



## **UNDERSTANDING RURAL PERSPECTIVES**

A survey on attitudes and perceptions  
towards hunting practices in rural  
communities

**Savanta:**

This survey was commissioned by Eurogroup for Animals, Humane Society International/Europe, Fondation Brigitte Bardot, Dierenbescherming, Djurskyddet Sverige, Deutscher Tierschutzbund, World Animal Protection Denmark, World Animal Protection Netherlands, World Animal Protection Sweden and LAV and conducted by Savanta in November 2023.

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## Background

This survey aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of residents in rural communities towards hunting practices. It seeks to gather valuable insights into the complex relationship between rural populations and hunting.

## Objectives

- Assess the alignment of rural communities' attitudes towards hunting interest groups.
- Assess the general awareness and knowledge of residents regarding hunting in their region.
- Explore attitudes towards hunting, considering factors such as safety concerns and animal welfare.

The findings of this survey will contribute to a better understanding of rural communities' attitudes towards hunting practices, aiding in the development of effective strategies that align with their values and concerns.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted by [Savanta](#) in November 2023 among a sample of 10,000 inhabitants of rural areas in the following Member States of the European Union: Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Romania (1,000 per Member State).

When entering the survey and prior to accessing the content and aims of the survey, participants were asked if they live in a rural area. If the answer was negative, they could not conduct the survey. This question allowed us to filter rural residents according to their perceptions, a crucial factor when assessing whether their viewpoints are accurately reflected in policy-making decisions.

The survey consisted of a structured questionnaire with a majority of closed-ended questions where respondents were invited to assess their attitudes towards a statement. For each of these questions, respondents could provide a “neutral” response.

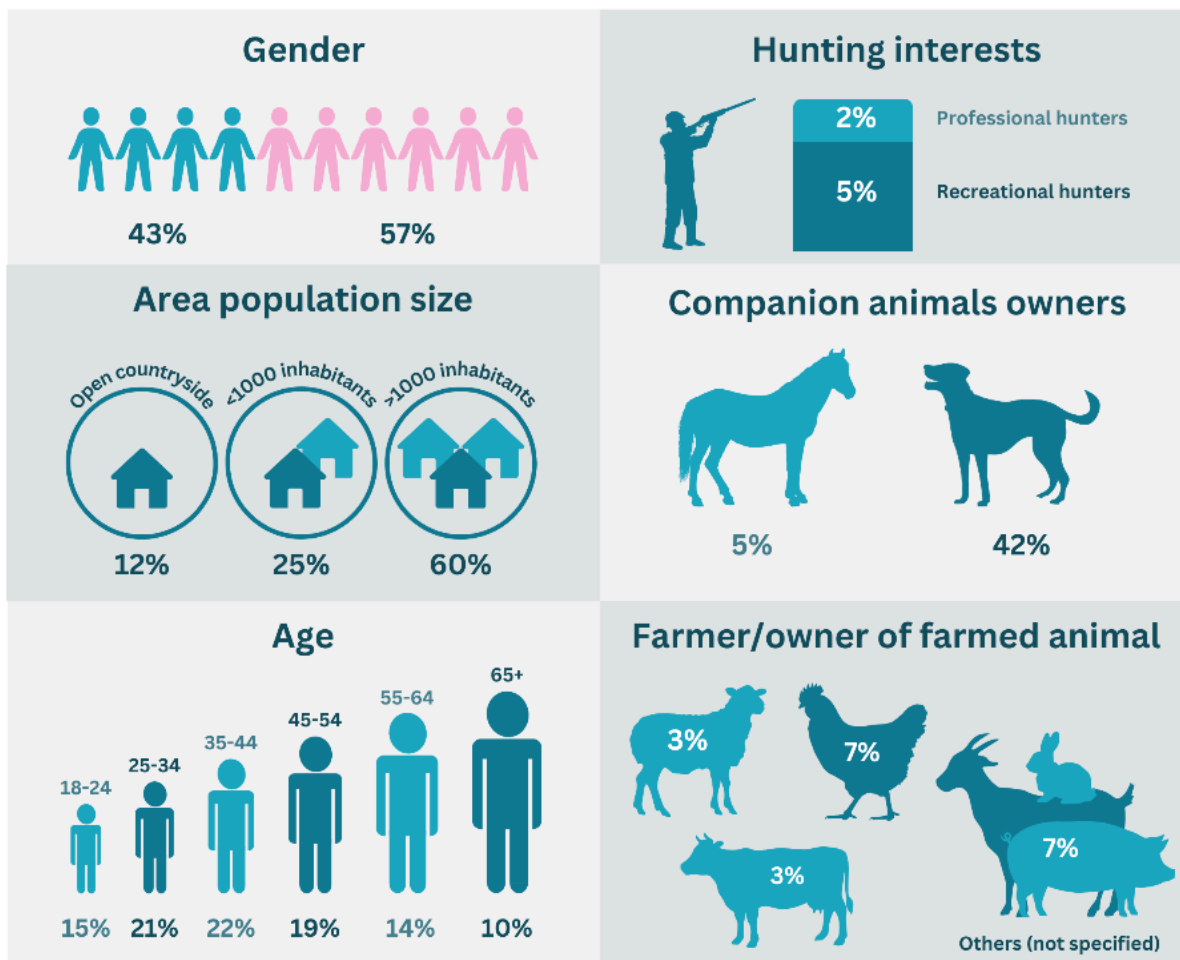
The survey was administered through online platforms<sup>1</sup>.

The following demographic data was collected:

- Age range
- Gender
- Area population size
- Annual income
- Farming occupation (Farmer/owner of cattle, sheep, chicken, other farmed animal)
- Hunting occupation (recreational or professional hunter)
- Companion animal ownership (dog or equine owner)

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<sup>1</sup> In 2022, 90% of rural households in the European Union had internet access. As a consequence, this data collection method did not significantly impact the results. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1236336/share-of-households-rural-internet-access-eu27/>



## Overall results

### *General lack of representation by hunting interest groups*

Interest groups have been defined for participants to the survey as “a group of people that seeks to influence public policy and legislation on a particular issue, interest or concern”. When seeking to assess the representation of rural communities by hunting interest groups, the survey reveals that only 12% of respondents feel well represented by such interest groups. **Less than half (46%) of hunters feel well represented by hunting interest groups.** Worth noting, recreational hunters feel significantly better represented as 50% indicated feeling well represented compared to 38% of professional hunters.



The results indicate that hunters also find themselves inadequately represented by hunting interest groups. Representation by hunting interest groups is highest in Sweden but still accounts for only 16% of respondents. It is important to note that results for were consistent across respondents from the different population area sizes indicating that, contrary to some perceptions, support is not higher in the open countryside.

### *Overwhelming support for environmental protection and conservation*

This collective stance reflects a deep-seated commitment to environmental stewardship, as evidenced by the identified priorities of 80% emphasising environmental protection for future generations and 78% highlighting the importance of biodiversity conservation for the European Union. Interestingly, older generations were more likely to consider these issues important. This attitude was largely shared by hunters (72% and 67%, respectively).

Similarly, the majority of respondents (67%) indicated prioritising the protection of biodiversity and animal welfare over the maintaining of hunting traditions. This opinion was shared by 61% of the hunters responding to the survey, tending to indicate that hunters also give full consideration to conservation interests and can be attentive to the well-being of animals.



