



Towards a Better Understanding of the  
**DRIVERS AND MOTIVATIONS  
BEHIND ILLEGAL KILLING, TAKING  
AND TRADE OF BIRDS**  
in the Mediterranean Region

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SUMMARY REPORT | MARCH 2026



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**Cover image:** Red-backed Shrike trapped on illegal lime stick (© BirdLife Cyprus)



The summary report and full report will be available here:



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# Introduction



Illegal killing, taking, and trade of birds (IKB) remains one of the most significant threats to migratory birds across the Mediterranean region. In 2016 it was estimated that 11 to 36 million birds were illegally killed each year in the Mediterranean (Brochet *et al.* 2016). Despite sustained policy attention and international commitments, progress in reducing IKB has been inconsistent, in part because the underlying human drivers and motivations of the behaviour are not well understood.

In 2014, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) adopted Resolution 11.16 (Rev. COP14) on the Prevention of Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds, which mandated the creation of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean (MIKT). MIKT brings together governments and key stakeholders to coordinate action against IKB across the region and works to promote a zero-tolerance approach to illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds.

In 2019, countries across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East committed to reducing IKB by at least 50% by 2030 as part of the Rome Strategic Plan (RSP) 2020-2030: Eradicating Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade in Wild Birds in Europe and the Mediterranean region - the strategic framework of the CMS MIKT and the Bern Convention's Special Focal Points on IKB.

Left top: European Bee-eater (© 2021 aaltair, Shutterstock)

Left bottom: European Bee-eaters are often illegally persecuted by bee-keepers (© BirdLife Cyprus)

Right: Types of flexible netting are often used for the illegal take of wild birds (© BirdLife Cyprus)



Supporting the implementation of Rome Strategic Plan Objective 1.2, the present study assessed the social, economic, cultural and institutional drivers and motivations that shape IKB across 18 countries in the Mediterranean region. Contributing to actions 1.2a to 1.2d, this assessment provides a regional-level overview of the motivations driving IKB. Further country-specific analysis will be required to confirm and refine understanding at the national level and inform the design of targeted, evidence-based interventions included as part of National Action Plans.

Information was collected via a questionnaire answered by CMS MIKT National Focal Points. The questionnaire examined the problem of IKB in two connected parts; first the supply, or offer, then the demand, using the COM-B behavioural framework to identify where policy interventions can most effectively disrupt illegal practices (Michie, van Stralen and West, 2011)

This study provides an important first step to explore and close knowledge gaps on the drivers and motivations of IKB across the Mediterranean region. It is based on respondents' perceptions and knowledge rather than direct observation or scientific research.

The full report including a full list of references and definitions will be made available on the CMS MIKT website [www.cms.int/taskforce/mikt](http://www.cms.int/taskforce/mikt).

## Behavioural Framework Used in This Study (COM-B)

COM-B explains behaviour as the result of three interacting components:

- **Capability:** whether individuals have the skills, knowledge, and experience to carry out IKB
- **Motivation:** whether personal incentives, beliefs, traditions, or justifications drive engagement in IKB.
- **Opportunity:** whether social norms, access to tools, markets, and weak enforcement enable the behaviour

By breaking down these components, the COM-B model clarifies the complex web of individual factors and external drivers behind IKB (Michie, S. *et al.* 2011). It also highlights where interventions can be most effectively targeted—whether by limiting capability, shifting motivation, or altering the social and environmental conditions that support the behaviour (Michie, S. *et al.* 2014, Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019; Thomas-Walters *et al.*, 2020).

Since this study relied on the perceptions of government officials rather than direct accounts from perpetrators, all three COM-B dimensions are assessed indirectly, an important limitation to acknowledge. For this reason, the study places greater emphasis on the motivation and opportunity dimensions.

