

# Assessment of public attitudes toward lynx and lynx conservation in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy

*Final report of the Action D.4*

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## Methods

### Study area

Study area of the attitude survey has included the entire Alpine-Dinaric LIFE Lynx project area of Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. The Slovenian study area has been additionally divided into the Alpine and the Dinaric part.

### Questionnaire

For this final report the same questionnaire as for the intermediate report (modified version of the questionnaire developed in A.7 action) was used. A great deal of attention was dedicated to the development of that A.7 questionnaire, the main tool for data collection. The process included identification of the relevant issues to be explored where the entire project team has participated in the subsequent design and testing of the wording of the questions. The original questionnaire was designed in the English language which participating national teams have translated into their languages. The modified questionnaire that we have used for this report contained 48 questions. Some questions as or the previous survey (intermediate D4 survey) was used and mostly the same questions were used as for the questionnaire survey done in 2019 (A.7 action), with three minor differences. The first difference is that in this questionnaire we did not use three questions about which European lynx population is the most suitable for translocations to Slovenia, as most of the lynx translocations to Slovenia have already taken place and these questions are no longer so relevant. Another difference is that this time the question "From which sources of information do you get the most information about the lynx?" was closed-ended, so possible answers were offered to the respondents in advance. The third difference is that we added a question asking the respondents if they had already answered a similar questionnaire in the past.

The questionnaire included questions covering the following topics:

- General sentiment towards lynx
- Perceptions about lynx
- Knowledge and beliefs about lynx
- Opinions about different management measures and approaches
- Evaluation of information sources about lynx
- Demographic characteristics of the respondents
- Project visibility

In designing the questionnaire we've also partially used the questionnaire used in a public attitude survey in Slovenia and Croatia in 2007 (Interreg IIIA DinaRis).

### Target groups and sampling

With the public attitude survey, we've targeted the main stakeholder groups which are either crucial for lynx conservation or whose livelihoods lynx presence can impact – the general public in the project area, hunters in the project area and livestock breeders in the project area. In Slovenia, a sample of potential general public respondents was obtained from the register of inhabitants – a random stratified (Alps and Dinarics) sample of adult (18

years and older) inhabitants was obtained from the national Statistical Office. The sample included first name, last name, and address of the selected potential respondent. In Italy a commercial panel sample was used and in Croatia a CATI sample. In Slovenia questionnaires were sent to the potential respondents and an envelope with prepaid return postage was included. Seven days later a reminder/thank you card was sent to increase response rate. In Croatia, the study was conducted using a CATI telephone method. In Italy questionnaires were filled online or through telephone interviews.

Sample of farmers was obtained in Slovenia from the register of farmers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food. Names, last names, and addresses were obtained, and questionnaires were sent by mail with an envelope with prepaid return postage. Seven days later a reminder/thank you card was sent in order to increase response rate. In Croatia a CATI telephone method was carried out and additionally an online survey was shared on various social networks and portals thematically related to the areas of Lika and Gorski Kotar. In Italy breeders were identified within the panel sample by answering the question whether they own livestock. Additionally, the questionnaire was emailed to breeders associations for distribution among their members.

Sample of hunters was obtained in Slovenia by sending 3-5 questionnaires to each of the local hunting organizations in the project area and asking the leaders of the hunting organizations to distribute the questionnaires among the hunters. In Croatia a CATI telephone method was carried out and additionally an online survey was shared on various social networks and portals thematically related to the areas of Lika and Gorski Kotar. In Italy a panel survey was carried out and additionally the questionnaire was also distributed by hunters themselves to increase the sample size.



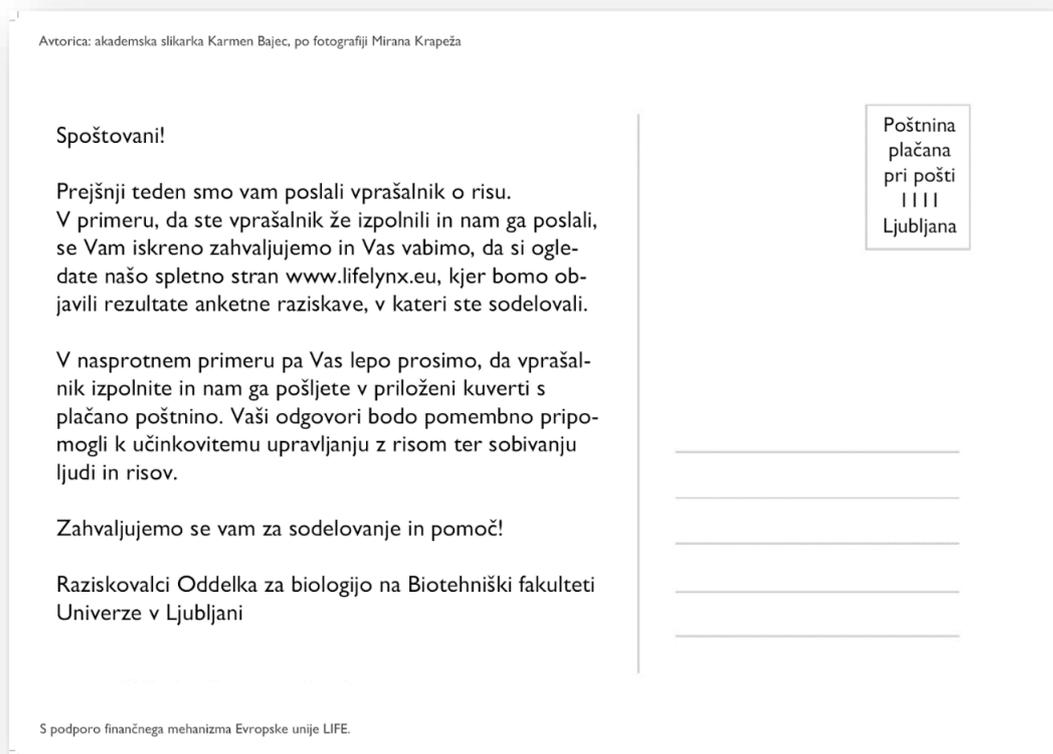


Figure 1: Reminder/Thank you card that was used in Slovenia to increase response rates for general public, farmers and hunters.

## Data management and analysis

All the data was entered into an excel form. A random sample of 3% of questionnaires entered by hand was re-checked for the typing mistakes at the end. We did not find any mistakes.

## Results

### About the sample

The obtained sample sizes within this survey implemented in spring and early summer 2023 were 859, 661 and 719 for Slovenia, Italy and Croatia, respectively. Response rate for questionnaires sent by mail in Slovenia was 26,8%.

Within the general public sample, the share of females vs. males was not so well distributed. Females made up 40%, 49% and 54% in Slovenia, Italy and Croatia, respectively. The oldest were general public respondents in Italy (58 years average), followed by Croatia (57 years on average), and Slovenia (53 years average).

In the following section we show first the results of the general public in the three countries. The answers of all the stakeholder groups are presented in the following sections "Results by stakeholder group". It is important to note that respondents from each country were answering questions about their own country.

## Attitudes towards lynx

### General public by country

In all three countries the majority of respondents described themselves as being in favor of lynx. In Italy, where the lynx are scarcest, the share of those describing themselves as being neither in favor nor against was the highest with 25% (Figure 2). In comparison with previous surveys (2021 and 2019) the proportion of those describing themselves as being neither in favor nor against has decreased, where in both previous surveys it stayed relatively the same (36% and 35%). In comparison with previous survey (2021) the support of lynx has grown a little in Italy while in Slovenia and Croatia it remained about the same. Similar distribution of opinions was found when respondents in all three countries assessed their agreement/disagreement to supporting maintaining lynx in their respective countries for future generations (Figure 3, Figure 4).

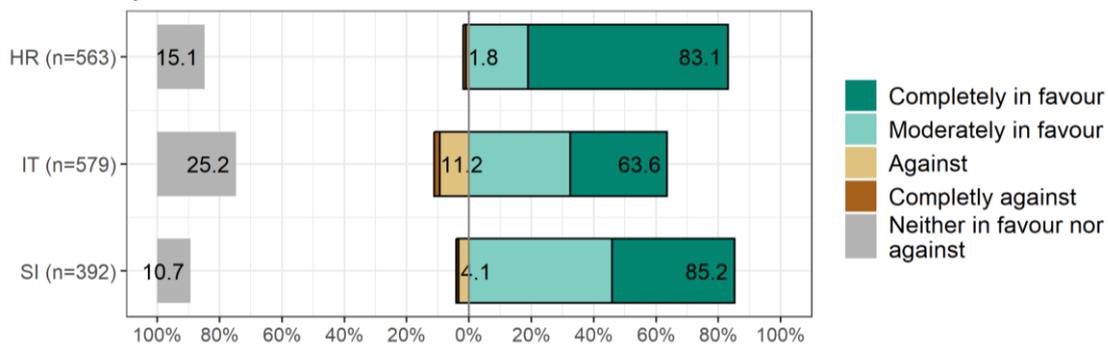


Figure 2: How would you describe your attitudes towards lynx?

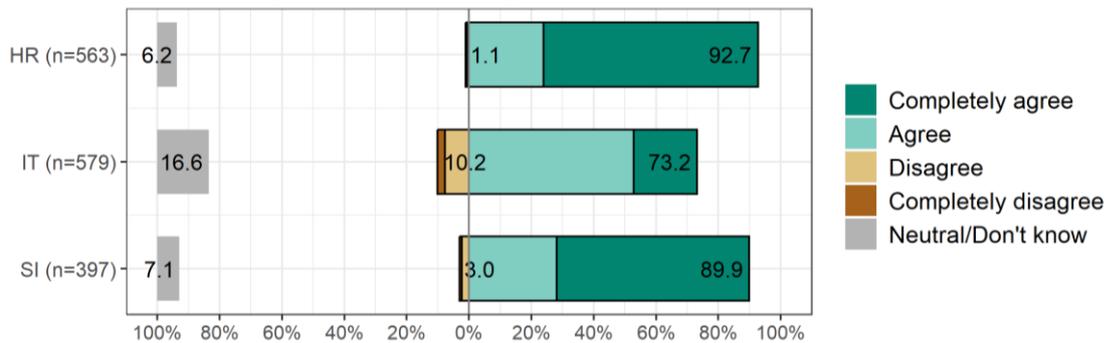


Figure 3: It is important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia for future generations.

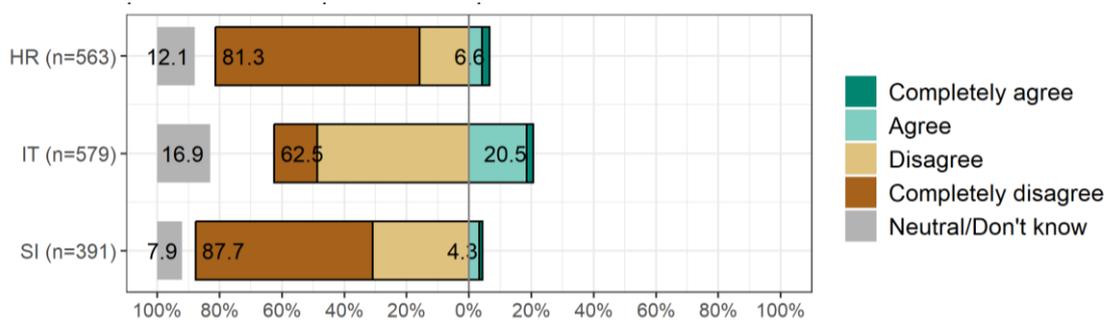


Figure 4: It is not important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia because there are lynx present in other parts of Europe.

When we compare the results of this survey with previous two surveys we can see that the majority respondents in all countries disagreed with the statement “It is not important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia because there are lynx present in other parts of Europe. In Slovenia there were only minor differences between the three surveys. In Italy the percentage of those who disagreed with the statement first increased (2019-2021, 70% to 75%) and then decreased in the last survey (62%). In Croatia we can observe a decrease of respondents who disagreed from the first to the second survey (90% to 74%) and then increase in the last survey (81%).

### Results by stakeholder group

If we look at the results based on the respondents’ belonging to a stakeholder group, we see that the only group not so overwhelmingly in favor of lynx are livestock breeders since a little over a quarter of them still describe their attitudes as being against lynx (Figure 5). With 61% agreeing to the question it is important to conserve lynx for future generations (Figure 6), this is the stakeholder group with the lowest acceptance level.

During the three surveys, the general public was the most consistent interest group as their opinions have not changed much for the statements »How would you describe your attitudes towards lynx«. »It is important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia for future generations« and »It is not important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia because there are lynx present in other parts of Europe«. The general public shows a positive attitude towards lynx and highly supports maintaining lynx in their respective countries. Hunters are another interest group which shows a positive attitude and strong support to maintain lynx in their respective countries. Throughout the project this group shows little change in their opinion with the exception of the first survey where their attitudes were even more positive, however, it is important to note that the sample size of hunters in 2019 was 81 while in other years it was over 360.

Livestock breeders were the group showing the least support for lynx, however, it needs to be noted that even so, the majority of livestock breeders claimed to have positive attitudes toward the lynx and stated their support for maintaining lynx for future generations. Similarly, to other groups, there was little change in their opinion regarding their attitude towards lynx and the lynx presence in their respective countries through all three surveys.

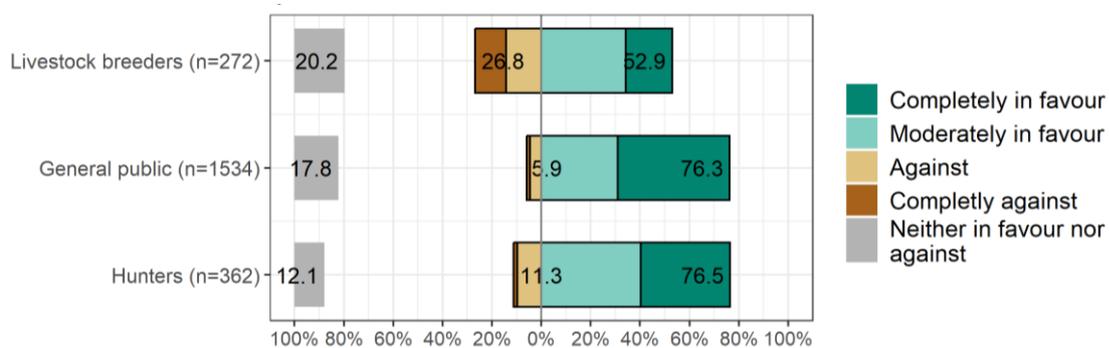


Figure 5: How would you describe your attitude towards lynx?

