



Harrison Collective

Annual Report 2024





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I. Introduction

The Harrison Collective was officially incorporated in June 2023. Even if our projects were already ongoing by that time, the official incorporation of an NGO (VZW/ASBL) marked the formal start of our organization, meaning a step towards full professionalization. For us - scholars/jurists with a passion for animals and the law - this was a symbolic moment.

The Harrison Collective is now a formal NGO of legal experts committed to the improvement of legislation addressing animals used for production in Belgium. This Annual Report reflects on the first full year of operations.





II. Letter from the Founders

2024 was a defining year for the Harrison Collective—our first full year of operations and the year we officially launched our organisation to the public. It was a year of hard work, important milestones, and unwavering commitment to farmed animals.

When we founded the Harrison Collective, we knew that the legal protection of farmed animals required a new kind of approach—one that was strategic, legally rigorous, and focused on enforcement. Too often, legal protections for farmed animals exist only on paper, with vague standards, weak oversight, and insufficient enforcement. We set out to change that.

Since our inception, we have worked to ensure that existing animal welfare laws are applied correctly and that violations do not go unchallenged. Over the past year, we have focused on:

- challenging new Belgian legislation that allowed piglet castration by farmers
- challenging the non-enforcement of illegal chicken catching in Flanders
- investigate the legal possibilities to reduce barn fires in Flanders

In November 2024, we officially launched the Harrison Collective at an event that brought together supporters, legal experts, and advocates from across Belgium and beyond. Seeing so many of you there—sharing our vision and engaging in meaningful discussions—was a powerful moment for us. It reinforced why this work is so important and why it must continue. To everyone who attended: thank you. Especially thanks to Wakker Dier and in particular Angie van Dijk for presenting their experience with our Dutch neighbours. Our collaboration with their organization has been an essential support for us in setting up our first projects.

None of this would have been possible without your support. Whether through donations, volunteer work, or spreading the word, your contributions have made a tangible difference. The Harrison Collective is entirely funded by individual donors and grants from organisations like the Healthy Air Fund and EA Funds.

Looking ahead, 2025 will be another crucial year. We will continue our legal actions, expand our investigative efforts, and advocate for stronger enforcement of existing animal welfare laws. With your help, we can push forward in the fight against legal loopholes, weak enforcement, and systemic neglect—and ensure that farmed animals receive the protection they deserve.

Thank you for standing with us in our first year. We look forward to continuing this journey together.

With gratitude,
Elias, Eva, Joren and Elien.



III. Our Vision

What

In 1964, Ruth Harrison published her book *Animal Machines*, in which she provided a detailed account of how animals in intensive farming were treated purely as machines. The book caused a shockwave and had a major influence on the development of animal welfare legislation. The Harrison Collective continues Ruth Harrison's legacy in today's society. We believe that many farmed animals are still excessively instrumentalized.

Although significant progress has been made in animal protection since the 1960s, the quality and enforcement of regulations concerning farmed animals still fall short. This is due, among other things, to:

- 1. Deficient legislation:** Animal welfare laws often contain vague standards that leave room for interpretation and/or contradict each other. This can lead to overly broad applications, weakening the legal norms. Therefore, an organization is needed to ensure that legal provisions are applied effectively and correctly. In our Piglet Castration project, for example, we oppose the erosion of protections against unanesthetized castration, which contradicts higher EU standards.
- 2. Lack of enforcement:** The 'enforcement gap' in animal welfare is substantial. Animal protection is not a priority, meaning that existing rules are often not monitored or enforced. Only a small percentage of farms are effectively inspected, and some regulations are not enforced at all. In our Chicken Catching project, for instance, we urge authorities to enforce the existing ban on catching chickens by their legs.
- 3. Conflicting regulations:** The legal framework for farmed animals is fragmented. European regulations, national laws, decrees, and ordinances are often applied inconsistently or incorrectly, violating higher legal standards. In our Healthy Air project, we investigate where unjustified exceptions have been applied, allowing chickens to be kept at excessive densities, negatively impacting air quality in surrounding areas.

In short, the Harrison Collective is necessary because, despite significant progress in animal welfare law, the adequate treatment of farmed animals is still not guaranteed. On paper, farmed animals have gained more protections since 1964, but in practice, the reality remains bleak. We aim to change this by ensuring that the promising words of the law are truly implemented in practice.



Why and how?

Why focus on farmed Animals?

