



European
Commission



DG Health and
Food Safety

OVERVIEW REPORT
**Protection of the welfare
of laying hens at all
stages of production**

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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Health and food audits and analysis

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OVERVIEW REPORT
ON
THE PROTECTION OF THE WELFARE OF LAYING HENS
AT ALL STAGES OF PRODUCTION

Executive summary

This report presents the outcome of a project of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) conducted in 2021 to assess the official controls on the protection of the welfare of laying hens at all the stages of production in the European Union.

EU legislation sets specific rules to protect the welfare of laying hens after they start egg production. Member States carry out official controls, which generally ensure the correct implementation of those EU requirements. The current main non-compliance in this area is the overstocking.

Although younger hens (pullets and chicks) are not included in those specific requirements, the general EU rules on protection of animals kept for farming purposes are applicable to protect their well-being. The project found that official controls on farms keeping pullets and hatcheries are far less frequent and consistent than those for laying hen farms. In many cases, Member State authorities do not check animal welfare properly or at all in these establishments.

The report identifies areas where national authorities have opportunities to improve. The report also highlights certain practices in Member States that can be considered as good practices, as they contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the official controls.

The project concluded that some EU requirements are open to legal interpretation and have been translated differently into national provisions by Member States. On the other hand, some Member States have added requirements in their territories that go beyond the EU ones. As a result, welfare protection for laying hens varies across the EU. Animals generally enjoy better conditions for their well-being where clearer or additional national provisions have been established. This potentially creates an uneven playing field for the EU producers.

The report proposes some actions which Member States' authorities could consider improving their official controls in this area.

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1 INTRODUCTION

With more than 375 million laying hens, the European Union (EU) is self-sufficient regarding egg production. The welfare of the hens depends greatly on their housing, for which the EU has some of the most advanced laws in the world. These rules prohibit the use of battery cages, which do not provide the animals with environmental enrichment.

The recent European Citizen’s Initiative “End the cage age” ⁽¹⁾ highlights that currently half of all laying hens in the EU continue to live in cages, albeit with environmental enrichment. This initiative has been supported by almost 1.4 million people and is an example of the public’s perception that caged animal systems lead to animal suffering, as they do not give birds the possibility to move freely and express some of their natural behaviours, including foraging, wing-flapping and flying.

In 2021, the EU produced more than seven million tonnes of eggs, with six Member States having a majority share of EU production.

Number of laying hens by farming method (maximum capacity) according to notifications under Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/1185, Art. 12(b) - Annex III.9						
Member State (MS)	2021		% by farming method in respective country			
	Total laying hens in MS	% MS / EU	% enriched	% barn	% free range	% organic
DE	58,064,747	15.4%	5.5%	58.8%	22.1%	13.6%
PL	51,241,025	13.6%	76.2%	17.8%	5.0%	1.0%
FR*	48,255,709	12.8%	54.1%	11.7%	23.0%	11.2%
ES	47,069,236	12.5%	73.3%	16.1%	9.1%	1.6%
IT	40,519,407	10.8%	35.6%	54.5%	4.9%	4.9%
NL	31,483,393	8.4%	7.8%	60.9%	22.8%	8.6%
BE	10,814,337	2.9%	36.2%	42.8%	13.5%	7.4%
PT	10,228,212	2.7%	75.0%	19.5%	4.7%	0.8%
RO	8,954,319	2.4%	57.3%	36.8%	3.3%	2.7%
SE	8,655,197	2.3%	3.7%	77.0%	4.9%	14.3%
HU	7,548,745	2.0%	71.2%	27.2%	1.3%	0.3%
AT	7,406,040	2.0%	0.0%	58.7%	28.4%	12.9%
CZ	7,471,545	2.0%	62.1%	36.2%	1.2%	0.4%
BG	5,090,680	1.4%	70.1%	27.5%	2.3%	0.0%
FI	5,071,922	1.3%	45.5%	43.9%	3.5%	7.1%
EL**	4,649,598	1.2%	76.5%	12.4%	5.5%	5.6%
DK	4,331,408	1.2%	9.9%	49.0%	8.1%	33.0%
IE	3,880,164	1.0%	48.5%	1.4%	46.4%	3.7%
LV	3,533,598	0.9%	69.3%	27.5%	3.0%	0.2%
SK	3,126,067	0.8%	75.3%	22.3%	2.2%	0.2%
LT	2,926,891	0.8%	79.6%	18.5%	1.2%	0.6%
HR	2,369,476	0.6%	62.1%	33.5%	3.9%	0.5%
SI	1,449,060	0.4%	17.2%	61.4%	18.9%	2.6%
EE	843,487	0.2%	87.7%	8.3%	2.6%	1.4%
CY	516,461	0.1%	67.8%	15.9%	13.1%	3.2%
MT	360,585	0.1%	99.4%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
LU	134,497	0.0%	0.0%	66.6%	10.7%	22.7%
TOTAL	375,995,806	100%	44.9%	35.6%	12.8%	6.6%

* 2019 data
** 2020 data

Source: European Commission’s egg market situation dashboard ⁽²⁾

These consumers’ animal welfare concerns have already driven many egg producers, retailers, and food service companies to shift to non-cage systems in their supply chains, and this trend is continuing.

The production of eggs has another important ethical challenge: what to do with male day-old chicks? Due to their inability to lay eggs and their unsuitability to be raised competitively for meat production, they are considered an unwanted by-product of the egg production chain and are usually culled at the hatchery. Ethical concerns and societal disapproval are leading the industry and Member State authorities to seek alternatives to routine culling.

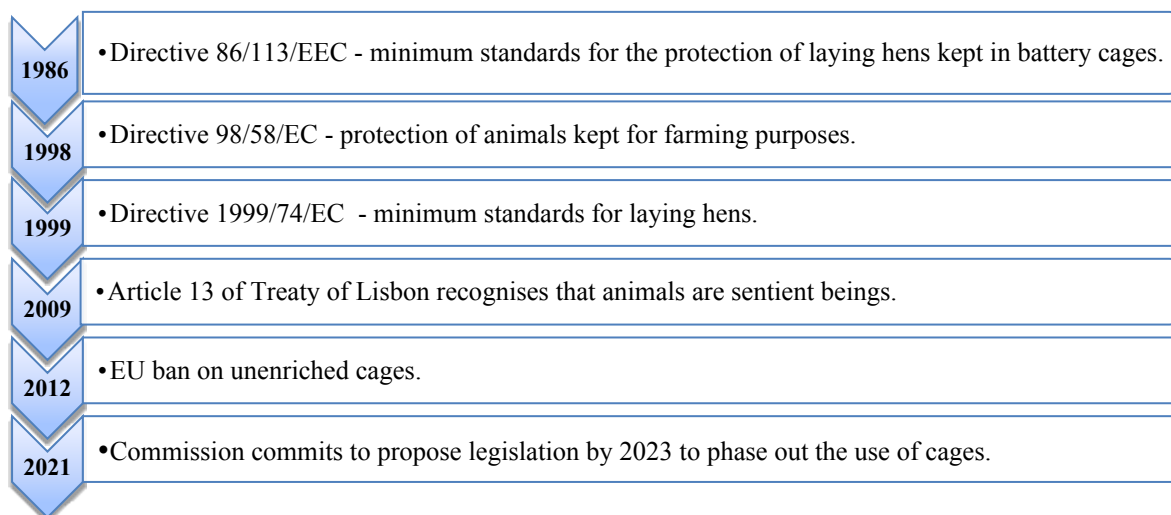
¹ [European Citizens’ Initiative End the Cage Age](#)

² [European Commission’s egg market situation dashboard](#)

2 BACKGROUND

The EU has legislative provisions for the protection of laying hens since 1986.