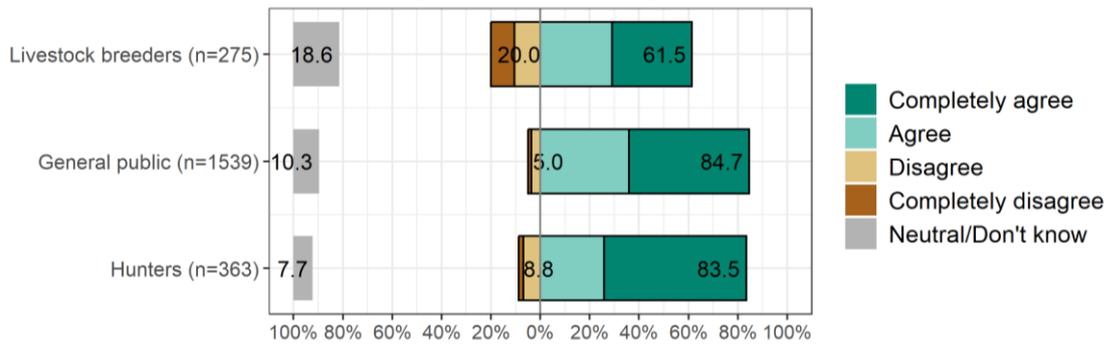


Figure 6: It is important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia for future generations.

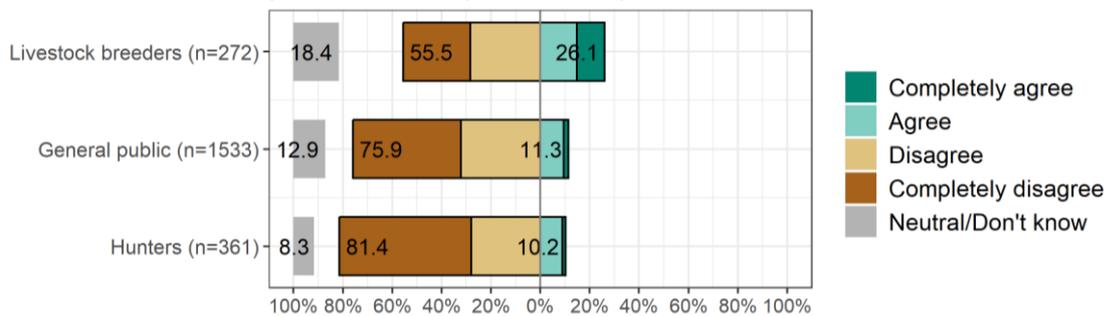


Figure 7: It is not important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia because there are lynx present in other parts of Europe.

## Fear of lynx

### General public by country

Large carnivores can evoke strong and emotional responses in humans (Jacobs et al. 2019). They often feel fear, hatred or admiration, and excitement towards them (Røskaft et al. 2007, Johansson et al. 2012, Sjölander-Lindqvist et al. 2015). Lynx avoid people and are not considered to be dangerous to them, which respondents from Slovenia and Croatia seem to be well aware of (Figure 9). The majority (49%) of respondents from Italy, on the other hand, chose the “Not sure” answer to the statement that lynx often attack humans, and 43% of them expressed they would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present (Figure 8).

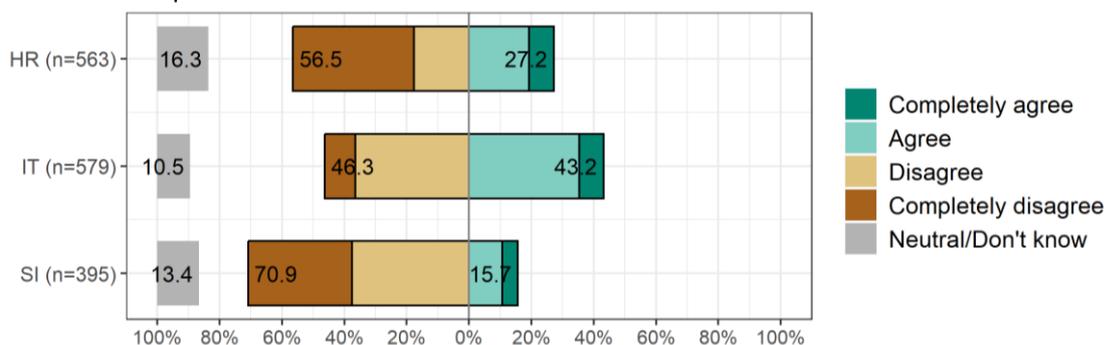


Figure 8: I would be afraid to go into the forest where lynx are present.

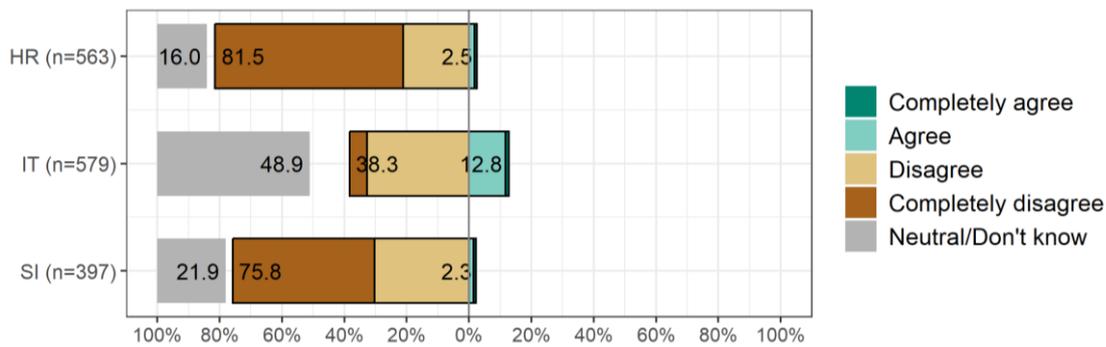


Figure 9: In areas where lynx live in nearby forests, they often attack humans.

The biggest change in attitudes towards the statement “I would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present.” can be noticed in Italian data, where in 2021 26% of respondents were neutral (didn't agree or disagree) about that statement and in 2023 we can see that only 10% still remained neutral about the statement, and the majority of the previously neutral moved towards those that disagree with this statement. In 2021 only 32% of respondents from Italian general public disagreed to be afraid to walk in forest where lynx is present and now 46% disagreed with the statement. One reason for this might be the translocation of lynx to Italy in 2023 and due to communication activities the knowledge of general public increased and fear decreased. However, in the next statement »In areas where lynx live in nearby forests, they often attack humans« the majority of respondents still remains neutral. The number of lynx in Italy is really low and general public does not have much experience with the species.

In Slovenia and Croatia, the opinion of general public has not changed much with exception of increased percentage of respondents in Croatia who agreed to be afraid to walk in forest where there are also lynx present (13% in 2019 and 29% in 2021), but that can be perhaps explained with the sample size, as in 2019 the sample size was 183 and in 2021 the sample size of Croatian general public was 563. General public in Croatia shows a little more fear as 29% agreed with statement »I would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present« in 2021 and 27% in 2023 (Figure 8), while 17% of general public in Slovenia felt the same in 2021 and 16% in 2023. The majority of general public in both countries is aware that lynx is not a big threat to people as only 2% of respondents from general public in Slovenia in 2021 and 2023 agreed that lynx attacks on people happen often in areas where lynx live in nearby forests (Figure 9) while 5% of respondents from Croatian general public agreed with this statement in 2021 and 2% in 2023.

### Results by stakeholder group

Fear of lynx seems to be to some degree an issue with the general public and livestock breeders (Figure 10) as a little less than a third (30% and 32%) of respondents agree to be afraid to walk in forests where lynx are present, while only 5% of hunters feels the same. This opinion has not changed much during the three surveys. Even though a part of respondents from the general public and livestock breeder interest group reported fear of lynx, the majority of respondents do not agree that lynx often attacks

people, however, those two groups had a higher percentage of neutral responses.

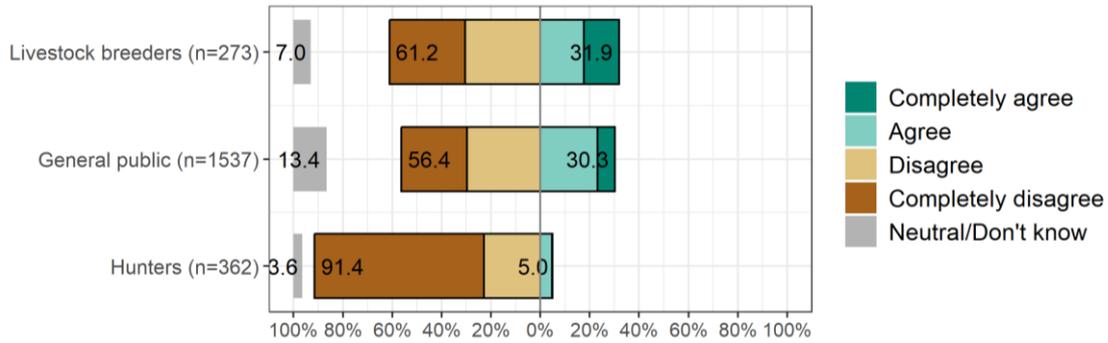


Figure 10: I would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present.

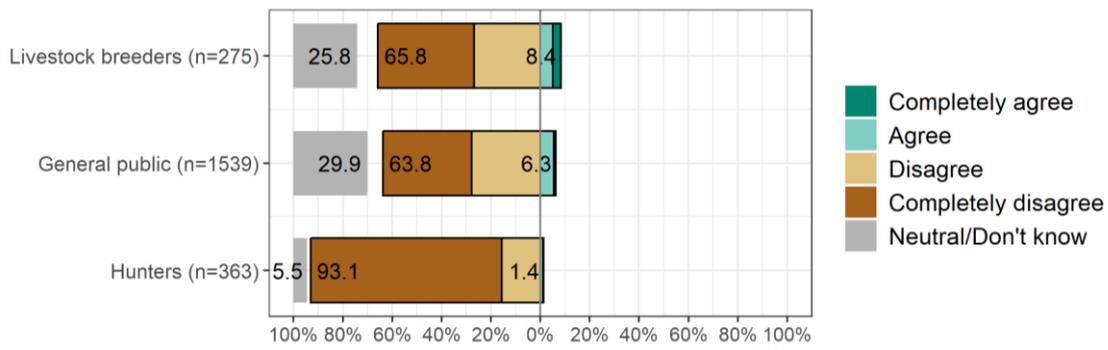


Figure 11: In areas where lynx live in nearby forests, they often attack humans.

## Acceptance of lynx in local environment

### General public by country

One of the important factors determining the lynx population's chances for long-term survival is whether the local inhabitants are willing to tolerate lynx in their vicinity. Large majority of all respondents disagree with the extermination of the species (Figure 12). Economic impacts of coexisting with large carnivores are often one of the factors influencing acceptance levels. Respondents in our survey are generally not concerned with the potential financial damage caused by lynx (Figure 13). If strong negative attitudes toward wildlife develop, wildlife poaching can become an issue (Červený et al 2019). Respondents from all three countries participating in the LIFE Lynx project believe that illegal killings of lynx are not justifiable (Figure 14).

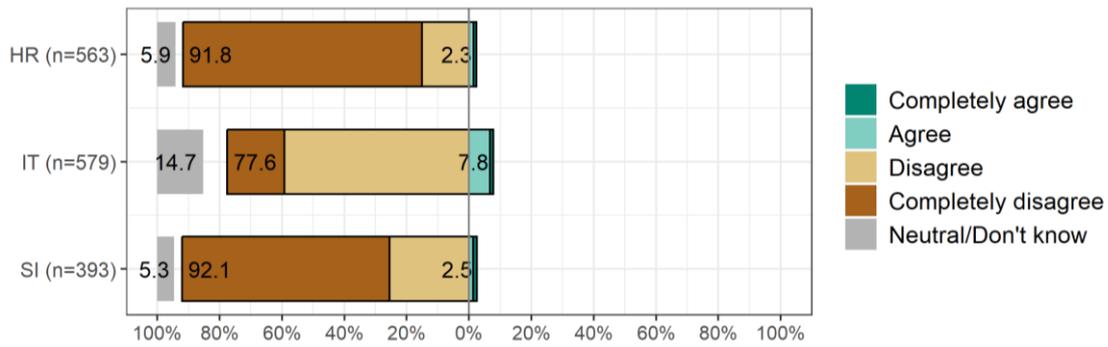


Figure 12: Lynx do not belong to our country and should be exterminated.

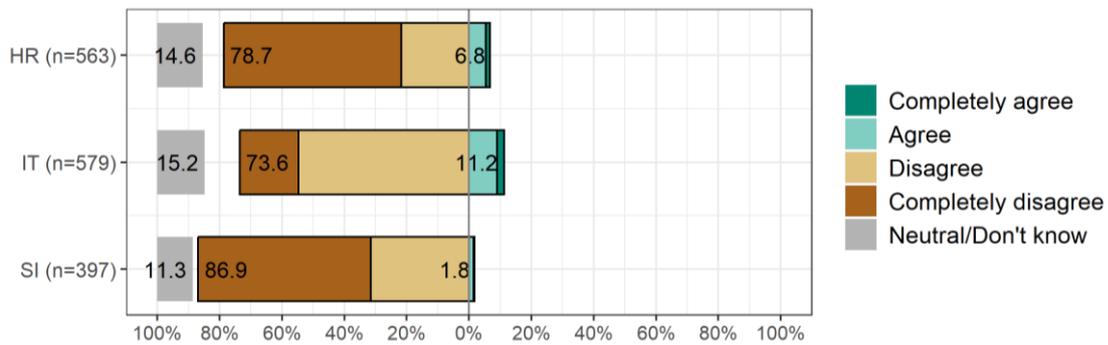


Figure 13: I am afraid that increased lynx presence would cause me financial damage.

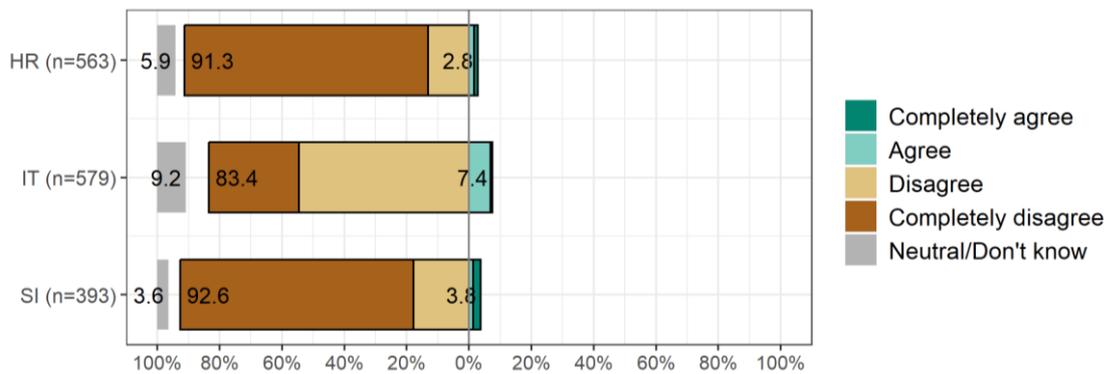


Figure 14: Illegal killings of lynx are justifiable.

The opinion of general public in all three countries hasn't changed during the three surveys regarding statements »Lynx do not belong to our country and should be exterminated«, »I am afraid that increased lynx presence would cause me financial damage« and »Illegal killings of lynx are justifiable«. The biggest difference was in the neutral respondents in Italy. During the first survey (2019) the proportion of neutral respondents for all three statements was 28%, 28% and 16%, in 2021 this proportion decreased to 17%, 5% and 4% and during the last survey remained similar with 15%, 15% and 9%. The number of neutral respondents decreased and number of those who show positive opinion towards lynx has increased in 2023.

