Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

Revealing the scale of Vietnam's illegal dog and cat meat trade

How trafficking networks undermine public health and law enforcement.

A consolidated report based on three investigations conducted on behalf of FOUR PAWS by TRACKS Investigations (2022-2025).

Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 3

Key findings 3

- Cross-border transport routes and areas of concern 3
- Cross-country transport 6
- Transport methods 8

Risks posed by the dog and cat meat trade 12

- Public health and risks to rabies elimination strategies 12
- Animal welfare issues 13
- Other findings: pet theft as a source of supply for the trade 16

Recommendations 17

Conclusion 18

Bibliography 19

Annex 21

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from three investigations into the illegal transport of dogs and cats for the meat trade in Vietnam, conducted by TRACKS Investigations on behalf of FOUR PAWS between December 2022 and June 2025. Drawing on Highway to Hell: The Illegal Trade of Dogs and Cats through Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam[1] and two subsequent cross-border investigations, it examines key transport routes, methods, and the associated risks to public health and animal welfare.

The investigations reveal widespread movement of dogs and cats along major highways and across borders without veterinary certification or vaccination documentation, indicating challenges in the implementation of existing animal health and transport laws. These findings highlight risks to animal welfare and public health, particularly in the context of regional efforts under the WOAH–WHO "Zero by 30" strategy to eliminate human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.[2]

The unregulated movement of unvaccinated animals poses a significant health risk and may weaken disease control measures set out in ASEAN and WOAH frameworks. Human rabies remains a major public health concern, with between 70 and 100 deaths reported each year,[3] one of the highest numbers in the region. Rabies deaths increased from 82 in 2023 to 89 deaths recorded in 2024.[4] Persistent outbreaks in high-risk provinces such as Binh Thuan and Gia Lai,[5] together with continued cases in both Vietnam and Laos, highlight the ongoing transmission risks, particularly where cross-border animal movement occurs.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) donation of 9,000 human rabies vaccine doses to northern provinces in October 2025 further illustrates the continued public health burden of dog-mediated rabies in Vietnam and the need for strengthened prevention measures.[4] The illegal transport of unvaccinated dogs and cats for the meat trade directly undermines these public health efforts, facilitating the potential spread of rabies through uncontrolled animal movement and poor transport conditions.

Strengthening inspection consistency, inter-agency coordination, and documentation processes along key routes such as National Highway 1A and at border crossings could support Vietnam's existing national public health and biosecurity objectives while significantly reducing illegal transport activities and their associated risks.

Investigators documented regular cross-border trafficking, welfare violations, and reported instances of facilitation along Laos-Vietnam routes, with traders and bus companies openly admitting to transporting live dogs and cats without checks or certifications. The findings reveal serious public health concerns, particularly the movement of animals through Gia Lai Province, a recognised rabies hotspot. The evidence highlights the urgent need for coordinated enforcement and review of implementation approaches to protect public health, animal welfare, and the integrity of law enforcement in Vietnam.

These findings provide a clear roadmap for action to strengthen enforcement, protect public health, and uphold Vietnam's existing laws.

Key investigative findings

Cross-border transport

- Key border areas of concern include Lao Bao on the Vietnam-Laos border and other unofficial crossings known locally but not formally monitored by authorities.
- Evidence confirms live dogs, and in some instances, cats, are transported from Laos into Vietnam through Lao Bao, facilitated by reported informal payments to Laotian officials.
- Documentation checks and enforcement interventions were described as inconsistent.

Cross-country transport

- Primary routes for transporting dogs and cats include National Highway 1A and Highway 22 (See map Fig. 1).
- Inspections were reported to be infrequent, and enforcement was described as inconsistent in some areas.
- The overall volume of animal transport remains high, with limited deterrence reported along some routes.

Transport methods

- Dogs and cats were moved using motorbikes, small and large trucks, and passenger buses.
- Several passenger bus companies were identified as regular participants in the illegal transport of animals.

Risks posed

- **Public health:** The trade poses serious risks of rabies and other zoonotic diseases. Both Vietnam and Laos continue to report human and animal rabies cases, making the transport of unvaccinated animals from known rabies hotspots a significant public health concern. Investigators documented animals being moved from such locations without certification or vaccination documentation.
- **Animal welfare:** Investigations documented severe abuse and neglect of animals during capture, holding, transport, and slaughter. Animals were captured violently, kept in overcrowded cages, deprived of food and water, and killed using extremely inhumane methods.

Recommendations

- Strengthen enforcement of existing transport legislation and inter-agency coordination.
- Support a One Health approach to rabies eradication as a public health priority.
- Implement a roadmap to phase out the dog and cat meat trade.

Introduction

This report brings together the findings of three investigations conducted by TRACKS Investigations on behalf of FOUR PAWS between 2022 and 2025. The investigations sought to map the transport networks and enforcement gaps that enable the illegal dog and cat meat trade in Vietnam.

It provides an overview of cross-border and domestic transport routes, the methods used to move animals, and the associated welfare, public health, and governance risks. The report also identifies key areas where strengthened enforcement and policy action are needed to curb the trade and support Vietnam's national rabies elimination goals.

Investigative methodology

The investigations were carried out in different regions of Vietnam, including selected cross-border routes with Laos, and were undertaken as separate field deployments rather than a single longitudinal study.

Methods included on-site observation, visual documentation of animal transport and handling practices, monitoring of key transport routes and locations, and interviews with traders, transport operators, and local stakeholders. All findings reflect observations made during the investigation periods.

