



Harrison Collective

Annual Report 2025





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I. Introduction

The Harrison Collective celebrated its second birthday in 2025. What began as a small initiative has, over the past year, taken more concrete shape. Our work remains focused on a simple but demanding objective: using the law to address persistent and structural failures in the protection of animals.

This year has been one of consolidation. We have continued to develop our core cases and legal strategies, often in contexts where the appropriate legal route is not immediately clear and requires careful analysis and preparation. Strategic litigation takes time, and much of our work still happens behind the scenes. Nevertheless, important steps have been taken across all of our focus areas.

A particularly encouraging development has been the involvement of volunteers who have joined us over the past year. Their support has strengthened our capacity and brought new energy into the Collective, while allowing us to remain a small and specialised team.

At the same time, we are in the process of securing additional funding. This is necessary to ensure that we can sustain and expand our activities, in particular given the costs associated with litigation and external legal expertise. Our model remains largely pro bono, but meaningful impact requires a certain level of financial stability.

As in our first year, our work is driven by the conviction that many harmful practices persist not because the law is absent, but because it is not enforced. The cases and projects presented in this report should be understood in that light: as part of a broader effort to close that enforcement gap, step by step.

We are grateful to everyone who has supported us over the past year and who continues to contribute to the development of the Collective.





II. Vision & Mission

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.



III. Ongoing 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**

We initiated legal proceedings against a Belgian royal decree that allows piglet castration to be carried out by farmers under insufficient welfare safeguards. This case was lodged before the Council of State in 2023 and challenges the compatibility of royal decree with Belgian and European law.

In 2025, we submitted our final legal briefs and received the opinion of the advocate general in this case. That opinion advised the Council of State to annul the royal decree. We expect a favourable ruling in 2026.

- **Impact**

Our efforts aim to significantly reduce the pain and suffering of approximately four million piglets per year in Belgium. On average, 4 million piglets are castrated in Belgium every year



2. Chicken catching

- **Goal**

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

- **Strategy and actions**

Following the examples set in the Netherlands and the UK, we have urged the competent Flemish authorities to enforce this prohibition. We received a reply stating that the practice of trapping by the legs is not considered unlawful and is not enforced.

We are challenging this decision to refuse to take enforcement action before the Council of State. In April 2025, we filed our final submission before the Belgian Council of State.

- **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.





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**

In 2024, we presented the findings of our investigation into the causes of stable fires in Flanders. Following several letters and meetings, we convinced the Flemish authorities to request an external report on the issue.



In 2025, external experts issued a report on stable fires in Flanders. This report endorsed our plea that the government must start the inventarisation of the causes of stable fires in Flanders.

Based on this report, we sent another notice of default to the Flemish government to demand, once more, to start the inventarisation (see full letter [here](#)). We also spoke with policy makers and convinced them to submit a policy proposal concerning the inventarisation of stable fires.

- **Impact**

Each year, approximately 100,000 to 200,000 animals die as a result of barn fires in Flanders. 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.



4. Animal welfare washing

- **Goal**

Animal products are often marketed with misleading claims about animal welfare. The aim is to address such misleading and inaccurate statements.

- **Strategy and actions**

In 2025, we continued to hold companies accountable for animal welfare claims that are misleading, as illustrated with the following two examples.



Firstly, we found out that Vache Bleue was buying milk from a dairy farm where cows were mistreated. We immediately issued a formal notice to Vache Bleue to amend its animal welfare claims. We also filed a complaint with the FPS Economy and the Jury on Ethical Practices regarding Vache Bleue's misleading animal welfare claim.

Secondly, the development of a Flemish 'Better for Animals' label took concrete shape. We closely monitored and evaluated the criteria for using this label and we will continue to do so in 2026.

- **Impact**

More and more consumers are prioritising animal welfare. A [2024 survey](#) shows that 9 out of 10 consumers in the EU consider the treatment of farm animals a very important issue.

At the same time, consumers are misled by claims that brands make concerning animal welfare. Our fight against these misleading 'animal welfare claims' protects both consumers and animals. The more consumers are correctly informed about the way animal are actually treated, the more they buy products that do not harm animals.



IV. New Projects

1. CO₂-stunning of pigs

- **Goal**

The objective is to challenge the continued use of CO₂ stunning in pig slaughter, by enforcing existing legal requirements to avoid severe and avoidable suffering.

- **Strategy and Actions**

The appropriate legal route requires a combination of evidence-building and targeted litigation. We will first develop a comprehensive legal and scientific analysis of the incompatibility of current CO₂ stunning practices with EU and Belgian animal welfare law (Action 2.1). On this basis, we will initiate strategic litigation challenging the legality of authorisations or practices allowing CO₂ stunning in slaughterhouses (Action 2.2). Where relevant, we will also pursue enforcement actions addressing regulatory or inspection failures (Action 2.3). In parallel, we will engage with experts and stakeholders to strengthen the evidentiary basis and support legal arguments.

- **Impact**

CO₂ stunning affects millions of pigs annually and is associated with significant welfare concerns. Legal action targeting this practice has the potential to trigger large-scale improvements in slaughter practices, either by prohibiting its use or by imposing stricter welfare requirements, with immediate and sector-wide effects.

2. Routine tail docking

- **Goal**

The objective is to end the routine tail docking of pigs by enforcing EU and Belgian rules that prohibit the practice as a standard procedure.

- **Strategy and Actions**

Our strategy focuses on challenging systemic non-enforcement. We are currently preparing legal action targeting the failure of competent authorities to enforce the existing rules that ban this practise. These actions will be supported by targeted engagement with stakeholders and experts.

