

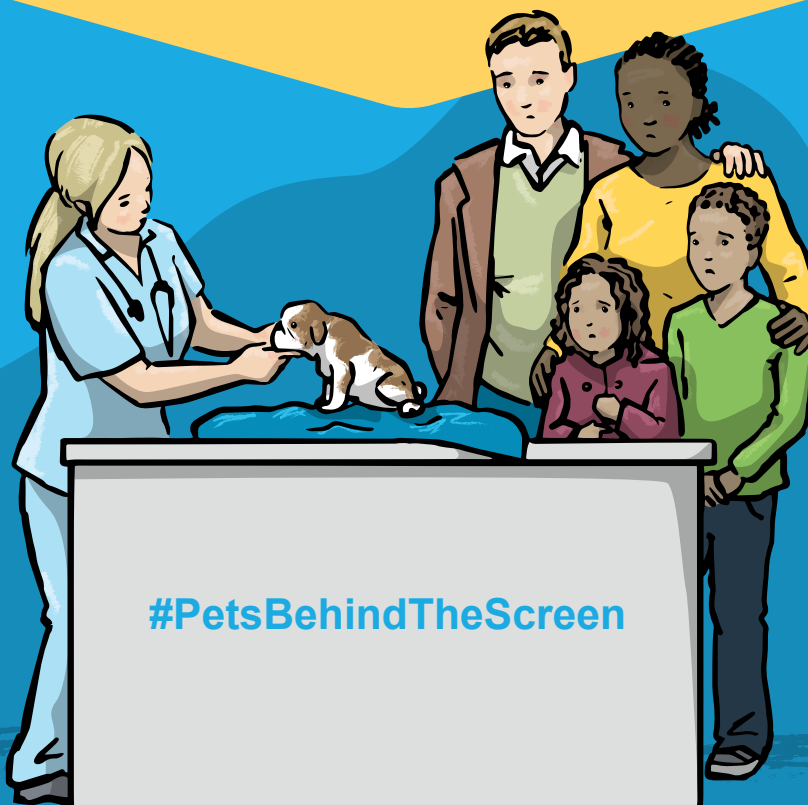


**EU DOG & CAT
ALLIANCE®**



Online pet advertising in the EU: the cost continues to rise

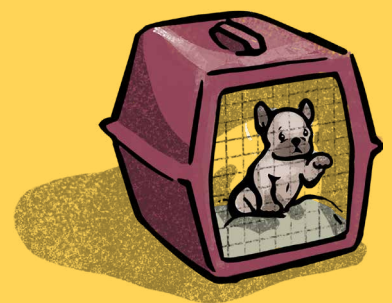
December 2020



#PetsBehindTheScreen

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Suzie Carley
Chair of the EU Dog & Cat Alliance

Foreword

The internet has now become the largest marketplace for advertising the sale of pets in the EU. On a given day we found more than 438,000 adverts for dogs and 80,000 for cats on the main classifieds websites across the EU and the UK. Behind these numbers there is a reality tainted with false and misleading adverts, animal welfare concerns and cross-border pet trafficking by unscrupulous breeders and dealers. The EU Dog & Cat Alliance is committed to tackling the serious issues associated with online advertising of pets.

To that end, we partnered with Tech4Pets, a company that is committed to improving animal welfare using technology solutions, to gather data on online advertising of pets for sale in the EU and analyse trends and bad practice. This evidence-based research will be used to support and strengthen our campaigning and to help educate key stakeholders such as website operators and policy makers to the scale of the problem and make appropriate recommendations. The findings of this analysis are presented in this report.

Executive summary

The EU Dog & Cat Alliance and Tech4Pets have collected and analysed online data on pet adverts across 26 European countries. On a given day, 438,004 dogs and 80,712 cats were advertised for sale, a slight decrease compared to our analysis in 2017 which we attribute in part to the introduction of regulatory measures in some countries.

Using metadata and pattern recognition of adverts in 7 European countries, we identified prolific online sellers and numerous cross-border networks of pet dealers, thus highlighting the pan-European dimension of the trade in pets. An in-depth analysis of pet adverts in these countries during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic shows that the offer declined initially but quickly rose back again. This fits into the pattern of increase in e-commerce more generally and highlights the need to develop strategies for the regulation of online companion animal adverts in order to protect animals and buyers.

We recommend that the European Commission:

- **Develop strategies for regulation of online companion animal adverts in order to stop misleading advertising, as part of the Commission's wider efforts to regulate e-commerce**
- **Agree with stakeholders on a complete set of guidelines for the online advertising of pets, to be promoted to and used by classifieds websites across Europe**
- **Support the creation of EUPAAG partnerships across the EU**
- **Facilitate the co-operation and information exchange on illegal trade between EU and national authorities**
- **Encourage Member States to carry out consumer protection campaigns aimed at educating the public on responsible pet purchasing**



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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.**

In 2017 the EU Dog & Cat Alliance published a study titled “Online pet sales in the EU, what’s the cost?”¹, which highlighted the fact that 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.

