

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Online Puppy Trade: United Kingdom



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FOUR PAWS UK



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Summary of UK Research results for March – June 2020

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, countries began imposing travel restrictions and, ultimately, lockdowns. At FOUR PAWS, our concerns turned to the impact this might have on the puppy trade. The European puppy trade relies heavily on people travelling within their country to buy puppies from breeders and/or puppy dealers; and puppy dealers travelling, often across borders, to deliver puppies that were bred in cruel conditions. Ultimately, these dealers use online classified ad sites to advertise these puppies to unknowing families in the UK.

A team of researchers and campaigners at FOUR PAWS, working across six European countries, have monitored the impact of the pandemic lockdown by measuring the number of ads on the leading classified ad sites. Because of the illegal nature of much of the puppy trade, determining the exact scale of the industry is impossible even at the best of times, however the below results can give an indication of the impact COVID-19 has had on the puppy trade.

Despite a gradual decrease in the number of dogs and puppies advertised across both tracked platforms, the rate of decrease had begun to slow by mid-April and, in the case of Gumtree, indicated an alarming increase in the number of dogs being advertised by the end of April, before lockdown travel restrictions had lifted. From mid-May onwards, the number of dogs and puppies being advertised via online classifieds began to increase.

Research objectives

Our objectives were to track and capture:

1. The total number of dogs and puppies advertised for sale on several leading classified ad sites across Europe each day
2. The total number of each of the most popular breeds of puppy for each country advertised for sale each day across the leading classified ad sites

Please contact FOUR PAWS UK to request further details on the research results or methodology.

International Results

Sum average of results across Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and United Kingdom for the first month of lockdown.

Date	Total puppy ads on a single day at start of lockdowns on leading classified ad sites in Europe; and again at the end of April
25-30 March	82,805
29 April	66,909

United Kingdom Results

A selection of results from tracked dog and puppy ads on Gumtree and Pets4Homes is in the tables below. The difference in search criteria functionality and categories between the two platforms meant that for Gumtree dogs of all ages were included in our data collection, whereas Pets4Homes allowed for a more nuanced search of young puppies for sale (0-3 months) specifically. These limitations in search functionality means the data collected gives a general indication for the rate of puppies advertised for sale across both platforms but should not be considered exact.

Gumtree

Date	Total dogs for sale	Shih Tzu	Labradors	French Bulldogs	Cocker Spaniel	English Bulldog	Dachshund incl. Mini	Pug	German Shepherd	Chihuahua	Staffordshire Bullterrier	Jack Russell	Husky	Cockapoo	Pomeranian
25.03	2360	51	43	327	19	91	54	129	66	150	55	46	53	32	61
01.04	1560	21	29	218	17	71	34	76	41	110	32	33	33	21	43
08.04	1091	11	24	152	11	47	21	46	27	61	24	24	23	17	32
15.04	788	6	12	113	12	42	14	38	19	47	7	20	17	13	20
20.04	702	6	13	112	10	41	21	38	12	59	10	13	9	12	20
29.04	723	5	10	109	13	35	10	27	16	46	8	15	14	15	23
-%*	-69%	-90%	-77%	-67%	-32%	-62%	-81%	-79%	-76%	-69%	-85%	-67%	-74%	-53%	-62%
19.05	673	6	15	75	21	31	26	29	9	58	6	23	12	15	23
%**	-71%	-88%	-65%	-77%	+9%	-66%	-52%	-78%	-86%	-61%	-89%	-50%	-77%	-53%	62%
05.06	887	9	20	79	35	28	42	30	17	67	9	38	12	28	39
%***	+24%	+33%	+25%	+6.33%	+40%	-9%	+38%	+3%	+47%	+13%	+33%	+39%	0	+46%	+41%

