

# **PUPPY TRADE IN EUROPE**

**Research on the impact of illegal businesses  
on the market, on consumers, on the one-health concept  
and on animal welfare**

**FOUR PAWS International**

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More Humanity towards Animals



## SUMMARY

The puppy trade business (with mostly breed puppies) grew more professional and more industrial in the last 5 years. The profit margin all through the trade chain and the little to none existent law enforcement seems to make it an easy gamble with a lot of wins. They drug the puppies and drive with them through the whole of Europe. This industrial scale of puppy trade needs to be targeted. Stronger law enforcement needs to be put in place to control known traders and their veterinarians.

In the frame of its 2013 Puppy Trade Campaign, FOUR PAWS has mandated an investigator to lead a field investigation to identify puppy trade networks in Europe. The goal was to identify the biggest puppy traders likely to be illegal traders using harmful or illegal practices and breaching current puppy trade, transport and animal welfare legislation. Out of a range of identified targets, several puppy traders were chosen to be investigated more in detail.

During its 8 month inquiry, the investigator visited around 50 places. This permits to shed light on how puppy trade businesses are operating today. The interviews, collected documents and detailed observation led to identify around 30 international trade links that appear to be operational.

In parallel to this investigation, FOUR PAWS has lead several actions against illegal puppy trade. Among other, the organisation has created a platform ([www.stoppuppytraders.org](http://www.stoppuppytraders.org)) to gather testimonies of people who bought a puppy that was sold through illegal practices, got seriously ill or died. Moreover, a collaboration with several two online websites of classified adds in Germany and Austria has contributed to raising consumer awareness on illegal puppy trade.

The identified practices and collected information might contribute to understand how the puppy trade market could be controlled in a better way.

This summary report will present the results of FOUR PAWS's investigation and actions on the puppy trade market. It will give an overview on the European Puppy Market and in more detail, it will permit to understand the puppy production and distribution process, and all the welfare, and health consequences arising from it.

## STRUCTURE

<b>I. MARKET DISTORTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Preliminary notice: the Field Investigation approach .....	4
Puppy Trade Networks in Europe .....	4
Puppy Production in Europe.....	5
Production Costs.....	5
1 <sup>st</sup> part of the network: Retailers in Hungary and Slovakia .....	7
2 <sup>nd</sup> part of the network: distribution.....	9
<b>II. ANIMAL HEALTH .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Statistics.....	11
Transport.....	11
Online Trade .....	11
Rabies risk .....	11
<b>III. CONSUMER PROTECTION .....</b>	<b>13</b>
FOUR PAWS' collaboration with Ebay .....	13
“Online Platform Test – Consumer’s Behaviour Online”, collaboration with willhaben.at .....	13
The FOUR PAWS awareness website.....	14
Case Studies – Consumer complaints.....	16
<b>IV. CASE STUDIES .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Luxembourg.....	18
Austria .....	18
<b>V. THE ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERN .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>VI. RESULT AND REQUEST .....</b>	<b>20</b>

## I. MARKET DISTORTION

### *Preliminary notice: the Field Investigation approach*

The following points were identified as main objectives of the investigation:

- Identify main international networks of illegal puppy trade
- Provide information about puppy trade businesses, their locations, involved contacts and the techniques and methods used.
- Identify most appropriate borders for controls
- Provide written, photo- and video documentation

A research plan has been done to identify key leads of the puppy trade market.

- Considering the first results of the FOUR PAWS campaign, **Hungary** and **Slovakia** appeared to be the **main and key dog breeders in Europe**.
- Following the assessment of some puppy traders, it appeared also that **the Netherlands** could be a “**transit country**“ because of its weak puppy trade legislation.

The overall goal in Hungary and Slovakia was to understand how the puppy market is organized today and to identify **operating production networks**. Information was gathered through business talks with a wide range of Hungarian and Slovakian traders.

The field investigation was done in two steps.

- a) **production networks (Hungary and Slovakia**, traders collecting from breeders to export to Western Europe)
- b) **distribution networks (The Netherlands and Romania<sup>1</sup>** as transit countries)

