

Affinity Foundation Pet Abandonment and Adoption Study 2014. Interpretation of the results.



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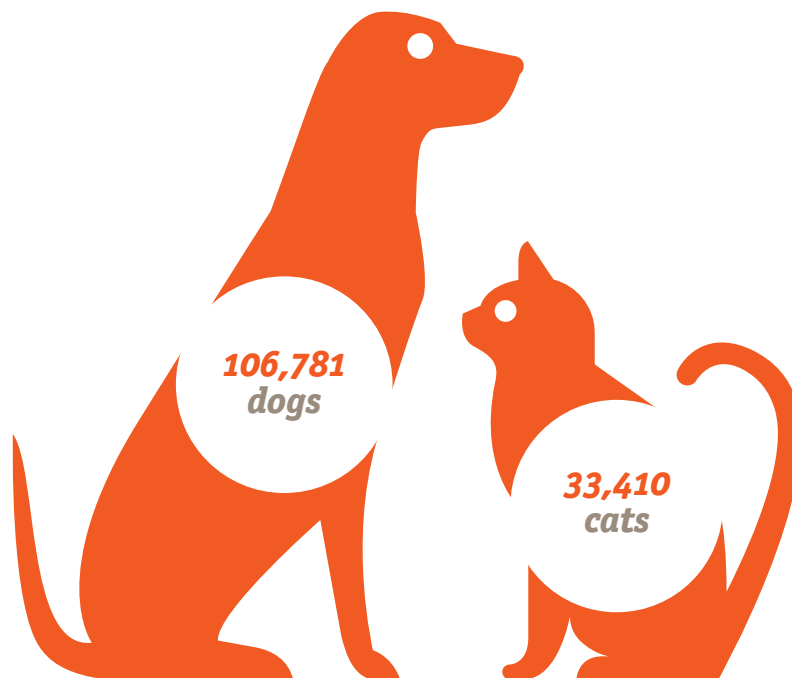
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Chair
Affinity Foundation
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How many dogs and cats were taken in by animal shelters?

- Key data:
 - Last year, 140,191 pets were taken in.
 - 106,781 dogs.
 - 33,410 cats.
 - Based on the above data, we can estimate the rate of abandonment and/or loss of animals as being 2.3 dogs taken in per 1,000 inhabitants and 7 cats per 10,000 inhabitants.



Our interpretation:

- Dogs and cats being abandoned and lost is the main problem affecting the well-being of pets in Spain¹. The rate of abandonment and/or loss per 1000 inhabitants has not changed compared to the data for 2013 and 2012.
- The figures are even more worrying if we consider that not all families have a pet at home. As we said last year, abandonment is a structural problem that requires greater intervention and cooperation by all agents, public and private, involved in its prevention.

Abandonment is one of the most important problems affecting the well-being of pets.

How many pets are actually abandoned?

- Key data:
 - 22% of dogs and 3% of cats taken in by animal shelters and protection organisations were returned to their owners (Figures 1 and 2).
 - Only 30% of dogs and 3% of cats who are taken into a shelter are correctly identified with a microchip (Figure 3).

Figure 1 Destination of dogs arriving in animal shelters or protection organisations.

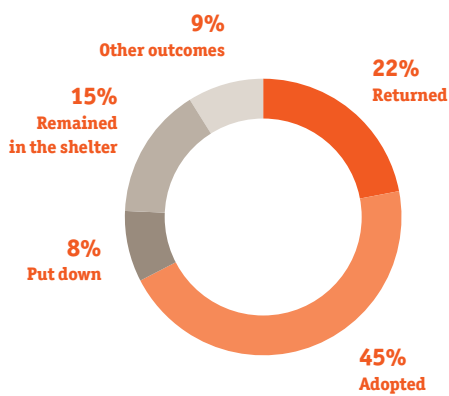


Figure 2 Destination of cats arriving in animal shelters or protection organisations.

