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FINAL REPORT OF AN AUDIT  
OF SPAIN  
CARRIED OUT  
FROM 22 SEPTEMBER TO 6 OCTOBER 2025  
IN ORDER TO  
EVALUATE THE ANIMAL WELFARE CONTROLS IN PLACE AT  
SLAUGHTER AND DURING RELATED OPERATIONS

*In response to information provided by the competent authority, any factual error noted in the draft report has been corrected*

## ***Executive summary***

*This report describes the outcome of a Directorate-General Health and Food Safety audit of Spain carried out from 22 September to 6 October 2025, as part of its work programme.*

*The main objective of the audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of official controls on business operators to ensure that animals are spared any avoidable pain, distress, or suffering during their killing and related operations. The audit also assessed the actions taken in response to the recommendations made in the previous audit report DG(SANTE) 2014-7079.*

*In addition to the main objective, and as the official controls in slaughterhouses contribute to controls on animal welfare on farms and welfare during transport, the audit also evaluated whether: indications of poor welfare conditions of chickens kept for the production of meat are being detected at slaughterhouse level; only animals which are fit for transport are sent to slaughterhouses, and whether this is supported by “emergency slaughter” on farm.*

*The report concludes that the authorities in Spain have established good cooperation between the different authorities involved in animal welfare controls.*

*The system of official controls is mostly achieving consistent and effective results with official controls correctly detecting and reporting most slaughterhouse operator non-compliances and requiring correction of animal welfare issues. This, and operators’ awareness of how to provide proper animal welfare at slaughter ensured generally satisfactory welfare in most operations at all slaughterhouses.*

*However, when operators are unwilling to comply, the administratively burdensome and lengthy sanctioning process is not always dissuasive. Sanctioning procedures that are not dissuasive reduce the effectiveness of official controls and may result in extended animal suffering through either continuing or repetitive non-compliances.*

*The national legal framework goes beyond EU requirements by requiring video surveillance in slaughterhouse areas with live animals. This is seen as positive for animal welfare by both the operators and the authorities and contributes to improving animal welfare.*

*The measures taken after the 2014 audit have largely addressed the recommendations made in that audit report. Communication between the authorities involved in animal welfare at slaughter, at farm and during transport have improved significantly. The data currently available is insufficient to confirm that the improved communication and actions taken resulted in corresponding improvements in welfare at farm of broilers and decreased the transport of unfit animals to the slaughterhouses.*

*The report contains a recommendation to the competent authorities to address the main shortcoming identified.*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
2014 audit report	Report DG SANTE 2014-7079
ACs	Autonomous Communities
AESAN	Spanish Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition ( <i>Agencia Española de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutrición</i> )
EU	European Union
MANCP	Multi-annual national control plan
MAPA	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ( <i>Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación</i> )
the Regulation	Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing
SOP	Standard operating procedure

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This audit of Spain took place from 22 to 26 September and 6 October 2025 remotely, and on-the-spot from 29 September to 3 October 2025. It was undertaken as part of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety's planned audit programme. The audit team comprised two auditors from the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety.

The audit team held an opening meeting on 22 September 2025 with the Spanish competent authorities. The Spanish Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition (*Agencia Española de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutrición*, 'AESAN') the central competent authority for welfare at slaughter. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (*Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación*, 'MAPA') the central competent authority for animal welfare for the other areas within the scope of this audit. Representatives from the competent authorities of the four Autonomous Communities (ACs) audited.

At this meeting the audit team confirmed the objective of, and itinerary for, the audit, and requested additional information and further clarification on some of the documents and information received before the audit.

AESAN representatives participated in every meeting throughout the audit (remote and on-the-spot) and coordinated the videoconferences and sharing of the required information.

## 2 OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND AUDIT CRITERIA

The main objective of the audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of official controls on business operators to ensure animals are spared any avoidable pain, distress, or suffering during their killing and related operations. In particular the audit aimed at:

- assessing the actions that authorities took in response to recommendations in the previous audit (report DG SANTE 2014-7079, '2014 audit report');
- evaluating whether official controls give confidence that business operators comply with applicable requirements of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009; and
- assessing whether official controls, carried out under Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council, are suitable to ensure the effective implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009.

In addition to the main objective, and as the official controls in slaughterhouses contribute to controls on animal welfare on farms and welfare during transport, the audit also evaluated whether:

- indications of poor welfare conditions of chickens kept for the production of meat are being detected at slaughterhouse level and subsequently reported and acted on, as required by Article 3 and Annex III to Council Directive 2007/43/EC; and
- only animals which are fit for transport are sent to slaughterhouses, as required by Article 3 and Chapter I of Annex I to Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005, and whether this is supported by the implementation of the procedures laid down in section I, chapter VI of Annex III to

Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which facilitates the killing of “emergency slaughter” animals on farm and sending their carcasses to the slaughterhouse.

The scope of the audit included:

- main farmed species (poultry, porcine, bovine, ovine, caprine and equine);
- large and small throughput slaughterhouses and killing/slaughter at farm level;
- all operations, facilities and equipment related to slaughter;
- business operators’ systems for ensuring compliance with Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 requirements, and
- official controls at central, regional and local level, including verification and audits, in the last three years (2023-2025).

The scope excludes killing of animals on farms in the context of disease control situations.

The audit criteria were:

- Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (‘the Regulation’);
- Regulation (EU) 2017/625 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.

