

Straydog Situation in Niksic / Montenegro



Report funded by
StrayCoCo Foundation

Supported by
Family Vet ambulance
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Niksic / Montenegro

The municipality of Niksic covers the central and western part of Montenegro with an area of 2.065 km², which makes it the largest municipality in Montenegro. Niksic has about 72.000 inhabitants distributed in 110 settlements, so Niksic is the second largest city in terms of population, right after the capital Podgorica.



In Niksic, dogs were once kept purposefully, they had a role in society, they were treated better, so their position used to be better and their needs more respected. Today the situation is completely different. A dog has seldom a forever home, is abandoned when no longer wanted, sick or old. Responsible dog ownership is not yet developed in our country. In rural places dogs are kept their life time on a chain, cannot run as would correspond to their nature. And once they do not fulfil their guarding task, they are dumped like garbage.

The citizens seem to be unaware that a dog has its needs, a dog is a being, not a toy, a dog is not for a few days, but for a lifetime. Many citizens consider it a shame to love a dog and give it the love it deserves, to take care of it as an equal member of the family.

People buy a dog without being conscious about their responsibility for his wellbeing and the food- as well veterinary costs that they have to expect. They think it is just beautiful at a certain moment to have a dog, or their children to have fun with a puppy. And after a short period of time they abandon their dog. And the society has to suffer from too many hungry stray dogs.



The citizens leave dogs even when they no longer benefit from it, when they get sick or when they are too old. In Niksic, a large number of owner dogs end up on the street. So there are thousands of abandoned dogs in this city, and that number is growing because they are breeding uncontrollably. 90% of abandoned dogs are females that have had unwanted mating and have been thrown out into the street in high pregnancy. Such females breed on the street, raise their litters and there is an increased number of dogs on the streets of the city of Niksic. Due to the large number of irresponsible owners, who do not sterilize or neuter their dogs, unwanted mating occurs, so a large number of puppies are thrown out.



What is important, and does not exist in Montenegro, is the education of citizens, especially children. Children should be taught from an early age about the nature of dogs and their needs, as well as about their attitudes toward dogs.

In Niksic, there are NGOs "Niksic Association for the Protection of Animals" and "Korina Animals". These two organizations are the only ones fighting for a better position for stray dogs in this city. *The Niksic Association for the Protection of Animals* has only three members, but there are also a small number of volunteers who help them. Due to the lack of material resources, and due to the fact that they do not have adequate space to take care of endangered dogs, but also due to the lack of all other resources, this organization could not help all endangered dogs from the street.

The Animal Welfare Association helps dogs as much as they can.

The Korina Animals is fighting for the implementation of legal regulations that exist in Montenegro, as well as for the amendments and modifications of some laws that are necessary in the Montenegrin Code.



Laws relating to the welfare of dogs in Montenegro



Abandoned dogs in Montenegro;

In Montenegro, there are laws related to the welfare of dogs, but they are not implemented in the right way. The situation of stray dogs in this city, but also in the whole country is very bad. A large number of citizens are not benevolent towards them, so some dare to poison them. Dog poisoning in Montenegro is common, and because of that, no one has been held accountable yet.

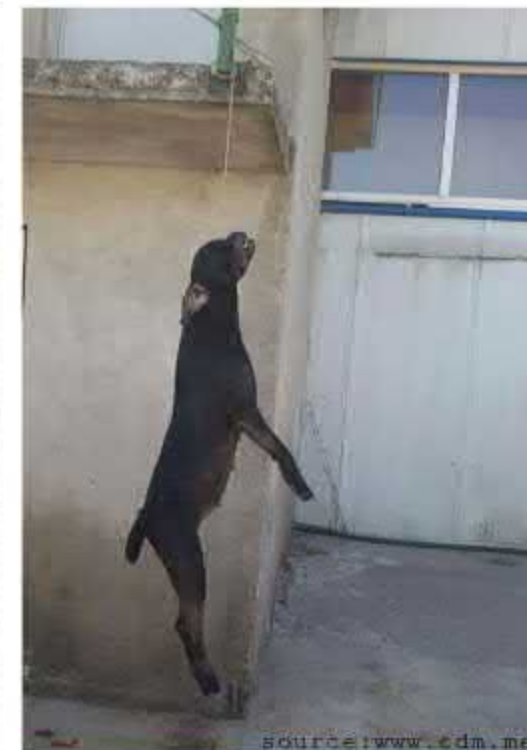
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Notwithstanding the Criminal Code of Montenegro, specifically Article 309, paragraph 1, which reads:

"Whoever violates the regulations by killing, injuring or torturing an animal will be punished by a fine or imprisonment for up to one year."

In Niksic, dogs are most often killed by being poisoned en masse. There are a large number of poisoned dogs in this city, but no one has ever been punished for the crime.

Despite the fact that the citizens filed charges, the processes were never completed, nor were any of the citizens of Niksic criminally liable.



There was a case of poisoning of the owner's dog in Podgorica, for which there is evidence.

Although there is surveillance camera footage, which clearly shows a neighbor of a dog owner giving poison to a dog in the yard, she has not been punished as required by law. The perpetrator got suspended sentence, but not a constitutional one.

