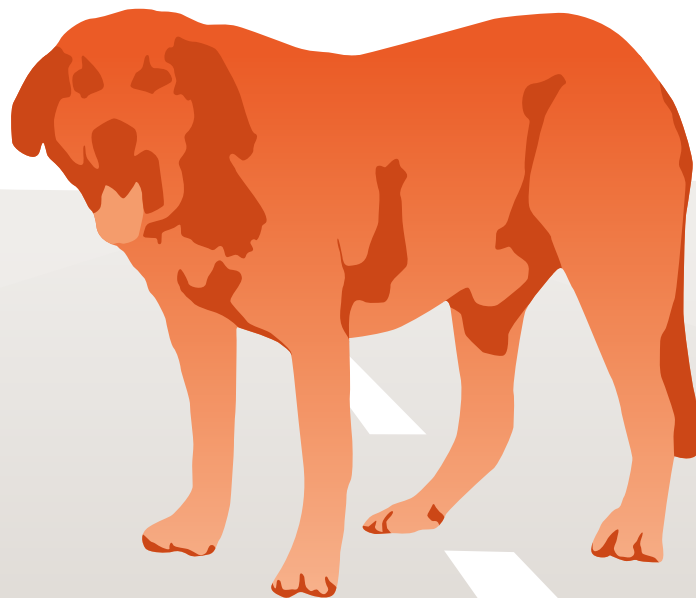




FOUNDATION
— 1987 —

Study They would never do it

by the Affinity Foundation on the abandonment,
loss and adoption of pets in Spain 2023:
interpretation of results

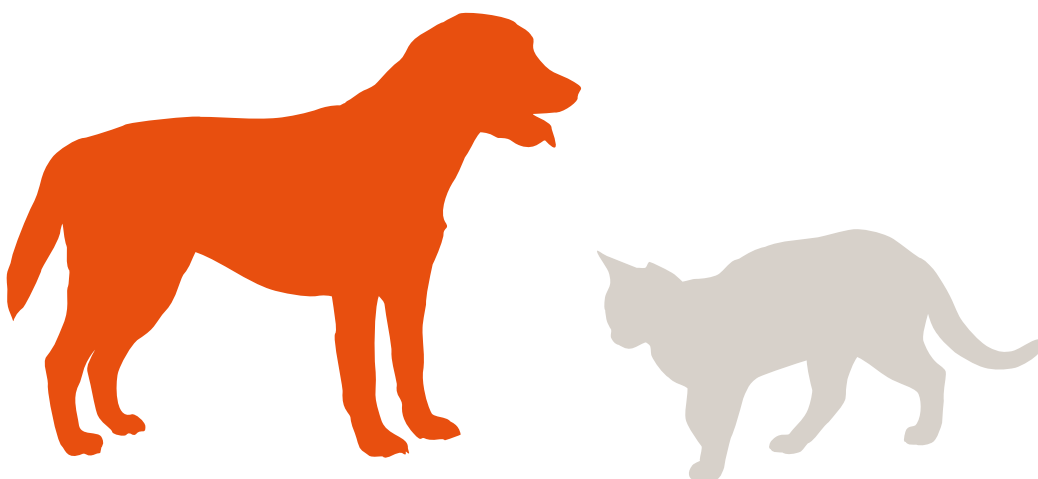


The following participated in the preparation of this survey:

- 386 pet companion animal shelters across Spain.
- Affinity Foundation.
- Department of Market and Consumer Intelligence of Affinity Pet Care.
- Punto de Fuga Research Institute.
- Chair Affinity Foundation Animals and Health (Autonomous University of Barcelona and Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute).

Summary of results

- The abandonment of pets is once again this year the main pet welfare problem in Spain.
- In 2023, 170,712 dogs and 115,970 cats were taken in by the nearly 1,600 companion animal shelters in Spain. This total figure represents the actual data of the 386 organisations that provided information, plus estimates for the rest of the animal protection centres in Spain that did not participate in the 2023* study.
- Dog and cat admissions to companion animal shelters in 2023 is virtually identical to that observed in the two previous years.
- Dog adoptions fell compared to 2022. Cat adoptions remained stable.
- Identification helps recover lost animals and is one of the main strategies for mitigating the impact of abandonment and loss of pets.
- Abandonment is a phenomenon that affects dogs and cats of all types and is not restricted to a particular age group or breed.
- Unwanted litters are one of the main sources of abandoned animals in our country. More than half the cats arriving at shelters are kittens.
- The four main reasons for abandonment reported by companion animal shelters are unwanted litters, loss of interest in the animal, behavioural problems and the end of the hunting season.
- The two characteristics of a dog that make it most difficult to adopt are belonging to a breed affected by legislation on potentially dangerous dogs and having a behavioural problem.



*Note: the total figure indicated for dogs and cats is our best estimate, obtained by the procedure described in the Methodology section at the end of this document.

How many dogs and cats were taken in by companion animal shelters and animal welfare centres in 2023?

Key data

- Last year 286,682 dogs and cats were taken in.
 - 170,712 dogs.
 - 115,970 cats.
 - Note: the total figures for the entire country are based on data from a sample of 386 out of a total of 1,591 animal welfare societies, town halls and county councils across Spain.

The previous data allow us to estimate the rate of abandonment and/or loss of animals at 3.6 dogs and 2.4 cats per 1,000 inhabitants (Spanish population: 48,085,361*).

- Abandonment or loss in 2023 affected 2.6% of the estimated 6,510,000 dogs and 2.4% of the estimated 4,783,000 family cats estimated to live in Spain**.

* Source: Spanish National Statistical Institute (Final data for the first quarter of 2023).

** Source: Affinity Pet Care (Estimated population data for 2022).

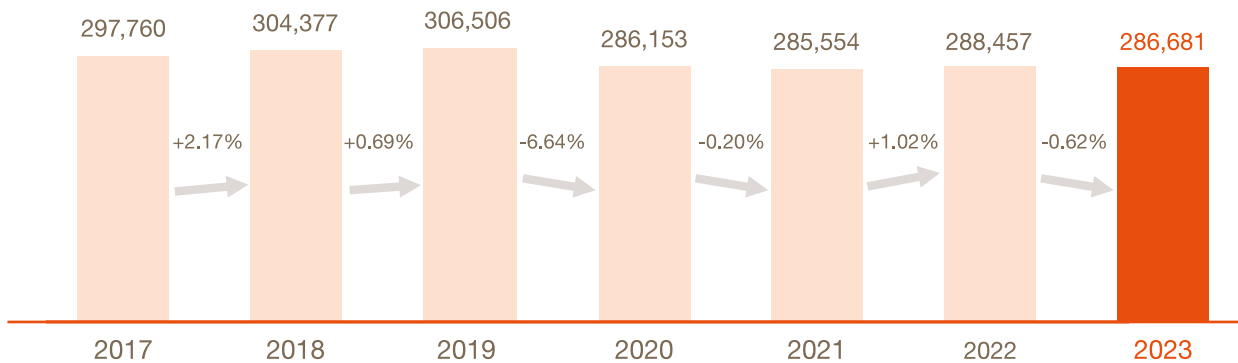


Figure 1. Trend in the number of animals admitted to companion animal shelters or animal welfare.

Our interpretation

- Abandonment and loss are once again this year the main problem for the welfare and quality of life of dogs and cats in our country¹.
- In 2023, approximately the same number of animals were taken in by the welfare centres as in 2022 (Figure 1).

As we will see below, the situation is different if we compare dogs and cats.

- In 2020, the admission of dogs to companion animal shelters fell by 11.5% (Figure 2). This was the largest annual reduction we have observed in all the years we have conducted our survey, which we attribute mainly to lockdown periods. However, in 2021 the figure increased by 3.48% and again in 2022 by 1.46%. Fortunately, this trend seems to have stabilised in 2023 and, in any case, still remains below the figures observed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

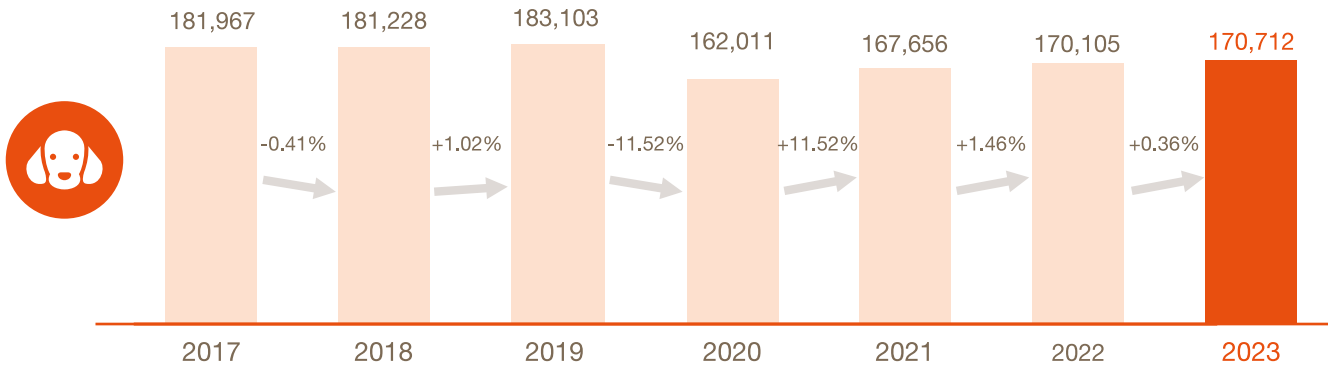


Figure 2. Trend in the number of dogs admitted to companion animal shelters or animal welfare.

The number of cat admissions, although somewhat lower in absolute value, does not differ statistically to that observed in 2022 (Figure 3).

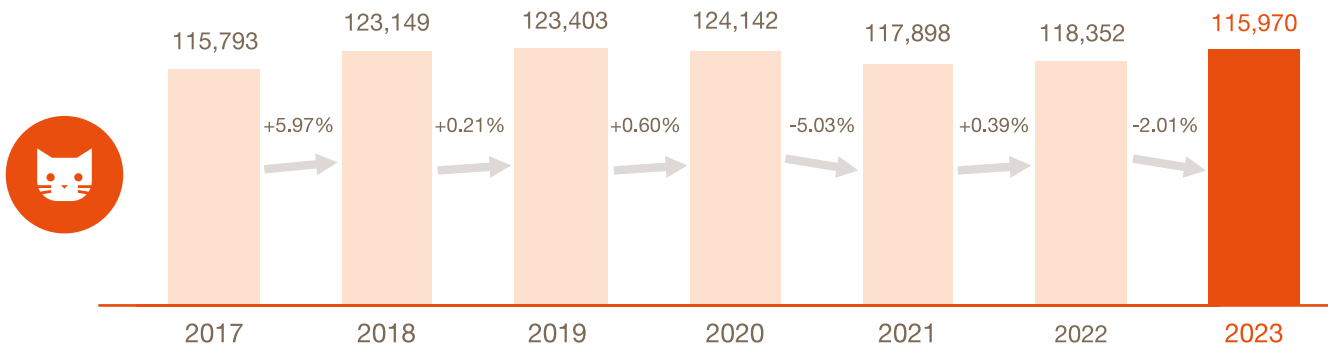


Figure 3. Trend in the number of cats admitted to companion animal shelters or animal welfare.

What was the outcome of the dogs and cats that were taken in by companion animal shelters in 2023?