*Clear condemnation of harmful practices*

A vast majority of respondents (70%) support the statement that each wild animal is a sentient being that needs to be protected. Cattle farmers and hunters are both significantly less likely to agree with this statement but it remains widely supported (61%).



Interestingly, **an even larger proportion of respondents (75%) believe that hunting methods causing avoidable suffering to wild animals should be banned.** It is widely supported by recreational hunters (68%) and more moderately supported by professional hunters (59%). This could be explained by the different methods used by hunters whether they exercise hunting as a leisure or a professional activity.



One hunting method that could be judged as causing avoidable suffering is hunting in large fenced private land where animals cannot escape. **71% of respondents support a ban on this practice.**





Without questioning the cruelty of this method, a similar proportion of respondents (70%) also support a ban on the hunting of animals that have been born and reared in captivity, including 60% of hunters.



When questioned on the safety of hunting practices for dogs, an overwhelming majority (77%, including 73% of hunters) believe that hunters should protect their dogs from accidents, such as drowning, disturbing other wild species or encountering large carnivores. 81% of recreational hunters that have a dog agree with this statement compared to 65% of professional hunters that have a dog.

### *High concerns over safety of hunting practices*

The safety of hunting practices is particularly relevant to ask inhabitants of rural areas. They are the most affected by such practices and the risks it bears. **44% of respondents indicate that they feel unsafe going outside during hunting season. Even more concerning, only 31% state that they feel rather safe.** Only 1 in 10 respondents would strongly disagree with the fact they feel unsafe.



These results differ considerably between countries. We can identify two groups: the countries where respondents generally feel unsafe, namely France (62% feel unsafe), Spain (57%), Romania (52%), Italy (51%), Belgium (46%) and Poland (44%), and the countries where safety is not a major concern for respondents namely Netherlands (45% feel safe), Germany (44%), Denmark (39%) and Sweden (39%). Further research into the regulations of hunting practices in these countries could inform these results and give indications on best practices to the elements that impact the feeling of safety of inhabitants of rural areas during hunting season.

Beyond the feeling of safety, hunting can severely impact the livelihood of inhabitants of rural areas as **39% indicated that they avoid going out during hunting season.**



More concerning, only 35% of respondents indicated disagreeing with this statement. This is especially verified in the countries where inhabitants indicate feeling unsafe, namely France (54% avoid going out), Spain (53%) and Romania (51%).

Surprisingly, a high proportion of hunters indicated feeling unsafe (41%) or avoiding going out (37%) during hunting season. As hunters are the first to be affected by hunting safety, these results could be explained by the lack of trust of certain hunters in the safety measures of hunting practices.

We observe very different results among countries surveyed on whether respondents consider hunting as a leisure activity like any other. Opinions are clearly split as on average 35% consider it to be a leisure activity like any other while 41% disagree. It is more widely accepted as such in Denmark (50%), Sweden (48%) and Romania (42%) while it is clearly the contrary in Italy where 59% of respondents disagree with the statement. These results tend to show strong disparities across the EU on hunting culture and its acceptability.

Interestingly, 18% of respondents who do not avoid going outside during hunting season still feel unsafe doing so.

### *Call for EU-wide selective and humane wildlife management*

Inhabitants of rural communities demand action at European level. **65% agree that hunting practices should be harmonised throughout the EU** based on scientific knowledge and in application of EU legislation, especially regarding the protection of biodiversity.



The survey also gives indications on the type of measures demanded by rural inhabitants. First, **64% of respondents support a limitation of hunting to cases where independent scientific assessments conclude that the species pose a risk to the environment or public health**, including 56% of hunters. This result echoes the wide support towards a ban on hunting of animals reared in captivity. Going further, **a large majority of respondents (70%) want effective non-lethal and humane wildlife management methods to be researched and implemented**, including 62% of hunters.



Therefore, we observe that inhabitants of rural areas across the EU demand additional measures to guarantee the humane management of wildlife.

## Key results per country

### *Germany*

Germany is among the three countries where respondents were significantly more likely to agree (78%) that hunting methods causing avoidable suffering to wild animals should be banned.

Half of German respondents (50%) indicated that they do not consider hunting as a leisure activity like any other (only 24% agree with this statement). Therefore, there is a strong support regarding research and implementation of effective and non-lethal management methods for wildlife (70%) as well as for the ban of certain hunting methods like rearing animals for hunting purposes (71%). Above all, most rural citizens see each animal as a sentient being that needs to be protected (72%) whereas only very few people do not agree with this statement (5%).

### *France*

France is the second country where most respondents strongly agree (40%), along with 28% who agree, that the protection of biodiversity and animal welfare is more important than maintaining hunting traditions.

France stands out as the country where rural inhabitants feel the **most unsafe in relation to hunting**. 62% feel unsafe going during hunting season out while 54% avoid going out.

In France, like in Italy, no respondent stated being professional hunters.

### *Spain*

Rural inhabitants of Spain do not feel represented by hunting interest groups as only 13% feel well-represented. 67% of respondents indicate feeling not at all or rarely represented by these interest groups, the highest proportion of the countries surveyed.

Spanish respondents are very supportive (76%) of the research and implementation of effective non-lethal and humane wildlife management methods.

### *Netherlands*

Only 59% of Dutch respondents believe that hunting practices should be harmonised across the EU, which is less than the average of all countries (65%).

The Netherlands present the second highest proportion of respondents who disagree (12%) with the statement that each wild animal is a sentient being that needs to be protected.

The Netherlands is the country where the most respondents state feeling safe going out during hunting season as 45% feel safe and only 23% do not. However, 29% of respondents say that they avoid going out during hunting season (39% disagree with this statement).

## *Italy*

55% of rural inhabitants in Italy do not feel represented at all by hunting interest groups. It is also the country where hunting is the least considered as a leisure activity like any other with 59% disagreeing with this statement.

Italy is among the three countries where respondents were significantly more likely to agree (79%) that hunting methods causing avoidable suffering to wild animals should be banned. A large proportion of respondents (39%) strongly agree that the protection of biodiversity and animal welfare is more important than maintaining hunting traditions.

**Italy is the most supportive country of effective non-lethal and humane wildlife management methods**, as 83% agree that such methods should be researched and implemented. It is also the country where respondents are the most critical of hunting in large fenced private land where animals cannot escape, with 78% agreeing that it should be banned.

Italian respondents are more likely to support a harmonisation of hunting practices across the EU than the other countries (76%).

In Italy, like in France, less than 1% of respondents stated being professional hunters.

## *Belgium*

Belgium is the country where the most respondents strongly agree (41%) that the protection of biodiversity and animal welfare is more important than maintaining hunting traditions. Belgian respondents were generally aligned with the average responses of the ten countries surveyed.

## *Poland*

Polish respondents are among the most supportive of humane and sustainable hunting practices. For instance, Poland is the country where respondents agree the most (73%) that hunting should be limited to cases where independent scientific assessments conclude that the species pose a risk to the environment or public health. Polish respondents were generally aligned with the average responses of the ten countries surveyed.

## *Denmark*

On most questions, Danish respondents provided similar responses to Swedish respondents. It must be noted that Denmark is the country where the most respondents state being recreational hunters (12%) and professional hunters (5%). This is significantly higher than other countries.

Danish respondents, similarly to Sweden, are less likely to support a harmonisation of hunting practices across the EU as only 54% support such a change compared to 65% for the average.