A case of hanging a pregnant female dog happened in Podgorica, due to which the perpetrator was sentenced to 240 hours of socially useful work.

In Bar, a 5-month-old owner's dog was shot by a neighbor and then thrown down a cliff in a sack by the very owner without providing dog with a medical care.



Pursuant to the Law on Protection and Welfare of Animals, Article 5 and paragraph 1, which reads:

"A person who injures an animal must help it, and if he is not able to help himself, he is obliged to provide assistance to the animal."

In Montenegro, dogs hit by cars are frequent occurrence, without the perpetrator acting as required by law. In almost all cases, dogs are left in poor condition after being hit.



The man who shot the dog was sentenced to 4 months, suspended for one year. The dog owner was sentenced to 2 months, suspended for one year.

This case was covered by the media and was under pressure from that side.

Were it not for the media coverage, this punishment probably would not have been like this and the question is whether the perpetrators of the crime would have been punished at all.



According to the Law on Conditions and Manner of Keeping Pets, Article 13 and Paragraph 6, which reads:

"The pet owner is responsible for the life and well-being of the animal, as well as for the damage it may cause to other persons or animals."

Regardless of this law, there are several cases of attacks by owner dogs in Montenegro, without the competent authorities reacting according to the law.



Dog fights are organized in Montenegro, without anyone controlling those actions. And it often happens that the owner throws his dog out on street because he lost the fight. Although this is a police issue to confront, unfortunately they never react to these situations.

According to the Law on the Protection of Animal Welfare, Article 8 and paragraph 6, which reads:

**"It is prohibited to:
6) train animals for fights, organize animal fights or fights between animals and humans, participate in them, visit them, advertise and organize betting and participate in betting."**

The Law on the Conditions and Manner of Keeping pets is described in Article 4 of the Law:

"The pet owner is obliged to treat the pet with the care of a good host and to provide the pet with comfortable accommodation, care and nurture in accordance with the type, race, sex, age, as well as physical and biological specifics, behavioral characteristics and animal health."

Article 5 reads:

"The pet owner is obliged to provide a sufficient amount of food, living space and hygienic living conditions for the pet."

In Montenegro, there are a large number of owners who do not keep their pets in accordance with this law, without anyone being punished for it.



Municipial shelter for dogs in Niksic



The shelter for dogs in Niksic was not built according to the standards required by the regulations. There was no free space for dogs in this shelter, only boxes and chains. The shelter was staffed by untrained people for the job, who didn't even come to their workplace regularly, so the dogs were neglected.

The dogs did not have a regular meal, they did not even get enough water. The dogs were fed only with granules that were not of the best quality.

A large number of healthy dogs were euthanized in order to free up space for new dogs from the streets.

At the end of 2017 the killing dogs in this shelter was stopped.



A shelter for dogs in Niksic was opened at the end of October 2015, with the aim of solving the problem of stray dogs. This shelter is about 20 km away from the city, with a capacity of 50-60 dogs. It is located in the village of Brestice.

The shelter is located in a rocky and hilly part of the village with inapproachable access.

The 2.2 km of the road to the shelter was not paved until 2019. The shelter was built without plumbing, and there are also problems with the installation of electricity in the shelter.

The problem with electricity dates back to the establishment of this shelter and up today it has not been resolved.

At the end of 2017, the "Niksic Association for the Protection of Animals" joined the work around the shelter. They found the shelter in extremely poor condition. At the time they entered the shelter, they found as many as 103 dogs, there were 13 dogs in one box. Dogs were mixed, males and females, large and small dogs, aggressive and calm dogs, even sick dogs were not separated.

The dogs were malnourished and so hungry that it happened that the dogs in one box ate another dog. Hygiene was extremely poor, the boxes were not cleaned for days. The dogs lived in inhumane conditions.

This *Association*, with the help of volunteers, started helping dogs in the shelter. Thanks to a foreign investor, *Network for Animals-NFA*, two 5000m³ water tanks have been provided and thus the water problem has been solved. Also, this organization donated about 30 dog houses with the necessary insulation, and thanks to that, the boxes were more spacious.

The "Niksic Association for the Protection of Animals" with a small number of volunteers have managed to find foster homes for a certain number of dogs from the shelter and some dogs were adopted. The dogs started getting a regular meal, but maintaining hygiene was a constant problem.

Until July 2020, the shelter did not have its own veterinarian. The dogs did not have veterinary care, they were not vaccinated, neutered or spayed.

No work was done on the socialization of the dogs. The dogs were not adopted. Many citizens of Niksic do not even know that this shelter exists, and therefore they do not know that they can adopt a dog from there. Furthermore the shelter was not opened to public.

The Law relating to the Treatment of Lost and Abandoned Pets, by its Articles: 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25, clearly describes the conditions that must be provided. The shelter in Niksic does not meet the conditions prescribed by law, and yet it has received a work permit and has been operating as such for years.



From July 2020, thanks to the *StrayCoCo* organization, more investment is being made in the Niksic shelter and conditions for dogs are slowly improving.

