

**“Él nunca lo haría”
 (“They’d never do it to you”):
 a study by Fundación Affinity into
 the abandonment and adoption
 of pets in Spain in 2018:
 Interpretation of results.**



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— 1987 —

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Outline of results:

- Abandonment is once again the number one pet welfare problem in Spain.
- The number of animals taken in by animal shelters and humane societies is comparable to that recorded in 2017. This means that approximately 17 out of every 1000 dogs and 10 out of every 1000 cats living in Spain were taken in by an animal shelter or humane society last year.
- Properly identified, microchipped dogs are more easily returned to their owners. Identification is confirmed as one of the most effective ways of addressing the loss and abandonment of pets.
- Around 40% of the dogs and cats housed at animal shelters are adopted. However, the figure seems to have stalled, as it is similar to that recorded 5 years ago.
- The number of puppies taken in by shelters is higher than would be expected given the proportion of puppies in the total population of cats and dogs.
- The number of medium and large-sized dogs taken in by shelters is also greater than would be expected given the proportion of the total dog population for which they account.
- Unwanted litters are the top reason for handing over cats and dogs to pet shelters.
- Abandoned puppies are more likely to be adopted than adults.
- Half of the animal welfare organizations that took part in the study regularly handle cat colonies.

How many cats and dogs were taken in by animal shelters and animal welfare organizations in 2018?

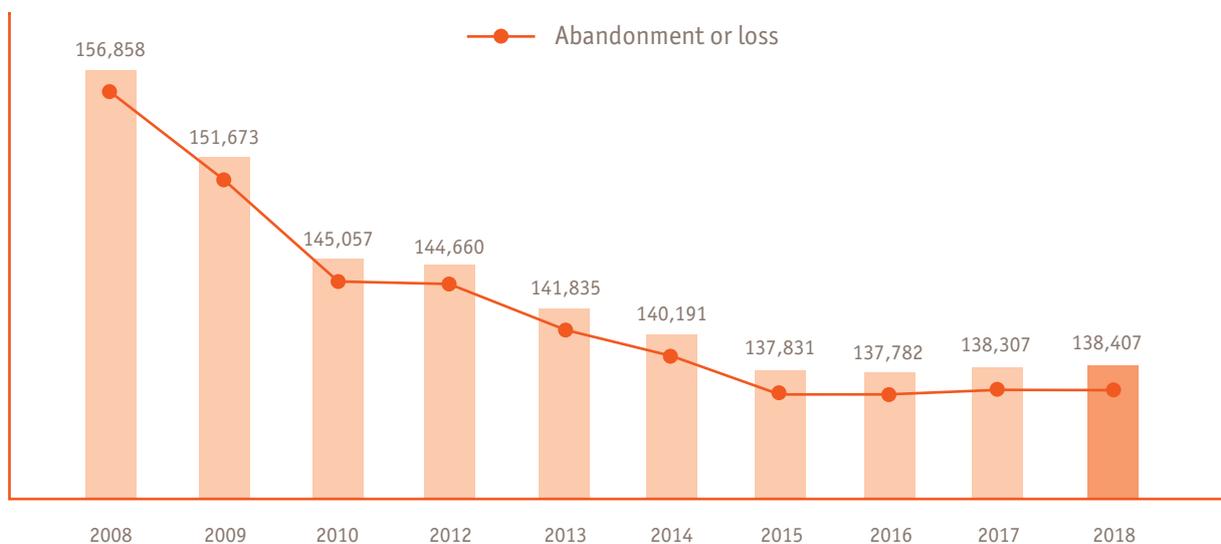
- Key facts and figures:

- In 2018, 138,407 cats and dogs were taken in.
- 104,688 dogs.
- 33,719 cats.

NB: these figures are estimations based on data from 327 animal welfare organisations, town councils and supra-municipal councils throughout Spain.

- These data mean that the estimated rate of abandonment and/or loss is 22 dogs and 7 cats per 10,000 people (the population of Spain is estimated to be 46,733,038*).
- 1.7% of the 6,300,000 dogs and 1% of the 3,800,000 cats estimated to live in Spain** thus suffer abandonment or loss.

Figure 1 Trend in number of animals taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations each year.



* Source: INS (National Statistics Institute) (July 2018).

** Source: Affinity Pet Care.

Figure 2 Trend in number of dogs taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations each year.



Figure 3 Trend in number of cats taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations each year.



The figures give even more cause for concern when the fact that not all households have pets is factored in. Year after year, abandonment continues to be a structural problem that calls for greater intervention and cooperation on the part of all actors – public and private alike – involved in preventing it.

Our interpretation:

- The abandonment of cats and dogs is the biggest welfare problem for pets in Spain¹.
- The overall figures for abandonment and loss in 2018 are almost the same as for 2017. After a small reduction in the number of animals taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations in recent years, the data for 2017 and 2018 in fact show a slight upturn, with figures close to those recorded in 2014 (see Fig. 1, 2 and 3).

Abandonment is one of the biggest pet welfare problems.

How many pets are really abandoned?

- Key facts and figures:
 - 18.2% of the cats and dogs taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations were returned to or picked up by their owners (Figure 4). Figure 5 shows the trend in the total number of animals recovered by their owners and those that can be considered as lost or abandoned. As shown below, there are major differences from one type of animal to another.
 - 25% of the dogs taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations were returned to their owners (Figure 6). This is similar to the 2015 figure, which is the best of the last 10 years (Figure 7a). Figure 7b shows the total number of dogs recovered by their owners and those that can be considered as lost or abandoned.
 - Only 3.3% of the cats taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations were returned to their owners (Figure 8). This figure is practically identical to that recorded in the four previous studies into the abandonment and loss of animals (Figure 9a). Figure 9b shows the total number of cats recovered by their owners and those that can be considered as ultimately lost or abandoned.
 - To show the impact of microchipping on the recovery of pets, we first show the number of animals which have proper identification when they are taken in at shelters (Figure 10a), then the proportion of properly identified animals recovered by their owners (Figure 10b) and finally the reasons why some properly identified animals are not reunited with their legal owners (Figure 10c).
 - 34.3% of the dogs and 4.5% of the cats taken in by shelters were properly microchipped (Figure 10a).
 - 61.1% of those animals which are microchipped were returned to their owners (Figure 10b). The main reasons for not doing so were refusal on the part of owners or inability to locate them because the ID data were incorrect, because they were not registered in an ID database at the proper time or because non-approved microchips had been used (Figure 10c).

Figure 4 Final outcomes for animals taken in by shelters and welfare organizations.

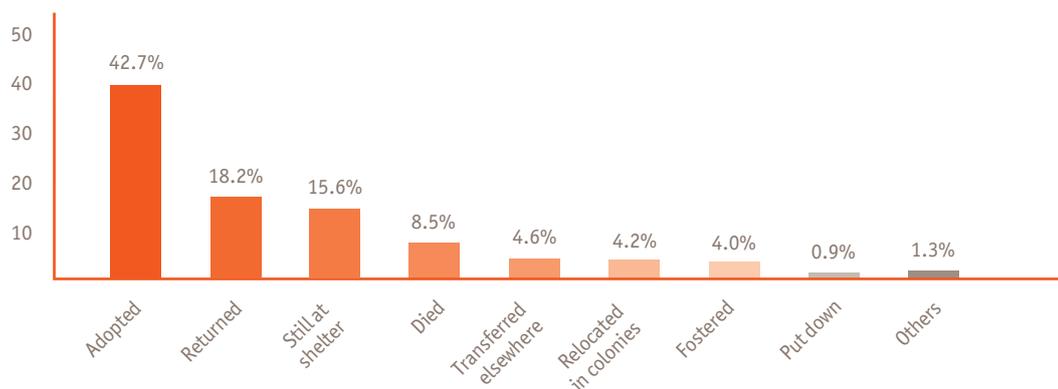


Figure 5 Trend in numbers of cats & dogs taken in by shelters which are recovered by owners and those which can ultimately be considered as lost or abandoned.

The total number of cats and dogs taken in by shelters is shown in orange. The number recovered by their owners is shown in light grey. The total ultimately considered as abandoned or lost once the number recovered by owners has been subtracted is shown in dark grey.