### *Puppy Trade Networks in Europe*

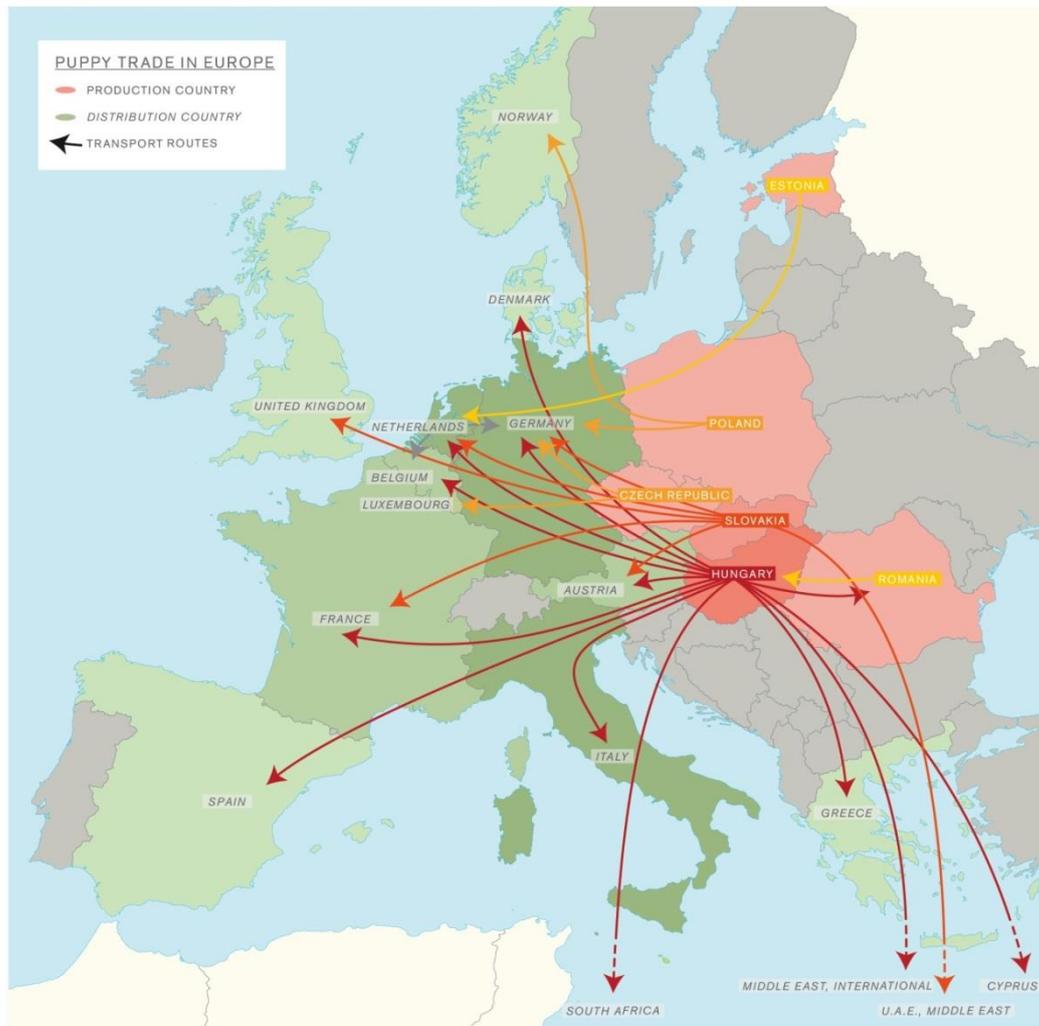
The map shows an overview of the puppy trade networks discovered in Europe. The overall information creates a picture of the trade network that divides **countries with high market values, countries attractive for distribution, and production countries**, where production costs are very low.

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<sup>1</sup> A research was also done in pet shops in Romania, and leads to a trader who gave information about the distribution link between Hungary, Romania and Italy.

The **green marked countries** are marked as **distribution countries**, so countries with high market values for puppies.

The **red marked countries** are the **biggest Puppy producers of Europe** (puppy mills). In these countries, there is a large number of suspicious traders that operate with large networks of puppy breeders. They are able to deliver quantities of more than twenty puppies, wherever and however it is desired.



### *Puppy Production in Europe*

#### **Production Costs**

**Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia** can be described as key puppy production countries. In these countries, **dogs are sold at a low price**, including **identification documents** and **vaccination** which are mostly faked or none existing at all. Such low prices could never be reached by serious breeders in a Country where the breeding, transport and health and

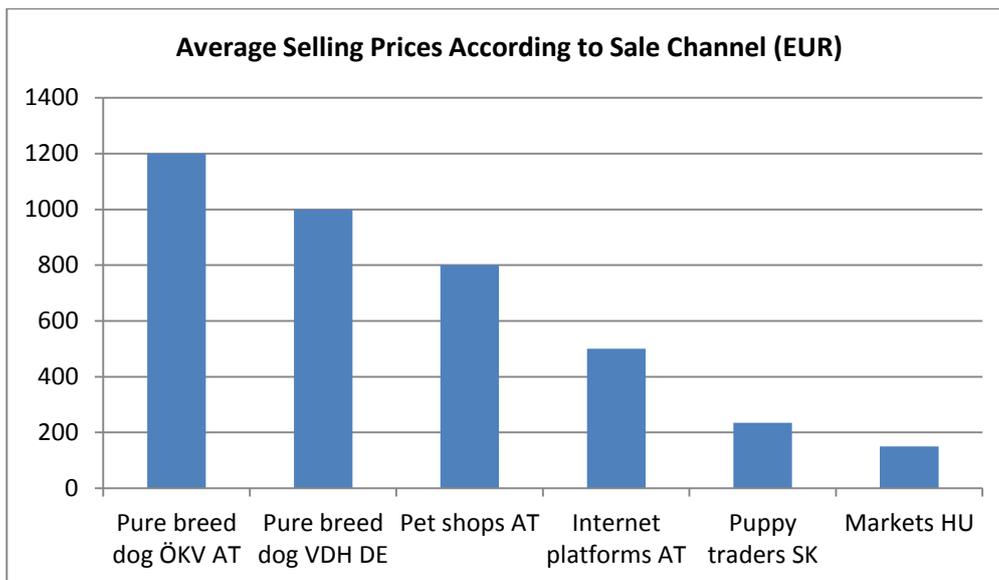
welfare legislation is properly enforced. In particular, **low enforcement of transport rules** allows the cheap prices.

