



**The fragmented  
landscape of animal  
welfare legislation in  
the European Union**

Report  
February 2025

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## Introduction



Across the 27 EU Member States, the legislative landscape is highly fragmented, leading to distortions in the internal market and unnecessary administration for farmers and other operators. This fragmentation can also lead to farmers, particularly small holdings, in one Member State feeling they cannot compete on an equal footing with farmers in other Member States where regulations and administration are different. This is one of the issues **highlighted by farmers during their protests all around the European Union.**

This is particularly the case in **animal farming, where over 430 laws**, regulations and constitutional provisions govern animal protection **across the 27 Member States**. Moreover, in certain Member States, a handful of legislative acts govern all animal welfare, anti-cruelty and legal status issues, while in others there are over 140 pieces of legislation.

This discrepancy highlights the **complex landscape of animal welfare in the EU, which varies significantly from one country to another**. For example, in Sweden, Austria and Belgium, amongst others, there are specific regulations setting minimum standards for particular species, such as dairy cows, rabbits, turkeys and farmed fish. However, most Member States protect the welfare of animals only through the directive concerning the protection of animals for farming purposes.

The [End the Cage Age](#) ECI, backed by 1.4 million EU citizens, the [Fur Free Europe](#) ECI, supported by 1.5 million Europeans, and a clear preference for stronger animal protection measures expressed in the [2023 special Eurobarometer](#) on animal welfare, show significant **public support for animal protection**. Moreover, the increasing consumer demand for higher standards underscores the **necessity for EU-wide regulatory harmonisation**, curbing the possibility for legislation to fragment even further in the future.

**Simplified, unified, and ambitious, legislation will respond to EU citizens' calls for higher animal welfare standards and will reduce the need for Member States to further legislate at national level.** This will ease compliance for farmers, ensuring **fair competition** and aligning agricultural practices with the EU's **sustainability and resilience goals**: benefiting animals, farmers, and consumers in a streamlined, equitable agricultural market. High animal welfare can, moreover, foster **positive livelihoods for farmers** through business models that improve small farmers' and holdings' margins and profitability. Moreover, the legislation existing at EU level has not been updated for the past twenty years, meaning that at least forty scientific opinions produced by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) are not reflected. It is high time to update it so that it reflects the current scientific evidence.

The Commission should strive to take forward the revision of the EU's acquis on animal welfare without delay, to ensure a high level of protection to the animals through an ambitious streamlined legislation. The revised animal welfare legislation needs to be straightforward, coherent and enforceable to help farmers produce healthy and nutritious food sustainably, without overburdening them with unnecessary administration.

This report highlights Member States that have adopted animal welfare standards beyond the EU minimum requirements. While all EU countries were reviewed, those adhering only to the baseline EU legislation are not individually listed. This approach aims to showcase best practices and areas where additional progress is needed.

Our thorough analysis of the legislation in particular Member States follows.

# **Animal welfare issues in particular EU Member States**

## **Recognition of animal sentience and constitutional inclusion in EU Member States**

When the [Lisbon Treaty](#) came into force in 2009 it amended the 'Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union' (TFEU) and introduced the recognition that animals are sentient beings. Article 13 of Title II states that:

"In formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the EU countries relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage."

Across the European Union, the recognition of animal sentience and the inclusion of animal welfare in constitutional and legislative frameworks vary significantly. A total of six EU Member States have explicitly included animal welfare in their constitutions as of May 2024.

### **Austria**

Austria has included animal welfare in its constitution, specifically in §2 of the Federal Constitutional Law on Sustainability and Animal Welfare. The country recognises animals as sentient beings, ensuring that their welfare is considered in legislative processes.

### **Belgium**

Belgium recently became the sixth EU Member State to include animals in its constitution, following Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Austria. The recognition of animal sentience has been formally added to Article 7 of the country's Constitution.

### **Denmark**

Denmark acknowledges animals as sentient beings, stating that they shall be treated with respect. The country's laws promote good animal welfare, incorporating ethical aspects into the treatment of animals. However, there is no specific mention of the Five Domains framework. Animals are not included in the Constitution.

## **Finland**

Finland recognises that animals have inherent value and they should be respected, although they are not recognised as a separate entity in the Constitution.

## **Germany**

Germany incorporates principles for animal protection in Article 20A of its Constitution, which mandates the protection of the natural foundations of life and animals through legislation. This provision recognises animals as sentient beings, ensuring their welfare is protected by the state.

## **Italy**

Italy's Constitution, through Article 9 (2022), includes the protection of animals under state law. The country recognises animals as sentient beings and integrates this recognition into its constitutional framework, emphasising the importance of animal welfare.

## **Luxembourg**

Luxembourg has constitutional principles for animal protection embedded in Art.11 bis of its Constitution, which addresses the protection and welfare of animals. The country acknowledges animals as sentient beings, ensuring their welfare is a constitutional concern.

## **Netherlands**

While the Netherlands recognises animals as sentient beings as a basis for policies and legislation, this is not explicitly stated in the constitution. The main law on kept animals ('Wet dieren') refers to the Five Freedoms, based on the Brambell Report, which might change to the Five Domains, Mellor model. Currently, there are no concrete proposals to include this recognition in the constitution or change it on the agenda of the Parliament or Government.

## **Slovenia**

Article 72 of the Slovenian Constitution imposes a duty on the State to protect animals from cruelty by law.

## **Sweden**

Sweden acknowledges animals as sentient beings, although this is not explicitly stated in legal texts. The Animal Welfare Act declares that animals should be treated with respect and that the law should promote good animal welfare. However, there is no reference to the Five Domains framework in the legislation.

## **Norway (EEA)**

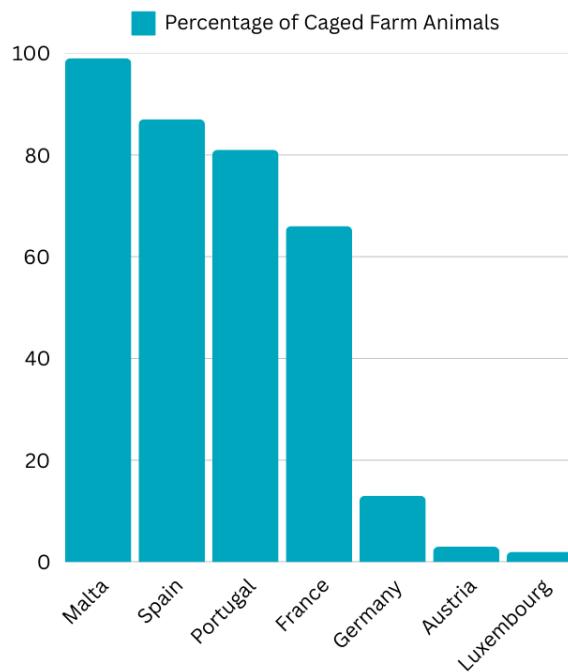
Norway, as part of the European Economic Area, recognizes animals as sentient beings and affirms that animals have intrinsic value beyond their potential use for humans. This recognition underscores the country's commitment to animal welfare, ensuring their treatment respects their inherent value.



