

Affinity Foundation study on the abandonment, loss and adoption of pets in Spain 2015: interpretation of the results.



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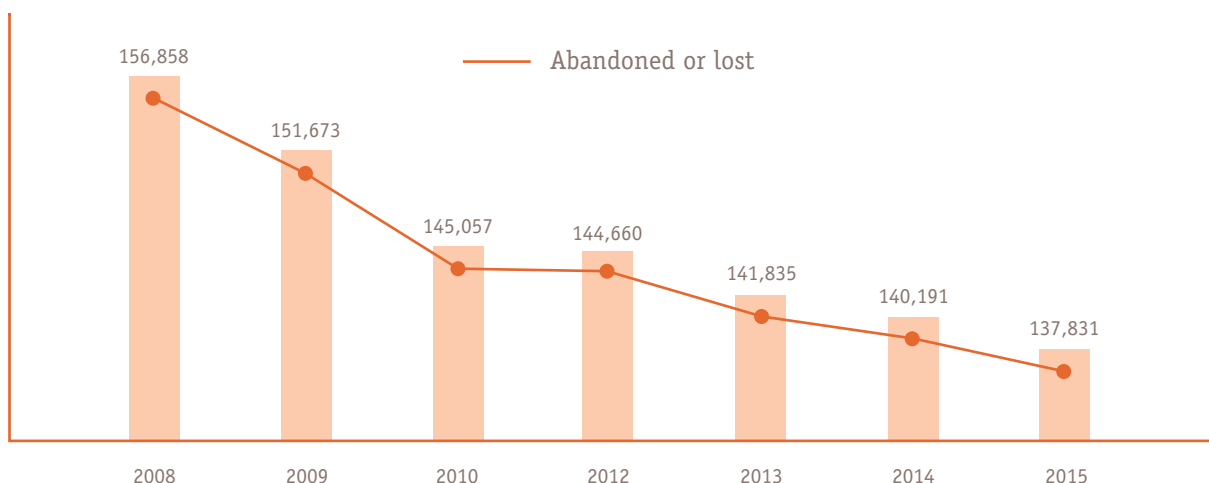
Summary of the results:

- The abandonment of pets is, once again, the main problem affecting the well-being of pets in Spain.
- There is a slight reduction in the number of animals arriving in shelters and animal protection associations compared to previous years.
- There is an increase in the number of lost animals that were reunited with their owners.
- Economical issues are no longer the main reason for abandoning a dog or cat in a pet shelter.
- Behavioural and adaptation issues are the primary reason for abandoning a pet.
- Abandoned puppies and kittens find new homes more easily than adult animals.

How many dogs and cats were taken in by animal shelters in 2015?

- Key data:
 - Last year, 137,831 dogs and cats were taken in.
 - 104,501 dogs.
 - 33,330 cats.
- Based on the above data, we can estimate the rate of abandonment and/or loss of animals as being 22 dogs and 7 cats per 10,000 inhabitants.
- Abandonment affects 1.7% of the 6,100,000 dogs and 1% of the 3,600,000 cats that are estimated to live in Spain.*

Figure 1 Evolution of the number of animals (dogs and cats) that arrive in shelters or animal protection associations every year.



* Source: internal estimation, Affinity Petcare.

Our interpretation:

- Dogs and cats being abandoned and lost is the main problem affecting the well-being of pets in Spain¹.
- In recent years there has been a downward trend in the number of animals arriving at shelters and animal protection associations. However, it is a small decrease in figures that still remain very high (Figure 1).
- 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 significant problems affecting the well-being of pets.

How many pets are actually abandoned?

- Key data:
 - Overall number of animals returned to their owners: 20.4% of animals taken in by shelters and animal protection associations were returned to their owners. This number has increased in recent years and constitutes an increase of almost 9% in relation to the same data observed in 2008 (Figure 2). However, as noted below, there are significant differences between dogs and cats.
 - 25.9% of dogs taken in by animal shelters and protection organisations were returned to their owners (Figure 3). This number has increased in recent years and constitutes an increase of almost 12% in relation to the same data observed in 2008 (Figure 4).
 - Only 3.3% of cats taken in by shelters and animal protection associations were returned to their owners (Figures 5 and 6).
 - Altogether, 19% of all animals that arrive at shelters are returned to their owners (Figure 7).
 - 31.2% of dogs and 3.1% of cats that are taken into a shelter are correctly identified with a microchip (Figure 8).

Figure 2 Evolution of the percentage of animals that arrive at animal shelters that are recovered by their owners.

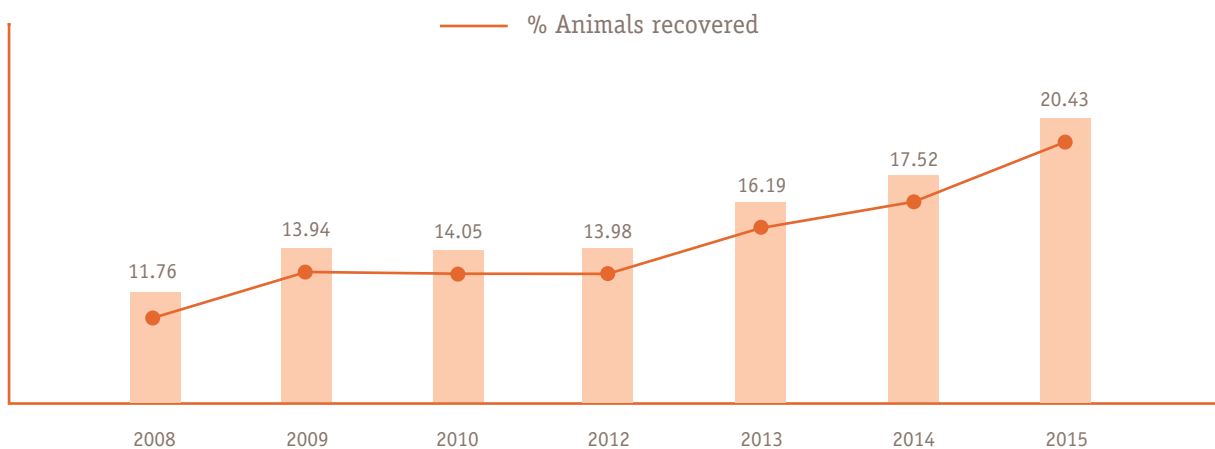


Figure 3 Destination of dogs arriving in animal shelters or protection organisations.

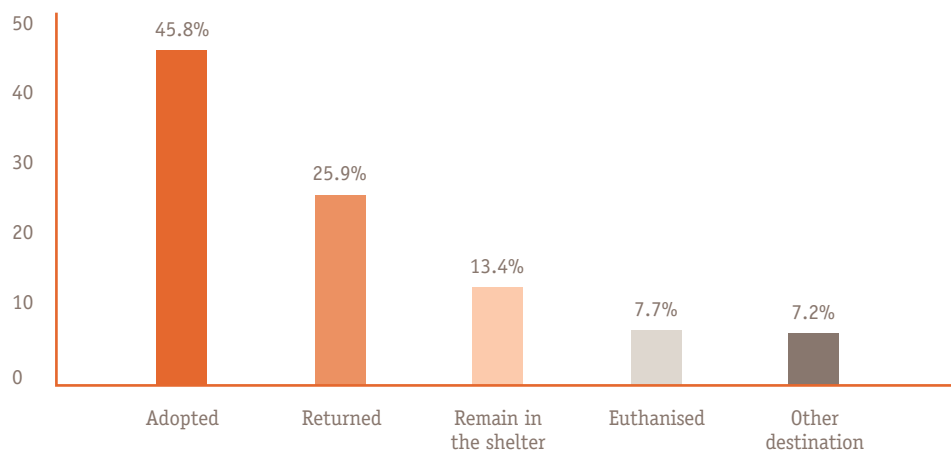


Figure 4 Evolution of the percentage of dogs that arrive at shelters that are recovered by their owners.