Key data

Dogs

- 20.7% of the dogs taken in by companion animal shelters and animal welfare centres were returned to their families (Figure 4). From this percentage, we can estimate that at least 35,337 of admissions to companion animal shelters were lost dogs (Figure 5).

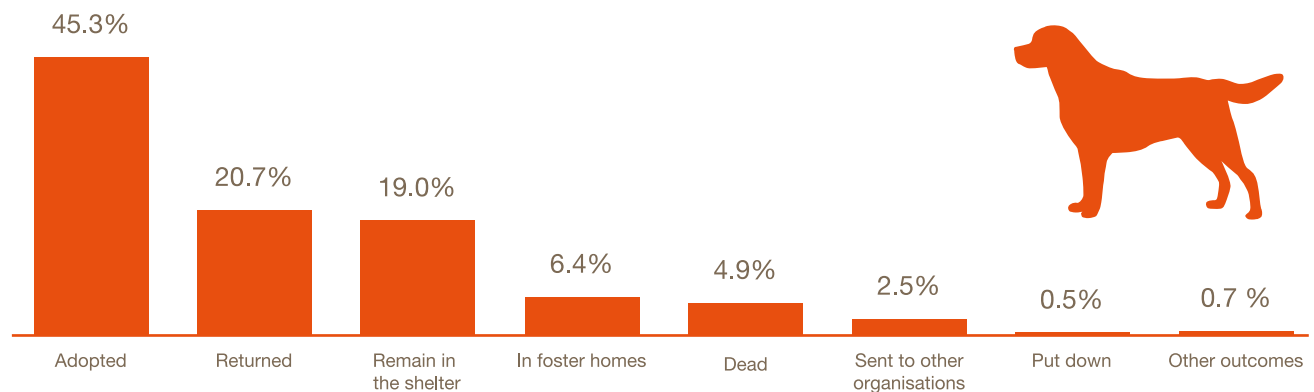


Figure 4. Outcome of dogs admitted to companion animal shelters in 2023.

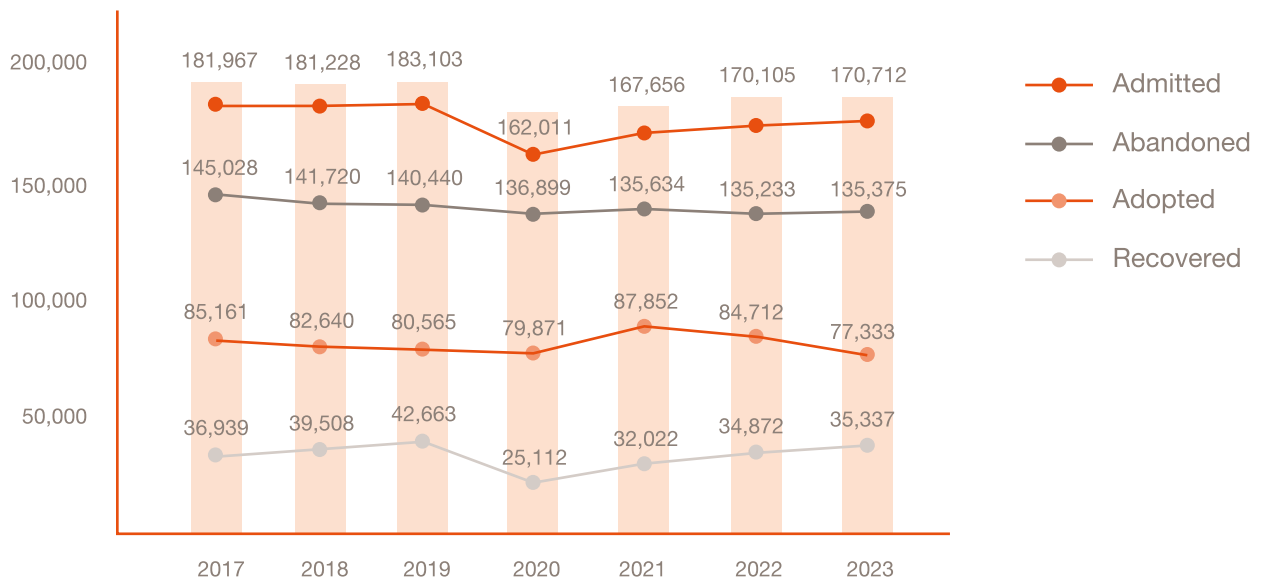


Figure 5. Estimated number of dogs that were admitted to companion animal shelters (orange), that were taken back by their families (light grey), that have been abandoned or whose families have not been able to take them back (grey) and that were adopted by a new family (light orange). In most cases, the animals recovered are those that have been taken in by the companion animal shelter after having been lost.

- 45.3% of dogs fue adoptado (Figure 4).
- 19% remained in the companion animal shelter awaiting adoption, 5.4% died or were put down for medical reasons (Figure 4).

Cats

- 5.4% of the cats taken in by companion animal shelters and animal welfare centres were returned to their families (Figure 6). From this percentage, we can estimate that at least 6,262 of the admissions to companion animal shelters were lost cats (Figure 7).

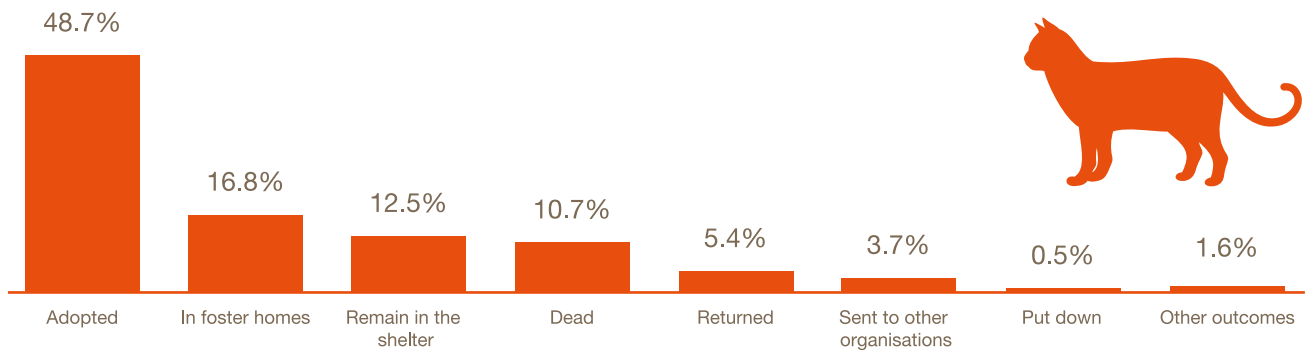


Figure 6. Outcome of cats admitted to companion animal shelters in 2023.

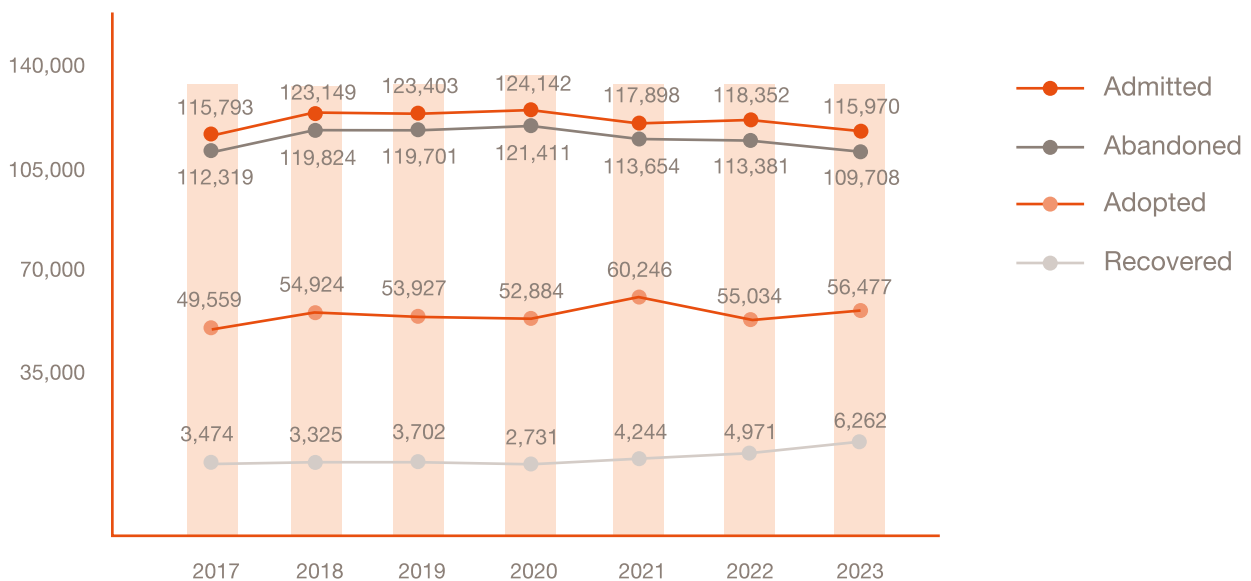


Figure 7. Number of cats that were admitted to companion animal shelters (orange), that were taken back by their families (light grey), that have been abandoned or whose families have not been able to take them back (grey) and that were adopted by a new family (light orange). In most cases, the animals recovered are those that have been taken in by the companion animal shelter after having been lost.

- 48.7% of cats were adopted (Figure 6).
- 16.8% remained in the companion animal shelter awaiting adoption, 13% died or were put down for medical reasons (Figure 6).
- 10.7% were relocated to foster homes (Figure 6).



Our interpretation

- The annual turnover of a companion animal shelter is related to three key indicators:
 - Total number of admissions.
 - Returned to the family. This parameter is an indirect indicator of the number of animals admitted to companion animal shelters after having been lost.
 - Adoptions.

The actual abandonment figure can be inferred by subtracting the number of animals that have been recovered by their families from the total number of admissions. In this regard, in recent years a moderate but steady reduction in the total number of abandoned dogs has been observed in recent years (Figure 5), which in 2023 seems to have lost momentum. The steepest drop observed in 2020 was circumstantial and limited to that year, due to the lower number of dogs lost during the pandemic lockdown periods.

- In 2021, for the first time in several years we detected a moderate reduction in the number of cats taken in by companion animal shelter organisations. After a figure in 2022 almost identical to that observed in 2021, the figure for 2023 was positive once again, although not statistically significant.

It should be noted that, in relation to loss, cats have two important differences compared to dogs.

Firstly, the proportion of identified cats is substantially lower than that of dogs, both in the general population and in the case of animals taken in by companion animal shelters (Figure 8).

Secondly, the proportion of cats with outdoor access is very low. According to data from our study on the effects of the pandemic on the behaviour and quality of life of pets, more than 80% of cats never have outdoor access (Figure 9).

