

## Workforce Shortage of veterinarians

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### Summary report

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*Brussels, 14 April 2024*

## OVERVIEW

Workforce shortages are a key challenge facing the veterinary profession. While this is not a new phenomenon for the veterinary sector in some European countries, the issue now extends to almost all European countries and more veterinary work fields.

Measuring the precise extent of workforce shortages on a national level and in the different sectors can be challenging due to data limitations, regional and work field disparities, and dynamic economic fluctuations. While in North America (US and Canada) detailed economic studies have been done, this is not the case for most European countries.

Despite this lack of a detailed analysis, all indicators show **veterinary workforce shortages are increasing worryingly and expanding across most European countries**. Almost all FVE members report workforce shortages in their countries, especially in certain critical areas such as rural and remote areas, livestock veterinary practices, and state and official veterinarians.

Veterinary workforce shortages pose significant challenges, affecting veterinarians, animals, animal caretakers and the society at large. It endangers the broader ecosystem and hinders economic development. The increased workload for the remaining veterinarians may lead to burnout and lower retention rates. **Maintaining a robust veterinary network is essential** to ensure the prevention, early detection, and rapid control of diseases. Accessible veterinary care supports local agriculture, ensures the health of livestock, and promotes animal welfare. Ensuring a robust veterinary network can address the diverse challenges related to animal health, public health, and economic and environmental sustainability. It ensures that the benefits of veterinary expertise are accessible to all communities, contributing to a healthier and more resilient society.

Some countries started to map the problem and have already taken **measures** to tackle the problem with varying strategies and outcomes. Some measures include increasing student places at veterinary faculties, ensuring a network of state-funded veterinarians (e.g. in the Nordic countries, Romania and Greece), financially supporting veterinarians who practice in rural areas, tutored internship programs (e.g. in France), mentoring programs for young graduates and a veterinary scheme offering subsidies for veterinary services (e.g. in France, Romania, Scotland, and Spain).

### Case Study: Shortage of veterinarians in rural and remote areas

Europe's veterinary professionals play a crucial role, especially in rural and remote communities. They contribute significantly to the agriculture sector, which is vital to the economy and food security in Europe. Currently, we have around 330 000 veterinarians in Europe. While this number has been growing slowly but continuously over the last decades, we see that the number of active veterinarians is stagnating to even reducing in the last years. In addition, every year, less veterinarians report to work with livestock<sup>1</sup> and veterinary expansion is seen in other fields of the profession (e.g. companion animals, academia, research). This has led to closure of veterinary practices in rural and remote areas, to the situation today, were almost all European countries notify a shortage of veterinary workforce in rural and remote areas are lacking. This

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<sup>1</sup> FVE Survey of the Veterinary Profession of Europe: <https://fve.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/FVE-Survey-2023-updated-13-Dec-23.pdf>

has a negative effect on biosecurity, animal health and welfare and is especially worrying in situations of disease outbreaks (e.g. Avian Influenza, ASF).

Veterinary services in rural and remote areas are not a luxury, they are an essential public good to protect animal health and welfare, food safety and against zoonotic disease. Therefore, it is essential to ensure enough veterinarians remain in rural and remote areas by increasing the profitability of veterinary practices in rural and remote areas and make this an attractive career option for veterinarians again.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND REASONS FOR LEAVING THE PROFESSION

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES SEEN IN VETERINARY PROFESSION OF EUROPE (ACCORDING TO THE [FVE SURVEY OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION OF EUROPE 2023](#)):

- Private clinical practice is changing rapidly. Practice size is increasing in all countries. In addition, while slow in some countries, and fast in others, the increased share of corporate ownership is leading to larger practices and more veterinarians working as veterinary employees instead of owners. This is having an impact on earnings, working patterns, and work culture. Most veterinary corporations tend to get established in urban areas and focus on companion animal practice.
- Increasingly, most veterinary practitioners work in companion animal practice (71%), the breakdown of other species is as follows: cattle (23%), equine (21%) and pigs (13%). The amount of veterinarians working with livestock is decreasing constantly over the years.
- The veterinary profession is becoming predominantly female (FVE survey 2023: 65% female) while substantial pay gap differences remain.
- An increasing number of veterinarians opt for increasingly diverse working regimes, such as working part-time, in consultancy, doing telemedicine or taking interim roles.
- The working week contracted for European veterinarians has shrunk (from 40 hours in 2015 to 37 hours per week in 2023). Vets however typically work about 4 to 6 hours more per week than contracted and can also not take all holidays they are entitled to due to too high workload. As more vets work part-time, and working hours decrease, more veterinarians are needed
- Stress levels among veterinarians are high (more than 90% say they are stressed) and the need for mental breaks is also high (23% had to take a mental break for at least two weeks in the last 3 years).
- High workloads and staff shortages are the top challenges facing the veterinary profession. Up to 59 percent of European veterinarians surveyed in 2023 viewed 'too much work' as a key challenge and 49 percent cited recruitment difficulties or staff shortages.

### REASONS FOR MISMATCH SUPPLY/DEMAND VETERINARY WORKFORCE INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND RETURN CHALLENGES

- **Increasing Demand for Veterinary Services:** The demand for veterinary services has been rising due to factors such as increased companion animal ownership, greater awareness of the importance of animal health services population growth and increased demand for food of animal origin and the trade thereof. The trend towards specialization within veterinary medicine can result in shortages of veterinarians with expertise in certain areas.
- **Regulatory barriers:** The mobility of veterinarians within Europe can be impeded limiting the ability of countries to address workforce shortages by recruiting veterinarians from other regions.

- **Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction:** Veterinary professionals often face demanding work schedules. The perceived lack of work-life balance and job satisfaction may deter individuals from pursuing or continuing a career in veterinary medicine. Recent generations tend to work more part-time than previous generations, leading to a lack due to their retirement.
- Veterinarians leaving the profession before the end of their career due to unfavourable working conditions and schemes, difficulties in achieving the desired work/life balance, insufficient development opportunities/challenge, dissatisfaction with remuneration, not feeling rewarded/valued (in non-financial terms), stress and mental health issues, bad experience with colleagues or animal owners, lack of mentorship, the burden of bureaucracy/legislation, etc.
- **Rural-Urban Disparities:** Veterinary workforce shortages generally are more pronounced in rural areas compared to urban centres. Veterinarians may be more inclined to practice in or near urban areas, leading to a maldistribution of veterinary services. Rural and remote areas and specific veterinary work fields (e.g. slaughterhouses) face more pronounced shortages due to a lack of attractiveness, difficult working hours and/or low profitability.

#### VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGES SPECIFICALLY IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS AND FOR LIVESTOCK PRACTICES

The lack of veterinary professionals in rural and remote locations is part of the larger trend of seeing population outflowing to urban locations<sup>2</sup>. This evidence reinforces the severity and urgency of the problem. Reason include:

- **Lack of attractiveness of rural areas.** The lack of services and infrastructures in remote areas does not meet with current social aspirations of younger generations, such as a vibrant urban lifestyle, job opportunities for spouses, sufficient child-care raising to achieve the desired work/life balance.
- **A preference for companion animal practice<sup>3</sup>.** Companion animal practice aligns often better to graduates' vision of the veterinary profession and professional aspirations since a majority of students report animal welfare as the main driver for taking up a veterinary career<sup>4</sup>. Livestock treated at herd level and not so much individually, leads to veterinary care provided depending on its economical profitability.
- **Economic hardship experienced by farmers.** Because of the low financial power of small and medium livestock businesses, they cannot always afford to pay for veterinary services, and this results in a decrease in the demand and thus in a lack of sustainability for veterinary practices.
- **Difficult to set up a profitable business.** Linked to the previous point, the low demand for veterinarian services implies that the volume of business makes it difficult or impossible for rural veterinarians to make a living. Consequently, professionals are not willing to buy or set up new practices in these areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Between 2013 to 2017, 500 million people left rural areas. (European Commission (2019), "Jobs and Growth in Rural Areas", CAP specific objectives, Issue n°8)

Rural population outflow affects many other sectors such as the human health profession. The World Health Organisation wrote a report on the issue in 2010: "Increasing access to health workers in remote and rural areas through improved retention. Global policy recommendations"

<sup>3</sup> 67% of European veterinarians work in small animal practice while 54% are in farm practice (26% cattle, 14% poultry and 14% swine). (FVE (2019), *Survey of the Veterinary Profession in Europe*)

<sup>4</sup> FVE (2019), *Survey of the Veterinary Profession in Europe*

- **Increased corporatisation of the veterinary profession<sup>5</sup>.** Corporations are slowly but steadily settling as an important business model in the sector. The attractiveness of corporations lies in a more balanced schedule, well-equipped clinics, support systems and a stable income. However, corporate practices tend to settle in urban areas and the companion animal sector, as this is a more profitable market. Very few corporates are active in farm animal practice.
- **Working conditions.** Having to work long hours to make up for the lack of workforce, travelling long distances, often alone and increased on-call duties at night and during weekends render rural practice unattractive for most. These unfavourable conditions can result in increased stress, burnout, and ultimately retention problems.
- **Decline of public procurements.** In most countries, the government contracts several tasks to private veterinarians such as on mandatory vaccinations and disease prevention activities. In some countries, these public procurements make up an important part of the workload of private practitioners in rural areas. However, in several countries, they are declining, which is making it more difficult for practitioners to be profitable.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF VETERINARY SHORTAGES

*‘VETERINARY DESERTIFICATION IS THE LAST SIGN BEFORE AGRICULTURAL DESERTIFICATION’*

- **Animal health and welfare problems.** The shortage of veterinary professionals impacts preventive work and early diagnosis, which is particularly important in the case of notifiable diseases. This can lead to disease outbreaks, and, with a loss of livestock, economic benefits also decrease. Emergency services cannot always be guaranteed either. In those cases where farmers experience economic hardship, they will choose not to call a veterinarian until it is too late, or they will even try to take on veterinary duties themselves. Shortage of veterinarians also means that they have less time to attend to their clients and so the quality of the service offered can be affected. Finally, the shortage of veterinarians puts the welfare of the animals seriously at risk.
- **Welfare of the veterinary profession in rural practices.** Veterinarians in rural and remote areas are under great pressure to cover the demand for their services due to shortages of competent assisting staff and clients who face difficulties to pay. Serious retention problems arise from this situation.
- **Shrinking of the agricultural economy in remote areas.** Shortage of veterinarians in rural areas further hinders the development of the livestock sector and rural areas more generally. Farmers may experience an economic loss as a consequence of the poor health of those animals that were not able to receive professional treatment on time or disease outbreaks that went unprevented and undetected. Some livestock businesses are having to close down, and the number of small and family farms has reduced substantially over the last decade<sup>6</sup>. This is especially worrying given the contribution of rural areas to the food supply chain.

