



# Private Rehoming of Pets in Sweden

- A Study on the Rehoming of Dogs and Cats on the Swedish Online Marketplace Blocket.se

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# Private Rehoming of Pets in Sweden - A Study on the Rehoming of Dogs and Cats on the Swedish Online Marketplace Blocket.se

*Privat omplacering av husdjur i Sverige – En studie om privat omplacering av hundar och katter via köp- och säljsiten Blocket.se*

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## Abstract

Thousands of dogs and cats end up in rehoming ads every year. In Sweden, little is known about these pets and why they end up in that situation. Studies made in Sweden have found that most pets rehomed on Blocket.se were under two years of age and that the most common reasons are “allergies”, “lack of time”, the pet needing a “new environment”, and “family issues”.

This study examined the extent and reasons for rehoming cats and dogs through the online marketplace Blocket.se. Ads were collected from February to March 2022. The ads were concerning private rehoming of cats and dogs and did not include rehoming/sales done by breeders or puppies/kittens that had not left the bitch/queen. Information from these ads was collected to analyse their contents statistically and draw conclusions from the material.

The data consists of 990 ads for 1046 dogs and 777 ads for 946 cats. The most common dog breeds were mixed breeds. Among the pure breeds, American Bully, French Bulldogs, and German Shepherds were the most common. Mixed-breed cats were the most common. Among the pure breeds, Ragdolls, Bengal, and Maine Coon were the most common. There were no big differences in gender for the pets, and for both groups, the mean age was around two years. For dogs, the most common reasons for rehoming were “family issues” and “lack of time”, and the most common demands on new owners were to have “knowledge of dogs” and “time” for the dog. The most common reason for rehoming cats was that the cat was “miserable in its current environment” and “allergies”. The most common demands were for the cat to “live with another cat” and to be able to be an “outdoor cat”.

Further research needs to be done to find a way to prevent the rehoming of pets. People need to be educated about the normal behaviour of pets and what it requires to own a pet.

*Keywords:* rehoming, relinquishment, adoption, dog, cat

## Sammanfattning

Tusentals annonser för omplacering av hundar och katter läggs upp på nätet varje år. I Sverige vet man väldigt lite om dessa husdjur och varför de hamnar i den situationen. Studier gjorda i Sverige har visat att de flesta husdjur som omplaceras via Blocket.se var under två år och att den vanligaste orsaken var "allergi", "tidsbrist", att husdjuret "behöver en ny miljö" och "familjeförhållanden".

Denna studie syftade till att undersöka omfattningen och anledningarna till omplacering av katter och hundar genom online-marknadsplatsen Blocket.se. Annonser samlades in i under februari till mars 2022. Annonserna gällde privat omplacering av katter och hundar och omfattade inte omplacering/försäljning gjord av uppfödare eller valpar/kattungar som inte lämnat tiken/kattmamman. Informationen från annonserna samlades in för att kunna analysera dess innehåll statistiskt och kunna dra slutsatser av materialet.

Materialet som analyserades bestod av 990 annonser för 1 046 hundar och 777 annonser för 946 katter. De vanligaste hundraserna var blandraser, bland de ren-rasiga var American Bully, Fransk bulldog och Schäfer de vanligaste. Bland katter var huskatten vanligast och av de renrasiga var Ragdoll, Bengal och Maine Coon vanligast. Det fanns inga stora skillnader i könsfördelning mellan husdjuren och för båda grupperna var medelåldern cirka två år. För hundar var de vanligaste orsakerna för omplacering "familjeförhållanden" och "tidsbrist", och de vanligaste kraven på nya ägare var att ha "kunskap om hundar" och "tid" för hunden. För katter var de vanligaste orsakerna till att man omplacerade katten att den var "olycklig i sin miljö" och "allergier". De vanligaste kraven var att katten skulle "leva med en annan katt" och att kunna vara en "utekatt".

Ytterligare forskning måste göras för att hitta ett sätt att förebygga omplacering av husdjur. Människor behöver utbildas om det normala beteendet hos husdjur och vad som krävs för att äga ett.

*Nyckelord:* omplacering, överlåtande, adoption, hund, katt

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# 1. Introduction

Worldwide, about 373 million domestic cats and about 471 million domestic dogs lived in households in 2018 (Statista 2019). Including dogs and cats living as feral and stray would increase these numbers to about 1 billion dogs and 600 million cats (Natcheva 2022).

Dogs owned by humans are often used for company, hunting, sports, community service work etc. Cats are often used as a pet only but can also be used for their excellent ability to keep farms and yards free from rodents, as well as therapy animals in elderly homes and for children with disabilities.

Animals kept by humans in Sweden are covered by The Animal welfare act. The Animal welfare act (SFS 2018:1192) states (among other things) that “animals shall be treated well and shall be protected from unnecessary suffering” (SFS 2018:1192). It also states that “animals shall be kept and cared for in a good animal environment and in such a way that:

1. their welfare shall be maintained
2. they can perform behaviours that they are strongly motivated to do and which are important to their welfare (natural behaviour) and
3. behavioural disorders are prevented” (SFS 2018:1192, 2 Ch. §2).

How well this is fulfilled regarding our household pets has yet to be discovered.

Most pets should get vaccinated before leaving the breeder and then a few weeks later by the new owners, according to the vaccination recommendations in Sweden (Windahl & Ingman 2009). Otherwise, veterinarians may only see the animal if it is ill and the owner thinks it needs veterinary care; alternatively, if there is an active animal abuse case that needs attention from the animal welfare inspection authority.

When new pet owners come in for their pet’s vaccination, it may be their first and only veterinary visit. Studies show that what is said to them on that visit by the veterinarian can significantly impact the animal’s life with its owner (Voith 2009). This is specifically evident regarding the care of the animals and preventing problem behaviour by educating pet owners about the animal’s normal behaviour and basic needs. Equally, information via schools and television can impact pet owners' knowledge of normal animal behaviour and its basic needs.

In Sweden, as in most other countries, dogs and cats are abandoned, relinquished, or rehomed for multiple reasons. It has yet to be studied in detail how these animals are affected by relinquishment or rehoming. Still, we can imagine that it significantly impacts their well-being, especially for dogs and cats being rehomed multiple times.

This study aims to identify the extent of and reasons for the private rehoming of dogs and cats in Sweden via the online marketplace Blocket.se. Through this work, we want to find the reasons for rehoming, if it is more common in certain breeds and age categories, and if other factors are linked to rehoming. This study will also look at the requirements the present owners express in their ads for their pet's new home, as this may reflect on the present owners' care for their pets and understanding of their pet's needs and preferences.

The following questions were formulated:

- What is the extent of private rehoming of dogs and cats in Sweden through Blocket.se?
- Which is the most common reason for rehoming stated by the owner in their ads on Blocket.se?
- Does the present owners have demands on the new owners, and what are these demands?
- Is rehoming more common in certain breeds and age groups?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cats and Dogs in Sweden

“Pet - an animal that is kept in the home as a companion and treated kindly” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.). The most popular pets in the western world are dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and cats (*Felis catus*) (Archer 1997). According to Archer (1997), dogs and cats are the pets humans interact the closest with.

In Sweden, 34% of all households owned a cat or dog in 2017, and Sweden had about 881 000 dogs and 1 443 000 cats (Novus 2017).

As of November 2022, there are a total of 1 086 000 registered dogs in Sweden (Jordbruksverket 2022b). Until January 2023, Sweden did not have an official registry of cats, so for now, there are no official statistics on the number of cats in Sweden (Jordbruksverket 2022a).

#### 2.1.1 Statistics From a Survey in 2012

In 2012 Statistics Sweden sent out a questionnaire to 20 146 households in Sweden, asking questions about keeping pets. 10 287 answered the questionnaire on paper or the web (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012).

##### *Dogs*

According to statistics Sweden, Swedish households keeping dogs had a mean of 1.37 dogs in 2012 (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012). About 15.5% of these households also had kids. The age distribution of dogs was 0-1 years 14.4%, 2-5 years 37.9%, 6-10 years 35.3% and 11 years or older 12.4%. The mean age in 2012 was 5.6 years (in 2006, it was 5.3 years). 50.6% of dogs were female, and 49.4% were male. 23.3% were neutered. The number of dogs tagged at the time was 92.4%, and 82.8% were registered on the owner.

##### *Cats*

According to statistics Sweden, Swedish households keeping cats had a mean of 1.56 cats in 2012 (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012). About 19,9% of these households also had kids. The age distribution of cats 0-5 years was 51.6% and six years or

older 48.4%; no mean age is available for cats from 2012; in 2006, the mean age was 4.8 years. 52.6% of cats were female, and 47.4% were male. 81.2% were neutered. The number of cats tagged at the time was 41.3%, and 28.4% were registered on the owner.

### 2.1.2 Legislation for Keeping Cats and Dogs in Sweden

The animal welfare act is the foundation for the Swedish way of animal care (SFS 2018:1192). It states that one should not abandon domestic animals, it is forbidden to hurt animals physically and to be involved in bestiality, and you shall give the animals the necessary mental stimulation and a large enough space to live in. Chapter 2 of the animal welfare act states how to care for and treat animals (SFS 2018:1192, 2 Ch).

There is also legislation that specifies how to care for cats and dogs; The Swedish Agricultural Agency's regulations and general advice for keeping dogs and cats (SJVFS 2019:28). This legislation states that cats and dogs need to be looked after at least twice a day; if they are young, sick, or injured, you need to look after them more often and that dogs and cats are not to be sold in markets, pet shops or likewise.

#### *Laws Specifically for Dogs*

Dogs with permanent residence in Sweden must be tagged and registered in the state's agricultural agency's registry (SFS 2007:1150). This must be done and paid for by the owner before the dog reaches the age of 4 months and has been a requirement since 2000.

Normally puppies should not be separated from the bitch until they reach an age of at least eight weeks (SJVFS 2019:28). Dogs who are kept indoors and do not have access to an outside environment shall be taken outside regularly. If they are kept in an outdoor kennel, they must be taken out in another environment for a walk daily. You cannot keep dogs outside every day all day if they are not used to and suited for the outside environment.

#### *Laws Specifically for Cats*

Feral cats should not be forced to live inside (SJVFS 2019:28). Kittens normally cannot be separated permanently from the queen until they reach an age of at least twelve weeks. In 6 Ch. §2, the legislation recommends that cats roaming freely outside are neutered, sterilised, or prohibited from reproducing in other ways.

As of 2023, even cats with permanent residence in Sweden must be tagged and registered in the state's agricultural agency's registry (Jordbruksverket 2022a).

### 2.1.3 The Use of Pets in Sweden and Their Impact on the Economy

Although many people in Sweden acquire pets as companions, many get them for other reasons. Pets in Sweden are estimated to contribute to the Swedish economy, with at least 6.7-7.1 billion Swedish crowns each year (Hoffmann *et al.* 2017). Dogs are used as both service dogs and companions, but sometimes these two groups are combined. Examples of this given by Hoffman *et al.* (2017) are dogs used for hunting, herding, and sledging, among others. Service dogs working in the private sector can also be owned and cared for by a private person. Because of this, dogs are not only a contributor to the Swedish economy but also the pet owners' economy.

Cats are mainly used for company and keeping farms and yards clean of rodents (Hoffmann *et al.* 2017). The most common activity to use cats for is cat shows. About 57% of cats were kept as mostly indoor cats in Sweden in 2012.

### 2.1.4 Rehoming and Relinquishment

In a study from 2021, the extent of rehoming of cats in Sweden through blocket.se was examined (Lust 2021). This study examined ads for rehoming one or more cats from February to April 2021. The study showed 1470 cats needing a new home and found that most of these cats were two years old or less. Lust (2021) also found that the most common reason for rehoming was allergies, that the cat needed environmental change and problems between the cat and other animals in the household.

A questionnaire study answered by 47 cat shelters in Sweden found that approximately 5 600 cats arrived at the examined shelters each year, estimated to be around 7 400 if all shelters asked (62) would have answered the study (Eriksson Ljung *et al.* 2009). About half of the shelters responded that they did not accept feral cats, i.e., they did not take in non-socialised cats. The study found that homelessness was the most common reason cats ended up in the shelter; the second was allergies.