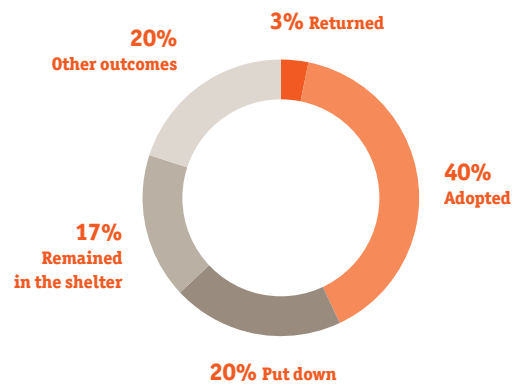
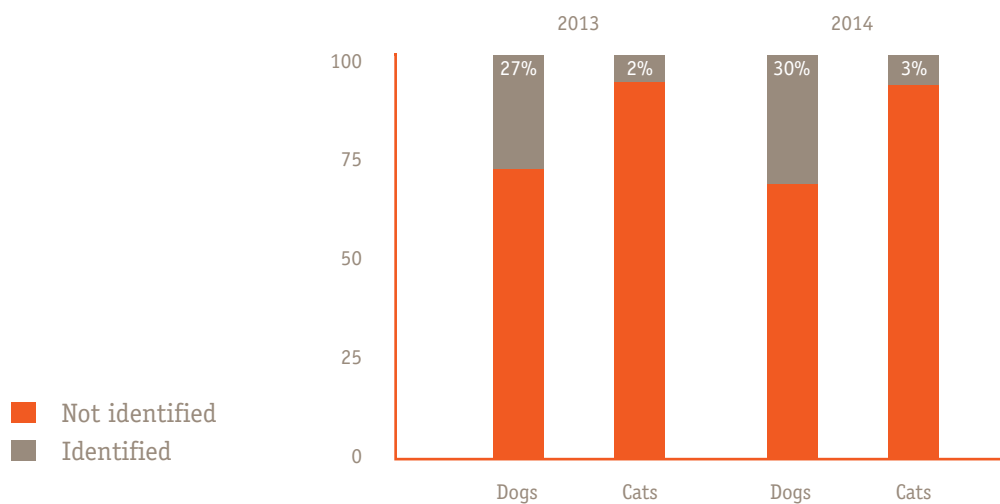


Figure 3 Percentages of identified dogs and cats who arrive in animal shelters.



Our interpretation:

- Some pets that are brought into a refuge are not really abandoned but have actually been lost.
- The key factor in returning a stray is being able to locate its owners. In order to succeed in this, it is essential for the pet to be easily identified by microchip. An encouraging result is the increase in the number of dogs and cats correctly identified when they reach the shelter, compared to the data for the previous year. This trend could explain the small increase there has been in the percentage of dogs recovered by their owners, although this trend is not seen among cats. We'll have to wait for data for the coming years to confirm or reject this hypothesis.
- The number of cats returned to their owners is noticeably lower than that of dogs. This data may, on the one hand, reflect the lower number of cats identified as compared to dogs and, on the other hand, the arrival in animal shelters of many cats that are born and grow up on the streets.
- Identifying pets is definitely one of the main strategies for combatting pet abandonment and loss.

Microchip identification allows us to combat abandonment and facilitate the recovery of lost animals.

Is it true that more animals are abandoned in summer?

- Key data:
 - The proportion of dogs taken in by animal protection organisations was 33, 33.9 and 33.1% respectively for each of the three 4-month periods of the year (Figure 4).
 - The proportion of cats taken in by animal protection centres for each of the three 4-month periods of the year was 24.8%, 42.3% and 32.9% respectively (Figure 5).

Figure 4 Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of dogs taken in by animal protection organisations.