### *Average prices on different selling channels<sup>2</sup>*

FOUR PAWS has inquired at the national kennel clubs in Austria<sup>3</sup> and Germany<sup>4</sup> for an **exact listing of breeding costs** and resulting puppy selling prices of their members.

Consumers have a wide range of selling channels where they can buy a puppy. The main channels are serious accredited **dog breeders, pet shops** and the booming **internet platforms**. In some cases consumers also choose to take a trip across the East European borders where they can easily acquire pure bred puppies on **animal markets, e.g. in Hungary**.

**The discrepancy among the prices in different selling channels is obvious.** Apart from that the FOUR PAWS campaign teams have researched and visited pet shops in Germany and Austria as well as puppy traders and animal markets in **Slovakia, Poland** and **Hungary**. As a result, the chart below **reflects that cheap prices** are contributing to a market distortion among the EU Member States based on **consumers' price sensitivity** as far as puppy trade is concerned.



In Eastern countries puppy mills, **low costs is the motto of the production**. Every breed is available. The price can vary according to the number of puppies ordered.

<sup>2</sup> VDH Germany, ÖKV Austria, pet shops “Cats&Pets” Austria, willhaben.at analysis, field research HU & SK

<sup>3</sup> ÖKV – Österreichischer Kinologenverband

<sup>4</sup> VDH - Verband für das Deutsche Hundewesen

As an example, here below, is an **average calculation for a delivery to Germany (Hamburg) of “good quality” Hungarian Chihuahua puppies** (excluding the handling/ advertisement costs for the German trader, taxes, etc)<sup>5</sup>. This table shows very clearly the high profits for the illegal traders, and the resulting market distortion.

Position	Costs per dog	Transport of 20 dogs	Transport of 260 dogs
Chihuahua	150€	3.000€	39.000
10% Commission	15€	300€	3.900
Passport and Chip	20€	200€	2.600
Veterinarian Charge	1,2€	24€	312€
<b>Total Price in Hungary</b>	<b>186,20€</b>	<b>3.724€</b>	<b>48.412€</b>
Transport for 20 dogs from Hungary to Hamburg (Germany)	50€	1.000€	2.500
Average sales price in Germany	1.000€	20.000€	260.000
<b>Profit for trader in Germany</b>	<b>763,80€</b>	<b>15.276€</b>	<b>209.088€</b>

During **summer season**, prices are **lower**, towards **Christmas** they **raise**.

20 - 25 dogs is the minimum amount to transport to Germany, under that amount it wouldn't be worth doing the trip.

### 1<sup>st</sup> part of the network: Retailers in Hungary and Slovakia

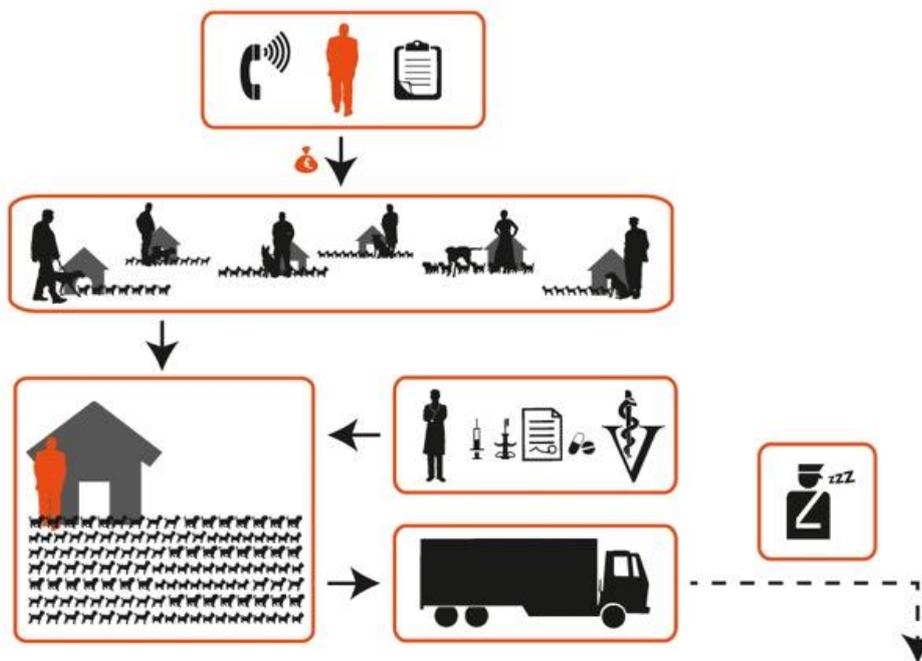
As most focused on traders in production countries, three retailers have been identified as **sourcing agents for traders** in countries like **Italy**, **Germany** or the **Netherlands**. They drive around to collect dogs from their breeders and kennel networks and either transport them right away or gather them in a secret collecting point facility.