### Results by stakeholder group

Among stakeholder groups, livestock owners are still the most concerned about the potential of economic damage caused by lynx (Figure 16). Through all three surveys about a third of livestock breeders have reported fear of financial damage with the increasing presence of lynx, although in 2023 the percentage of breeders who are afraid of financial damage due to lynx presence is the lowest (27% while in 2021 it was 34%). In hunter group however, fear of damage cause by lynx has decreased from 2021 as only 13% of hunters now agree with statement »I am afraid that increased lynx presence would cause me financial damage« when in 2021 survey 18% of hunters agreed with the statement. Nevertheless, all the stakeholders overwhelmingly disagree with the extermination or illegal killings of lynx. This was true for all survey years.

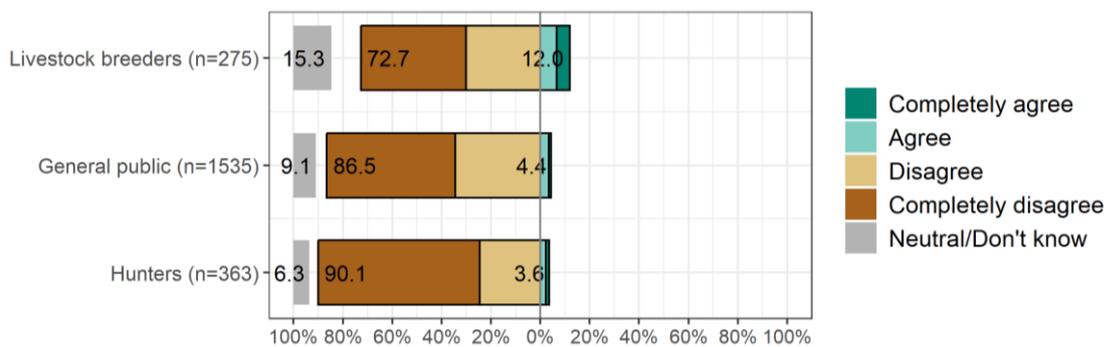


Figure 15: Lynx do not belong to our country and should be exterminated.

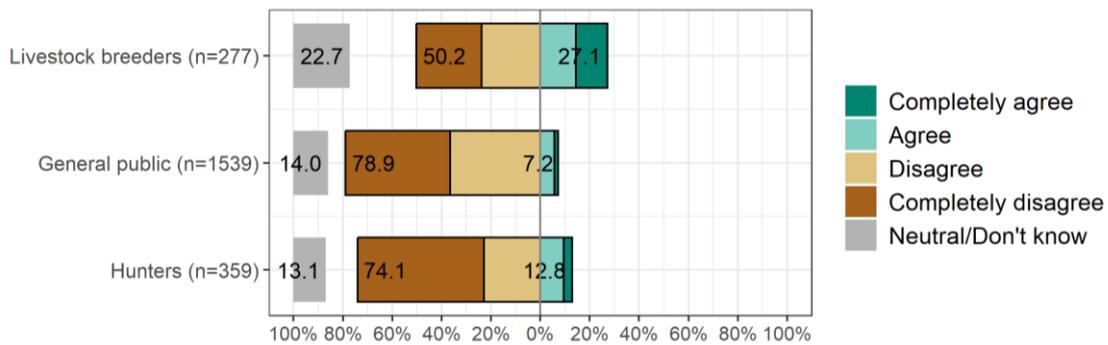


Figure 16: I am afraid that increased lynx presence would cause me financial damage.

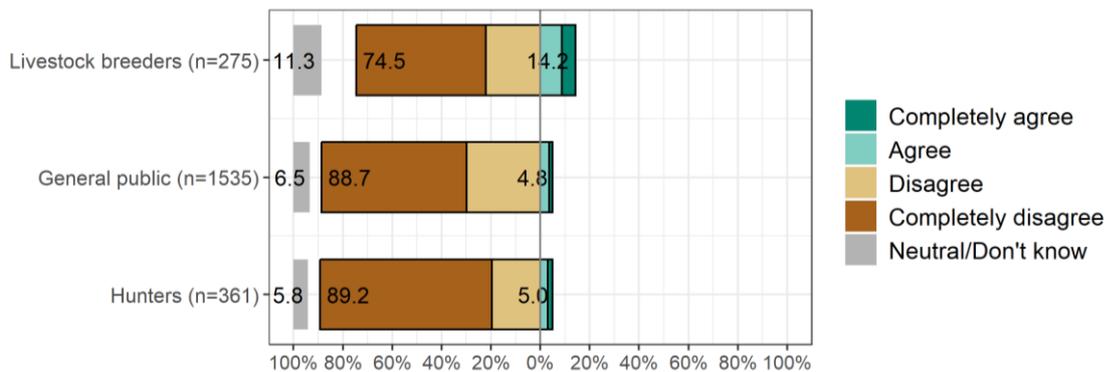


Figure 17: Illegal killings of lynx are justifiable.

## Lynx population management – size and status of the population

### General public by country

Public perceptions about the species' abundance play an important role in shaping public support or opposition to different management measures. We have used a series of statements to assess these perceptions. Most of our respondents did not believe the lynx population is in good condition. In Italy, 52% and in Croatia, 39% of the respondents chose a neutral answer and in Slovenia 36% (Figure 18). In addition, the respondents have mostly agreed that the population is close to extinction (Figure 19).

While the majority of respondents still do not agree that lynx population in Slovenia and Croatia is in good condition, the percentage of those that do agree has been slowly increasing in Slovenia and Croatia. During the first survey in 2019 only 4% of respondents agreed that lynx population is in good condition in Croatia and 21% were neutral about it. In Slovenia 5% of respondents agreed that lynx population in Slovenia is in good condition and 22% were neutral. Four years later during the last survey 19% of Croatian respondents now agree that lynx population is in good condition while 39% are neutral about it. In Slovenia 11% of respondents agree that lynx population is in good condition and 36% are neutral. The increasing percentage of respondents without formed opinion (neutral) and respondents that think lynx population is in good condition is most likely due to translocations of Slovakian and Romanian animals and media reports about the success of the project. In Italy the percentage of respondents who believe that lynx population is in good condition was higher than those who disagreed. However, it needs to be stated that the majority (52%) remain neutral. The high percentage of neutral respondents has remained throughout the years and could be explain with lack of knowledge about the lynx as well as with conflicting media reports about the success of LIFE Lynx projects and problems of lynx population. In 2021 52% respondents in Italy disagreed with the statement that lynx population is in good condition, and 43% remain neutral while in 2019 31% disagreed that lynx population is in good condition, and 5%% remained neutral. Similar picture can be seen with the next statement »Lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is close to extinction«. From 2019 to 2023 the number of respondents who agree with the statement has been slowly decreasing on the account of neutral and those who disagree that lynx population is close to extinction. However, it should be noted that the majority, 47% in Italy, 57% in Croatia and 58% in Slovenia, still agree that population is close to extinction.

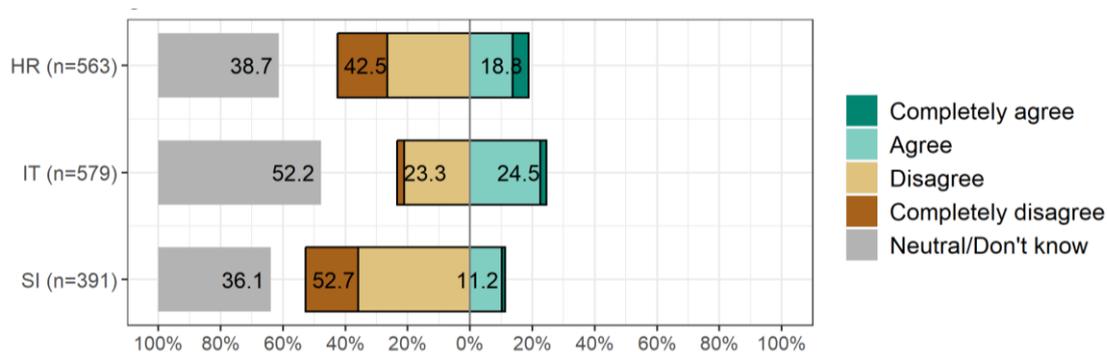


Figure 18: Lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is in good condition.

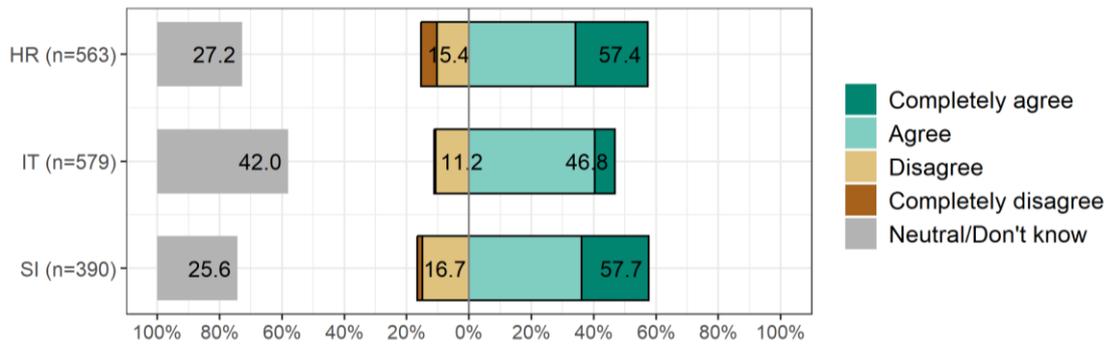


Figure 19: Lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is close to extinction.

Prevalent support to increasing the number of lynx in their respective countries was documented in Slovenia and Croatia while in Italy 35% of respondents disagreed with increasing the number of lynx and 32% agreed (Figure 20). In all three countries the majority of respondents were opposed to hunting lynx (Figure 21 and 22). Croatia is the only one of three countries where the difference between those in support of hunting quotas and those against is really small. In 2019 survey 30% supported hunting quotas and 47% disagreed. In 2021 survey 41% supported hunting quotas and 47% disagreed, During the last survey 36% supported hunting quotas and 37% disagreed.

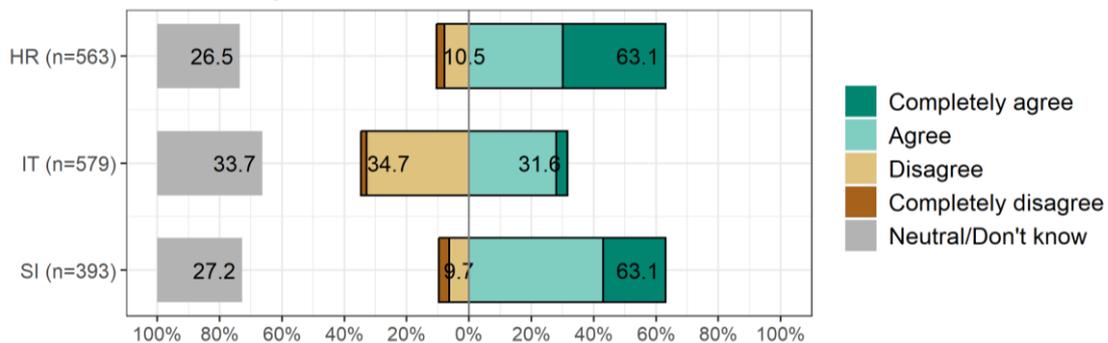


Figure 20: The number of lynx should be increased in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

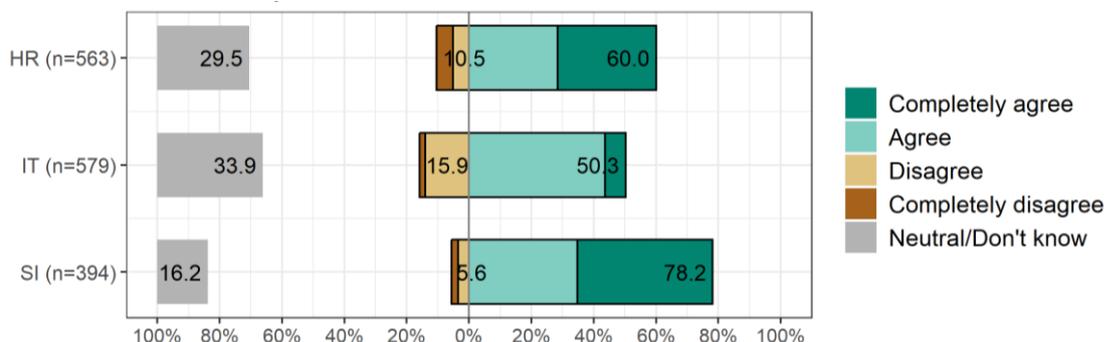


Figure 21: Currently there are too few lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia to be hunted.

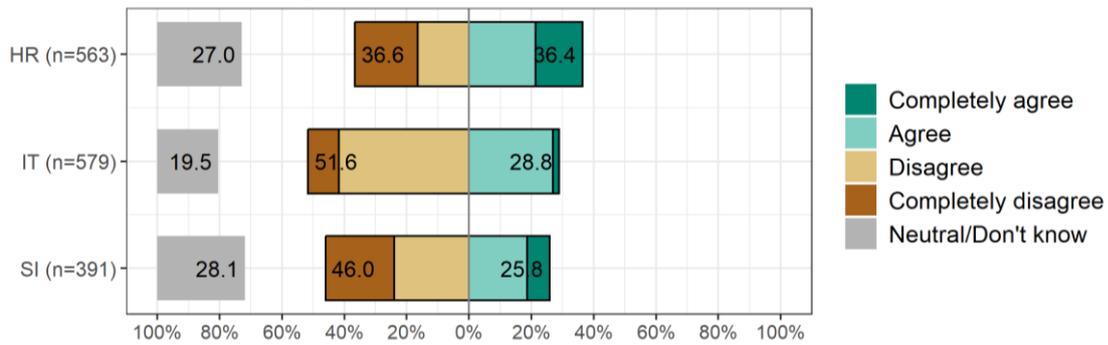


Figure 22: There should be regular quotas for hunting of lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

Over the years, several possible causes for lynx population deterioration were identified. Genetic analysis has confirmed that inbreeding depression was most likely the leading cause (Sindičić et al. 2013). Respondents from Slovenia have correctly identified this cause as the leading one (Figure 23), while respondents from Italy and Croatia ranked illegal killings (Figure 26) as the main cause of deterioration of the population. It is interesting that the opinions about the leading cause for lynx population deterioration in the specific countries have not changed and remained the same in all three countries through all surveys.