## Delivering on the ban of caged farming systems in the EU

Over 300 million farm animals, including hens, quails, rabbits, sows and ducks, are confined in cages on farms in the European Union each year. Many of them are kept this way for all or most of their lives. Caged animals are severely restricted in their movements and prevented from performing their natural behaviours, with detrimental effects on their health and welfare. European citizens overwhelmingly support an end to caged animal farming. A total of 1.4 million certified signatures were collected during the End The Cage Age European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to make cages history for farm animals.

Compassion in World Farming published a ranking that evaluates all 27 EU Member States based on how many farm animals they are keeping in cages. It reveals that despite progress in some areas, no nation has achieved the status of being completely free from cages, with millions of sows, calves, quails, rabbits, hens, ducks, and geese continuing to be caged for all or part of their lives, often under appalling conditions.



**Graph: Percentage of animals in cages in seven Member States.**

At the lowest position on the ranking is Malta, with a distressing figure of 99% of farm animals living in cages. Following closely are Spain, Portugal, and France, with caged animal percentages of 87%, 81%, and 66%, respectively. In contrast, Germany reports only 13% of its farm animals are kept in cages. Even in nations leading the way in reducing the number of

animals being caged, like Austria with 3% and Luxembourg with 2%, it is estimated that there are still hundreds of thousands of animals living in confinement.

## **Countries with comprehensive cage bans and phase-out plans**

Austria has implemented significant legislative measures to phase out caged farming systems. The First Regulation on Keeping Animals from 2004 of the Animal Welfare Act 2004 (amended in 2017) mandates the phase-out of farrowing crates by 2033, restricting confinement to one day before the expected farrowing date to five days afterwards. Additionally, enriched cages for hens have been banned, and cages for meat rabbits have been prohibited since 2012.

Belgium has also made considerable strides. Cages for laying hens were banned in the Wallonia region in 2018, and by 2025, all breeding rabbits in professional farms in Flanders must no longer be kept in cages. Both Wallonia and Flanders regions have legislation laying out minimum standards for the protection of laying hens.

Germany is in the process of phasing out crates for pigs, allowing confinement for a maximum of five days around birth in farrowing crates. By January 1 2026 (with certain exceptions until January 1 2029), the use of cages for laying hens will be completely prohibited (see [§ 45 \(4\) TierSchNutzV](#)). Additionally, barren cages for rabbits will be banned in 2024.

## **Countries with partial bans or ongoing transitions**

Denmark has prohibited the creation of new cage system facilities for laying hens from 2023 and mandated a phase-out of battery cages within twelve years. New pig housing in Denmark permits the use of sow stalls for only three days, with full implementation by 2035. Stalls have been illegal in the new housing since 2015. Denmark also aligns with the EU's 2013 commitment to ban sow stalls, moving towards innovative free farrowing systems. Pregnant sows must be kept in groups instead of individual stalls. One week before the expected farrowing, sows are moved to the farrowing crates where they are kept until the weaning of their piglets. The farrowing crates have an attached crate from which their piglets can nurse. Denmark does not outlaw such farrowing crates but is innovating with the free farrowing system (SWAP F-pen) which affords more space than a conventional farrowing crate.

The Netherlands is transitioning away from caged systems. Sow stalls are only permitted for the first four days after insemination. While farrowing crates are not outlawed, there is innovation with free farrowing systems. Barren cages for rabbits were banned in 2016, though current housing systems are still cage-like. The Netherlands also phased out enriched cages for hens by 2021. The Netherlands bans battery and enriched cages in favour of colony cages, which

generally provide slightly more space per hen and have the same provisions as enriched cages (perches, nests, and surfaces for scratching and foraging). In short, although small improvements have been made, The Netherlands still allows cages for laying hens. In addition, there are systems such as veranda (breeders and layers) and patio (broilers) that also classify as cage systems, according to some animal welfare NGOs.

Finland has forbidden the use of farrowing crates for sows for more than eight days at a time (starting from 2035). New farrowing crates are not allowed to be built.

### **Countries with legislative commitments and phase-outs**

The Czech Republic has committed to banning the use of cages to confine hens by 2027, following a seven-year phase-out period. Similarly, Slovakia's Poultry Union has committed to phasing out cages for laying hens by 2030.

### **Countries with ongoing legislative and policy developments**

France prohibited the use of new or refurbished buildings for raising laying hens in cages as of 2018, although there are discussions about allowing refurbished buildings under specific conditions. France annually keeps around 17 million laying hens in cages (one of the top three producers in the EU) and 840,000 caged sows (one of the top five producers in the EU). Finland has moved towards temporary crating for sows, with government subsidies now restricted to true free-farrowing systems. As such, further investments by industry are more likely to involve true free-farrowing pens, rather than temporary crating systems.

Sweden has banned farrowing crates since 1994 and mandates that sows must be kept loose. However, there are some exceptions to this ban. The freedom of a lactating sow may be restricted for the piglets' first days of life by using a safety gate or equivalent device. Group-housed sows and gilts may be confined to stalls when being fed or handled for care and treatment. Enriched cages are still allowed for hens: it is estimated that about 2% of hens were kept in cages in 2023. The Swedish government supports the End the Cage Age initiative and has declared its commitment to EU-wide legislation.

### **Countries with minimal progress**

Countries like Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Hungary have made minimal progress in phasing out caged farming systems. These countries still have significant numbers of laying hens in cages, and there are no comprehensive national policies or legislation specifically addressing the phasing out of caged systems.

## Summary

The phase-out of caged farming systems is a crucial step towards improving animal welfare across the European Union. While some Member States have made substantial progress with clear legislative measures and timelines, others are still in the early stages or lagging behind. The European Commission committed to revising the EU's animal welfare legislation in 2023, yet there has been no progress on the update regarding the Kept Animals proposal, which would include the ban on cages. Despite significant public support demonstrated through the ECI and 2023 Eurobarometer on animal welfare, where 89% of EU citizens claimed it is important to ensure that animals are not kept in individual cages, the issue was absent from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's [State of the Union Address in September 2023](#), and the subsequent 2024 letter of intent.



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## Delivering on the ban of force-feeding in the EU

In the foie gras industry, geese and ducks undergo force-feeding (or 'gavage'). A funnel is forced down their oesophagus to make them ingest large quantities of food. This very painful procedure results in the fatty degeneration of the liver, which gives the typical colour and consistency of foie gras.

The movement to ban the force-feeding of geese and ducks for the production of foie gras has gained significant momentum across the European Union. Many Member States have already implemented bans on foie gras production, reflecting a growing concern for animal welfare. This section explores the legislative measures and bans adopted by various EU countries, highlighting the need for a unified EU-wide approach to ban force-feeding and remove minimum liver weights for geese and ducks.

### Countries with comprehensive bans on foie gras production

A total of 22 EU Member States have taken decisive action by implementing complete bans on foie gras production. These bans reflect a clear commitment to animal welfare and the ethical treatment of geese and ducks, setting a strong precedent for other Member States to follow.