These provisions include the requirement for establishing standards relevant to the farming systems, the establishment of compulsory labelling of table eggs displaying the farming method, and the **elimination of battery cages** since 2012. The current regulatory framework has improved the welfare of laying hens.



The legal requirement to **label eggs with the farming system** is linked to the animal welfare rules empowering consumers to choose according to the farming system used for the egg production.

When the Lisbon Treaty ⁽³⁾ came into force in 2009 it introduced the recognition that **animals are sentient beings**. The Treaty states that: "*...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.*"

Union legislation concerning the welfare conditions of farm animals lays down minimum standards, but **Member States may adopt more stringent rules** provided they are compatible with the provisions of the Treaty.

Before this project, the European Commission's Directorate for Health and Food Audits and Analysis had not audited the welfare of laying hens after the ban on unenriched cages. The previous audits on the welfare of laying hens did not include pullets, breeding laying hens and day-old male chicks in their scope.

In 2018, the European Commission registered a European Citizens' Initiative entitled "**End the Cage Age**" which proposed to prohibit the use of cages for laying hens, pullets, layer breeders and other farm animals in the EU ⁽⁴⁾. Following support from almost 1.4 million

³ [Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007](#)

⁴ [European Citizens' Initiative 'End the Cage Age'](#)

signatories from across the EU, the initiative was validated in 2020. In 2021 the European Parliament supported the initiative by adopting a resolution ⁽⁵⁾ and the European Commission responded with a commitment to propose legislation by 2023 to phase out the use of cages for farm animals ⁽⁶⁾.

Some Member States have already banned the systematic destruction of chicks without a reason, or plan to do it. In October 2022, nine Member States called for an EU-wide ban on the systematic killing of male chicks. This proposal was widely supported by ministers.

3 OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This report provides an overview of the official controls in the EU to protect the welfare of laying hens, highlight good practices, identify common challenges, and make this information more accessible to stakeholders.

During 2021, the European Commission's Directorate for Health and Food Audits and Analysis ran a project to evaluate the effectiveness of official controls to spare laying hens any avoidable pain or suffering during all stages of production. Its scope included the welfare of laying hens kept in commercial establishments at all stages of production and the links with the labelling of table eggs indicating the farming method. It excluded the protection of animals during transport, which is covered by other projects. The project scope also excluded establishments keeping less than 350 laying hens, the welfare at the time of killing of birds in slaughterhouses or during total depopulation operations at farm (for example, as part of animal disease control measures) and the specific requirements for organic production.

The project also gathered information about alternative uses of day-old male chicks; the management of laying hens at the end of their productive life; the use of animal-based indicators for laying hens; and the impact on the welfare of free-range birds confined for seasonal biosecurity measures.

The European Commission collected most of the information for this overview report by means of audits of nine Member States and questionnaires to other 16 Member States (see Annex II).

4 THE EGG PRODUCTION CHAIN AND MANAGEMENT OF LAYING HENS IN EUROPE

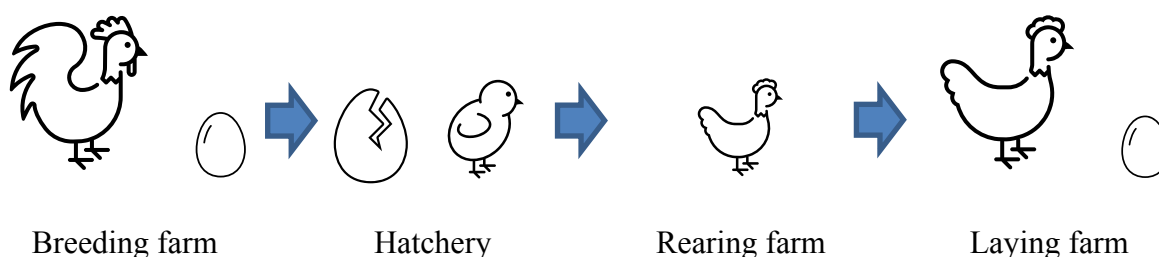
The vast majority of hens grown for commercial egg production are hybrids. Specialised breeding companies select and maintain pure genetic lines, progressively crossbreeding them at different stages (that is, through great-grandparent, grandparent and parent flocks) on breeding farms. Genetic lines are selected for a variety of traits. For instance, the selection looks into economic traits, such as egg production per hen and shell quality. The selection also addresses producers' needs. For example, new types of housing require different characteristics in the hens, and social and good nesting behaviour became more important; the colour and size of the eggs would make their marketing easier or more difficult in specific

⁵ [European Parliament resolution on the European Citizens' Initiative 'End the cage age' \(2021/2633\(RSP\)\)](#)

⁶ [European Citizens' Initiative: Commission to propose phasing out of cages for farm animals](#)

markets. Selection of traits for improved welfare of hens (e.g., shorter beaks to reduce feather pecking, behaviour patterns, rates of keel bone fractures) has increased its relevance for the genetic companies and dual-purpose lines (egg and meat) are gaining attention particularly in the context of the ban on killing male day-old chicks.

Breeding farms keep both male and female birds, which produce fertilised eggs that are incubated in **hatcheries**. Chicks emerging from hatched eggs are segregated by sex at the hatchery. Female chicks are raised as laying hens while male chicks are generally culled shortly after hatching, either through exposure to certain gasses (e.g., carbon dioxide) or by maceration (i.e. immediate crushing of the entire animal). Both methods are approved in EU Law (7). Culling of male birds occurs for all industrialised egg production systems, whether organic, free range, barn, or enriched cage.



In general, female chicks are transported from the hatcheries to special **rearing farms** where pullets are kept. A ‘pullet’ is a young hen that has not yet started laying eggs. Most pullets reach their ‘point of lay’ (the age at which they lay their first egg), between the 16th and 24th weeks of age. Just before that point, pullets are moved to **laying farms** (or laying houses if they are already in those farms).

Farmers are free to use any of the farming systems defined by the EU legislation to keep their hens. A farm may have more than one laying house and a different farming system in each house.

