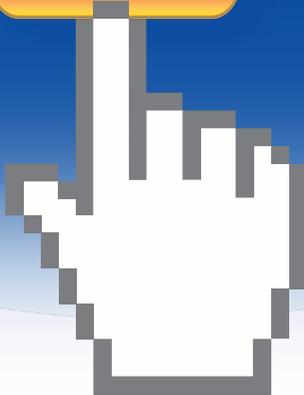


# Online pet sales in the EU

## What's the cost?



add to basket



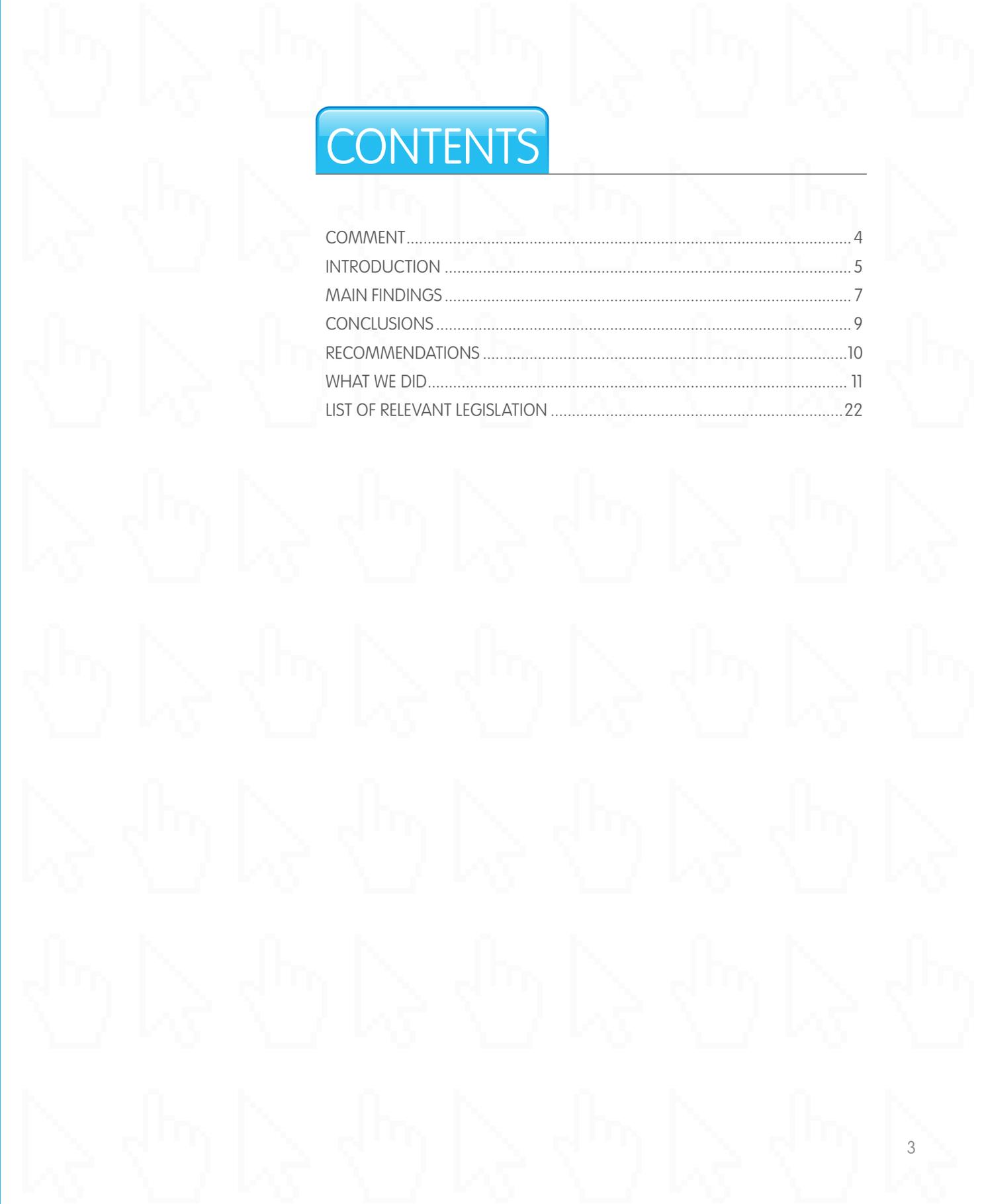
EU DOG & CAT  
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# CONTENTS

COMMENT.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
MAIN FINDINGS.....	7
CONCLUSIONS.....	9
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	10
WHAT WE DID.....	11
LIST OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION.....	22



## COMMENT



*Suzie Carley,  
Chair of the EU Dog & Cat Alliance*

The Pet Advertising Advisory Group was initially set up to address the lack of regulation in newspaper adverts, a source historically used by the majority of people seeking to buy a pet. However today, buyer behaviour has broadened and currently in the EU, 400,579 dogs and 104,318 cats are advertised online for sale on any given day. The online sale of pets in the EU is completely unregulated in more than three-quarters of member states. That's why the EU Dog & Cat Alliance felt it was important to work with Blue Cross to produce this report to highlight the need for better standards of online advertising throughout the EU.

We consulted our vast network of member organisations across Europe when preparing the report and have gathered vital information to assist policymakers and websites to instil better practices for the online advertisements of animals.



