



2023 Survey on Assistance Dogs in Europe

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2023 Survey on Assistance Dogs in Europe

Background

In 2013 the European Guide Dog Federation (EGDF) conducted the first comprehensive survey of guide dogs in Europe.

The purpose of this survey was to establish the number of guide dogs in geographical Europe to enable EGDF to plan and develop appropriate services for the guide and assistance dog community.

This survey was supported by the European Commission who awarded a grant for the work, allowing EGDF to engage the services of a professional researcher.

The research at the time was difficult, of the 116 guide dog schools identified by the research in Europe, only 47 - 40% responded. Some schools declined to comment, citing medical confidentiality, GDPR regulations or because they had already reported the information to the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) or Assistance Dogs International (ADI).

Despite these limitations, the results of this 2013 survey were very well received and the report was quoted in many other studies.

The intention had been to repeat the survey in 2019, however, several factors including ill health of the Executive Director of EGDF, the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit delayed the subsequent survey until 2023.

This time, as a UK based charity EGDF were not eligible for a European Commission grant.

The 2023 survey was conducted using our network of member organisations with board members responsible for co-ordinating the circulation of the questionnaire in designated geographical areas.

The survey was launched using a Microsoft 365 Forms questionnaire on 1st December 2023 and closed on 30th April 2024

EGDF contacted both IGDF and ADI and asked for the data from the information they collect at the end of each year from their member schools, so that this could be cross referenced and combined with the results that EGDF gathered. Both organisations agreed on the proviso that the information would not identify individual schools, and where they only had one member in a country, they would need permission to share the information.

EGDF also used their network of contacts in countries where national regulations allow for other means of accrediting guide and assistance dogs to establish the optimum data.

Within the questions in the survey, the respondents were asked if they were members of either IGDF or ADI, or both. This enabled us to subsequently cross reference the data and ensure that there was no 'double counting'

The EGDF survey asked for numbers at the end of 2023, matching the time scale of the IGDF and ADI data gathering.

EGDF received responses from 55 organisations (47 in the initial survey and few additional responses after the original deadline date of 31st March 2024) and combined and cross referenced the information with that from IGDF and ADI and other country organisations as detailed above.

Of course, the results of the 2023 survey are dependent upon the responses of those people that were contacted, and if no response was forthcoming, it could not be included.

However, EGDF believe that this is the most inclusive survey of the number of guide and assistance dogs in geographical Europe at the end of 2023

Methodology

As previously mentioned, the survey was distributed by as many channels as possible, and the questions asked were as follows:

Are you a member of the following organisations? Please state all that apply

- International Guide Dog Federation
- Assistance Dogs International
- European Guide Dog Federation
- None of the above

The survey went on to ask about the type of dogs trained by category

- Guide Dogs for the assistance of blind and partially sighted people
- Hearing Dogs for the assistance of deaf or hard of hearing people
- Mobility Dogs for the assistance of those in wheelchairs or with reduced mobility
- Medical Alert Dogs for the assistance of people with epilepsy, diabetes or similar
- Development Disorder Dogs for the assistance of people with autism or similar
- Psychiatric Dogs for the assistance of people with PTSD or similar psychiatric disorders

We used the categories of assistance dogs as defined by the developing European Standard - For guidance on categories of assistance dogs see Annex B of EN 17984-1:2024 Assistance dogs – Part 1: Vocabulary.

The survey also asked about dual-purpose dogs

To explore the emerging trend for owner trained dogs, the survey asked if schools supervised or advised owners training their own dogs.

In each of the categories of assistance dogs, the following questions were asked

Current population of dogs

- How many of your assistance dog teams are currently active in your own country?
- How many of your assistance dog teams are currently active in other European countries?

Dogs trained in 2023

- How many new assistance dog teams did you set up in 2023 within your own country?
- How many new assistance dog teams did you set up in 2023 for export to other European countries?

A free text option was available for any comments after each of these sections

Where respondents had indicated that they worked with owners to train their own dogs; the following questions were asked

- Which type of owner trained dogs do you work with?
- How many owner trained dogs have you worked with in the last 12 months?
- Do you certify owner trained dogs?
- How many owner trained dogs have you certified in the last 12 months?

Analysing of Data

When the survey was closed on 30th April 2024, we had received 52 responses. The results were cleaned for duplicates and cross referenced with the data received from both the International Guide Dog Federation and Assistance Dogs International.

Other organisations were approached to establish information from countries where little or no details had been gathered, this included the Messerli Forschungsinstitut at the University of Vienna in Austria, Matesze in Hungary, Deutscher Blinden- und Sehbehindertenverband e. V. (DBSV) in Germany and Chiens Guides d'Aveugles au Luxembourg in Luxembourg.

Considerations on accuracy of data

If a school had not responded, or had not received the survey, their information could not be included.

Those member schools from IGDF or ADI who had been contacted by them for permission to share their data because they were the only school in their country, and did not respond or refused permission, their data is not included.

Definitions of different types of assistance dogs varies slightly from country to country – especially those dogs falling under the categories of development disorder and psychiatric dogs.

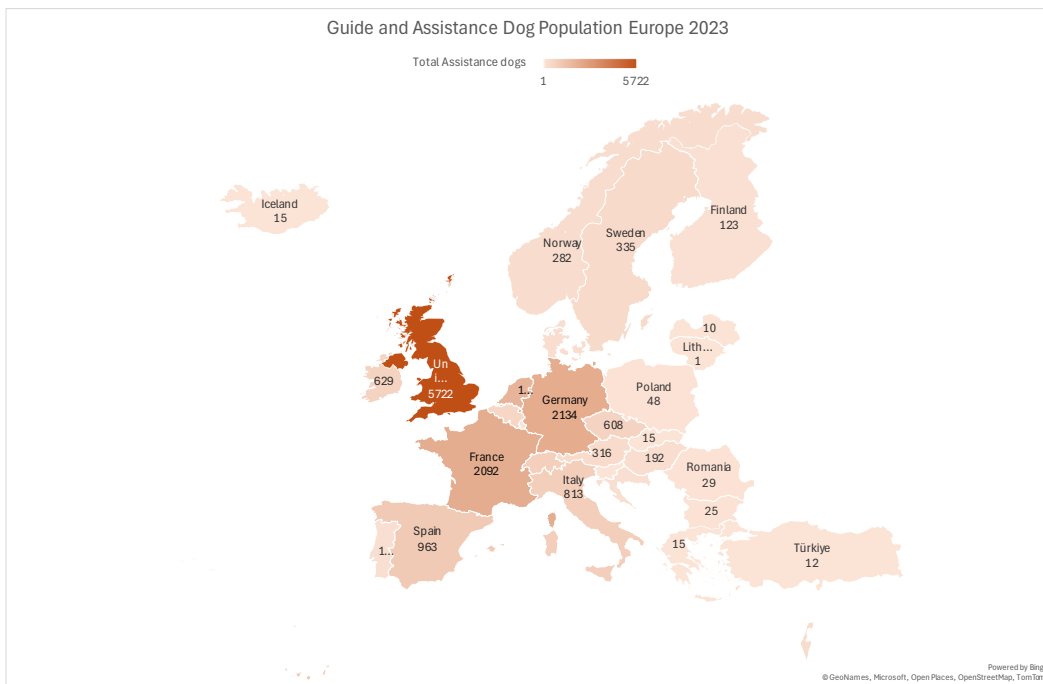
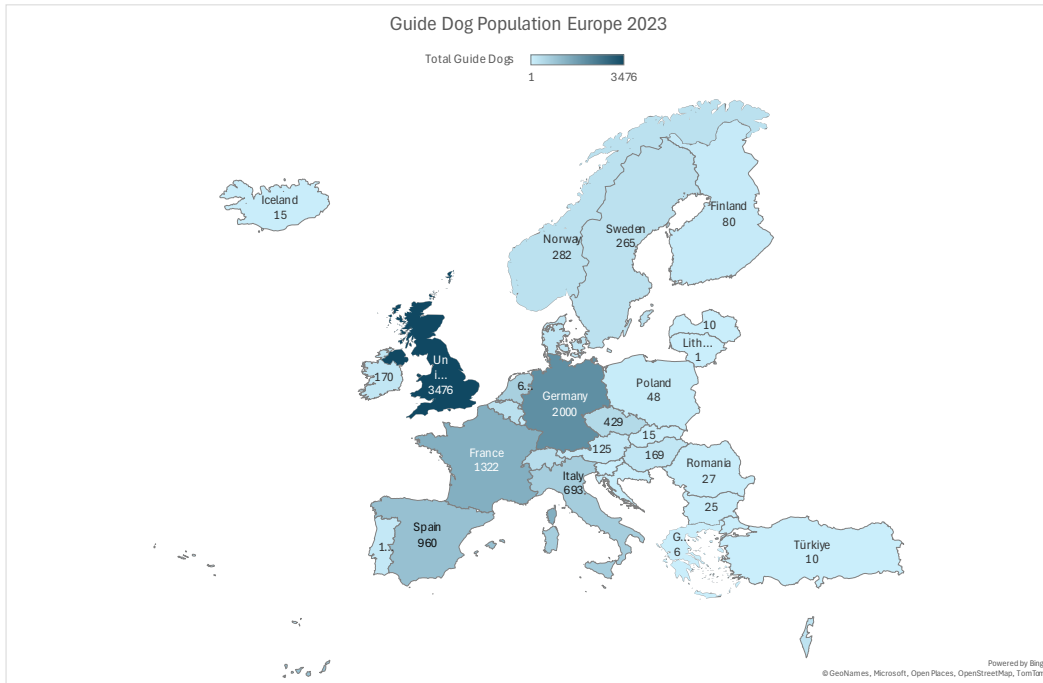
In analysing the data where this was not clear – these were allocated to the category that was the best match from the information provided.

Results of the survey

Number of guide and other assistance dogs by country on 31st December 2023

Country	Total guide dog teams in 2023	Total 'other' assistance dog teams in 2023	All assistance dog teams in 2023
Austria	125	191	316
Belgium	292	228	520
Bulgaria	25	0	25
Croatia	23	139	162
Czechia	429	179	608
Denmark	184	39	223
France	1322	770	2092
Finland	80	43	123
Germany	2000	134	2134
Greece	6	9	15
Hungary	169	23	192
Iceland	15	0	15
Ireland	170	459	629
Israel	227	36	263
Italy	693	120	813
Latvia	10	0	10
Lithuania	1	0	1
Luxembourg	25	0	25
Malta	10	62	72
Netherlands	627	1174	1801
Norway	282	0	282
Poland	48	0	48
Portugal	117	42	159
Romania	27	2	29
Slovakia	15	0	15
Slovenia	5	8	13
Spain	960	3	963
Sweden	265	70	335
Switzerland	348	424	772
Turkey	10	2	12
United Kingdom	3476	2246	5722
Totals	11986	6403	18389

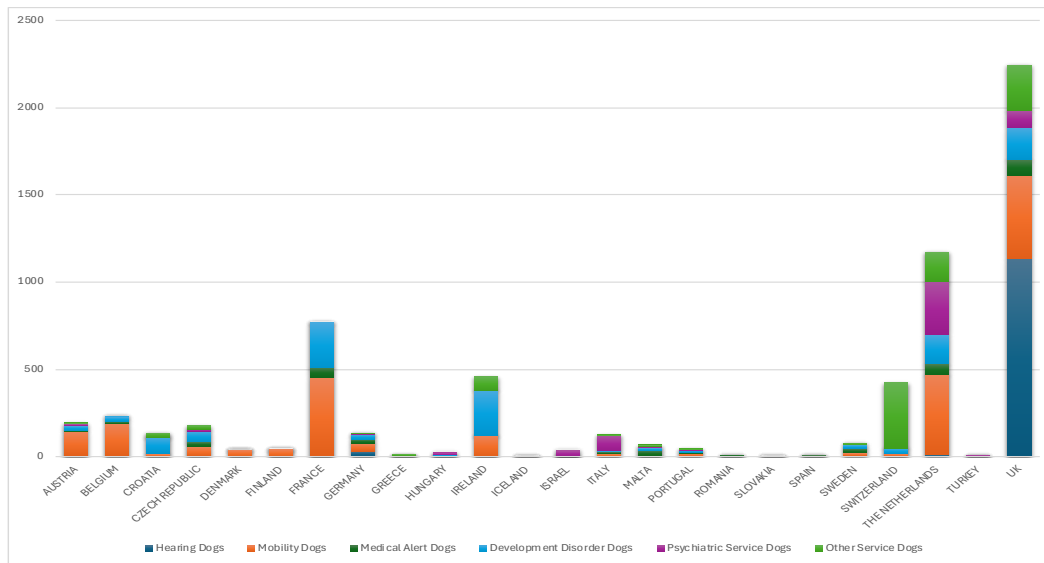
Maps of Europe showing number of both guide dog and all assistance dogs by country