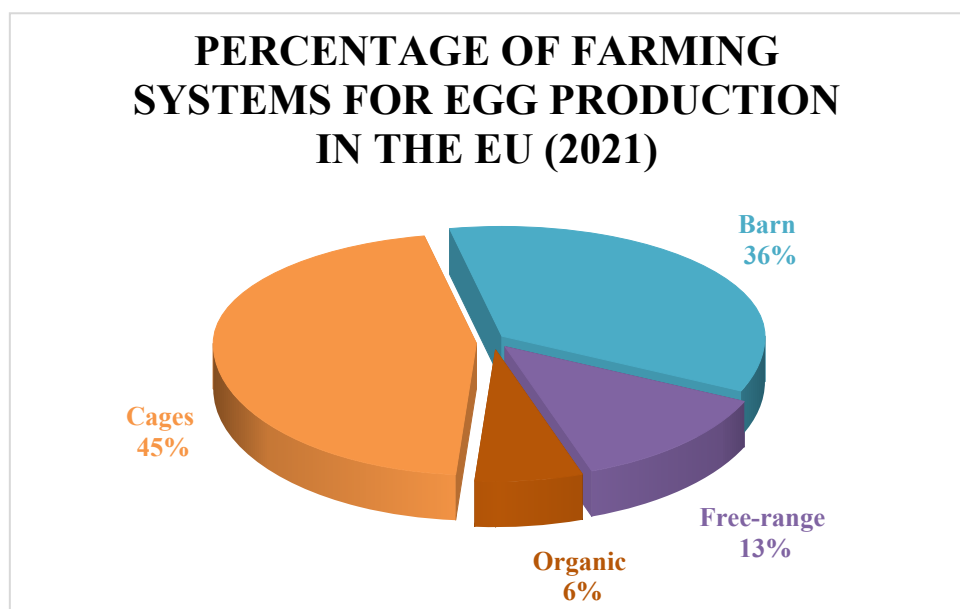
Farming systems that do not use cages are referred to as alternative systems. Here, hens are free to move throughout the available space, which may include outdoor areas (free-range and organic systems) or not (barn systems). The layout of the indoor parts of alternative systems may include multi-tier setting, known as an aviary, which increases the capacity of the house to accommodate hens, with the birds being free to move through different levels.

Laying hens reduce their egg production when the hours of daylight decrease (late autumn and winter). The duration of light in each day and the light levels influence reproductive and egg production cycles, total feed intake, and growth rate. They can also influence aggression between hens. Egg producers can use lighting programmes to compensate for the reduced hours of daylight and avoid the seasonality of egg production.

In commercial systems in Europe hens typically lay eggs for around one year before being slaughtered as end-of-lay hens or ‘spent hens’ because egg production declines progressively and, by their 72nd week of age, egg production becomes less cost effective.

⁷ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing](#)

PERCENTAGE OF FARMING SYSTEMS FOR EGG PRODUCTION IN THE EU (2021)



Source: European Commission's egg market situation dashboard (1)

5 CHALLENGES FOR THE WELFARE OF LAYING HENS

Farming systems

Each farming system has its own challenges. The disadvantages vary depending on local conditions and management:

- **Enriched cages:** hens have limitations to express many natural behaviours (e.g. freedom of movement, scratching, wing-flapping, perching at a height above the ground), and are heavily and continuously dependent on the conditions provided within each cage without the opportunity to move to other parts of the house in search of better conditions (e.g. vacant nests/perches, comfortable litter, alternative drinkers) or to escape from birds with abnormal behaviours (e.g. injurious pecking).
- **Alternative systems (with or without access to outdoors):** they expose hens to a more enriched environment, allowing more natural behaviour and more social interactions. If well managed, the higher risk of acquiring aggressive or abnormal behaviours or being subject to such behaviours (e.g. injurious pecking) due to a larger number of hens can be limited. The higher risk of being exposed to pathogens (e.g. coccidia), airborne dust and traumatism (e.g. keel bone fracture) lead on the one hand to better immune response and lower use of antimicrobial substances, but on the other hand require welltrained staff. Use of covered verandas further reduce the risk of infection. Litter based barns may have increased levels of ammonia compared to caged systems. If not properly managed, the levels of ammonia risk reaching levels that are harmful to the animals, negatively influencing their well-being.

- **Alternative systems with access to outdoors:** increase the risk of exposure of the hens to predators (e.g. raptors, weasels and foxes), parasites and diseases associated to wild birds (e.g. avian influenza). Today, these challenges are faced by farmers that use such systems.

Hens kept in alternative housing systems have a lower occurrence of *Salmonella* than the ones in cage systems ⁽⁸⁾ but the reasons for that could not be fully explained.

Analysis conducted by Member States suggest that there is a higher risk of introduction of avian influenza in flocks of laying hens with access to outdoors than in flocks kept indoors. Temporal confinements are normally used as a measure for reducing the risk of exposure to avian influenza at high-risk periods and areas.

Farming practices

There are **farming practices** which may have direct impact on the welfare of laying hens such as:

- **Beak-trimming:** many hens have their beaks trimmed to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism. Beak trimming is a painful procedure which is usually performed at the hatchery. In many Member States, is systematically performed. The farm environment, nutrition and health conditions and sudden modification of those can lead to injurious behaviour, such as aggression and feather pecking. Feather pecking is where hens peck and pull at the feathers of other hens, sometimes leading to serious injuries and even cannibalism.
- **Moulting** in birds is a natural process which involves the periodic shedding and replacement of feathers. In natural conditions, it occurs every year when the days get shorter. During moulting, hens stop laying eggs and use this time to build up their nutrient reserves and reproductive tracts. After moulting, a new laying cycle starts resuming the egg productivity although not to the levels reached in the previous laying cycle. Forced moulting is implicitly banned in the EU through Directive 98/58/EC requirements, as it involves long periods of darkness and severe feed restriction.
- **Temporal confinement:**
 - a) Biosecurity measures improve the welfare of the hens by protecting them from diseases. However, the temporal confinement of free-range and organic hens during high-risk periods of avian influenza present challenges for maintaining the welfare standards of the flock. For example, when released after confinement, those hens may exhibit increased levels of aggression or feather pecking. Nevertheless, none of the competent authorities have detected any particular animal welfare problem related to this.

⁸ [EFSA Journal 2019;17\(2\):5596](#)

- b) To protect the welfare of hens during exceptional extreme weather conditions, some competent authorities have established an administrative procedure for allowing the temporal confinement of hens in free-range systems without affecting the category of their egg labelling. Although the egg marketing legislation does not contemplate such exception, the procedures were robust and fully documented including the specific limit for the categorisation of the weather as extreme.

6 EU LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL PROVISIONS

Annex I to this report indicates the main legislation applicable to different farming systems applicable to laying hens and egg production. The table below is a summary of the main EU minimum requirements for the different production systems ⁽⁹⁾:

	Enriched cage	Barn	Free range	Organic
Space allowance in the usable area	16.7 hens/m ²	9 hens/m ²		6 hens/m ²
Nest	A nest per cage	A nest per 7 hens		
If group nest		83 cm ² /hen		120 cm ² /hen
Perch	15 cm/hen	15 cm/hen		18 cm/hen
Stocking density in the outdoor area	N/A	N/A	4m ² /hen 2 500 hens/ha but organic production has further nitrogen limitations	
Litter	Presence	≥ 250cm ² littered area/hen (40 hens/m ²) covering, at least, one third of the floor area.		
Beak trimming	Permitted to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism when performed before 10 days old and authorised by MS.			On a case-by-case basis
Access to outdoor area	N/A		Continuous daylight access	One third of the hens' life
Number of hens per house	N/A			3 000

The concept of “*limiting factor*” is not defined in the EU legislation but used by some competent authorities for referring to the parameter required by the legislations (e.g. usable area, length of perches...) which most restricts the capacity in number of laying hens of a housing (house, cage or barn partition).

The EU legislation does not include specific farming methods or requirements for pullets and breeders. Therefore, the EU legal requirements applicable to them are the generic ones in Council Directive 98/58/EC. Although there is insufficient data and a lack of definitions to monitor trends in the farming methods used, they seem to follow the same patterns as for laying hens because rearing, genetics and epigenetics influence the adaptation of the laying hens to the farming systems.