These operators are quite well known, among animal welfare organisations as well as dog traders. They pretend to respect the legislation, but also say that they have never been controlled by public authorities. The owner of one of this three trade companies is even a police officer.

<sup>5</sup> Price offer list „Hungarian Pets“ puppy trader and transporter

The investigation permits also to identify one big Hungarian retailer working with an Italian partner known to be **involved in the Illegal Puppy Trade** and to have strong links with the mafia. It's well-known that this Italian dog trader is part of the Italian organised crime in Napoli.

The **operating business** can be described as schematized here below.



1) The **retailer** has a **set of breeders** with whom he is working since decades. Sometimes, the retailer is also breeding few dogs on its own. Once they have an order, they **ask the breeders to meet in a non-specified place to gather the puppies**.

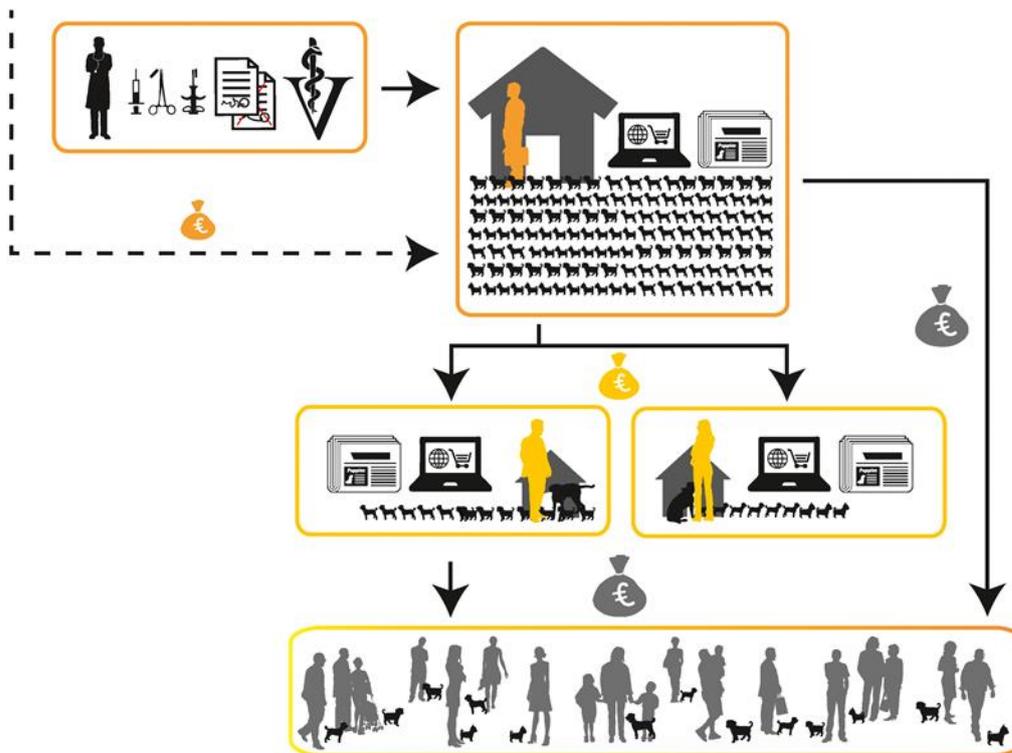
2) There they **come with their veterinarian** to check all the dogs and choose those good for selling and transport (as they said, “only the best and healthy, well-looking puppies”). These puppies get an (mostly faked) **EU-Passport** and a **Microchip** on the spot. The first owner appearing in the Hungarian EU-Passport would be either them or the buyer.

3) Then, the puppies are **loaded straight in to the truck** where the driver is waiting to start the journey in to the destination country. **No quarantine** is done, but retailers told us that they take care that the puppies in the car can not lick each other.

The breeders where the puppies come from are **all named on a list the driver is taking with him** on the transport. Sometimes, the **ministry of agriculture** is **informed in advance of how many dogs of which breed will be transported**. The transport is sometimes legal, sometimes illegal.