The team from the *Family Vet* ambulance, in cooperation with the *StrayCoCo Foundation*, took care of the dogs in the shelter. All dogs were veterinary treated, vaccinated, neutered and spayed, chipped and registered. Work is being done to improve the space in which the dogs reside, with the aim that dogs have a space to play and not be trapped in boxes all the time. The plan is to level the space in the shelter, and to create several zones.

The *StrayCoCo* organization donated funds to build a fence for the first two zones intended for dog running, which have also been completed.



In addition to the *StrayCoCo Foundation*, the *NFA* organization is also working to improve conditions, which will help with its donations to build a fence for the third zone, which will be divided into two parts, one part for puppies and the other for dogs that have been in contact so far.

The fifth zone will be created, which will represent quarantine, and it will be financed by JKP Niksic from its budget. *Family Vet* team and *Niksic Association for the Protection of Animals* are involved in planning the space and arranging the inner part of the zones.



Family Vet team, together with volunteers, visits the Niksic shelter every Saturday to take care of sheltered dogs and walk them outside. Until recently this was the only day that the dogs could get out of their Kennel or get freed from their chain for a moment.

The time period of 6 months, since the *StrayCoCo* organization started helping around the shelter, is not enough for the conditions in the shelter to become ideal, but they have certainly improved and will be improved further more.

The *StrayCoCo* organization and the *Family Vet* team, as well as the *Niksic Animal Welfare Association* in cooperation with the *NFA*, are working together on a completely new look and function of the Niksic shelter.

CNVR and Family Vet ambulance Niksic



The collaboration between the *Family Vet* team and the *StrayCoCo Foundation* started in March 2020 and since then this team is implementing a *CNVR* project with financial support from the *StrayCoCo Foundation*. The job of this team is usually a five-day program that every dog has to go through, and that is:

- 1st day - deworming,
- 2nd day - surgery and vaccination of rabies,
- 3rd day and 4th - day recovery and good food,
- 5th day - release.

The *StrayCoCo Foundation* donates vaccination for puppies, money for food for street dogs, as well as sterilization, i.e. castration and rabies vaccines. Thanks to the *StrayCoCo* organization and the dedicated work of the *Family Vet* team, which, in addition to its daily responsibilities in the outpatient ambulance, have managed to sterilize or castrate as many as 359 street dogs and adopted dogs. All of these dogs have undergone veterinary examination, vaccination, chipping, spaying or neutering.



Every street dog received an eartag with a number, so it is clear that he was treated and castrated. The principle of *CNVR* is, that a treated dog has to be released to the same location where he was caught. In the beginning the former Mayor of Niksic boycotted this work and removed the tagged dogs from the streets.

They were repeatedly brought to the Municipality shelter - and freed again through the Team. After clear protests, that the *CNVR* program would be immediately stopped if the dogs would be sheltered, the Mayor accepted the concept of "Community Dogs".

Puppies dumped like garbage!

In Niksic, dogs are very rejected, often just born. *The Family Vet* team saved a large number of discarded puppies and find adopters for them, and has the support of the *StrayCoCo Foundation*. The *StrayCoCo Foundation* provides vaccines for all abandoned stands.

Dumped puppies are an indicator that too many dog owners did not pay their female dog, but prefer to dump or kill the offsprings. So the more puppies you have, the less people have castrated their female dogs.

The puppies do NOT come from street dogs but from owned dogs. Dumped puppies are an indicator of irresponsible dog ownership, not castrated female dogs that are not under control, not on leash and roaming free or let alone in the garden, where male dogs can visit.



Transitory Care Center (TCC) Niksic: TCC - StrayCoCo

TCC was built in July 2020 when the *StrayCoCo* organization had started the CNVR project in Niksic. For the realization of this project premises were needed for the dogs to stay until complete recovery after sterilization, after which they had to be returned to the location from which they were brought. The space for the construction of this center was provided by Srdjan Todorovic, he gave his land and he had received the basic material support from the *StrayCoCo Foundation*.



The place is designed to provide dogs with adequate care and attention, but also a space in which they would move freely during those 4-5 days of their stay there.

The StrayCoCo Foundation have financed the setting up the fence and the construction of 5 boxes.