For safety and operational reasons, specific details regarding investigators, exact dates, and certain investigative procedures are not disclosed.

Key findings

NOTE: *Please find a summary of the key findings in Table 1: Key patterns, evidence and implications in the Annex at the end of this report, which provides a consolidated overview of the patterns and issues observed at every stage of the supply chain, from capture through to transport, holding and slaughter. These are presented alongside key enforcement, animal welfare, and public health implications.*

Cross-border transport routes and areas of concern

Investigations identified several routes used for the illegal cross-border transport of dogs and cats into Vietnam (See Fig. 1), with the Lao Bao crossing on the Vietnam-Laos border emerging as a significant area of concern. Accounts from traders and transport operators indicated that informal payments were reported during cross-border movement, while inspection practices were described as inconsistent. This suggests that inspection and verification measures may not always be implemented consistently, allowing unregulated transport to continue in some cases without effective intervention.

Observations suggest that unofficial routes near border areas may be used by motorcycles and small trucks to bypass formal inspection posts, enabling onward transport to major highways such as National Highway 1A, Vietnam's main north-south artery. This highway facilitates the movement of dogs and cats via passenger buses and trucks from Ho Chi Minh City in the south, through Hue and Quang Tri to Hanoi in the north.

Although minimal activity was observed along the Cambodia-Vietnam border, reports suggest that dogs from Cambodia, Laos, and within Vietnam continue to be traded through Le Thanh International Border Gate (Gia Lai Province), which links efficiently to National Highway 1A and may serve as an alternative trafficking route.

Access restrictions due to typhoon conditions prevented full assessment of northern border areas, but consistent verbal accounts from restaurant owners, traders, bus drivers, and officials confirm that cross-border transport from Laos persists, particularly during peak trading seasons. Reported enforcement gaps and inconsistent oversight may contribute to continued cross-border movement of unvaccinated animals, heightening the risks of rabies and other zoonotic disease transmission.

The following case studies illustrate the scale, organisation, and reported facilitation mechanisms underpinning the illegal dog and cat meat trade in Vietnam. They provide evidence of established trafficking routes, cross-border networks, and implementation challenges that enable the trade to persist despite existing legislation.

Reported facilitation of illegal transport at Moc Bai Border

At Moc Bai Border Station, individuals openly offered to smuggle dogs from Cambodia into Vietnam for 500,000 VND per animal, payable only after delivery. The fee was said to include "unnamed payments" to facilitate the transport of live dogs and cats into Vietnam. Dogs were moved in small batches using vans and motorbikes to avoid inspection, highlighting reported trafficking networks and informal practices that enable regular, unmonitored cross-border animal transport.