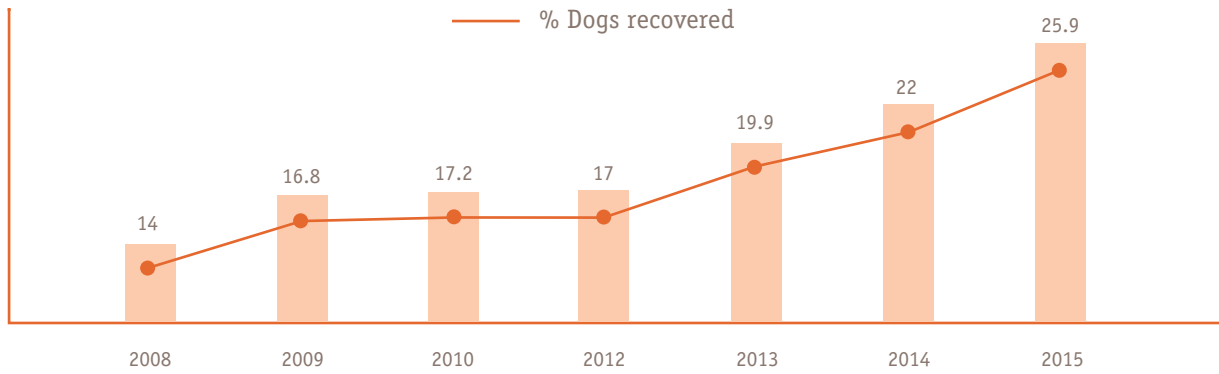


Figure 5 Destination of cats arriving in animal shelters or protection organisations.

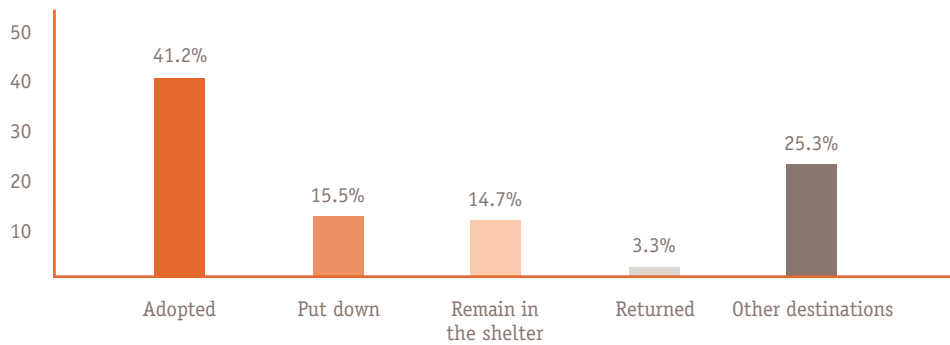


Figure 6 Evolution of the percentage of cats that arrive at shelters that are recovered by their owners.

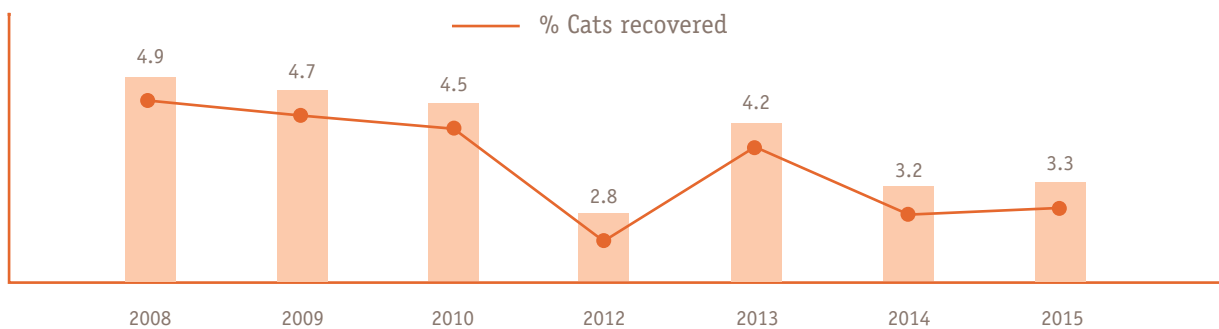


Figure 7 Destination of the animals that arrive at shelters or animal protection associations (aggregated data on dogs and cats)

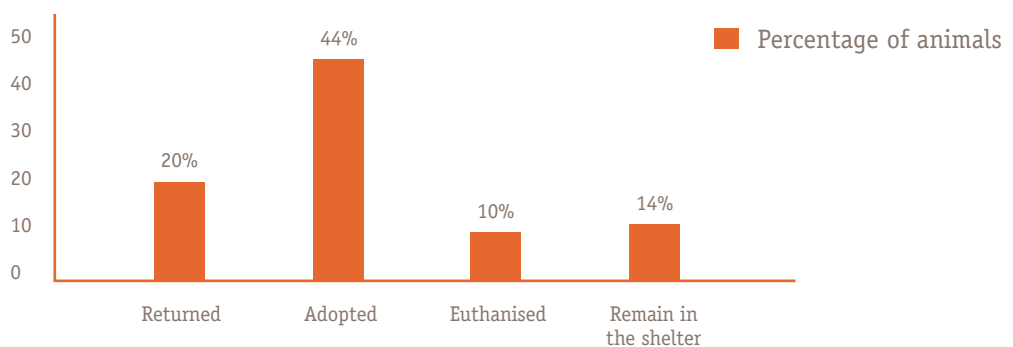
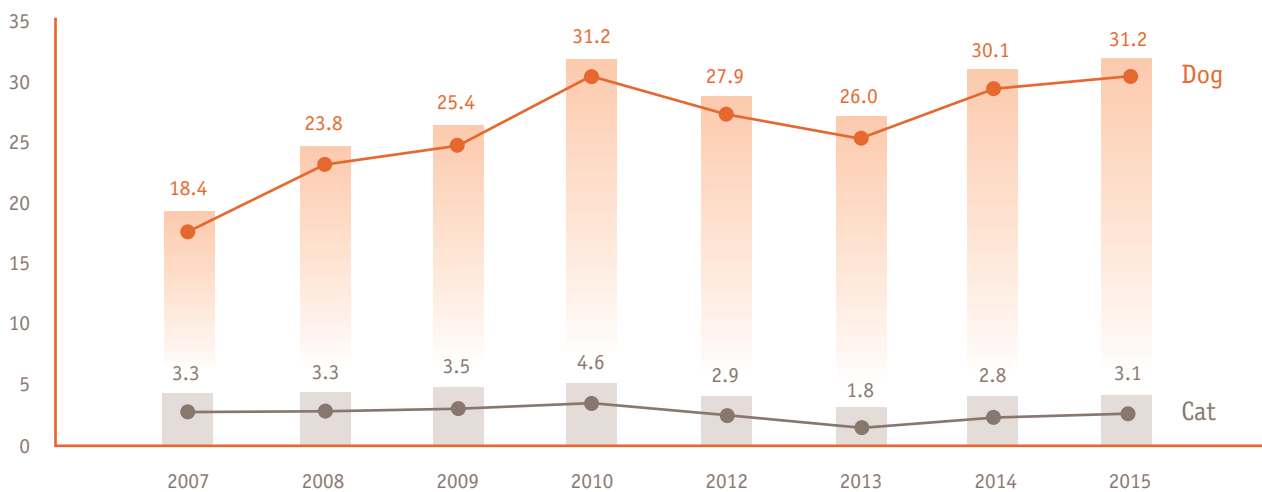


Figure 8 Percentages of identified dogs and cats that arrive in animal shelters. A gradual increase in the percentage of identified animals is observed, after the fall in 2012 and 2013.



