

# PUPPY SMUGGLING

When will this cruel trade end?





## OVERVIEW

**Dogs Trust is the United Kingdom's largest dog welfare charity and is the founding member of the EU Dog & Cat Alliance. In 2018, Dogs Trust carried out its fourth investigation into the abuse of the EU's Pet Travel Scheme.**

The latest undercover investigation has unveiled the continued widespread, organised abuse of the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) in Central and Eastern European Member States, with large numbers of puppies being bred, destined for sale throughout the EU. For the first time, this investigation also revealed breeders and vets willingly engaged in the illegal puppy trade in Serbia, a Third Country seeking EU accession, from which the more stringent rules for entry into the EU are being ignored. Using forged EU passports, puppies are being classified as "EU-bred" in order to be sold throughout the EU at ages younger than they should legally be sold.

This causes suffering for the puppies involved, with sometimes severe repercussions for their long-term health and welfare – restricting their ability to lead happy and healthy lives, and potentially burdening their owners with anguish and expensive veterinary bills. It also poses a risk to public health and fatally undermines confidence in – and the credibility of – PETS.

Whilst it is difficult to get a true estimate of the number of animals involved, a recent European Commission funded study on the welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices estimated that every month around 46,000 dogs are traded between EU Member States<sup>1</sup>.

Given the sheer scale of the trade and implications for public health, consumer protection and animal health and welfare, we call on the EU institutions and Member States to work together in an effective and coordinated manner, to end this wide-scale and cruel practice.

### WHY IS THIS REPORT RELEVANT TO THE EU?

The illegal trade in companion animals is rife across the EU. Most Member States are either source, destination, or transit countries. The illegal trade springs from abuses of EU pet movement legislation and differences in pet welfare standards and prices across the Union, and is best addressed via a coordinated EU-wide approach.

## HUNGARY – KEY FINDINGS

As in 2014, our investigators found breeders and vets willing to falsify pet passport and vaccination information to transport puppies below the legal age of 15 weeks for onward sale.

- Breeders could obtain passports for puppies with the dates of birth changed by a vet to make them appear older than they actually were. Two vets issued four passports to this effect.
- Passports contained false information about the rabies vaccination and the *Echinococcus multilocularis* tapeworm treatment.
- Rabies vaccinations were administered to underage puppies – too early for the vaccine to be considered effective.

## SERBIA – KEY FINDINGS

UK enforcement agencies informed Dogs Trust of Serbian-bred puppies being illegally imported into the EU for onward sale. Despite the more stringent rules for importing puppies into the EU from Serbia - which mean that, in general puppies should be approximately seven months old before being moved into the EU - it was easy to obtain Serbian puppies with EU passports. Online advertisements in Serbia openly stated that EU documents could be obtained for Serbian puppies for onward sale (including EU Member States Germany, Austria, Sweden, France; and listed Third Country Norway).

- A vet sold our investigators two Bulgarian passports and microchips for €35, without even seeing the puppies.
- A breeder offered underage puppies for sale; for an additional payment they offered Hungarian passports for the puppies, pre-filled with vaccination stickers and veterinary surgeon signatures. Several other breeders were filmed offering to provide EU passports for Serbian-bred puppies.
- Vets suggested hiding puppies whilst crossing the Serbian border into Hungary (i.e. truly smuggling them), and to obtain an EU passport once there.

### WHY PUPPY SMUGGLING IS AN ISSUE

'Fashionable' breeds such as French Bulldogs, Pugs, Dachshunds and English Bulldogs can fetch huge prices in certain EU Member States as demand for them has increased significantly in recent years. With a limited supply of puppies from reputable breeders, unscrupulous breeders have an opportunity to fill the gap in this lucrative market. A French Bulldog puppy can sell for around €1,700 in the UK whereas in Hungary, Lithuania and Poland it would fetch nearer €675 (Source: EU Dog & Cat Alliance Members 2017).

Given that the chances of getting caught are low and the penalties for doing so are woefully small, it is unsurprising individuals are tempted to get involved. Moving forward, it will be essential to address buyer behaviour - as well as legislation - if we are to truly stop puppy smuggling.

