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Research Article

Evaluation of the Regulatory Structure of Local Animal Experiments Ethics Committees at Universities with Faculties of Veterinary Medicine in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

The first Research Ethics Committee overseeing animal use in Türkiye was established in 1986 at Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine. Later, in 1996, the Local Animal Experiments Ethics Committee (local ECAE) was founded at Ankara University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, based on the "Veterinary Medicine Deontology Regulation" of 1994. A nationwide legal framework was established with the "Regulation on the Working Procedures and Principles of Animal Experiments Ethics Committees," issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural *Affairs in 2004* and revised in 2014. Following the 2014 update, local ECAEs were established across the country. Universities prepared guidelines in accordance with this regulation and began operating after approval by the Central Animal Experiments Ethics Committee (ECAE). Most university committees were founded after 2014, and their operations were aligned with this regulation. Veterinary faculties existed long before the establishment of ethics committees; however, the first local ECAEs within veterinary faculties were created in 2014 at Kafkas University and Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University. As of 2025, this study examined 28 Turkish universities with active veterinary faculties, evaluating the compliance of their local ECAE guidelines with the regulation, identifying structural variations, and analyzing the academic and professional backgrounds of committee members. Guidelines from Kastamonu and Sivas Cumhuriyet Universities were unavailable. Most institutions followed the regulation's general framework. Nevertheless, some universities—such as Çukurova, Afyon Kocatepe, Dicle, Fırat, and Van Yüzüncü Yıl—used modified subheadings for clarity. Selçuk University's guideline uniquely included an additional section titled "Ethical Principles." Among committee members, 103 were from veterinary faculties and 77 from medical faculties, forming the majority. Although Turkish regulations largely align with the European Union Directive 2010/63/EU, practical inconsistencies remain. The study contributes to improving ethical standards by analyzing the organization and functioning of local ECAEs within Turkish universities.

Keywords: *Animal Experimentation Ethics Committees, local ECAEs regulation, university guidelines.*

Türkiye'de Veteriner Fakültesi Olan Üniversitelerde Hayvan Deneyleri Yerel Etik Kurullarının Mevzuat Yapısının Değerlendirilmesi

ÖZET

Türkiye'de hayvan kullanımını denetlemeye yönelik ilk Araştırma Etik Kurulu, 1986 yılında Hacettepe Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi bünyesinde kurulmuştur. Ankara Üniversitesi Veteriner Fakültesi'nde ise 1994 yılında yürürlüğe giren "Veteriner Hekimliği Deontoloji Yönetmeliği" esas alınarak, 1996 yılında Hayvan Deneyleri Yerel Etik Kurulu (HADYEK) oluşturulmuştur. Tarım ve Köyişleri Bakanlığı tarafından 2004 yılında yürürlüğe konulan "Hayvan Deneyleri Etik Kurullarının Çalışma Usul ve Esaslarına Dair Yönetmelik" ile bu alandaki yasal çerçeve oluşturulmuş, yönetmelik 2014 yılında güncellenmiş ve HADYEK'ları ülke genelinde kurulmaya başlanmıştır. Üniversitelerin HADYEK'ları, yönergelerini 2014 tarihli yönetmelik esas alınarak hazırlamış, Hayvan Deneyleri Merkezi Etik Kurulu (HADMEK) onayının ardından faaliyetlerine başlamıştır. Yapılan incelemede, kurulların çoğunluğunun 2014 yılı ve sonrasında kurulduğu, dolayısıyla değerlendirmelerin yukarıda anılan yönetmelik hükümlerine göre yapıldığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Veteriner fakültelerinin kuruluş tarihlerinin, etik kurulların kuruluşlarından çok daha önceye dayandığı tespit edilmiş ve veteriner fakültesi bulunan üniversitelerde ilk HADYEK, 2014 yılında Kafkas Üniversitesi ve Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üniversitesi bünyesinde kurulmuştur. Bu çalışmada, 2025 yılı itibarıyla Türkiye'de veteriner fakültesi bulunan ve eğitim-araştırma faaliyetlerini sürdüren 28 üniversite incelenmiştir. Araştırmada, üniversitelerdeki HADYEK yönergelerinin, yönetmelik esasına uygunluk düzeyleri belirlenmiş; mevcut farklılıklar ile kurul üyelerinin mesleki ve akademik profilleri değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışma kapsamında Kastamonu ve Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi yönergelerine ulaşılamamıştır. Yönergelerin genel yapısında ana başlıkların yönetmelikle örtüştüğü, ancak Çukurova, Afyon Kocatepe, Dicle, Fırat ve Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversiteleri yönergelerinde anlaşılabilirliği artırmak amacıyla bazı alt başlıkların farklı biçimlerde düzenlendiği görülmüştür. Selçuk Üniversitesi yönergesinde ise ayrıca "Etik İlkeler" başlığına yer verilmiştir. Kurul üyelerinin mesleki profillerine ilişkin sayısal dağılım incelendiğinde, 103 kişinin veteriner fakültesi, 77 kişinin tıp fakültesi mensubu olduğu; bu iki grubun diğer fakülte üyelerine kıyasla daha yüksek temsil oranına sahip bulunduğu belirlenmiştir. Türkiye'deki yasal düzenlemelerin her ne kadar 2010/63/AB sayılı Avrupa Birliği Direktifi ile uyumlu hale getirildiği görülse de, uygulamada belirli tutarsızlıkların devam ettiği saptanmıştır. Bu çalışma, üniversitelerdeki HADYEK'lerin yapısal ve işlevsel açıdan değerlendirilmesi yoluyla, etik standartların geliştirilmesine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler*: HADYEK yönetmeliği, hayvan deneyleri yerel etik kurulları, üniversite yönergeleri.*

