

Welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability

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Regulation (EU) 2026/1818 establishes minimum Union requirements for the welfare of dogs and cats bred or kept in establishments or placed on the Union market, and for their traceability. It applies to breeding, keeping, identification, marketing and entry into the Union of dogs and cats, with exclusions for animals used for scientific purposes or veterinary clinical trials and certain farm stray cats used for pest control.

Welfare requirements for establishments

Operators of breeding establishments, selling establishments, shelters and foster homes must ensure appropriate nutrition, housing, health care, behavioural conditions and positive human-animal interactions. They must prevent cruelty, abandonment, unnecessary suffering and harmful handling practices, and must rehome animals before ceasing activity.

Dogs and cats must receive adequate feed and continuous access to clean water. Puppies and kittens must receive colostrum during their first two days and be weaned gradually, no earlier than six weeks. Establishments must provide safe, clean and suitable accommodation, resting areas, adequate light and temperature conditions, and sufficient space. Keeping dogs and cats in containers is prohibited except in limited situations, including transport, short-term isolation and certain care needs.

Dogs older than eight weeks must have daily outdoor access or be walked for a combined minimum of one hour, unless a veterinarian advises otherwise. Animals must be socialised from three weeks of age and provided with enrichment. Puppies may not be permanently separated from their mothers before eight weeks; kittens may not be separated before eight weeks in shelters and foster homes, or before 12 weeks in breeding establishments, except for medical reasons.

Operators must inspect animals daily, provide preventive health measures and obtain veterinary advice where welfare is compromised. Euthanasia must normally be performed by a veterinarian using anaesthesia and analgesia. Mutilations, including ear cropping, tail docking, claw removal and vocal-cord resection, are prohibited unless medically justified and performed by a veterinarian under anaesthesia and prolonged analgesia. Tethering for more than one hour is prohibited, subject to limited exceptions.

Breeding strategies must minimise harmful genetic effects. Breeding animals with excessive conformational traits that pose a high welfare risk is prohibited. Close inbreeding is prohibited, except where authorised to preserve local breeds with a limited genetic pool, and breeding to produce hybrids with wild species is prohibited. Female cats may be bred from 10 months and female dogs from their second oestrus; no more than three litters may be produced in two years, followed by at least one year of recovery after three litters. Animals that have undergone two caesarean sections may no longer be used for breeding.

Operator obligations and controls

Operators must notify their activities and establishments to competent authorities. Breeding establishments producing more than five litters annually or keeping more than five breeding females must obtain prior approval. Competent authorities must inspect such establishments and maintain a public list of approved breeders.

Animal carers must have documented education, training or professional experience. At least one carer in each establishment must complete approved training and share knowledge with other carers. Operators must arrange veterinary advisory welfare visits by 31 August 2029, or within one year of notifying a new establishment, and retain records for at least four years.

Operators placing animals on the market must provide acquirers with written information on responsible ownership, the animal's needs, vaccination status and known health conditions. Online advertisements must include a prominent responsible-ownership warning.

Identification, registration and online advertising

All dogs and cats covered by the Regulation must be individually identified by an injectable, readable microchip meeting specified International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards and registered in national databases. Identification is generally required by three months of age and before marketing; registration must occur within two working days. Changes of ownership, deaths and replacement microchips must be recorded.

Member States must establish interoperable national databases, while the Commission must maintain an index database. For online advertisements, advertisers must obtain and display a unique verification token, enabling prospective acquirers to verify the animal's identification, registration and ownership through a free public system. Online platforms must facilitate these requirements but are not subject to a general monitoring obligation.

Identification and registration apply from 31 August 2030 to operators and persons placing animals on the market, from 31 August 2036 to non-commercial dog owners, and from 31 August 2041 to non-commercial cat owners.

Imports, enforcement and review

Dogs and cats imported for placement on the Union market must originate from listed third countries and establishments and comply with equivalent welfare and traceability requirements. They must be microchipped before entry and registered within five working days. Non-commercial movements from third countries must generally be pre-notified at least five working days before entry from 31 August 2036.

Member States must establish effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties. They may retain or adopt stricter national rules, provided these are compatible with the Regulation and do not hinder the internal market. The Commission will publish its first monitoring report by 31 August 2033 and evaluate the Regulation by 31 August 2040.

The Regulation was adopted following the European Parliament's position of 28 April 2026 and the Council's decision of 22 May 2026. It was published on 10 August 2026, entered into force on 30 August 2026 and applies from 31 August 2028, with phased application dates for specific provisions.

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