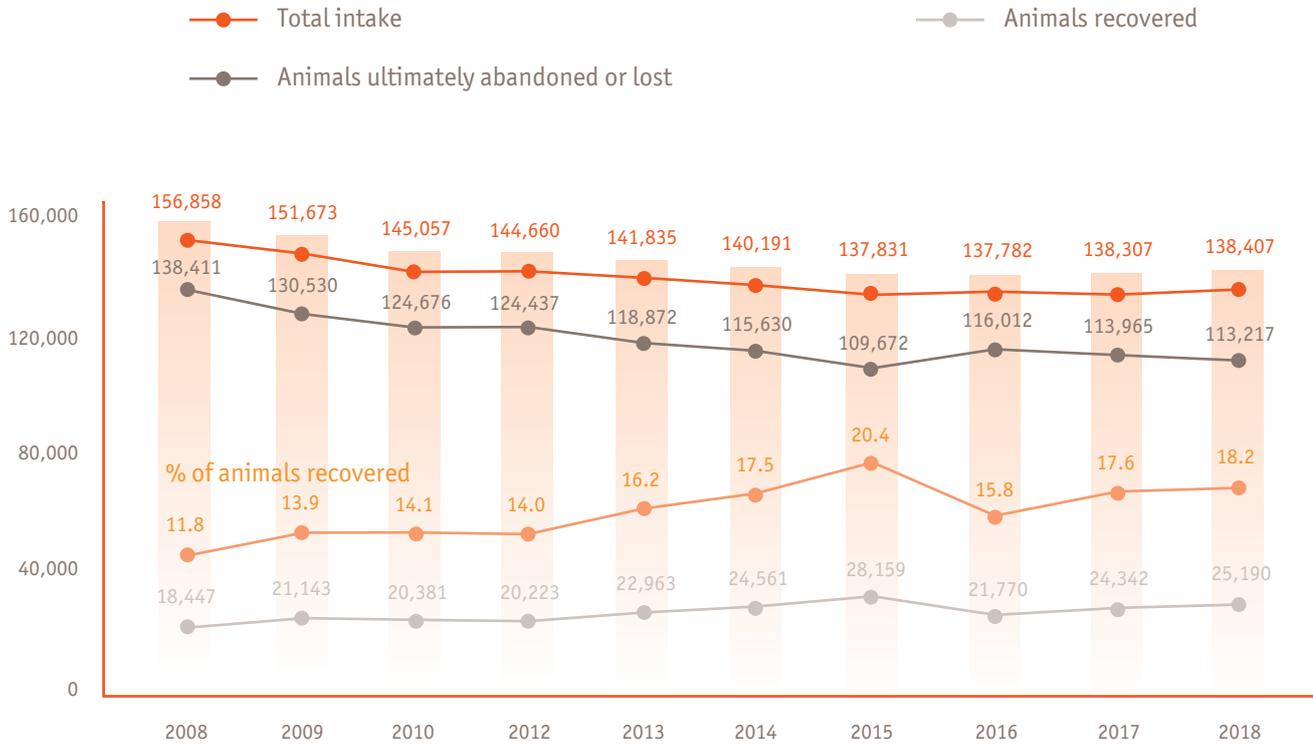


Figure 6 Final outcomes for dogs taken in by shelters or animal welfare organizations.

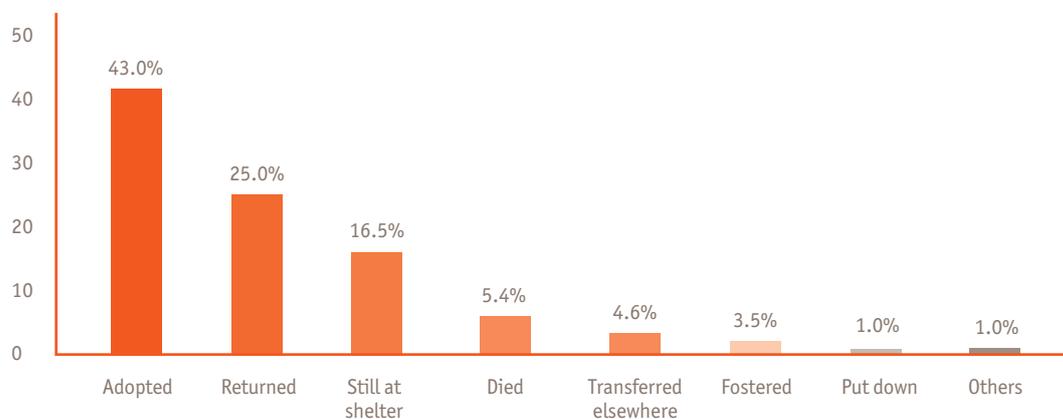


Figure 7a Trend in proportion of dogs taken in by animal shelters recovered by their owners.

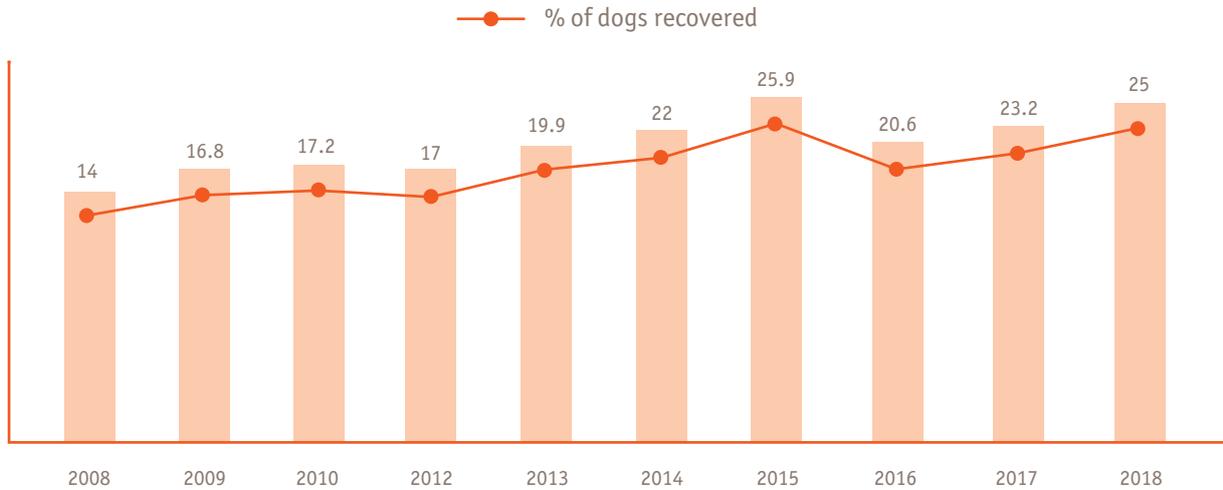


Figure 7b Trend in number of dogs taken in by animal shelters recovered by their owners and those ultimately considered as lost or abandoned.

The total number of dogs taken in by shelters is shown in orange. The number recovered by their owners is shown in light grey. The total ultimately considered as abandoned or lost once the number recovered by owners has been subtracted is shown in dark grey.

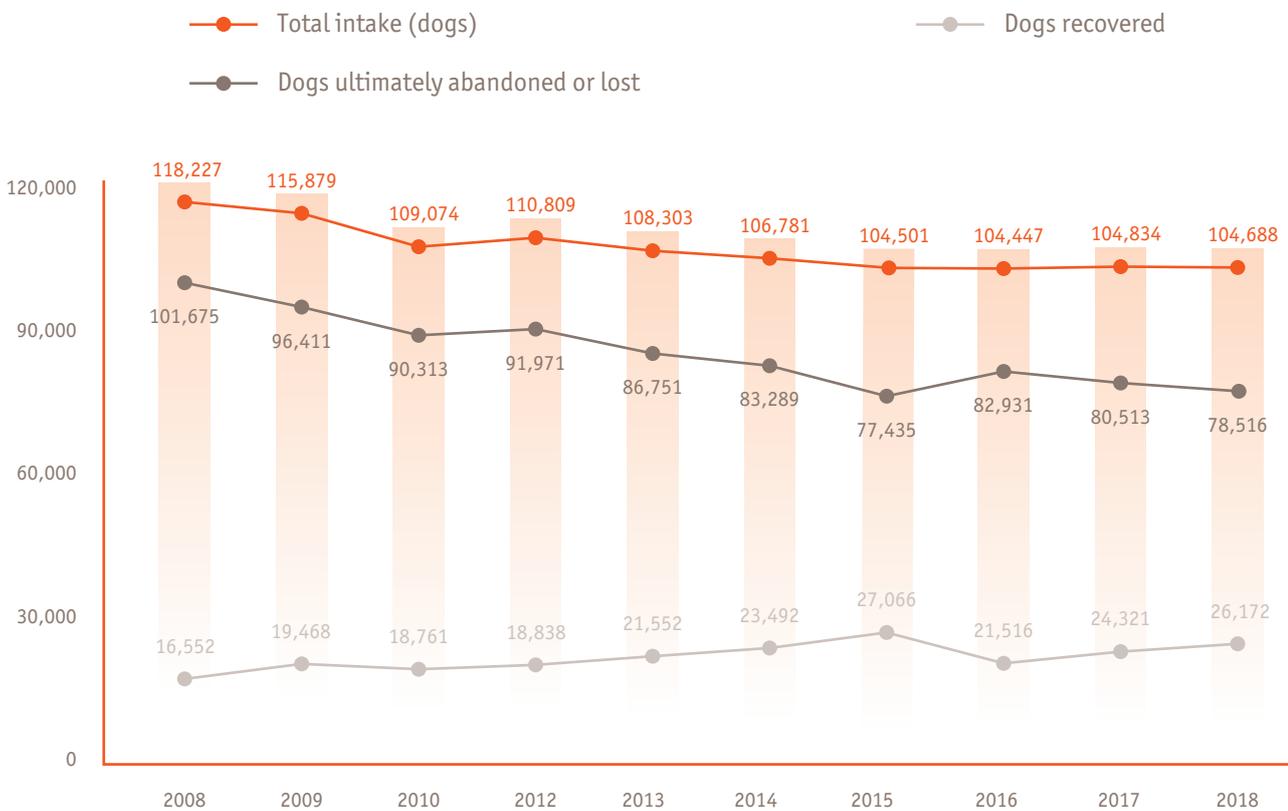


Figure 8 Outcomes for cats taken in by shelters and animal welfare organizations.