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Introduction

A large proportion of experimental studies in the field of health sciences are conducted on animals (Ülker and Hüseyinoğlu, 2012). In the broadest sense, animal experimentation has been carried out since ancient times. One of the earliest ethical approaches in this field was expressed by Jeremy Bentham in his 1789 work An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Bentham emphasized that animals possess the capacity to feel pain and argued that ethical responsibility should be based on this capacity. In contrast, Claude Bernard (1813–1878), one of the leading physiologists of the 19th century, defended the necessity of using animals in physiological experiments and proposed the development of standardized care and breeding protocols to ensure that such experiments were conducted under healthy conditions (Çobanoğlu and Aydoğdu, 2009). These fundamental views eventually led to the emergence of legal regulations, and the first legislative measures governing the use of animals for scientific purposes began to be implemented in Europe. The Grammont Law, enacted in France in 1850, was the first legal regulation aimed at preventing animal suffering caused by humans (Tan and Çobanoğlu,2012). Subsequently, the Cruelty to Animals Act, adopted in the United Kingdom in 1876, established the first comprehensive legal framework regulating the use of animals in scientific experiments (Uludağ, 2019). The excessive use of animals and the widespread application of painful procedures raised public sensitivity and highlighted the need to establish ethical principles and standards. This situation led to the implementation of various national and international regulations and the establishment of ethics committees overseeing animal experimentation (Eşitli, 2012). Regarding animal experimentation, Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) and Research Ethics Committees (RECs) began to be established in Europe during the 1970s (Özkul, 2008).

