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Raising standards: What lawmakers can do for chicken welfare

The Pecking Order 2025

Chickens raised for meat, known as “broiler” chickens, are the most farmed land animals in the world. In 2023, more than 6.4 billion chickens were slaughtered in the EU, and over 300 million of those in Romania¹ alone.

Despite their numbers, chickens receive minimal protection under outdated EU and Romanian welfare standards, which fall short of recent scientific recommendations. Current industry practices cause serious welfare issues and no longer meet public expectations regarding animal welfare.

As a major chicken meat buyer, the fast-food industry has a significant impact on how these animals are kept and killed.

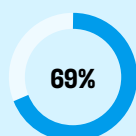
To address this, *The Pecking Order* assessed 81 leading fast-food chains in Europe, including Romania, based on the science-based criteria of [European Chicken Commitment \(ECC\)](#).

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.

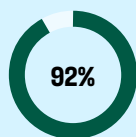


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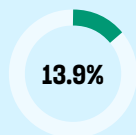
69% of Romanians want better protection for farmed animals.²



92% of Romanians find it very important to ensure good farm animal welfare.³



80% of Romanians are willing to pay up to 10% more for higher animal welfare products.⁴



13.9% increase of retail sales of free-range and organic chicken meat in Romania between 2018-2022.⁵

EU law is outdated

Current EU legislation permits overcrowded and barren conditions, dim lighting and inhumane slaughter of chickens. It also allows the use of fast-growing genetic lines of chickens, who reach market weight so quickly that they suffer from painful skeletal disorders and walking abnormalities.^{6,7,8}

In 2023, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a series of [scientific opinions](#) on farm animal welfare, that underline the serious shortcomings of existing EU law and the urgent need for legislative change to improve the welfare of animals.

One science-based solution is the [European Chicken Commitment \(ECC\)](#). Agreed by animal welfare organisations worldwide, the ECC sets minimum standards that address the most urgent welfare issues in broiler chicken production. The standards align with EFSA's recommendations and provide guidance for companies and lawmakers. In the below overview, current EU legislation, which is also the law for Romania, is compared to some key ECC welfare criteria.

✓ **Further reading:** [Full comparison EU broiler chicken legislation vs. all ECC criteria](#)

Criteria

EU legislation⁹

ECC requirement¹⁰

Stocking density

A maximum stocking density of 33-42 kg/m²

A maximum stocking density of 30 kg/m²

Breeds

Low welfare, fast-growing genetic lines permitted

Only slower-growing genetic lines with higher welfare outcomes permitted

Enrichment

Not required

Perches and pecking materials required

Slaughter

Electrical waterbath stunning permitted¹¹

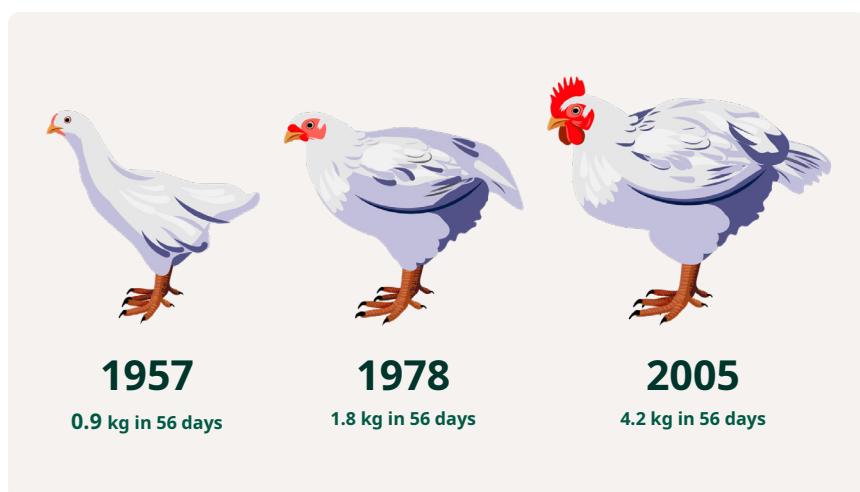
Controlled atmospheric stunning using inert gas or multiphase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion

Chicken welfare and antibiotic challenges

Broiler chicken welfare remains a critical but often overlooked issue in food production. Chickens raised for meat are bred for rapid growth, which often leads to serious health issues, including lameness,^{12,13,14} respiratory problems¹⁵ and muscle damage.¹⁶ In the EU, including Romania, billions endure poor living conditions each year. Additionally, the overuse of antibiotics to promote growth and prevent disease has fueled antibiotic resistance, threatening both animal welfare and public health. Adopting the ECC standards offers a practical path to higher welfare and safer food production.