The protection of farmed animals deserves special attention. They represent the largest group of animals used by humans and face a high risk of systemic exploitation and mistreatment. Moreover, there is a form of 'discrimination' against farmed animals in legal frameworks. For example, a pig classified as a 'pet' is entitled to significantly more space than a pig kept as a 'farm animal.' Legal standards for pets are generally stricter than those for farmed animals: mistreatment of a cat or dog is penalized far more severely than mistreatment of a laying hen. This is why we believe that farmed animal regulations require our legal expertise the most.

What makes us unique?

The Harrison Collective distinguishes itself from other animal protection organizations in several ways:

- 1. Legal expertise:** Our collective consists of legal professionals, the majority of whom have completed or are pursuing a PhD. We focus exclusively on legal strategies rather than large-scale public campaigns. Our goal is not so much to convince society that animals deserve better protection, but to raise awareness of current abuses and ensure that existing laws are correctly applied and interpreted.
- 2. Legal action:** Drawing on our in-house legal expertise, we initiate lawsuits to challenge the incorrect application and interpretation of regulations.

How do we work?

Our approach focuses on research and legal action:

- We collect data and request information from authorities to verify whether animal welfare regulations are being complied with and effectively enforced.
- We investigate violations and hold authorities accountable for their responsibilities.
- We verify whether information about animal welfare is accurate and combat 'welfare washing' (misleading positive portrayals).
- We publish our findings in newspapers and academic journals.
- We transparently share our findings on our website, ensuring public access to this information.

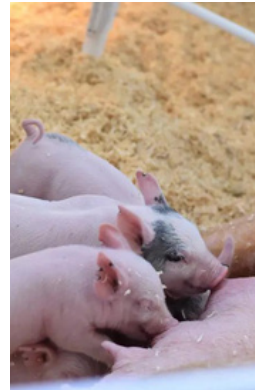
How are we funded?

Our funding consists entirely of donations from individuals, the Healthy Air Fund, and EA Funds. The Harrison Collective does not accept conditional donations and uses all contributions exclusively to pursue its statutory objectives.



IV. Projects

1. Piglet castration



- **Goal**

The objective is to abolish surgical piglet castration in Belgium or, at the very least, to secure castration conditions that significantly improve piglet welfare.

- **Strategy and Actions**

Given the current lack of political will to prohibit surgical piglet castration in Belgium, we focus on the enforcement of existing rules.

In addition, we are challenging a Royal Decree of 2023 that allows pig farmers to castrate piglets themselves, without the involvement of a veterinarian or prior training. We contend that, as long as castration is still permitted, it must be carried out exclusively by veterinarians, under general anaesthesia and with appropriate analgesia. Only veterinarians can ensure that the procedure is performed correctly and with minimal suffering. In addition, we urge the government to increase inspections and take stricter action against violations.

As a first step, we initiated proceedings before the Council of State seeking the annulment of Belgian legislation that allows pig farmers to castrate piglets themselves, without the involvement of a veterinarian or prior training. These proceedings are still pending. While awaiting a decision in these proceedings, we requested the interim suspension of the Royal Decree. Unfortunately, this request was rejected due to an alleged lack of urgency.

In March 2024, we submitted a formal complaint to the European Commission, asserting that the Royal Decree violates European regulations.

We subsequently requested the Flemish Minister for Animal Welfare to prohibit piglet castration in the new Flemish Animal Welfare Decree. Unfortunately, the new Decree did not revise the rules on piglet castration. We continue to urge the competent ministers to strengthen existing regulations and, pending reform, to ensure their strict enforcement.

Impact

Our efforts aim to significantly reduce the pain and suffering of approximately four million piglets per year in Belgium. On average, 3.6 million piglets are castrated in Flanders every year and 0.4 million in Wallonia.



2. Chicken catching

- **Goal**

The objective is to ensure the enforcement of the prohibition on catching chickens by their legs.

- **Strategy and Actions**

Despite a clear prohibition under European law, the practice of catching chickens by their legs remains widespread in Belgium, and authorities fail to enforce the ban. This method causes severe animal suffering, including broken limbs, trapped wings and necks, suffocation, and death during transport. Our strategy is to compel the Flemish authorities to enforce the prohibition by means of legal action, building on precedents set by Wakker Dier in the Netherlands and the Animal Law Foundation in the United Kingdom.



We first conducted a legal analysis to identify possible grounds for challenging the inaction of the Flemish government. Following this analysis, we lodged an appeal before the Council of State, challenging the decision by the Flemish authorities not to enforce the prohibition. In this case, we are represented by a specialised law firm.

In parallel, we contacted the press, which resulted in several press articles, including one in a major Flemish newspaper highlighting the legal and ethical issues involved.