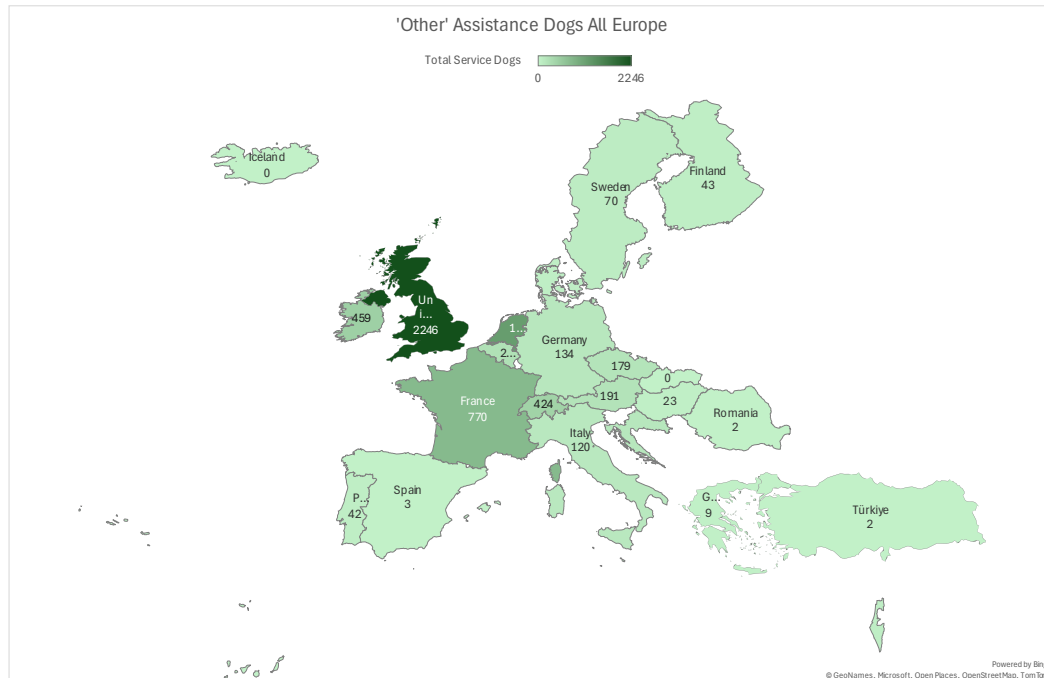
Guide and assistance dogs trained in 2023

Country	Total guide dogs trained in 2023	Total 'other' assistance dogs trained in 2023	All assistance dogs trained in 2023
Austria		14	14
Belgium	45	36	81
Bulgaria	4	0	4
Croatia	6	12	18
Czechia	39	25	64
Denmark	16	6	22
France	223	84	307
Finland	20	19	39
Germany	35	6	41
Greece	3	4	7
Hungary	21	11	32
Iceland	0	0	0
Ireland	26	84	110
Israel	23	12	35
Italy	46	14	60
Latvia	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	0	0
Luxembourg	0	0	0
Malta	0	4	4
Netherlands	111	217	328
Norway	46	0	46
Poland	10	0	10
Portugal	16	10	26
Romania	3	0	3
Slovakia	2	0	2
Slovenia	1	1	2
Spain	0	3	3
Sweden	0	17	17
Switzerland	68	72	140
Turkey	0	0	0
United Kingdom	472	320	792
Totals	1236	971	2207

Distribution of types of 'other' assistance dogs in Europe



Map of Europe showing number of 'other' assistance dogs by country



Comparison 2013 to 2023 – guide dogs

Country	Total guide dog teams in 2013	Total guide dog teams in 2023	Difference	% Difference
Austria	250	125	-125	-50%
Belgium	175	292	117	67%
Bulgaria	30	25	-5	-17%
Croatia	59	23	-36	-61%
Czechia	600	429	-171	-29%
Denmark	250	184	-66	-26%
France	1500	1322	-178	-12%
Finland	209	80	-129	-62%
Germany	2100	2000	-100	-5%
Greece	8	6	-2	-25%
Hungary	140	169	29	21%
Iceland		15	15	100%
Ireland	190	170	-20	-11%
Israel		227	227	100%
Italy	1000	693	-307	-31%
Latvia	3	10	7	233%
Lithuania	0	1	1	100%
Luxembourg	25	25	0	0%
Malta	42	10	-32	-76%
Netherlands	700	627	-73	-10%
Norway	300	282	-18	-6%
Poland	120	48	-72	-60%
Portugal	75	117	42	56%
Romania	3	27	24	800%
Slovakia	70	15	-55	-79%
Slovenia	20	5	-15	-75%
Spain	1013	960	-53	-5%
Sweden	290	265	-25	-9%
Switzerland	350	348	-2	-1%
Turkey		10	10	100%
United Kingdom	4770	3476	-1294	-27%
Totals	14292	11986	-2306	-16%
Other Assistance dogs all Europe	4104	6403	2299	56%
Total Guide and Assistance dogs	18396	18389	-7	-0.038%

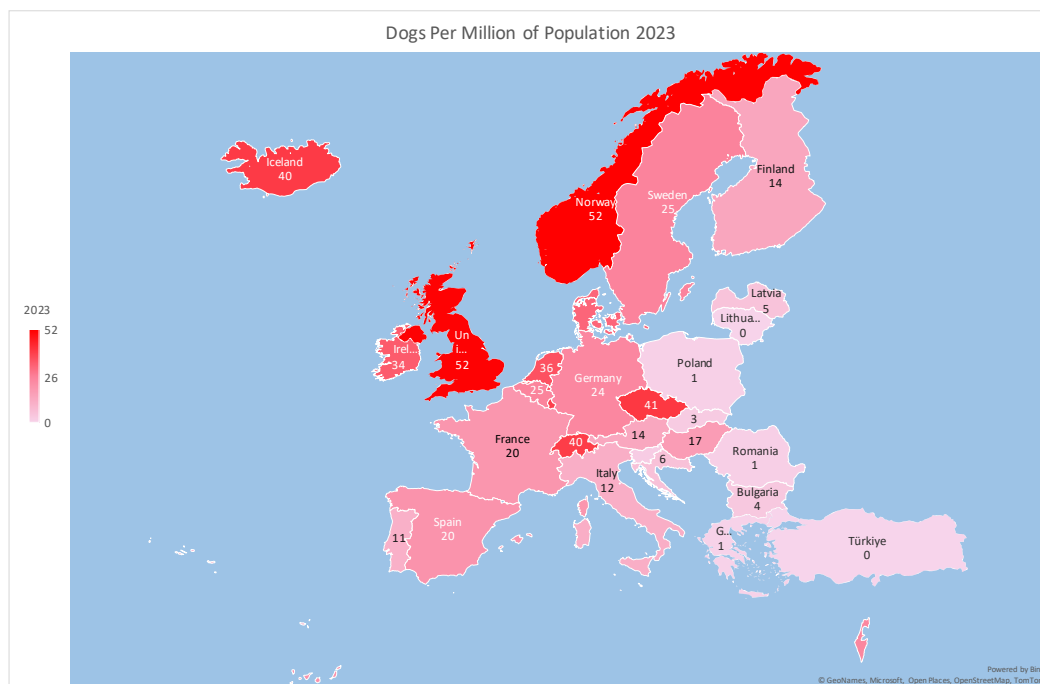
Guide dogs per millions of population per country

The 2013 survey identified the number of guide dogs per millions of population per county

Representing the 2023 survey in the same manner shows the following comparison

	Population Millions	Dogs Per Million of Population	
		2013	2023
Austria	8.96	30	14
Belgium	11.59	16	25
Bulgaria	6.52	4	4
Croatia	3.87	14	6
Czech Republic	10.51	57	41
Denmark	5.82	45	32
France	67.75	23	20
Finland	5.54	39	14
Germany	83.15	26	24
Greece	10.48	1	1
Hungary	9.71	14	17
Iceland	0.37		40
Republic of Ireland	5.03	41	34
Israel	9.36		24
Italy	59.11	16	12
Latvia	1.88	1	5
Lithuania	2.80	0	0
Luxembourg	0.64	47	39
Malta	0.52	26	19
Netherlands	17.59	42	36
Norway	5.41		52
Poland	37.75	3	1
Portugal	10.35	7	11
Romania	19.12	0	1
Slovakia	5.45	13	3
Slovenia	2.12	10	2
Spain	47.42	21	20
Sweden	10.42	30	25
Switzerland	8.74		40
Turkey	84.78		0
United Kingdom	67.33	75	52

Guide dogs by millions of population by countries in Europe – Map



Observations

The number of guide dogs in Europe has decreased over the last 10 years and the number of other types of assistance dogs has increased.

The overall change in numbers of total assistance dogs remains roughly the same – less than 1% change.

Many factors may have influenced this – the Covid-19 pandemic affected the training and supply of assistance dogs.

Identification and definition of different types of assistance dogs has become more refined during this period, in our 2013 survey it is feasible that some dogs identified as guide dogs were assistance dogs (guide dogs for disabilities other than blindness).

There are increasing numbers of owner trained assistance dogs who will not be included within this survey.

EGDF conducted a further survey alongside the 2023 survey aimed at schools, to try to identify the number of owner-trained dogs within Europe.

This survey ran over the same period and was circulated via member contacts and social media.

Owner trained assistance dogs

Methodology

As previously mentioned, the survey was distributed by as many channels as possible, and the questions asked were as follows:

Which of the following categories best describes your assistance dog?

- Guide Dogs for the assistance of blind and partially sighted people
- Hearing Dogs for the assistance of deaf or hard of hearing people
- Mobility Dogs for the assistance of those in wheelchairs or with reduced mobility
- Medical Alert Dogs for the assistance of people with epilepsy, diabetes or similar
- Development Disorder Dogs for the assistance of people with autism or similar
- Psychiatric Dogs for the assistance of people with PTSD or similar psychiatric disorders
- Dual Purpose Assistance dog

For dual purpose dogs, the survey asked for the main role of the assistance dog, by category as above.

To establish how the dog had been trained; the survey asked what help, if any, had been used in the training of the dog.

- A professional assistance dog trainer or school
- A professional dog trainer
- Online course
- Friend or relative
- Book, video or similar
- No help or advice

The survey asked if the assistance dog had been certified. If so, how was this done.

- In person – both the dog and the partnership performance assessed
- In person – only the dog performance was assessed
- On-line – both the dog and the partnership performance assessed
- On-line – only the dog performance was assessed
- In person – without any assessment, a certificate was provided
- On-line – without any assessment, a certificate was provided
- No certification

We asked for the reason behind the decision to train their own assistance dog.