*Steve Goody,  
Chief Operating Officer  
and Deputy Chief Executive,  
Blue Cross*

The growth of internet use across the European Union over the last ten years has been huge. Eighty-five per cent of European citizens now have access to the internet and many use it as a place to buy and sell animals. This rapid growth of the online market place has sadly led to an increasing number of welfare concerns across many European countries.

This report shines a light on the issues that exist in this online market place and suggests workable solutions that will better protect the welfare of pets bred and sold across the European Union.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the explosion in internet commerce at the turn of the century, the online pet trade has grown exponentially, with animals traded online in huge numbers throughout the European Union (EU). However, the casual nature and ease of online trading has led to animal welfare standards suffering as a result of sellers not listing key information regarding their welfare, and buyers purchasing animals without understanding their specific welfare needs and requirements. As this study highlights, the vast majority of online pet adverts across the EU lack basic information on the animal's health and needs. In addition to this, many adverts are for animals that are too young to be separated from their parents, in poor health or for banned breed types.

A growing body of evidence supports the notion that the online sale of pets is conducive to poor standards of care for animals and poorly evaluated purchase decisions by prospective owners. The recent study by the European Commission on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices<sup>1</sup> notes that there is a general lack of knowledge and information for keeping pets, and suggests that best practice should be shared. It also notes that internet sales are a major factor to the undocumented trade and that there is a poor understanding of EU regulations in this area.

The EC's study shows that there is a risk to new owners; less than 20 per cent of purchasers of pets reported being well informed about animal welfare and health at the moment of purchase. The report suggests that appropriate information on the health and welfare of animals and on consumer rights could be helpful at the time of purchase.

European citizens are asking for more information on responsible pet ownership; a recent Eurobarometer on the attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare<sup>2</sup> shows that 74 per cent believe that companion animals should be better protected and 87 per cent consider that information campaigns are a good way to influence attitudes in that way.

Whereas the Animal Health Law 2016<sup>3</sup> makes it mandatory for operators selling pet animals to provide basic information to the future pet keeper, it is unclear whether this applies to the online sale of pets, which today represents the main marketplace for the purchase of companion animals.

In addition to poor standards, e-commerce is increasingly being used to illegally sell protected wildlife such as CITES\* species or species listed on Annex A of European Council Regulation 338/97. The European Parliament study on the EU trade policy and the wildlife trade<sup>4</sup> highlights the fact that the illegal wildlife trade is increasingly conducted via new technologies, including the internet and social media, yet the legislative framework at EU level is not capable of addressing it.

<sup>1</sup> Study on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices, [https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/aw\\_eu-strategy\\_study\\_dogs-cats-commercial-practices\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/aw_eu-strategy_study_dogs-cats-commercial-practices_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare – Eurobarometer, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyky/2096>

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law'), article 11.4.4. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ.L:2016:084:TOC>

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament study on the EU trade policy and the wildlife trade. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO\\_STU\(2016\)578025\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO_STU(2016)578025_EN.pdf)

\*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

The detrimental effects of the lack of animal welfare legislation at European level has been highlighted in a 2017 study for the European Parliament Committee on Petitions<sup>5</sup>. There are an estimated 68 million owned dogs and 74 million owned cats in the EU\* but their welfare is not covered by EU legislation; other than transport and fur trade legislation. The author of this study, Emeritus Professor Donald M. Broom, argues that there is a need for EU legislation on the welfare of animals but also praises the benefits of promoting animal welfare through the exchange of information, for example on the internet.

To raise standards of welfare for pet animals across the continent we believe that a set of voluntary standards directing the online trade in pet animals, based upon best practice as recommended by animal welfare organisations, should be promoted. The EU Pet Advertising Advisory Group (EUPAAG), which promotes self regulation and high standards for the advertising of pets online, therefore sought to gain as much information as possible about the current standards of regulation in EU countries, in order to create an effective and comprehensive set of guidance for sellers.

This research seeks to highlight the methods currently used in the sale of pets, the characteristics of the online trade, and the regulations, if any, that govern these transactions. It draws conclusions from the answers given by respondents, illustrating the current deficiencies in online advertising in those instances covered by the survey.

<sup>5</sup> Animal Welfare in the European Union, study for the Petitions Committee.  
europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583114/IPOL\_STU(2017)583114\_EN.pdf  
\*fediaf.org/who-we-are/facts-and-figures.html

## MAIN FINDINGS

The study identified the following key findings:

### A growing trend in Europe

The research has highlighted that the most common method used to purchase a pet is through online classified adverts, followed closely by social media. These methods largely outweighed purchases from pet shops or breeders. A snapshot count of online adverts for dogs and cats on the main classified websites in the 21 European countries for which respondents had answered the survey, revealed that 400,579 dogs and 104,318 cats were advertised for sale on a given day; thousands of exotic animals were also offered for sale.

These findings underline the fact that most pet purchasing has moved online and suggest that any initiative to protect animals and educate prospective owners must take this reality into consideration.