In pursuit of these objectives, the audit team had the following remote meetings:

<b>Competent authorities</b>		
AESAN and MAPA	2	Opening and closing meetings, with attendance also of ACs representatives.
ACs	4	With representatives of the audited ACs

and visited the following sites:

Poultry slaughterhouses	4	Slaughtering chickens and turkeys
Mammal slaughterhouses	4	Slaughtering cattle and sheep

### **3 LEGAL BASIS**

The audit was carried out under the general provisions of EU legislation and, in particular Articles 116, 117, and 119 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

EU legal acts quoted in this report are provided in Annex 1 and refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

## 4 BACKGROUND

Every year, billions of animals are slaughtered in the EU for food. This process takes place largely out of public view, but how animals are treated in their final moments matters deeply to consumers and to society. Ensuring that animals are spared avoidable pain, distress or suffering during killing is a legal obligation and, moreover, an ethical one.

Since 2013, EU rules on the protection of animals at the time of killing — set out in the Regulation — have applied across all Member States. These rules place clear responsibilities on slaughterhouse operators and require national authorities to check that businesses comply.

This new series of audits looks at how effectively countries are enforcing those rules today, more than a decade after they entered into force.

In Spain, livestock production remains a key driver of the agri-food sector and a major contributor to EU totals. In 2024, approximately 53.9 million pigs were slaughtered, a 1.5% rise from 2023, while bovine numbers declined to around 6.1 million head and 13.4 million sheep were recorded. Spain is the EU's top producer in pig and sheep categories. Poultry holdings represent the one growing segment of the livestock census (up by 9.5% from 2020 to 2023).

Briefly the overall conclusions of the 2014 audit report were that official controls on:

- mammal slaughterhouses were generally effective. Some weaknesses concerned restraining boxes for bovine animals and on training and issuing of certificates of competence for slaughterhouse staff;
- poultry slaughterhouses were insufficient to ensure business operator compliance with the Regulation and acceptable bird welfare at stunning and slaughter;
- transport of unfit animals to slaughterhouses were not effective, with sanctions applied not being dissuasive enough to prevent it from being a major problem;
- the recording of specific welfare indicators post-mortem at poultry slaughterhouses, with official control intervention levels and follow up procedures were not yet in place or were just starting to be implemented.

The report included 11 recommendations, and the competent authorities sent an action plan to address them. One recommendation remained still open (see paragraph 75) at the time of the present audit.

## 5 MAIN CONCLUSIONS

1. The competent authorities have a varied approach to planning, performing and supervising the effectiveness of official controls. Nevertheless, this varied approach is based on nationally agreed principles and is generally correctly implemented. It achieves mostly consistent and effective results, with official controls correctly detecting, reporting and addressing most operator non-compliances.

2. The national legal framework goes beyond EU requirements by requiring video surveillance in slaughterhouse areas with live animals. This is seen as positive for animal welfare by both the operators and the authorities and contributes to improving animal welfare.
3. Structural conditions in slaughterhouses generally support adequate animal welfare. However, weaknesses in official controls in some establishments allowed certain shortcomings in facilities and practices to go undetected, resulting in avoidable animal distress.
4. The lack of online instructions from manufacturers of restraining and stunning equipment can cause difficulties for operators in using this equipment in optimal conditions, reducing the effectiveness of welfare safeguards during slaughter operations.
5. Handling and restraining operations generally provided adequate animal welfare. Stunning was effective, ensuring continued loss of consciousness and sensibility from stunning until death and preventing distress during this period.
6. Most operators have the necessary knowledge and motivation to ensure proper animal welfare at slaughter. Improvements in animal welfare at slaughter are driven by that, supported by effective official control activities with adequate follow-up actions from operators. However, administratively burdensome and lengthy sanctioning process reduce the dissuasive effect of enforcement when operators are reluctant to comply. Sanctioning procedures are not dissuasive, risking repeated or prolonged animal suffering.
7. The measures taken after the 2014 audit have largely addressed earlier recommendations made. Communication between the authorities involved in animal welfare at slaughter, at farm and during transport has improved significantly. However, available data are insufficient to confirm whether these improvements resulted in better welfare at farm for broilers and reduced the transport of unfit animals to the slaughterhouses.

## 6 MAIN FINDINGS

### 6.1 FRAMEWORK FOR OFFICIAL CONTROLS

*The key strength of the official control systems framework is the good cooperation between authorities, at central and AC (implementing) level, in developing national instructions that facilitate ensuring consistency of the official controls between all 17 ACs.*

*The use of video surveillance in slaughterhouse areas with live animals is seen as positive for animal welfare by both the operators and the official controls.*

*There is clear designation and allocation of responsibilities and tasks at the different authority levels.*

1. Spain's multi-annual national control plan ('MANCP', available in Spanish at [https://www.aesan.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/documentos/seguridad\\_alimentaria/pncoca/PNCOCA\\_2021\\_2025\\_V5\\_Rev\\_Espana.pdf](https://www.aesan.gob.es/AECOSAN/docs/documentos/seguridad_alimentaria/pncoca/PNCOCA_2021_2025_V5_Rev_Espana.pdf)) describes the organisation of the official control systems in Spain, including for animal welfare.
2. Very summarily, the central competent authorities are AESAN, for slaughterhouses, and MAPA, for farm and transport, and are responsible for national level legislation and coordination. The ACs are responsible for implementation of official controls over these three areas. This is in line with Article 4(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. Local level authorities usually do not perform official controls in the areas within the scope of this audit.
3. The MANCP includes four high-level objectives, three of them focused on risk reduction through compliance and official controls, and one focused on guaranteeing a high level of food quality. The three high-level objectives focussed on risk reduction include a reference to 'animal welfare'. Each high-level objective is further developed in several strategic objectives.
4. One high-level objective includes animal welfare at slaughter. This high-level objective is split into five strategic objectives, one of which has an animal welfare component. This is strategic objective 2.1 that calls for improving 'compliance with the food hygiene regulation and animal welfare in food establishments'. The MANCP does not go into further details and refers to the specific programme for slaughterhouses and other establishments (see also paragraphs 16 and 17). The MANCP clearly states the competent authorities and the coordination mechanisms; however, neither the high-level nor the strategic-level objective applicable to animal welfare during slaughter operations include measurable parameters or baselines which would allow to assess whether these objectives are met.
5. Royal Decree 37/2014 of 24 January 2014 regulates some aspects of animal protection at the time of slaughter and implements the Regulation nationally. Royal Decree 361/2009 of 20 March 2009 regulates the food chain information that must accompany animals intended for slaughter.