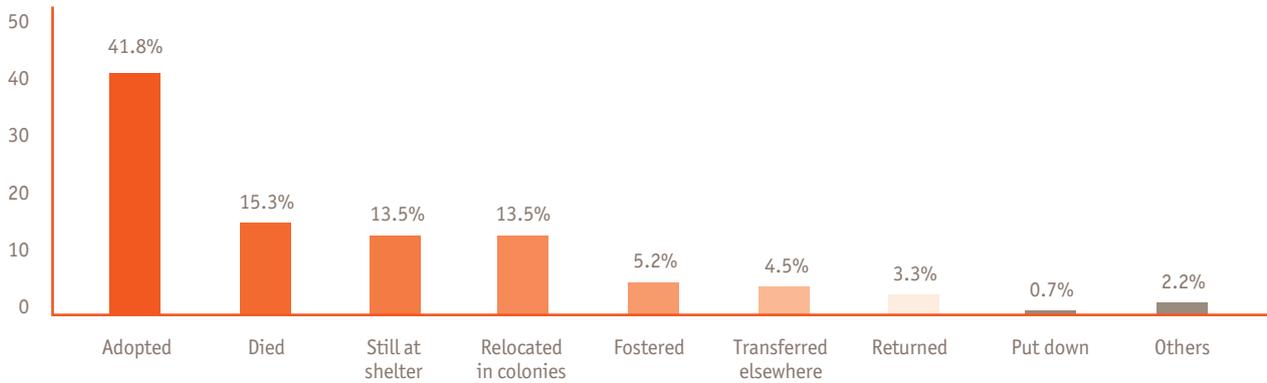


Figure 9a Trend in proportion of cats taken in by animal shelters recovered by their owners.

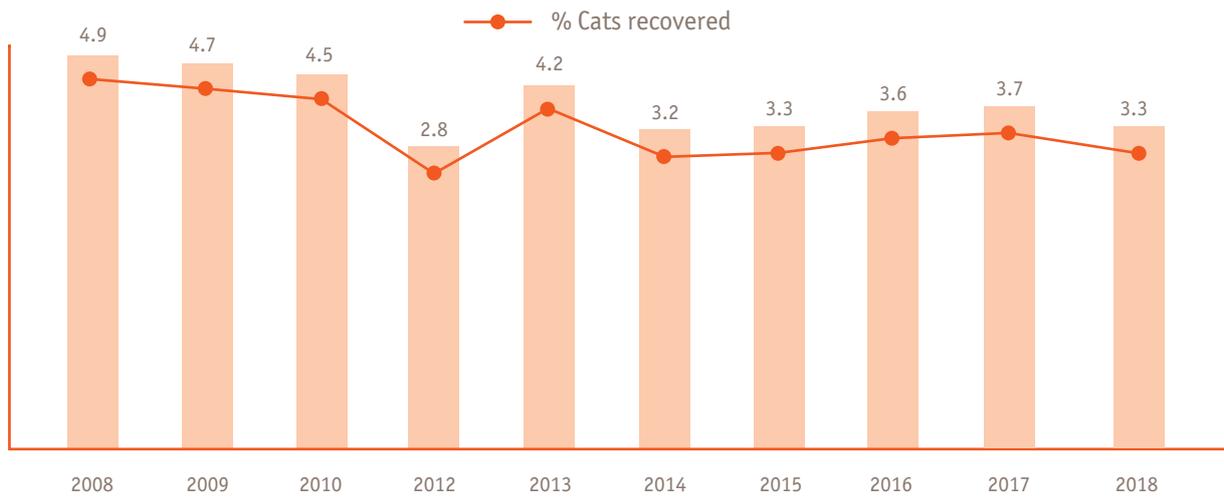


Figure 9b Trend in number of cats taken in by animal shelters recovered by their owners and those ultimately considered as lost or abandoned.

The total number of cats taken in by shelters is shown in orange. The number recovered by their owners is shown in light grey. The total ultimately considered as abandoned or lost once the number recovered by owners has been subtracted is shown in dark grey.



Figure 10a Proportion of cats and dogs taken in by shelters which are properly identified. In spite of occasional setbacks, the trend since 2007 is positive for dogs, but not for cats.

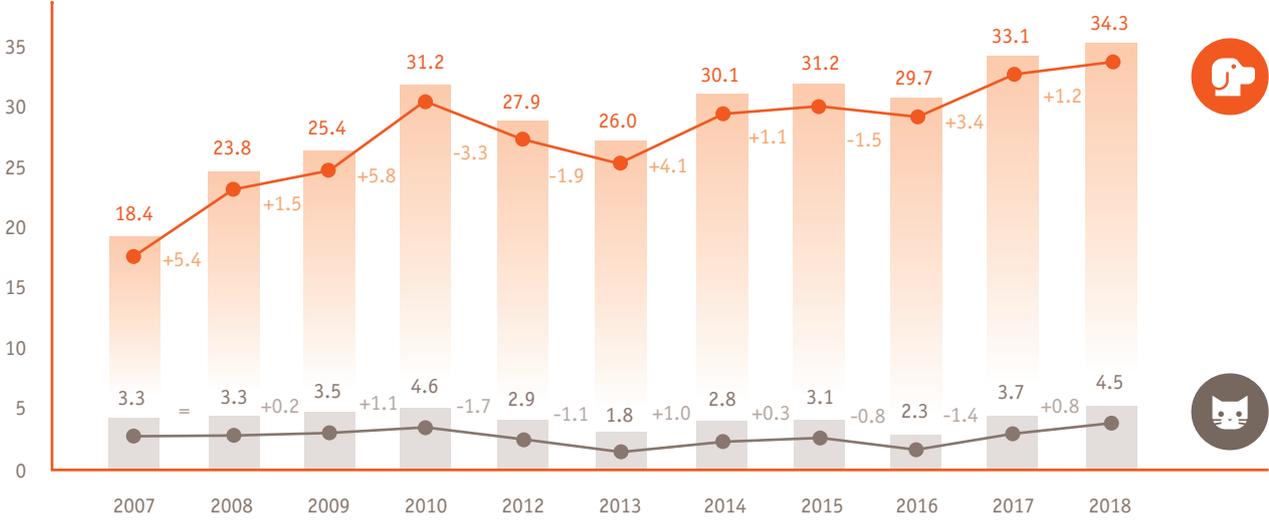


Figure 10b Proportion of microchipped animals returned to their owners.

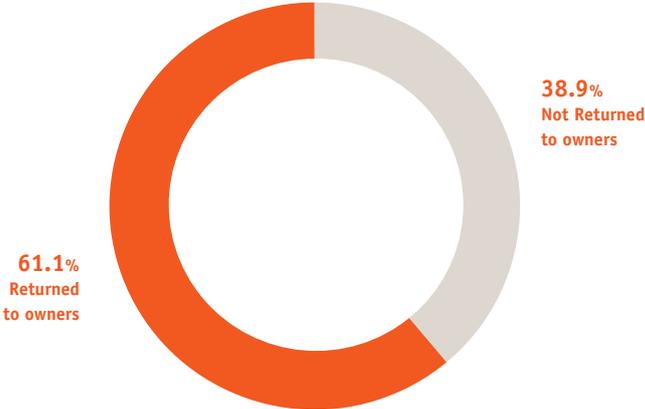
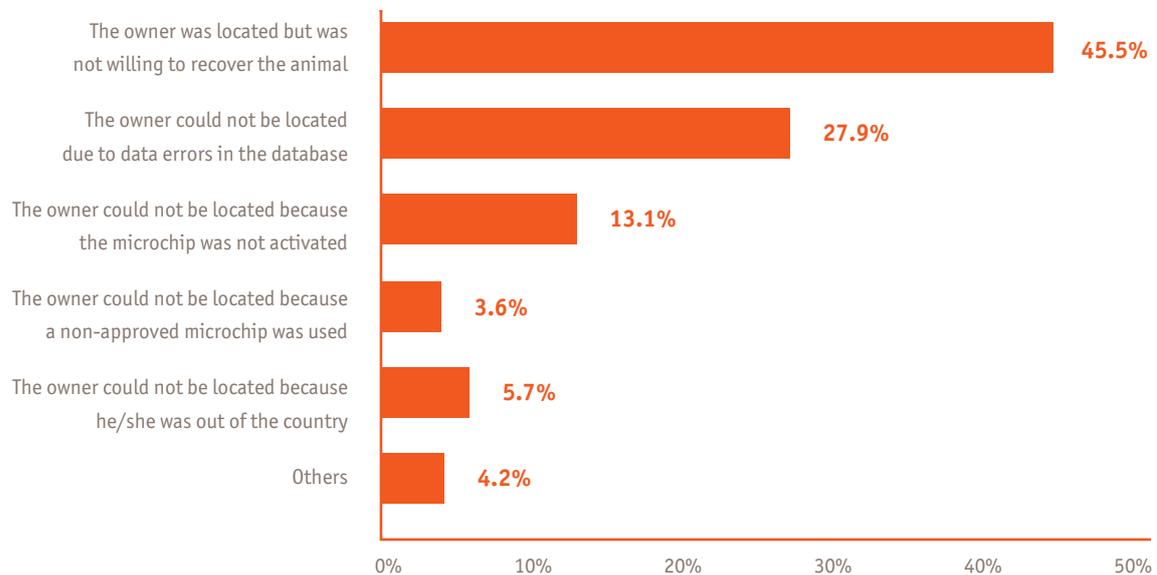


Figure 10c **Reasons why microchipped animals could not be returned to their owners.**



Our interpretation:

- A large proportion of the pets taken in by shelters are not actually abandoned but more likely lost.
- The key factor in recovering lost animals is whether the owners can be located, and for that it is essential that animals be properly microchipped². Around 18% of all the animals taken in by shelters are recovered, but the figure for microchipped dogs and cats is 60%.
- Errors in the identification procedure can prevent an animal's owner from being located, so it is important to realise that microchipping and identification are two different things. Identification is a veterinary procedure that includes both the implanting of an approved microchip under the skin and registration in an approved animal identification database.
- The percentage of dogs properly identified is increasing, while that of cats is holding steady. Even so, the figures are far lower than the total number of animals identified in Spain, which estimates by Affinity Pet Care put at 85% of dogs and 34% of cats. Proper identification of pets is one of the main indicators of responsible ownership, so our data indicate that abandonment and loss are at least partly attributable to a failure to fulfil the duties and commitments entailed by owning a pet.
- The percentage of animals returned to owners is markedly lower for cats than for dogs. This could be due on the one hand to a lower proportion of cats than dogs being properly identified, and on the other hand to the arrival at shelters of large numbers of cats born as strays.

