



# United for The Future of Cats & Dogs

*Baseline Report  
16th of October 2025*





## Context

Companion animals play many important roles in our human lives and consequently pet ownership continue to grow globally. The global pet population has now reached 1.1 billion<sup>1</sup>, with cats leading the way. In Europe alone, a 2025 report found that 50% of households are home to one or more of the region's 299 million pets<sup>2</sup>. With pets being members of such a major portion of homes, it's essential that society contributes to meaningful measures to protect their health and welfare.

However, alongside this growth in ownership, there are also **several concerning trends** that are promoted by the use of online platforms, putting animal welfare at serious risk. Ongoing high public demand for pets with extreme conformation and poor traceability for many of these pets acquired via online sales platforms are leading to **rising numbers of animals with lifelong health and behavioural problems**. Low welfare pet production practices and extreme conformation also have wider implications, potentially creating emotional and financial hardship for owners, weakening confidence in the pet sector and contributing to wider societal challenges such as increased pressure on shelters and veterinary services, risks to public health, and difficulties in enforcing animal welfare standards.

Against a backdrop of EU discussions on its **first regulatory framework on the breeding and traceability of cats and dogs**, the Choose Health Coalition sees the current time as an opportune moment to develop and drive real positive change for cats and dogs and the people who care for them.

Two interrelated issues currently pose serious and growing risks to the welfare of cats and dogs: **low welfare pet production practices** and **extreme conformation**.

- The rise of online and social media marketplaces for pets has allowed low welfare pet production practices to flourish, with low welfare pet producers often avoiding detection and regulation. Research from FOUR PAWS, an international animal welfare organisation, found that almost half

of puppies acquired through online sales were brought home below the age of 8 weeks and almost a third of puppies become sick soon after purchase<sup>13</sup>.

- Extreme conformations describe physical traits that don't exist in nature but are heavily shaped by human preferences and that cause significant health and welfare issues for cats and dogs. While many dog and cat breeds, whether the animals are pedigree or non-pedigree, luckily are not defined by having an extreme conformation, some breeds regrettably have been bred so far from functional anatomy that **unhealthy traits are now widely accepted as the norm**. The deliberate production of cats and dogs with extreme traits constitutes de facto evidence of low-welfare pet production practices driven by sustained consumer demand that often overlooks or remains unaware of the animal suffering involved.

These concerning trends in low-welfare pet production practices and extreme conformation **must be reversed and eventually eliminated**. Beyond the clear threat to the health and welfare of the cats and dogs themselves, the **negative consequences extend further**. For example, cats and dogs with predictably compromised health and welfare from a poor start in life or from extreme conformation face a **much higher rate of abandonment** and euthanasia, placing unnecessary and avoidable strains on animal charities and public services. These abandoned pets are then often replaced by owners with puppies and kittens from the same low-welfare pet producers, fuelling demand and exacerbating negative trends.

The cats and dogs themselves are not the only ones that suffer from these practices, with owners also facing **emotional and financial consequences** when they purchase pets that are physically unhealthy, under-aged, without sufficient socialisation, and without suitable health checks having been undertaken. Low-welfare pet production practices and extreme conformation can also **erode public trust in the wider pet ecosystem**, undermining confidence in pet producers and sellers to behave responsibly.

With pet ownership continuing to grow across Europe, the proposed EU regulation on the welfare and traceability of cats and dogs is a crucial opportunity to set clear and enforceable standards. Without action, pet producers who behave responsibly may be driven out of the system, while unregulated low-welfare practices continue to grow — putting animal welfare at even greater risk and weakening trust in the pet industry.



# Cats & Dogs Population



There are over **1.1 billion** cats & dogs worldwide<sup>1</sup>.