*The legal framework is in line with the relevant EU legislation and goes beyond it by requiring video surveillance in slaughterhouses*

*Both official veterinarians and slaughterhouse operators consider video surveillance useful to support animal welfare.*

Royal Decree 159/2023 of 7 March 2023 lays down provisions for the application in Spain of EU legislation on official controls on animal welfare and amends prior royal decrees.

6. Royal Decree 695/2022 of 23 August 2006 lays down measures for the control of animal welfare in slaughterhouses by installing video surveillance systems in the areas with live animals (unloading, lairage, restraint and stunning). Video surveillance of animal welfare goes beyond EU requirements in the Regulation. Additionally, the Royal Decree 37/2014 of 24 January 2014 lays down provisions for slaughterhouse operators to also register time of arrival of each live animal truck and time of unloading of those animals.
7. Operators met generally considered these cameras useful to remotely supervise the workers and detect mistakes even when the animal welfare officer is not present beside the worker. One operator mentioned that having the surveillance cameras helped in collecting images for use during internal staff training to illustrate both good practices and mistakes to avoid.
8. Official veterinarians also considered video surveillance useful to obtain details on what occurred before and during events affecting animal welfare. The use of video surveillance images helped in identifying causes and/or responsibilities for incidents and facilitated applying enforcement measures, including sanctions, when needed.
9. AESAN and to some extent MAPA have requested the scientific support covered by Article 20(1) of the Regulation. AESAN requested support on different operational matters from technical consultations, reviews or setting up criteria for re-stunning of animals. In 2025, AESAN requested such support on quality requirements for CO<sub>2</sub> for stunning of pigs and on a new revision of the national instruction on stunning. MAPA requested support on revision of guidance documents and technical answers (see also paragraph 38).
10. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 1) taking actions to guarantee good coordination and cooperation between ACs' public and animal health departments to follow up on measures taken when controls at slaughter detect animal welfare non-compliances related to operations at farm and during transport. The competent authorities took actions to address this in 2015 and 2016, resulting in closure of this recommendation.
11. More recently (approved in 2022 and updated in 2025) AESAN and MAPA developed and agreed with the ACs on a national instruction for notification of such animal welfare non-compliances detected at slaughterhouses. This national instruction details communication flows, responsibilities for the required actions (if the non-compliance relates to

*There is good cooperation between the central and AC level authorities in developing nationally agreed instructions.*

the farm of origin, to transport or to slaughter operations) and deadline for the communication (see also section 6.3.5).

12. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 6) that procedures to facilitate the on-farm killing of animals should be developed and implemented, thereby, as far as practically possible, alleviating pain or suffering, as required in the Regulation. The competent authorities took actions to address this, resulting in closure of this recommendation.
13. AESAN, MAPA and the ACs developed and agreed (in 2017) a national instruction on ‘Actions at farm relating to fitness for transport to slaughterhouse and emergency killing’. This national instruction includes how to evaluate an animal’s fitness for transport, who, when, and how to perform emergency on-farm killing, or slaughter and dispatch to a slaughterhouse, of animals that suffered an accident and/or are unfit for transport (see also paragraphs 81 and 82).
14. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 7) ensuring that in all ACs, strong action is taken to:
  - assess the fitness for transport (Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005) when animals, particularly bovines, arrive at slaughterhouses; and
  - ensure effective enforcement action is taken as required at slaughterhouses and effective follow-up actions are instigated on farms and with transporters.

The competent authorities took actions to address this, resulting in closure of this recommendation (see also paragraphs 76 to 80).

## 6.2 PLANNING OF OFFICIAL CONTROLS

*The controls planned are a combination of daily inspections and risk-based audit type activities.*

15. There are no references or guidance in the MANCP on how the prioritisation of official controls and allocation of resources should reflect the high-level objectives or the strategic objectives.
16. The MANCP includes the framework for controls at slaughter which is further developed in a specific control programme for slaughterhouses (Programme 3). This programme includes permanent (often daily) and risk-based controls control tasks (with a frequency depending on the level of risk). Permanent controls include ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections, with most animal welfare issues detected during ante-mortem inspections. Risk-based control activities include inspections or audits specifically addressing animal welfare, which numbered close to 2 000 per year during the period 2018-2022. The control programme does not elaborate on how the risk-based control activities are decided, and this allows each AC to tailor them to their own circumstances.

*The control programme for slaughterhouses is generally correctly implemented by the ACs. This can provide reliable assurances of operators' compliance with animal welfare requirements.*

17. Moreover, at the level of this specific programme for slaughterhouses, the MANCP general objective and the strategic objective are both related to the number of controls and the results of these, without setting any targets which would allow the competent authorities to evaluate the observed results of the programme.
18. AESAN has not referenced a particular slaughter practice/operation as causing higher animal welfare risks. The ACs use general risk-based criteria (such as number and severity of non-compliances, slaughter capacity) to plan their controls. Some ACs additionally identified specific slaughter practices as higher risk, with a higher risk-weighting, to plan their official controls. Several ACs did so with slaughter without stunning and one with waterbath stunning. This is in line with the risk-based requirements in Article 9(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
19. ACs audited generally complied with their official control programmes (see also paragraphs 53 and 56).

