

## Revealed: exported EU animals subject to abuse and illegal conditions

Undercover videos show EU cattle and sheep being beaten, given electric shocks, and inhumanely slaughtered at destinations in Turkey and Middle East



Irish cattle arrive in Turkey after a 12-day voyage. Their hair is matted with faeces from the journey. Photograph: Animals International

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Animals exported live from EU countries are routinely being subjected to abuse, illegal transportation conditions and inhumane slaughter, an investigation has found.

Dozens of undercover videos and photographs obtained by the Guardian show live cattle and sheep from EU countries being beaten, shocked with electric prods, held for days in overcrowded pens and covered head to toe in faeces as they are transported from Europe to their final destinations in Turkey and the Middle East in conditions that breach European law.

At their destination, at least some of the animals are slaughtered in appalling conditions. The footage shows cattle and sheep from France, Romania and Lithuania kicking and flailing violently as their throats are crudely cut or sawed at repeatedly, often in crowded street markets and run-down abattoirs.

The footage was collected over eight months by campaigners from the Australian animal rights charity Animals International, who worked undercover in Croatia and six Middle Eastern countries to follow animals from their departure at European ports through to destination.

The evidence they collected shows clear breaches of a number of European laws in almost every country the campaigners visited. European legislation maintains that export livestock must receive certain standards of care throughout the entire journey, including any stages that occur entirely in third countries. The standards dictate that animal handlers must carry out their task without violence or any method likely to cause unnecessary fear, injury or suffering; that transport and loading equipment must be designed, maintained and operated so as to avoid injury and suffering, and that transport is carried out without delay and at the minimum possible length.

The Guardian asked Conte & Giacomini, an Italian law firm specialising in animal rights and shipping and transport law, to review the evidence. They responded: “We might deem that the transports shown in the footage are all in breach of the [EU] Regulation EC No 1/2005 [on the protection of animals in transport].

“Moreover, we could also state that, according to the ruling of the European court of justice and to the interpretation of the regulation EC No 1/2005, the competent authorities of the member states of departure shouldn’t even have authorised these transports as they couldn’t ensure that provisions would be met,” they said.

In an EU port in Croatia, the video shows animals from at least five European countries, including Germany, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Slovenia, waiting to be loaded on to a vessel headed to Beirut. Cattle and sheep are seen being kicked, beaten and shocked with electric prods to the anus while being loaded on to the ship. A sheep is shown being picked up by an animal handler and thrown on to the boat; cows slide backwards on to each other while trying to climb steep loading ramps.



A cow exported from France is suspended by its leg in a Turkish abattoir. Photograph: Animals International

At a port in Turkey, footage shows cattle being unloaded from a vessel that has arrived from Ireland after a voyage of almost two weeks. Their hair is thick with faeces from the journey as they are crammed on to a small and open-topped truck to be transported along the next leg of the journey. In Palestine, Romanian cattle travelling unharnessed in the back of an overcrowded truck are shown being thrown violently against the railings, causing clear distress to the animals.

While European legislation covers EU export livestock up until they are unloaded at their final destination, it does not apply to the final stages of the animal's life. The footage shows repeated instances in multiple countries of animals being brutally slaughtered. In a street market in Jordan, a Romanian sheep spasms violently across the blood-soaked pavement after its throat is cut. In an abattoir in Turkey, French cattle hang by one leg from the ceiling, kicking and twisting violently as their throats are repeatedly cut at.

An Animals Australia investigation in 2011 showed the poor treatment of animals being exported to Indonesia. After a public outcry, a ban was temporarily introduced and new regulations were imposed. They include a responsibility to ensure that both the handling and slaughter of the animals in the importing country complies with the animal welfare recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Exports of livestock from the EU to the Middle East have grown rapidly in the past two years, with exports of cattle doubling since 2014 to 650,000 last year, while sheep exports rose by a quarter to 2.5 million, mostly to Libya, Lebanon and Jordan.

The increase in exports coincided with a landmark legal case at the European court of justice in 2015, in which the judge ruled that any transport provider carrying livestock from the EU to third countries must take steps to prove that they have complied with EU legislation throughout all stages of the journey. Transport providers are required to submit a log detailing their journey to the national authorities in the country of departure. It is these national authorities who are responsible for enforcing European regulations.

However, EU officials, member states and animal rights groups have repeatedly claimed that enforcement is poor across much of the continent. In November 2016, a paper presented by several member states to the European agriculture council called on the European commission to address the problem. It stated: "The continuing shortcomings in enforcement [of animal welfare in export laws] is simply not acceptable. Since the entry in to force of Regulation 1/2005 [on the protection of animals during transport], there have been numerous examples of infringements and lack of enforcement. Both member states and commission have to intensify their efforts to put an end to transports that are in obvious breach of the regulation".