Identification by microchipping is confirmed as one of the main strategies for combating abandonment and allowing the recovery of lost animals.

Is it true that more animals are abandoned in summer?

- Key facts and figures:
 - If the year is split into three four-month periods, the total intake of cats and dogs by shelters breaks down as 30.6%, 38.1% and 31.3% (Figure 11). Month-by-month figures are also shown (Figure 12). Once again, there are marked differences in regard to cats and dogs.
 - The proportion of dogs taken in by welfare organizations in each period was 33%, 34.7% and 32.3% respectively (Figure 13). Month-by-month data are also shown (Figure 14).
 - The proportion of cats taken in by welfare organizations in each period was 23.8%, 43.7% and 32.5% respectively (Figure 15). Month-by-month data are also shown (Figure 16).

Figure 11 Breakdown by 4-month periods of the number of animals taken in by welfare organizations in 2018 as a percentage of total intake.

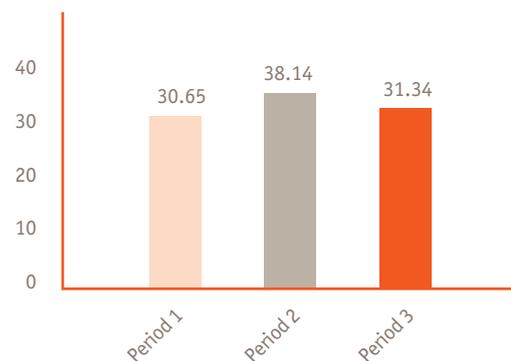


Figure 12 Breakdown month-by-month of the number of animals taken in by welfare organizations in 2018 as a percentage of total intake.

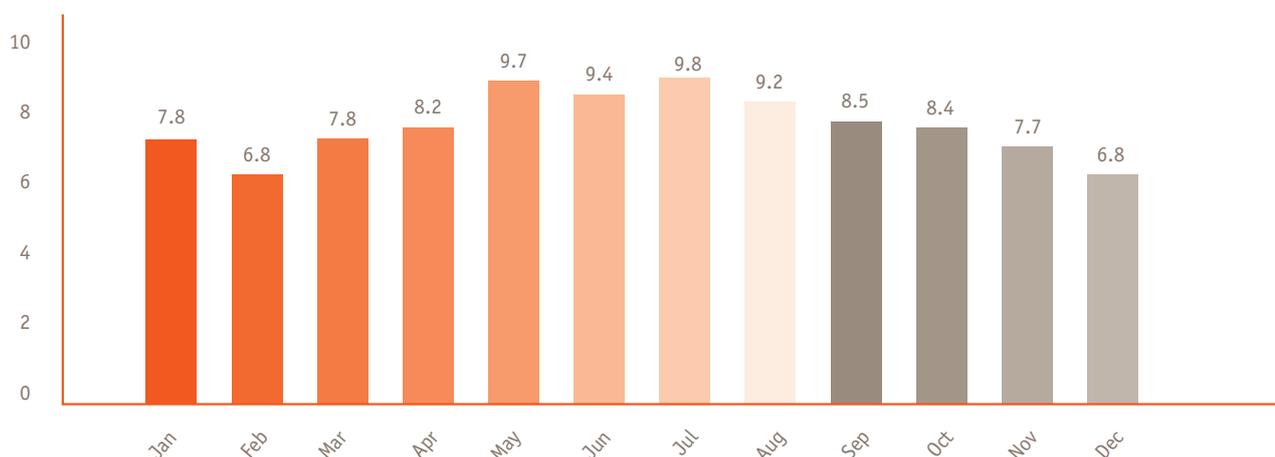


Figure 13 Breakdown by 4-month periods of the number of dogs taken in by animal welfare organizations as a percentage of total intake.

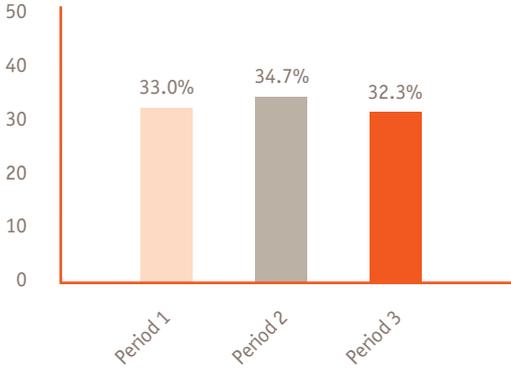


Figure 14 Breakdown month-by-month of the number of dogs taken in by welfare organizations as a percentage of total intake.



Figure 15 Breakdown by 4-month periods of the number of cats taken in by animal welfare organizations as a percentage of total intake.

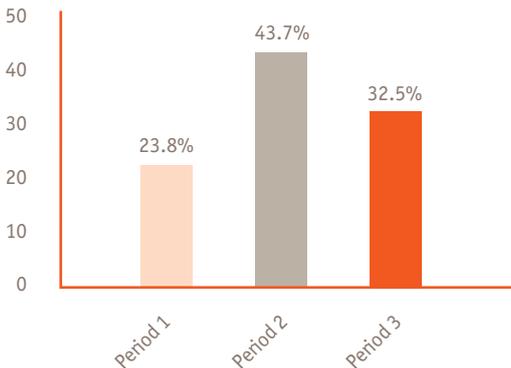
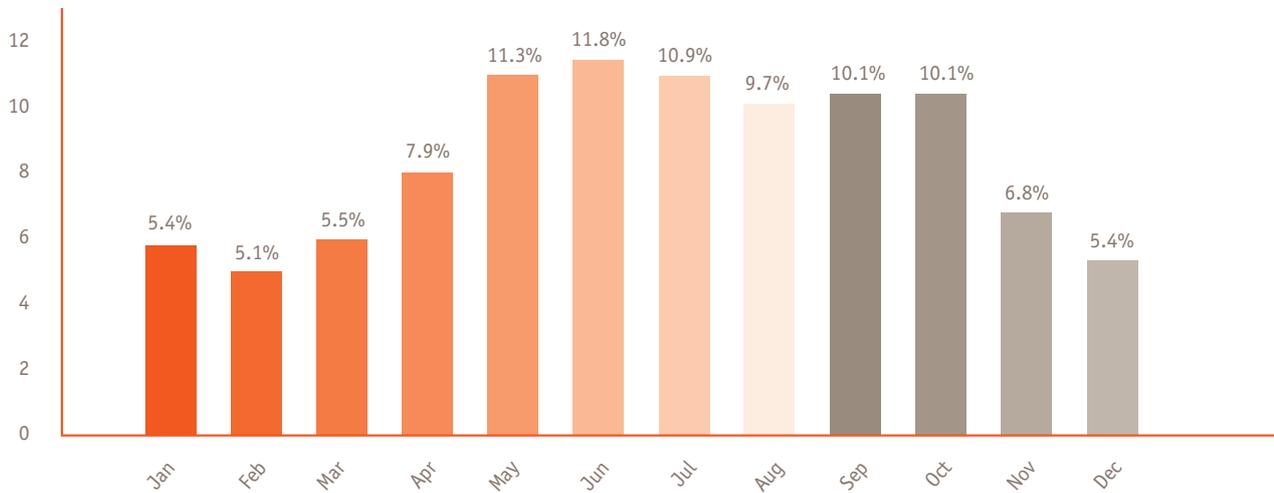


Figure 16 Breakdown month-by-month of the number of cats taken in by welfare organizations as a percentage of total intake.



Our interpretation:

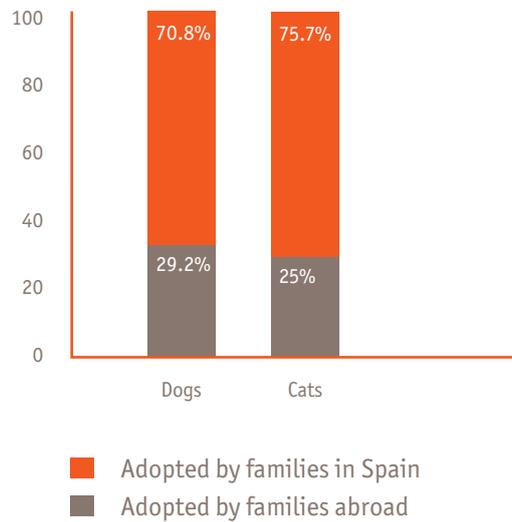
- Contrary to the popular belief in Spain that dogs in particular are abandoned mainly before summer holidays, animals are actually abandoned all year round. To understand the slight increase in abandonment and loss in the middle months of the year, it is necessary to look at dogs and cats separately.
- The number of dogs taken in by shelters and welfare organizations is spread very evenly over the whole year, but the number of cats is much higher in the second four-month period. This can be explained by the fact that for cats breeding is seasonal, and the birth of unwanted litters is one of the main reasons for pet abandonment. Studies indicate that most litters of kittens are unwanted by their owners³. These data underline the importance of sterilisation in keeping pets from being abandoned.

