

Follow-Up Questions for Open Cages Part Two (2017)

In 2017, how many views will the media coverage of Open Cages' investigations receive?

The estimated reach is at least 3.5 million views in press or TV and at least 5 million views on social media in both Poland and Lithuania.

- So far, a Polish fur farm investigation from November 2016 was still publicized in 2017, being featured in two reportage shows on Polish national TV, with a combined estimated audience of 2.5 million viewers.
- A Lithuanian egg-laying hen farm investigation has reached at least 1 million people through TV news and major online newspapers.
- Additionally, videos featuring Open Cages' investigations had approximately 3.6 million views on our own Facebook page (estimated total for 2017 is 4.8 million). Together with coverage of investigation in Lithuania, this makes over 5 million views.

Please note that these numbers can vary significantly year to year as most media attention is brought to major investigations, which are not published frequently.

Occasionally our investigations are featured in news publications outside Poland and Lithuania. This year such publications included reportage TV shows in Germany, and an article and video in [Mail Online](#) which has up to 14.8 million unique daily visitors.

At this moment we are building our media contacts in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, so that in the future we are able to get some media coverage of investigations there. It is likely to happen, because markets in this region are very interconnected.

In 2017, how many activists will Open Cages train in their activist trainings?

We estimate that in 2017 around 1,000 people participated in our initial trainings in Poland and Lithuania. We also started first initial trainings in Estonia, Ukraine, and Belarus, and we're planning to organize the first one in Russia in December 2017. For all those countries combined the number will be between 100–150, but will grow significantly over the course of 2018. It is after the training that we ask people to volunteer with us. In our opinion such trainings are beneficial even if people do not decide to be activists later on, because many people who participated in the trainings become our donors or help us in some other way. We are confident that we played some role in educating people who are interested in helping animals on the necessity of focusing on farmed animals and taking a goal-oriented approach to activism.

In addition to the initial trainings, we also organize additional ones for people who stay in our

local groups as activists. We are now looking into using webinars as an additional tool to spread knowledge inside the organization.

In 2017, how many policy changes will Open Cages' corporate outreach be associated with? Do you happen to have an estimate of the number of birds who will annually be affected by these policy changes?

At this moment we have already secured 12 policies, mostly from the retail sector. All those policies were a result of communication with our corporate team. One of the policies also involves retail operations in Portugal and Colombia. We were also connected to a couple of policies through the Open Wing Alliance.

We are confident that before the end of the year we are going to secure at least five more policies, and there is a strong possibility that the biggest chain of Polish restaurants will be among them, which hopefully will create a domino effect in another sector of the market—until now the majority of policies were in the retail sector.

In Lithuania we started our corporate work much later, but already secured the first three cage-free policies.

Unfortunately the business owners in this region generally do not want to share any numbers with us, since they consider it a business secret. Most legal regulations in this region favor privacy over transparency, even regarding business.

We also already [started communication](#) on broiler chicken improvements with some retailers with whom we developed good relations during our work on caged-egg policies.

In 2017, what have the outcomes of your international outreach work been?

As of 2017 we are working as an established organization in Poland and Lithuania. We also expanded to Estonia, Ukraine, and Belarus. We are always open to helping organizations in other countries. Countries where we formed partnerships that involve training of activists, sharing resources, and mentoring—when needed—include Russia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Japan, Czechia, and Slovakia. We made some attempts to start activist groups in Romania and Hungary, but at this time there is a lack of even grassroots groups that we know of who are willing to start farmed animal-oriented campaigning.

We were only looking to expand to countries where there were already people willing to work with us and with whom we were sure to share a similar worldview and organizational culture. It is very important for us that people running Open Cages groups in other countries are independent

and capable of making informed decisions about what would be the best outcome in their countries. We are not trying to expand into countries where we lack local contacts who want to work as a part of bigger organization. In countries where there is a capable local organization (like Dzīvnieku Brīvība in Latvia or Obraz in Czechia), we only work by creating partner relations and exchanging resources. We think that starting new offices in countries with active and capable organizations would create unnecessary tensions. We also believe that supporting existing organizations would be more efficient.