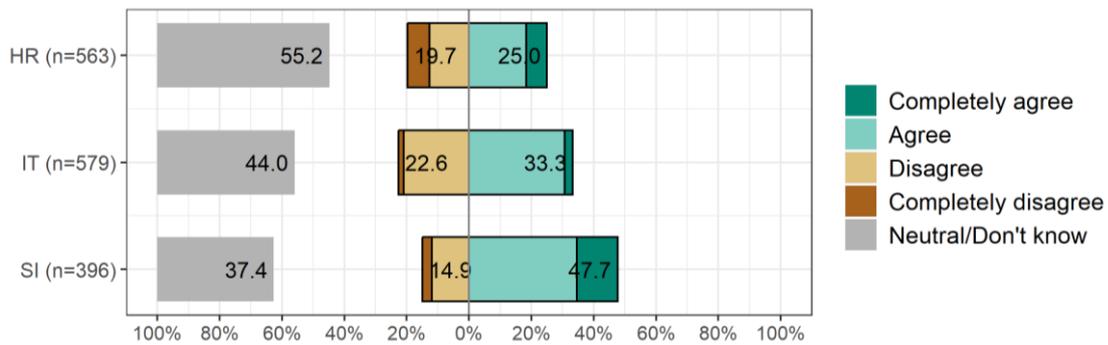


Figure 23: Inbreeding is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

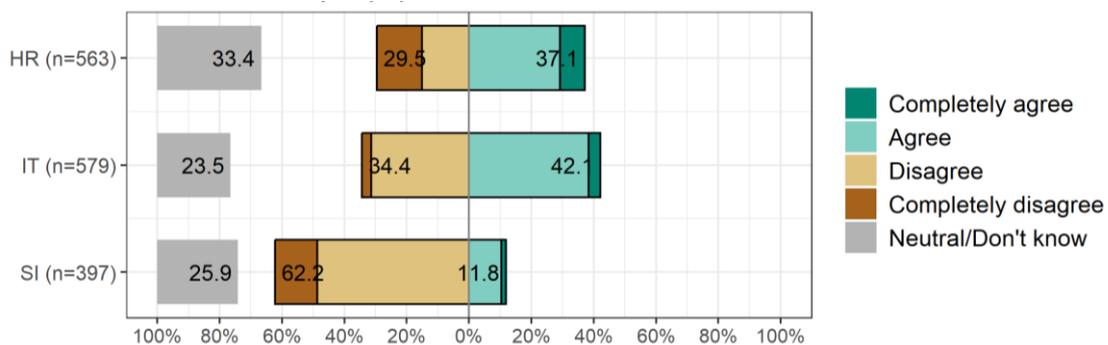


Figure 24: Lack of food is the main cause for recent deterioration of lynx population.

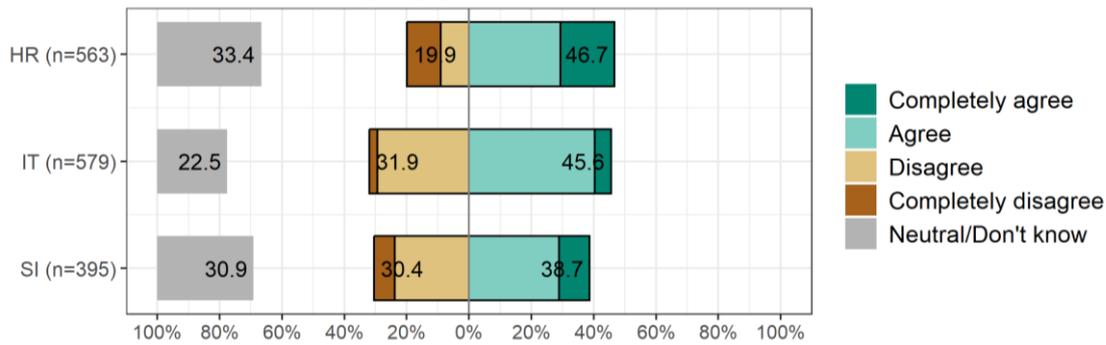


Figure 25: Overharvest is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

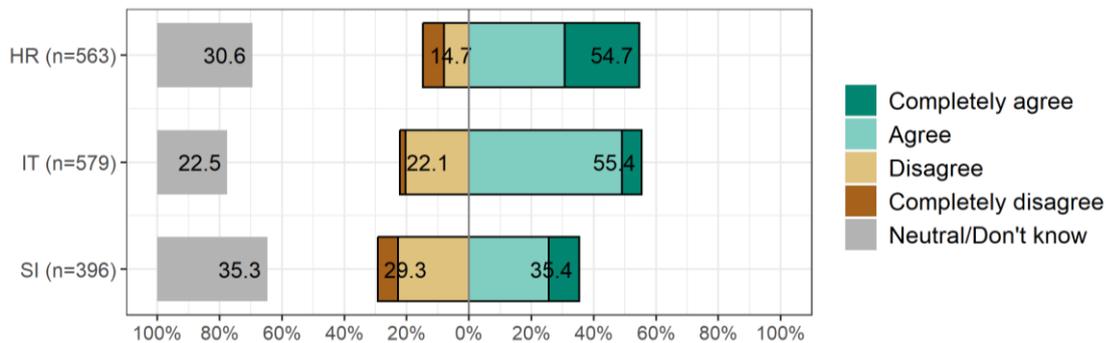


Figure 26: Illegal killing of the lynx is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

### Results by stakeholder group

The opinion of interest groups shows quite interesting results. Within general public and livestock breeders 43% doesn't know if lynx population is in good condition, while 32% of hunters shares similar opinion. Hunters are also the only group where larger part of respondents (35%) believes lynx population is in good condition, while livestock breeders (39%) and general public (38%) both agree that is not the case (Figure 27). Interestingly however 53% of general public believes lynx is close to extinction and 43% of livestock breeders also agree. With hunters, the majority (41%) disagrees that lynx is close to extinction and 36% agrees. The large percentage of undecided perhaps shows that while in the past people understood that lynx is in trouble but with the arrival of new animals and reporting of success in media, majority is now confused about the state of lynx population. Comparison through years 2019, 2021 and 2023 shows that generally the percentage of respondents who disagreed that lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is in good condition were decreasing with each survey. Percentage of undecided (or neutral) has also been increasing. Within general public in 2019 54% respondents disagreed that lynx population is in good condition, 58% in 2021 and only 38% in 2023. Within hunters, 75% disagreed in 2019, 56% in 2021, and 33% in 2023. Within livestock breeders, 55% disagreed that the population is in good condition in 2019, 53% in 2021, and 39% in 2023. Similar can be observed for the statement »Lynx population in Slovenia is close to extinction«, however the percentage of those who agree with the statement are decreasing.

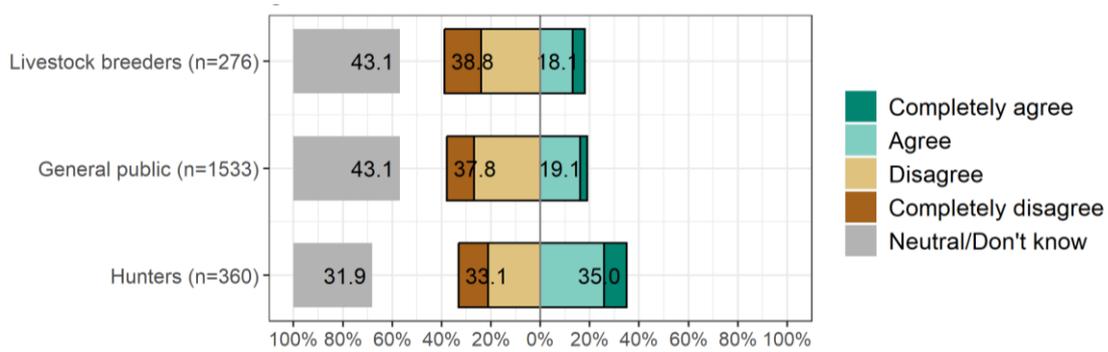


Figure 27: Lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is in good condition.

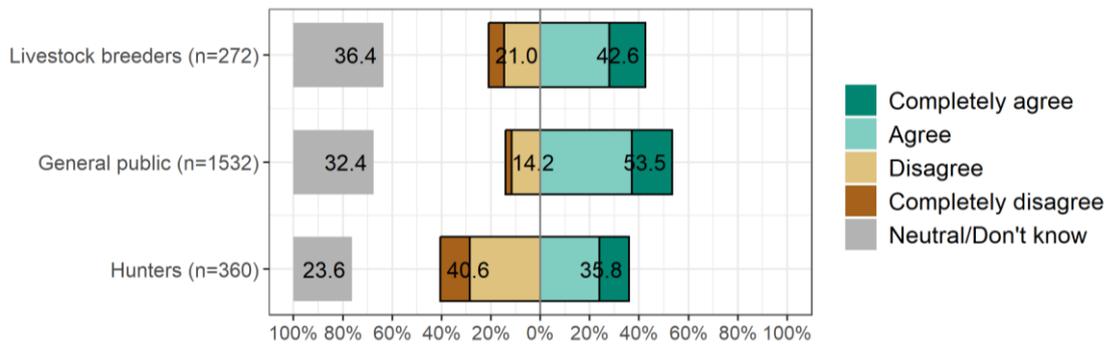


Figure 28: Lynx population in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is close to extinction.

The increase in the number of lynx is supported by respondents from the general public and hunters, however 39% livestock breeders are against increase in lynx numbers while 32% support it. The support has been decreasing a little through the surveys (2019-2023) as within general public 63% supported increase of lynx number in 2019, 67% in 2021 and 51% in 2023. Within hunters 75% supported the increase in 2019, 54% in 2021 and 45% in 2023. Within livestock breeders 41% supported the increase of lynx number in 2019, 43% in 2021 and 32% in 2023.

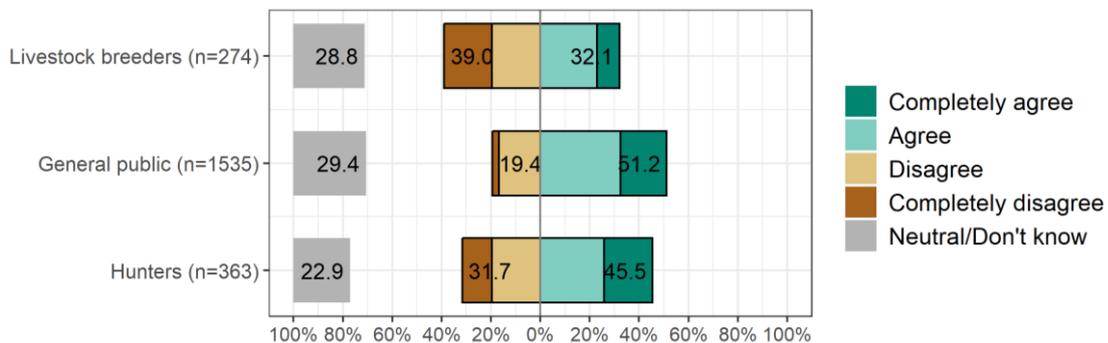


Figure 29: The number of lynx should be increased in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

Respondents from all stakeholder groups support the notion that there are too few lynx to be hunted (Figure 30) and disagree with the statement that there should be regular quotas for hunting of lynx.

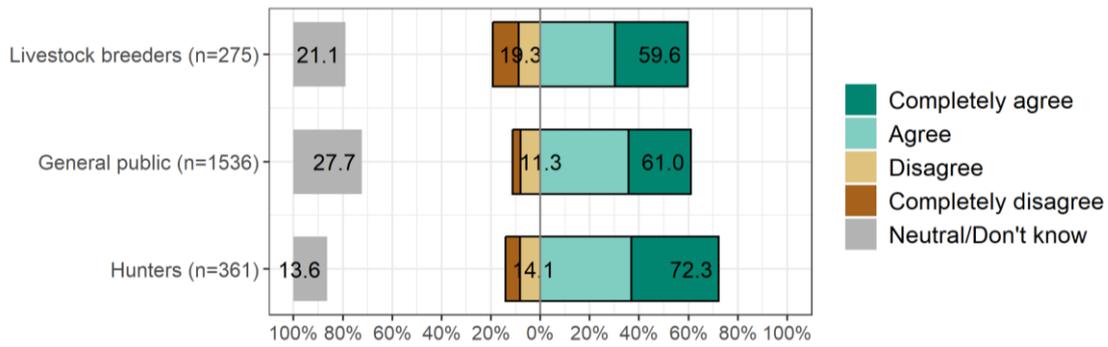


Figure 30: Currently there are too few lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia to be hunted.

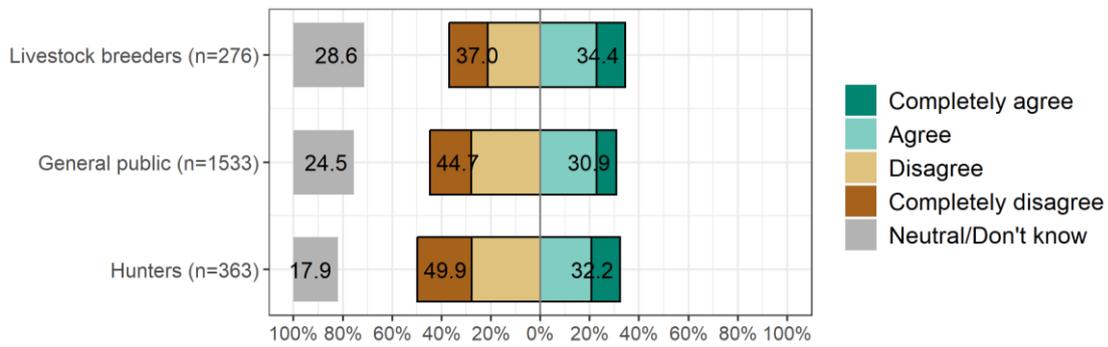


Figure 31: There should be regular quotas for hunting lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

Livestock breeders and especially hunters seem to be much more familiar with the causes of lynx population deterioration than the general public. General public respondents identified illegal killings and overharvesting as main causes, while hunters and livestock breeders primarily ranked inbreeding as the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population. Each of the three stakeholder groups identified the same cause as the main one in all three surveys.

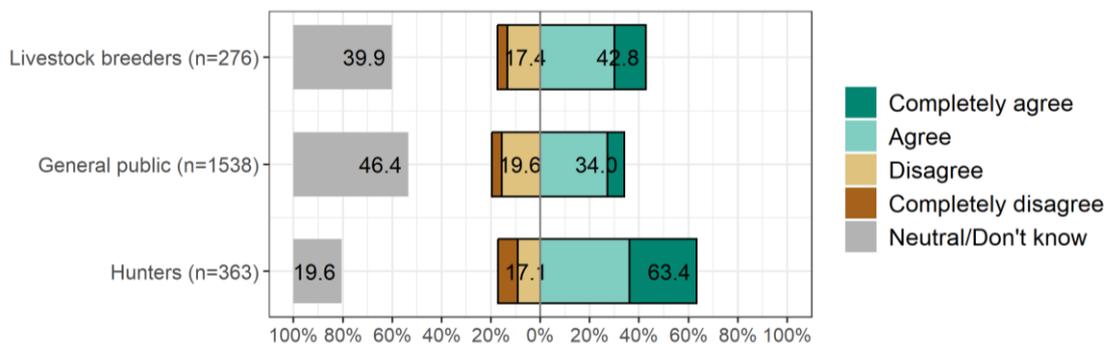


Figure 32: Inbreeding is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

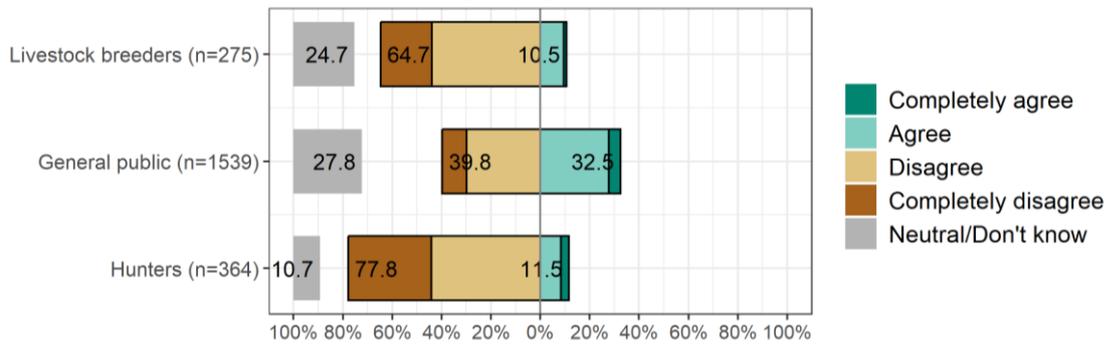


Figure 33: Lack of food is the main cause for recent deterioration of lynx population.