In 2009 a study was made analysing 685 ads from January 2009 on the private rehoming of dogs on Blocket.se in Sweden (Larsson 2009). The study found no difference in gender for the dogs being rehomed. Most dogs (61%) were aged six months up to two years, and a majority (66%) were purebred. The most common breeds were German Shepherd (50), Rottweiler (41), American Staffordshire terrier (31), Chihuahua (27) and Jack Russel terrier (24). The most common reasons for rehoming stated in the ads were lack of time (36.2%), new family situation (14,6%), rehoming by a breeder (10.6%) and allergies (9,4%).

### 2.1.5 The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Sweden had an estimated 100 000 homeless cats in 2021 (Djurskyddet Sverige 2021). Animal welfare Sweden found that 3 000 cats were cared for by local associations during 2020, an increase of over 400 cats compared to 2019. Many of these cats are reported to be abandoned. This increase supposedly depends on the increased demand for cats during the pandemic and that many people chose to adopt their cats rather than get them from a breeder, making room for more cats in the shelters.

In her study from 2021, Lust (2021) could not find a connection between the pandemic and the rehoming of cats but suggests that such a change may not have started due to the still ongoing pandemic (Lust 2021).

During the pandemic of Covid -19, many people in Sweden ended up working from home, resulting in the acquisition of dogs increasing rapidly (Jordbruksverket 2021). In 2020, the registration of new dogs increased by 11%, the highest increase since 1971.

## 2.2 Prevalence and Reasons for Rehoming and Relinquishment Outside of Sweden

In the USA, in 2015, there was a five years prevalence for the rehoming of pets at 6% (Weiss *et al.* 2015). Of these rehomed pets, 37% were given to a friend or family member, which made this the most common way to rehome a pet in the USA, closely followed by surrendering to a shelter at 36%. Individually, cats were more likely to be relinquished to a shelter (40%) than to a friend or family member (30%). In comparison, dogs were more likely to be rehomed to a friend or family member (41%) and secondarily to a shelter (34%). Weiss *et al.* (2015) studied reasons for rehoming pets privately and surrendering them to a shelter. They found the most common reason for rehoming being “pet problem”, i.e., a problem regarding the pet (27%). The most common pet reason stated was aggression (35%), followed by destruction (29%) and health problems (26%). This was the same for dogs and cats. The study also found that pets rehomed for pet problems were more likely to be relinquished to a shelter than rehomed to a friend or family member.

In an interview study from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, regarding surrendering of pets to shelters, they found that behavioural reasons (32%) were the most common reason for relinquishment, followed by allergies (7%) and moving (7%) (DiGiacomo *et al.* 1998). People questioned in the study expressed, for example, that they did “not have time to train a puppy” or “do not have the money” to care for the dog. Not having time or money was also stated as a reason for not intervening with their dog’s behaviour problems from some of the participants. The study found that the people rehoming their dogs often had lived with their pet’s



problem for weeks, months and sometimes years before finally making the rehoming decision final.

Taiwan has approximately 2 million dogs, representing a significant dog overpopulation (Weng *et al.* 2006). Of these 300 000 are stray and homeless dogs, a big problem for dogs and humans living on the island. Taiwan has a size that is less than 7% of the area of Sweden and houses more than double the population of humans (Statistiska centralbyrån 2022, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023) and about double the population of dogs (Weng *et al.* 2006).

The study by Weng *et al.* (2006) on risk factors for unsuccessful dog ownership in Taiwan found that dogs younger than three years at acquisition had a higher risk of being left by the owner. Weng *et al.* (2006) define unsuccessful dog ownership as ownership that ends involuntarily, not with the dog dying of natural causes. They found that dogs soiling the house and barking were the most significant factors leading to unsuccessful ownership and that an owner who previously had abandoned a dog had a higher risk of doing so again.

A study in Denmark looked at reasons for surrendering dogs and cats to a shelter from 1996-2017 (Jensen *et al.* 2020). They found owner-related problems were the most common reason for surrendering dogs (75%) and cats (74%), and owner health problems (29%) were the most common owner-related problem. Regarding animal factors of relinquishment, behavioural problems were the most common in dogs (23%) and cats (25%). Jensen *et al.* (2020) also found that housing issue was the case for 26% of the relinquishments and that lack of time was a more common reason for relinquishing dogs (14%) than cats (4%). In their study, Jensen *et al.* (2020) stated that their findings suggested that dogs' relinquishment decreased during the study's later period. Reasons for this were discussed as dogs were probably rehomed via social media or other online websites instead of being relinquished to a shelter and not that the need for rehoming dogs had gone down. Since cats do not have the same value when it comes to money, Jensen *et al.* (2020) suggest that is the reason that the same pattern was not seen in cat relinquishment.

### 2.2.1 People's Knowledge of the Behaviour of Dogs and Cats

Many studies on the rehoming of dogs and cats are not using a control group of dogs and cats not being rehomed (Patronek *et al.* 2022). Therefore, there may be a view of rehomed/relinquished dogs having more behaviour problems than dogs not being relinquished when there might as well be the same number of dogs in the general dog population with behavioural problems, as stated by Patronek *et al.* (2022).

In a questionnaire study made in Pennsylvania, USA, in 1981, owners answered questions regarding how they treat and train their dogs and whether the dog had a behaviour that the owner considered a problem. The study found that 42% of dog owners had dogs with problem behaviours, where the most common ones were

aggression (48%), inappropriate elimination (41%) and vocalisation (41%) (Voith *et al.* 1992). This study did not ask about rehoming or relinquishing; it just states that many people live with a dog they consider having problem behaviours.

In their study from 2020, Jensen *et al.* found that pet behavioural problem was the reason for the relinquishment of dogs and cats in about 25% of the cases. In their study, they discuss the difficulty in determining if the “pet problem” is an actual problem behaviour from the pet or rather a problem behaviour that is human-related. This study was made by looking at data collected by animal shelters when owners relinquished their pets (Jensen *et al.* 2020).

Borchelt and Voith (1982) state that humans may find behaviours problematic in our animals when the behaviour is not a problem at all, but instead a normal behaviour from the pet that becomes a problem in our human world. Voith further discusses this in her article from 2009, where she suggests that veterinarians informing new pet owners of normal behaviours from their pets and how to handle them is an essential step in eliminating problematic behaviours in our pets (Voith 2009). Jensen *et al.* (2020) further discuss that eliminating pet behaviour problems and educating owners about normal animal behaviours may reduce the number of rehomed/relinquished pets. As Da Graça Pereira *et al.* (2014) show in their study from 2014, veterinarians and veterinary nurses show a higher knowledge of the needs of cats than cat owners do. They further discuss that it is important for veterinarians and veterinary nurses to help educate cat owners about their cat’s needs (Da Graça Pereira *et al.* 2014).

## 2.3 The Veterinarian’s Impact on Pet Owners

In two separate investigations studies (one for cats and one for dogs) by Gazzano *et al.* (2008, 2015), the impact of advice given to owners of a new puppy or kitten by a veterinarian was studied. Both studies found a positive connection between owners’ advised on how to foster their new pet and the pet’s behaviour and relationship with their owner one year later (Gazzano *et al.* 2008, 2015).

In the studies by Gazzano *et al.* (2008, 2015), they could not conclude whether these findings would lead to fewer pets being rehomed or relinquished. Further, they discuss that since many studies in other countries have found that the animal’s behaviour is an essential factor in the owner’s decision to rehome, one can conclude that it would have an impact (Gazzano *et al.* 2008, 2015).

Voith discusses in her article from 2009 that veterinarians are an essential and respected source of information regarding our animals and their behavioural problems (Voith 2009). She also discusses that it is essential that the clinic staff brings up behaviour problems when having patients during routine visits; since owners often are embarrassed by these kinds of issues, they may not seek help for themselves, and then the problem behaviour cannot be treated or prevented.

Furthermore, Voith (2009) discuss that it is also essential that the veterinary clinic staff's information is correct so as not to provide owners with wrong or bad advice.

However, for this kind of advisory to work, it also requires compliance with the pet owner, which is known to be a problem (Casey & Bradshaw 2008).

### 2.3.1 How to Make Owners Comply

The article by Casey and Bradshaw (2008) found that overall compliance with veterinary advice on behavioural problems in cats was 61%. Owners tended to show more compliance with advice for problems they found most problematic as opposed to problems the veterinarian found the most worrisome (Casey & Bradshaw 2008). Moreover, compliance was higher for more human-related problematic behaviour, such as aggressiveness towards family members, than for problems relating to the cat, such as pica and overgrooming. This is most likely because the medically trained veterinarian sees problems related to the animals' health as more severe, and the owner considers those that are annoying to the humans (but might be normal behaviour, i.e. behaviour problem of the cat rather than an actual problem behaviour) (Casey & Bradshaw 2008).

A study by Maille and Hoffman from 2013 found that owners are more likely to comply when they strongly trust the veterinarian (Maille & Hoffmann 2013). A stronger attachment to the pet also makes compliance higher. Likewise, the social risk motivates following veterinary advice since society may look down on you if you do not treat your animal's sickness correctly.

### 3. Material and Method

Data was collected from the 1st of February to the 12 of March 2022. The data is gathered from ads for the private rehoming of cats and dogs on Blocket.se, which originates in Sweden.

The data collection was done by participating researchers in the project of rehoming of cats and dogs before the start of this thesis. Criteria for collecting the ads were as follows: Primary inclusion criteria for the ads to get included were that it was indicated in the ad that it was a rehoming of either one or more dogs or cats. Eligibility criteria required the animals to be older than eight weeks for dogs and 12 weeks for cats, not to include breeders who sell their pups or kittens.

The author of this thesis received the raw data in an Excel document divided into two categories, ads for relinquished cats and ads for relinquished dogs. The data was divided into columns for each day of collection. While going through the data, ads that did not fit the criteria stated above were removed, and ads by breeders and doublets of ads on the same animal were also removed. Ads by breeders were removed since they cannot be viewed as private rehoming. Lastly, ads that seemed fake were removed. After removal, the number of ads in the analysis constituted 990 ads for rehoming dogs and 777 for cats.

A qualitative analysis of the data on dogs and cats being rehomed was created by sorting the ads. All collected ads did not contain all information about the animal; therefore, data as “not specified” is also presented. The following sections show the results from ads for cats and dogs shown separately.

The text from these ads was analysed and transferred to another Excel document containing columns for sex, age, price, number of animals in the ad, breed, neutered status, unwanted behaviour, reasons for rehoming, and demands on the new owner. The results are based on the individual dogs or cats and not based on ads; this was done since some ads had multiple dogs or cats being rehomed, and they were rarely of the same age, breed, or gender and were not always rehomed for the same reasons. Whether the cat or dog was rehomed successfully and how long that took could not be seen in this study.

The purpose of this thesis was to transcribe, compile and process this data and present it graphically and analyse the results based on the question statements.