4) The buyer pays the breeder and they get a commission on each dog (around 10%).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the network: distribution



The Distribution Network

### *Distribution from the Netherlands*

The second step of the investigation focused on distribution networks, where the **Netherlands** plays a key role as a “**transit country**” due to **weaker dog trade regulations** than in Germany or Belgium. The dogs come directly from Eastern European Traders to the Netherlands, where the buyer will **remove the Hungarian chip** and put a new one (Dutch) to sell them more easily.

The biggest Dutch dog trader has been investigated. He is a **prime example of how business should not be done**.

This trader is **getting dogs from Hungary once or twice in a fortnight** and is also **getting dogs from other places abroad**<sup>6</sup>. Then, the dogs are sold through a **website hosted in Belgium**. From former research it seems that this trader **took over the business from the Belgium website after they had to close their huge breeding facilities**. They are reluctant to show the backyard, where

<sup>6</sup> As a transporter with an Estonian number plate was seen unloading boxes (with most likely puppies) on his courtyard, he could be delivered from as far as Estonia

he keeps his own breeding kennel. He has got up to 60 dogs alone in one part of the backyard and is building more kennels. A lot of Dutch, Belgian and German customers and traders are visiting the trader throughout the whole week. It is assumed **they got problems with the authorities and had to close the kennel some years ago**. They are working with veterinarians to **renew the documents** and possibly to **remove and to replant the chips**.

This trader is especially well-known since a **TV show** exposed his business. Since then, the business is still on-going, but traders are more careful.

### *Distribution from Romania*

**Romania** is a **transit country** between **Hungary** and **Italy**. In the biggest Romanian pet shop chain, the client is told that the animals are delivered by "trusted suppliers/breeders" from all over the country. The reality is that **the dogs come from farms in Hungary**. The main middleman, a **veterinarian** from Baia Mare was **repeatedly enquired by the Italian police for animal traffic** and has **5 penal complaints in Italy**. He also admitted in an interview that **most of the dogs in the stores are seriously sick**.

In many cases, Romania is just a **link** from an **international route** that **ends in Italy**. The **documents facilitating the Italian market** are **obtained through Romania**.

The current president of the Canine Association of Maramures claims that **dog traffic in Italy and France is estimated at 43 million Euros**.

## II. ANIMAL HEALTH

The illegal puppy breed and trade create a lot of problems.

Born and transported in very bad conditions, thousands of puppies are not only **way too young** but also **seriously sick**. They suffer from **worms, parasites, inflammation** and even often from **distemper** or **parvovirus**. Medical help comes often too late. **The pups die painfully**. For the owners it is not only very **sad**, but also usually **very expensive**.

### *Statistics*

#### **Transport**

The Animal Transport Association noticed in its 2008 Report<sup>7</sup>, that an inquiry of the Italian Veterinarian Council on control of transport reveals that **only 15% of animals transported had valid documents**. Moreover, **52% of puppies controlled were found to be sick**. Among them, **34% were infected with endoparasites, 23% were infected with parvovirus, 17% had fungal infections** and **10% of them were carriers of distemper**.

These **health risk are increased by transport and promiscuity**. Indeed, according to veterinarians, when a large amount of healthy animals is brought together in the same location, there is a biological phenomenon called “microbisme” **making them all sick in the three following days**<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Online Trade**

A recent survey<sup>9</sup> on online trade from the UK kennel club found that **almost one in five puppies bought via social media or the internet die before they get six months old**. **12 percent** of puppies bought online or on social media end up with **serious health problems** that require expensive on-going veterinary treatment from a young age. In comparison, **94 percent of puppies bought direct from a breeder were reported as having good overall health**.

#### *Rabies risk*

Another issue is the risk of rabies. The vaccination for puppies can only be done in the age of 12 weeks and takes another three weeks to be effective. However, most puppies are sold under eight

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<sup>7</sup> ATA newspaper, 2008, Vol. 3, 4th Quarter, P. 14

<sup>8</sup> Pr. Dr. Guy QUEINNEC, Truc et astuces pour votre chien, Hachette, Paris : 2003

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/our-resources/kennel-club-campaigns/puppy-farming/puppy-awareness-week/>.



weeks and are therefore too young to be vaccinated effectively. This is illegal and can cause **death danger not only for the animals but also for humans**. Today rabies is eradicated in Western Europe, however, this danger can lead to the anew spread of rabies as it has been the case in Bulgaria recently<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, **several veterinarians have issued an alert about the risk of Eastern European puppies infected with rabies**, after two cases of the disease were discovered in the Netherlands.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article3901725.ece>



### III. CONSUMER PROTECTION

#### *FOUR PAWS' collaboration with Ebay*

FOUR PAWS Germany has started a collaboration with **ebay Kleinanzeigen**<sup>11</sup>, classified online ads in order to **raise more awareness to consumers** about illegal puppy trade. Since most of the irresponsibly bred and imported puppies are sold via online ads it is **crucial to build collaborations with internet platforms** and **find a solution that can confine this trade**. The first step in collaborating with **ebay Germany** was to introduce a **pop-up warning page** on the puppy ad section. This way **each consumer is being warned in a direct way** about the risks of buying a puppy from an irresponsible trader.