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<sup>5</sup> Data on the rise in the number of corporations: from 1% in 2015 to 3% in 2019. Market share of corporations varies between 0% to 52% across EU countries. There was also a rise in the number of limited liability companies, from 11% to 21%. (FVE (2019), *Survey of the Veterinary Profession in Europe*)

<sup>6</sup> Between 2005-2016, it is estimated that up to 4.2 million farms were lost across the Member States, of which the vast majority (~85 %) were small farms. The largest reductions in farm numbers were recorded in Poland (~1.1 million farms, 43

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: SOME COUNTRIES HAVE ALREADY PUT MEASURES IN PLACE

**Summary: Measures to Tackle Veterinary Workforce Shortages**

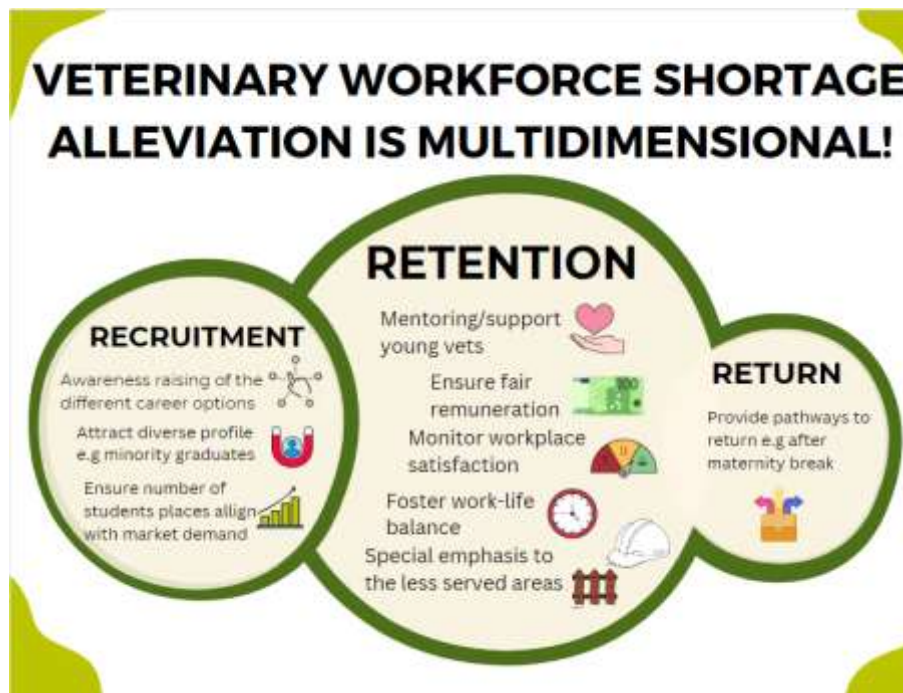
No miracle solutions exist, but several measures can help to alleviate this worrying and serious problem. The main measures needed are:

- **'Measure to improve'**: economic market studies should be done on the national and EU levels to estimate the extent of the workforce shortage and make a foresight for the future
- **Educational**: increasing student places, better student support, student selection, better preparing students for the market, internship programs, etc.
- **Legislative**: sufficient budget for veterinary services, financial support to provide veterinary services in non-profitable but needed areas e.g. rural & remote areas, emergency services, financial aids and incentives, etc
- **Promoting retention and return to the veterinary field**: support/mentoring young graduates, profitable business models, fair compensation, supportive workplaces, work/life balance, etc
- Make the general public aware of the **importance of the veterinary profession to society**, in all its aspects

Addressing veterinary workforce shortages in Europe requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders, including governments, educational institutions, professional organizations, and the veterinary community. Several countries e.g. France, Ireland, Romania and Norway **commissioned** studies to analyse the availability of veterinary services to farmers in rural and remote areas. This is important to know the precise extent of the problem and the most problematic areas. It's important for stakeholders to work collaboratively and remain adaptable in addressing workforce shortages. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of these strategies will help refine approaches and ensure their effectiveness over time. Additionally, staying informed about the evolving needs of the veterinary profession will be crucial for successful long-term solutions.

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%), Romania (~0.8 million farms, 20 %) and Italy (~0.6 million farms, 34 %). Source: Eurostat Statistics explained Evaluation of farms and farmland 2005-2016



The response of the countries to this situation focuses on ‘recruiting, retaining and returning’ of veterinarians to the profession. It mainly focuses on three main areas: educational, legislative and financial support, and community support.

- **Educational**

- **Increasing veterinary faculty capacities.** Several countries have invested in expanding the number of student places in veterinary faculties or even started new veterinary faculties. Some also specifically located new veterinary faculties in rural areas to attract a more diverse student population.
- **Placement programmes.** Several countries offer short or longer-term internships in veterinary practices that focus on rural veterinary practice to address disparities in service distribution. For example, the veterinary faculties in France offer tutored internships, financed by the government, with an 80% success rate of students staying in rural farming upon completion of the programme. Keys of its success are tailored training in the hands of an experienced rural veterinarian and deep immersion in rural practice. The programme also benefits rural veterinarians since it helps secure the continuation of their businesses. Denmark has a project to invite students from veterinary school to spend a week in practice, covering student expenses for transport to and from the practice, and extra courses on work safety in large animal practices that are free to attend for students.
- **Support programmes.** Several countries provide mentorship programs to support students through their education and early career stages and support ongoing professional development to encourage veterinarians to stay updated on the latest advancements in the field or create opportunities for veterinarians to specialize in high-demand areas through targeted training programs. Mentorship programmes provide guidance and support for recent graduates who can benefit from experienced veterinarians sharing their knowledge, offer career advice, and help newcomers navigate challenges.

- **Legislative**

- **State-employed veterinarians.** In certain regions e.g. remote island, it is impossible to set up profitable practices. Therefore, in several countries, e.g. Finland, Greece, Norway and Sweden, it is a legislated duty for veterinary services to be organised and financed at the municipal or regional level. In this way, essential animal healthcare is ensured across the territory, including rural and remote areas.
- **Addressing regulatory barriers:** Some veterinary statutory bodies invested in streamlining the licensing and certification processes to facilitate the movement of veterinarians within Europe. FVE collaborates with its members on harmonising regulatory standards to promote consistency across countries to share best practices and address common challenges and to explore opportunities for cross-border workforce mobility to ensure a more equitable distribution of veterinary professionals.
- **Financial aid.** A public funding scheme in Romania, Spain, Scotland and France pays for veterinarian services in small and medium-size rural farms or areas identified at risk. These measures increase the demand for veterinary services which makes setting up a profitable veterinary business more plausible, while it ensures that the health of animals is looked after. Countries can help also by continuing public procurements to mandate private practitioners to perform certain official tasks, such as mandatory vaccinations.
- **Incentives.** Several countries developed incentives for veterinarians to work in rural and underserved areas, such as ensure working conditions and remunerations are improved for official veterinarians, loan forgiveness programs or financial incentives to set up practices and established telemedicine initiatives to provide veterinary services in remote regions.

- **Community support**

- **Improve work-life balance.** Many workplaces implemented policies and practices that promote a healthy work-life balance for veterinarians, reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction and explored flexible work arrangements and part-time options to accommodate diverse lifestyle preferences. A positive and supportive workplace culture that encourages collaboration and teamwork, including the recognition and celebration of achievements, create a sense of belonging and satisfaction.
- **Professional engagement:** Many workplaces encourage veterinarians to become involved in local communities and professional organisations. Networks to coordinate practices within the same area contribute to better work conditions. Networks contribute to better management and distribution of working time, while at the same time it allows to create more attractive schedules and to set up a rotative on-call schedule. It's also a way of tackling isolation, as it puts professionals in contact. An example of this has been done in Scotland. This creates opportunities for networking and collaboration with peers, both within and outside the practice.
- **National and international collaboration.** FVE fosters collaboration between veterinary associations, statutory bodies, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions to address workforce challenges collectively and to identify and respond to emerging trends in the field through proactive collaboration.