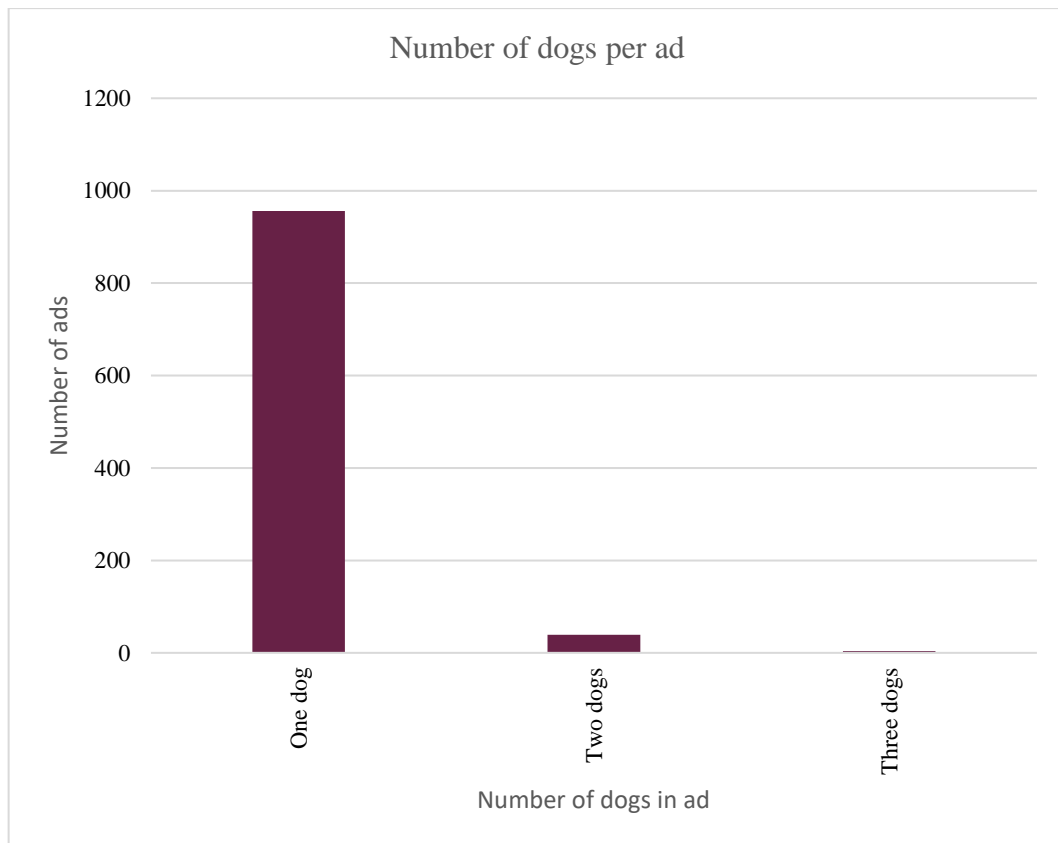
### 3.1 Data Analysis and Statistics

Data was collected by reading the ads and writing in information in a separate Excel document. That document contained formulas to recognise certain words and count for each ad if the word was used. Data from those formulas could later be used to determine how many dogs/cats had that statement in their ads. The data was analysed to look for possible patterns in gender, breed, and age of the pet being relinquished. Reasons for relinquishment, as stated by the person relocating, were also transcribed and analysed, as were demands on the new owners. All these categories were transcribed to count the number of pets where the statement was true. While sorting through mixed breeds of dogs, they were put into seven categories since present owners mostly described what breeds were mixed in or what size the mixed breed dog was. Graphs used were bar graphs and histograms made using Excel.

## 4. Results

The data in this study contains 990 ads for rehoming 1046 dogs from 1 February to 12 March and 777 ads for rehoming 946 cats from 1 February to 6 March.

Most ads included only one cat and one dog. However, some ads included more than one animal (Figure 1, Figure 2).



*Figure 1. Graph showing the number of dogs being rehomed per ad on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March 2022.*

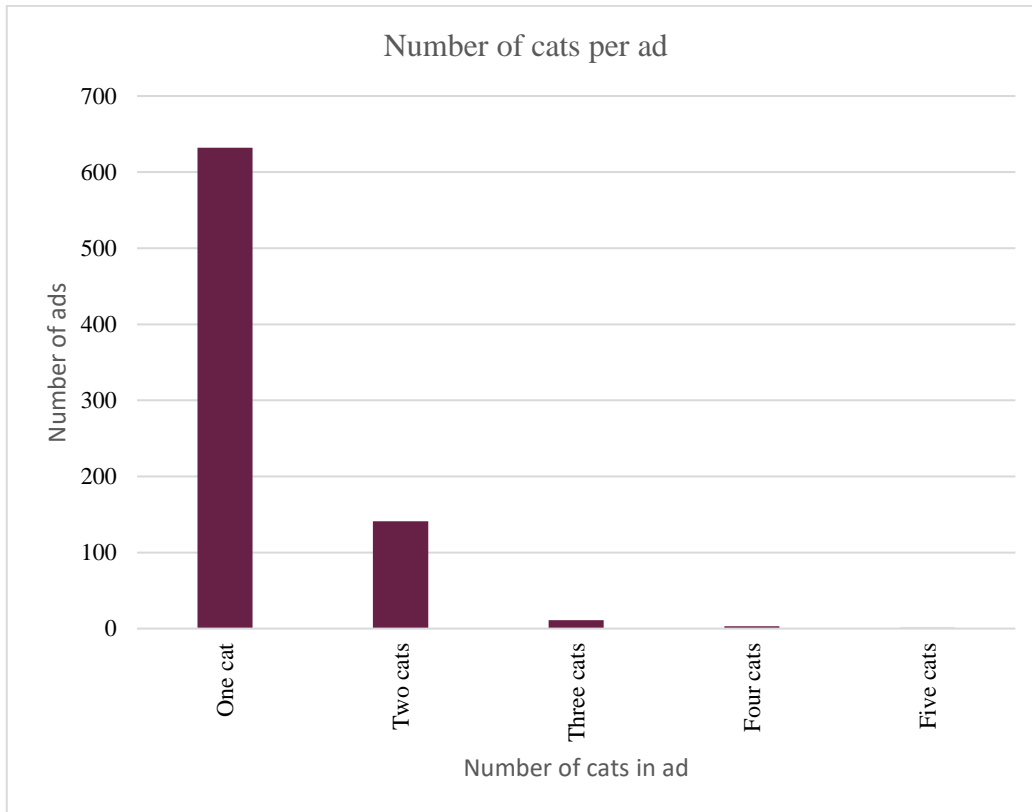


Figure 2. Graph showing the number of cats being rehomed per ad on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## 4.1 The Animals

### 4.1.1 Gender Distribution and Neuter Status

#### *Dogs*

51% (538) of the dogs were male, and 45% (470) were female. 4% (38) of the dogs did not have a gender specified in the ad. 35% (362) of all dogs were listed as intact, and 8% (90) as neutered. 57% (594) of dogs had no information about their neuter status. 5% (22) of female dogs and 12% (66) of male dogs were explicitly listed as neutered.

#### *Cats*

45% (438) of the cats were male, and 51% (492) were female. 4% (34) of the cats did not have a gender specified in the ad. 27% (261) of cats were listed as intact, and 44% (425) were listed as neutered. 29% (278) of cats had no information about their neuter status. 40% (196) of female cats and 51% (221) of male cats were explicitly listed as neutered.

## 4.1.2 Breed Distribution

### *Dogs*

27% (286) of dogs were described as mixed breeds and 69% (723) as pure breeds. The pure breeds were distributed between 116 single breeds. 4% (37) of dogs lacked information about their breed. The most common pure breeds being rehomed were American Bullies 7% (69), French Bulldogs 6% (63), and Huskys 4% (46) (Figure 3).

The most common mixed breeds were small (79) and large (74) mixes, and in third came mixes containing Amstaff (42) (Figure 4).

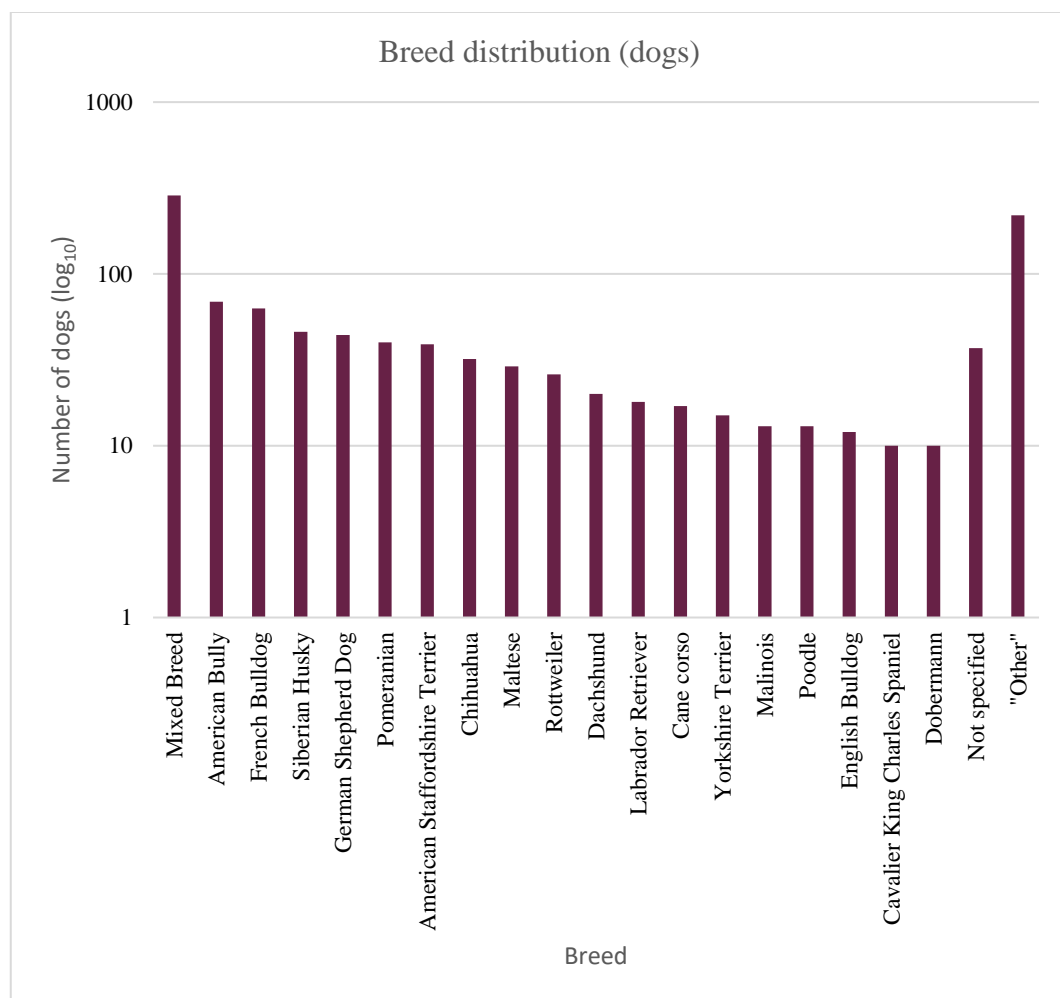


Figure 3. Graph showing breed distribution for dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. Breeds with less than ten individuals have been combined in "Others". The number of dogs is shown on a logarithmic scale.



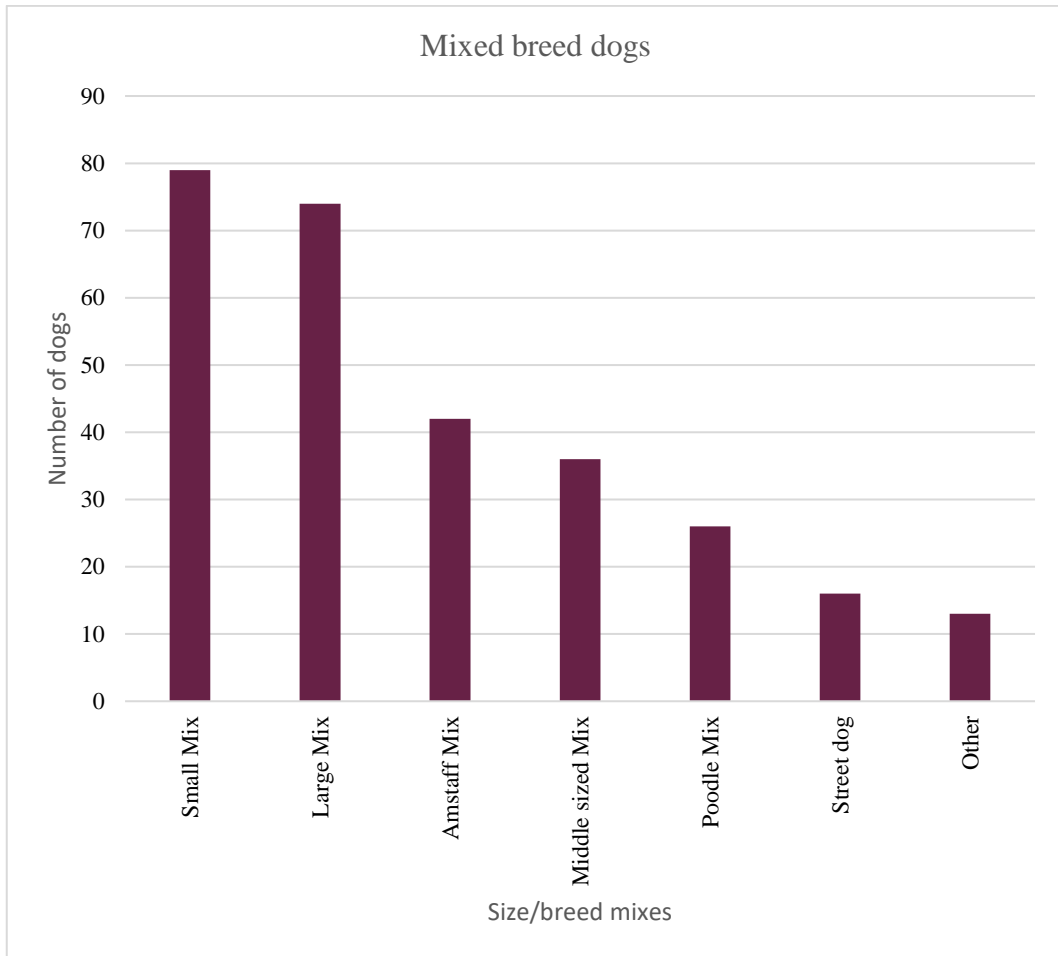


Figure 4. Graph showing the distribution of the mixed breed dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. "Other" includes uncommon or unusual mixed breeds or if the mix was not specified. Small, large and middle mix relates to the size of the dog (as described by the present owner).

