



EASVO Workforce Investigation Report

**“State Veterinary Medicine is the last line of
defence for animal health, animal welfare and
public health”**

Version 2 of the Document –
PROPOSED FOR ADOPTION AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE 13th June 2024
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1. Purpose of the survey

EASVO's vision is "Ensuring the well-being of humans and animals" in support of the FVE's mission to enhance animal health, animal welfare, public health, and the protection of the environment through the work of the veterinary profession.

We live in a rapidly changing world where people and animals live closely together and are more interconnected than ever. They can travel more rapidly between countries and continents, than the incubation period of the pathogens they may carry. We face challenges and inequalities on a global scale, leading to crises developing at an overwhelming pace, including new diseases, wars, as well as droughts, and flooding.

State Veterinary Officers, united in EASVO, are at the centre of this world and protect the health, welfare, and well-being of humans, animals, and the environment alike through a preventative approach. This is achieved by ensuring the safety of the whole production chain of food and feed, preventing or containing animal diseases and zoonosis, verifying the protection of animals from unnecessary suffering, and supporting sustainable agriculture, all in line with the principles of **"One Health", "One Welfare", and "One World"**.

EASVO was founded in 1980 and represents Veterinary Inspectors and Official Veterinarians, most of whom are employed by Competent Authorities within State Veterinary Services in European Countries. Our members specialise in one or more disciplines to deliver this role (e.g., epidemiology, animal welfare and ethics, transboundary diseases, food and feed safety through the delivery of Official Controls). However, attracting and retaining young colleagues is a continuing challenge, exacerbated by the workforce shortages in other sections of the profession. This means that paying attention to the well-being of our profession, both physical and mental, is vitally important in delivering our mission. To address these challenges, EASVO ran a survey to gather insight into the challenges and opportunities of the work as an official veterinary officer for future generations.

2. Survey methodology

The survey protocol was developed by the EASVO Board and membership in 2022 and was launched at the beginning of April 2023 until the end of May 2023. The survey took place exclusively online. To engage with the participants, emails were sent to the EASVO members and contact points with the request for distribution to their individual members, a method also known as „snowball sampling“. During the data collection period, three fortnightly reminders were sent to EASVO members.

The questionnaire was offered in English and Spanish. Some participants did not answer all questions, which led to different subtotals for each analysed question. The questions covered demography, challenges and opportunities of state veterinary medicine, learning, traineeship and working patterns, and the future of the profession (annex 1). All data were collected, stored, and interpreted aiming to serve the scope of this investigation. Data was analysed and plotted using MS Excel.

3. What did the respondents say?

A total of 426 responses were received from the participants in this study. All participants came from different backgrounds and experience in the veterinary sector.

Demographics

According to the data based on demographics, we observed that the highest proportion of respondents were aged between 36-65 years old with a higher proportion of females taking part in this survey (n=206, 59,4%). On the other hand, according to the data regarding the years of experience, there was a higher proportion (n= 69, 75%) of veterinarians with 0-5 years of experience who were females, while the proportion of veterinarians with 26> years of experience was led by males (n= 51, 61.4%) (Fig.1.).

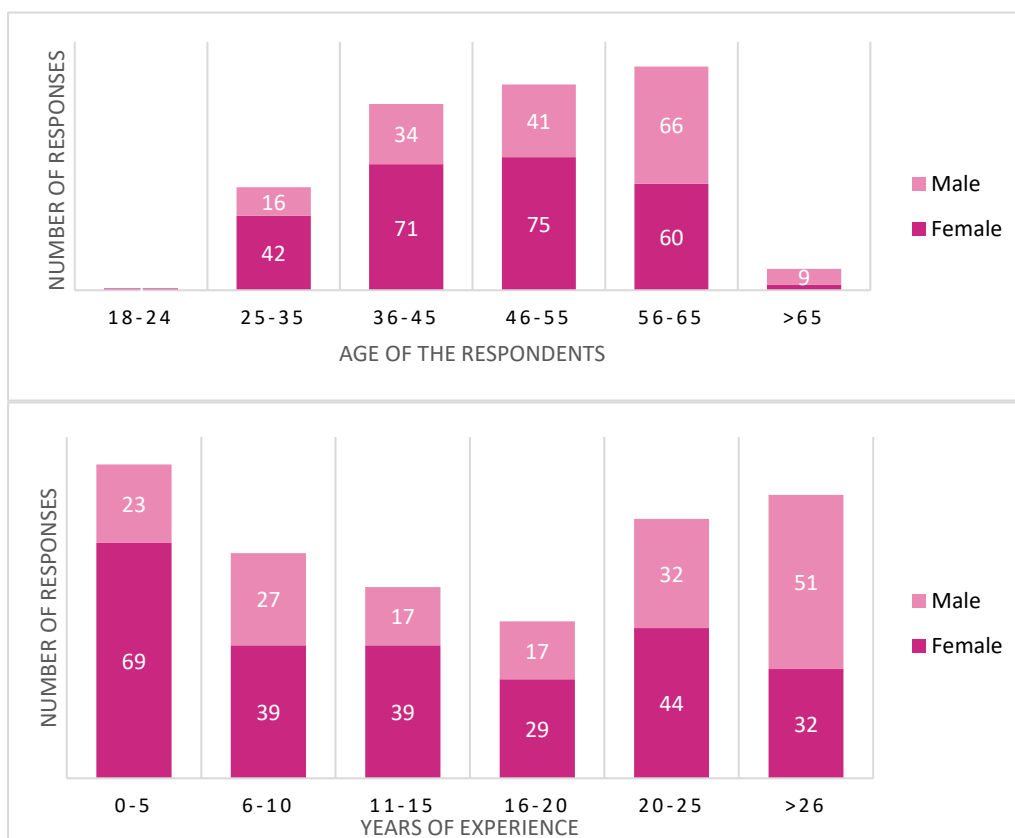


Figure 1. Age distribution and years of experience

Most of the respondents worked full-time (n=378, 89%), and 11% (n=89) part-time. While the proportion of part-time work remained stable at 14-12% for those with 0-20 years' experience, the proportion decreased to 7% and 5% in the groups with 20-25 years and >26 years, respectively.