### 6.3 IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW UP OF OFFICIAL CONTROLS

*The key weaknesses of the implementation and follow up of official controls were the undetected facilities' shortcomings in two poultry slaughterhouses (in different ACs) and the burdensome and not always dissuasive sanctioning procedures. These undetected shortcomings caused avoidable distress to poultry while hanging and until stunned. Sanctioning procedures that are not dissuasive reduce the effectiveness of official controls and may result in extended animal suffering through either continuing or repetitive non-compliances.*

*The key strengths were that the official controls correctly detect and report most operator non-compliances, that most operators know how to ensure proper animal welfare and react adequately to official control requests, that controls at slaughter detect and act when animals arrive unfit for transport and there are signs of poor welfare at broiler farms. This helps in providing adequate animal welfare at slaughter, during transport and at broiler farms.*

#### 6.3.1 Controls on animal welfare officers and staff training

20. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 2) ensuring that certificates of competence are only issued to personnel that have demonstrated their skill in performing killing and slaughter operations (in particular slaughter without stunning) as required in Article 7 of the Regulation. The competent authorities took actions to address this in 2015 and 2016, resulting in closure of this recommendation.
21. The training requirements for obtaining a certificate of competence vary among ACs, with different time requirements, training delivery methods and examination procedures. ACs have largely recognised the equivalence of other qualifications, with veterinarians generally exempted from the

*Workers may lack or lose certified skills, and not all operators address this.*

obligation of following specific training. Certificates of competence are normally issued by ACs or delegated public bodies.

22. The audit team saw a sample of the required (Article 7 of the Regulation) certificates of competence during the on-the-spot part of the audit for the slaughterhouse workers for which they are relevant. All certificates seen indicated the categories of animals, type of equipment and for which operations it was valid, in line with Article 21(3) of the Regulation. Nevertheless, the audit team visited:

- one slaughterhouse where, despite being certified, the workers performing slaughter of sheep without stunning, released several animals from restraint after the bleeding cut while still presenting signs of consciousness, contrary to Article 5(2) of the Regulation. The animal welfare officer present did not prevent this from continuing and later incorrectly told the audit team that the observed struggling and kicking post release of those several sheep were ‘reflex contractions’, demonstrating a lack of the competence required in Article 17(4) of the Regulation.
- another slaughterhouse where an official control report indicated the operator had waited two hours to carry out killing at lairage of an animal unable to move. The animal welfare officer informed that this was because the workers carrying out stunning and bleeding had not yet arrived. The audit team queried why the killing had not been done by one of the lairage workers since their certificates declared them competent for all operations. The animal welfare officer informed that, despite the certificate, they did not consider the lairage workers competent for stunning and bleeding operations because they did not routinely perform those. The official control report required corrective measures to address this situation, and proposed sanctions.

23. The audit team analysed the standard operating procedures (‘SOP’s) from a total of 21 slaughterhouses from all four ACs audited remotely, and on-the-spot at two ACs the SOPs from eight more slaughterhouses. Many of these were multispecies slaughterhouses with the SOPs having to cover all species slaughtered at each of them.

24. All eight slaughterhouses visited had designated one or more animal welfare officers, in line with Article 17 of the Regulation.

25. Slaughterhouse SOPs audited correctly designated animal welfare officers, in line with Article 17(1) of the Regulation, with one exception. The exception was one poultry slaughterhouse that did not include the mandatory reference to an animal welfare officer (Article 17(3) of the Regulation) in any of three relevant SOPs, even though it slaughtered well

*Most SOPs are generally*

*correct and give adequate assurance on proper animal welfare.*

*SOPs often contain sporadic aspirational statements instead of clear instructions.*

above the number of animals that would allow it to not have an animal welfare officer (Article 17(6) of the Regulation).

26. Most SOPs generally complied with the requirements of Article 6 of the Regulation, with two major exceptions. One being the one referenced in the previous paragraph. The second one being the SOP from a slaughterhouse, belonging to a group that owns several slaughterhouses, that instead of explaining the procedures at this slaughterhouse included only general “aspirational statements” of how the group slaughterhouses could provide adequate animal welfare. The AC provided the audit team with information on the actions it took (still during the audit) for this second slaughterhouse to correct this issue.
27. Many of the SOPs evaluated showed changes along the years caused by both operator and official control initiatives. Nevertheless, the audit team detected several mistakes and gaps here and there in many SOPs:
  - The most common mistake was unspecific aspirational statements, in a few points of the SOPs, about matters of attention for animal welfare instead of the required instructions for workers on how to perform those procedures to ensure compliance with requirements (Article 6 of the Regulation). This resulted in some activities being only implicit in the SOP, instead of specifically detailed, such as: performing animal welfare checks on arrival of each consignment; that a bleeding cut was to be performed but not how; checks for signs of life prior to scalding or dressing (see also paragraph 52).
  - Some SOPs mentioned the key parameters for stunning without then defining the values of those key parameters (Article 6 (2)(b) of the Regulation) that had to be respected.

### *6.3.2 Controls on layout, construction, equipment and approval of slaughterhouses*

*ACs’ approval instructions do not always reference all required details.*

*Approval procedures can theoretically ensure that*

28. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 5) ensuring that the instructions for approval of new slaughterhouses are updated so that the requirements set out in Article 14(2) of the Regulation are included in these instructions and implemented. The competent authorities took actions to address this in 2015 and 2016, resulting in closure of this recommendation.
29. The four ACs audited informed the audit team about their current slaughterhouse approval procedures and that there had been no new slaughterhouses approved in the last three years (and none have had to renew their approval for animal welfare reasons).
  - One AC informed that its documented procedure for slaughterhouse approvals did not include a specific reference to the requirements of Article 14(2) of the Regulation.

