

OpenVoiceNews U.K.

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

Unregulated Dog Imports Putting Public and Animal Safety at Risk, Warns RSPCA

July 28, 2025

Categories: Breaking News



Download IPFS

A leading British animal welfare charity has warned that unregulated imports of rescue dogs pose a growing risk to public safety, native pet populations, and responsible dog

ownership across the United Kingdom. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is calling for mandatory licensing of all dog rescue organisations in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, mirroring existing rules already in place in Scotland.

Thousands of dogs from Eastern Europe, including Romania, Ukraine, and North Macedonia, are being brought into the UK each year and rehomed via online platforms and social media, often without thorough behavioural assessments or proper health checks. David Bowles, RSPCA's head of public affairs, likened the current system to a "Deliveroo for dogs," highlighting the ease with which people can acquire potentially dangerous animals without meaningful vetting.

Secret footage obtained during a recent investigation revealed that some rescue groups were happy to rehome dogs following just a phone call, a simple online form, and a brief video inspection of the applicant's home. In a review of 150 advertisements on Facebook and a popular pet resale website, roughly half of the listings promoted dogs that could be delivered directly to new owners across the UK.

Although most groups appear to follow rules around transportation and import documentation, experts are increasingly concerned about the consequences of pairing traumatised, unfamiliar dogs with unprepared owners. "These dogs are essentially ticking time bombs—coming over without being properly health tested," said Mr Bowles. "Diseases are being imported, and they don't just impact the dogs—they threaten existing pets and owners as well."

One such disease is *Brucella canis*, a bacterial infection transmissible to humans. Although the risk of human infection remains low, scientists say it is under-researched and potentially dangerous. The condition can cause flu-like symptoms in people and, in some cases, long-term joint or bone complications. While there were only three known UK cases before 2020, there were 333 cases under investigation in 2024 alone, according to medical records.

Trudy Cain, a dog owner from Derbyshire, discovered that her Romanian rescue dog Nola tested positive for *Brucella canis* four months after arrival. Despite rising veterinary bills

and mounting anxiety over the health of her family, she refused a vet's recommendation to put the dog to sleep. "My brain does not compute having a dog that looks healthy put to sleep," she said. "I wanted to do a good thing, and now I feel like I've done a bad thing."

Other cases highlight how incomplete documentation can have wider implications. Sian Keen, a Somerset resident, agreed to adopt a pregnant rescue dog from Ukraine. Shortly after, the dog gave birth to 11 puppies. But when trading standards raided her home over concerns of forged veterinary documents, all 12 dogs were seized and quarantined. Upon return, the mother dog had become highly aggressive and later attacked Sian and her 12-year-old son. The family ultimately made the difficult decision to put the dog down.

Paw Help UK, the rescue organisation involved in the case, said it regretted the outcome and that it had only used a questionable laboratory once during emergency conditions in 2022. It claimed all other dogs were imported with valid health documentation.

According to a Freedom of Information request, over 32,000 dogs entered the UK as commercial imports in 2024—many through rescues. Legitimate UK-based rescue charities are feeling the strain as a result. Emma Shaffery of Forest Dog Rescue in Worcestershire said her organisation was increasingly forced to "mop up after rescues that aren't stepping up" to support rehomed animals. Forest Dog Rescue insists that prospective owners must meet the dog beforehand, followed by a cooling-off period before adoption is finalised.

"It does blow my mind," Shaffery said. "You see a few pictures online and the dog turns up at 3 a.m. at your door. That's not rescue—that's Russian roulette."

Dr Rowena Packer, a canine behaviour expert at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), echoed the warning, stating that without understanding a dog's past, trauma, and temperament, successful rehoming is a "very big gamble."

When asked whether licensing would be expanded, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) said that animal rescues must meet statutory welfare requirements. Defra encouraged members of the public to adopt from groups affiliated

with the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH), which enforces higher operational standards. A Defra spokesperson confirmed that the department is “developing an overarching approach to animal welfare” but did not confirm whether licensing requirements would be introduced nationally.

With mounting health risks, inadequate regulation, and overwhelmed rescue centres, many in the sector argue the time for reform is now. As well-intentioned adopters face heartbreak and rising costs, the RSPCA and others are calling for decisive action to protect both people and pets.