Capability, which concerns the internal knowledge and skills that enable a behaviour, is considerably harder to infer from third-party perceptions and is therefore not a primary focus of this analysis. For countries interested in applying this framework to better understand IKB, future assessments drawing on direct accounts from perpetrators would be well placed to explore the capability dimension in greater depth.

# Key Findings

## SECTION 1: IKB SUPPLY

In this section, we describe the key findings regarding the supply side of IKB, by highlighting the perpetrators profiles, motivations and drivers shaping this illegal activity.



## WHO IS BEHIND IKB?

Socio-economic profiles of perpetrators were categorised based on their method of operation and geographic scope:

Method:

- **Shooters:** Individuals who illegally kill or injure birds using firearms or other weapons
- **Trappers:** Individuals who use traps, nets, snares, or other non-selective equipment
- **Takers:** Individuals who illegally collect birds or eggs using methods other than shooting or trapping
- **Poison Users:** Individuals who apply banned substances or legally permitted substances in illegal or inappropriate ways, resulting in bird mortality

Geographic Scope:

- **Local:** Operate within their immediate district or region
- **National:** Operate across multiple regions within their country
- **International:** Travel from other countries



Left: Illegal hide and decoys, Gediz Delta (© Doğa Derneği)

Above: Illegal lime sticks, Cyprus (© RSPB Images)

Top right: Eurasian Blackcap caught on illegal lime stick (© BirdLife Cyprus)



IKB perpetrators are perceived overwhelmingly as being male, regardless of method or geographic scope. A clear gradient emerges between geographic scale and socio-economic status: local actors are typically seen as low-to-middle income, national actors predominantly middle income, and international actors largely perceived as high income.