Sterilisation is a fundamental strategy in keeping pets from being abandoned.

What happens to cats and dogs taken in by animal shelters?

- Key facts and figures:
 - As indicated above, 18.2% of all the animals taken in by shelters are returned to their owners (Figure 4).
 - 42.7% are adopted and 15.6% remain at the shelter (Figure 4).
 - 8.5% of animals taken in by shelters die or are put down for medical reasons, and a further 0.9% are put down for non-medical reasons (Figure 4).
- What happens to dogs?
 - As indicated above, 25% of dogs are returned to their owners (Figure 6).
 - 43% are adopted (Figure 6), 70.8% of them by families in Spain and 29.2% by families abroad (Figure 17).
 - 16.5% remain in shelters awaiting adoption, 5.4% die or are put down for medical reasons and 1% are put down for non-medical reasons (Figure 6).
- What happens to cats?
 - As indicated above, 3.3% of cats are returned to their owners (Figure 8).
 - 41.8% are adopted, 75% of them by families in Spain and 25% by families abroad (Figure 17).
 - 3.5% remain in shelters, 13.5% die or are put down for medical reasons and 0.7% are put down for non-medical reasons (Figure 8).

Figure 17 Final outcomes for adoptions of cats and dogs at shelters and welfare organizations in Spain.



Our interpretation:

- Promoting adoption is one of the most effective basic strategies for reducing the number of animals abandoned in the short and medium term.
- Some of the cats and dogs taken in by shelters are adopted by families abroad. This reveals that there is a shortfall of pet adoptions in Spain: not only are there fewer adoptions than animals abandoned but part of those adoptions are made abroad.
- Pets which are not adopted are destined to spend the rest of their lives in a shelter or, in many cases, to be put down.

The data for 2018 confirm the upward trend in the proportion of dogs recovered by their owners, but show a slight drop in the proportion of adoptions (Figure 18a).

The increasing number of dogs left in shelters is a particular cause for concern. If this trend is maintained, the problem of overcrowding already suffered by many shelters and animal welfare organizations in Spain could become still worse in the medium and long term (Figure 18a).

The small proportion of cats recovered by their owners, which has failed to rise in recent years, is a particular cause for concern, as is the high proportion of cats put down (Figure 18b).

Figure 18a Trend in the proportions of dogs which are recovered by their owners or adopted, which die or are put down and which remain at shelters.

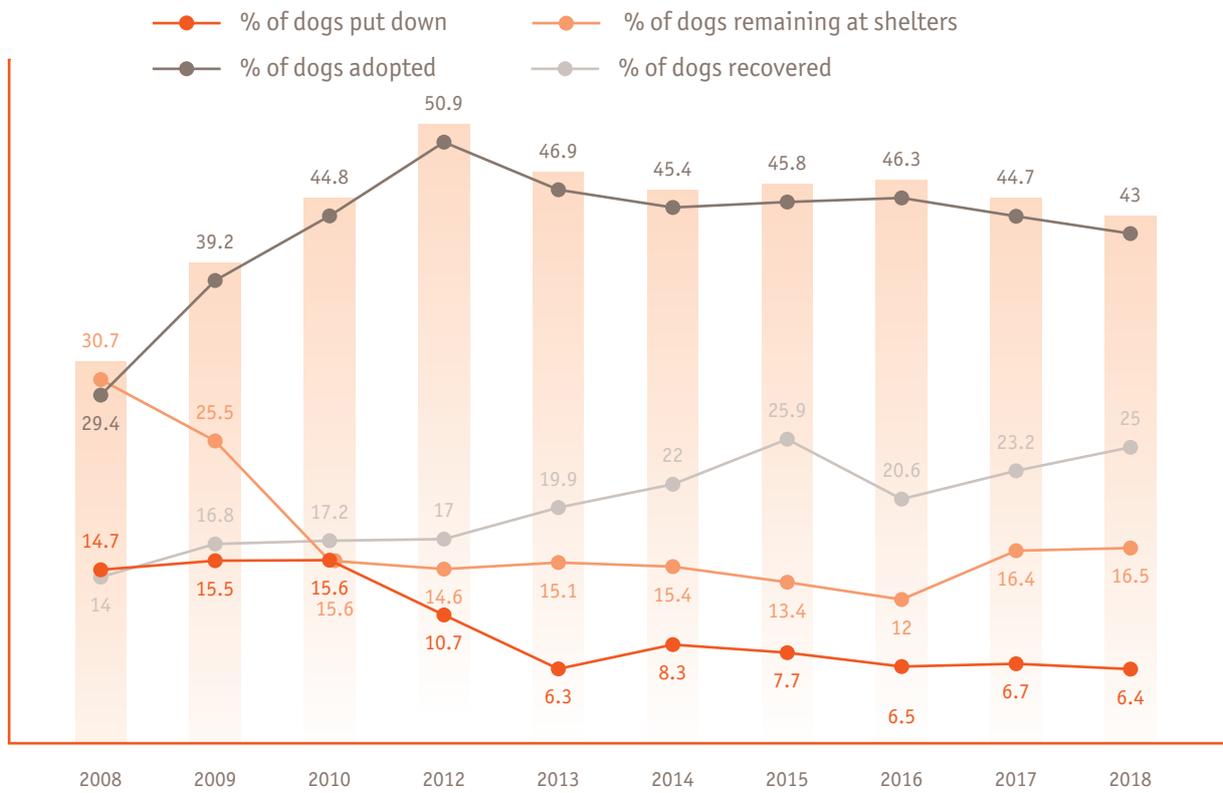
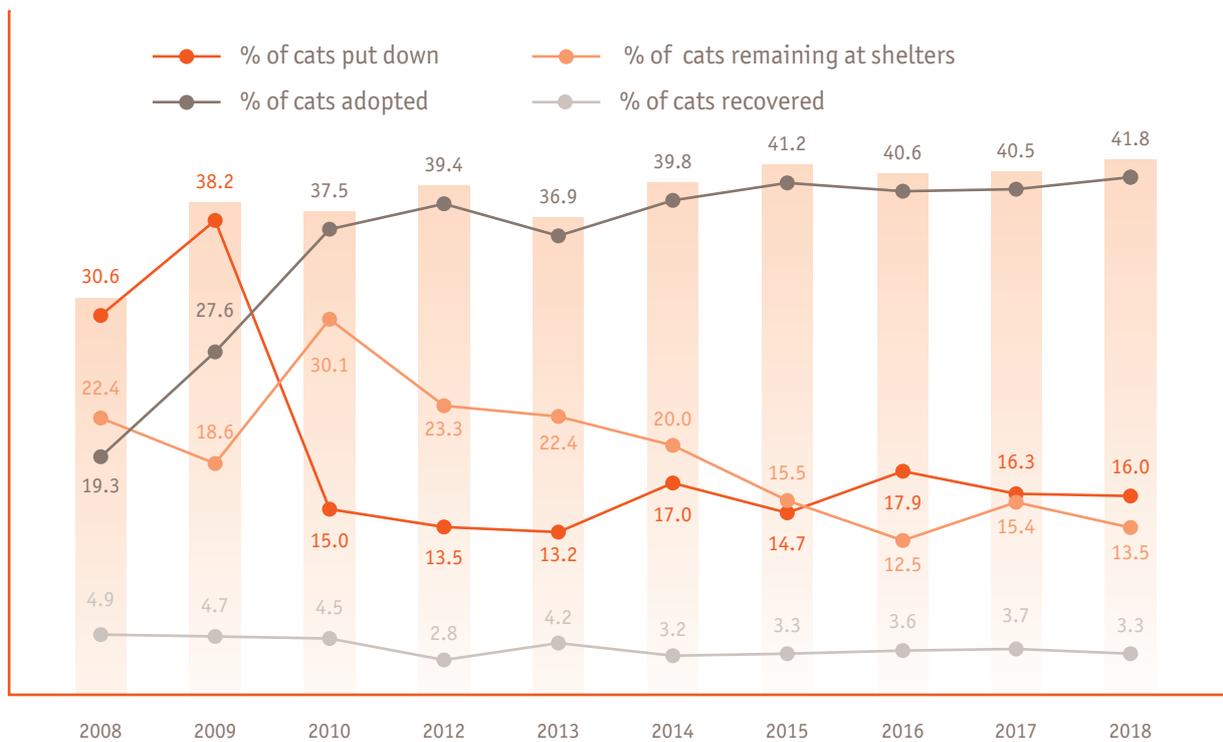


Figure 18b Trend in the proportions of cats which are recovered by their owners or adopted, which die or are put down and which remain at shelters.



Adoption is fundamental in reducing the number of abandoned cats and dogs.

