

EXPLORING CAT-KEEPING HABITS IN HUNGARY

Orsolya Horváth¹, Dóra Menich¹

¹Századvég Konjunktúrakutató Kft., Hidegkuti Nándor utca 8-10., Budapest, Hungary

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to data from Statista in 2023, cats are the most commonly kept pets in Europe. Therefore, responsible pet ownership – particularly cat ownership – is of paramount importance. Ensuring the welfare of animals is essential, but the proper care and keeping of cats is also a significant economic issue. Uncontrolled breeding, improper care, inadequate living conditions, and the issue of stray cats pose serious societal challenges. These can lead to the spread of infectious diseases, endanger the environment – as cats may hunt endangered species – and negatively affect the health of the animals themselves.

This research explores the current state of cat ownership in Hungary, with a special focus on attitudes toward cats and the actual versus ideal conditions of cat keeping. Additionally, we provide an overview of the European situation regarding cat ownership and responsible pet keeping, paying particular attention to the requirements for microchip identification and neutering.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The issue of responsible pet ownership and cat ownership was examined using a benchmarking method, as well as quantitative and qualitative research methods. The benchmarking method was used to review European regulations, revealing that in 14 countries.

A representative quantitative survey was conducted among the adult Hungarian population to gain insight into pet ownership habits and attitudes related to cat ownership. According to the results, 67.4% of Hungarians own some type of companion animal. The majority keep dogs (73.1%), but the proportion of cat owners is also high (56.4%). Pet ownership is more common among older individuals.

Focus group interviews were conducted with both cat owners and non-cat owners, living in the capital and in rural areas, to explore attitudes toward cat ownership and Hungarian animal welfare regulations in more detail. In total, eight focus group interviews were conducted: four with non-cat owners and four with cat owners.

3 RESULTS

Based on the benchmarking analysis conducted across European countries, it can be said that the requirement for microchipping and neutering cats is nearly evenly divided between mandatory and non-mandatory regulations. In 8 countries, microchipping cats is not compulsory; however, in the majority of these (6 countries), it is available as an option if the owner chooses to have their cat microchipped. When it comes to neutering, it is mandatory in 3 of the countries examined.

Among the Hungarian adult population, nearly half have a positive attitude toward cats and regard them as companion animals rather than livestock. Regarding neutering, 71.6% of Hungarians believe that neutering cats is part of responsible pet ownership. However, only about half of the population considers microchipping cats to be part of responsible ownership. Hungarians also tend to show supportive attitudes toward rabies vaccination for cats, as well as toward the TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) method.

Based on the results of the focus group research, both cat owners and non-cat owners consider it important to provide a suitable environment for cats. Among the challenges associated with cat ownership, the narrative of veterinary and healthcare costs emerged as the most prominent. The issue of free-roaming and stray cats is seen as a major problem by cat owners, primarily due to health concerns. A key narrative that also emerged was the need for education in responsible pet ownership, with many suggesting that schools should teach what it truly means to care for a companion animal.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results show a division at the European level regarding the requirements for microchipping and neutering cats. Hungarians consider both neutering and microchipping as part of responsible pet ownership; however, they also identified several challenges related to implementation, such as financial burden, lack of education, and the enforcement of regulations.

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Contact information

Corresponding author's e-mail: horvath.orsolya@szazadveg.hu