*newly approved slaughterhouses provide adequate animal welfare.*

*Structural conditions in slaughterhouses generally support adequate animal welfare.*

*In two slaughterhouses, birds with signs of stress between hanging and stunning not noted by official controls.*

*Waterbath stunning of turkeys caused avoidable distress despite apparently correct*

- All four ACs' approval procedures for slaughterhouses, as described to the audit team, are in line with the requirements of Article 148 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
30. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 4) ensuring that the design and operation of stunning boxes are reviewed to verify that, as appropriate, they comply or can comply with the requirements of point 3(1) of Annex II to the Regulation and that, where appropriate, ACs ensure corrective actions. The competent authorities took actions to address this in 2015 and 2016, resulting in closure of this recommendation.
  31. The national animal welfare working group, with AESAN and the 17 ACs, discussed and agreed, as needed along the years, the interpretation of layout and equipment requirements in the Regulation with a transition period for implementation at the latest by December 2019 (Article 29(1) of the Regulation). Some of these interpretations are gathered in an 'Interpretative note on questions concerning Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009', to provide for consistent implementation (Article 5(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625) of those requirements.
  32. The layout, construction and equipment of the eight slaughterhouses visited generally complied with the requirements of Article 14 and Annex II to the Regulation. Namely, concerning the requirements for restraining/stunning boxes and for electrical stunning equipment to display and record the details of the electrical key parameters used.
  33. However, in two poultry slaughterhouses (in different ACs) the facilities did not effectively minimise struggle and vocalisation of restrained birds (Annex II (3.1)(c) to the Regulation) after hanging and until stunning. A majority of birds kept their heads raised all the way after shackled (instead of relaxing after a few seconds) and/or vocalised. This had not been noted by the official veterinarians. In both slaughterhouses this may have been caused by the excessive light and noise in the area, together with insufficient maintenance of the system that should be in contact with the breast of the birds (Annex II (5.8) to the Regulation) but was not.
  34. One slaughterhouse visited used electrical waterbath stunning for turkeys. Even though the design of the equipment facilitated the swinging of the birds' heads into the waterbath stunner, the wingspan of the turkeys (which causes their wings to hang lower than their heads) still meant most of the turkeys received pre-stun electric shocks, contrary to Article 3(1) of the Regulation.
  35. A mammal slaughterhouse visited had recurring problems with cattle trying to turn around (and ending up stuck) in the race just before entering the stunning box. The official veterinarians reported on this, requested

***equipment design.***

corrective measures and proposed sanctioning. The operator took measures to address it, but the problem was not yet fully resolved.

36. Two restraining systems for slaughter without stunning of cattle by inversion were observed on-the-spot (only one while in operations). Both were fitted with a device restricting the vertical and lateral movement of the head of the animal, in line with Article 15(2) of the Regulation.
37. The audit team saw a sample of maintenance records of restraining and stunning equipment in a few slaughterhouses visited. These were in line with requirements, Article 9(1) of the Regulation.

***6.3.3 Controls on handling, restraining and stunning operations***

***Manufacturers of restraining and stunning equipment do not publish the instructions on the Internet. This can cause difficulties to slaughterhouse operators to use the equipment in optimal conditions to ensure the animals' welfare.***

38. MAPA requested scientific support to, in collaboration with AESAN, issue in 2022 a guidance document concerning the requirements (Article 8 of the Regulation) on manufacturers' instructions for the use of restraining and stunning equipment.
39. MAPA informed the audit team that it evaluated the manufacturers' instructions (of manufacturers with headquarters in Spain) published online. In 2022 MAPA notified the 20 manufacturers whose instructions presented shortcomings, as well as the five relevant ACs where they are headquartered, attaching the guidance document as reference for the required mandatory minimum content of such instructions.
40. The audit team evaluated the online equipment instructions from these manufacturers during the audit and they are still not in line with all requirements of Article 8 of the Regulation. MAPA informed that it is the ACs' authorities that have enforcement competencies for manufacturers headquartered at each AC. One AC provided the audit team with information on the actions it took (still during the audit) to correct this issue.
41. In all eight slaughterhouses visited handling and restraining operations at the time of the visit were generally performed in line with requirements laid down in Article 15 and Annex III to the Regulation. Nevertheless, the audit team noted a major issue at one slaughterhouse with insufficient restraining time for bleeding, while performing slaughter without stunning of sheep (see also the first bullet of paragraph 22), without effective action from the operator. The official controls had already noted several animal welfare issues in a report from a few months earlier. The official veterinarians informed the audit team that this operator has been the object of sanctions, and ongoing proposals for sanctions. As yet without sufficiently dissuasive and preventive results (Articles 139(1) and 138(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625), as it kept repeating several of the reported non-compliances.