In addition a **link is indicated to the FOUR PAWS webpage where the consumer can access detailed information about illegal dog trade** and responsible dog acquisition.



#### *“Online Platform Test – Consumer’s Behaviour Online”<sup>12</sup>, collaboration with willhaben.at*

In September 2013, FOUR PAWS conducted an action in **collaboration with Austria’s biggest internet platform offering puppies, willhaben.at**.

The purpose of the action was on the one hand to **observe how many consumers are interested and ready to buy cheap dogs without any detailed information**. On the other hand **consumers were informed about the risks of buying puppies from irresponsible traders** and about responsible dog purchase.

<sup>11</sup> the German “Ebay classified ads”

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.vier-pfoten.at/news-press/pressearchiv/2013/vier-pfoten-und-willhaben.at-mit-gemeinsamer-aktion-gegen-illegalen-welpenhandel/>, 28.10.2013

The initiative involved posting **12 fake puppy ads** on the platform, which had **typical characteristics of irresponsible breeder ads**. The price offers ranged from 100-350 EUR. In one month the ads registered **14.600 clicks** and **530 consumers** replied to the ads showing interest in buying a puppy. The most demanded breeds turned out to be Huskies, followed by French Bulldogs, Mini-Maltesers and Mini-Chihuahuas. The Husky ad registered the most clicks, which can relate to its cheap price offer of 100 EUR. The initiative proved a strong price sensitivity of the online consumers as well as a lack of information and education of the consumer about responsible dog purchase.

### *The FOUR PAWS awareness website*

As part of its campaign against “Illegal Puppy Trade”, FOUR PAWS encourages consumers who are victims or witnesses of such a trade to **report their experiences**. As a result, FOUR PAWS received complaints regarding illegal puppy trade on a regular basis from affected consumers by phone, e-mail or by web-form. The complaints are submitted by **persons who witnessed dog sales in public spaces** or are **personally buyers of a sick puppy via pet shops, internet ads or dubious breeders**.

The reported cases are documented in order to **create an overview on the damages caused to the consumer by illegal puppy trade** in concrete examples. However, information such as the seller’s identity, a contract of purchase or an EU Pet-passports is often missing.

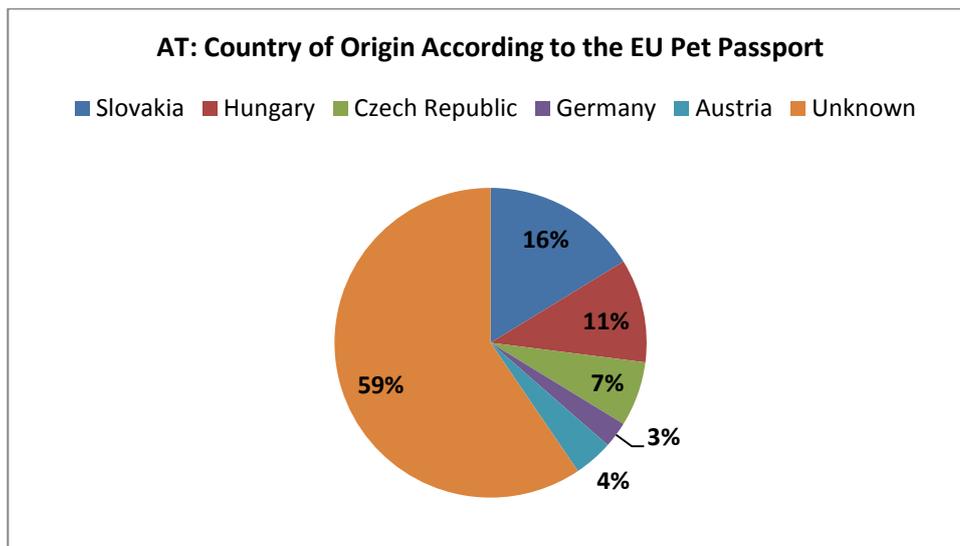


With the goal to obtain more evidence and transparency by legal cases, in summer 2013, FOUR PAWS has launched a landing page [www.stoppuppytraders.org](http://www.stoppuppytraders.org) in Austria and Germany as an online tool to inform consumers about responsible dog acquisition. Additionally, the landing page offers a reporting tool for consumers who were affected by unreliable dog breeders and traders.

