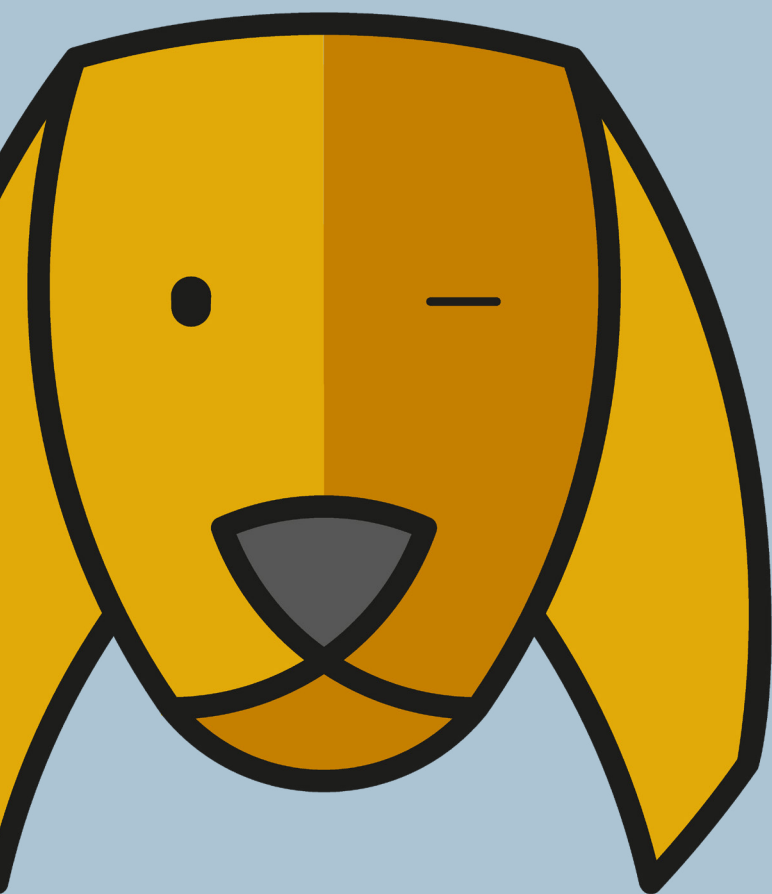




Responsible Pet Ownership:

From Legislation to Action Fostering
Responsible Dog and Cat Ownership
and Welfare in Europe

Conference Report



MINISTARSTVO POLJOPRIVREDE,
ŠUMARSTVA I RIBARSTVA



World Organisation
for Animal Health



Federation
of Veterinarians
of Europe

Executive Summary:

The conference Responsible Pet Ownership: From Legislation to Action – Fostering Responsible Ownership and Welfare in Europe, held in Zagreb on 19–20 November 2025, brought together policymakers, veterinarians, the private sector, enforcement authorities, NGOs, academics and European Union's (EU) institutions, as well as EU candidate and potential candidate countries at a pivotal moment for companion animal welfare in Europe.

With the EU on the verge of adopting its first-ever Regulation on the Welfare and Traceability of Dogs and Cats, the event focused on the transition from legislation to effective implementation.

Key Takeaways:

Start preparing now for the two-year transition, by mapping legal gaps, technical needs and institutional responsibilities at national level.

I&R is the basis for future actions:

- treat I&R as a core public infrastructure, not a niche tool, by ensuring it is properly funded, maintained and continuously improved;
- develop, adapt and upgrade national I&R systems so they can meet the new EU requirements (inclusion of foster homes, hybrid breeding ban, extreme traits restrictions, online platforms);
- improve usability and accessibility of new technologies for traceability, monitoring and enforcement, with particular attention to closing gaps in coverage and data quality in rural, disadvantaged and high-stray areas;
- develop standardised, user-friendly guidance and tools, including on innovative solutions (e.g. AI, interoperable databases) for strengthening identification and reporting and upskilling actors working in rural areas and small practices;
- replicate and scale effective models, using scientific evaluation to demonstrate links between robust I&R and free roaming dog reduction.