### Cats

25% (245) of cats were listed as mixed breeds, and 27% (262) as pure breeds. The pure breeds were distributed between 25 single breeds. 47% (457) of cats lacked information about their breed. The most common pure breeds were Ragdoll 7% (71), Bengal 3% (32) and Maine Coon 3% (26) (Figure 5).

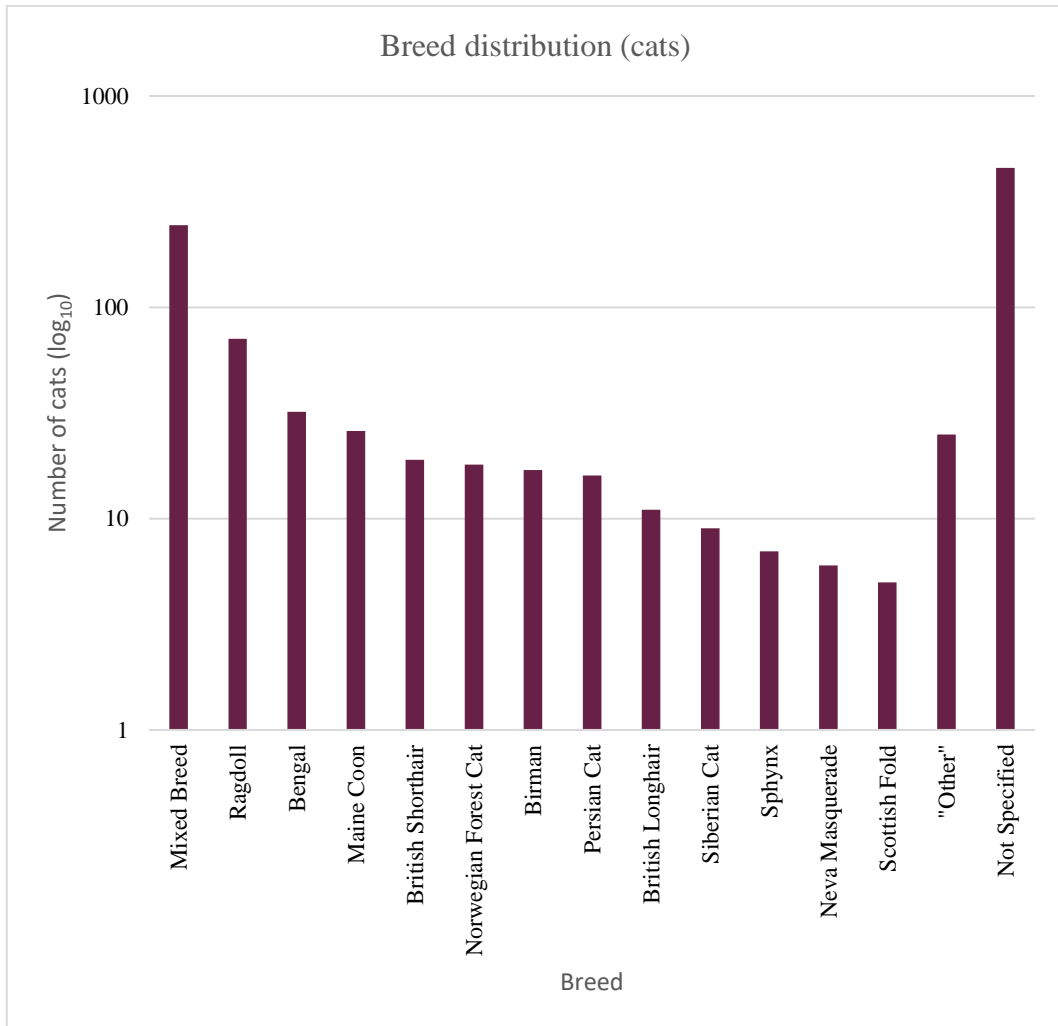


Figure 5. Graph showing breed distribution for cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. Breeds with less than five individuals have been combined in "Others". The number of cats is shown on a logarithmic scale.

### 4.1.3 Age Distribution

#### *Dogs*

The dogs' ages ranged from >8 weeks up to 11 years, with a mean of 1 year and 10 months. The most common age group were puppies between the age of 4-6 months. 4% (45) of dogs were listed without age (Figure 6).

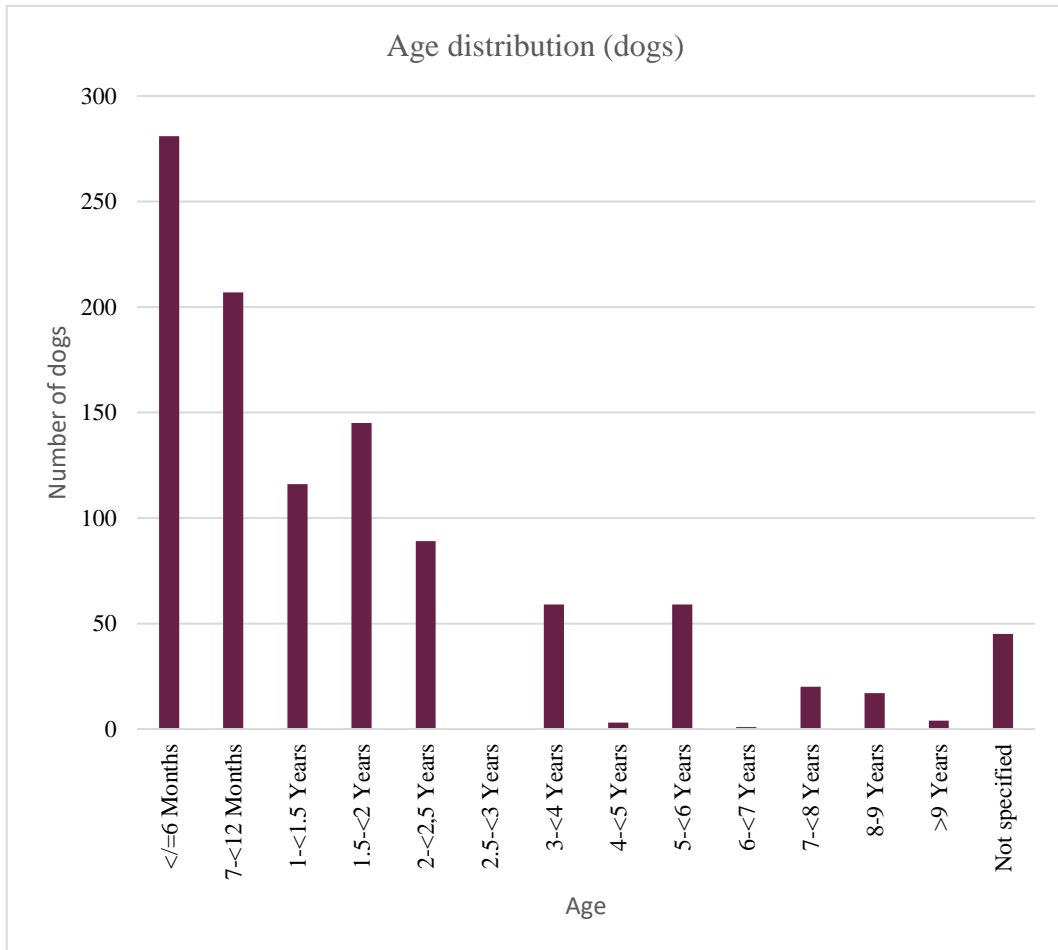


Figure 6. Graph showing age distribution for dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

### Cats

The cats' ages ranged from >10 weeks up to 13 years, with a mean of 2 years and 7 months. 9% (84) of cats were listed without age (Figure 7). The most common age group were kittens between 7-12 months.

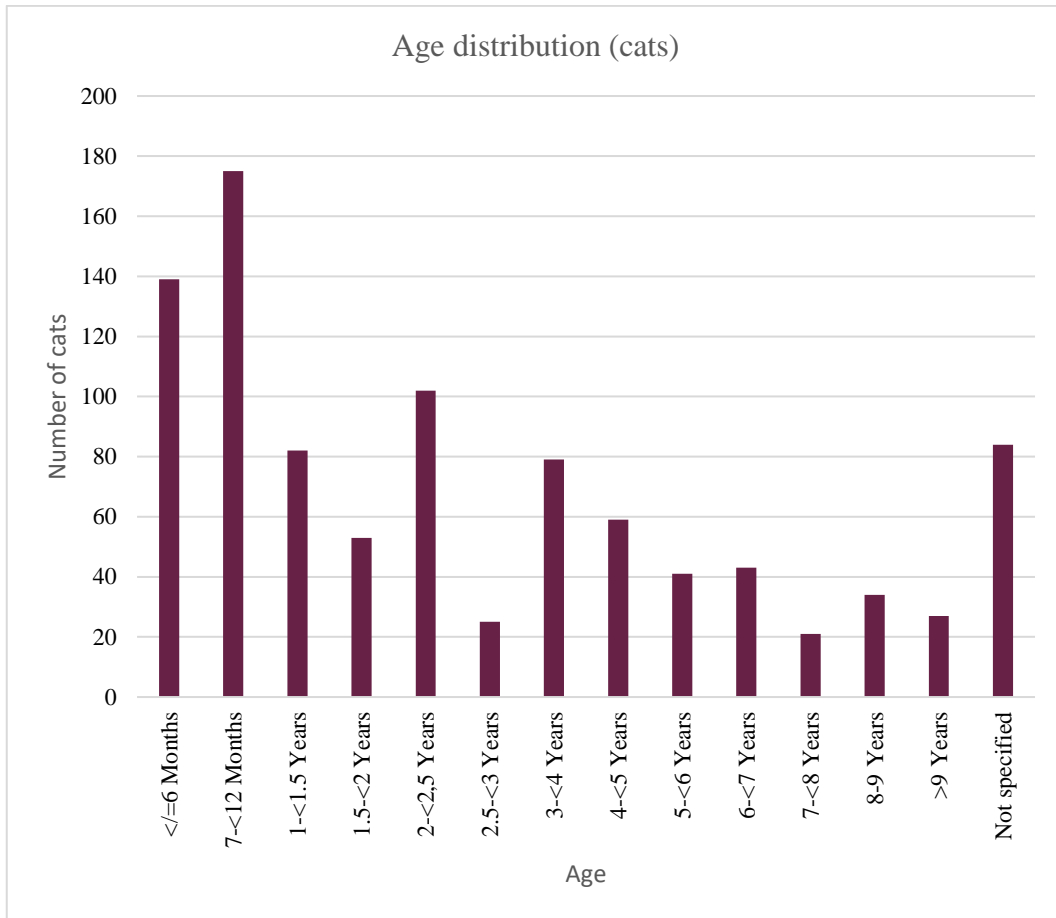


Figure 7. Graph showing age distribution for cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## 4.2 Prices of Cats and Dogs in Ads

### *Dogs*

5% (49) of dogs were listed as “free”, and 6% (67) did not have a price mentioned in the listing. Ads with a price mentioned ranged between 1000 SEK and 50 000 SEK per dog. The most common were dogs listed between 5 000 and 15 000 SEK (Figure 8). The most expensive dogs listed were a six-year-old English Bulldog listed at 45 000 SEK and an English Bulldog puppy, and one dog without age and breed in the description, both listed for 50 000 SEK.

