

Public Attitudes on the Use of Horses in Sport: Survey Report (November 2022)



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All reasonable measures have been taken to ensure the survey has been carried out ethically, any analysis of the available information is robust and accurate, and the interpretation of results objective and without bias. The information contained in the report does not replace or alter any FEI policy or regulations, nor other official guidelines or requirements.

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1. Introduction and methods

A survey to collect opinions of the public concerning the welfare of horses used in sports was developed by the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission (an independent commission established by the FEI) in July 2022 and prepared by independent research company Savanta Comres who conducted the survey and analysed the results. The survey consisted of 9 questions (see appendix).

The survey was presented in English, Spanish and French and conducted by Savana Comres who polled more than 1,000 respondents from 14 countries including Germany, France, United Kingdom (UK), the Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, United States of America (USA), Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, South Africa, Poland, Chile and United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In total Savanta ComRes interviewed 14,273 adults aged 18+ in 14 different countries between 09 and 22 September 2022. Data were weighted to be representative of each country by age, region and gender. The results of this survey therefore represents a statistically valid reflection of the views of the populations of these countries. Savanta ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

2. Results

2.1 Respondents

The public survey was distributed in 14 selected countries. A total of 14273 people returned the survey. Results were scaled to 1000 respondents per country (see 1. Introduction and methods and table 1).

Table 1. Countries and number of respondents that completed the survey.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Unweighted total</i>	<i>Weighted total</i>
<i>Germany</i>	1,031	1,000
<i>France</i>	1,011	1,000
<i>UK</i>	1,036	1,000
<i>Netherlands</i>	1,005	1,000
<i>Spain</i>	1,027	1,000
<i>Brazil</i>	1,040	1,000
<i>USA</i>	1,005	1,000
<i>Switzerland</i>	1,003	1,000
<i>Australia</i>	1,032	1,000
<i>Sweden</i>	1,014	1,000
<i>South Africa</i>	1,030	1,000
<i>Poland</i>	1,019	1,000
<i>Chile</i>	1,009	1,000
<i>UAE</i>	1,011	1,000
<i>Total</i>	14,273	14,000

Respondents had a varied experience with horses. Almost half of the respondents had had some experience with horses in the past (47%) and 27% had had no experience with horses whatsoever. Only 1% regarded themselves as a professional equestrian (see Figure 1).

The pattern across countries was similar the Netherlands and Switzerland having a larger proportion of the respondents with no experience with horses (see Figure 2).

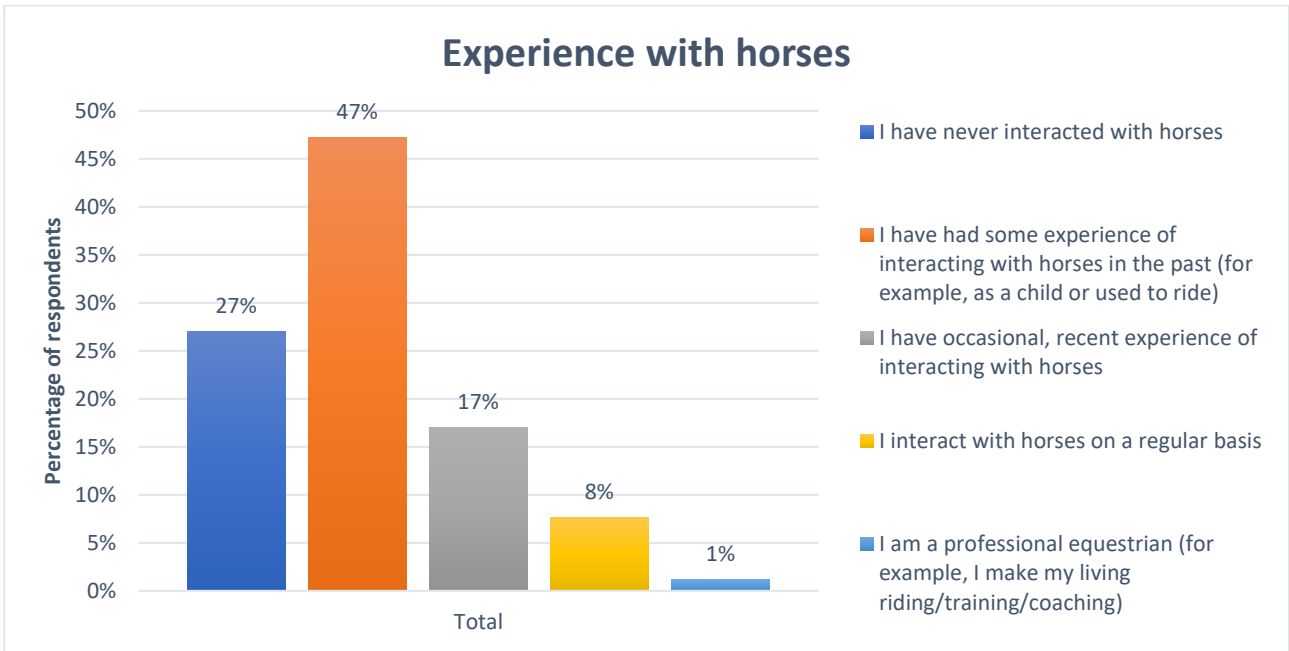


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents with different experiences with horses. The question in the survey was: “Which of the following comes closest to describing your experience with horses?”

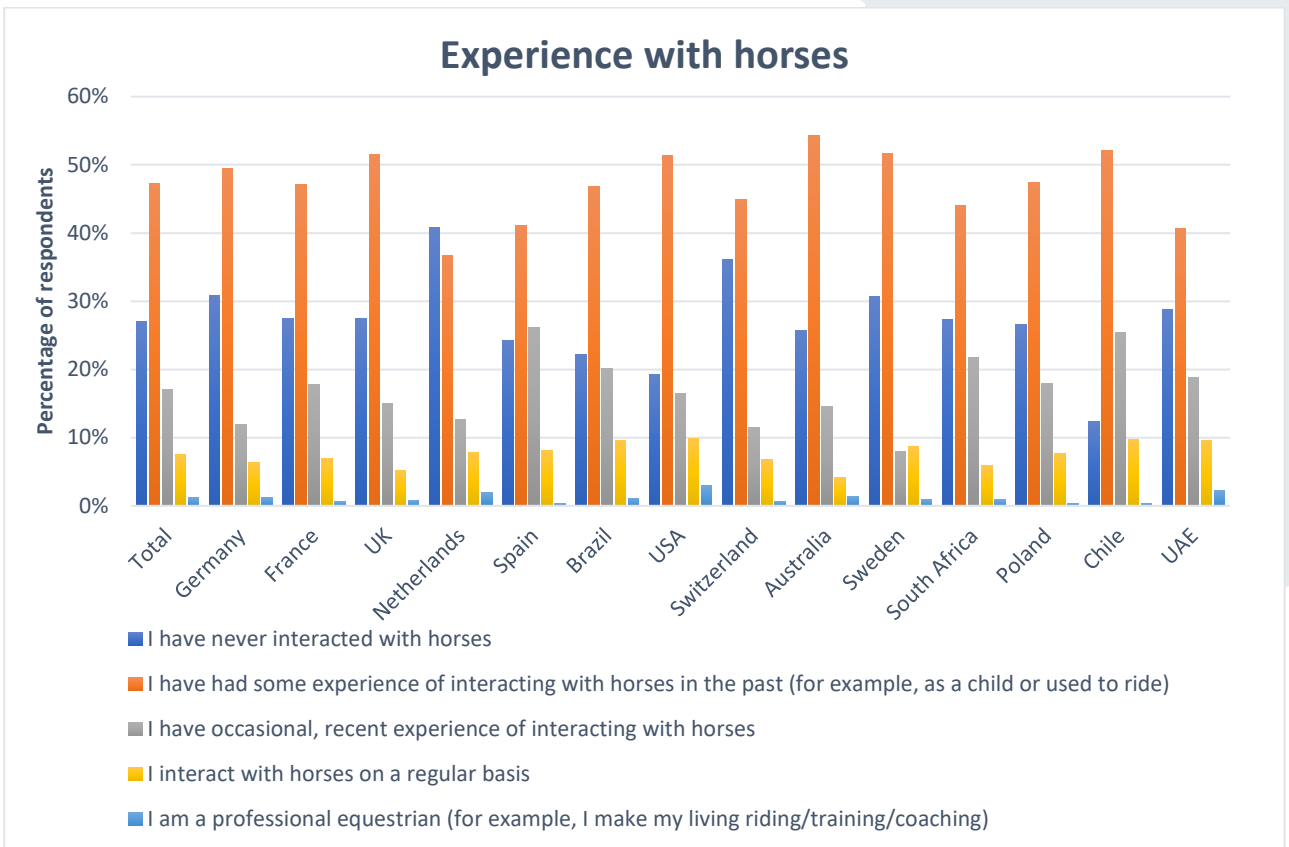


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents with different experience with horses for all 14 countries. The question in the survey was: “Which of the following comes closest to describing your experience with horses?”