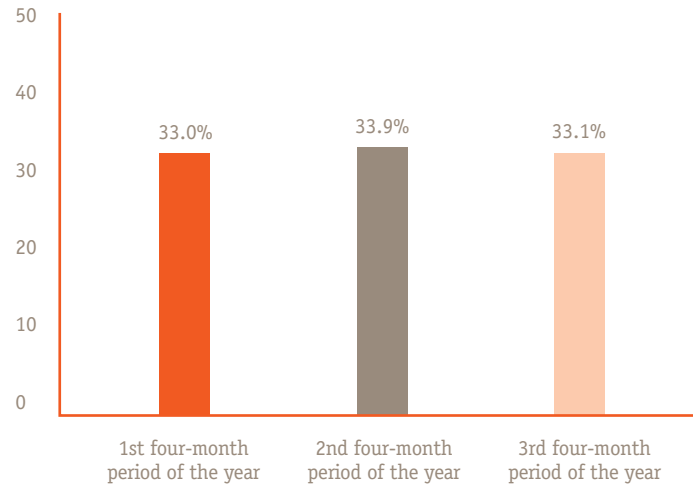
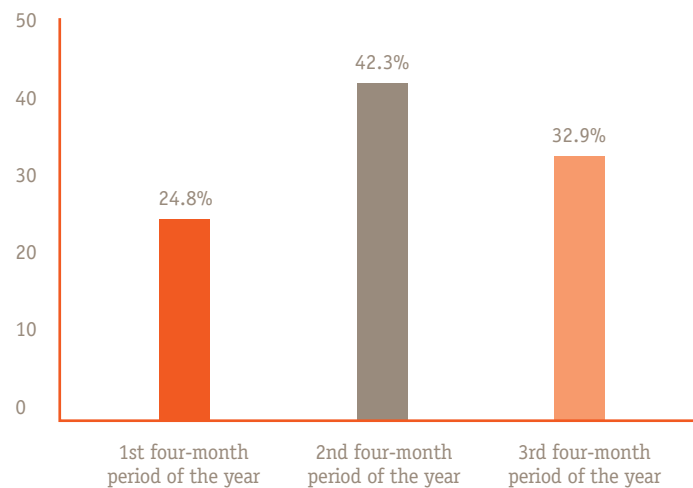


Figure 5 Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of cats taken in by animal protection organisations.



Our interpretation:

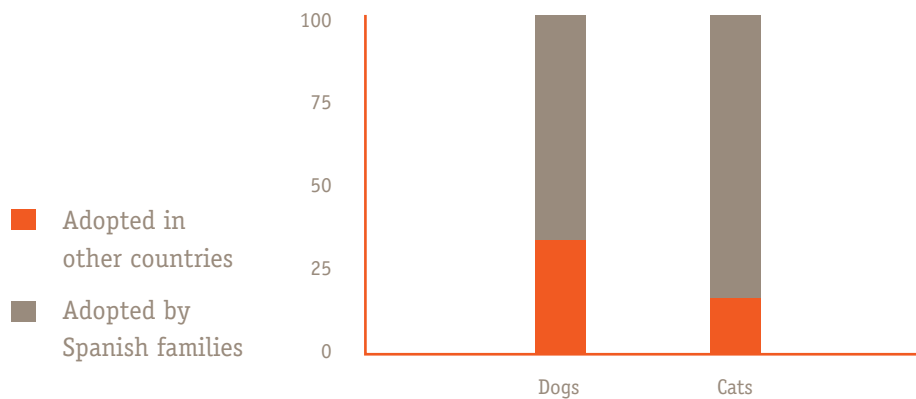
- Dogs are abandoned and/or lost at the same rate throughout the year. This figure contrasts with the very widespread opinion that dogs are abandoned particularly before the summer holidays.
- Most cats arrive in animal shelters in the second four months of the year. This may be explained by the fact that cat reproduction is seasonal, and that one of the major reasons for pets being abandoned is precisely unwanted litters. Studies carried out on this subject indicate that most cat litters are unwanted by their owners². This data helps us understand how important sterilisation is in preventing pet abandonment.
- It is important to highlight that the distribution by 4-month period of animals taken in is identical to that observed in the study conducted the previous year.