**299 million** pets in Europe -**46% of** European households have a pet – that’s **90 million** households.

# Cats & Dogs Trade

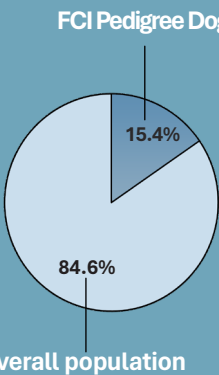
**€ 1.3 - €4.6 billion<sup>8</sup>**

Estimated value of the EU’s dog & cat trade – **the true value is difficult to predict due to widespread fraud and illegal activity.**

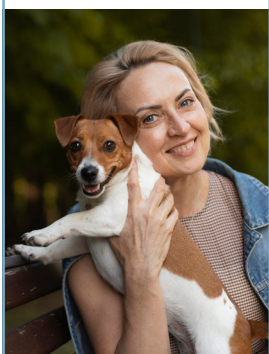
**Annual demand of dogs may exceed 8 million puppies a year in the EU.**

## EU Pedigree Dog Populations

FCI Pedigree Dog Distribution in the EU - 2022



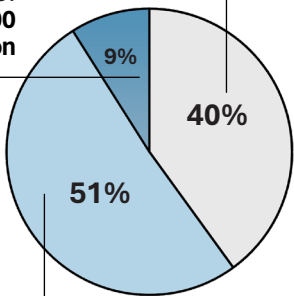
Source: FCI



## Global Cat Populations<sup>5</sup>

Pet (domesticated) cats: ~373 million of which **0.064% are pedigree**

Outdoor/ feral cats: ~60 to 100 million



Stray cats: ~480 million

Source pedigree cats: WCC

## Puppy Acquisition

**36% of people** spend less than 20 minutes researching where to get their puppies from<sup>15</sup>.

Where puppies were advertised <sup>13</sup>:



**33%**  
Website/  
Ad Sites



**39%**  
Social Media



**8%**  
Newspapers

## Pets in social media



There are currently **over 2 million pet influencer accounts** on Instagram, with a combined reach of **over 40 billion followers<sup>14</sup>.**



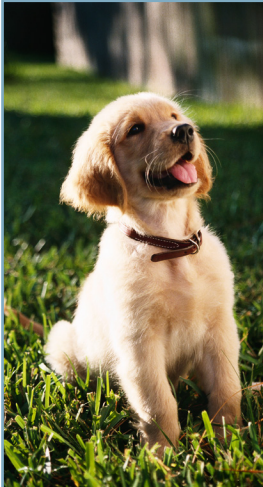
On TikTok, **1.2 million Pet-related videos** were created in 2024.

**Want-it now culture, social media and the ease of online impulse purchases mean people do not conduct adequate research and acquire without knowing where they get it from.**

# Low Welfare Pet Production Practices

Low welfare pet production practices refer to breeding, raising, or selling pets under environmental conditions and/or with physical conformation that fail to meet minimum established legal, ethical, scientific, moral and social standards for animal health and welfare. These practices often prioritize profit or human preferences over the physical and psychological needs of the pets, resulting in compromised health and welfare. A survey conducted by FOUR PAWS revealed that insufficient research prior to purchasing a puppy significantly increases the risk of owners purchasing from low welfare pet producers and falling victim to scams<sup>15</sup>.

|     |                                                                                                                   |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12% | of people pay for their puppy before they have even seen it                                                       |
| 20% | don't see the puppy in its breeding environment                                                                   |
| 31% | either don't see the puppy with its mum, or see it with a dog that they suspect was not the real mum              |
| 28% | who bought from the internet, after initially seeing the advert online, claim they experienced financial hardship |
| 25% | of pups found on social media go on to <u>die before their fifth birthday</u> <sup>15</sup>                       |



Almost 50% of puppies acquired online are brought home too young<sup>13</sup>

## Extreme Conformation

Extreme conformations describe physical traits that don't exist in nature but are heavily shaped by human preferences and that cause significant health and welfare issues for cats and dogs. ICECDogs defines these traits as 'a physical appearance that has been so significantly altered by humankind away from the ancestral natural appearance that affected pets commonly suffer poor health and welfare, with negative impacts on their quality and quantity of life'.