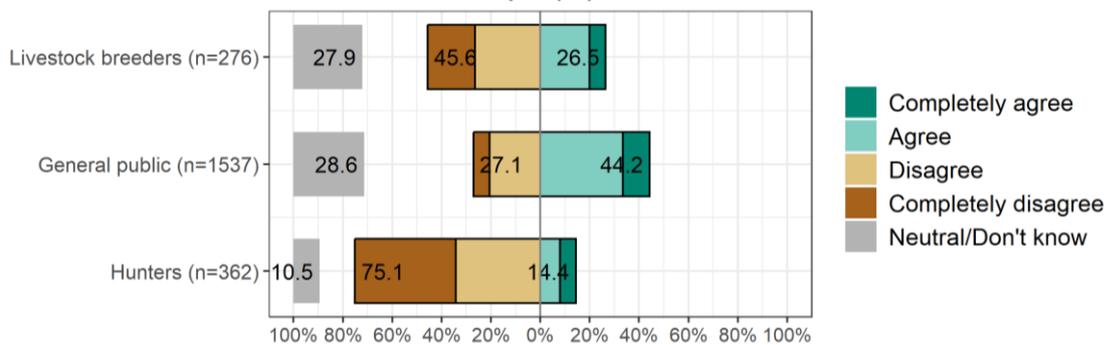


Figure 34: Overharvest is the main cause for recent deterioration of the lynx population.

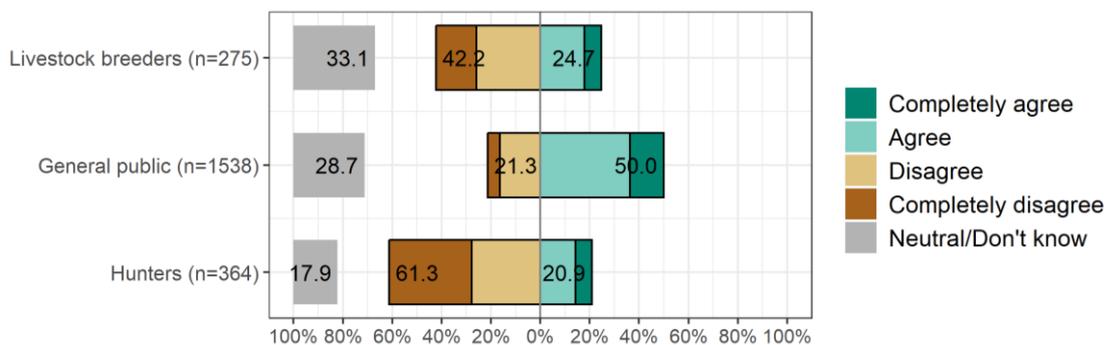


Figure 35: Illegal killing of the lynx is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

## Lynx population management – Population reinforcement

### General public by country

The only plausible way of addressing high inbreeding levels in the short term in the Dinaric lynx population is to bring new, unrelated animals to the population. While the translocations that were performed during the project have helped in the short term, without regular migrations between neighboring populations, the Dinaric lynx population will again face high inbreeding levels in the future and more translocations will be needed. Public support of this action is crucial for maintaining the positive attitudes toward lynx. The general public in all three countries generally supports population reinforcement (Figure 36). In Italy, we can also notice the biggest difference since the start of the project regarding this topic as in 2019 survey 8% of respondents disagreed with population reinforcement and

65% supported it while in the last survey (2023) 44% supported it and 38% disagreed. The knowledge that in Italy almost as many people support future lynx translocations as are against it enables us to tailor communication activities after the project ends.

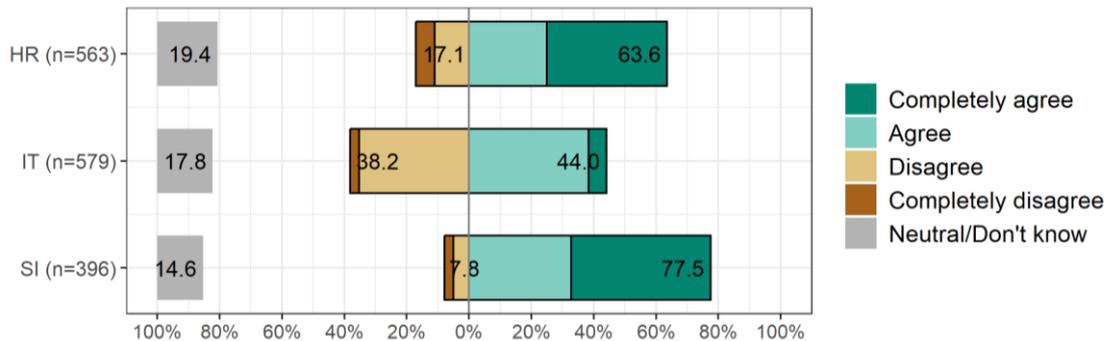


Figure 36: I support bringing new lynx to Slovenia/Italy/Croatia to save the population.

### Results by stakeholder group

Respondents from all stakeholder groups support bringing new lynx to Slovenia/Croatia/Italy (Figure 37). Opposition to bringing new lynx to Slovenia/Croatia/Italy was documented primarily among livestock breeders. Comparison through 2019-2023 shows within general public 72% supported translocations in 2019, 75% in 2021 and 60% in 2023. Within hunters 84% supported translocations in 2019, 67% in 2021 and 61% in 2023. Within livestock breeders support was the smallest with 49% supporting translocations in 2019, 54% in 2021 and 43% in 2023.

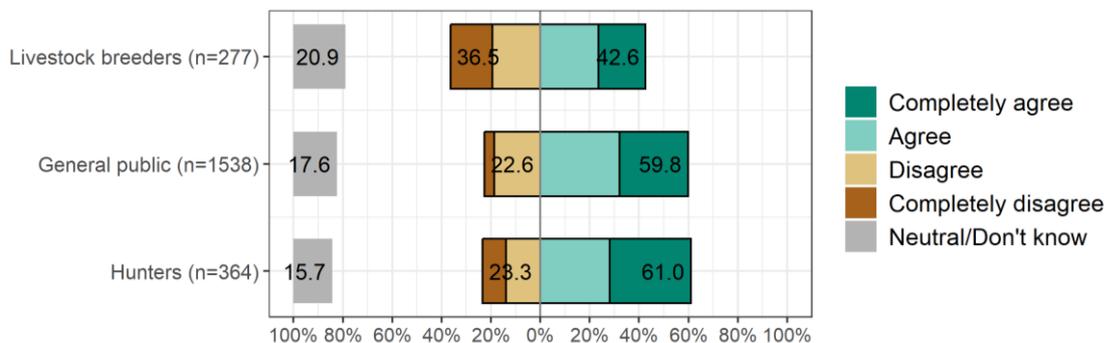


Figure 37: I support bringing new lynx to Slovenia/Italy/Croatia to save the population.

### Damages and damages prevention

#### General public by country

Lynx belongs to the least damage-causing large carnivore species. Nevertheless, there are concerns that increased lynx abundance could result in more damages in the agriculture. Damages caused by lynx in all three countries have been close to non-existing over the last decade. General public seems to be aware of this (Figure 38). Even so, in Italy almost a third of respondents thought domestic animals represent lynx’s main food source in vicinity of pastures (Figure 39).

The opinions of respondents in their respective countries have mainly stayed the same with

exception of Italy and Croatia during years 2019 and 2021. In Italy during 2019 survey 42% respondents disagreed that lynx causes unacceptable damage to domestic animals while 45% were neutral. In next survey (2021) 49% respondents disagreed and only 29% were neutral. In Croatia the situation was different as in 2019 survey 84% respondents disagreed that lynx causes unacceptable damage to domestic animals and 11% were neutral. During the next survey (2021) only 63% still disagreed and 26% were neutral.

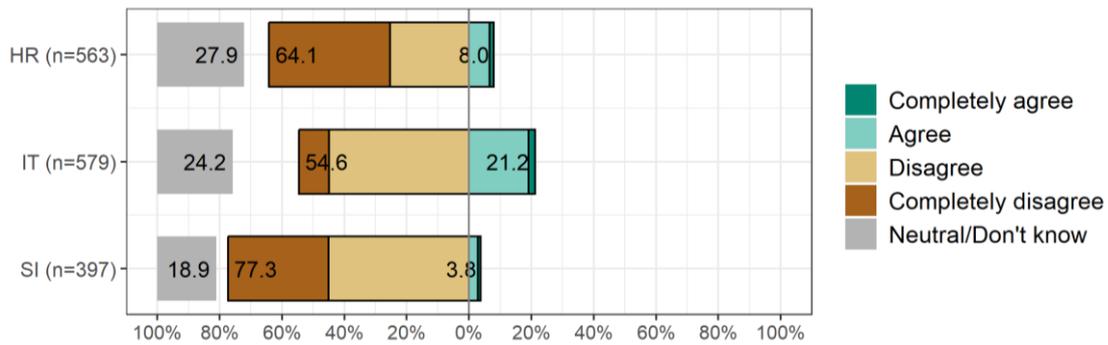


Figure 38: Lynx cause unacceptable damage to domestic animals in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

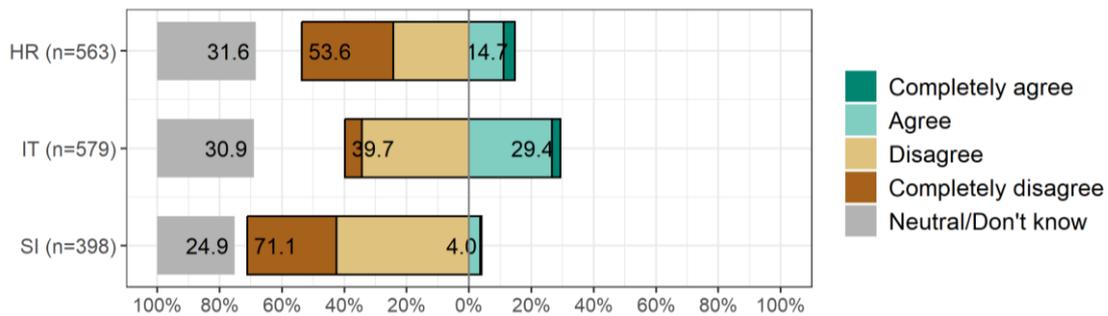


Figure 39: In areas where lynx occur near pastures in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia, domestic animals are their main food source.

Among livestock guarding dogs, electric fences, and removal of lynx, the respondents in Slovenia and Croatia chose livestock guarding dogs most often as an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock (Figure 40). In Italy, electric fences (61%) and livestock guarding dogs (61%) were both understood as equally effective measures for preventing lynx attacks on livestock (Figure 40 and Figure 41). Removal of lynx as a damage control measure was opposed by most respondents in all three countries (Figure 42). It is interesting that the opinions about the most effective measure for preventing lynx attacks in specific countries have not changed and remained the same throughout the project except Italy where both measures were recognized as effective in the last two surveys.

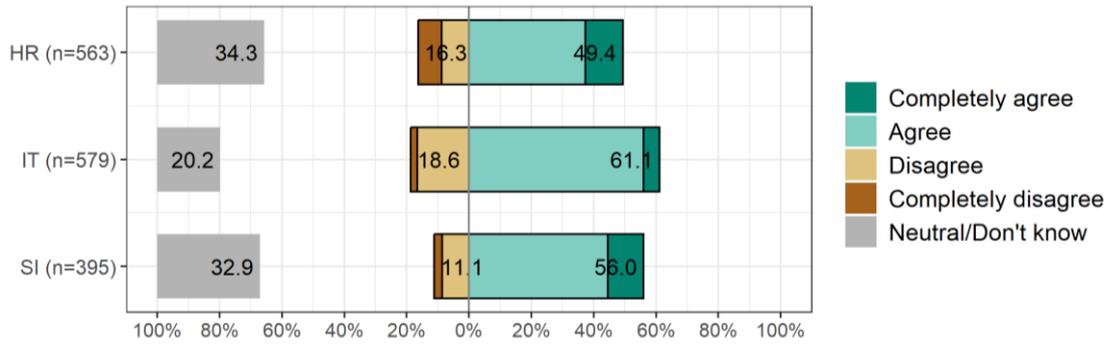


Figure 40: livestock guarding dogs are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.

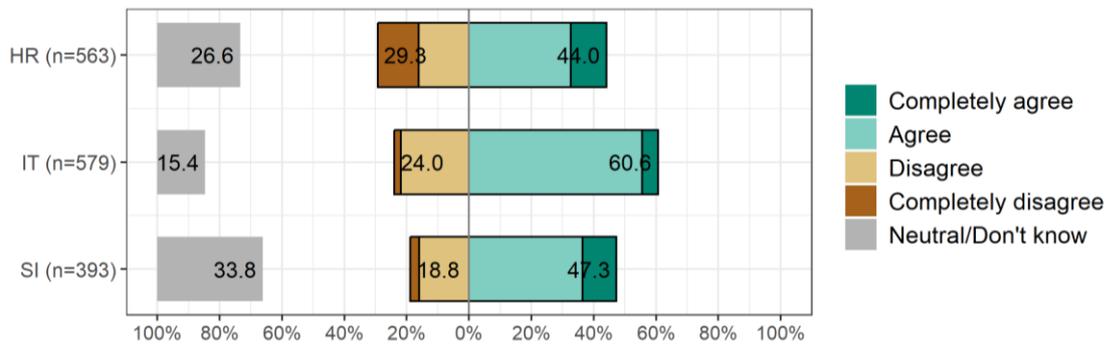


Figure 41: Electric fences used at pastures are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.

