



Long-distance horse transports in the European Union

In 2012 alone, 36,465 horses were subjected to the stress of long-distance transportation from one EU Member State to another before they met their inauspicious ends in the abattoir.¹ Horses in the EU are routinely crammed into vehicles often unsuitable for carrying equines and then transported over long distances by road – and sometimes even by sea – before they reach their final destination. Journeys can last for several days and the animals are often transported across a number of national borders before being unloaded at the slaughterhouse.

Destination Italy: the centre of European horse slaughter

The vast majority of horses transported for slaughter are destined for Italy. Live horses are routinely transported to Italy over distances of hundreds or even a couple of thousand kilometres mainly from Eastern and Central European countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, but also from Belgium, France and Spain. Horses are also transported from outside the EU from as far afield as Russia. According to the Italian Institute of Statistics, 32,841 horses were imported to Italy in 2013; 32,316 of which derived from other EU Member States.²

The southern region of Puglia is the main destination for long-distance horse transports. Nearly half of all horses transported to Italy end their lives in this region. Of the 67,005 horses that were slaughtered in Italy in 2010, 31,144 were slaughtered in Puglia. The northern region of Veneto is the second most important region for horse slaughter, followed by Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont, Lombardy, Lazio, Sicily and Sardinia.³

¹ TRACES data on equidae for slaughter cited in Annex VIII of European Commission (2013) Animal Health DG SANCO Unit G2 Activity Report 2012.

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/resources/docs/ahsc_report_2012_en.pdf

² The majority of these horses are imported from slaughter, though smaller numbers may be used for breeding. Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica Monthly survey on external trade of live animals and meats - January - December - Year 2013

http://agri.istat.it/sag_is_pdwout/jsp/dawinci.jsp?q=plCER0000010000010000&an=2013&ig=1&ct=744&id=8A|72A

³ Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica Slaughtering of equidae (in quintals). Data by Region - Year 2010

http://agri.istat.it/sag_is_pdwout/jsp/dawinci.jsp?q=plA120000010000012000&an=2010&ig=1&ct=298&id=8A|9A|10A|51A



Horse transports to Poland, Belgium and France

In addition to Italy, other EU Member States such as Poland, Belgium and France, import significant numbers of horses for slaughter.

Of the 22,514 horses slaughtered in 2013⁴ in Poland, many originate from Germany, France, Hungary, Lithuania and the Netherlands.

Horses are also transported for slaughter to Belgium primarily from the Netherlands and Germany, but also from Denmark and France. A significant number of horses slaughtered in Belgium originate from these other EU Member States. The slaughter operation is far smaller than in Italy with some 8,734 horses being slaughtered there in 2013.⁵

France also imports live horses from other EU Member States, primarily from Belgium, Poland and Spain. The majority of these horses will have been imported for slaughter. The total number of horses imported to France has, however, significantly decreased from 6,820 in 2007 to 2,441 in 2012. France also exports live horses to Italy, Poland, Spain and Belgium though again the numbers shipped to Italy have also fallen significantly from 7,396 in 2008⁶ to 4,337 in 2012.⁷

Animal welfare problems associated with long-distance horse transports

The long-distance transport of live horses for slaughter can involve serious animal suffering. Below is an overview of the kind of animal welfare problems that are typically associated with such transports:

- Horses placed on long-distance transports may already be in poor state of health, due to existing injuries, disease and no longer fit for purpose originally kept;
- Horses deliberately fattened for slaughter may be obese;
- Some equidae, particularly 'unbroken' horses, have little or no previous experience with transportation and are unaccustomed to being loaded into and travelling in moving vehicles, increasing stress for these animals;

⁴ Central Statistical Office of Poland (2014) Statistical yearbook of agriculture 2013

⁵ beSTAT- SPF Economie, Statistiques des animaux abattus

<http://statbel.fgov.be/fr/statistiques/chiffres/economie/agriculture/transformation/animaux/> Accessed 2nd October 2014.

⁶ France AgriMer (2013) Les filières animales terrestres et aquatiques: Bilan 2012 - Perspectives 2013; p. 55.

⁷ TRACES data on equidae for slaughter cited in Annex VIII of European Commission (2013) Animal Health DG SANCO Unit G2 Activity Report 2012.



- Horses may also be unused to interacting with unfamiliar horses, which can lead to stress, aggression and injury;
- Horses often do not have sufficient access to water, food or rest during long-distance transportation;
- Horses are often densely packed into vehicles with inadequate space and inappropriate flooring to be able to balance and brace themselves during transportation. This can lead to an increased risk of animals falling and being unable to get back up again in a moving vehicle;
- The structures of the lorries and lack of partitioning to separate individual horses leads to a high level of injuries among horses transported;
- Horses suffer from thermo-regulation problems in hot temperatures with high humidity and inadequate ventilation. There is a risk of (severe) dehydration, which leads to a greater susceptibility to respiratory disease, gastro-intestinal disease and other infections;
- Increase the spread of infectious equine diseases, such as Equine Infectious Anaemia, throughout the European Union;⁸

EU legislation to protect horses during transport

Horses in the EU are classified as farm animals, which means that their transportation (as part of an economic activity) is presently regulated under the terms of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations. This legislation is supposed to be designed to prevent injury and suffering to animals, and to ensure that they are transported under the appropriate conditions.