***Handling and restraining operations generally adequate.***

***When handling or restraining was incorrect, official controls requested corrective actions.***

***Stunning was effective and ensured continued loss of consciousness and sensibility from stunning until death.***

42. At two mammal slaughterhouses visited the audit team saw evidence of the operators notifying the official veterinarians about animals arriving unfit for transport, or with broken horns, or already in the lairage but with movement difficulties, in line with point 1.1 of Annex III to the Regulation.
43. However, not all operators notified the official veterinarians of such issues or took prompt action to address them. The audit team saw documented evidence that this usually resulted in the official controls initiating sanctioning procedures (see also paragraph 79). Nevertheless, the sanctioning procedures are still not fully dissuasive and preventing this continued practice by some operators, contrary to the requirements of Articles 139(1) and 138(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
44. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 3) ensuring that the stunning parameters, specified in Annex I to the Regulation, for electrical waterbath stunners are applied. The competent authorities took actions to address this in 2015 and 2016 resulting in closure of this recommendation.
45. The national instruction on 'Slaughter operations: stunning' provides adequate instructions (in line with the requirements in Annex I of the Regulation and with relevant EFSA opinions) supporting operators with correct implementation of the main methods of stunning. It includes relevant details for those methods such as: the key parameters, facilities requirements/points for attention, signs of effective stunning and of recovery of consciousness.
46. At all four poultry slaughterhouses visited the waterbath stunning parameters applied were in line with the stunning parameters specified in Annex I to the Regulation. The four ACs audited confirmed to the audit team that this is valid also when performing slaughter under religious rites.
47. At one poultry slaughterhouse the stunning was not effective when operations started with (at a rough estimate) possibly 4% of the birds' showing signs of recovery while bleeding. The operator did some adjustments and satisfactorily addressed this still during the visit. At the other poultry slaughterhouses visited slaughter operations were ongoing and stunning was effective in all three.
48. Stunning and bleeding of poultry was performed generally in line with requirements, Article 4 and Annexes II and III to the Regulation.
49. The audit team observed stunning of cattle in four slaughterhouses and of sheep in one. In all cases the stunning was effective and when there was a failure (both equipment failure and ineffective stunning) the operators promptly corrected them in line with requirements, Article 4 and Article 9(2) of the Regulation.

***Slaughter without stunning showed deficiencies. While prompt measures were taken in one of them in the other animal suffering was not avoided.***

50. It also observed slaughter without stunning (Article 4(4) of the Regulation) of sheep in one slaughterhouse, and of cattle in another. In both cases they were mechanically restrained as required, Article 15(2) of the Regulation.
- The slaughter of sheep was not in line with requirements (see also the first bullet of paragraph 22) causing avoidable suffering, contrary to Article 3(1) of the Regulation. In addition, the operator had no SOP for performing and monitoring slaughter without stunning, contrary to the required by Articles 6 and 16 of the Regulation.
  - The slaughter of cattle presented several cases of slow bleeding (prolonging the period of consciousness and distress post bleeding cut) possibly caused by false aneurysms. The animal welfare officer and workers present promptly took corrective measures, in line with Article 3(1) of the Regulation, to attempt to correct and address this, such as: application of prompt post-cut stunning to the animals presenting slow bleeding, sharpening and exchange of bleeding knives, changing the worker doing the bleeding cut.
51. Checks on stunning, in the sample of slaughterhouses where the audit team observed them, were generally performed in line with requirements, Article 5 of the Regulation.
52. The SOPs detailing the monitoring procedures at the slaughterhouses did not always include all the required details, Article 16 of the Regulation. The most frequently observed shortcoming (remotely and on-the-spot) concerned not specifying a check for signs of life prior to further dressing or scalding (Annex III (3.2) of the Regulation).

#### *6.3.4 Controls on slaughterhouse operator obligations*

***Official control records confirmed the performance of daily and risk-based official***

53. There is permanent official veterinarian presence at the slaughterhouses during slaughter operations. In all ACs audited, the official veterinarians perform some animal welfare inspections as part of their daily work routine. These focus on the condition of the animals upon arrival, while in the lairage, and during unloading, handling, restraining, stunning and bleeding. They also address requirements such as water, food, temperature and signs of poor maintenance of infrastructures and equipment.
54. In all ACs audited the official veterinarians also perform additional animal welfare controls (audit type) such as on: SOPs, registers of operator activities relevant for animal welfare, as well as on animal transport requirements. These additional checks are performed on a risk-based frequency.

*controls in accordance with the planned frequencies.*

*Official controls correctly detect and report operator non-compliances.*

55. The daily and risk-based controls cover welfare at slaughter (the Regulation), transport (Regulation (EC) No 1/2005) and national rules on animal welfare, in line with Article 38 of Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627.
56. The frequency of risk-based checks, and the specific checks performed, varied between trimestral to annual depending on the AC. The four ACs audited generally performed the risk-based controls at the respective planned frequencies, in line with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
57. In the eight slaughterhouses visited the official veterinarians used correct controls methods (Article 14 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625) and had generally detected existing operator non-compliances with the Regulation.
58. Official veterinarians report animal welfare issues detected to the operators (and record when they are satisfactorily addressed), indicating that actions are required to address those deficiencies, in line with Article 13 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.
59. All four ACs audited had adequate documented procedures, with instructions for staff performing official controls, in line with Article 12(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. However, some of these procedures or checklists quote only legal statements that do not convey the practical checks to fully verify the practices of hanging live poultry prior to stunning (see also paragraph 33).
60. Official veterinarians can require immediate action from the operators and can stop slaughter operations (Article 138(2)(i) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625), However, the ACs informed the latter is considered a last-resort action and rarely applied, as it is juridically difficult to justify. One AC audited informed that for animal welfare reasons in the last three years, it had:
  - Temporarily suspended part of the slaughter activities in one slaughterhouse; and
  - Notified four others that serious non-compliances reported meant the operator had to implement preventive and corrective measures within 15 days or would have operations suspended. These four slaughterhouses took measures as requested and none had operations fully or partially suspended.
61. The audit team analysed sanctioning procedures in the four ACs, from the detection of an infringement, the opening of the enforcement procedure, the allegation phase, the final sanction and payment of fines by the operators. This legal process is administratively burdensome and relatively lengthy.