2.2 Horses used in sports

Respondents were asked whether they thought that horses enjoy being used in sports. In total almost half of the respondents (47%) thought horses enjoyed sport sometimes, 20% thought they never enjoy sports and 9% and 24% thought they always or frequently enjoyed being used in sport (see Figure 3)

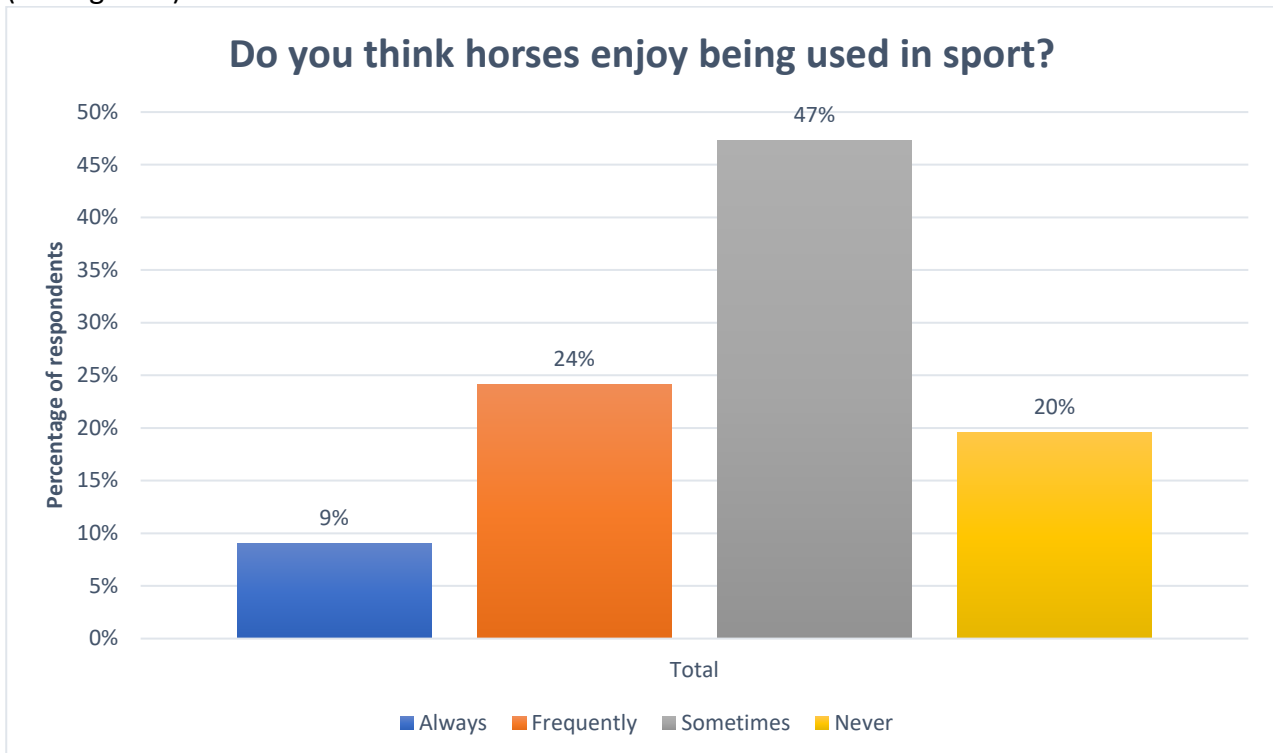


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents according to what extent they think horses enjoy being used in sport. The question in the survey was: “To what extent, if ever, do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport?”

Figure 4 shows that 33% of all respondents think horses enjoy being used in sport (Always & Frequently), and 67% of the respondents think they would mostly not enjoy being used in sport (Sometimes & Never). There was some variation between the different countries.

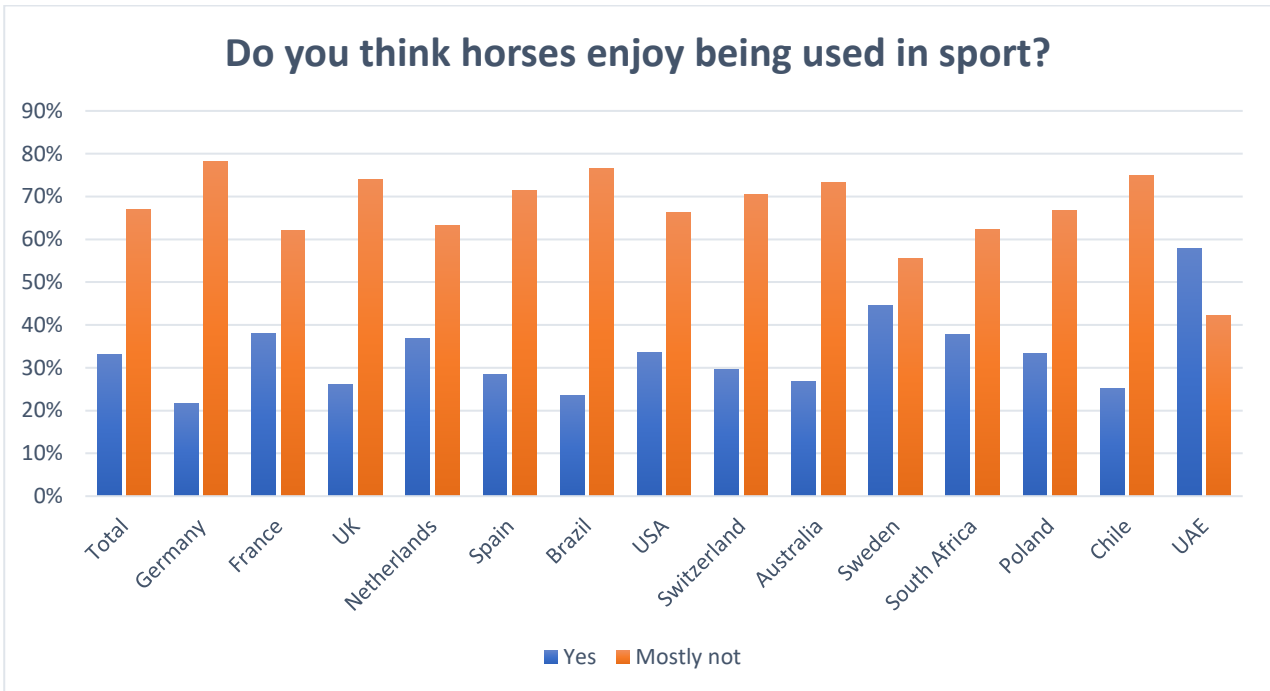


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents according to what extent they think horses enjoy being used in sport. The survey question was: “To what extent, if ever, do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport?” The categories ‘Always’ and ‘Frequently’ were combined to ‘Yes’; the categories ‘Sometimes’ and ‘Never’ were combined to ‘Mostly not’.