Many Member States have set stricter national provisions regarding the welfare of laying hens. These include the prohibition of using cages, more space per bird or requirements for natural lighting. The national provisions are very varied and cover many different areas and

⁹ The references are not exhaustive, the table includes only some requirements to make it easier to compare the systems.

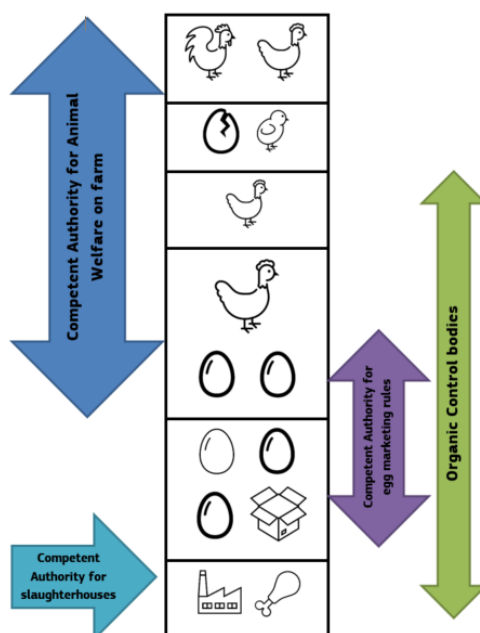
systems. This also explains why **the welfare conditions for laying hens are not uniform through the EU**. Animals generally enjoy better conditions for their well-being where national provisions have been established.

In a small number of cases, the development of national requirements has led to one Member State favouring something that another has forbidden (e.g. in the Netherlands, national provisions require the use of *colony housing* ⁽¹⁰⁾ for caged hens; in Denmark, and Sweden, cage *colony housing* is *de facto* banned because they limit of capacity of the cages to 10 or 16 hens/cage).

7 ORGANISATION OF OFFICIAL CONTROLS

Competent authorities

Member States have designated competent authorities for the official controls on animal welfare and, separately, authorities responsible for the verification of the egg marketing standards. This results in different authorities conducting inspections in farms keeping laying hens. The *ante-mortem* and *post-mortem* inspection of the end-of-lay hens slaughtered for human consumption are usually performed by a different competent authority and organic control bodies/authorities conduct inspections of organic farms.



The co-existence of many authorities, which generally operate independently, creates many challenges for coordination and sharing of tools and information. This is an area where Member States could generally improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Good practice: Netherlands

- In the Netherlands, there is an egg labelling inspection body and a different authority performing animal welfare checks.

¹⁰ “*Colony housing*” uses larger enriched cages with higher capacity in number of hens per cage than conventional cages.

- The egg labelling inspection body carries out the systematic measurement of all the hen houses establishing the maximum capacity of the house in number of hens and the “*limiting factor*” of each house.
- The competent authority conducting the animal welfare checks systematically uses the information collected by the egg labelling inspection body when checking the welfare on the hens.

Registration of farms keeping laying hens

EU legislation requires Member States to establish a register of laying hen farms. This register links animal welfare rules (farming methods) and egg-marketing rules (labelling of eggs with the farming method), which must be updated and accessible to the competent authority for the purpose of tracing eggs.

The register reflects the maximum capacities in number of hens of each farm per farming system. Some farms operate different farming systems at the same time in different houses. This is relevant for the organisation of both the egg-marketing checks (e.g. plausibility of egg production per farming method) and the welfare checks (e.g. farming systems to check). Member States have established this register but there are some issues with its access and its use, for example:

- It is quite common that **not all relevant authorities have access to the register**. This leads to duplication of registers by different authorities. It also causes difficulties for tracing eggs. For example, eggs may be dispatched unstamped from farms to egg packing establishments in another region, which may not have access to the register for the region or origin.
- In several Member States, **registers are not accessible to officials performing the checks or they are not used** systematically during the inspections of farm or/and egg packing establishments. This means that the officials do not ensure that the register remains updated and accurate, particularly when changes in the farming methods or hen capacity occur.
- Officials in some Member States do not **use the information in the register** regarding maximum capacity:
 - This happens often with officials checking welfare requirements at farms. This is particularly relevant where welfare checks are based on the inspection of a sample of houses rather than in all the houses or units of the farm.
 - Sometimes, officials checking the egg marketing rules at farms or/and at egg packing centres do not use the available information to verify the plausibility of the production records per farming method (by crosschecking egg production per farming method against the maximum number of laying hens in each housing system).

Some **farms keeping breeding flocks produce eggs for human consumption** from time to time. It may happen because the farms are occasionally populated with laying hens rather than by breeders or because fertilised eggs are sold for human consumption. In these cases,

they must be included in the hen register as laying hens and must comply with the requirements for laying hens. However, this is not always the case. Consequently, these farms may not be included in controls scheduled for checking laying hen farms.

Planning of official controls

The Official Controls Regulation ⁽¹¹⁾ obliges Member States to perform official controls in the area of food safety (including animal welfare controls) based on a published multi-annual national control plan. Official controls must be performed on food businesses regularly, on a risk basis and with appropriate frequency. All Member States have established animal welfare control programmes which cover the egg producing sector, but none has included specific animal welfare objectives for the welfare of laying hens in its multi-annual national control plan.

Local authorities generally select the farms that will be inspected according to criteria set at central or local levels, depending on the Member State.

Risk-based planning could be improved in the planning of official controls on animal welfare of laying hens.

- Often the selection of farms is based on all livestock and poultry holdings in the region **without using a stratification** of the selection based on the species and farming systems.
- **The used risk criteria and the attribution of risk to each of the criterion is usually unclear and often subjective.** The main risk factors considered for establishing the frequency of visits include: the size of the farm (i.e., number of animals); the time elapsed since the previous check, the history of non-compliances and the farming method. These are the risk factors specifically mentioned in the Official Controls Regulation. Authorities generally attribute higher risk to bigger farms, but without evidence or analysis of previous results to justify this. Many identified the farming method as risk factor, but without evidence of which one represents a higher or lower risk for welfare.
- **Authorities rarely use other factors with significant impact in animal welfare** to establish their risk-based programme (e.g., particular features which allow operators to modify quickly the farming system or to restrict the available space; conditions in the farms that require beak-trimmed birds). Such a risk analysis would require the collection and analysis of data that authorities are currently not collecting.
- When authorities establish a number or proportion of farms for inspection, it is frequently **resourced-based rather than risk-based** (i.e., it depends on the number of farms in proportion to the resources of a competent authority rather than in the objective risk of the animals and operations). Often, each authority does its own risk analysis, which leads to different frequencies of inspection for the same kind of farm, even within the same Member State or region.

¹¹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products \(Official Controls Regulation\)](#)

Reports and complaints from citizens and organisations generally trigger farm inspections which authorities add to the planned controls.

The risk-based frequency of the checks should consider the reliability and results of the controls performed by a third party including, where appropriate, private quality assurance schemes. There are private quality assurance schemes in many Member States and some competent authorities are currently considering how they might make use of the unofficial controls that they perform. However, they are not currently using the results of checks done by quality assurance schemes for their official planning.

Some of the competent authorities verifying egg marketing rules use risk-based procedures to plan their controls. Some include as a risk factor the use of different farming methods at the same farm.