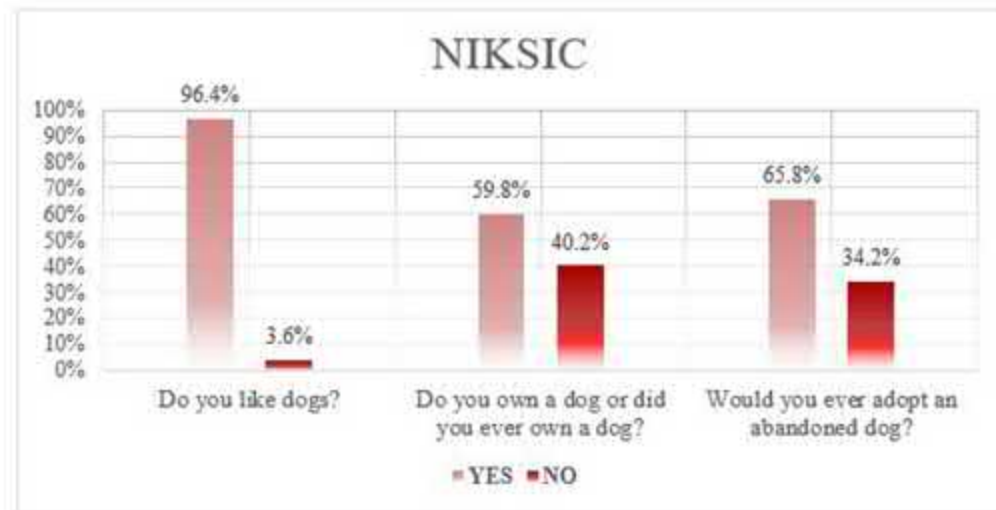
They have donated a container with the necessary conditions for hygiene and heat, which is intended for the recovery of dogs that are placed there immediately after the operation, and after one to two days when the dogs are already stable, they are moved to boxes from which they can go out into the open to run and play.

This center also houses dogs that have a health problem and they need a longer period of time to recover.

The StrayCoCo Foundation donates money for dog food at this center. They also have donated a vehicle that is used to transport street dogs, as well as to visit the shelter in Brestice.

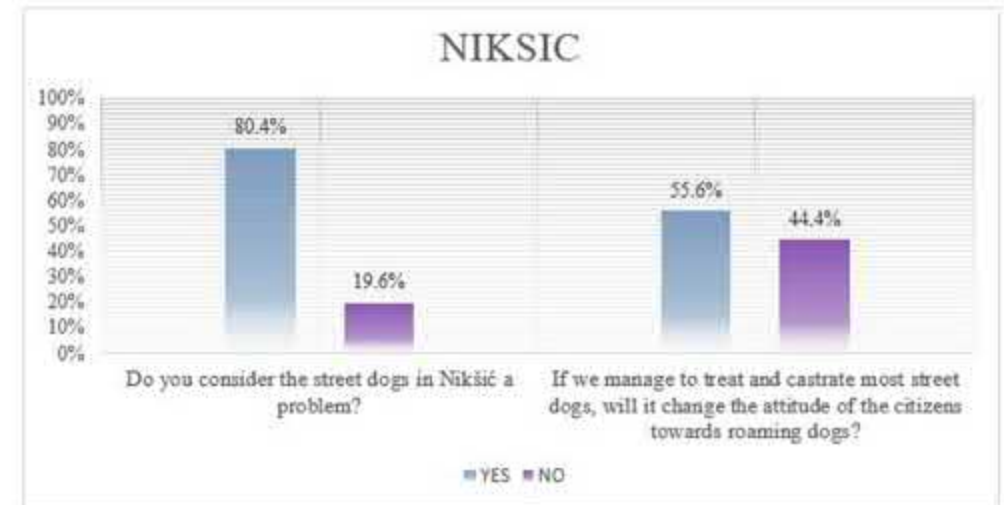
Opinion survey

StrayCoCo wanted to find out, how their CNVR program is accepted by the citizens and started questioning citizens in the following regions, Niksic city center, suburb Klicevo, and two villages Gornje Polje and Ozrinici. Citizens were interviewed by random selection. Young citizens, middle-aged and old citizens, as well as both sexes alike, were surveyed everywhere.

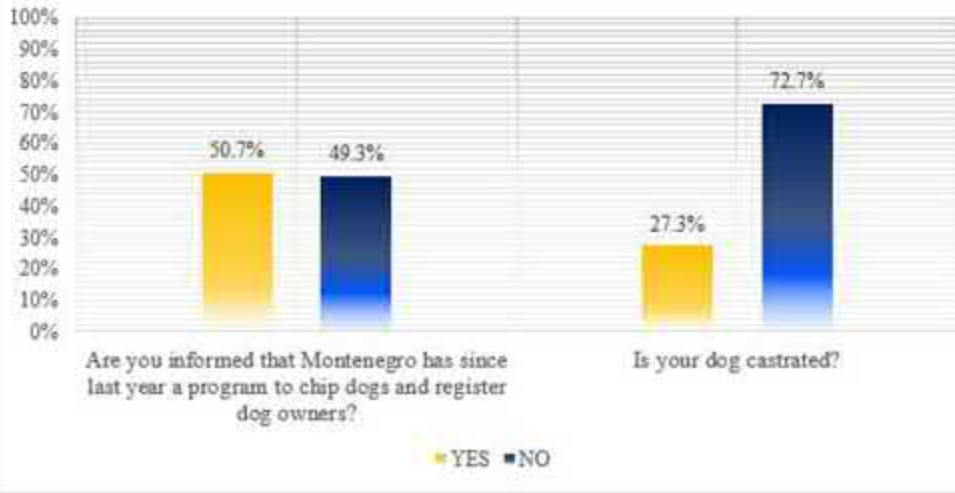


According to a survey conducted in this city, almost everyone loves dogs and a large number of citizens would adopt an abandoned dog. This tells us about the sincerity of the citizens of Niksic, because, the people of Niksic do usually not adopt abandoned dogs in such big numbers.