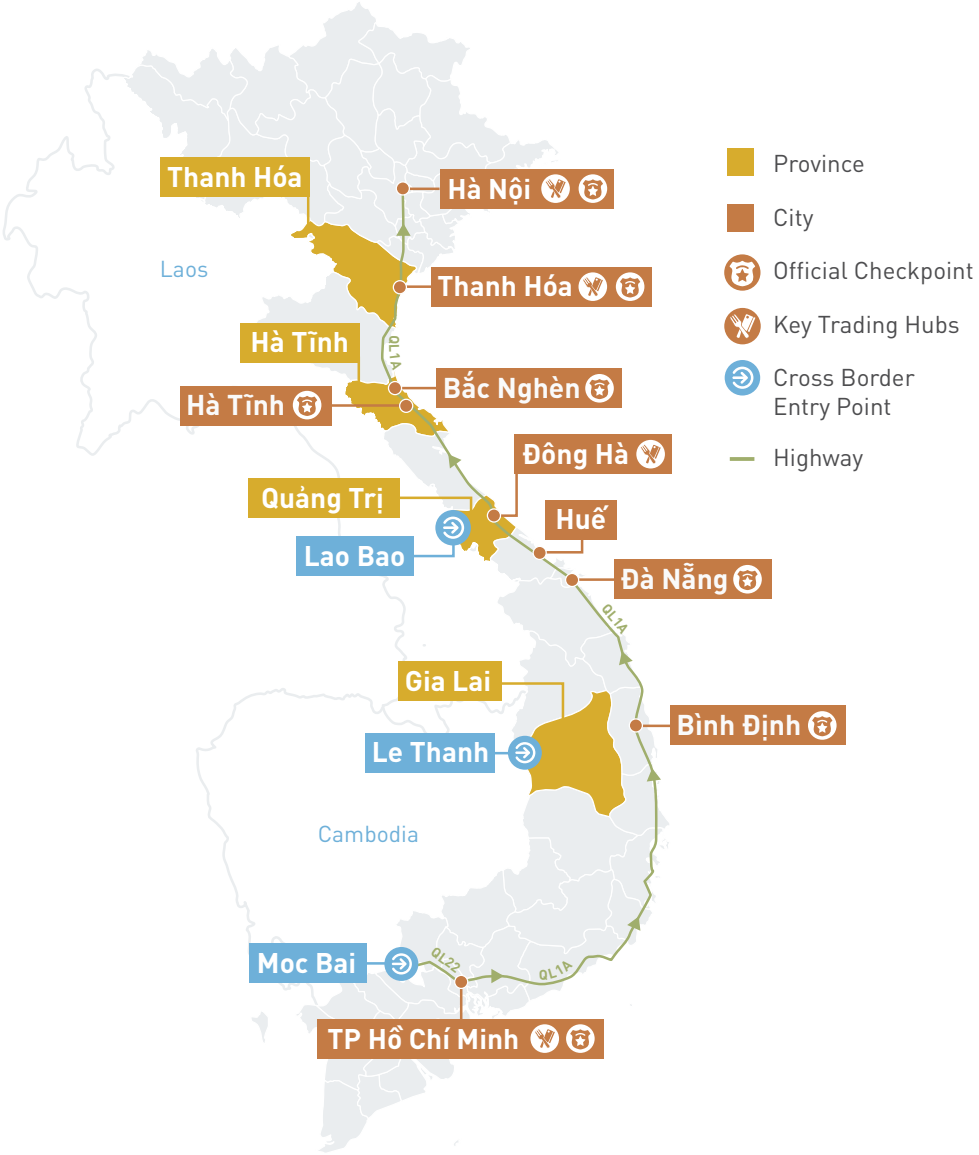

Fig. 1: Map (R) of primary transport routes for dogs and cats in Vietnam, including National Highway 1A and Highway 22.

Cross-border dog smuggling at the Lao Bao border

Investigators documented an active cross-border supply chain moving dogs from Laos into Vietnam through unofficial routes near the Lao Bao border (See Fig. 2). A motorcyclist transporting dogs and goats described daily animal movements, reporting payments of 20,000-30,000 VND to Lao officials and moving five to seven dogs per trip over distances of up to 150 kilometres.

Further along the route near Dong Ha, another motorcyclist described a wider network of traders who bypass the official Lao Bao border gate and transfer dogs to larger trucks in Gio Linh District for transport north along National Highway 1A, with a prolific pickup-truck trader playing a central role.

Fig. 2: Image (L) Motorcycle trader transporting crate of dogs through Cam Lo. Image (R) same driver stopped at a service station.

Public online reviews (See Fig.3) from restaurants beside nearby bus stops also reported sightings of caged dogs and suspected on-site slaughter (See Fig. 4). Observation of trader premises near Lao Bao confirmed ongoing activity, with dogs seen in metal crates at night and the crates empty by morning, indicating night-time movements to avoid daytime inspections (See Fig. 5).

Cross-border transport and informal payment practices along the Laos-Vietnam route

In Dakrong, Quang Tri Province, the owner of a dog meat restaurant confirmed that passenger buses and small trucks regularly carry 50-70 dogs from Laos into Vietnam, with informal payments reported to Lao officials, while Vietnamese authorities were said to conduct limited inspection or intervention. A local driver further explained that shipments are divided into smaller loads to reduce the likelihood of inspection.

Cross-country transport

Dogs and cats were moved across Vietnam along major routes, particularly National Highway 1A and Highway 22, with limited oversight reported in some areas. Investigators found that inspections were infrequent; official veterinarians at posts along National Highway 1A reported checking only one truck per week, while further evidence gathered suggests inspections along the route are otherwise rare, allowing large-scale, unregulated transport to continue.

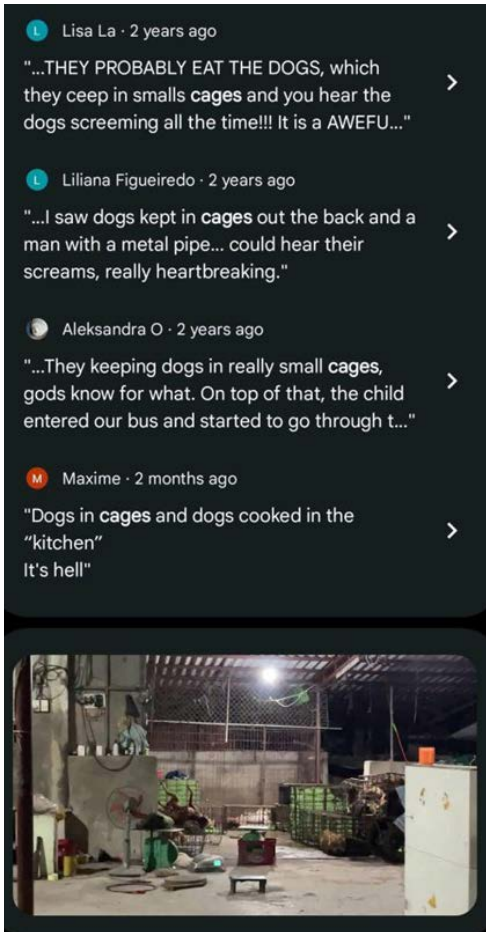

Fig. 3: Image shows screenshots of online reviews from a restaurant near a bus stop, where users report witnessing animal cruelty and suspected on-site slaughter. Restaurant named "Restauroute" - reviews and location can be found via this link: https://maps.app.goo.gl/cvMgd4rFFZfhWD7B7

Fig. 4: Image shows dogs in crates at premises at bus stop/restaurant.

Fig. 5: Image (L) Several dogs in crates at the premises of a known dog meat trader. Image (R) the same crates empty the next morning.

During fieldwork, investigators observed three motorcycles on Highway 22 carrying cages of cats and dogs, indicating active distribution operations. Further north, locals at a service station on National Highway 1A reported dog trucks passing every 10-15 days, typically using 3.5-tonne vehicles.

Although carrying live animals on passenger buses is illegal, traders were reported to routinely use bus luggage compartments to transport animals without detection. Officials acknowledged the practice occurs frequently, yet quarantine officers from the Department of Animal Health and Husbandry reported that they do not have the authority to intervene directly or inspect these buses.