What types of animal are abandoned?

- Key facts and figures:
 - 49.1% of the dogs taken in by shelters and welfare organizations are medium-sized, 27% are large and 23.9% are small. Overall, 52.5% of all the dogs in Spain are small, 29.5% are medium-sized and 18% are large. This means that far fewer small dogs and more medium and large sized dogs than might statistically be expected are taken in by shelters (Figure 19).
 - 62.2% of the dogs taken in by shelters and welfare organizations are classed as adults, 24.5% as puppies and 13.3% as seniors. Overall, 70.8% of the dogs in Spain are adults, 5.8% are puppies and 23.4% are seniors. Thus, welfare organizations take in far more puppies than might statistically be expected but fewer adults and seniors (Figure 20a).
 - 49.3% of the cats taken in by shelters are adults, 40.5% are kittens and 10.2% are classed as elderly or senior. Overall, 70.2% of the cats in Spain are adults, 9.8% are kittens and 20% are seniors. Thus, welfare organizations take in far more kittens than might statistically be expected but fewer adults and seniors (Figure 20b).

Figure 19 Size of dogs taken in by animal shelters.

The proportions of small, medium-sized and large dogs taken in by shelters are shown in grey. The proportions of dogs of each size in the general canine population are shown in orange*.

* Source: Affinity Pet Care (2017).

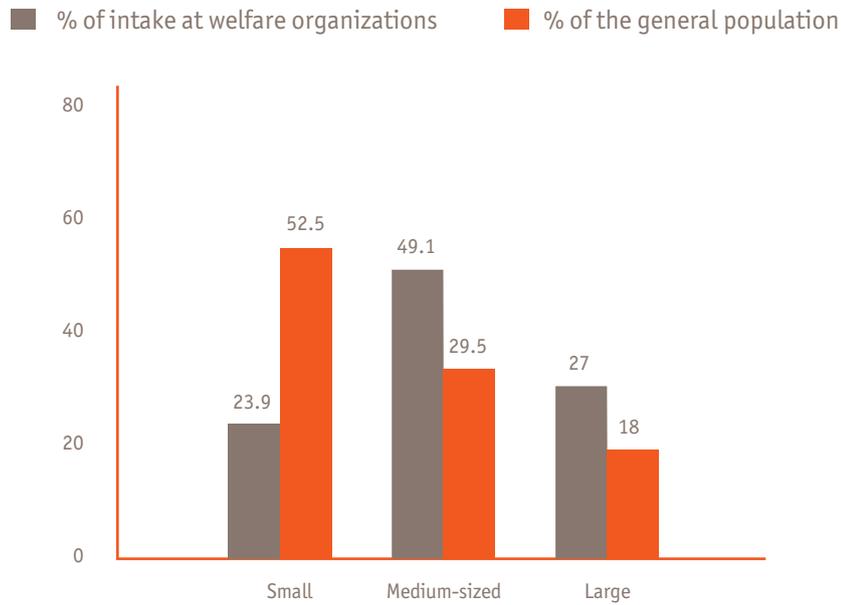


Figure 20a Age-range of dogs taken in by shelters and welfare organizations.

The proportions of dogs in each age bracket taken in by shelters are shown in grey. The proportion of the general dog population accounted for by each age bracket is shown in orange*.

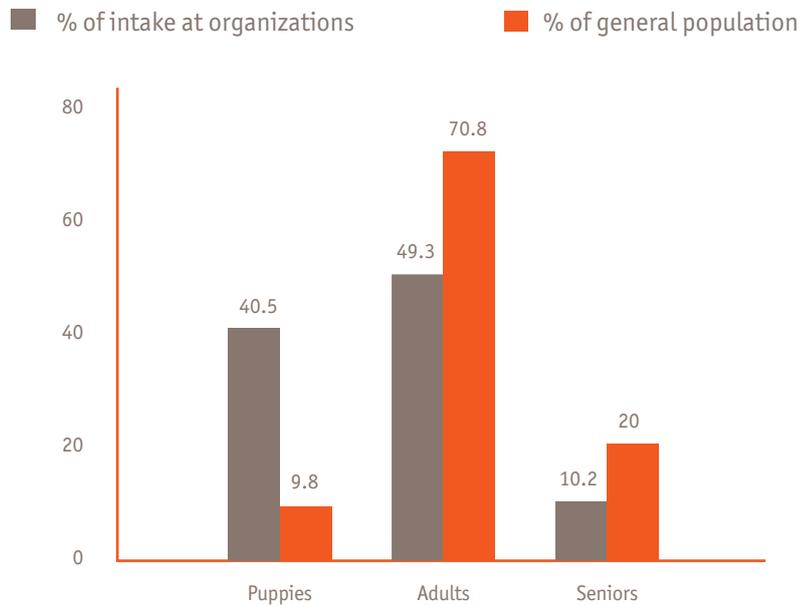
* Source: Affinity Pet Care (2017).



Figure 20b Age-range of cats taken in by shelters and welfare organizations.

The proportions of cats in each age bracket taken in by shelters are shown in grey. The proportion of the general cat population accounted for by each age bracket is shown in orange*.

* Source: Affinity Pet Care (2017).



Our interpretation:

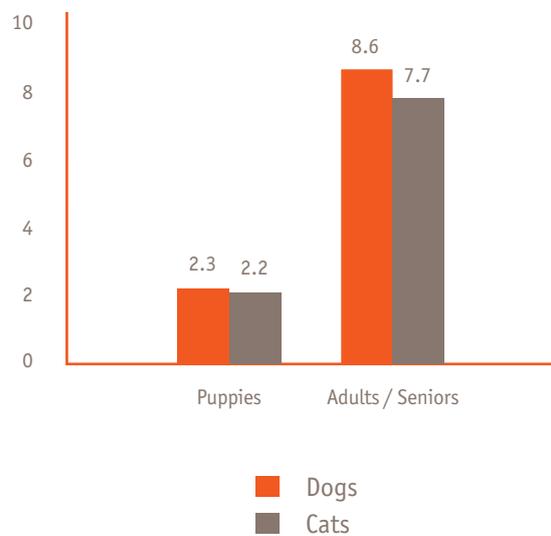
- Abandonment is not a problem restricted to particular age groups or sizes but affects cats and dogs of all types.
- The proportion of medium-sized and large dogs taken in by shelters exceeds the proportion of the general dog population for which they account. This suggests that small dogs may be abandoned and lost less often than larger ones. As shown below, behavioural problems seem to be one of the main reasons for abandoning pets, and the impact of such problems is usually greater in larger dogs. In the case of lost dogs, a size bias may be introduced by factors such as walking time and, above all, the tendency to let dogs run loose.
- 40.5% of the cats and 24.5% of the dogs taken in by shelters are puppies. In other words, the number of puppies taken in by shelters and welfare organizations is four times greater than the proportion of the general dog and cat populations for which they account. A large proportion of these animals originate from unwanted litters. It is important for all owners to effectively control the breeding of their dogs and cats to prevent such litters, which are the main factor responsible for the current overpopulation of pets.

The dogs and cats taken in by shelters belong to all types and age groups.

Is it true that puppies are more likely to be adopted?

- Key facts and figures:
 - Puppies spend far less time in shelters than older cats and dogs (Figure 21).

Figure 21 Average stay in shelters of animals by age brackets (months).



Our interpretation:

- The less time spent by juveniles at shelters can be largely explained by the fact that many adopters find younger animals more appealing.
- The mistaken idea persists that adult animals will not be able to integrate into new families, or can no longer be effectively trained. It is therefore important to set up information campaigns for adopters informing them of the ease and even the advantages that taking in an adult dog or cat can entail. A scientific study conducted in 2017 as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Anthrozoology of the Chair Affinity Foundation Animals and Health at the Autonomous University of Barcelona suggests that many people would adopt older animals if they were given aid or incentives in caring for them⁴.

Why do some people abandon their pets?

- Key facts and figures:
 - 63.4% of the animals taken in by shelters were either picked up by the shelter itself or brought in by the police (in cases of abuse or animal hoarding). 27.5% are brought in by private individuals who have found them, and only 9.1% are taken directly to shelters by the person abandoning them (Figure 22).
 - The top five reasons given by owners who hand over their pets to shelters are unwanted litters (15.3%), the end of the hunting season (12.6%), the behaviour of the animal (10.8%), financial factors (10.7%) and loss of interest in the animal (9.8%) (Figure 23).

Figure 22 Origin of animals taken in by shelters.