Since then, the problems associated with the online advertising of pets has received increasing interest at EU level. The European Commission undertook a **Coordinated Control Plan** on the online sale of dogs and cats to gain insights into misleading and fraudulent practices, and into the volume of dogs and cats being sold via advertisements on the internet. It found evidence of underage, unhealthy and unvaccinated animals being offered for sale, as well as **evidence of fake identification documents and illegal transport.**

The European Parliament has also taken these concerns seriously. On 12 February 2020, Members of European Parliament (MEPs) adopted a **Resolution on protecting the EU’s internal market and consumer rights against the negative implications of the illegal trade in companion animals.** In the Resolution, MEPs called inter alia for:

- **Information campaigns** to raise awareness among potential companion animal buyers of the risks associated with misleading online pet adverts
- **Mandatory checks** on the identity of users advertising pets for sale online
- The development of **strategies for regulation or self-regulation** of online companion animal adverts in order to stop misleading advertising
- The development of **partnerships** between authorities, databases, websites and animal welfare organisations to come up with precise measures against the misleading advertising and illegal online trade of dogs and cats

The EU Dog & Cat Alliance welcomed these developments as they align with our approach to tackling the issues associated with online advertising of pets via self-regulation, in the absence of regulation; namely the creation of **Pet Advertising Advisory Groups (PAAGs)** in EU countries through our project EUPAAG.

EUPAAG was launched by the EU Dog & Cat Alliance in 2017. Since then, using the PAAGs already established in the UK and Ireland as models, we have helped to set up groups advocating for better standards of online pet adverts in Belgium, Sweden, Romania, the Czech Republic, Italy, Cyprus, Poland and Bulgaria, bringing the total number of national PAAGs to 10. These groups, made up of animal welfare organisations, trade associations, veterinarians and local authorities, work with classified websites in their countries to **improve the quality of pet adverts and to remove fraudulent and illegal adverts**, making it more difficult for unscrupulous breeders to operate across borders. They also work to **raise public awareness** of the need to act responsibly when looking to buy pets advertised on websites and the need to do research before making any purchase.

In order to capture the trends in online trade of pets, the EU Dog & Cat Alliance has partnered with **Tech4Pets**, a company that is committed to improving animal welfare using technology solutions, to collect and analyse online data and identify pet trafficking networks. The findings are contained in this report and serve as evidence of the scale of the problem for the use of policy makers and website operators.



¹ https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/assets.dogandcatwelfare.eu/live/media/publicationtemp/12195_-_EU_Pet_sales_report_spreads.pdf

Findings

Still the largest marketplace

Our research has highlighted that online classified adverts are still the most common method used to advertise a pet for sale, followed by social media.

A snapshot count of online adverts for dogs and cats on the main classifieds websites in 26 European countries revealed that 438,004 dogs and 80,712 cats were advertised for sale on a given day. We observed a slight reduction in numbers compared to the count made for our 2017 report, "Online pet sales in the EU, what's the cost?". We attribute this reduction to the enforcement of regulation in France which bans the online sale of animals by private individuals, as well as a shift in advertising towards social media, in particular Facebook groups.

This reinforces our 2017 finding that most pet purchasing is done via online adverts and suggests that any initiative to protect animals and educate prospective owners must take this reality into consideration.

Regulated v unregulated online market

The study reveals that there have been significant drops in the number of dogs and cats advertised online in **France** and the **Czech Republic**, two countries that have different systems of regulation.

In 2016, France introduced the mandatory registration of online sellers as commercial breeders. This puts strict obligations on the sellers and subjects the revenue resulting from their online pet advertisements to income tax. The increasingly strict enforcement of the legislation since 2016 has borne fruit; France has seen a 5-fold reduction in the number of dogs advertised online, totalling 9,200 dogs for sale in 2020 compared to 45,835 in 2017. For cats, the number dropped from 30,733 in 2017 to 5,131 in 2020. We believe this is the result of the threat of fines of up to €7,500 for sellers who do not register accordingly and partnerships between the Ministry of Agriculture and major classifieds websites. The authorities have asked websites like Leboncoin.fr and Vivastreet.fr to block the publication of adverts from sellers who do not have a registration number. While it is not yet clear whether some advertisements that would otherwise have been posted on classifieds websites in France have simply moved elsewhere, such as to social media, it is likely that regulation has had a positive impact.

The numbers of dogs and cats advertised online in the Czech Republic have also dropped since 2017. This is in part thanks to the work done by the Czech Pet Advertising Advisory Group (CzechPAAG) with classifieds websites such as Annonce.cz to educate potential buyers on how to identify pet traffickers and the risks associated with the online purchase of pets. However, there is evidence that advertising is moving to social media where there is no, or very little, self-regulation.

These examples demonstrate that both regulation and self-regulation can be effective in reducing the scale of the pet trade, hindering the business of puppy farms and promoting the reduction of poor practice to the benefit of animals and potential buyers.

Prolific individual sellers

Data collected by Tech4Pets from classifieds websites in 7 selected EU Member States shows that prolific sellers of pets operate freely where markets are largely unregulated. Our evidence has uncovered numerous individual sellers who advertise large numbers of pets.

