

Assessment of the incidence and scale of current religious slaughter practices

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Stunning before slaughter is a statutory requirement in Europe and is performed to induce unconsciousness in animals so that slaughter could be performed without causing the animals any avoidable anxiety, pain, suffering or distress. In some countries, religious slaughter is exempt from pre-slaughter stunning, but some religious authorities accept certain stunning methods. The DIALREL project (www.dialrel.eu) was undertaken to gather information about religious slaughter practices and aimed at addressing issues by encouraging dialogue between stakeholders and interested parties.

An objective of DIALREL is to evaluate the incidence and the scale of religious slaughter practices (Halal and Shechita) in cattle, small ruminants (sheep and goats) and poultry. Data on the incidence of animals being religiously slaughtered, the application of pre-slaughter stunning, restraining and slaughter methods used were collected using questionnaires.

Introduction

Information on current religious slaughter practices in EU countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium), a candidate country (Turkey) and associate countries (Israel and Australia) was collected through 2 types of questionnaires during 2007 and 2008. The first questionnaire aimed to collect data from the competent authorities about the number of animals slaughtered for Halal and Kosher. The second questionnaire was used to collect information on the restraining methods, pre-slaughter and post-cut stunning practices.

Results

The data collected from competent authorities and abattoirs in this survey may not constitute a true representation of the ritual slaughter practices in the EU and surveyed countries because of the low number of questionnaires returned. However, these results give for the first time an overview of the incidence and scale of current religious slaughter practices.

a) Questionnaires to the competent authorities

Information on the number of animals (religious and conventional) slaughtered in 2006 was provided by the competent authorities of Germany (DE), Italy (IT), Spain (ES), Australia (AU) and Israel (IL) (Figure 1).



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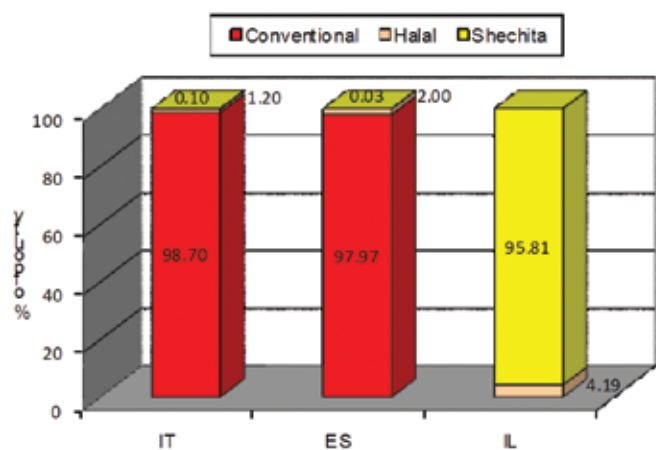
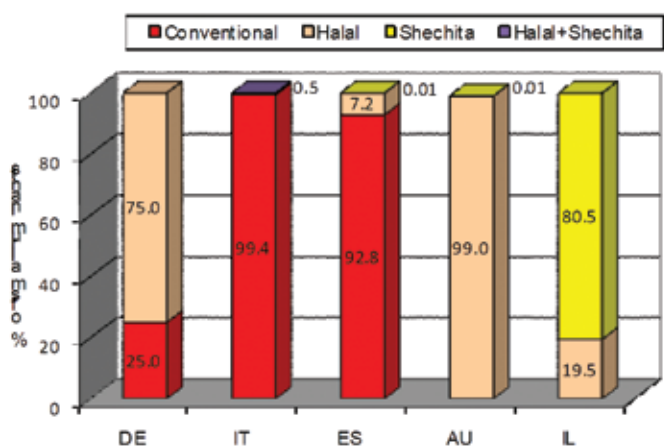
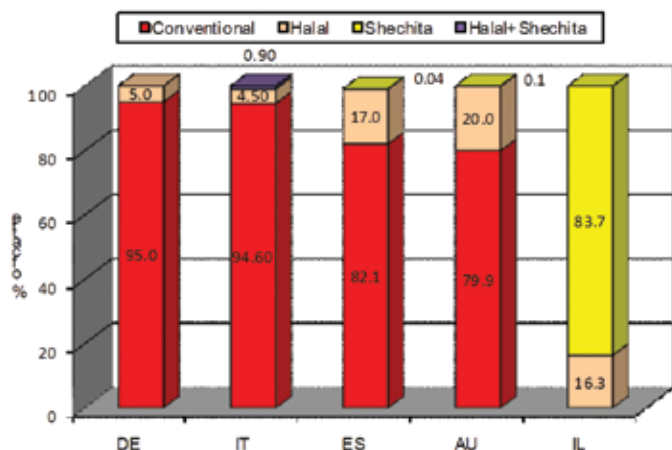
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Figure 1. Percentage of cattle, small ruminants and poultry slaughtered by conventional, Halal and Shechita practices.



b) Questionnaires sent to abattoirs

Shechita

Data on Shechita practices were received from France, Italy, Spain, the UK, Australia, and Israel. In all the abattoirs surveyed, cattle, small ruminants and poultry were slaughtered without stunning (neither before nor after the neck cut), with the exception of Australian abattoirs where cattle were post-cut stunned with captive bolt.