Interestingly, the more experienced the respondents were with horses, the more respondents believed that they enjoyed being used in sport (see Figure 5).

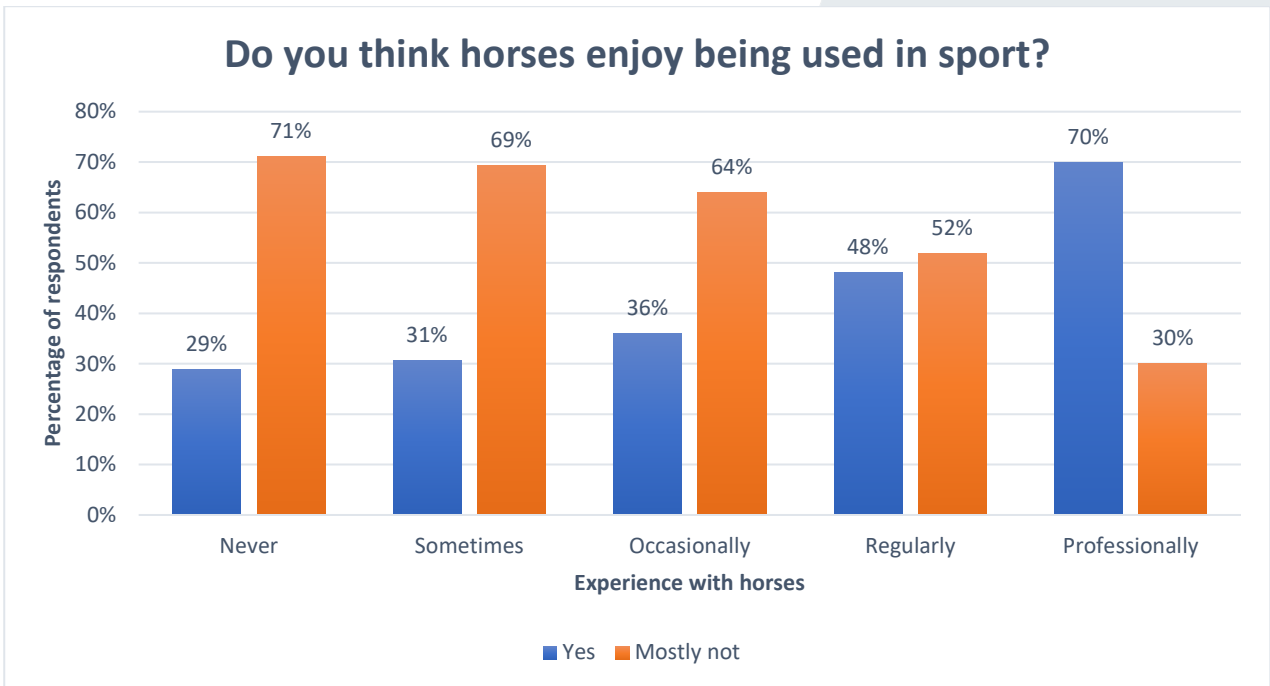


Figure 5. Percentage of respondents according to what extent they think horses enjoy being used in sport separated by groups with different experience with horses. The survey question was: “To what extent, if ever, do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport?” Note: the percentage of respondents for the categories differed. never: 27%, sometimes: 47%, occasionally: 17%, regularly: 8% and professionally: 1%.

2.3 Concerns about horses used in sport and leisure

Sixty-five percent of the respondents were concerned about the use of horses in sport, while only 35% of the respondents had no concerns. Respondents were most concerned about Endurance, followed by Eventing and Carriage-Driving. The respondents were the least concerned about Dressage, although still more than half of the respondents were concerned (see Figure 6).

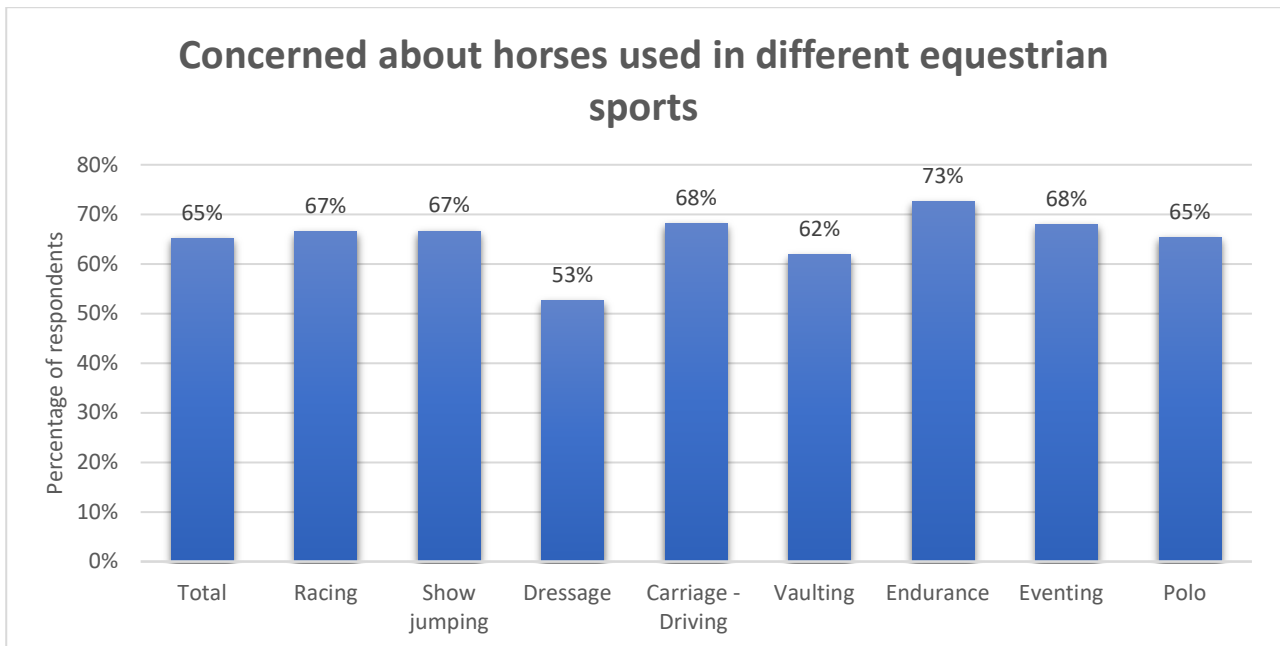


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents that have concerns about the use of horses in equestrian sports, in total and per discipline. The question in the survey was: *Thinking about horse welfare, how concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following equestrian uses?* (see for description of the uses Appendix, survey question 6).

The concerns about horses used in sports showed differences between countries. Whereas in Brazil, Germany and South Africa the highest percentages of respondents with concerns were found, Sweden, Spain and UAE had the lowest percentage of respondents being concerned (see Figure 7).