The following table lists the results of the landing page:<sup>13</sup>

Country	Website visits	Registered Puppy Trade Reports	Cases of sickness & recovery	Cases of sickness resulting in death
Germany	4.705	68	16	8
Austria	3.444	74	13	7
Total	9.911	154	29	15

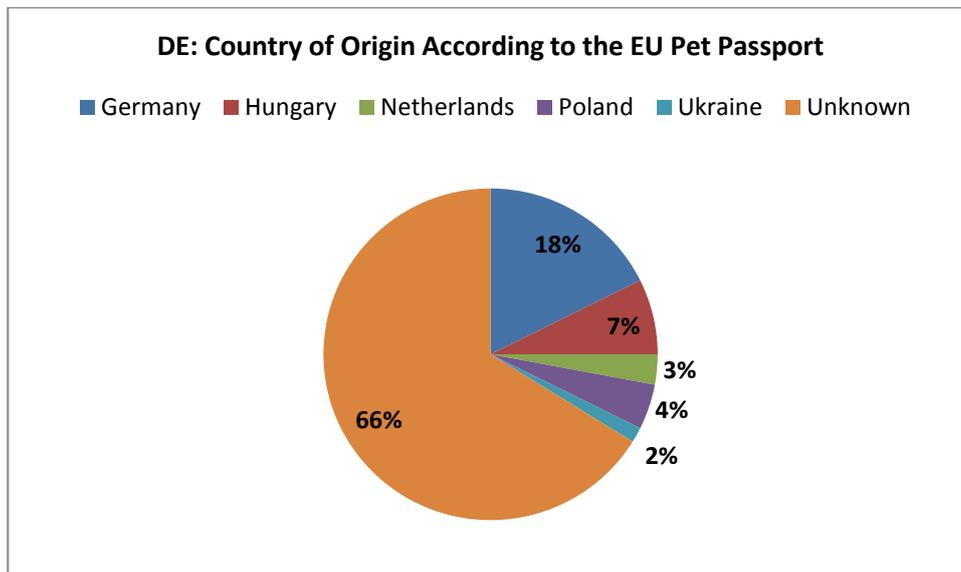
In Summer 2013, FOUR PAWS received **74 complaints** related to puppy trade in Austria and **68 complaints** from Germany.



From the 74 reported cases in Austria, **7 cases resulted in the death of the puppies** and **13 cases involved severe sickness** where after medical treatment the puppies finally survived. Sickneses reported were **mostly parvoviruses** as well as **worms** and other parasites **infections** and **malformations** or **diarrhea**.

<sup>13</sup> [www.stoppuppytraders.org](http://www.stoppuppytraders.org) analysis, August-November 2013

In 12 of the reported cases the puppies had **Slovakian EU Pet Passports**, **8 were from Hungary**, **5 from the Czech Republic** and only **2 from Germany** and **3 from Austria**. In the rest of 44 cases the puppy's origin is not mentioned.



From the **68 reported cases in Germany**, **8 cases resulted in the death** of the puppies and **16 cases involved severe** or slight sickness where after medical treatment the puppies survived and recovered.

In **12** of the reported cases the puppies had **German EU Pet Passports**, **5** were from **Hungary**, **2** from the **Netherlands**, **3** from **Poland** and **1** from the **Ukraine**. In the rest of 45 cases the puppy's origin is not mentioned.

### Case Studies – Consumer complaints

Following a few concrete examples should offer more insight into the reported cases. The examples listed below were chosen as representative cases of consumers who were damaged by illegal puppy traders and who's newly acquired puppies faced fatal consequences caused by severe health issues.

#### *Birgit R.*

December 2011: Birgit R. bought a mixed pinscher-pomeranian puppy from an internet ad on [www.tiere.at](http://www.tiere.at) for 200 EUR. The puppy was bought and picked up in the seller's apartment in the 15<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna. The puppy's tail was docked which is illegal according to the Austrian Animal Protection law and was imported from Slovakia. In the Slovakian EU pet passport the first 2 deworming procedures were noted as well as the vaccination against parvoviruses, signed and

stamped by a Slovakian veterinary. The puppy was also chipped. After two days the veterinary check proved the dog had parvoviruses. After a week of infusions and treatment the puppy died. The total veterinary costs were 192,70 EUR.

***Irene W.***

November 2012: Irene W. bought a French bulldog-mops mixed puppy on willhaben.at. She picked the puppy up in the seller's apartment in the 22<sup>nd</sup> district of Vienna. In the apartment the seller had 3 puppies and stated they were all vaccinated and dewormed one time. The dogs were not chipped and the seller was a registered breeder in Slovakia. The price was 230 EUR for the puppy and an extra 70 EUR for the vaccinations. After 2 days the dog started to have diarrhea. Despite antibiotics and infusion treatment the dog died after 2 days. The cause of death was a parvoviruses infection.

***Mandy Z.***

September 2013: Mandy Z. has purchased a puppy Vizslar via an Ebay ad in Germany. Supposedly, the dog should have been vaccinated and micro-chipped and have an EU passport. The dog was originally from Poland. After a short time he died of distemper. The sellers were no longer to be attained.

