ZERO STRAYS GEORGIA
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# Disappearing Strays in Georgia

*Context and recent developments | Updated April 3, 2026*

Summary: Georgia's National Food Agency is running a pilot sterilisation/neutering programme for stray animals. For the second year, activists report that a large proportion of animals taken to shelters are not being returned. The agency also frequently takes already sterilised dogs (identifiable by ear tags). More than 37,000 citizens/activists and 40+ organisations demand that animals taken for sterilisation be returned to their original habitat—and that this obligation be written into law, into government decrees, and enforced in practice. Evidence of inhumane treatment and ineffective practices continues to emerge online. On 4 April at 15:00, citizens will gather outside the Government Chancellery for the third time to demand protection for stray animals.

## The Neutering Programme: Legal Framework

On the basis of the Law on Companion Animals and Decree No. 1019 of 26 June 2025, the National Food Agency (NFA) launched a pilot programme for managing the population of stray and community animals. The decree envisaged the sterilisation/neutering and vaccination of 9,000 animals from specific municipalities.

The decree required the agency to “return sterilised animals to the environment” (Article 3, Paragraph 1, Subparagraph c). Numerous local activists reported to Zero Strays Georgia and Animal Project that the agency was not bringing a large proportion of the animals back. Caretakers were given no information about the animals’ whereabouts. The agency also took large numbers of already sterilised dogs (identifiable by ear tags). Some returned animals were found to have contracted canine distemper and other diseases.

Under a new decree (No. 412, 25 February 2026), the sterilisation of more than 36,000 stray and community dogs is planned for 2026.

The new decree (Article 3, Paragraph 3) states: “It is prohibited to return a dog near early education and pre-school facilities, general education facilities, medical facilities, public catering establishments, agricultural markets, hotels, and children’s and sports grounds.”

The decree doesn’t specify what “near” means. The clause is not only vague but also futile: if a dog is not returned to a given location, another stray will simply take its place. Activists fear this clause will be used to justify the disappearance of even more animals. Notably, the 2025 decree contained no such restriction, yet animals still vanished.

## Joint Statement

More than 37,000 citizens/activists and over 40 organisations/companies (the list is regularly updated) have signed a joint statement declaring that mass sterilisation of stray companion animals is the only humane way to solve the overpopulation crisis, but demanding the following changes to enforcement, legislation, and decrees:

1. **Return to the original habitat.** Every animal taken to a shelter must be returned to its original habitat, with photo or video proof made publicly available. This obligation must be written into the law, into decrees, and—most importantly—enforced in practice. The vague clause restricting return areas (Article 3, Paragraph 3) must be removed from Decree No. 412.
2. **No unnecessary shelter transfers.** The agency must not take animals to shelters when there is no need. If a dog is already sterilised, vaccination and registration should be carried out on-site. Where possible, the agency should cooperate with local and mobile veterinary clinics.
3. **Transparency on disappeared animals.** The NFA must provide any caretaker or concerned citizen with official, documented information on the whereabouts of any disappeared animal.

Full text of the joint statement in Georgian.

## Population Management: Failures in Practice

NFA staff have privately confirmed to some activists that Georgian Dream's goal is to solve the stray problem "as quickly as possible"—possibly by means of mass euthanasia, killing, or abandonment in uninhabited areas.

### Zugdidi Dogs

On 30 March, a video filmed by a Zugdidi activist showed already sterilised and vaccinated (ear-tagged) dogs being transported to the Kutaisi shelter. The NFA's official statement claimed the dogs would be gradually returned to Zugdidi. On 1 April, some dogs were returned—not to Zugdidi, but to an uninhabited area near the city with only a factory and a highway, where dogs would have virtually no chance of survival.