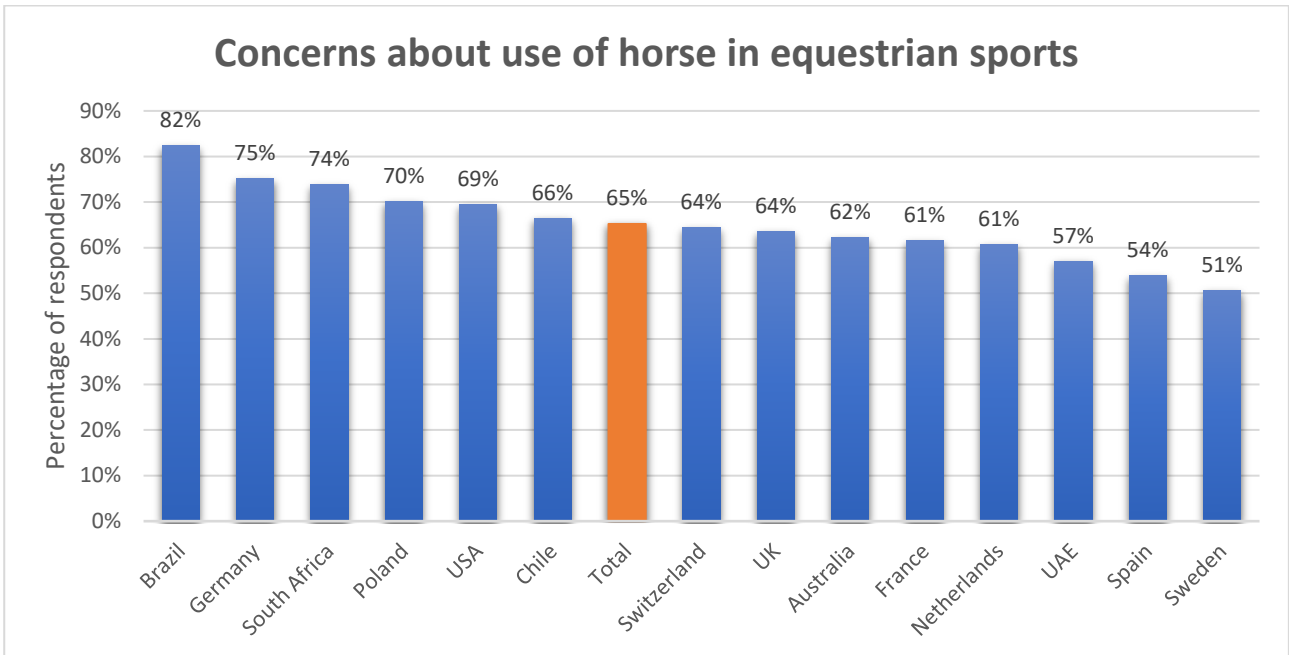


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents that have concerns about use of horses in equestrian sports, in total and per country. The question in the survey was: “Thinking about horse welfare, how concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following equestrian uses?”

Respondents were mostly concerned about the welfare and safety of the sport horse (see Figure 8). Furthermore, respondents were concerned about human safety and the impact horse sport has on the environment.

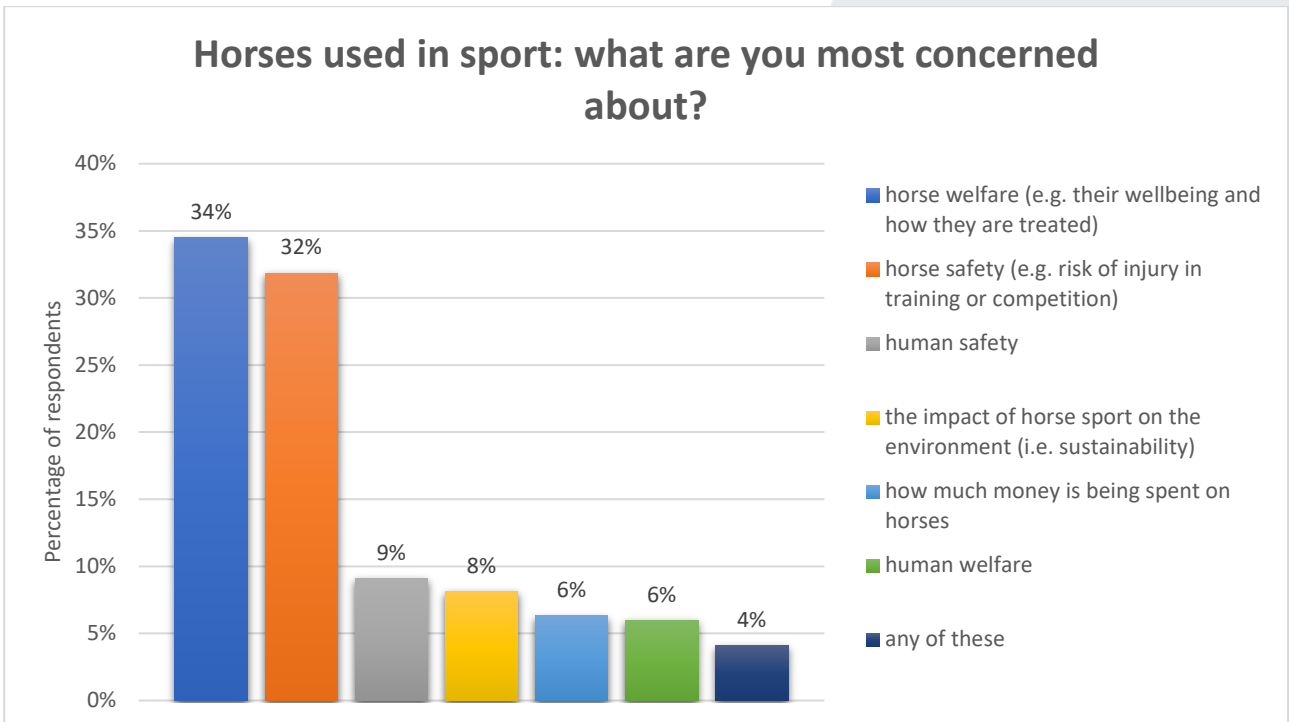


Figure 8. Percentage of respondents per category of concern. The question in the survey was: “Which of the following statements regarding the use of horses in sport do you most agree with?” All statements started with: I am most concerned with... Respondents could tick maximum of three.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were concerned about the wellbeing of horses for leisure. This percentage was very different between countries with France having the highest percentage (92%) and Sweden the lowest percentage (37%) of respondents concerned about the wellbeing of horses for leisure (see Figure 9).

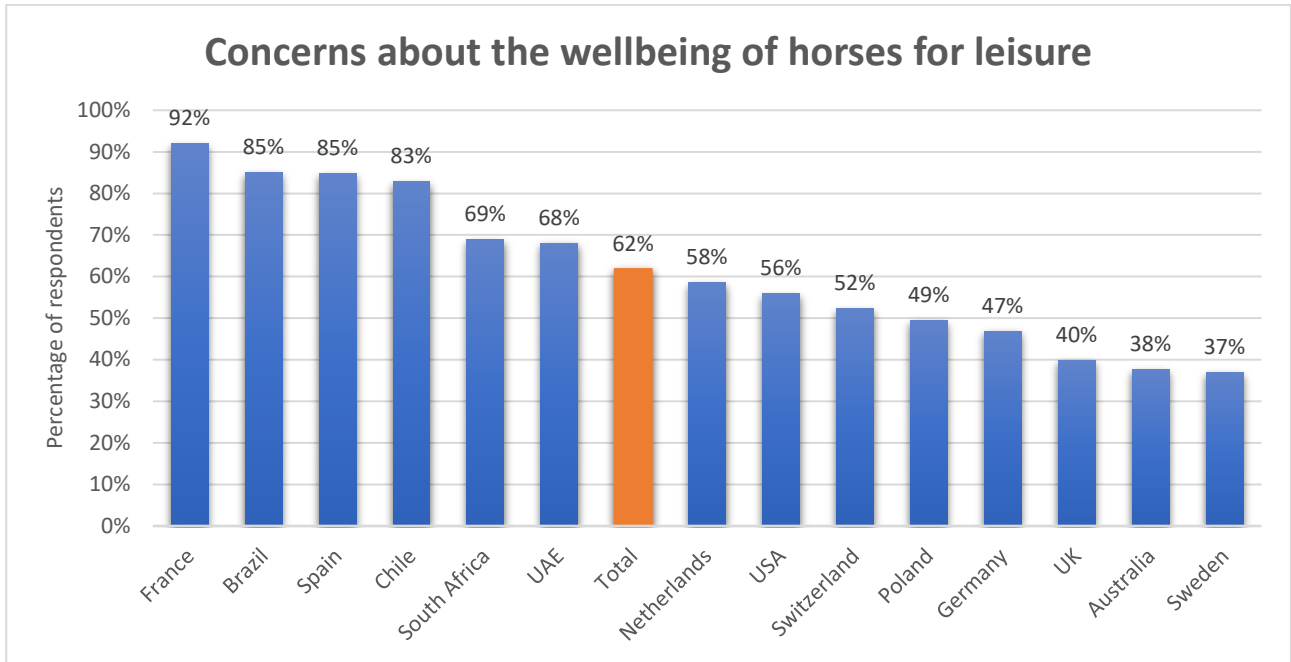


Figure 9. Percentage of respondents having concerns about the wellbeing of leisure horses, in total and per country. The question in the survey was: “Now thinking about horses kept mainly for leisure purposes, overall, do you have concerns about their well-being?”

