



UNITED KINGDOM

State of Pet Homelessness Project

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the State of Pet Homelessness Project market report for the United Kingdom. This is a global data project undertaken by Mars alongside leading animal welfare experts and organizations across 20 countries. It seeks to help gather data and insights to better understand the number of dogs and cats who do not have regular access to the care they need, within a loving home or a community – and the factors that may contribute to solving the related challenges.

OBJECTIVE

Our aim is that the data collected can help identify the points in the cycle where pets are most at risk for becoming or remaining homeless and inform actions that reduce its prevalence. Pets that don't receive the sustained human care they need are at risk of poor health and compromised welfare. Tackling pet homelessness helps both animals and people – bringing the benefits of the human-animal bond to more people and ensuring every pet gets the sustained care and nutrition they need to thrive. Until now, there was no common way of looking at the issue. It is our hope that sharing this work and the collected data, will create conversations, drive action, and make a difference in the lives of millions of homeless cats and dogs.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

Measuring the scale of pet homelessness is a complex task, as the homeless pet population fluctuates constantly due to its many interconnected contributing factors. Stray pet numbers are difficult to count and increasing every day due to the rapid reproduction rates of unsterilized strays, and, in most countries, there is no single source of information on the shelter pet population at any given point in time.

The State of Pet Homelessness Project provides a wealth of data and uncovered insights into areas of action critical to tackling the pet homelessness challenge. Three areas were identified where we believe concerted effort and focus could make the biggest impact:

PREVENT UNWANTED PETS. ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE. KEEP PETS IN HOMES.

This report contains a small set of that data for the United Kingdom. The full data sets from all 20 markets are available online at stateofpethomelessness.com.



This global data project across 20 countries consisted of:

930 SOURCES REVIEWED	44 ANALYST INTERVIEWS	~30,000 PUBLIC SURVEYS	9+ MONTHS OF FIELDWORK
7,700+ HOURS GATHERING DATA	180 DATA POINTS	200 PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS	

The United Kingdom has a low level of overall pet homelessness of the 20 markets this project looked at. The opportunity is to understand how to prevent homelessness increasing and tackle the challenges that are still present.

24.73M TOTAL CATS AND DOGS IN THE U.K.