Major trading hub in Thanh Hoa Province

Investigations in Thanh Hoa and Hanoi revealed strong demand for dog meat, with hubs processing up to 200 dogs per shipment. The village of Thanh Loc in Hau Loc District, Thanh Hoa Province, appeared to serve as a major aggregation point, receiving truckloads of dogs from southern provinces for redistribution to Hanoi and northern markets. Dogs were confined in crates for up to two days before being sorted, re-crated, and

transported to Hanoi every two to three days in 3-tonne trucks. Traders reported that as many as 1,000 dogs may pass through the village daily, highlighting Thanh Hoa's role as a central node in Vietnam's dog meat supply chain.

Unchecked truck transport

Investigators documented a truck in Ha Tinh City carrying an estimated 300-400 dogs in 18 crates that passed two police stops without inspection, despite the audible distress of the animals and strong odour coming from the vehicle.

Dong Ha to Ha Tinh route

A separate eight-hour observation from Dong Ha to Ha Tinh recorded dogs being collected, sold, and reloaded at multiple points. The truck crossed multiple official inspection posts (See Fig. 6) without presenting any documentation, highlighting the routine evasion of regulatory oversight along National Highway 1A.

Fig. 6: Image shows a small truck carrying cages of dogs from Da Nang to Ha Tinh.

Large-scale dog shipments from Thanh Hoa to Hanoi

In Thanh Hoa province, investigators documented a 3-tonne truck being loaded with around 150-200 dogs for transport to Hanoi (See Fig. 7). The trader confirmed that such shipments occur every two to three days, supplying holding areas and slaughterhouses. Dogs were sorted by size and weight before being packed into crates, many visibly stressed or injured. Nearby slaughterhouses allowed customers to select live dogs for immediate killing and preparation. These findings demonstrate the industrial scale, frequency, and cruelty of the dog meat trade operating with limited effective oversight, as reported during investigations.

Fig. 7: Image shows a truck in Thanh Hoa loaded with approximately 150-200 dogs awaiting transport to Hanoi.

Transport methods

Investigators documented multiple methods used to transport dogs and cats across Vietnam and from neighbouring countries. Vehicles included motorbikes, small trucks, large trucks, and passenger buses, with the latter two identified as the most frequently used for long-distance transport across the country. Several passenger bus companies were reported during investigations to be regularly involved in the illegal movement of live animals, in clear breach of Vietnam's transport regulations.

These practices contravene several legal requirements, including Article 69 of Law on Animal Husbandry (2018) on humane treatment of animals in animal husbandry, Articles 37 to 39 of Vietnam's Law on Animal Health (2015), which mandate quarantine certification, proof of vaccination, and compliance with disease control procedures during transport.[6] Overcrowding, lack of ventilation, and failure to provide basic care also contravene welfare provisions and are subject to administrative sanctions under Decree 14/2021/ND-CP dated 1 March 2021, as amended and supplemented by Decree No. 07/2022/ND-CP issued on 10 January 2022, on administrative penalties for violations in the field of animal husbandry, which sets out penalties for violations in animal husbandry and animal welfare.[7,8] The movement of live animals through unofficial routes is also inconsistent with the Prime Minister's Directive 29/CT-TTg, issued on 6 December 2023, on preventing illegal import and transport of animals and animal products; strengthening disease control, promoting sustainable livestock development, and ensuring food supply.[9]

Passenger bus networks

Investigations found that several passenger bus companies routinely transport live dogs and cats, both domestically and across borders. At the Lao Bao border, drivers confirmed carrying 60-70 dogs per journey for fees covering "all procedures", implying no health checks or permits. Reported charges ranged from 300,000-1,500,000 VND per consignment, depending on the route and number of dogs transported. Signs at local service stations reading "Do not drop off dogs and cats here" suggested frequent animal loading and unloading (See Fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Image shows signage warning against animal loading at Lao Bao service station. Signs read: - Cấm bỏ động vật: No abandoning animals, - Cấm bỏ chó mèo: No abandoning dogs and cats, - Cấm đỗ ô tô con: No parking.

In one instance, investigators observed tourists boarding a bus operated by the same company which was later documented carrying live cats in its luggage hold (See Fig. 9). At another site, dogs were seen being crated and left for collection by a different bus company. These findings indicate that long-distance passenger buses between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are frequently used to covertly transport live animals. An official at the Ha Tinh inspection checkpoint confirmed awareness of the practice but said only police have authority to intervene.

Fig. 9: Image shows cats crammed into crates in the luggage hold of a passenger bus.

At a service station in Pleiku, Gia Lai Province (a recognised rabies hotspot in Vietnam),[10] investigators witnessed a bus being loaded with live cats and dogs in its luggage hold for a 24-hour journey north to Thai Binh, Hai Phong, and Quang Ninh (See Fig. 10). Staff confirmed daily pickups and bookings for animal transport.

Fig. 10: Image of cats and dogs being loaded onto a bus in Pleiku, Gia Lai Province (a known rabies hotspot).

In Quang Tri Province, two men with a trolley containing around 12-14 dogs were seen beside parked passenger buses, likely awaiting loading onto a bus bound for Hanoi (See Fig. 11). Officials later acknowledged that such transport is illegal but admitted that inspectors lack authority to stop passenger buses.

Fig. 11: Image of dogs packed into a crate at a bus stop/service station on National Highway 1A, Quang Tri.

A dog trader based along National Highway 1A confirmed daily shipments of dogs to Hanoi via passenger bus services from Hue to Hanoi, with drop-offs at Giap Bat and Nuoc Ngam stations (See Fig. 12). He added that traders from Nghe An collect dogs from Laos and transport them north via Lao Bao, illustrating how passenger transport services enable rapid distribution nationwide with minimal oversight.