Communication and collaboration are essential pillars:

- communication and shared understanding underpin effective implementation, focusing not only on what is required, but why it matters;
- communication and guidance on the EU requirements for breeders, shelters, veterinarians and platforms should explain new obligations in simple and practical terms;

- capacity-building must extend across the entire implementation chain, strengthening professional and technical capacities at all levels – veterinarians, inspectors, breeders, shelters, municipalities and competent authorities – with a specific focus on the uptake of digital tools;
- awareness-raising must go hand in hand with technical preparedness as the challenges are complex and multi-faced;
- targeted awareness campaigns on microchipping and registration should be launched, directly addressing myths, privacy concerns and the benefits for owners;
- public education on responsible pet acquisition and ownership helps prospective owners make informed decisions and choose pets from responsible breeders and sources.

Implementation and enforcement across authorities need sufficient resources:

- legislative frameworks need to enable and support authorities with clear rules and allocation of appropriate resources;
- clarify and formalise roles and responsibilities across central governments, municipalities, veterinarians, breeders and NGOs for effective dog population management and enforcement of breeding standards and rules;
- cross-agency collaboration is essential to disrupt illegal pet trade, moving beyond siloed approaches to put in place coordinated strategies that fill existing enforcement gaps.

Coordination of actions across the veterinary, police and judicial levels is essential for consistent approaches and outcomes thanks to complementary expertise and intelligence sharing.

Introduction

The conference Responsible Pet Ownership: From Legislation to Action – Fostering Responsible Ownership and Welfare in Europe, took place at a pivotal moment in the policy discussions around pet health and welfare.

After decades of advocacy efforts and campaigning, the European Union was on the verge of adopting its first-ever comprehensive Regulation on the Welfare and Traceability of Dogs and Cats, with expectations to influence further progress in the larger European region and globally. While the institutional negotiations on the new EU legislative requirements concluded shortly after the event, the coming years will be crucial to effectively improve pet lives across the bloc, with Member States having the responsibility to transpose and implement the new rules at the national level.

Against this backdrop, the conference opened with a clear message: the forthcoming Regulation represents a turning point for companion animal health and welfare in the EU and beyond. The event brought together participants from across the EU Member States, as well as EU candidate, and potential candidate countries. A particular focus was placed on the Western Balkans and neighbouring regions which offer examples of best practices and advanced national legislation, while also being in a unique position in the management of issues at the intersection between EU internal market rules and the cross-border movement of companion animals.

The conference provided a timely platform to examine the implications of the new Regulation, the need for regulatory convergence, and the role of regional cooperation in supporting effective implementation and accession preparedness to other countries. As Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi noted in his welcoming speech, with recent FEDIAF estimates counting nearly 146 million cats and dogs in the EU and with 44% of EU households owning pets, “the responsibility is immense and so is the opportunity.”



Session 1

Insights into the upcoming EU Regulation on welfare of dogs & cats and their traceability.



Photo credit: FVE

Session 1 kicked off the conference with a sharp focus on the EU's new rules for dog and cat welfare and traceability. Led by Ms. Ivana Lohman Janković, Head of Animal Health Service at the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, the session brought together EU lawmakers and national experts to unpack what the upcoming regulation meant in practice.

It emerged clearly that the proposed EU Regulation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats marked a major step towards the harmonization of standards across the bloc: until its publication, there had not been specific EU law covering how dogs and cats were bred, housed, cared for and tracked, leading to widely varying national rules and persistent problems such as illegal trade, poor breeding conditions and lack of traceability.

Considering this, the conference aimed to offering speakers and participants the opportunity to discussed what the future Regulation changed in practice by hearing directly from the key actors and stakeholders involved.

At the time of the Responsible Pet Ownership: From Legislation to Action – Fostering Responsible Dog and Cat Ownership and Welfare in Europe, policymakers from the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the EU Commission were still engaged in the interinstitutional negotiations, with a provisional political agreement reached later the same month. As of today, this provisional deal still needs formal endorsement by both Parliament and Council before becoming EU law in early 2026.



Dr. Ivan Matijević, Croatian State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, highlighted the significance of this new EU framework, the first to establish harmonized standards for the breeding, socialization, identification and trade of companion animals.

Ms. Tatjana Karačić, Croatia's Chief Veterinary Officer, outlined the regulation's core objectives: harmonizing rules across Member States, introducing mandatory microchipping and registration, strengthening breeder requirements, tightening online sales provisions, and equipping authorities with stronger tools to curb the illegal pet trade.