Short summary of our activities in Lithuania in 2017: In Lithuania we have published an investigation from egg-laying hen farms which got the most media attention of all our investigations so far (it was the fifth). We managed to keep it in the news for one week by protesting the State Veterinary Inspection after they couldn't find any violations of law in the egg farms. 560,000 people were reached on facebook with the investigation footage (there are only 1.2 million Lithuanians with facebook accounts).

In the beginning of 2017 we had the first ever march for animals, which attracted about 1,000 people and also got a lot of media coverage.

So far we have secured cage-free pledges from three companies (one food producer, one big restaurant chain, and one hotel) and we expect many more to come if not by the end of 2017, then in the beginning of 2018. We also made McDonald's and Subway publish their existing policies in the Baltic countries.

In Ukraine, Belarus, and Estonia we are now working on building basic organizational capacity. We are also looking at opportunities to do some work in Russia, where we are already cooperating with Vita and Voices 4 Animals. The reason for considering our involvement in Russia is that there is an unwillingness on the part of local organizations to engage in corporate campaigns.

In 2017, how many pieces of literature will Open Cages distribute?

We estimate the number of brochures and leaflets distributed this year to be 80,000 in Poland and Lithuania.

In 2017, what do predict the outcomes of your lobbying campaigns will be?

It's a very interesting moment to ask this question, because according to our knowledge the parliamentary animal welfare commission is now preparing a bill that would include a couple of

improvements, and the ban on farming of fur-bearing animals is among them. At this moment it is impossible for us to know what the final outcome will be, but we know that some influential politicians from the ruling party are supporting the fur ban in Poland. In the case of the fur farming ban, the campaigning and lobbying work was done in Poland by Open Cages and Fundacja Międzynarodowy Ruch na Rzecz Zwierząt Viva. I understand that lobbying efforts can only be judged as successful if we are able to achieve this ban, but in my personal opinion, the fact that in five years we were able to bring the issue from being absolutely unknown to being seriously discussed as an industry that can be banned altogether is an important step forward. When we started the campaign to ban fur farming, we were thinking that we could be in this place in 10–15 years. We are not the biggest country in the world, but we have third biggest fur trade.

Additionally, our work with local communities brought at least 55 interpellations of MPs. The interpellations were connected to risks involved with factory farming.

There are some indications on the Open Cages strategy document that you explicitly don't set concrete short-term goals, but I'm not sure if that's the case. Does Open Cages set short-term goals? If so, could you please tell us what these short-term goals are?

Currently, as a group that works on many projects simultaneously, we use an objectives tracking tool called OKR (Objectives and Key Result) to set short-term goals. The framework is explained in more depth [here](#).

The basic idea is that at Open Cages we have long-term goals to which people or groups link when setting their OKR. That way we can split big long-term goals as measurable and divided tasks between our groups and people. The OKR are set and reviewed quarterly and annually. They are publicly available to the rest of the team, in addition to a self-grading rubric. Every set objective links to the strategic plan above.

Some of our short term goals (including examples from different spheres of activities) are:

- Cage-free policies among 20 biggest retailers
- Improving our end-of-year fundraising campaign by 33%
- Implementation of a restaurant campaign in Ukraine
- Starting a campaign to introduce the position of a public litigator delegated to animal abuse cases
- Creating a website for the upcoming broiler campaign

How does Open Cages evaluate their programs? What metrics, if any, are used?