Our interpretation:

- A significant amount of the pets that arrive in shelters are not actually abandoned but are in fact probably lost.
- The key factor in recovering a stray animal is the ability to find its owners and in order to do this, it is vital that the animal is properly identified by microchip.
- The increase in dogs recovered by their owners could be explained, at least in part, by the increased number of identified animals. Almost 31.2% of the dogs that arrived in shelters in 2015 were identified, which is more than a 7% increase on the same figure recorded in 2008.
- The percentage of cats returned to their owners is notably less than that of dogs and, unlike what is being observed in dogs, it does not appear to improve with time. 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. In relation to identification, it is interesting to note that the percentage of cats that arrived at shelters with a microchip in 2015 is almost identical to the figure from 2008.
- The recovery of the percentage of identified dogs and, to a lesser extent, cats arriving in shelters and animal protection associations seems to be confirmed after the drop observed in 2012 and 2013. However, these figures are still well below the number of animals identified in Spain, which, according to Affinity Petcare's estimations, amounts to 85% of dogs and 34% of cats. If we consider that being able to identify a pet is one of the main indications of responsible ownership, unidentified dogs and cats are more likely to arrive in animal shelters.

Identification by microchip is one of the main strategies for tackling abandonment and enabling lost animals to be recovered.

Is it true that more animals are abandoned in summer?

- Key data:
 - The total proportion of animals (dogs and cats) taken in by animal protection associations was 30.4%, 36.9% and 32.6% respectively for each one of the three 4-month periods of the year (Figure 9). As a new feature of the 2015 study, the data collected on animals taken in is presented month by month (Figure 10). Again, there is a notable difference between dogs and cats.
 - The proportion of dogs taken in by animal protection organisations was 31.9%, 34.7% and 33.4% respectively for each of the three 4-month periods of the year (Figure 11). The data collected on animals taken in is presented month by month (Figure 12).
 - The proportion of cats taken in by animal protection organisations in the three 4-month periods was 26.5%, 42.6% and 30.9% respectively (Figure 13). The figures collected on cats taken in are presented month by month (Figure 14).

Figure 9 Distribution by 4-month periods (2015) of the total number of animals taken in by animal protection associations.

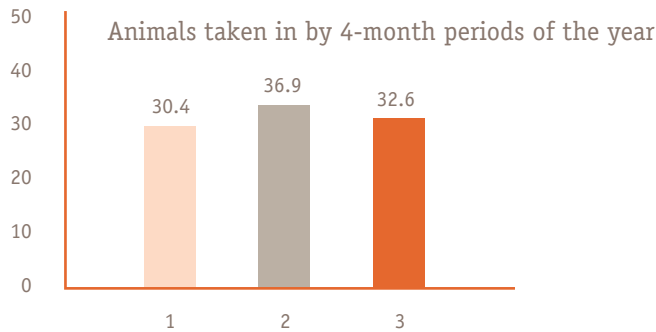


Figure 10 Distribution by month of the total number of animals taken in by animal protection associations.

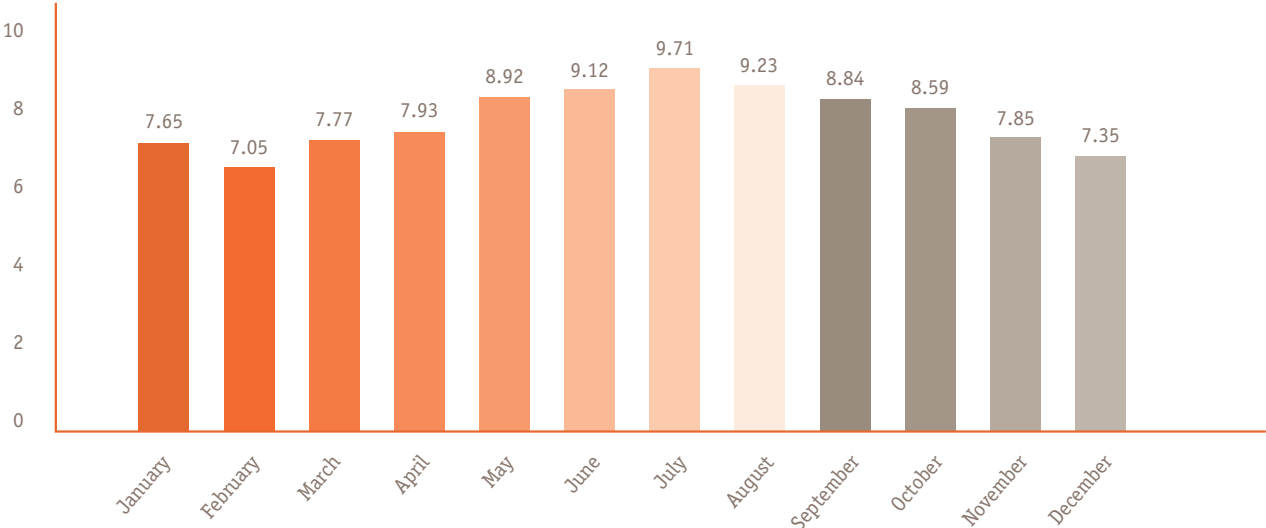


Figure 11 Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of dogs taken in by animal protection organisations.

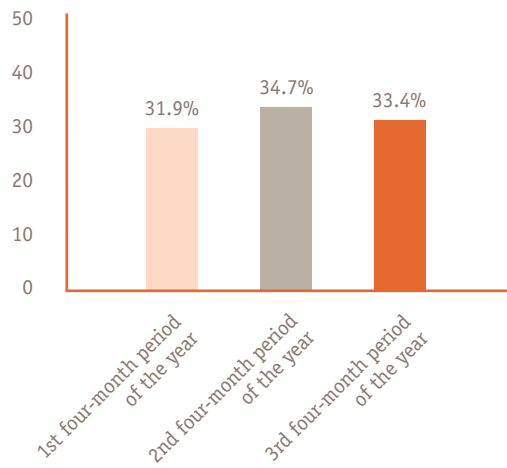


Figure 12 Distribution per month of the total number of dogs taken in by animal protection organisations.