2.4 Welfare of horses used in sport

More than half of the respondents (52%) believed that welfare standards need improving. This percentage ranged from 37% (Sweden and UAE) to 63% (Germany and France). On average 15% of the respondents believe that it is impossible to provide adequate welfare protection for horses used in sport. And 33% of the respondents believed that welfare standards of horses used in sport are high. This ranged from 24% (Germany and France) to 44% (Sweden and UAE) (see Figures 10 and 11).

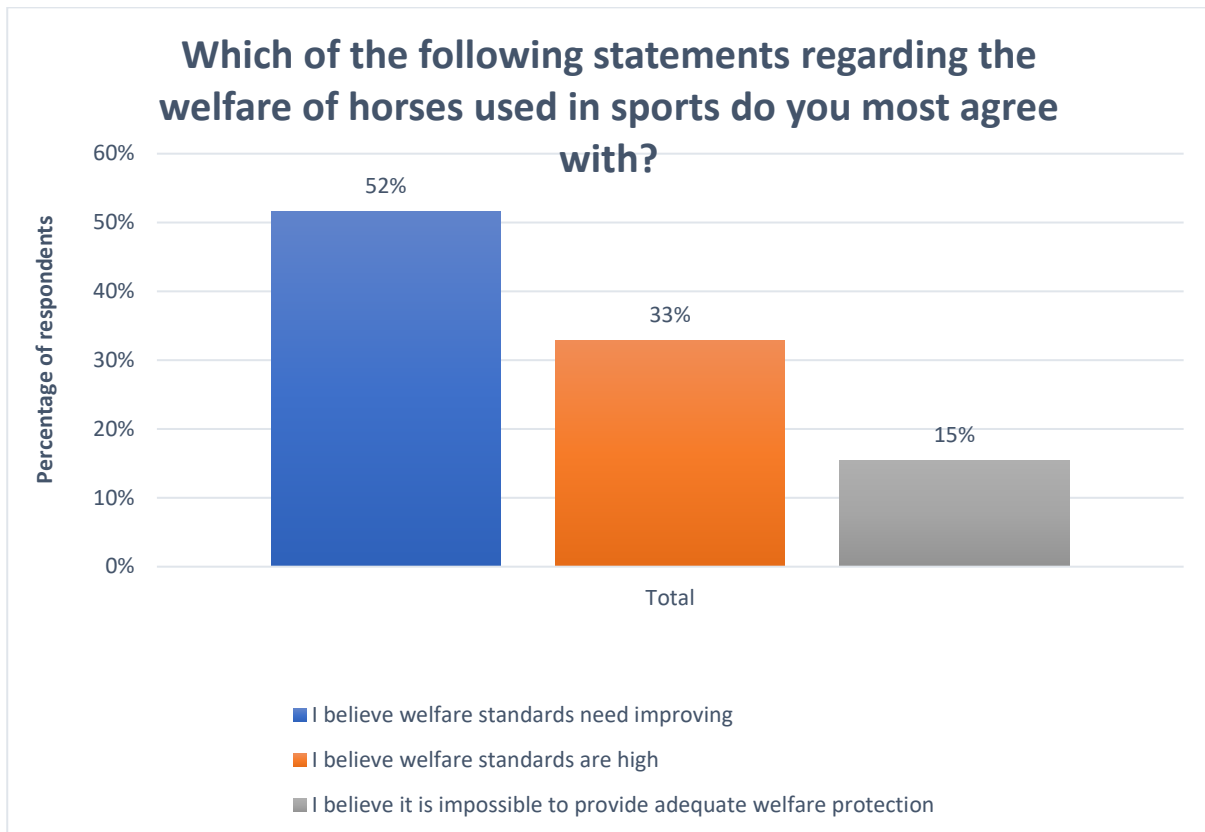


Figure 10. Percentage of respondents answering statements on welfare standards. The question in the survey was: “Which or the following statements regarding the welfare of horses used in sport do you most agree with?”

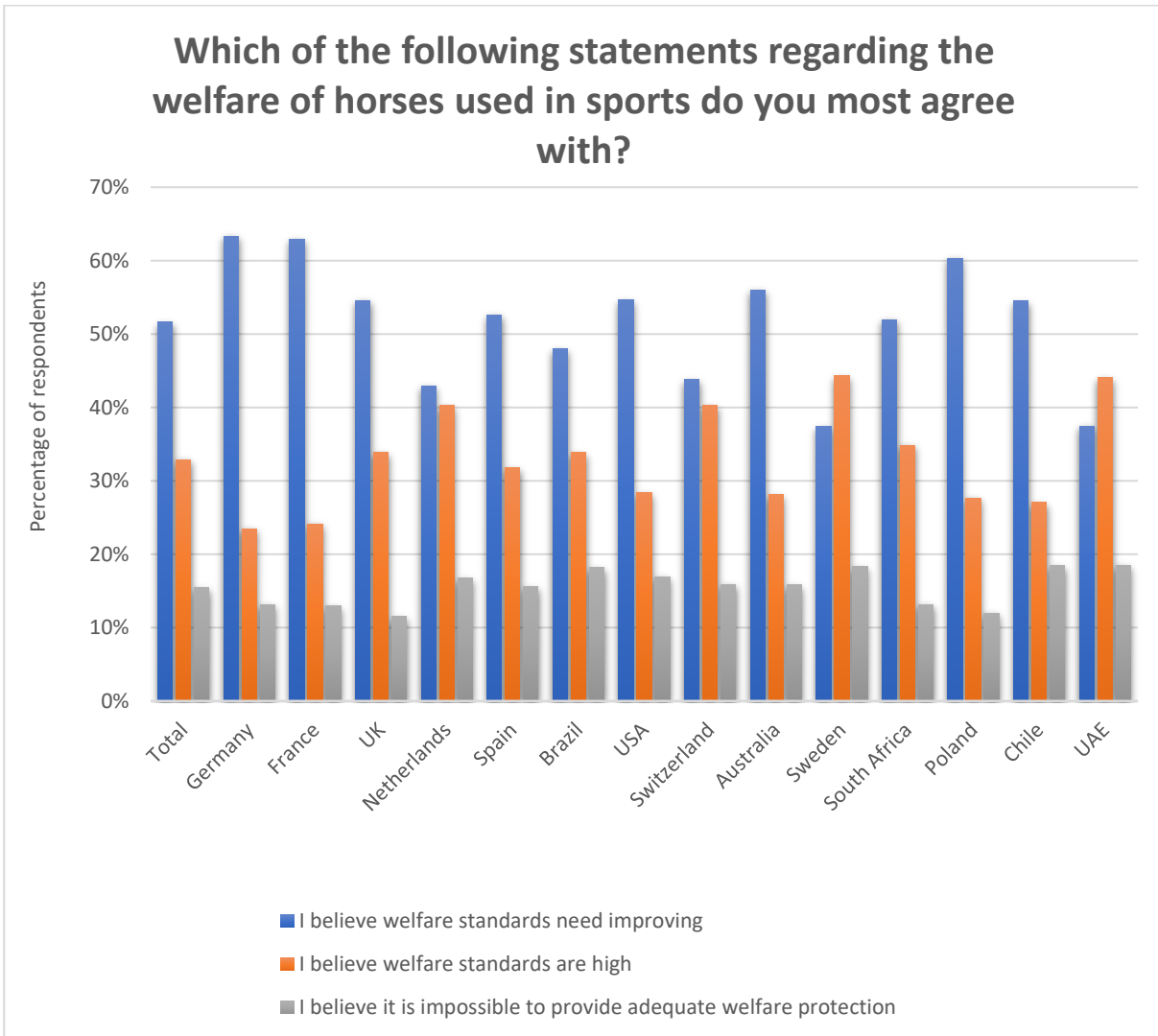


Figure 11. . Percentage of respondents answering statements on welfare standards, in total and per country. The question in the survey was: “Which or the following statements regarding the welfare of horses used in sport do you most agree with?”