The legislative initiative: a turning point for animal welfare

Speaking on behalf of the EU Commission, **Ms. Lucie Carrouée**, Deputy Head of Unit and **Mr. Pablo Gómez-García**, Policy Officer at DG SANTE – Animal Welfare outlined the content of the legislative proposal as published in December 2023, built on the technical, scientific, and public assessments of the issues at stake, as well as on the findings of the EU Enforcement Action on illegal pet trade. The EU Commission’s representatives also offered an overview of the specific changes resulting from the following interinstitutional legislative process. The audience was therefore reminded of certain elements brought into the political discussion by the Member States within the Council of the EU, notably an explicit inclusion of foster homes within the scope, a ban on hybrid breeding (e.g., wolf-dog crosses), and measures to prevent the breeding or exhibition of animals with extreme conformational traits.

In her conclusions, Ms. Carrouée stressed that for the implementation of the new provisions there is a transition period of at least two years following the official adoption, with lead time of up to five years envisaged for certain requirements, such as the interoperability between databases.

Once approved the regulation is expected to introduce harmonized rules for breeders, sellers, shelters, and online platforms, along with mandatory identification and registration requirements for all dogs and cats placed on the market.

The role of the European Parliament in raising the ambition.

Dr. Claudia Vinci, Policy Analyst at the Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Service and veterinarian, presented the amendments to the original proposal as adopted by the EU Parliament in June 2025. The Members of the European Parliament called for microchipping and registration requirements to be extended to all dogs and cats, regardless of their market placement, a ban on inbreeding, and a ban on pet shop sales of dogs and cats. Dr. Vinci highlighted that in the EU Parliament’s view these changes were considered as needed to increase the protecting of both animal welfare and consumer trust. She also acknowledged that the enforcement of the new rules in the context of private “home litters” will require careful attention.

Advancing pet traceability: lessons from Croatia and Albania

Dr. Sinisa Mandek from the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture introduced the process that laid the foundation of the country’s digital central platform for I&R. Since its establishment in 2003, the system went through a series of technological developments and today it allows for the integration with other national records such as e-Citizen and e-Agriculture, linking pet records to vaccination shelters, breeders, veterinary practices, zoos and transporters databases. Dr. Mandek highlighted as the continuous upgrades have strengthened the system’s data accuracy and transparency making it ready for compliance with new EU rules.

Mr. Jorgen Dedja from Albania’s Ministry of Agriculture presented the national progress and remaining steps towards aligning with EU standards from the perspective of an EU-candidate country. She highlighted that Albania advanced in many relevant areas with an update of its veterinary legal framework, the introduction of microchipping and pet passports, positive steps towards the establishment of a national identification and registration system, as well as the strengthening of rules applying to the non-commercial pet movement. While challenges persist, such as infrastructure, enforcement capacity, and public awareness, the country set clear deadlines up to 2027 to fully approximate EU legislation, improve data systems and enhance stakeholder cooperation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 1

- 1 Start preparing now for the two-year transition, by mapping legal gaps, technical needs and institutional responsibilities at national level.
- 2 Develop, adapt and upgrade national I&R systems so they can meet new EU requirements (inclusion of foster homes, hybrid breeding ban, extreme traits restrictions, online platforms).
- 3 Improve usability and accessibility of new technologies for traceability, monitoring and enforcement, with particular attention to closing gaps in coverage and data quality in rural, disadvantaged and high-stray areas.
- 4 Design communication and guidance on the new requirements for breeders, shelters, veterinarians and platforms explaining new obligations in simple, practical terms.



Session 2

Building professional and technical capacities to support the implementation of the upcoming Regulation

The second session shifted from discussing legislation to the practical implementation, exploring how veterinarians, inspectors, breeders, shelters, and authorities can prepare for the upcoming EU Regulation. Moderated by Ms. Tisa Kosem, Public Affairs Manager at Nestlé Purina PetCare Europe, the session highlighted diverse national experiences while revealing shared challenges across Europe.



Photo credit: Giovanni Tesei

Two decades of digital progress in Croatia

Building on Dr. Mandek's speech, **Dr Ivan Zemljak**, President of the Croatian Veterinary Chamber, presented more in details Croatia's 20-year journey in the implementation of the national I&R database for dogs, LISACAN. Sharing his experience and insights, he explained to the audience that, while transitioning from handwritten books to a fully digital platform represented a major challenge at the time, the benefits of the current integrated system are tangible: today the databases counts over 766,000 dogs registered and daily access by veterinarians who widely rely on it for the smooth running of their profession. Remaining challenges, he said, include owner compliance, maintaining up-to-date records, and ensuring equitable access in rural areas.