**OUTLOOK: MORE CAN AND SHOULD BE DONE!**

- **Support regular preventive veterinary visits to all farms.** The Animal Health Law introduced obligatory animal Health Visits which came into force in April 2021. The aim is to encourage veterinary preventive work and to put the principle ‘prevention is better than cure’ into practice. The new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) also gives special attention to rural areas. Veterinarians are accounted for in some of the objectives, especially in the “Health, Food and Antimicrobial Resistance” pillar, which seeks to promote and incentivise the development of farm health plans<sup>7</sup>. To make this happen is vital.
- **Support emergency service provisions**
- **Smart management of veterinary practice by using already available infrastructure for other purposes.** Veterinary practice nowadays depends at large on sophisticated tools for diagnosis and treatment. Veterinarians should be encouraged to enlarge their network of cooperatives with other health professions, e.g. medical doctors, dentists, laboratories, etc. to be able to deliver high-level services (e.g. radiography, echography, laboratory tests, etc) sustainably. This will benefit enhance a ‘One Health’ approach. This can be done in a variety of ways: for example, facilities such as buildings could be shared by the human and animal health professions to reduce costs. Establishing professional networks between health professionals could prevent the feeling of isolation and help them better integrate into the local society and benefit the rural population.
- **Facilitating favourable living conditions**<sup>8</sup>. For example, providing for child-care support, good maternity and annual leaves, as well as housing and a car. With supporting living conditions that contribute to achieving the desired work/life balance, workforce retention will be more safely guaranteed.
- **Financing the supply of work equipment**<sup>9</sup>. Especially, facilitating those instruments that allow working off-site, such as telecommunication technologies and health monitoring technology. If the time spent on the road is reduced, the overall quality of their services is likely to improve as veterinarians will be able to spend more time with their clients. Also, it positively impacts on the veterinarians’ wellbeing, prevents burnout and enhances job retention.

Different types of measures should be applied together to maximise results. Especially since the shortage of veterinarians is a multi-factorial problem and the reasons can be varied according to the regions, different aspects should be addressed in a joint effort.

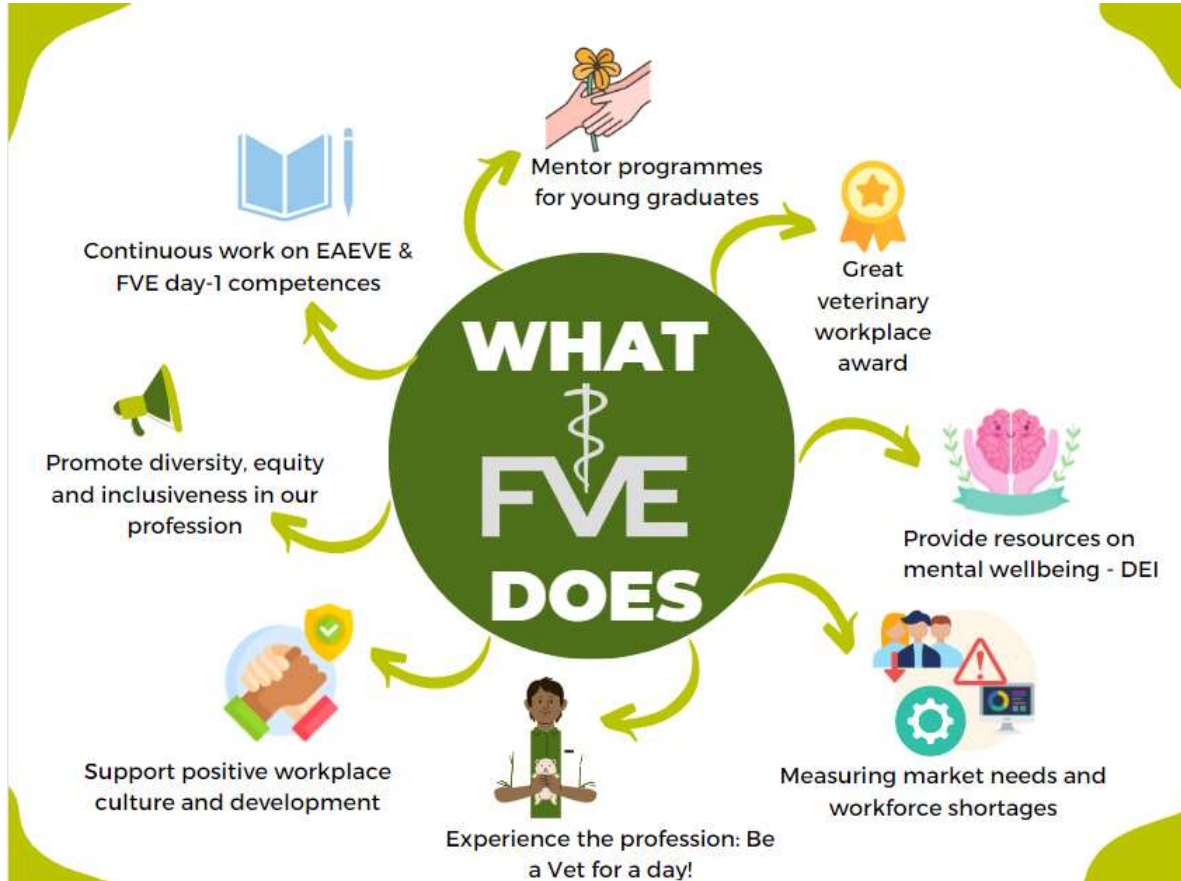
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<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2019), “Health, Food and Antimicrobial Resistance”, *CAP specific objectives*, Issue n°9, p6.

<sup>8</sup> Austria is applying innovative ideas to address the lack of attractiveness of rural areas. More information can be found on <https://www.vetvoice.com.au/articles/creative-methods-to-attract-veterinarians-to-rural-areas/>

<sup>9</sup>The WHO suggests that professional support measures help make rural posts more attractive and improve workforce retention. World Health Organisation (2010), *Increasing access to health workers in remote and rural areas*.

**FVE IS TAKING ACTION ALREADY!**



## FINDINGS PER COUNTRY AND SECTOR

### Albania

In Albania rural population makes up for about 47.7% and the hilly-mountainous relief occupies about 60% of the entire territory of the country, habitats that are preferred for cattle breeding, sheep, goats, and wild fauna.

Every year more people migrate to urban areas. This phenomenon has also included veterinarians, thus creating difficulties and shortages in the provision of veterinary services in rural areas.

Due to the lack of services and poor infrastructure in rural and remote areas, as well as difficulties in raising a family and finding the desired work/life balance, there has been a lack of desire to work in these areas. There is a preference for companion animal practice, especially amongst the younger generation of veterinarians up to 35 years old, as it is more comfortable and profitable. Large animal practice is seen as difficult and it has a low-profit margin. The economic difficulties experienced by farmers have also affected the payment of veterinary services in rural areas. As a result, it is difficult for veterinarians to get enough income, and also to purchase instruments and equipment to apply new technologies. Finally, the corporatisation of the profession of veterinarian has not yet been established as an important business model. This might solve problems as it provides more balanced schedules, well-equipped clinics, and a stable income.

Working conditions -extended hours, long-distance, high-cost travel, dealing with emergencies and on-call duties- are not attractive and can lead to stress and veterinarians leaving the profession.

The lack of veterinarians in rural and remote areas has put livestock farms in difficulty or out of service, mainly sheep and goat farms. It has had consequences not only for the protection of animal health and well-being but also for many other veterinary problems such as control of animal products for human consumption, control of zoonoses and monitoring of waste, which have an impact on public health.

In response to the pressing need for action, the Albanian government has taken measures to address these challenges. Salaries of veterinarians serving rural areas have been increased by \$100-250 per month. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the Agricultural University of Tirana, provides a monthly financial incentive of \$400 to students choosing to graduate from faculties such as veterinary medicine, aquaculture, and fisheries. These initiatives aim to encourage students' interest in these fields, preventing their decline in enrollment, despite their high market demand.

There is no support initiative for veterinarians in private veterinary practice in rural areas, the only support is the revision of veterinary legislation to provide support to veterinarians in the private sector in rural areas.

Due to many social and economic factors, Albania still does not have a simulation program for veterinarians in rural and remote areas. The Albanian parliament has made legal arrangements for the organization of veterinary service on a geographical basis by assigning veterinarians to all municipalities and communes of the country who will conduct surveillance and implement animal protection measures on all livestock farms. Incentives have also been proposed for all veterinarians and recent graduates to set up veterinary clinics and go to work in rural and remote areas of the country.

Albania still does not have a proper study report on the distribution of veterinary doctors and veterinary problems in rural and national areas, but the Veterinary Order of Albania is working on several concerns such as higher salaries, logistical and material support.

**Austria** 

There is already a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas in Austria. In 2019, the Institute of Advanced Studies of Austria (IAS) assessed the state of the veterinary market in Austria<sup>10</sup>. It concluded that despite there being a sufficient number of new graduates to cover the overall demand for veterinarians in Austria at present, shortages in rural areas are expected to increase in the next 10 years, paired with growth in livestock numbers.

No measures are being studied or implemented at present. In 2022, the Austrian Statutory Body directed a forecast report on the future of veterinary practitioners in Austria<sup>11</sup>.

The report showed that currently 63% of veterinarians working are in the small animal sector, 24% are in the farm animal sector, 7% work in the equine sector and 6% in other areas. Of those starting their careers, around 65% are employed and 35% are self-employed. From the age of 40, this ratio shifts to 14% employees and 86% self-employed. The exact allocation is also based on occupation and gender. The full-time equivalent (FTE) of employees averages at 0.77 FTE (men: 0.91 FTE, women: 0.75 FTE). Employees over 40 have an average lower FTE than younger employees. Full-time equivalent of self-employed people averages at 0.91 FTE (men: 1.20 FTE, women: 0.60 FTE). Self-employed between 40 and 65 years old have a 48% higher FTE than younger people. Accordingly, there is a short-term replacement needs of almost 1.5 FTE per retirement.



Only around 22% of veterinarians retire within the following year when they reach the eligible retirement age retire. Consequently, veterinarians work on average 3.5 years longer than the retirement age. However, every year around 50 people leave working life before reaching retirement age (1.7%). To conclude, the total demand of FTEs will remain almost constant over the next 15 years, with slight trend upwards based on a strong demand in the small animal sector shows while the livestock sector expects decreasing FTEs.

In the next 15 years, the proportion of women among veterinarians increases from 60% to 78% and the average age falls slightly from 46.8 to 44.7 years.