Fig. 12: Image shows a trader's premises on National Highway 1A with dogs awaiting transport by passenger bus to Hanoi.

Motorcycles and small vehicles

Motorcycles were reported to be frequently used to transport dogs and cats from Laos into Vietnam via unofficial border routes. Local sources described organised motorcycle gangs that transport animals daily, often paying Lao officials to cross while Vietnamese authorities were described as conducting limited checks in some locations. In one case, a key trader was reported to supply up to one tonne of dogs (approximately 65 individuals) within three days, moving them to Dong Ha for onward transport north.

Fig. 13: At a holding centre near the Lao Bao border, image (L) shows approximately 30 dogs confined in metal crates on the floor of the premises, while image (R) shows cats tied inside net bags, one appearing unconscious. All animals at the site are believed to have been smuggled across the Lao Bao border by motorcycle gangs.

In Ka Tang village, investigators followed a motorcycle carrying empty crates to a property beside a dog meat restaurant. Staff confirmed sourcing dogs from Laos and offered to supply animals for 70,000 VND per kilogram. The riders, identified as Laotian nationals, later returned toward the border.

In another instance, investigators spoke with a trader transporting three dogs by motorcycle (See Fig. 14). He explained that larger quantities of meat could be obtained from District 12, Ho Chi Minh City, where a slaughterhouse near Quang Trung Bridge Market supplies local restaurants. He stated that Cambodian dogs are sold at the same price as Vietnamese ones and are purchased without documentation.

Fig. 14: Image shows a dog trader transporting three dogs in cages on his motorcycle - photo was taken near the Moc Bai border station.

Risks posed by the dog and cat meat trade

Public health and risks to rabies elimination strategies

The dog and cat meat trade poses serious public health threats, particularly through the spread of rabies and other zoonotic diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), both Vietnam and Laos continue to report human rabies cases.[11] In Laos, rabies is estimated to cause approximately 38 human deaths each year, while in Vietnam the disease remains responsible for an estimated 70-100 human deaths annually.[1213]Recent reporting from Vietnam's Ministry of Health further indicates that 89 deaths were recorded nationwide in 2024, and during the first nine months of 2025 alone, 58 human rabies deaths were reported across 18 provinces and cities.[14] Against this backdrop, the unregulated movement of unvaccinated animals from known hotspots, such as Gia Lai Province, poses a serious public health risk. Laos and Vietnam both participate in regional and international initiatives aligned with the "Zero by 30" global strategic plan to eliminate human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.[17]

The ASEAN regional strategy has been developed to detail how a One Health framework is necessary to achieve the rabies elimination goal, and both countries have identified similar issues and challenges in providing comprehensive rabies vaccination coverage.[15] With an unregulated cross-border trade in dogs, the challenge of surveillance and disease control increases exponentially. Dogs captured from rural and mountainous areas, which are often associated with higher rabies incidence and lower vaccination coverage, may increase the risk of disease and undermine ongoing rabies control and vaccination efforts.[16,17]

When vaccinated animals are removed from a population, the herd immunity is reduced, and unvaccinated animals are likely to fill the vacuum. This creates an environment where disease can thrive, particularly with more feral and potentially aggressive dogs coming into closer contact with human populations. With most bites and rabies deaths occurring in children, this is a serious public health concern. Furthermore, rabies-related deaths have been reported among Vietnamese dog meat traders and slaughterhouse workers including through bites, or inhalation of brain splatter during slaughter, demonstrating the multiple severe health threats throughout all aspects of the trade.[18] Addressing the dog and cat meat trade is an essential component of broader rabies elimination efforts.

The long-distance transport of dogs and cats in overcrowded, unhygienic, and stressful conditions can increase the risk of disease transmission, particularly as disease stress can be associated with reduced immune function and higher rates of infectious disease, while the movement of dogs through meat trade networks has been identified as a contributing factor to rabies transmission risks.[16,19] Infected animals can expose traders, consumers, and the wider public to rabies and other zoonoses at every stage of the supply chain, from capture and transport to slaughter and sale. Conditions inside transport vehicles further amplify the risks: animals are crammed into metal cages soaked with urine and faeces, and drivers have been seen hosing them down while confined, spreading contaminated wastewater.

Despite existing legal provisions prohibiting the movement of unvaccinated animals, enforcement has been reported as inconsistent. Traders routinely transport animals without health certificates, vaccination records, or permits, often reporting informal payments to avoid inspection or penalties. Investigations found that informal payments were made to border officials to move animals from Laos into Vietnam, while domestic enforcement along major routes, such as National Highway 1A, is reported as limited in some locations.

These practices reflect reported implementation challenges, inconsistent oversight, and limited accountability mechanisms that may undermine disease control, biosecurity, and public confidence in authorities. The persistence of these gaps enables organised criminal networks to operate freely and jeopardises Vietnam's progress toward its rabies elimination and public health goals.

Animal welfare issues

Investigations documented severe abuse and neglect throughout all stages of the dog and cat meat trade, from capture to transport, holding, and slaughter. Animals suffer significant cruelty during capture, with dogs and cats commonly snared, beaten, poisoned, or stunned with homemade devices before being loaded for transport in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. They are confined in severely cramped cages, deprived of food and water, and slaughtered using extremely cruel methods.