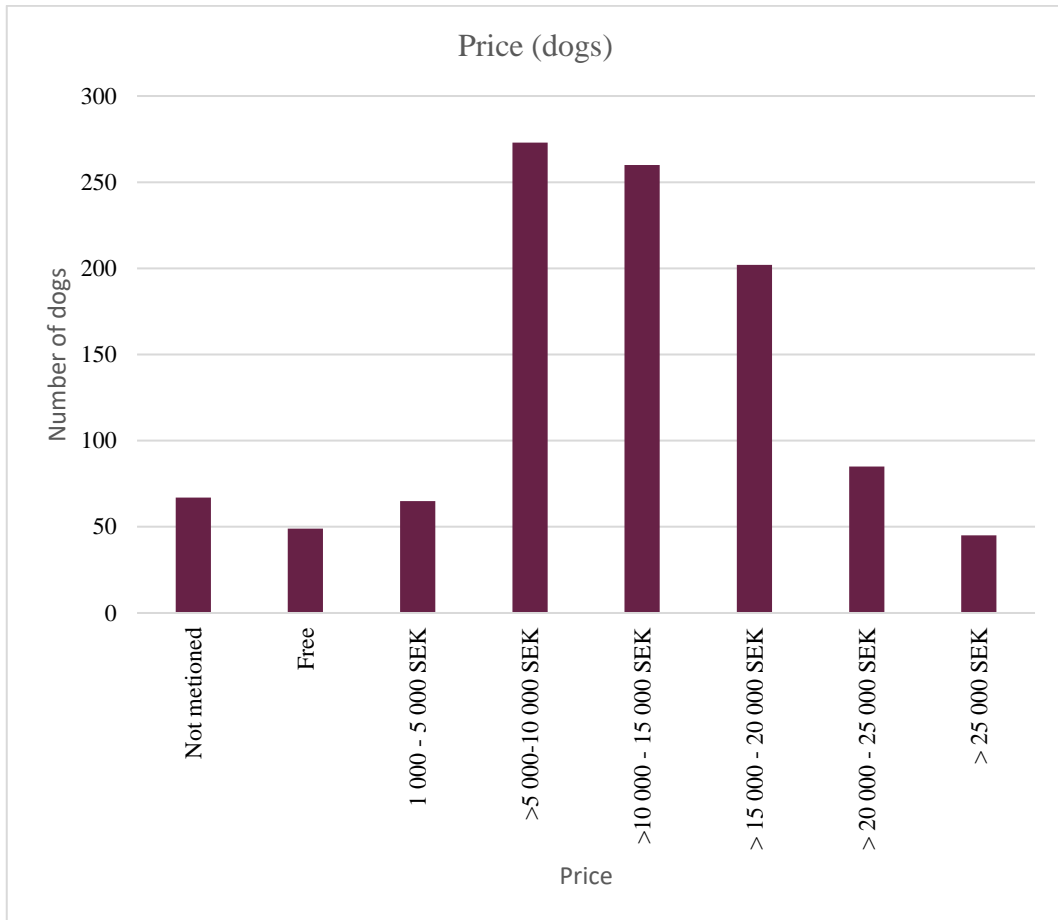


Figure 8. Graph showing price distribution for dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. Prices are shown in SEK (Swedish krona).

### Cats

5% (38) of cats were listed as “free”, and 31% (295) did not have a price mentioned in the listing. Ads with a price mentioned ranged between 250 SEK and 18 000 SEK per cat. The most common were cats listed >1 000 – 2 000 SEK (Figure 9). The most expensive cats listed were a one-year-old Neva Masquerade, a two-year-old British Shorthair, an eight-month-old British Shorthair for 15 000 SEK, and a one-year-old Bengal for 18 000 SEK.

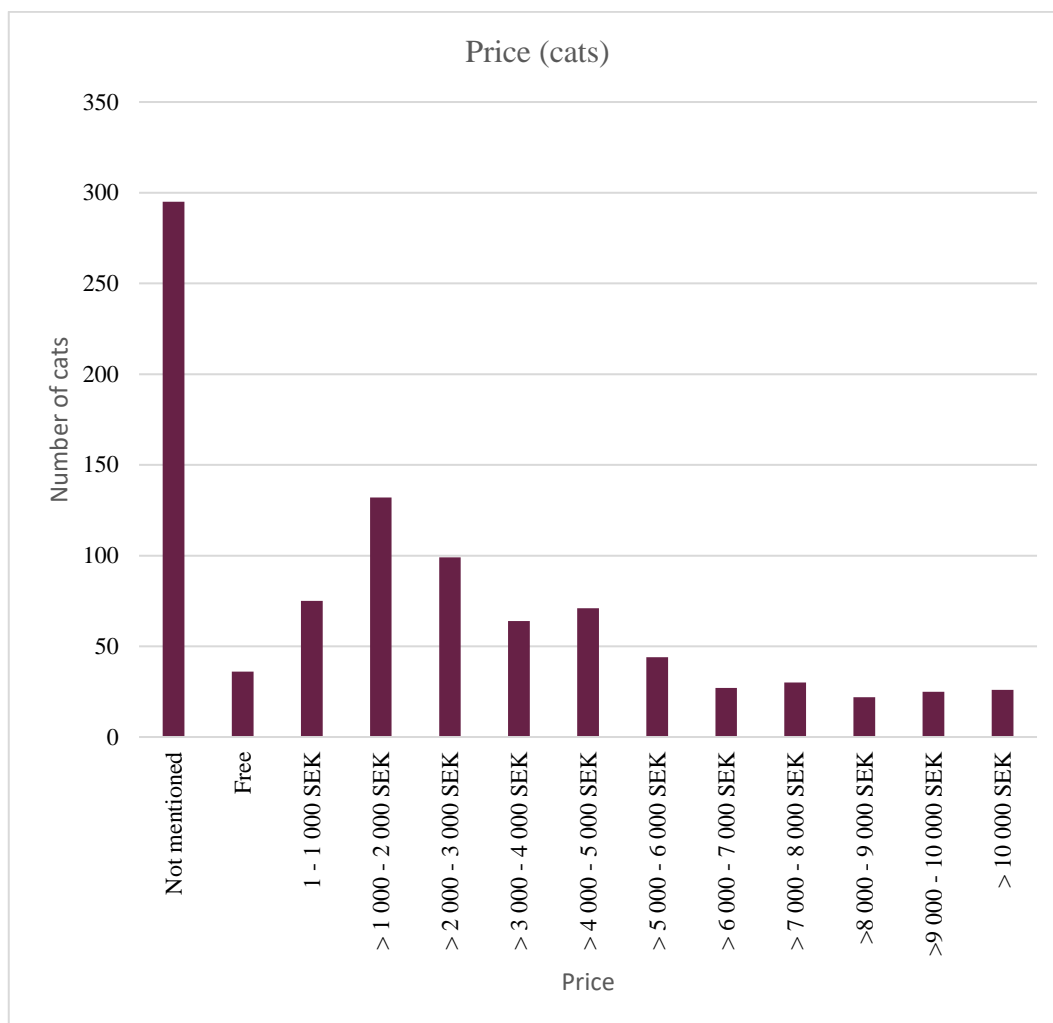


Figure 9. Graph showing price distribution for cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. Prices are shown in SEK (Swedish krona).

### 4.3 Behavioural Problems

Most ads specified if the animal had any unwanted behaviours or not. It was common for the ad to state that the animal was loving and kind. It was also common to say something like – The cat sometimes doesn't like being pet, but that is not a problem. These statements have been considered as the pet not having unwanted behaviour in this study since the owner did not see it as unwanted or problematic. One animal could have more than one behaviour considered unwanted by the owner.

15% (160) of dogs were considered to have an unwanted behaviour, and 74% (773) were not. In 11% (113) of ads, the behaviour was not mentioned.

6% (58) of cats were considered to have an unwanted behaviour, and 79% (762) were not. In 15% (144) of ads, the behaviour was not mentioned.

### 4.3.1 Behaviours

#### *Dogs*

The most common unwanted behaviour stated in ads for dogs was that the dog was described as guarding, unreliable or reserved (these were all collected in the same category); this was seen in 6% (64) of dog ads, next after that was that the dog was too stressed in the environment it lived in now at 3% (30) and that it cannot be alone in 3% (28). One dog could have more than one problem behaviour (Figure 10).

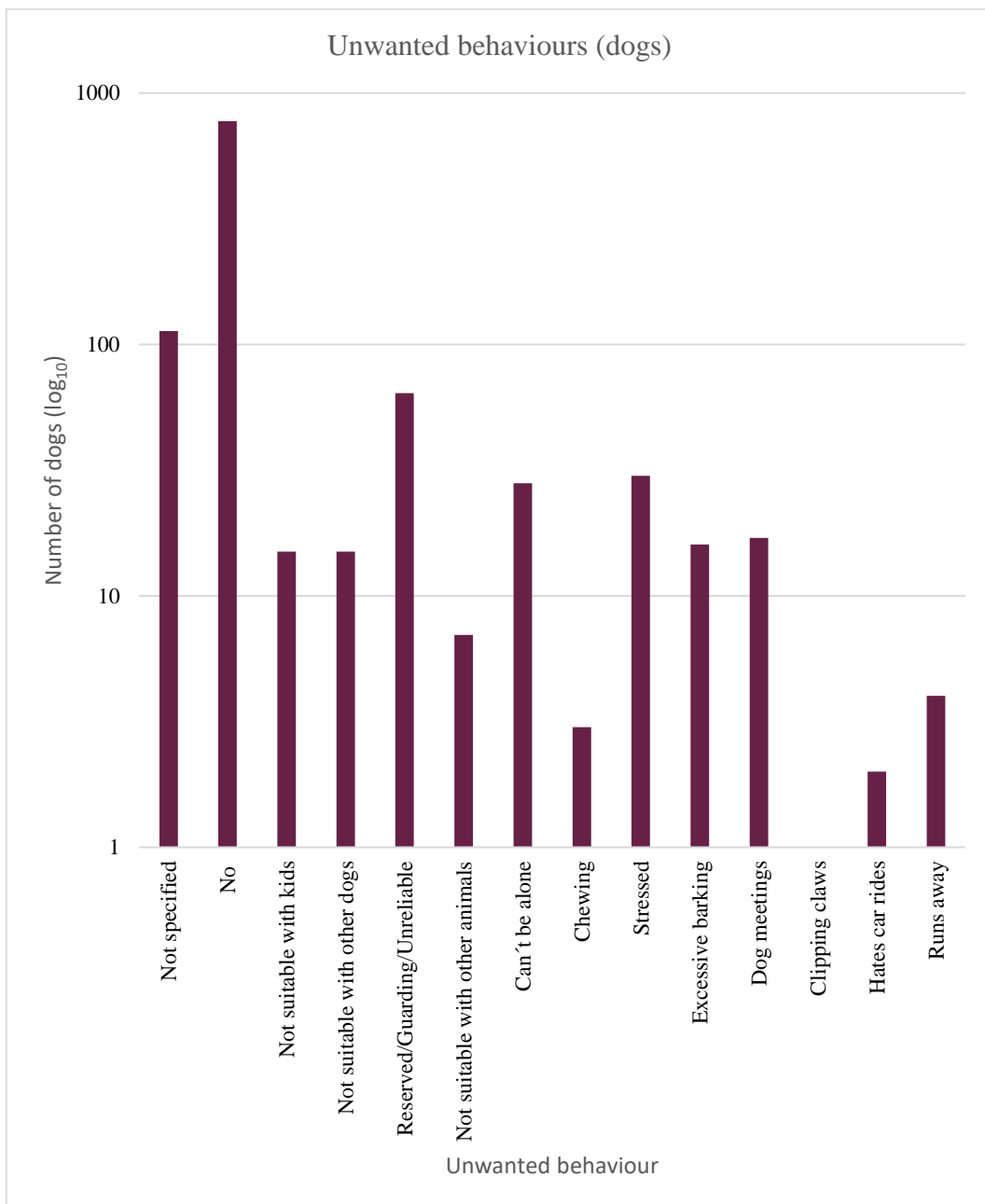


Figure 10. Graph showing the unwanted behaviours of dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. The number of dogs is shown on a logarithmic scale.

