

The background of the page is a solid green color. In the upper left, there is a white silhouette of a dog's head and neck, facing right. Below it, there is a white silhouette of a cat's head and neck, also facing right. The text is overlaid on the lower right portion of the green background.

How can the Digital Services Act help to curb the illegal animal trade online?

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How can the DSA help to curb illegal animal trade online?

Five Steps to make online sale of animals safer for the European consumer through the **Digital Services Act**:

Step 1: Recognise "illegally traded animals"

Step 2: Introduce effective due diligence process for advertisement approval

Step 3: Apply proactive information verification process

Step 4: Not enable publications known to be false or misleading

Step 5: Ensure legal framework fit for long-term challenges and technological developments

Scale of illegal animal trade

The large majority of **cats and dogs from cross-border illegal trade are sold online**, and their lucrative trade is booming, especially now at the time of COVID-19 when people are craving for company. Such a need for a puppy or a kitten can be very quickly satisfied via online platforms and social media where animals are advertised. With limited requirements in place, poor enforcement and anonymity, it is easy for the market participants to acquire and sell animals regardless of their origin, putting **animal health and welfare, human health and public finances at risk** and fuelling criminal activity. The annual trade value of pet trade in Europe is estimated in billions of euros, however, due to underreporting and lack of standardised data collection, the real scale of the problem is unknown and so are the exact numbers of traded animals across European borders.

Until now, any focus on the criminal pet trade has concentrated on the animal welfare and consumer fraud aspects, but it has become clear that **illegal trade is structured and organised by criminal elements**. Both EU and the Member States recognize the need to **join forces** to tackle this increasingly pressing problem and point to long-term solutions for the sake of protecting the European citizens and the Single Market. Similar to the fight of central and local governments against drug trade and human trafficking, combatting pet trade controlled by criminal gangs must be assisted by mechanisms of support at the EU level.

Risk of illegal animal trade

1. The illegal animal trade bares all the characteristics of **organised crime**, such as drug or human trafficking, as mentioned in the **EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime (2021-2025)**.
2. Biosecurity concerns including **bioterrorism**. Pets can be used as bioweapons - inconspicuous carriers of disease are capable of inflicting serious damage on the public health sector, and as a result, destroy economies.
3. **Health of consumers** at risk. Rabies, a lethal zoonosis causing **59 000 deaths globally** each year, is becoming more prevalent in countries such as the Netherlands or France due to the influx of unvaccinated puppies from Eastern European countries. Other risks include parasitic and bacterial infections with severe implications for human health, such as intestinal worm infestations and alveolar echinococcosis caused by *Echinococcus multilocularis*.

4. **Consumer fraud** and violations of import **rules**. The pet's health status, country of origin, vaccination status, breed and even **existence** can all be falsely presented to the consumer.

The role of the EU

The illegal pet trade is a problem of all the EU Member States and only an EU wide solution will be able to respond to an EU wide problem. The EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime (2021-2025) confirmed the seriousness of illegal animal trade as organised crime, while the Croatian Presidency workshop Illegal Pet Trade: Game Over, surfaced the sentiment among the majority of experts, including EU Member States, where 92% declared a need for EU wide rules for the trade of pets, 93% stated that online platforms should be made responsible for verification of sellers' information, and 90% indicated that only registered cats and dogs can be advertised. It is now up to policy makers to decide to what extent protecting the health and welfare of traded pets, consumer rights and public health is relevant.

**EUROGROUP
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