Whereas risk-based controls allow the authorities to target efficiently their resources on what they consider the ‘most risky farms’, they may not establish the effectiveness of their selection or estimate the level of compliance in the sector unless they compare the results with the ones performed over farms selected on a different basis e.g., randomly.

The incorporation of a small proportion of checks based on a random selection of the holdings, established either in parallel of the risk-based controls or through a project (e.g., Italy, Netherlands) can have a positive impact in the controls system because:

- It allows the authorities to verify whether risk-based checks find more non-compliances than random checks (i.e., that the checks target more risky farms).
- It avoids potential blind spots in the official control plan, particularly where there are types of farms, or outliers, which would otherwise not be checked.

Good practice: Italy

- Periodically, the authorities run a project for establishing the situation of the sector, visiting farms randomly selected from the establishment database.
- This database helps to verify the stocking density on farm and that forced moulting is not practised. The competent authorities are further supported by a centralised farm register. The register’s information may be inaccurate in some instances, but the central competent authority is aware of this risk and regularly monitors the data.
- The project collects a wide range of data that inform the authorities of the animal welfare conditions in laying hen farms at national, regional and local level, enabling them to better target their controls.
- This system provides official veterinarians with a robust methodology to conduct more effectively the checks on welfare of laying hens in farms.

Cross-compliance checks link compliance with specific EU legislation with Common Agricultural Policy payments. They cover 1% of the farms receiving those payments per year. Although cross-compliance checks cover Directive 98/58/EC, they do not cover the Directive 1999/74/EC, leaving out of their scope most of the legal requirements specific to

laying hens. The approach to cross-compliance checks at laying hen farms varies in different Member States. In some, the same inspector carries out the official controls and cross-compliance checks during the same or separate visits. In others, different departments or ministries complete them independently. This has led to inconsistent written records and misunderstandings, particularly when national legislation used by officials is a transposition of several EU Directives.

Coverage of the controls

The **proportion of farms keeping laying hens inspected** to verify compliance with welfare rules varies between different Member States but remains relatively stable over time in each Member State. While, in some Member States, the number and proportion of inspected farms goes up to 100%, in others, it only reaches 5%. These differences are linked to different factors, such as the number of farms under the authorities' control (the lower the number, the higher the inspected percentage) or the relative relevance of the sector in relation to other agricultural productions. In many Member States, the main criteria for selecting livestock farms to be controlled for animal welfare is the number of animals kept on the farm (the higher the number of animals, the higher the likelihood of being inspected). As a result, in those Member States with significant numbers of farms keeping laying hens, where animal welfare control plans set an annual percentage of livestock farms, the proportion of farms keeping laying hens selected is generally high (because of the large number of birds kept).

Most Member States do not include **farms keeping pullets, breeding farms and hatcheries** within their animal welfare control programmes. In principle, they subject these farms to the same prioritisation process but without assigning any specific risk factor (e.g., the authorities do not consider the number of chicks culled or the killing method used for planning risk-based controls at hatcheries). The main risk factor considered is the capacity of establishments (in terms of the number of animals that can be kept at one specific time) rather than their throughput. As a consequence, hatcheries are seldom selected for inspection as part of the plans.

Hatcheries, rearing and breeding establishments where hatching eggs or birds are moved to another Member State, are approved under the Animal Health Law ⁽¹²⁾ and thus they should receive annual checks for animal health rules. The scope of those annual checks does not usually include an active verification of compliance with the animal welfare rules but they may identify welfare issues when they are evident. These establishments are also under the scope of Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. However, Member State authorities do not define the frequency of the official controls on welfare for them. There is an opportunity to extend the scope of those annual checks to cover animal welfare rules, thereby increasing the efficiency of the controls and obtaining guarantees on the welfare of birds. This is particularly relevant for the verification of the killing method used for culling day-old chicks and the practice of beak-trimming.

Some farms keep both laying hens and pullets in different houses (so in fact they contain a pullet and laying hen farm in the same location). In these cases, as the rearing farm is used for

¹² [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health \('Animal Health Law'\)](#)

supplying pullets to the co-located laying hen holding, the rearing farm is not approved for intra-Union trade and therefore, not subjected to annual checks.

Inspection procedures and checklists

Member States have sufficient written procedures and instruction to ensure that controls are consistently applied at a national level.

Officials normally use checklists during the inspection, and they are usually part of the inspection records.

Good practice: Austria

- The central authorities have developed comprehensive checklists not only for farms keeping laying hens but also for breeding farms, farms keeping pullets, and hatcheries.
- Officials use the lists when performing the animal welfare checks at farms.
- The checklists are also available to farmers. They can perform a self-assessment of their farms using the same criteria as official services.

The project identified some opportunities to improve the effectiveness of written procedures:

- Many checklists contain statements which are **vague, difficult to interpret** or simply mirror the legislative wording. This does not help the officials conducting the inspection and leads to inconsistencies between them when assessing the same requirement. For example, this happens for the assessment of the nest, where there is no guidance for the officials on the characteristics that a nest must fulfil to consider it compliant.
- Documented procedures do **not always include instructions for ensuring consistency and accuracy of inspection records** (e.g., what checks are needed to score a checkpoint as compliant, when to score a checkpoint as not applicable or not checked or when and what to record in the comments section). For example, when officials evaluate beak trimming at farms keeping laying hens without further instructions, it is not clear for the officials whether the control is about the process of beak trimming of adult hens on that farm or the use of birds with trimmed beaks at that farm for preventing feather pecking and cannibalism.
- Most authorities keep the completed checklists only in paper format. Not using IT systems to load the data makes it very time consuming to carry out an **analysis of data** to get overviews and trends, and it also makes it difficult to perform that analysis outside the local level.

Good practice: Germany

- The use of a common software platform for recording the result of the checks allows their analysis.
- The Länder assess the number of checks, the frequency of the identified non-

compliances and their rectification.

- One Land ran a project for verifying the effectiveness of the official controls and the level of compliance in the sector during 2019.
- That project identified a considerable proportion of farms with moderate overstocking situations.
- Considering the outcome of that project, the Land implemented an additional annual official control of the hen density (simultaneously with the Salmonella controls) in all the farms with more than 1 000 hens.

8 ANIMAL WELFARE CHECKS

The project identified that the most frequent non-compliances found during the official controls are:

- Overstocking (or insufficient space).
- Inadequate equipment.
- Record keeping.

Stocking density:

One of the most relevant parameters for protecting the welfare of the hens is the **stocking density** (number of hens per square meter) and thus its official verification is important.

The audits uncovered that **the main weakness in the official controls for the welfare of laying hens refers to the calculation of the maximum stocking density of cages**. The European Commission found routine overstocking in farms under some of the competent authorities audited.

The main causes for miscalculation are:

1. Competent authorities usually consider the number of hens present at the time of the inspection to assess compliance with stocking densities. However, they may **overlook overstocking at the time of introducing the birds** into the house, a practice that operators may use for compensating the expected mortality between the moment of introduction (as pullets) and the moment they start laying, which is when EU rules on the welfare of laying hens (including on stocking densities) start to apply.
2. Some authorities **rely on the operator's declaration** (in some cases supported by data and plans of the housing) at the time of the registration, but they do not verify whether the documents reflect the reality or whether, at a later stage, the producer made changes affecting the maximum permitted stocking density.
3. Absence of separate calculations to establish the **maximum capacities of each housing unit (cages or/and houses)** considering their dimensions and features and taking into account the limiting factors.