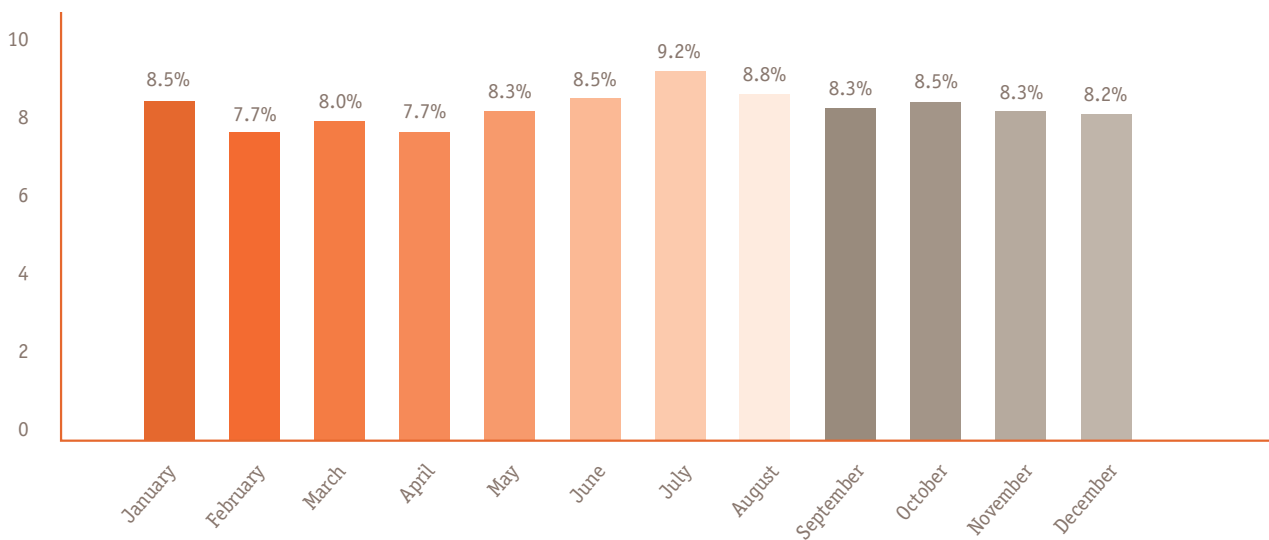


Figure 13 Distribution per 4-month period of the total number of cats taken in by animal protection organisations.

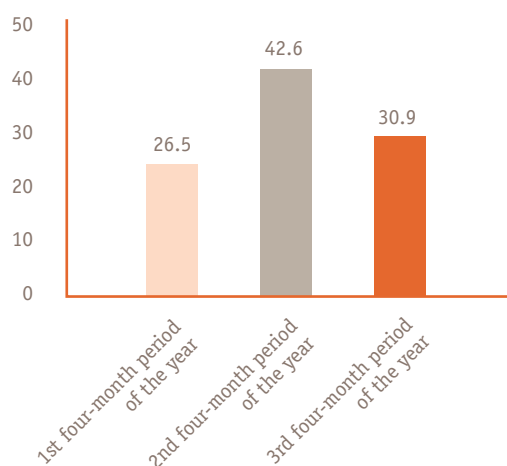
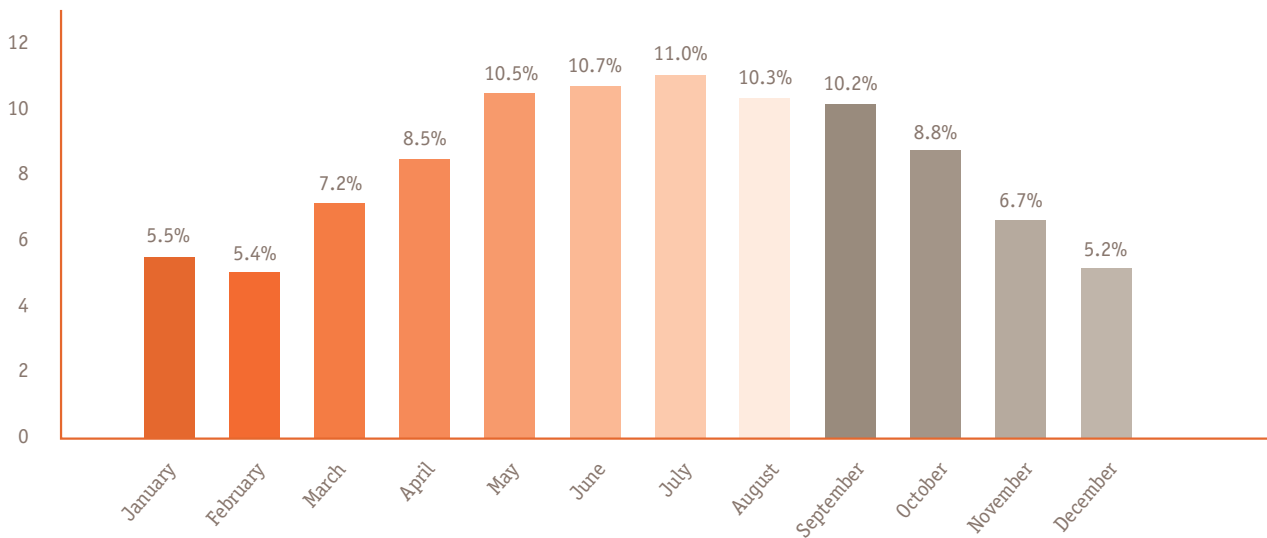


Figure 14 Distribution by month of the total number of cats taken in by animal protection entities.



Our interpretation:

- The abandonment or loss of animals is a phenomenon that occurs throughout the year. This figure contrasts with the very widespread opinion that dogs are abandoned particularly before the summer holidays. In order to understand the slight increase in abandonment or loss in the middle of the year, dogs and cats must be looked at separately.
- The number of dogs arriving at shelters and animal protection associations is very stable throughout the year. However, the number of cats arriving increases during the second four-month period of the year. This finding can be understood if we take into consideration that cats are seasonal breeders and that a significant reason for abandoning pets is precisely unwanted litters. Studies carried out on this subject indicate that most cat litters are unwanted². This data shows how important sterilisation is in preventing pet abandonment.
- As occurred in the 2014 study of abandonment, the distribution of animals taken in by four-month periods is almost identical to what was observed in the previous year's study.

Sterilisation is a key strategy for preventing pet abandonment.

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

- Key data:

Firstly, we will examine the numbers of both dogs and cats in order to gain an overall perspective of the problem. Afterwards, we will explain the differences between dogs and cats, which in some aspects are remarkable.

- What happens to animals that arrive at animal shelters?

- As was already indicated, 19% of the total number of animals that arrive at shelters are returned to their owners (Figure 7).
- 44% are adopted (Figure 7).
- 14% remain in the shelter and 10% are put down (Figure 7).

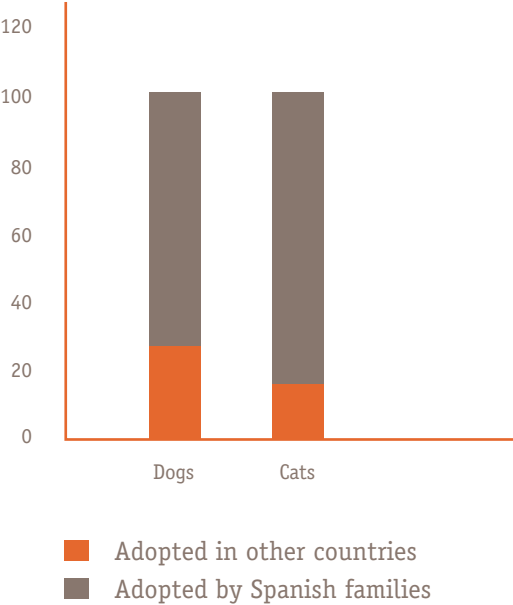
- What happens to dogs?