A considerable number of State veterinary officers surveyed suggested that their main activity was at the regional level (n= 60, 36.4%), while fewer worked at a National (Ministry) and Local level (n= 49, 29.7% and n= 48, 29.1%, respectively). Only a small proportion of official veterinarians surveyed indicated their work at the Municipal level (n= 8, 4,8%) A very high proportion of Official veterinarians responded that their main area of work was at the Local level (n= 75, 43.4%), followed by Regional and National level behind (n=46, 26.6% and n=

33, 19.1%, respectively). The number of official veterinarians working at a local level was higher compared to State veterinary officers, according to the data provided by the survey (n= 18, 10.4%) (Fig.2.).

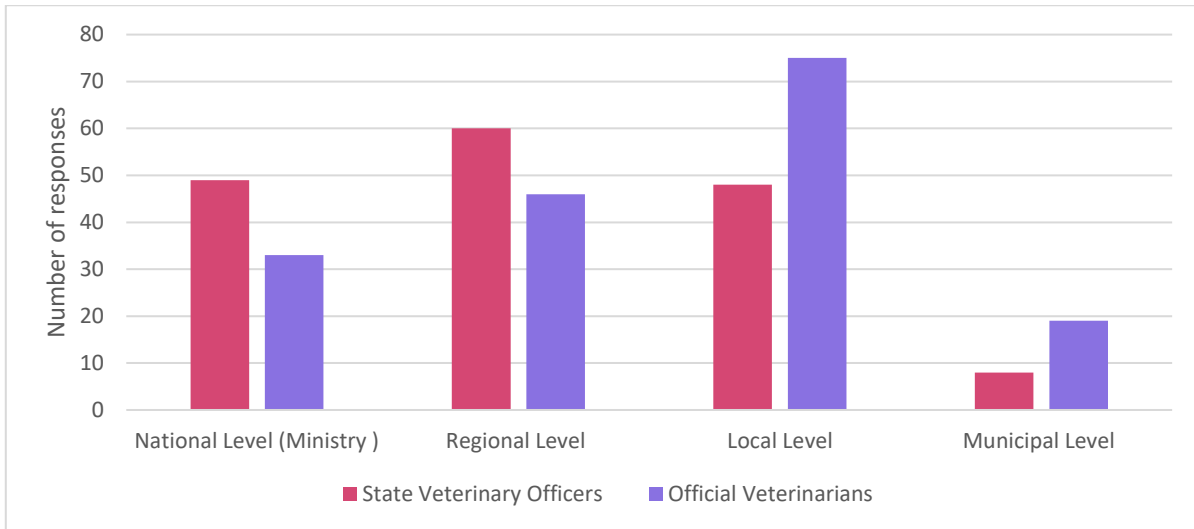


Figure 2. Respondents level of activity

Fields of work

According to the data gathered, veterinarians tend to work in several areas of work at the same time but overall, over 90% tend to be active in 1-3 areas at the same time (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Number of areas of work

Area of work	1	2	3	4	5
Number of responses	n= 191 43.2%	n= 110 24.9%	n= 98 22.2%	n= 42 9.5%	n= 1 0.2%

The main sector of their activity is food safety, being closely followed by the animal welfare and animal health areas (n= 238, 60.4%; n=238, 53.8%; n= 215, 48.6%, respectively). As presented in Figure 3 below, it shows the number of participants in the areas of: border inspection, animal production, exports, policy, education, and animal by-products.

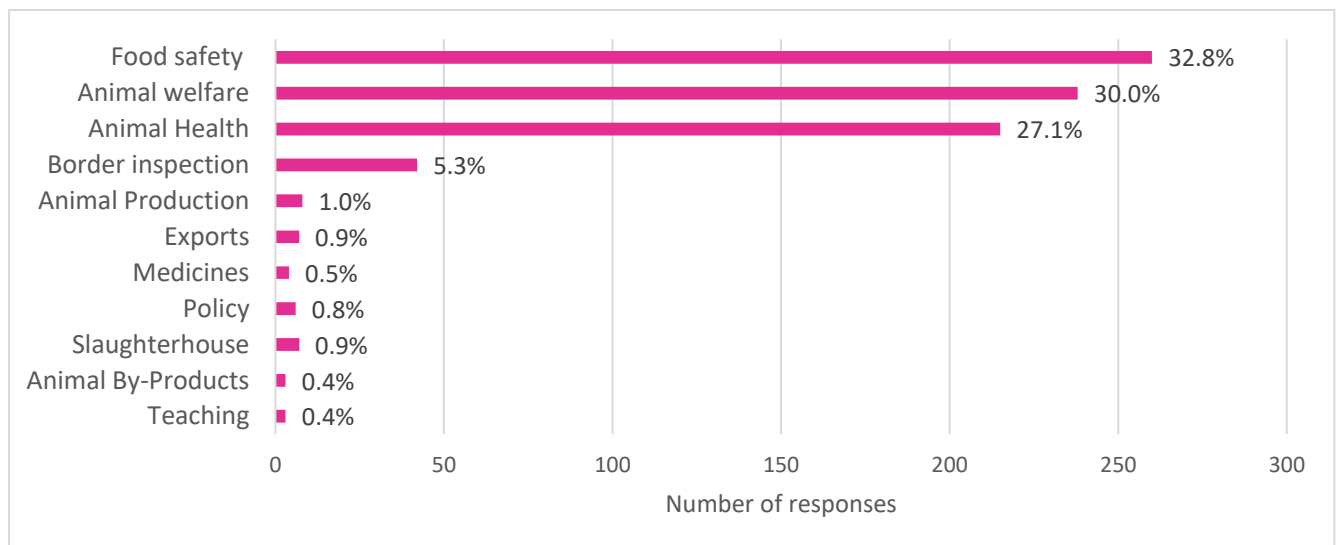


Fig.3. Veterinarians' areas of work (number of responses and percentage)