Sterilisation is a key strategy for preventing pet abandonment.

What happens to dogs and cats that arrive in animal shelters?

- Key data:
 - What happens to dogs?
 - As we have already shown, 22% of dogs are returned to their owners (Figure 1).
 - 45.4% are adopted.
 - Of these, 71.7% are adopted by Spanish families and 28.3% are taken abroad (Figure 6).
 - 15.4% remain in the shelter waiting for adoption and 8.3% are put down (Figure 1).
 - What happens to cats?
 - As we have said, around 3.2% of cats are returned to their owners (Figure 2).
 - 39.8% are adopted.
 - 85.1% of all adoptions take place in Spain and 14.9% in other countries (Figure 6).
 - 17% remain in the shelter and as many as 20% are put down (Figure 2).

Figure 6 Destinations of dog and cat adoptions from animal shelters and protection organisations in Spain.



Our interpretation:

- Promoting adoption is one of the key strategies for reducing the population of abandoned animals.
- Some of the dogs and cats that arrive in shelters are adopted by families in other countries. This data suggests that Spain has a pet adoption deficit, not only because the number of abandoned animals is not offset by the number adopted, but also because some of these adoptions take place outside the country.
- If they are not adopted, pets are condemned to spending the rest of their days in a shelter or in many cases to being put down.

Adoption is key to reducing the abandoned dog and cat population.

What kind of animal is adopted?

- Key data:
 - 21.9% of dogs and 10% of cats abandoned are purebreds (Figure 7).
 - Almost half of all abandoned dogs are medium sized (Figure 8).
 - Some of the dogs and cats that arrive in shelters are puppies or kittens (Figure 9).

Figure 7 Abandoned dogs and cats that are purebred.

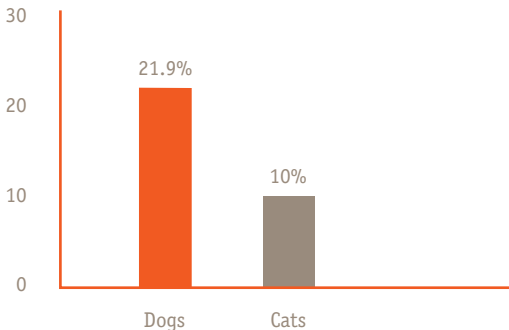


Figure 8 Size of the dogs that arrive in animal shelters.

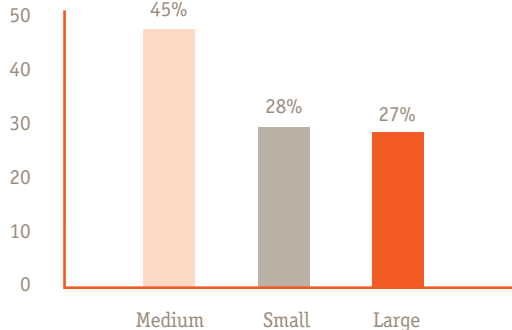
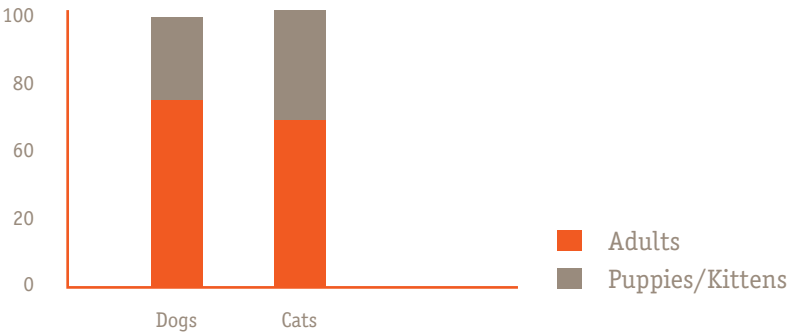


Figure 9 Percentage of puppies and kittens out of the total number of dogs and cats arriving in animal shelters.