Regulating breeders to tackle free roaming dogs in North Macedonia

Professor Vlatko Ilieski, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of North Macedonia, urged countries to recognise the link between breeding practices and effective dog populations management. Without clear definitions of breeders and proper inspection systems, he warned, "the source of the problem remains untouched." The new EU requirements will demand significant inspection capacity and municipal involvement.

Infrastructure and communication in Slovenia

Professor Ožbalt Podpečan, University of Ljubljana presented Slovenia's recently established National Centre for Animal Welfare, which conducts scientific evaluations, provides training, and advises competent authorities. Slovenia is also moving toward mandatory microchipping of cats by 2027. Professor Podpečan emphasised that communication between stakeholders is crucial because "even the best law can fail without shared understanding and trust."

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)'s Regional Roadmap for dog population management

Dr Tomasz Grudnik, Veterinary Officer at the World Organisation for Animal Health, presented WOA's Regional Platform for Animal Welfare in Europe, which supports 53 European countries in implementing WOA's animal welfare standards. He highlighted that countries in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia are working toward full compliance with dog population management standards (Chapter 7.7. of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code). The audience was reminded of the importance of evidence-based policy development, legislative frameworks, responsible dog ownership, public health risks, and multi-stakeholder coordination.

A shared understanding on the way forward

Across all presentations, a common theme emerged: the success of the EU regulation will depend on skilled professionals, functional systems, and effective collaboration and coordination. Whether through Croatia's long-term digital investment, Slovenia's institutional development, North Macedonia's focus on breeder control, or WOA's regional guidance and support, the session underscored that implementation is a collective effort requiring preparedness at every level.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 2

- 1 Capacity-building must extend across the entire implementation chain, strengthening professional and technical capacities at all levels, veterinarians, inspectors, breeders, shelters, municipalities and competent authorities, with a specific focus on the uptake of digital tools.
- 2 Bringing clarity around roles that different stakeholders have is crucial for effective and humane dog population management.
- 3 Communication and shared understanding underpin effective implementation, focusing not only on what is required, but why it matters.
- 4 Awareness-raising must go hand in hand with technical preparedness as the challenges are complex and multi-faceted.

Session 3

Workshops on the challenges and opportunities of the future of dog and cat welfare in Europe.

The afternoon of day 1 saw the roll out of three interactive working groups; the aim was to translate the morning's discussions into recommendations for implementation and identify practical steps forward. The groups presented back to the audience their findings which converged on the challenges and solutions.



Group 1: the importance of raising public awareness on identification & registration.

Participants agreed that microchipping and registration remain the foundation of the new regulation, yet many countries struggle with incomplete coverage and database maintenance. Several groups estimated that only around half of dogs are identified and registered in practice, with rural areas presenting the greatest gap. Misinformation also persists as some owners fear microchips for 'privacy' reasons or misunderstand their purpose. Delegates from North Macedonia shared examples of public awareness videos explaining how microchipping helps return lost animals as a simple but effective tool. The consensus was clear: technical systems are only as strong as public understanding, hence awareness campaigns are key.

Group 2: clarifying a multi-layered system of roles & responsibilities.

Another group examined the distribution of roles between central authorities, local governments, veterinarians, breeders and NGOs. The group found that communication between these layers is often fragmented and must be strengthened before the regulation comes into force. In particular, a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved should be achieved.

It was also emphasized that enforcement cannot fall solely on veterinarians; instead, a coordinated chain of responsibility is needed. Breeders must comply with registration and welfare rules, municipalities must support outreach and inspections, and NGOs can contribute through education and neutering campaigns.

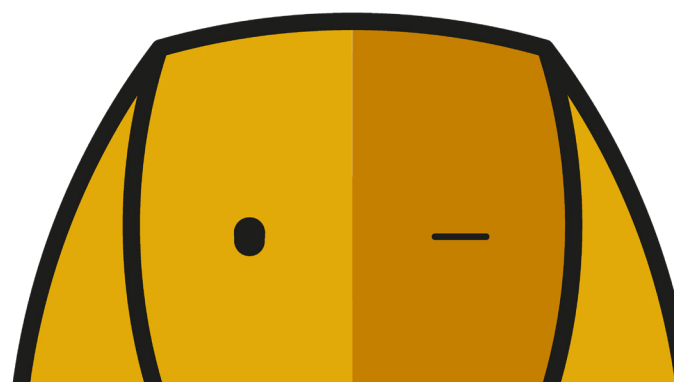
Group 3: building technical & professional capacity.