- As we have already shown, 25.9% of dogs are returned to their owners (Figure 3).
- 45.8% are adopted (Figure 3). Of these, 70.2% are adopted by Spanish families and 29.8% are taken abroad (Figure 15).
- 13.4% remain in the shelter waiting for adoption and 7.7% are put down (Figure 3).

- What happens to cats?

- As previously mentioned, 3.3% of cats are returned to their owners (Figure 5).
- 41.2% are adopted. 83.6% of all adoptions take place in Spain and 16.4% in other countries (Figure 15).
- 14.7% remain in the shelter and 15.5% are put down (Figure 5).

Figure 15 Destination 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. In this sense, it is important to point out that both the percentage of animals being put down and the percentage of animals remaining in shelters have both experienced a downward trend during recent years (Figures 16 and 17).

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

Figure 16 Evolution of the proportion of dogs that are put down, that remain in shelters or that are adopted.

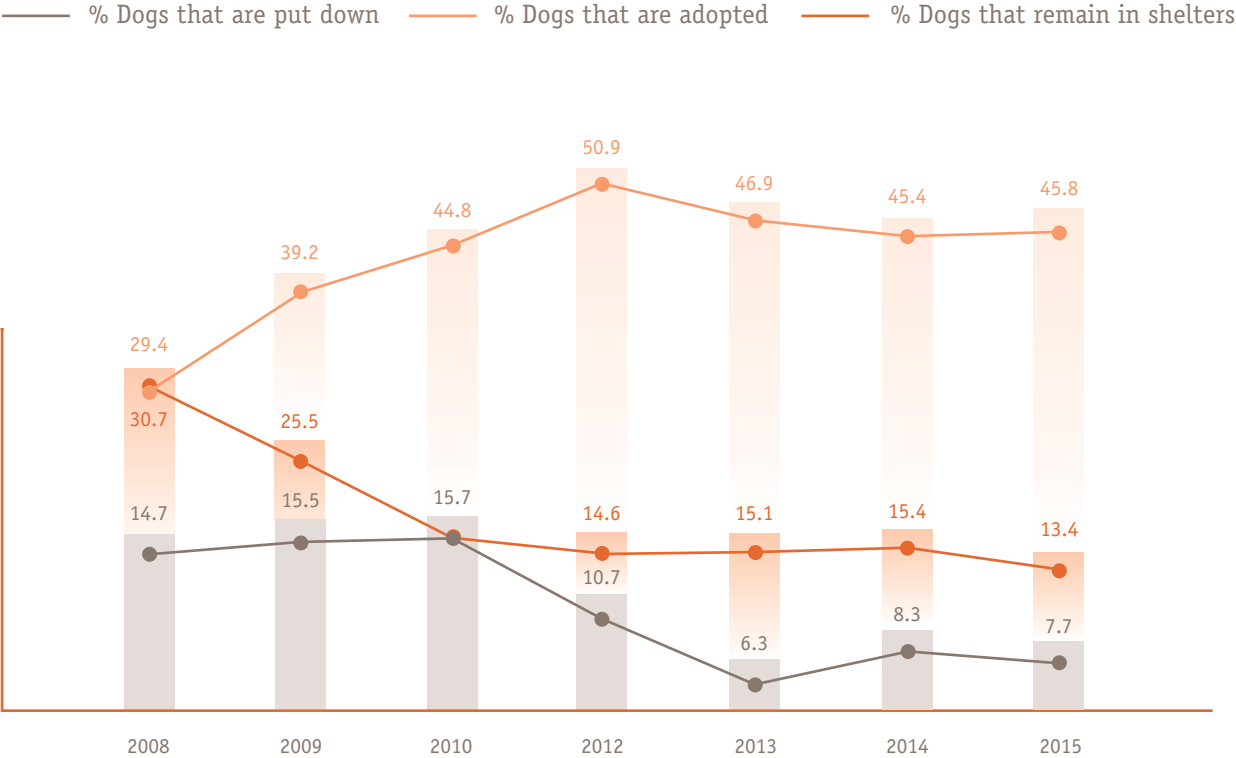
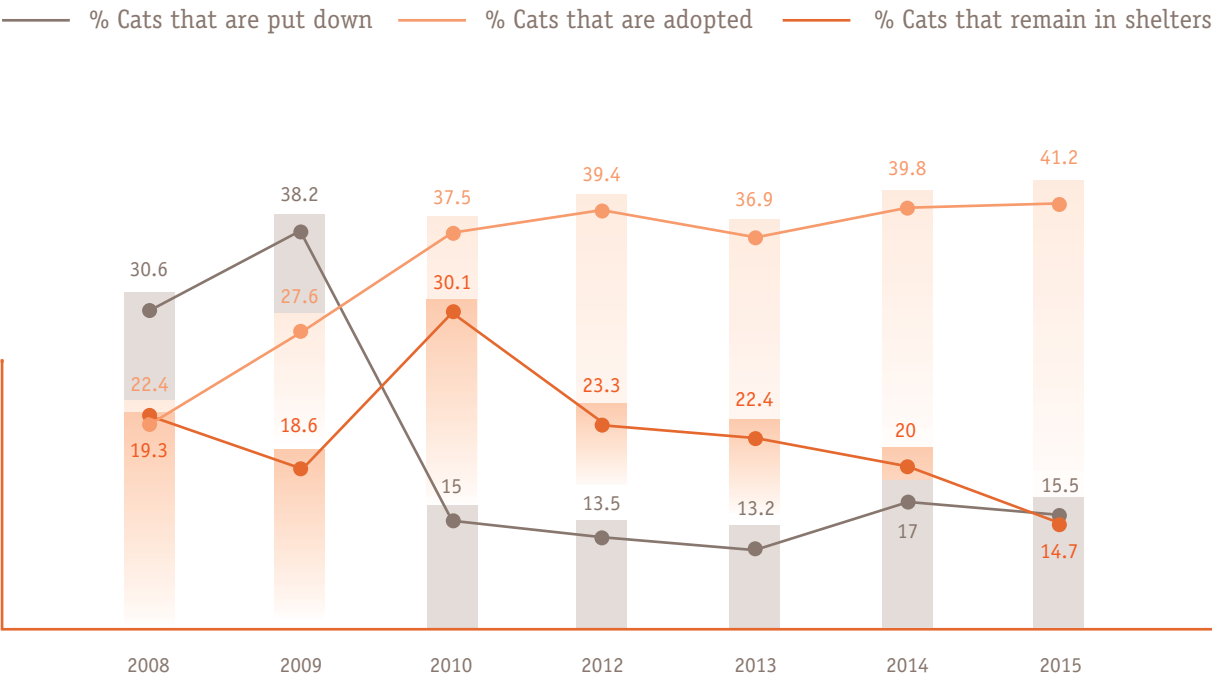


Figure 17 Evolution of the proportion of cats that are put down, that remain in shelters or that are adopted.