Again showing similar results to Sweden, Danish rural inhabitants are less likely to agree with the statement that each wild animal is a sentient being that needs to be protected (60%). More than 1 in 10 respondents (11%) disagree with this statement.

Although the majority of respondents support such measures, Denmark is also one of countries where there is slightly less support towards the ban of the hunting practices assessed with 64% agreeing with a ban on hunting in large fenced private land where animals cannot escape and 61% on hunting of animals that have been born and reared in captivity.

### *Sweden*

On most questions, Swedish respondents provided similar responses to Danish respondents. Although less than Danish respondents, 10% of Swedish respondents state being recreational hunters. However, and contrary to Denmark, only 1% state being professional hunters.

Swedish respondents, similarly to Denmark, are less likely to support a harmonisation of hunting practices across the EU even though 56% support such a change compared to 65% on average of all countries surveyed. Interestingly, only 8% of Swedish respondents disagree with this statement.

Again showing similar results to Denmark, Swedish rural inhabitants are less likely to agree (59%) with the statement that each wild animal is a sentient being that needs to be protected. More than 1 in 10 respondents (13%) disagree with this statement, the highest proportion from the 10 countries surveyed, although it remains a minority. However, and interestingly, Sweden is among the three countries where respondents were significantly more likely to agree (81%) that hunting methods causing avoidable suffering to wild animals should be banned.

The majority of Swedish respondents (65%) support a ban on hunting in large fenced private land where animals cannot escape but this support is less evident than in other countries.

### *Romania*

A large proportion of Romanian respondents (42%) consider hunting as a leisure activity like any other while only 24% disagree with this statement. However, and surprisingly, only 15% of respondents state feeling safe going out during hunting season (compared to 52% feeling unsafe) and 51% avoid going out (compared to 14%). Romanian respondents were generally aligned with the average responses of the ten countries surveyed.

### **Conclusion**

This survey shows a widespread consensus among inhabitants of rural areas of the ten countries surveyed towards more humane and justified hunting practices. These rural communities value the protection of the environment and biodiversity more than hunting traditions. The survey also depicts strong disparities regarding the feeling of safety of inhabitants regarding hunting, questioning the existence of best practices or, on the contrary, a lack of regulations in certain countries to prevent incidents. Acknowledging these differences, the respondents clearly call for harmonised regulation governing hunting across the EU. Such measures should recognise the sentience of wild animals, phase out cruel

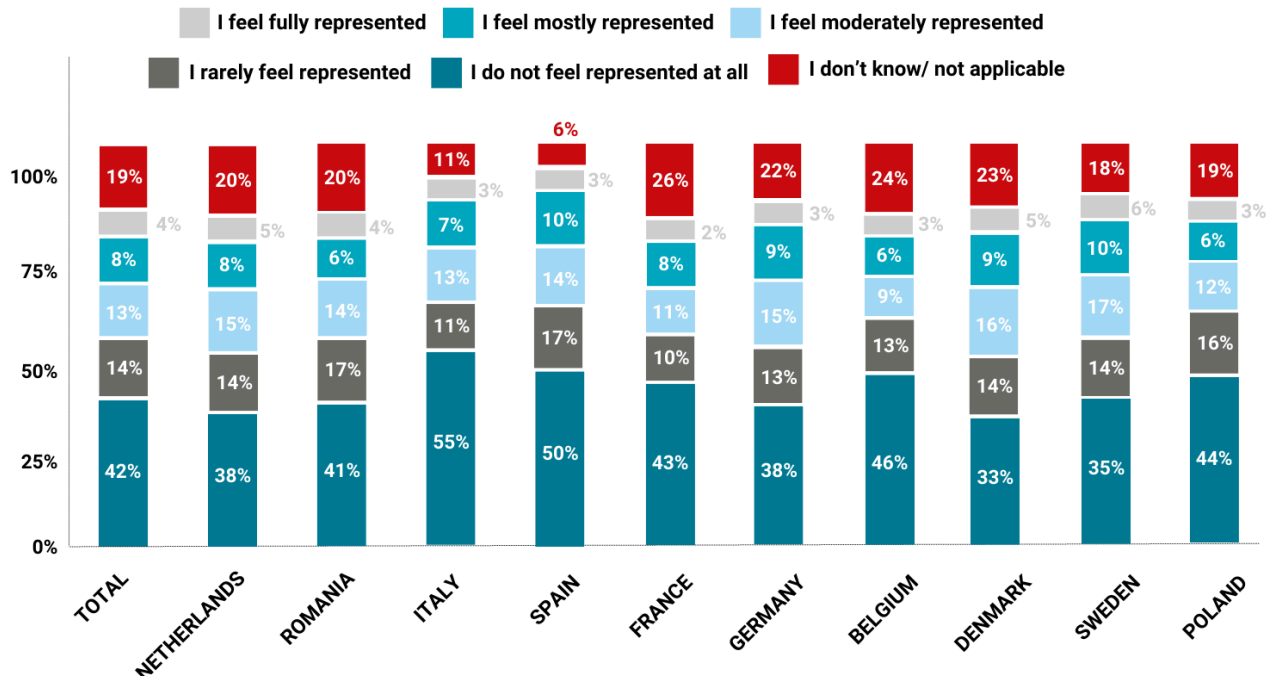
methods, limit hunting to cases where wildlife management is necessary, and provide for non-lethal and humane innovations.



## Annexes

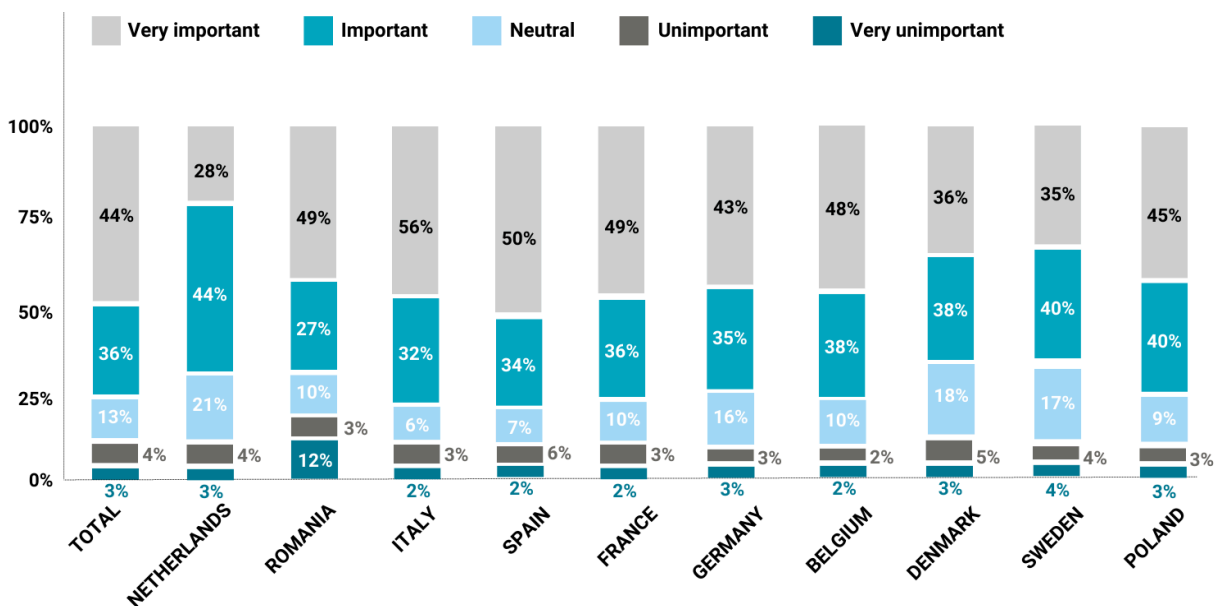
### Annexe 1

As an inhabitant of a rural area, to what extent do you feel represented by hunting interest groups?



