

# Recognising gender differences in Veterinary Services: unlocking success



## Do you know...?

**The percentage  
of women  
veterinary  
professionals  
in your country?**

**What roles men  
and women play  
across the animal  
health value  
chain?**

**What share of  
animal farming  
is managed  
by women?**

**What barriers  
women face  
simply because  
they are women?**

**Why does it matter for  
the performance of your  
Veterinary Services?**



World Organisation  
for Animal Health

# Recognising gender differences in Veterinary Services

A gender-sensitive approach is not only a matter of equity and inclusion. It is also a powerful way to unlock the full potential of your workforce and improve animal health service delivery. It contributes to the well-being of animal health professionals and helps them better understand and address the diverse needs of their stakeholders, ultimately improving their impact on the ground.

A gender-sensitive approach recognises that the different roles played by men and women and attributed by society influence how they fulfill their professional duties, whether as animal health specialists or as livestock owners and keepers.



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## A growing presence of women in veterinary medicine

The demography of the veterinary profession is changing, with more and more women enrolling in veterinary studies across the world. This shift comes with new challenges:

- **Discrimination:** Female animal health professionals often face unjustified scepticism about their ability to handle large animals.
- **Occupational segregation:** More women work in urban clinics, leading to shortages of veterinarians in rural areas.
- **Shortages in the veterinary workforce:** Several European countries report a decreasing number of veterinarians in part because of changes of work life balance expectations of the workforce.
- **Burnout is rising in the profession:** with female veterinarians at higher risk of suicide than male veterinarians.

These challenges affect animal health management, particularly in rural areas where most livestock is concentrated.

# Gender differences in animal health management

Roles in the livestock value chain vary by gender. In many countries and communities:

- Women manage household food security and seek animal health services.
- Women tend to own small animals and poultry, while men own larger livestock.
- Exposure to zoonotic diseases differs between men and women, adults and children, because of the different roles they play in the management of herds.

**Recognising gender differences in veterinary medicine and herd management is key to improving animal health worldwide and mitigating subsequent negative economic, social and environmental consequences.**



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## Impact of gender inequalities on animal health management

Research on gender and animal health is still scarce, but existing data highlights how gender inequalities affect the effectiveness of animal health management. In some contexts, or cultural settings, it may be more difficult for women to directly interact with men outside the household in accessing animal services. Studies also underscore the pressing need for more comprehensive data to inform evidence-based policy-making.



Disparities in access to education and animal health information



Animal vaccine adoption rate can differ between male- and female-headed households



Women have limited access to finances and decision-making power



Men often have management roles while women have more operational roles



Male veterinary professionals are more likely to approach male-owned large herds than women and small farmers who raise small animals

# Advancing gender awareness in the veterinary workforce: building a WOA Global Strategy

Inclusive policies can drive better outcomes for animal health professionals and the communities they serve.

WOAH has launched the development of a global gender strategy to help its Members adapt to the evolving landscape of their national veterinary workforces.

Addressing rural labor shortages is not just about attracting more men to the profession. Instead, key animal health stakeholders—including universities, veterinary schools, Veterinary Services and private providers—must first understand, document, and discuss these challenges.

WOAH strategy will be twofold: it will address gender issues within the Organisation as well as within the Veterinary workforce. Set to be developed in 2025, it will serve as a critical tool to guide WOA and its Members to achieve more equal access to animal health services, aligning with the Organisation's mandate. Alongside WOA's upcoming 8th Strategic Plan, the Gender Strategy will help consolidate WOA's work and impact.

## The contribution of national Veterinary Services to WOA Global Strategy on Gender is key to its success

A solid strategy can only be built considering the variety and complexity of WOA Members needs, priorities and capacity.

### We need:

- **Better data** to map out the diverse issues across regions
- **Identification of challenges** faced in your region
- **Context-specific solutions** that ensure a more resilient and inclusive veterinary workforce

**Your involvement in building the first WOA Global Strategy on Gender will be instrumental.**

**Do not hesitate to share your questions or ideas, perspectives with WOA.**



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[www.woah.org](http://www.woah.org)

Your contact at WOA:  
[m.buchy@woah.org](mailto:m.buchy@woah.org)

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