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Humane Society International

Improving broiler chicken welfare

A call to action for lawmakers

Broiler chicken welfare is a critical but often overlooked issue in conventional food production. Broiler chickens, those raised for meat, are bred for rapid growth, which often leads to serious health issues, including lameness^{1,2,3} respiratory problems⁴ and muscle damage.⁵ Across the European Union, including Romania, billions of chickens are raised each year under poor conditions, emphasizing the need for improved welfare standards.

As a major chicken meat buyer, the fast-food industry has a significant impact on how these animals are kept and killed. To address this, *The Pecking Order* assessed 75 leading fast-food chains in Europe, including Romania, based on the science-based criteria of the [European Chicken Commitment \(ECC\)](#).

Lawmakers have a key role in supporting and influencing the industry to align broiler chicken welfare standards with consumer demand and animal welfare science, to improve the welfare of millions of chickens in Romania each year. As the global industry adapts to higher welfare production, Romanian producers have an opportunity to stay competitive and meet this evolving consumer expectation for more ethical and more humane practices.



The case for updated legislation

More than 25 years ago, the European Union adopted legislation on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (Council Directive 98/58/EC), followed by the Broiler Directive (2007/43/EC) in 2007, laying down minimum standards for chickens kept and slaughtered for meat. In 2020, the European Commission recognized the need to update these laws. In 2023, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) [published scientific opinions](#) highlighting gaps in current laws and the need for reform to improve the welfare of animals kept and killed for food. While no legislative updates have been released yet, lawmakers in Romania can take the lead and act now to make sure Romania's industry is not falling behind.

European Chicken Commitment

The ECC is a science-based set of criteria created to address the most critical welfare issues in broiler chicken production based on the latest animal welfare science. These standards include:

- A lowering of maximum stocking density to reduce overcrowding.
- A transition away from fast-growing chicken breeds, who often suffer from severe health problems.
- A requirement for enriched environments, including natural light, perches, pecking substrates, cleaner air and no cages.
- A mandate for more humane slaughter practices without shackling upside down.



Facts

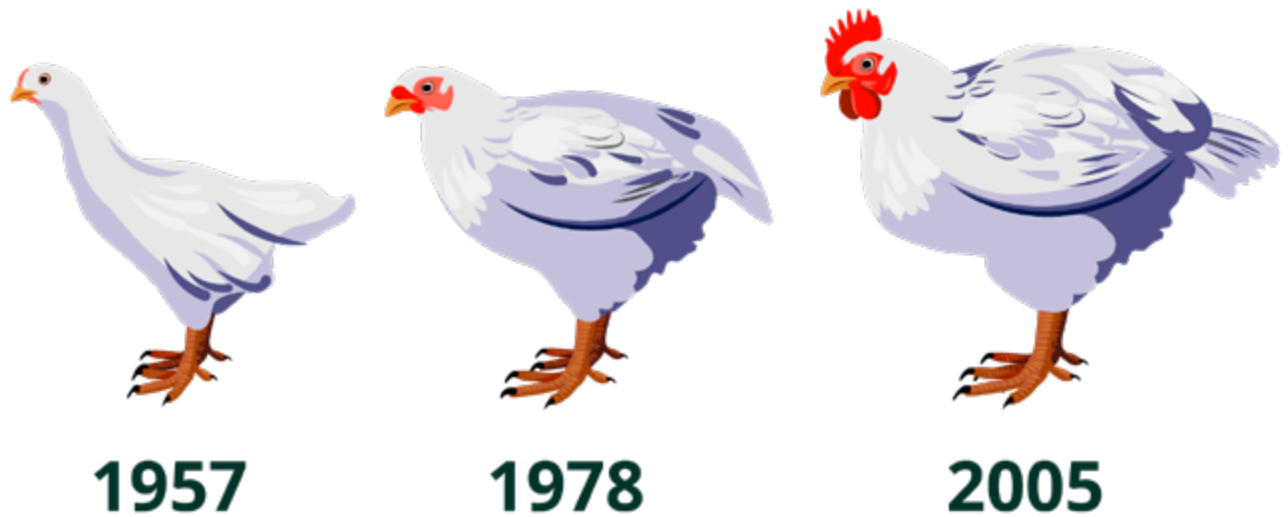
Romania is the eighth-largest chicken meat producer in the EU, slaughtering 300.8 million chickens yearly.⁶