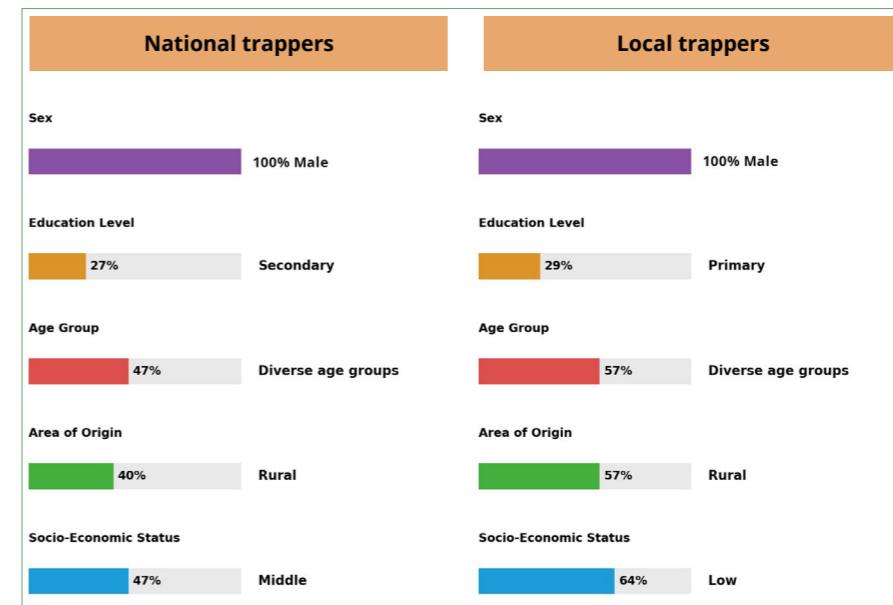
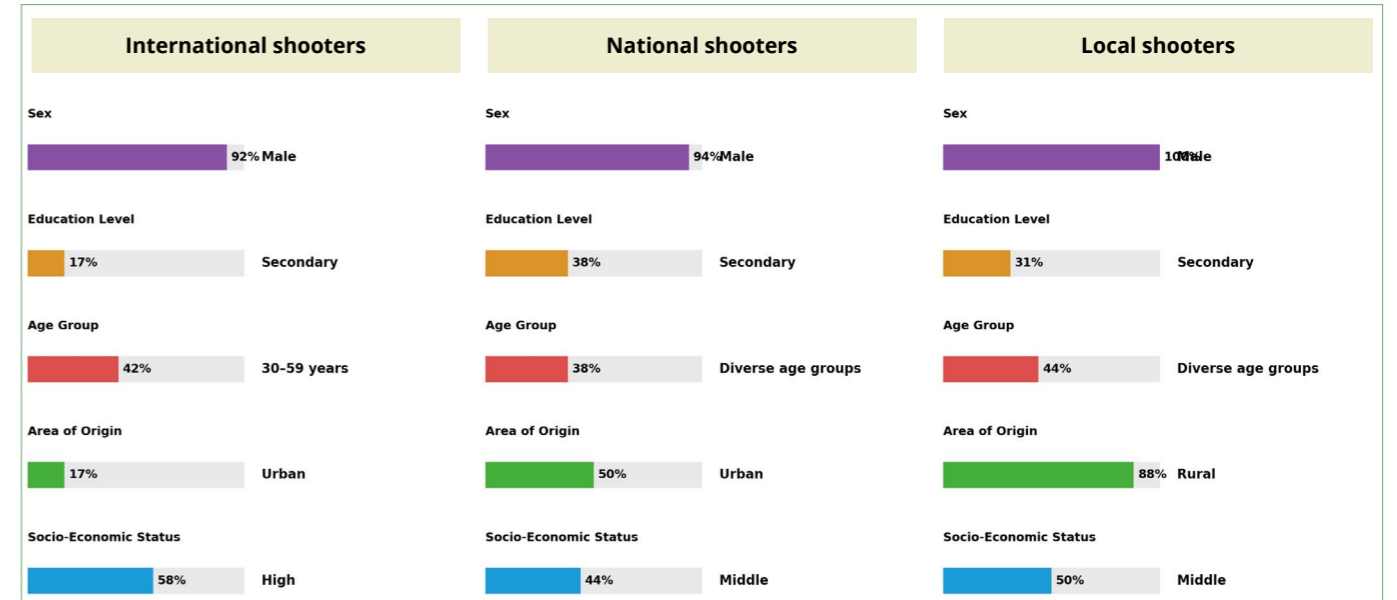
Overall, the profiles indicate that IKB is carried out by distinct actor groups with differing socio-economic statuses.



European Honey-buzzard, Germany (© Christoph Moning)



Illegally shot Great Cormorant (© Miro Cerar)



*Note: Each variable displays the most frequently reported response.*

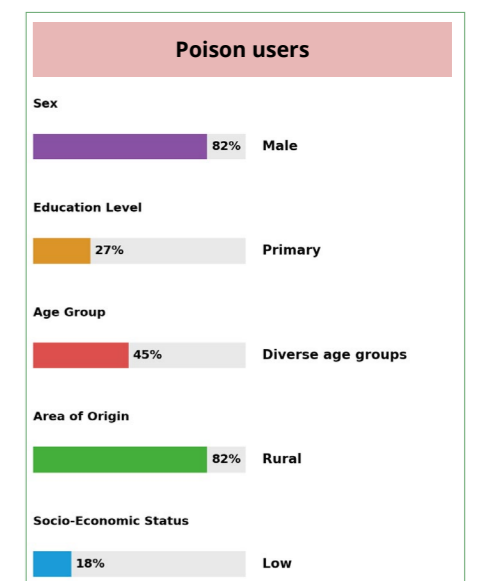
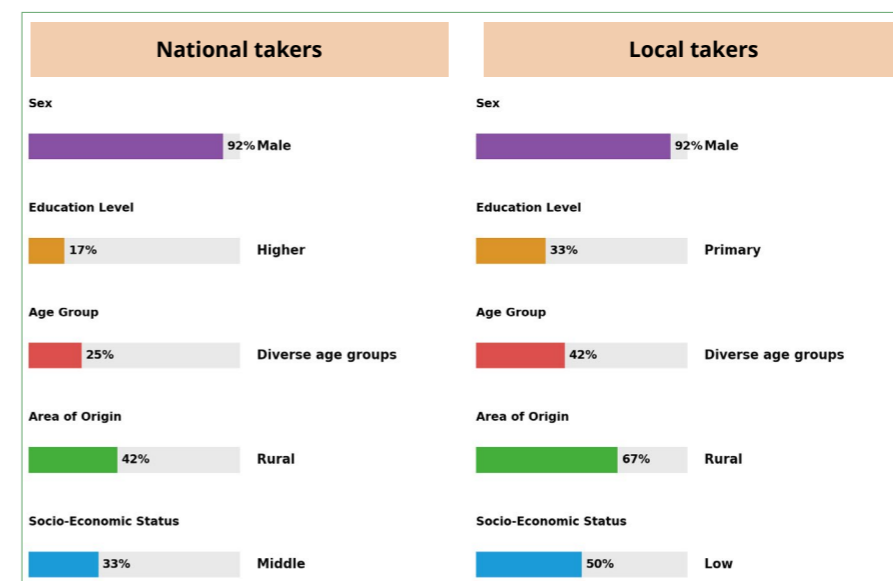