A recurring theme across groups was the necessity to strengthen professional capacities. Participants called for user-friendly guidelines and standardised protocols for identification, inspection and reporting, as well as raising awareness about existing digital tools to improve traceability, monitoring and enforcement. Some groups proposed innovative solutions, such as AI-based facial recognition to support animal identification, or unified European data systems to simplify cross-border verification.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 3

- 1 Launch targeted awareness campaigns on microchipping and registration, directly addressing myths, privacy concerns and the benefits for owners.
- 2 Clarify and formalise roles and responsibilities across central government, municipalities, veterinarians, breeders and NGOs for population management and enforcement.
- 3 Develop standardised, user-friendly guidance and tools, including innovative solutions (e.g. AI, interoperable databases) for strengthening identification and reporting and upskilling actors working in rural areas and small practices.



Session 4

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in implementing I&R rules of the upcoming Regulation on dog and cat welfare

The final session of day 1 brought the conference back to its central theme: identification and registration (I&R).

Moderated by Dr Tomasz Grudnik, the session featured perspectives from NGOs, veterinary practitioners, national veterinary authorities, and animal welfare experts. Their all spoke with united voice: without robust I&R, the regulation cannot succeed.



Dr Bugeag highlighted that even a strong system suffers if owners fail to update records, to address this sustained public engagement and future interoperability with EU systems remain key.

How traceability can save lives.

Representing Four Paws, **Ms. Georgia Diamantopoulou** outlined how the lack of traceability fuels Europe's illegal pet trade and undermines consumer trust. She explained that although I&R systems exist in the majority of Member States, vast loopholes remain especially in cross-border movements disguised as "private" pet travel.

Large-scale registration and its challenges in Romania.

Ms. Sara Turetta, founder of Save the Dogs and Other Animals, presented Romania's experience with the country's national dog database (RECS) created in 2014. With over 3.6–3.7 million dogs registered, Romania has one of Europe's largest identification systems, yet coverage falls incomplete, especially in rural and disadvantaged communities.

Ms. Turetta described Save the Dogs' door-to-door campaigns, which combine free neutering with microchipping and registration. These efforts fill critical gaps but cannot substitute nationwide enforcement.

The day-to-day reality of veterinarians on the ground

From Montenegro, veterinarian **Ms. Maša Jovanović** shared some insights based on her daily practice. Although microchipping is mandatory, many owners resist, some due to misinformation, others due to cost or mistrust. She emphasised the need for better communication skills among veterinarians and more accessible systems for updating records. She pointed out that the primary challenge in Montenegro is a deficiency in veterinary staff, not only in clinics but also for all administrative and inspection activities, which could result in weak enforcement of this new regulation.

The advantage of digital systems use for National Authorities.

Representing the College of Romanian Veterinarians, **Dr. Oana Bugeag** described the comprehensive structure behind RECS: more than 4,000 clinics connected, 6,000 active veterinary users, and millions of recorded events, from vaccinations to ownership changes. RECS supports both rabies control and consumer protection, demonstrating how a well-built system can serve multiple public interests at once.

Evolving systems and future alignment in Hungary

Speaking on behalf of the Hungarian competent authority, Veterinary Attaché **Ms. Borbala Bende** from the country's Permanent Representation to the EU outlined Hungary's longstanding approach to pet identification

and registration. She recalled that compulsory dog registration has been in place since 2013, supported by a dual-database system jointly operated by the Hungarian Veterinary Chamber and the National Food Chain Safety Office. While veterinarians remain the sole authorized to enter and modify data, the system also allows authorities to have full visibility of registered dogs. Ms. Bende also noted the country's longstanding emphasis on training and awareness-raising, including initiatives aimed at schoolchildren.