Our interpretation:

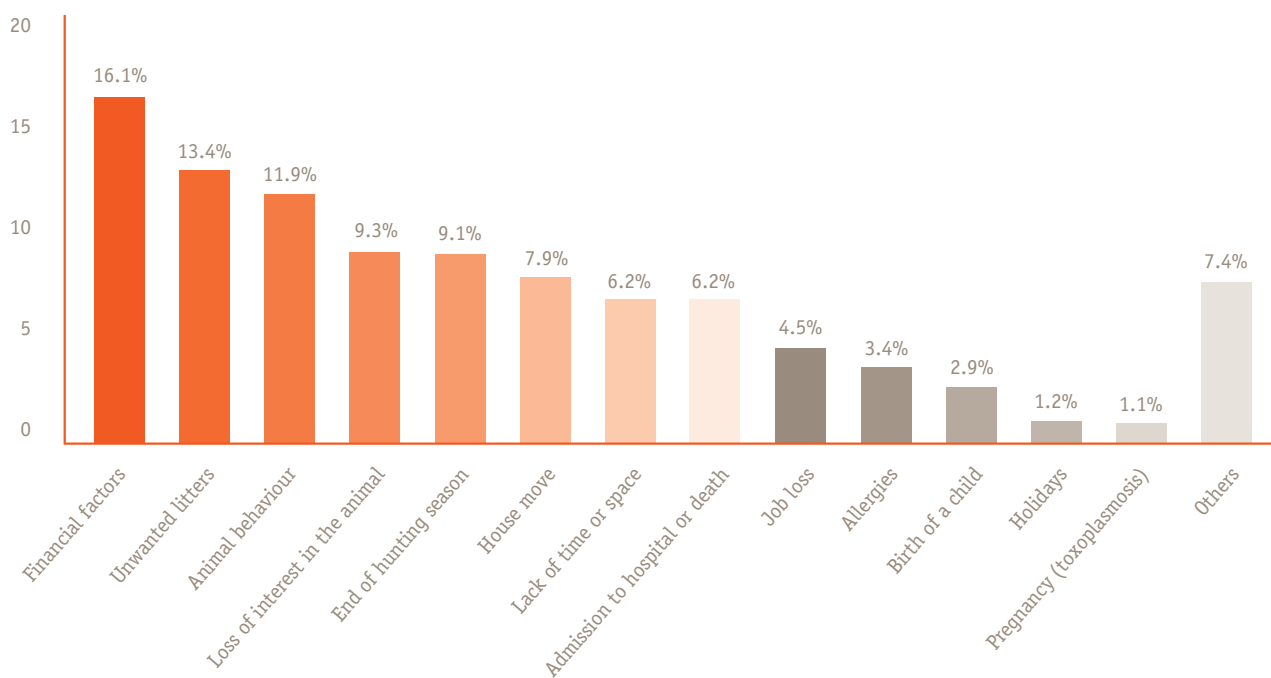
- Abandonment is a phenomenon that affects dogs and cats of all kinds, and is not therefore restricted to a particular age group or to specific breeds.
- The proportion of medium-sized and large dogs arriving in animal shelters is greater than their presence in the general dog population. This suggests that small dogs are lost or abandoned less often than larger dogs.

Animal shelters receive dogs and cats of any age and breed.

Why do some people abandon their pets?

- Key data:
 - The 5 main reasons why people abandon their pets are financial problems (16.1%), unwanted litters (13.4%), animal behaviour (11.9%), loss of interest in the animal (9.3%) and the end of the hunting season (9.1%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Reasons for abandoning pets.