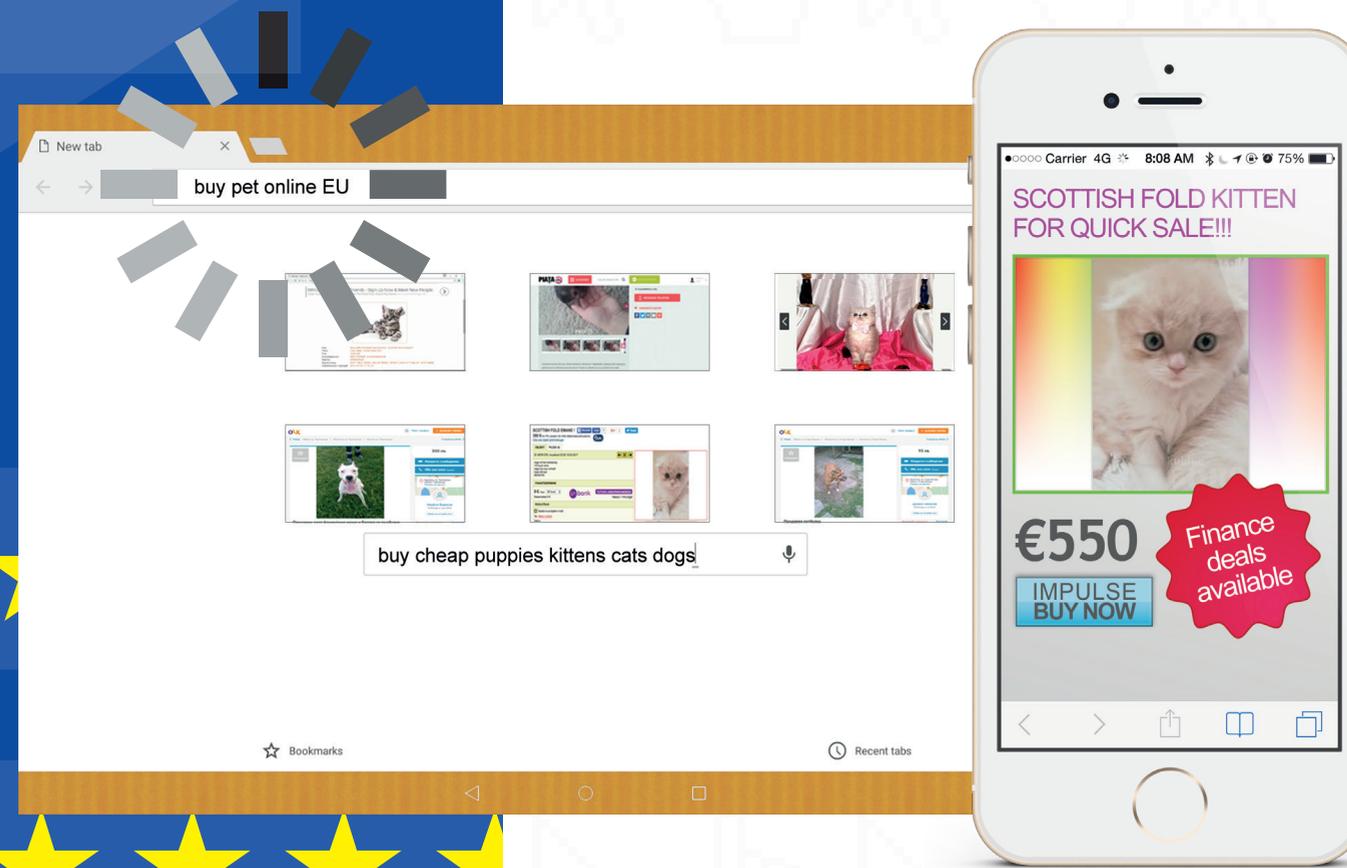
### Unregulated online market

The study reveals that in over three-quarters of the countries listed the online sale of animals as pets is unregulated – a worrying situation considering that it has become the main marketplace to purchase a pet. Only one country and one region have rules governing the sale of pets online specifically. Malta's law states that you must be registered as a pet shop to trade in animals; the Wallonia region of Belgium introduced a new regulation in June 2017 which bans the advertising of animals on generalist classified websites.

The answers show that there are a number of regulations applicable to the trade in pet animals in the countries surveyed, including governing the age of animals that can be sold, and banning certain breeds. Some countries, like France, require commercial breeders to be registered, although this does not affect peer-to-peer sellers.

However, only in the UK and Ireland are there voluntary standards that online advertisers adhere to, which can result in advertisers being banned in the event that they breach the voluntary regulations. Still, very few websites are signed up to these regulations – just six out of the 75 listed by respondents across the EU.

Pets are increasingly being sold on a multitude of closed groups on social media. These present additional challenges as the groups are moderated by individuals with seemingly no training in animal welfare and their ad-hoc nature make them more difficult to regulate, even through voluntary standards.



# CONCLUSIONS

The available data provided by organisations across Europe provide a clear picture of the state of the regulation of the online trade in pets in each country listed.

From the survey responses it can be concluded that there is much to be done to improve the standards of pet advertising across the EU. There are considerable gaps in the legislation governing online advertising and in most cases even a lack of voluntary minimum standards to ensure animal welfare does not suffer.

## Poor practice

A study of adverts on classified websites across 21 EU countries has highlighted many instances of poor practice. These included lack of information about the animal, animals that were not weaned, websites offering finance deals to purchase an animal and animals in poor health. This highlights the fact that most websites do not require standard information on the animals advertised nor do they provide guidance to sellers.