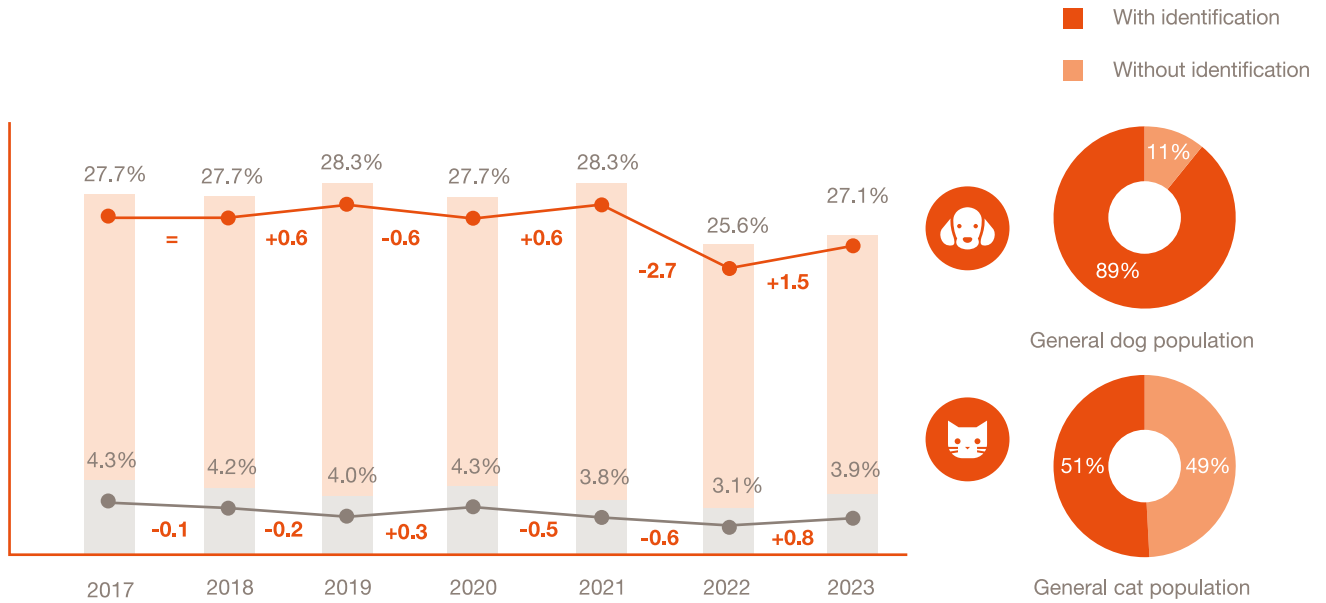


Figure 8. Proportion of microchipped dogs and cats arriving at companion animal shelters (left). The percentage of dogs and cats living with families that are identified is shown on the right.

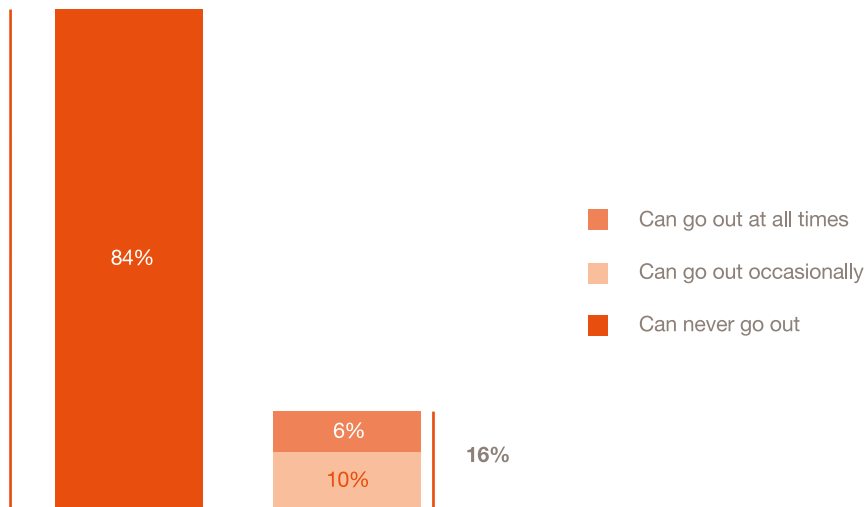


Figure 9. Percentage of cats with outdoor access.

Adapted from: Bowen J, García E, Darder P, Argüelles J, Fatjó J (2020) The effects of the Spanish COVID-19 lockdown on people, their pets, and the human-animal bond. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 40, pp 75-91. doi:10.1016/j.jveb.2020.05.013

- In short, the 2023 global data on the abandonment and loss of pets do not differ significantly to those observed in 2022..

What impact does identification have on the abandonment and loss of pets?

Key data

- 63% of the microchipped animals admitted were returned to their families (Figure 10).

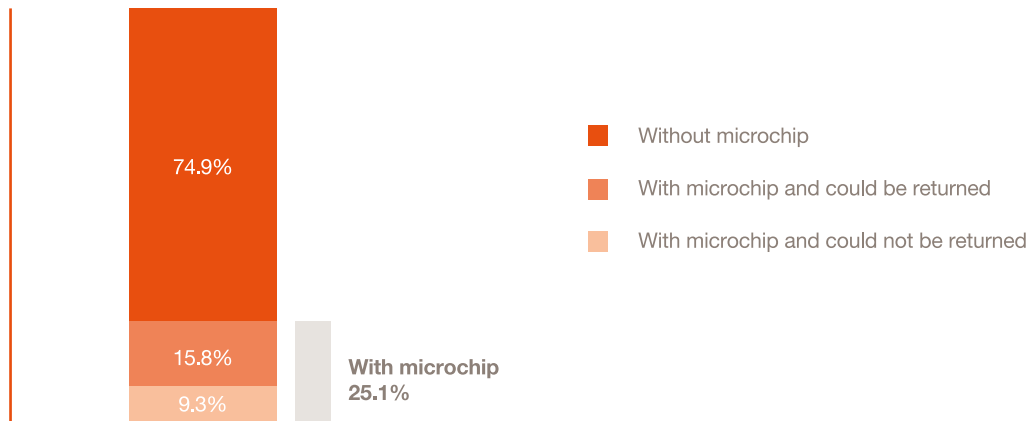


Figure 10. The graph shows the percentage of animals taken in that were microchipped, and how many of these were able to be returned to their families of origin.

Our interpretation

- The percentage of animals recovered by their families is much higher among those that are properly identified. The key factor in the recovery of a lost animal is the possibility of locating its family and to achieve this it is essential for the animal to be properly identified by means of a microchip. Approximately 14.5% of all animals admitted to shelters in 2023 are recovered by their families, while this percentage rises to 63% for dogs and cats that arrive at the shelter properly identified. In other words, an identified pet is between four and five times more likely to be recovered by the family than an unidentified one.

The number of cats with outdoor access is very low. According to data from our study on the effects of the pandemic on the behaviour and quality of life of pets, more than 80% of cats never have outdoor access (Figure 9).
- The number of identified animals arriving at companion animal shelters is very low compared to that observed in the general pet population (Figure 8).

The number of identified cats arriving at companion animal shelters has always been very low and, although in 2023 it increased for the first time in three years, it does not suggest a change in trend.

According to estimates by the research institute IPSOS for Affinity PetCare, the total percentage of identified dogs and cats living with families is 89% and 51%, respectively (Figure 8). If we take into account that identifying a pet is one of the main indicators of responsible pet ownership, our data would suggest that the abandonment or loss of pets would be at least partly related to a failure to fulfil the obligations and commitments involved in living with a pet.
- The percentage of cats returned to their families is considerably lower than dogs. This may reflect, on the one hand, the lower proportion of cats identified compared to dogs and, on the other, the admission to shelters of many cats that have been born and raised on the street.

What is the profile of the animals taken in by shelters?

Key data

- 63% of the microchipped animals admitted were returned to their families (Figure 10).
- 28% of dogs admitted to companion animal shelters and animal welfare centres are purebred, while the rest are crossbreeds (Figure 11).
- Only 7.3% of dogs admitted to companion animal shelters and animal welfare centres are purebred, while the rest are crossbreeds (Figure 11).
- Only 57.6% of all dogs admitted to companion animal shelters are medium-sized, 26.5% are large and 15.9% are small (Figure 12).
- The majority of dogs arrive at shelters as adults (61.5%), although puppies (24.4%) and older (or senior) animals (14%) are also taken in (Figure 13).
- Nearly half of the cats arriving at shelters are adults (47.1%), followed by kittens (46%) and finally older animals (6.9%) (Figure 13).

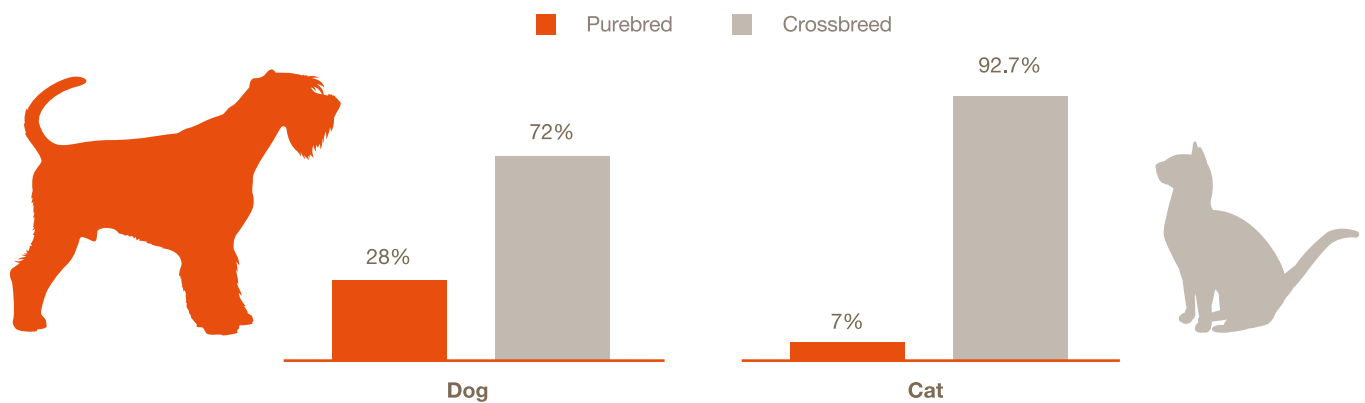


Figure 11. Percentage of animals taken in by shelters according to whether they are purebred or crossbreeds.

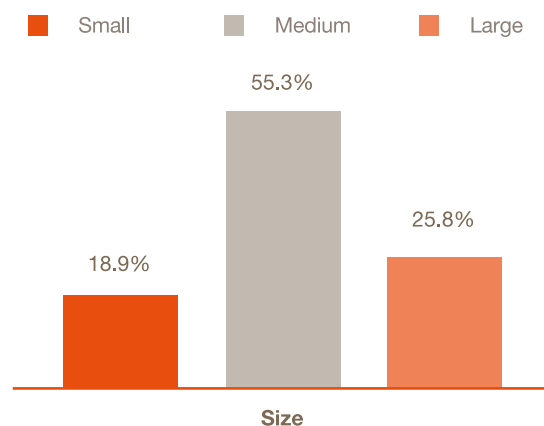


Figure 12. Percentage of dogs taken in by shelters according to their size.

