

## PROJECTS

# TACKLING ILLEGAL ANIMAL TRADE ACROSS THE ITALY-AUSTRIA BORDER

**TOTAL INVESTMENT  
EUR 1 117 300**

**EU CONTRIBUTION  
EUR 949 700**

**Public services in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy and Carinthia, Austria are working together through the Bio-Crime project to prevent the illegal trade in animals. Such trade is endangering human and animal health by facilitating the spread of diseases and threatening economic security and public safety.**

The border regions of north-east Italy and southern Austria are on the transit route for the illegal trade in pets (mainly dogs, cats and birds), mostly from countries in eastern Europe. This illegal practice can help spread zoonoses – infectious diseases, such as rabies or avian chlamydiosis – which are transferred between animals and humans.

This transnational crime also has negative impacts for animal health and welfare, market protection (for national breeders), consumer fraud, and the possible use of zoonotic pathogens in bioterrorism.

The Bio-Crime team has enabled joint responses, sharing of data, and training and education programmes for both the authorities concerned and the wider public. Digital innovations were an important aspect of the project, which was supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

A strong network of cooperation has been set up among the public authorities, including health services, police, customs and the judiciary, to ensure the project remains sustainable.

Bio-Crime organised a series of training courses on animal disease risks, prevention and animal handling for more than 1 000 Italian and Austrian officials and police officers. Joint operational protocols were developed, and joint cross-border inspections were carried out, resulting in a lower crime rate.

Common epidemiological surveillance facilitated better access to data and more data-sharing. A faster and more coordinated response across the different services was also achieved, thanks to a real-time system for alerting officials to serious cross-border threats. Public officials, police and teachers can now benefit from a secure web platform.

## Learning curve

As parents often buy pets for their children, educational programmes for children aged 11-13 were developed during the project. A questionnaire in the cross-border region evaluated the children's knowledge before and after they took part in the programme. It indicated that more than 30% of children lacked knowledge of animal-human disease transmission and correct animal handling, which is in line with other EU countries.

In total, 240 children in Carinthia and 200 in Friuli-Venezia Giulia participated, resulting in greater awareness of zoonotic health risks and a final exhibition of their drawings, texts and photographs. Schools from Germany and Slovenia are now involved in the project, too.

Digital communications tailored to the children included a YouTube Bio-crime education channel and short cartoon videos, alongside a public website supported by a web traffic analysis system. ■

## FIND OUT MORE

<http://www.biocrime.org/>