- No assistance dog providers in location
- Waiting times for assistance dogs from providers

- Costs of assistance dogs from providers
- No assistance dogs available to mitigate specific disabilities
- Poor standards of assistance dogs trained by providers
- Own dog suitable to train
- Other reason – describe

Analysing of Data

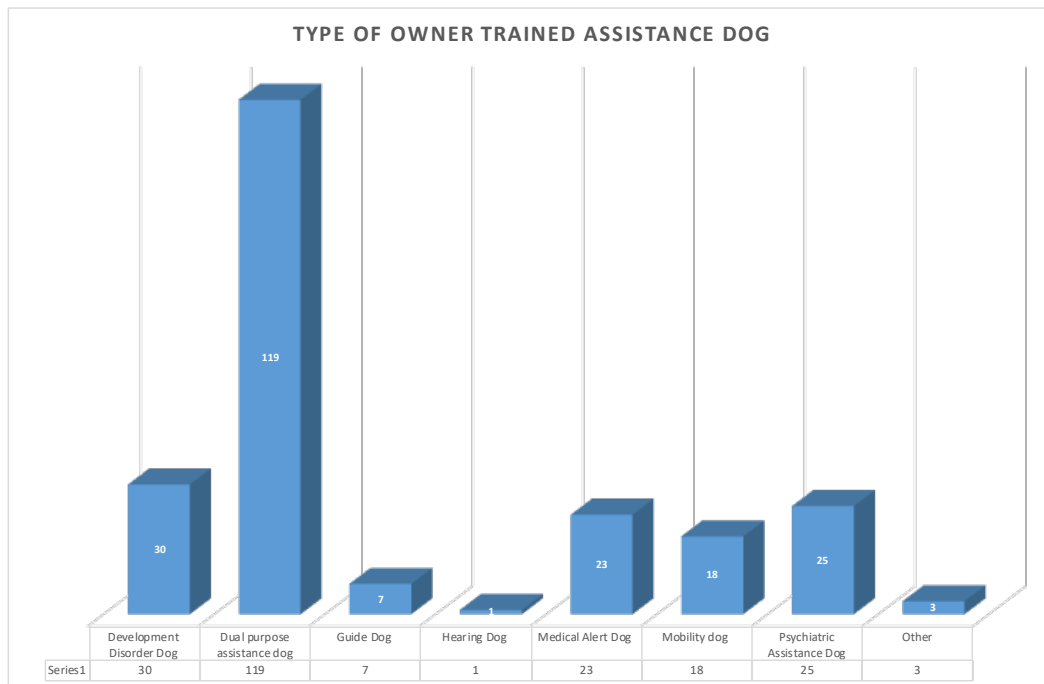
When the survey was closed on 30th April 2024, we had received 237 responses. The results were cleaned for duplicates and inaccuracies, leaving 226 responses

These were identified by country as below:

UK	202	Sweden	3
Spain	2	Denmark	2
Portugal	1	France	1
Italy	3	Ireland	5
Netherlands	4	Lithuania	1
Poland	2	Total	226

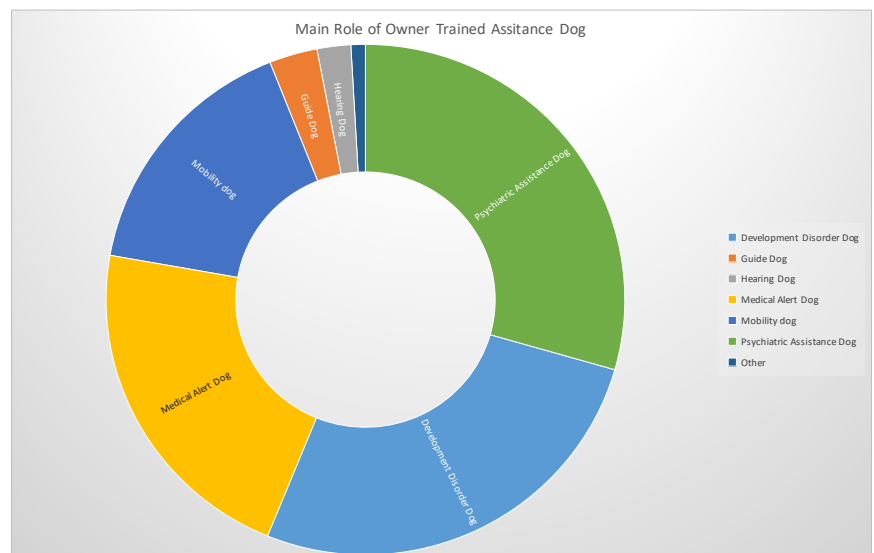
The main role of the owner-trained assistance dog was identified as follows:

Development Disorder Dog – to mitigate the effects of autism or similar	30
Dual purpose assistance dog	119
Guide Dog – to mitigate the effects of blindness or sight loss	7
Hearing Dog – to mitigate the effects of deafness or hearing loss	1
Medical Alert Dog – to mitigate the effects of diabetes, epilepsy or similar	23
Mobility dog – to assist wheelchair users or persons with limited mobility	18
Psychiatric Assistance Dog – to mitigate the effects of post-traumatic stress or similar	25
Other	3
Total	226



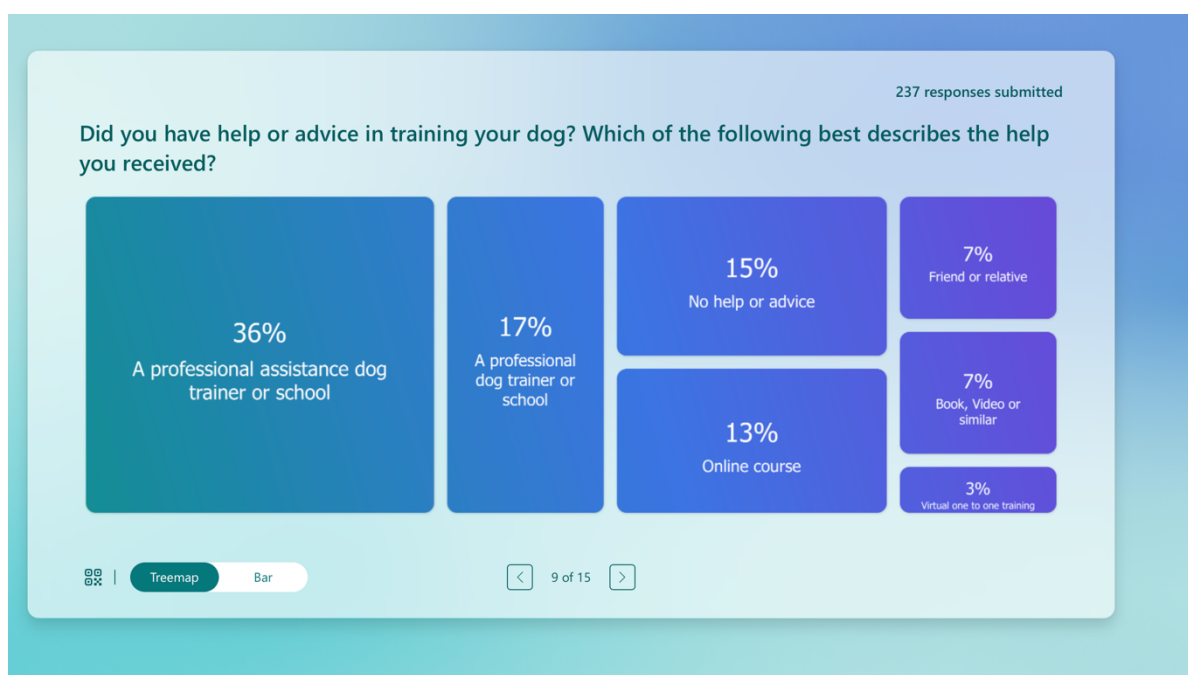
The roles of owner-trained, dual-purpose dogs were identified as follows:

Development Disorder Dog 89
 Guide Dog 10
 Hearing Dog 7
 Medical Alert Dog 72
 Mobility dog 54
 Psychiatric Assistance Dog 98
 Other 3



The type of help received by owner's in training their assistance dog was identified as follows:

A professional assistance dog trainer or school	83
A professional dog trainer or school	39
Friend or relative	16
No help or advice	34
Online course	31
Virtual one to one training	7
Book, video or similar	16
Total	226

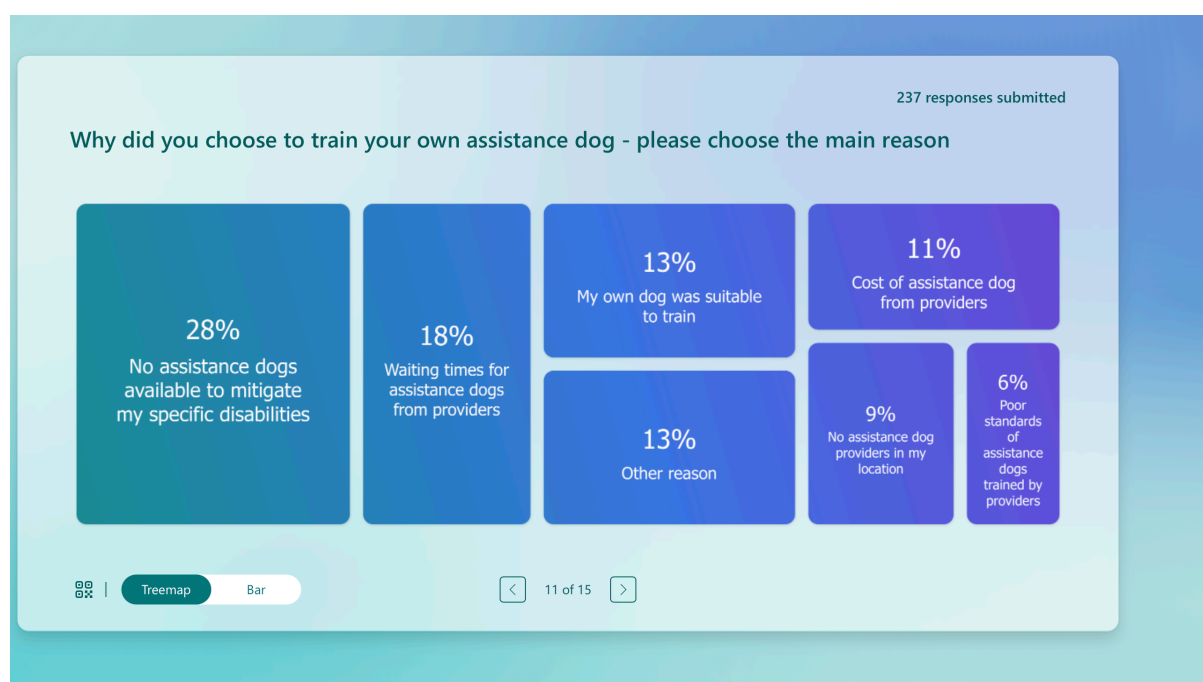


Certification was identified as follows:

In person – both the dog and the partnership performance were assessed	67
In person – only the dog performance was assessed	7
In person – without any assessment, a certificate was provided	1
On-line – both the dog and the partnership performance were assessed	15
On-line – only the dog performance was assessed	4
On-line – without any assessment, a certificate was provided	3
No certification	129
Total	226

Reasons for choosing to train their own dogs

Cost of assistance dog from providers	25
My own dog was suitable to train	30
No assistance dog providers in my location	21
No assistance dogs available to mitigate my specific disabilities	65
Poor standards of assistance dogs trained by providers	14
Waiting times for assistance dogs from providers	41
Other reason	30
Total	226



Observations

The number of owner-trained assistance dogs in Europe is increasing, with the UK having by far the highest reported number of these.

The majority of these in the UK are dual-purpose or multi-purpose assistance dogs which are not as readily available from assistance dog schools.

Nearly half of respondents to this survey stated that the main reasons for training their own assistance dog was that none were available to mitigate their personal combination of disabilities and the long waiting times from assistance dog schools.