Learning approaches on state veterinary medicine

A total of 47.2% (n= 164) of the respondents participating in this survey indicated that they learned about the work and tasks of a state veterinary officer during their university/college studies. Followed by testimonials from their colleagues already working in the field (n= 66, 19%) and post-graduation training (n= 35, 10%). A considerable proportion of the respondents had compulsory internship/externship during their studies (n= 32, 9.2%), closely followed by voluntary externships/internships during the study period (n= 29, 8.3%). A smaller proportion of the respondents indicated that they learned about the tasks of a State veterinary officer on the job/substitute (n= 21, 6.0%) (Fig.4.).

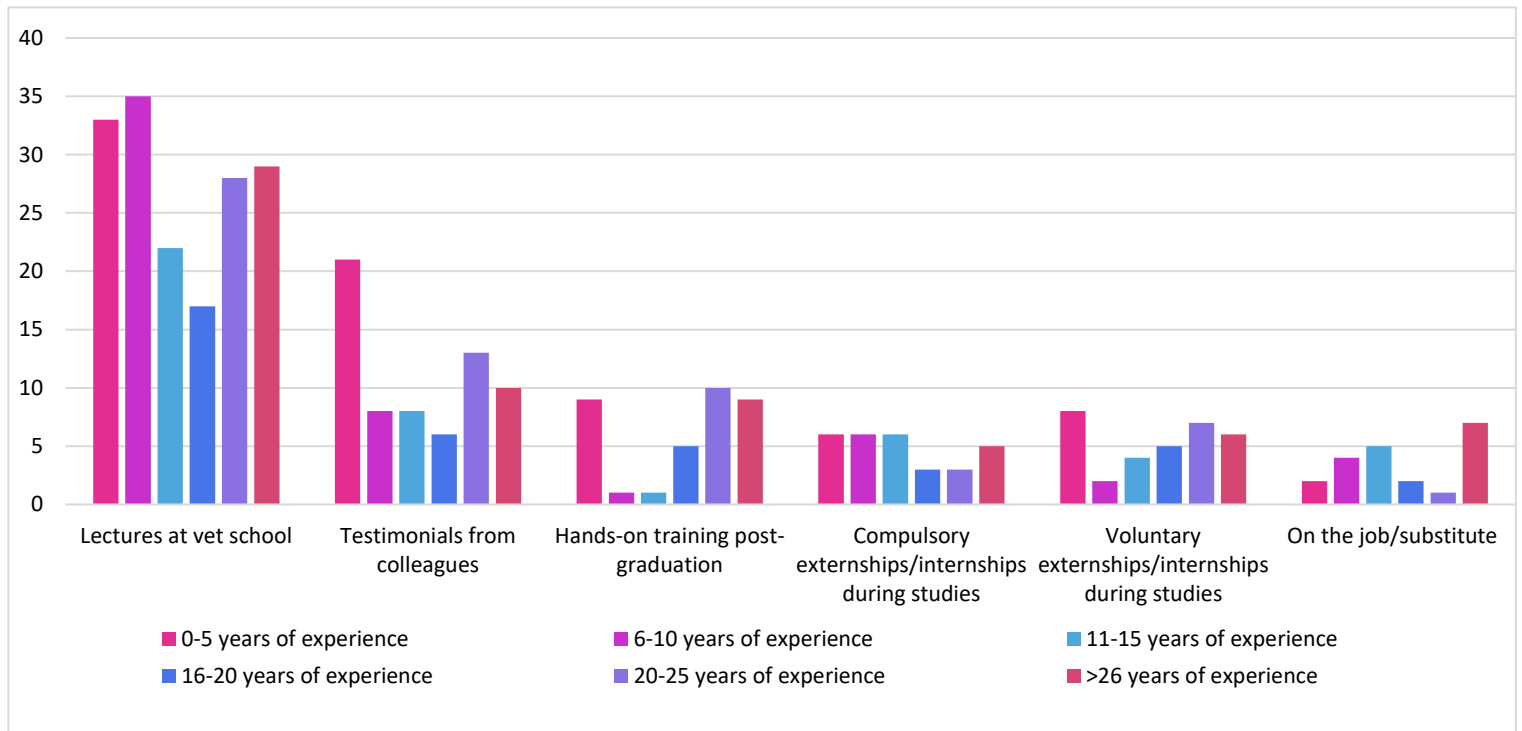


Figure 4. Learning approaches about the tasks of state veterinary medicine per experience

Advantages and added value of state veterinary medicine

According to the data gathered, a good work/life balance, an appropriate salary, and networking with colleagues had the highest mean scores with 4.2, 3.8, and 3.8, respectively. Particularly valued by those respondents with 0-10 years of experience compared to those with more experience were the good work/life balance (mean 4.3), appropriate salary (mean 4.0), and part-time working options (mean 3.4) (annexe 2). Depending on their experience, the most appreciated value shift was in social recognition of the profession and their role in society, but also the higher demand to attend CPD courses (n= 124, 31.7% and n= 145, 39.80%). The median score of a good work/life balance was higher for those with 0-15 years of experience than those with more experience, while it was lower for social recognition and introductory sessions. The other categories were not taken into consideration due to the low fluctuation of the results between the two groups (0-15 years of experience and 16-26+ years of experience) (Fig.5.).