Citizens believe that street dogs are a problem in Niksic, most of them believe that the attitude of citizens will change if we manage to cure and castrate most street dogs. What we are seeing today is that the attitude of citizens towards dogs on the street has already improved, thanks to the program of the *StrayCoCo* organization.



NIKSIC



Based on a survey conducted in Niksic, it was shown that as many as 94.3% of citizens would provide some form of assistance to an abandoned dog.

However, whenever help is needed or when donations are collected for the treatment of stray dogs, the response from citizens is negligible.

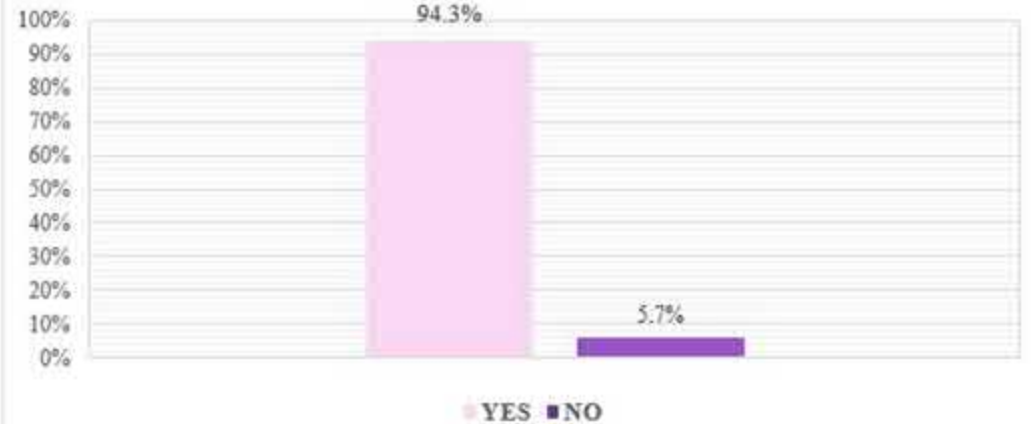
To the question "If you have a dog, is he allowed to roam free in the village or the streets?", All citizens answered "NO". Unfortunately, that is not true, often owner dogs walk alone and wander around the city. This is one such example. Comments are taken from the social network Facebook. All this tells us about (ir)responsible ownership in Niksic.



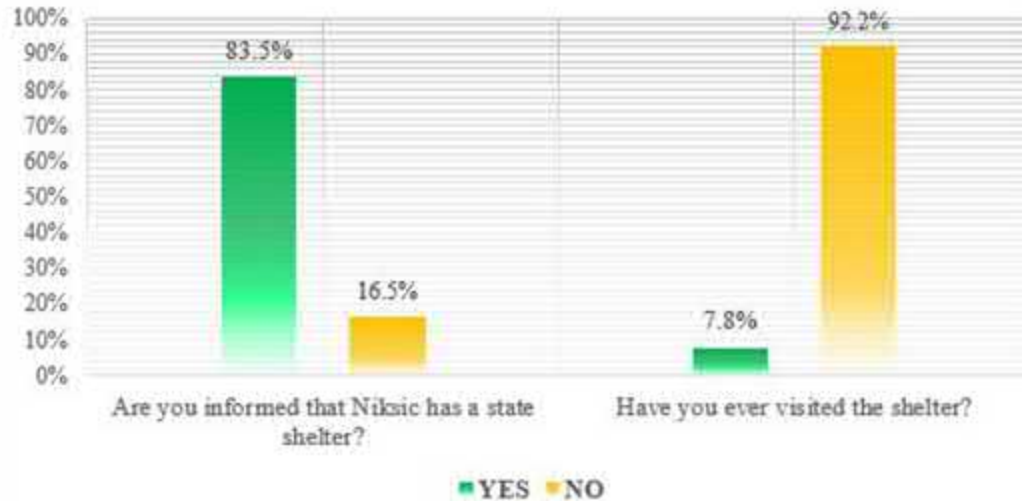
Our citizens understand that "irresponsible dogownership" includes a dog that spends the night at home, and during the day it has the full right to roam the streets. Such owners usually consider their dog to be extremely intelligent, so no harm will happen to him.

That's why we have so many poisonings of owned dogs or car crashes, whereby that "owned" dog automatically becomes a stray dog. That is why it should be insisted on chipping, and keeping dogs in the yards or on a leash while walking with him.

If you see an abandoned dog, do you provide water and food or any other help to him?