2.5 The effect of media

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) were not influenced by media regarding their level of confidence about sport horse welfare. Furthermore 28% were more confident due to media coverage and 24% were less confident due to media coverage (see Figure 11).

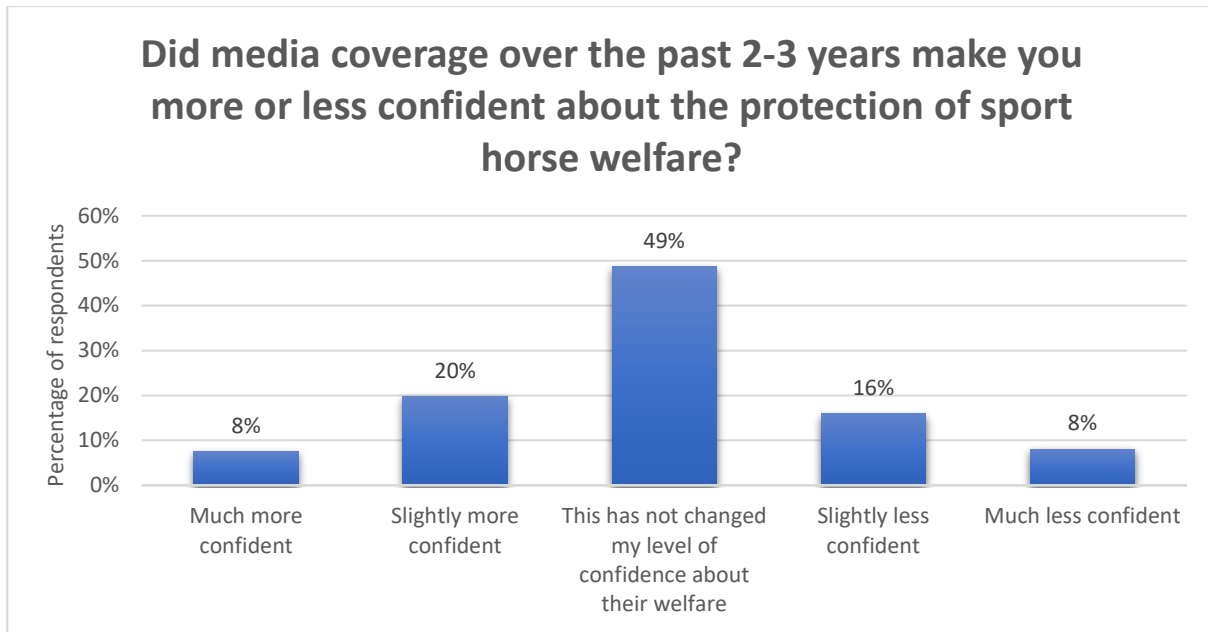


Figure 12. Percentage of respondents that had become more or less confident about the protection of sport horse welfare due to media coverage over the past 2-3 years. The question in the survey was: “To what extent, if at all, has media coverage over the past 2-3 years made you feel more or less confident about the protection of horse welfare in horse sports?”

There were some differences between countries: in UAE 55% and in Brazil 39% of the respondents had become more confident, whereas Germany, Switzerland and Australia had the highest percentages of respondents that had become less confident about the protection of sport horse welfare (respectively 38%, 29% and 31%) (see Figure 13).

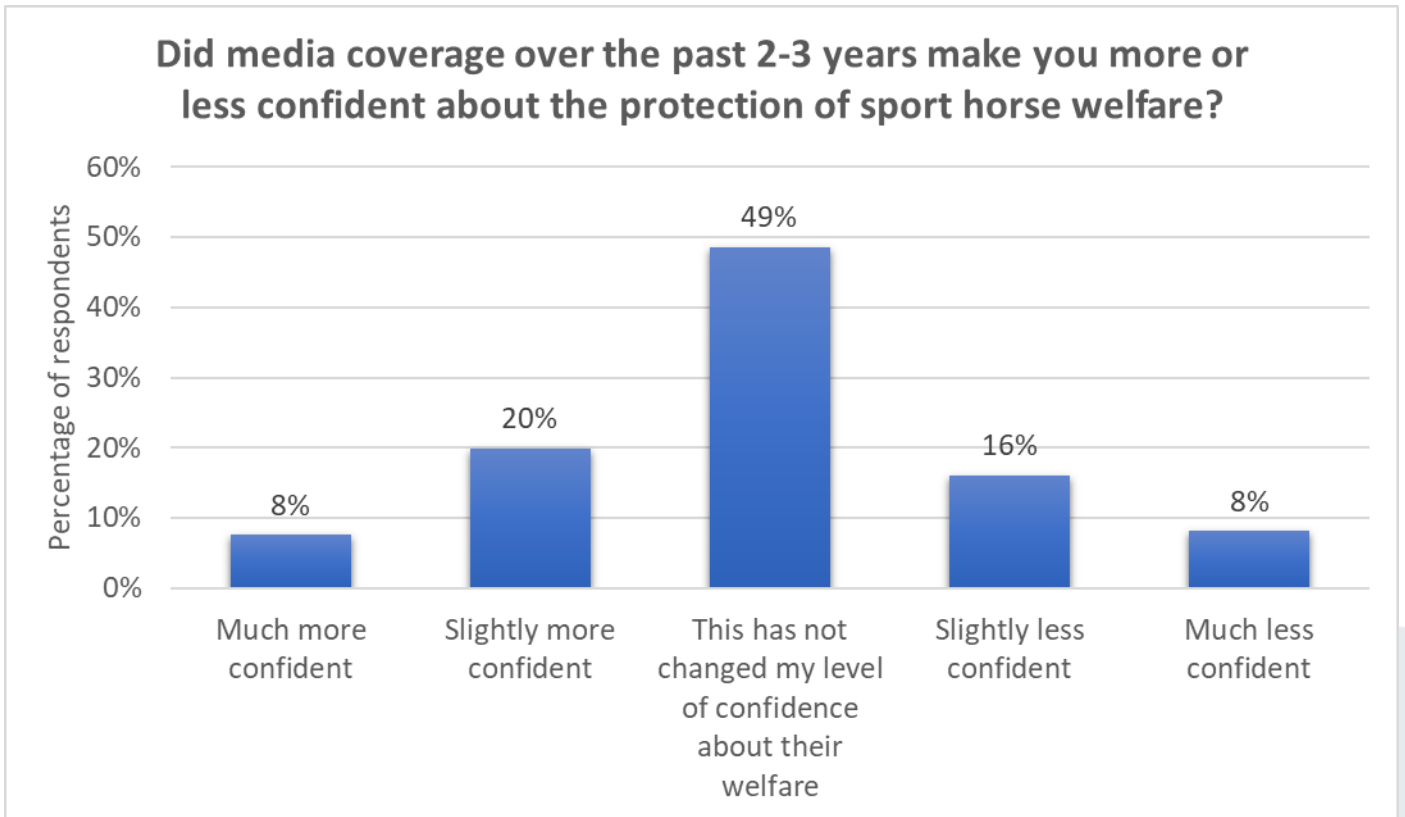


Figure 13. Percentage of respondents that had become more or less confident about the protection of sport horse welfare due to media coverage over the past 2-3 years, in total and per country. The category 'much more confident' is included in the category 'more confident' and the category 'much less confident' is included in the category 'less confident'. The question in the survey was: "To what extent, if at all, has media coverage over the past 2-3 years made you feel more or less confident about the protection of horse welfare in horse sports?"