The idea of granting legal status to animals first emerged in the 18th century, following Jeremy Bentham's philosophical perspective. Subsequently, the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights, adopted in Paris on October 15, 1978, emphasized that animals should not suffer in scientific, medical, or commercial experiments (Sungurbey, 1998). The statement within the declaration that "experiments causing physical or psychological pain to animals, regardless of the species, are contrary to animal rights" (Ergün, 2010), along with regulations such as the Animal Experimentation Ethics Law (Uzel, 1994), reflect efforts to legally and ethically restrict the experimental use of animals. An important development at the international level occurred in 1984 with the participation of the World Health Organization. This was marked by the publication of the Ethical Principles for Animal Experimentation, approved by the European Medical Research Council, which represented a turning point in the establishment of ethical standards (Uzel, 1994). With in the framework of the European Union, the first legal framework for the protection of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes was established in 1986 by Council Directive 86/609/EEC (Council Directive, 1986). In this context, the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes (No. 123) was opened for signature by the Council of Europe on March 18, 1986, and Türkiye signed the convention on September 5, 1986 (Eşitli, 2012). In Türkiye the first Research Ethics Committee established to oversee the use of laboratory animals was founded in 1986 within the Faculty of Medicine at Hacettepe University (Yaşar and Yerlikaya, 2004)

With the enforcement of the Veterinary Medicine Deontology Regulation in 1994, a legal basis was established for the functioning of ethics committees in experimental research. It was stated that veterinarians are obliged to comply with national and international ethical principles in all experimental procedures, and that ethics committees would be established both at the ministerial level and within institutions to oversee research activities (Koç, 2017).

In accordance with this requirement, the local ECAE was established within the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Ankara University on July 10, 1996, and efforts were initiated to standardize animal experimentation (Yaşar, 2001). This development served as a model for other universities—particularly faculties of veterinary medicine and medicine—and led to the establishment of new committees in many institutions under various titles such as Research Ethics Committee, Animal Experiments Ethics Committee, or Laboratory Animals Ethics Committee (Koç, 2017).

In the 2000s, legal (Anonymous, 2004a; Anonymous, 2004b; Anonymous, 2006a) regulations regarding animal experimentation gained momentum, and alignment with international standards was achieved. The first significant legal step in this field in Türkiye was the enactment of the Animal Protection Law in 2004 by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, within the framework of Türkiye's harmonization process with the European Union, Union, it was observed that legal structuring concerning the use of animals in scientific research had been implemented. The regulation enacted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in 2004, along with the Implementation Directive issued in 2006, provided further clarification on the subject. The Regulation (Anonymous, 2006b) ethical principles have been incorporated into legal practice; updated in 2014 (Anonymous, 2014) to comply with EU Directive 2010/63/EU (Uludağ, 2019).

This regulation aims to ensure animal welfare during experimental procedures and prevent unnecessary suffering. The same regulation establishes a legal basis by regulating the provisions concerning the establishment and operation of the ECAE and its local ECAE.

Within the scope of this study, the local ECAE of 28 universities in Türkiye that have veterinary faculties and continue their education and research activities as of 2025 were examined. The study evaluated the estab-

lishment of veterinary faculties, the founding years of university local ECAEs, the compliance or differences of local ECAEs, guidelines prepared in accordance with the "Regulation on the Working Procedures and Principles of Animal Experimentation Ethics Committees" (Anonymous, 2014) and the professional and academic profiles of the committee members.

The main objective of the study was to determine the status of veterinary faculties local ECAEs, in the member lists of the universities examined and to reveal the contribution of these faculties to the committees. Furthermore, the study aims to determine how long after the relevant regulations came into force the establishment of these committees took place. Additionally, by identifying the differences in the guidelines prepared based on the regulations, the study also aims to contribute to achieving national standardization in committee guidelines.

Materials and Methods

As of January 2025, this study identified and evaluated the current status of the local ECAEs, of 28 universities in Türkiye that host faculties of veterinary medicine. The scope of the study comprised universities within Türkiye that actively conduct educational and research activities. Data regarding these ethics committees were compiled from open-access institutional databases available on the official websites of the respective universities. The primary legal reference for this research is the Regulation on the Working Procedures and Principles of Animal Experiments Ethics Committees, which entered into force in 2014. In this context, the senate approval dates of the universities' local ECAEs, directives were taken as the official establishment dates of the respective ethics committees. The review revealed that most local ECAEs, were instituted in or after 2014; therefore, institutional compliance was assessed with reference to the provisions of the 2014 Regulation.