It should be noted that the definition of the type of dog is subjective in this owner-trainer survey, with respondent classifying their own dogs. This could mean therefore that

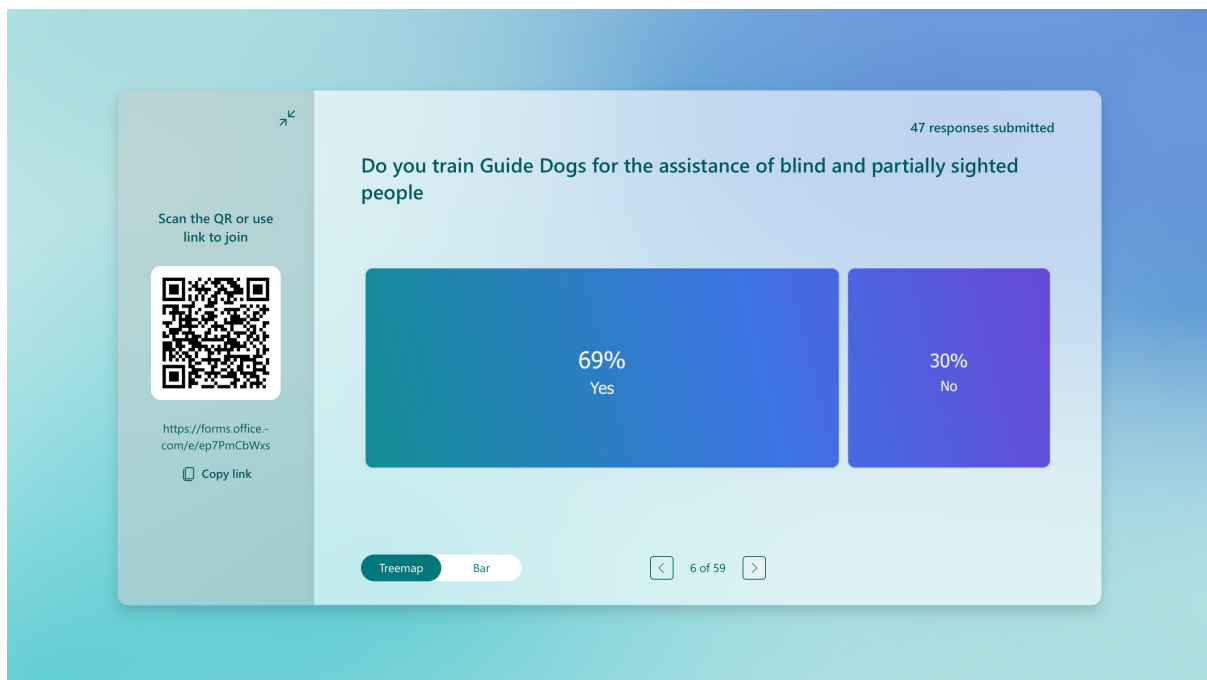
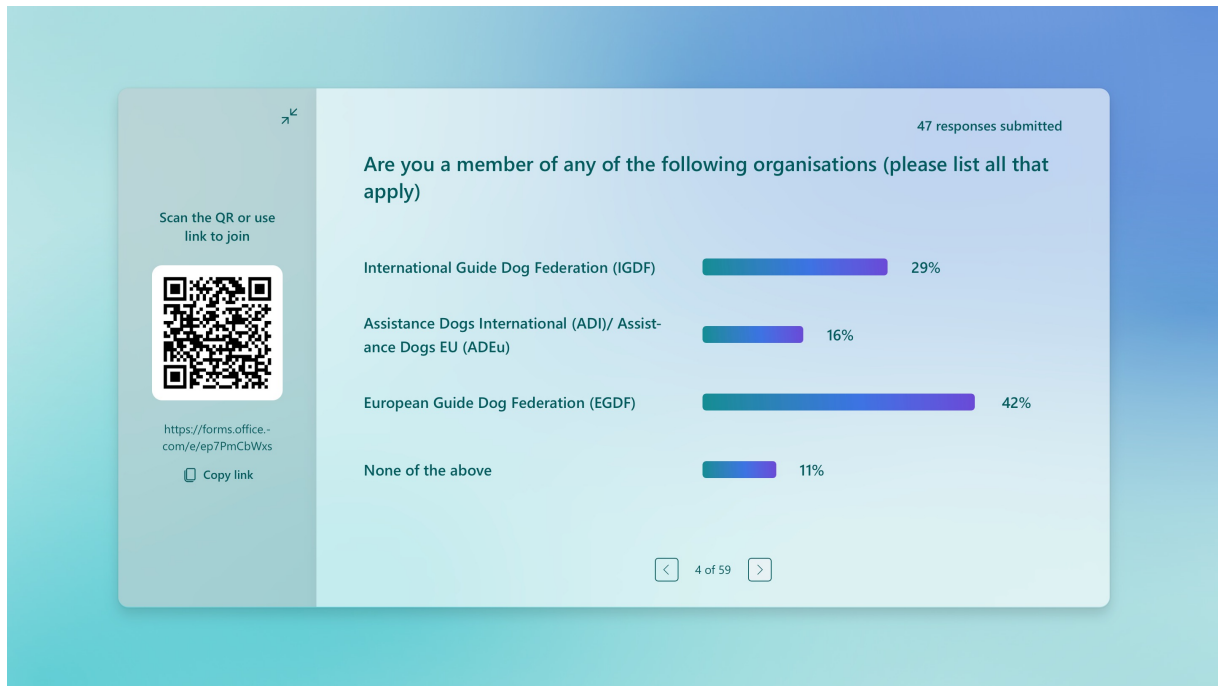
these assistance dogs do not necessarily fall with the correct category as defined within the European Standards as set out in the main survey.

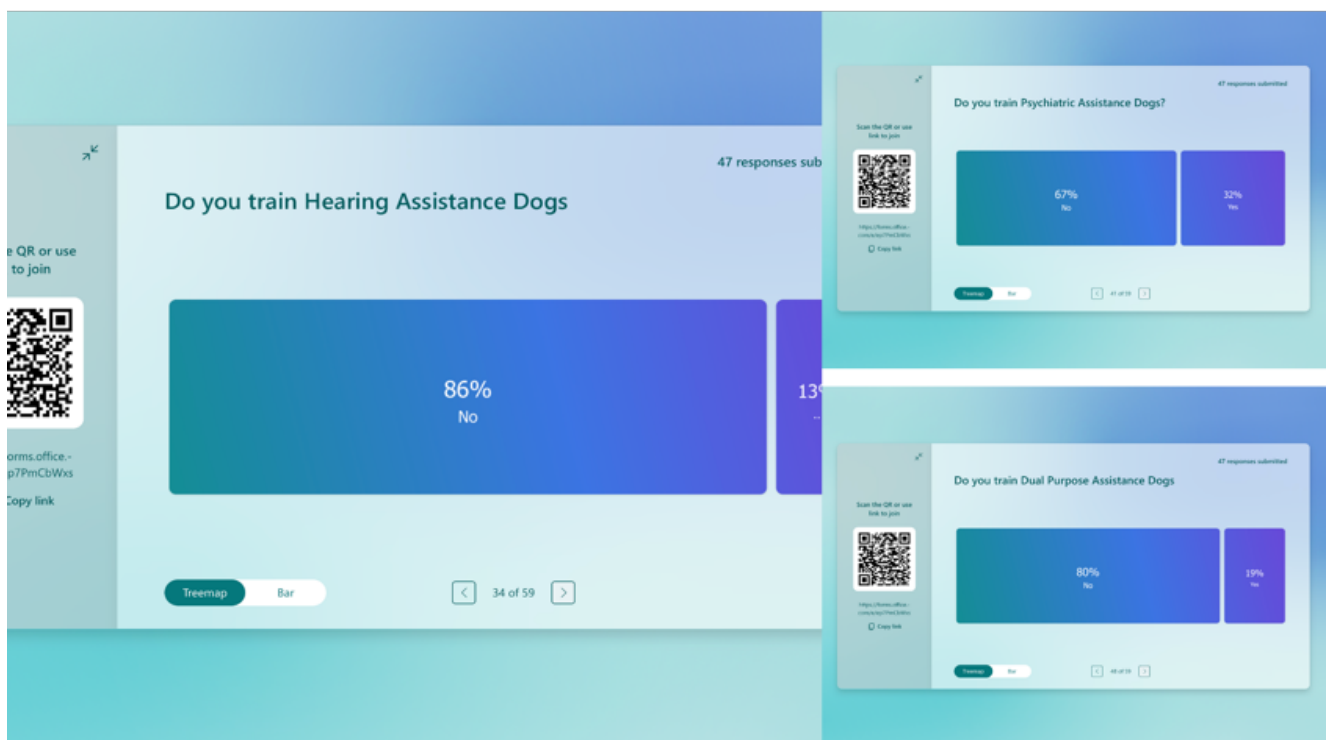
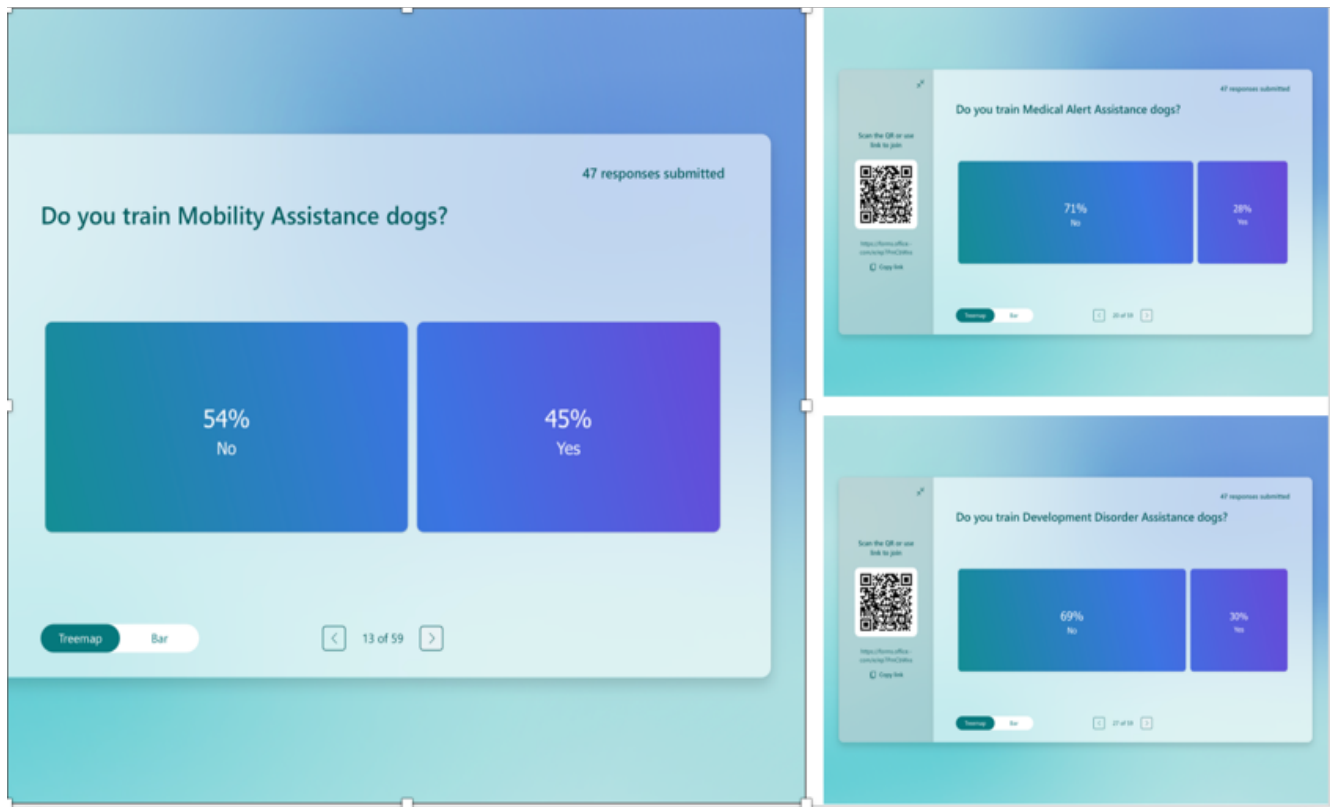
There are many very well-trained assistance dogs who have been trained by their disabled owners to mitigate their own disabilities. However, there are also many dogs who are passed off as assistance dogs but have not been well trained or are comfort dogs or pets.