- **Impact**

This project aims to end a harmful and illegal practice that remains standard in the poultry industry. If successful, it would prevent considerable suffering for a vast number of chickens each year. By enforcing existing European standards, the case would align Belgian practice with EU law and with recent developments in other member states. The case also contributes to broader public awareness and scrutiny of enforcement failures in animal welfare regulation.

De Standaard Nieuws Opinie Inspiratie Podcasts

Meest recent De helpdesk Politiek Binnenland Buitenland Economie Cultuur

DIERENWELZIJN

Mag je een kip ondersteboven vangen? Vlaanderen aangeklaagd omdat het “onnodig leed” niet aanpakt





3. Barn fires

- **Goal**

The objective is to improve fire safety measures in livestock barns in order to prevent barn fires and reduce the number of animal victims.

- **Strategy and Actions**

The appropriate legal route to challenge the government's inaction on barn fire prevention is not immediately evident. Therefore, our initial focus has been on conducting a thorough legal analysis to identify potential avenues to urge the government to impose stricter fire safety standards for barns and to encourage insurance companies to strengthen their policy conditions (Action 3.1). In parallel, we have raised awareness about the scale and severity of the issue (Action 3.2). We urged the Flemish Minister for Animal Welfare to conduct an inventory of barn fires and to adopt a policy plan for their prevention. We also launched our own investigation by submitting access to information requests to map incidents of barn fires across Belgium. We contacted various stakeholders who can contribute to the prevention of barn fires. In October 2024, we organised a roundtable for dialogue and knowledge exchange with several stakeholders, including Assuralia, Boerenbond, the Flemish administration, Prevent Agri, and others.

Our persistent engagement on this issue—including direct advocacy, stakeholder dialogue, and press work—has contributed to a concrete policy response: the Flemish authorities have now decided to commission an external investigation into barn fires. As a result, a government contract has been awarded to Prevent Agri to carry out a literature and field study to provide insight into the problem.

In addition, we contacted the press, which resulted in several press articles, including coverage in major Flemish newspapers. Once we have a comprehensive overview of viable legal strategies, we plan to expand this project with further targeted actions in 2024–2025 (Action 3.3).

- **Impact**

In 2021 alone, approximately 200,000 animals died as a result of barn fires in Belgium. Research shows that improved fire safety standards can significantly reduce these numbers. The absence of effective regulation in this area reflects a serious failure by the authorities. It is therefore essential to raise awareness, involve relevant actors, and identify legal avenues to challenge this ongoing inaction. The decision by the Flemish authorities to launch an external investigation marks an important first step toward addressing this systemic issue.





4. Legal advocacy

Topic 1. The Flemish animal welfare decree. In 2024, the Flemish parliament adopted a new legislative decree on the welfare of animals. The Harrison Collective was consulted by the parliament to share its analysis of the proposed decree. We addressed several shortcomings from a legal point of view and formulated proposals on how to improve the proposed decree. The decree entered into force on 1 January 2025.

Topic 2. Access to courts. Animal welfare NGOs in Belgium can currently not bring civil claims to court to protect animal welfare. In a judgment of 11 June 2024, the Court of Cassation ruled that such claims are inadmissible. We aim to change this and ensure that the legal interest and standing of animal welfare NGOs is recognised so that they can defend animal welfare before court. The Justice Committee of the Belgian Parliament has been debating a bill (introduced by Groen/Ecolo) that would grant standing to animal welfare NGOs. At the Committee's request, we submitted written advice in October 2024 and presented it during a parliamentary hearing in December 2024. Unfortunately the Committee voted against the bill in April 2025.



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JUSTITIE-JUSTICE COMM Forum FOB Magritte