# A call for action

**95%** of the respondents consider there to be a problem with the online advertising of pets in their country, thus demonstrating that this is a Europe-wide problem.

This is corroborated by the main welfare concerns of respondents who listed a number of common themes, including the sale of animals that are too young or in ill health, as well as a lack of animal welfare information with the sale.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

It is difficult to know who sells pets online; whether they are pet owners with a new litter which they cannot keep or a breeder, either professional or hobby. In both cases it would be beneficial to regulate the advertising of pets online and offer information and guidance to sellers and buyers.

In order to create a better environment for the online trade of pets we recommend the introduction of self-regulation for classified websites. This would take the form of:

- a complete set of guidelines for the online advertising of pets, to be promoted to classified websites across Europe
- examples of best and worst practice to be shared with interested parties
- co-operation with NGOs across the continent to ensure that standards are monitored and maintained
- co-operation and information exchange on illegal trade between EU and national authorities.

We recommend initiating cross-border co-operation to encourage best practice based on the experience of the UK Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) and the Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group (IPAAG), to ensure that standards of animal welfare are raised during the online sale of animals as pets across the continent.

These objectives are the essence of the EUPAAG project. Its aim is to promote self regulation among classified websites in Europe to improve animal welfare. EUPAAG provides stakeholders with a toolkit to help them set up and operate a collaborative pet advertising advisory group in their respective countries.



## CASE STUDY

### The Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG)

PAAG was created in the United Kingdom in 2001 to combat growing concerns regarding the irresponsible advertising of pets for sale, rehoming, and exchange. The group comprises animal welfare organisations, trade associations and veterinary bodies.

PAAG aims to ensure that pet animals advertised for sale are done so legally and ethically. PAAG has been

engaging with online marketplaces in the UK to help them distinguish appropriate adverts from those that should be removed and has developed a set of Government-backed minimum standards which several of the UK's largest classified websites have agreed to meet. During a six month moderation period, 130,000 illegal or unethical ads were removed. This continuing work with websites is vital, especially given the current lack of regulation with regards to the online sales of pets.

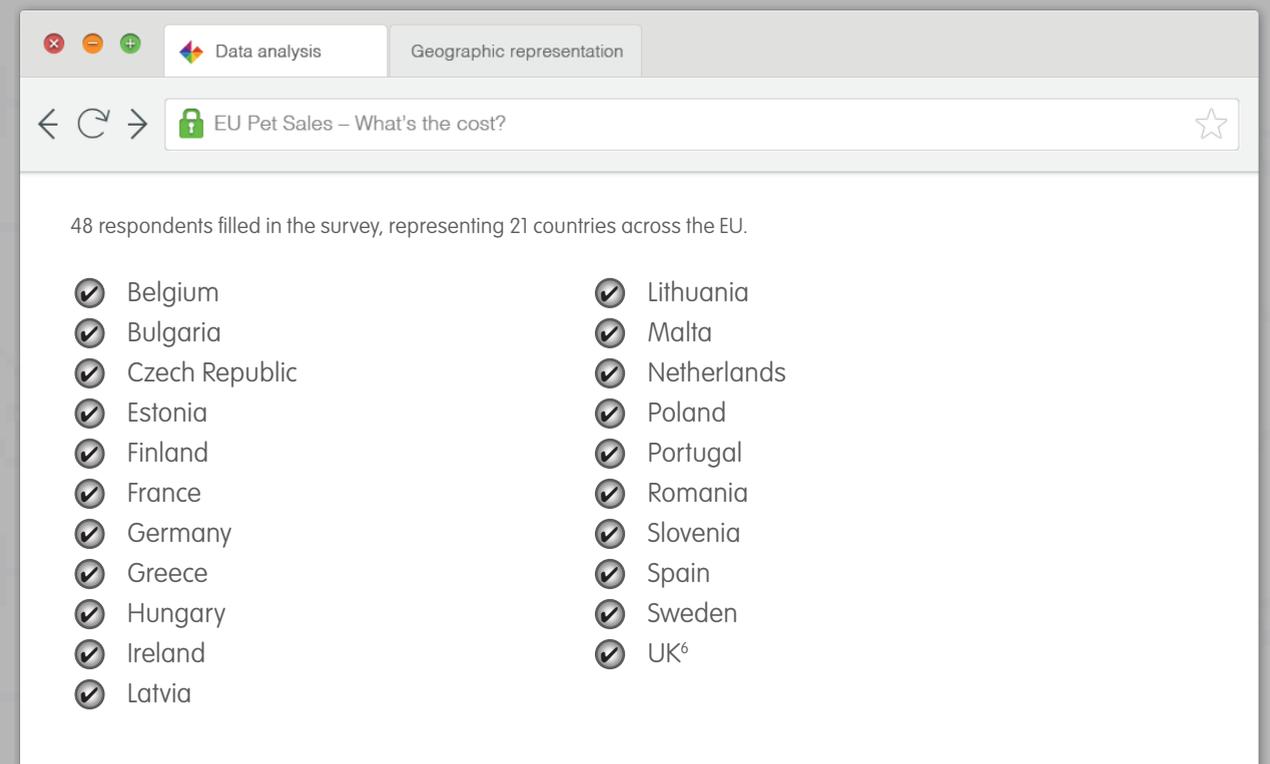
# WHAT WE DID

The survey was conducted using an online tool and was sent out to members of animal welfare organisations in EU member states. The questions were drafted by Blue Cross and were designed to provide both quantifiable and supplementary data. The questions covered issues relating to the pet trade in the country in question, including the methods of sale, the regulations governing the sale of pet animals,

and the standards that online sellers must adhere to, and if they are respected. In addition, participants were invited to include further information, where possible, to illustrate the situation in their country as they have experienced it.