13.02M TOTAL DOGS

11.71M TOTAL CATS

23.57M
TOTAL OWNED
CATS AND DOGS

139.1K
TOTAL SHELTER
CATS AND DOGS

1.02M
TOTAL STRAY
CATS AND DOGS



113K (1%)
DOGS ARE HOMELESS



1.05M (9%)
CATS ARE HOMELESS

63.8K
IN SHELTERS

49.3K
STRAYS

75.3K
IN SHELTERS

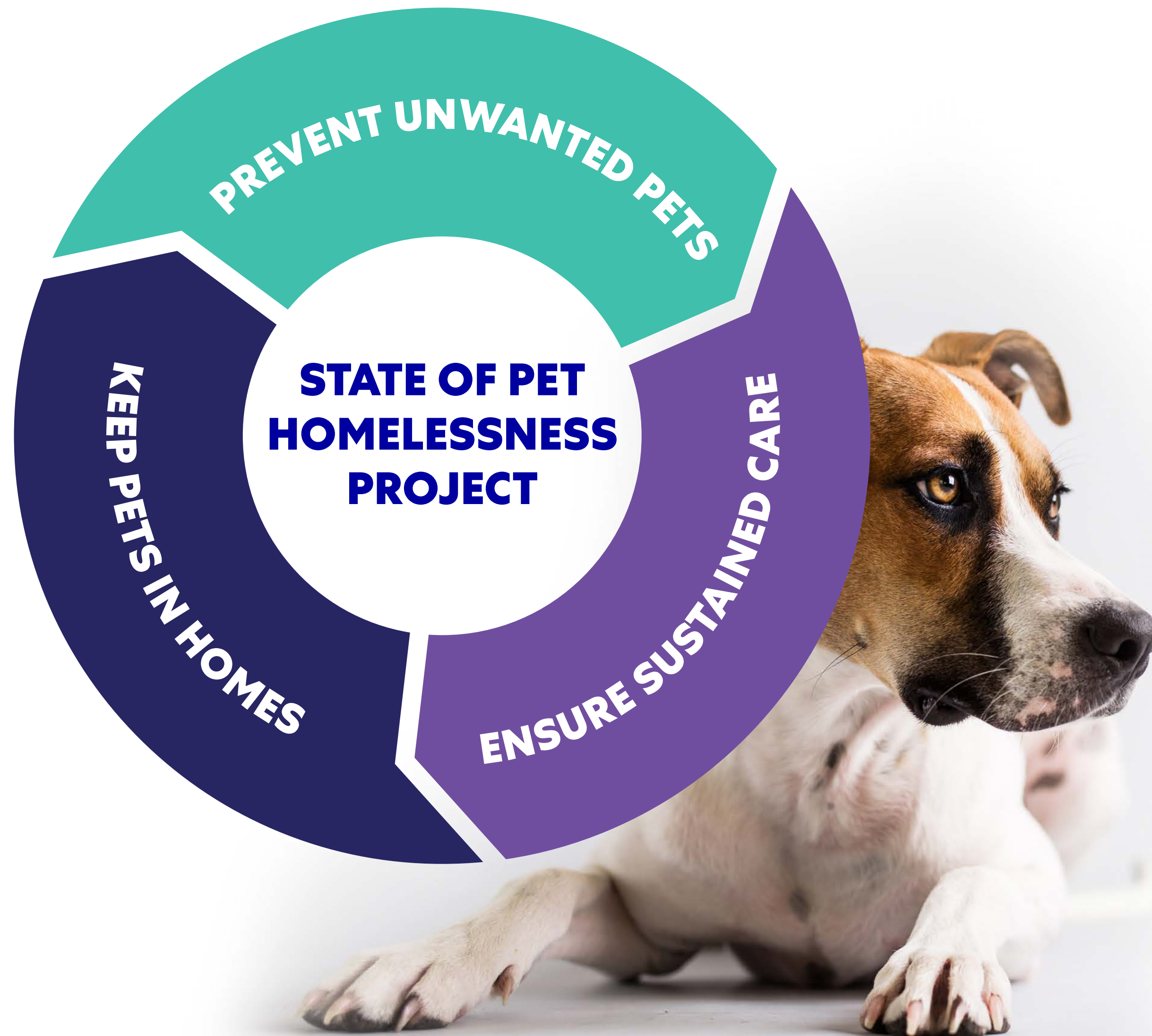
970K
STRAYS

United Kingdom

5%
of cats and dogs
are homeless

1.16M
TOTAL HOMELESS CATS AND DOGS

Pet Homelessness estimates based on primary and secondary research conducted by Euromonitor International (EMI) in 2022-2023, and owned pet estimates collected by Mars Consumer & Marketing Insights (CMI). Additional interviews were conducted with local expert organizations.



To bring transparency, awareness and insight to the challenge of pet homelessness, we have set out to build a data set that can offer insights into a range of attitudes and behaviors that impact the issue. Three interconnected themes emerged from the data, highlighting where interventions could help reduce pet homelessness.

PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

Large populations of stray pets which can breed at a rapid rate are a huge part of the problem. This, coupled with irresponsible breeding practices, e.g. those that do not pay enough attention to health, temperament, positive early socialization, or to ensuring a good fit with the pet owner, can result in increasing numbers of homeless pets and groups of pets that are difficult to provide sustained care to or match with a home. Our data looks at this significant and critical piece of the challenge.

ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE

Helping to provide more homeless pets with responsible loving homes, or the sustained human care they need in the community, is a foundational step in tackling pet homelessness. Achieving it requires an understanding of the key barriers to acquiring or adopting a pet, or accessing veterinary care, as well as facilitating pathways to ownership, and provision of care for community animals, whose home may not be a conventional house but still need access to sustained care. Shelters may provide care for cats and dogs, but resources are often strained and, if pets are not adopted to new homes, demand may exceed capacity.

KEEP PETS IN HOMES

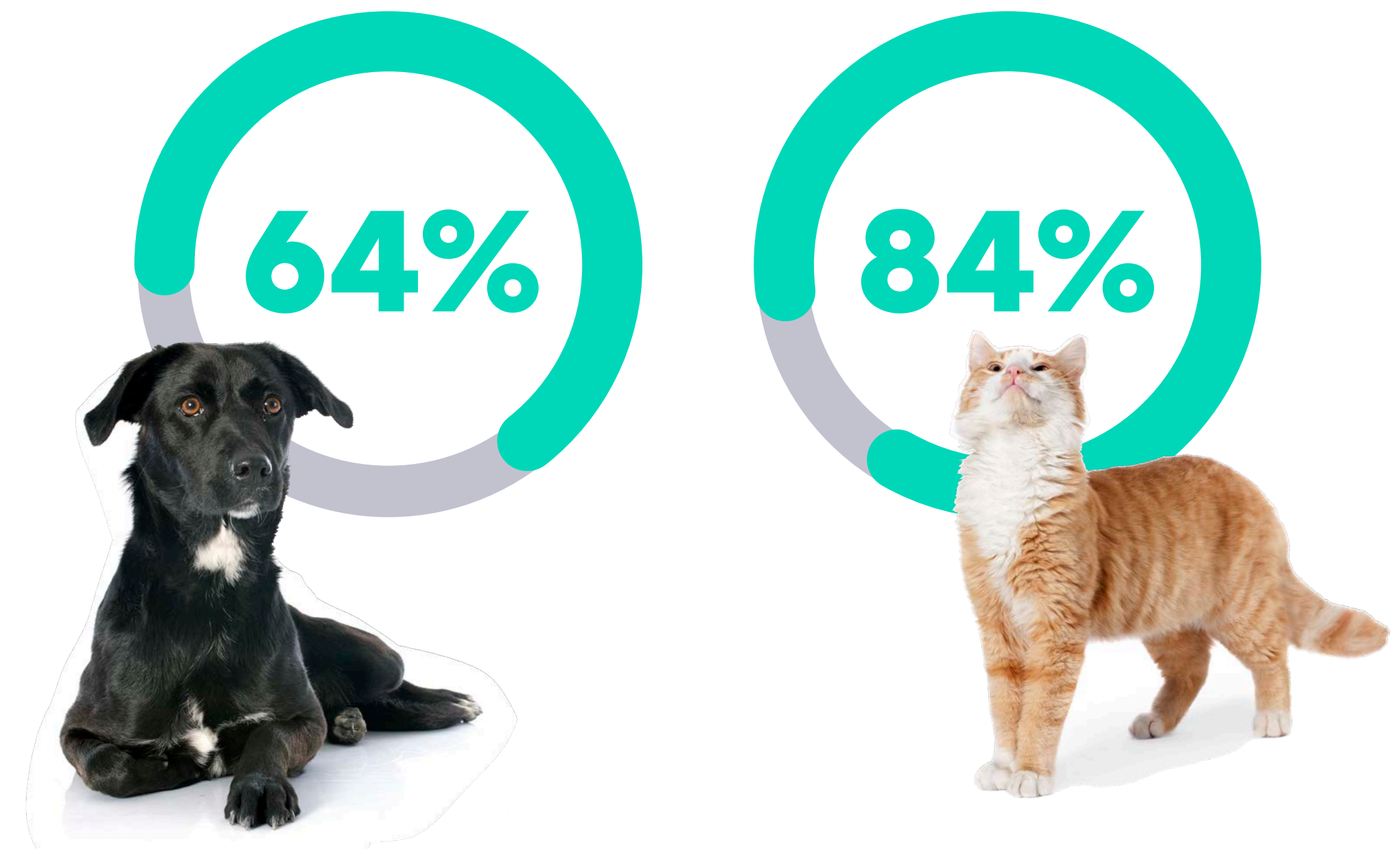
Keeping pets in homes is vital for both pet and owner to benefit from a longstanding bond. Pets are at risk of becoming homeless through being relinquished or abandoned if the pet ownership experience is difficult, or a pet owner can't access the advice and support they need. Pet owning practices which easily allow pets to stray or become lost can also result in owned pets becoming homeless. Our data looks at issues such as the cost of caring for a pet, common pet care practices and the incidence of lost pets.