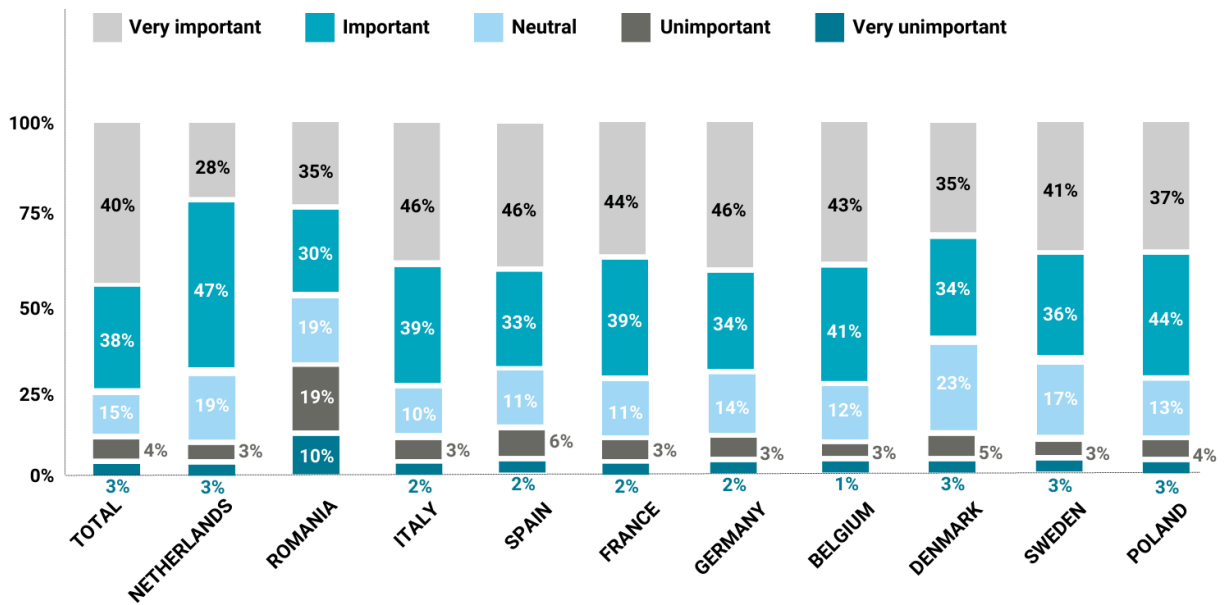
### Annexe 2

How important is it that the European Union prioritises environmental protection for future generations?



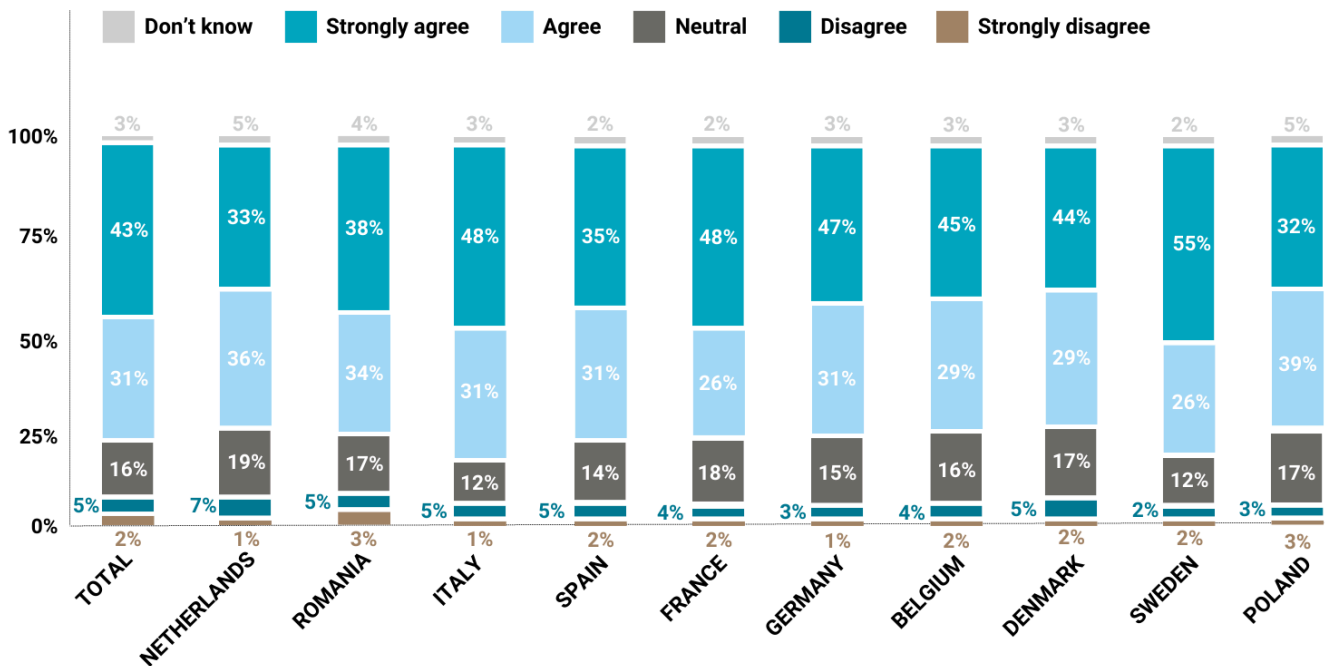
### Annexe 3

How important is it that the European Union prioritises the conservation of biodiversity/species?