### Countries with no ban and significant production

In contrast, some Member States continue to allow and even lead in the production of foie gras. These include:

- **Bulgaria:** A significant producer of foie gras;
- **France:** One of the main producers and consumers of foie gras, deeply entrenched in cultural and culinary traditions;
- **Hungary:** Another major producer of foie gras;
- **Spain:** While some regions may have restrictions, Spain remains a notable producer of foie gras.

### Summary

The practice of force-feeding is in open contradiction with Directive 58/98 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, which states (point 14 of the ANNEX):

"[A]nimals must be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health and satisfy their nutritional needs. No animal shall be provided with food or liquid in a manner, nor shall such food or liquid contain any substance, which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury."

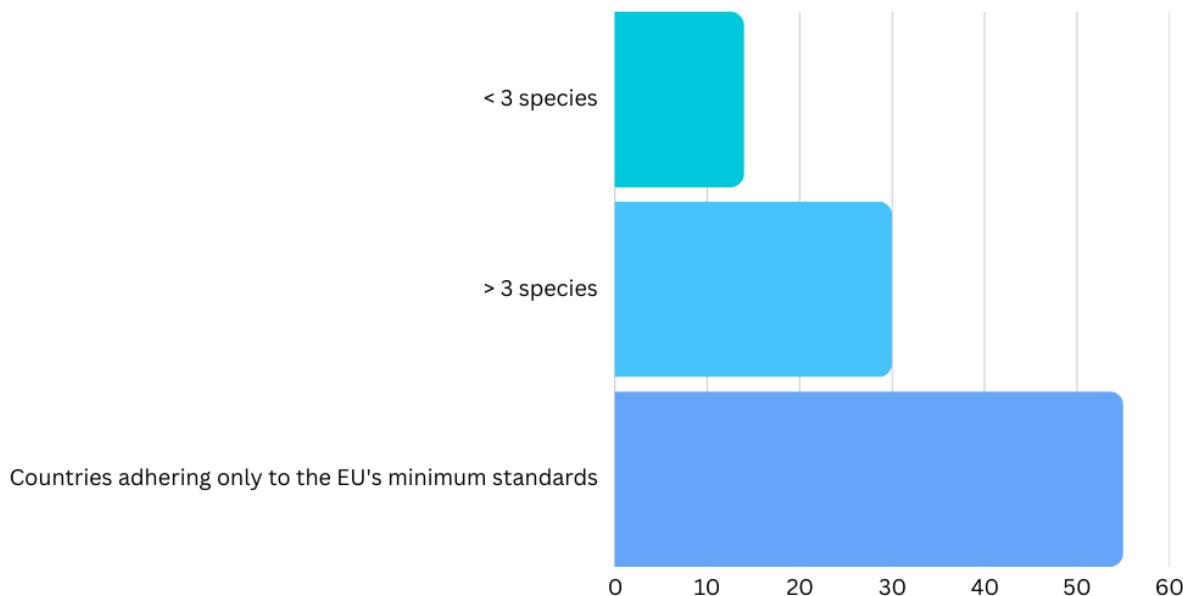
The ban on force-feeding for foie gras production is a crucial step towards improving animal welfare across the European Union. While most Member States have already implemented bans, others continue to produce foie gras, highlighting the need for a unified and comprehensive EU-wide legislation. Removing minimum liver weights for geese and ducks and revising the marketing regulations will ensure a consistent and high standard of animal welfare, reflecting the growing public concern for the ethical treatment of animals.



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## Delivering on new standards for dairy cows, rabbits, turkeys, and pigs in the EU

The welfare of many animal species in Europe is protected only by the “General Farm Animals Directive” instead of species-specific laws. This lack of specificity in EU legislation has led to widespread issues for millions of animals, including cows, sheep, pigs, broiler chickens and laying hens, as well as more overlooked farm animals, such as turkeys and rabbits, and companion animals like dogs and cats. The establishment of new, harmonised standards for dairy cows, rabbits, turkeys, and pigs across the European Union is essential to ensure consistent animal welfare practices. This section explores the legislative measures adopted by various EU Member States and highlights the necessity for EU-wide regulatory alignment to improve the welfare of these animals.



**Graph: Percentage of EU countries that have species-specific legislation for more than three farm animal species, versus those that have species-specific legislation for less than three farm animal species and those that only follow the EU's minimum standards for animal welfare.**

## **Austria**

Austria has comprehensive legislation governing the welfare of various farm animals, including horses and other equids, pigs, cattle, sheep, goats, hoofed game, lamas, rabbits, poultry, ostriches and farmed fish. The First Regulation on Keeping Animals 2004, under the Animal Welfare Act 2004, sets minimum standards for their care. Specific provisions relating to the keeping of poultry include design requirements for accommodation, access to food and water, and cleaning protocols. Notably, the board of Animal Protection Ombudspersons declared the tethering of cattle unlawful. The tethering of calves is also prohibited in Annex 2 of the First Regulation on the Keeping of Animals 2004 and there is a maximum stocking density for turkeys.

## **Belgium**

Belgium has enacted detailed regulations to protect the welfare of rabbits, turkeys, calves, and pigs. The Walloon region, for example, has specific decrees ensuring the welfare of rabbits and turkeys on farms, while Flanders has royal decrees that set standards for the protection of calves, rabbits and pigs, with specific requirements for their housing and care.

## **Denmark**

Denmark has implemented extensive legislation that often exceeds EU requirements, particularly for pigs and dairy cows. For pigs, specific regulations address the design of outdoor and indoor facilities, including requirements for flooring, sick pens, and documentation of tail docking practices. The Danish regulation for dairy cows mandates standards that surpass EU requirements, such as maintaining cows and calves together for 24 hours. Denmark also has species-specific welfare legislation for turkeys.

## **Finland**

The species specific legislation in Finland will be updated soon, because of the recent national animal welfare law revision.

## **France**

France has decrees that lay down minimum standards for the protection of pigs and calves, implementing Council Directives (Decree of 16 January 2003 concerning pigs and Decree of 20 January 1994 on calves). However, these decrees do not specify standards for dairy cattle or prohibit zero-grazing systems for dairy cows and calves. The French legislation focuses on basic welfare provisions without addressing more advanced welfare standards.

## **Germany**

Germany's Regulation on the Protection of Farm Animals establishes minimum standards for pigs, with requirements that often go beyond EU directives. For instance, the regulation mandates more space and higher lighting standards for pigs. Germany also has legal requirements for the welfare of rabbits and a new regulation for calf housing. Specific legislation for turkeys is anticipated soon.

## **Italy**

In Italy, Legislative Decree No. 126/2011 implements Council Directives for the protection of calves and [Legislative Decree No. 122/2011](#) does so for pigs. However, the decree does not set comprehensive standards for dairy cattle or prohibit zero-grazing systems, focusing primarily on basic welfare requirements.

## **Netherlands**

The Netherlands has set minimal targets for dairy cow welfare, aiming mainly for a high percentage of cows with access to grazing. The Pig Decree in 1994 (later transposed to the Animal Holders Decree) provides more space for pigs than the minimum requirements from the EU directive 2008/120 and forbids fully slatted concrete floors. Moreover, tethering has been banned since 2002. While the country has some regulations for turkeys, broiler breeders, and rabbits, these are minimal.