- **Impact**

Routine tail docking would improve considerable welfare improvement for approximately 10-11 million pigs/year in Belgium. If succesful, the strategy could be copied to other EU countries (improving welfare conditions of approx. 250 million pigs/year).



3. One-day chick culling

- **Goal**

The objective is to end the killing of one-day-old chicks by bringing into force an existing legal ban under Flemish law.

- **Strategy and Actions**

The Flemish Animal Protection Decree provides for a ban on killing one-day-old chicks once alternatives are feasible. Our strategy is to initiate strategic litigation in order to challenge the failure of the Flemish government to bring this ban into force.

In 2025, we have been consulting with stake holders and researchers to conduct an evidence-based analysis of the feasibility of alternatives. Based on this analysis, we are currently preparing a lawsuit. Where appropriate, we will complement this lawsuit with targeted advocacy and stakeholder engagement.

- **Impact**

In Flanders, approximately 20-25 millions one-day-old chicks are killed each year. Bringing the legal ban into force would result in an immediate and structural end to this practice in Flanders, with significant and lasting welfare benefits.

V. Financial Overview



• Costs description

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

Our general working costs (5.4%) cover the basic needs of keeping the Collective running and include the maintenance costs of our website, the necessary insurance costs, and ensuring that our public outreach remains active and accessible.

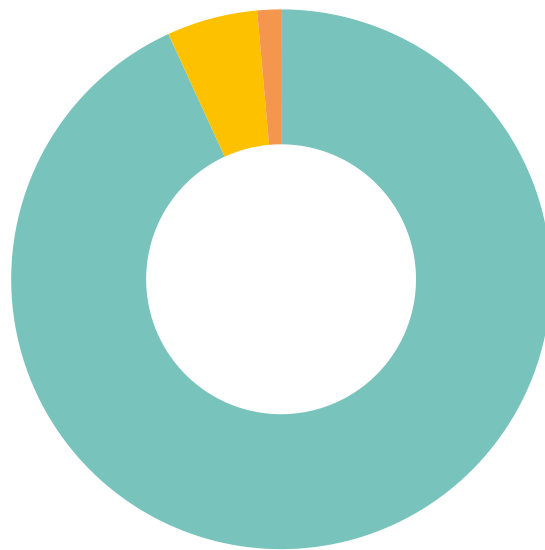
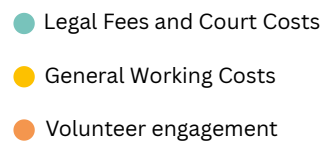
Following our public launch, we have continued to invest modestly in visibility and communication, in order to support our work and connect with relevant stakeholders. We now also have an active Instagram account.

The largest share of our resources has been directed to legal action (93.1%), which include court costs and fees for legal counsel. Our work on piglet castration and chicken catching has continued to require significant legal efforts, including proceedings before the Council of State. Most of our costs therefore relate to these two court cases, reflecting the complexity and importance of the issues. We are currently awaiting the outcome of these proceedings.

Apart from these costs, a small percentage (1.4%) goes to volunteer engagement. Once a year, we invite our volunteers to come together physically to prepare our actions and discuss our priorities.

• Funding description

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





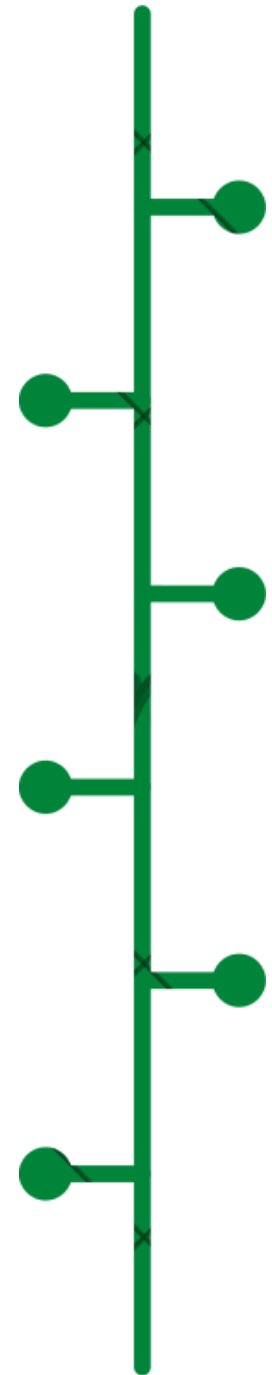
VI. The Year Ahead

The coming year will be focused on further building out the projects we have initiated. Several of our current files are now moving beyond the preparatory phase, and we will continue to develop these into concrete legal actions where appropriate. At the same time, we are exploring new avenues for strategic litigation, with a view to addressing additional structural issues in the enforcement of animal welfare law.

A key priority for the year ahead is to secure more stable, structural funding. While our work to date has largely relied on pro bono efforts and project-based support, the next phase of the Collective requires a more sustainable financial basis. This will allow us to maintain continuity in ongoing cases, engage external expertise where needed, and expand our capacity in a measured way.

We also expect that some of the projects initiated in our first year will reach more advanced stages, and, where possible, be brought to a conclusion. Whether through judicial outcomes or other forms of impact, these cases will be important in assessing and refining our approach to strategic litigation.

Overall, the year ahead will be one of transition: from groundwork to implementation, and from initial momentum to a more established and sustainable practice.





VII. Contact Us



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[@harrisoncollectief](https://www.instagram.com/harrisoncollectief)

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 an email to info@hetharrisoncollectief.be.