✓ **Further reading:** [Overview of chicken welfare issues vs.ECC](#)

✓ **Further reading:** [Insights into tackling antibiotic resistance through better chicken welfare](#)



Graphic 1: Chickens raised conventionally are bred for extremely rapid weight gain.¹⁷

Romania's performance is the weakest in the EU

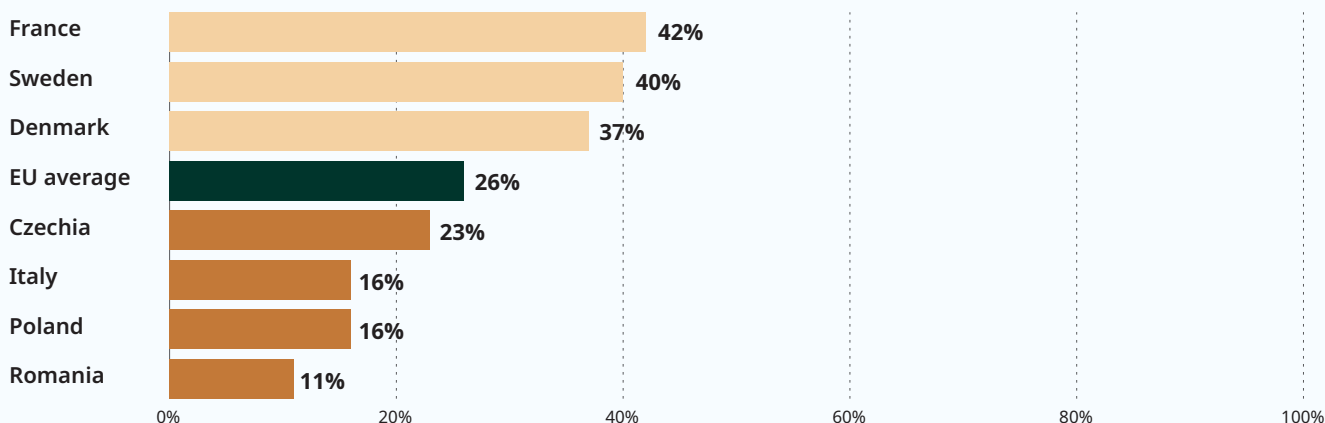
In 2025, *The Pecking Order* assessed fast-food companies in Czechia, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Romania and Sweden. Company scores within a country reflect the state of broiler chicken welfare in a country's fast-food industry. All countries together reflect the state of affairs in the EU.

- There is an EU-wide increase in scores. The EU average rose to 26% in 2025, up from 22% in 2024. This improvement is also driven by positive developments in Czechia, Italy and France.
- Romania has the lowest score among all countries, with an average industry score of 11% in 2025—down from 17% in 2023, highlighting both the urgency and the opportunity for action.



The average fast-food industry score by country on broiler chicken welfare (2025)

Romania's fast-food industry scores lowest on chicken welfare among all assessed countries.



Why is Romania's industry score low?

Romania's fast-food sector is lagging behind on chicken welfare. Most brands have taken no meaningful action, and 83% still lack a clear policy aligned with the ECC. No new ECC commitments have been made. In 2025, only half of the companies mention chicken welfare on their global websites, and just two report publicly on both commitments and progress. Crucially, none of the assessed brands share this information on their Romanian websites, leaving consumers in the dark and transparency at zero.

Ways forward for Romania

- **Companies: From commitment to action**
Fast-food companies must take visible steps to improve chicken welfare. Those without a commitment should begin developing policies aligned with the ECC criteria. Those with existing commitments should create clear road maps to achieve their goals.
- **Producers: Collaboration toward higher welfare supply chain**
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, which can also help reduce reliance on antibiotics. 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.

- **Lawmakers: Driving change through legislation**
Voluntary action alone will not shift the industry. Romanian lawmakers must set clear, enforceable standards that apply to all companies. Aligning national legislation with ECC criteria and current animal welfare science, especially regarding stocking density and promoting slower-growing genetic lines, can level the playing field, support producers during the transition and ensure progress benefits all chickens.

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, such as reducing the use of antibiotics in farming.
- Incentivize and recognize businesses that invest in chicken welfare improvements.

Access to all reports in English:
humaneworld.org/thepeckingorder

Access to all reports in Romanian:
humaneworld.org/thepeckingorderromania



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