## **Poland**

Poland lacks specific legislation related to the welfare of pigs, dairy cattle, and calves. The country primarily adheres to basic EU requirements without implementing additional national standards.

## **Romania**

Romania mandates minimum standards for pigs and calves through ordinances, which align with EU directives but do not extend beyond these basic requirements (Ordinance No. 20/2012 on pigs and Ordinance No. 72/2005 dealing with the protection of calves).

## **Slovakia**

Slovakia has ordinances that establish minimum standards for the protection of calves, pigs, and animals kept for farming purposes. These standards align with EU directives but do not introduce additional national regulations.

## Slovenia

Slovenia has special rules for cows, sheep, goats, turkeys, waterfowl, and farmed fish.

## Spain

Spain has royal decrees that set basic rules for the management of pig farms and the protection of calves. These regulations focus on minimum standards without addressing more advanced welfare requirements for dairy cows and other animals.

## Sweden

Sweden's regulations on animal welfare are among the most comprehensive in the EU. The Animal Welfare Ordinance 2019 mandates loose housing for pigs, where pig fixing devices can only be used temporarily. The Swedish Board of Agriculture's Regulations (SJVFS 2019: 20) requires that dairy cattle be kept on pasture during the summer. The Regulation states that both the cattle owner and keeper are responsible for the welfare of the animals. Stables built after June 2010 and for whom an application to the county administrative board was submitted after April 2007 are required to keep their cattle untethered. The Regulation also includes minimum space requirements for both cattle and calves. The regulations include detailed requirements for bedding materials and space allowances. Sweden also has specific regulations for turkeys and rabbits.

## Norway (EEA)

Norway's regulations for dairy cows prohibit tethering by 2034, ban fully slatted floors and mandate rubber mattresses. For turkeys, there are maximum stocking density limits, and for pigs, requirements include free-farrowing systems and prohibitions on certain practices like surgical castration without anaesthesia, tail docking and teeth clipping.

## Summary

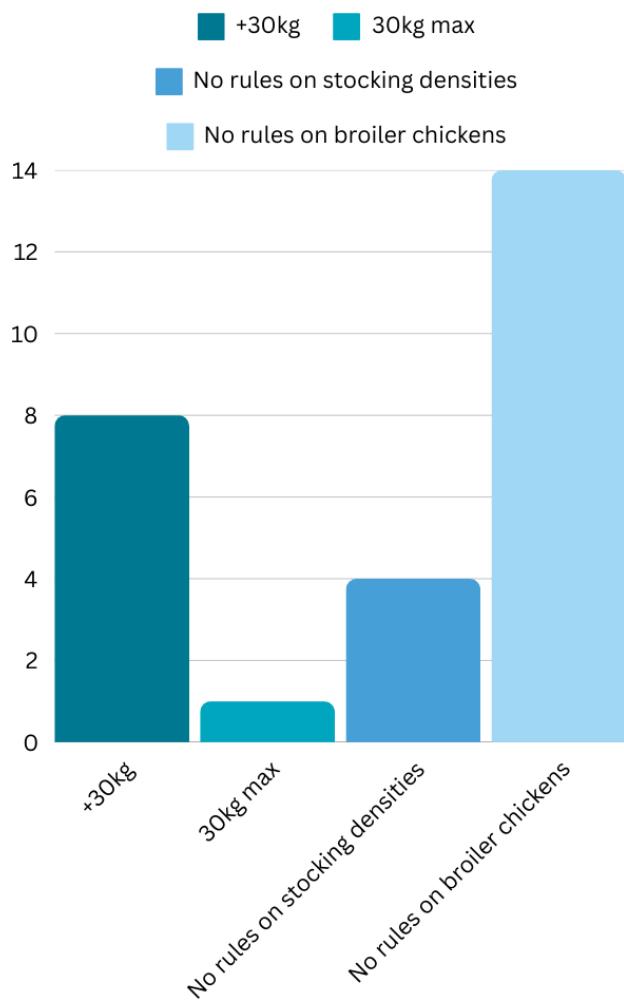
Currently, countless terrestrial farmed animals and billions of farmed fish are only protected by the general provisions of [Directive 98/58/EC](#), also known as the "General Farm Animals Directive" on the EU level. Although this Directive rightly states that "farmers must take all reasonable steps to ensure the welfare of animals under their care and to ensure that those animals are not caused any unnecessary pain, suffering or injury", a [report](#) by the European Commission shows that such generic rules are not easy to enforce.

**Establishing new standards for dairy cows, rabbits, turkeys, and pigs across the EU is critical for ensuring consistent and high levels of animal welfare.** While some Member States have implemented comprehensive regulations that exceed EU directives, others adhere only to the minimum requirements. Harmonising these standards at EU level will not only improve animal welfare but also simplify compliance for farmers, ensuring fair competition and aligning agricultural practices with the EU's sustainability goals.



## Additional practices for broiler farming

Ensuring the full implementation of the [European Chicken Commitment](#) involves setting new standards for lower stocking densities, transitioning to breeds with improved welfare outcomes, factoring in enrichment provisions, and ensuring adequate access to natural light. This section examines how different EU Member States have approached these goals and highlights the existing regulations that align with, or exceed, these standards.



**Graph: Number of EU countries that comply with the European Chicken Commitment's proposed maximum stocking density of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> or less for broiler chickens, versus those that do not comply, those that have welfare rules for broiler chickens but do not have any specific rules on stocking densities in place, and those that have no welfare rules for broiler chickens at all. Only one Member State (Austria) is currently compliant with the European Chicken Commitment's**

**maximum stocking density, whereas eight surpass the limit, four have not set any explicit limit, and 14 not only have no stocking density limits but have no rules for broiler welfare in place.**

## **Austria**

Austria has established specific legal requirements for the welfare of broiler chickens through Annex 6 of the First Regulation on Keeping Animals 2004. This regulation limits the stocking density of broiler chickens to 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Austria mandates a maximum stocking density of 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> for turkeys, ensuring lower densities that align with the European Chicken Commitment.

## **Belgium**

Belgium has detailed regulations for the welfare of broiler chickens in both the Wallonia and Flanders regions. The Walloon region's Royal Decree of June 13, 2010, and Flanders' minimum requirements for the protection of broilers from 13 June 2010, establish minimum rules for the protection of chickens intended for meat production. These regulations include provisions for lighting and require a minimum intensity of 20 lux during periods of brightness, and a 24-hour rhythm with periods of darkness, to ensure proper rest for the chickens. However, the allowed stocking density can exceed 33 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, which does not fully align with the European Chicken Commitment's standards.

## **Republic of Cyprus**

The Protection and Welfare of Animals (Protection of Chickens Raised for Meat Production) Regulations 2011 set the standards for broiler welfare in Cyprus, addressing key aspects of their care and management.

## **Denmark**

Denmark's Executive Order No. 54 of January 11 2017 provides regulations on keeping broilers, stipulating that broilers must grow 25% slower than those in conventional production systems to obtain the governmental Welfare Label "Bedre Dyrevelfærd". This indicates a commitment to lower stocking densities and slower growth rates.