What kind of animal is abandoned?

- Key data:
 - 20.2% of dogs and 10.9% of cats that are abandoned are purebred, while the rest are mixed breed (Figure 18).
 - Almost half of all abandoned dogs are medium sized (Figure 19).
 - The majority of dogs and cats that arrive at shelters are adults, although puppies, kittens and senior animals are also taken in (Figures 20 and 21).

Figure 18 Profile of the animals taken in by shelters by breed.

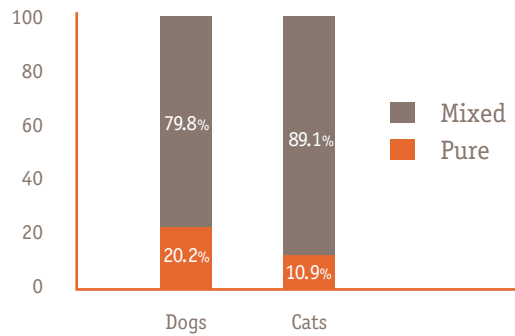


Figure 19 Size of the dogs that arrive at animal shelters.

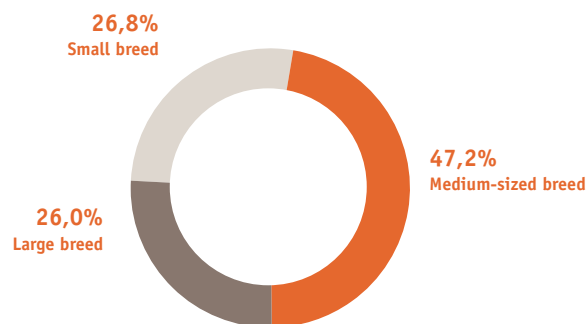


Figure 20 Distribution by age of the animals that are taken in by shelters and animal protection associations.

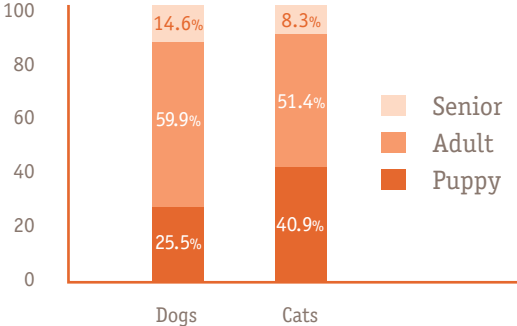
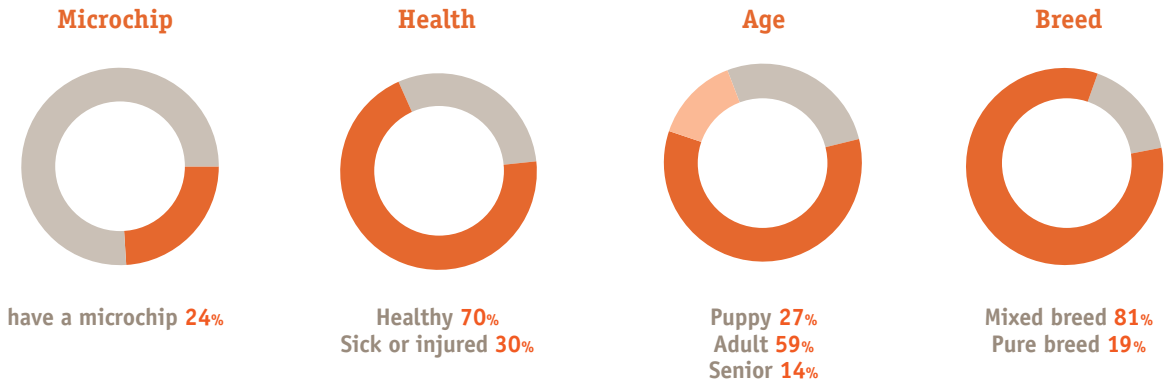


Figure 21 Distribution by characteristics of the animals that are taken in by shelters and animal protection associations.



Our interpretation:

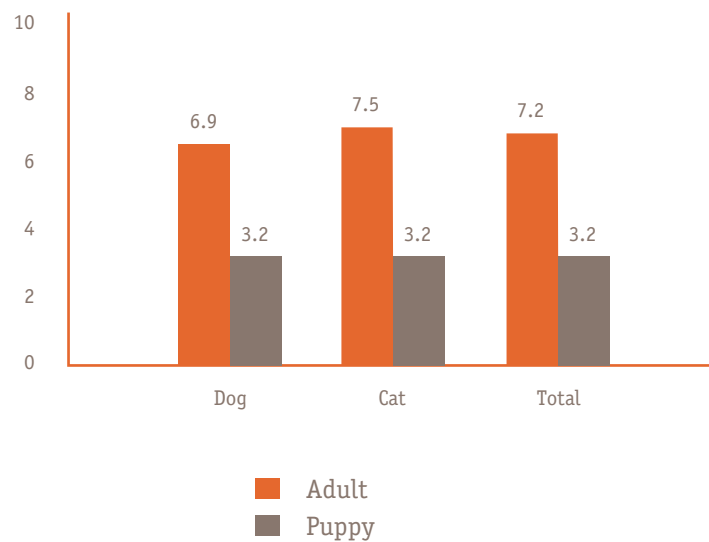
- Abandonment is a phenomenon that affects dogs and cats of all kinds, and is not therefore restricted to a particular age group or to specific breeds.
- The proportion of medium- and large-sized dogs that arrive at shelters is greater than the proportion in the general dog population. Consequently, this may suggest that small dogs suffer from less loss and abandonment than larger dogs.

Animal shelters receive dogs and cats of any age and breed. The majority of animals that arrive at shelters are unidentified and healthy.

Is it true that it is easier to rehome puppies and kittens?

- Key data:
 - The amount of time that puppies and kittens remain in shelters is much less than that of older dogs and cats (Figure 22).

Figure 22 Average amount of time spent in the shelter according to the animal's age (in months).



Our interpretation:

- The small amount of time that puppies and kittens spend in shelters can largely be explained by the greater appeal that a young animal holds for many adopters.
- There is a misconception that an adult animal won't integrate into its new family or that it won't be possible to educate it effectively. It is therefore important to develop informative campaigns for adopters about the convenience and even the advantages that adopting an adult dog or cat often offers.

Why do some people abandon their pets?

- Key data:
 - 66.4% of animals that are admitted into a shelter are found on the street. The remaining 33.6% are taken to the shelter by an individual who is unknown to the animal (70.4%) or by the owners directly (29.6%) (Figure 23).
 - The five main reasons given by owners who bring a pet to a shelter are the animal's behaviour (14.8%), unwanted litters (14.5%), economic factors (11.9%), the end of the hunting season (10.1%) and changes in address (9%) (Figure 24).

Figure 23 Origin of animals arriving in shelters.