Case Study: a Romanian county-level model linking I&R to stray dog reduction

In the final presentation of the session, **Mr. Heiko Färber and Mr. Viorel Andronie** introduced a large-scale model project underway in the Argeş County in Romania. In a region with over 185,000 dogs, all ninety-six territorial veterinarians now microchip and register animals in RECS and channel this data to the county authorities, enabling the partner organization Tierhilfe Hoffnung and its Smeura shelter, to organize targeted, well-funded sterilization campaigns both door-to-door and at dedicated centres. A key aim of the project is the scientific evaluation: by 2029, the partners intend to assess whether the integrated model can sustainably reduce free roaming dog populations. If successful, the approach could be replicated for other regions and countries. A good example of how effective I&R with all parties working together can be transformed from an administrative requirement into the backbone of a strategic, measurable dog population management program.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 4

- 1 Treat I&R as a core public infrastructure, not a niche tool, and ensure it is properly funded, maintained and continuously improved.
- 2 Close gaps in coverage and data quality, with special focus on rural, disadvantaged and high-stray areas through outreach and enforcement.
- 3 Replicate and scale effective models, using scientific evaluation to demonstrate links between robust I&R and free roaming dog reduction.
- 4 An effectively implemented identification and registration (I&R) system can have a significant impact on reducing animal abandonment, which contributes to free-roaming populations in many countries across Europe.

Session 5

Enforcement agencies' collaboration on combating illegal pet trade.

Day 2 opened with a shift in tone. After a first day focused on legislation and systems, the second day confronted participants with the realities of illegal pet trafficking, a criminal market worth at least €1.3 billion annually in the EU.

The session, introduced by Ms. Alexandra Hammond-Seaman, International Advocacy and Policy Advisor at RSPCA Europe, highlighted that enforcement is not merely an administrative exercise, but a matter of public health, biosecurity, consumer protection, and criminal justice.



The scale of the problem: data from the European Commission

Mr. Marton Kazinczy, external consultant to DG SANTE, presented the latest findings of the Pet Animals Network, created in 2023 as part of the EU's Alert and Cooperation Network. His data illustrated a system under pressure: notifications of fraudulent movements of dogs and cats have increased dramatically since 2020, with two-thirds of cases showing suspicion of fraud. In 90% of those cases, fraud related to illegal commercial activity disguised as non-commercial movement. Recurrent patterns are forged or missing passports, falsified vaccine information and a shift from large trucks to small passenger vehicles to avoid detection.

When the animal crime becomes public health risk: the Biocrime Project.

Dr. Paolo Zucca from the Biocrime Project in the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, provided an account of cross-border cases where illegal trade had direct human health implications. The Biocrime Project began in 2015 after the seizure of over 2,000 parrots infected with *Chlamydia psittaci*, which led to widespread infections among the smugglers and their families.

Dr. Zucca argued that illegal trade is wrongly viewed as "just an animal welfare issue, while it is a human health issue, a consumer fraud issue, a market distortion issue, and in some cases, a national security issue."

He described a "triad model" of cooperation between veterinarians, law enforcement, and public prosecutors, with the Biocrime model being an example to be adapted, replicated and scaled up at European level.

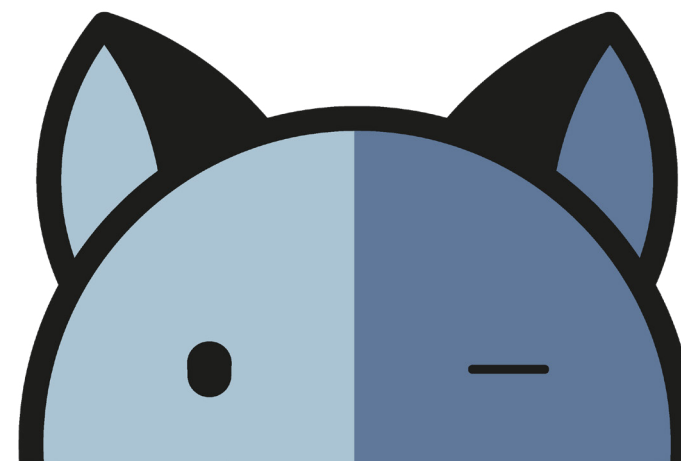
The organised crime dimension: the perspective of the Environmental Crime Network's.

Mr. Ondrej Koprec, Head of the Investigation Unit for Environmental Crime at the Slovak Ministry of Interior, detailed how the country helped elevate environmental crime to an EU-level priority through strategic cooperation and the formation of the EnviCrimeNet, a network now formalised with 18 member countries.