The *limiting factor* is the area (e.g., usable area, littered area) or feature (e.g., drinkers, perches) determining the maximum number of hens that can be kept in certain space (house, cage) considering the legal requirements. Some competent authorities use

software tools to calculate the maximum hen capacity and to identify the limiting factor. It is important to conduct some kind of verification of the established limiting factor considering particularly that alteration of the features (e.g., perches, drinkers) may occur as a consequence of the ongoing maintenance and operation of the farm.

4. **Wrong calculations:** some officials include as usable area parts that they should not, such as nests and verandas that are not permanently accessible.

Most Member States have databases (e.g., for animal movements) which they could use to **check compliance remotely with the maximum hen capacity of the farm**, by crossmatching data on pullet intake, dispatch of end-of-lay hens and the maximum hen capacity recorded in the laying hens register. However, this possibility is not systematically used as part of the controls.

The legislation defines laying hens ⁽¹³⁾ as hens which have reached egg-laying maturity, thus the requirements for densities do not apply to pullets at the beginning of their placement. Some Member States have legislation establishing, for older pullets, the same stocking density as that required for laying hens. This avoids the potential **uncertainty of the assessment of the stocking density of laying hens at the beginning of the laying cycle**.

Good practice: Germany

- Germany identified a risk of overstocking at the beginning of the laying phase. In the manual for official controls, it defined the concept of “*flock’s laying maturity*”, which is the moment when 50% of the maximum laying capacity has been reached for three consecutive days.
- That definition provides certainty to the officials about the assessment of the stocking density rules at the beginning of the laying cycle when the pullets are introduced in the laying hen houses.

Member States have not used the legal possibility ⁽¹⁴⁾ of assigning an individual code for each house of the laying hen establishment, which would allow the implementation of a register per house and facilitate the official controls.

There is no EU specific requirement to include in a register the maximum capacity of pullet and breeding farms, and this is only done where national legislation defines housing criteria for pullets and breeders. When the national rules do not establish these criteria, the inspectors have to assess compliance with the requirements in Directive 98/58/EC subjectively, deciding whether the number of birds in those farms is adequate to minimise welfare issues.

Verandas

In free-range and organic systems, **verandas** or wintergardens are required or encouraged in several Member States. They are covered areas without solid walls acting as a transition area

¹³ [Directive 1999/74/EC defines ‘laying hens’ as hens of the species *Gallus gallus* which have reached laying maturity and are kept for production of eggs not intended for hatching.](#)

¹⁴ [Directive 2002/4/EC states that Member States can add further characters to the identification number, as for the identification of single flocks kept in separated buildings of an establishment.](#)

between the indoor (barn) and outdoor part (open-air runs) of the house. They reduce contact with wild birds and provide additional shelter to hens with outdoor access. Verandas can also be installed in alternative farming systems without outdoor access (barn system) providing additional enrichment and natural light.

Verandas facilitate the confinement of free-range hens during animal health restrictions imposed due to the seasonal risk of avian influenza. Under the EU legislation on egg marketing standards (i.e. stocking densities, vegetation cover), verandas do not meet some the conditions for being considered open-air runs. Therefore, they cannot be used for supporting the marketing of eggs labelled as free-range when those influenza-related confinements are extended beyond 16 weeks.

However, the organic legislation permits the partial covering of the open-air areas and that the open-air area shall be mainly covered with vegetation which suggests that verandas may be considered part of the open-air areas in the case of organic poultry.

As the floor of the verandas is litter, the competent authorities usually accept the verandas as littered area for calculating the maximum stocking densities in barn and free-range farms. However, continuous access to the verandas is generally not compatible with commercial production and the protection of the hens. Access to these areas is only provided during daytime and the consideration of the verandas as usable area is therefore incorrect because the hens must have continuous access to the littered area. For example, some competent authorities required special heating equipment at the veranda pop-holes for accepting its continuous accessibility without affecting the welfare of the hens.

Biosecurity

To improve the biosecurity of poultry houses, during periods of high risk of avian influenza in high-risk areas, hens that normally have access to the outdoors (free-range and organic systems) may need to be confined indoors. Member States may require the compulsory confinement of poultry to reduce the risk of contact with wild birds and, therefore, the risk of infection by avian influenza. Such a sudden change in the farming conditions can cause a potential alteration of hens' behaviour which may increase the risk of feather pecking or injurious pecking.

Houses equipped with **verandas** improve the biosecurity of farming systems with outdoor access and may reduce the impact of the confinements on hens' behaviour. A veranda provides natural light, fresh air, additional enriched space with litter and, particularly when the walls are wire mesh screen, it reduces the risk of contact with wild birds and predators.

The egg marketing rules require, for free-range systems, daily access to the outdoors. The egg marketing legislation allows the marketing of eggs as free-range when the hens producing them have been confined up to 16 weeks due to measures imposed by the competent authority to protect public or animal health. Thus, **after 16 weeks of confinement**, the **eggs should not be marketed as free-range** because. When the compulsory confinement extends for longer periods, preventing the marketing of the eggs as free-range, it requires additional measures from producers/retailers (amendment of egg labels, communication to consumers)

and authorities (verification). This factor has less impact on organic farms because the organic rules require access to outdoors for only one third of the hens' life.

Although temporal confinement does not affect the organic labelling of eggs to the extent that it does for free-range eggs, the organic legislation requires that, where poultry are kept indoors due to restrictions or obligations imposed on the basis of Union legislation, they shall permanently have access to sufficient quantities of roughage and suitable material in order to meet their ethological needs.

Nests, perches and litter

The verification of EU rules for cage enrichment, and their suitability for allowing hens to express natural behaviour is challenging. The industry requires pragmatic designs facilitating their maintenance, operation, and cleaning which, in some cases, has led to a minimalist design. Competent authorities usually approach this challenge through guidance for inspectors and/or industry.

There are different interpretations across the Member States regarding the **minimum requirements for nests**. This arises from a broad definition of the requirements in EU law⁽¹⁵⁾. In practice, the accepted design of cage nests is often very basic, simply consisting of a small space within the cage that is equipped with plastic strips curtain on one or more sides.

- EU legislation requires the nest to be a “separate space”. In most cases, plastic strip curtains provide that separation.
- The nest floor shall avoid the contact of the wire mesh with the bird. In most cases, farmers use perforated plastic plates, plastic coating of the wire mesh or artificial turf for preventing such contact. Artificial turf is broadly accepted as litter, and some authorities consider that artificial turf at the nest as both litter and nest floor.
- There is no minimum dimension for the nest.
- EU legislation does not establish any temporal availability of the nest. Although in most cases hens have continuous access to nests, some farming practices may limit that availability (e.g., for preventing brooding behaviour).

When Member States have specific national requirements and where competent authorities have provided clear guidance for their officers, the approach is more consistent, and the nest seems to provide more private and comfortable area for laying hens.

Good practice: Poland

- The competent authorities have included clear instructions in the inspection manual, requiring the shielding of the nest on its four sides for allowing the hens to lay eggs without being disturbed by other hens.
- This ensures the appropriateness of the nest and that officials have a uniform and consistent approach to checking nests and establishing their compliance.