## **Finland**

Finland regulates the stocking density of broilers, with an upper limit of 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, which can be exceeded under certain conditions. These conditions include a history of compliance with animal welfare regulations and maintaining low mortality rates. If the breeding density of broilers

is more than 33 kilograms of live weight per square meter, the owner or keeper of the broilers must prepare a written description of the production system of the broiler farm, which must include technical information about the buildings and their equipment. This approach does not fully meet the European Chicken Commitment's rule pertaining to a lower maximum stocking density, but includes measures to ensure higher welfare standards.

## France

France's Decree of June 28 2010 transposes Council Directive 2007/43/EC, setting the maximum stocking density for broilers at 42 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. While this meets EU directives, it does not align with the lower density standards of the European Chicken Commitment.

## Germany

Germany's Regulation on the Protection of Farm Animals (TierSchNutzV) exceeds EU standards by setting a maximum stocking density of 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup> for broilers, which is lower than the EU's 42 kg/m<sup>2</sup> limit but still above the European Chicken Commitment's 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> target.

## Italy

Italy's Legislative Decree No. 181/2010 implements Council Directive 2007/43/EC. However, the Decree falls short of reducing the maximum permitted stocking density to 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

## Netherlands

The Netherlands' Broiler Decree of 2010, transposed into the Animal Holders Decree, allows for derogations on stocking densities. Farmers stocking more than 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup> must meet additional conditions on footpad dermatitis, aligning somewhat with higher welfare standards but not fully with the European Chicken Commitment's lower density measure.

## Romania

Romania's Order No. 30/2010 sets minimum welfare standards for broiler chickens.

## Slovakia

Slovakia's Ordinance on Minimum Rules for the Protection of Broiler Chickens (2009) establishes basic welfare standards.

## Spain

Spain's Royal Decree 692/2010 sets the minimum standards for broiler welfare. It specifies that the maximum stocking density on a farm or in a chicken coop on a farm shall at no time exceed 33 kilograms of live weight per square meter of usable area, with some exceptions.

## Sweden

The Board of Agriculture in Sweden has regulations regarding broiler welfare. Farms not part of the industry's so-called animal welfare program have a maximum stocking density of 20 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, while those in the program can go up to 36 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (99% of farms are a part of the programme). The Swedish Board of Agriculture's (SJVFS 2019: 23) regulations include provisions for light and air quality. However, there are no specific regulations on breeds or enrichment, and breeding stocks are required to have platforms. Only chicken breeds with an average weight of less than 2.4kg may be kept in cages and only for a maximum of two years. However, electrical water bath stunning is still permitted and common.

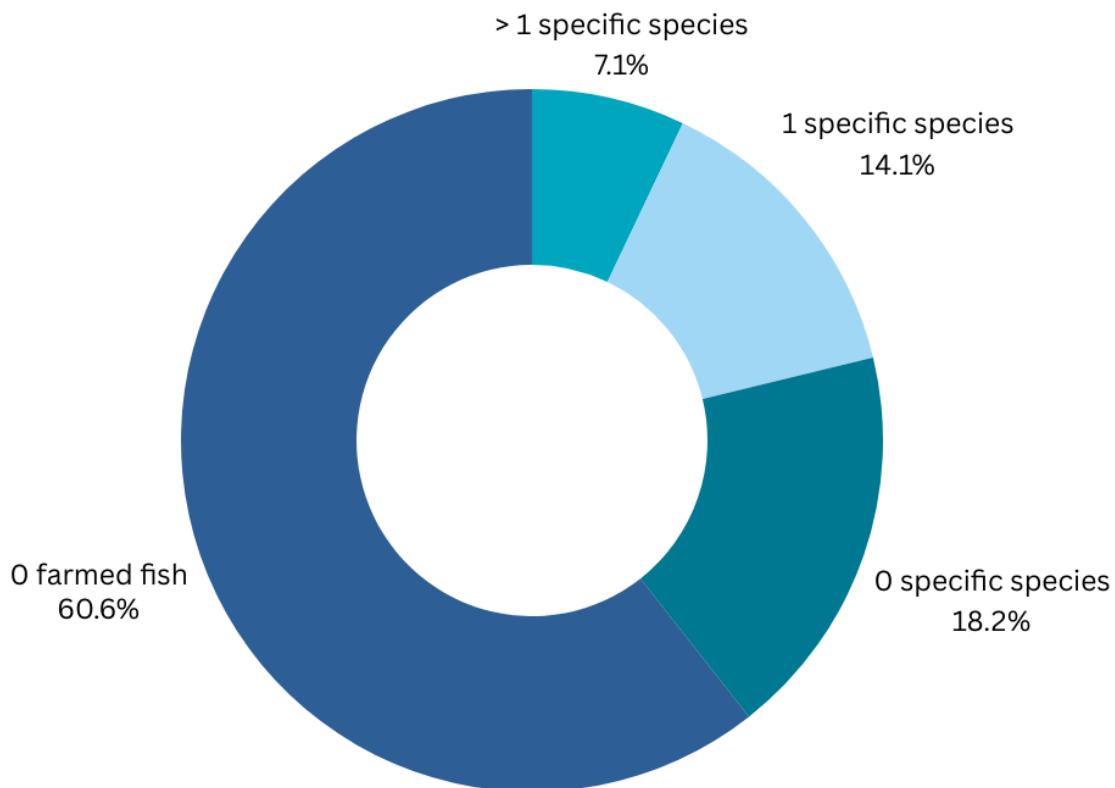
## Summary

The full implementation of the European Chicken Commitment's standards across the EU remains a work in progress. While some Member States, such as Austria, have stringent regulations that align closely with the Commitment's targets, others still adhere to higher stocking densities and lack provisions for enrichment and natural light. Harmonising these standards across the EU is essential to ensure consistent and high levels of welfare for broiler chickens, aligning with consumer expectations and scientific recommendations.



## Rules for fish species

Over a billion fish are farmed within the EU every year, plus a similar number in Norway (EEA). Additionally, the EU imports farmed fish (especially salmon) from other countries. Lacking legislative requirements, there has been little attention from the aquaculture sector on reducing the harm caused by many common farming procedures, or on providing a good life for farmed fish. Implementing legislation on farmed fish species is crucial for ensuring consistent and high standards of fish welfare across the EU. Currently, Member States exhibit a wide range of regulations concerning the welfare of fish, particularly in aquaculture systems, with varying degrees of specificity regarding different fish species.



**Graph: Percentage of EU countries that have species-specific legislation for more than one farmed fish species, versus those with species-specific legislation for only one farmed fish species, and those with no species-specific legislation for any farmed fish. In addition, 16 Member States have no legislation for farmed fish whatsoever.**

## **Austria**

Austria has established minimum requirements for keeping utility fish, and keeping criteria for commercially relevant species of marine fish. The regulations outline the necessary aquarium sizes and other conditions required to ensure the welfare of these fish species.

## **Bulgaria**

Bulgaria's Ordinance No. 17 of June 16 2008, addresses health requirements for farmed aquatic animals, their products, and the prevention and control of aquatic animal diseases. However, the ordinance does not specify particular fish species.

