



Population of Pedigree Dogs and the Consequences of Breed-specific Legislation

> Population of pedigree dogs

Thanks to the registration process, the **number of pedigree dogs is easy to follow**, monitor, and tendencies can easily be detected.

Furthermore, the dogs themselves are “visible” and **traceable within the population** due to the compulsory identification.

The same is not true regarding the overall dog population. Only rough estimations are available. Based on the available data, **pedigree dogs represent 16,87%** of the overall dog population.

Depending on country-specific examinations, the figures drastically vary. The lowest one is below 3%, and the highest rate is a bit over 60%.

Important to know is that a significant number of **pedigree dogs remains within the breeders’ sphere** and does not contribute to the population of dogs kept by the public.

These figures – how many of the dogs are coming from registered kennels, with a pedigree – depend on the **habits and knowledge of dog keepers**: do they want to have a dog from a known and registered source, or is this factor insignificant?

The other part of the dog population comprises mutts, crossbreds, and probably a **very high number of unregistered dogs looking like pedigree dogs**.

> The lookalike dogs

Common people do not distinguish between a pedigree dog and a purebred-looking dog in case it bears the traits of a specific breed. These lookalike dogs come from **unknown sources** with no registration (depending on the legal requirements of the very country) and **without traceable records referring to their source**.

Especially in highly **popular breeds**, the number of lookalike dogs coming from **backyard breeding and puppy farms via illegal trade** is significant. One can gain the **highest profit** with these dogs.

Dog welfare issues detected in **lookalike dogs are often falsely related to registered (official) breeding**.

Animal welfare organisations, decision-makers, and even scientific studies do not differentiate between a registered pedigree dog and a lookalike dog coming from unknown, uncontrollable sources.

However, the proposed solution/ruling usually targets registered kennels/breeders.

As these lookalike dogs – being the majority of the dog population in any country – are **not the result of registered breeding**, such regulation will not have a real effect, as it **does not target the dogs that cause the problem**.

Any **breed-specific legislation** imposed on registered kennels **will not have any influence** on the welfare of **lookalike dogs which represent the vast majority** of the dog population.

> Importance for dog welfare of traceable population

The circumstances a **puppy has to cope with at an early age** are vital from the aspect of dog welfare. Besides fighting genetically inherited diseases, biological vulnerability and possible behavioural problems are determined by the conditions the puppies are held and raised. Therefore, it is important **that people breeding dogs are linked/affiliated to official national canine organisations and/or breed clubs so that some monitoring can be performed and advice given at any time.**

In case of visible and registered population, **control and professional support can be conducted** via education, breeding regulations, registration procedures, compulsory health and DNA tests, which makes genetically inherited disease easier to handle on a population level.

In case of wrongdoing or violation of breeding regulations or animal welfare law, the prosecution is more likely to happen.

In contrast, the conditions of unregistered litters are -by nature- absolutely unknown, **and no measure can be taken to maintain and improve dog welfare.**

The bigger the visible population, the better the dog welfare.

> Consequences of over-regulation

A good number of dog welfare related matters can be solved via the activity of registered breeders, but **not with enforcing unnecessarily strict regulations.**

If regulations are unreasonably **strict or hard to follow**, it can easily **lead to a drop of the volume of registered breeding activity** and a decreased number of pedigree dogs.

If the registered, visible population of dogs further declines, the **unmonitored population** of dogs will **automatically rise, escalating dog welfare matters.**

If the population of registered dogs drops, it does not mean that the demand from dog owners will also diminish. That will only cause a **higher demand for lookalike dogs coming from unknown, unregistered places**, such as puppy farms and any illegal trade route.

Finding the **right measures** – being both strict on a justified way and cooperative at the same time – is essential.

Proper **balance and cooperation** are in the mutual interest of decision-makers, animal welfare organisations and kennel clubs.

Improper measures are counterproductive.

Instead of solving the problem, improper measures just increase the spread of those dogs coming from unknown sources with unknown background and health condition.

Source: Pedigree dogs versus overall dog population available on <http://www.fci.be/en/Healthy-breeding-Dog-Welfare-Informative-package-3573.html>

Attila Márton
FCI PR consultant
public.relations@fci.be