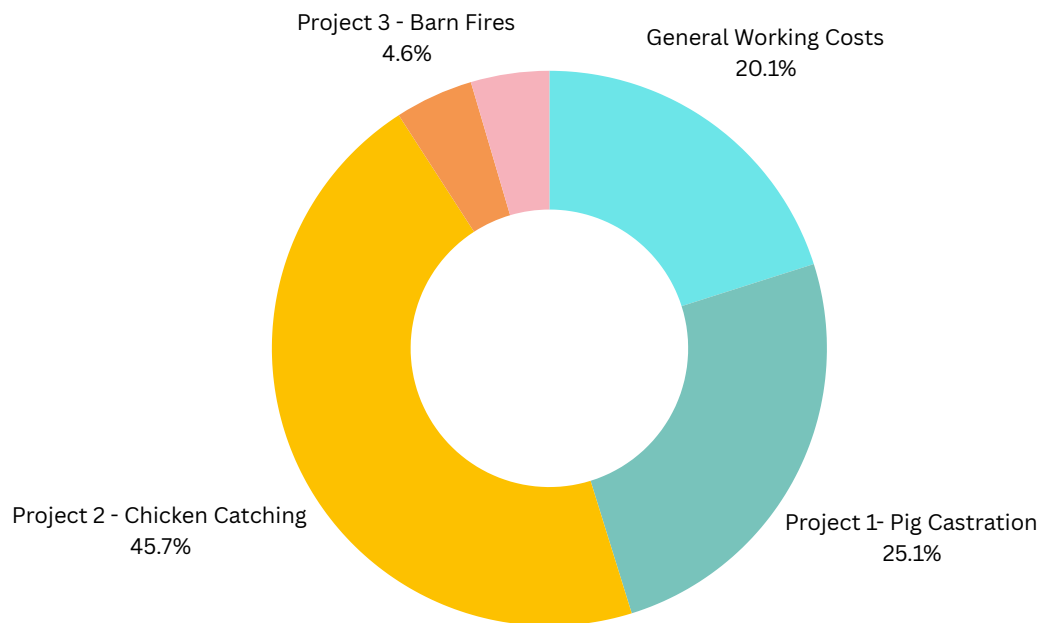
5. Animal welfare washing



Animal products are often marketed with misleading claims about animal welfare. The Harrison Collective is committed to addressing such misleading and inaccurate statements. We mainly focus on statements by government agencies as they should act in an exemplary manner.

For example, in 2024 we submitted two complaints against the government agency VLAM for misleading claims about rabbit welfare.

VI. Budget & Funding

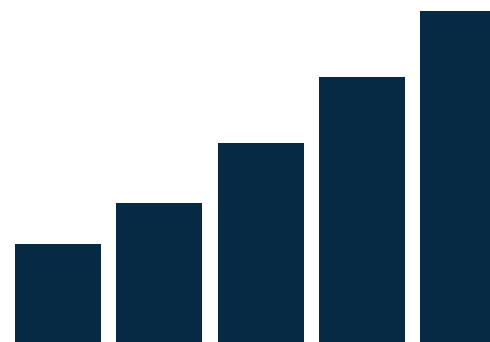


Over the past year, our financial support has been directed toward both the essential operations of our organisation and three main projects.

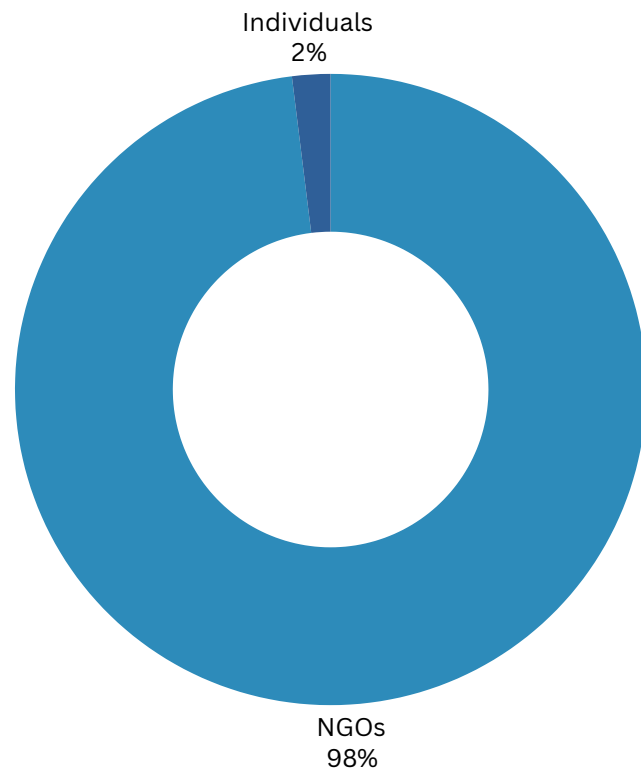
Our general working costs cover the basic costs of keeping the Collective running—maintaining our website, and ensuring that our public outreach remains strong. We also invested in launching our work publicly, bringing together legal experts, stakeholders, and supporters to build momentum for our mission.

The largest share of our resources has gone into legal action. Our work on piglet castration has required extensive legal proceedings, including challenging Belgian regulations before the Council of State and filing a formal complaint with the European Commission. The legal fees and procedural costs associated with these efforts represent a significant part of our budget, ensuring that we have the necessary expertise to pursue these cases effectively. Another major focus has been our chicken-catching litigation. Legal proceedings can be lengthy and complex, so we have dedicated funds to court costs and legal representation, with additional support from partner organisations.