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One unsterilized homeless pet can quickly create many more. Reducing uncontrolled or unplanned breeding is a critical approach to decreasing pet homelessness.

IS YOUR PET NEUTERED/STERILIZED?¹



¹Sample definition: 251 current dog owners / 242 current cat owners who could identify if their pet was sterilized



WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

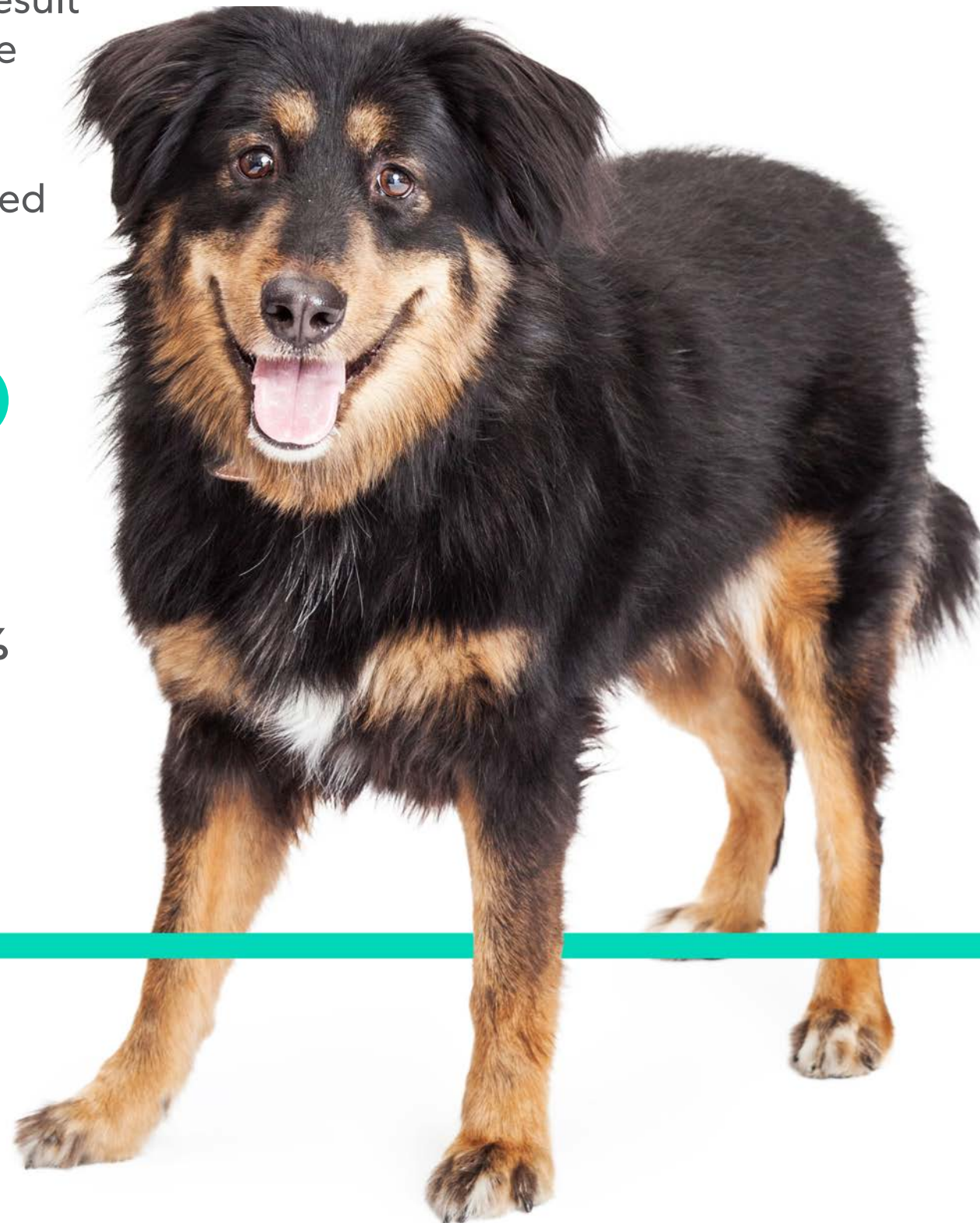
“People are becoming more educated about irresponsible or backyard breeding, and they don’t want to support that at all because they know that definitely leads to an influx of animals into rescue and rehoming centers.”

– Rehoming Manager, Shelter (cats and dogs)



WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR PET?¹

Where people get their pets reveals important insights about the pathways to pet ownership and the proportion of people making a direct impact on homeless pet numbers through adoption of shelter pets or strays. Pet breeders are also key. While responsibly bred pets are more likely to be matched to lifelong homes, irresponsible breeding practices, e.g. those that neglect health and temperament issues, or fail to ensure a good fit with the pet owner can result in unwanted pets. These behaviors increase the numbers of pets for which a home cannot be found, or pets which may find a home but later be relinquished or rehomed due to problems.