### Examples of Extreme Conformations & Affected Breeds



#### Brachycephaly

**Description:** Shortened skull leading to breathing difficulties and risk of brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome or BOAS

**Examples of Breeds Affected:** Pug<sup>17</sup>, French Bulldog<sup>18</sup>, English Bulldog<sup>19</sup>, Boston Terrier, Boxer<sup>20</sup>



#### Excessive Skin Folds

**Description:** Deep skin folds can cause infections, dermatitis and eye issues due to trapped moisture and debris

**Examples of Breeds Affected:** Shar Pei<sup>21</sup>, English Bulldog<sup>19</sup>, Neapolitan Mastiff<sup>22</sup>



#### Protruding or Bulging Eyes

**Description:** Prominent eyes are prone to injury, ulcers, and dryness due to inadequate eyelid coverage

**Examples of Breeds Affected:** Pug<sup>17</sup>, Shih Tzu<sup>23</sup>, Pekingese, Boston Terrier<sup>24</sup>



#### Sloped Back

**Description:** Exaggerated angulation can lead to hip dysplasia, arthritis and spinal problems

**Examples of Breeds Affected:** German Shepherd dog<sup>25</sup>



#### Extreme Dwarfism or Gigantism

**Description:** Excessive size variation can result in joint problems, heart issues and shortened lifespan

**Examples of Breeds Affected:** St Bernard, Great Dane<sup>28</sup>

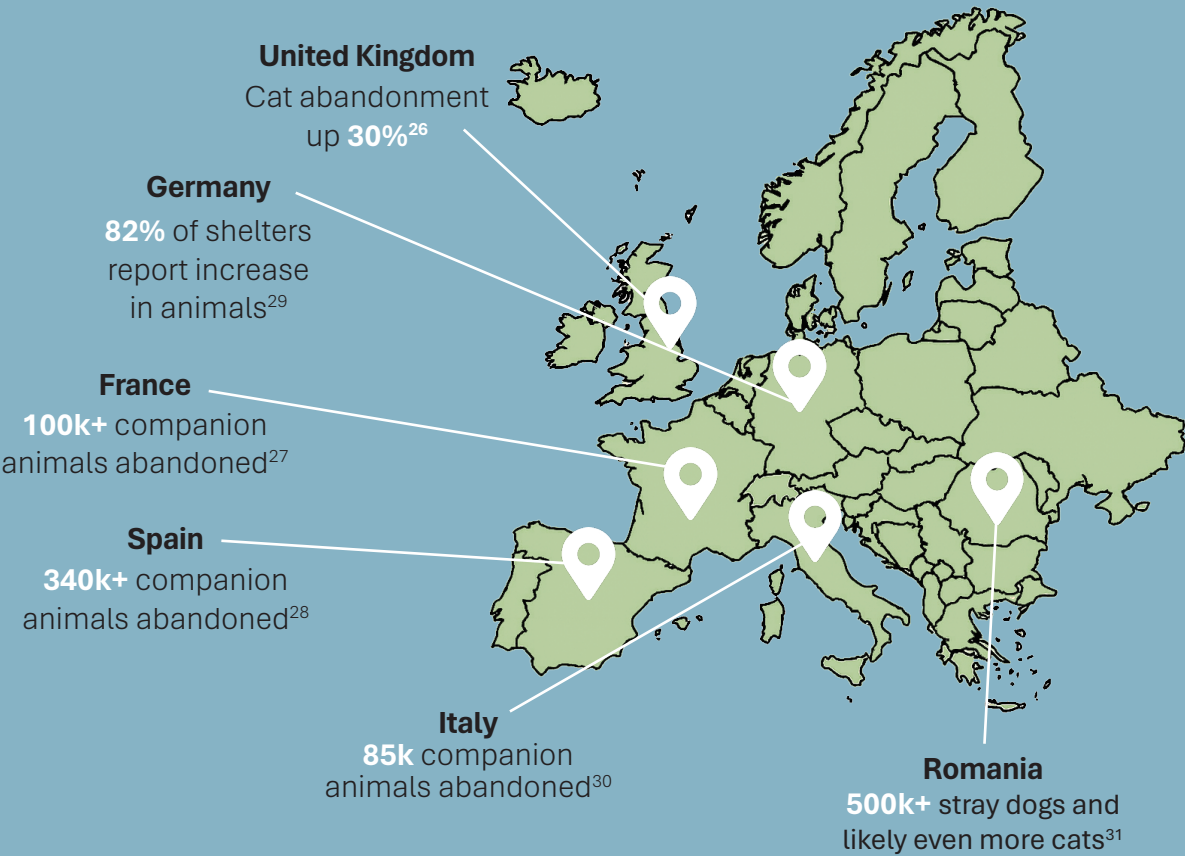


#### Turned In or Out Eyelids

**Description:** Dogs are deliberately bred for abnormal eyelid conformation, leading to the turning in or out of eyelids