The Regulation is not just applicable to transporters and drivers, but to all those involved in the transport of animals (i.e. farmers, slaughterhouse personnel, staff at assembly centres and markets). All of these parties are supposed to be appropriately trained. Drivers and attendants are specifically required to undergo animal welfare training and possess a certificate of competence as proof.

Under the terms of the legislation, transporters must be officially authorised by the competent Member State authority for any live animal transport over 65km. For transports exceeding eight hours, the transporters require more detailed documentation, including information

⁸ In May 2010, the EU took steps to strengthen measures to prevent the spread of Equine Infectious Anaemia from Romania (where it is endemic) to other Member States. Equidae may only be exported from holdings certified as being free from the disease and additional testing is required before transport. European Commission Press Release, 4th May 2010.



on contingency plans, and proof that they are using a satellite navigation system.

The Regulation also sets down rules for approved control posts at which transported animals are supposed to be rested for a minimum of 12 hours and to receive food, water and appropriate care. However, this only applies to journeys within the EU, which means that horses being from outside the EU may have already had long journeys without any rest before they enter a Member State.

Transport Regulation fails to safeguard animal welfare

Despite this animal transport legislation, there has been a failure to adequately protect the welfare of horses (and other farm animals) being transported for slaughter within the European Union. Investigations carried out by World Horse Welfare and Animals' Angels have revealed serious and routine violations of Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 and the failure to protect the welfare of horses during long-distance transports in the EU.

They have found that horses are not provided with adequate rest, water and food during transport and are being shipped through Europe under unacceptable transport conditions. Moreover, their shocking undercover footage reveals how many horses arrive at their destinations with injuries, open wounds and nasal discharge. These animals also exhibit the signs of stress, exhaustion and dehydration.⁹

EFSA recommendations on horse transport

A report by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the welfare of animals during transport concluded that the entire journey duration (including resting periods, watering and feeding intervals) for horse should not normally exceed 12 hours. It also states that horses should have continual access to an unrestricted supply of clean drinking water for a period of one hour before transport and for one hour immediately following transport.¹⁰

EFSA recommends that to avoid aggression leading to injury, horses (except for mares travelling with their foals) should always be transported in individual stalls or pens, irrespective of whether they are being transported by road, rail, air or sea. Finally, EFSA also advises that partitions are used between stalls, which should protect and physically isolate each animal both physically and socially.

⁹ World Horse Welfare (2008) Recommendations for amendments to EU Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005: dossier of evidence

¹⁰ EFSA Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW); Scientific Opinion concerning the welfare of animals during transport. EFSA Journal 2011;9(1):1966.[125 pp.].



8 hours maximum journey time

More broadly, the EU animal welfare transport legislation has been deemed woefully inadequate to protect the welfare of animals under transportation. There are serious problems with the enforcement of the Regulation by many Member State authorities. A recent animal welfare campaign, supported by Humane Society International, has called for the established of a maximum journey time of 8 hours for the movement of animals transported for slaughter in the EU.

This call for legislative change has also been endorsed by the European Parliament, which adopted a Declaration to these ends in March 2012.¹¹ Thus far calls to change the EU animal transport legislation have fallen on deaf ears with the Commission, who appear reluctant to change the existing Regulation.

A carcass only trade

Short of ending horse slaughter altogether, the most effective way of reducing the suffering of horses in Europe is to move towards a carcass only horsemeat trade. In some Member States, this would necessarily require additional establishments being approved for the slaughter of horses to enable shorter transport distances where no appropriate facilities to slaughter horses presently exist.

It is clear from the sheer scale of exports of chilled and frozen horsemeat from third countries – and re-exports of this meat as part of intra-EU trade – that there is already a market for such products in the EU Member States where horsemeat is still consumed.

There is a clear need for consumers, particularly in Italy, who have an apparent preference for meat from horses that have been locally slaughtered to be better educated about the origins of their horsemeat. Increased consumer awareness through public education and labelling would contribute significantly to the cessation of long-distance live horse transports in Europe.

¹¹ Written declaration on the establishment of a maximum 8-hour journey limit for animals transported in the European Union for the purpose of being slaughtered
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7_TA\(2012\)0096&language=EN#ref_1_1](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7_TA(2012)0096&language=EN#ref_1_1)