The documents examined were evaluated on the basis of a "chronological analysis." The relevant regulation was examined in chronological order, and the directives based on the regulation were analyzed within the scope of its relevant articles and subheadings. In this study, all articles of local ECAEs and guidelines from 28 universities were evaluated using the "comparative analysis" method. Three main criteria were used in the comparative analysis method; Regulations-Directives/Compliance-Differences, Similarities/Differences of 28 University Directives, Professional profiles of board members and their compliance with regulations and directives.

The second major source of data consists of institutional directives that outline the operational procedures and principles of local ECAEs, within universities hosting faculties of veterinary medicine. In the Findings section, data obtained through a document analysis approach are presented in tabular form. Explanatory notes concerning the examined documents are provided in the footnotes, together with full citations of the relevant issues of the Official Gazette. The approval dates of the local ECAEs, directives and the professional profiles of committee members are presented under dedicated subheadings through comparative tables. In the Discussion section, the 26 provisions of the 2014 Regulation are systematically examined, and both the structural similarities and practical divergences among the local ECAEs, directives are critically analyzed. To provide a comprehensive overview of the current functioning of the local ECAEs, in universities with veterinary faculties across Türkiye, the collected documents and relevant literature were analyzed.

Results

The study revealed the relationship between the establishment dates of veterinary faculties and the development of ethics committees, as well as the formation processes of legislation related to laboratory animals. It evaluated the guidelines of. To provide a comprehensive overview of the current functioning of the local ECAEs, in universities with veterinary faculties across Türkiye, the collected documents and relevant literature were analyzed. Their similarities and differences based on the relevant regulations, and the current status of committee members. The study was also prepared to identify the connection between the founding dates of veterinary faculties and the development process of the relevant regulations and to reveal their contribution to the establishment of. To provide a comprehensive overview of the current functioning of the local ECAEs, in universities with veterinary faculties across Türkiye, the collected documents and relevant literature were analyzed.

The study examined 28 universities in Türkiye that conduct education, research, and publication activities and have veterinary faculties between January and June 2025. The universities included in the study were accessed through their official websites, and all data used are open access.

The establishment years of Veterinary Faculties (Anonymous, 2025a) and the establishment years of University local ECAEs (Anonymous, 2025a) are presented in the findings (Table 1). The establishment dates of the University local ECAEs were added to the table based on the date of acceptance of the committees' guidelines by ECAE.

In Türkiye, after 1980, ethical oversight of animal use in research made it mandatory to establish special committees. Veterinary faculties established before 1994 relied on existing regulations during this process, while faculties established afterwards conducted their animal research within the framework of the Veterinary Medicine Deontology Regulation (Anonymous, 1994) (Table 1). Türkiye's first "Animal Experimentation Ethics Committee" was established in 1996 within the Ankara University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Although similar committees emerged worldwide in the 1970s, the establishment of a legal basis for animal experiments and the introduction of ethical restrictions in Türkiye began with

this committee; Ankara University took a pioneering role in this field. This served as an example for other veterinary faculties, and five veterinary faculties (Selçuk University, Erciyes University, Istanbul University, Yüzüncü Yıl University, and Kırıkkale University Veterinary Faculties) established ethics committees (Anonymous, 2025a).

With the regulation (Anonymous, 2006b) that came into effect in 2006, local ECAEs began to be established at universities. The committees, whose guidelines are set by the ECAE.

The regulation required all local ECAEs to prepare their own guidelines and bring them into compliance with the regulation within two years. In addition, ECAE has the authority to suspend the activities of committees that violate the guidelines and regulations. The 2006 regulation was revised and entered into force in 2014, and the operation of the committees has been shaped according to this latest amendment. Two of the university local ECAEs were established in 2014, and the others were established in subsequent years with the approval of ECAE (Table 1) (Anonymous, 2025a).

