

# Stray dog and cat laws and enforcement in Czech Republic and in Italy

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**Summary.** The growing numbers of stray dogs and cats have posed serious public-health, socio-economic, political and animal-welfare problems in many EU countries. Stray animal population control is a complex issue and there are no easy solutions. Recognising the importance of the issue the European Commission has, since 2007, actively contributed to the elaboration of the first global welfare standards for the control of dog populations in the framework of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Problem-solving approaches vary in different countries as there is no common European Community legislation dealing with stray animal control. In this paper the authors describe the characteristics of the stray dog and cat problem in general and focus on existing European legislation. A comparative overview of policies and measures in place in the Czech Republic and in Italy is made to observe the differences between the two countries and understand the different needs in each, considering their historical and social differences (*i.e.* a post-communist eastern country vs a western country and founder member of what is now the European Union).

**Key words:** stray dog, stray cat, control, legislation, Italy, Czech Republic.

**Riassunto** (*Normativa sul randagismo canino e felino e sua applicazione nella Repubblica Ceca e in Italia*). Il crescente numero di cani e gatti randagi pone gravi problemi per la salute pubblica, per il benessere animale, nonché sotto l'aspetto socio-economico e politico in molti paesi dell'UE. Il controllo del randagismo è un argomento complesso e di non facile risoluzione. Riconoscendo l'importanza della questione, la Commissione Europea sin dal 2007 ha attivamente contribuito attraverso l'OIE all'elaborazione di linee-guida per il controllo della popolazione canina. Tuttavia, le strategie per risolvere detto fenomeno differiscono nei diversi paesi, poiché non esiste una specifica normativa a livello comunitario atta a controllare il suddetto fenomeno. Il presente lavoro descrive il fenomeno del randagismo in generale ed analizza la normativa esistente in Europa. Viene, altresì, effettuato un esame comparativo delle politiche e delle misure attuate nella Repubblica Ceca ed in Italia, al fine di confrontare le due realtà legislative stante le differenze storiche e sociali esistenti tra i due paesi (da un lato un paese post comunista e dall'altro un paese membro fondatore dell'attuale UE).

**Parole chiave:** cane randagio, gatto randagio, controllo, legislazione, Italia, Repubblica Ceca.

## INTRODUCTION

Stray (ownerless, feral) and free-roaming (owned) dogs and cats pose a significant threat to human health through their role as vectors of diseases (*i.e.* rabies, toxocariasis, echinococcus spp., leishmaniasis, toxoplasmosis, bartonellosis, etc.) [1-10].

Stray animals also pose animal health and welfare problems due to a lack of resources or of the veterinary care necessary to safeguard each of their five freedoms [11].

They may be responsible for bite occurrences, for damage to property and livestock, for deposition of excreta near or in areas inhabited by people, etc. [12-13].

The growing numbers of abandoned and free-roaming pets (especially dogs and cats) have become

a problem in many European countries, including Italy and the Czech Republic.

Although the free-roaming proportion of the dog and cat population is infrequently quantified, evidence suggests that their numbers are increasing in many countries [14-16].

Free-roaming dog and cat population density may vary with habitat, culture, and a variety of socio-economical conditions. Generally, in developing countries many dogs and cats are abandoned on the streets and become part of a stray population. In developed countries, stray and unwanted dogs and cats, pure-breeds included, are usually taken to animal shelters. Although it may be assumed that the large amount of money paid for a pure breed dog (or cat) would