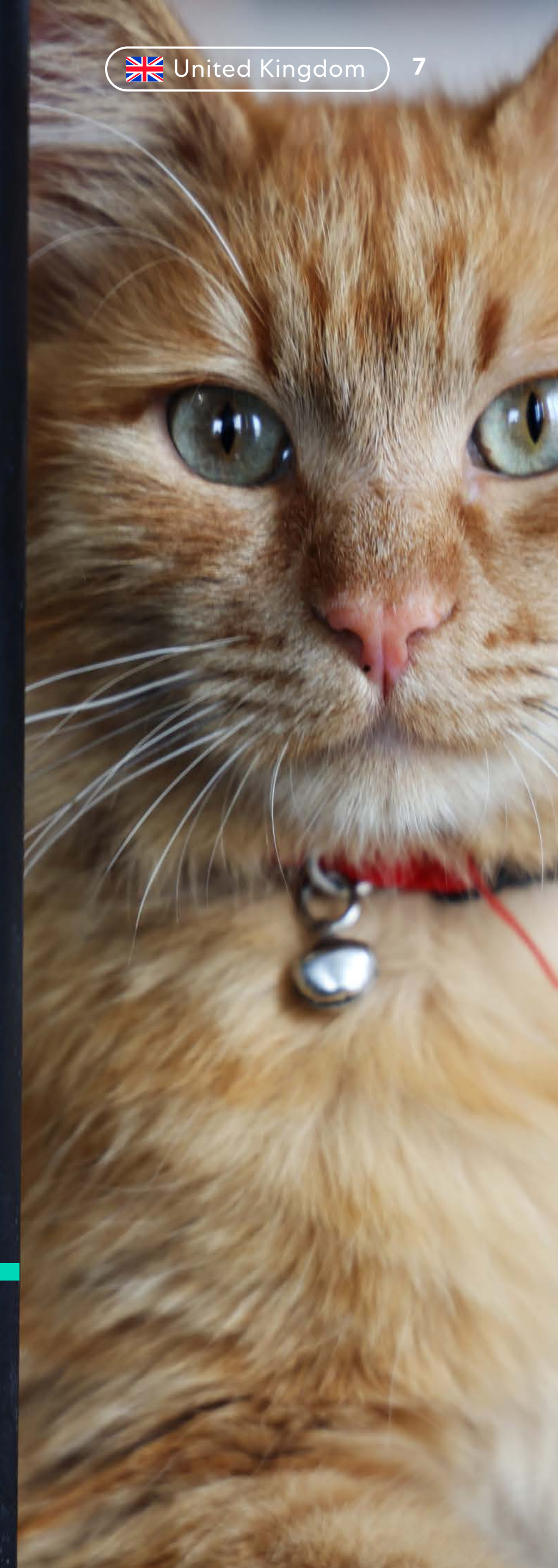


DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. BREEDER: 27%
2. Private Individual: 24%
3. Rescue Center/Shelter: 21%
4. Friend/Relative: 16%
5. Pet shop: 3%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. FRIEND/RELATIVE: 27%
2. Rescue Center/Shelter: 22%
3. Private Individual: 22%
4. Stray/I found it: 10%
5. Breeder: 9%



¹Sample definition: 251 current dog owners / 242 current cat owners



WHAT ACTIONS DO YOU TAKE IF YOU ENCOUNTER A STRAY?¹

Stray pets may interact with humans or remain hidden. Encouraging people to learn about appropriate ways to interact with different types of stray pets can help pets who would benefit from human care get access to what they need.

DOG

35% ACT OF KINDNESS



11% CHASE IT AWAY



22% DO NOTHING



CAT

30% ACT OF KINDNESS



6% CHASE IT AWAY



49% DO NOTHING



¹Sample definition: 138 has seen a stray dog / 152 has seen a stray cat

WHICH MEASURES DO YOU THINK WOULD BEST REDUCE PET HOMELESSNESS?²

Gathering opinions about potential solutions from a wide range of pet owners suggests solutions that can be quickly scaled.

DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. MICROCHIPPING: 43%
2. Banning puppy mills/farms: 35%
3. Fighting animal cruelty: 34%
4. Sterilization: 31%
5. (Tie) Providing subsidized vet services and Raising awareness around responsible breeding practices: 29%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. MICROCHIPPING: 51%
2. Banning kitten mills/farms: 42%
3. Fighting animal cruelty: 41%
4. Sterilization: 41%
5. (Tie) Providing subsidized vet services and Promoting programs so people know where to adopt: 32%