2.6 The future of horse sport

Almost half of the respondents (47%) believed that horses will be involved in sport in the future but only with modifications to ensure their welfare is improved. Eleven percent (11%) of the respondents think that in the future it will no longer be acceptable to involve horses in sport. Germany and the Netherlands had the highest percentages (both 19%) (see Figures 14 and 15). Furthermore, in Switzerland, UK and Sweden 40% or more of the respondents believe nothing will have significantly changed for horses from the present time.

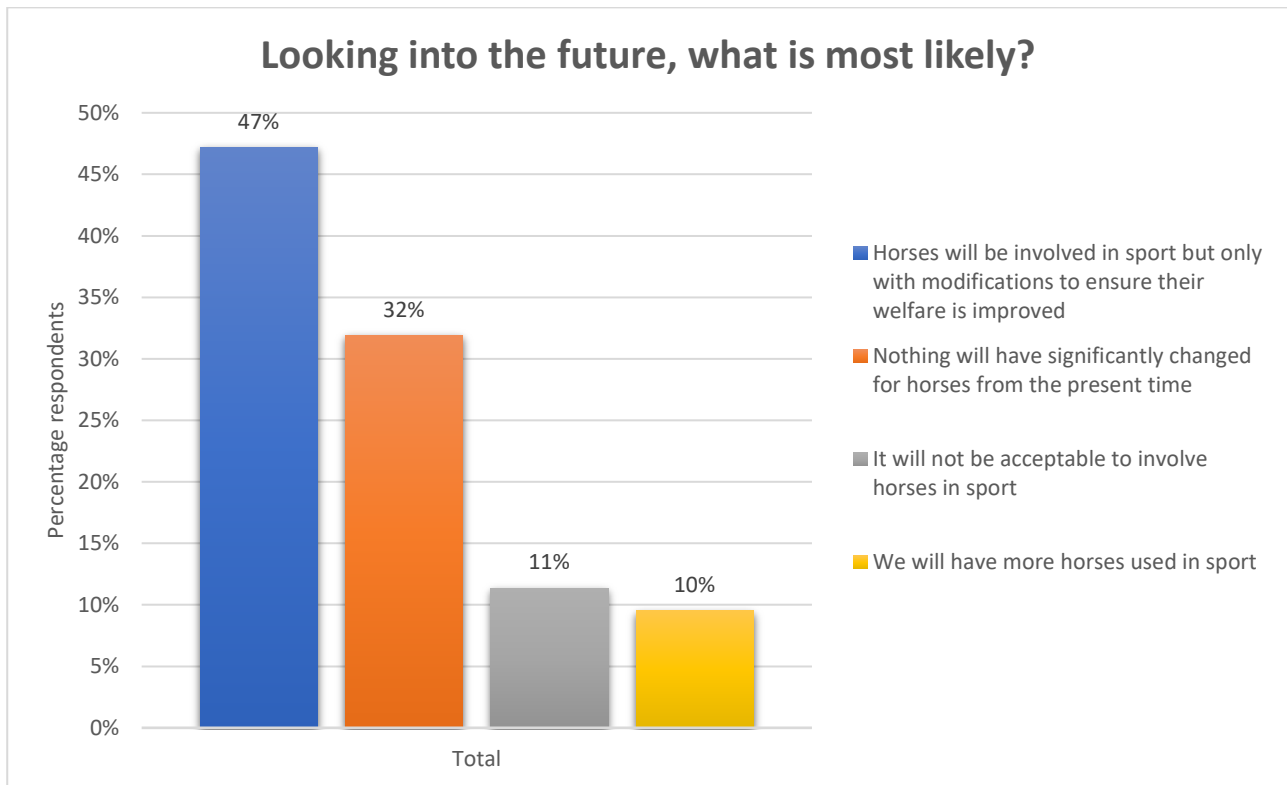


Figure 14. Percentage of respondents agreeing with statements regarding the future of horse sport. The question in the survey was: “Looking to the future, which of the following statements about horses used in sport do you think is most likely?”

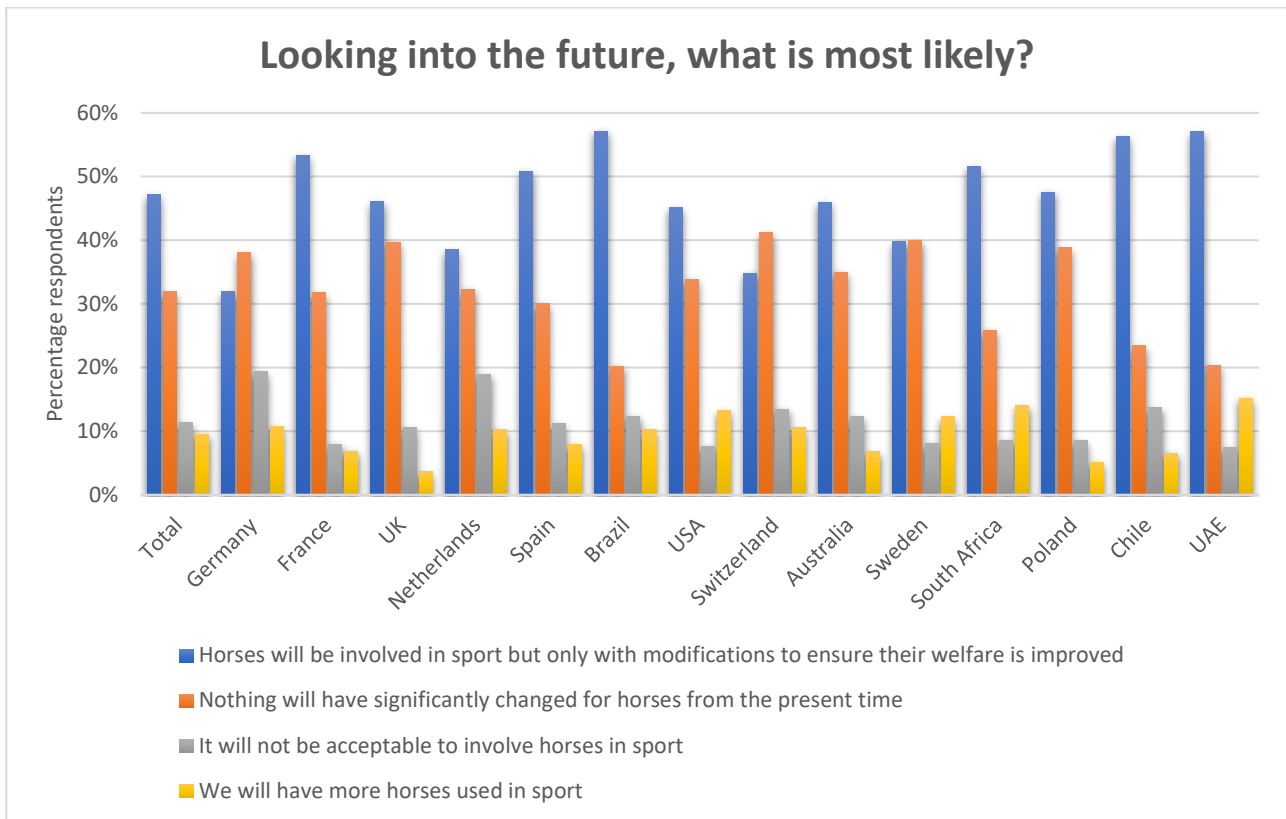


Figure 15. Percentage of respondents agreeing with statements regarding the future of horse sport, in total and per country. The question in the survey was: “Looking to the future, which of the following statements about horses used in sport do you think is most likely?”

To improve their confidence in sport horse welfare 19% of the respondents would like to see or hear more about the daily care the horses receive, followed by 18% of the respondents who want to know what happens to horses when they leave sport. Other themes that are of interest are: training of horses, what horses do in their free time, the safety, horse-rider combination and the horse as an individual (see Figure 16).