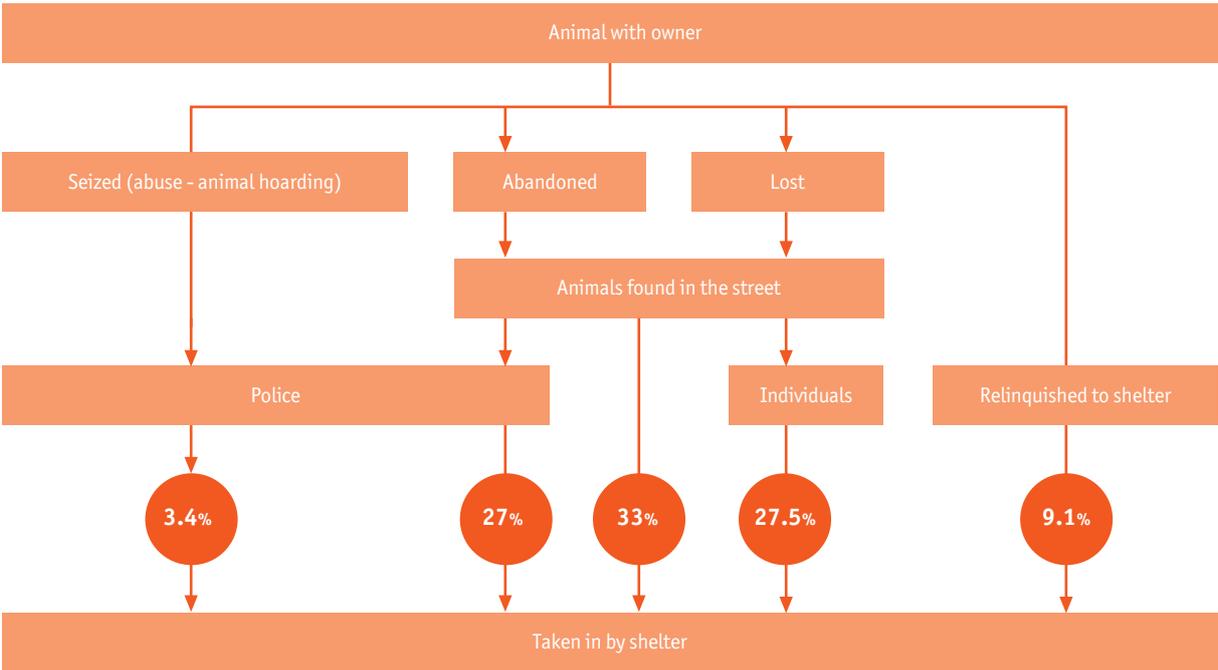
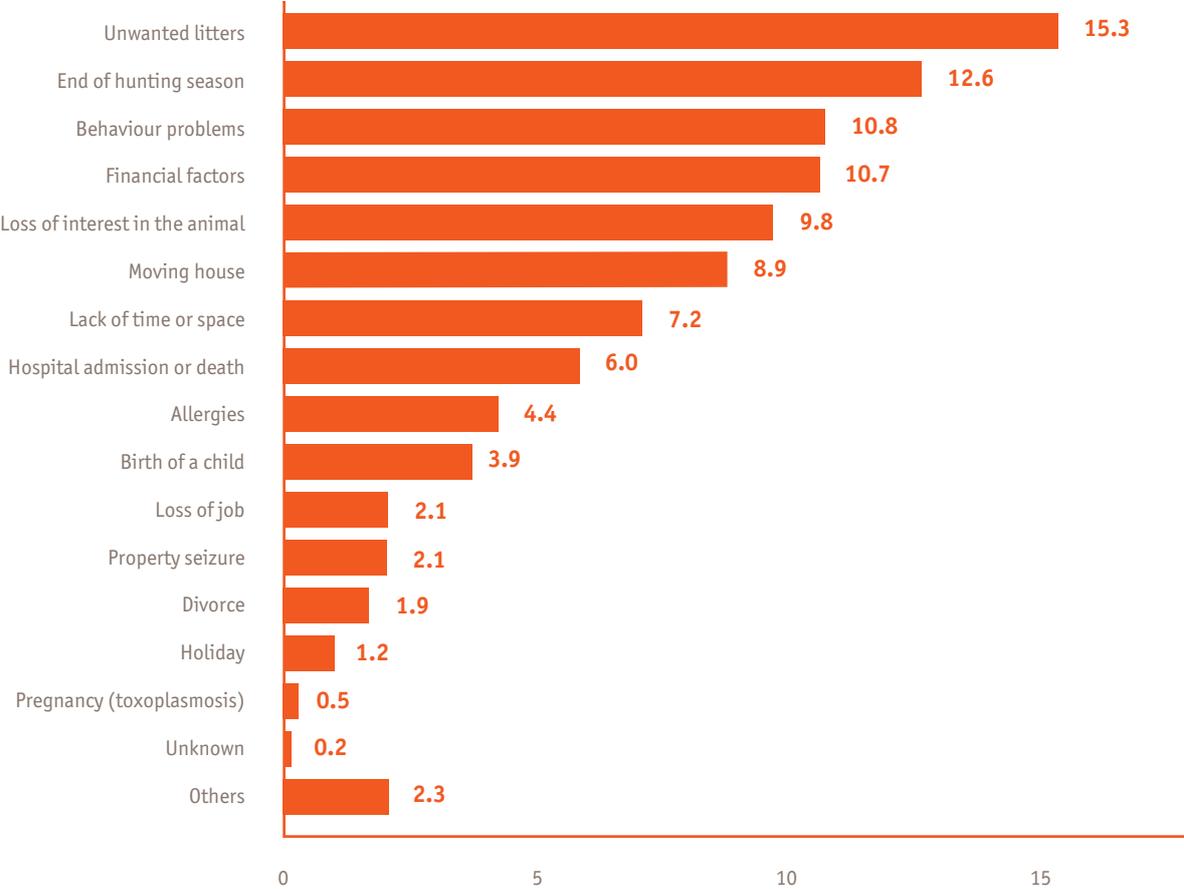


Figure 23 Reasons for abandoning pets.



Our interpretation:

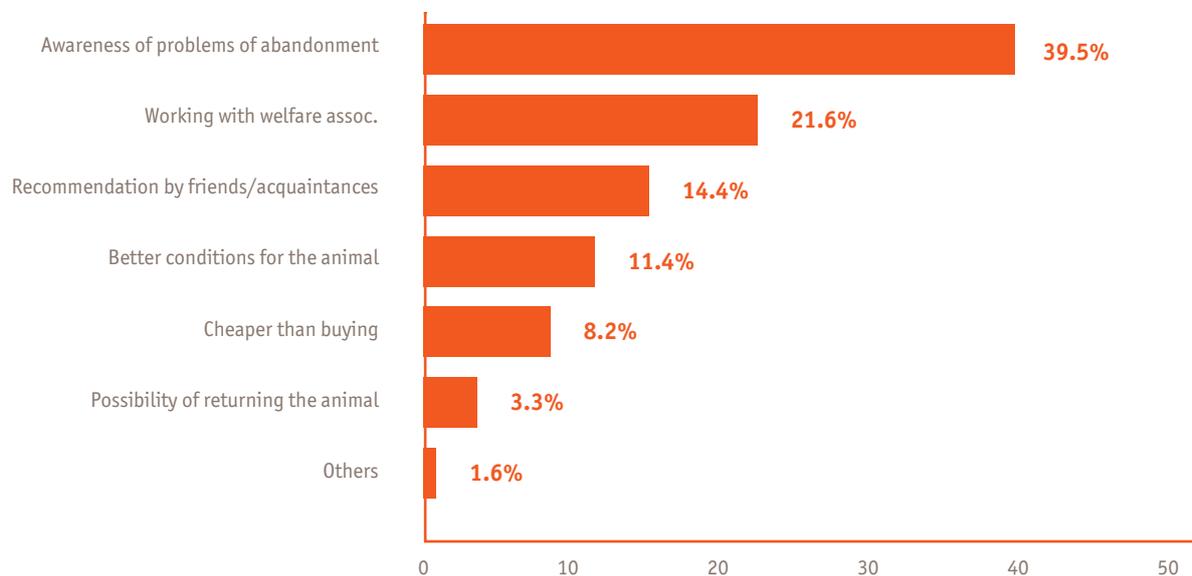
- Unwanted litters are the top reason given for abandoning animals again this year. This is reflected in the high proportion of puppies taken in by shelters and welfare organizations (Figures 20a and 20b).
This again highlights the importance of sterilising pets as one of the best strategies for reducing the number of animals abandoned.
- Again this year, the animal welfare organizations that took part in the study highlighted the end of the hunting season as a significant reason for abandonment.
- As shown in the studies conducted in 2016 and 2017, financial factors and behavioural problems are also frequent causes of abandonment of pets.
- It is important to stress that the information available on the reasons for abandonment comes mostly from people who personally take their pets to a shelter. However, as indicated, most of the animals taken in by shelters are found on the street or brought in by persons other than their owners. This means that the specific reasons for the abandonment of many pets in Spain are not yet known.

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

- Key facts and figures:

- The top three reasons given for adoption are awareness of the problem of abandonment (39.5%), a desire to help animal welfare organizations (21.6%) and recommendations by friends or acquaintances (14.4%) (Figure 24).

Figure 24 Reasons given for adopting a pet.