Mr. Koprec illustrated the high-profit, low-risk criminal schemes uncovered in Slovakia, including a major puppy-trafficking network exporting thousands of underage, sick animals using falsified veterinary passports. Despite the severity of these crimes, he noted that low penalties, limited public awareness and the criminal groups' sophisticated tactics, such as online sales, money laundering and cross-border coordination, continue to hinder enforcement.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 5

- 1 Cross-agency collaboration is essential to disrupt illegal pet trade, moving beyond siloed approaches to coordinated strategies to fill existing enforcement gaps.
- 2 Connecting the actions taken at the veterinary, police and judicial levels ensures consistent approaches and outcomes thanks to complementary expertise and intelligence sharing.
- 3 Legislative frameworks need to enable and support authorities with clear rules and allocation of appropriate resources.
- 4 Public education on responsible pet acquisition and ownerships helps prospective owners make informed decisions and choose pets from responsible breeders and sources.



Session 6

An interactive session on increasing the effectiveness of enforcement.



During a live interactive session, participants identified serious enforcement gaps in the dog and cat trade, with the majority pointing to chronic shortages of human resources, weak inter-agency cooperation, and the persistent scale of illegal trade. Many highlighted slow justice systems, limited training for frontline officers and a lack of political prioritisation, while others stressed fragmented databases and inadequate cross-border coordination as major operational obstacles. Surveyed through Mentimeter, an overwhelming 96% of participants to the conference stated that the commercial pet transport is frequently disguised as non-commercial, underscoring how easily current rules are exploited. When asked about how to reduce illegal trade, respondents consistently called for public awareness, education, and stronger penalties, alongside better controls, compulsory registration and improved data-sharing.

On responsible pet ownership, the message was unequivocal: education, supported by awareness-building, meaningful penalties and mandatory identification and registration, was seen as the single most impactful action to drive lasting change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 6

- 1 Disguised non-commercial pet transport represents the major loophole in the current framework and raising awareness on responsible pet acquisition remain the single most effective solution.



Session 7

Cross-border collaboration and enforcement strategies against illegal puppy trade under the new regulation



Moderated by **Ms. Nancy de Briyne**, Executive Director at the Federation of Veterinarians Europe (FVE), the panel painted a picture of the status of the illegal pet trade, which has shifted from large truckloads of puppies to harder-to-detect, small-scale movements in cars or vans organized through social media and “non-commercial” certificates.

Ms. Inga Dujmović, State Veterinary Inspector for Animal Welfare of Bosnia and Herzegovina, reported that most illicit movements now run through closed online groups, with many dispersed individuals moving small numbers of animals rather than a few big traders making enforcement far more complex. A special mention was the crucial role of border guards, customs and veterinary inspectors, but also the structural weaknesses they face with the paper pet passports that can be forged or recycled, databases that do not “talk” to each other, and microchips that can be counterfeited or even technically cloned. Mr. Koperec, drew experiences with other types of environmental crime, such as doping sport horses, re-identified and sent to slaughter using cloned microchips and falsified documents, underscoring how quickly criminals exploit regulatory and enforcement loopholes.

Against this backdrop, the panel converged on a set of urgent reforms. Ms. Diamantopoulou underlined the need for mandatory microchipping and registration of all dogs and cats, with no exceptions, and for microchipping to be strictly a veterinary act so that both animals and veterinarians are traceable when fraud occurs. The panel stressed that veterinarians should educate owners, raise awareness and report suspected fraud but must not be turned into de facto police by refusing treatment of unchipped animals.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM SESSION 7

- 1 Stronger EU-wide traceability systems are essential to address the increasingly hard-to-detect illegal pet trade.

Panellists urged the EU to move away from relying on paper passports and towards interoperable, cross-border databases linking microchip numbers, owners, passports and the veterinarians who issued them, while also ensuring tighter control and traceability.



Turning commitment into impact:

A Europe-wide call to action to raise awareness on responsible pet ownership

A Shared European Commitment

The coming years will determine whether Europe will lead the way in companion animal health and welfare stewardship by setting an example with an ambitious EU legal framework and the support of national best practices across the larger region. The message of the conference was clear, inconsistent action and uncoordinated national systems undermine progress in this area, however there is political will and strong expertise to tackle challenges. We have the knowledge, the tools and a historic legislative opportunity. Now we must match it with collective action.