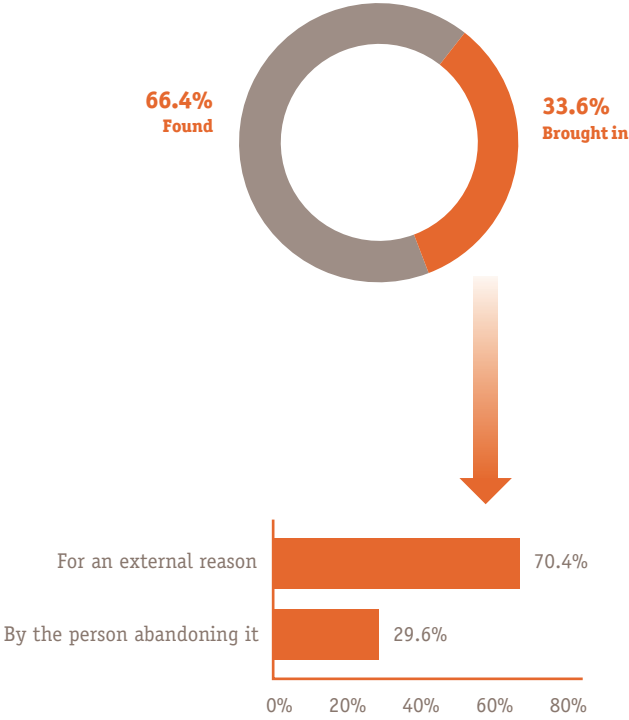
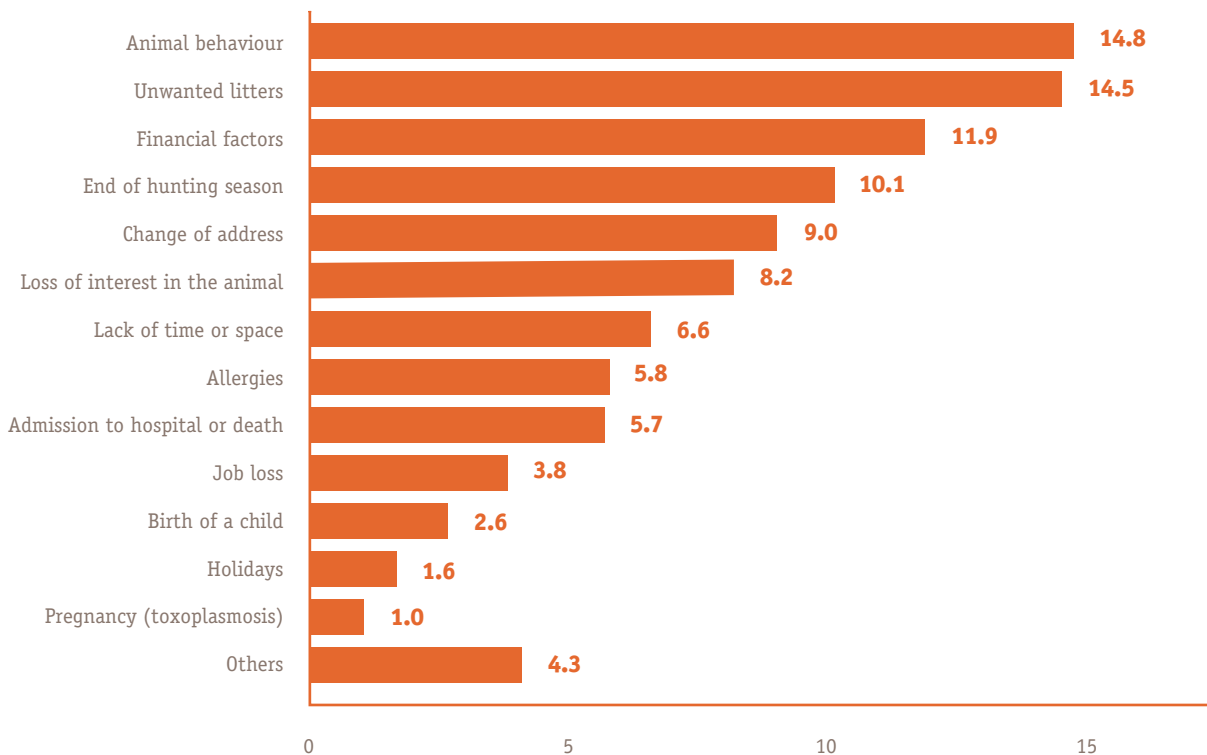


Figure 24 Reasons for abandoning pets.



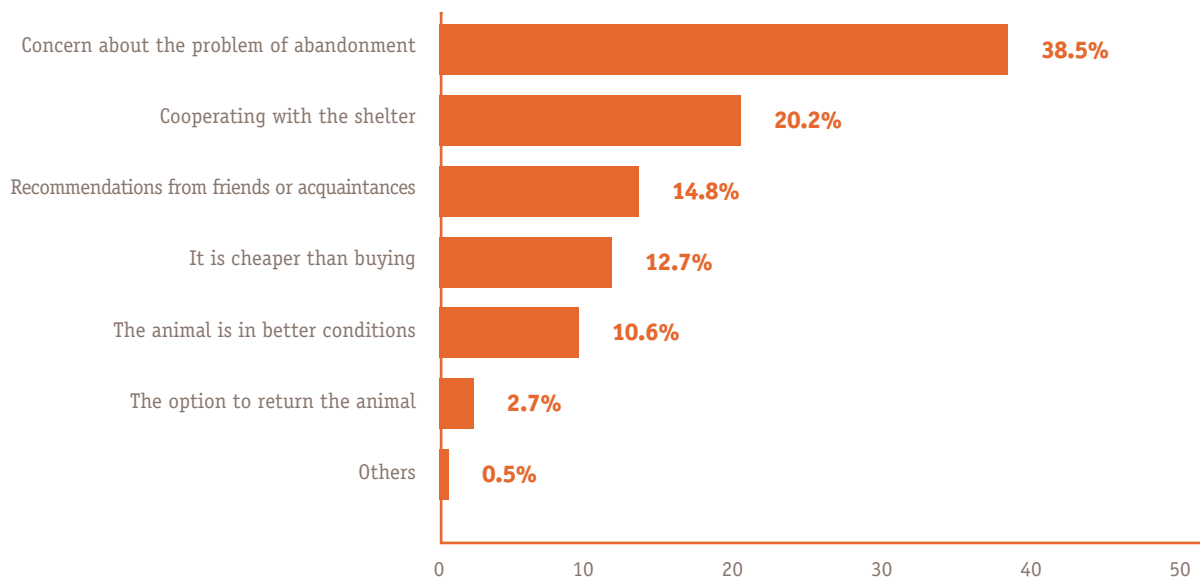
Our interpretation:

- In contrast to data from 2014, economic factors are no longer the main reason for bringing a pet to a shelter.
- Behavioural issues appear to be the most significant reason given for pet abandonment in Spain. In this sense, it is important to remember that today, the majority of behavioural and adaptation problems found in pets can be prevented and, where they are already present, effectively resolved. Behavioural medicine is now a fully recognised veterinary speciality, which aims to prevent and treat behavioural and adaptation problems in both dogs and cats from the moment of adoption.
- 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.
- It is very important to insist that people who personally bring in their animals to animal shelters provide information on why the animal is being abandoned. The majority of animals that are admitted to shelters have been found in the street or are taken there by people who are not their owners. Therefore, we still don't know the real reasons why so many pets are abandoned in Spain.

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

- Key data:
 - The three most significant reasons why people decide to adopt are the concern that many of them have about the problem of abandonment (38.5%), their desire to work with the animal protection organisation (20.2%) and recommendations from friends or acquaintances (14.8%) (Figure 25).