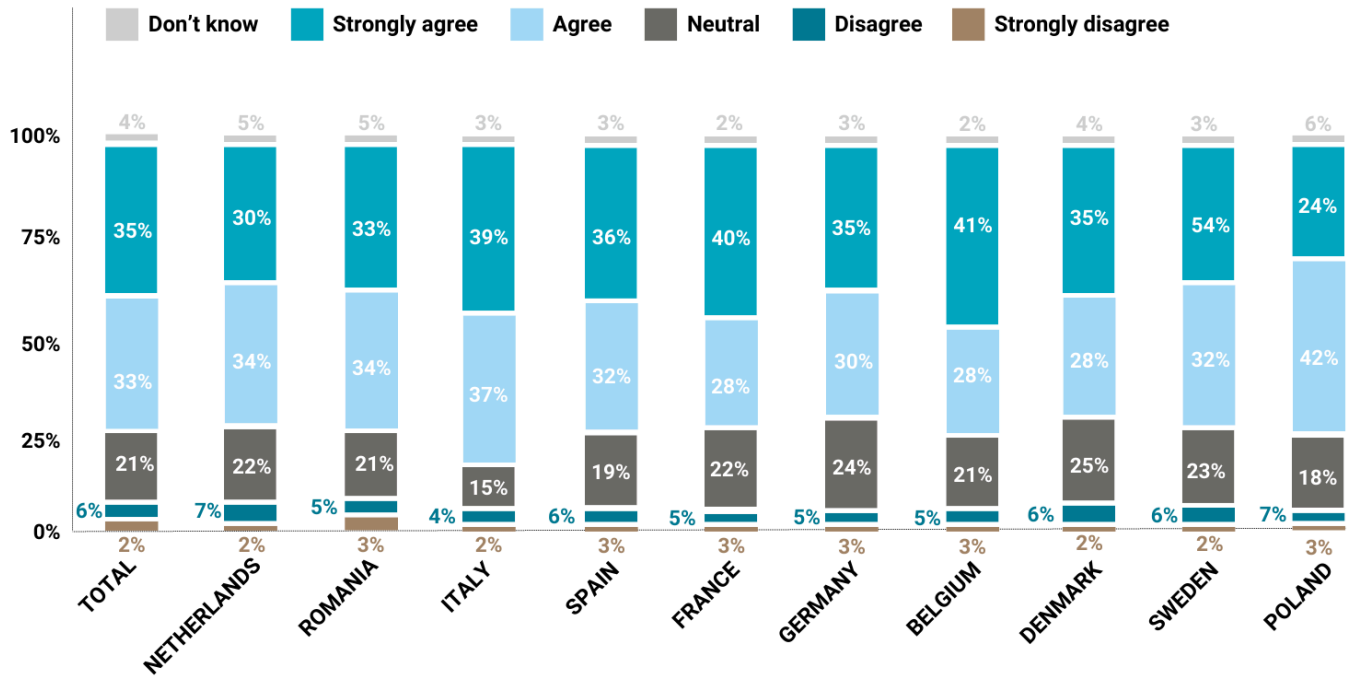
### Annexe 4

Hunting methods causing avoidable suffering to wild animals should be banned



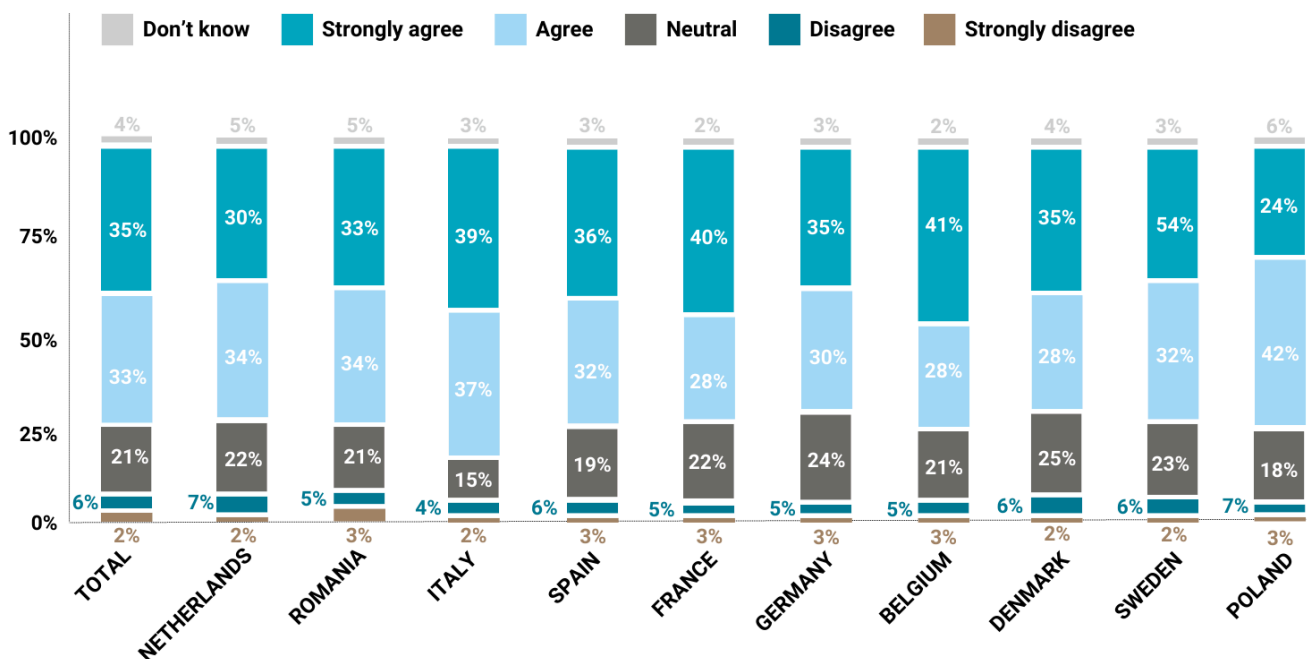
## Annexe 5

The protection of biodiversity and animal welfare is more important than maintaining hunting traditions



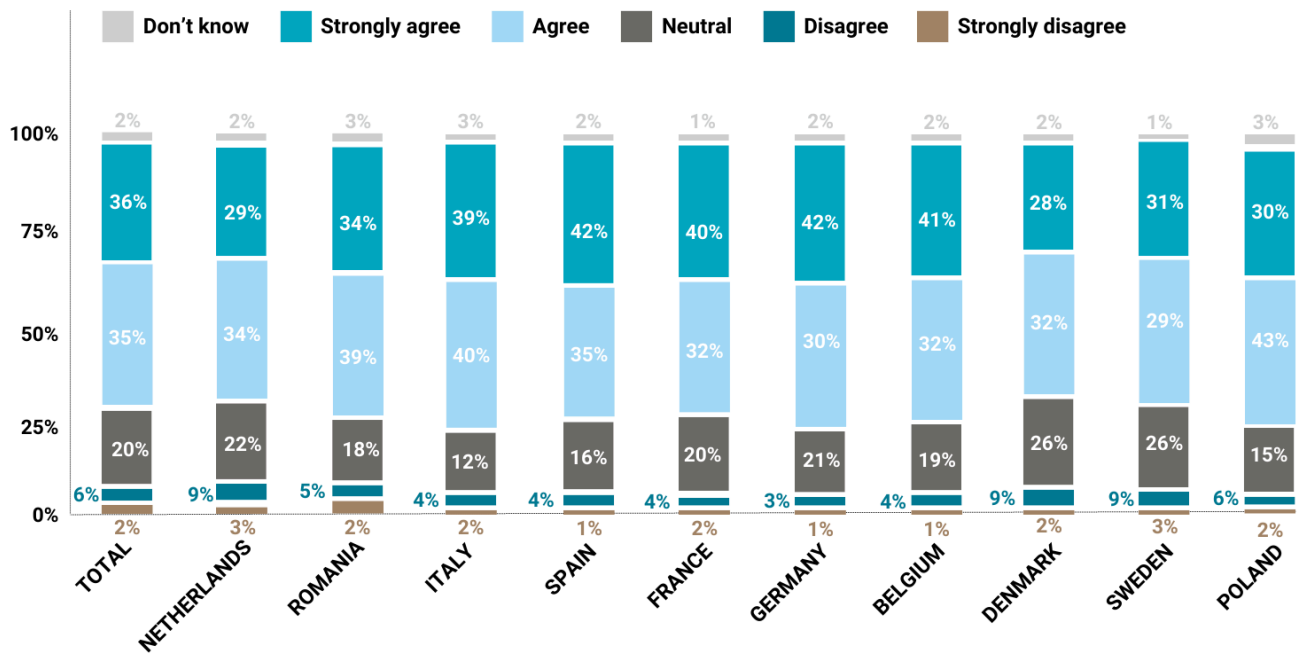
## Annexe 6

Hunting practices should be harmonised throughout the EU based on scientific knowledge and in application of EU legislation