¹⁵ Directive 1999/74/EC defines ‘nest’ as a separate space for egg laying, the floor components of which may not include wire mesh that can come into contact with the birds, for an individual hen or for a group of hens (group nest).

EU legislation does not require any specific design or location of perches ⁽¹⁶⁾ in enriched cages. In some cage designs, perches are positioned to form a cross or a “T”, and manufacturers calculate the stocking density using the total length of these perches. Hens however cannot perch at the same time on both axis of an intersection as this would in practice mean placing one hen on top of the other.

EU legislation requires the provision of litter ⁽¹⁷⁾ in all the farming systems. In the case of cages, in practice, a piece of a mat of synthetic turf completed with scattering grains over the mat is used as litter in most cases. As indicated previously, when verandas exist, officials often consider they fulfil the requirement regarding provision of litter.

The legislation does not require access to a littered area at all times and in some cases, the access is temporarily restricted, such as:

- In cages using dust baths which are closed at some time of the day.
- In alternative systems, when the veranda is part of the minimum littered area and its access is closed, for example, at night.

Moulting

Most of the competent authorities assume that forced moulting is not carried out in their territories and they do not include checks to verify whether it happens. They generally do not assess it specifically during their checks at farms or at slaughterhouses. Competent authorities assess adequate feeding, access to water and the use of substances as part of the on-site checks but the explicit assessment of the force moulting is rare.

Good practice: Italy

- The authorities have established a system to verify the moulting process when laying hens are kept in the farm beyond a set age limit (i.e., 60-80 weeks old).
- Operators keeping hens after moulting provide information to the authorities concerning the lighting, feeding and watering regime.
- The authorities can verify that there is no forced moulting process.

Beak trimming

Some Member States reported that the industry finds the control of injurious pecking more challenging in brown laying hens than in white laying hens and some of the Member States successfully control feather pecking while completely banning beak trimming by keeping predominantly white laying hens.

¹⁶ Directive 1999/74/EC requires, for enriched cages, appropriate perches allowing at least 15 cm per hen.

¹⁷ [Directive 1999/74/EC defines “litter” as any friable material enabling the hens to satisfy their ethological needs, and requires, for enriched cages, litter such that pecking and scratching are possible.](#)

The situation regarding beak trimming ⁽¹⁸⁾ varies across the EU. Most Member States have a system generically authorising the beak trimming. Other Member States specifically authorise its use in specific farms. Some Member States do not allow it for hens kept in their territory but allow it for chicks sent to other Member States or exported to third countries. A small number of Member States have completely banned the practice. Furthermore, some private quality schemes ban its use among their members.

When performed, beak trimming is normally conducted at the hatcheries using laser/infrared methods and is applied to up to one third of the beak. It may also take place using other methods when the day-old chicks arrive to the rearing farms. Some hatcheries perform the trimming systematically while others do so on demand.

Competent authorities tend to focus their controls on beak trimming procedure at the hatcheries, paying less attention to the assessment of the justification of the use of laying hens with trimmed beaks unless they identify problems with feather pecking.

Beak trimming is only allowed for preventing feather pecking and cannibalism. Feather pecking can affect hens in any system and outbreaks can happen suddenly. The root cause of these abnormal behaviours is multifactorial but there is a strong component related to rearing conditions (e.g., stocking density, provision of litter, ventilation, keeper's daily inspection, staff competence). The risk of injurious behaviour can be reduced by good practices. It would be plausible to identify farms using beak trimming as farms with a higher risk of poor animal welfare conditions. The documents accompanying the chicks and pullets to the different farms do not indicate whether the birds have been subjected to beak trimming.

As in most cases beak trimming is performed systematically at hatcheries for supplying any farm (independently whether the farms have a problem of feather pecking or not), inspectors do not question why hens are beak trimmed when they inspect laying hens, neither do they gather data about the prevalence of its use. The competent authorities rarely know which and how many farms keep hens with trimmed beaks. Many Member States are therefore not in a position to take this information into account when planning their risk-based controls. Such information could be gathered, for example, when visiting the farms for official controls for animal welfare or other purposes (e.g., Salmonella sampling).

Animal welfare indicators

The current EU legislation focusses more on farming systems than on the welfare condition of the hens and does not require the use of animal welfare indicators apart from checks on mortality rates. The approach to the inspections, as reflected by guides, instructions and checklists, is generally consistent with that focus. However, inspectors indicate that they usually assess the conditions of the hens (e.g., feather coverage, feet condition) using their professional judgement and experience.

Very few authorities (e.g., Italy) use animal welfare indicators.

¹⁸ [Directive 1999/74/EC states that in order to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism, the Member States may authorise beak trimming provided it is carried out by qualified staff on chickens that are less than 10 days old and intended for laying.](#)

Officials check on-farm **mortality data** ⁽¹⁹⁾ during official controls on farms and take them into consideration for assessing compliance with the welfare rules. In some Member States, national rules require rendering companies to report the collection of abnormally high numbers of dead poultry to the competent authorities. This allows the authorities to carry out targeted checks on those farms.

9 END-OF-LAY HENS

Although not specifically included in the scope of the project, the transport of **end-of-lay hens**, also known as spent hens, seems to pose a high risk for animal welfare, considering the limited availability of local slaughterhouses accepting this category of bird, the impact of the transport on hens' welfare and the low market value of the end-of-lay hens.

These hens are usually transported to slaughterhouses to produce poultry meat or meat products. In some Member States or regions, there are no poultry slaughterhouses accepting them due to economic reasons (e.g., lack of market demand, low meat yield) or technical reasons (e.g., non-standardised size) so they are transported to slaughterhouses in other Member States or regions, often over long journeys.

The dispatch of end-of-lay hens to other Member States represents a challenge for establishing national animal welfare indicators that can only be assessed at *ante-mortem* (e.g., on-farm mortality data accompanying the flock) or *post-mortem* (e.g., incidence of pathological injuries; compliance with beak-trimming rules) inspection in slaughterhouses.

Unlike for broilers, for which the legislation requires on-farm mortality data to be included in the food chain information, there is no equivalent requirement for end-of-lay hens. This reduces the possibility of triggering targeted farm inspections as a result of excessive mortality rates reported at the time of slaughter.

In some cases, the competent authorities authorise the killing of hens on farm using authorised methods (e.g., based on carbon dioxide). The dead hens are handled as animal by-products.

Good practice: Sweden

- New hen houses have pre-installed gas inlet for killing the end-of-lay hens using gas.
- When they are not going to be used for producing meat for human consumption, this system provides a humane system for killing them on farm.
- The system spares them the stress involved in being caught, transported and handled at the slaughterhouse prior to stunning.
- The system can also be used in case the farm needs to be depopulated for animal health reasons (e.g., outbreaks of high pathogenic avian influenza).

¹⁹ [Directive 98/58/EC requires the owner or keeper of the animals to maintain a record of the number of mortalities found to each, at least, daily inspection.](#)

There are private initiatives for providing the end-of-lay hens with a “second life” by keeping them in free-range conditions producing eggs which are marketed as such.

10 HATCHERIES

As indicated previously, authorities rarely control animal welfare at hatcheries. This is due to the absence of specific EU requirements and to the fact that they do not perceive a big risk in these establishments with quick turnover of animals.