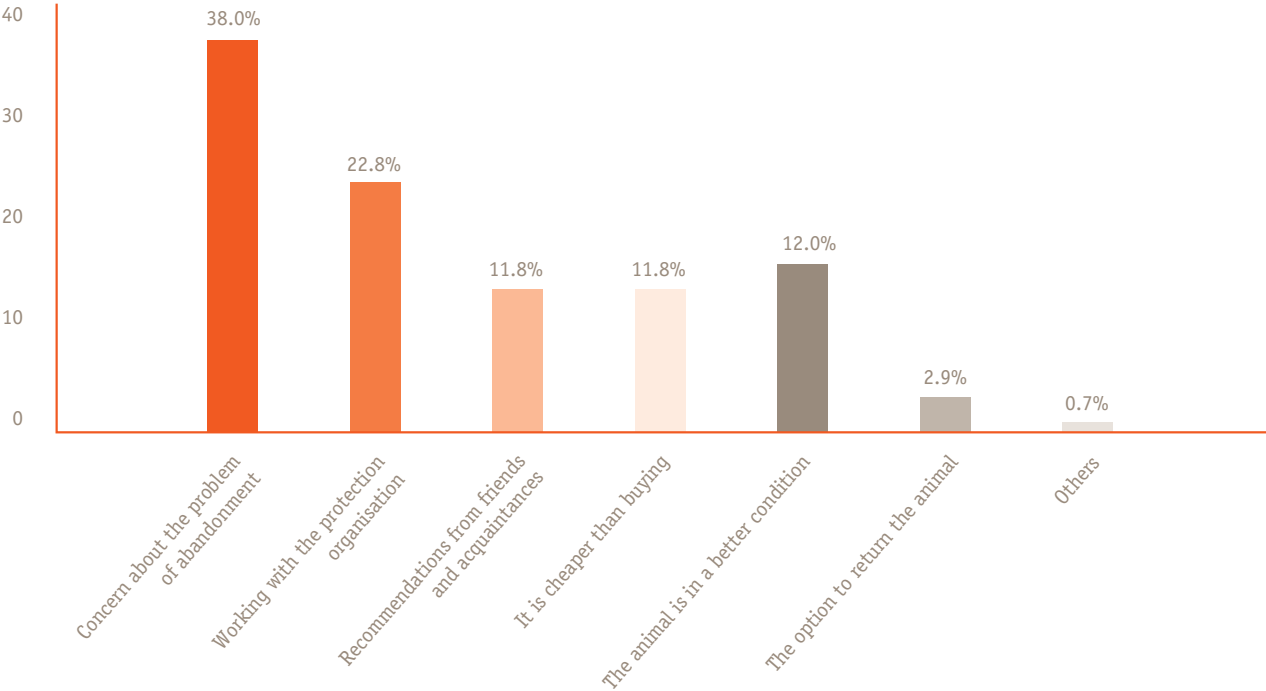
Our interpretation:

- Just as in the 2013 study, financial factors and unwanted litters are the two most important reasons for abandonment. Beyond the potential impact of the economic crisis on the keeping of pets, both factors suggest that many abandonments could be avoided with proper planning by the owners.
- With regard to unwanted litters, it is important to remember the importance of sterilising pets as a strategy for reducing the population of abandoned animals.
- The idea that a pet has to reproduce at least once in its life for its well-being is not correct. The information on the reasons why pets are abandoned is given by people who personally take their pets to animal shelters. It is worth remembering, however, that the great majority of animals who arrive in shelters have been found on the street or brought in by people who are not their owners. Therefore, we still don't know the real reasons why so many pets are abandoned in our country.

Why do people decide to adopt a dog or a cat from an animal shelter?

- Key data:
 - The 3 most important reasons why people decide to adopt are the concern that many of them have about the problem of abandonment, their desire to work with the animal protection organisation and recommendations from friends or acquaintances (Figure 11).
 - There has been a detectable increase over recent years in people’s awareness of adoption, which has increased from around 27% in 2010 to 38% now.

Figure 11 Reasons for abandoning pets.



