



ILLEGAL IMPORTATION OF MEAT, INCLUDING BUSHMEAT, FROM AIR PASSENGERS

Need for active support from the air transport sector

Global air traffic passenger traffic is growing every year (+6.4% in 2018), with a total of 8.8 billion passengers. In the European Union, more than 1 billion passengers travel by air every year, with a third from non-EU States. For health and conservation reasons, it is vital to involve the transport sector against the illegal importation of meat and bushmeat by passengers and more generally against wildlife trafficking.

Smuggling of illegal goods, animals and plants via air transport

The air transport industry unwillingly participates in the supply chain of illegally imported goods, animals and plants by passengers. Passengers nowadays form a major conveying channel, for instance for wildlife trafficking with 54% estimated to be smuggled in this way. This is considered a new phenomenon, since cargo was historically the main transport method used by smugglers and criminal organisation networks.

This is the reason why the air transport industry committed in May 2018 to taking action against crime. According to Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO): *"This is vital as traffickers and high-risk passengers seek to exploit new transportation modes for criminal activities, and ever-increasing passenger numbers and growing connectivity present new challenges in countering the shipment of drugs and other illegal goods, whether on passengers, in luggage, through air cargo, by private aircraft or by parcel post and express."* Globalisation and the changing transport patterns of the world highlight opportunities for action, calling for greater commitment and involvement from the aviation industry.

Involvement of the air transport industry against illegal wildlife trade

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the illegal trade in wildlife is recognised as a specialised area of organised crime. It is estimated to be worth up tens of billions of US dollars per year and ranks first in terms of profits next to human, arms and drugs trafficking. The increased complexity and scale of the problem require the setting up of a global partnership involving all stakeholders. Up to now, two initiatives have

been taken with regards to the air transport industry: the Routes partnership in the US and the Buckingham Palace Declaration in the UK. Accession to such initiatives expresses strong commitments to reduce the illegal trade of wildlife in an efficient manner by joining forces. Currently, more than 120 stakeholders have signed the Buckingham Palace Declaration, including international organisations such as the World Customs Organization or the International Air Transport Association, more than 50 airlines companies and airports such as Heathrow.





The special case of illegal importation of meat and bushmeat by passengers

Most of the available research on illegal imports of meat, including bushmeat, was carried out in relation to air passengers from third countries. To date, there is little data available for air cargo, cargo ships, mail or rail. Research estimates that dozens of tons of bushmeat are being smuggled by passengers each year to the European Union. With regard to the study conducted in Belgium, it is assumed to be mainly for personal consumption given the small volumes generally concerned. In addition, the lack of data and knowledge about the entire supply chain makes it impossible to determine whether such smuggling may involve participation in an organised criminal network. The fact remains that from a health and conservation perspective, the illegal importation of meat by passengers has to be considered a high risk.

Information to be provided by air sector to passengers

According to Commission regulation (EC) No 206/2009, information must be provided by international passenger transport operators and postal services to their clients. Member States should report any relevant information on the measures taken to advertise and enforce the rules laid down at European level to the European Commission on an annual basis. There is no specific information on non-processed meat or bushmeat which, from an operational viewpoint, can be an obstacle for passengers to visualise what is forbidden.



Article 4: International passenger transport operators, including airport and port operators and travel agencies as well as postal services, shall draw the attention of their customers to the rules laid down in this Regulation, in particular by providing the information set out in Annexes III and IV, as provided for in Article 3.

Recommendations

- **Build, jointly with relevant public authorities such as customs, Food Safety authorities, animal health authorities and nature conservation authorities, a coherent information campaign for passengers relating to the importation of illegal meat in personal consignments;**

In order to be able to do so:

- 1. Set up a multi-disciplinary task force including public authorities, airports, airline companies and any other relevant stakeholders to establish an action plan aiming to combat the illegal importation of meat, including bushmeat;**
- 2. Develop an awareness-raising campaign at airports and on aeroplanes using videos, leaflets, in-flight announcements or any other appropriate tools to make understand passengers the risks posed by illegal meat to human health, animal health and nature conservation;**

3. Provide more space at the airport for public authorities to present information on foodstuff products, including meat, as legally required by the European Union;
 4. Recommend that airports act as facilitator for actions to be implemented by airline companies, such as the following:
 - when booking, organise a link to a public website where passengers can be informed about the illegal importation of meat and bushmeat;
 - include a message on the illegal importation of meat and bushmeat in flight confirmation e-mails;
 - when boarding, make an awareness-raising announcement to passengers flying to countries where bushmeat is commonly eaten;
 - engage with airports in source countries and develop a joint awareness-raising campaign on meat and bushmeat for passengers flying to the European Union.
 5. Encourage public authorities, including the European Commission, to disseminate information on bushmeat next to the EU official posters on foodstuff products;
 6. Encourage public authorities to investigate legally the possibility for passengers to declare meat in personal consignments during the flight. Goods being declared will be checked at the point of entry in order to determine whether they are allowed in the European Union. In case of infringements, illegal meat could be discarded. Such importation would be considered an unintentional unlawful act and border control agents would only issue a warning;
 7. Encourage public authorities to spread a strong message to passengers by rendering confiscated meat unfit for human consumption upon seizure;
 8. Encourage public authorities to develop a single web portal where passengers can find all information relating to goods, including products of animal origin, that are not permitted to be imported in personal consignments into the European Union.
- Provide appropriate space and means at the airport for border control authorities to perform their checks and consider facilitating access to the airport to the Environment Inspectorate.
- Formally commit to initiatives aiming to combat the wildlife trade, such as the Buckingham Palace Declaration established under the auspices of United for Wildlife.

References

- Chaber AL., Gaubert P., Green H., Garigliany M., Renault V., Busoni V., Dieudonné M., Saegerman C. 2018. Report on the illegal importation of meat, including bushmeat, seized at Zaventem Airport (2017-2018). Study carried out under the authority of the Federal Public Service for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment. Belgium.
- Commission regulation (EC) 206/2009 of 5 March 2009 on the introduction into the Community of personal consignments of products of animal origin and amending Regulation (EC) No 136/2004 [2013] OJ L77/27.
- Gittens A. 2019. In the balance: Global air transport demand in 2018 and 2019. International Airport review; accessed 2019 Nov 12. <https://www.internationalairportreview.com>.
- International Air Transport Association. Combatting Illegal Trade in Wildlife; accessed 2019 Nov 12. <https://www.iata.org>.
- International Civil Aviation Organization. 2018. Information paper. Ensuring that airlines and aviation contribute to combatting illegal wildlife trade; accessed 2019 Nov 12. <https://www/icao.int>.
- Meers J. 2018. Illegal Wildlife Trade is Organized Crime, 80 Countries Declare. Organized crime and corruption reporting project; accessed 2019 Nov 16. <https://www.occrp.org>.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2018. UNODC and ICAO sign partnership to strengthen airport security against crime, terrorist threats; accessed 2019 Nov 12. <https://www.unodc.org>.
- United for Wildlife. Transport Task Force; accessed 2019 Nov 16. <https://www.unitedforwildlife.org>.

This fact sheet is part of a set of a series of six covering the trade in exotic animal species. They are focused on illegal importation of meat into the European Union (including bushmeat) and the legal or illegal trade in reptiles and amphibians. They were developed on a collaborative way between the FPS Health and a group of experts. They were issued during the "Towards a sustainable wildlife trade" One World One Health recommendations event organized on 3 and 4 December 2019 by the FPS Health and the Belgian Biodiversity Platform.



Biodiversity.be



federal public service
HEALTH, FOOD CHAIN SAFETY
AND ENVIRONMENT