However, there will be an increasing demand in the small animal sector with a maximum increase of 18% in 5 years, while the demand for veterinary services in the horse sector is assumed to be constant in the next few years. However, due to a decline in livestock and number of farm animals, a subsequent decline in demand of

<sup>10</sup> Binder, David; Terzieva, Berta; Unger, Martin; Haag, Nora; Mathä, Patrick and Engleder, Judith (2019) *Veterinärmedizinische Versorgung in Österreich*. [Research Report]

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.tieraerzteverlag.at/vetjournal/studienpraesentation-zur-zukunft-des-tieraerztlichen-berufs> (full report available on request)

2.9% to 8.6% is expected over the next 15 years for livestock veterinarians. The falling trend leads to the next 5 years to a shortage of 30 to 50 FTEs. In the next 10 years, this shortage will increase to 70 to 105 FTE.

The reports simulates that with similar distribution across the areas of activity, a net increase in the number of incoming veterinarians would need to be covered by increasing the number of study places or increasing the number of young professionals with foreign qualifications. In order to counteract the shortage in the livestock sector, the entry rate in this sector would have to be increased by at least be increased by 5 percentage points. Yet, a net increase in the number of people starting their careers or a pure increase in the entry rate in the livestock sector alone is not enough to ensure adequate supply in all areas.

Accordingly, a combination of measures is required to meet the demand veterinary services in all areas in the future. The forecasted demand in areas other than veteriney practices remains to be determined.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

There is a shortage of veterinary professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina and especially in rural and remote areas. The main reported reasons for this shortage are poor infrastructures in rural areas, the small business potential of rural practices, and the low economic power of farmers to invest in veterinary services.

The main concern is the risk that this shortage poses to controlling the epizootic area of the country and more generally managing possible disease outbreaks, both of which can have devastating economic effects for farmers and the economy at large.

No measures are being taken at the moment, neither in the form of financial incentives or initiatives to encourage young professionals.

### Bulgaria

There is a shortage of veterinary professionals, especially in rural areas and for farm veterinary practice. Bulgaria has around 2200 practitioners of which around 900 are acting in farm animal practice and 65-75% are close to or have retired.

### Belgium

Over the last few years, Belgium has been experiencing a shortage of veterinarians. Job vacancies in all sectors are difficult to fill in. About 3,600 veterinarians are currently active in Flanders, of whom 800 will retire in the next few years. The influx of young graduates is limited to 240 veterinarians a year, with some of these leaving after graduation to neighbouring countries. In addition, the dropout rate is high: as many as 37 percent of new veterinarians give up after three years of work experience and move on to another sector. The shortage stretches across the country, and in all specialisations (from companion animals to horses, livestock and official sector). The reasons given for leaving are long working hours for low remuneration, work-life balance, increasing levels of bureaucracy and more demanding customers. In the region of Wallonia, a similar situation exist. Around 1/3 of young graduates leave within 3 years of graduation, work satisfaction is low, especially among younger veterinarians (<5/10), satisfaction with remuneration is equally low and veterinarians suffer from the increased administrative burden. It was found that especially veterinarians who earn <4000 € brutto and work more than 50 hours per week are at risk of leaving the profession. There also has been a reduction in the number of veterinarians specialising in mixed practice as reported by the Union Professionnelle Vétérinaire (UPV)<sup>12</sup>. The

<sup>12</sup> Union Professionnelle Vétérinaire. *Heureux ou malheureux dans votre pratique?*

report also found that a more attractive work-life balance and better economic conditions are the main reasons why veterinarians prefer companion practice over livestock practice.

Some activities taken are: surveys of the profession (Equete UPV: 'Vétérinaire, le plus beau métier du monde ? Utopie ou réalité?', Enquete UPV Youth), [Horizon 2030 project](#) to map future profession, [project 'No We Can't'](#) against additional bureaucracy and for more recognition of the veterinary profession. In March 2024, the Walloon ministry of Agriculture decided to fund a Veterinary Observatory to monitor the profession. The operative consortium is Union Professionnelle Vétérinaire, the French-speaking Order, the veterinary faculty of Liege, and collaborative unit of our Food Safety Administration (FASFC), and the local animal health labs (ARSIA)

The goal of the observatory is to firstly to protect agriculture, secondly to create an atlas of the Walloon veterinary profession (currently practicing, but also the last 5 years graduates to follow how students found their way), and thirdly to set up dedicated working groups to find short and mid-term solutions to avoid any risk of veterinary shortage.

### Croatia

In Croatia, there is a generalised shortage of veterinarians in farm animal practice, especially in small farms in rural areas. In some areas, especially those with small numbers of large animals (Dubrovnik-Neretva, parts of Split-Dalmatia, Šibenik-Knin county, and parts of the islands) it is not possible to establish a thriving veterinary business.

According to the numbers of the Croatian Veterinary Chamber, in 1992, 3500 veterinarians were members of the chamber. In 2000, the number had decreased to 3000 veterinarians of which 70% worked in mixed or farm animal practice. In 2020, the amount of veterinarians further decreased to 2200 veterinarians, of which 1600 worked as practitioners and of which 60% worked in companion animal practice. These numbers show a significant decrease of large animal practitioners. The reasons behind these were a decreasing number of farm animals, a general decrease of population in Croatia, dissatisfaction with remuneration and the unattractiveness of rural areas.

In rural areas, many veterinarians have a contract with the state, which subsidises disease control and animal food control activities. A significant percentage of a veterinarian's income derives from this contract with the state. However, the number of livestock is decreasing and thus it is feared that state procurement will also decline.

In the last twenty years, there has been a decline in the number of family farms while the number of big livestock businesses has grown. Big farms are allowed to perform veterinary duties, thus posing a threat to the veterinary profession. With lower demand for their services, veterinarians struggle to make an income.

Finally, the demand for veterinarians in farm animal practice cannot be met. Many young professionals move out of the country or choose to work in small animal practices. Also, while it is a legal requirement for local authorities to ensure the provision of veterinary services, there is no enforcement mechanism to ensure the application of this rule.

As a result of the shortage of veterinarians, animal owners have difficulties in finding veterinary services and control measures for the prevention of disease cannot be guaranteed.

### Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is beginning to experience a growing shortage of veterinarians in all areas, which is particularly pronounced in rural areas due to the decreasing number of young professionals moving to remote

areas. Emergency service in veterinary practice in general, worse in horses and cattle, is another area that is difficult to fulfil.

At present, veterinary faculties (2) in the Czech Republic produce about 200 new graduates per year, but some of them leave the country (foreign students, about 30%), some do not enter veterinary practice or leave it soon after graduation (up to 5 years, maternity leave and burn-out being the most common factors).

Some of the reasons for the shortage are changing professional expectations, with young professionals unwilling to work long shifts or unsocial hours, low pay and lack of job opportunities for partners in rural areas. In general, rural practices have an urgent need to recruit staff and are seeing a decline in the quality of their services and the availability of out-of-hours services. There is little 'entrepreneurial spirit' among older rural vets and little appetite to take on young successors (lack of mentoring for older vets in handing over practice, fear of employment difficulties, administrative burdens and over-protection of staff, little protection for employers, fear of successor taking over the practice).

A recent survey assessed the number of new vets in the country. It concluded that the less urbanised areas tend to have the lowest percentage of new vets. Furthermore, the problem is not only a lack of vets, but also a lack of specialisation in large animal medicine. Public administration also faces a shortage of veterinarians. Each year, around 120 new vets join the Chamber (national VSB) and around 100 have left. If the European ratio of 3:1 (three new vets for every retiring vet) applies, there is a shortage of about 200 vets every year, and there is now a marketed shortage of veterinary care.

The Veterinary Chamber of the Czech Republic has organised seminars for final year students on starting a career in veterinary medicine and current developments in both companion and farm animal practice.

#### Denmark

The country is experiencing a minor shortage of veterinarians in rural areas especially for livestock practices.

The bovine and pigs' groups of the Danish Veterinary Association are working on projects dealing with how to recruit and keep young veterinarians in large animal practices. Examples of activities are inviting students from veterinary school to spend a week in practice, covering student expenses for transport to and from the practice, and extra courses on work safety in large animal practices that are free to attend for students. This is in addition to the university's courses and curriculum.

In 2024, an additional veterinary school will open in Jutland (Foulum), starting with 30 students in 2024, 60 in 2025 and 100 students in 2026. Part of the political reasoning for the new school is that the students will be closer to the farm animals and that it could potentially attract a more diverse student body.

#### Estonia

Estonia is currently experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in all veterinary sectors (companion animals, large animals, official veterinarians). The estimation is that the market needs around 20% more veterinarians. The most problematic areas seem to be the rural areas and official veterinary services.

Rural areas due to the unattractive location and working conditions (irregular hours and workload). Furthermore, it is difficult to set up profitable practices in rural areas due to the low demand for veterinary services given the limited financial power of small farmers and because larger holdings contract veterinarians permanently and have restrictions to practice outside of the company. As a consequence, current rural areas are not covered by veterinary service and there are fears over the health and welfare of livestock and public health implications.

Concerning governmentally employed veterinarians working in food safety and animal welfare, many are near pension age and around 60% of the veterinarians are expected to retire in the next 10 years. It proves very

difficult to find veterinarians to replace them due to the lack of veterinarians on the market, and government salaries not being competitive with the private sector.

So far, no official studies have been done on the shortage, but the Estonian Veterinary Association has looked into the data on veterinarians with active licenses to assess their activity in the sector. However, as in Estonia the license is for life (not renewable every year), these numbers include also veterinarians working outside the profession, abroad, or being retired. An abnormally low number of veterinarians with active licenses in the age category of 40-49 years old is noted. The precise reasons are unknown, but it could be caused by fewer graduates at certain years, more immediately moving abroad, etc.