## Cats

The most common unwanted behaviour stated in ads for cats was that the cat was described as timid; this was seen in 4% (39) of all ads. Next, after that, the cat was not suitable with kids at 1% (10) of all ads or the cats marked indoors in 1% (6) of all ads. One cat could have more than one behaviour (Figure 11).

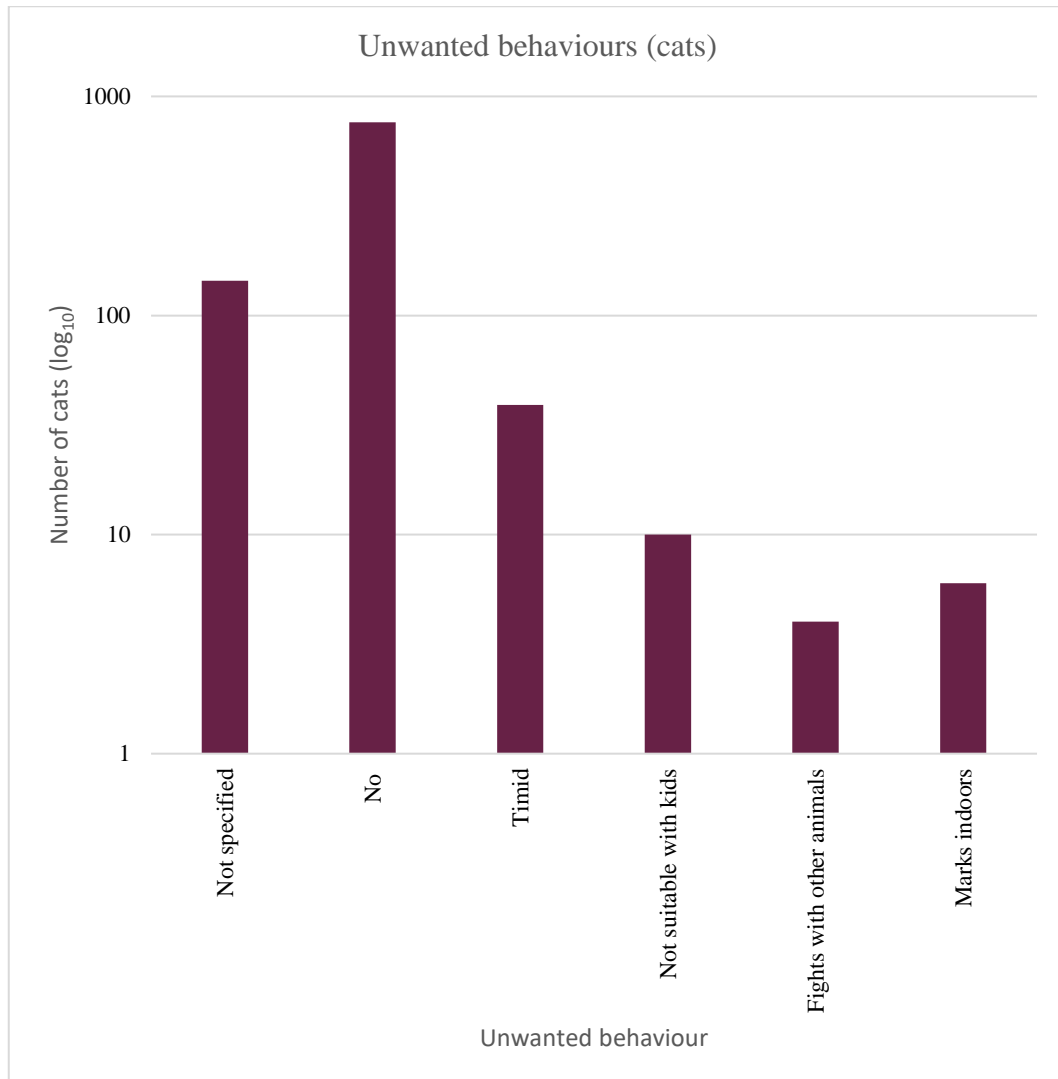


Figure 11. Graph showing the unwanted behaviours of cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March. The number of cats is shown on a logarithmic scale.

## 4.4 Reasons for rehoming

64% (658) of dog ads and 64% (617) of cat ads stated reasons for rehoming.



## Dogs

The most common reason for rehoming a dog was family circumstances at 17% (180) of all ads for dogs. After that came lack of time at 13% (138) and allergy at 7% (72) (Figure 12).

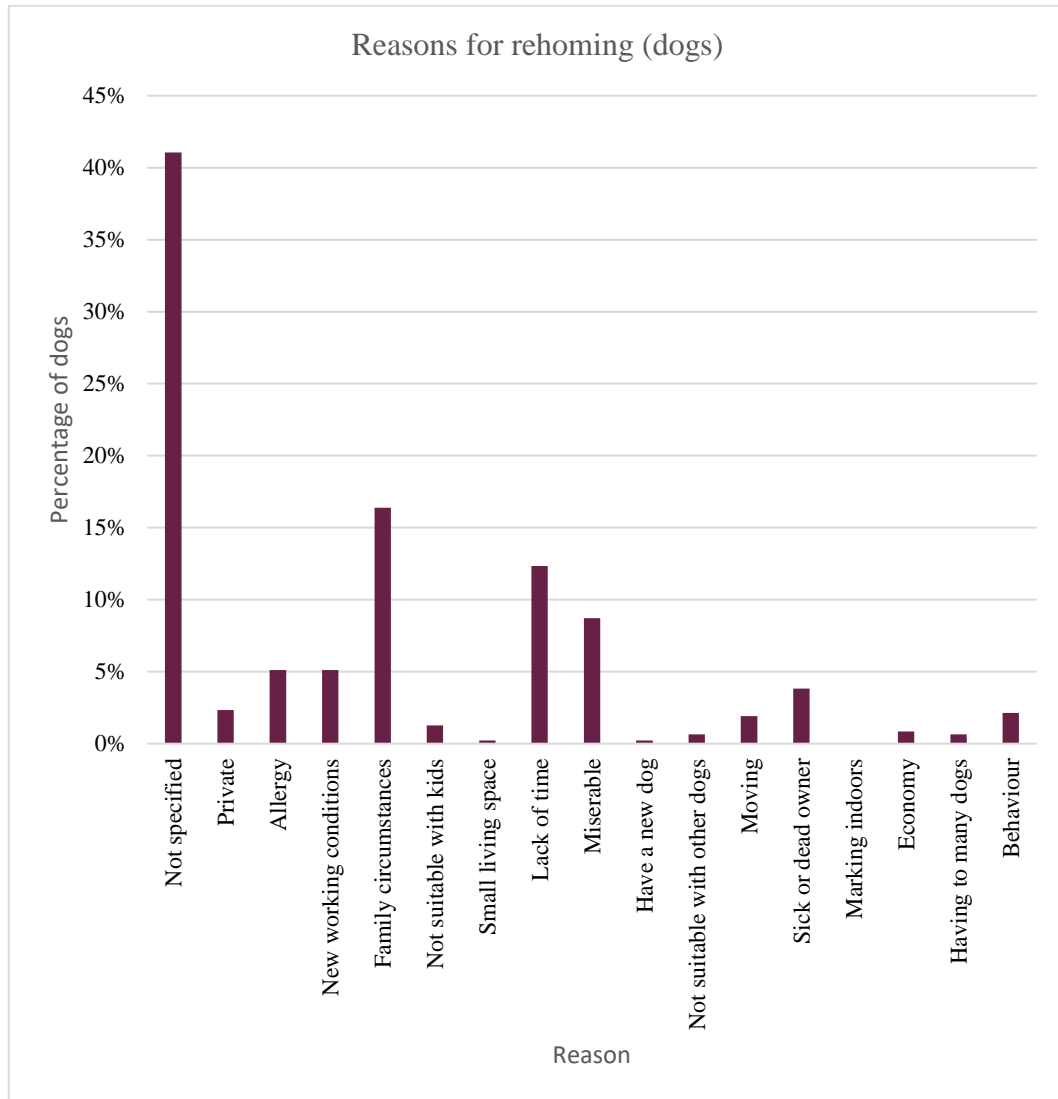


Figure 12. Graph showing reasons for rehoming for dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## Cats

The most common reason for relinquishing a cat was the cat being miserable in its living environment at 19% (181) of all ads for cats. After that came allergy at 13% (125) and family circumstances at 9% (91) (Figure 13).

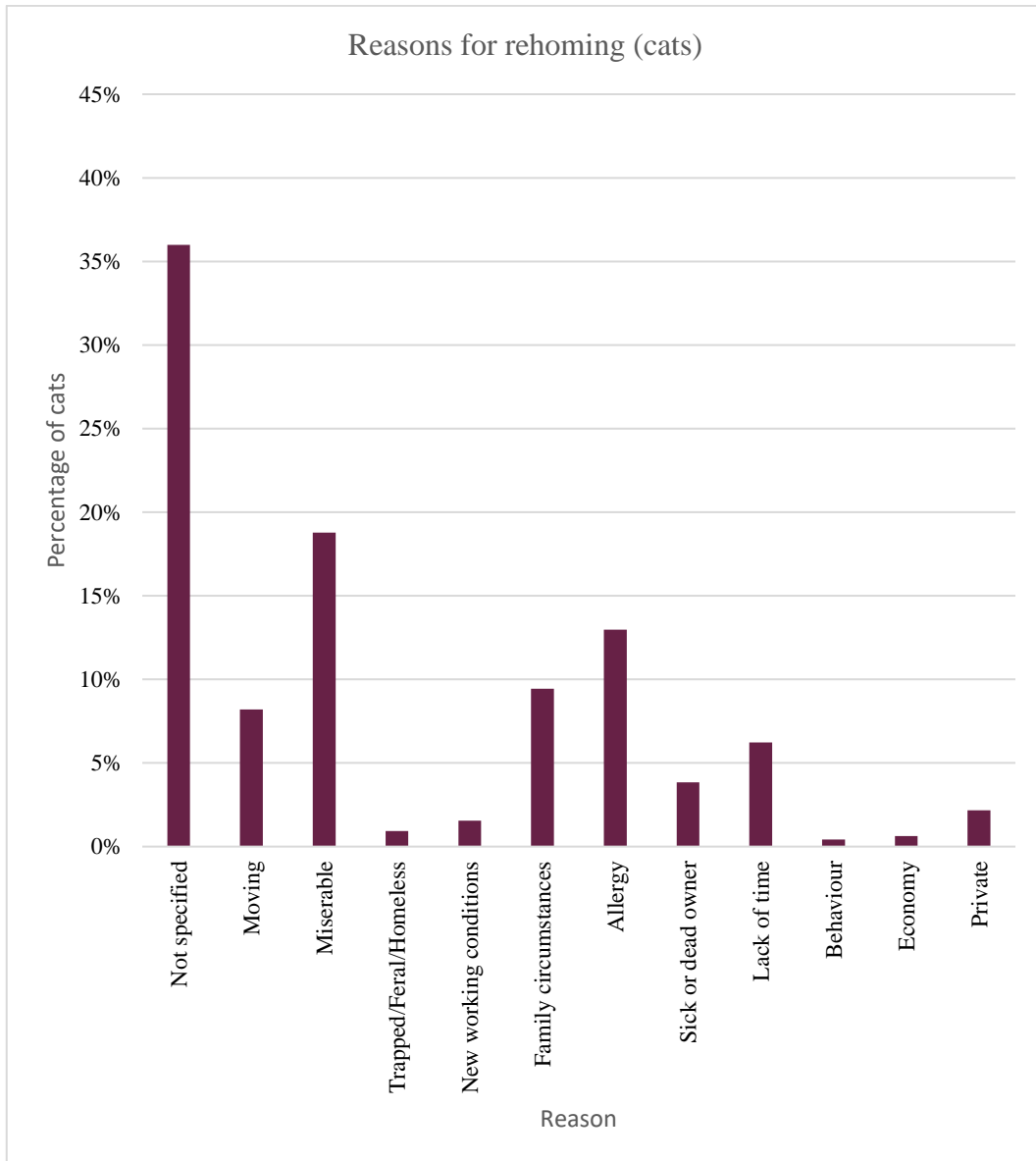


Figure 13. Graph showing reasons for rehoming for cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## 4.5 Specific Demands on the New Owners

44% (462) of dog ads and 51% (494) of cat ads stated specific demands for the new owners. One ad could contain more than one demand.