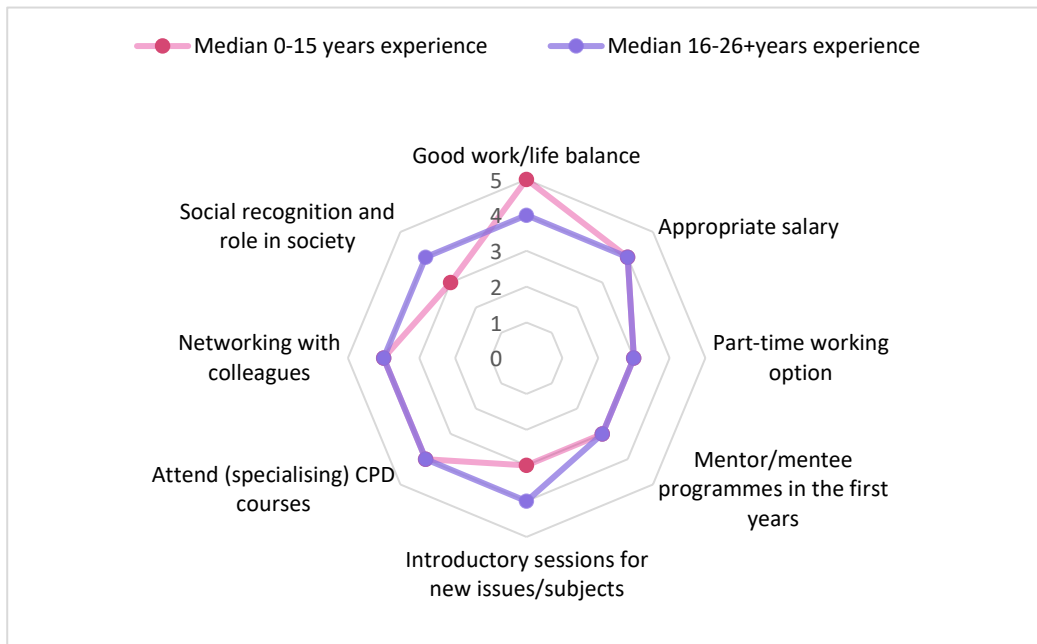


Fig.5. Most appreciated values of state veterinary medicines professional pathway

Traineeships (externships and internships)

Most veterinarians had their traineeship in their final years of study, that means in the 4th (n= 76, 33%) and 5th (n= 103, 44.8%) year. Only a small proportion of the respondents indicated years one, two, or three as the main period of traineeships during their studies (n= 12, 5.2%; n= 14, 6.0%; n= 25, 10.8%). Those respondents with 0-5 and more than 26 years of experience showed the most varied moments within their studies of traineeships (Fig. 6).

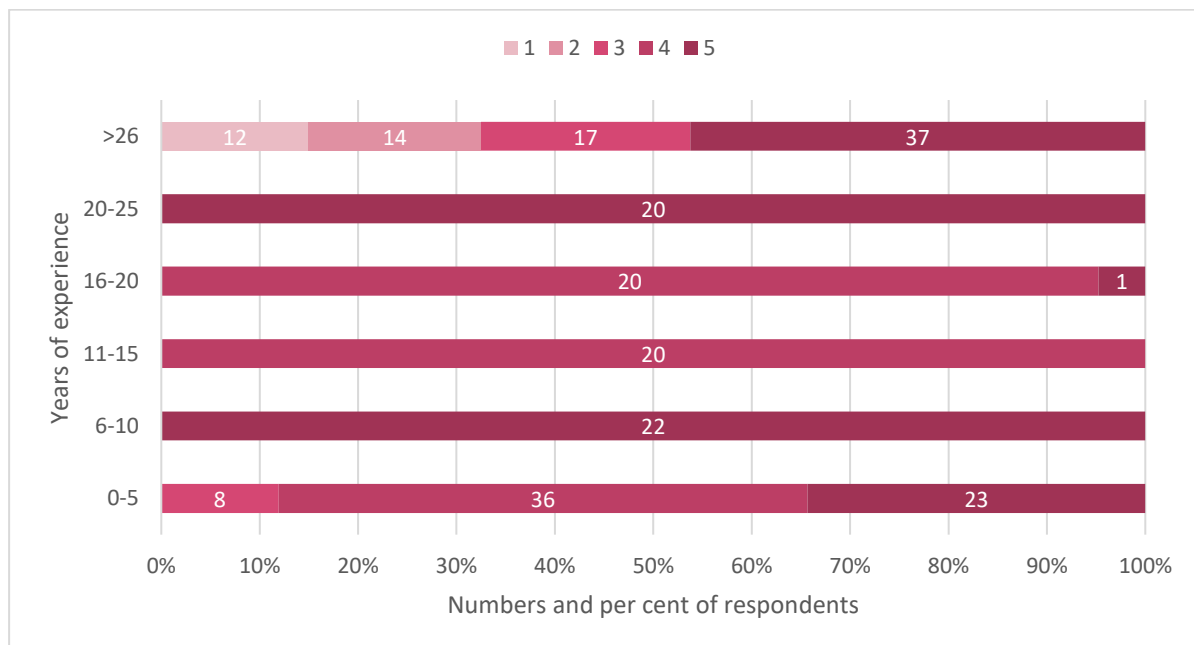
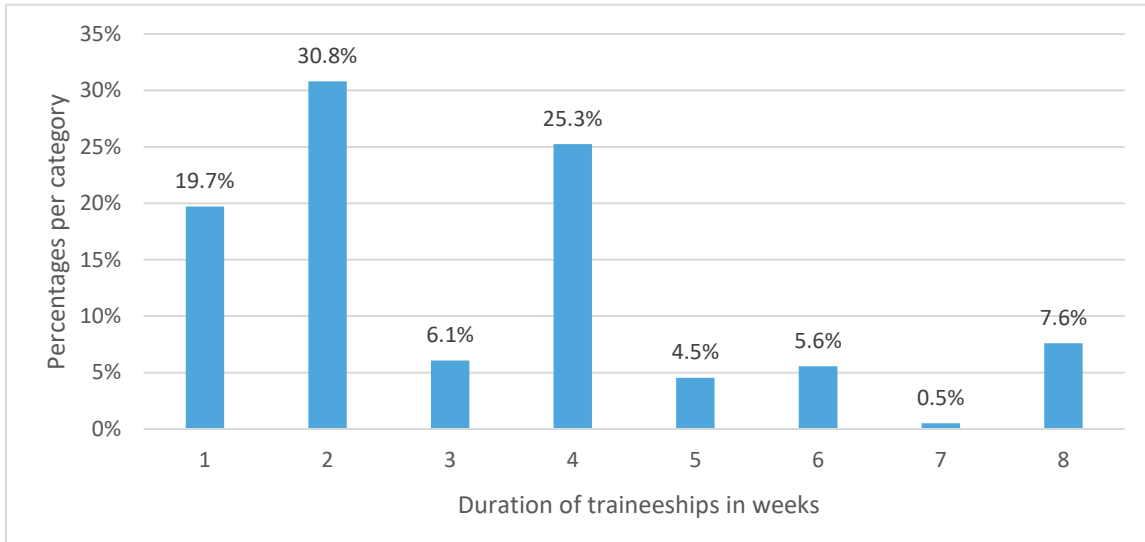