During transport and holding

Dogs and cats were tightly packed into metal cages, often stacked on trucks or hidden in the luggage holds of passenger buses, enduring journeys of over 24 hours without rest, food, or water. Investigators observed dogs being prodded with electric rods, violently hosed down inside crates, and handled roughly during loading and weighing. Sick or injured animals were thrown back into cages, left to suffer in filthy, cramped conditions that caused immense stress, dehydration, and injury.

During slaughter

At slaughterhouses, investigators recorded some of the worst cruelty they had documented in over 25 years of animal welfare investigations. In Cao Xa Ha village, where several hundred dogs are killed daily, animals were bludgeoned with heavy metal bars, often repeatedly, before having their throats cut, sometimes while still conscious and in full view of other dogs. Others were electrocuted (See Fig. 15 and 16) with 220-volt prods or drowned in nylon sacks weighted with bricks. Workers showed total indifference to their suffering, and no attempt at humane slaughter methods were observed.

> **"This was one of the most brutal sights we have ever witnessed during an investigation. The practice was carried out in plain sight of the other live dogs, who watched in distress. After each dog's throat was cut, the body was tossed onto a heap of already-killed dogs."** - TRACKS Investigator

Fig. 15: Image shows dogs crammed into a crate awaiting electrocution.

Fig. 16: Image (L) shows electrocuted dogs lying dead across a crate. Image (R) shows cats being drowned in a tied-up nylon sack submerged in a bucket of water with a brick placed on top.

Slaughter at a premises on Huu Hung Street, Hanoi

Investigators observed dogs struck repeatedly on the head, sometimes up to seven times, before their throats were cut (See Fig. 17). One dog, lying among carcasses, was still moving as they bled out.

> **"The suffering I witnessed during this investigation ranks among the worst I have seen in my 25 years of experience. And I have seen a lot."** - TRACKS Investigator

Fig. 17: Image of dogs being slaughtered at a premises in Huu Hung street, Hanoi

Investigators noted the indifference of those carrying out the killings, who continued their work despite being observed. Nearby, dogs were confined in steel crates awaiting slaughter, many of whom had reportedly travelled up to 30 hours without food or water. Their physical exhaustion and stress were evident. These findings highlight the extreme cruelty associated with dog slaughter practices documented during the investigations.

Dog slaughter operations in Cao Xa Ha Village, Thanh Hoa Province

Dogs were found confined in cages at a large slaughter site where neighbours reported that killings take place daily between 3 and 9 am, with trucks from Thanh Hoa delivering animals each night (See Fig. 18). Around 30 dogs were killed here each night, reportedly rising to 50 during rainy periods or at the end of the lunar month, using blunt-force trauma followed by throat cutting.

> **Villagers described the trade as highly profitable but noted declining demand and expressed support for a potential ban, saying it could help curb dog theft and catching.**

Fig. 18: Image (L) shows dogs awaiting slaughter at a premises in Cao Xa Ha and image (R) shows dogs being slaughtered at a premises in Cao Xa Ha.

Slaughterhouse in An Giang Province

A slaughterhouse in Khanh Hoa, Chau Phu District, reportedly kills up to 100 dogs per day for local restaurants. Locals also identified mobile collection points near the border that frequently change location to evade police detection.

Other findings: pet theft as a source of supply for the trade

Evidence gathered across the investigations indicates that pet theft may contribute to the supply of dogs and cats for the meat trade. Investigators observed animals in vendor cages still wearing collars, suggesting that owned pets may have entered the trade. For example, on Binh Long Street in Ho Chi Minh City, multiple cats were documented in cages with collars still attached, indicating that they were likely owned animals prior to entering the trade (See Fig. 19).

Testimony from communities near slaughter sites further supports this concern. In Cao Xa Ha village, Thanh Hoa Province, villagers associated the trade with dog theft and catching activities, noting that reducing demand could help curb these practices.

While the precise scale of pet theft is difficult to quantify, these findings suggest that the trade may be linked to the loss of owned animals, raising additional animal welfare and social concerns. This concern is further reflected in data from the FOUR PAWS Dog and Cat Meat Trade Reporting Tool[1], which received 1,867 reports related to pet theft between September 2025 and March 2026, accounting for 36% of all reports submitted during this period. These reports indicate that pet theft associated with the trade remains a pressing issue affecting both Vietnamese citizens and international communities.

Fig. 19: Image shows cats in cages, many wearing collars, awaiting slaughter on Binh Long Street, Ho Chi Minh City.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence gathered across the three investigations, FOUR PAWS recommends consideration of the following actions to address the illegal trafficking of dogs and cats throughout Vietnam:

1 Strengthen enforcement of existing legislation

Investigations reveal that existing animal transport regulations are not being effectively enforced, with dogs and cats routinely trafficked without veterinary certificates, vaccination records, or proof of origin required under the Law on Animal Health 2015,6 posing significant public health risks. These practices violate Articles 38, which mandate proper documentation and humane transport conditions, and Article 70, which lists veterinary hygiene requirements in the transportation of animals and animal products. Cross-border movements through unofficial routes also breach the Prime Minister's directive 29/CT-TTg9 on preventing illegal import and transport of animals.

Evidence from National Highway 1A demonstrates that inspection posts check as few as one truck per week, while most vehicles transporting dogs and cats pass through without any inspection. At Lao Bao, Vietnamese traders admitted to using unofficial routes and reported making informal payments to avoid checks, confirming that enforcement gaps are enabling cross-border movement.