## Data analysis

Geographic representation – 48 respondents filled in the survey, representing 21 countries across the EU.



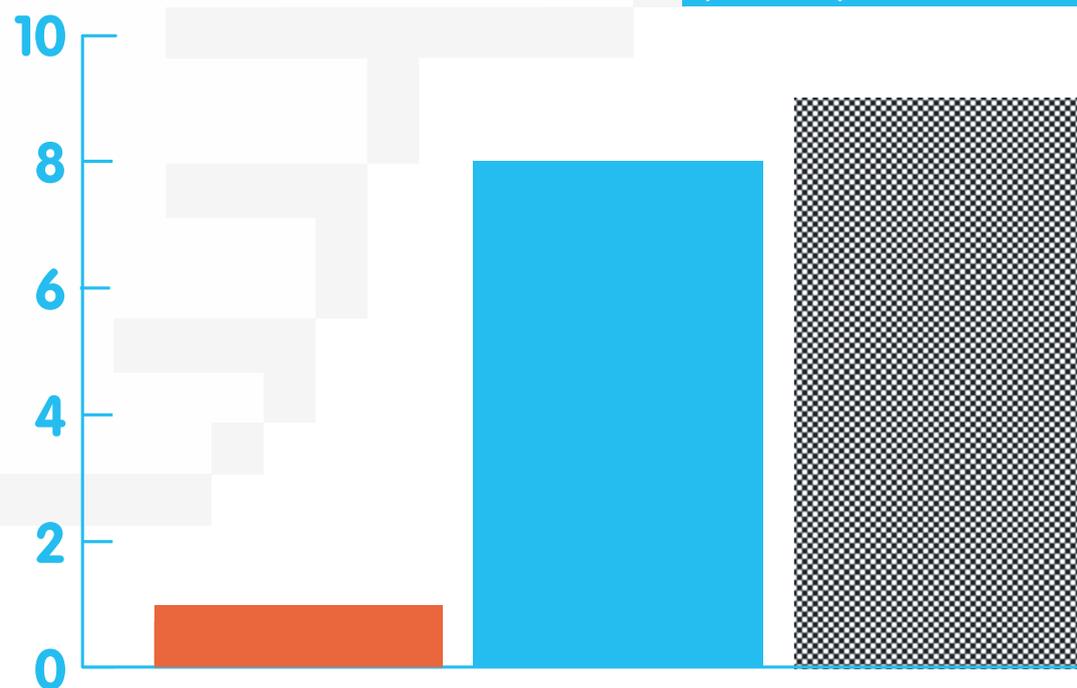
<sup>6</sup>This includes separate responses for Jersey and Guernsey.

## Regulation of online advertising of pets

The study highlighted that Malta has specific regulation for the online advertising of pets. Its law states that one must be registered as a pet shop to trade in animals. The Wallonia region of Belgium voted in a law in April 2017 (entry into force 1 June) which specifically forbids advertising pets for sale on generalist classified websites. In Portugal, a law proposal was adopted on 19 July 2017 which makes advertisements for the sale of pet animals subject to

certain validity requirements, such as having to indicate the age of the animals. In the UK, France, Greece, Slovenia, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands the online sale of pets is covered in wider animal legislation. All other countries do not have regulations or legislation covering the online sale of pets. This means that in over half of the countries listed the online sale of animals as pets is unregulated – a deeply worrying situation.

Number of EU countries



- Yes, by specific legislation
- Yes, the online sale of pets is covered in wider legislation
- No, it is not covered

Is the online advertising of pets regulated in your country?



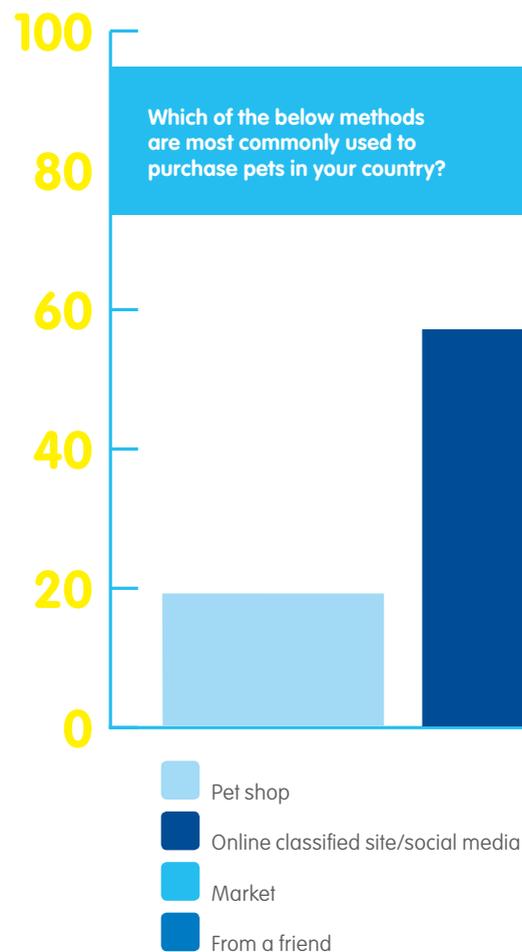
Online advertising covered by:

- Specific legislation
- Wider legislation
- No specific legislation

## Most common method to purchase a pet

Respondents were asked which methods are most commonly used to purchase pets in their country. Online classified websites and social media are where 57 per cent of buyers purchase pets, followed by 19 per cent in pet shops and only 6 per cent from markets. This data shows how online platforms have become the major marketplace for the purchase of animals.

% of respondents



The answers given as 'Other' are as follows:

breeders, shelters, animal charities, adverts at veterinary clinics, dog beauty salons, supermarkets; adverts found on street signs, rescue centres, kennel clubs, adopted/bought from other countries and through charities from other EU countries.

## Problems associated with the online advertising of pets

The study shows that

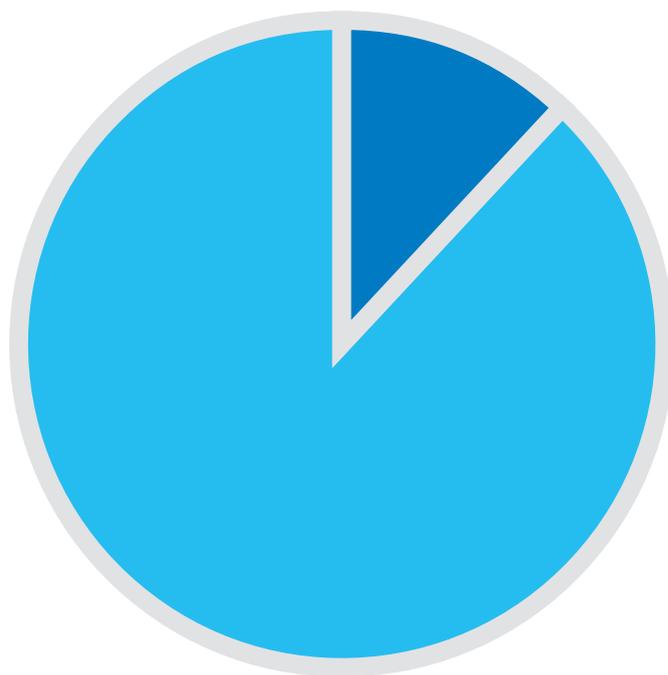
**95%**

of respondents perceive that there is a problem with the online advertising of pets in their country.

Respondents were asked to clarify their answers and describe the main welfare concerns around the online sale of pets they experienced in their country. The main themes listed were as follows:

- Too many "breed, but no pedigree" pets available online
- False advertising
- Sellers using fraudulent identification numbers
- Animals illegally imported from other countries
- Animals are too young
- Indiscriminate breeding with no thought for health testing
- Buyers have very little idea about animal welfare and have not considered all aspects of pet ownership
- Animals are in poor health
- Keepers at the animal wholesales are unqualified
- Living conditions at wholesalers are terrible
- Selling endangered or forbidden (wild or exotic) animals
- Unlicensed breeders
- Lack of traceability/after-sales support
- Impulse buying

## Voluntary standards for the online advertising of pets



Are there voluntary standards for the online advertising of pets in your country?

- Yes – UK and Ireland
- No – all others



### Ireland – IPAAG

Sites are monitored and breaches raised directly with the websites. Advertisers can be banned from advertising in future.



### UK – PAAG

A number of leading UK sites have signed up to minimum standards drawn up by PAAG members. The sites are monitored and breaches are reported directly to the websites.

## Are these websites signed up to voluntary standards?

Of the websites listed: Yes – 7, No – 54

### Examples of good practice from individual websites

**Czech Republic** – May 2016, large advertising agency **ANNONCE**, as the first commercial entity in the Czech Republic, began blocking objectionable advertisements posted by illegal dog breeders and dealers and initiated a large enlightenment campaign.  
[www.annonce.cz/chcemepsa/](http://www.annonce.cz/chcemepsa/)

**France** – **Leboncoin.fr** and **Paruvenu.fr** and **Vivastreet.fr** provide additional information about animals such as date of birth, vaccinations, whether it is sold by an individual or professional etc. However, it seems that adverts can still be published without this information.

**Ireland** – **DoneDeal** immediately removes adverts if concerns are raised about illegal behaviour or failure to comply with minimum standards. Also cooperates with ISPCA – authorised officers regarding illegal behaviour.