- Introduce mandatory microchipping and registration of all dogs and cats underpinned by extensive and coordinated public awareness campaigns on owners' responsibilities.
- Strengthen veterinary authorities with clear and stronger mandate to act and the necessary resources to carry out responsibilities.
- Transition from paper passports to interoperable EU-level digital systems, linking microchips, owners, documents and issuing vets to reduce fraud.
- Establish mechanism for cross-agency collaboration and coordinated efforts at the veterinary, police and judiciary levels.
- Equip and train border/customs officers and inspectors to detect cloned microchips, falsified documents and disguised commercial movements, including online-based trade.
- Support capacity-building among EU candidate countries and early involvement into decision-making process around legal measures for effective implementation and enforcement.

The event Responsible Pet Ownership: From Legislation to Action – Fostering Responsible Ownership and Welfare in Europe brought together an extraordinary cross-section of Europe's animal welfare community, veterinarians, private sector, enforcement officers, policymakers, competent authorities academics, and NGOs, each with different experiences but united by a single conviction: Europe can no longer afford fragmented systems, isolated efforts, or partial solutions.



Good legislation is only the starting point; action must follow suit. Everyone is responsible: what changes animals' lives is what we choose to do next.

The new EU Regulation on Dog and Cat Welfare and Traceability provides the framework Europe has needed for decades. But its impact will depend entirely on the choices made from this moment forward. By placing welfare, identification, registration and traceability at the heart of the discussion, the conference paved the way for the coordinated action, trust and capacity-building that will be essential in the implementation phase. As Europe prepares to move from legislation to delivery, this collective momentum offers a strong foundation for partnerships and cooperation that will be required to turn the new regulatory framework into lasting progress for animal welfare and responsible ownership across the continent.

Now is the moment to Act.

This is a call to action for:

- International organizations, and standard setting bodies and EU institutions: to deliver high standards for dogs and cats, supporting the national governments with addressing free roaming dog and cat populations by developing humane standards and guidelines for companion animal management and building effective multi agency, cross-border networks to tackle illegal pet trade.
- National governments: develop and maintain national databases to register all dogs and cats, including breeders and other relevant operators, ensuring these systems are fully interoperable and linked through an EU-level database developed at Union level; allocate dedicated enforcement resources; run awareness campaigns on responsible pet acquisition; and ensure inspectors, customs officers, and veterinarians receive continuous training and mental health support.
- Veterinarians: continue leading on identification, welfare standards, and responsible breeding guidance, while strengthening collaboration with authorities and civil society.
- Local authorities and municipalities: actively bridge rural and urban gaps, support community outreach campaigns, and maintain accurate, real-time records to strengthen traceability.
- Private sector: support institutional actors and professionals of the sector in the roll out of awareness raising campaigns and the dissemination of informative material on responsible pet ownership, further bridging the gap with citizens and perspective pet owners.
- NGOs and welfare organisations, to push for transparency, offer support where systems fall short, and continue advocating for humane, evidence-based approaches to dog and cat population management.
- Breeders and sellers: Embrace regulation as a pathway to higher standards and consumer trust, ensuring compliance and transparency so citizens can make informed choices when deciding to obtain a cat or a dog from verified sources.
- Citizens across Europe: make informed decisions when acquiring pets, choosing verified breeders or reputable adoption organizations, commit to microchipping, registering, and caring responsibly, because traceability and welfare begin at home.

A Moment of Opportunity and Responsibility

Ms. Borbala Bende, Veterinary Attaché from the Hungarian's Permanent Representation to the EU, outlined



It was a pleasure to participate in this event, as the topic is currently a hot issue in Hungary as well, particularly in light of the new regulatory developments. The event provided an excellent platform to better understand the perspectives of all participants. The professional atmosphere and high level of expertise contributed greatly to the value of the exchange. The event also offered a valuable opportunity to present an overview of the Hungarian system and its current developments.

Ms Yulianna Demchuk, from the State Service of Ukraine on Food Safety and Consumer Protection said



For Ukraine, as a country implementing welfare legislation, this conference was very useful and informative. The issues of animal registration and identification, control and registration of animal breeding facilities, as well as illegal trade in domestic animals are also very relevant for our country. New legislation on animal welfare, as well as cooperation between countries, are important steps towards solving these problems.



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