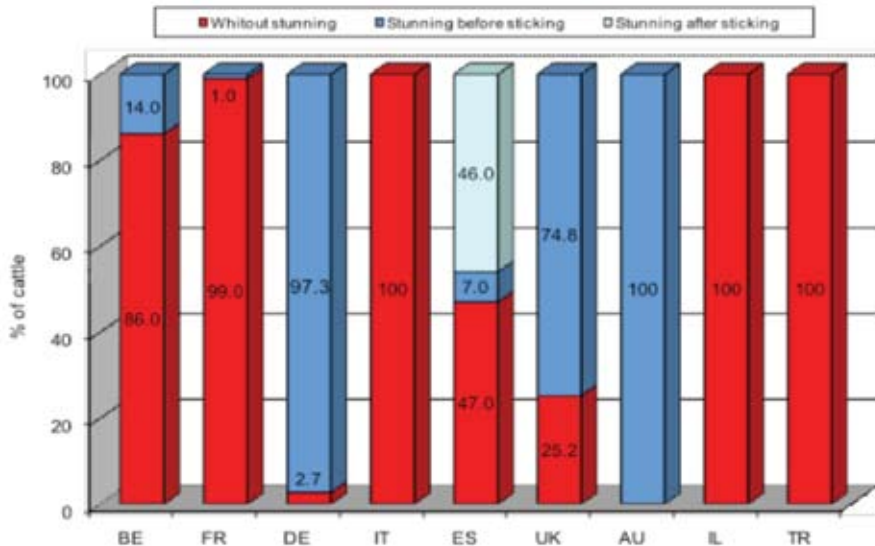
In the Italian, British and Australian cattle abattoirs surveyed, cattle were slaughtered in upright position, whereas in the abattoirs of Spain, France (except 1) and Israel, cattle were mechanically restrained and turned on their back in a rotary pen. The restraining method for small ruminants in the UK and Israel was manual and turning the animals on their side. In Australia, both upright position and turning on their side were used as restraining methods. In the Italian abattoirs, small ruminants were hoisted before sticking. Poultry were restrained manually before sticking in the Italian and Israel abattoirs, and they were shackled before sticking in the Spanish abattoir.

Halal slaughter

- Cattle

Halal slaughter was carried out without stunning in Israel, Turkey, Italy and in most of the Belgium and French slaughterhouses (Figure 2). However, stunning before sticking was the most common practice of the abattoirs surveyed in Germany, the UK, and Australia. Furthermore, two abattoirs in Spain stunned cattle after sticking.

Figure 2. Percentage of cattle slaughtered for Halal without stunning, with stunning before sticking, and after sticking.



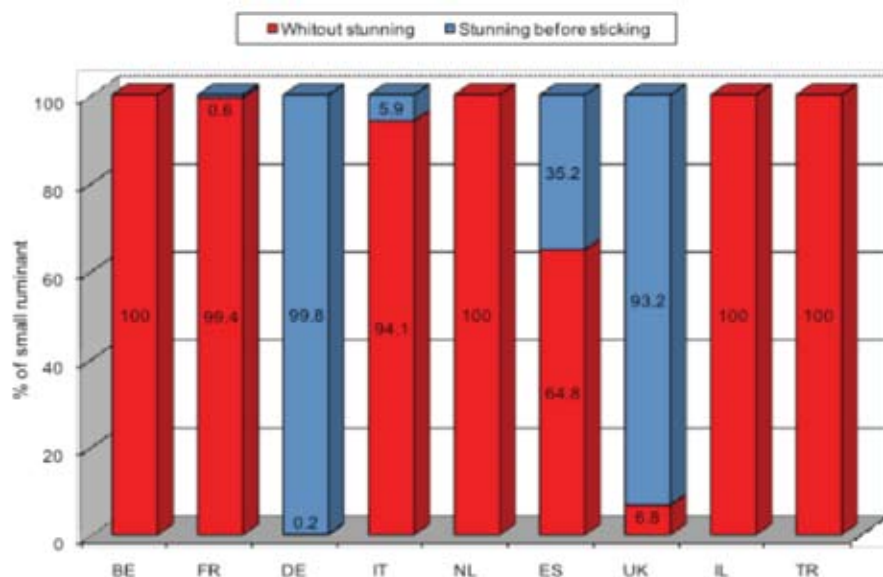
The main restraining method for Halal slaughter without stunning was upright position in Italy, the UK and in 80% of the abattoirs in Belgium. On the other hand, all the abattoirs in Spain and Israel turned the animals mechanically on their back in a rotary pen. Cattle were partially hoisted before sticking in 33% of Turkish abattoirs.