Figure 6. Traineeship organised throughout the studies per years of experience

Regarding the duration of internships/externships, a high number of respondents took part in a two-week training, followed by a period of four weeks in their stage and one week in their traineeships. Only a small percentage among veterinary medicine students spent five or more weeks in their preparation (Fig.7).

Figure 7. Duration in weeks of traineeships during the study period on state veterinary medicine



Food Safety and Animal Health were the main subjects covered by the veterinary medicine students during their traineeships and education. Animal welfare was less taken into consideration, while border inspection and development of soft skills/economics were nearly non-existent (Fig.8).

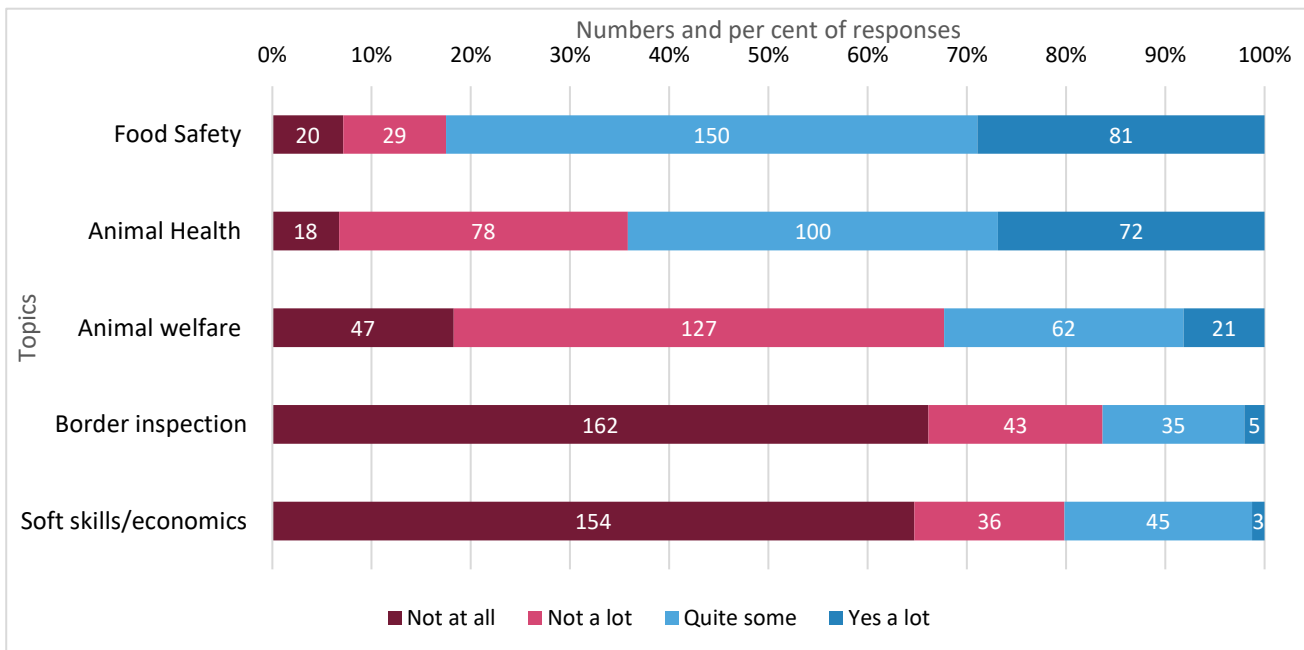


Figure 8. Traineeship subjects in numbers and percent

To prepare students most effectively for the work of state veterinary officers, most respondents (n= 124, 43.8%) indicated that vet schools must provide more practical activities and lectures from and exchanges with SVO/OV on real-life examples (n=117, 41.3%). To raise awareness of the importance of veterinary public health more effectively, it is essential to enhance students' soft skills in areas such as economics, legislation, and human

psychology (n=32, 11.3%). A total of 3% (n= 10) of veterinarians highlighted the necessity of post-grad specialised training (Fig. 9).