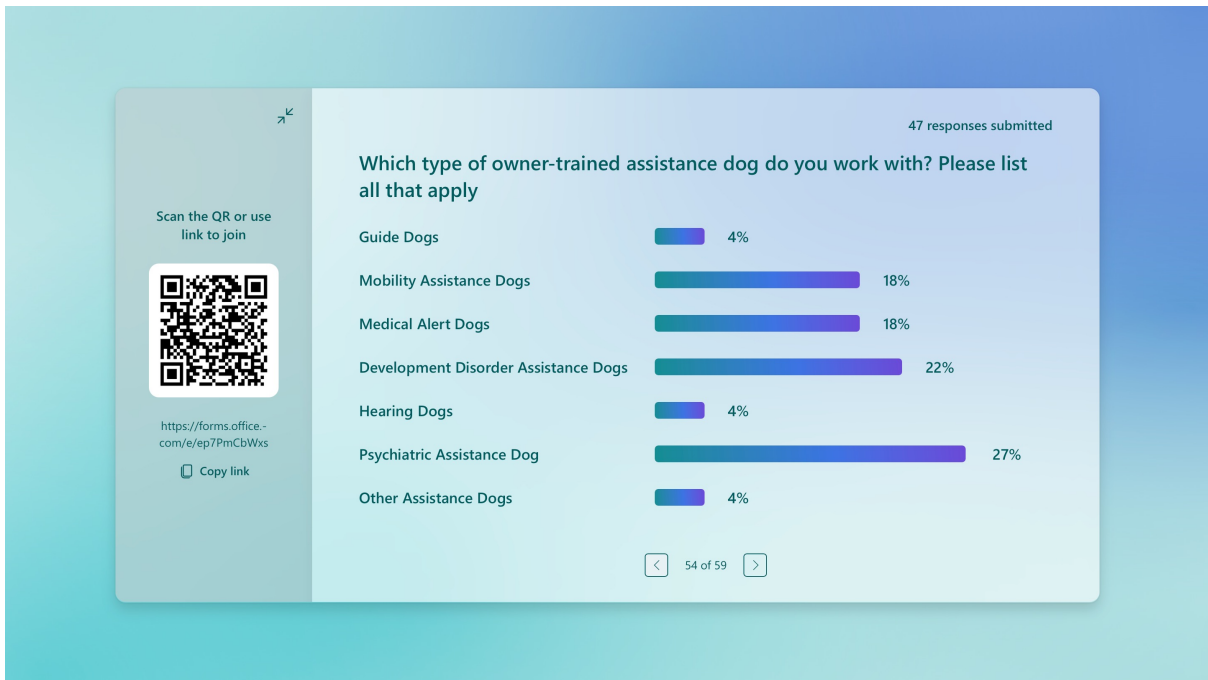
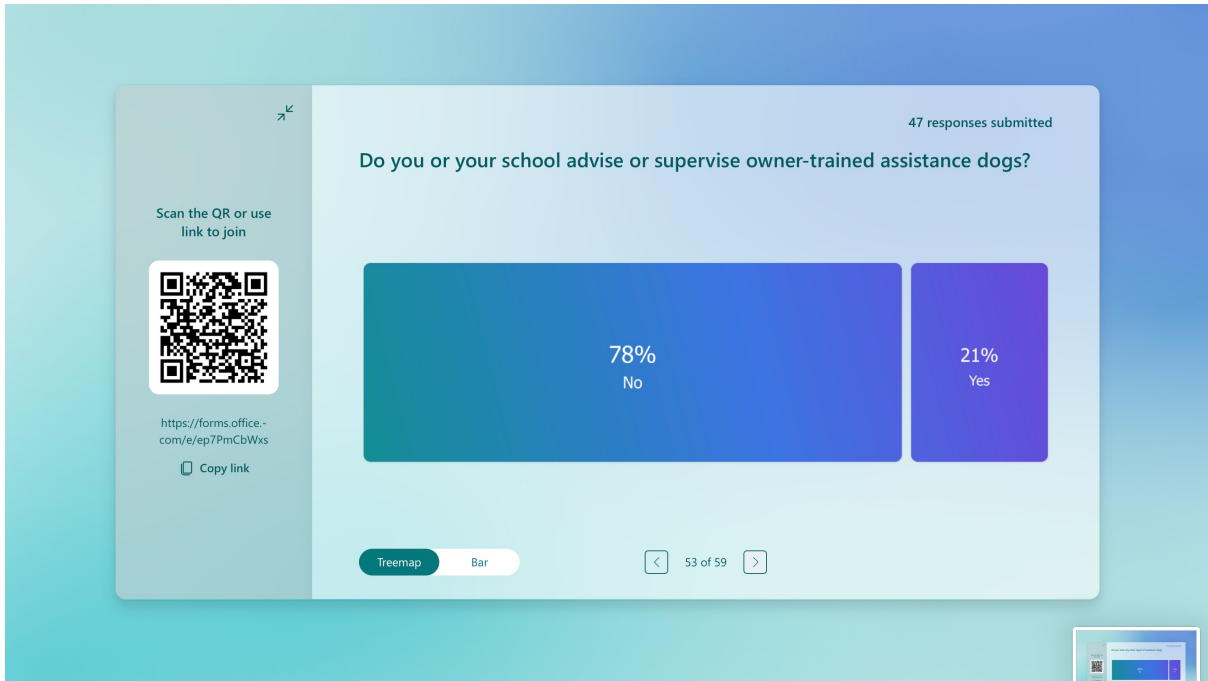
As a community we need to find a way to work with, assess and accredit these well-trained dogs to ensure the reputation of all qualified assistance dogs and training organisations within Europe and protect against the increasing trend of 'fake' assistance dogs.