### *Dogs*

The most common demand on new owners was that the new owners had experience with the breed/knowledge of dogs from before, which was stated in 17% (177) of all dog ads (Figure 14).

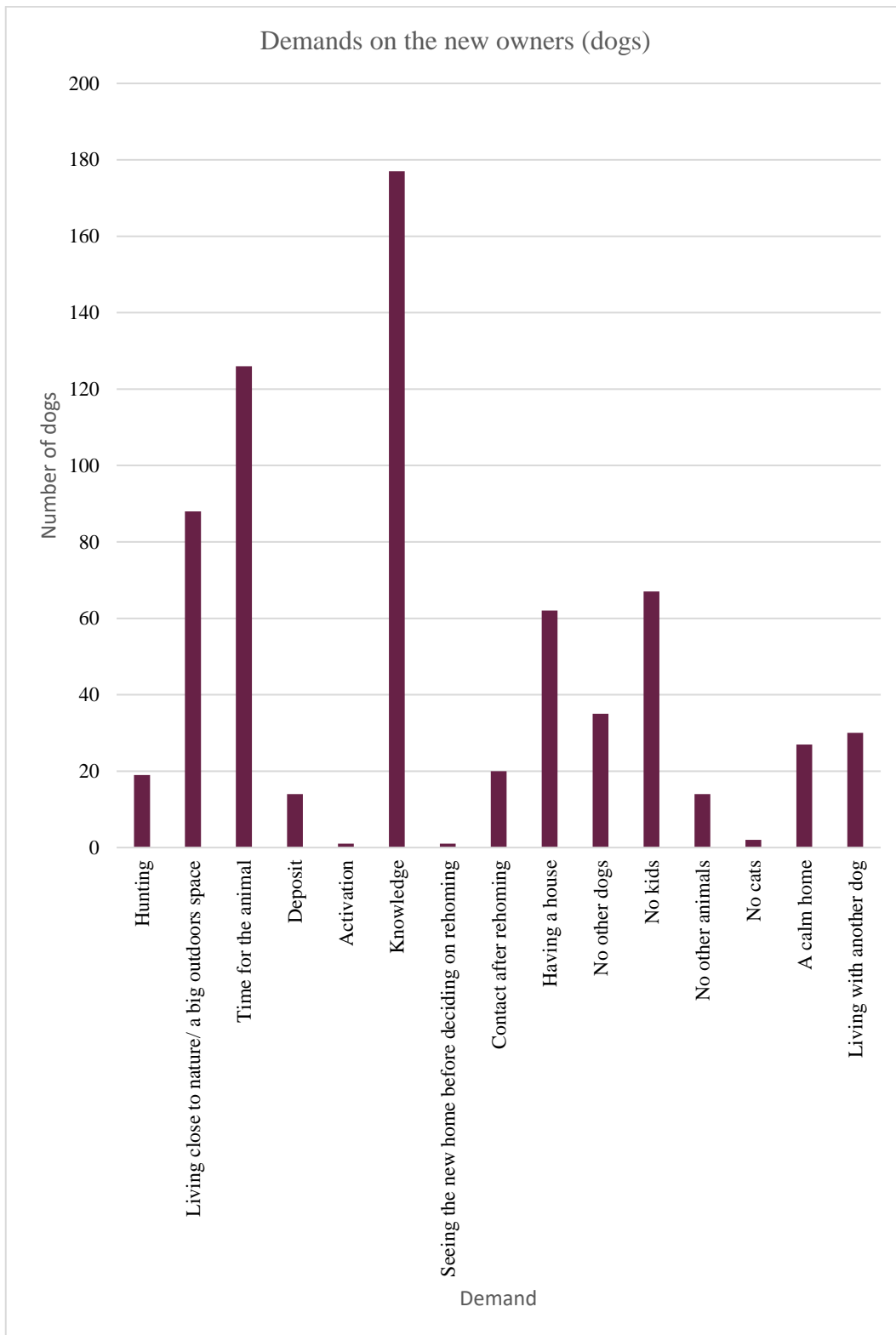


Figure 14. Graph showing what demands were mentioned in the ads and for how many of the dogs being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## Cats

The most common demand on the new owners in cat ads was that the cat needed to live with another cat; 21% (199) and that the cat needed to be an outdoor cat; 20% (191) (Figure 15). 172 cats that needed to live with another cat were being rehomed together, or the ad had as a preference that they would be rehomed together with another cat from the same ad.

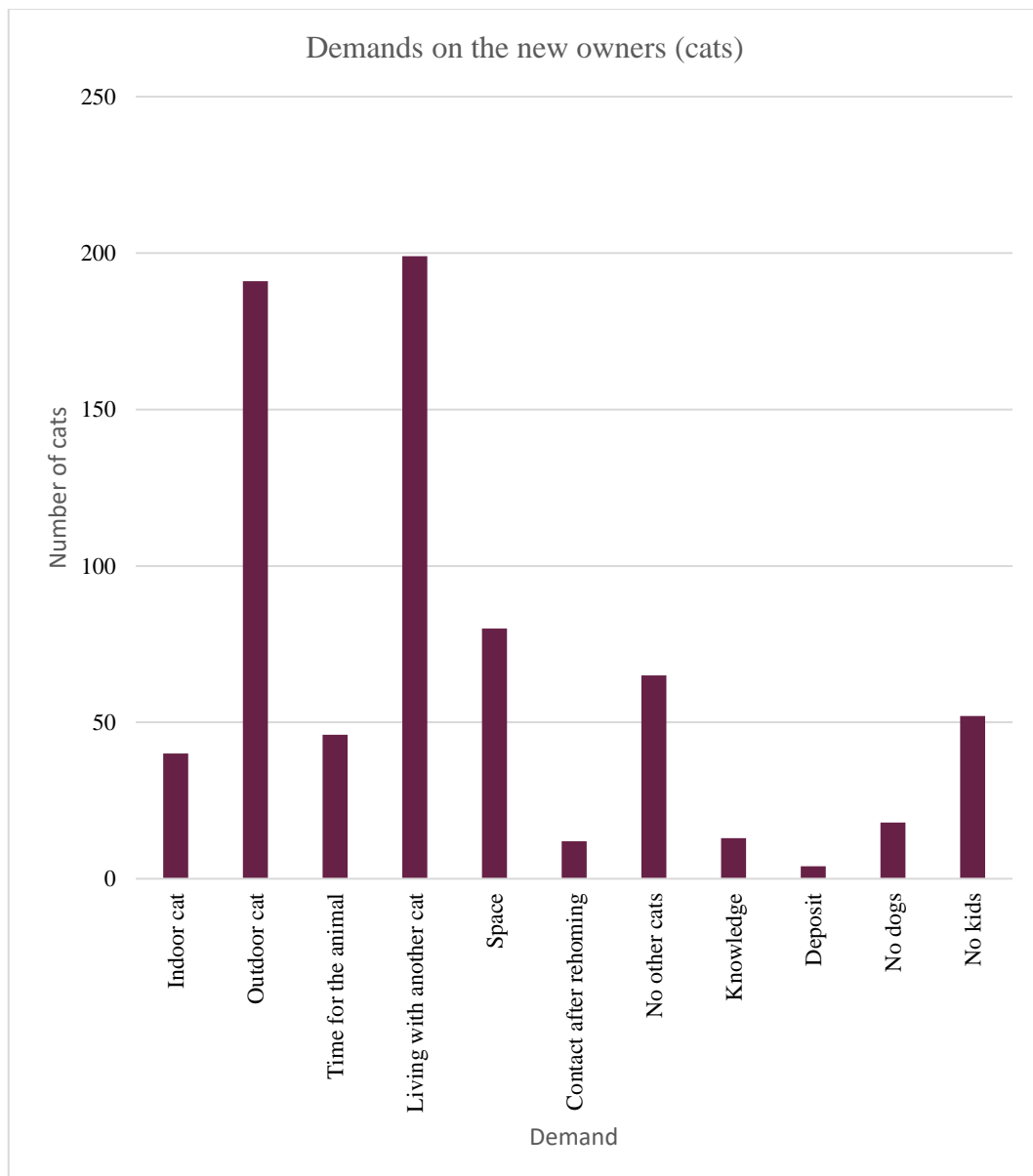


Figure 15. Graph showing what demands were mentioned in the ads and for how many of the cats being rehomed on blocket.se from 1 February to 12 March.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 The ads

In Sweden, there are multiple ways to rehome pets, and a large part of pets are probably being rehomed to friends and family, via ads on Facebook and thru breeders. Some pets are also relinquished to shelters. Blocket.se is not only a site for rehoming pets but also a place to sell and buy many other things, from cars and houses to toys and clothing, and they handle many ads daily. Since it is not only a site for rehoming, they do not have many guidelines or rules for what the ads need to contain regarding information about the animals.

Most ads in this study contained only one cat or dog being rehomed, but especially for cats; it was common to rehome two or more cats (20% of ads). These ads often mentioned that the cat needed another cat to live with, and often that was another cat being rehomed in the same ad. Some also stated this as preferred but not a demand. The same pattern was less telling in dog ads which are interesting since dogs are more of a pack animal than cats are.

A sizeable part of the ads lacked important information about the animals being rehomed. Of cat ads, 29% lacked information about the neuter status, and 9% did not mention the cat's age. For dogs, 57% lacked information about the neuter status, and 4% lacked information about age. Information like neuter status and age are important since pets of different ages have different needs, as a very young pet may need much looking after, and a very old pet may have more health problems related to age and also is expected to be with the new owner for a shorter amount of time. Neuter status is important since intact pets can copulate and produce offspring, which is not always desired.

It's nearly impossible to find if the ads from this data are real or if some are fake ads trying to fool people of money. In some situations, there were ads where the author started to recognise the style of writing the ad. When sorting the material for that person's sales name (a name chosen by the seller to be viewed by the public in their ad), the author found a lot of similar ads from that person with the almost exact description of the animal, but the name and age of the animal were changed. What seems to be the most common among these were young Maltese dogs described as

super sweet and family-friendly. The author could not see the same pattern among cat ads.

Some ads were present multiple times in the material, as some were being renewed by the present owner since the pet had yet to find a new home. In the study, there are no numbers for these ads as they were counted as doublets and were removed, but it is a sign that rehoming is not straightforward and often takes much time.

## 5.2 Gender, Breed, Age, and Neuter Status

### 5.2.1 Gender

Regarding gender distribution, the statistics show that the number of female dogs being rehomed was slightly less than male dogs at 45% vs 51%. The opposite relationship was shown for cats, as male cats made up 51% and females 45%. Even if it is a difference between the genders, it is not large enough to say anything about it from this material. Data from Statistics Sweden show results close to 50% in both genders in dogs and cats (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012).

### 5.2.2 Breed

#### *Dogs*

The most common dog breed in this study were mixed-breed dogs. Of the pure breeds, the most common were American Bullies, French Bulldogs, Siberian Huskys and German Shepherds. American Bullies come in many different sizes, but they all count as the same breed, and sizes have therefore not been accounted for in this study.