Given that the legal framework already contains clear requirements, strengthening enforcement and capacity remains a key priority. Authorities should consider increasing inspection capacity along known trafficking routes such as National Highway 1A and key border points such as Lao Bao and Le Thanh. This requires improved capacity and coordination of veterinary, police and border agencies to inspect vehicles, including passenger buses, while increasing inspection powers and applying stricter penalties for violations. Effective enforcement of existing legislation would significantly reduce illegal animal movements and associated public health risks. Clear and practical implementation plans should be developed for how to humanely deal with confiscated animals and those deemed to be of zoonotic risk.

2 Support rabies eradication as a public health priority

The illegal movement of unvaccinated dogs and cats across long distances undermines Vietnam's national rabies elimination goals and regional disease control efforts. Strengthening inspection procedures, improving inter-agency coordination, and aligning transport enforcement with national rabies control strategies would support existing public health objectives. Integrating improved oversight of animal movement into One Health approaches may help reduce transmission risks while reinforcing progress toward the Zero by 30 goal. Trade and movement of animals should be incorporated into National Rabies Control Strategies, and strategic plans should be developed with multi-stakeholder input.

3 Implement a roadmap to phase out the dog and cat meat trade

FOUR PAWS recommends that the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) formally acknowledge the public health and animal welfare risks associated with the dog and cat meat trade and explore collaboration with FOUR PAWS to develop a national roadmap to phase out the trade. This approach would build on

emerging efforts in Vietnam to address public health risks and reduce dog and cat meat consumption, alongside local initiatives in cities such as Hoi An and Hanoi to promote more humane and sustainable practices. These efforts align with Vietnam's broader One Health commitments, including the Zero by 30 rabies elimination strategy.

Conclusion

This report brings together findings from three investigations documenting the illegal trafficking of dogs and cats across Vietnam and its borders, including through Ha Tinh and key crossings with Laos and Cambodia, to supply the dog and cat meat trade. Investigators documented extensive footage of animal collection, transport, and slaughter, as well as accounts from traders, transport operators, and officials involved in enabling the trade.

The findings reveal the continued movement of unvaccinated and undocumented animals across provincial and national borders, enabled by reported informal payments and inconsistent enforcement. These activities violate Vietnam's animal health and transport laws, undermine disease control, and cause severe animal suffering.

Stronger enforcement of existing legislation is urgently needed, including consistent inspection of trucks and passenger buses by veterinary and police authorities. More broadly, national measures to phase out the dog and cat meat trade would protect animal welfare and strengthen Vietnam's defences against rabies and other zoonotic diseases.

The illegal transport of dogs and cats for the meat trade threatens public health, food safety, and the rule of law, while perpetuating systemic animal cruelty. By improving coordination between government agencies, veterinary services, and border enforcement, Vietnam can close enforcement gaps, advance its 2030 rabies elimination goal, and show regional leadership in public health and animal welfare.

FOUR PAWS encourages members of the public to use our specialised reporting tool[a] to inform us of any dog and cat meat trading activity they witness. Reports received to date have provided valuable insight into where trading is taking place throughout Vietnam and offer important feedback to government and law enforcement. Gathering information about illegal activities that perpetuate the trade, such as pet theft, is essential to helping authorities understand the severity of the issue. The reporting tool enables the public to share what they have seen and play an active role in saving lives and preventing further suffering.

a FOUR PAWS public reporting tool for dog and cat meat trading activity: https://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/campaigns/end-the-dog-cat-meat-trade/help-us-report-a-case

Bibliography

1 FOUR PAWS International. 2024. Highway to Hell: The illegal trade of dogs and cats through Ha Tinh province, Vietnam. Vienna (AT): FOUR PAWS International. Available from: https://media.4-paws.org/d/a/b/c/dabcab6fa5be-05986f1eaa640c638415a86d8dfb/2024-04-29_DCMT-Ha-Tinh-Expose-Report_EN.pdf?_jtsuid=868181686045314658277 6

2 World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). 2024. ASEAN–WOAH rabies meeting: regional progress towards Zero by 30. Available from: https://rr-asia.woah.org/en/events/asean-woah-rabies-meeting/

3 World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. Rabies: Collaborate and vaccinate to end rabies. Geneva (CH): WHO. Available from: https://www.who.int/vietnam/news/detail/27-09-2020-rabies-collaborate-and-vaccinate-to-end-rabies

4 World Health Organization (WHO). 2025. World Health Organization donates life-saving rabies vaccines to high-risk provinces in Viet Nam. Geneva (CH): WHO. Available from: https://www.who.int/vietnam/news/detail/22-10-2025-world-health-organization-donates-life-saving-rabies-vaccines-to-high-risk-provinces-in-viet-nam

5 United Nations Vietnam. 2024. Rabies prevention and control update: high-risk provinces and national response. Hanoi (VN): United Nations Vietnam. Available from: https://vietnam.un.org/en/274867-local-agencies-organizations-or-institutions-implement-capacity-building-activities-rabies

6 National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2015. Law on Animal Health (No. 79/2015/QH13). Hanoi (VN): Government of Vietnam. Available from: https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/report/downloadreportbyfilename?-filename=Vietnam%20National%20Assembly%20Passes%20Animal%20Health%20Law_Hanoi_Vietnam_10-7-2015.pdf

7 Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2021. Decree No. 14/2021/ND-CP on penalties for administrative violations in animal husbandry. Hanoi (VN). Available from: https://thuvienp-hapluat.vn/van-ban/EN/Vi-pham-hanh-chinh/Decree-14-2021-ND-CP-penalties-administrative-offences-involving-animal-husbandry/468068/tieng-anh.aspx

