeys in order to allow for more harmonised data collection and assessment of the parameters monitored.

MAIN REFERENCES

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations](#), European implementation assessment, EPRS, European Parliament, October 2018.

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