80% of Romanians are willing to pay up to 10% more for higher animal welfare products.⁷

13.9% increase in retail sales of free-range and organic chicken meat in Romania between 2018-2022.⁸

69% of Romanians want better protection for farmed animals.⁹

92% of Romanians find it very important to ensure good farm animal welfare.¹⁰



0.9 kg in 56 days

1.8 kg in 56 days

4.2 kg in 56 days

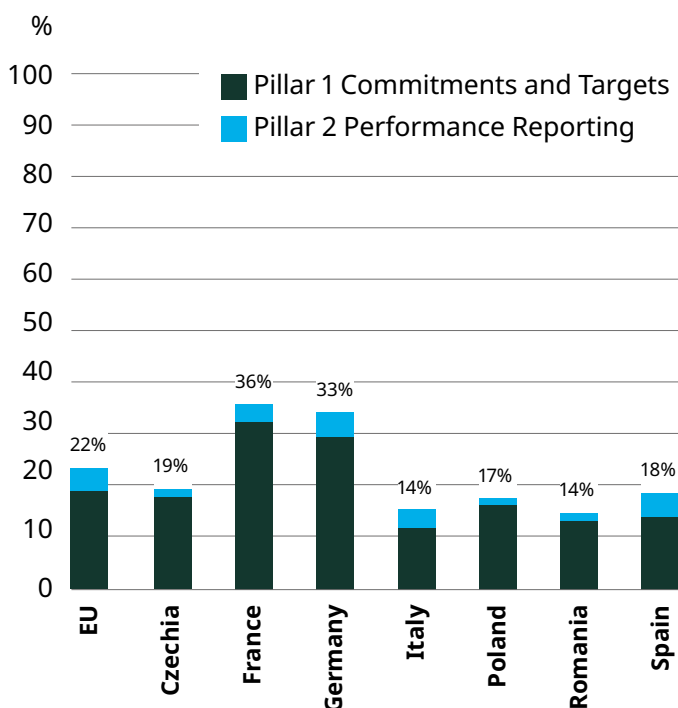
Chickens raised conventionally are bred for extremely rapid weight gain.¹¹

Romania's industry performance across the EU

The fast-food industry's performance on broiler welfare policies varies significantly across the European Union. In 2024, The Pecking Order assessed fast-food companies in Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain. While some progress has been noted compared to 2023, Romanian chains had the lowest scores in both years, (14% in 2024; 17% in 2023), signaling a significant need for improvement.

Why does Romania's industry score low?

Although 33% of assessed Romanian companies have committed to higher broiler welfare standards, most have yet to prioritize chicken welfare. Those with commitments have not published progress, leaving consumers to assume little is being done. International chains often rely on parent company policies, showing global progress but lagging locally. The local offices are either unaware of or unengaged in the company's chicken welfare commitments. National chains fall even further behind, lacking any chicken welfare policies altogether.



Fast-food industry score by country in 2024



Ways forward for Romania

- **Commitments and road maps:** Fast-food companies without a chicken welfare commitment should begin developing policies aligned with ECC criteria. Those with existing commitments should create clear road maps to achieve their goals.
- **Collaboration between companies and producers:** With only a few chicken producers in Romania using alternative, higher welfare farming models, aligned with the ECC criteria, fast-food chains and producers must collaborate closely to meet these standards. Producers need dedicated buyers to justify investments in higher welfare, while fast-food chains rely on these producers for a steady supply of higher welfare chicken.
- **Legislative action:** Lawmakers play a critical role in ensuring the transition to higher welfare standards for broiler chickens. Through policy development and enforcement, legislators can drive industrywide changes that protect animal welfare while keeping the industry competitive in both the national and European markets.

Call to action for lawmakers

- Develop and enforce comprehensive animal welfare legislation that addresses the worst abuses in conventional farming, including updated chicken welfare standards that align with ECC standards.
- Collaborate and participate in partnerships and initiatives that promote chicken welfare improvements.
- Incentivize and recognize businesses that invest in chicken welfare improvements.

[Explore the full report for detailed insights, year comparisons and methodology.](#)

References

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