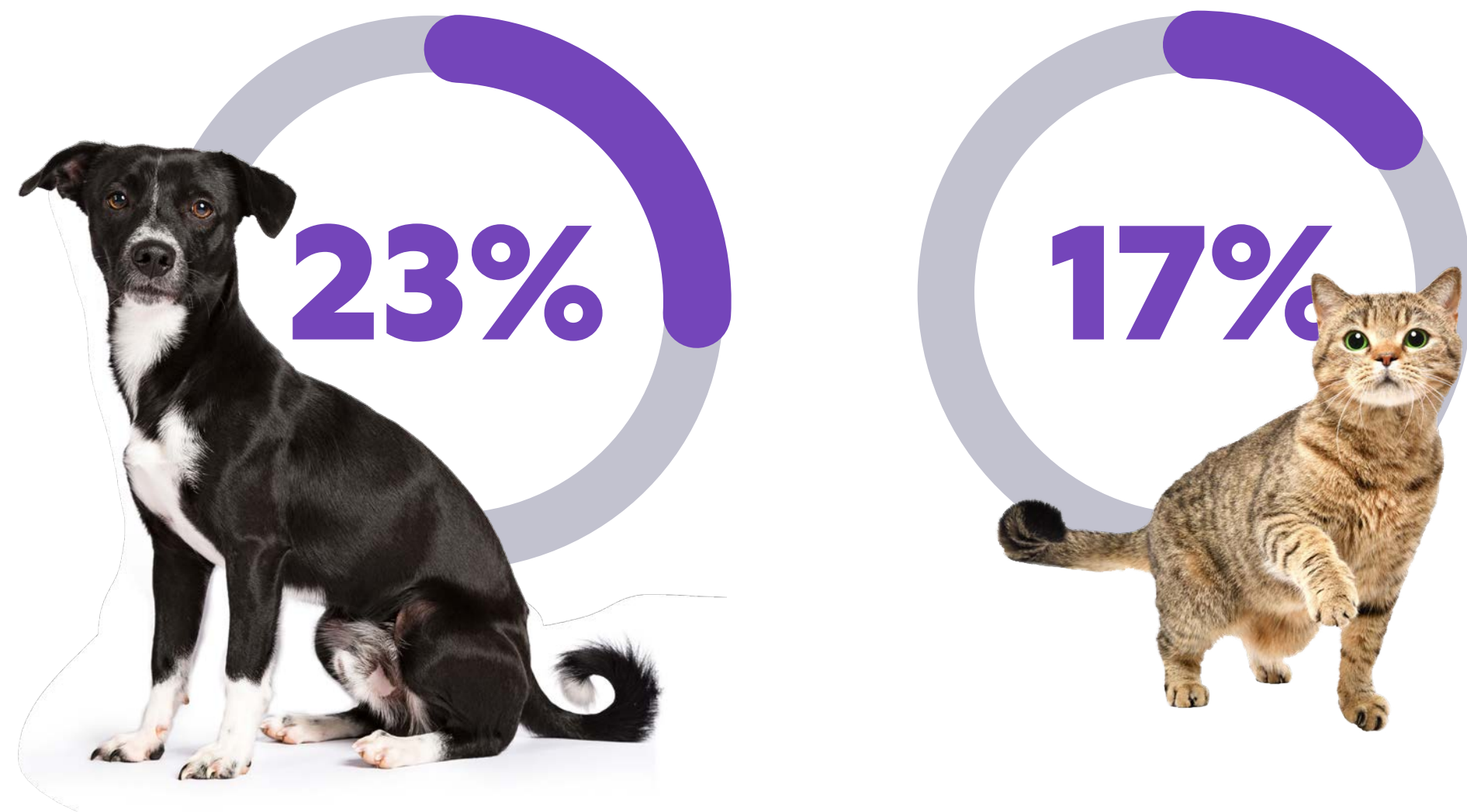
²Sample definition: 307 current or previous dog owners / 275 current or previous cat owners



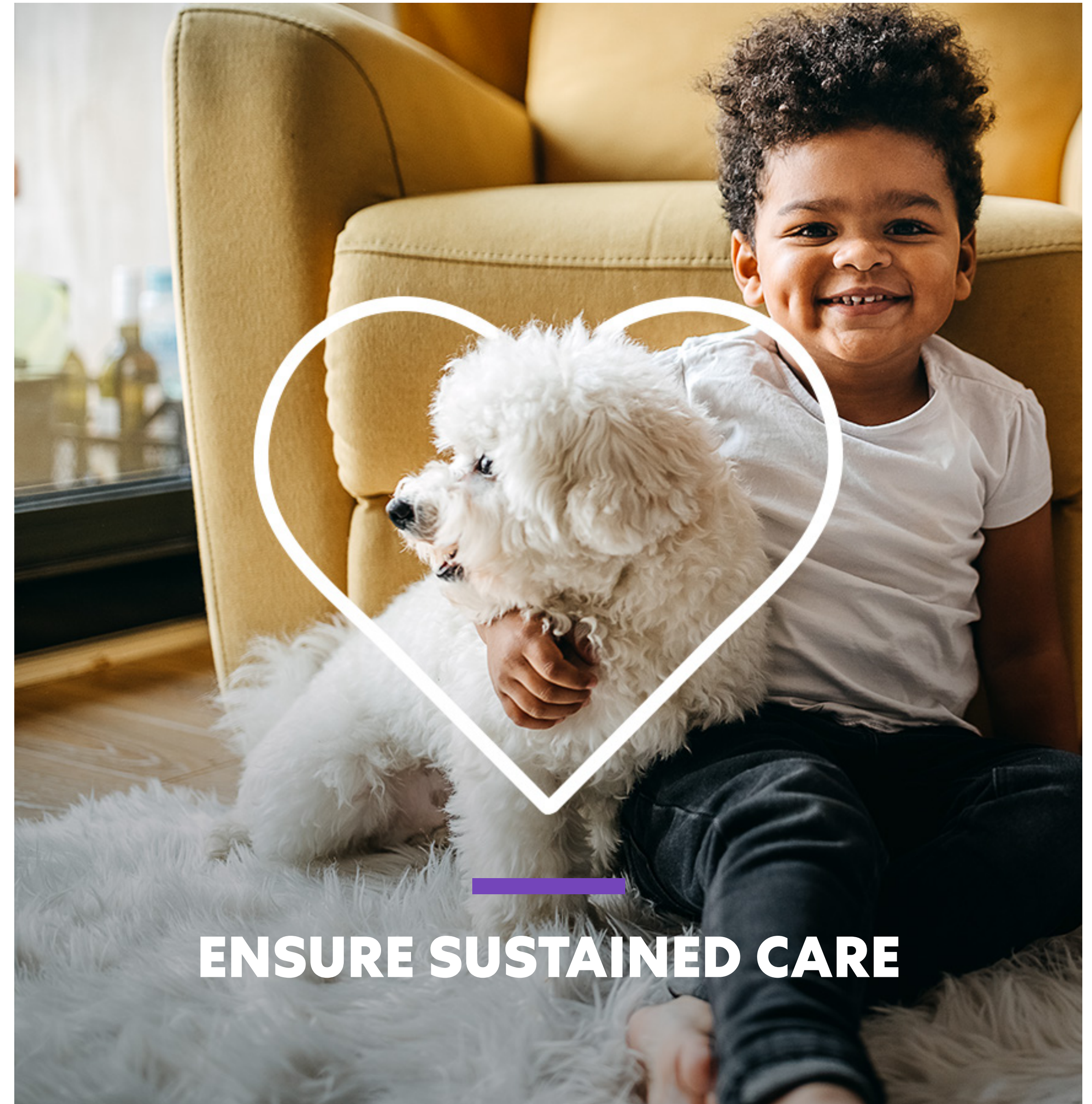
Helping to provide more homeless pets with responsible loving homes, or the sustained human care they need in the community, is a foundational step in tackling pet homelessness. Achieving it requires an understanding of the key barriers to acquiring or adopting a pet, or accessing veterinary care, as well as facilitating pathways to ownership, and provision of care for community animals, whose home may not be a conventional house but still need access to sustained care. Shelters may provide care for cats and dogs, but resources are often strained and, if pets are not adopted to new homes, demand may exceed capacity.