***Sanctioning procedures are burdensome, can be lengthy, and not always dissuasive.***

***Official controls are generally satisfactory and, when followed by adequate operator reaction, resulted in improvements in animal welfare***

62. As regards the opening of the enforcement procedure, this is formally initiated through an administrative action that is notified to the operators (*'apertura de expediente informativo'*). Welfare infringements are communicated to the legal services of the ACs, with these adopting different practices and strategies. While in some ACs each single infringement is followed by its own enforcement procedure (i.e. its own *'expediente'*), other ACs group several infringements by a same operator into one enforcement procedure. ACs following the latter practice stated that it strengthens the procedure and may result in higher fines by showing repeated violations.
63. However, when infringements are grouped there were instances in which the time between the first events and the opening of the enforcement procedure took months. Very long sanctioning processes can diminish the deterrent effect of sanctions. As an example, the audit team saw one such procedure that included infringements detected more than one year before the date of the formal action. When this operator was finally sanctioned, the ownership and management team had changed, and the operator denied responsibility and appealed the sanction further prolonging the procedure.
64. A few operators either systematically (but unsuccessfully) denied responsibility, prolonging even more the sanctioning process, or paid the fines but kept on repeating the non-compliances. The same operators repeating the same non-compliances shows that the penalties implemented are not dissuasive and prevent further occurrences of the non-compliance, contrary to requirements of Articles 139(1) and 138(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625. Nevertheless, most operators tried to promptly correct deficiencies reported by the official controls.
65. The system of official controls on operators is generally in line with the quality, consistency and effectiveness requirements of Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

### *6.3.5 Controls on animal welfare in specific context*

66. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 11) ensuring that:
  - official veterinarians in slaughterhouses are provided with the correct instructions and necessary information in order to carry out effective monitoring of indicators of animal welfare as required by Point 2 of Annex III to Directive 2007/43/EC; and
  - field veterinarians take appropriate actions to follow up (at farm level) on the information provided from slaughterhouses on indications of poor animal welfare as required by Point 3 of Annex III to Directive 2007/43/EC.

***Officials at the slaughterhouse have the necessary information and instructions to effectively monitor indicators of broiler welfare at farm.***

***Official controls at slaughter help detect poor animal welfare conditions in broiler farms and notify these to operators and to farm supervisory authorities.***

***Authorities act on notifications to address farm issues.***

The competent authorities took actions to address this resulting in closure of this recommendation.

67. A national instruction, issued first in 2015, details which animal welfare indicators, and how to assess them, can be used in broilers. Briefly, in addition to mortality the most frequently used indicator is contact dermatitis, particularly footpad dermatitis. This national instruction sets threshold values to identify abnormal levels of footpad dermatitis (amongst others) and indicates the minimum sample of flocks to be tested, 10% of flocks from farms with stocking density up to 33 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, and 50% for other densities.
68. The audit team visited four poultry slaughterhouses, all four received broilers only from farms with stocking densities below 33 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.
69. The ACs implement the national instruction and perform official controls at slaughter to detect poor animal welfare conditions in broiler farms, in line with the requirements of Annex III (2) to Directive 2007/43/EC.
70. However, official veterinarians at different slaughterhouses do not all apply this national instruction in the same manner. In two visited slaughterhouses, the official veterinarians systematically tested 100% of consignments for footpad dermatitis (not the 10% sample indicated by the SOP for <33kg/m<sup>2</sup> stocking density). They notified all abnormal results without registering how many were from the additional (beyond 10%) testing. This will result in overestimation of the relative frequency of abnormal results. Therefore, footpad dermatitis notifications cannot reliably be used for comparison purposes between ACs (and possibly even within an AC).
71. The national instruction calls for systematic checks on flocks from farms with any notification of abnormal levels of footpad dermatitis within the previous six months. However, there is no automatic system in place tracking these and alerting official veterinarians about new flocks from farms with recent notifications. Consequently, in some cases the official veterinarians fail to check those subsequent flocks.
72. Official veterinarians notify the slaughterhouse of abnormal results and monthly transmit these to the relevant service within the AC. Generally, the service supervising slaughterhouses reviews and consolidates the information from different slaughterhouses before forwarding it to the service responsible for animal welfare at farms. Each AC follows up these notifications differently. Some ACs open an administrative procedure after each abnormal result, others group several results for administrative economy, while others consider these notifications as an input on its risk-assessment exercise which can result in more frequent controls at farm. Official veterinarians at slaughterhouse may receive feedback about the

***Slaughterhouses take independent action. No sufficient data confirming improved broiler welfare at farm.***

***There is no validated data confirming that transport of unfit animals has reduced.***

***Operators generally report the arrival of unfit animals, but not all.***

***Authorities apply enforcement when unfit animals arrive to slaughterhouses.***

outcome of these actions, but feedback is irregular on time and sometimes provided only upon request.