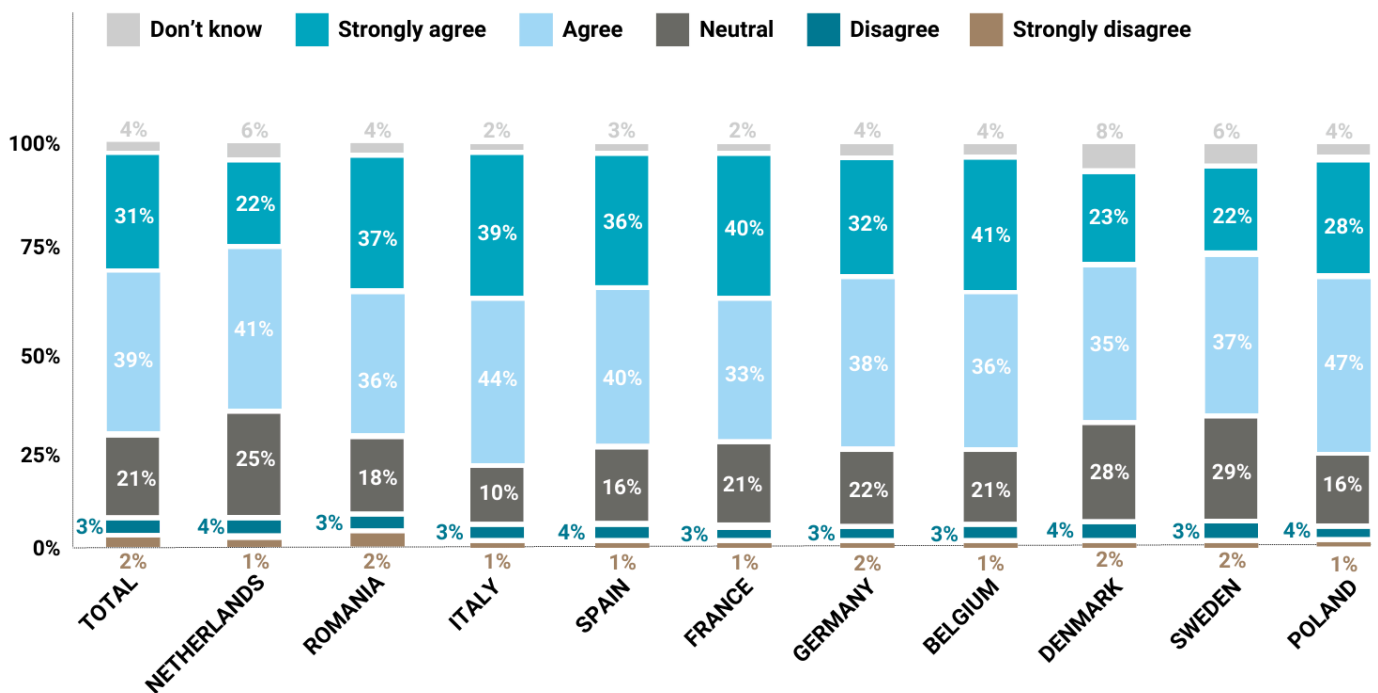
## Annexe 7

Each wild animal is a sentient being that needs to be protected



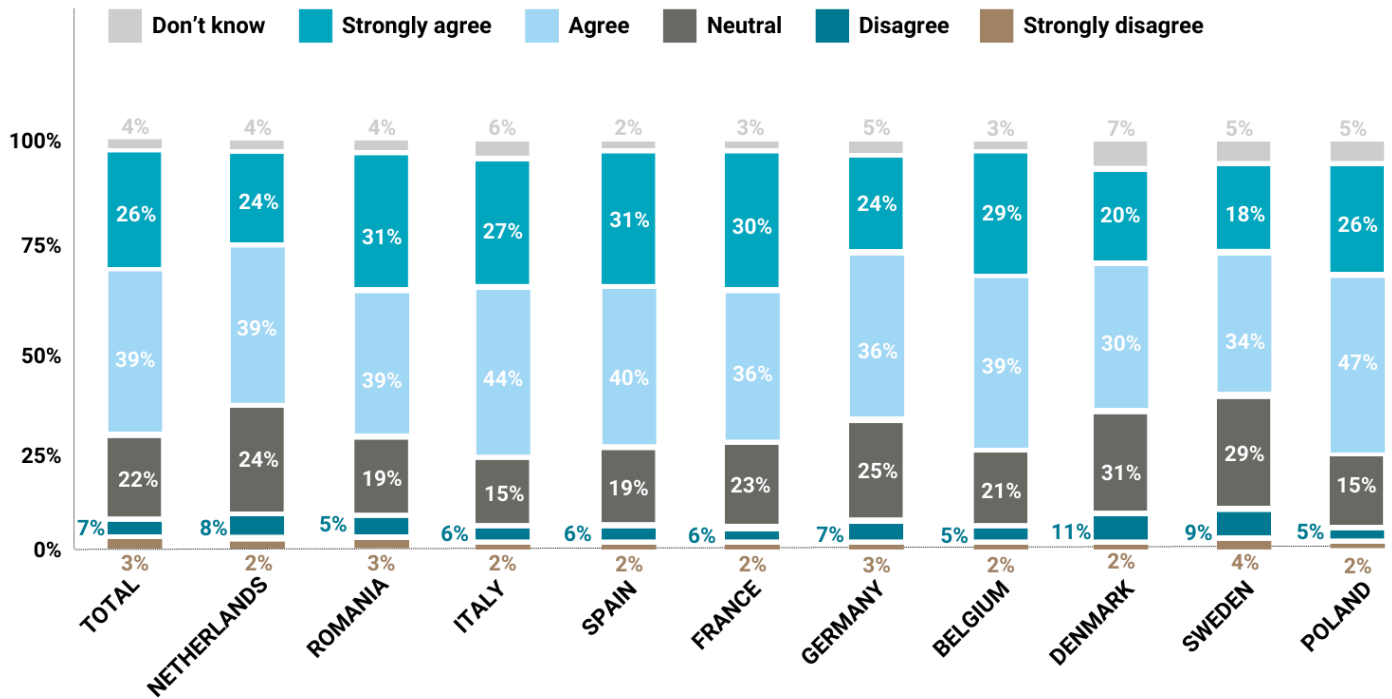
## Annexe 8

Effective non-lethal and humane wildlife management methods should be researched and implemented