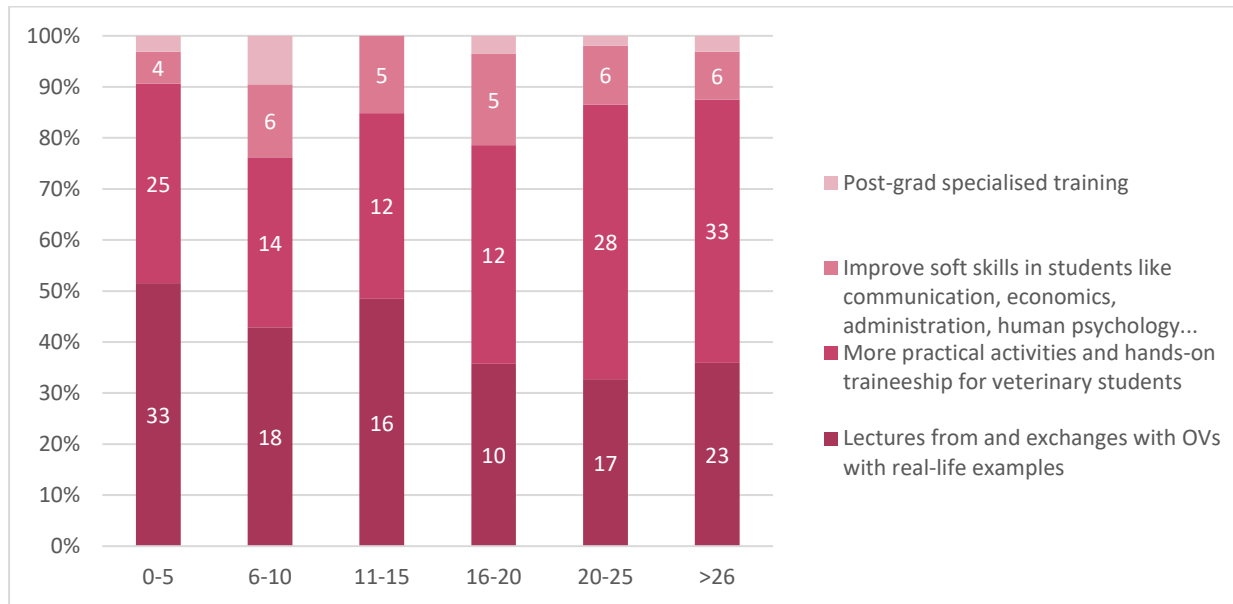


Figure 9. Best perceived preparatory work for veterinary students on state veterinary medicine

Definition of the work of state veterinary officers/ official veterinarians

The majority of the respondents (n= 142, 57%) indicated the vital role a State Veterinary Officer has in protecting animal health, human health, and the environment we live in, as an essential part of the One Health – One Welfare concept. These goals can only be achieved through strict law enforcement to protect society as a whole, positioning State Veterinary Officers as the last line of defence for animal health, animal welfare, and public health. The significant responsibility of an SVO, who must be aware of and fulfill their crucial role, was highlighted by 34% of respondents (n=85). A total of 9% (n= 23) of the veterinarians were not satisfied with the wages, recognition from the public, unfavourable workplace environment, and political influence added to the top.

4. EASVO areas of action

More than 60% of the surveyed veterinarians emphasized the need for increased visibility, a more positive representation, and improved working conditions to effectively promote the work of state veterinary officers. However, 18% suggested that promotion within universities is a key element in advancing this sector (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Required measures in descending order of the frequency of mentioned topics.

Topic	Number of responses	Examples
Increase visibility and positive representation	116	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make society aware of the importance and benefits of state veterinary officers' work. • The general public is not interested in work that prevents things. It is essentially an invisible public good. • A good way would be to produce content on TV or social media that shows how important our work is. Otherwise we usually only appear uninvited, cause problems and cost money
Better working conditions (salary, work-life balance, support)	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive salary with the vet practices • Support and more employees, paid extra hours when complaints and intervention of support services are required
Better promotion at university	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a good role model • State veterinary officers give some lectures in the vet schools • More information during studies about varieties of tasks, better payment, possibility of working in home office
Improve regulatory farmwork and procedures	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less bureaucracy, honouring good work not only honouring fulfilment of bureaucratic procedures • Participation in legislative procedures, for example by providing opinions on draft legislation
Create more CPDs/ Internships	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating and expanding postgraduate specialization • Promote continuing education • Giving training to clinical veterinarians and job opportunities
Clarify job specifications	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining an open competence catalogue (ONE HEALTH as objective)
Other	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a uniform when the service is being provided, to make ourselves visible to society. Like the state security forces

5. What did others already find out?

The questionnaire was completed by 426 respondents and all participants came from different backgrounds and experience in the veterinary field.

The objective of our survey was to investigate the current workforce situation amongst SVO/OV in the field and the challenges the professionals face regarding the current situation of shortages in different areas (e.g. teaching, border inspection, exports), remuneration and job opportunities, and physical and mental well-being. Additionally, we aimed to gather insights into the challenges and opportunities of working as an official veterinary officer for future generations.