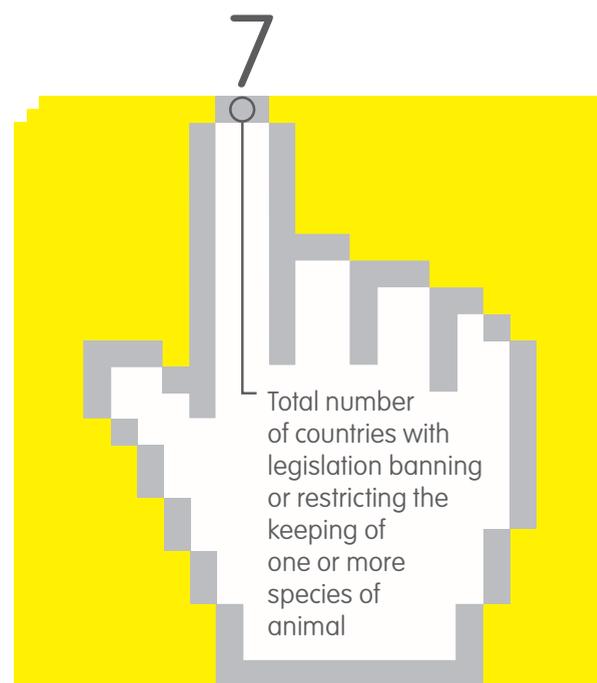
**Romania** – [www.adoptiicaini.ro/](http://www.adoptiicaini.ro/)  
This is not a website for selling pets, but to promote responsible adoptions and with links to animal protection associations.

**Finland** – Although **Tori.fi** does not have voluntary standards, it does warn the buyers about puppy mill puppies and recommends customers to avoid suspicious adverts/sellers. [www.tori.fi/turvallisuus/elaimet.htm?ca=18](http://www.tori.fi/turvallisuus/elaimet.htm?ca=18)

**UK** – Six websites operating in the UK have engaged with PAAG. Many have developed new ways of tracking questionable advertisers and are responsive to deal with any queries regarding an advert. Gumtree have planted fake adverts on their site to raise awareness of what to look out for.

## Restrictions on sale/ownership of certain animals

In order to conduct research on the legality of the sale of certain species on online classified websites across Europe, respondents were asked for information on legislative restrictions in place. The answers show that there are a number of regulations governing pet animals in the countries surveyed, including governing the age of animals that can be sold, and banning certain breeds or types. Additionally, in the UK and Ireland there are voluntary standards that online advertisers adhere to, which can result in advertisers being banned in the event that they breach the voluntary regulations.



### Example of national legislation

#### Finland:

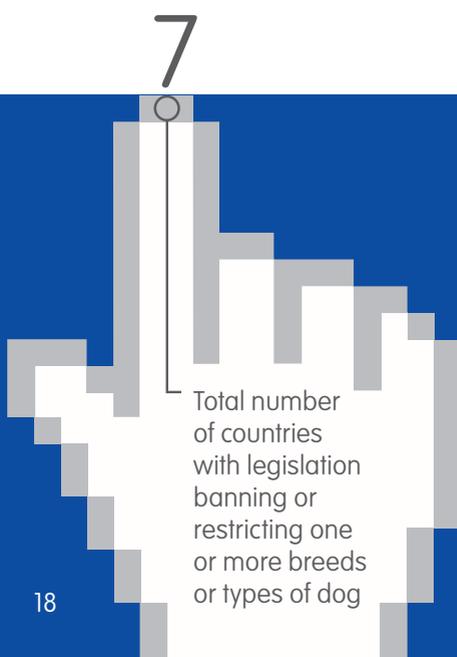
The Animal Welfare Act 1996 (rev 2006), states that capturing wild mammals and birds to be cared for is prohibited unless the animal is captured to be kept in a zoo or farmed for the production of meat or eggs or breeding animals for this purpose or for game management purposes, or for temporary medical care or other acceptable temporary cause or for scientific research work.

#### Netherlands:

The Netherlands operates a positive list for exotic pets.

## Minimum age restriction for the sale of certain/all animals (not imported)

Belgium	puppies and kittens over 7 weeks
Bulgaria	no
Czech Republic	50 days but only for breeders/pet shops
Estonia	no
Finland	puppies and cats over eight and 12 weeks
France	for both kittens and puppies, the minimum age is eight weeks
Germany	puppies over eight weeks
Greece	no
Guernsey	no
Hungary	eight weeks (dogs, cats, ferrets)
Ireland	no
Jersey	no
Latvia	puppies, eight weeks; kittens, 10 weeks; ferrets, eight weeks
Lithuania	puppies over eight weeks; kittens over 12 weeks
Malta	eight weeks
Poland	no
Portugal	puppies over eight weeks
Romania	over eight weeks – cats and dogs
Slovenia	puppies over eight weeks, kittens over 12 weeks
Spain	no
Sweden	puppies, eight weeks kittens, 12 weeks
UK	puppies over eight weeks (eight weeks for kittens awaiting legislation)