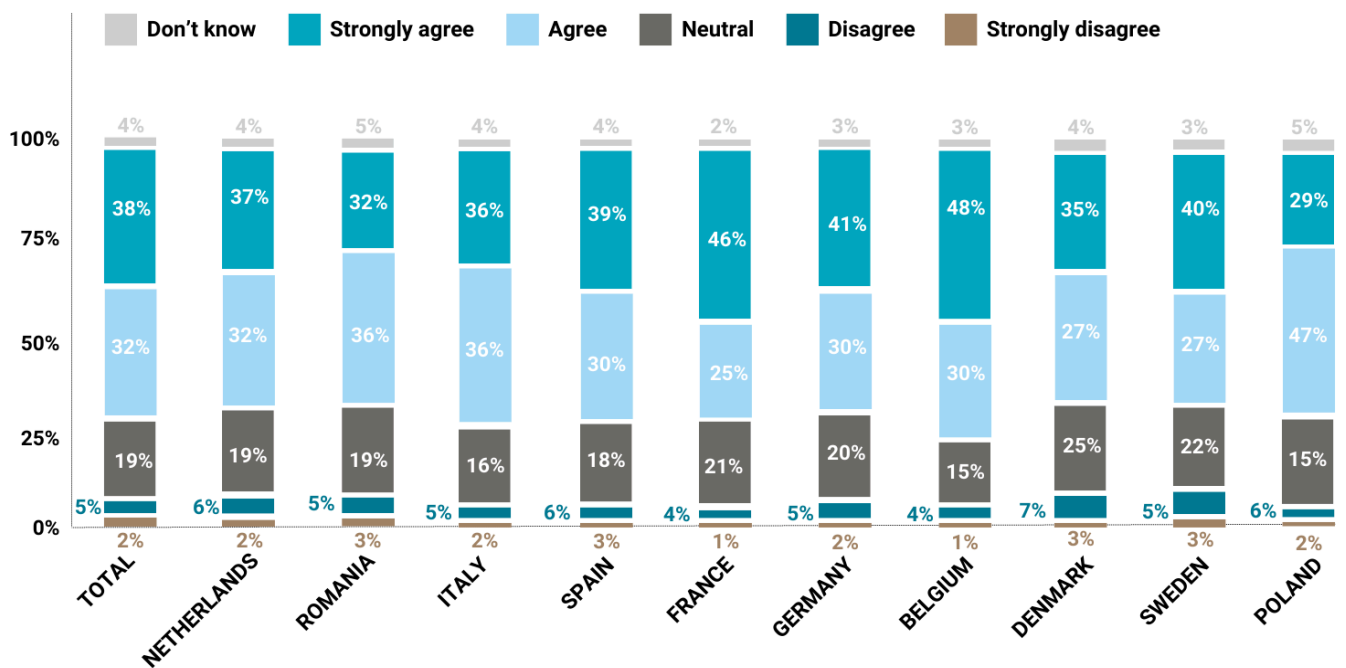
## Annexe 9

Hunting should be limited to cases where independent scientific assessments conclude that the species pose a risk to the environment or public health



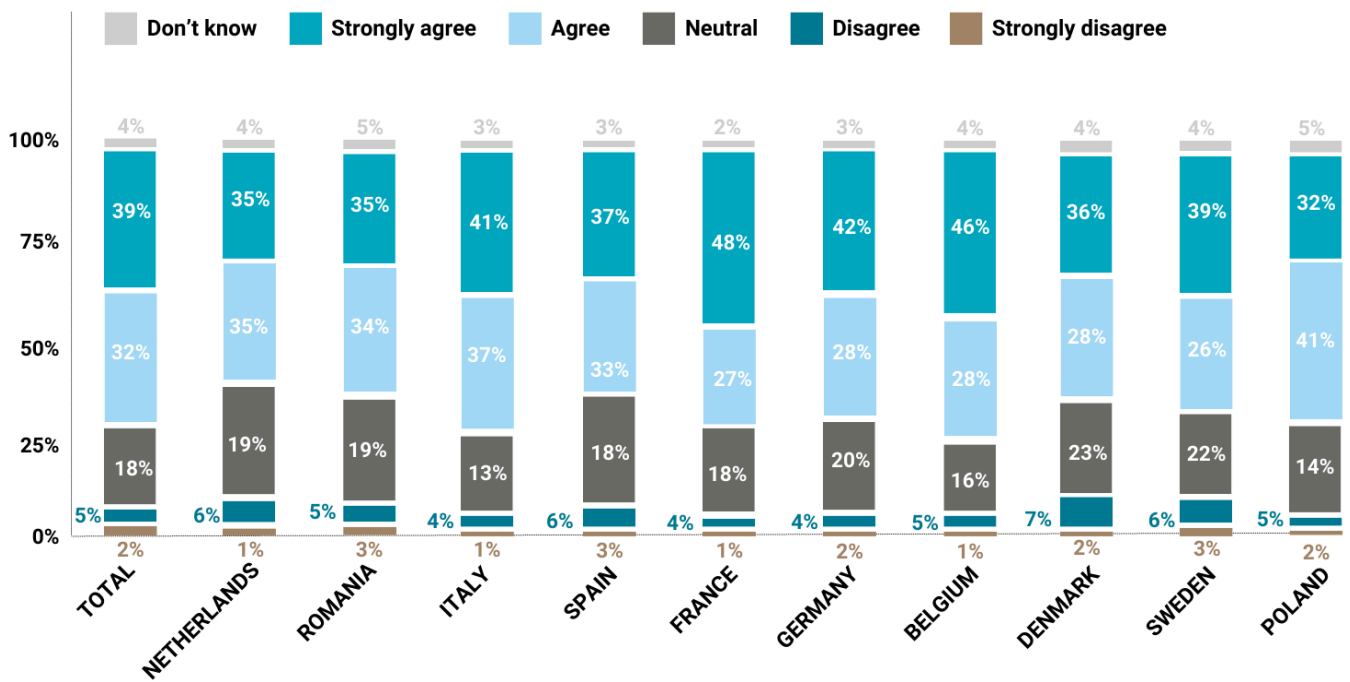
## Annexe 10

Hunting of animals that have been born and reared in captivity should be banned



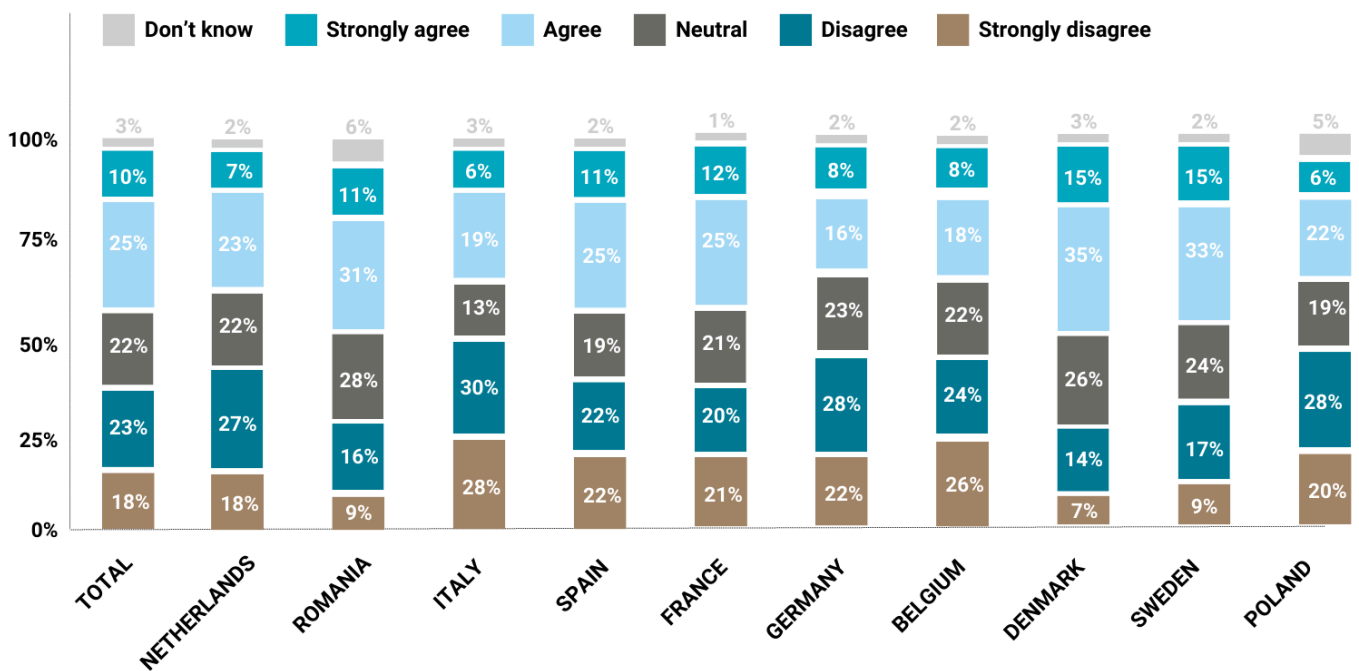
Annexe 11

Hunting in large fenced private land where animals cannot escape should be banned