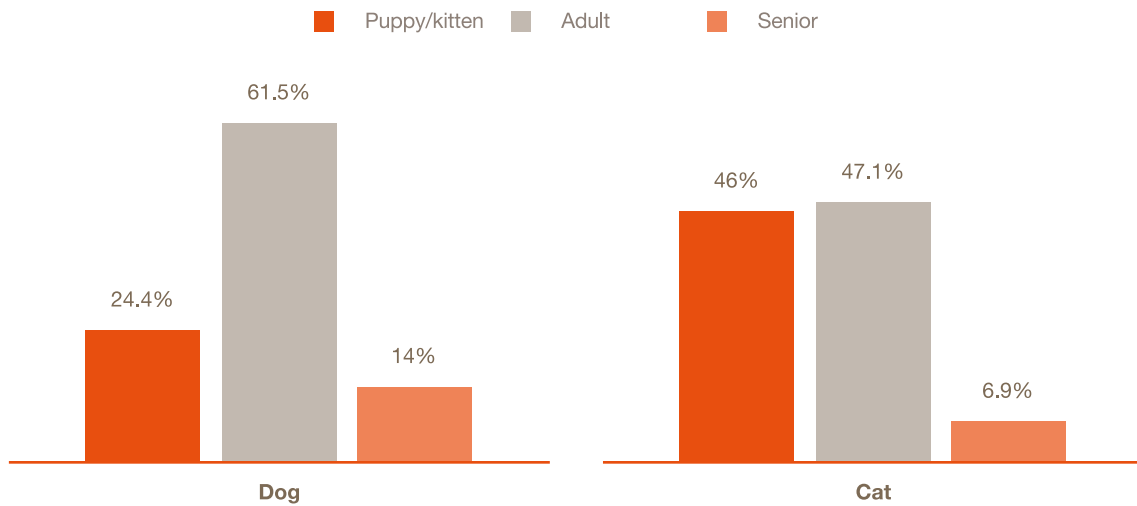
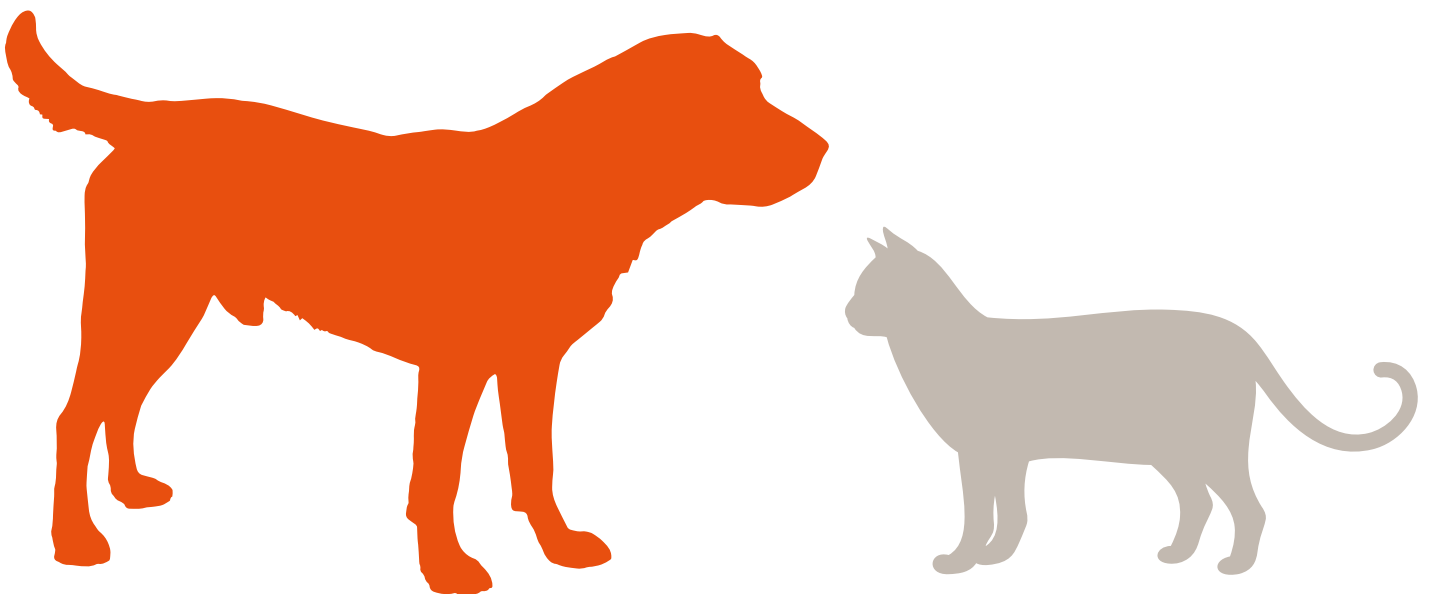


Figure 13. Percentage of animals taken in by shelters according to their age.



Our interpretation

- Abandonment is a phenomenon that affects dogs and cats of all types and is not restricted to a particular age group or breed.
- The proportion of medium-sized and large dogs arriving at shelters is higher than their presence in the general dog population. Consequently, it could be suggested that smaller dogs suffer less abandonment and loss than larger dogs. As we will see below, behavioural problems are one of the main reasons for abandonment of pets and their negative impact is sometimes greater in larger dogs. In terms of loss, there may be a new bias towards large dogs, perhaps because of the places where they are walked and the greater tendency to let them loose in open spaces compared to smaller dogs.
- 46% and 24.4% of animals taken in by shelters are kittens and puppies, respectively. Most of them come from the birth of unwanted litters. It is important for all families to effectively control the reproduction of their dogs and cats in order to avoid this phenomenon, which is the main cause of the current overpopulation of pets.

How does the admission of animals to shelters vary throughout the year?

Key data

- There are no significant differences in the number of dogs taken in during the different months of the year (Figure 14).

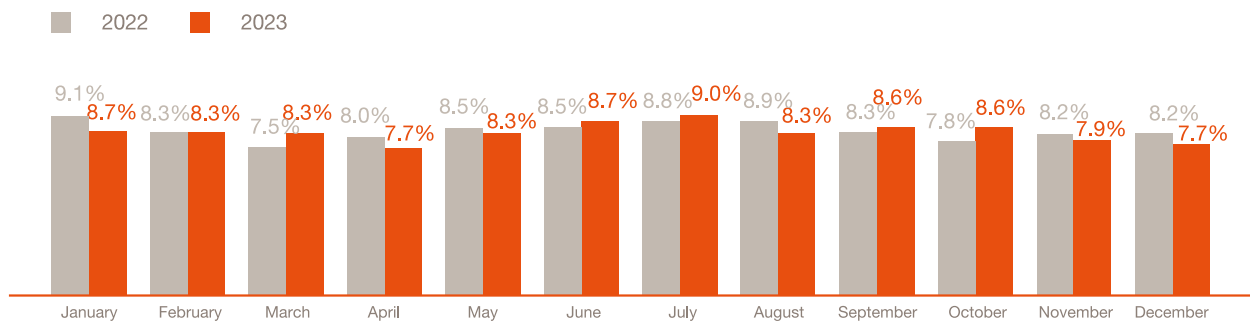


Figure 14. Distribution by month of the total number of dogs taken in by animal welfare organisations in 2023 (orange) and 2022 (grey) (expressed as a percentage of the annual total).

- In contrast to dogs, the admission of cats to companion animal shelters varies significantly throughout the year (Figure 15).

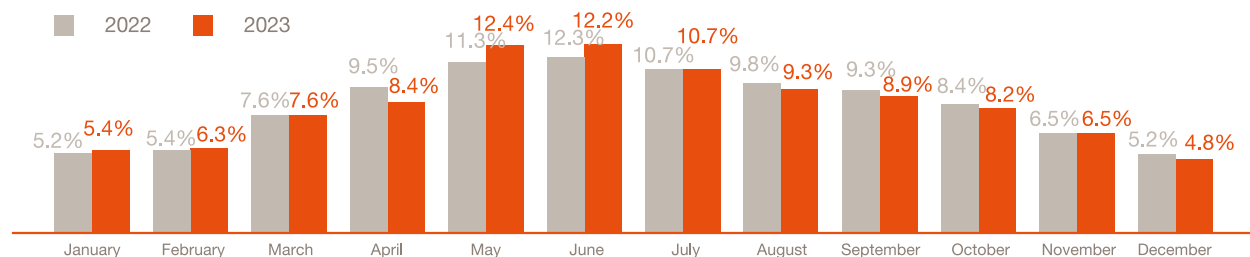


Figure 15. Distribution by month of the total number of cats taken in by animal welfare organisations in 2023 (orange) and 2022 (grey) (expressed as a percentage of the annual total).

Our interpretation

- The rate of admission of dogs to companion animal shelters did not vary throughout the year (Figure 14). It is only in 2020 that we observed differences in the rate of admission of dogs to companion animal shelters, as a result of the restrictions on mobility imposed by the state of emergency, as well as the impact of the first months of the pandemic on the operation of animal welfare organisations.
- In the case of cats, we did observe differences throughout the year in the number of admissions to companion animal shelters. The central part of the year is always the most difficult for animal welfare organisations dedicated to helping abandoned cats. It must be recalled that the seasonal nature of cat reproduction means that the number of arrivals at companion animal shelters is higher in the central months of the year (Figure 15).

What happened to pet adoption in 2023?

Key data

- As mentioned earlier, 45.3% of dogs managed by companion animal shelters in 2023 were adopted (Figure 4). Of these, 83% were adopted by Spanish families and 17% by families in other countries (Figure 16).
- 48.7% of cats managed by companion animal shelters were adopted (Figure 6). Of these, 90.9% were adopted by Spanish families and 10.9% abroad (Figure 17).

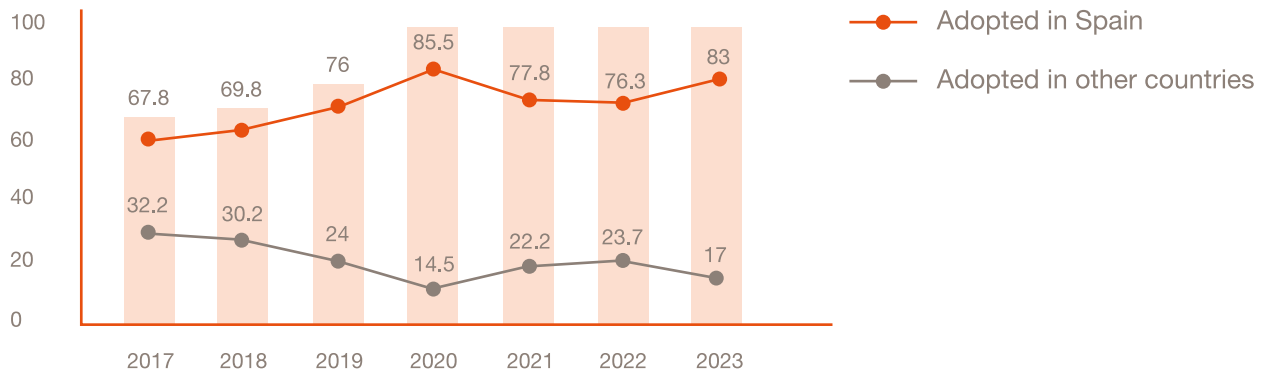


Figure 16. Percentage of dogs adopted by Spanish families (orange) and by families in other countries (grey).

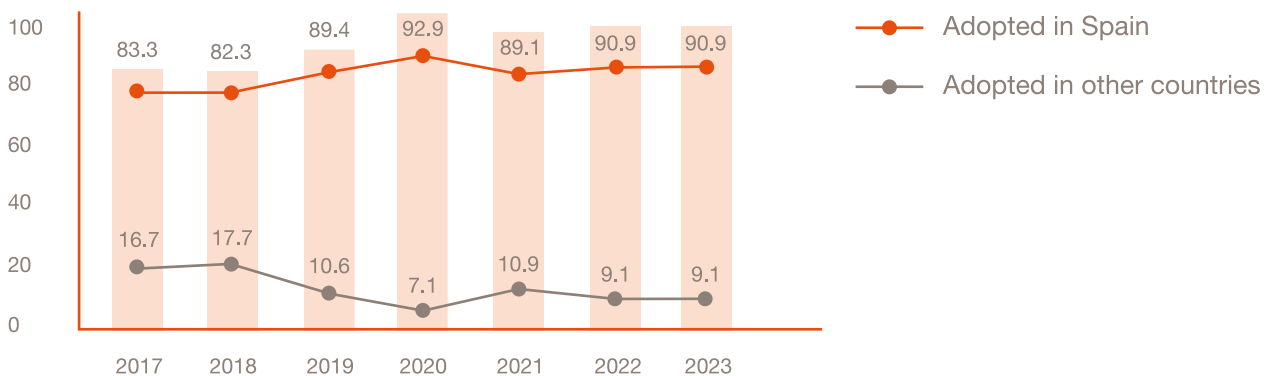


Figure 17. Percentage of cats adopted by Spanish families (orange) and by families in other countries (grey).