Mental health issues such as burnout is another serious matter. Veterinarians who left the profession (e.g. on maternity leave or to other fields of veterinary industry) find it difficult to come back within the profession as the market has changed significantly. Client expectations are very high with willingness to pay for veterinary treatment being low (they compare it with human healthcare which is paid by the governmental system).

The Estonian Veterinary Association has released several warnings about the dangers of the shortage of veterinary workforces, which is already a food safety issue/risk as it is often very difficult to recruit a veterinarian to farm or food hygiene. They reached out to the media and directly to politicians for additional financial support to increase veterinary teaching and for financial support for Estonian veterinary students. The drop-out of Estonian veterinary students is high, partly due to the costs of living. Luckily, the wish and the competition to study veterinary medicine is one of the highest in the local university teaching veterinary curriculum. Currently, the government has not made any decisions on actions and different ministries are discussing it among them.

#### Finland

At present, rural areas in Finland are experiencing a shortage of veterinarians. This situation also mildly applies to other regions and all veterinary fields.

The country has a system of official veterinarians organised at the municipal level that spreads across the entire country. Official veterinarians treat both companion and large animals and provide a wide range of services: preventive care, on-call service, disease control, herd health planning, animal welfare and meat inspection. They are organised in working groups, allowing for the share of different duties.

A 2021 survey by the Finnish Veterinary Association among young veterinary graduates found that 'More than half of young vets in Finland have at some point considered leaving the profession' and 'One in three newly graduated vets would not have studied veterinary medicine if they knew the profession as they do now'. The main reasons given to consider leaving the profession were: high workload/I am working all the time, unrealistic expectations clients, SM criticism, low income. The Finnish Veterinary Association established a mentoring program to improve students' transition to practicing veterinarians by providing mentoring and guidelines of new employee orientation.

The government has addressed veterinary shortages through a study. It made recommendations to increase the number of veterinary students and improve working conditions. Adopting these measures has begun but the work is difficult with only limited financial support.

#### France

Since 2020, there has not been significant changes in the situation : there is not a generalised shortage of veterinarians across all French rural and remote areas, but specific rural locations keep experiencing difficulties in recruiting new professionals. Around 40 departments are concerned by veterinary desertification and the number of veterinarians specializing in farm animals is still decreasing.

As already mentioned, the reasons for the shortage range from unattractive working conditions to changing life and professional aspirations. As a consequence, some farmers do not have access to veterinary services while



practitioners struggle to find successors to their businesses and need to work longer hours. This shortage also poses difficulties in terms of health monitoring and the permanence of care for farm animals.

Specific economic measures have been adopted by the government to help maintain veterinarians in rural areas and to facilitate the installation of young veterinarians: departments and regions can decide to sustain financially veterinarians as they are allowed to do for human doctors.

The government-funded tutored internship programme offered in all four veterinary faculties of France is still successful. The programme reports significant success, with 80% of the students taking the programme staying in rural practice.

At the same time, France has increased the number of veterinarians trained per year. A new private veterinary educational establishment has been opened in 2021, with 120 students per year. The French government has also decided to increase the number of places in the 4 public veterinary schools: in 2022 the total number of places is 640, will be 720 in 2025 and the final objective is 800 in 2030. At the same time, we observe an increasing number of French students who go abroad to study. In 2022, less than 50% of the new vets registered at the Statutory Body had studied in France.

The principal destinations for studying are Belgium, Spain, Romania and Portugal. Finally, between 2019 and 2022, the total number of veterinarians registered at the Statutory Body has increased by 10%.

Considering the current difficulties and the evolution of the agriculture sector (e.g decrease cattle farms), the French Ministry of Agriculture requested an expert mission to the High Council of Agriculture (CGAAER). The report should be submitted at the end of 2003. For this expertise, several investigations to identify the needs and the difficulties for recruitment in all veterinary sectors (medicine, veterinary officers, vet in industries,...) have been launched. The experts shall also study the opportunity to open a new veterinary school in France.

Map: coloured regions show regions coping with veterinary desertification.

### Germany

Germany experienced now for years a growing shortage of veterinary practitioners in rural areas and rural practices are struggling to recruit assistants. Thus, while the need for veterinary services in rural areas is covered in the present, it is feared that this will not be the case in the near future. However, there is not only a shortage of veterinary specialists in rural areas, but also in peri-urban and urban practices and clinics, including livestock, companion animal and equine practice. [Annual statistics](#) on the veterinarian profession in Germany based on data from the state/veterinary associations indicate that the number of veterinary clinics that have to offer 24-hour availability continued to fall in most federal states. The proportion of employed veterinarians among those working in practice: there has been an increase of almost 12% over the last ten years from 36% in 2013 to 48% in 2022. With around 40 full-time hours per week, employees can only partially cover the high working hours of a self-employed veterinarians and many practices owners don't find successors and need to close. Animal health and therefore animal protection in agriculture as well as in the small animal and horse sector are only possible if there are enough veterinarians available to treat sick or injured animals. However, this shortage affects all areas of veterinary work, including the public sector, teaching and research as well as the industry. The reasons are multifactorial. In addition, the rigid regulations of the regulations of the Working Hours Act make it difficult to distribute the available working hours sensibly. As a result, in many regions it is difficult to maintain the mandatory working hours prescribed by the emergency services for animals, which are prescribed by the medical professions laws of the federal states and the care of farm animals are severely jeopardised.

Therefore, immediate action is needed now to prevent isolated reports of untreated animals from developing into a wildfire in the next few months. Above all, the rigid working time law prohibits veterinarians from using their working hours flexibly and thus fulfilling their professional obligations.

The Federal Association of Practicing Veterinarians (BpT) together with the Federal Chamber of Veterinarians (BTK) and the state veterinary associations, called in 2023 on the federal government in a [joint statement](#) to finally make the Working Hours Act more flexible as an immediate measure in order to be able to continue to provide veterinary care to sick and injured animals at any time and across the board. It is incomprehensible that the federal government is not paying attention to the national goal of animal protection when it comes to this issue.

These veterinary organisations therefore call for the following changes to make the Working Hours Act more flexible:

- 1) Conversion from a daily maximum working time to a weekly maximum working time with a flexible distribution of working hours
- 2) A related possibility for a limited shortening of prescribed rest periods.
- 3) Defined flexible weekend and public holiday regulations

While the adjustment of the mandatory fee schedule was approved in 2022, politicians are still doing too little to combat the shortage of veterinarians in terms of the flexibilisation of the Working Hours Act, reduction of bureaucracy, reform of veterinary education (more subjects in economics and communication, in accordance with the [World Organisation for Animal Health Day 1 Competences recommendations](#)

Recent events during the 2024 Green Week highlighted the increased attention towards this topic, including a BpT panel discussion “ [Preventing gaps in veterinary care. Act now! But how?](#)’ and a BTK press release ‘[Dream job veterinarian?](#)’

Greece 

Greece is currently experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in several areas and sectors (including companion animal and livestock veterinary practices). It started some years ago with a shortage in rural and remote areas, especially the islands (Cyclades and Dodecanisos) and mountain areas like those in central Peloponnese. The shortage in rural/remote areas is linked to the abandonment of these areas because of poor animal health resulting in less profitability of livestock businesses.

Greece has two veterinary faculties and around 120-150 veterinarians graduating yearly. However, around 25 to 30% of them leave after graduation to find jobs in other EU countries or to start postgraduate studies. The Hellenic Veterinary Association is in regular contact with the two veterinary faculties in Greece, to deliver lectures and let the new graduates know what is veterinary profession in practice. They also support new graduates in finding rewarding careers.

The public sector employs around 300 veterinarians. Last year, they recruited around 60 veterinarians but this will be reduced to 50 in 2024. This is not enough veterinarians to deal with all official tasks, especially in the municipalities that are responsible for stray animal management. This is problematic with respect to animal health, welfare, and also public health. The Hellenic Veterinary Association has had multiple meetings with the federal and local governments to notify them of this and try to persuade them to employ more veterinarians to deal with official tasks.

Hungary 

There is a definite shortage of rural veterinarians in Hungary, but a shortage is also developing in small animal practices in both towns and cities.

In the last decades, the number of rural veterinarians has decreased. The majority of veterinarians work in mixed practices of small size (single or two-veterinarian practices). Young graduates prefer to work in companion animal practices.

Budapest University of Veterinary Science has introduced a set of special measures to encourage students and young veterinarians to start a career and build up their practice in rural areas or the state veterinary services. One of the measures is that in the last years, 57 extra student places became available (of them 17 in 2023) at the Budapest veterinary university. These extra places are funded by the "Marek József" foundation. These contracted students will have to work for 10 years in food safety/large animals/government field after graduation.

The Hungarian Veterinary Chamber (HVC) is regularly offering support for participation in foreign veterinary conferences and organizing online practice management courses. The HVC is also giving support to local (regional or county) organisations of the chamber to regularly organize high-quality CPD courses in the region.

Iceland 

Iceland faces a significant challenge in ensuring an adequate number of veterinarians, particularly in remote areas. This issue is primarily due to the difficulty of appointing Icelandic-speaking veterinarians to supervisory roles in public food and veterinary authorities. Working conditions in rural areas, where veterinarians often work in isolation with substantial workloads, have also contributed to the problem.

While concerns exist about shortages, Iceland has not conducted formal studies to quantify the issue. The Veterinary Association (DÍ) has engaged with the Ministry of Food on the matter, but there's been no substantial progress on potential legislative reviews.

DÍ believes that the shortage of veterinarians, particularly in rural areas, is more related to working conditions than an absolute shortage of professionals. Contributing factors include isolation, frequent on-call duties, limited project opportunities, and challenges in maintaining a work-life balance.

Recruiting young veterinarians for shift arrangements has become increasingly difficult due to stress and intense public debates. Limited funding often leads to single-veterinarian shifts, discouraging new entrants.