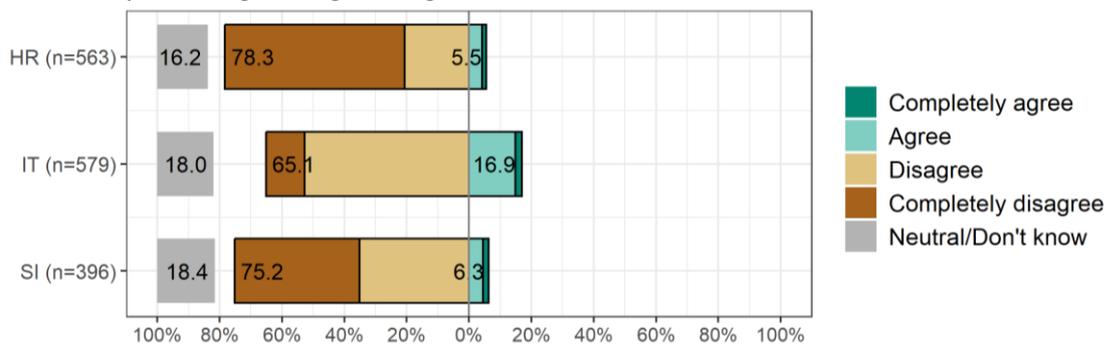


Figure 42: Removal of lynx is an effective measure for preventing damages in agriculture.

### Results by stakeholder group

27% of livestock breeders thought that lynx causes unacceptable damage to domestic animals in their respective country even though the damages caused by lynx are practically non-existent in the last decade (Figure 43). This could indicate a tendency of generalising the experiences with other large carnivores – wolves and bears, or in other words, it is not important which large carnivore species is causing the damage.

All three groups mostly assessed livestock guarding dogs and electric fences as effective in preventing the damages. With livestock breeders, 47% agreed that livestock guarding dogs were effective measures for preventing damages while 39% agreed that electric fences were effective. Removal of lynx to control the damages was to some degree supported only by livestock breeders (28%) and even there the majority (49%) was against it. Comparison over

the years (2019-2023) shows that in 2019 44% of livestock breeders agreed that livestock guarding dogs were effective and 31% agreed with effectiveness of electric fences. In 2021 54% agreed with effectiveness of livestock guarding dogs and 46% with effectiveness of fences.

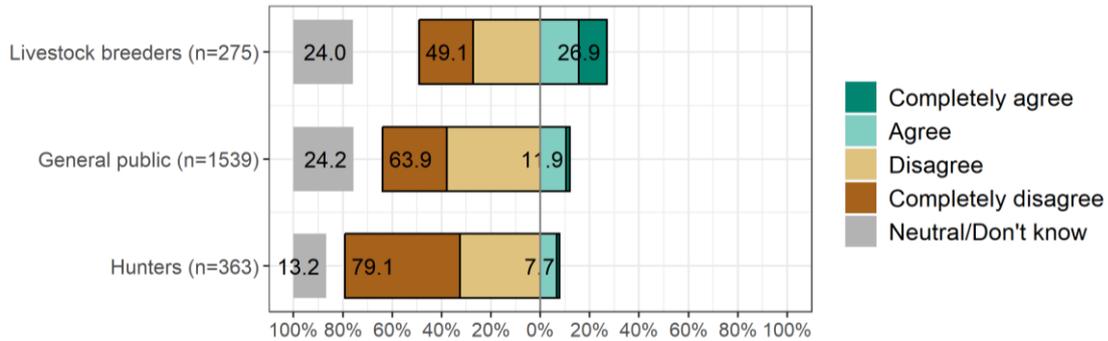


Figure 43: Lynx cause unacceptable damage to domestic animals in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia.

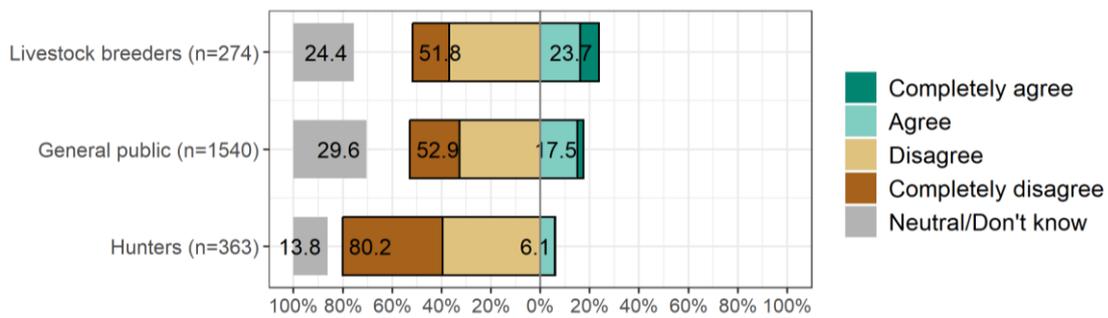


Figure 44: In areas where lynx occur near pastures in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia, domestic animals are their main food source.

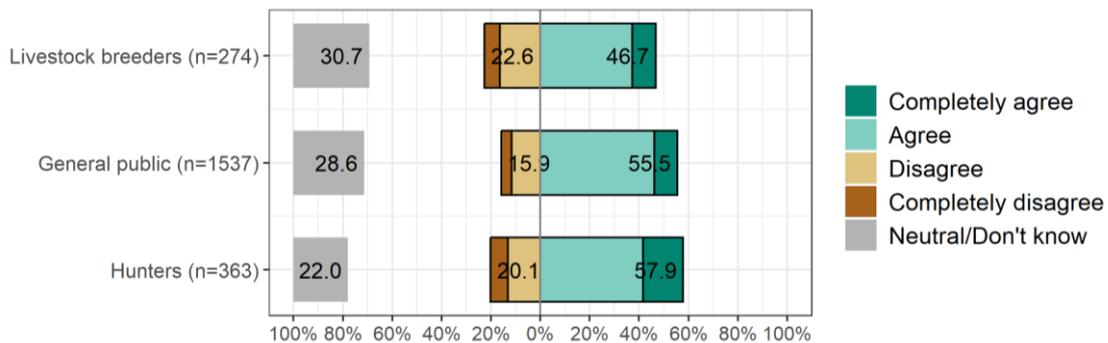


Figure 45: Livestock guarding dogs are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.

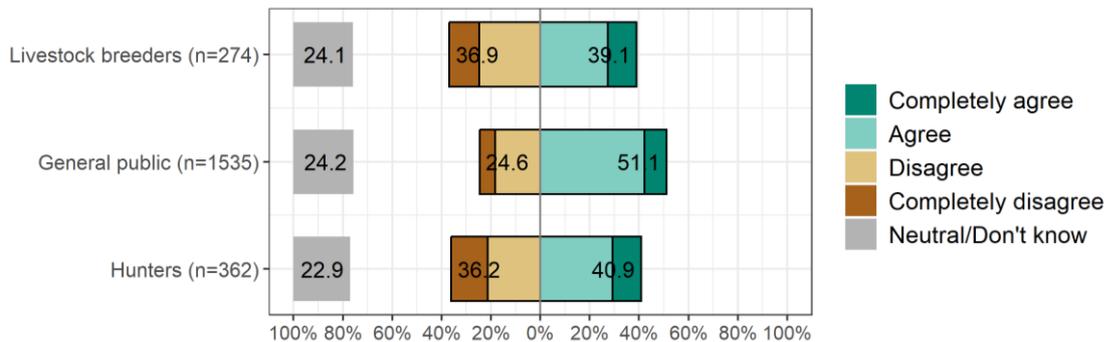


Figure 46: Electric fences used at pastures are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.

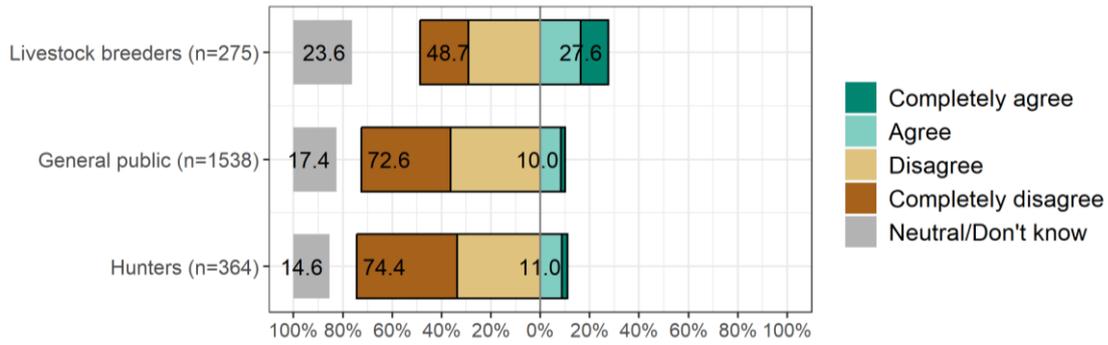


Figure 47: Removal of lynx is an effective measure for preventing damages in agriculture.

### Hunting and beliefs regarding lynx impacts on game species

#### General public by country

The fact that lynx prey primarily on roe deer is often mentioned as a cause of lynx being disliked by hunters. We have assessed the extent of this issue by asking the respondents to answer two questions – one regarding the lynx’s role in controlling the roe deer population and the other one regarding the impact of lynx predation to hunting opportunities. The large percentage of neutral answers (43% in Italy, 44% in Croatia and 38% in Slovenia) show that general public respondents are not sure about the role of lynx in regulating deer numbers. However aside from undecided, the remaining respondents largely acknowledged the importance of lynx in regulating roe deer numbers (Figure 48). The majority of Slovenian and Italian respondents disagreed that lynx reduces opportunities to hunt ungulates, while in Croatia the majority of respondents were undecided regarding the statement that presence of lynx reduces opportunities to hunt ungulates (Figure 49).

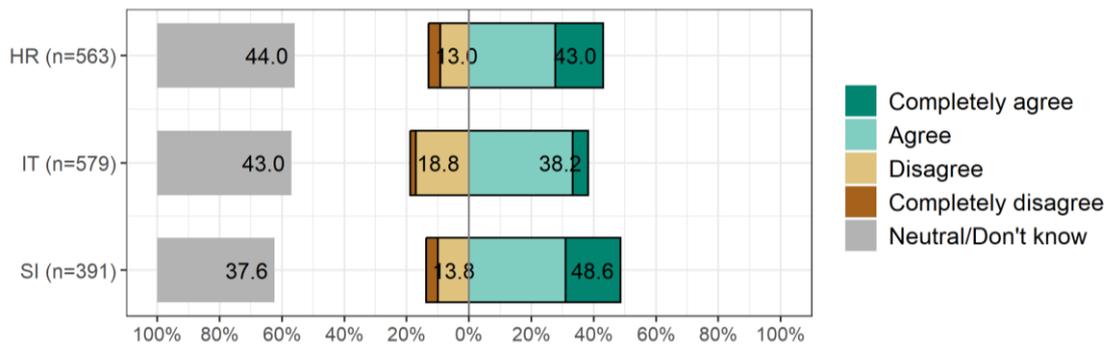


Figure 48: Lynx play an important role in regulating roe deer numbers.

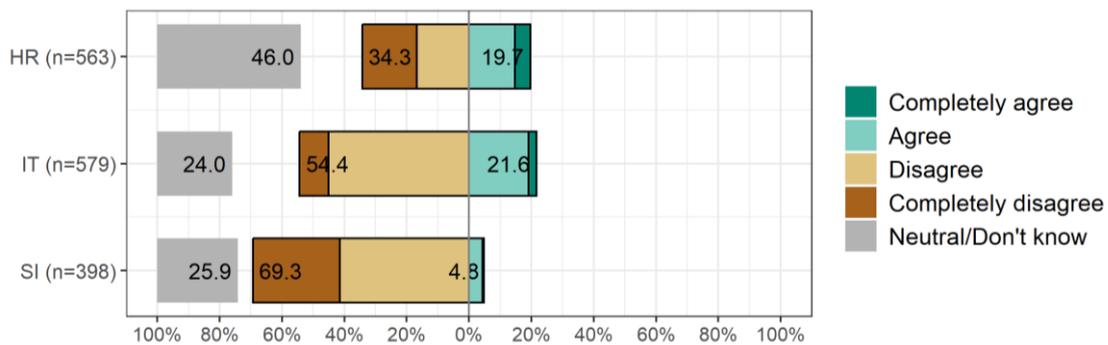


Figure 49: Presence of lynx reduces opportunities to hunt ungulates.

### Results by stakeholder group

Majority of hunters acknowledged the lynx role in regulating roe deer numbers (Figure 50). In addition, 32% of hunters thought the presence of lynx reduces their opportunities to hunt ungulates (Figure 51).

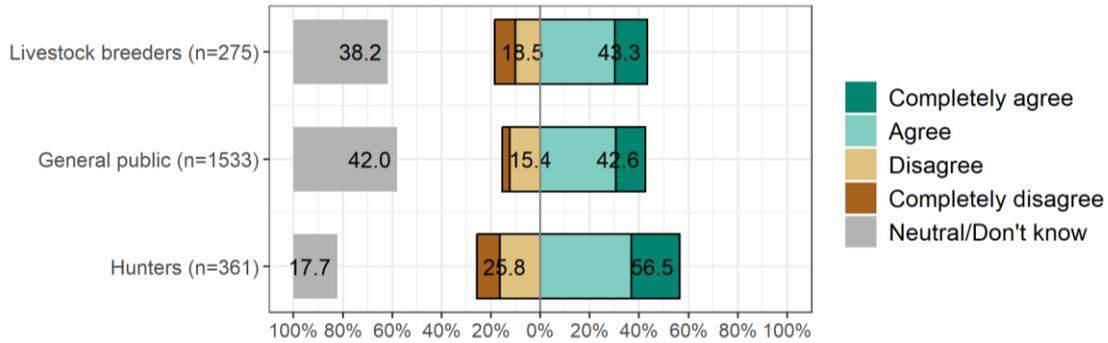


Figure 50: Lynx play an important role in regulating roe deer numbers

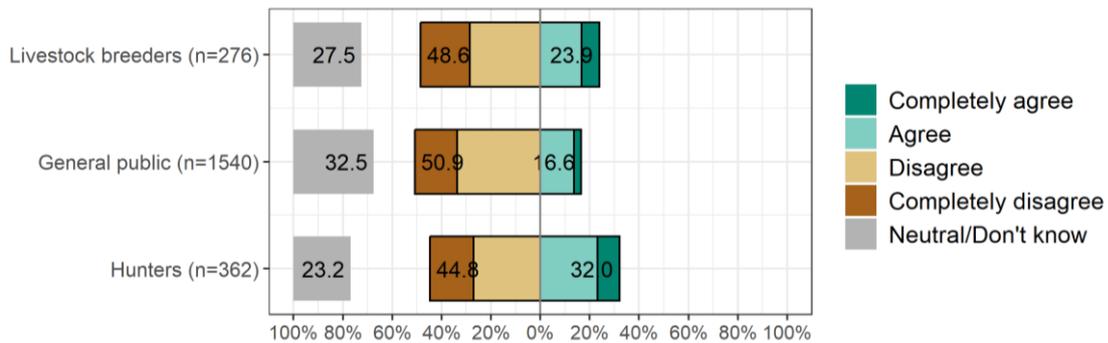


Figure 51: Presence of lynx reduces opportunities to hunt ungulates.