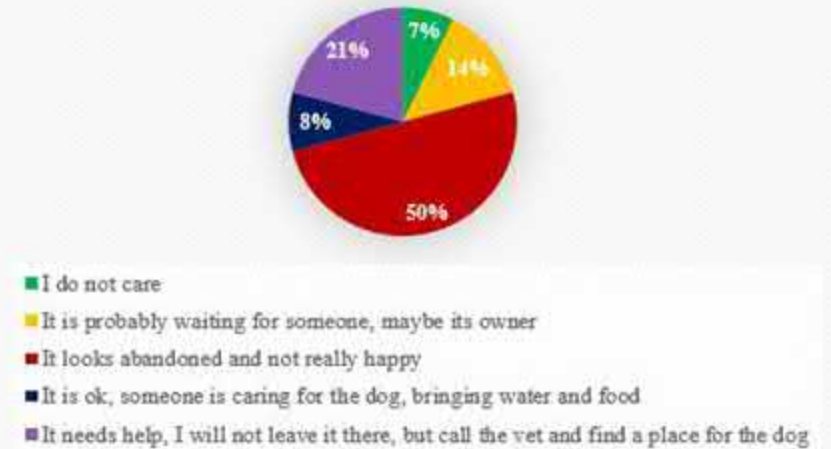
NIKSIC



Based on the conducted survey, as many as 75.7% of the citizens of NIKSIC think that the solution to the problem of stray dogs is a shelter, and only 7.8% of them visited a shelter for dogs in this city.

Citizens do not know what the conditions are like in this shelter. And they do not visit the shelter to adopt a dog instead buying one.

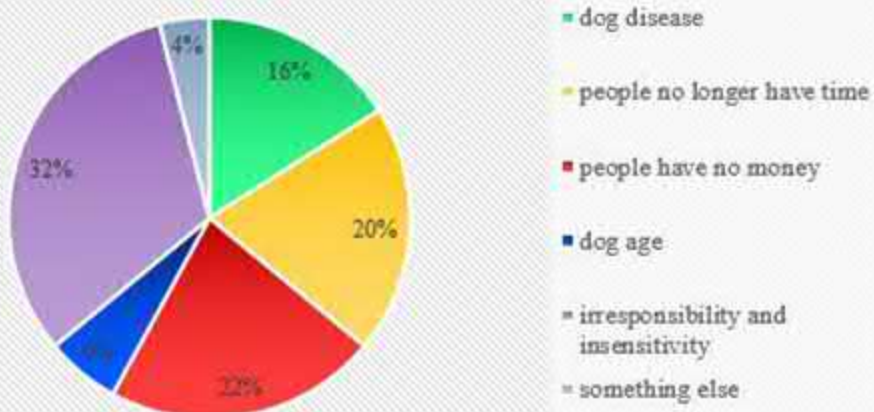
If you see a dog always on the same spot, what do you think?



About 15% of our citizens think that someone is already taking care of dog, but they are not interested what the dog is doing outside alone.

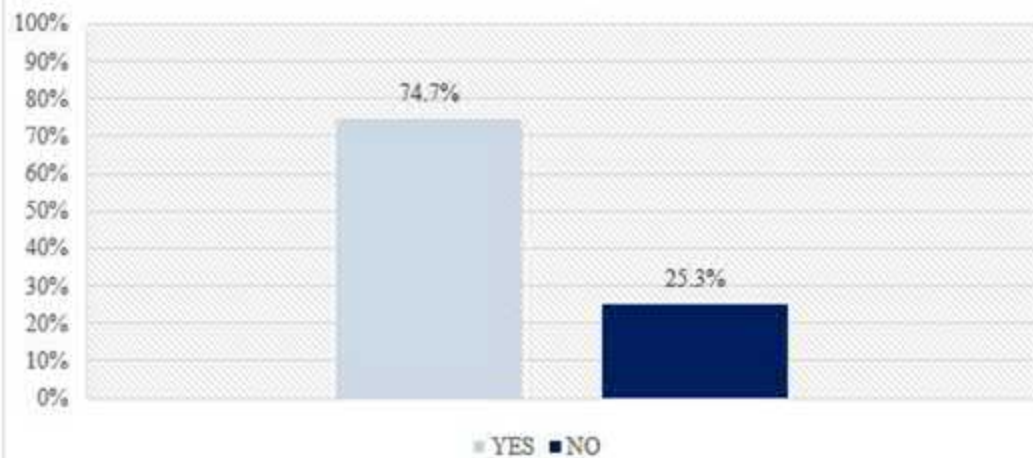
50% of citizens think that dog is abandoned and unhappy, but they do not think that they should help.

Why do people abandon their dog?



Although at least 32% of citizens are aware that owners most often dump their dogs because they are irresponsible and insensitive, nothing changes regarding the implementation of already existing punitive measures. On the contrary, citizens believe that dogs can survive on their own, which is for the species PET not true.

Are you convinced that dogs can survive alone and without owner and care?