Our interpretation

- The number of dogs adopted in 2023 suffered a significant drop of 5 points in relation to 2022. If we observe the trend in recent years, we can see that adoption increased significantly in the years most affected by the pandemic (2020 and 2021). In 2020, due to the increase in domestic adoption. In 2021, domestic adoptions fell slightly, which was offset by adoptions in other countries. In 2022 and 2023, domestic adoptions became stabilised, but international adoptions decreased (Figure 18).

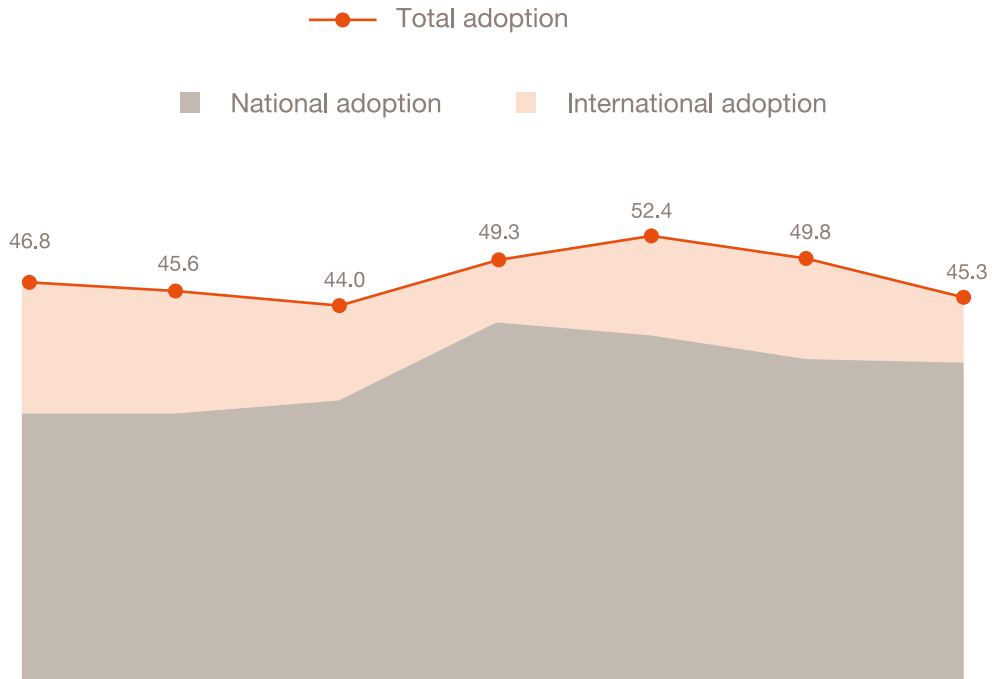
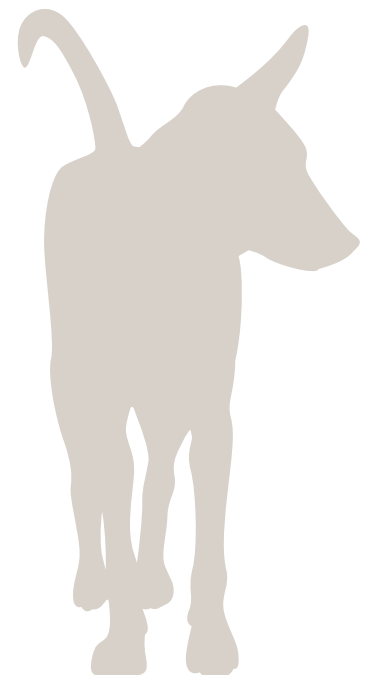


Figure 18. Trend in dog adoptions in recent years. The values indicate the total percentage of dogs arriving at companion animal shelters that are adopted (orange line). The grey area indicates the volume of that percentage corresponding to domestic adoptions, while the light orange area indicates adoptions abroad.

- After the slight decrease in cat adoptions in 2022, the figure increased slightly in 2023, although not in a statistically significant way (Figures 6 and 7).



What were the most common reasons for the admission of dogs and cats to companion animal shelters?

Key data

- 50.1% of the animals taken in by a shelter were found on the street. 15.3% are found and brought to shelters by the police, while 2.5% are brought by the police after interventions in cases of animal abuse or dysfunctional animal hoarding syndrome. 19.1% of the animals were brought to shelters by private individuals who had found them. Only 11.3% of the animals were brought to the shelter by the family with whom the animal was living up to that time (Figure 19).

Arrival of animals to the organisation

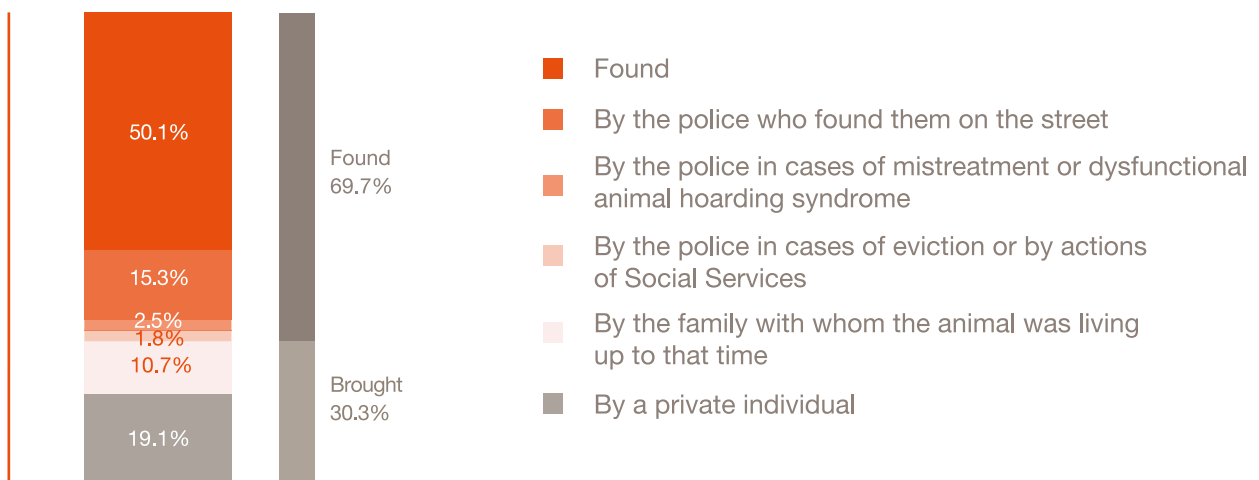
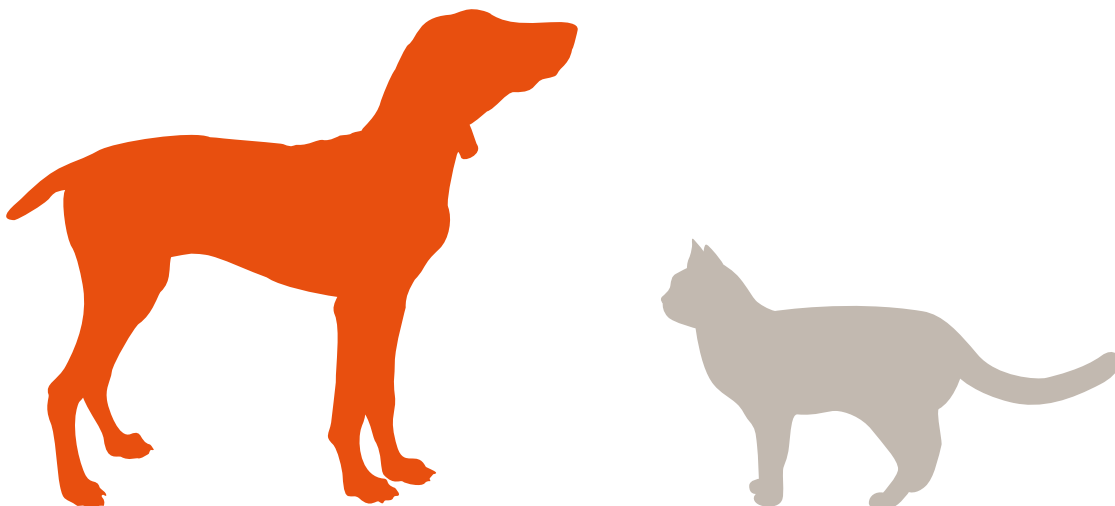


Figure 19. Origin of animals admitted to companion animal shelters in 2023.

- Of the total number of people who handed over their pet to an animal welfare centre in 2023, the six main reasons stated by them were unwanted litters (14.9%), loss of interest in the animal (13.3%), behaviour of the animal (11.8%), the end of the hunting season (11.4%), economic factors (9.6%) and housing changes (9.1%) (Figure 20).



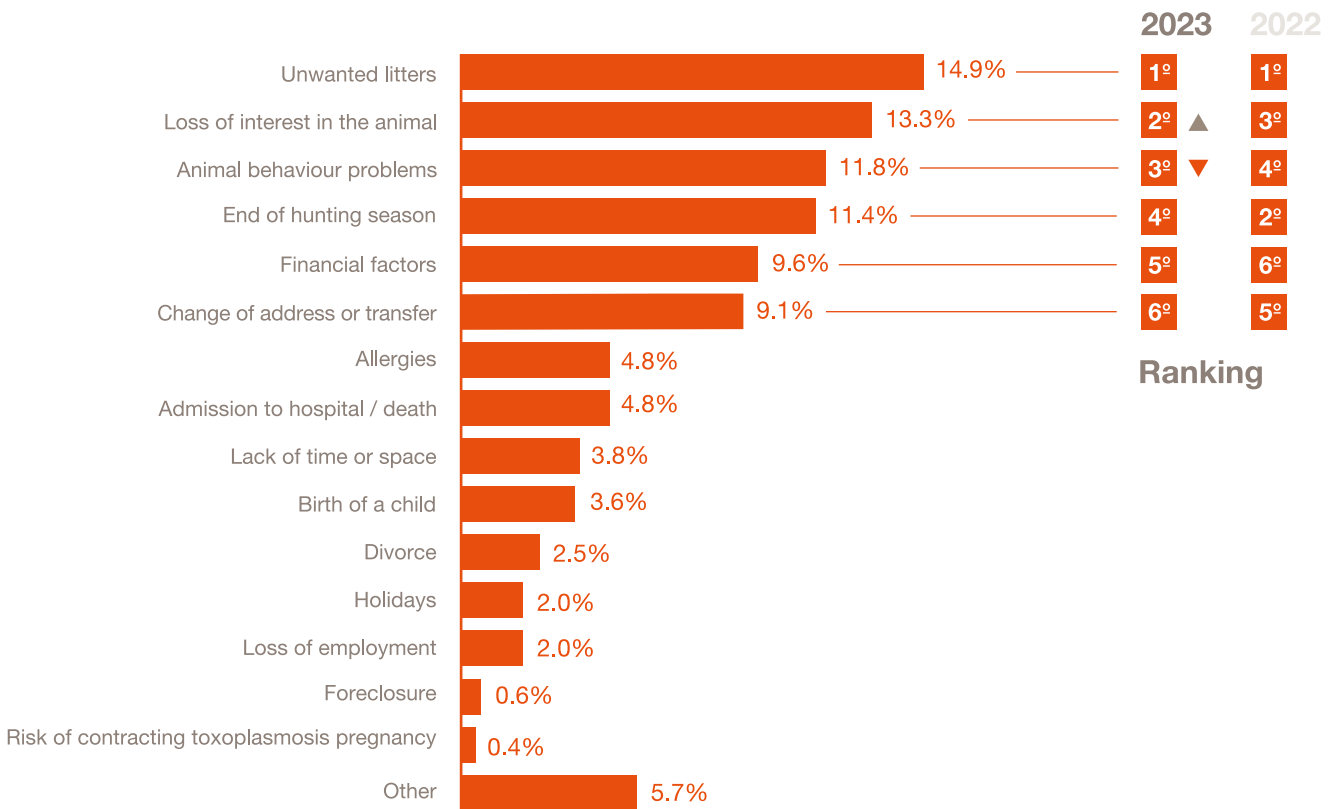


Figure 20. Declared reasons for handing over a pet to a companion animal shelter in 2023. We include the relative position in 2022 of the six reasons identified as most important this year.