### Value of lynx

Apart from the standard 5-point Likert scale which measures degrees of respondent’s agreement/disagreement to a statement, in the section designed to investigate the value of lynx to society, we’ve used semantic differential scale in order to better assess connotative meaning of lynx characteristics as perceived by society. Respondents were asked to rate their perception of lynx on a scale with opposite adjectives at each end (e.g. beautiful vs. ugly). The results shown in Figure 52 show that all groups on average preferred positive adjectives to describe lynx. The pattern of results across the multiple points in the scale is the same in all groups. Adjectives “beautiful” and “interesting” had the highest ranks in all groups indicating high aesthetic and educational values of the lynx. This result ought to be used by those wishing to successfully promote conservation of lynx.

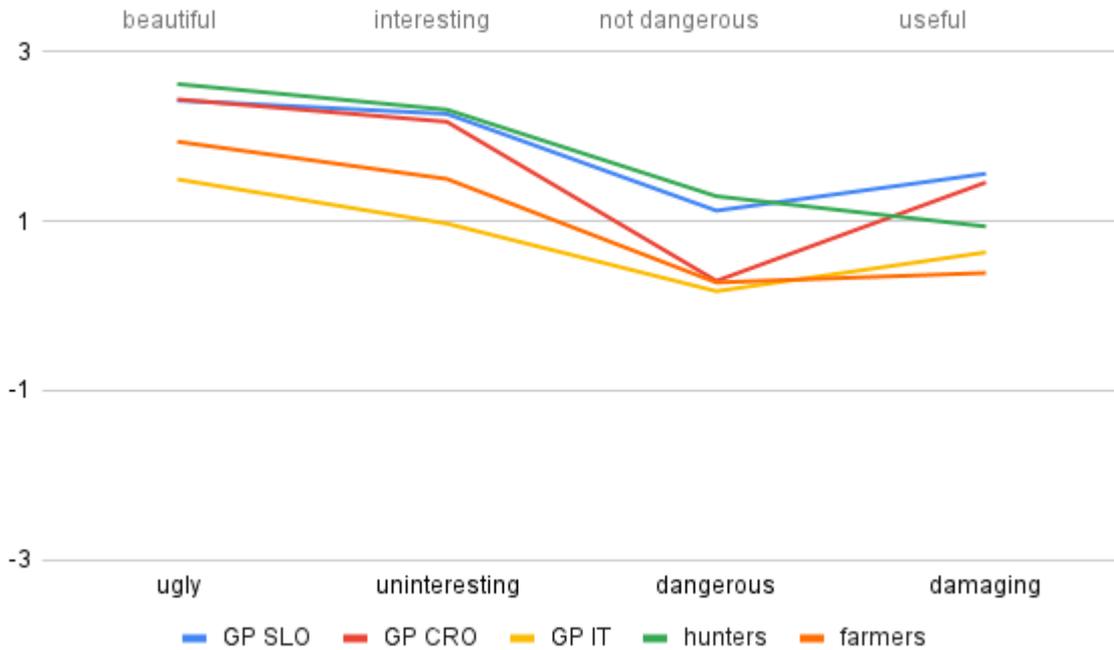


Figure 52: Average values by groups on a semantic differential 7-point scale describing the different characteristics of lynx (GP=general public). We show general public by country while hunters and farmers are merged.

In line with the results described above is also overwhelming agreement by the respondents from general public of all three countries to the statement “Lynx represents a symbol of preserved nature” (Figure 53) and to some degree to the statement “Presence of lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is beneficial for tourism” (Figure 55). General public together with hunters seem to have the highest appreciation of lynx as a natural heritage (Figure 54).

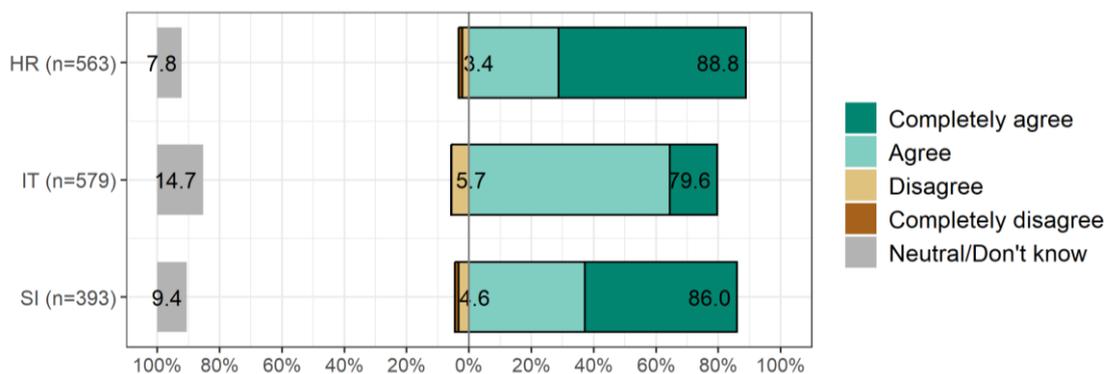


Figure 53: Lynx represents a symbol of preserved nature.

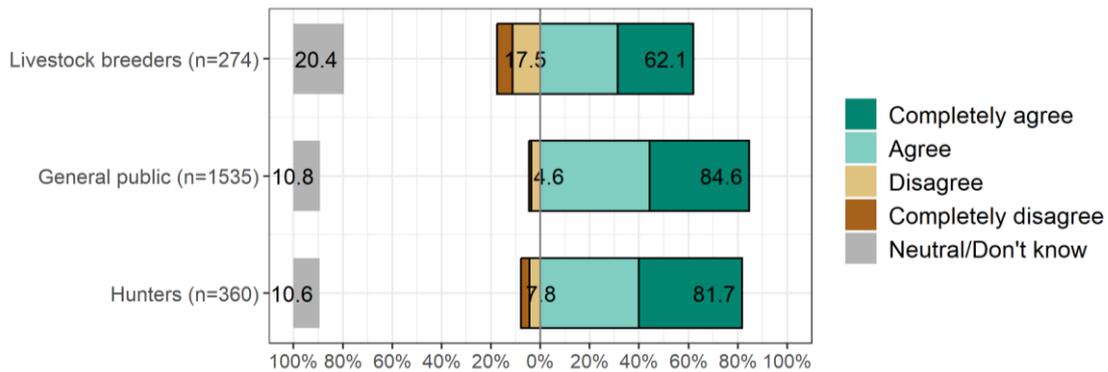


Figure 54: Lynx represents a symbol of preserved nature.

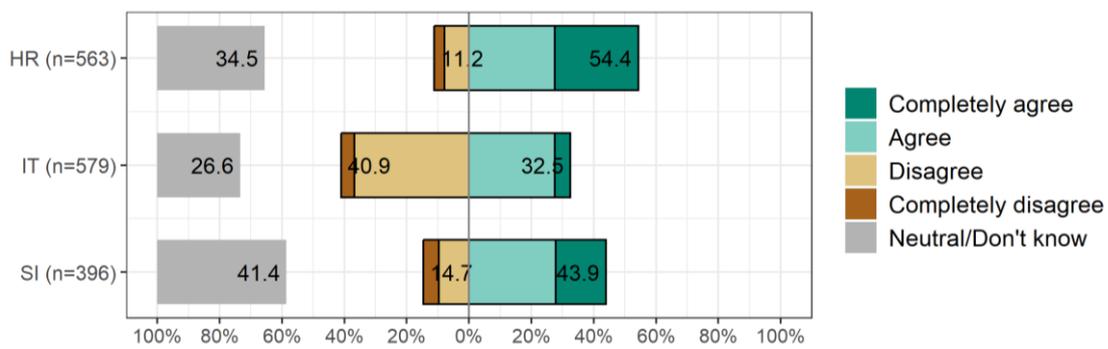


Figure 55: Presence of lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is beneficial for tourism.

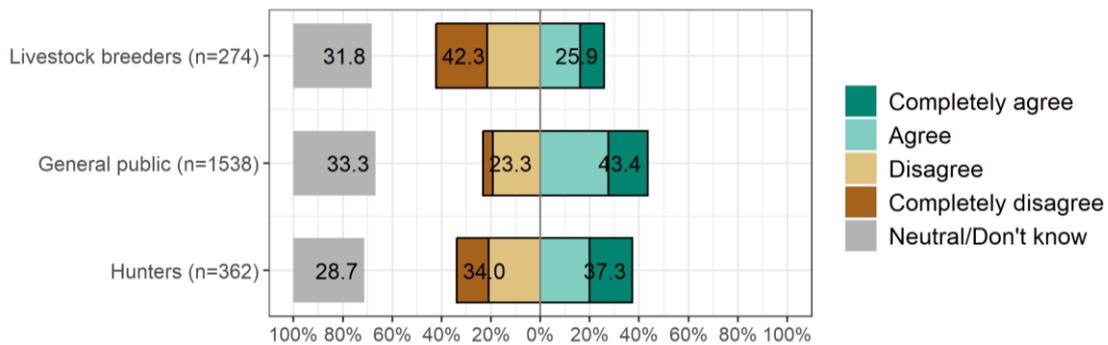


Figure 56: Presence of lynx in Slovenia/Italy/Croatia is beneficial for tourism.

### Knowledge of lynx

Research shows that more knowledge increases positive attitudes towards large carnivores. Lynx cause less conflict than wolves or bears and, because of their hidden lifestyle, are much less well known. We expect to see this also when analyzing the answers to the questions on knowledge of the lynx. We included seven questions in the questionnaire to test respondents' knowledge of the lynx:

- How much on average weights an adult male lynx?
- What is the length of a lynx's tail?
- What represents the majority of lynx food in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy?
- Was the lynx exterminated in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy in the past and then later

reintroduced?

- What is the legal status of lynx in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy?
- Does the state reimburse the damages caused by lynx?

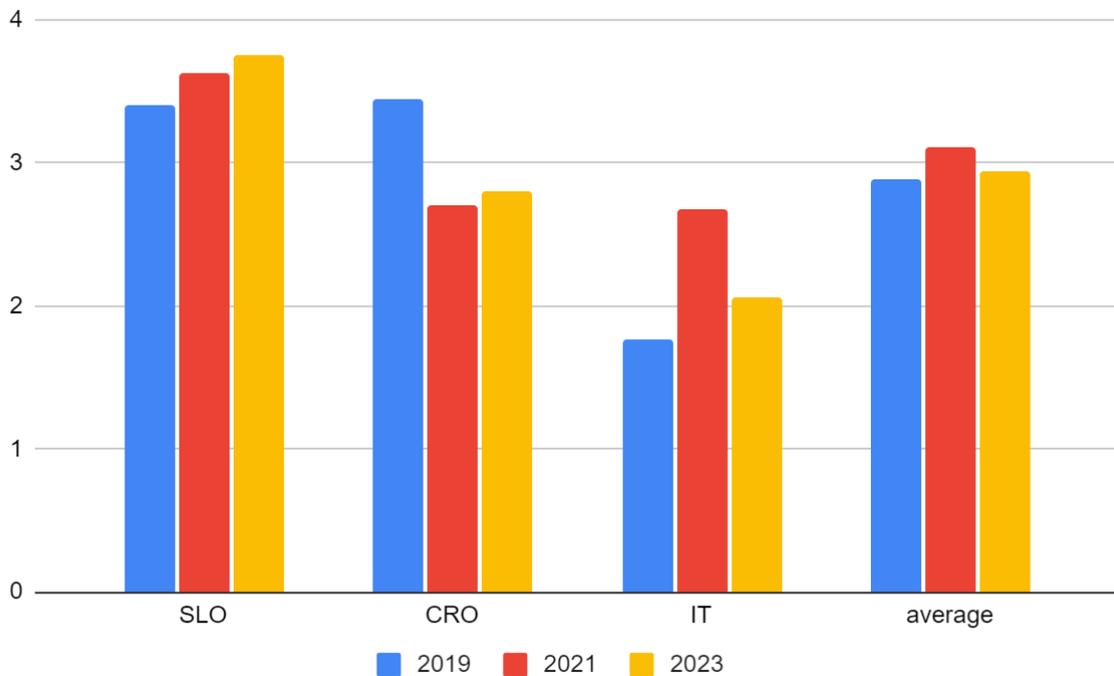


Figure 57: Correctly answered questions (out of 6) by respondents in all three countries and average values for all three years.

Slovenian respondents showed highest knowledge of lynx as well as an increase in correct answers with each survey. In Croatia the first survey was also the smallest in number of respondents (a little over 200 respondents in 2019 versus around 700 for 2021 and 2023) so its result might not be good representation for the knowledge of Croatian public, however we can see that in 2023 knowledge slightly increased in comparison with 2021. Italian respondents showed the least knowledge about lynx which can be expected due to the rarity of lynx in Italy.

We also checked if there were any questions that had low rates of correct answers in any countries. For this we decided to consider questions where a third or less respondents answered correctly (33.3% rate of correct answers). In Slovenia, all surveys had higher rates of correct answers for questions regarding knowledge of lynx. In Croatia in 2019 only one question had this low rate of correct answers: "What is the length of a lynx's tail", while in year 2021 there were three such questions: "How much on average weights an adult male lynx", "What represents the majority of lynx food in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy" and "Does the state reimburse the damages caused by lynx" and in 2023 the same questions had again the least correct answers (below 33.3% of correct answers). In Italy in 2019 four out of six questions had less than 33.3% correct answers – "How much on average weights an adult male lynx", "What represents the majority of lynx food in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy", "What is the legal status of lynx in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy" and "Does the state reimburse the

damages caused by lynx”. In 2021 only one question had less than 33.3% correct answers: “Does the state reimburse the damages caused by lynx”. In 2023 there were three such questions in Italy: “How much on average weights an adult male lynx”, “What represents the majority of lynx food in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy” and “Does the state reimburse the damages caused by lynx?”.

During the project, the majority of reporting in media or on the project webpage represented project achievements and not really facts about lynx biology and ecology, which is what our questions addressed, and this is perhaps why we don’t see drastic improvement of respondent’s knowledge in this topic.

In Slovenia there has been continuous media reporting regarding lynx since 2000s as well as different projects that aimed to improve the conservation status of lynx and inform the public about threats of lynx population (Interreg DinaRis 2008-2012, Interreg 3Lynx 2017-2020, LIFE Lynx 2017-2024) which could explain why the public is more aware of lynx and also has a better knowledge about it.

## Media clipping

During project LIFE Lynx media clipping was collected in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. From the project start and until the end of December 2023 we collected 2429 media clips coming from the above mentioned three countries, 1666 of those media clippings were mentioning the LIFE Lynx project. Moreover we also collected 39 media clips mentioning LIFE Lynx project, which were published in other countries.

*Table 1: Table showing country of the media origin and type of media of media clippings collected within the LIFE Lynx project until 31.12.2023.*

Country of media origin	COUNTA of Type of media (internet, print, TV, radio, other)					Grand Total
	internet	print	radio	TV	other	
CROATIA	827	65	18	21	4	935
ITALY	164	43	1	14		222
SLOVENIA	928	195	96	53		1272
OTHER	32	4		2	1	39
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2468</b>

As we can see from the Table 1 above the highest number of media clippings was collected in Slovenia (n=1272) and the second highest number in Croatia (N=935). Majority of publications were from internet sources, followed by publications in printed media.