The following are examples of prolific individual sellers:

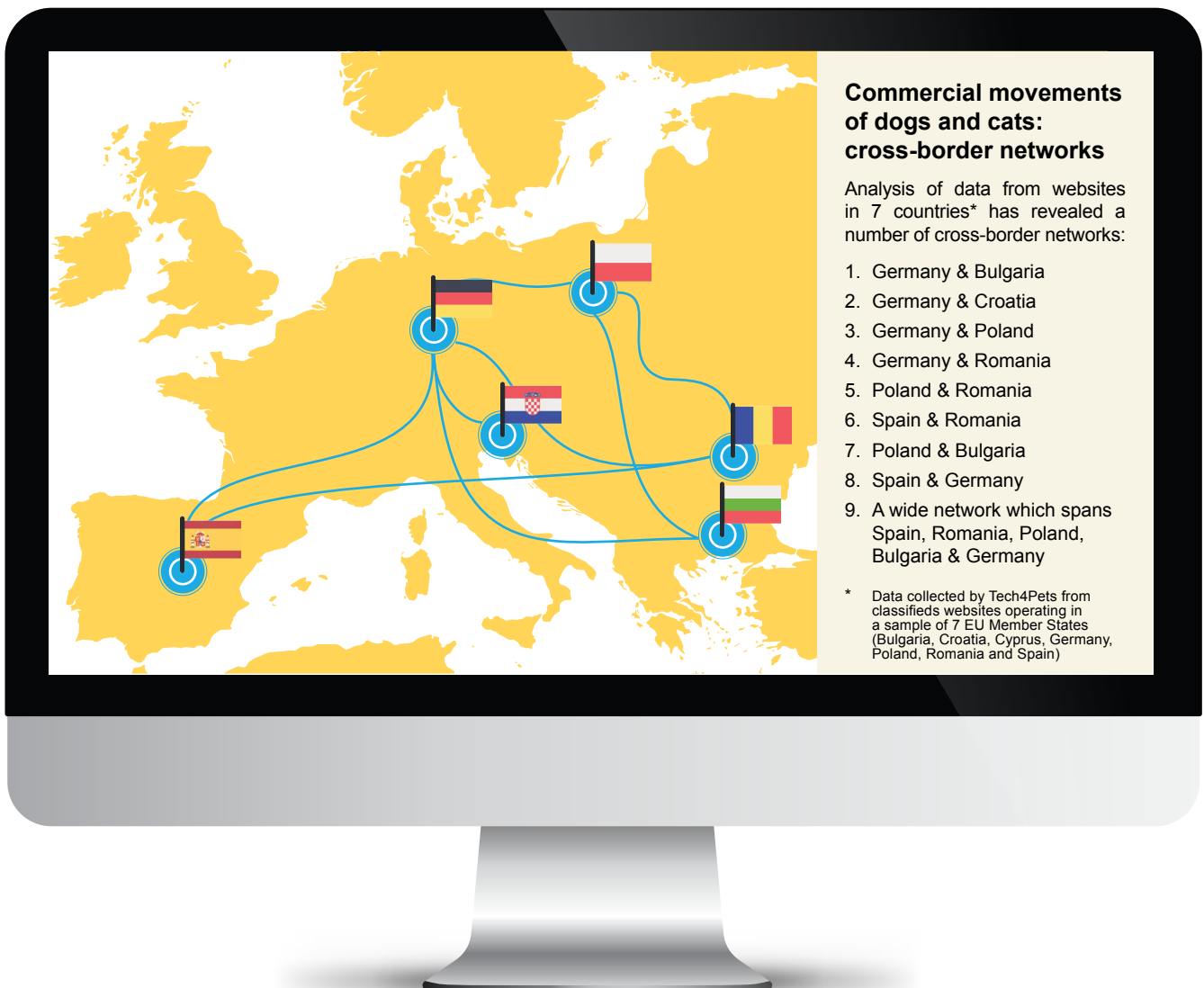
Bulgaria:	one individual seller had 72 live adverts
Croatia:	one individual seller had 103 live adverts
Cyprus:	one individual seller had 14 live adverts
Germany:	one individual seller had 52 live adverts
Poland:	one individual seller had 284 live adverts
Romania:	one individual seller had 82 live adverts
Spain:	one individual seller had 523 live adverts



Cross border networks

To highlight the scale of the trade and to give a concrete illustration of the cross-border networks, our research focussed on a sample of 7 EU Member States: **Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Poland, Romania** and **Spain**. An in-depth analysis of advert data collected from classifieds websites operating in these countries revealed numerous networks of traders operating across their respective borders. Using metadata and pattern recognition of adverts we are able to show what the real commercial movement of pets between European countries looks like.

Our findings show the pan-European dimension of the trade in pets which, considering previous evidence of pet trafficking², paints a worrying picture. It is a useful representation of the flow of trade because official figures do not take the fraudulent movement of pets under the non-commercial movement rules into account.

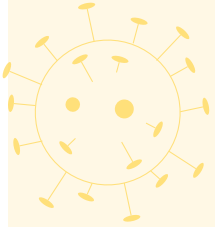


² European Commission study on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices (2015)
https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/aw_eu_strategy_study_dogs-cats-commercial-practices_en.pdf



Pet advertising during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a marked effect on online advertising of pets for sale, with interesting insights captured in our ongoing monitoring of online adverts. Data collected from classifieds websites in the sample of 7 EU Member States, **Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain**, shows that the numbers of dogs and cats advertised in these countries fell dramatically in March and April 2020 as lockdown measures were introduced across the EU. Interestingly, in May we witnessed a spike in the number of adverts which fell again slightly in June only to bounce back in July and August.



The social distancing and lockdown rules introduced in March 2020 were most likely responsible for reducing the advertising of dogs and cats online because of the uncertainty in the market. However, social distancing was exploited by traders when demand for companion animals from people staying at home increased. The data shows that this demand was met from May 2020.

“The upward trend in the online advertising of pets for sale is in line with a wider increase in the use of e-commerce since March 2020”

Germany has seen a steady increase of dog adverts from May; data from TASSO e.V.³ shows an increase of 25% in new dog registrations which coincided with the re-opening of borders with neighbouring countries in June. The number of cats advertised in Germany followed an even steeper upward trend, with the number of adverts in August 2020 roughly double that of February 2020.

Some of the new enthusiasm for pet ownership was fuelled by a desire for companionship during lockdown without careful consideration of the associated responsibilities and costs. Google searches for ‘buy a puppy’ increased by 166% in the UK following the announcement of a national lockdown on 23rd March 2020⁴. The Kennel Club in the UK said searches via its “find a puppy” tool had risen by 53% between February and March. Searches between 16 and 23 March were up 37% compared with the previous week and up 84% on the same week in 2019⁵. Members of the EU Dog & Cat Alliance have reported anecdotal evidence of similar trends in demand for pets across the EU. This highlights the need for clear and coordinated information campaigns on classifieds websites to ensure that buyers are fully aware of the associated responsibilities and costs related to pet ownership.



Google searches for ‘buy a puppy’ increased by 166% in the UK

The increase in demand for pets has also led to significant price hikes. Research by Dogs Trust in the UK revealed that the asking price for five of the UK’s most sought after breeds and the five breeds most often smuggled into the country – Dachshunds, English Bulldogs, French Bulldogs, Pugs and Chow Chows – shot up between March, when lockdown was announced, and the end of June 2020. The most expensive of the breeds, English Bulldogs, were advertised online for as much as £2,140 on average in June compared to an average of £1,637 in March - although some listings reached as high as £9,000⁶.

“It is more important than ever to put safeguards in place to ensure unscrupulous sellers cannot advertise online and that prospective buyers are well informed”

On top of the market opportunities filled by breeders, there is also evidence that fraudsters have turned the pandemic to their advantage. Buyers have been conned into buying animals that do not exist⁷, with unscrupulous sellers using social distancing rules as a reason for them to pay upfront before they have seen the animal in person.

The upward trend in the online advertising of pets for sale is in line with a wider increase in the use of e-commerce since March 2020, a change which is likely to continue after the pandemic⁸. It is more important than ever to put safeguards in place to ensure unscrupulous sellers cannot advertise online and that prospective buyers are well informed before they buy a pet via an online advert.

³ <https://www.tasso.net/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2020/Corona-laesst-Nachfrage-nach-Hunden-steigen>

⁴ Figures sourced from Propellernet, based on UK Google searches for “buy a puppy” from week commencing 22nd March 2020 and week commencing 12th July 2020.

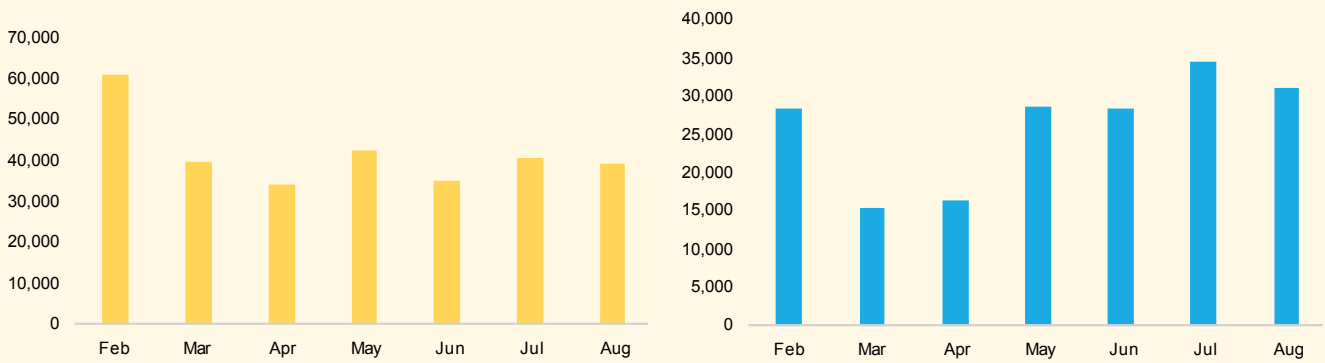
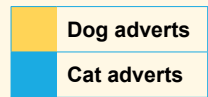
⁵ www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/apr/06/coronavirus-lockdown-lucys-law-puppy-new-pet-decision

⁶ Tech4Pets data, collected between March 2020 and June 2020

⁷ <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/news/animal-lovers-looking-for-pets-in-lockdown-defrauded-of-nearly-300000-in-two-months>

⁸ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/dk/Documents/strategy/e-commerce-covid-19-onepage.pdf>

Total adverts on classifieds websites in 7 EU Member States*



* Data collected by Tech4Pets from classifieds websites operating in a sample of 7 EU Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain)

The number of online adverts for dogs and cats fell when lockdown measures were introduced in March and April 2020.

In May, the number of adverts increased, before falling again slightly in June.

In most cases, the number of adverts bounced back again in July and August.

Between April and May, the number of dog and cat adverts increased by **+41%**



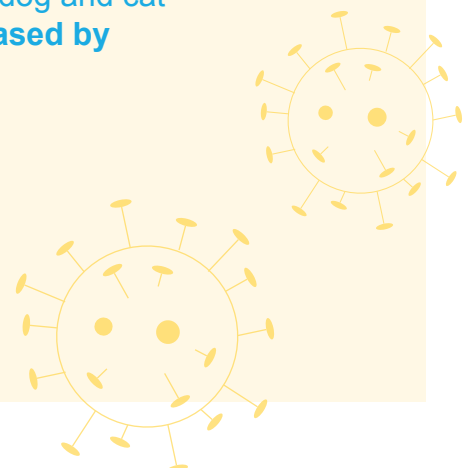
Between June and July, the number of dog and cat adverts increased by **+18%**



Number of dog and cat adverts in April 2020 was down **-43%** compared with February



Between May and June, the number of dog and cat adverts decreased by **-11%**



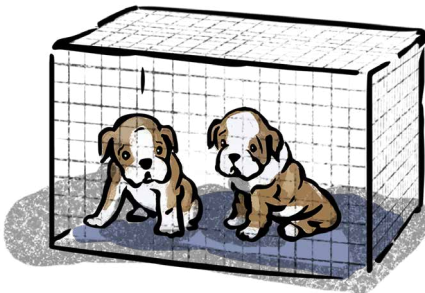
Recommendations

The vast number of online adverts for pets can hide the real identity of the sellers, create risks to the potential buyers and enable poor animal welfare. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that it would be beneficial to regulate the advertising of pets online and offer information and guidance to sellers and buyers. On 12 February 2020, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on protecting the EU's internal market and consumer rights against the negative implications of the illegal trade in companion animals. Point 30 of the resolution calls on the Commission and Member States to develop partnerships between authorities, databases, websites and animal welfare organisations to come up with precise measures to help protect against the misleading advertising and illegal online trade of dogs and cats.

We recommend that the European Commission:

- **Develop strategies for regulation of online companion animal adverts in order to stop misleading advertising, as part of the Commission's wider efforts to regulate e-commerce**
- **Agree with stakeholders on a complete set of guidelines for the online advertising of pets, to be promoted to and used by classifieds websites across Europe**
- **Support the creation of EUPAAG partnerships across the EU**
- **Facilitate the co-operation and information exchange on illegal trade between EU and national authorities**
- **Encourage Member States to carry out consumer protection campaigns aimed at educating the public on responsible pet purchasing**

These objectives are the essence of the EUPAAG project. Its aim is to promote self-regulation among classifieds 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. EUPAAG will continue to work with animal welfare organisations across Europe to set up more pet advertising advisory groups and better protect the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of pets sold online each year. Better regulation of pet adverts in the EU is also needed to ensure a level playing field among classifieds websites to prevent substandard adverts finding their way on to less responsible platforms.



EUPAAGs

The solution promoted by the EU Dog & Cat Alliance to tackle problems associated with the online sale of pets is self-regulation under the leadership of Pet Advertising Advisory Groups (PAAGs). Today, groups that bring together pet welfare associations, veterinarians, authorities and website operators to improve online adverts of pets are active in 9 EU Member States and the UK. The EU Dog & Cat Alliance supports their work through the EUPAAG project.



Annex

Dog and cat adverts on main websites per country on a given day in 2020

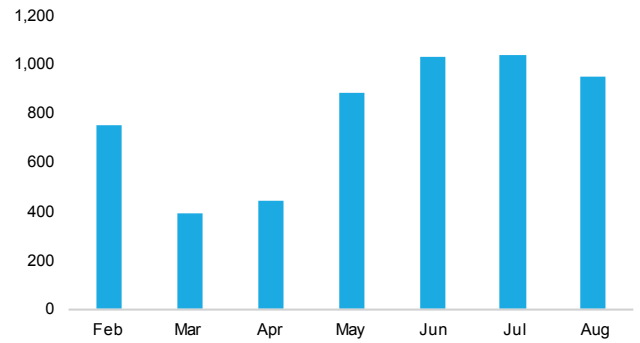
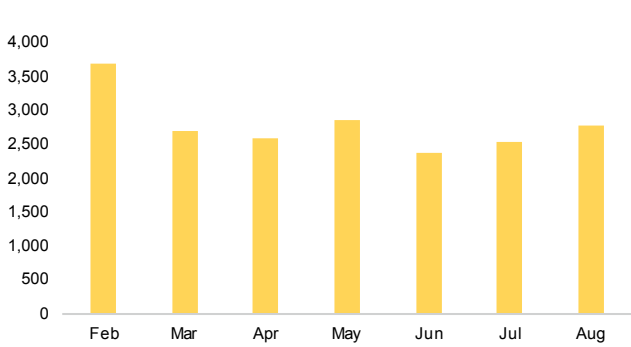
Country	Total numbers		Main classifieds websites	Dogs per website	Cats per website
	Dog	Cat			
Belgium	1274	184	www.2dehands.be	832	107
			www.chiens-chats.be	277	65
			www.2ememain.be	165	12
Bulgaria	52416	1211	http://www.olx.bg	2968	343
			https://bazar.bg	5843	868
			http://kucheta.puppy-market.eu	43605	
Croatia	3603	247	https://www.njuskalo.hr/	588	42
			https://www.oglasnik.hr/	678	57
			https://www.index.hr/oglas/	2337	148
Cyprus	103	15	www.bazaraki.com	103	15
			https://www.bazos.cz	993	683
Czech Republic	3816	1862	https://www.annonce.cz/	622	503
			https://www.webfordog.cz/	1559	523
			www.psi-inzerce.cz	642	153
			www.dba.dk	639	381
Denmark	1952	547	www.Gipote.dk	857	0
			www.Guloggratis.dk	456	166
			https://www.okidoki.ee/	622	281
Estonia	929	428	https://www.soov.ee/	209	104
			https://www.kuldnebors.ee/	98	43
Finland	993	438	www.tori.fi	569	270
			www.lemmikkipalstat.net	130	23
			www.nettimarkkina.com	294	145
France	9200	5131	https://www.leboncoin.fr/	7193	3141
			https://www.paruvendu.fr/	1242	1243
			https://www.vivastreet.com/	765	747
Germany	129316	23154	www.deine-tierwelt.de	49333	9639
			www.quoka.de/tiermarkt	19437	5135
			https://kleinanzeige.focus.de/tiere/	45067	6196
			https://www.snautz.de/hunde/kaufen	14479	1444
			https://www.markt.de	1000	740
Hungary	28	7	www.vatera.hu	28	7
			https://www.jofogas.hu/magyarorszag/haziallat		
Ireland	5433	700	www.gumtree.com	3847	590
			www.DoneDeal.ie	1586	110
			http://www.vendita-cuccioli-caniegatti.com/	39	
Italy	50035	6442	https://www.annuncianimali.it/	22888	4102
			www.kijiji.it	26645	2340
			www.Portaportese.it		
			www.subito.it	463	
			www.bakeca.it		
Latvia	838	587	http://pukainis.lv/	65	118
			https://www.ss.com/lv/animals/dogs/		
			http://info.dzivniekupolicija.lv/lv/		
			www.ss.lv	612	415
			www.reklama.lv	146	50
			www.zip.lv	15	4

Country	Total numbers		Main classifieds websites	Dogs per website	Cats per website
	Dog	Cat			
Lithuania	2045	904	http://www.skelbiu.lt	1625	647
			http://www.alio.lt	83	71
			http://rinka.lt	337	186
Luxembourg	1154	2	https://luxembourg.craigslist.org/	1	2
			https://dog.pet2me.com/en/ad/searchgo/?category=1&city=1260&country=30	353	
			https://www.europuppy.com/	800	
Malta	21440	5580	Maltapark.com		
			Pets.com.mt	21440	5580
Netherlands	5173	1347	https://www.marktplaats.nl/	4239	667
			www.kittentekoop.nl		374
			https://www.hondenmarktplaats.nl/	450	0
			http://www.dierenasiels.com	334	306
Poland	50187	12594	https://www.puppyplaats.nl/pups.php	150	0
			www.olx.pl	42231	10727
			www.allegro.pl	363	24
			https://gratka.pl/zwierzeta	3393	772
Portugal	2437	511	https://sprzedajemy.pl/zwierzeta	4200	1071
			https://www.adopta-me.org	1039	277
			https://www.olx.pt/animais/animais-para-adopcao/	758	76
Romania	16073	2824	https://www.custojusto.pt/portugal/animais-domesticos-doacao/caes	640	158
			https://www.olx.ro	1901	482
			www.lajumatate.ro	2423	298
			www.ocazii.ro	434	68
			Animale - Animalutul.ro	4700	750
			Caini de Vanzare	1915	476
Slovakia	5358	1015	https://www.publi24.ro	4700	750
			https://www.bazos.sk/	4262	776
			https://www.bazar.sk/	647	178
Slovenia	724	232	https://www.inzercia.sk/	449	61
			https://www.bolha.com/	584	221
Spain	49357	9767	https://www.zivalnik.si/	135	9
			https://www.podarimo.si/podarim/c100000/male-zivali-in-rastline/stran-1	5	2
			http://www.milanuncios.com	39111	8163
Sweden	2367	889	http://www.vibbo.com	10246	1604
			https://www.blocket.se/annonser/hela_sverige?q=djur	1320	780
			http://www.hyrahyra.se/aktiviteter_och_fritid-djur-hund	355	109
			https://www.skk.se/sv/kopahund/hundraser-valpkullar/	692	
UK	21753	4094	www.gumtree.com	3839	588
			http://www.preloved.co.uk	3671	761
			http://www.pets4homes.co.uk	10782	1983
			www.friday-ad.co.uk	3440	758
TOTAL	438,004	80,712	www.vivastreet.co.uk	21	4

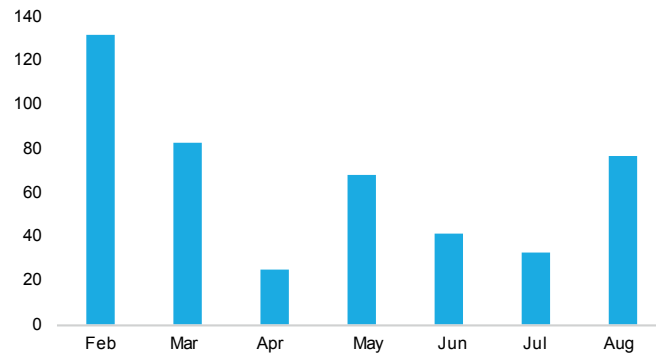
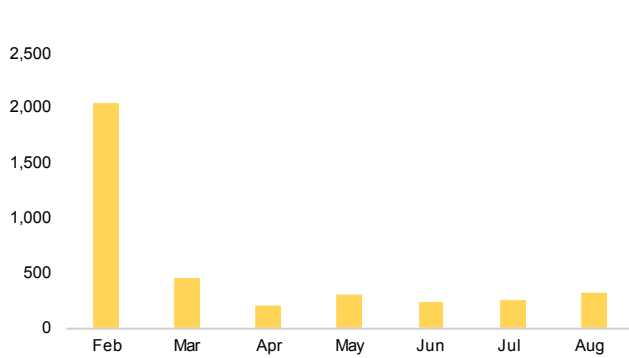
Dog and cat adverts during 1st wave of Covid-19 pandemic (2020)



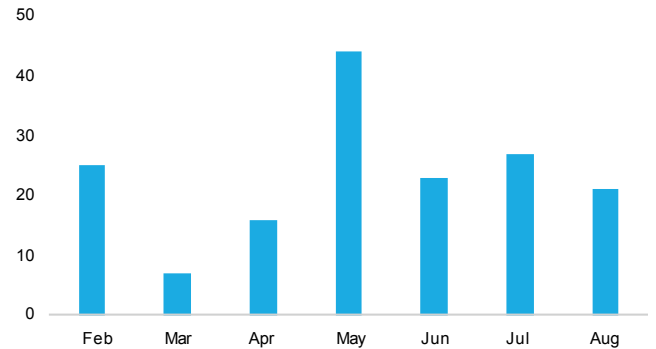
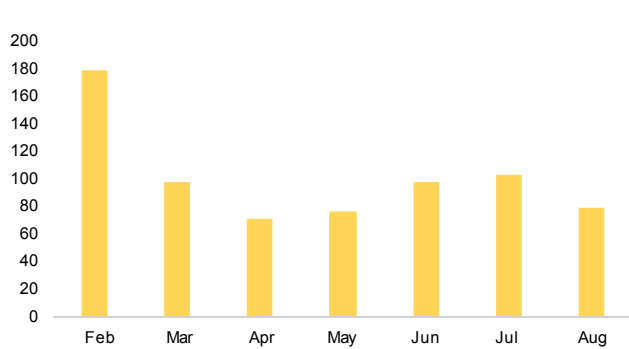
Bulgaria



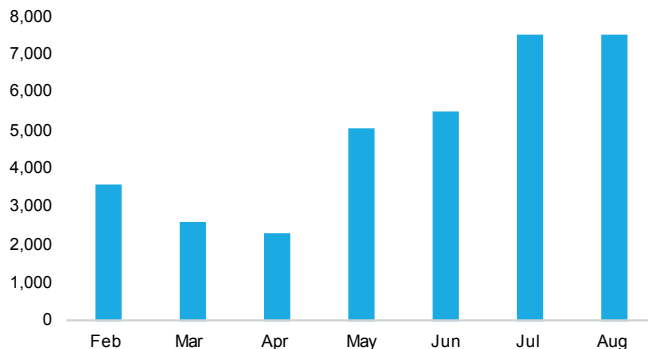
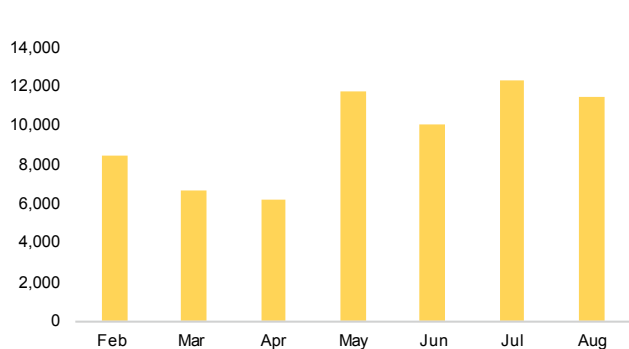
Croatia



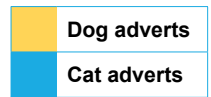
Cyprus



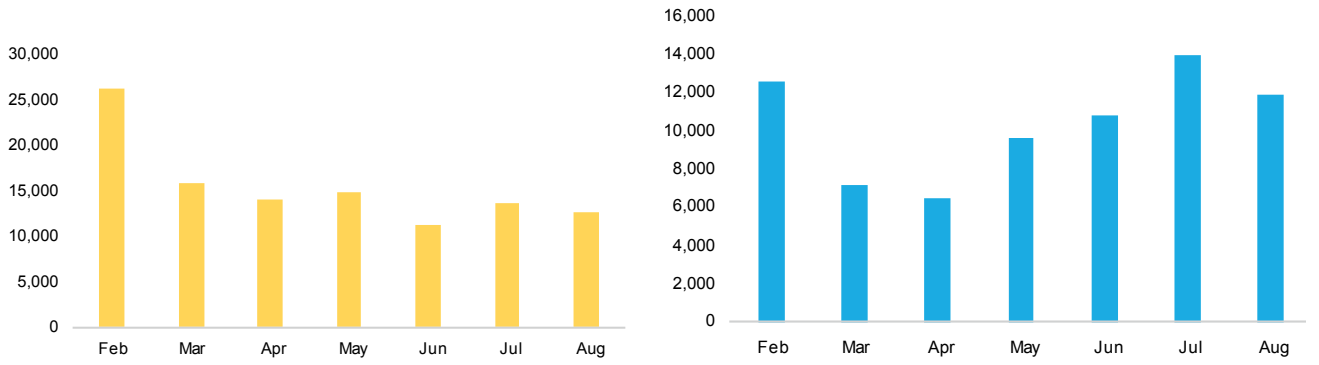
Germany



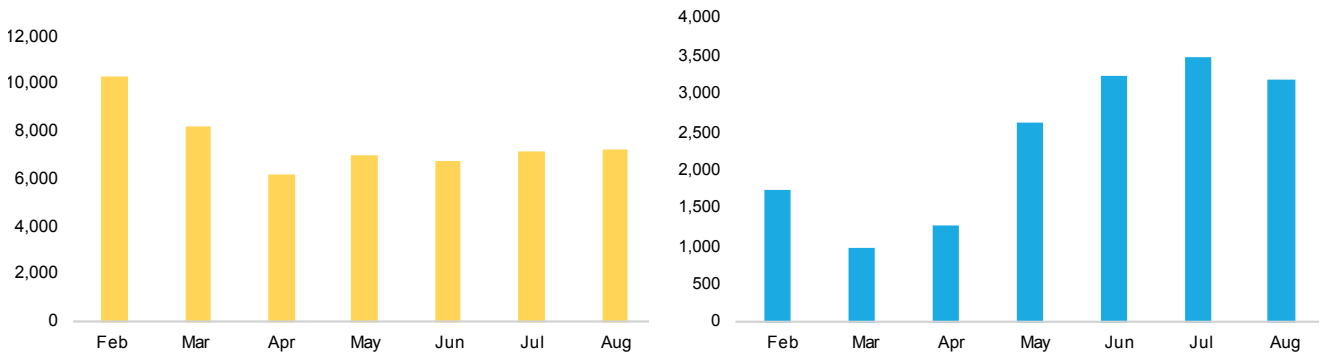
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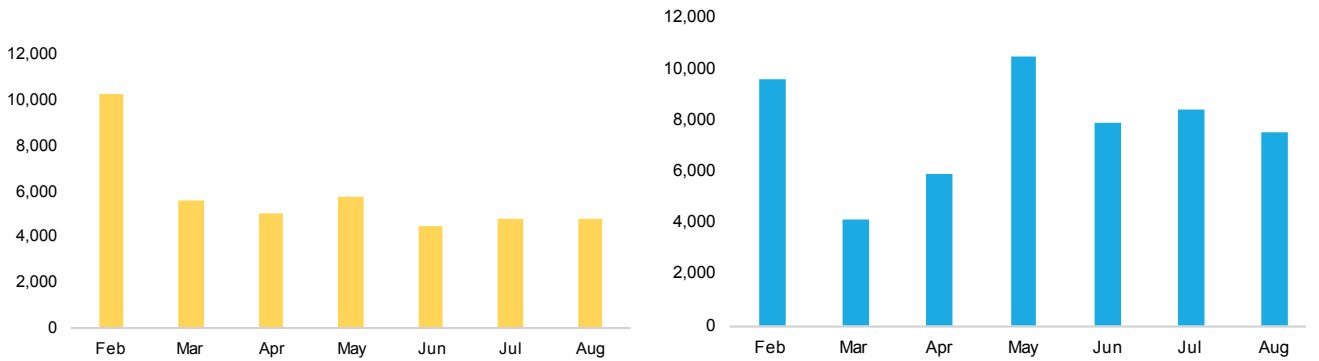
Poland



Romania



Spain



EU Dog & Cat Alliance

Since 2014 the EU Dog & Cat Alliance has been a leading European expert on companion animal welfare, encompassing 90 organisations across 25 EU Member States and the UK. 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 27 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.

Website | dogandcatwelfare.eu/about

Email | info@dogandcatwelfare.eu

Telephone | +44 7920 658685

Facebook | [@EUdogsandcats](https://www.facebook.com/EUdogsandcats)

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