In this study, the local ECAE guidelines at universities with veterinary faculties were examined as of 2025, and their compliance with current regulations was evaluated. The local ECAE guidelines for Kastamonu University and Sivas Cumhuriyet University could not be accessed. The guidelines of all the committees examined were prepared based on the regulations, and in some committees, subheadings were added to detail the content. In the guidelines of Çukurova, Afyon Kocatepe, Dicle, Fırat, and Van Yüzüncü Yıl Universities, different arrangements

Table 1. Establishment Dates of Veterinary Faculties and University Local Animal Ethics Committees *

University Name	Date of Establishment of Veterinary Faculties	Establishment Dates of Local Animal Ethics Committees
Afyon Kocatepe University	28.06.1995	08.04.2016
Aksaray University	08.09.2012	12.06.2020
Ankara University	30.06.1948	12.02.2016
Aydın Adnan Menderes University	03.07.1992	08.04.2016
Balıkesir University	18.10.2008	05.01.2018
Bingöl University	16.04.2012	27.09.2019
Bursa Uludağ University	14.05.1976	02.10.2015
Çukurova University	12.11.2012	16.08.2022
Dicle University	11.07.1992	17.11.2017
Dokuz Eylül University	14.06.2018	19.01.2016
Erciyes University	03.07.1992	08.04.2016
Fırat University	07.11.1970	02.10.2015
Harran University	21.07.1995	19.02.2016
Hatay Mustafa Kemal University	10.11.1992	19.02.2016
İstanbul University Cerrahpaşa	1889	29.04.2021
Kafkas University	20.07.1982	05.09.2014
Kastamonu University	08.04.2016	20.01.2021
Kırıkkale University	11.07.1992	19.02.2016
Mehmet Akif Ersoy University	03.07.1992	22.06.2018
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	05.06.2015	12.06.2020
Necmettin Erbakan University	02.08.2019	24.04.2023
Ondokuz Mayıs University	1995	16.03.2017
Selçuk University	17.06.1982	20.03.2015
Siirt University	25.06.2013	15.07.2016
Sivas Cumhuriyet University	2010	19.02.2016
Tekirdağ Namık Kemal University	23.06.2012	05.09.2014
Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	30.03.1983	21.09.2018
Yozgat Bozok University	17.03.2006	26.10.2023

* The dates of final acceptance of the university local ECAE directives have been considered. Information about the local ECAEs whose directives have been approved has been obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's ECAE website and university databases

were made in the subheading structure to make the text more understandable. The Selçuk University local ECAE guidelines, on the other hand, include comprehensive explanations under the heading "Ethical Principles" and cite 23 relevant laws, communiqués, regulations, and sources as references (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$).

The Aksaray University local ECAE guidelines do not include any statements regarding the types of animals that can be used in experiments. In all guidelines examined, in accordance with the regulations, it is mandatory for individuals who will be involved in experimental work to complete the relevant certification training program and possess the corresponding documentation. However, the Balıkesir University local ECAE guidelines contain an exception stating that certification is not required for research involving farm animals if a veterinarian is present (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$).

The study presents data on the organizational structure according to the professional titles of university local ECAEs members (Table 2) (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$). The

Table 2. Distribution of University local ECAEs Board Members by Areas of Expertise

University	FVM	FM	FD	FA	FHS	FS	FF	PF	VET	CSO	CM	HSS	FE	VSHS
ADU	1	2	1	1	-	1	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-
AKU	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
ASU	3	4	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-
AU	3	2	-	2	-	1	-	1	2	1	1	-	-	-
BANU	6	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
BU	3	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
ÇU	3	3	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1			-
DEU	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-
DU	5	3	1	-	-	1	-	4	1	1	1	-	-	-
ERU	3	4	1	1	1	1	-	2	2	1	1	-	-	-
FU	4	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
HRU	3	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-
İUC	2	6	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	1	-	-	-
KAU	4	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1		1	1
KKU	4	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
KU	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	-
MAKU	6	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
MKU	6	3	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
MSKU	3	3	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
NEU	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-
NKU	3	4	-	2	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
OMU	3	6	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
SCU	4	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
SİU	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
SU	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
UU	2	3	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
YOBU	4	2	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-
YYU	4	2	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Total	103	77	12	13	7	17	2	12	33	28	25	2	2	1