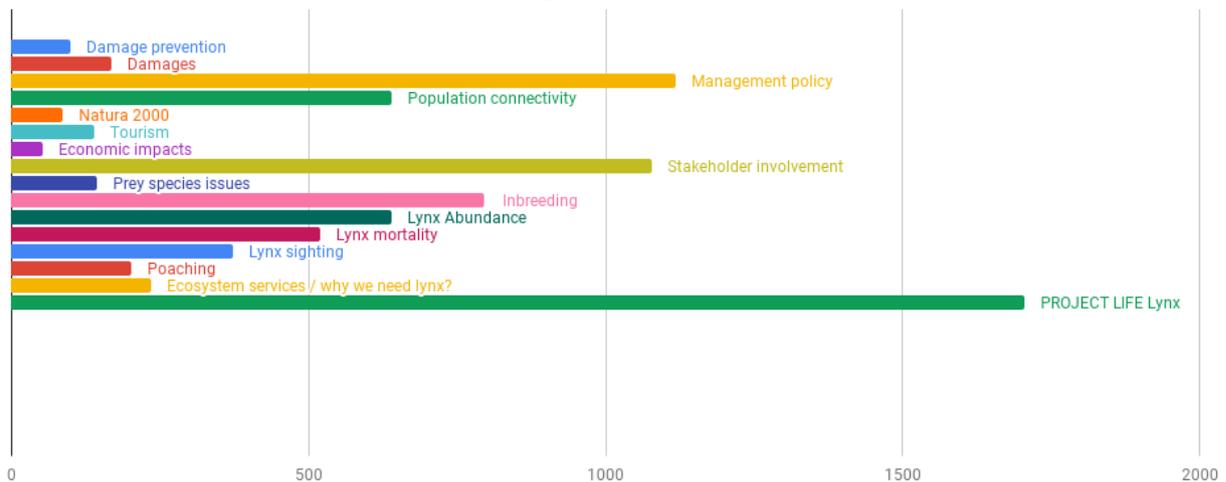


Figure 58: Graph showing the most mentioned topics in all of the collected clippings.

As we can see from the graph above the most mentioned topics in all the clippings collected were “Management Policy” and “Stakeholder Involvement”, both of which can be assigned to a solution “tool-box”. The next four – “Inbreeding”, “Lynx Abundance”, „Population Conectivity“ and “Lynx Mortality” belong to the biological challenges our project is trying to address.

Table 2: Table showing clippings collected each year by country within the LIFE Lynx project until 31.12.2023.

Country of media origin	COUNTA of media clippings per project year							Grand Total
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
CROATIA	32	129	321	205	82	90	76	935
ITALY	1	8	18	18	39	33	105	222
SLOVENIA	75	95	114	142	376	237	233	1272
OTHER	0	1	9	10	10	3	6	39
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>2468</b>

As can be seen from the table above, the highest number of clippings was collected in 2021, which was also the year in which the highest number of lynx were translocated. This was also the year when the first lynx were translocated to Gorenjska, a region in which there had not been any resident lynxes present for many years before this 2021 translocations. In Italy the highest number of clippings was collected in 2023, the reason for that are probably the first lynx translocations to Italy in this period, which were implemented through another project. In Croatia the project has collaborated with the largest Croatian brewery called



Zagrebacka pivovara, which in 2019 produced a special lynx beer variety of Ožujsko beer, this event was covered by many media and that is probably the reason why there were so many clippings collected in 2019 in Croatia.

Table 3: Table showing general attitude of clippings that mention the LIFE Lynx project (-5 = extremely negative, 0 = neutral, 5 = extremely positive) and collected until 31.12.2023.

AVERAGE grade for the collected clippings	Year when the clippings were collected							Grand Total
	2023							
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
	4.05	2.73	1.83	1.12	1.28	1.39	1.96	1.72

The general attitude of clippings mentioning LIFE Lynx project was positive, the average score of all the articles collected by the end of 2023 was 1.72 (-5 = extremely negative, 0 = neutral, 5 = extremely positive) so we can say that the attitude towards the project in the media stories was positive. The very high positive score in the first year of the project was due to a high number of articles graded as extremely positive (all graded by the same person).

## Conclusions

Knowing the public's perceptions and attitudes towards lynx is crucial for the successful translocation or reintroduction. There are few studies that track people's attitudes towards species over time, and even fewer that monitor people's attitudes before and after introduction or translocation. The survey on public attitudes towards lynx carried out in the LIFE Lynx project provided insight into attitudes of Slovenian, Croatian and Italian public just before, during and after the introduction of 18 lynx from Slovakia and Romania.

In all three countries the majority of respondents described themselves as being in favour of lynx and supporting its conservation. In Italy, where the lynx is scarcest, the share of respondents that do not have a formed opinion about their attitudes towards lynx was much higher than in other two countries, similar to what was already noticed in previous surveys. Only livestock breeders were not so overwhelmingly in favour of lynx, as approximately a little over a quarter of them described themselves as being against lynx, similar to what was already noted in both previous surveys.

Large carnivores invoke strong feelings in people, those often include admiration, hatred but also fear. Lynx avoid people and are not considered to be dangerous to them, which respondents from Slovenia and Croatia seem to be well aware of, while Italian respondents were not so sure about that as 43% answered that they would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present. In Italy, lynx is scarcest, and not well known to the respondents,



however the number of respondents that do not have a formed opinion about this has been decreasing and number of respondents who know lynx does not represent any danger has been increasing through the years of LIFE Lynx project in Italy. Overall fear of lynx seems to be to some degree an issue among the general public and livestock breeders.

Among stakeholder groups, livestock owners are the ones concerned about the potential of economic damage caused by lynx. Nevertheless, they still overwhelmingly disagreed with the extermination or illegal killings of lynx, showing high support to the conservation of lynx in their respective countries.

Public perceptions about the species' abundance play an important role in shaping public support or opposition to different management measures. Most of our respondents, especially in Slovenia, did not believe the lynx population is in good condition. In Italy, there are more respondents who believe that lynx population is in good condition than those who disagree, however, the majority does not have a formed opinion. It is also interesting to note that the number of respondents who do not have a formed opinion regarding the state of lynx population is rising in all three countries. This could be due to media reports about the successful translocations and, the increase in lynx numbers while at the same time also mentioning problems of lynx population.

In addition, the respondents have mostly agreed that the population is close to extinction.

Prevalent support for increasing the number of lynx in their respective countries was documented among general public respondents in Slovenia in Croatia, while in Italy the number of respondents who disagreed with the increase in lynx numbers was slightly higher than those who supported it. Before the last survey was carried out in Italy (spring 2023), five animals were translocated to Italy (Friuli Venezia Giulia region) as part of UlyCA2 project during spring 2023.

Respondents from all countries strongly opposed to hunting lynx due to their low numbers and the majority of respondents were against regular hunting quotas. However, in Croatia, a larger share of respondents agreed with the regular quotas for hunting of lynx in their respective countries.

Hunters and livestock breeders seem to be much more familiar with the causes of lynx population deterioration than the general public. General public respondents identified overharvesting and illegal killings as the main cause, while hunters and livestock breeders primarily ranked inbreeding as the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.

The only plausible way of addressing high inbreeding levels in the short term in the Dinaric lynx population is to bring new, unrelated animals to the population which is also the main goal of the LIFE Lynx project. Public support of this action is crucial for maintaining the positive attitudes toward lynx. The general public in all three countries supports population reinforcement, however, in Italy the number of those in support of translocations have been decreasing and are almost the same as those who are against it. Interestingly the number of those who do not have a formed opinion has also been decreasing in Italy. Most opposition to bringing new lynx to Slovenia/Croatia/Italy was documented primarily among livestock



breeders. Activities after the project should address the importance of new translocations in the future to prevent inbreeding until connectivity between different populations is established.

Lynx belongs to the least damage-causing large carnivore species. Nevertheless, there are concerns that increased lynx abundance could result in more damages it causes in agriculture. Damages caused by lynx in all three countries have been close to non-existing over the last decade, i.e. less than 5 animals killed from 2019-2023 in Slovenia (REF report C9). General public and hunters seem to be aware of this while around a quarter of livestock breeders thought that lynx causes unacceptable damage to domestic animals in their respective country. This could indicate a tendency of generalising the experiences with other large carnivores – wolves and bears, or in other words, to the farmer, it is not important which large carnivore species is causing the damage. All three stakeholder groups overall assessed livestock guarding dogs and electric fences as effective in preventing the damages. Removal of lynx to control the damages was to some degree supported only by livestock breeders.

The fact that lynx prey primarily on roe deer is often mentioned as a cause of lynx being disliked by hunters. Majority of hunters acknowledged the lynx role in regulating roe deer numbers. In addition, 32% of hunters thought the presence of lynx reduces their opportunities to hunt ungulates, confirming the existence of the concerns.

All stakeholder groups attributed high aesthetic and educational values to the lynx. Hunters and general public seem to have the highest appreciation of lynx as natural heritage. The presence of lynx is perceived as beneficial to tourism, but mostly in Croatia.

Slovenian stakeholders showed the most knowledge about lynx while Italian stakeholders showed the least knowledge. Lynx numbers are lowest in Italy, so the fact that lynx is not well known in Italy is expected. There has also been more media reporting since 2000s in Slovenia and Croatia than in Italy. News about the project and media reports also mostly addressed project results instead of facts about lynx biology and ecology which is the topic of the knowledge questions that were used in the survey.

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**LIFE**  
L y n x



# Questionnaire



LIFE16 NAT/SI/000634

The project is being implemented with support from the European Union's LIFE Fund.

Dear Resident!

Together with partners from Croatia, Italy, Slovakia and Romania we are implementing a project called “Preventing the extinction of the Dinaric-SE Alpine lynx population through reinforcement and long-term conservation” (LIFE Lynx). The project aims towards rescuing our lynx population from extinction by including 14 lynx from Romania and Slovakia in the lynx population in Slovenia and Croatia. One of specific objectives is assessment of public opinions about lynx and lynx population management and this questionnaire is the main tool for implementation of this study of attitudes.

Exclusively for the purpose of the study we have obtained your name and address from [The Statistical Office of Slovenia]. You and many others randomly selected adult residents of SLO/IT/CRO are invited to participate in the study of public attitudes toward lynx and their management in our country. Please answer all questions as completely as possible and return the questionnaire as soon as possible in the postage prepaid envelop provided with the questionnaire.

I encourage you to voice your opinions whether for, against of neutral to lynx conservation. Your opinion is important and will help guide future management decisions. Your participation is completely anonymous, individual responses are strictly confidential and for the purpose of the analysis will be grouped with those of others.

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like to learn more about the project do not hesitate to contact me at [enter phone] (on a workday, 10:00 – 14:00) or [enter email]. The results of the study will be published on the project web page [www.lifelynx.eu](http://www.lifelynx.eu).

Thank you! Your assistance with this study is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

[enter name], coordinator of the study

[enter organization]

**First few questions ask about your attitudes toward lynx and having lynx in general. Please choose one answer per question that best describes your feelings and opinions.**

**1. How would you describe your attitudes towards lynx?**

- a) Completely against.
- b) Against.
- c) Neither in favour nor against.
- d) Moderately in favour.
- e) Completely in favour.

**2. What do you think the lynx is like? Please choose one answer in each row (one number) that best describes your opinions.**

	Complet ely	Much	Somewh at	Neither	Somewh at	Much	Complet ely	
Ugly	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Beautiful
Uninteresting	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Interesting
Dangerous	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Not dangerous
Damaging	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Useful

<b>Question</b>	<b>Completely disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ Don't know</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Completely agree</b>
3. It is important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia for future generations.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is not important to maintain lynx in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia because there are lynx present in other parts of Europe.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Lynx represents a symbol of preserved nature.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Presence of lynx in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia is beneficial for tourism.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I would be afraid to go to the forest where lynx are present.	1	2	3	4	5
8. In areas where lynx live in nearby forests, they often attack humans.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am afraid that increased lynx presence would cause me financial damage.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Lynx cause unacceptable damage to domestic animals in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia.	1	2	3	4	5
11. In areas where lynx occur near pastures in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia, domestic animals are their main food source.	1	2	3	4	5

Question	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral/ Don't know	Agree	Completely agree
12. Presence of lynx reduces opportunities to hunt ungulates.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Lynx play an important role in regulating roe deer numbers.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Lynx population in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia is close to extinction.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Lynx population in Slovenia/ Italy/ Croatia is in good condition.					
16. Illegal killings of lynx are justifiable.	1	2	3	4	5

### KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

At each question please circle one answer that you think is correct.

#### 17. How much on average weights an adult male lynx?

a) Up to 10 kg.

d) 30-39 kg.

b) 11-19 kg.

e) 40 kg and more.

c) 20-29 kg.

f) not sure.

#### 18. The length of a lynx tale is:

a) Longer than half of the length of lynx body.

c) Shorter than the 1/4 of the length of lynx body.

b) Approximately the same as length of lynx body.

d) Not sure.



	Question	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Don't know	Agree	Completely agree
25.	Overharvest is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Illegal killing of lynx is the main cause for the recent deterioration of the lynx population.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Livestock guarding dogs are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Electric fences used at pastures are an effective measure for preventing lynx attacks on livestock.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Removal of lynx is an effective measure for preventing damages in agriculture.	1	2	3	4	5

**30. Where do you get majority of information about lynx from?**

- a) Media.
- b) Social media.
- c) LIFE Lynx Project webpage
- d) LIFE Lynx Project events.
- e) ZOO.
- f) Personal communication with hunters/foresters/biologists.
- g) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**31. How likely is it for a lynx to attack a person?**

- a) Highly unlikely.
- b) Unlikely.
- c) Not sure.
- d) Likely.
- e) Very likely.

**MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

**Please in each row circle one answer only.**

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Completely disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/Don't know</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Completely agree</b>
<b>32.</b>	The number of lynx should be increased in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>33.</b>	Currently there are too few lynx in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy to be hunted.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>34.</b>	There should be regular quotas for hunting of lynx in Slovenia/Croatia/Italy.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>35.</b>	Lynx do not belong to our country and should be exterminated.	1	2	3	4	5



**41. Postal code of your place of residence: \_\_\_\_\_**

**42. Highest Education Level Completed:**

- a) Unfinished elementary school.
- b) Finished elementary school.
- c) Finished high school.
- d) University degree or higher.

**43. Are you a hunter?**

- a) No.
- b) Yes.

**44. If you own pets or domestic animals, which of the following species do you own?**

- a) Sheep.
- b) Goats.
- c) Cattle.
- d) Cat.
- e) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- f) None.

**45. Are you a member of an environmental NGO?**

- a) Yes.
- b) No.

**46. If yes, which one?**

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**47. In which (if any) of the following fields are you professionally involved? Mark all that apply.**

- a) Nature conservation including protected area management.
- b) Wildlife management.
- c) Forest management.
- d) None of the above.

**48. Have you in the past already received and answered to such a questionnaire about lynx and lynx management ?**

- a) Yes.
- b) No.
- c) Not sure.



LIFE Lynx project partner organisations:



University of Ljubljana