We use different metrics for different types of campaigns and projects. One approach we regularly take is assessing based on opportunity cost: weighting programs against each other every time we are planning to take on new projects. We are in a different situation than organizations in countries with a more developed animal rights movement (e.g., U.K., U.S., Germany), where you can focus all your energy and resources on a few activities because you function as one of many organizations and can therefore decide where your area of focus is (since you know that other organizations are working on other issues). We believe there is a need for consumer awareness, media work, lobbying, and business outreach to work in sync with each other because it's hardly possible to achieve significant progress in only one sphere without at least some progress in the others. The way we look at new and ongoing projects is to look every 6 months at all our activities, think about our plans for the future, and see if there are some projects we could close or limit to create a place for new endeavors. In doing it, we ask for feedback from people inside and outside of the organization, to get as unbiased of a perspective as we can. One example of such a decision-making process that we have available in English (because we were asking for feedback from organizations from other countries) can be found here: [Case for empowering local communities to block factory farming investments.](#)

It is not a simple process, but I am sure you understand that it is difficult to easily compare the effectiveness of lobbying vs. investigations vs. leafleting on veganism at music festivals. We are working in quite new terrain (Eastern Europe) and we are trying to solve one of the biggest ethical problems of the modern world, in a country which is one of the biggest animals producers in Europe (especially in mink and birds). It's a sphere of very low certainty, and as much as we believe in measuring effectiveness, we also would not want to limit ourselves to activities whose major advantage is measurability (like calculating the number of animals per piece of brochure distributed).

While trying to assess if we are still willing to pursue some activities we ask ourselves some questions, like:

- Does it align with our strategy?
- Do we have any data that suggests that it's such a good idea that we should re-think our strategy?
- For how long are we willing to test a new idea before we decide to drop it?
- How are we going to decide if the program is successful?
- Can we afford it?
- Will it be the best use of our time compared to other programs we are focusing on at this moment?
- Will it be a good fundraising campaign or a project that is revenue-generating? (Some campaigns might not be worthwhile in and of themselves, but could make sense as a way

to bring resources for activities that are less popular with donors, like broiler welfare activities.)

- Will this bring more resources, contacts, and respectability to the organization and the whole farmed animal advocacy movement?
- Will this activity secure us against risks to the movement and the organization?

How is Open Cages' 15-member voting group divided among Open Cages leadership, staff, volunteers, and people otherwise unaffiliated with Open Cages?

According to Polish law, the general assembly of voting members is the ultimate decision-making group in the association. The leadership is chosen to deal with everyday decisions, but not the major ones. That being said, at this moment five of the people who are in the voting member group are hired and they are also members of the leadership group, the other ten people are volunteers (one person being both in the leadership group and a volunteer) and quite often also our donors. It is not legally possible for people unaffiliated with Open Cages to be voting members (because we are an association). At this moment we also have two staff members who are not members of the voting group, but are invited to meetings of the group that take place twice a year.

I've found a [translation of the Law on Associations from 1989](#). This law has been somewhat changed already but I think it will give you some insight into the thinking behind this form of non-governmental organizations.

We notice that all members of Open Cages' board are heavily involved in working for Open Cages. Is this common practice in Poland? If not, could you briefly explain the reasoning behind it?

We are an association and choosing board members from among the active members is the legal requirement for us (associations are self-governed). We could create an additional advisory board and we are now working on establishing one, mostly to bring more knowledge and experience from the business sector, but this is not a common thing to do in Poland. It is more common to institute a separate board if you decide to run your NGO as a foundation, but we did not want to do it this way, because [foundations are much less democratic](#).

How tractable is promoting concern for farmed animals in Eastern Europe? How has Open Cages seen attitudes or policies shift since they began working on farmed animal campaigns, and are there any signs that attitudes will or will not be able to shift further?

In Lithuania we order public opinion polls to see the attitudes towards farmed animals. On the fur issue we saw that the public opinion shifted 9% (from 58% of the public being against it to 67% against it) in less than a year (both surveys were conducted in 2016). We have published an investigation and had an outdoor ad campaign during the time between the surveys. Our survey on hen welfare showed that 78% of Lithuanians think that cages are not acceptable rearing systems for hens (before the investigation it was 75%, so not a lot gained here).

We are sure that we played a role in starting a media and political debate on the issues of fur farming and egg farming. Before our investigations on both subjects there were almost no materials in the media about the welfare of hens, minks, and foxes. Now the media starts writing about it independently from us, which is a sign of established awareness of problems connected with those industries. At the same time there is almost no discussion about the welfare of animals that we are not campaigning about. The only exception is horses (there is a campaign in Poland about the horse trade and horse-driven carriages in the mountain areas). I think this shows that media follows the trends created by organizations.