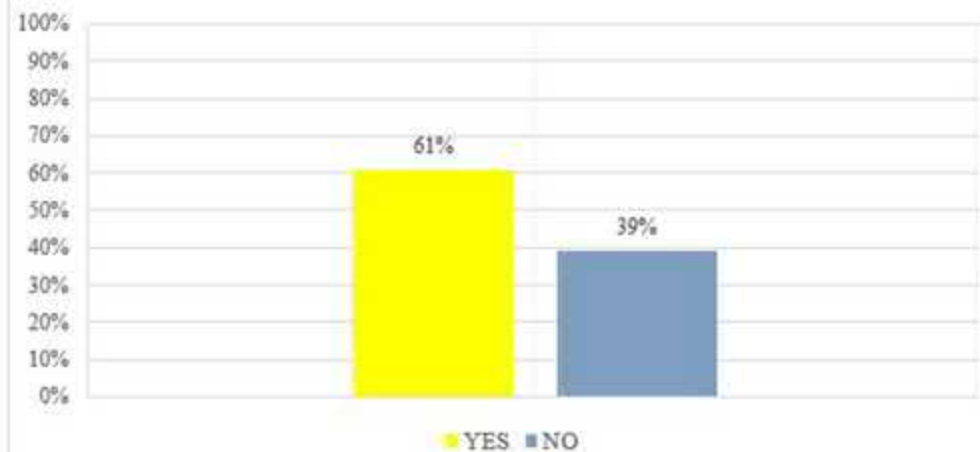


A large percentage of citizens think that dogs can survive alone on the street if their owners leave them, they think that they will somehow manage for food, that someone will feed them, and they do not think about other needs of dogs like deworming, vaccines, castration and veterinary help in general.

The citizens of Niksic do not think about the consequences that their actions will cause, they do not respect kids and adults that might be afraid of dogs, they do not consider the suffering of an abandoned dog - so dogs are being left en masse in this city.

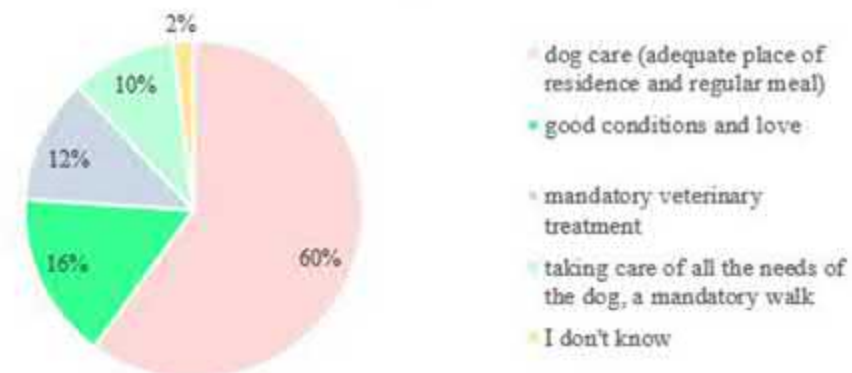
As many as 60% of citizens believe that responsible ownership means accommodation and dog food, and only 12% of them imply mandatory veterinary treatment like regular deworming, vaccinations and neutering – instead dumping offspring.

Do you know that the owner can be punished if the dog does not have proper care and is abandoned?



Although most citizens are informed that there is a law that they can be punished for irresponsible ownership, but the dog owners are not afraid, because they are informed that this law is still not implemented in our country.

What do you understand under responsible dog ownership?



The life of stray dogs in Niksic before the CNVR project

Niksic is a town with a large number of stray dogs and the municipality did never try to find solutions for citizens and dogs.

Dogs that hang around the city center are fed by workers from restaurants, bakeries and similar facilities. Volunteers also feed street dogs. However, dogs are being left en masse in nearby villages and suburbs.

The large number of stray dogs in these areas is a special problem, because no one cares about these dogs, and the consequence of the lack of food is increased aggression of dogs and attacks on livestock and poultry of the locals.

Dogs mostly move in packs, so in addition to attacking livestock, stray dogs also attack owner's dogs, as well as the locals themselves.

Neglect of stray dogs leads to their aggression and attacks, and the response of citizens to these attacks is mass poisoning and killing of dogs. Often dogs with visible skin diseases are abused, hit with sticks, stoned, tied in bags and thrown into the water.

Street dogs were not receiving veterinary treatment or being vaccinated. Citizens are afraid that the dogs would transmit diseases and that is one of the reasons why citizens are not benevolent towards street dogs. Citizens are not educated enough about dog diseases, and many do not have empathy.



As street dogs were not neutered and spayed, this further complicated the life of dogs on the street. When a female is in a heat, then she is followed by a pack of males. Due to that a fighting of dogs occurred, dogs are more aggressive, which caused additional fear among citizens.

The life of stray dogs is especially difficult during autumn and winter, when the weather is cold and when there are heavy rainfalls in Niksic and many dogs do not have any protection. The life of dogs on the streets is cruel and inhumane.



The lives of street dogs that have gone through CNVR

The situation started to change in summer 2020, when *StrayCoCo* took up its humane work to reduce the straydog population together with the *Family Vet* team. All street dogs that went through the CNVR project were marked with an ear-ring on their ear and the citizens have noticed that. A small number of citizens know exactly what an ear tag is, but everyone assumes that dogs have passed a veterinary examination and that someone has control over them, i.e. that they are chipped.

This fact is slowly changing the opinion of citizens about street dogs. They don't look the same way at dogs with an earring on their ear as they did before. Now they know that these dogs are vaccinated and harmless, so they are less bothered, they are not afraid that they will transmit some disease.

A number of citizens think that these dogs are protected, so they must not touch them. The mentality of the citizens of Niksic is such that they do not like females because they mate, but knowing that females with ear tags are sterilized and cannot reproduce, changed their opinion about these dogs. Knowing that there will be no new litter, citizens are now less bothered by street dogs.