Abbrevation: Aydın Adnan Menderes Üni.(ADU), Afyon Kocatepe Üni. (AKU), Aksaray Üni. (ASU), Ankara Üni. (AU), Balıkesir Üni. (BANU), Bingöl Üni. (BU), Çukurova Üni. (ÇU) Dokuz Eylül Üni. (DEU), Dicle Üni (DU), Erciyes Üni. (ERU), Fırat Üni. (FU), Harran Üni. (HRU), İstanbul Üni.-Cerrahpaşa (İUC), Kafkas Üni. (KAU), Kırıkkale Üni. (KKU), Kastamonu Üni. (KU), Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üni. (MAKU), Hatay Mustafa Kemal Üni.(MKU), Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üni. (MSKU), Necmettin Erbakan Üni. (NEU), Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üni. (NKU), Ondokuz Mayıs Üni. (OMU), Sivas Cumhuriyet Üni. (SCU) Siirt Üni. (SİU), Selçuk Üni. (SU), Bursa Uludağ Üni. (UU), Yozgat Bozok Üni.(YOBU),Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üni. (YYU), Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (FVM), Faculty of Medicine (FM), Faculty of Dentistry (FD), Faculty of Agriculture (FA), Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), Faculty of Science (FS), Faculty of Fisheries (FF), Faculty of Pharmacy (FP), Veterinary Doctor (Vet), Civil Society Organization (CSO), Civil Member (CM), Human and Social Sciences (HSS), Faculty of Engineering (FE), Vocational School of Health Services (VSHS)

regulation (2014) details the minimum qualifications that local ECAE members must possess. Accordingly, the committee must include a veterinarian who is responsible for breeding or caring for experimental animals, holds an experimental animal use certificate, works full-time within the unit, and has at least one year of experience in animal experiments. In addition, a representative from one of the units working with experimental animals within the institution must be present. It is mandatory for the committee to include a Turkish citizen who has no conflict of interest with the institution and who, along with their first-degree relatives, does not conduct experiments on animals, as well as a citizen who is a member of a non-governmental organization outside the institution. At least one of the local ECAE members must have at least one year of experience in in vivo animal experiments and hold a doctorate or medical specialty degree. It is recommended that medical or veterinary ethics experts be included in the committee. The regulation limits the number of local ECAE members to a minimum of five and a maximum of twenty-one.

When examining the data on the distribution of committee members, it was observed that in the vast majority of universities, local ECAEs were structured in accordance with the establishment criteria specified in the guidelines. However, deviations from the criteria stipulated in the regulations were identified in the selection of members at some universities. It was determined that no representatives from civil society organizations were included in the local ECAEs of Bursa Uludağ, Kırıkkale, and Van Yüzüncü Yıl Universities. Furthermore, it was found that the local ECAE of Necmettin Erbakan University consisted solely of faculty members from the Faculty of Medicine (Table 2) (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$).

The local ECAE guidelines of Çukurova, Erciyes, and Yozgat Bozok Universities require that a member specializing in medical or veterinary ethics be included in the committee. Similarly, the guidelines of Ankara, Uludağ, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, and Ondokuz Mayıs Universities also explicitly state the requirement for a member specializing in veterinary ethics to be on the committee (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$).

When examining the numerical distribution of the professional profiles of the board members, it was determined that 103 members were faculty members of veterinary faculties and 77 members were faculty members of medical faculties, which was relatively higher compared to members of other faculties. Universities with veterinary faculties were found to contribute significantly to local ECAEs, with a total of 33 veterinarians serving in 28 local ECAEs. (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$).

Discussion

This study is the first research examining the local ECAE guidelines and the areas of expertise of committee members within veterinary faculties in Türkiye. Some veterinary faculties were established before 2006, while others were established after that date. Regardless of the establishment period of their local ECAEs, they have played an active role in the legal processes related to the use of animals in experimental studies (Table 1) (Anonymous, 2025a).