In the EU, most of the beak-trimming is conducted at the hatcheries. However, this procedure is not normally included in the official controls performed at hatcheries.

In the EU, the vast majority of male day-old chicks ⁽²⁰⁾ are culled at the hatchery. EU legislation regulates the culling of male day-old-chicks and embryos ⁽²¹⁾. It permits methods based on modified atmospheres (carbon dioxide), which is the only method used in some Member States, and the maceration of chicks up to 72 hours of age. The application of these rules prevents their suffering during culling, but it involves ethical considerations concerning many citizens and consumers.

At hatcheries, official controls cover the welfare at killing to a varying extent. Whereas the authorities of some Member States assess and approve the equipment, others require specific procedures. Almost none include official verification of the process. Most competent authorities do not systematically gather information about the number of culled day-old-chicks per hatchery, the killing method or beak trimming practices. Neither have they used that information to plan their risk-based controls.

Many competent authorities do not verify compliance with the requirements for killing methods at hatcheries.

Good practice: Spain

- National instructions on official controls cover animal welfare at hatcheries.
- A national instruction provides guidance to officials on how to check the killing of day-old chicks.
- Hatcheries are required to have detailed standard operating procedures for the killing of chicks.
- The officials can review those procedures to assess their technical correctness (e.g., gas temperature to prevent avoidable suffering to the chicks).

Some Member States such as Germany ⁽²²⁾ and France ⁽²³⁾ propose to ban the culling of male day-old-chicks and some Member States have no hatcheries. In Austria, killing of male

²⁰ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/692 defines “day-old chick” as poultry less than 72 hours old.](#)

²¹ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing](#)

²² [Phasing-out of chick culling in Germany](#)

²³ [La France sera le premier pays au monde, avec l'Allemagne, à mettre fin à l'élimination des poussins mâles](#)

chicks without a specific reason was recently banned and Luxembourg also banned the systematic destruction of chicks.

In some Member States, there are schemes and businesses rearing male chicks for meat production, which is usually coupled with labelling eggs produced by their “sister” hens with information or/and a distinctive stamp for enabling the egg consumers to support that practice. Genetic companies have dual-purpose hybrids which are more compatible with that practice but the rearing of those male chicks for meat production is still less efficient than from broiler hybrids, due to feed conversion rates and longer rearing period.

Novel technologies for sex determination of the embryo during the incubation (*in-ovo* sexing) has allowed to carry out the sexing before hatching and thus permitting stopping the incubation of eggs with male embryos. The day of incubation in which those methods can identify the sex of the embryo is going to be relevant in the near future, as at least one Member State is legislating to ban the destruction of embryonated eggs beyond the sixth day of incubation, while such early detection is not possible with the current technology.

11 MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY MEMBER STATES

The following points summarize opportunities for improvement identified by the Commission. They are presented here for consideration by the Member States.

1. To better coordinate the controls between different authorities visiting hen establishments, in order to gain efficiency and to keep other relevant authorities informed about data, risk rating, frequency and result of the checks.
2. To plan their controls using risks factors for which they have objective evidence of their impact on the welfare of the animal, and to take into consideration for that planning the results of previous controls including those performed by other reliable entities, such as quality assurance schemes.
3. To consider the specific risks in farms keeping pullets and hatcheries, and to include them in their animal welfare checks.
4. To train officials on how to establish the maximum stocking density in farms keeping laying hens by identifying the limiting factor, thus ensuring that these farms are not overstocked.
5. As part of the verification of overall effectiveness of official controls, to use representative non-risk-based official controls at farm to be able to verify that the targeting is correct.
6. To use IT systems to assess the results of the official controls and to use them to continuously improve the effectiveness of the official control system.

12 ACTIONS FROM THE COMMISSION

The DG SANTE's project conducted in 2021 to assess the official controls on the protection of the welfare of laying hens at all the stages of production in the European Union included audits of nine Member States (Annex II). The Commission is following up the actions proposed by the competent authorities to address the recommendations made during those audits.

The outcomes of the DG SANTE's project will also be analysed in the context of the revision of the animal welfare legislation and in the light of latest EFSA scientific opinions.

In June 2021, the Commission replied positively to the European Citizens' Initiative "End the Cage Age". In its reply, the Commission committed, as part of the ongoing revision of the animal welfare legislation under the Farm to Fork Strategy, to propose legislation by 2023 to phase out, and eventually ban, caged farming in the EU for the species included in the initiative.

The Commission also committed to consider specific supporting measures in related policy areas to facilitate a balanced and economically viable transition to cage-free farming, particularly within the Common Agricultural Policy.

In October 2022, at a meeting of the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries), Germany and France tabled a note calling for an "EU-wide end to the systematic killing of male chicks". In her response to the note, Commissioner Kyriakides supported the initiative and indicated that the Commission would conduct a thorough impact assessment of the phasing out of this practice as part of the ongoing EU's overhaul of its animal welfare legislation.

ANNEX I LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Reg. (EU) 2017/625	OJ L 95, 7.4.2017, p. 1	Regulation (EU) No 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products
Dir. 1999/74/EC	OJ L 203, 3.8.1999, p. 53	COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens
Dir. 98/58/EC	OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23	COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes
Dir. 2002/4/EC	OJ L 30, 31.1.2002, p.44	COMMISSION DIRECTIVE 2002/4/EC of 30 January 2002 on the registration of establishments keeping laying hens, covered by Council Directive 1999/74/EC
Reg. (EC) 1099/2009	OJ L 303, 18.11.2009, p. 1	Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing
Reg. (EC) 589/2008	OJ L 163, 24.6.2008, p. 6	COMMISSION REGULATION (EC) No 589/2008 of 23 June 2008 laying down detailed rules for implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 as regards marketing standards for eggs

Legal acts quoted in this report refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

ANNEX II DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL AUDITS/OTHER CONTROL ACTIVITIES

Member State	Dates of Audit/activity	SANTE reference
Netherlands	1 – 5 February 2021 (remote)	2021-7245
Italy	12 – 23 April 2021 (remote)	2021-7250
Austria	26 – 30 April 2021 (remote)	2021-7242
Poland	24 May – 2 June 2021 (remote)	2021-7323
Cyprus	14 – 18 June 2021 (remote)	2021-7247
Germany	21 September – 1 October 2021 (remote)	2021-7243
Spain	20 September – 1 October 2021 (hybrid)	2021-7248
Greece	1 -15 November 2021 (remote)	2021-7244
Sweden	23 November – 2 December 2021 (remote)	2021-7246

Reports of these audits are available at: https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit_reports/index.cfm

Member State	Dates of survey response	SANTE reference
Luxemburg	27 July 2021	2021-7602
Bulgaria	5 August 2021	2021-7601
Lithuania	6 August 2021	2021-7599
Latvia	13 August 2021	2021-7598
Hungary	16 August 2021	2021-7588
Estonia	19 August 2021	2021-7597
Denmark	19 August 2021	2021-7596
Czechia	20 August 2021	2021-7595
Finland	20 August 2021	2021-7593
Romania	20 August 2021	2021-7594
Slovakia	20 August 2021	2021-7592
Belgium	23 August 2021	2021-7603
Portugal	6 September 2021	2021-7591
Ireland	10 September 2021	2021-7590
Slovenia	11 September 2021	2021-7589
France	3 November 2021	2021-7587

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