8 Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2022. Decree No. 07/2022/ND-CP amending and supplementing a number of articles of Decree No. 14/2021/ND-CP. Hanoi (VN). Available from: https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC212127/

9 Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. 2023. Directive No. 29/CT-TTg, issued 6 December 2023, on preventing illegal import and transport of animals. Hanoi (VN): Government of Vietnam. Available from: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/vie207689EN.pdf

10 Saigon Giai Phong News. 2023. Rabies incidence in the Central Highlands: Gia Lai among provinces with highest rabies fatalities. Available from: https://en.sggp.org.vn/rabies-cases-tend-to-increase-in-vietnam-post105408.html

11 World Health Organization (WHO), Western Pacific Region. 2024. Act now: You, Me, Community – Rabies in the Western Pacific Region. Available from: https://data.wpro.who.int/act-now-you-me-community

12 Institut Pasteur du Laos. [date unknown]. Molecular epidemiology of rabies in Lao PDR. Vientiane (LA): Institut Pasteur du Laos. Available from: https://www.pasteur.la/project-carried-on-in-the-lab-35/molecular-epidemiology-of-rabies-in-lao-pdr/

13 World Health Organization Western Pacific Region. 2024. World Rabies Day 2024 -- regional rabies data platform. Manila (PH): WHO WPRO. Available from: https://data.wpro.who.int/world-rabies-day-2024-0

14 Vietnam Government Portal. 2026 Feb. Vaccinating pets against rabies and properly treating wounds. Hanoi (VN): vietnam.vn. Available from: https://www.vietnam.vn/en/tiem-phong-dai-cho-vat-nuoi-va-xu-ly-vet-thuong-dung-cach-la-chan-bao-ve-tinh-mang-con-nguoi

15 World Health Organization; FAO; World Organisation for Animal Health; UNICEF. 2018. Zero by 30: the global strategic plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513838

16 Quan NK, et al. 2024. Combatting rabies outbreaks in Vietnam: High time to enforce One Health strategies. Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease. Available from: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11629242/

17 World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). 2025 Feb 24-26. ASEAN rabies meeting: ASEAN Rabies Elimination Strategy implementation planning. Pattaya (TH): WOAH Regional Representation for Asia and the Pacific. Available from: https://rr-asia.woah.org/en/events/asean-woah-rabies-meeting/

18 Ling MYJ, et al. 2023. Rabies risk associated with dog meat trade and occupational exposure in Vietnam. Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease. Available from: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37164462/

19 Romaniuk AC, et al. 2022. Effects of transportation on puppy welfare and health. Animals. Available from: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9737031/

Annex

Table 1: Key patterns, evidence and implications

The table below provides a consolidated but non-exhaustive overview of the patterns and issues observed at every stage of the supply chain, from capture through to transport, holding and slaughter. These are summarised in the table below alongside key enforcement, animal welfare, and public health implications. Please find a more detailed Case Study Overview table in the Supplementary Material.

Patterns/issues observed	Evidence from investigations	Implication
Cross-border transport through unofficial border gates	Dogs transported from Laos into Vietnam via Lao Bao; informal payments reported; smuggling also offered at Moc Bai	Existing border controls are not being applied consistently
Movement of animals along established routes	Animals moved from border areas onto trucks and transported along National Highway 1A	Trade continues across long distances with limited interruption
Use of passenger buses to transport animals	Dogs and cats transported in bus luggage compartments; daily movements reported; officials acknowledge practice	Current controls do not cover all transport methods
Limited inspection and enforcement	Trucks passed checkpoints without inspection; inspections reported as infrequent; limited authority over buses	Non-compliance with existing laws is not being effectively addressed
High-volume collection and redistribution	Large numbers of dogs gathered in Thanh Hoa and transported onwards to Hanoi	Trade operates at a scale that increases both welfare and disease risks
Movement from areas with known rabies risk	Transport of animals from provinces such as Gia Lai and across borders where rabies is present	Undermines efforts to eliminate rabies and protect public health from zoonoses
Welfare harm during transport and holding	Animals confined in overcrowded cages; long journeys without food or water; injured animals observed	Animals experience prolonged stress, injury and suffering
Severe cruelty during slaughter	Dogs beaten, electrocuted or drowned; animals killed while conscious and in view of others	Serious animal welfare concerns at point of killing
Evidence suggesting pet theft	Dogs and cats observed wearing collars; reports from local communities	Trade may involve owned animals and affect public confidence

Photos: © FOUR PAWS; Layout: FOUR PAWS | 06/2026

About 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 in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. The sustainable campaigns and projects of FOUR PAWS focus on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats and orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, the USA and Vietnam as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in eleven countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions.

About TRACKS

FOUR PAWS worked with the agency Tracks Investigations Ltd (UK) to conduct these investigations. Tracks Investigations is an ethical investigation agency supporting the work of conservation and animal protection NGOs and charities worldwide.

FOUR PAWS International in Vietnam
2nd floor, Trung Yen 1 Tower, 1A Vu Pham Ham street, Thanh Xuan Ward, Hanoi City, Vietnam

FOUR PAWS International
VIER PFOTEN International – gemeinnützige Privatstiftung
Linke Wienzeile 236
1150 Vienna | Austria
Phone: +43-1-545 50 20-0

four-paws.org
four-paws.org/linkedin
four-paws.org/instagram
four-paws.org/facebook
four-paws.org/x
four-paws.org/youtube