In terms of gender representation, approximately 59% of the official veterinarians in this survey identified as female, while 40% as male, and approximately 1% preferred not to say, compared to a similar study where 54% of the OVs were male, 45% female and 1% preferred not to answer (Gomes-Neves et al., 2023). The results of this survey showed that the gender proportion from 0-5 years of experience is in majority females (52.2%),

compared to males (47.8%). A study conducted by the FVE in 2019 highlighted an increasing trend toward the feminization of the veterinary profession, with a significantly higher percentage of females working in the public sector compared to males (FVE, 2019). However, the majority of veterinarians with more than 25 years of experience in the field are male (61.4%). FVE's most recent VetSurvey indicated the same proportion (n=178, 50%) of females and males (n=178, 50%) working in the public service or government (FVE, unpublished results).

Most State veterinary officers indicated that their main level of activity is at a regional level (% missing), followed by National (29.7%), Local (29.1%), and Municipal level (4.8%) in a descendent trend compared to Official veterinarians, which work mainly at Local level (% missing), closely followed by Regional (26.6%) and National level (19.1%). Only 10.4% of surveyed OVs worked at a Municipal Level. In this survey, SVO/OVs main areas of work are: food safety, animal welfare, and animal health. The share of proportion regarding the number of working areas indicated that 43.2% of the respondents work in only one area, 24.9% in two areas of work, 22.2% in three areas, 9.5% in four areas and only one respondent indicated working in 5 areas. In a recent study, OVs reported that they work mainly in cattle (44%) and pig (47%) slaughterhouses (Gomes-Neves et al., 2023). The majority of respondents to the VetSurvey however, didn't have a secondary occupation (n=7391, 68%), meanwhile, some of them worked in different areas within the veterinary sector (e.g. independent veterinary practice [n=1205, 11%], education-research [n=481, 4%], consultancy [n= 293, 3%], NGO/charity [n= 103, 1%] and only a few of them outside the veterinary profession [n=426, 4%]) (FVE, unpublished results).

According to Gomes-Neves et al. (2023), designated training to become an official veterinarian in the country of employment did not represent a prerequisite for all the respondents. A total of 35% of respondents identified the National Veterinary Authority as the main responsible for organising specific training, while only 18% of them suggested the mandatory requirement to possess a DVM degree (Gomes-Neves et al., 2023). However, this survey indicated the essential role of universities/colleges studies in legally pursuing a career as an official veterinarian. A total of 47.2% of the total respondents learnt about the roles and tasks of an official veterinarian during their studies. There is a significant shift from hands-on training after graduation (10%) towards university' lectures, compared to the previous generations. A considerable proportion (19%) of the surveyed veterinarians suggested the importance of testimonials they received from their colleagues regarding the work of Official veterinarians.

One of the most valuable aspects of SVO/OVs' highlighted by our research was the discrepancy between veterinarians having 0-15 years of experience, compared to 16-26 years of experience in the sector. Younger veterinarians tend to highly value the work-life balance and the part-time working options, while the more experienced generation indicated their need for more CPD courses and social recognition. A total of 60% (n=7015) of the total number of respondents of the VetSurvey indicated the importance of attending CPDs regularly to maintain their registration and 40% (n=4760) of them answered negatively regarding this aspect. With regards to the young graduates, a considerable proportion (n=806, 51%) of them highlighted the importance of having sufficient clinical skills, work-life balance (n=664, 42%), finding a practice with good team spirit and supportive culture (n= 417, 26%), and having sufficient communication skills to deal with clients and colleagues (n=313, 20%). One important aspect they considered relevant to their future career is the wage, a total of 42% (n=674) were unsatisfied about it, while other issues were represented by having insufficient business skills in approximately 6% (n=91) of the answers and only 4% (n=56) had difficulties regarding their student debt. Taking into consideration the quality of life, 33% (n=3678) of them responded positively, and only 3% (n=301) the most negatively. A considerable proportion (n=4552, 41%) of veterinarians were happy with the business environment in which they work, including collaboration with colleagues, fellow professionals, and the public sector, while approximately 2% (n=260) were not pleased about it. Work-life balance seemed to be an important aspect in veterinarians' daily life, about 24% (n=2683) indicated its importance in their jobs and roughly 4% (n=494) were not pleased about their job schedule. However, they also indicated their work

importance on a daily basis, where about 42% (n=4692) considered their tasks important and a small percentage of 1% (n=157) thought the opposite (FVE, unpublished results).

The majority of the respondents (89.4%) with >26 years of experience indicated to work on a full-time basis, while 10.6% within the same timeframe of experience working on a part-time basis compared to a study where 63.0% of the official veterinarians would dedicate their time for a full-time position and 15.9% for a part-time position (Gomes-Neves et al., 2023). In the VetSurvey 2023, similar results were obtained, where a considerable proportion of the respondents (n= 9170, 83%) indicated working on a full-time basis (e.g. public services, veterinary administration) and only 17% (n=1877) on a part-time basis (FVE, unpublished results). However, we also must take into consideration that a high demand for appropriate salary plays a pivotal role in this specific veterinary sector, as highlighted by 48% of the total respondents in this survey. It became clear that within the respondents' country of employment, a non-homogenous approach, and conditions to become an official veterinarian is applied. These results are in accordance with other observations, which showed that, according to the gathered responses, preparatory training is rather country-dependent, since a high heterogeneity was observed among the countries (Gomes-Neves et al., 2023). Our study found similarities in the heterogeneity of training periods. However, there is a relatively homogeneous approach across Europe regarding training, correlated with the study year.

Almost half of the respondents indicated that their practical preparation and introduction to the work of official veterinarians took part in the 5th year of study and one-third in the 4th year. More than 80% of the respondents indicated that their training took from 1 to 4 weeks during their study period.