## **Croatia**

Croatia's Rulebook on Quarantine Conditions for Aquatic Animals (OG 058/2012) sets general rules for the quarantine of aquatic animals, without mentioning specific fish species.

## **Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic has regulations concerning the process of killing fish and other rules for handling and transport, yet these do not specify particular fish species.

## **Denmark**

In Denmark, there are generally no species-specific regulations in aquaculture or fishery, with a few exceptions such as specific regulations on the slaughter of eels in aquaculture.

## **Germany**

Germany's Animal Welfare Slaughter Act contains regulations on the process of killing farmed fish and crustaceans, as stunning and killing must be carried out under elimination of pain (through stunning/anaesthetic). Specific methods are mentioned and are further specified for eels, flatfish and decapods. Furthermore, there are basic requirements and Good Practices Guidelines for handling and transport without specifying particular fish species.

## **Latvia**

In Latvia, zebrafish are specifically mentioned as one of the animal species permitted for use in procedures only if they have been bred in establishments for breeding experimental animals.

## Netherlands

The Netherlands has a specific legal requirement for stunning eels, whether they are farmed or wild-caught, based on legislation enacted in 2015 and enforced since 2018.

## Slovenia

Slovenia prohibits the placement of live fish on ice in aquaculture systems and requires anaesthesia for taking eggs or sperm from fish. Additionally, water quality parameters such as oxygen, ammonia, carbon dioxide, pH, salinity, temperature, and water flow must be adjusted based on species and stocking density, although no specific fish species are mentioned.

## Sweden

In Sweden, there are specific regulations on fish in aquaculture by the Board of Agriculture, but they do not specify particular species except for salmon bred for release in the wild. Currently, the slaughter of fish must comply with the Animal Welfare Act, though specific legislation for different fish species is not yet in place. However, efforts are underway by the Board of Agriculture to include fish species in slaughter legislation.

## Norway

In Norway, there is an extensive framework of legislation on many aspects of fish welfare in aquaculture including transport, farming and slaughter, and additionally some rules for crustaceans and rules in wild capture fisheries. The food safety authority in Norway continually updates advice on detailed requirements enforceable under the legislation.

## Summary

Legislation and labelling standards often do not extend to protecting fish. Huge numbers of fish suffer while a vast body of science and best practices remains largely unused. Consensus is well established among experts and stakeholders that fish are sentient, emotional animals. This was reflected by [EFSA in 2009](#). Fish welfare guidelines in aquaculture, applicable across species and production systems during farming, were developed by the [Council of Europe in 2005](#), and during transport and slaughter by the [World Organisation for Animal Health in 2009](#).

EU Member States demonstrate a varied approach to fish welfare regulations, with some countries implementing species-specific rules while others maintain more general regulations. Establishing delegated powers for the European Commission to lay down rules for fish species

would help harmonise these standards, ensuring a consistent level of fish welfare across the EU. This harmonisation is essential for addressing discrepancies in fish welfare regulations and promoting higher standards in aquaculture and fisheries, ultimately benefiting the welfare of fish and aligning with the EU's broader animal welfare goals.



## Prohibiting mutilations including piglet castration, dehorning, teeth grinding, and clipping, as well as beak trimming

The EU's Member States have varied regulations regarding mutilations such as piglet castration, dehorning, teeth grinding, and clipping. The vast majority of pigs in the EU are kept in intensive conditions indoors, which are typically barren, failing to satisfy even their most basic behavioural requirements. For this reason, these inquisitive and intelligent animals are mutilated to avoid the consequences of abnormal behaviours caused by boredom, stress and bad health. Male piglets undergo painful surgical castration to prevent boar taint, an unpleasant odour in the meat when cooked. Boar taint only occurs in 3-5% of pigs, and the presence of boar taint can be detected at the slaughter line. However, according to recent estimates and based on the [2023 slaughter data](#), **64.5 to 125 million male piglets are still surgically castrated every year across the EU (31.5-61%)**. In most cases, surgical castration is carried out without adequate pain relief. Painless alternatives remain far less common: [in 2022](#), entire boars represented 17% of the total, whereas immunocastrated animals were only 1%. The clipping or grinding of the corner teeth of young piglets is also still traditionally carried out to prevent injuries to the sow and littermates during the competition for suckling. However, [evidence shows](#) that many farmers are capable of rearing piglets with intact teeth.

Below is a detailed examination of the current status and regulations across several EU countries.

### Countries with comprehensive bans and restrictions

#### Austria

Article 7(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2004 in Austria prohibits surgical interventions, including tail docking and beak trimming, unless deemed indispensable for the intended use of the animal. Despite this, piglet mutilation without anaesthetics is still allowed, highlighting a gap in comprehensive animal welfare protection.

#### Denmark

Denmark prohibits routine tail docking, requiring evidence of tail biting for the procedure to be performed. Legislation introduced in 2018 mandates written documentation of tail biting. Additionally, Denmark bans more than half of a piglet's tail from being cut and forbids teeth clipping (though not grinding). Castration of piglets requires analgesia but not anaesthesia. Dehorning and castration of calves must be performed with anesthesia and prolonged pain treatment, and only by veterinarians or qualified personnel.

Beak trimming is allowed for laying hens and breeders for laying hens and broiler breeders and turkeys max 10 days of age. Beak trimming is, in practice, not done for laying hens due to an agreement with the industry. Comb dubbing, de-toeing, and de-clawing are allowed for male breeders (broiler and layer) up to 72 hours of age.

### **Finland**

In Finland, surgery or pain-causing procedures can only be performed if necessary due to illness or similar reasons. The procedure may only be performed by a veterinarian. If the pain caused by the procedure is mild and momentary, or if the procedure does not tolerate delay, the procedure may also be performed by a person other than a veterinarian. This ensures that such interventions are not performed unnecessarily. Finland has banned the surgical castration of pigs. During the 12-year transition period, analgesia must be provided. After a four-year transition period, local anaesthetic must be used during castration.

### **France**

France banned piglet castration without anaesthesia or analgesia starting January 1 2022, as per a decree from November 2021.

### **Germany**

Germany does not prohibit the routine tail docking of pigs. Over 95% of piglets are still tail docked despite regulations, indicating the need for stricter enforcement. Documentation has been required since 2019 to prove the necessity of tail docking. The surgical castration of male piglets is still allowed but must be performed under general anaesthesia (by inhalation of isoflurane or injection of ketamine and azaperone) and analgesia. Beak trimming for laying hens and turkeys is prohibited, though derogations exist. Beak trimming in laying hens has been almost completely phased out on the grounds of a voluntary agreement between the poultry industry and the German government. Turkeys in conventional husbandry are always routinely beak trimmed.

### **Ireland**

Irish law mandates the use of appropriate anaesthetics or analgesics for any operation involving interference with sensitive tissue or bone structure, as per animal health and welfare regulations. There is a list of prohibited operations and procedures, ensuring comprehensive protection for animals.

## **Italy**

In Italy, Legislative Decree No. 122/2011 implements Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs. The Decree falls short of completely banning all forms of piglet mutilation.