**Examples of Breed Affected:** Shar Pei<sup>21</sup>, Chow Chow, Neapolitan Mastiff<sup>30</sup>

# An Endemic Issue...



An estimated 362 million homeless cats and dogs worldwide<sup>4</sup>

2024 surveys from **ASPCA**<sup>32</sup> and **SAC**<sup>33</sup> highlights that the main reasons for surrendering a pet are:



**Housing issues**



**Financial hardship**



**Behavioural problems**



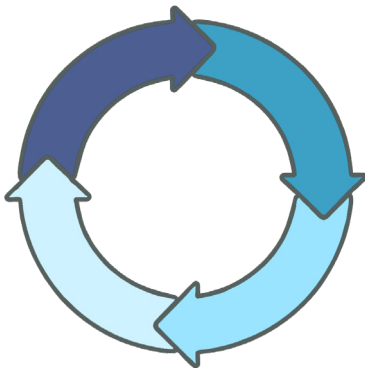
**Lack of time or lifestyle changes**



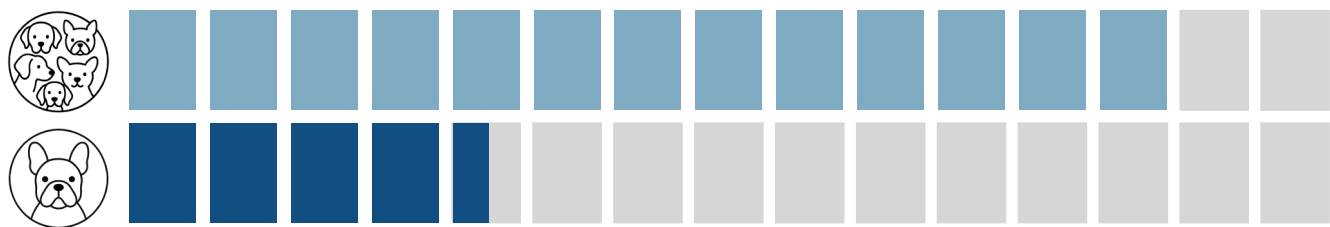
**Health Issues**

## ... Fuelled By A Vicious Cycle

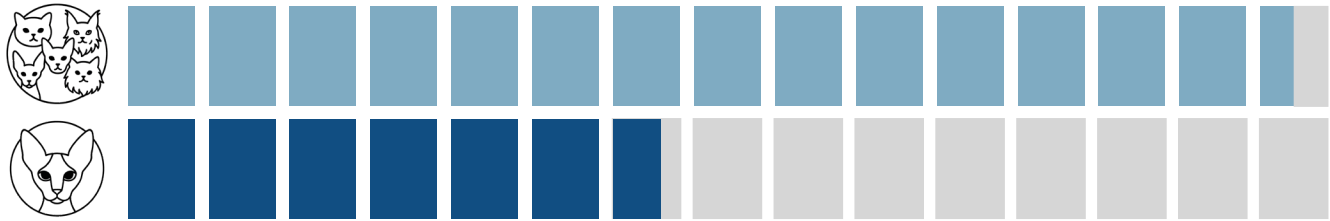
Trends favouring certain breeds are contributing to the rise of pet ownership. Online sale platforms encourage impulse purchases and make it easier for low-welfare pet producers to operate undetected. These breeders often prioritise profit over animal health, driving the proliferation of extreme conformations and reinforcing harmful trends that compromise the wellbeing of pets.