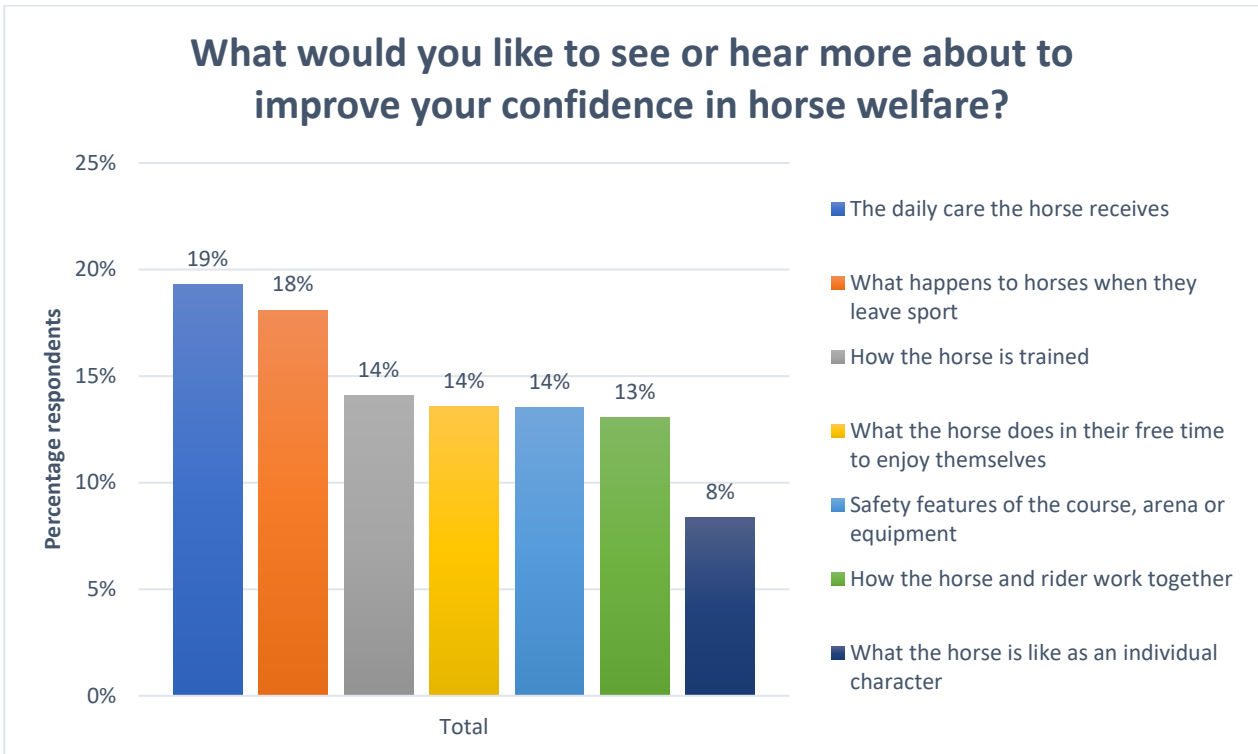


Figure 16. Percentage of respondents that would like to see or hear more about themes to improve their confidence. The question in the survey was: “Thinking about what you see on TV, hear or read regarding horses in sport, please indicate what you would like to see or hear more about to improve your confidence in horse welfare?”

Appendix: Survey questions

Equine Ethics and Well-Being Commission Public Survey August 2022

You are invited to participate in a survey to consider public opinion regarding the use of horses in sport and leisure. Responses will be used to inform the work being undertaken by an independent expert group commissioned to provide recommendations to the FEI (International Equestrian Federation) regarding the ethics and well-being of horses involved in sport. This survey is being carried out in a number of countries worldwide and all respondents will remain anonymous. The views captured in this survey are critically important for ensuring that public concerns regarding the use of horses in sport are addressed. We are grateful to you for your time in completing this survey.

1. Which of the following comes closest to describing your experience with horses? (*tick only one*)

- a. I have never interacted with horses
- b. I have had some experience of interacting with horses in the past (e.g., as a child or used to ride)
- c. I have occasional, recent experience of interacting with horses
- d. I interact with horses on a regular basis
- e. I am a professional equestrian (eg. I make my living riding/training/coaching)
- f. I don't know

2. Which of the following statements regarding the welfare of horses used in sport do you most agree with? (*tick the one you most agree with*)

- a. I believe welfare standards are high
- b. I believe welfare standards need improving
- c. I believe it is impossible to provide adequate welfare protection
- d. I don't know

3. To what extent, if ever, do you believe horses enjoy being used in sport? (*tick only one*)

- a. Always
- b. Frequently
- c. Sometimes
- d. Never
- e. I don't know

4. Which of the following statements regarding the use of horses in sport do you most agree with? (*Tick a maximum of three answers*)

- a. I am most concerned about horse welfare (e.g. their wellbeing and how they are treated)
- b. I am most concerned about horse safety (e.g. risk of injury in training or competition)

- c. I am most concerned about human welfare
- d. I am most concerned about human safety
- e. I am most concerned about the impact of horse sport on the environment (ie sustainability)
- f. I am most concerned about how much money is being spent on horses
- g. I am not concerned about any of these
- h. I don't know

5. Now thinking about horses kept mainly for leisure purposes (i.e.. as pets/companions, as a hobby, or for recreational riding), overall, do you have concerns about their well-being ? (tick only one)

Yes No Don't know / No opinion

6. Thinking about horse welfare, how concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following equestrian uses of horses in sport?

Very concerned / Fairly concerned / Not very concerned / Not at all concerned / Don't know

- a. Flat or Jump Racing (a race on a level course or with obstacles when referring to Jump racing)
- b. Show-Jumping (competitive equestrian event in which horse and rider are required to jump, often within a time limit, a series of obstacles)
- c. Dressage (also known as 'dancing horses,' where a horse performs special, carefully controlled movements as directed by the rider)
- d. Carriage-Driving (sport where horses (single, pairs or four-in hand) pull carriages at speed around specially-designed courses)
- e. Vaulting (where athletes perform acrobatics on a cantering horse, with judges assessing technique and artistry, as well as the regularity of the horse's pace to determine the final mark)
- f. Endurance (long-distance competition against the clock testing the speed and endurance of a horse and challenging the rider over their effective use of pace, thorough knowledge of their horse's capabilities and ability to cross all kinds of terrain)
- g. Eventing (equestrian triathlon consisting of Dressage, Showjumping and Cross Country, the latter of which involves a specially designed course with solid obstacles, technical questions and varied terrain)
- h. Polo (game played on horseback between two teams of four players each who use mallets with long, flexible handles to drive a wooden ball down a grass field and between two goal posts)

7. To what extent, if at all, has media coverage over the past 2-3 years made you feel more or less confident about the protection of horse welfare in horse sports? (tick only one)

- a) Much more confident
- b) Slightly more confident
- c) This has not changed my level of confidence about their welfare
- d) Slightly less confident
- e) Much less confident

f) Don't know

8. Thinking about what you see on TV, hear or read regarding horses in sport, please indicate what you would you like to see or hear more about to improve your confidence in horse welfare: Please select all that apply

- a. How the horse and rider work together
- b. Safety features of the course, arena or equipment
- c. The daily care the horse receives
- d. What the horse is like as an individual character
- e. How the horse is trained
- f. What the horse does in their free time to enjoy themselves
- g. What happens to horses when they leave sport
- h. None of the above
- i. Don't know

9. Looking to the future, which of the following statements about horses used in sport do you most agree with? (tick only one)

- a. It will not be acceptable to involve horses in sport
- b. Horses will be involved in sport but only with modifications to ensure their welfare is improved
- c. Nothing will have significantly changed for horses from the present time
- d. We will have more horses used in sport
- e. Don't know

Thank you for your valuable contribution to the Commission's work. If you would like to learn more about the work of the Equine Ethics and Well-being Commission, click [here](#).