The fact that the dogs were neutered, reduced the aggressiveness of the dogs during the chasing period, the dogs became calmer. Now dogs do not move in such a large pack as before, so the fear of street dogs is a bit minimized now.



Thanks to this project, the citizens of Niksic are increasingly deciding to adopt dogs with ear tags, because they know that these dogs have undergone the entire veterinary treatment. Furthermore *StrayCoCo* promised to help with future veterinary help, if someone adopts a street dog and does not buy breed.

There are several such examples, where citizens arbitrarily decided to adopt a dog from the street.

The CNVR project helped street dogs a lot, made life easier on the streets and began to change the opinion and attitude of citizens towards abandoned dogs.



Statistics

Neuterred dogs

Month	Females dogs	Male dogs	In total
June	21	9	30
July	38	35	73
August	28	9	37
September	56	20	76
October	29	19	48
November	40	20	60
December	24	11	35

The total number of neutered dogs from the first of June to the 22nd of December is **359**.

Adopted dogs through the StrayCoCo program

Month	Street adult dogs	Abandoned puppies
June	1	11
July	4	7
August	2	12
September	3	11
October	2	14
November	5	9
December	7	19
	24	83

The total number of adopted dogs from the first of June to the 22nd of December is **107**, of which 24 are adult stray dogs and 83 abandoned puppies.

15 adult dogs were adopted from the Niksic dog shelter and **1** puppy from the first of June to the 22nd of December.

Conclusion

The CNVR program has proved to be an effective method for reducing the street dog population in Niksic and strengthen the model of "Community Dogs". But it must be clear, that a CNVR program alone will not change the abandoning of dogs. As long as the dog owners do not register their dogs, as long as owned dogs are not castrated, the dumping of puppies will go on in whole Montenegro. There are many further steps to take by politicians that up to now ignore the significance of sick, old and starving dogs for touristic development and for the safe and happy life of their own citizens.

At the moment the CNVR program promoting "Community Dogs" and adoptions from the street is a much better solution than other methods like sheltering or inhumane and unethical euthanasia of healthy dogs. There are shelters everywhere in Montenegro, also in Niksic, but this is only a temporary solution. Sheltering dogs can only work out if combined with adoptions. The Niksic shelter is not functioning as it should, and the dogs on the street are at least free in their movement and some are used to dog friends who feed them.



If there will be no uncontrolled reproduction of street- and owned dogs the attitude of citizens towards them will ameliorate. Already after six months of implementing only the CNVR project in Niksic, a change can be seen. The number of street dogs has decreased, as thanks to veterinary treatment more dogs were adopted. There are less abandoned puppies as there were years ago. Puppies are still cruelly dumped, but their number has decreased compared to last year. The life of dogs on the streets has improved, we notice that the attitude of citizens towards them is changing, but it is still not at the level at which it really should be.

In just half of year, 236 abandoned female dogs were neutered, if we take into account the fact that dogs can have two litters a year, with an average of six puppies, the CNVR program prevented from giving birth to 2.832 unwanted puppies!

The citizens of Niksic are most bothered by females and blame them only for the increased population of street dogs, and they do not know that the male dogs contribute to the problem. One male can mate several females during the mating season. They are the most common carriers of sexually transmitted diseases, most often venereal tumors, which affect both sexes.

So far, several females who have had TVT (transmissible venereal tumor) have been treated at the *Family Vet* ambulance. Chemotherapy was used for their treatment, the treatment was successful, and all at the expense of this ambulance. Such females require special care, which is almost impossible to provide them, because they are street dogs and their place of residence is the street. No donations are collected for such dogs, there are no adequate spaces where they could be temporarily housed, and no one helps such dogs except a small number of volunteers and the *Family Vet* ambulance. Thanks to the CNVR project, 123 males were neutered in six months.

This project significantly reduced not only the reproduction of dogs, but also encouraged citizens to adopt dogs, mostly rejected puppies. Thanks to the free neutering program implemented in Niksic, provided by the *StrayCoCo Foundation*, a large number of dogs have been adopted. What is important is that this program is not only valid for street dogs, but also for dogs that have been adopted from the street.

It takes more time for this project to come to life, because a large part of the citizens do not know that this project is being implemented in our city and because there are still hundreds of unsterilized dogs specially owned dogs. Public awareness must be raised, organizing smaller groups of people to go, especially to suburbs and rural areas, to inform citizens about this program, to educate them and explain why this project is good for street dogs, and to inform them on how to protect dogs.

Very important is as well the castration of owned dogs that are allowed to roam free! Media, specially local television channels, should regularly encourage citizens to neuter their pets and to stop abandoning.



We must become aware that the CNVR program is changing the image of the city of Niksic for the better and that street dogs with ear tags are, in a way, becoming a symbol of this city. On the other hand, this is only a start to reduce the street dog population. Media and Politics must get more involved, citizens that dump their pets consequently punished, Police included in the control!

And most important: The government of Montenegro should oblige ALL regions to do a CNVR program and train veterinarians to do it.