While some dog breeds have a median life expectancy of 13 years,  
**French Bulldogs only live for an average of 4.5 years**<sup>34</sup>



Cats can live to the age of 14.5 years, but  
**Sphynx's have a life expectancy of 6.7 years**<sup>35</sup>



# The whole pet ecosystem is impacted



# Our Response as the Choose Health Coalition

This is why Royal Canin formed the Choose Health Coalition in November 2024, bringing together a select group of organizations: Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), FOUR PAWS, ICECDogs (International Collaborative on Extreme Conformations in Dogs), Royal Veterinary College (RVC), World Cat Congress (WCC), and World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA).

Each of these partners is already engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting more welfare-friendly pet production practices and at reducing extreme conformation. Through the coalition, we will **leverage the collective knowledge, experience, and ongoing activities of our members to create a cohesive program that will drive meaningful change for pet health and welfare and the wider pet ecosystem.**

As a group, we will raise awareness of low welfare pet production practices and extreme conformation and use our shared networks and expertise to drive change among key audiences.



## Our Ambition

Act together to raise awareness and ultimately achieve:

- A notable increase in high welfare pet production practices, within the following scope:
  - Dogs and cats only
  - Aspects related to acquisition and production
  - On a global scale.
- A notable global decrease (90% reduction within five years) in the proportion of dogs and cats with extreme conformations.

# Our Commitments

1

Work together to promote the breeding and acquisition of dogs and cats with good innate health.

2

Amplify the global conversation on responsible behaviours around pet ownership & acquisition and around breeding.

3

Speak as one voice against extreme conformations and low welfare pet production practices.

4

Prioritise the health and welfare of cats and dogs in all our activities as separate organisations and together as a coalition and be challenged if we do not achieve this.

5

Raise awareness of, and inspire positive actions aimed at eliminating extreme conformation and low welfare pet production practices and to promote responsible acquisition.

## Our picture of success



Protecting cats' and dogs' health and welfare is a primary concern shared by all coalition members.



Tangible improvements in the overall health, welfare and quality of life of cats and dogs.



New bans on cat or dog breeds not needed unless the breed is inherently and irreversibly defined by a phenotype or genotype that are incompatible with good health and welfare at a population level.



No new cat or dog breed have been created where the defining characteristics are based on pheno- or genotypic abnormalities or other inherited traits, which give rise to health problems or impede the normal life of the dog or cat.



A culture of mutual understanding and collaboration that respects the diverse perspectives of coalition members and strengthens our collective impact for cats and dogs worldwide.



Unified, consistent messaging from coalition members that prioritizes cat and dog health and welfare.



Widespread public acceptance that extreme conformation in dogs and cats is no longer acceptable from a welfare, moral, legal or social perspective. A clear shift in perceptions of what makes a desirable dog or cat with greater emphasis on health, function and welfare.



Acknowledgement from owners, breeders and other primary audiences that meaningful change is necessary to improve the health and welfare of dogs and cats.



## Our positions

- We believe that **cat and dog health and welfare should always come first**. These should be the primary criteria when judging or rewarding animals in shows and when making decisions about breeding, acquiring or owning any cat or dog.
- We recognize that both low-welfare breeding practices in pet production and extreme conformation are **complex, systemic issues**. Addressing them requires a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach in bringing together breeders, geneticists, media, owners, veterinarians, kennel clubs, cat fanciers' associations, animal welfare organisations, the academic and research communities, commercial partners, and policymakers.
- We believe that **physical diversity across dogs and cat breeds can be promoted** within the limits of good animal health and welfare standards. We support balanced, evidence-based regulations that promotes both physical and genetic diversity and high standards of health and welfare within breeds.
- We only support bans on cat or dog breeds when the breed is unavoidably defined by phenotypic or genotypic traits incompatible with good health and welfare in the general breed population.
- **We do not support the creation of new cat or dog breeds defined by characteristics based on phenotypic or genotypic abnormalities or other inherited traits** that cause health problems or prevent cats and dogs from living a normal, healthy life.
- We endorse the ICECDogs definition of 'innate health' as a solid foundation for identifying instances of extreme conformation:



**No aspect of a cat or a dog's conformation should restrict the companion animal from engaging fully in activities that are evolutionarily and biologically normal for the species and are necessary for good mental and physical health of the species** including interactions with people, other animals, and their environment. In order to experience good welfare - which can be assessed using the Five Domains of animal welfare<sup>36</sup> – a basic requirement is that a dog or a cat must have good innate health, and their conformation must not interfere with the animal's ability to:

- Breathe freely and oxygenate fully without effort at rest and with exercise.
  - Breathe freely and oxygenate fully without the need for conformation-related corrective surgical interventions.
  - Maintain body temperature within a normal physiological range for the species.
  - Move freely without conformation-related impediment.
  - Eat and drink effectively and without constraints or frustration.
  - Hear, smell, see, self-groom, eliminate and sleep effectively.
  - Ability to reproduce without help (breeding animals).
  - Communicate effectively with other dogs by using species-specific auditory and physical cues (tail, ears, grimace and other facial cues, stance, etc.).”
- We advocate for **comprehensive, evidence-based phenotypic and genotypic disorder testing and screening for breeding cats and dogs**. This may include DNA testing, evaluation of overall conformation for innate health, and physical and functional assessments. All assessments should be conducted prior to mating to ensure the health and welfare of both the parents and their future offspring.
  - We acknowledge that due to global variations in the national composition of populations, as well as differences in the prevalence and nature of related issues, strategies to address low welfare pet production practices and extreme conformation must be **tailored to the specific circumstances of each country**.
  - We **support the EU's ongoing efforts to establish a regulation on the welfare and traceability of cats and dogs**. We believe the registration and identification requirements mandated by the EU will provide a strong foundation for tackling the harmful and unregulated trade in pets.
- We see these actions of the Choose Health Coalition as just the beginning of a longer journey. To
- truly address low-welfare practices in pet production and to eliminate extreme conformation, it is essential to implement regulations that not only protect animals and promote high welfare practices in dog and cat production but also **engage the entire pet ecosystem in supporting healthy, responsible and informed pet ownership**.



## CHOOSE HEALTH: JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR CATS AND DOGS

**The Choose Health Coalition** calls on all stakeholders in cat and dog health and welfare — including breeders, breed institutions, authorities, owners, veterinarians, influencers, marketers and the general public — to recognize and embrace the vital responsibility each holds in improving the health and welfare of cats and dogs. This means breeding, acquiring responsibly cats and dog and not promoting, breeding, selling, or purposely adopting pets with extreme conformations that compromise their welfare. We all share responsibility for the welfare of cats and dogs. Whether we are breeding, owning, caring for pets, or even only engaging with pet-related content, we have the power to make choices that **prioritize health and contribute to a better future for cats and dogs.**





### **BREEDERS, JUDGES AND KENNEL CLUBS:**

Adopt an evidence-based approach to breeding by actively identifying and acknowledging disorders associated with extreme conformations. Commit to breeding away from traits linked to serious health problems, prioritizing the long-term welfare and innate health of every pet. Prioritize the core function of pet when breeding.

Judging and showing good innate health cats and dogs. Celebrate and reward health at shows to positively influence breeding trends and ensure healthier future litters.



### **FUTURE PET PARENTS:**

Educate themselves about what constitutes innately healthy feline and canine conformation. Choose to support breeders who are effecting positive change and prioritizing welfare in their breeding practices. Make informed decisions when acquiring a pet that prioritize the health, longevity, and quality of life of the pet—never selecting for extreme physical traits that are detrimental to welfare.



### **VETERINARIANS:**

Use their platforms and expertise to raise awareness about the risks of extreme conformations and promote responsible breeding and acquisition practices. Advocate for policies, messaging, and standards that protect pet welfare and discourage harmful trends.



### **MARKETERS AND INFLUENCERS:**

Serve as role models by choosing to showcase pets with good innate health.



### **AUTHORITIES:**

Implement balanced, consistent, science-based regulations that set clear standards for breeding, sale, and traceability of dogs and cats.



### **GENERAL PUBLIC:**

Promoting, demanding and engaging with content on pets with good innate health.