It has been stated that, in the period before the regulation, ethical controls in veterinary faculties were carried out by special committees and that ethical requirements regarding animal use were largely met (Yaşar and İzmirli, 2006). However, the 1994 Veterinary Medicine Deontology Regulation and the Animal Ethics Committees established in 1996 proved insufficient in practice, and the ethical approval processes failed to meet the needs (Başağaç et al., 2009). This situation highlights the necessity of the local ECAE Regulation, which came into force in 2006.

The study (Table 1) determined that local ECAE were first established in 2014. It was observed that the necessary infrastructure and regulations were completed during this period with the alignment of the relevant regulation with Directive 2010/63/EU on the Protection of Animals Used for Scientific Purposes (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$). Furthermore, the guide supporting the implementation of the directive revealed that the principles regarding the design and operation of national committees were consistent with the regulation (Olsson et al., 2016).

It has been determined that the guidelines prepared by local ECAEs in Türkiye in line with the relevant regulation are generally compliant (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$). However, due to administrative and geographical structures in European Union countries, there are differences in committee structure, areas of expertise, and authorization processes (Olsson et al., 2016). This explains why, despite being prepared in a manner similar to the regulation, there are still differences in the local ECAEs guidelines in Türkiye

Within the scope of this study, the local ECAEs guidelines of Kastamonu and Sivas Cumhuriyet Universities could not be accessed. Although the guidelines are generally similar, the Selçuk University local ECAE guidelines provide more comprehensive explanations under the heading “Ethical Principles” and refer to 23 regulations and sources. According to Marinou and Dontas (2023), this indicates that ethical evaluation is conducted based on a risk/benefit analysis and ethical principles.

The Aksaray University Directive does not specify the types of animals that can be used in experiments, which clearly conflicts with the species restrictions outlined in the regulation. The use of animals in experiments, (European Commission, 2010) species at risk of extinction, non-human primates, animals taken from the wild, and stray/wild animals belonging to domestic species, which are “not to be used in experiments.”

All local ECAE guidelines (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1-29}$) require that those conducting experimental research have a certificate for the use of laboratory animals. However,

the Balıkesir University local ECAE guideline states that there is an exemption from certification for studies involving farm animals if a veterinarian is present, but it excludes studies involving laboratory animals, which is a contradiction. The regulation does not clarify this issue and makes this condition mandatory for everyone. The guidelines are consistent with the regulation. Indeed, the American Psychological Association (APA) has stated that researchers and staff must complete all necessary institutional research training to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines (APA, 2022). Furthermore, it has emphasized the importance of participating in short or extended seminars, webinars, or obtaining an experience certificate from an academic department (Marinou and Dontas, 2023). This requirement is consistent with the results of the study and demonstrates its uniqueness.

However, it should be considered a reasonable approach to exempt veterinarians from certification requirements in this field, given their extensive knowledge of animal welfare, experimental practices, and interspecies differences. Within the framework of the regulation, establishing a standard regulation would be appropriate in terms of both consistency in application and recognition of the professional mission.

It has been observed that the minimum member qualifications specified in the regulation are also maintained in the guidelines and are consistent with (Table 2) (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$). However, it has been determined that Necmettin Erbakan University local ECAE consists solely of faculty members from the medical faculty. In Germany, it is a legal requirement that four of the committee members hold a degree in veterinary medicine, medicine, or science (Kolar and Ruhdel, 2007). Although the aforementioned university council structure is formally compliant with the regulation, it is ethically debatable.

In some local ECAE guidelines, the numerical distribution of board members and faculty member participation are clearly defined (Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Bursa Uludağ, Hatay Mustafa Kemal University) (Anonymous, 2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$). The requirement that members be selected based on their areas of expertise indicates that the aim is for the committee to have a multifaceted evaluation capacity, given the diversity of project applications. In international examples, committees are based on scientific research and veterinary medicine/animal welfare expertise; in some countries, law and ethics are also recommended as additional areas of expertise (European Commission, 2010). The Directive's recommendations are consistent with the decision to include different scientific disciplines in the committees.