The most popular breeds registered in Sweden in 2022 are Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, and the German Shepherd (Jordbruksverket 2022b). There were 4 602 American Bullies registered in Sweden in 2022; the most popular breed, Labrador Retriever, had 38 043 registered individuals. It seems like the American Bully is overrepresented in this study. There could be that people owning American Bullies do not register them, and there actually is a bigger population or something about the dogs, making them the most common to rehome. The American Bully is not an FCI-approved breed; therefore, information about the breed and its characteristics in Sweden is limited. It is approved by the United Kennel Club (UKC), and on their website, you can read that even though the breed originates from fighting dogs, it is a nice family dog that should be gentle against humans (UKC 2013).

### *Cats*

The most common cat breed in this study was mixed-breed cats. Of the pure breeds, the most common were Ragdoll, Maine Coon, and British Shorthair. The most popular cat breeds in Sweden in 2021 were the mixed-breeds when only counting pure breeds Ragdoll, Siberian Cat, and Maine Coon are the top three (SVERAK 2022). The British Shorthair is found in the top ten.

When comparing cat breeds in this study with the most common in Sweden, the author can't see that one breed stands out in the cat section. Statistics on cats in Sweden as of 2022 are based on voluntary registration; since the beginning of 2023, tagging and registering all cats has been mandatory. Hopefully, more reliable statistics will come out of this.

### 5.2.3 Age

The age of dogs in this study ranged from 2 months up to 11 years. With a mean age of 1.8 years, Statistics Sweden found the average age of the general dog population in 2006 to be 5.6 years.

The age of cats in this study ranged from 3 months up to 13 years. With a mean age of 2.6 years, Statistics Sweden found the average age of the general cat population in 2006 to be 4.8.

The population of pets in this study was very young. Since kittens generally leave the queen at three months old and puppies the bitch at 2 months old, many of these pets have only been in their new homes for a few days to a couple of weeks. It is worrisome that many pet owners realise they can't have a pet after only owning it for that short time when it is expected to live for over ten years.

One could argue that the pet should come to a new home rather than live in one where it is not wanted. However, the best thing would be if the decision to get a pet were closely thought through and the family met cats and dogs before getting one so as not to realise that there is an allergy in the family or they don't have time for a pet shortly after picking up their new, four-legged family member.

### 5.2.4 Neuter Status

Since this study lacked information on neuter status in 57% of all dog ads and 29% of all cat ads, it's hard to draw real conclusions. Therefore, conclusions in this study must be taken based on the ads where the animal's neuter status was mentioned.

### *Dogs*

More male dogs than females were neutered; this could be because the procedure is cheaper and less complex for a male dog than a female. Of the female dogs where neuter status was mentioned, this study found that 14% were neutered. Of the male dogs where neuter status was mentioned, this study found that 24% were neutered.

Statistics Sweden found that in the general population of dogs in Sweden, 22.3% were neutered in 2012 (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012). The number of neutered dogs found in this study seems to align with the general population of dogs in Sweden. The number of neutered female dogs is slightly lower than the general population, possibly because the dogs in this study are quite young. Many female dogs get neutered because of medical reasons such as pyometra and therefore are older when they get neutered.

### *Cats*

Since Sweden has a law that says cats' reproduction shall be regulated (SFS 2007:1150), the neuter status for cats is expected to be high. Of the female cats where neuter status was mentioned, this study found that 57% were neutered. Of the male cats where neuter status was mentioned, this study found that 67% were neutered. As for dogs, it is easier to neuter a male cat than a female, but the cost is not as different for cats, and it is generally cheaper and faster to neuter cats.

The number in this study is less than the 81.2% statistics Sweden found for the general population of cats in Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012). That could depend on the age of the cats since cats in this study generally were young.

## 5.3 Prices

Blocket.se has a rule that pets are not to be given away for free. This is to lower the impulsiveness of pet adoption and, by doing so, also lower the rate of animal cruelty. The lowest price they accept in a cat ad is 500 SEK, and for dogs, 1 000 SEK (Blocket.se 2022). In this study's data, animals were listed under the lowest price set by Blocket.se. Some ads had multiple animals and may have said something in style with - two cats for 500 SEK. In those cases, both cats were counted as 250 SEK each in this study. In some ads, the text specified that the animal was given away because the owner did not want money for the animal; they just wanted them to go to a good home. While this is a noble statement, and one can understand why they think so, it is important to have the right economy when getting a pet. The owner is responsible for the pet getting treatment when sick, which could be costly, especially when the animal is uninsured. In Sweden, 77% of all dogs and 36% of all cats had pet insurance in 2012 (Statistiska centralbyrån 2012).

Most dogs were listed around 9 500-15 001 SEK, which represents a normal price for a puppy in Sweden.

Cats are generally cheaper than dogs. Most cats were listed at 1 000 - 2 000sek, representing a normal price for a cat in Sweden. This is a bit sad because it makes it look like owning cats is less of a responsibility, and it makes it easier to buy a cat on impulse. It is also evident from the low insurance rate for cats that they don't



have the same status as dogs. This may contribute to how there are estimated to be over 100 000 homeless cats in Sweden. Also, the fact that up until now, you did not have to register your cat could make it easier to abandon them.

## 5.4 Behavioural Problems

Unlike Voith *et al.* (1992) findings that 42% of dog owners considered their dogs to have behavioural problems, this study found that only 15% mentioned behavioural problems in their ads. 15% is a low number, and the author believes that when creating an ad for rehoming a dog, the owner may not always write the whole truth. Some ads mentioned that personal contact before rehoming was obligatory, and the author thinks that most of the “real” problems and reasons are told in person. This is understandable, cause like Voith *et al.* (1992) discusses in their study, many people have dogs with behavioural problems that they live with and live their lives around those problems.

Only 6% of cats were mentioned to have behavioural problems. Regarding reasons for rehoming, behaviour was the reason in 2% of dogs and <1% of cats. Contrary to the 25% that Jensen *et al.* (2020) found in their study for dogs and cats, this is a really low number. A study made in Sweden in 2022 showed that 18% of the general population of cat owners reported having a cat with a behavioural problem (Hirsch *et al.* 2022). Since the number of cats with behavioural problems seen in this study (6%) correlates poorly with what Hirsch *et al.* (2022) saw in their study (18%), one can believe that many owners are not upfront and honest about their pets’ behavioural problems. More pets would be expected to be rehomed because of these problem behaviours than this study shows.

An important difference between this study and Jensen *et al.* (2020) is that owners relinquished their pets to a shelter and were asked in person why they were doing so, and the information was confidential. In this study, they wrote the ads themselves, and the ads and their information are open to the public to read. Owners in this study also have a personal goal of finding their pets a new home and needing someone to want to adopt their pets. Although it is good that the new owners know all the important information about the animals, you can, by writing it in the ad, make the problems sound worse than they may be. Therefore, it may be better to take that as an in-person conversation.

There could also be that the present owners are bad at recognising problem behaviours and describes them as the pet not being happy in their environment or that they have behaviour the present owners find problematic. Still, they write in the ad that the behaviour is not a problem because that makes the animal easier to rehome.

## 5.5 Reasons for Rehoming

Most ads for cats and dogs did not mention the reason for rehoming, which is reasonable since it is often personal and can be a hard decision for people. Decisions they do not want others to judge them for. At the top for dogs were “family circumstances”; most ads did not specify these circumstances, so the author can’t say more about that. Next were “lack of time”, “the dog being miserable in its environment”, and then “allergy” and “new working conditions”. Of these top 5 reasons, only one had to do with the dog itself, i.e., the dog is miserable.

The cat being “miserable” was the most common reason for rehoming the cat. After that was “allergy”, “family circumstances”, “moving”, and “lack of time”.

The ads stating that the pet was “miserable” often referred to the dog or cat not getting enough attention, not being happy living in the city/in an apartment, that the dog did not like living with the other animals in the house, or another animal in the house is miserable living with the dog/cat being rehomed.

Regarding “lack of time”, it felt like many people stating this tried to rehome young pets because they did not know what they signed up for when getting a pet.

“New working conditions” could have appeared as an effect of the covid-19 pandemic since the acquisition of dogs and cats increased during the pandemic's beginning (Djurskyddet Sverige 2021; Jordbruksverket 2021). These ads often stated that the pet was used to their owner working from home, and now they had to go back to the office, and the pet was now alone more than they wished for. This reason was more common among dogs than cats. That this is more visible for dogs than cats may be because cats are easier to leave alone at home when you need to go to the office, and they don’t have the same demand for attention that a dog has since a dog has to be walked multiple times a day.

## 5.6 Demands on New Owners

About half of all ads contain demands for the new owner. Looking at stated demands on new homes, several ads mentioning “lack of time” as a reason for rehoming demanded that new owners had “time for the animal”. Therefore, it seems that the present owners demanded that the new owners should be able to give the pet what they couldn’t. For dogs’ “knowledge” was the most common demand, often stated in ads for larger and “tougher” breeds. It is reasonable to have this demand since the present owner, in some ways, is responsible not only for the animal coming to a good home but also for the home taking in the animal can handle the task to do so.

For cats, two demands stand out. It is “living with another cat”, and the cat should be an “outdoor cat”.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the extent of and reasons for the private rehoming of dogs and cats in Sweden via the online marketplace Blocket.se.

During this study period, 1 046 dogs and 946 cats needed new homes on Blocket.se. This accounts for around 26 dogs and 28 cats per day. One must remember that much rehoming is done on other sites, Facebook and privately. Serious breeders usually also help their buyers rehome the pet if needed. Therefore, pets needing new homes is an even greater problem than this study could examine.

The most common reasons for rehoming dogs are human-related problems, as “lack of time” and “family circumstances” are the top reasons. The opposite was seen for cats as a pet-related problem, like the cat being “miserable” were most common for cats.

The old owners do often have demands on the new owners. The authors feeling for those is that they demand that the new owner give the pet the things they cannot, like time, space, and access to outdoor environments or a home without kids. The most common demand for dogs was that the new owners had knowledge of the breed or dogs in general.

This study shows that the proportion of American Bullies being rehomed is remarkably high compared to the general population of pure-breed dogs. For cats, there was no such trend. This study also shows that younger animals being rehomed are generally more common than older ones.

During this study, the author also found that ads for pets on Blocket.se often need more information about the animals.

Further research needs to be done to find a way to prevent the rehoming of pets. People need to be educated about the normal behaviour of pets and what it requires to own a pet. More in-depth studies about people rehoming their pets and their reasons for doing so are needed. More credible information about what it takes to own a pet is needed, and it needs to come from credible sources such as animal health workers and animal behaviourists.

One way to tackle this problem could be to hold short courses for people wanting pets about how to care for them and what it takes regarding the owners' time and dedication to care for a pet. This way, people could also ask personal questions and get expert advice. In a perfect world, pets' natural behaviours and needs would be taught in grade school as pets are a big part of people's lives.

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## Popular Science Summary

Dog and cat rehoming refers to the process of finding new homes for dogs and cats who have been relinquished or abandoned by their owners or found as strays. Rehoming can be done through animal shelters, rescue organisations, or by individual owners.

Rehoming dogs and cats can be a complex process involving several steps, including assessing the animal's behaviour and health and screening for potential adopters.

Owners rehoming their pets may use online marketplaces or social media platforms to find new homes. However, they should be cautious about whom they give their pets to and ensure that the new owners are responsible and have the resources to care for the animal properly.

Overall, rehoming is an important aspect of animal welfare and can help dogs and cats find safe, loving homes where they can thrive.

Through this work, I have collected data about dogs and cats being rehomed on an online marketplace in Sweden. The most common reasons for rehoming dogs are “lack of time” and “family circumstances”. The cat being “miserable” were most common for cats.

The old owners do often have demands on the new owners. Often, they demand that the new owner give the pet the things they cannot, like time, space, and access to outdoor environments or a home without kids. The most common demand for dogs was that the new owners had knowledge of the breed or dogs in general.

This study shows that mixed breeds were the most common in both cats and dogs and that American Bullies are more common than other pure breeds being rehomed if accounting for the general population of pure-breed dogs. Generally, younger animals are more common than older ones.

During this study, I also found that ads for pets on Blocket.se often need more information about the animals.

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