## **Luxembourg**

Luxembourg requires anaesthesia for any procedure on a vertebrate animal causing pain or suffering, performed by a veterinarian, with minor interventions specified by grand-ducal regulation exempted. This ensures that significant mutilations are not performed without proper pain management.

## **Sweden**

Sweden has banned tail docking and tooth cutting for pigs and phased out piglet castration without anaesthesia since January 1 2016. Beak trimming is interpreted as banned under EU regulations. The country's Animal Welfare Act ensures all mutilations are performed with anaesthesia. However, toe clipping is still allowed on roosters for breeding and can be performed by the keeper without anaesthesia. Also, the removal of extra teats can be performed by the owner if the heifer is no more than one month old. No anaesthesia is required. Moreover, male reindeers can be castrated without anaesthesia. They can also be marked by cutting specific patterns in the ears.

## **Norway (EEA)**

Norway has implemented bans on tail docking, teeth clipping (but allows grinding), beak trimming, and the surgical castration of piglets without local anaesthesia and pain relief. This stringent regulatory framework ensures high standards of animal welfare.

## **Countries with partial bans or specific restrictions**

### **Czech Republic**

The Czech Republic allows certain mutilations, such as the castration and tail docking of young animals, without anaesthesia when performed by qualified individuals. Other procedures like dehorning, teeth grinding, and clipping have similar exemptions, indicating a need for stricter regulations.

## Netherlands

The Netherlands has a phased approach to banning beak trimming, with prohibitions in place for laying hens, male broiler breeders and other specific categories. Freeze branding of cattle is also banned. However, some mutilations are still allowed under regulated conditions, such as beak trimming in female broiler breeders of slower-growing breeds, turkeys, and in layer (grand) parent stock, as well as de-toeing in male broiler breeders. Moreover, day-old layer chicks for export can still be beak-trimmed.

## Spain

Spain allows certain mutilations like partial tail docking and teeth trimming under strict conditions, and requires these procedures to be performed by veterinarians or trained individuals. The country mandates environmental and management modifications to prevent harmful behaviours before resorting to mutilations. The Royal Decree states that if castration or tail-docking is carried out after the seventh day of life, they will be carried out only through anaesthesia and prolonged analgesia performed by a veterinarian.

## Slovenia

Slovenia allows certain procedures such as piglet castration and tail docking without anaesthesia for young animals:

- Castration until seven days old for piglets;
- Tail docking until four days old for piglets and lambs (by a worker) or until seven days old (by a veterinarian);
- Teeth grinding until one day old for piglets (by a worker) or until seven days old (by a veterinarian).

Beak trimming and piglet tail docking are allowed if they supposedly will prevent greater harm during rearing. Realistically, this means they are allowed all the time.

## Summary

The EU's approach to regulating animal mutilations varies significantly across Member States. While countries like Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Norway have implemented comprehensive bans and strict regulations, others like the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Spain have more lenient rules allowing certain procedures without anaesthesia. Harmonising these regulations at EU level would ensure consistent and high

standards of animal welfare across the Union, reflecting public sentiment and scientific recommendations for the humane treatment of animals.

[Directive 2008/120/EC](#) lays down the minimum animal welfare standards for pigs kept for farming purposes. **30 years** after it first came into force, [official evidence](#) shows **25 out of 27 Member States are still in breach of the Directive and do not face any consequences**. Mutilation is an especially pressing issue in the sector. The European Commission devoted substantial public funding to disseminate best practices on the [prevention of tail biting](#) and [alternatives to piglet castration](#). Similarly, the [European Reference Centre on Pig Welfare](#) developed [indicator factsheets](#) and a knowledge base to deliver guidance on best practices for improved pig welfare.

Despite these efforts, **we still haven't seen any concrete improvements in how pigs are reared across the EU**. In its [2022 scientific opinion](#) on the welfare of pigs, the European Food Safety Authority concluded that tail docking "is not necessary if husbandry practices and management are appropriate" and recommended that "tail docking should not be performed". It identified the following factors as important to prevent tail biting: the **provision of enrichment materials such as straw, increased space allowance, and low levels of ammonia**. These are clear and unequivocal conclusions that we hope will be considered when the EU revises its animal welfare legislation.



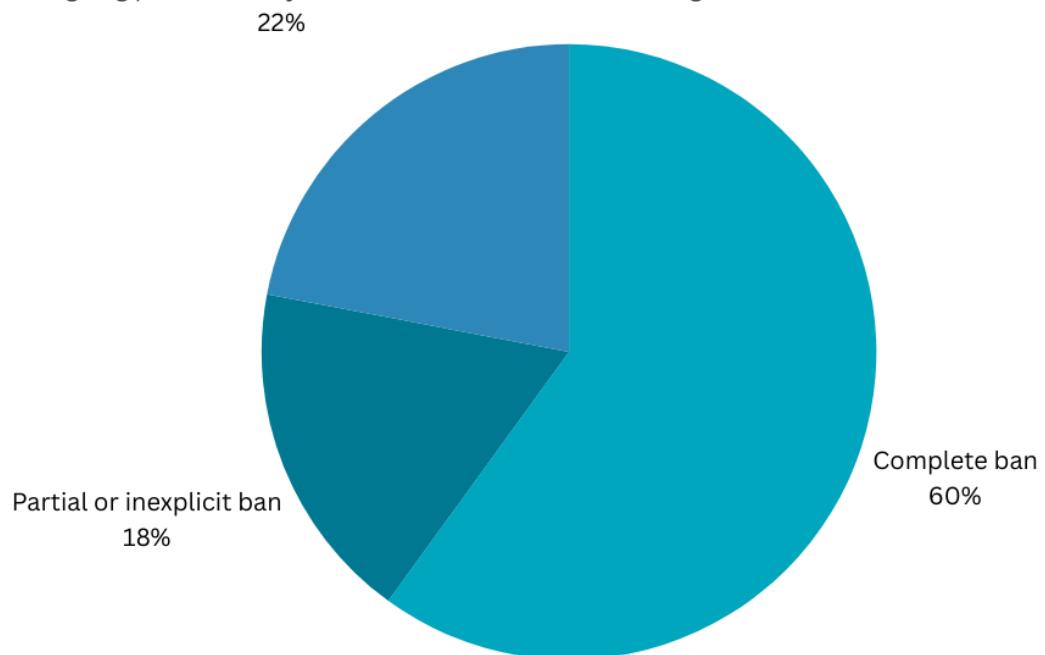
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## A ban on fur farming and the placement on the market of farmed fur products

The welfare of animals farmed for fur is seriously compromised in current farming systems. Keeping what are essentially wild animals in small cages results in numerous serious health and welfare problems, including infected wounds, missing limbs and cannibalism. Scientific studies add further weight to the substantial body of evidence demonstrating that the needs of animals kept and killed for fur are not being met in current housing systems, and in fact, cannot be met in any housing system.

The European landscape of fur farming is diverse, with several countries implementing bans on fur farming and others still allowing the practice. Below is a comprehensive overview of the current state of fur farming legislation across various EU Member States, highlighting the varying degrees of regulation and the movement towards banning this practice.