Getting more people interested in pet ownership and turning that interest into action creates more loving homes for pets.

ARE YOU THINKING OF GETTING A PET IN THE NEAR FUTURE?¹



¹Sample definition: 1100 owners and non-owners



WHAT'S PREVENTING YOU FROM OWNING A PET?¹

Reducing the initial barriers to pet ownership makes it easier for more people to become pet parents.



DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. BIG COMMITMENT: 43%
2. Too expensive: 43%
3. Problem during holidays: 32%
4. A dog limits where I can go: 32%
5. (Tie) When I work, there is nobody at home to look after it and They would make my life too complicated: 27%



CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. I WOULD NOT WANT TO HAVE A LITTER TRAY FOR A CAT WHERE I LIVE: 29%
2. Too expensive: 28%
3. Big commitment: 27%
4. They damage furniture: 25%
5. Problem during holidays: 25%

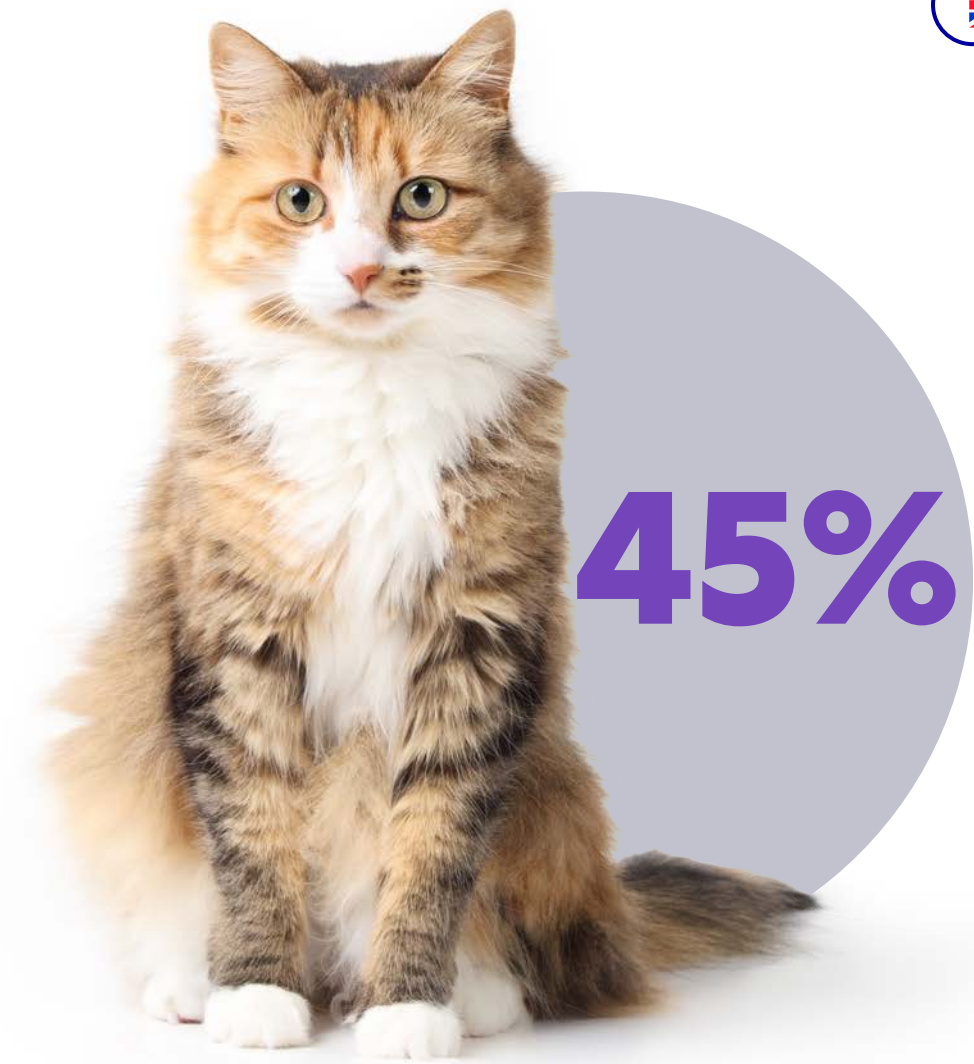
¹Sample definition: 793 non-dog owners / 825 non-cat owners

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

A successful match is about making sure that both parties, human and animals, are going to have their needs met and then being there to support them because they are going to have bumps. Having that support service there when something does go wrong, it's really important.”