A Lithuanian cow tied up in Palestine. Photograph: Animals International

Animal rights groups including the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) and Tierschutzbund Zürich believe that financial motives drive many export and transport

enterprises to breach European animal protection regulations, as it reduces costs and administrative charges. As a result, enterprises are encouraged to operate in member states with poorer enforcement of EU law.

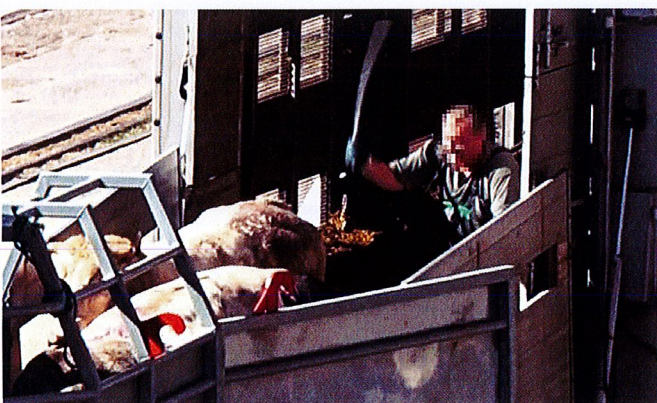
This view appears to be supported by the European commission's own Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015, in which the commission notes that "a diverging interpretation of [protection of animals in transport] rules may result in market distortions which, combined with reduced profit margins and different administrative costs, could put a transport business operator in a difficult situation. Furthermore, a lack of vigour in enforcement may put compliant transporters at disadvantage".

After watching the footage, MEPs from Germany, France, Lithuania and Finland said they are calling on the European commission for stronger enforcement of existing laws and an extension of legislation to cover the slaughter of European-bred animals in third countries.

Sirpa Pietikäinen, a Finnish MEP and president of the European parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals, said: "These shocking revelations should be the final frontier for the European commission to take this seriously. We need EU strategy on this issue. Better law enforcement, agreement with supervision on slaughtering practices, with the goal of ending the transportation of living animals for slaughter to third countries."

The MEPs join a growing movement that is calling for reform of Europe's animal transport regulations. The Eurogroup for Animals, the EU umbrella group for animal advocacy organisations, has collected more than 700,000 signatures urging the EU to put an end to long distance transport of live animals.

"Europe is to all effects exporting massive animal cruelty, which is largely invisible for EU citizens", says Reineke Hameleers, Eurogroup's director. "It is crystal clear that the transport regulation is not fit for purpose and that we should move towards a food system where animals are reared and slaughtered as close as possible to the place where they are born. This is not only paramount for animal welfare but also essential for food security, the environment and to protect public health."



Animals exported from EU countries are loaded on to a boat in Croatia. Photograph: Animals International

A European commission spokesman told the Guardian "The level of enforcement of existing EU legislation on animal welfare during transport has improved over the last years and has been considered one of the key priorities of the directorate general for

health and food safety. Although the responsibility for the enforcement lies primarily with the member states, the commission has made considerable efforts to improve the enforcement and provides active assistance to member states.”

The spokesman said: “The EU has limited power to enforce the union legislation on animal transport within the territory of non-EU countries. The commission will continue supporting training activities on animal welfare during transport and at slaughter, including for non-EU countries.”

The European commission has failed to respond to pressure on the protection of animals in transport before. In early 2016, animal rights groups Tierschutzbund Zürich, the AWF and Eyes on Animals presented the commission with a 1,000 page report detailing hundreds of cases of illegal treatment of animals being transported over land between Europe and Turkey in the hot summer months. The NGOs claim the commission ignored all their requests, including an appeal for transport of live animals to Turkey in the hottest summer months to be halted.

Iris Baumgärtner, project manager at AWF, said: “Despite the fact that the commission and the member states have been well informed since 2010 of the suffering of animals transported to Turkey, the situation remains unchanged and the numbers of animals being exported are increasing. The commission and member states are ignoring the core elements of their own regulations.”

The governments of Ireland, France, Germany, Romania, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland did not respond to requests for comment. The Slovenian agriculture ministry said: “Should the Slovenian competent authority receive any information on any non-compliances in live animal consignments aboard any vessels, we would immediately institute an investigation into the problem and, based on investigation results, we would institute the required and prescribed measures for the prevention of any subsequent non-compliances.”

The Croatian agriculture ministry said they saw no truth in the accusations and that necessary procedures and checks in line with the EU regulation are implemented in order to ensure animal welfare. They said competent veterinary authorities were always present “in order to monitor and undertake necessary corrective measures if irregularities are detected”.

- Animal welfare
- Animals
- Farming
- Court of justice of the European Union
- Middle East and North Africa
- Turkey