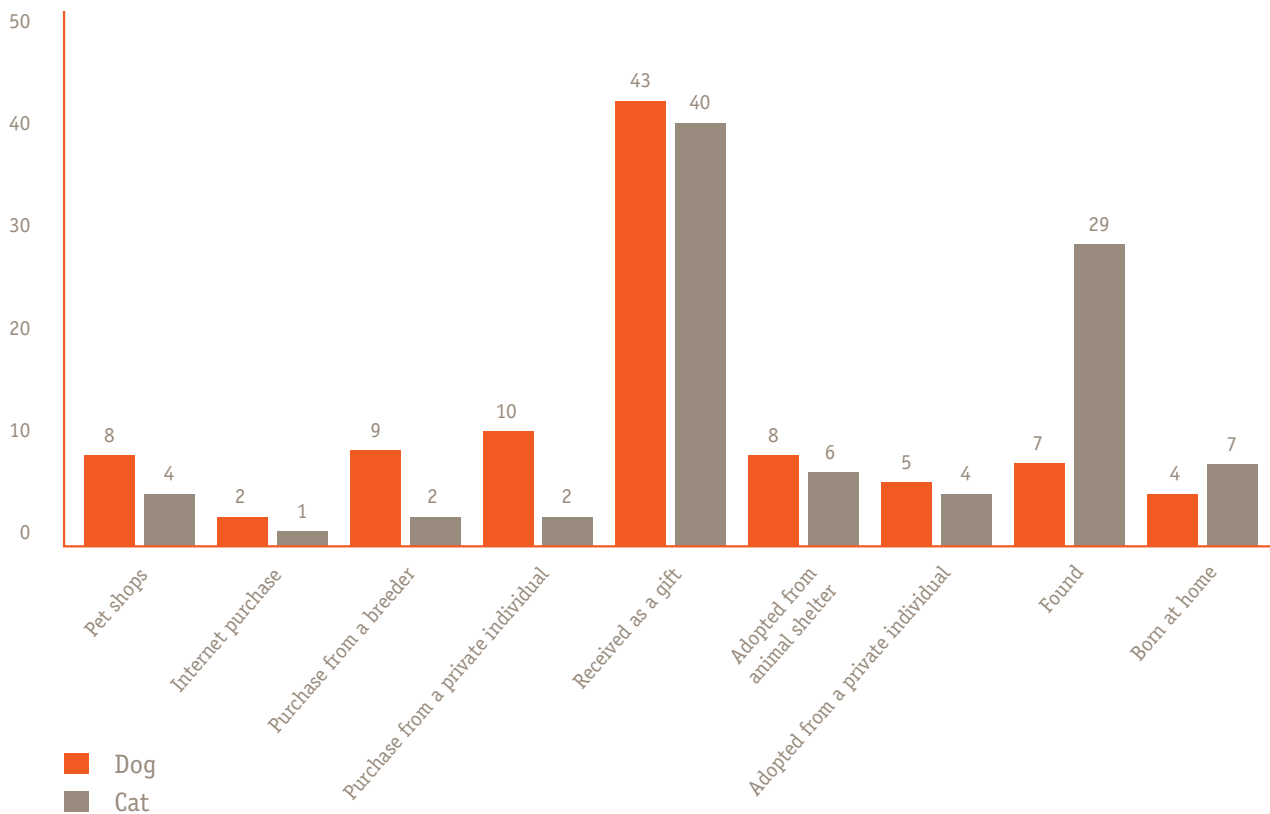
Our interpretation:

- Adoption is an alternative to buying a pet that benefits everyone: the family, the animal protection organisations and, of course, the dog or cat itself.

Is adoption a frequent option when acquiring a pet?

- Los datos clave:
 - Around 8% of dog owners say they adopted their pet from a shelter or animal protection organisation (Figure 12).
 - Around 6% of cat owners say they adopted their pet from a shelter or animal protection organisation (Figure 12).

Figure 12 Origin of dogs and cats in Spain (2014).



