

EU Dog and Cat Alliance

The welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices: a review of the legislation across EU countries

Genetic welfare problems

There are 28 member states. Only 15 of these have legislation to prevent the selective breeding of dogs with genetic problems such as inherited diseases or exaggerated conformation:

Austria

The law prohibits the breeding of animals where it can be foreseen that the animals or their descendants will suffer as a consequence of it, in particular in connection with genetic anomalies. Breeding animals of which descendants exhibit one of the following anomalies is specifically prohibited: dyspnoea, movement anomalies, lameness, inflammation of the skin, hairlessness, inflammations of the eyelid, conjunctiva and/or cornea, blindness, exophthalmos, deafness, neurological symptoms, deformities of the teeth, deformities of the skullcap, body shapes where it must be assumed with high probability that natural births will not be possible.

Belgium

According to the 2007 Decree on the conditions for breeding and commercial establishments, the breeding of animals which have one of the inherited diseases listed by the Minister is prohibited. However no list has been established so far.

Denmark

A working group on the breeding of animals has recently finished its work, and given recommendations on, for example, exaggerated conformation. These recommendations are being considered.

Estonia

There is no provision in the legislation preventing specifically the breeding of dogs which have genetic problems such as inherited diseases or exaggerated conformations, but the prohibition in the Animal Protection Act on 'breeding activities that cause suffering to an animal' must be interpreted as covering these problems.

Finland

The Animal Welfare Act includes provisions concerning animal protection and health in breeding. The use of breeding methods which may cause distress or significant damage to the health and welfare of animals is prohibited. In addition, an animal may not be kept for production purposes unless it can be reasonably assumed on the basis of its phenotype and

genotype that it can be kept in a way that keeping the animal does not cause damage to its health and welfare.

This is a very general statement which may be subject to interpretation. However the problem of inherited disorders seems to be taken very seriously by the Finnish food safety Authority (EVIRA). They are currently conducting a project to identify new hereditary diseases affecting the welfare of cats and dogs. The research project started in 2013 and is running until 2018. The project found two new hereditary diseases in Finnish Lapphund, causing Osteogenesis imperfecta. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is currently preparing a new Animal Welfare Act, in which this provision should be clarified.

France

It is prohibited to select companion animals based on criteria which could compromise their health and welfare as well as those of their descendants. The breeder must aim at producing animals in good health, with a good temperament, with no defect or traits which can compromise their welfare. These provisions aim to prevent the selection of cats and dogs with exaggerated conformations, which have a negative impact on the animals' health and welfare.

Germany

In Germany it is prohibited to breed vertebrates if it is expected that the offspring, due to hereditary factors, will be lacking parts of the body or organs, or will be unfit or deformed thereby causing pain, suffering or harm. It is also prohibited to breed vertebrates if behaviour problems are expected to occur in the offspring due to hereditary factors which could result in suffering or increased aggressiveness.

Greece

Animals whose anatomical and physiological characteristics or behavioural attributes may, depending on the species and breed, prove to be harmful for the health and well-being of the breeding female and her offspring are not allowed to be selected for breeding purposes. According to the legislation, the determination of harmful characteristics is done by decision of the Minister of Rural Development and Food. However, this determination has not yet been done.

Hungary

The breeding of any animal that suffers from a hereditary disease is considered as cruelty to animals and is prohibited. A person holding pets for sale must also prevent the reproduction of animals with abnormal conformations or behaviour that would cause the offspring to suffer or would have detrimental effects on their health.

Lithuania

Breeders must ensure that only animals with no genetic diseases, birth defects or pathologies reproduce.

Luxemburg

Any person who selects a pet animal for breeding is responsible for having regard to the anatomical, physiological and behaviour characteristics which are likely to put at risk the health and welfare of either the offspring or female parent.

Malta

The Animal Welfare Act includes very general provisions on the breeding of animals. All people involved in the breeding of animals are responsible for ensuring that the anatomical, physiological and behavioural characteristics of animals are taken into account, so that the health and welfare of the offspring or the parents is not put at risk.

Netherlands

The Law on animals prohibits the use for breeding of animals with physical characteristics which can affect their health and well-being as well as the health and well-being of the progeny. The Degree about the keeping of animals also prohibits breeding pets in a manner which harms the welfare and health of the parent or the offspring. Breeding must prevent the following from being transferred to, or occurring in, the offspring:

- Serious hereditary defects or diseases
- External characteristics that have harmful consequences for the welfare or health of animals
- Serious behavioural defects

Slovakia

Decree 123/2008 requires that pet animals used in breeding should not show serious genetic disorders, problematic behaviour such as aggressiveness or exaggerated timidity. Selective breeding methods should not cause permanent disability.

Slovenia

The Animal Welfare Law prohibits the breeding of vertebrates if they or their descendants present hereditary defects which negatively impact the welfare of the animals. Breeders must also ensure that the breeding of animals does not lead to behaviour problems in their progeny.

Sweden

In Sweden it is prohibited to use animals for breeding which have diseases or disabilities that can be inherited, animals which are most likely carriers of a genetic disease and the mating combination increases the risk of illness or disability of the offspring, and/or animals which exhibit behavioural disorders in the form of exaggerated fear responses or aggressive behaviour in everyday situations.