Additionally, a negative discourse toward regulatory bodies in Icelandic society has affected the profession's image, dissuading young veterinarians.

Ireland 

The Veterinary Council of Ireland ensures that all registered veterinary professionals meet high standards in education, skills, and conduct. As of March 2023, there are 3,352 registered Veterinary Practitioners in Ireland, with a 65% UCD and 35% abroad qualification split. Among these, 52% are male, 48% female. The majority work in clinical practice (70%), with 20% in government roles, 4% in education, 3% in industry, and the remainder in various categories.

In 2019, the Veterinary Council of Ireland recognised the shortage of veterinarians in rural and remote areas as a key challenge for the profession<sup>13</sup>. The overarching issue is Recruitment and Retention particularly in farm

<sup>13</sup> Veterinary Council of Ireland (2019), *Corporate Strategy 2019-2023*.

animal practice but also in rural areas. The reasons for the shortage are long working hours, poor work-life balance and low salaries. The Recent Graduate Working Group of Veterinary Ireland (RGWG) reports that the corporatisation of practices certainly may become an issue, but it is not the primary issue at the moment for younger veterinarians.

The RGWG also reports that the retention of staff in rural areas, especially in mixed veterinary practice (i.e. two or more species from food animal, equine and/or companion animal practice), is becoming increasingly more difficult due to long working hours, low salaries and poor work-life balance.

While rural and remote areas of Ireland have a shortage of veterinarians, the situation in Ireland is seen by some veterinarians in the Food Animal Interest Group of Veterinary Ireland as part of the greater overall rural divide and a drive for people to live in urban areas of Ireland. Cattle veterinary practices are not always rural based, as there are a number of food animal veterinary practices based around large urban centres like, Limerick, Cork and Galway. While it is seen that all food animal practices, even those more urban based, find it hard to attract veterinary staff, those practices based around the larger urban areas do find themselves at an advantage and can attract staff easier than perhaps those in the more westerly or southernly rural and remote areas of the country. Despite this, food animal veterinary practice still does have issues regardless of its location, due to increased workload and low remuneration, and the sustainability of large animal practice, succession and long term career prospects may be some of the reasons leading to shortages, further enhancing the urban-rural divide. Concerns have also been expressed by some Food Animal members that the basic food animal competencies needed for Food Animal practices are not being taught in veterinary schools, and this may have the effect of diverting recently qualified practitioners away from cattle and pig practice.

The main concerns for such shortages in rural and remote areas of Ireland are that disease may appear and spread more quickly, and that emergency services cannot be guaranteed.

A study by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine of Ireland (DAFM) showed that 95% of bovine and sheep herds are in remote locations, within 20km of their nearest practice (unpublished data).

On the other hand, a Competition Authority of Ireland report on the veterinary profession in 2008<sup>14</sup>: highlighted an increase in the number of veterinarians in companion animal practice while the numbers of livestock had decreased.

Suggested solutions::

- Opportunities for Graduates - more state work is available now with better Ts&Cs.
- Profession is an Underutilised Resource so should be more formally involved in a national effort to improve animal health and welfare and to collaborate in the big challenges such as e.g. Climate, Biodiversity, Water Quality and Soil Health.
- Out-of-hours cover may need to be subsidised as in Human Health.
- Professional salaries and good working conditions are required to attract and keep good quality graduates.
- Profession also must be sold as an attractive life choice.

## Italy

In Italy, there are currently around 26,600 active veterinarians. In the last few years, they have seen a decreasing trend in new registrations (940 in 2019, 689 in 2022) with an increasing trend of removal requests from the register (488 in 2019, 546 in 2022). Veterinary faculties have increased the number of student places in the first year, from 759 in 2019 to 1080 in 2022. It is seen that most veterinary students want to go into the companion animal sector, with few students interested in livestock farming. This is a worry as already currently there is high demand for veterinarians working with large animals, but few new veterinarians available for this.

It has been noted that in the last years, it has become more difficult to fill veterinary vacancies in all sectors, from livestock veterinarians to companion animal veterinarians. The current market trend for veterinary

<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.ccpic.ie/business/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/02/2008-06-19-Vets-Final-Report.pdf>

expenses in companion animals after the pandemic is toward an increase. On the other side, there is also a constant increase in costs (energy, medicines, etc) and regulatory complexity (new medicines regulations, waste management, etc.). These data explain, in part, the increasing shortage of veterinarians also in companion animal clinics, where many hospitals or clinics have stopped the 24-hour opening service.

Budgets for official veterinarians are also under pressure. Some regional competent authorities have started to hire alternative professionals instead of veterinarians, e.g. in slaughterhouses, for food chain controls, or in laboratories. These people have lower education, lower salaries and nevertheless, are allowed to do veterinary acts.

While the career track of an official veterinarian employed by the State or Regional health system is still appealing in Italy (decent remuneration, structured workload), there are, however, increasingly fewer tenders due to a lack of finances. This is especially worrying as many official veterinarians are close to retirement age and so will retire soon.

We also see that the veterinary market itself is going through some challenges from single veterinary practices to larger practices. Some corporate companies also entered the market. While many veterinary practices would like to hire additional workforce, they do not always manage because the conditions (compensation, workload etc.) they can offer are not always appealing.

FNOVI, the National Federation of Italian Veterinary Orders, has been following these worrying developments closely for many years and has initiated multiple discussions with Competent Authorities and other stakeholders to try to find solutions and to point to the importance of keeping a strong veterinary network to protect animal health, public health, and the One Health concept.

**Latvia** 

Most veterinarians in Latvia work in the companion animal sector. Currently, private veterinarians working in the livestock sector struggle to have a full-time working schedule. They usually work on an on-call basis and they are rarely asked to perform preventive activities, such as herd health management. Partly, this is because there are a lot of veterinary consultants, available for free, from veterinary medicines wholesalers. Besides, small farmers cannot afford to pay for veterinary services and bigger livestock businesses prefer to have an employed veterinarian to have better control of the animals. Farmers' associations have alarmed the government about the lack of local veterinarians in some rural areas with a lower density of people and animals and worse economic situation. The Latvian Veterinary Association will survey the situation. At present, the government does not offer incentives.

**Lithuania** 

Lithuania has seen a decline in the number of veterinarians choosing to work in the livestock sector in rural and remote areas for several years. One of the reasons is the outflow of population to urban areas, but also the lowering demand for veterinary services in rural areas, due to a decline in the number of livestock over the recent years- either because the prices for meat have fallen or due to disease outbreak such as African Swine Fever. Veterinary services are increasingly being performed by non-trained personnel, mainly by farmers, and medicines are supplied directly to businesses. Finally, there has been a decline in public procurement destined to state veterinarians which further compromises the profitability of rural veterinary practice.

The government plans to strengthen the law so that veterinarian medicines must be prescribed by a veterinarian and to increase the number of in-farm controls to monitor the correct use of medicines.

**Luxembourg** 

Luxembourg is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in large animal practices. It is getting more and more difficult to recruit veterinarians for large animal practice and the demand for veterinary services is not sure to be guaranteed in the near future.

Malta



Malta is experiencing serious challenges with a shortage of veterinarians in large animal practices. Around 100 veterinarians are active in Malta, of which more than 60% work with companion animals, 20% for veterinary services. Only around 4 veterinarians are active with farm animals. The main species farmed are cattle (~15 000), pigs (~30 000), sheep and goats (~14 000), rabbits (~2.4 mj production yearly), and aquaculture (~140 tons/yearly). Malta has no veterinary faculty, most veterinarians study in Italy or English-speaking universities. Food animal veterinary practices have difficulties in setting up profitable practices and farmers have difficulties in getting veterinary care.

Netherlands



The Netherlands is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas, both for private and public professionals.

The reported reasons are a small number of places at universities and retention. The consequences are increased stress suffered by professionals in rural practice and a decrease in the quality of the service given.

In 2022, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture issued a [report](#) on the veterinary labour market. The conclusion was that with unchanged policy there was a serious probability that the shortage of veterinarians would become problematic. However, these predictions were dependent on several assumptions on economic development and the uncertain future of livestock farming in the Netherlands. Recommendations were to develop better post graduate guidance for young veterinary professionals to prevent dropout, to increase the number of veterinary students, to investigate possibilities to expand the competencies of veterinary nurses and to improve the labour conditions of veterinarians.

The Royal Dutch Veterinary Association is currently discussing this issue with other relevant authorities and stakeholders.

Interesting studies/reports: <https://bvajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/vetr.2178>

Norway



Rural areas in Norway are experiencing a shortage of veterinarians, even though municipalities are required to provide sufficient veterinary services by law. Financial incentives have increased in recent years but this has not been sufficient to address the problem.

Not being able to provide on-call services in every case or delays in the provision of services are some of the consequences being experienced.

When the new government was elected in 2021, they announced their political mission for the upcoming 4 year period, part of which was for the Veterinary services:

“Enforce Veterinary services throughout the country to secure qualified medical treatment for all animals”

This was a direct result of good political work from the Norwegian Veterinary Association. The follow-up from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food was to appoint a working group in August 2022. This working group delivered its report in March 2023. The report reviews the status and challenges regarding access to veterinary services and lists several possible measures to solve the problems.

An English summary of the report can be downloaded from the Government's website: [Access to veterinary services in Norway - regjeringen.no](https://www.regjeringen.no)

The Norwegian Veterinary Association has in addition financed a paper from the research community, AgriAnalyse, "Where did all the clinicians go? – On the lack of Veterinarians for clinical practice and out-of-hour duty"

The paper which contains an English summary can be downloaded here: [Microsoft Word - Hvor ble det av dyrlegene \(agrianalyse.no\)](https://www.agrianalyse.no)

### Poland

There is a shortage of veterinary professionals in the rural areas of Poland. The main reasons for this shortage are the long working hours, hard work, low salaries and low economic power of farmers to invest in veterinary services. Rural practices are struggling to recruit successors as young veterinarians prefer to settle in small animal practice in urban areas.