The most common stunning method for Halal slaughter in the EU Member states was penetrating captive bolt, similar to conventional slaughter. In Australia, cattle were stunned with a non-penetrating captive bolt. Halal stunned animals were restrained in upright position in all the abattoirs surveyed in the UK, Australia and in the majority of Germany and Spain.

- Small ruminants

Halal slaughter was carried out without stunning in all the abattoirs surveyed in Israel, Turkey, Belgium, the Netherlands, and in most of the Italian, French and Spanish slaughterhouses (Figure 3). On the other hand, stunning before sticking was the most common practice of the abattoirs surveyed in Germany and the UK.

Figure 3. Percentage of small ruminants slaughtered for Halal without and with stunning.



* See comment about Turkish poultry slaughter on following page

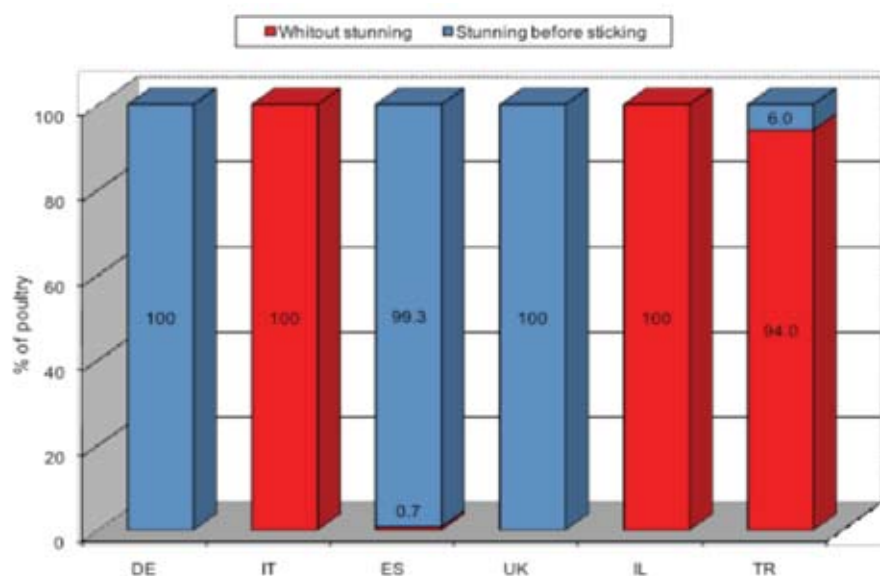
The main restraining method for Halal slaughter without stunning was upright position in the UK, turning on their side in Belgium, France, Germany and Italy, and turning on their back in The Netherlands. Small ruminants were partially hoisted before sticking in the majority of the slaughterhouses in Spain and Turkey.

The most common stunning method for Halal slaughter in the EU Member states and Australia was head-only electrical stunning, similar to conventional slaughter.

- Poultry

Halal slaughter was carried out without stunning in all the abattoirs surveyed in Israel, Italy and in most of the Turkish abattoirs (Figure 4). *However, it later emerged that some Turkish poultry plants did not acknowledge use of stunning although electrical stunning is commonly used during halal slaughter of poultry in Turkey. On the other hand, stunning before sticking was the most common practice of the abattoirs surveyed in Germany, Spain and the UK.

Figure 4. Percentage of poultry slaughtered for Halal without and with stunning.



The main restraining method for Halal slaughter without stunning was shackling before slaughtering in Italy and Spain.

The most common stunning method was waterbath electrical stunning, being the same as for conventional slaughter.

Halal stunned poultry were hoisted before stunning in all the abattoirs surveyed in Spain, the UK and Turkey, and in the majority of the abattoirs in Germany.

The DIALREL project is funded by the European Commission and involves partners from 11 countries. It addresses issues relating to religious slaughter in order to encourage dialogue between stakeholders and interested parties. Religious slaughter has always been a controversial and emotive subject, caught between animal welfare considerations and cultural and human rights issues. There is considerable variation in current practices and the rules regarding religious requirements are confusing. Consumer demands and concerns also need to be addressed and the project is collecting and collating information relating to slaughter techniques, product ranges, consumer expectations, market share and socio-economic issues. The project is multidisciplinary and based on close cooperation between veterinarians, food scientists, sociologists, and jurists and other interested parties.

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The text represents the views of the author(s) and does not necessarily represent a position of the Commission, who will not be liable for the use made of such information.

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