

Animal welfare and protection: EU laws explained (videos)



European wild cat © AdobeStock/creativenature.nl

The EU has some of world's highest animal welfare standards. Find out how the legislation protects wildlife, pets as well as farm and laboratory animals.

The European Union has advocated animal welfare for more than 40 years and is widely recognised as a global leader, with some of the world's best animal welfare standards. EU rules have also positively influenced legislation in non-EU countries. They mainly concern farm animals (on the farm, during transport and at slaughter), but also wildlife, laboratory animals and pets.

" The Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals "

Article 13 of Title II of the Lisbon Treaty

Farm animals' welfare

According to a special [Eurobarometer](#) survey on the attitudes of Europeans to animal welfare in May 2021, 82% of respondents said the welfare of farmed animals should be better protected than it is now.

The first EU rules protecting farm animals [date back to the 1970s](#). The 1998 [directive for the protection of farmed animals](#) established general standards for the protection of all animals kept for the production of food, wool, skin, fur or other farming purposes - including fish, reptiles and amphibians - and is based on the [European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes](#) of 1978.

EU rules on animal welfare reflect the so-called five freedoms:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

Other EU rules set welfare standards for farm animals during [stunning and slaughter](#), as well as for breeding conditions for **specific animal categories** such as [calves](#), [pigs](#) and [laying hens](#).

In October 2018, MEPs adopted a new regulation on [veterinary medicinal products](#) to curb the use of medicines to compensate for poor conditions or to make animals grow faster.

In line with the presentation of the new [Farm to Fork strategy for a more sustainable agriculture](#), the European Commission is currently evaluating all EU legislation on the welfare of farmed animals.



Animal transport

https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/welfare-of-transported-animals_N01-PUB-190207-ANIM_ev

Parliament's call for better protection for transported animals

EU rules for [the protection and welfare of animals during transport](#) were approved in 2004. However, in a resolution adopted on 14 February 2019, Parliament called for [better enforcement, sanctions and reduced journey times](#).

On 19 June 2020 MEPs set up an [inquiry committee to look into alleged breaches in the application of EU animal welfare rules](#) during transport within and outside the EU.

During a debate on 2 December 2020, MEPs asked Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski to [ensure that EU farm policy improves animals' welfare during transportation](#). They called on the Commission to support the shortening of supply chains, to encourage the transport of meat instead of live animals and to guarantee imports comply with EU animal welfare standards.

In April 2021, Parliament's inquiry committee looking into the protection of animals during transport said the failure to enforce the [current rules on animal welfare during transport is unacceptable](#) and called for concrete action to correct the problem, including infringement procedures against member states that fail to enforce existing EU rules.

The committee found [systemic failures in the implementation of animal transport](#) rules across the EU. The committee's [report was adopted](#) during a plenary session in January 2022.

MEPs want to ban caged farming

On 10 June, in response to the [European citizens' initiative](#) called [End the Cage Age](#), which was signed by 1.4 million people from across the EU, [MEPs called on the Commission](#) to come up with a proposal to [ban caged farming](#) in the EU by 2027.

Learn [how to launch or contribute to a European citizens' initiative](#)



Animals' drug resistance

https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/tackling-the-spread-of-drug-resistance-from-animals-to-humans_N01-PUB-181009-VETI_ev

Wildlife protection

The 500 **wild birds** naturally occurring in the EU are protected by the [Birds Directive](#), whilst the [Habitats Directive](#) aims to ensure the conservation of [rare, threatened or endemic animal species](#) and characteristic habitat types.

The EU Pollinators Initiative was launched in 2018 to tackle the [decline of wild pollinating insects](#), especially bees. Parliament called for a [further reduction of pesticides and more funds for research](#). In a report adopted in January 2018, Parliament had already said [regional and local bees varieties should be better protected](#).

In June 2021, when voting on the EU Biodiversity for 2030, MEPs called for an urgent revision of the [EU Pollinators Initiative](#) to include: a new EU-wide pollinator monitoring framework with robust measures, clear time-bound objectives and indicators, including impact indicators and capacity building.

[Whales and dolphins are protected](#) from capture and killing in EU waters. In addition, the EU has always been a defender of the full implementation of the [moratorium on commercial whaling](#) in place since 1986.

An EU regulation [bans the trade in seal products](#).

There are also rules on [trapping methods](#), prohibiting the use of leghold traps to catch wild animals in the EU and setting humane standards.

The EU implements and goes beyond the provisions of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#) (Cites) through its [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) to ensure trade in **wildlife products** does not lead to species becoming endangered.

In June 2021, [Parliament adopted its position](#) on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which is part of the [EU Green Deal](#).

Zoos

[EU rules on keeping wild animals in zoos](#) seek to strengthen their role in the conservation of biodiversity and set standards for protection measures, including appropriate accommodation for animals.

Animal testing for scientific purposes

The EU has created a legal framework that [regulates animal studies](#) for the development of new medicines, for physiological studies and for testing of food additives or chemicals. The rules are based on the principle of the three R's:

- Replacement (fostering the use of alternative methods)
- Reduction (trying to use fewer animals for the same objective)
- Refinement (efforts to minimise pain and suffering)

Animal testing on **cosmetics** and the marketing of such products is prohibited in the EU. In a resolution adopted in 2018, Parliament called for a [global ban on animal testing for cosmetics](#).

Parliament wants to go further. In September 2021, it called for more funding into alternative test methods so that [the use of animals in research](#) and testing can be phased out.



Ban on animal testing for cosmetics

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/programme/society/no-makeup-for-animals>

Pet protection

To [clamp down on the illegal trade in dogs and cats](#), Parliament called for an EU-wide action plan, tougher sanctions and mandatory registration in a resolution adopted on 12 February 2020.



Illegal pet trade

https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/fighting-illegal-pet-trade-1_N01-PUB-200116-PETS_ev

To address the concerns of Europeans who consider pets as part of their families, [cat and dog fur has been banned in the EU since 2008](#). The legislation bans the placing on the market and the import to or export of **cat and dog fur** and of all products containing such fur.

Thanks to harmonised [EU rules on travelling with pets](#), people are free to move with their furry friends within the European Union. The **pet passport** or the animal health certificate is the only requirement for dogs, cats and ferrets to travel across EU borders, with certain exceptions.



Travelling with your pet

<https://www.europartv.europa.eu/en/programme/society/travelling-with-your-pet-in-europe>

Relevant parliamentary committees

[Agriculture and rural development](#)

[Environment, public health and food](#)

[Inquiry committee on the protection of animals during transport](#)

Background information

[At a glance: EU trade and transport of live animals \(February 2020\)](#)