Our interpretation

- Once again, in 2023 unwanted litters appear as the main reason for abandoning pets.
- This figure is yet another reminder of the importance of controlling the reproduction of pets as one of the best strategies for reducing the population of abandoned animals.
- Loss of interest in the animal appears as the second reason, followed by behavioural problems.
- Loss of interest in the animal is related in many cases to a misconception in the family’s initial expectations of what living with a pet entails.
- In relation to behavioural problems, it should be noted that most behavioural problems can be prevented and successfully treated by veterinarians, veterinary ethologies and dog trainers.
- The animal welfare organisations that participated in the study indicate that the end of the hunting season is one of main reasons for the abandonment of pets. This figure seems particularly alarming to us, if we consider that the second most common cause of abandonment is specifically related to dogs involved in hunting activities, which only account for a small part of the almost 7,000,000 dogs living in Spain.
- In 2023, economic factors appeared as the fifth most important factor for handing over a pet to an animal welfare centre (Figure 20).
- It should be noted that the information available on the reasons for abandonment is provided in most cases by the people who personally take their pet to a companion animal shelter or by the animal welfare centre. As mentioned earlier, most of the animals taken in by shelters have been found on the street or brought there by people who are not their families. Therefore, we still do not know the specific reasons for many of the pet abandonments that occur in our country.

What are the dynamics of dog and cat adoptions?

Adoption is one of the most effective measures for reducing the negative impact of pet abandonment in the short and medium term. However, not all animals equally likely to be adopted. Moreover, not all adoptions are successful and can sometimes result in the dog or cat being returned to the shelter of origin.

Key data

- Puppies remain in shelters 2.8 months on average before being adopted, while in the case of adults and seniors the average length of stay is 11.8 months (Figure 21).
- Kittens remain in shelters 4.7 months on average before being adopted, while in the case of adults and seniors the average length of stay is 15.2 months (Figure 21).
- The organisations that participated in the study consider that the characteristics of dogs that most delay their adoption are, in order of importance: belonging to one of the breeds considered potentially dangerous by current legislation, exhibiting behavioural problems, being large in size, suffering from a chronic disease and being of advanced age (Figure 22).
- Adoption is relatively evenly distributed throughout the year, with a slight increase after the summer months. One in five adoptions of dogs and cats takes place in September and October (Figure 23).
- 91.8% of adoptions in 2023 were successful (Figure 24).
- 32.3% of returns to the shelter were due to problems related to the animal's behaviour. In 14.9% of cases, the family stated that the reason for returning the animal was higher than expected responsibility. 11% were related to changes in address of transfer and 10.2% were related to allergies. This was followed by lack of space or time and financial difficulties (Figure 25).
- Almost 47.9% of returns occurred within the first 4 weeks after adoption and 52.1% within the first 3 months (Figure 26).

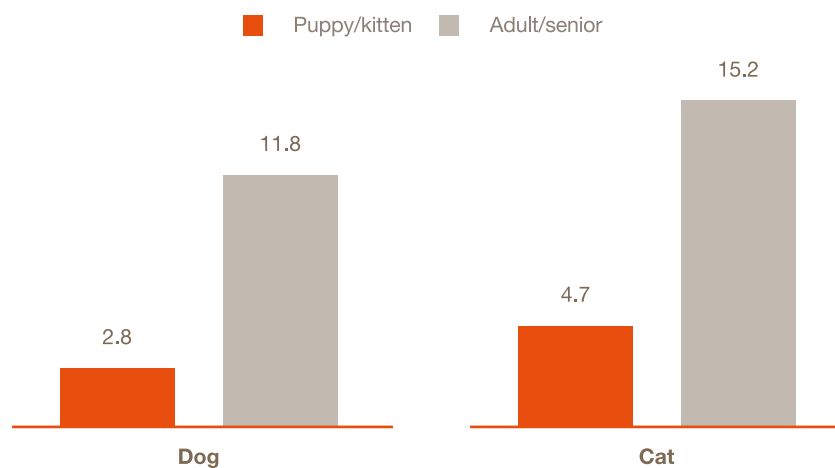


Figure 21. Average monthly length of stay of dogs and cats depending on their age at the time of arrival at the shelter.

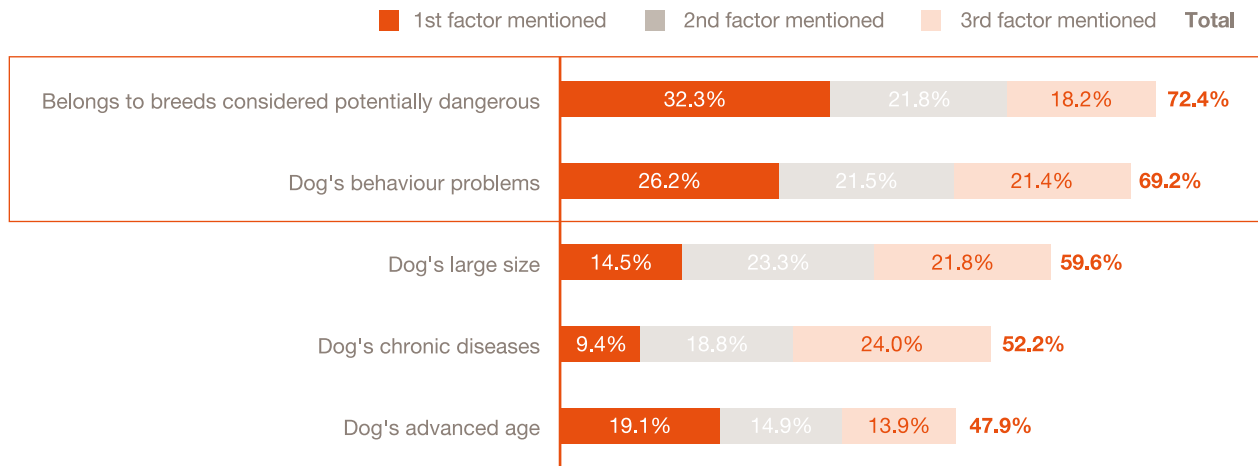


Figure 22. Characteristics of dogs that pose a barrier to their adoption.
 Order of factors according to their impact on the time a dog remains at the shelter before being adopted. The factors are divided into three segments that indicate the frequency (%) with which they were mentioned by the animal welfare organisations as the first, second and the third most important. The percentages of the total number of mentions allow the factors to be ranked according to their importance.

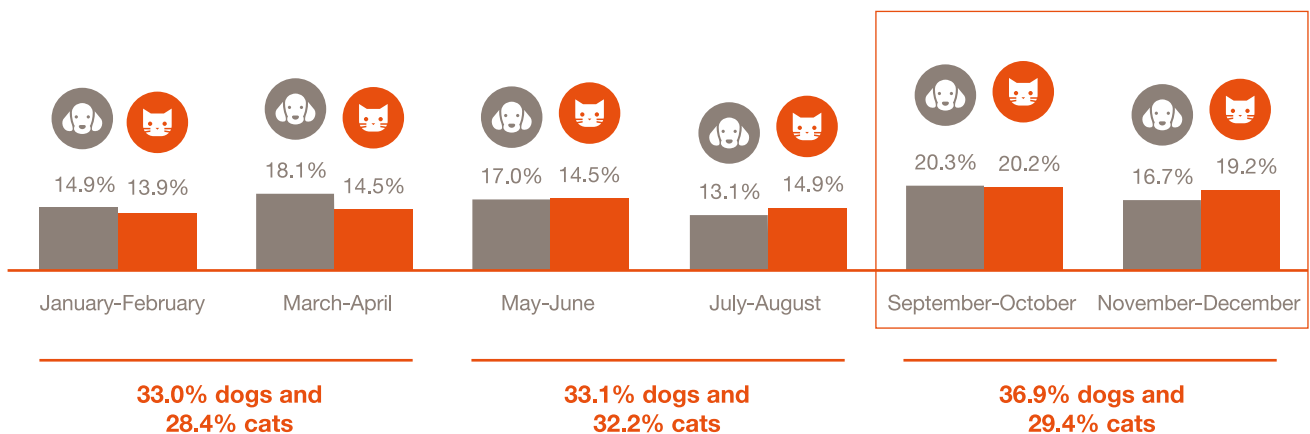


Figure 23. Adoption of dogs and cats during the year.

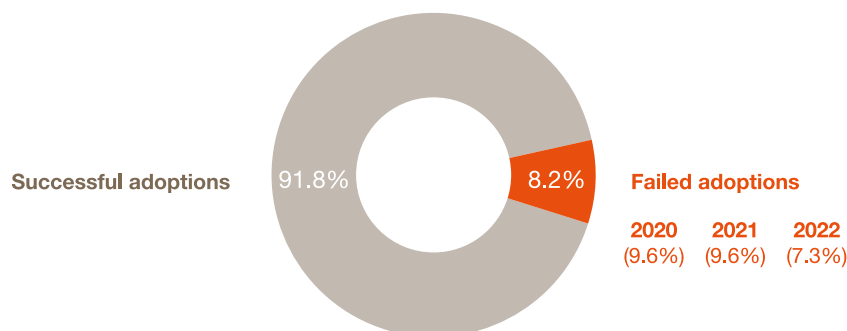


Figure 24. Percentages of successful and failed adoptions declared by the organisations that participated in the study

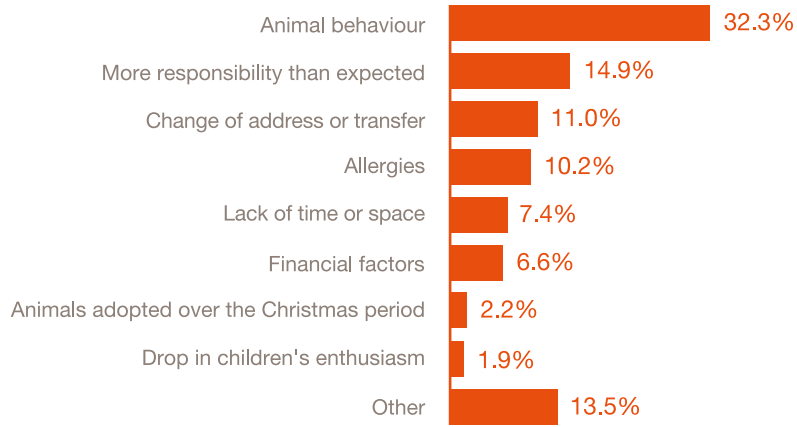


Figure 25. Main reasons for returning adopted animals to the shelter.