Appendices

Responses to questions from EGDF survey as a percentage of respondents

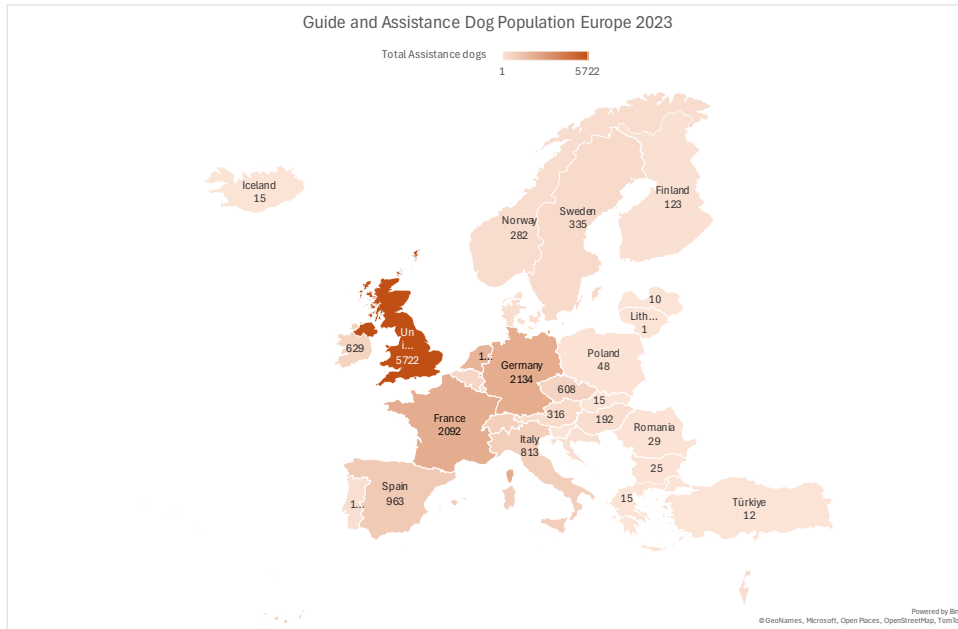




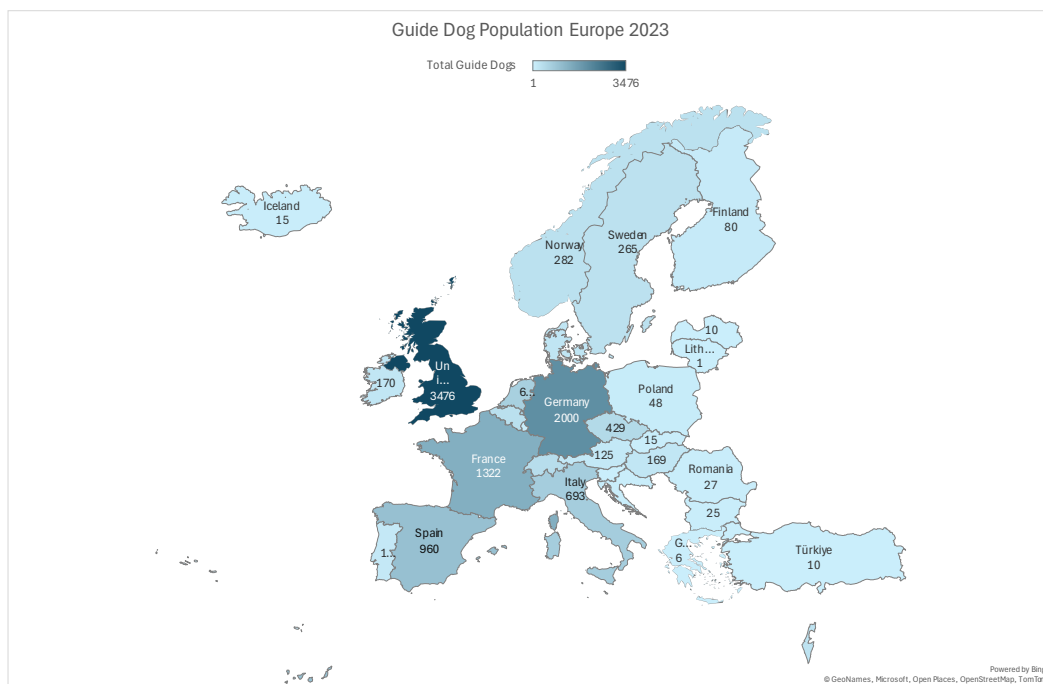


Maps of Assistance dogs in Europe

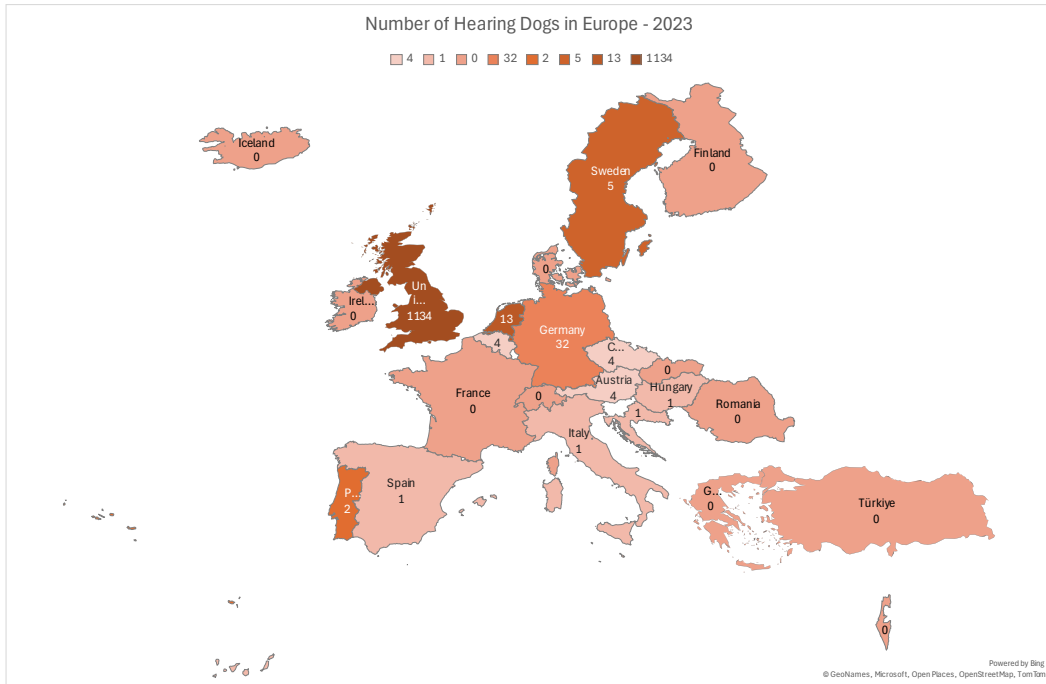
All Assistance Dogs



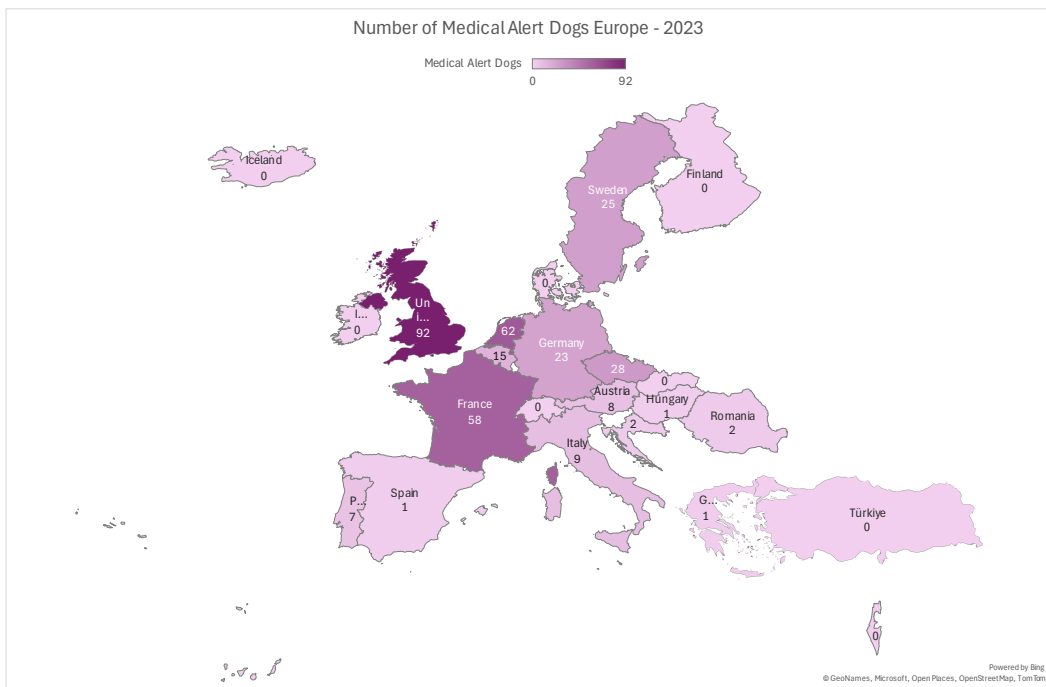
Guide Dogs



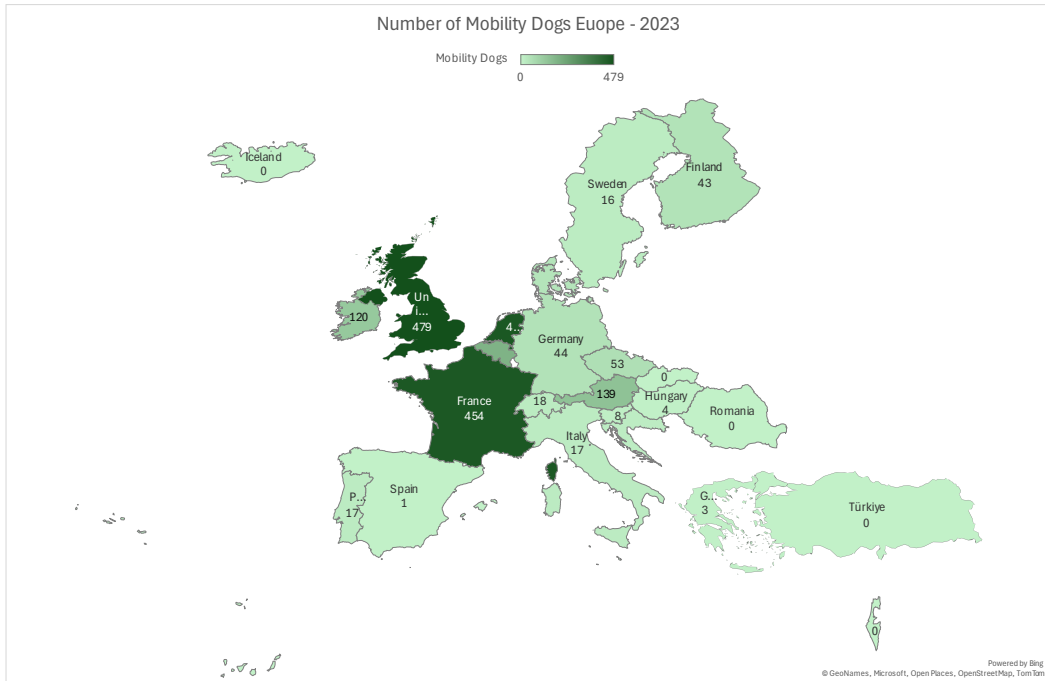
Hearing Dogs



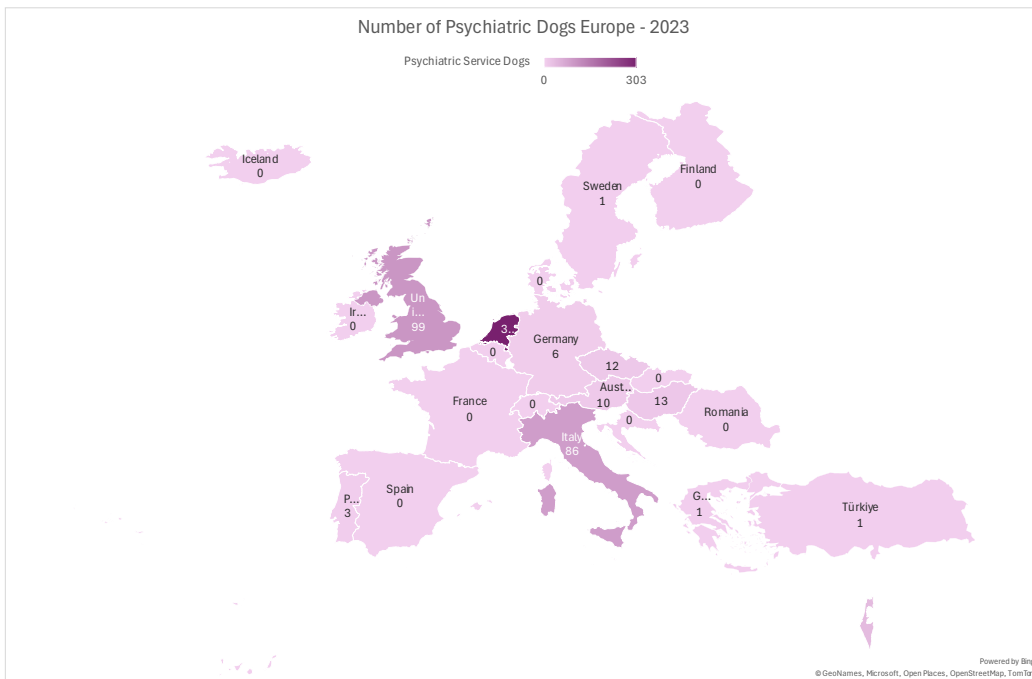
Medical Alert Dogs



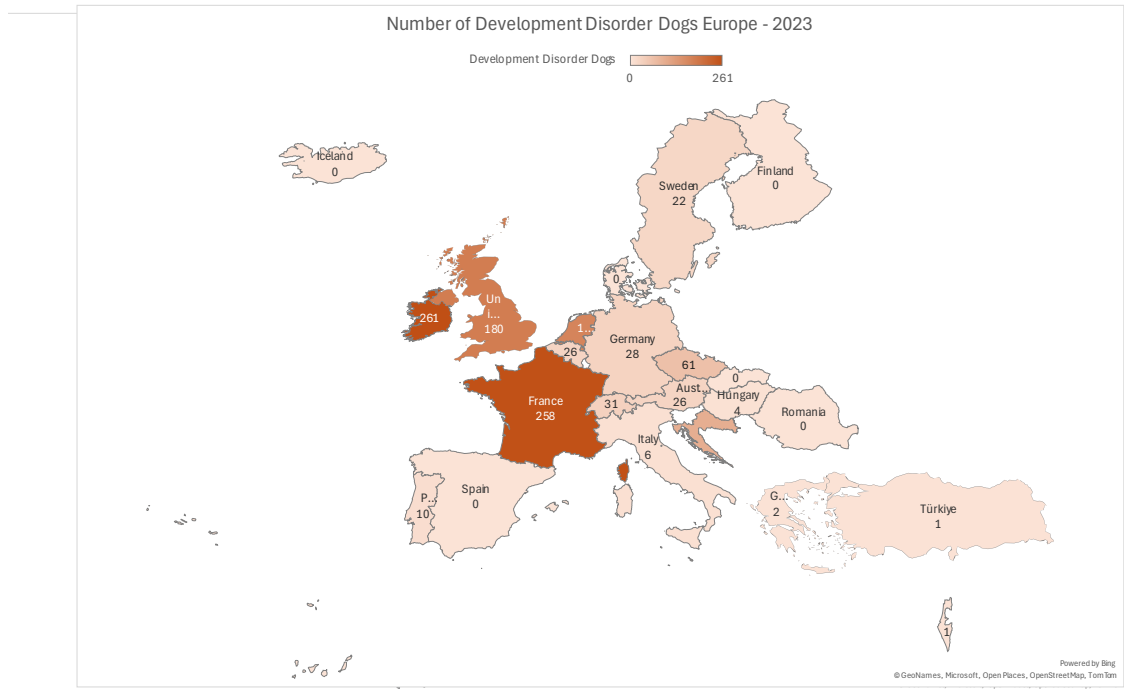
Mobility Dogs



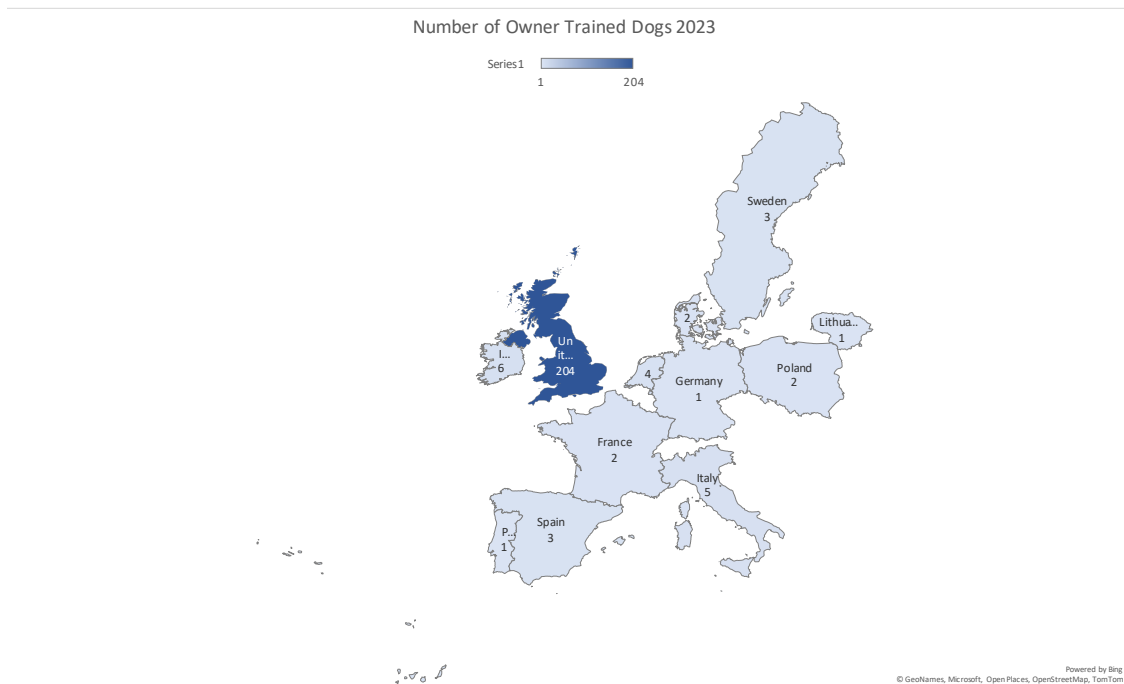
Psychiatric Dogs



Development Disorder Dogs



Owner Trained Dogs



Other Reasons for owner trainers training their own dogs – some comments translated to English using Google Translate