Volunteers who had been patrolling outside the shelter since 7 AM followed the transport vehicle. Dogs were being held in inhumane conditions: unfamiliar animals were crammed into shared, narrow cages, with volunteers witnessing fighting, biting, and severe stress. Dogs that already had ear tags (confirming prior sterilisation) had not received new ones—despite the NFA's earlier claim to activists that it was specifically transporting sterilised dogs in order to replace their ear tags. Volunteers hired a minibus and managed to return the dogs to Zugdidi themselves.

See Zero Strays Georgia's video and observations.

Most dogs from Zugdidi have since been returned in stages. On 2 April, one dog was returned with a severely infected paw. A woman from Khobi contacted Zero Strays Georgia, explaining she had brought the dog from Khobi to the Kutaisi shelter for treatment of a paw injury. Instead of treating the paw, the shelter neutered the dog and sent it to a completely different city along with dozens of other dogs. In that condition, the dog would not have survived. On veterinary advice, Zero Strays Georgia's team amputated the paw and placed the dog in paid foster care.

Some Zugdidi dogs known to Zero Strays Georgia's activists have still not been returned, despite the NFA's statement that all dogs were brought back. Instead, some unfamiliar dogs were returned to Zugdidi — presumably from other locations.

### Tbilisi Animal Monitoring Service

Although the pilot programme (including Decree No. 412 and its restrictions on returning dogs near schools, food establishments, hospitals, etc.) does not apply to Tbilisi, the city's animal monitoring service has also begun actively removing dogs from the vicinity of such facilities. For example, a sterilised, harmless, vaccinated dog was taken from near School No. 51.

On 2 April, citizens entered the municipal shelter in Tbilisi. Inside, they found animals that the monitoring agency had claimed were not at the shelter. They also found unsanitary conditions, including a dog lying in its own faeces, apparently suffering from seizures. A dog in that condition should not have been left without veterinary supervision.

The municipality stated that the citizens' entry into the administrative building constituted a legal violation and would be met with "an appropriate response."

### Gori Shelter Crematorium

On 1 April, footage emerged of the Gori animal shelter. According to local residents, the crematorium operated for seven hours overnight. Activists say the timing of the crematorium's operation coincided with the mass removal of dogs from the surrounding area.

Animal rights defender Tamaz Elizbarashvili suspects the dogs may have been burned alive, as the catching teams entered the shelter only minutes before the crematorium was started—too little time for the animals to have been euthanised. The shelter has produced no documentation of euthanasia or natural death. The shelter claimed they burned a dog that had died a few days before.

### Zestaponi

According to the NFA's statement, on 3 April, strays were collected with the involvement of local residents, and 20 dogs were vaccinated on-site. Zestaponi-based activists confirm this is true, but add that in the preceding days, locals witnessed other teams quietly removing strays from other locations — despite telling activists the opposite. Dogs were taken even as locals tried to physically prevent the teams from taking them. This leads some activists to believe no systemic changes are planned. Communication with animal welfare advocates is performative, aimed at creating an appearance of "transparency" (a point also reinforced by segments aired on pro-government media) rather than achieving actual transparency.

### Government Propaganda Response

Pro-government media outlets have begun producing biased segments highlighting stray dog aggression and the damage they cause. They also produce segments on how the NFA crews are working together with local activists (see the Zestaponi case). The illegitimate Georgian Dream regime representatives portray animal welfare activists as "emotionally damaged radical opposition".

## Key Context for Reporting

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**Sterilisation/neutering programmes** (known as CNVR: Catch, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return) are the **only humane method** for addressing stray overpopulation. For CNVR to work, dogs must

be returned to their original territory, where they are already adapted and have established food sources.

**Abandoning dogs in uninhabited areas is a death sentence.** This directly violates Article 4 of the Law on Companion Animals on the principle of animal welfare. It is also ineffective: the primary driver of stray overpopulation is **uncontrolled breeding in households**—a problem that has not been addressed. Removed dogs are quickly replaced by new ones abandoned by owners. The practice also inflicts severe distress on the citizens who spend their own time, money, and emotional energy caring for, sterilising, and vaccinating these animals.