No measures are being taken at the moment, neither in the form of financial incentives or initiatives to encourage young professionals.

### Portugal

In Portugal, the demand for veterinarians across various sectors, including pet and farm animal clinics, municipal roles, official positions, and health inspection, poses significant challenges. Despite the presence of eight higher education institutions offering veterinary medicine programs, which annually contribute a considerable number of new professionals to the workforce, the retention rate remains alarmingly low.

This retention issue stems primarily from precarious labour. The absence of collective bargaining agreements in the private sphere, coupled with the lack of distinction between the roles of senior technicians leaves to veterinarians leaving the profession. In the public sector, the absence of a clear career trajectory in public administration exacerbates the problem.

Moreover, veterinarians in Portugal face substantial physical and mental stress due to their profession's nature. The financial strain on Portuguese families limits their ability to afford veterinary care, compounded by the burden of a disproportionately high 23% VAT on veterinary services. This fiscal discrimination against veterinary medicine is unique within the country's healthcare landscape.

The financial constraints placed upon both veterinary practices and pet owners create significant tension, often hindering the recommendation and implementation of necessary, albeit complex, procedures and treatments. Consequently, many veterinarians are driven to emigrate or even abandon the profession entirely, with some experiencing extreme psychological distress, with in more extreme cases suicide.

### Romania

At present, Romania does not have a shortage of veterinarians in rural and remote areas because, due to the change of the legislation, the entire national territory was covered. Romania has over 2600 veterinary practices in rural areas. Most of them provide their services to non-professional farms and since 1999 they also have a contract with the state, which subsidises the following activities: issuing of slaughter and transport certificates, identification and registration, disease control activities, and vaccination.

In Romania, comprehensive studies were conducted to map veterinary workforce shortages, shedding light on the existing challenges in the field. These studies served as a foundation for subsequent policies and initiatives aimed at addressing the shortage of veterinarians.

Starting in August 2020, a landmark policy, Law no. 236/2019, was introduced by the Romanian government to combat the shortage of veterinary professionals. Under this law, the government allocates 2000 euros per month to each practicing veterinarian who has a contract with the state. This substantial financial incentive not only provides additional income to veterinarians but also serves to facilitate the covering of their current practice expenses.

In conjunction with this incentive, Romania also undertook a comprehensive territorial approach. The entire national territory was divided into sanitary-veterinary constituencies, each representing at least one territorial administrative unit with a minimum of 300 large livestock units, all within a radius of at least 30 kilometers. For each sanitary veterinary constituency, a contract is established between the state and a veterinary practice, organized in accordance with the law. These contracts ensure that the necessary sanitary-veterinary actions are carried out efficiently, bringing essential veterinary services closer to where they are needed the most.

The implementation of Law no. 236/2019 marked a significant turning point in the country's efforts to address the shortage of veterinarians. As a direct result of these measures, there was a noticeable increase in the number of young professionals who chose to relocate to rural and remote areas, where their services were most needed. This migration of young veterinarians has been a positive response to the incentives and opportunities provided by the government, contributing to better veterinary coverage in underserved regions.

Furthermore, while there are young graduates who opt to pursue veterinary careers abroad, with an average of 100 veterinarians emigrating annually, this trend has not raised alarm in Romania. This is primarily due to the country's ability to continually produce a sufficient number of new graduates. Romania's domestic supply of new veterinarians ensures that there is a consistent and stable workforce available to meet the overall demand for veterinary services within the country.

In summary, Romania's approach to addressing veterinary workforce shortages encompasses both financial incentives and territorial organization, resulting in a more balanced distribution of veterinary professionals and ensuring the country's ongoing capacity to meet the demand for veterinary services.

**Slovakia** 

Slovakia is starting to experience veterinary workforce shortages in rural areas and also in veterinary services. Slovakian farming sector has experienced a massive decline in stocks of farmed animals (pigs 50%, dairy cows up to 70%) in the past 2 decades so the issue was rather about requalification from the farm animals' sector to the companion animals' sector.

Currently, most practitioners in rural areas are aged 60 and more and there is very little interest from the new graduates to work in the farm animal sector. This is supported by the demographic shift where the current share of female vets reaches 90%. This causes a rather opposite problem with the increased pressure on the companion animals' sector, mainly in larger towns and the capital city of Bratislava where the offer of veterinary services exceeds the demand for them.

**Spain** 

In Spain, there's an oversupply of veterinary graduates, but they are unevenly distributed across different areas. Rural clinical practice faces a shortage of professionals due to various factors, including changes in the structure of the agricultural sector (decrease in the number of farms and increase in intensive production, that has led to a reduction in the demand for veterinary services in rural areas); increased



demand for specialized veterinary services in companion animals in urban contexts (more employment opportunities); development of specialty areas such as internal medicine, surgery, dermatology, veterinary oncology, etc, which are often found in urban settings, where veterinary clinics and hospitals with specialized equipment and resources can be found); demographic changes and veterinarians' preferences (quality of life, professional development opportunities, leisure and cultural options). Demographic and preference shift among veterinarians also contribute. From the point of view of veterinarians working in the large animal sector, there is a lack of knowledge or a distorted image of the figure of the farm veterinarian among young people and there should be greater organization among colleagues to cover on-call duties or absences.

Apart from the general strategies to address rural depopulation and subsidies for farmers, not many incentives or policies are being implemented. The General Council of Veterinarians is currently developing a course on the farm veterinarian and plans to improve training for veterinarians in this area.

According to the media specialized in the veterinary field, there is a growing problem when it comes to incorporating veterinarians in the clinics. This is in contrast with the number of veterinarians graduating each year who would like to work in small animal clinics. It is believed that this could be due to issues related to working conditions. Young professionals have different priorities when choosing jobs.

Moreover, in recent years, there seems to be an increase in the emigration of recent university graduates to other countries, without actually practicing in Spain. In many cases, these are students from other countries who decide to study in Spain and later return to their countries of origin.

No specific studies are mapping veterinary workforce shortages nor estimates of its extent, however, there are some sectors in which the General Council considers that an increase in the recruitment of new veterinarians would be desirable. This is the case, for example, of veterinarians working for the administration in the municipalities or the environmental sector. With respect to public employment positions related to the environment, in some autonomous communities, public administrations are restricting these positions to other professional qualifications (veterinarians are being replaced by agronomists, agricultural engineers, etc). Regional Veterinary Councils are working to reverse this situation.

#### Sweden

Sweden is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in all veterinary fields ( pets, horses and farm animals) and geographically, in rural and remote areas. Increased work burden for current veterinarians in rural practice and difficulties in covering all the farms within an area are reported. There has been a governmental investigation that highlighted the shortage of veterinarians. As a result, the number of veterinary students each year has increased from 115 to 145. It is necessary to increase the number of veterinarians willing to continue working in clinical practice and also to improve working conditions.

In Sweden, the District Veterinarian Organisation (DVO)<sup>15</sup> is a nationwide veterinary organisation managed by the government. The government provides all necessary equipment including the clinic (the building) office and car. The DVO offers 24/7 emergency service and it prioritises farm animals and the control of certain

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<sup>15</sup>More information about the DVO can be found here: <https://www.sva.se/media/vjgp1dqf/district-veterinarian-organisation-in-sweden.pdf?epieditmode=False>

diseases. The private veterinarians work mainly during the day, but in a few areas, there are successful cooperations between the governmental DVO and the private practitioners where the 24/7 emergency service is solved.

While the DVO's coverage extends to the whole country, including rural and remote areas, it is not exempt from the fact that is difficult to cover the need in remote areas. The DVO is in the process of employing more veterinarians. They are also working to increase the effectiveness and have started a career ladder to make the veterinary profession more attractive.

### Switzerland

In recent years, Switzerland experienced a growing workforce shortage. Veterinarians are often stretched to their limits to ensure that companion animals and farm animals can be treated appropriately. Soon, the veterinary sector in Switzerland will be faced with a significant shortage of young talent and therefore a shortage of skilled workers, especially in large animal medicine. At the initiative of the Society of Swiss Veterinarians (GST), an assessment by the Federal Council on the impending gap in basic veterinary care as well as on various measures to counteract the shortage of young talent and skilled workers in veterinary medicine was filed, containing all proposed GST measures<sup>16</sup>. The measures include, among others, a substantial increase in the number of admitted veterinary students, expansion of the veterinary faculty (possibly third location) and intensification of cooperation with other educational institutions and review of the admission requirements for studying veterinary medicine for their professional relevance, the promotion of internships and development of incentive systems for livestock medicine in peripheral regions and the revision of the employment conditions for veterinarians, including a substantial reduction in administrative requirements. The Federal Council's answer agreed that basic veterinary care is of great importance in Switzerland. According to a study on the demand and supply of Swiss livestock medicine by the University of Bern published in 2019<sup>17</sup>, the service supply is currently largely good to very good. However, as in other areas, generating enough young talent for livestock practice in the long term is a complex issue that not only affects the number of training positions, but also the attractiveness of the working conditions. As the Vetsuisse Faculty VSF of the autonomous universities of Bern and Zurich, or their sponsoring cantons, is responsible for the basic training of all veterinary medicine students, the federal government has no authority to order an increase in the number of students in veterinary medicine or the expansion to a third location. However, the topic could be picked up with the cantonal authorities and bring it up for discussion within the framework of the Swiss University Conference (SHK).