Countries with ongoing parliamentary debates or no bans on fur farming



**Graph: Percentage of EU countries that have a complete and explicit legislative ban on fur farming for all species (whether fully enacted yet or still pending), versus those that have only a partial or inexplicit ban and those that are having ongoing parliamentary debates or that have no bans.**

## Austria

Austria enacted a ban on fur farming for all species in 2004, which became effective in 2005. The [Federal Act](#) on the Protection of Animals explicitly prohibits keeping animals for the purpose of obtaining furs. There are no operating fur farms in Austria.

## Belgium

Belgium has regional bans on fur farming in [Wallonia](#), [Brussels](#), and [Flanders](#), with the bans enacted between 2015 and 2018 and becoming fully effective by 2023. These bans cover all species, and no fur farms are currently operational.

## Croatia

Croatia implemented a fur farming ban for all species, effective from 2017 after a 10-year phase-out period. This ban is confirmed in the [Animal Protection Act](#) of 2017. No fur farms are currently operational.

## Czech Republic

The Czech Republic banned fur farming for all species in 2017, with the ban becoming effective in 2019. This ban is enshrined in the [Animal Protection Act](#). No fur farms are currently operational.

## Denmark

Denmark has a partial ban on fur farming, including a [prohibition](#) on fox farming, a [ban](#) on building new raccoon dog farms (there are no active raccoon dog farms currently) and a suspension on mink farming until 2023. The suspension on mink farming has been lifted, allowing mink and chinchilla farms to operate.

## Estonia

Estonia passed a [ban](#) on fur farming for all species in 2021, which will take full effect in 2026. Currently, no fur farms are operational under the ban's provisions.

## France

France implemented a partial [ban](#) in 2021, prohibiting the breeding of non-domestic species for fur production. No fur farms are currently operational under this ban.

## Germany

Germany effectively phased out fur farming for all species by implementing stricter keeping standards. This led to the closure of all fur farms by 2022. The regulations are part of the Tiererzeugnisse-Handelsverbotsgesetz ([Animal Products Trade Prohibition Act](#)).

## Hungary

Hungary has a partial ban on fur farming, covering species such as mink, fox, polecat, and coypu, enacted in 2020. Chinchilla farming is still permitted and there are currently operating chinchilla fur farms.

## Ireland

Ireland banned fur farming for all species in 2019, with the ban becoming effective in 2022. The [ban](#) includes provisions for compensating affected farmers. There are no operating fur farms.

## Italy

Italy enacted a fur farming ban in 2021, effective from 2022, covering all species. This is part of the comprehensive [state budget law](#). There are no operating fur farms.

## Latvia

Latvia passed a [ban](#) on fur farming for all species in 2022, which will be effective by 2028. However, fur farms are still operational until the effective date.

## Lithuania

Lithuania implemented a ban on fur farming for all species in 2023, set to take full effect in 2027. The [legislation](#) prohibits keeping and breeding animals for fur production.

## **Luxembourg**

Luxembourg [banned](#) fur farming in 2018, with no operating fur farms under the current legislation.

## **Malta**

Malta enacted a fur farming [ban](#) in 2022, effective immediately. The ban covers all species, and no fur farms are operational.

## **Netherlands**

The Netherlands [banned](#) mink farming in 2013, with the ban becoming effective in 2021. Fox and chinchilla farming was phased out in the 1990s. No fur farms are operational.

## **Romania**

Romania banned mink and chinchilla farming in October 2024, with a phase-out period until 2027.

## **Slovakia**

Slovakia passed a fur farming [ban](#) in 2019, effective from 2025. The ban covers all species, with one fur farm still operating until the effective date.

## **Slovenia**

Slovenia [banned](#) fur farming in 2003, with the ban becoming effective in 2013. The legislation prohibits breeding animals solely for fur production and encompasses all species.

## **Spain**

Spain has prohibited the establishment of new mink fur farms since 2016 and between 2011-2013. There are currently operating fur farms in Spain.

## **Norway (EEA)**

Norway enacted a fur farming [ban](#) for all species in 2019, with immediate effect for new farms and a phase-out period for existing farms until 2025. No fur farms will be operational after the phase-out.

## Countries with ongoing parliamentary debates or no bans on fur farming

### Bulgaria

Bulgaria introduced a ban on the breeding and import of American mink in June 2022, but this was suspended in August 2022 due to an appeal. The matter is being handled by the Bulgarian Supreme Administrative Court. The Parliamentary debate on fur farming continues.

### Greece

Greece has not implemented a ban on fur farming, and fur farms continue to operate without any ongoing parliamentary debate.

### Finland

Finland has not enacted a fur farming ban, and the country continues to operate mink, fox and raccoon dog farms.

### Poland

Poland is one of the top producers of fur, with ongoing parliamentary debates about a potential ban. No ban is currently in place.

### Portugal

Portugal does not have a ban on fur farming, but there are no operating fur farms.

### Sweden

Sweden has not implemented a complete ban on fur farming, but there is ongoing parliamentary debate and budget provisions for the voluntary closure of mink farms. Fox (2001 by [the Ordinance, chapter two](#)) and chinchilla (in 2014 by the [Board of Agriculture, chapter three](#)) farming have been phased out due to strict welfare regulations.

### Summary

The legislative landscape for fur farming in the EU shows significant progress towards banning the practice, with many countries implementing comprehensive bans and phasing out existing

farms. However, some countries continue to allow fur farming, either fully or partially, and ongoing debates suggest that further legislative changes may occur in the future.

Harmonising these efforts at the EU level through a ban on the placement of farmed fur products on the market would align with public sentiment and ensure consistent animal welfare standards across the Union. The breeding of animals for the purposes of fur production is [opposed](#) by many EU citizens, who believe that it is unacceptable, unnecessary and unethical to keep and kill animals for the production of a non-essential product for which there are many warm and humane alternatives. The public's long-standing opposition to fur farming and the changed ethical perception of animals is reflected by the law in an increasing number of countries.



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## Conclusion

The fragmented landscape of animal welfare legislation in the European Union presents significant challenges for both animal protection and the internal market. With over 430 different laws, regulations, and constitutional provisions governing animal welfare across the 27 EU Member States, inconsistencies persist in legal standards, enforcement, and the treatment of farmed animals. While some countries have taken decisive steps to improve animal welfare—such as banning caged farming, prohibiting force-feeding for foie gras, and eliminating fur farming—others lag behind, leading to uneven progress and continued suffering for millions of animals.

A more unified and science-based regulatory framework is urgently needed. The European Food Safety Authority has provided extensive scientific evidence supporting stricter animal welfare measures, yet these insights remain largely unreflected in existing EU laws. Without immediate action, the disparities in national regulations will continue to undermine both the welfare of animals and the fairness of competition among European farmers.

To ensure meaningful progress, the European Commission must act decisively by introducing clear, enforceable, and ambitious animal welfare legislation. A harmonised approach would not only uphold the EU's ethical and sustainability commitments but also create a fairer agricultural market that benefits animals, farmers, and consumers alike. The revision of the EU's animal welfare framework is long overdue—it is time for Europe to lead by example in setting the highest standards for animal protection.



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