Our interpretation:

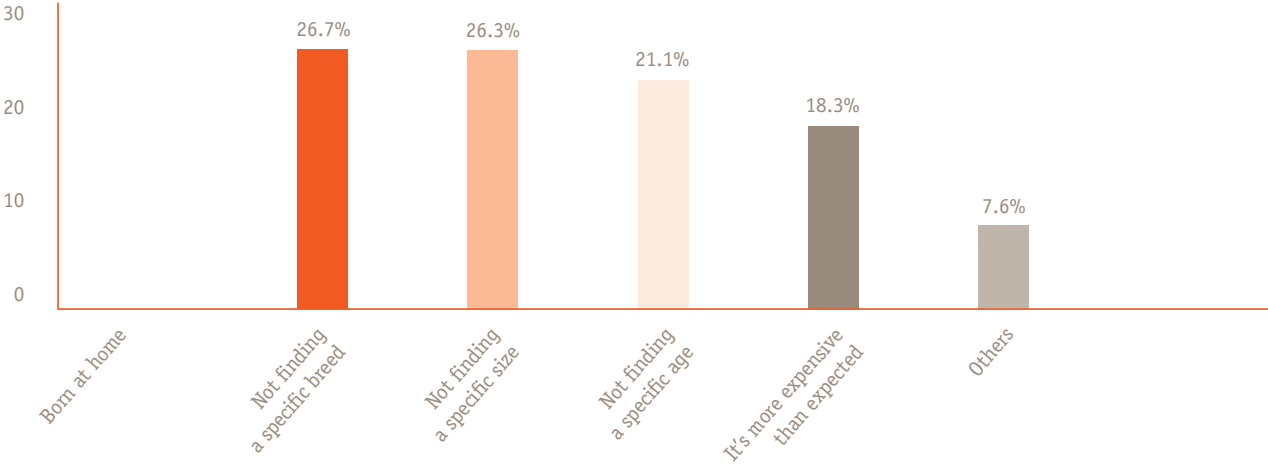
- Adoption is not yet the option chosen by the majority of people when acquiring a dog or cat.

Adoption should be promoted as a clear alternative when bringing a pet into the family.

Why do some people interested in adopting an animal end up not doing so?

- Key data:
 - Around 28.8% of people who are initially interested in adopting a dog or a cat eventually decided not to do so.
 - Among them, the 3 key reasons for not adopting were respectively not having found the appropriate breed, size or age (Figure 13).
 - One in every 5 people who decided not to adopt stated that the cost of the adoption was higher than expected (Figure 13).

Figure 13 Reasons for not adopting a pet among people initially interested in adopting.



Our interpretation:

- For many people, physical appearance and breed in particular continue to be important criteria when adopting a dog or cat. However, the breed does not guarantee a particular behaviour profile. Animals must only be adopted after serious consideration, particularly of the impact the animal will have on quality of life in the family.
- One in every 5 people believes that adopting is expensive. However, the average cost of an adoption in Spain is very small, particularly if you consider the cost borne by the shelter to care for its animals responsibly (e.g. feeding the animal while at the shelter, veterinary care, identification, etc.).
- Overall, these findings show that greater educational work is required on the benefits and characteristics of adoption. All agents involved directly and indirectly in animal protection must participate in this task, from animal protection organisations to vets and the government.

Main conclusions

- Abandonment remains a major animal welfare issue in Spain. The 2014 results do not differ significantly from those of the 2013 study.
- Sterilisation, identification and adoption are the 3 key strategies for preventing and minimising the impact of pet abandonment. Sterilisation and identification are part of a wider concept of responsible pet ownership, which includes the duties of responsibility that all owners assume in respect of their pet.
- Citizen participation is fundamental for combatting the problem of abandoned pets.
- In addition to raising awareness of the need to adopt, we must educate the public about the benefits as well as the duties involved in adopting a pet, and the impact their arrival can have on our lifestyle.

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