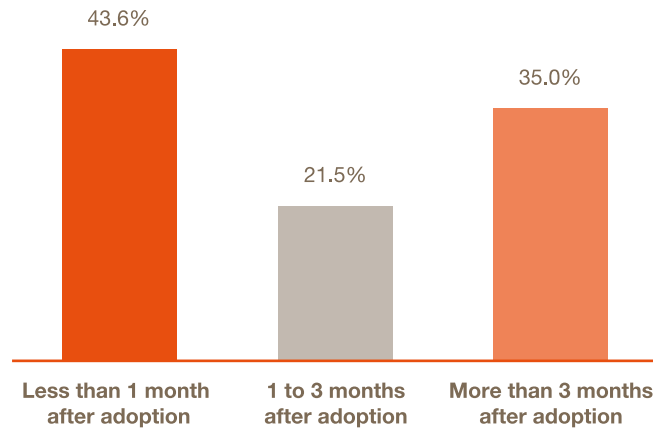
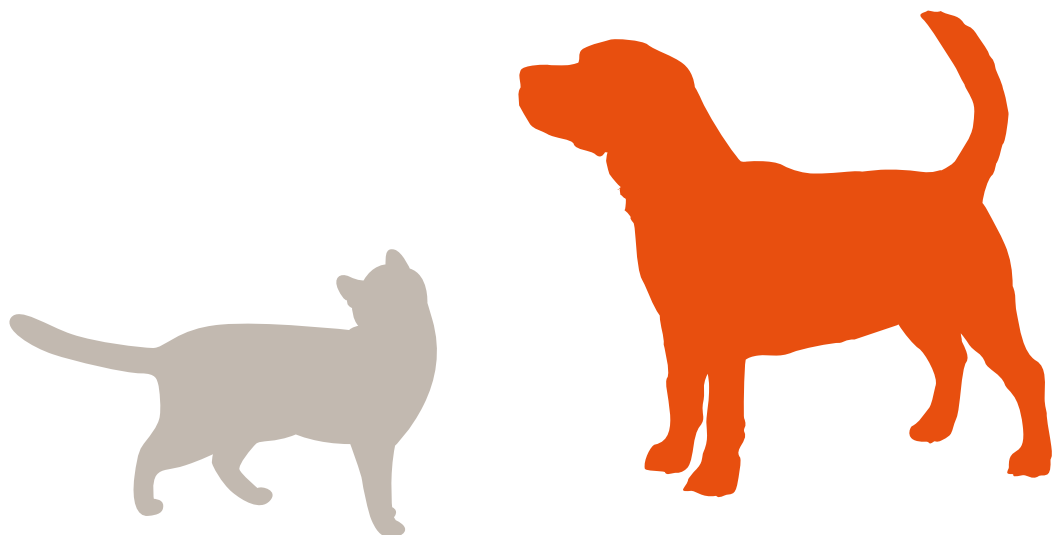


Figure 26. Distribution of animal returns to organisations according to the time elapsed since adoption.



Our interpretation

- The shorter time puppies spend in the shelter can be explained largely by the greater attractiveness of a young animal to many adopters.
- There is a misconception that an adult animal will not become integrated in its new family or that it can no longer be trained effectively. It is therefore important to develop information campaigns to inform adopters about the convenience and even advantages for coexistence of adopting an adult dog or cat. In this regard, a scientific study, conducted in 2017 within the framework of the Postgraduate Course in Anthrozoology of the Affinity Foundation Animals and Health Chair of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, suggests that many people would adopt older animals if they received aid or incentives for their care³.
- A study presented in 2023 by the Affinity Foundation Animals and Health Chair on a population of almost 10,000 dogs registered on the Miwuki online adoption promotion platform shows that older dogs are indeed much less likely to be adopted⁴.
- Age is one of the characteristics that can delay the adoption of a dog, but it is not the only one. Bureaucratic and psychological barriers arising from legislation on potentially dangerous dogs makes adoption very difficult.
- Behavioural problems, advanced age and chronic diseases also make adoption difficult and prolong the dog's length of stay at the shelter.
- In an attempt to promote their adoption, some authors have also proposed the term invisible dogs, in reference to those which have one or more of these characteristics³.
- Adoption is relatively evenly distributed throughout the year, with a peak period just after the summer. Many people wishing to adopt a dog or cat prefer to do so after the holidays, once the usual routine has been resumed.
- The organisations reported a very high adoption success rate, averaging more than 90%.
- However, in approximately one in twelve adoptions, the bond is not consolidated due to different barriers. These figures coincide with those found in other parts of the world. For example, a study conducted in the United States in 2013 by the American Humane Association estimated that 10% of dog and cat adoptions fail within the first 6 months after the animal joins the family⁵.
- The animal's behaviour is reported as the main reason for returning it to the shelter, followed by erroneous expectations about the responsibility of caring for a pet.
- With regard to the behaviour of the animal, it is interesting to note that, as we have already seen, it is also referred to as the third most important reason for handing over an animal to a companion animal shelter. In fact, if we do not consider unwanted litters, which are irrelevant in the failed adoption scenario, behavioural problems and loss of interest in the animal appear as the main reasons for giving up a pet.
- It should be noted that behavioural problems are a diverse category, which in general encompasses all those behaviours that pose a barrier to harmonious coexistence. In short, they describe coexistence problems between the family and the dog or cat, which can be analysed and, in most cases, corrected.



Main conclusions

- The abandonment and loss of pets is still the main animal welfare problem in our country. The number of dogs and cats arriving at animal welfare centres in 2023 are comparable to those observed in 2022.
- We observe a slight, but nevertheless concerning, decrease, in dog adoptions compared to 2022.
- Neutering, identification, education and adoption are the four most important strategies for preventing and minimising the impact of pet abandonment. Neutering, identification and education are part of a broader concept of responsible pet ownership, which encompasses the obligations and responsibilities of every person who commits to caring for an animal. Citizen participation is therefore essential to fight the problem of pet abandonment, since it is the basis for the effective implementation of the four aforementioned strategies (neutering, identification, education and adoption), which have proven to be key factors in combating the problem of abandonment.
- It is important to highlight the importance of citizenship education about everything related to responsible pet care, as a fundamental pillar for preventing abandonment in the medium and long term.
- Beyond simply raising awareness of the need to adopt, we must educate the public about the advantages, but also the obligations, of adopting a pet, and how its arrival can influence our lifestyle.

Methodology

How is our study on the abandonment, loss and adoption of pets conducted?

The main aim of our annual study is to assess the magnitude of pet abandonment and loss in Spain.

As in any rigorous epidemiological study, in order to arrive at this figure it is necessary to:

1. Carry out a comprehensive census of the animal welfare centres and companion animal shelters that operate in Spain.
2. Obtain data from a broad and significant sample of these centres.
3. Make a reasonable estimate of the total number of dogs and cats admitted to companion animal shelters, based on the data obtained from the sample.

How many companion animal shelters currently exist in Spain?

The objective

Obtaining a list of all companion animal shelters implies a major effort in terms of research, documentation and constant refining of the data. On the one hand, some centres may have closed from one year to the next and new ones may have opened during the same period. On the other, if a companion animal shelter works in collaboration with a public centre, it may be that both organisations provide information about the same group of animals, resulting in a duplication of data.

The method

Each year for the study:

- We verify the opening of new animal welfare organisations or the possible closure of some that have been part of the census up until now.
- We verify that there are no duplicate data, for example, from collaborating organisations.

The Result

The Affinity Foundation now has the most extensive and comprehensive census of companion animal shelters in Spain.

It includes 1,591 organisations, of which 1,334 (85%) are private organisations and 247 (15%) are municipal companion animal shelters (Figure 27).

Although the majority of shelters take in dogs and cats, a small number only take in one of these two species (Figure 28).

49% of the organisations that take in dogs are small (with a capacity to care for up to 30 animals), 23% are medium-sized (from 31 to 70 animals) and 28% are large (more than 70 animals) (Figure 29).

63% of the organisations that take in cats are small (with a capacity to care for up to 30 animals), 19% are medium-sized (from 31 to 70 animals) and 18% are large (more than 70 animals) (Figure 29).

60% of organisations have their own shelter and 62% collaborate with animal welfare centres (Figure 30). 44% of organisations manage feline colonies (Figure 30).

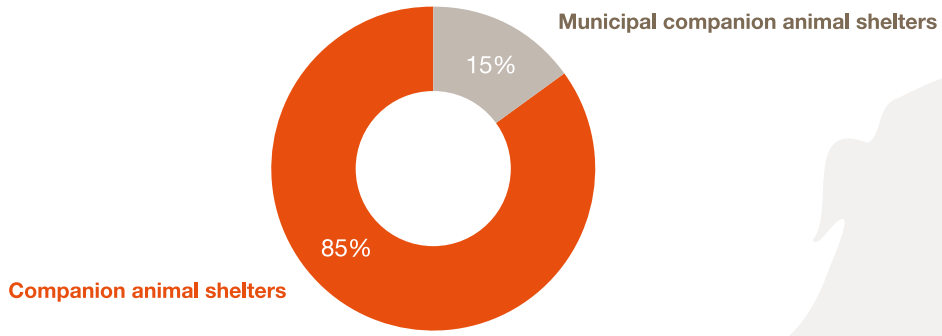


Figure 27. Types of organisation.

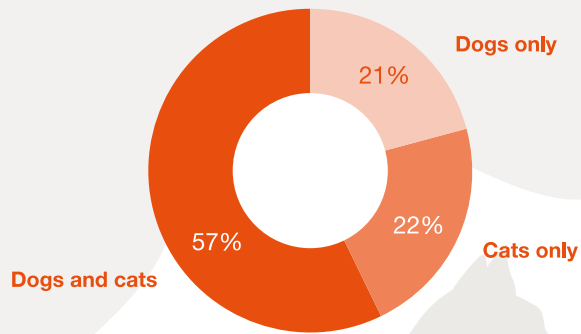


Figure 28. Percentage of organisations that take in dogs and cats, only dogs and only cats.