Finally, for the barn fire project our expenses have remained low. As no legal avenues can be identified yet, we have only used funds in relation to the stakeholder meetings organized in autumn 2024.

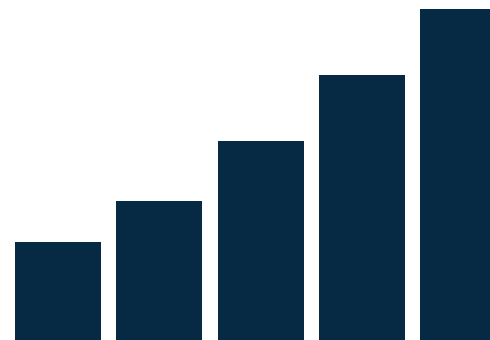


VI. Budget & Funding



Funding description

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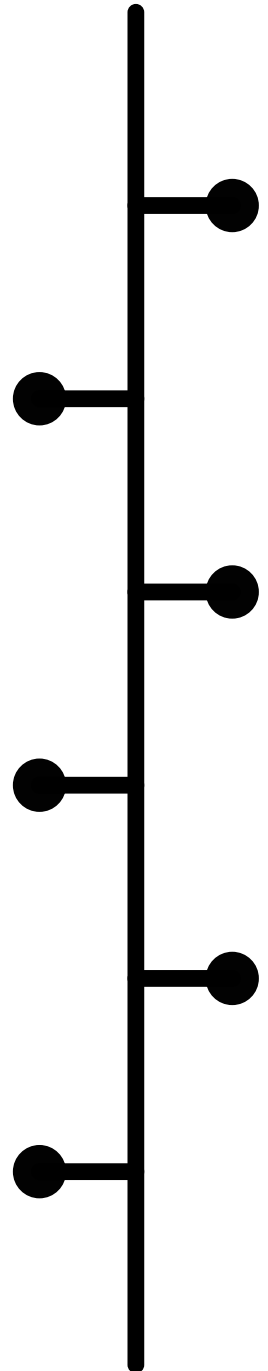




V. The Year Ahead

In the year ahead, the Harrison Collective will continue to build on the legal foundations laid in our initial projects, while expanding our focus to new dossiers. These topics reflect growing societal concern about animal welfare and pressing gaps in legal enforcement. We have identified several potential cases for further exploration, research, and legal action:

- **Tail Docking and Tooth Clipping in Piglets:** Despite a clear ban on routine tail docking and tooth clipping under the EU Pigs Directive, these painful procedures are still frequently carried out. This dossier will explore the structural lack of enforcement and transparency in Belgium, and assess the legal avenues available to address systemic non-compliance.
- **Mixing of Unfamiliar Pigs:** The common practice of mixing unfamiliar pigs—especially in transport or at slaughterhouses—leads to avoidable injuries and stress. Although European legislation prohibits unnecessary contact between animals likely to harm each other, enforcement appears inconsistent. We aim to analyse the legal framework and pursue enforcement or legal action where warranted.
- **Animal Welfare Washing:** The increasing use of misleading claims and welfare labels on animal products undermines consumer trust and animal protection. We will identify problematic cases and explore formal complaints, legal warnings, and strategic communication—potentially in partnership with NGOs such as Bite Back and Animal Rights.
- **Male Chick Culling:** The routine killing of day-old male chicks is under increasing political pressure, yet legislative changes remain slow. While this topic may not immediately lead to litigation, we intend to continue to advocate for stricter regulations, particularly in light of changes in neighbouring countries and ongoing political negotiations.
- **Separation of Calves from Mothers:** New scientific findings and recent campaigns have raised serious concerns about the immediate post-birth separation of calves from their mothers. We plan to investigate how this practice aligns with EU and Belgian law and assess the potential for legal or policy intervention.
- **Farrowing Crates for Sows:** The confinement of sows in farrowing crates—restricting their movement around birth and weaning—is another practice increasingly under scrutiny. We will assess the legal status of these crates and their compatibility with existing welfare standards.





VI. Contact Us



www.linkedin.com/company/92675649



hetharrisoncollectief@gmail.com



www.hetharrisoncollectief.com

Join the Harrison Collective!

Does the vision of the Harrison Collective resonate with you? Don't hesitate to get in touch!

We are always looking for enthusiastic volunteers with expertise in different fields.

Become a Harrison Expert by filling out the contact form on our website or sending a short motivation letter and CV to hetharrisoncollectief@gmail.com.