We can also observe a significant growth in the number of interpellations regarding farmed animals from MPs. In the last elections, political parties started involving animal welfare issues in their party programs, and we were able to bring the issue of animal welfare to pre-election debates.

Does Open Cages worry that focusing on some of the most extreme confinement practices could lead to complacency with other forms of suffering that farmed animals endure or with meat consumption?

Yes. This potential problem of shifting consumer attitudes toward animals in a negative direction is something we always worried about and weighed in our strategic planning.

When we started our campaign focused on cage egg farming in 2014 we believed that there was enough evidence against increasing complacency. Currently, with more data available and more experts investigating spillover effects (like Open Philanthropy Project research), we are feeling even more strongly that there are convincing arguments for this advocacy approach.

The most convincing arguments we see are the fact that there is no historical precedence of such effect or even weak positive evidence that these tactics decrease complacency (Henry Spira's campaigns would be a good example). Other major factors include tractability of such an approach and the scale of suffering that the most cruel practices cause. Also, moral progress seems to be gradual—so exposing people to the horrors of animal farming may be best done by focusing on the practices they are the most likely to be against, or to push the moral circle further

with the foot-in-the-door approach. The final argument is that these tactics are not the only ones in animal advocacy—so while helping so many animals is crucial, we can also reach other, more receptive audiences with arguments against animal farming and suffering.

That being said, we still think that increasing complacency and moral excuses for eating animal products is a possible risk. We believe animal advocates should consider such downsides of any intervention they employ and seek new data and evidence about whether current programs are net harmful or not both in the short term and the long term. We are ready to change our approach if new evidence emerges.

There are many more farmed animals than there are animals used for fur. Open Cages seems to direct comparable resources towards advocacy for farmed animals and advocacy for animals used for fur. Is this true? If it is, why does Open Cages do this?

We decided to answer this question for both Lithuania and Poland, which are two countries where we run fur campaigns. Due to the numbers of fur animals in both countries and the specific context of Eastern Europe we don't think there is a reason to exclude fur animals from the pool of "farmed animals." Technically and legally, all the fur-bearing animals in Europe are farmed.

In Poland, fur is actually one of the biggest issues: the amount of fur-bearing animals is comparable to the number of pigs and milk cows, and bigger than the number of cows bred for meat consumption. Poland is one of the three biggest fur-producing countries in the world (together with China and Denmark). It's also an industry that we can just completely stop, whereas with other types of animal production we can only try to make the industry move away from the most harmful practices. We believe that in our local context it does not make sense to treat the fur industry as separate from other types of farming.

In Lithuania the number of animals raised for fur far exceeds that of cows, pigs, goats and sheep combined (2.5 million and 1.5 million respectively). We also have almost the same amount of egg laying hens as we have fur-bearing animals. Only the broiler chickens (54 million) exceed the number of fur animals here. Even though we were eager to work towards reducing broiler consumption, it seemed better to get the public on our side by fighting fur farming (which is a form of factory farming). We also think that banning fur farming—which is absolutely achievable—would reduce more suffering than switching cage farms into barn systems, since the number of animals is the same.

Unlike in the U.S., U.K., or some other countries in Western Europe, we cannot just benefit from the work that has already been done by other organizations and move on from there, but rather we need to create momentum and build a real movement around farmed animal issues. Because of this, in both countries we decided that it strategically makes sense for us to start with campaigns that are easier to accept by members of the society, so that we gather supporters and

general organizational capacity before we move on to campaigns focusing on animals that people do not empathize with so easily (like birds).

I am all in favor of focusing on farmed animals, but I also think that as a movement we should be much more aware of local contexts and the necessity of building the movement and garnering support before you start copying tested solutions from organizations working in the U.S. or other regions. Implementing seemingly successful tactics in environments that are not ready for them will not bring the successes we expect. I believe there are not as many shortcuts in animal rights work as we would want there to be, and it is impossible to jump from having a movement that is almost exclusively focused on homeless dogs to campaigning about chicken or fish welfare without engaging the society in other debates regarding animals we breed and kill.