**Together, by understanding and prioritizing criteria for good innate health, and by making responsible choices in breeding, selling, acquiring and showcasing cats and dogs, we can drive meaningful change and ensure a healthier, happier future for all pets.**

# Who we are



## Fédération Cynologique Internationale

The Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI) is the world's leading international canine organization, uniting national kennel clubs from over 100 countries. Founded in 1911, the FCI is dedicated to the promotion and protection of purebred dogs through the recognition of breed standards, the regulation of international dog shows and trials, and the mutual recognition of pedigrees and judges. With a commitment to canine health, welfare, and responsible breeding, the FCI plays a central role in shaping the global dog community.

To learn more about FCI, visit [Fédération Cynologique Internationale](https://www.fci.be/).



## Four Paws

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded by Heli Dungler and friends in Vienna in 1988, the organisation focuses on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With sustainable campaigns and projects, such as its own sanctuaries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term protection for suffering animals.

To learn more about FOUR PAWS, visit [www.four-paws.org](https://www.four-paws.org).



## International Collective on Extreme Conformations in Dogs

The International Collective on Extreme Conformations in Dogs (ICECDogs) is a global multi-stakeholder group that works together to minimize welfare issues resulting from extreme conformations in dogs by seeking out and applying evidence-based canine and human approaches.

The current focus of the ICECDogs is to support national/regional multi-stakeholder groups engaged in the issues raised by extreme conformation in dogs, and to act as a leader in the development and dissemination of policy and guidance on minimizing extremes of conformation and promoting moderate, healthy conformation in dogs.

To learn more about ICECDogs, visit [www.icecdogs.com](https://www.icecdogs.com).



## Royal Canin

The Royal Canin Division, owner of the ROYAL CANIN® brand, is part of Mars, Incorporated and a global leader in Health Through Nutrition for cats and dogs. Founded in 1968 by French veterinarian, Dr. Jean Cathary, Royal Canin continues to push the limits of nutrition and knowledge in partnership with pet professionals and experts to fulfill its Purpose: A BETTER WORLD FOR PETS.

Royal Canin collaborates with partners, including breeders and veterinarians, not only to design precise, science-based nutrition for cats and dogs but also to develop a variety of tools and services to generate a significant positive impact on pet health. The company does this in a respectful, responsible, and sustainable way towards pets, people, and planet.

Operating in more than 120 markets, Royal Canin counts over 8,000 Associates, including more than 400 veterinarians and nutritionists. It runs 15 factories and 2 pet centers around the globe (our innovation centers), one Research & Development center and 7 laboratories from the Mars network.

To learn more about Royal Canin, visit [www.royalcanin.com](https://www.royalcanin.com).



## The Royal Veterinary College (RVC)

The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is the United Kingdom's largest and longest-established independent veterinary school and a member institution of the University of London. Founded in 1791, the RVC offers world-class education in veterinary medicine, veterinary nursing, and biological sciences at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is internationally recognized for its cutting-edge research, outstanding clinical services through its teaching hospitals, and commitment to animal and human health. With campuses in London and Hertfordshire, the RVC is consistently ranked among the top veterinary schools globally and holds accreditations across Europe, North America, and Australasia.

To learn more RVC, visit [Royal Veterinary College, RVC](#).

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## World Cat Congress (WCC)

The World Cat Congress (WCC) is a global alliance of the world's leading cat registries, established in 1994 to promote cooperation, understanding, and high standards in the international cat fancy. Representing nine major feline organizations, the WCC works to advance feline welfare, responsible breeding, and the recognition of pedigrees across borders. Through annual meetings, educational initiatives, and collaborative efforts, the WCC addresses key issues such as cat legislation, health, and show standards, uniting breeders, judges, and cat lovers worldwide under a shared commitment to the well-being of all cats.

To learn more about WCC, visit [Home | World Cat Congress](#).

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## World Small Animal Veterinary Association

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) is a global community representing over 300,000 veterinarians through its 117 member associations. United by a shared mission to advance companion animal health and welfare worldwide, WSAVA focuses on four core pillars: promoting animal welfare, developing globally relevant Standardization Guidelines, providing continuing education for veterinary professionals, and advocating for the role of companion animals within the One Health framework.

To learn more about WSAVA, visit [www.wsava.org](http://www.wsava.org).

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