<sup>1</sup> [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)



## TRADE ROUTES FROM NON-EU MEMBER (THIRD COUNTRY) SERBIA

### DESTINATIONS OF SERBIAN BRED PUPPIES



IDENTIFIED  
7 SERBIAN BREEDERS  
WILLING TO PROVIDE  
UNDERAGE PUPPIES  
WITH FALSIFIED  
EU PASSPORTS

### AVERAGE PRICES PAID FOR FRENCH BULLDOGS IN...



 Serbia  
€355

 Germany  
€1,475

 France  
€1,475

 Sweden  
€2,120

 UK  
€1,700



SERBIAN PUPPIES AS YOUNG AS  
10 WEEKS\* BEING GIVEN  
HUNGARIAN/BULGARIAN/CZECH  
PASSPORTS PRE-FILLED WITH  
FALSE VACCINATION DETAILS  
AND VET DETAILS



\*PUPPIES SHOULD BE AT LEAST  
7 MONTHS OF AGE BEFORE THEY  
CAN LEGALLY TRAVEL TO AN  
EU MEMBER STATE FROM  
A UNLISTED THIRD COUNTRY



## EU LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

Currently, Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 regulates pet travel and is more commonly known as the Pet Travel Scheme or PETS. Council Directive 92/65/EEC, also known as the Balai Directive, imposes additional rules for the commercial movement of animals. This Directive also applies whenever five or more dogs and/or cats are being transported at the same time and when dogs and/or cats are being moved for rehoming purposes, irrespective of whether any financial gain is made.

However, a new EU Animal Health Law (Regulation (EU) 2016/429), adopted in March 2016, streamlines almost 40 EU legal acts related to animal health into a single law and will repeal both PETS and the Balai Directive. Intended as a framework law, the regulation itself only lays down general principles and basic rules on animal diseases and detailed provisions are still to be established by further legislation (delegated or implementing acts).

Although the Animal Health Law will apply from 2021, the current pet travel rules will continue to apply until April 2026. This means the more detailed provisions for pet travel have yet to be confirmed and presents an important opportunity to ensure the new legislation is as robust as possible.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU:

- EU legislation requiring the compulsory permanent identification and registration of dogs on national databases linked to an EU database. The new EU Animal Health Law provides framework legislation under which this could be introduced
- The EU should draw up an action plan to tackle illegal companion animal movement across Europe, involving key stakeholders including the European Commission, European Parliament, Member States and relevant Third Countries, including enforcement agencies and border and veterinary authorities. The seizure of 30 blank pet passports by Serbian customs officials in August 2018, though welcome, represents a drop in the ocean
- We call on all parties to keep companion animal welfare concerns at the forefront of their thinking when shaping the future UK-EU relationship

### THIRD COUNTRY RULES

For a puppy from an unlisted Third Country, such as Serbia, to comply with the EU's pet travel rules, the following steps need to be adhered to:

- The puppy must be vaccinated against rabies not before the age of 12 weeks in order for it to be valid
- A blood titration test must be carried out at least 30 days after the vaccination date
- The rabies blood (titre) test must be carried three months before the date of travel to an EU country (i.e. a three month wait between the date of the successful blood test and the date of travel)

A puppy will therefore be approximately seven months of age before it can legally travel from an unlisted Third Country to an EU country.

One potential loophole we had considered was that Article 11 of EU regulation No 576/2013 allows EU Member States to accept companion animals from Third Countries without valid treatment for rabies, if certain strict criteria are met. Hungary – destination for many Serbian-bred puppies – does not allow for such a derogation (in fact, at present, only four EU Member States – Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, and Estonia – allow for such a derogation) so this would not explain the presence of Serbian-bred puppies into Hungary.



### ABOUT THE EU DOG & CAT ALLIANCE

The EU Dog & Cat Alliance consists of 82 member organisations from across the EU. We engage with EU institutions and stakeholders to improve companion animal welfare and build a better Europe for dogs and cats.

Our membership encompasses veterinary organisations, rescue and rehoming organisations, and organisations working to protect companion animal welfare, so we are in a unique position to offer the benefit of our expertise and experience in relation to companion animals – to influence policymaking, coordinate actions and facilitate dialogue.

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