- "Both waiting time & cost"
- "I have qualification as a dog behaviourist and had competed in Agility etc for many years. I was offered to register as trainer by an organisation, then train and assess my own dog under their scheme. I didn't consider this was ethical, no availability anywhere otherwise, so trained alone but made sure standard was well above what is required."
- "All of the above"
- "Cost too much and because of my age and disabilities "
- "Waiting time, cost, poor standards/reviews/methods, I wanted to train my own"
- "The cost and waiting times for getting an assistance dog in the UK are extremely long which would have caused my health to deteriorate. My own dog was extremely suitable for assistance dog training and has since then surpassed all the tests we have put against her. She is task trained through visual cues and scent training to alert me for my disability and to provide dpt. "
- "In this case I chose the breed of my guide-dog; I chose the dog that could be my guide; I started training the dog while I had yet another guide-dog and when he died, with illness in 10 days, she was already doing many things well has a guide-dog and she could help me, has a guide, 2 days after the loss of the previous dog; training my own dog brought feelings of more confidence, my self-esteem is better and now I am not dependent of an institution which pretend to decide things of my life, and that's reminding all the time it's the owner of my guide-dog, not me. I feel more skilled and more confident and with feelings of self-satisfaction being guided by my own trained dog."
- "Mainly I wanted to try myself and see if I would be able to and, in such case, to enjoy the great sense of accomplishment anytime I walk around with my dog. Also, I wanted to choose my dog's breed. Lastly I wanted to set free from the guide dog school influence, which is sometimes toxic, once they tend to give unwelcome opinions about my life because they have provided me with one of their dogs."
- "Cost, time waiting, many organisations don't take on multiple disabilities, many only accept children"
- "My disabilities are too complex, cost is too high for organisation trained dogs, and wait time is too long for charities. "
- "There are no organisations near me, and on top of that none, or very few that train for my disabilities unless I happen to be a child or veteran. On top of that, the wait times and how much one costs is not suitable for me, and the chosen breeds that are often used (I understand why organisations use these breeds, of course) do not fit my other wants or needs and overall lifestyle. I also don't like

set uniforms, preferring to be creative with my gear and show a little "me" on my dog's work setups. I have, unfortunately, also seen very poor standards of training and behaviour from dogs from several different organisations which did not impress me."

- "No providers in my area, and I am an experienced dog trainer so wanted to have the input into my own dog, and the increased timescale possible for owner training vs organisation requirements."
- "All of the above"
- "I was not eligible for other programmes - my PTSD isn't from being a soldier, nor am I aged under 18 which is the age you seem to have to be for an autism assistance dog. Furthermore, it allowed me to choose the breed/size of dog that was right for my lifestyle"
- "Mijn vorige hond is opgeleid onder begeleiding van een organisatie, maar zij wilde mij niet helpen met de nieuwe hond vanwege de raskeuze (border collie). Dus nu ben ik het zelf gaan doen met de ervaring die ik eerder heb opgedaan."
 ["My previous dog was trained under the guidance of an organization, but they did not want to help me with the new dog because of the breed choice \(border collie\). So now I started doing it myself with the experience I gained earlier."](#)
- "Owner training just suited me better as I have prior training experience, and I wanted to set the standards of my assistance dog's training myself"
- "I'm a consultant for guide dogs with a PhD in dog behaviour"
- "Multiple from the above. None local, waiting times too long and the cost "
- "I hold a Level 4 in Canine Behaviour and Training, I felt suitably qualified to train my own dog to the correct standards"
- "In 2014 I trained a seizure assistance dog with an organisation, but the training was unsuccessful as my seizure's did not happen during office hours. "
- "I wanted there to be a solid bond between me and my dog plus I wanted to select the breed and size most suitable."
- "There wasn't anywhere that could provide a dog that would be suitable, my dog showed strong potential, issues around allergies "
- "Cost and age limits of organisations. Only 1 organisation would take me, I am early 20s, for an autism assistance dog. However, the selection process was very long and quite picky over who they think is needing a dog more, and it could cost 10 to 15,000 pounds for a charity dog which is financial discrimination against poorer backgrounds."
- "These were the first assistance dogs in our country, so the only option available."
- "All of the above "
- "More than one of the reasons above! My assistance dog joined our pet family specifically to be an assistance dog - she was a five-month-old rescue with exceptional disposition for the work. Having had her from so young we bonded and before the training started, she was already trying to help me - within her first week here. I chose a breed of my preference guided by advice which also helps me significantly. But - mainly - No assistance dog providers in my area,

very few for my combination of disabilities, and the waiting times and cost made pursuing organisation dog's impractical. "

- "I've got a degree in clinical canine behaviour and training and have supposedly been "top of the waiting list" with an organisation since November 2020"
- "I was meant to work with a trainer, but she dropped a lot of her clients with no warning, so I was left to train my dog by myself "
- "The organisation was not kind and the physical blood tests required were intrusive and really not necessary and other things "
- "I was quoted £18,000 for a part trained dog from an organisation, and then never even heard back from them. I bought a puppy from assistance dog background and worked under the guidance of assistance dog trainers from the start. "

Further comments from owner trainers training their own dogs – some comments translated to English using Google Translate

- “There are a lot more organisations now but when I started training her 6 years ago when there were not very many”
- "I did a combination of owner training from a “started” dog in the USA where I spend a decent amount of time. She wasn’t suited to her initial match, and I was assisting with training and socialisation, she began to bond and instinctively task for me so it was decided she would become mine (not planned and I couldn’t find any organisations in the UK that catered for my disabilities. So, she then received dedicated training for my needs, and I return to the USA for top up team training and have virtual consults."
- "I feel there should be more support for Owner Trained Assistance Dogs within the UK to have more rights internationally and nationally. Service Dogs within the US can travel, in Europe a lot of family members are located across different countries, but the lack of understanding for owner trained Assistance Dogs prevents disabled people from seeing their family. For example, my Assistance Dog has passed a PAT and even been with me to Disneyland Paris (via the Eurostar), yet I can’t visit my immediate family in Spain as there is no option to travel there with my Assistance Dog without spending £6,000 each way."
- "I have trained four dogs for my use "
- "If I could do a PAT test I would. All my trainers are willing to vouch for my dog. There is literally no way for me to have an organisation trained dog that I can find, and it seems to me that in such circumstances it is a violation of equality There are several reasons I owner-trained, and I cannot tick more than one. Similarly, my dog and I have trained with different people to get us working well - both assistance dog trainers and ‘normal’ dog trainers and behaviourists who have where necessary upskilled to help me"
- "Costi elevati da sostenere personalmente per addestrare il cane che ho voluto preparare nel mio territorio di residenza con le sue peculiarità ed esigenze specifiche." "[High costs to bear personally to train the dog that I wanted to prepare in my area of residence with its peculiarities and specific needs.](#)"
- "It takes a lot of time and consistency "
- "You need to have a good understanding of dog training and behaviour as well as education before starting it in the first place. Luckily for me I was fully prepared and do have the knowledge, but for people who need to access an assistance dog and there’s not charities/organisations out there to help them and they get a dog to train themselves, I can see where the struggle comes from."
- "Training my own dog from a puppy has created a strong bond and helped me with my own difficulties from the start. I can’t imagine not having done it myself as the waiting times would have cost me greatly to my physical and mental health."

- "There are very limited organisations in my area and the ones I do have are very expensive "
- "It was very difficult but definitely worth it. Mainly there are not enough trained assistance dogs for everyone. "
- "This is the normal way in Sweden owner be trained under supervision "
- "It's extremely hard but would be impossible to do with an organisation "
- "I think there needs to be more clarification in the UK as in the beginning, it was very confusing finding the correct information on how to train your own dog"
- "It has been a very stressful journey but there were no suitable Assistance dog charities that suited my conditions. Also, the cost was unaffordable. "
- "Would love to have a certification process in the UK "
- "A checklist would be helpful. It took a lot of research to ensure I knew all I needed to know."
- "Dog is not neutered so no organisation would take us even though he is 100% trained with no issues and has been scientifically shown that neutering can cause issues with cruciate ligament injuries etc. Which are high in the breed, and we also occasionally show (for socialisation), he is not to breed from as not up to breed standards, but vet has advised not altering unless medically necessary "
- "Tak, powinni zalegalizować wszystkie rasy w Polsce. Tak jak w w Anglii. W Anglii szkolłam psa i teraz tutaj w Polsce czasami mam problemy ze jest z Anglii. ["Yes, they should legalize all breeds in Poland. Just like in England. I trained a dog in England and now here in Poland I sometimes have problems because it is from England"](#)
- "No"
- "It's been one hell of a rollercoaster for us both! But well worth the efforts "
- "It's been very well supported by an assistance dog organisation, and I'd do it again"
- "I have a BSc in animal behaviour and am a dog trainer, I live on a remote island with rare seizure conditions "
- "The assistance dog organisations near me are known to have sent out reactive dogs. My friend has pets only been barked at aggressively by an organisation trained guide dog. The wait times are ridiculous as well, with up to 4 years for dogs who still only come with basic training and 2/3 tasks. I have 6 disabilities my dog is trained to assist with and no organisation in the whole of Scotland could train the dog for more than 2 disabilities. "
- "It was amazing"
- "I had no option but to train my own dog. It breaks my heart that I get punished for this "
- "there's a very interesting phenomenon that happens when you train your own assistance dog. When your dog transitions from 'in training' to fully qualified and trained. You must learn how to trust your dog to make correct choices without micromanaging. It is very hard to train a dog and manage your own disabilities but when everything is finally finished it is so rewarding"
- "No"

- "My dog was already mitigating my disabilities. "
- "I am visually impaired, physically disabled, neurodivergent, require medical alerts and have CPTSD. Even a dual trained organisation dog would not cover all bases."
- "It was worth it. He was bespoke to what I need"
- "I loved training my own assistance dog as we formed more of a better bond and there have been some rocky moments along the way but he's an incredible dog now and classed him as fully trained, he works to the best of his ability and can't thank him enough for the job he does "
- "It was a lot of hard work and repetition"
- "Additionally, to question 10, I have had dogs trained by official UK organisations lunge excitedly towards my owner trained assistance dog and jump around on London buses. I don't trust these charity organisations as their standards are clearly falling. As an owner trained assistance dog team, it would be nice if we had the same legal recognition when it comes to flying, ferry's etc "
- "I'm tired of not being able to access things because my assistance dog isn't recognised"
- "Also, no assistance dogs for adults with my conditions or trainers in area"
- "I had 2 guide-dogs before my actual guide-dog. The others came from an official school, and I loved them, I am thankful to both for all the love, confidence and all the years they lend me their eyes and guided me. Training your own dog it's not always easy, but I wouldn't change it for anything. I feel safe when I walk with my dog on harness, and I am sure she works very well. She is not a perfect dog, but there are not perfect dogs, or perfect owners. I think we are a good team together."
- "There are no official organisations in the north of England. The expectation and limitation that all assistance dogs must be officially trained dogs is frustrating. My dog is trained to an extremely high standard with an in-person trainer and online training with an assistance dog trainer and is trained daily with myself but isn't considered to be the same standard. "
- "No "
- "We need to keep fighting for more countries to have owner trained assistance dog rights"
- "He is in the middle of training, so he hasn't got all his certification, but I find training him a lot easier than looking for trainers in my area as it not only strengthens my bond with him, but it also allows me to learn more about dog training for the future when my dog retires."
- "Obedience and puppy trainer for over fifty years "
- "If one has the right motivation to go through the process and a plan B in case plan A doesn't go right, I think that training one's guide dog has many advantages: you can chose your dog, you can customize its training to your own preferences, you do not get stuck on guide dog schools waiting lists, you can have the satisfaction of having succeeded in a challenging task. "
- "It would be good if the public were more educated on owner trained assistance dogs"