– Research Officer, Shelter/charity (cats and dogs)





Changing the perception of rescued animals can get far more pets out of shelters and into loving homes.

**IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING GETTING A PET,
DO YOU PLAN ON ADOPTING FROM A SHELTER?¹**

58%
**CONSIDERING
GETTING A DOG
FROM A SHELTER**

45%
**CONSIDERING
GETTING A CAT
FROM A SHELTER**

¹Sample definition: 161 dog considerers / 175 cat considerer



KEEP PETS IN HOMES

Keeping pets in homes is vital for both pet and owner to benefit from a longstanding bond. Pets are at risk of becoming homeless through being relinquished or abandoned if the pet ownership experience is difficult, or a pet owner can't access the advice and support they need. Pet owning practices which easily allow pets to stray or become lost can also result in owned pets becoming homeless. Our data looks at issues such as the cost of caring for a pet, common pet care practices and the incidence of lost pets.

Pets are lost more frequently than many may realize, leading to an unintended yet noteworthy increase in homeless pets. Keeping pets from straying is a beneficial objective for pets and the people who care for them.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A PET GO MISSING?¹

DOGS
20% (2.58M)

49% (1.27M) of those who lost their dog got them back.

CATS
30% (3.2M)

56% (1.79M) of those who lost their cat got them back.

HAVE YOU HAD A PET GO MISSING IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?¹

DOGS
2%



CATS
4%

¹Sample definition: 822 has or had a pet



WHAT ARE THE BEST METHODS TO HELP LOST PETS?¹

Understanding public perceptions of lost pet prevention techniques and how to help find lost pets can focus community efforts and increase utilization.

DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. MICROCHIPPING: 82%
2. Tags with contact details: 63%
3. Updates in social networks: 35%
4. Communication from shelters when the pet turns up in their shelter: 30%
5. Direct access to contact pet shelters/ rescue centers: 22%

CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. MICROCHIPPING: 84%
2. Tags with contact details: 54%
3. Updates in social networks: 36%
4. Signs in local community: 30%
5. Communication from shelters when pets are lost by an owner: 26%

IS YOUR PET MICROCHIPPED?²

Microchipping is considered an effective way to permanently identify pets but, crucially, reuniting lost pets with owners via this method relies on owner contact details being registered and kept up to date on the microchip database.

DOGS
82%

CATS
69%

¹Sample definition: 163 has lost a dog / 180 has lost a cat

²Sample definition: 251 current dog owners / 242 current cat owners

WHY MIGHT YOU CONSIDER REHOMING YOUR PET?¹

Caring for a pet is a significant commitment of time, energy and money. Understanding the potential causes for rehoming can guide the efforts of organizations and businesses in supporting current pet owners to continue to care for their cat or dog.



DOGS (Top 5 Responses)

1. I AM NO LONGER FIT ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF HIM/HER: 42%
2. A member of my household/close friend/family is allergic: 15%
3. I don't have enough time to look after him/her as I would like to: 14%
4. I will move and cannot take him/her with me: 9%
5. Costs of keeping pet become too expensive: 9%

ARE YOU CONSIDERING GIVING UP YOUR PET IN THE NEXT YEAR²

The benefits of pet ownership are numerous, but when confronted with significant challenges, giving up or rehoming might seem like the only option.

DOGS
7%

CATS
5%



CATS (Top 5 Responses)

1. I AM NO LONGER FIT ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF HIM/HER: 44%
2. Costs of keeping pet become too expensive: 16%
3. I will move and cannot take him/her with me: 11%
4. A member of my household/close friend/family is allergic: 11%
5. I don't have enough time to look after him/her as I would like to: 8%

¹Sample definition: 312 current or previous dog owners / 268 current or previous cat owners

²Sample definition: 251 current dog owners / 242 current cat owners

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS TELL US

If animals are not being moved on for any other reason than change of circumstance, it's really frustrating because we want to keep the animals in loving homes where they're happy and safe and secure. However, some people almost see them as disposable rather than a member of their family, which is probably the most heartbreaking.”

– General Manager, Shelter/charity (cats and dogs)

TAKEAWAYS

The United Kingdom is well below the average¹ of 35% homeless cats and dogs. However, there are still significant opportunities to help more pets find the sustained human care and nutrition they need to thrive.

United Kingdom

5%
of cats and dogs
are homeless

PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

The sterilization rates are 64% for dogs and 84% for cats, which is well above the global averages of 49% for dogs and 63% for cats. In the UK, some pet cats are allowed to roam freely. Those that are unsterilized pose a significant risk of breeding and producing unplanned litters of kittens.

Stray cats account for 84% of the homeless pet population in the UK. Reducing these populations through breeding prevention could have a significant impact.

ENSURE SUSTAINED CARE

Those thinking of getting a pet in the near future are below the global averages, with 23% considering a dog and 17% considering a cat.

Shelters being named as a favored destination for acquiring a pet indicates that there is an opportunity to find more homes for pets - about half of those surveyed said they would consider a shelter/rescue when adopting a pet (58% for dogs and 45% for cats).

There may be an opportunity to promote more adoption for pets. The number one place those surveyed acquired a pet dog is from a breeder (27%) and a pet cat is from a friend/relative (27%), suggesting that there may be a gap between intentions and actions.