Some of Open Cages' activities (perhaps particularly protests) have the potential to backfire, either by leading to legislation targeting activists or by negatively affecting public opinion of activists. Has Open Cages considered these possibilities?

Our utmost concern connected to legislation is that we are witnessing the shrinking of democratic space and attempts to criminalize or discourage some civil activities (like public gatherings) in the whole regions of Eastern Europe, including countries of our interest—Poland and Ukraine mostly. This tendency poses a big risk to non-governmental organizations and civil society in general, with human rights and environmental NGOs being the most affected. Learning from the experience of other Polish or foreign NGOs, we are aware that under these circumstances the kind of tactics used by targeted organizations is sometimes insignificant. Any kinds of repressions are triggered, rather, by the political agenda of decision makers or collusion with lobbies than by actual activities that organizations conduct.

We consider Open Cages resilient to most common tools used to systemically incapacitate NGOs, like suspension of funding—mostly because we are independent from governmental and public grants and have wide support among diverse social groups. However, we are closely watching the public debate about non-governmental organizations and are ready to form alliances against potential crackdown on civil organizations.

The actual backfire risk of our activities we assess to be at about a medium level. The perception of “aggressiveness” of some tactics may be different in every society, but daily public debate in East European countries happens to be far more aggressive than any of our messages could be—like Polish miners burning tires in front of Parliament in protest of the closing of coal mines, or occupation of the Parliament by MPs in Poland or Ukraine.

Protests and blockades are still a part of the political culture of our region, as we still remember the opposition to the Soviet Regime. The local communities we support in their fight to prevent the factory farm investments in their backyard often engage in protests, roadblocks, and

barricades—proving that the most radical tactics used to stop factory farming are grass-rooted and perceived as acceptable even by countryside inhabitants—not to mention very favorable media and local politicians that use the opportunities to bond with the rural electorate. Those protests are actually the most radical activities we ever supported and they were not even organized by us but by the “ordinary people” we cooperate with—and still they were only non-violent acts of civil disobedience that are granted and protected under European Union law.

To highlight how soft our tactics and image may appear when comparing to the “radicalized” image of the animal rights movement, we can say that some of the most radical incidents (alleged property destruction and release of animals) have appeared to be “false flags” crafted by mink farmers as a part of a black PR campaign when they failed to find enough scandalizing content from our activities. To mitigate the risk created by those attempts to criminalize our image, and to balance some of the messages or topics that could be considered radical, we engage in a range of activities that position us as experts and partners for politicians and businesses, and contribute to a more open and friendly image of animal rights activists.

Aside from our work with local communities, we do not engage much in protests but rather use events to create powerful images that circulate in media and social media. And when we do, we are careful to choose the topics and expressions of our message in such a way as to make sure that they will be understandable for the majority of our society. But we are aware of the fact that some tactics can actually backfire in eyes of public opinion—more often resulting in ridicule than in anger—so we are constantly looking for clues on how our work is perceived by the media and the society in general, and we are always ready to change the way we do things if we realize it is not working the way we wanted.

Why does a significant portion of Open Cages' outreach focus on dietary change rather than directly shifting public attitudes?

Any outreach focused on personal dietary change is, for us, always a tool to develop opportunities for institutional changes and changes in public attitude. We are absolutely aware that focusing on individual dietary changes will not bring a breakthrough in the situation of farmed animals—but it can help create space for shifting more general public attitudes and make small but meaningful corporate and legislative changes.

We also generally believe that it will be easier to change people’s attitudes if they are not so invested in everyday use of animal products.

By engaging in dietary outreach, we are able to reach out to a large number of people, who can form a good consumer base for new startups in plant-based meat alternatives. We also believe that it is important that animal protection organizations educate their followers and prepare them for new technologies in replacing animal products. By making sure that as a movement we are

considered experts in this area, we might be able to mitigate the risk of opposition to “lab-meat,” similar to the one that GMOs are now facing.