Figure 25 Reasons given by people for adopting a pet.



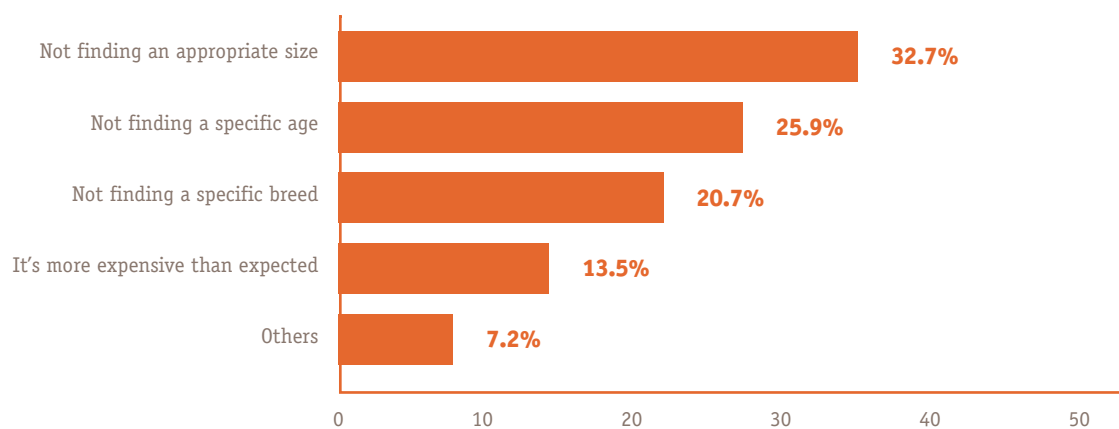
Our interpretation:

- These results are consistent with the very slight percentage variations of the results obtained in the 2014 study.
- 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.
- Through adoption many people don't just incorporate a new member into their family but they participate in and support an important social cause: the defence of animal welfare.

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

- Key data:
 - Around 29.3% of people who are initially interested in adopting a dog or a cat eventually decided not to do so.
 - Among them, the three key reasons for not adopting were respectively not having found the appropriate size (32.7%), age (25.9%) or breed (20.7%) (Figure 26).
 - Around 13.5% of potential adopters decide not to do so, arguing that the cost of the adoption is more expensive than expected (Figure 26).

Figure 26 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. In this sense, a study carried out by the Affinity Foundation in Spain in 2015 indicated that when choosing a pet, the needs of the animal and the owner's lifestyle are only taken into consideration in 21% of cases.
- Approximately one in every seven prospective adopters 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 of adoption. It is also important to increase awareness about the enormous economic effort involved for a shelter in looking after an ownerless animal. It is important to remember here the great work carried out every day by shelters and animal protection associations for pets by the selfless efforts of their members and volunteers.
- All those directly and indirectly involved in animal protection should participate in this educational task, from animal shelters and vets to administration.

Why do some people who have adopted a pet then return it to the shelter?

- Key data:
 - 6.2% of adoptions carried out in 2015 were unsuccessful.
 - Behavioural problems were the main reason for returning a pet to the shelter after adopting it (Figure 27).
 - A significant amount of animals were returned within a month of the adoption and almost all of them within the first three months after the animal was first taken home (Figure 28).

Figure 27 Reasons behind failed adoptions.

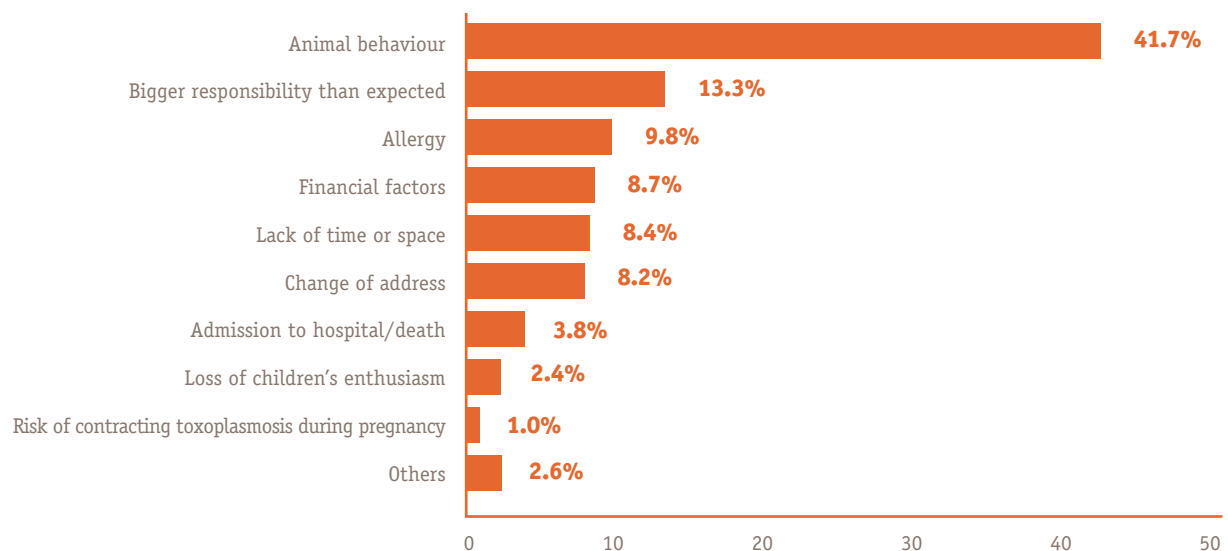
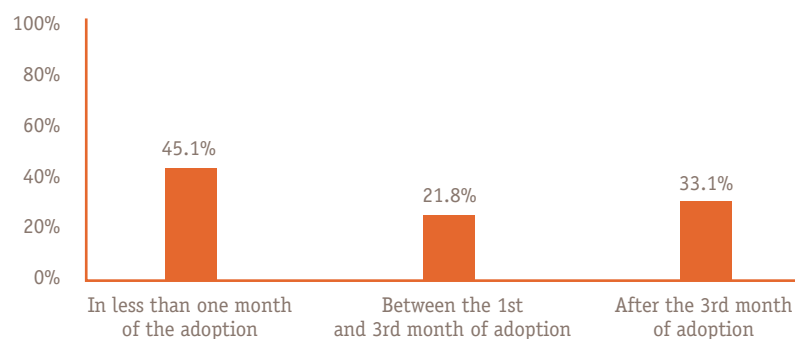


Figure 28 Distribution of the return of animals to shelters according to the time that has elapsed since the adoption.



Our interpretation:

- It is recommended that people who adopt a dog or cat are given information to help facilitate the animal's successful adaptation to its new surroundings. In this sense, as was already mentioned, it is important to remember that many behavioural problems can be effectively prevented.

Main conclusions

- Abandonment remains a major animal welfare issue in Spain. The number of animals that arrived at animal shelters in 2015 is slightly lower than numbers observed in previous years.
- Sterilisation, identification and adoption are the three 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. Thus, citizen participation is fundamental for combating the problem of abandoned pets, since this depends on the effective application of the three previously mentioned strategies (sterilisation, identification and adoption), which have proved to be fundamental in tackling the problem of abandonment.
- 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.

Bibliography:

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