It has been determined that the members of the committee who do not include representatives of civil society organizations (Bursa Uludağ, Kırıkkale, and Van Yüzüncü Yıl Universities) (Anonymous,2025b$_{1\text{-}29}$) are inconsistent with the guidelines and regulations. However, the balance of membership also varies compared to EU countries (European Commission, 2010). It has been determined that the guidelines developed to meet the requirements of the Directive regarding the structure and duties related to the establishment of National Committees allow flexibility for member states (Marinou and Dontas, 2023) and that this result is consistent with the less common presence of representatives who are not truly professionals and have no connection to the area of special interest (Olsson et al., 2016).

The study indicates that seven universities (Çukurova, Erciyes, Yozgat Bozok, Ankara, Uludağ, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, and Ondokuz Mayıs Universities) require local ECAE to have veterinary and medical ethics experts, as stipulated in their guidelines. However, the regulation leaves this matter to discretion, which appears consistent with the current situation. The inclusion of expertise in ethics among the conditions for university membership in local ECAE is an appropriate and positive approach to strengthening the committee's decision-making processes based on ethical values and ensuring that scientific research is conducted in accordance with ethical principles. The regulation's provision leaving the presence of an ethics expert to discretion may be considered a shortcoming in terms of evaluating research from a scientific and ethical perspective.

The study found that the members of the local ECAE committee included a total of 103 faculty members and 33 veterinarians from veterinary faculties within universities that have veterinary faculties. Veterinary faculties play an important role in animal health, welfare, and sustainability. The numerical dominance of veterinary faculty members among the board members indicates that local ECAE made an appropriate choice in terms of its objectives, areas of responsibility, and decision-making processes. It is also important in terms of demonstrating that ethics committees comply with legislation and fulfill their institutional responsibility to protect animal welfare.

Although the legal framework in Türkiye is consistent with European Union Directive 2010/63/EU (European Commission, 2010), certain inconsistencies persist in practice. The success of scientific research conducted on animals is directly related not only to achieving scientific goals (Horner and Minifie, 2011) but also to the implementation of the legal framework that defines ethical approaches.

The study has revealed the relationship between the founding dates of veterinary faculties, the development of ethics committees, and the formation processes of legislation concerning laboratory animals. It aims to assess the current status of the guidelines and members of local ECAEs, serving as a foundation to identify shortcomings and to develop solution-oriented recommendations.

The study reveals the need to reassess existing regulations and university guidelines in light of contemporary scientific and ethical requirements, to ensure the effective implementation of provisions, and to enhance the

functionality of oversight mechanisms. Ultimately, the structural and functional analysis of local ECAEs at universities contributes significantly to the development of ethical standards.

Conclusion

This study chronologically outlines the establishment years of veterinary faculties, the founding dates of local ECAEs, and the development process of the legal framework regarding animal experiments. Furthermore, as the first systematic evaluation addressing existing gaps in the literature, the study serves as an important reference source.

With the entry into force of the relevant regulation, a legal framework for animal experiments was established; furthermore, university local ECAEs guidelines approved by ECAE were prepared and implemented. In general, it was determined that the guidelines and committee memberships were shaped based on the relevant regulation, but that there were differences and partial deviations in some articles. It was found that veterinary faculties played a decisive and effective role in the development and functioning of animal experimentation ethics committees.

As a result, in order to ensure full compliance with national regulations and strengthen institutional commitment, the operating principles must be reassessed in line with current scientific and ethical requirements. The concrete operation specified in the guidelines of the board members must be clarified. For example, ensuring a standard distribution of members across all universities or monitoring the requirement for civil society representatives.

In this context, university guidelines should be comprehensively reviewed, and binding standards should be developed with the contributions of all stakeholders to ensure effective operation and address deficiencies in implementation.

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Ethical Statement

This study does not present any ethical concerns.

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