Concerning the data of subjects covered during the study period, food safety, animal health, and welfare were the most debated subjects. A total of 81 respondents (29%) out of 280 suggested that they learned a lot about food safety and a majority of 54% indicated that they had some lectures on this subject. Almost one-third of respondents (26.9%) learned a lot about the subject dedicated to animal health, while a high percentage (37.3%) answered with "quite some". Animal welfare was one of the subjects veterinarians surveyed didn't learn much (49.4%), or only had a few lectures about it (24.1%). Most veterinarians rarely received training on topics related to border inspection (66.1%) and soft skills/economics (65%).

According to the data provided, most respondents suggested the introduction of more practical activities and a better focus on the training of veterinary students by SVO/OV through lectures, including real-life situations. It is essential to implement a more efficient method to raise awareness of the importance of veterinary public health and improve soft skills in students, especially human psychology, as indicated by one-third of the respondents. However, we must not neglect the vital role of a State veterinary officer to protect animal health, human health, and the environment we live in, as an essential part of the One Health – One Welfare concept. A majority of 62% of the total answers took into consideration the increase of the visibility, a more positive representation and better working conditions to promote efficiently the work of state veterinary officers. A major issue highlighted by the veterinarians represents the definitory promotion in the university, a key element of veterinary education, which must be taken into consideration.

6. Conclusions

State veterinary officers and official veterinarians play an essential role in our society by assuring food safety, protecting public health, safeguarding animal health and welfare, contributing to environmental protection, and enforcing legislation in the benefit of the entire society.

- Objective met: Many veterinarians with less than 15 years of experience participated with an almost equal distribution of State Veterinary Officers and Official Veterinarians.
- The majority of official veterinarians work on a full-time basis and at a local level.
- Most veterinarians work in food safety, animal health, and welfare, while there is a significant shortage in border inspection, exports, policy, slaughterhouses, and other areas.
- There has been a significant gender shift in the last decades in the veterinary sector.
- Vet school remains one of the first sources of information on the tasks of State Veterinary Officers and Official Veterinarians.
- Good work/life balance and part-time options are essential aspects for the younger generation.
- State veterinary medicine is perceived as the last line of defence for animal health, animal welfare, and public health.

7. Recommendations

- EASVO will raise awareness of career opportunities and professional development in state veterinary services within the profession and with students and veterinary school applicants with the aim that careers in veterinary services are attractive and adequately provided with staff and relevant resources.
- EASVO will continue to contribute towards supporting the effective and consistent delivery of Official Controls by veterinarians.
- EASVO will increase the visibility and positive representation to promote the role of State Veterinary Officers and Official Veterinarians through lectures and real-life examples for students.
- EASVO will contribute to raising awareness of more varied training sessions regarding their duration and subjects amongst European countries and universities.
- EASVO will increase the visibility of activity as the main European association representing the state veterinary officers as the last line of defence for animal health, animal welfare, and public health.

Annex 1. Survey questions

I am older than 18 years and I agree to participate. I confirm that I have read and understood the specific private policy and agree with the processing of my personal data for the purposes stated therein.				
Yes				
1. How do you identify?				
Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Other	
2. How old are you?				
18-24				
25-35				
36-45				
46-55				
56-65				
>65				
Prefer not to say				
3. Where do you work within the veterinary profession? (multiple answers are possible)				
	National level (Ministry)	Regional level	Local level	Municipal level
State veterinary officer				
Official veterinarian				
4. How many years of experience do you have in carrying out official veterinary tasks?				
0-5				
6-10				
11-15				
16-20				
20-25				
>26				
Prefer not to say				
5. Please indicate your area of work (multiple answers possible)				
Animal health (detection, eradication programmes, etc.)				
Animal welfare				
Food safety				
Border inspection				
Other:				
6. Do you work full-time or part-time?				
Full-time			Part-time	
7. How did you first learn about the tasks of a state veterinary officer?				
Lectures at vet school				
Compulsory externships/internships during studies				
Voluntary externships/internships during studies				
Hands-on training post-graduation				
Testimonials from colleagues				
None of the above				
Other:				

8.a. How were externships/internships on the work of state veterinarians during studies organised in terms of timing within the studies (which year) (Only answer if applicable)								
	1	2	3	4	5			
Yes								
8.b. How were externships/internships on the work of state veterinarians during studies organised in terms of duration? (Only answer if applicable)								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Score								
8.c. How were externships/internships on the work of state veterinarians during studies organised in terms of subjects covered? (Only answer if applicable)								
	Yes - a lot		Quite some		Not a lot		No - not at all	
Animal welfare								
Animal Health								
Food safety								
Border inspection								
Soft skills/economics								
Other subjects								
If "Other subjects", please explain below								
9. What do you most value most about your professional pathway? (multiple answers possible, only answer if applicable)								
	1 - I don't value this at all	2 - I value this a bit	3 - neither nor	4 - I value this a lot	5 - I value this very much			
Good work/life balance								
Appropriate salary								
Part-time working option								
Mentor/mentee programmes in the first years								
Introductory sessions for new issues/subjects								
Attend (specialising) CPD courses								
Networking with colleagues								
Social recognition and role in society								
10. In your opinion, how should vet schools prepare students most effectively for the work of state veterinary officers, particularly regarding soft skills/economics ?								
11. In your opinion, what defines the work of state veterinary officers /official veterinarians?								
12. In your opinion, how can the work of state veterinary officers be promoted most efficiently?								

Annexe 2. Supplementary material



Supplementary Figure 1. Most appreciated values of state veterinary medicines professional pathway per years of experience. Panel A: Good work/life balance, Panel B: Appropriate Salary, Panel C: part-time working option, Panel D: mentor/mentee programmes in the first year, Panel E: Introductory sessions for new issues/subjects, Panel F: Attend CPD courses, Panel G: Networking with colleagues, Panel H: Social recognition and role in the society