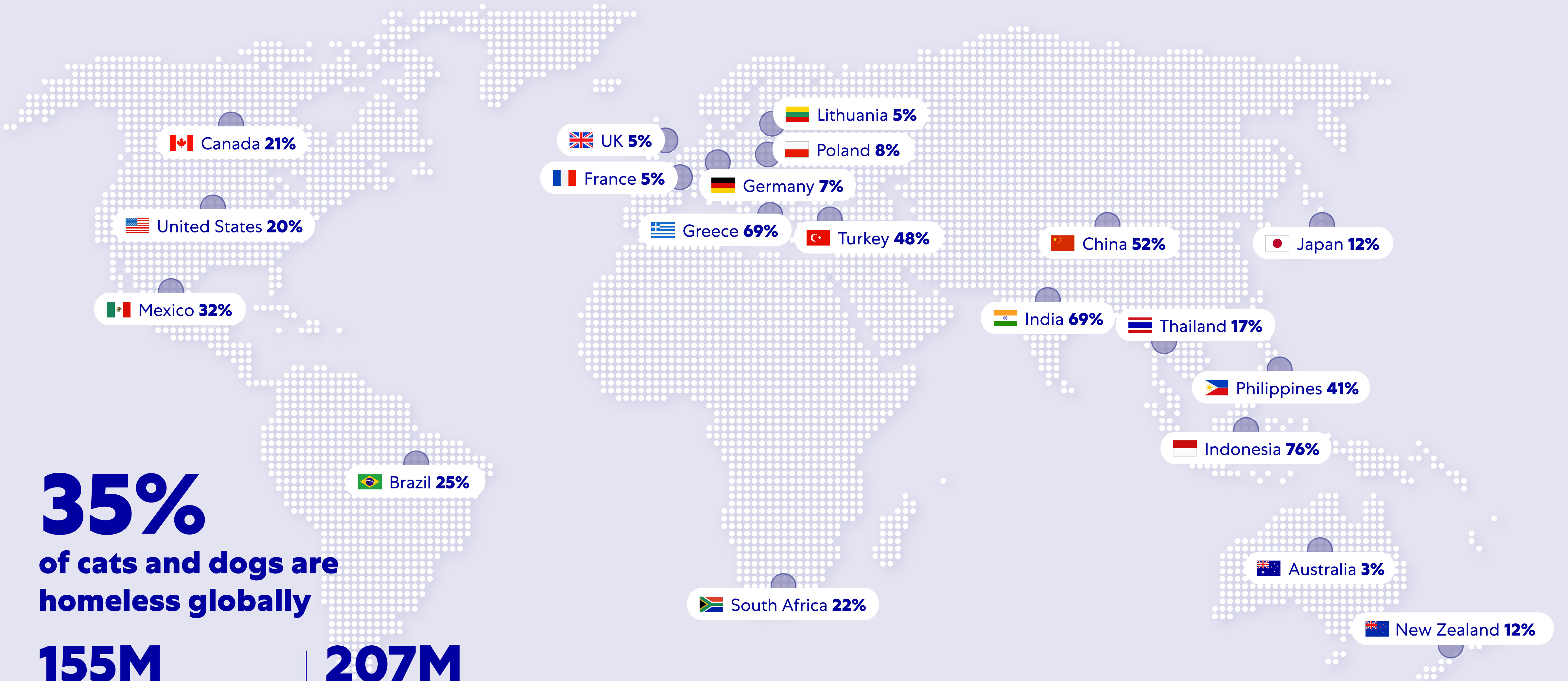
KEEP PETS IN HOMES

In the UK, microchipping became mandatory for dogs in 2016 and cats in 2023. The survey reported a very high level of microchipping for pets, with dogs at 81% and cats at 69%. There are still a significant number of pets without a microchip despite the legislation, which makes identifying owners of lost or stray pets very challenging.

The proportion of owners stating they may have to rehome their pet in the next 12 months is 20% for dogs and 24% for cats. Not being fit enough to care for them is cited as the top reason to consider rehoming both dogs and cats.

¹“average” or “global average” refers to the average of the 20 countries included in this project

20 COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY



35%
of cats and dogs are
homeless globally

155M
HOMELESS DOGS

207M
HOMELESS CATS



At Mars, we have worked for many years to play our part in tackling pet homelessness issues around the world, with a wide range of programs, partnerships and donations to support vulnerable pets.

WE ADVOCATE FOR:

- Organizations and individuals to get involved in recognizing, measuring and acting to change the issue of pet homelessness; helping to improve the accuracy and availability of data around the number of homeless pets.
- Pet-friendly government legislation and policies to keep pets and people together and enable more people to benefit from the companionship of pets.
- Pet owner and prospective pet owner education to promote and support responsible pet ownership.
- Programs to help homeless pets find a loving home or receive sustained care.
- Programs to limit the uncontrolled breeding of stray and street pets.
- Programs to reduce the number of pets at risk of becoming homeless.

WHERE DID THE DATA COME FROM:

The data in this report is drawn from three sources:

1. Pet Homelessness estimates based on primary and secondary research conducted by EMI in 2022-2023, and owned pet estimates collected by Mars CMI.
2. Public sample surveys (online and in the field) of pet owners and non-pet owners conducted by Kantar in 2022-2023.
3. Pet Professional interviews, such as shelters and NGOs working in the pet homelessness space.

To find out more about the State of Pet Homelessness Project and the actions that we are taking alongside partners and stakeholders please visit: stateofpethomelessness.com.

The following partner organizations are among those working to drive the efforts to end pet homelessness and are members of the advisory panel of the State of Pet Homelessness Project. Please continue to support them and the local resources in the United Kingdom.





Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this research study are solely the beliefs and personal opinions of the individuals who participated in the interviews or surveys. These perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of Mars or any affiliated organizations. The purpose of this research is to gather varied viewpoints and insights from different individuals and these should not be interpreted as endorsed or supported by Mars.