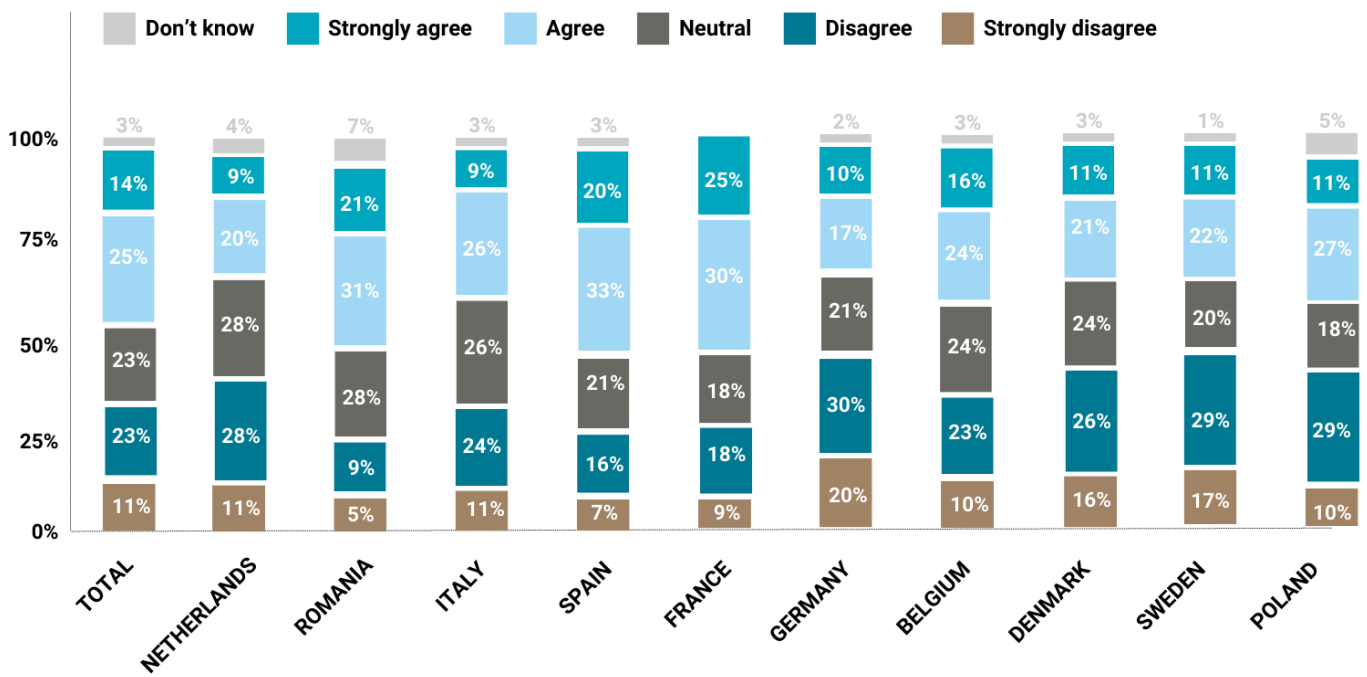
Annexe 12

Hunting is a leisure activity like any other



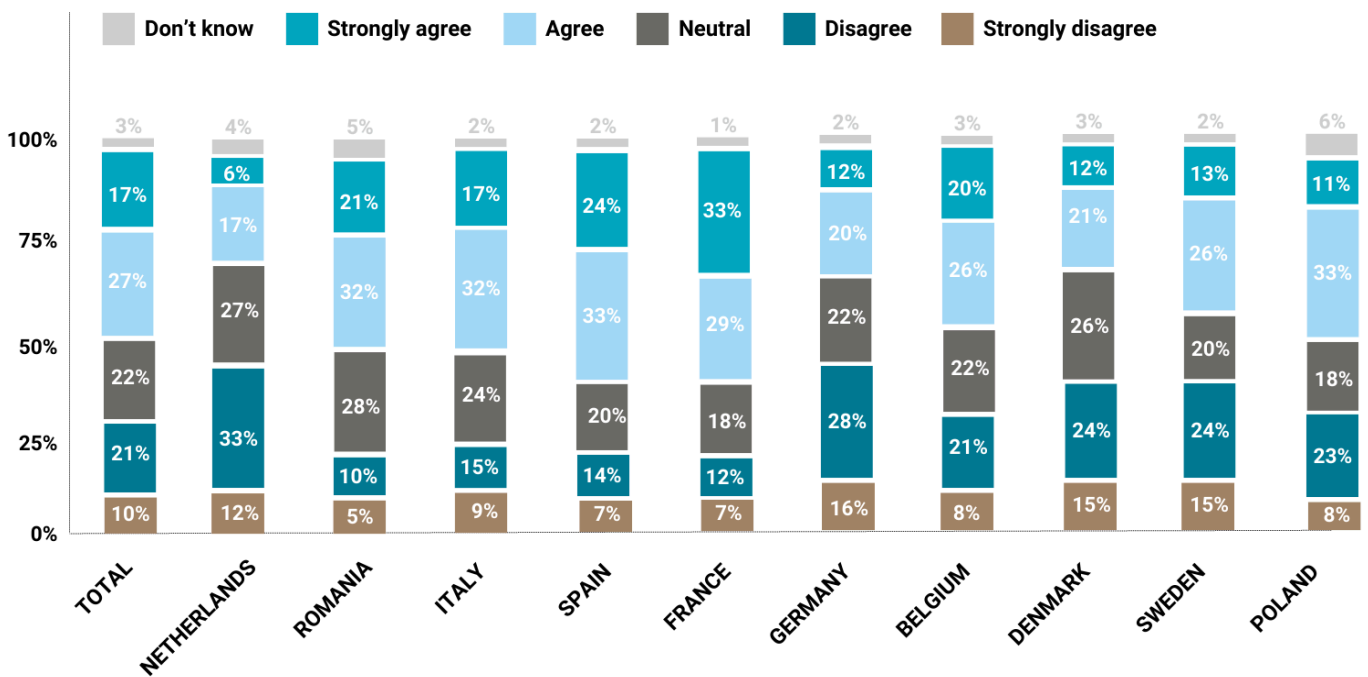
### Annexe 13

I avoid going out during hunting season



### Annexe 15

I feel unsafe going out during hunting season









November 2023

Savanta: