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Ukraine Task Force for cats and dogs at Eurogroup for Animals

Joint opinion on cat and dog population
management in Ukraine - November 2023

Joint opinion on cat and dog population management in Ukraine

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Joint opinion on cat and dog population management in Ukraine

Ukraine needs nationwide strategy for cat and dog population management programmes

The members of the Ukraine Task Force at the Eurogroup for Animals have been helping companion animals in Ukraine from the very beginning of the full-scale war in 2022, which allowed them to identify many issues facing cats and dogs in Ukraine. Having had sterilisation programmes for cats and dogs for years and having put in place numerous new ones over the past year and a half, a demand for such services remains high. Thus, the members believe that only comprehensive **population management** programmes for cats and dogs, which rely on targeting the **sources** of these animals and include collaboration with Competent Authorities, can help solve the issue.

We aim to help implement sound and humane population management for cats and dogs in Ukraine in order not only to *improve the welfare of these animals* but also to *help reduce public health risks associated with zoonotic diseases*, while advancing Ukraine's *smooth integration into the EU*.

This is to be done in line with the existing global standards such as Terrestrial Animal Health Code (TAHC) 7.7 chapter on Dog population management and TAHC 8.15 chapter on Rabies virus¹, as well as using the best available knowledge and expertise such as International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAM) Dog² and Cat³ population management guidance, and best practice from the field. Moreover, Ukraine is a signatory to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

The approach requires a high involvement from the Competent Authorities, veterinary professionals and paraprofessionals to ensure the highest level of animal health and welfare as well as minimising risks to public health.

Improve animal welfare of cats and dogs in Ukraine

The foremost principle of the success of the cat and dog population management programmes is that they must be **humane and ethical**. Improving animal welfare goes hand in hand with minimising harm to both animals and human communities, which is the basis for population management. Using culling as a method for population mana-

¹ WOAH 2023, Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.7 and Chapter 8.15.

² ICAM, [Humane dog population management guidance](#)

³ ICAM, [Humane cat population management guidance](#)

gement is ineffective from strategic and health perspectives, not to mention the unethical and cruel sides of this method:

- Culling focuses on the current free-roaming populations and **does not address the source of these animals**. Strategically it does not help clear the streets of roaming animals.
- From a health perspective targeting dog population size is not an effective solution for reducing rabies prevalence according to WOAAH. However, the reduction of dog population *turnover* can contribute to rabies control. This means that it is best to focus on the reduction of birth rates of puppies and the **improvement of welfare and life expectancy of existing vaccinated dogs, rather than on their population size reduction**. Therefore, dog population management also contributes to effective and sustainable rabies control.⁴
- Culling is an **ethically unacceptable method** among Europeans, which contradicts their willingness to protect companion animals.⁵

Human and animal health links

The interconnectedness of human, animal and environmental health is extensively covered by the One-Health approach. The most common example is the transmission of rabies to humans, which can be controlled only with the continuous vaccination coverage of animals. Unvaccinated free-roaming animals are a risk to animal and public health, but a vaccinated and stable free-roaming dog population achieves herd immunity which prevents the spread of rabies. Ukraine is a sporadically rabies-endemic country.⁶ We know that there were high rates of abandonment of companion animals due to the high migration of the population provoked by the war; we also observe groups of free-roaming dogs, especially in the cities in Ukraine close to the front line. Cat and dog vaccination and population management are crucial instruments within the One-Health approach.

European Treaty and values

Introducing humane population management of cats and dogs is the only right path on Ukraine's way into the European Union. Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) expressly recognises that animals are sentient beings and provides that the EU shall be mindful of animal welfare when formulating its policies and Ukraine will have to comply with this.

Problem

We believe that the problem of the **lack of responsible pet ownership practices** in the country is the root cause to be addressed. For example, the abandonment of litters of owned animals is a common practice in Ukraine. This constant influx of free-roaming and reproductively active animals keeps driving numbers up.

⁴ WOAAH 2023, [Terrestrial Animal Health Code](#), Chapter 7.7.

⁵ Animal welfare: [Eurobarometer 2023](#).

⁶ WHO, 2021. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/rabies>

Our opinion

In our opinion the population management of cats and dogs in Ukraine, considering the current circumstances, should focus on the components described below. In order to prove effective the following actions will require the engagement of different parties with a central role played by a government. Moreover, these components are not stand-alone solutions to effective population management but are rather mutually reinforcing and must be used in combination.

1. Supporting Identification and Registration of cats and dogs in Ukraine.

Promoting the identification and registration practice of cats and dogs among owners will permit tracking an animal back to its source and as a result will help reunite lost animals with their owners and, when linked with health records, can establish the vaccination status of an animal. The progress towards nationwide identification and registration of cats and dogs can start by promoting microchipping of pets; supporting the development of the electronic pet passport; supporting the training of veterinarians on the use of electronic registry system (once developed); as well as supporting the mandatory licensing of commercial breeders of cats and dogs with identification and registration being part of their obligation.

2. Supporting evidence-based cat and dog sterilisation programmes for owned and unowned animals.

Evidence-based cat and dog sterilisation programmes prevent the birth of unwanted offspring and consequently positively benefit the humane reduction of the size of free-roaming cat and dog populations. The "Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release" sterilisation programmes should be preferred as a means of reproductive control for unowned free-roaming animals, while fostering the acceptance of these animals by the local communities. This should be coupled with the promotion of sterilisation of owned animals as part of the responsible pet ownership practice. The promotion of sterilisation programmes will require veterinary input, thus it is important to support veterinary capacity building by providing training courses for veterinarians on surgical protocols and incentives to work with cats and dogs. It is also essential that such programmes are based on a collection of reliable data on the numbers of cats and dogs over time, as well as permanent marking to indicate that the animal has been neutered.

3. Advising on minimum standards for shelters.

Another measure used for population management is the sheltering of free-roaming animals. In Ukraine there is a need for helping shelters transform into adoption centers, promoting their temporary rather than permanent role. This should be coupled with promoting the culture of adopting and rehoming animals. Additionally, considering Ukraine's current reality, promoting shelter evacuation strategy in case of a disaster should be a good practice for all shelters.

Roles and responsibilities

Sterilisation programmes put in place by the members of the Task Force and local governments in Ukraine have been helping to tackle the issue, but the cycle of animals in need of sterilisation does not end. Consequently, we believe that **joining forces** of international and local NGOs, veterinarians and importantly the Ukrainian government is necessary to address this issue.

- Namely, in line with the ICAM, we believe that the strategy has to include the cooperation among the **national government** (the main role is governance, funding and training), **local governments** (the main role is implementation and enforcement of the legislation) and **NGOs** (the main role is education and awareness).
- The suggested approach also takes into account the WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 7.7, which stresses that the enabling environment for a population management programme should be created by the **competent authority at the national level**.
- Recognising the diversity of stakeholders in population management, it is crucial that everyone has a **clear role and responsibility**.

Moreover, the ultimate responsibility for a pet should lie with the owner. On the one hand, the government should create an enabling environment for pet owners to be responsible, such as access to veterinary services, and on the other hand, the owner should be accountable for identifying, registering and vaccinating their pet, as well as taking care in terms of feed and water supply and reproduction control.

Conclusion

For the population management of cats and dogs to be effective in Ukraine, it is pivotal to realise that a permanent system of population management services has to be put in place because *“as long as people own dogs and cats, there will always be a need to manage their populations”*.⁷ A set of actions undertaken as part of a sound population management programme will eventually promote responsible pet ownership practices, which is at the core of the issue.

Disclaimer

This document and its contents are provided for informational purposes. Eurogroup for Animals serves as a platform for the exchange of information about the needs of cats and dogs in Ukraine in order to promote better coordination among animal welfare NGOs and experts. The Ukraine Task Force consists of the Eurogroup for Animals member and non-member organisations, who make every effort to ensure that the information provided is complete, correct, accurate and up-to-date. The information published in this document is based on the Task Force members' experience in Ukraine and research of the best field practices available. The resources are referenced throughout the document. If you have any questions or suggestions, reach out to us at uataskforce@eurogroupforanimals.org.

⁷ [Dog and Cat Population Management Guide, Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals](#)

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