73. The audit team saw examples of slaughterhouse operators systematically testing footpad dermatitis levels in all broiler consignments and adjusting the compensation to the farmer accordingly. The slaughterhouses' testing method does not evaluate footpad dermatitis levels in the same way as the official testing. In a few cases this could result in a stricter evaluation, with deductions to farmers even without exceeding the official threshold level.
74. Operators met informed the audit team that footpad dermatitis results appear to show an improvement. However, there was no data available to confirm this.
75. The 2014 audit report recommended (recommendation 9) ensuring that sanctions applicable to the enforcement of legislative requirements on the fitness of animals for transport in Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 are effective, proportionate and dissuasive.
76. MAPA monitors data about animals unfit for transport with the objective of reducing the number of non-compliances. This monitoring includes information by farm of origin and by slaughterhouse, permitting the analysis and identification of unusual patterns. However, in the last three years not all ACs sent this information to MAPA and the data has not been analysed.
77. One AC audited informed the audit team that the number of animals arriving at its slaughterhouses unfit for transport had dropped from 319 in 2014 to 107 in 2024.
78. The audit team observed that operators reported to the official veterinarian about animals arriving at the slaughterhouse unfit for transport, but not always. Some operators still do not report the arrival of unfit animals, nor take responsibility for killing them on-the-spot if needed, contrary to Annex III 1.1 and 1.11 to the Regulation. These operators wait instead for the official veterinarians to detect them and request action.
79. Deliveries of animals unfit for transport are not evenly distributed among slaughterhouses; some received a high number of cases. In this regard, the audit team observed that the detection at slaughterhouse of animals unfit for transport was systematically followed by either formal warnings or initiation of enforcement procedures. ACs also consider suspending or revoking the drivers' certificates of competence (Article 6(5) of Regulation (EC) No 1/2005) from non-compliant transporters but cannot do so if their certificates are issued by another AC or Member State.
80. One AC evaluated alternatives such as criminal proceedings or requiring affected individuals to be re-trained and re-certified by its own bodies. This would make it easier to revoke the certificate of competence if the

*Increased use of farm- slaughter after national instructions were updated.*

observed non-compliances were repeated. Another AC grouped several instances of violations by a transporter and requested the assistance of MAPA to inform the transporter's Member State, successfully resulting in a temporary suspension of the certificate.

81. The national instruction on 'Actions at farm relating to fitness for transport to slaughterhouse and emergency killing', approved in 2017, was updated in 2022 and 2025. Slaughtering at farm has increased significantly in recent years after the approval of this national instruction, with differences among ACs.
82. One AC opted to support slaughter at farm by facilitating and funding veterinarian ante-mortem inspection at farm and indicated that this has resulted in lower numbers of animals unfit for transport being detected at slaughterhouse.

#### **6.4 OFFICIAL CONTROL SYSTEM AUDITS AND VERIFICATION**

*Variability in verification procedures, but all seem effective to detect and address most official control shortcomings.*

83. The four ACs audited all have developed their own control verification procedures (Article 12(3) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625) to ensure their official controls are consistent and effective.
84. All ACs have some type of electronic system in place (ranging from shared intranets to use of spreadsheets) to supervise the performance and results of the official controls at slaughterhouse level.
85. The supervisory systems in place in the ACs audited all verify (at different minimum frequencies) if, in brief, the official controls are performed:

- at the planned frequency;
- according to the respective procedures/instructions;
- effectively detect, act and follow up on non-compliances noted; and
- are registered and filed in line with administrative requirements.

This is done with a combination of supervisory checks of electronic records and communications, of reports/notifications issued, and on-site observation of the official veterinarians while they carry out the controls.

86. Explanations provided, software applications and registers seen showed how these were being implemented and their results. The most frequent shortcomings noted related to 'performance of official controls'. One AC audited informed that this category covers a very wide scope of activities explaining why most shortcomings fall within it. Most of these related to not following procedures/instructions, not respecting inspection frequencies or deadlines, and some to detection and correct categorisation of non-compliances.

## 7 CLOSING MEETING

The audit team presented the main findings and preliminary conclusions of the audit to the competent authority at the remote closing meeting on 6 October 2025. The competent authorities acknowledged the findings and preliminary conclusions.

## 8 RECOMMENDATION

The Commission invites the competent authorities to provide details of the actions taken and planned, including deadlines for their completion ('action plan'), aimed at addressing the recommendation set out below. The Commission brings to the competent authorities' attention that this report also outlines non-compliances which have not resulted in a recommendation.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>To ensure that the competent authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• take appropriate action as per Article 138 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 in case of non-compliances with EU legislation on animal welfare, in particular to prevent further occurrences of such non-compliances;</li><li>• take all measures to implement the rules on penalties as required by Article 139(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 hence penalties for non-compliances with EU legislation on animal welfare can be effectively applied. apply penalties that are effective and dissuasive, as required by Article 139(1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/625.</li></ul> <p>Recommendation based on conclusion No 6</p> <p>Associated findings Nos 41, 43, 61 to 64</p>

## ANNEX 1 - LEGAL REFERENCES

Legal Reference	Official Journal	Title
Regulation (EU) 2017/625	OJ L 95, 7.4.2017, p. 1–142	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, amending Regulations (EC) No 999/2001, (EC) No 396/2005, (EC) No 1069/2009, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) No 1151/2012, (EU) No 652/2014, (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 1/2005 and (EC) No 1099/2009 and Council Directives 98/58/EC, 1999/74/EC, 2007/43/EC, 2008/119/EC and 2008/120/EC, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 89/608/EEC, 89/662/EEC, 90/425/EEC, 91/496/EEC, 96/23/EC, 96/93/EC and 97/78/EC and Council Decision 92/438/EEC (Official Controls Regulation)
Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009	OJ L 303, 18.11.2009, p. 1-30	Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing
Directive 2007/43/EC	OJ L 182, 12.7.2007, p. 19-28	Council Directive 2007/43/EC of 28 June 2007 laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production
Regulation (EC) No 1/2005	OJ L 3, 5.1.2005, p. 1-44	Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations and amending Directives 64/432/EEC and 93/119/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1255/97

<b>Legal Reference</b>	<b>Official Journal</b>	<b>Title</b>
Regulation (EU) 2019/627	OJ L 131, 17.5.2019, p. 51–100	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/627 of 15 March 2019 laying down uniform practical arrangements for the performance of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council and amending Commission Regulation (EC) No 2074/2005 as regards official controls