

W eekends with extended police hours on the streets are not just for those who go to work or for medicine.

Homeless animal welfare activists have special permits to travel around Skopje and take care of those who are not currently cared for.



"Unlike other countries where even the military and police have hired them to feed stray animals outside populated areas, we have not reached that level."

says Ivana Misheva from the civil initiative "Kane Korzo".

But while for some long hours are a signal to help homeless animals, for others it is a chance to harm them. Vinica is just one example of mass poisoning dogs.



"Now it seems more and more massive that poisoners are abusing this situation in all cities, so they are poisoning both domestic and street dogs. It is a pain that lasts in Macedonia for a very long time, which is not sanctioned. "It can't be an unknown perpetrator, how can it go unpunished?"

says Misheva.

As authorities search for the perpetrators, activists are saving lives.

In addition to the state of emergency, members of the Cane Corso Association regularly devote their time and money to rescue missions and patrols in abandoned suburbs.

"We are united by the love of animals and the desire to help these suffering souls who live in a cruel place to survive. The word welfare does not literally exist here, as you can see. "

says Irena Koleva, an activist in the civic initiative "Kane Korzo".



Dogs that cannot be approached are given food. Others are given a chance at a new life. This time Glory was so lucky.

This is not the only landfill that some people consider a landfill for their pets. The number of stray dogs can only be guessed at, but one thing is for sure - without effective control at the moment, the problem is only growing.



"The state should take this problem a little more seriously and solve this once and for all, because it is not in our power to solve this." We're just fixing the consequences. "

says Koleva.

Until the new state-run hospital opens in Skopje, activists are temporarily keeping dogs in their homes.

There are more than 50 dogs in Ivana's yard. Some of them have spent their entire lives on the streets, but others are here because of irresponsible owners.

"There are some that the owners don't like anymore and we have decided to take them, treat them and try to house them." However, capacity is limited. "

says Misheva.



Some have already found a new home. But their seats will not be empty.

"The problem is real and it is growing. In a year, the 'Catch, Sterilize and Restore Program' hospital is not working, no matter how much it has been implemented, in a partial way, the difference is visible and there is a new influx of dogs and new beds all the time."

Misheva explains.

Some of them live on the landfill near the once infamous Vardarishte hospital, which until last year was run by Communal Hygiene. The new public enterprise "Laika", conceived as a partnership between the City of Skopje and animal protection associations, should work here.



But why isn't the hospital ready? The director replied that the preparations were nearing completion. For the increased number of stray dogs, meanwhile, the City says the biggest problem is the irresponsible owners, which is why they had a campaign for free chipping of pets.

"For non-identification of the pet with a microchip, according to the provisions of the Law on Identification and Registration, the fine is from 100 to 150 euros in denar counter value for individuals and 1,000 euros for legal entities,"

say from the City of Skopje.

The obligation for domestic dogs to have a microchip has been in place since 2013, and the goal was to end irresponsible ownership. Penalties were imposed over the years, not only if the animal did not have a chip but also if the owner abandoned it.

In seven years, only one person has been fined for leaving a pet on the street, and not one for implanting a microchip.



"So far, all those people who have been found or reported that the pet has not been chipped have been educated, because immediately after that they chipped the pet, and the activity was like that for free chipping,"

says the director of the Food and Veterinary Agency, Zoran Atanasov.

And while unscrupulous owners are easily passing by for now, charges are being filed against the City for homeless dog attacks.

Report on homeless dog attacks in Skopje

Year	Number of applications
2016	68
2017	122
2018	404
2019	618
2020 (up to 31.3)	196

According to the data we provided from the Ministry of Interior, in 2016 there were 68 reports from citizens who were attacked by stray dogs in Skopje. By 2019, that number has increased almost tenfold, to 618 applications. The trend is still growing, as in the first three months of this year alone there are almost 200 applications.

It is not possible to calculate the share of the increased awareness of the citizens in this statistic, but the fact is that the court verdicts empty the city treasury.

On paper, Atanasov sees the solution in a new law stuck in parliament that provides for greater control over wild dog breeders. But on the ground, the problem can only be overcome with intensified inspections and activities by local authorities. The Agency's assistance in the process will consist of donating microchips to municipalities.

"You know, there are stories, I don't know how accurate they are, that dogs walk from one municipality to another. Now, if you find the same dog in another municipality, and there is a microchip that is owned by Tetovo, for example, and was found in Skopje, then the Municipality of Tetovo will pay the fine, not Skopje.

says Atanasov.

Municipalities that do not have shelters will need to identify and sterilize animals in collaboration with veterinarians. But until then, they remain excluded from the story.



"As long as the proposals are so slightly unformed and everyone wants to do half the work, there will be no effect. And I believe that veterinarians, not only us as an ambulance but also a lot of colleagues, will be a little bit further away from the whole situation. "

says veterinarian Svetla Drakulovska.

In Skopje, after Laika works, the veterinarian there will decide which dog will be chipped or treated and which will go to euthanasia. It was this part of the program of the new public enterprise that came under fire, so now the Food and Veterinary Agency is waiting to be cut.

If Laika had worked, Glory would have gone through the hospital. And if there was a microchip, you would know who left it on the street and maybe someone would be punished. But now it is not the care of activists in whose home it remains to recover. The most important thing for them is that her glow has slowly begun to return and she is already ready to be someone's new best friend, who can beautify the days in quarantine.



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