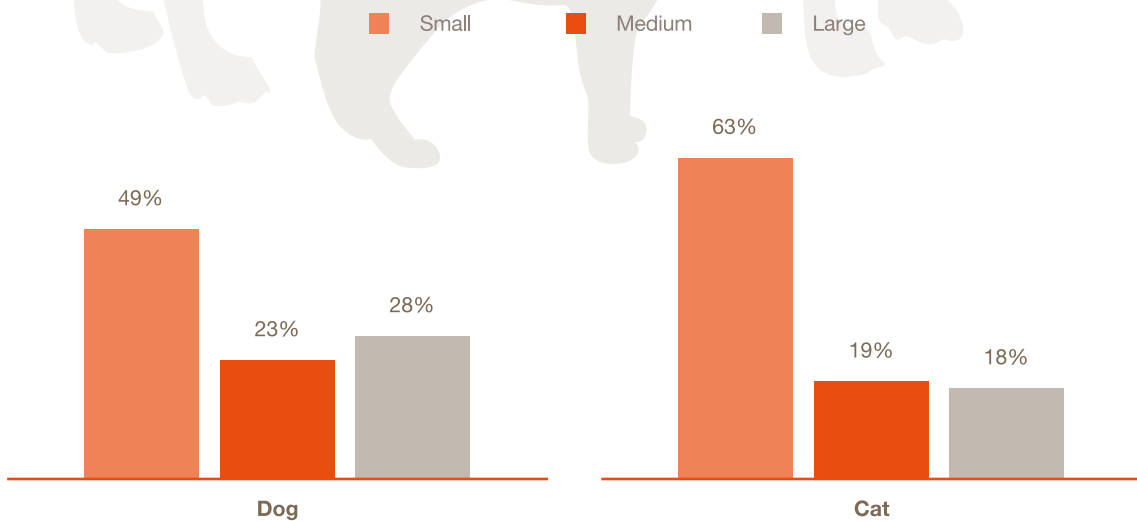


Figure 29. Distribution of organisations in accordance with their capacity to take in dogs and cats.

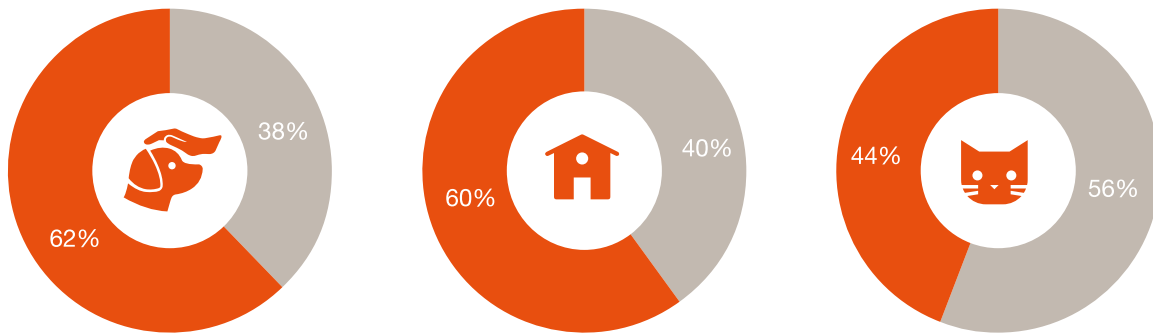


Figure 20. Percentage of organisations that work with temporary shelters (left), that have their own shelter (centre) and that manage controlled feline colonies (right).

Figures 31 and 32 show the map of companion animal shelters that are part of our census for dogs and cats, respectively.

How many companion animal shelters participated in the study?

The objective

Having obtained a comprehensive and reliable census, our next aim is to obtain data from as many companion animal shelters as possible, in order to obtain a representative sample of the total.

The method

The data was collected using a standardised questionnaire, which was designed by researchers from the Affinity Foundation and the Affinity Foundation Animals and Health Chair at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. We contacted all the organisations in the census directly. The follow-up was done by means of more than 7,000 phone calls and up to six email reminders.

The result

We obtained data from 386 private and public organisations, i.e. 24% of the total number of companion animal shelters registered in Spain.

How can we estimate the total number of lost and abandoned dogs in 2023?

The objective

Any survey that aims to obtain information from a whole population faces a basic limitation: we cannot get answers from everyone. Whether it is a survey of people's opinions on a certain topic or, as in our case, a survey of a set of organisations, it is very unlikely that we will be able to obtain information from all of them.

Therefore, based on the information from the sample of 386 organisations, we must try to estimate the number of animals taken in by the organisations that were unable to provide us with this information, in order to estimate the total number of lost or abandoned animals in Spain.

The method

The part of a whole set of people or organisations that provide information in a survey is called a sample. For example, if we talk about the political opinions of the population and we carry out a survey in which 1,000 citizens participate, that part of the population will be our sample. Similarly, in our case, the number of animal welfare centres and companion animal shelters that have provided us with information would constitute our sample. Specifically, as mentioned earlier, we would be talking about 386 centres. Therefore, based on the information from the sample, we must try to estimate the number of animals.

After years of experience and based on the information and advice of the animal welfare organisations that have helped us year after year, our researchers estimate the number of animals that arrived at those centres that have not provided information, taking into account their capacity, which we do know, and comparing them with the data from the centres that have been able to participate in the survey

Let's look at an example to illustrate this type of calculation. Let's imagine that the census of animal welfare centres included one-third of centres of small capacity, one-third of medium capacity and one-third of large capacity. Now let's assume that two-thirds of the organisations participating in the study were of large capacity and only one-third of medium or small capacity. If we were to extrapolate the data from this sample directly to the entire census, we would be overestimating the presence of high-capacity centres and, therefore, the overall figure for abandonment and loss would be artificially inflated.

If, on the contrary, our sample included a higher proportion of small-capacity centres than the total census, we would run the risk of underestimating the overall number of lost or abandoned animals.

In order to be able to correct the data obtained from the 386 centres participating in the study, we needed one key piece of information: the distribution according to capacity of all or most of the centres included in the census, whether or not they had provided information on lost and abandoned animals. To achieve this, and as a complement to our annual study, in recent years we have conducted around 1,400 direct interviews with the managers of the centres, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of their characteristics, including their size and capacity.

The result

Our estimation method allows us to conclude that 286,682 dogs and cats were admitted to the TOTAL number of Spanish companion animal shelters in 2023. As mentioned earlier, this OVERALL figure is the result of extrapolating the data obtained from our sample, after adjusting the figure to take the capacity of the various centres into account.

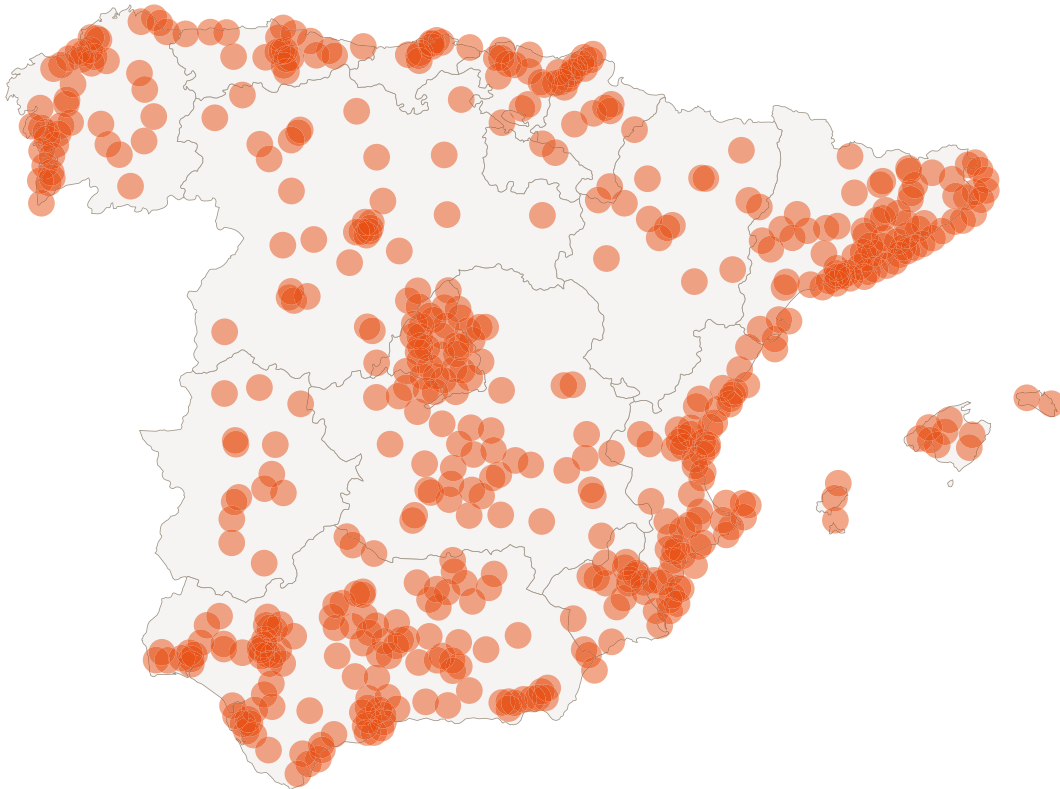


Figure 31. Map of companion animal shelters that take in lost and abandoned cats.

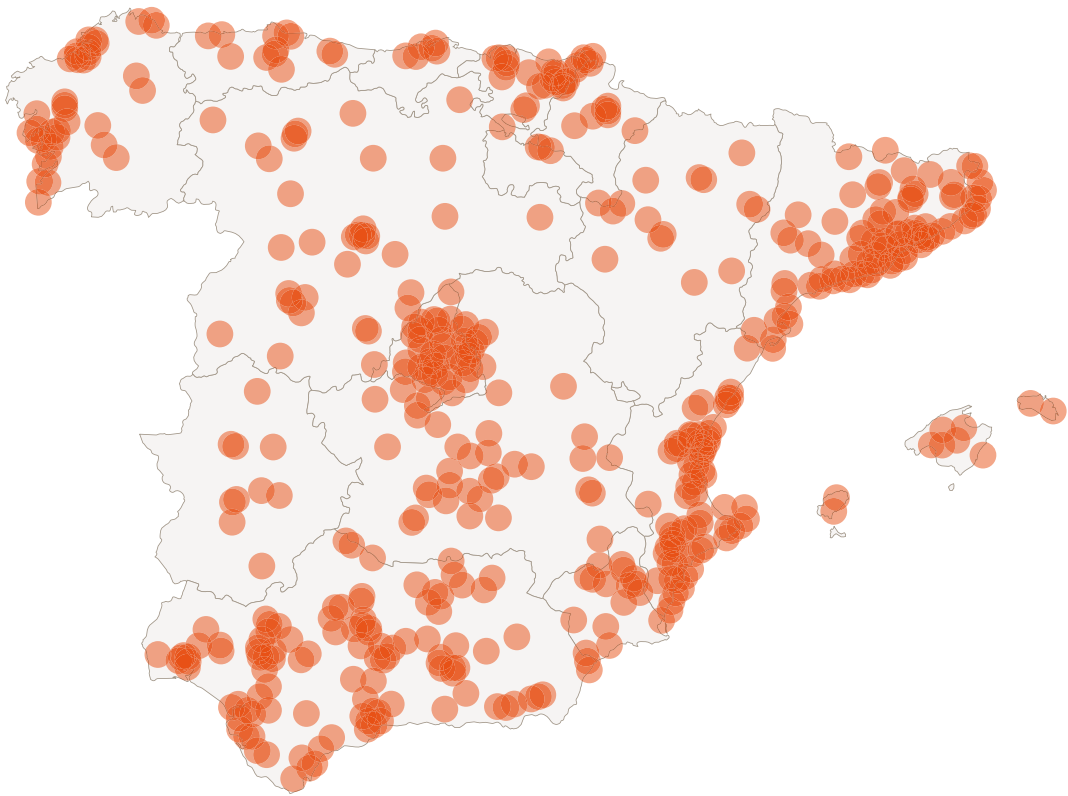


Figure 32. Map of companion animal shelters that take in lost and abandoned cats.

The three keys to our methodology

1. A comprehensive census of companion animal shelters.
2. A detailed knowledge of the characteristics of the existing companion animal shelters in Spain.
3. An accurate estimation method that takes the characteristics of ALL companion animal shelters into account, whether or not they have been able to provide data for 2023.

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