Since the number of registrations significantly exceeds the study space capacity, the VSF restricts access via a numerus clausus and relies on the aptitude test when selecting students. In 2017, based on the report of the Swiss Science Council, the SHK confirmed the cognitively oriented EMS as a suitable instrument for selecting students from all medical disciplines. The advantages and disadvantages of alternative selection methods, such as the introduction of internships, were discussed in depth. All methods were rejected due to the high workload for the clinical staff and the limited number of clinical places. Yet, and due to high demand, it has already significantly increased the study place capacity in recent years (Bachelor's degree: 2016: 150, 2023: 172). It was felt that a further increase without loss of quality in training would result in very large investments

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.gstsvs.ch/de/news-archiv/news?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=show&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=840&cHash=4e8b673e80e3af98b18f3d69b4c6380f](https://www.gstsvs.ch/de/news-archiv/news?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=show&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=840&cHash=4e8b673e80e3af98b18f3d69b4c6380f)

<sup>17</sup> [https://sat.gstsvs.ch/fileadmin/datapool\\_upload/IgJournal/Artikel/pdf/SAT\\_01\\_2019\\_Thomann.pdf](https://sat.gstsvs.ch/fileadmin/datapool_upload/IgJournal/Artikel/pdf/SAT_01_2019_Thomann.pdf)

in infrastructure and a significant increase in personnel. The clinical part of the training requires a clinical structure that cannot easily be set up in other educational organizations. Even with a differentiated approach to studying veterinary medicine (e.g. Passerelle), the candidates would have to catch up on the clinical part and thus the bottleneck of the training.

The Swiss vet schools have recognized the need to promote professional knowledge during studies and has revised the curriculum accordingly. In the funding period 2021-2024, the vet schools will receive CHF 1.2 million in project-related contributions from the federal government to set up a structure for external training modules for students in teaching practices. With the support of the federal government, the curriculum in veterinary training will be realigned and extended by one semester, which will serve as advanced practical training. The federal government also has no authority to act regarding working conditions. However, the GST has recognized the problem and drawn up guidelines. For example, approaches are being discussed that are aimed at relieving the strained personnel situation, particularly in smaller practices. In addition, the public veterinary system strives to keep the administrative workload for veterinarians as low as possible and to compensate them. The digital transformation will help reduce the administrative burden. The GST and some of its specialist and regional sections have also taken up the issue of the migration of veterinarians from clinical practice and discussed possible solutions. Based on regular surveys and studies, the GST has developed recommendations, carries out education and communication measures and is committed to specific solutions. In summary, the Federal Council acknowledged that basic veterinary care is of great importance in Switzerland but did not want to take any immediate measures. For GST, this answer is unsatisfactory. The number of companion animals in Switzerland has increased in recent years and both companion animals and livestock require good, comprehensive medical care so that animal welfare is always guaranteed. This requires immediate solutions, and the GST continues to promote its suggested measures to support specifically recent graduates and their retention within the profession with dedicated projects<sup>18</sup>.

UK



The most recent survey of the Professions carried out by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons found that only 3.2% of veterinary professionals work in farm practice in the UK<sup>19</sup>. In 2018 data from the veterinary Major Employers Group suggested that there was an 11.5% shortage of veterinary surgeons, a shortage which is believed to have grown subsequently. The shortage is understood to be particularly acute in certain sectors, particularly veterinary public health.

**England** is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas, especially in the South-West. Some shortages also exist in other areas (see UK Parliament enquiry<sup>20</sup>). With older professionals retiring from practice and young veterinarians not wanting to take a position in rural locations, there is a concern that the demand for veterinary services in these areas will be difficult to meet in the future. The increased corporatisation of the profession, unfavourable work conditions, difficulties finding a good work/life balance and a decrease in the number of profitable farms are the main reasons for young professionals favouring urban areas, as found by The British Cattle Veterinary Association<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://happyvetproject.org/>

<sup>19</sup> Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. *The 2019 survey of the veterinary profession. A report for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons* (2019, p11)

<sup>20</sup> UK Parliament Enquiry in veterinary workforce shortages – March 2024: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8164/vet-shortages/publications/>

<sup>21</sup> British Cattle Veterinary Association (2019), *Survey of the Profession*.

The consequences range from the deterioration of the relationship between veterinarians and farmers to increased pressure suffered by rural veterinarians as well as fears for the welfare of production animals.

The corporative VetPartners is running a formative course, the Farm Graduate Development Programme, in which experienced clinicians deliver specialised training to those who wish to pursue a career in farm animal practice. FAVS is also a group for students from the UK and Ireland who have an interest in a career in farm animal veterinary work. They provide extra teaching, trips and information for students who want to go in farm practice.

The UK also launched the [Animal Health and Welfare Pathway \(the Pathway\)](#) in 2023. The Pathway supports continual improvement in farm animal health and welfare. The Pathway is a partnership – the government is working together on each step with farmers, vets, the wider industry, and the supply chain. The [Pathway](#) is a critical part of the farming reforms set out in the Agricultural Transition Plan, delivering benefits for animal health and welfare, farm productivity, food security, public health, UK trade and the environment.

The rural areas of **Scotland** are experiencing an acute shortage of veterinarians prepared to work in mixed practice. There is also a general lack of veterinary professionals across the whole country, mainly because they prefer urban life and small animal practice. Increased pressure experienced by veterinarians currently in rural practice, retention problems and difficulties identifying and managing disease in time are the most worrying consequences.

The Highland and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme is funded by the Scottish Government. Its aim is to ensure the provision of an adequate veterinary service to prevent and eradicate animal diseases for all animals kept for agricultural purposes and belonging to crofters and others of like economic status, where no other provisions are available on the market.

It is necessary to support large animal veterinary practices, in some remote areas of the Scottish highlands and islands, because without them, crofters and their animals would be completely without practical veterinary cover. It is important to ensure these practices continue to provide cover for remote areas as they play a vital role in prevention and identification of animal disease.

In practical terms, this means that crofters and other eligible persons can arrange a visit by a participating veterinary surgeon for a modest maximum charge. This charge is supplemented by a grant to the veterinary practice which will cover the costs of a visit when vets are called out to take preventative and eradication measures for animal diseases.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons is currently working with the Institute of Employment Studies to identify the scale of the workforce shortage, including in particular geographic areas and sectors. The evidence provided by the workforce model will help to inform calls for policies to address identified shortages, including increased funding for veterinary education and student debt relief schemes.<sup>22</sup>

PER SECTOR

European Veterinary Specialists



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<sup>22</sup> [https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/our-consultations/survey-of-the-veterinary-and-veterinary-nurse-professions-2024/?utm\\_source=informz&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=rcvs](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/our-consultations/survey-of-the-veterinary-and-veterinary-nurse-professions-2024/?utm_source=informz&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=rcvs)

The European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) plays a vital role in promoting specialized expertise, advancing veterinary science, improving treatment outcomes, fostering collaboration, and recognizing excellence within the veterinary profession, all of which contribute to the overall well-being of animals and society. The EBVS grants European Veterinary Specialist status to veterinarians who have successfully completed rigorous postgraduate training, education, and examinations through one of the 27 recognized veterinary specialist colleges. So far, the number of active EBVS® European Veterinary Specialists is approximately 5000 in 2024. Unfortunately, the number of EBVS® European Veterinary Specialists is not equally distributed among disciplines and countries. There is a specific shortage of veterinary specialist throughout Eastern European and Baltic countries and in the food producing animal sector.

**Case Study: Shortage of veterinarians in education**

Furthermore, EBVS is acutely aware of the shortage of veterinary specialist throughout Eastern European and Baltic countries. This is particularly due to the shortage of veterinary specialists in academic settings throughout these countries, and continues to jeopardize animal health and welfare in both clinical veterinary services and diagnostic and supporting services.

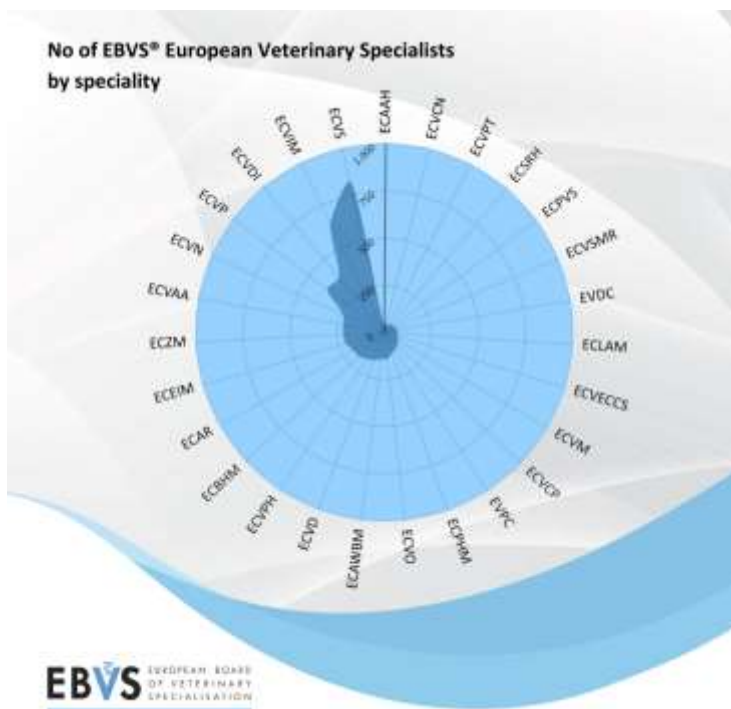


Fig 1: Distribution of nr of EBVS® European Veterinary Specialists per College. Colleges with the most members are European College of Veterinary Surgery, the European College of Veterinary Internal Medicines and the European College of Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging; all Colleges very focused on Companion Animal Medicine.

Fig 2: Distribution of nr of EBVS® European Veterinary Specialists per Country. Countries having the most Veterinary Specialists per population and in relation to the veterinary profession are the Northern and Central European countries. The Baltic and East-European countries have few veterinary specialists.