***Wilma R.***

September 2013: Wilma R. bought a West Highland terrier via the internet at a reputed breeder. The dog was dewormed, vaccinated, with an EU passport and pedigree. The purchasing price for was 1.000 EUR. Just three days after the dog died of canine parvovirus. The dog's origin is presumed to be the Czech Republic. The breeder refused to refund the money and continues to sell dogs. There is every indication that the German veterinarian who issued the vaccination in the vaccination card is involved in the illegal puppy trade, as he is already known to the police.

## IV. CASE STUDIES

### *Luxembourg*

A previously convicted **Czech puppy dealer** has been accused of **illegal animal trade and animal cruelty in Luxembourg in October 2013**.

The dealer was transporting puppies **from the Czech Republic to Luxembourg** for over 10 years and collaborating with the official veterinary service. The accusations resulted from various collective consumer complaints at the veterinary authority and investigative research by animal welfare organizations and journalists.

On the **10<sup>th</sup> of October 2013** the first trial in court was postponed as the defendant failed to appear in court. A next trial is expected in 2014.

*Update:* On June 24<sup>th</sup> the defendant failed to appear in court again. The next appointment was on July 15<sup>th</sup>. The puppy dealer was then sentenced to nine month jail time and 10.000 Euro penalty.

### *Austria*

A **Slovakian couple** will appear in court on the **28<sup>th</sup> of November 2013, in Vienna for charges of animal cruelty, serious commercial fraud and endangering of animal health through viruses**.

The previously convicted Slovakian couple was importing puppies from Slovakia to Austria with fake documents on a regular basis and was **denounced by FOUR PAWS and 6 damaged consumers**.

**13 dogs were confiscated** by the Austrian authorities from which **3 animals died of parvoviruses**.

**FOUR PAWS acts as a witness in the court** hearing and actively contributed to the exposure of these traders. It was FOUR PAWS who delivered valuable evidence to the authorities which resulted in the confiscation of 13 puppies by the official veterinarian and the police.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 the convicted couple were sentenced to two years in prison.

*Update:* The couple went into appeal on the count of fraud. In the appeal in November 2014 the judge confirmed the verdict. He raised the sentence up to two and a half years without probation.

Together with the sentence for animal cruelty that the couple received in the first trial, the total sentence is now prison sentence of four years.

## V. THE ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERN

Every year, **hundreds of thousands of puppies** are **raised in extremely bad conditions**, and are sold, after a **long and painful transport**, to European consumers to give them company. The consumers do not know what the puppies and their mothers have endured during transport and breeding. The **puppies are often sick**, have **genetic defects** or **personality disorders**, travel with incomplete or false papers giving wrong information on the origin, the veterinarian prevention and their age. **Some of the animals even die a few days** after they have been bought.

Born into **mass breeding facilities** and robbed of the opportunity to enjoy a life free of suffering – this is the fate that awaits the puppies destined to be sold somewhere in Europe by “dog producers”. They are **kept in dark, dirty accommodations** and are **malnourished** and **dehydrated**.

The puppies are **deprived of social contact** and care from humans or their mothers. The mother, frequently **reduced to a breeding machine**, is often **too weak to care for her puppies**. The **separation from their mother** taking place too early **harms the young dogs in their normal social behavior**.

A few weeks after their birth the puppies are **packed into crates, cat boxes or bags**. Crammed into tight spaces, without food, water or sufficient fresh air, the **puppies suffer greatly from fear and anxiety**. Frequently, they are then **transported long distances** to the dog markets located close to the borders, to irresponsible traders or to other sales locations.

Moreover, the **mother dogs are raised in small cages** where they cannot move and are **forced to have three litters per year**. Very often, having reached the age of four or five years, they are **killed** or **sold for experiments to laboratories**, and replaced by younger animals.

## VI. RESULT AND REQUEST

- The main outcome of the analysis is the **need to increase consumer awareness** to dry out the market. The FOUR PAWS campaign has indicated that consumers are still led by low prices, which shows that the most important aspect, to be a responsible owner, is not fulfilled.
- Puppy trade operations **have developed to an industrial level**. Puppy trader have adapted the stronger regulations and the increased publicity. Most traders especially in the production countries (HU, SK) have **changed their appearance so they seem as if they now comply with all regulations**.
- The **legal loophole regarding breeding is encouraging puppy mills**. A **common legislation for breeders is needed in combination with a licensing system**.
- Illegal or scrupulous puppy trade is **creating a market distortion**, as a result of the price dumping. Serious and careful breeders would never be able to compete with such prices. The high market price in the main distribution countries creates **win-win situations for breeders, traders, distributors and certainly the involved veterinarians too**.
- **Consumers who have bought an ill dog are not protected enough**, and case law is still rare.
- As dogs can cause serious health problems such as zoonosis, **traceability for each dog is needed**. Unfortunately, the revised “Pet Passport Regulation” did not consider this fact. **The draft EU Animal Health Law gives the opportunity to implement this important tool of Identification and Registration for the creation of Responsible ownership in Europe**.