- "The laws in place to protect owner trained assistance dogs are not properly in forced leading to more access refusals "
- "it's not easy! Time consuming & expensive. "
- "I have been registered disabled for 16 years and have actually trained 3 dogs to help me with my needs all dogs were temperament assessed and took their bronze to gold qualifications and passed "
- "The training was very intense, but I feel a lot better having trained my own dog, knowing them inside out and having that strong bond before training. I find that I trust her implicitly, which I think would take more time with an older, ready charity trained dog. The only thing I wish would be better is the recognition that owner trained dogs have the same training (if not more!) than organisation trained dogs. It would be good to not be discriminated against on things like access, travel etc just because of not being part of an official organisation. I would be more than happy to do a standard public access test (in addition to the ones she's already done) to prove she is at the same standard. "
- "It's been hard work but totally worth it as she makes a huge difference to my children's lives "
- "I do not consider my assistance dog as fully trained yet, combined with my health problems training is hard to stay focused on and I have very little support. I feel isolated. "
- "It's been hard but the best thing I've ever done"
- "They're just as legitimate and well behaved as organisation trained dogs"
- "I honestly wish there were organisations that train for medical alert dogs in Ireland because it would benefit me and a lot of people but as there is not, I trained my own and it was generally very hard work "
- "Hard work but is doable, I'm in my 70s I self-trained as I couldn't get on any lists of providers or was over 2-year wait I had been waiting to be accepted since 2020. I wasn't getting any younger and health was deteriorating "
- "It is more difficult for providers to take you seriously; I think a form of registration even for owner trained dogs which is cheap and easy to access would be helpful "
- "No"
- "Very hard work but would help more certificates to be certified or trainers knowing how to certify or register. "
- "Yes, I had more help than just the professional assistance dog trainer: I had help from a lot of different dog trainers, and other people (now friends) with assistance dogs! Also though the main reason for owner training was the money, it was also do to the long waiting times, and do to a lot of misinformation out there about the rules and how one could get an assistance dog."
- "I prefer being able to choose a breed that fits my lifestyle, getting to decide what my dog wears and looks like when working, and overall love raising my own assistance dog and building that bond from puppy to adult."
- "I have had owner trained assistance dogs for over 20 years."
- "Hard work but worth it. Will be training successor dog next year."

- "It allows you to choose a breed that is better suited to you, your lifestyle, your interests"
- "It was hard, but the prices are horrendous "
- "Since starting I found it is so unregulated it a really needs looking into, so many people are getting assistance dogs for no reason other than social media, training methods puppies being rushed into work and unqualified trainers "
- "Training my own assistance dog was the best option for me, and I'm very glad I did it. She helps me every day and I'm lucky owner training was a viable option for me."
- "No one nearby was able to provide to me an assistance dog that met my specific independent needs. "
- "The assessments were a mix of online and in-person, and the training was also a mix of online and in person - this made it more accessible for me. However, I am on a waiting list for joining a scheme that is recognised - I worry that being owner trained is going to limit my options in terms of travel"
- "Public access test should be standardised and a requirement for any assistance dog, charity or owner trained"
- "Het is zeker mogelijk als je weet wat je aan het doen bent. ik zou het heel jammer vinden als deze mogelijkheid zou komen te vervallen vanwege strakke wetgeving, juist omdat de opleidingsmogelijkheden met behulp van organisaties bijna nooit vergoed worden voor psychiatrische hulphonden." ["It is certainly possible if you know what you are doing. I would find it a great shame if this option were to disappear due to strict legislation, precisely because the training opportunities with the help of organizations are almost never reimbursed for psychiatric assistance dogs"](#)
- "It's certainly very challenging but rewarding as I can ensure my dog meets my own specific needs. However, I wish there was more support available. I've been turned down for help by many charities because of my dog's breed, I cannot afford ongoing training or a private assistance dog and there is a very long wait with a lack of support in my area for a trained dog."
- "Was better because charities have age restrictions and rules that don't correlate to the law. For example, they wanted spayed and non-raw fed which is not required by law"
- "Long waiting times, costly, none could cater for all my disabilities "
- "My dog was already doing medical alerts without training so public access training was all she needed"
- "No "
- "I got refused by an official organisation for an assistance dog to alert to my rare food allergy. Which is in a hell of a lot of food and was told to just take anti-allergy medication. Despite my allergy also occurring when I so much as touch said food, either cooker or raw I'm allergic to it."
- "I didn't plan to train her, she just adapted to the role as my health got worse"
- "It's expensive and time consuming which is difficult when living on disability income. Online training and assessment has been extremely helpful. The Public

Access test will be in person assessment, my 2nd dog is still currently in training."

- "This is my 3rd"
- "Yes, in response to question 9 there is no legal requirement for someone's assistance dog to be 'certified' if it mitigates handlers' disability and behaves appropriately (to a certain level/standard) then it legally classes as an assistance dog and has public access rights in UK"
- "I have a diagnosis of Tourette's Syndrome and a spinal cord injury. When I first looked into assistance dogs, I was 16 and desperate for independence. Because I was 16, I was too young for programmes providing dogs for adults, but almost too old for programmes providing dogs for children. There were also only 7 official organisations at the time (there are now 19 member and candidate organisations). Many of the charities I contacted did not train dogs for Tourette's Syndrome as they believed it was a psychiatric condition, however it is a neurological movement disorder. I found a company, who claimed for £6,600 they could train an assistance dog for me. Unfortunately, the company fell into liquidation, and I was left with an untrained puppy but thankfully did not lose too much money. I was able to use the remaining funding I had saved to train my Golden Retriever with a local police and security dog trainer for 2 years. She then deemed my dog fit for assistance dog work in 2017. My dog is due to retire next year when I graduate from university. I do not currently have a replacement dog for when my current dog retires due to the waiting lists for a mobility assistance dog. I am likely to train my own dog again for these reasons, however I would like the support of an organisation as it can be very isolating as an owner trainer to not have support from an organisation when it comes to issues regarding access refusals and dog attacks."
- "My dog was originally supposed to be trained by a program but when they delivered him to me, he was in no way trained to mitigate my disability, so although he'd been trained for public access by the program, I ended up having to owner train him mostly unassisted by professionals to actually be an assistance dog and not just a very well-behaved dog "
- "I am a professional dog trainer "
- "My dog has a training paper trail significant enough he is allowed on British Airways, and we have travelled extensively on all manners of public transport. It is considerably harder to do this with non-organisation trained dogs due to providers lack of trust in owner trained dogs. I was happy to provide details of my business and my education which fortunately alongside the voluntary public access tests were enough. "
- "That personally I found the help of a local charity invaluable "
- "No"
- "There are not enough organisations/charities that can certificate dogs. The waiting lists are longer than most dogs. Very few allow you to train your own dog which limits it further. "
- "I learnt a lot from an official organisation and when I found out I was allowed to train my own dog I attended classes so my dog could get obedience certificates, then assessed by an official organisation"

- "It was at mine & my dog's pace & I was able to train the tasks I needed help with plus knowing how I'd trained ensured I could develop his training when new tasks were needed. It also developed our already strong bond. "
- "I am a qualified dog behaviourist; I tried to get under an official scheme but no trainers available. Was offered to register myself as a trainer, train and assess and pass my own dog under their scheme. Instead, I spoke to a local behaviourist who trains 2 assistance dogs at a time and received the advice I needed to make sure my dog is trained to high standards."
- "It was hard work, but consistency was key."
- "My dog was also very suitable - he took to the tasks before his training began. Senses things and didn't need to be task trained as he did it anyway. "
- "Many disabled people do not meet the criteria put in place by assistance dog organisations this is why owner training exists among other reasons. At the end of the day if the disabled persons assistance dog is trained and able to mitigate their disability that's the most important thing "
- "I originally had an officially registered dog but the charity no longer covers my area so I went on to owner train my 2nd dog now currently training my next, I have many years of dog training under my belt and have attended multiple dog training workshops over the years , I've trained and competed in obedience, scent work , agility and rally so have vast experience in training and very high standards and expectations "
- "More affordable help would be beneficial to many assistance dog owner-trained handlers "
- "I started up my own organisation so I could help those with similar needs and have worked with airlines, NHS etc"
- "There's no standardized training, so training my own dog makes it suitable for my specific needs and situation. If the dog meets the highest training standards and is not intrusive or disruptive and ignores distractions such as other dogs or food when in harness, certification should be a plus because what matters the most is the assistance it provides and the level of training "
- "Training is difficult to source and access, given my disabilities"
- "I could perfectly match my needs with a suitable training style around my life "
- "Despite my dog meeting all criteria set out by official organisation regulations (including their public access test) myself and my dog are frequently discriminated against"
- "It wasn't the plan. But we made it work "
- "With multiple conditions I also couldn't find a provided dog"
- "I have not loved every minute of training my dog, however my quality of life is much improved with him. It has been a learning curve because my individual dog cannot cope with full time assistance work in public because of being attacked by other dogs, so I have learned how he can best assist me at home, so I have quality of life outside of the home and his welfare is looked after too. "
- "This is my third owner trained dog and first under an organisation, though I've always worked with trainers. Personally, I believe having a trainer involved in some capacity is essential to provide an external review and checking process for the dog's welfare and handler's support."

- "Life changing. There is no charity or organisation in the UK that provides trained assistance dogs for my multi complex disabilities "
- "Cost and that official organisations very rarely give dogs to autistic adults, the ones that do have long waitlists "
- "I'm an experienced dog trainer"
- "It is worth noting that I am a qualified behaviourist and trainer so whilst I trained my own dog there is professional knowledge involved. Similarly, although no formal test was done, they are assessed with a professional mindset"
- "Low incomes you can't afford to pay trainers"
- "Had help from an organisation - weekly zoom calls for guidance. "
- "It was a lot more emotionally intensive than having a pre trained dog"
- "Training my own assistance dog was my only option due to location, time, finances and disturbance by the covid pandemic "
- "I personally trained my own and help many others train others assistance dogs and run a Facebook group of now 3,000 members"
- "He is the most perfect assistance dog I can have"
- "I would love to assess under an official organisation with my dog. I don't really see any value in a unofficial organisation. We have trained with three trainers, do a weekly class to maintain my general skills, we have done flight specific training with a non-organisation assistance dog trainer "
- "Was easy to train my own dog "
- "It would be nice if there were more professional resources available to people on how to train their guide dogs, I had to train mine with no help as official charities in the UK refused to provide any training help, both in person or online."
- "I trained my own assistance dog through an official organisation "
- "She is my first dog in general, so I've had a lot to learn but she has turned out to be a great dog"
- "It helps the bond between each other massively "
- "I would not feel as confident in training my dog without the assistance of an organisation.
- "Ik heb mijn eigen hulphond getraind dmv service dog training school (min 120 uur, modules, toetsing, beeldmateriaal opdrachten uitvoeren en opsturen) en 1-1 feedback en coaching. Ik heb mijn hond naast algemene assistentie hond taken ook specifieke taken voor mijn handicap aangeleerd. " ["I have trained my own assistance dog through service dog training school \(min 120 hours, modules, testing, performing and sending visual material assignments\) and 1-1 feedback and coaching. In addition to general assistance dog tasks, I have also given my dog specific tasks for my learned disability."](#)
- "I have multiple disabilities and unfortunately no official organisation would train for them all. I could have applied for a dog and then taught it the additional tasks; however, I was quoted 3-5 years for the free programmes or £15,000 for the "non-profit"
- "Incredibly challenging. Was only possible by having access to multiple dogs and supportive parents."
- "She is amazing, and the charity were so helpful "

- "There does need to be some regulation in place as too many times has someone faked an assistance dog or taken their dog into places it's not ready for, and it has put me and my assistance dog at risk. however, care must be taken to make sure the regulations - standardised public access test etc., are accessible and accommodating of people and not excluding someone"
- "It was absolutely worth it"
- "It is not something I had much choice about. I felt an assistance dog was something that would help me and the only option was to train myself. I think there is huge value in raising your own assistance dog and your ability to maintain the behaviour standard and navigate yourself as a team is unmatched. We practice working together for years before a dog is considered fully trained. We don't get placed with an adult dog we have no relationship with. It's all relational. "
- "It helped me through a really dark time. "
- "Charity dogs aren't available enough for disabled people to rely on them. Official organisations are also very inaccessible with huge wait lists and very few local trainers. My dog is trained to a high standard, but I could be waiting years before she can be assessed by one of these organisations."

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