Pets4Homes

Date	Total Pups for sale	Shih Tzu	Labradors	French Bulldogs	Cocker Spaniel	English Bulldog	Dachshund incl. Mini	Pug	German Shepherd	Chihuahua	Staffordshire Bullterrier	Jack Russell	Husky	Cockapoo	Pomeranian
27.03	4671	125	161	786	103	292	190	204	137	255	57	36	32	231	95
01.04	3888	92	131	631	82	270	164	163	113	206	41	36	21	192	80
08.04	3187	76	103	499	98	224	130	138	89	151	38	27	19	171	71
15.04	2839	63	92	425	77	197	n/a	118	74	132	29	39	13	173	66
20.04	2594	53	83	371	93	192	102	104	70	110	25	39	7	165	66
29.04	2179	45	59	310	77	177	107	80	47	87	14	33	5	173	42
-%*	-53%	-64%	-63%	-61%	-25%	-39%	-44%	-61%	-66%	-66%	-75%	-8%	-84%	-25%	-56%
26.05	1924	21	66	256	98	125	137	55	36	82	9	46	4	203	49
%**	-59%	-83%	-59%	-80%	-5%	-57%	-28%	-73%	-74%	-68%	-84%	+22%	-87%	-12%	-48%
05.06	2193	25	64	240	125	144	165	71	36	92	7	50	6	244	46
%***	+12%	+16%	-3%	-6%	+22%	+13%	+17%	+23%	0	+11%	-22%	+8%	+33%	+67%	-6%

-%* Percentage decrease since the start of data collection

%** Percentage difference since the start of data collection

%*** Percentage difference since lowest rate of puppy sales (May 19 for Gumtree; May 26 for Pets4Homes)

In general, both Gumtree and Pets4Homes saw a steady decrease in puppies/dogs being advertised over the first month of data collection for both total puppy/dog ads and for every popular breed, with some exceptions:

- A 3% increase in total dog advertisements on Gumtree between the 20th and 29th of April.
- After an initial gradual decrease, a sudden increase from 27 to 39 individual ads for Jack Russell puppies on Pets4Homes on 15th April. As of April 29, there was only a reduction in the number of Jack Russell puppy ads on Pets4Homes of 8 % (36 down to 33).
- Siberian Huskies (9 to 14), German Shepherds (12 to 16), Jack Russells (13 to 15), Cocker Spaniels (10 to 13) and Cockapoos (12 to 15) all increased between the 20th and 29th of April on Gumtree.
- Between 20th and 29th of April, Cockapoos (165 to 173) and Dachshunds (102 to 107) increased on Pets4Homes

The rate of decrease over time generally slowed. After the 1st week of data collection, there was a total decrease in dog advertisements of 38% on Gumtree; however by mid-April this had dropped to 28% per week. Then, between the 20th and 29th of April there was actually an increase of 3% in total dog ads across Gumtree.

After the first week of data collection on Pets4Homes there was a total decrease in dog advertisements of 22 %; this dropped to only 11 % between April 8th and 15th; and 16% in the period between 20th and 29th of April.

Lucy's Law, which came into effect in England and Wales on April 6th, appeared to not impact the number of dogs and puppies advertised across either platform to any recognisable degree. On Friday the 3rd of April the total number of ads were 1388 (Gumtree) and 3652 (Pets4Homes). On the 6th of April they were 1131 (Gumtree) and 3301 (Pets4Homes), approximately the same rate of reduction prior to that date.

The rate of reduction was in some cases very different between the tracked breeds, and sometimes for the same breed across different platforms. For example, there was a 90% decrease in advertised Shih Tzus on Gumtree, but only a 64% decrease on Pets4Homes during the first month of data collection.

Breeds that saw the highest rates of reduction in advertisements on Gumtree during the first month of data collection were Shih Tzu (90%), Staffordshire Bull Terriers (85%) and Dachshunds (81%, including mini Dachshunds).

Breeds that saw the highest rates of reduction in advertisements on Pets4Homes during the first month of data collection were Siberian Husky (84%), Staffordshire Bull Terriers (75%), and Chihuahua (66 %).

From mid-May onwards there was a general incline in most breeds across both platforms.

The lowest rates of sales for Gumtree was tracked on May 19th, and May 26th for Pets4Homes. On those dates, the total percentage decrease for dogs on Gumtree was 71% and 59% on Pets4Homes.

Following these dates, the increase in both total sales and the popular breeds tracked became noticeable. In the ten days between 26 May and 5 June, there was an increase of 12.27% in total puppy sales on Pets4Homes; and a total of 24.13% between 19 May and 5 June on Gumtree.

The tracked breeds which grew the fastest between mid-May to June 5 on Gumtree were: Pomeranians, Jack Russells and Dachshunds (including mini Dachshunds); and on Pets4Homes were Cockapoos, Dachshunds (including mini Dachshunds) and Cocker Spaniels.