## Main advertisements websites on which pets are sold

Country	Total numbers (Snapshot number on a single day. Data collected January 2017.)	Main classified websites
Belgium	Dogs: 4,530 Cats: 1,379 Exotics: 610	2dehands.be 2ememain.be vivastreet.be kapaza.be locanto.be jannonce.be les-annonces.be chiens-chats.be
Bulgaria	Dogs: 42,610 Cats: 722 Exotics: 477	olx.bg bazar.bg kucheta.puppy-market.eu
Czech Republic	Dogs: 16,012 Cats: 8,461 Exotics: 1,201	zvirata.bazos.cz annonce.cz sbazar.cz zvirata.hyperinzerce.cz zvirata-rostliny.avizo.cz
Estonia	Dogs: 1,077 Cats: 245 Exotics: 78	facebook.com kuldnebers.ee soov.ee
Finland	Dogs: 1,156 Cats: 494	huuto.net lemmikkipalstat.net tori.fi nettimarkkina.com koiratori.com apula.fi
France	Dogs: 45,835 Cats: 30,733 Exotics: 189	leboncoin.fr paruvendu.fr vivastreet.com secondechance.org
Germany	Dogs: 145,086 Cats: 32,342	ebay-kleinanzeigen.de/s-hunde/c134 suche.deine-tierwelt.de/tiere/25087/welpen-hamburg.html quoka.de/tiermarkt/hunde/hamburg/cat_48_5030_ct_115382.html haustier-anzeiger.de/hunde/mischlingshunde/seite_2.html snautz.de/hunde/kaufen/
Greece		
Guernsey	Dogs: 5 Cats: 7	gspca.org.gg*
Hungary	Dogs: 11,732 Cats: 952	ebadta.hu kiskutya.hu facebook.com/groups/elado.kutya.macska.kisallat.haziallat/?fref=ts jofogas.hu/magyarorszag/haziallat
Ireland	Dogs: 2,202 Cats: 142	DoneDeal.ie*
Jersey		jerseyinsight.com

Country	Total numbers (Snapshot number on a single day. Data collected January 2017.)	Main classified websites
Latvia	Dogs: 963 cats: 431	ss.lv reklama.lv zip.lv
Lithuania	Dogs: 3,682 Cats: 2,152	skelbiu.lt alio.lt rinka.lt plius.lt
Malta		
Netherlands	Dogs: 9,034 Cats: 2,719	dierenasiels.com marktplaats.nl
Poland	Dogs: 39,304 Cats: 9,195	olx.pl allegro.pl gratka.pl
Portugal	Dogs: 2,780 Cats: 177	olx.pt
Romania	Dogs: 18,274 Cats: 1,616	olx.ro piata-az.ro lajumate.ro publi24.ro caini-de-vanzare.ro animale.ro vanzaricaini.com
Slovenia	Dogs: 1,769 Cats: 428	milanuncios.com vibbo.com wallapop.com
Spain	Dogs: 64,377 Cats: 8,332	milanuncios.com vibbo.com es.wallapop.com
Sweden	Dogs: 942 Cats: 54	blocket.se skk.se/sv/kopahund/hundraser-valpkullar vovve.net/Hundannonser kattannonser.se/annonser
UK	Dogs: 27,569 Cats: 3,737	gumtree.com* preloved.co.uk* pets4homes.co.uk* friday-ad.co.uk* vivastreet.co.uk*

**Total: 104,318**  
**400,579**

\* websites signed up to voluntary standards for the advertising of pets

### List of relevant legislation:

France: Ordonnance n° 2015-1243 du 7 octobre 2015 relative au commerce et à la protection des animaux de compagnie (<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000031279297>)

Belgium: the legislation is only for Wallonia and came into effect 1 June 2017 (Projet de décret modifiant l'article 11bis de la loi du 14 août 1986 relative à la protection et au bien-être des animaux en ce qui concerne la publicité visant la commercialisation d'espèces animales)

Netherlands: Animal Welfare Act 2011

Slovenia: Animal Protection Act

Spain: Every Region has different law. In Catalonia we have a DL 2/2008 of animal protection, but in the other regions haven't any law. (Decreto Legislativo 2/2008, de 15 de abril, por el que se aprueba el Texto refundido de la Ley de protección de los animales (Vigente hasta el 04 de Agosto de 2017))

Greece: Law 4039/2012: On pet animals and the protection of animals from exploitation or use for profit-making purposes

Portugal: Protection of Animals Act 1995

UK: The Animal Welfare Act 2006

Finland: Animal Welfare Act 1996 (updated 2006)

Malta: Anyone who advertises pets for sale has to have a pet shop license (these carry their own conditions) – Subsidiary Legislation 439.16 Protection of Animals Offered in Pet Shops (minimum standards) Regulations

Estonia: Animal Protection Act

Czech Republic: Act on the protection of animals against cruelty

Romania: Animal Protection Act 2004

Bulgaria: Animal Protection Act 2008

Poland: Animal Protection Act

Latvia: Animal Protection Law 2012

Lithuania: Animal Welfare and Protection Law 1997

Ireland: Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013

Sweden: Animal Protection Law (1988:534)

### EU Dog & Cat Alliance

Since 2014 the EU Dog & Cat Alliance has been a leading European expert on companion animal welfare, encompassing over 75 organisations from 24 Member States. The Alliance has been working within the EU on issues relating to animal welfare, having published a groundbreaking report on national legislation to protect dogs and cats across all 28 EU Member States. The Alliance looks forward to constructively working with the European Commission, Parliament and Member States to improve not just the welfare of dogs and cats in the EU, but also human health through helping to prevent the spread of zoonosis, ensure consumer protection, and deal a blow to one of the profitable trafficking sectors in the Union – the illegal importation of dogs and cats.

### Blue Cross

Sick, injured and homeless pets have relied on us since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured, pets turn to us for help every year. Each year thousands of cats, dogs small pets and horses turn to our animal hospitals, clinics and rehoming services for treatment and to find them the happy homes they deserve. Blue Cross has chaired EUPAAG since 2016.

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