Our interpretation:

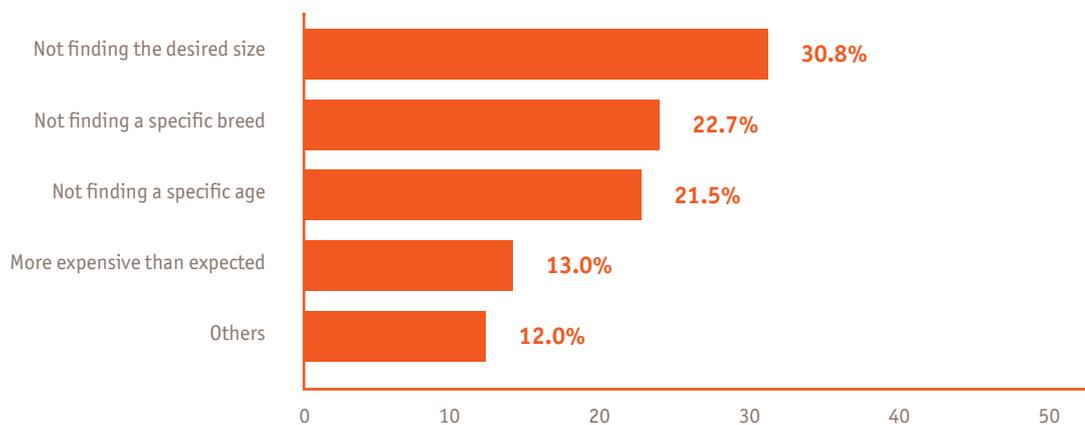
- These results differ only very slightly from those of the studies conducted in the previous three years.
- Adoption is a win-win option for acquiring a pet: it benefits the family, the animal welfare organization and, of course, the dog or cat itself.
- By adopting an animal many people not only incorporate a new family member but also support a major social cause: defending animal welfare.

Adoption must be encouraged as a clear option for bringing a pet into a family.

Why do some people interested in adopting a pet eventually not do so?

- Key facts and figures:
 - 27.2% of people who initially express an interest in adopting a dog or cat eventually decide not to do so.
 - The top three reasons for not following through on adoptions are failure to find an animal of the desired size (30.8%), breed (22.7%) or age (21.5%) (Figure 25).
 - 13% of potential adopters state that they drop out because the cost of adoption is higher than they expected (Figure 25).

Figure 25 Reasons why people initially interested in adopting a pet eventually fail to do so.



Our interpretation:

- For many people the general appearance and specifically the breed of dogs and cats continue to be important factors in deciding whether to adopt one. However, breeding certainly does not guarantee good behaviour. The decision to adopt a pet must be the result of an in-depth reflection on what impact the pet will have on the family's quality-of-life. In this regard, a study by the Affinity Foundation conducted in Spain in 2015 reveals that the needs of the animal and the lifestyle of the owner are only taken into account when choosing a pet in 21% of cases.
- Approximately one out of eight potential adopters believes that adopting is expensive. However, the average cost of adoption in Spain is actually low, especially when one takes into account how much it costs the shelter to care for animals responsibly (e.g. feeding them while they are at the shelter, providing veterinary care, properly identifying them, etc.).
- Overall, these findings indicate a need for efforts to educate people about the benefits of pet adoption. It is also important to publicise the major financial cost for shelters of caring for homeless animals and remind people that the hard work done day by day by animal welfare organizations and shelters is largely based on disinterested collaboration by members and volunteers.
- All parties directly and indirectly involved in animal welfare, including welfare organizations, vets and the public administration, should take part in these educational efforts.

Why do some adopters return pets to shelters?

- Key facts and figures:
 - 7.6% of the adoptions carried out in 2018 failed.
 - The main reason given for returning a pet to a shelter after adopting it is the behaviour of the animal (Figure 26).
 - A considerable proportion of returns take place within one month after adoption, and most of them within three months (Figure 27).

Figure 26 Reasons for failure of adoption.

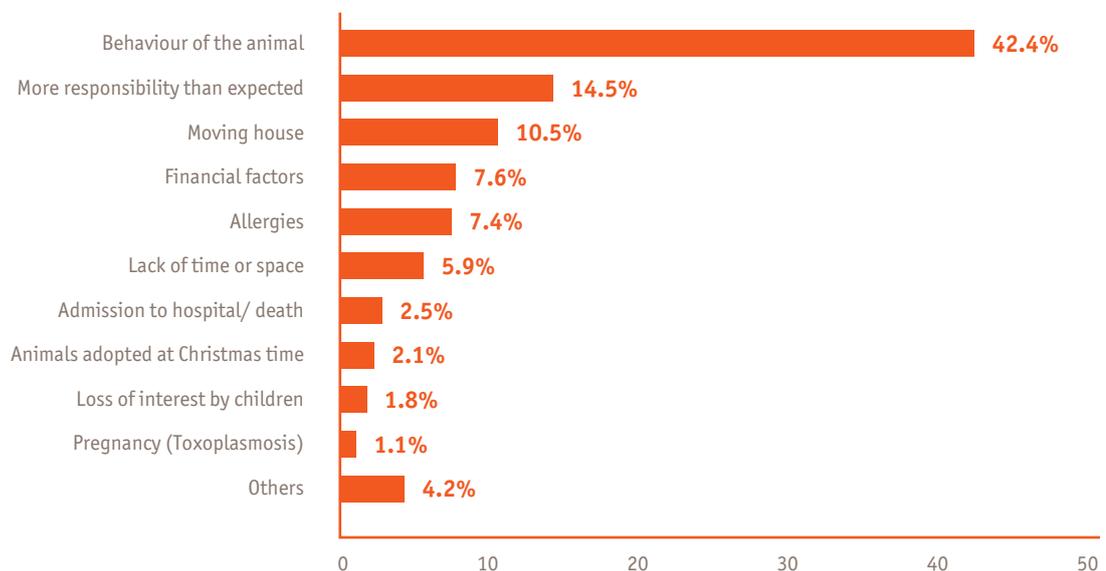
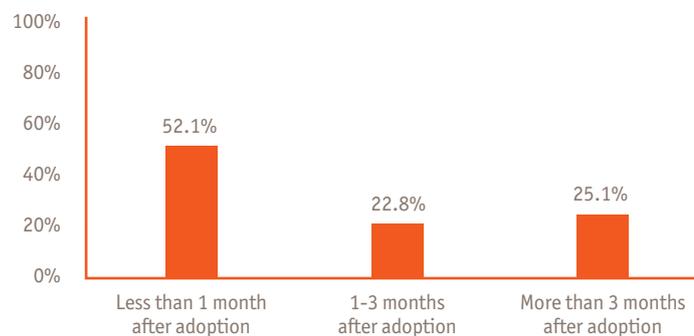


Figure 27 Breakdown of animals returned to shelters by time as from adoption.



Our interpretation:

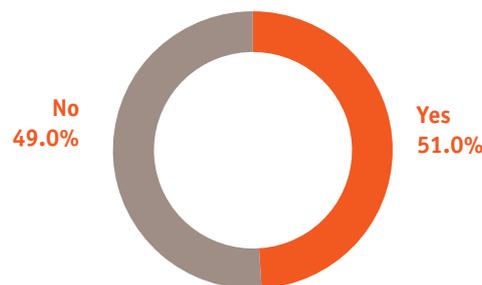
- Adopters of dogs and cats should be provided with information to help the pet adapt to its new environment. As indicated above, this includes reminding them that many behavioural problems can be effectively prevented.

What role do animal welfare organizations play in caring for stray and feral cats?

Stray and feral cats tend to form more or less large groups known as colonies. Many are managed by local councils and animal welfare organizations to ensure that the animals are well cared for. Support for colonies includes regular health checks, feeding and sterilisation to prevent overpopulation problems.

- Key facts and figures:
 - 51% of the organizations that responded to our survey regularly manage cat colonies (Figure 28). Between them they care for 4518 colonies with a total of 31,969 cats.
 - It is important to point out that the figures given here on colonies refer exclusively to those cared for by the 122 organizations that provided information on this issue. The actual number of cat colonies handled by animal welfare organizations in Spain is much higher.
 - 13.5% of the cats taken in by shelters and welfare organizations in 2018 were relocated to controlled cat colonies (Figure 8).

Figure 28 Proportion of animal welfare organizations that regularly manage cat colonies.



Our interpretation:

- Managing cat colonies is one of the most important tasks handled by animal welfare organizations, though it is not always recognised as such. A study conducted in Barcelona by the Chair Affinity Foundation Animals and Health at the Autonomous University of Barcelona indicates that most people are unaware that monitored cat colonies exist, but react favourably to the idea⁵. This finding is particularly interesting in view of the fact that 768 monitored cat colonies were counted in Barcelona in 2018, containing a total of 9099 cats.
- 2017 saw a major increase in the proportion of abandoned or lost cats relocated in colonies from 6.5% in 2016 to 13.1%. The figures for 2018 show a further increase on 2017, albeit a smaller one.

Finally, it is important to stress that although they are controlled, cat colonies are open in structure and may be joined by cats not originating from the welfare organizations that manage them. These cats may be feral, i.e. cats which have never lived with human beings, or cats whose owners abandon them by taking them directly to a colony⁶.

In short, the total number of stray cats in Spain is unknown. Attempts will be made to determine it in future studies.

Main conclusions:

- Abandonment continues to be a major animal welfare problem in Spain. The numbers of animals taken in by shelters in 2018 are comparable to those recorded in the studies conducted in 2016 and 2017. This seems to confirm that the slight downward trend observed in recent years has stalled somewhat.
- Sterilisation, proper identification and adoption are the three main strategies for preventing or at least minimising the impact of pet abandonment. Sterilisation and identification form part of a broader concept of responsible ownership which extends to the duties and responsibilities of all pet owners. Thus, the engagement of the public is essential in combating the problem of pet abandonment, because the effective application of all three of these strategies (which have shown themselves to be essential in combating the problem of abandonment) depends on it.

The importance of educating the public on matters of responsible pet care must be stressed as an essential factor in preventing abandonment in the medium and long term.

- Over and above mere awareness of the need to adopt, the public should be educated concerning the benefits and also the duties that come with adopting a pet, and how doing so can influence their lifestyles.

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