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## Donkey welfare assessment in north-east Portugal

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### Abstract

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The well-documented versatility of donkeys (*Equus africanus asinus*) means that issues concerning their welfare can vary depending on how they are mainly used and their geographic location. The present study is the first assessment of donkey welfare to be systematically conducted in the Iberian Peninsula. This area is characterised by the coexistence of high levels of mechanisation and industrialisation, and human populations with low levels of formal education, still making use of donkeys in their daily work. This study aims to evaluate the main welfare problems affecting donkeys within this context. The welfare assessment was carried out in accordance with the first level of the AWIN protocol for donkeys. Only 37.6% of the animals evaluated showed all positive indicators, with no physical problem detected while the remaining 62.4% revealed at least one negative health indicator. Body Condition Score (BCS) was one of the main concerns, with around half of the donkeys exhibiting an inadequate body condition. Dental evaluation revealed similarly concerning results, with 62.8% of the animals assessed requiring treatment. Indications of hoof neglect were noted in 39.5% of the animals evaluated with a 9.84% incidence of lameness. Skin problems affected 26.7% of individuals. Only 41% of the animals displayed positive results for all behavioural indicators. Aside from BCS, the most prevalent problems were sub-optimal behaviour, pain reaction to cheek palpation, hoof disease and integument alterations. These issues should be prioritised, both as regards this specific donkey population and the education of their caretakers.

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, AWIN, behaviour, donkey, health, Iberian Peninsula