The problem cannot be solved by moving all animals into **shelters**. Georgia has an estimated half a million strays. Housing that many animals in shelters is not only impractical and unrealistic, but harmful: in cage-type enclosures on cold, wet concrete, dogs develop musculoskeletal diseases and muscle atrophy, experience constant pain and stress from noise and smell, and suffer weakened immunity. In countries like Georgia, shelters should primarily serve as transit facilities for sterilisation and medical treatment.

To solve the overpopulation crisis humanely, established international guidelines recommend:

- **Ban uncontrolled breeding** in households;
- **Ban pet abandonment** (requiring microchipping so abandoned animals can be traced to their owners, with mandatory microchipping enforced through veterinary clinics);
- **Make sterilisation, vaccination, and microchipping accessible** for household pets (through transit shelters, local clinics, mobile clinics, and financial support);
- **Raise public awareness** about sterilisation/neutering and encourage adoption;
- Most importantly, **sterilise at least 70% of street-dwelling females** using CNVR, which requires an advance population census by region.

The average lifespan of a stray dog is 3–7 years. With a rigorous reform along these lines, the number of strays would approach zero within that period.

## Activist Quotes

*The following quotes may be used freely in reporting, with the attribution provided.*

> *"They took every dog they could catch from the Tsavkisi area and didn't return a single one. We had been looking after these dogs, spent significant money—they were all vaccinated and sterilised. I wrote letters, went to the monitoring agency with a lawyer—nobody would tell me where the animals were. One employee said: 'We're still getting to know the new law ourselves.' Another said: 'If they order us to euthanise, we'll euthanise.'"*
>
> — Anonymous activist

> *"Countless caretakers look after street animals like family members, at the expense of their own physical and mental health and financial resources.* ***When an animal disappears, these people lose a beloved companion and are left with devastating trauma.****"*
>
> — Natia Chikovani, co-founder, Animal Project

*“The NFA’s pilot **programme disappeared two of my fostered animals and 30 strays** I had been caring for. There was nothing I could do.”*

— Maka Bazghadze, activist, Kutaisi

*“I’ve been helping strays in Tkibuli for five years—we never had a single case of distemper. They took sterilised dogs from Tkibuli and we still don’t know where 31 of them are; we only found five and I brought them back from Samtredia myself. They took two chipped dogs from my yard, refused to return them, said they needed ‘procedures.’ These dogs had European travel documents, were sterilised, had passports. When I got them back, there were six other dogs in the van—we kept them in Tkibuli because we knew they’d be dumped otherwise. One had distemper. It spread to every dog in Tkibuli. We’ve been giving them medicine morning to night ever since. **Activists spend our own money on sterilisation. They waste our money and kill the dogs we barely managed to save.**”*

— Tamar Bubashvili, activist, Tkibuli

*“At the Tbilisi municipal shelter alone—to say nothing of regional shelters—**hygiene standards are so neglected that on the very first day an animal is admitted, the probability of contracting a lethal virus exceeds 90%. This constitutes deliberate harm to animal health. Animal welfare advocates now have to protect strays from the very agencies whose primary duty is to ensure their wellbeing.**”*

— Keso Baramidze, founder, Peteasy

*“It is essential that the responsible authority cooperate with caretakers and inform them about any procedure carried out on an animal. Today it is precisely caretakers and other animal lovers who ensure the welfare of strays—at the expense of their own mental health, time, and financial resources.”*

— Mariam Shekiladze, founder, Zero Strays Georgia

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## Key Links

- Joint statement by activists and organisations
- NFA pilot programme page
- Decree No. 1019 (26 June 2025)
- Decree No. 412 (25 February 2026)

- Decree No. 92 (2027–2028 plan)
- Law of Georgia on Companion Animals
- International guidelines on return-to-territory best practices: ICAM, University of Edinburgh
- Transparency International Georgia assessment
- Two-minute video on humane stray population management

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