Figure 1. Socio Economic Profiles of Perpetrators



## WHAT ARE THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND IKB?

In this report, motivation is understood broadly to include both what involvement in IKB delivers to individuals and the beliefs and attitudes that make this behaviour feel acceptable or justified. Motivations explain the tangible or experiential benefits actors derive from IKB: income, food, enjoyment, or risk reduction (Thomas-Walters, *et al.*, 2020). Beliefs and attitudes shape how individuals rationalise the behaviour in relation to tradition, social norms, legality, or necessity. Closely linked but analytically distinct, both aspects are required to understand why IKB persists.

### MOTIVATIONS DIFFER DEPENDENT ON ACTORS, METHODS AND THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Motivations are rarely singular; economic, experiential, cultural, and social drivers frequently overlap, shaping different forms of IKB in different ways. This diversity has clear implications for intervention design.

Across all countries surveyed, shooters, whether operating at local, national, or international level, show a consistently experiential motivation profile. Recreational enjoyment, thrill-seeking, and leisure activities are repeatedly identified as their primary drivers. For shooters, social recognition and cultural traditions frequently appear to reinforce these motivations, particularly at local and national levels.

Trappers and takers display a markedly different profile. Involvement is most strongly associated with financial gains. Among local trappers, cultural practices also received a notably high score.

### POISON USERS EMERGE AS A DISTINCT GROUP

Unlike all other actor types, poison users are primarily motivated by risk mitigation, particularly predator control. This pattern is consistent across countries. Poisoning is typically framed as a defensive or preventive measure rather than an act of profit-seeking or recreation. Birds, especially raptors, may be the intended target of gamekeepers, farmers or pigeon keepers, but in other cases birds are killed as non-target victims of bait put out illegally to kill carnivores.



### A MULTI-ACTOR, MULTI-MOTIVATION CHALLENGE

The analysis of motivations by country shows that financial gain emerges as the strongest motivation overall, followed closely by experiential motivations and cultural practices. This reinforces the finding that IKB understood to be driven primarily by economic opportunity, rather than subsistence. Notably, no country ranks subsistence as a dominant motivation, and it appears only in a limited number of contexts where it co-exists with other economic and cultural drivers.

Cultural motivations are rarely identified as the single most important motivation, but they consistently rank highly across multiple countries and actor types. In these countries, examples often indicated that such motivations function as enabling factors that sustain IKB rather than directly incentivise. Similarly, social motivations, appear to reinforce participation by embedding IKB within community relationships and shared norms rather than act as a main incentive.

	EXPERIENTIAL	SOCIAL STATUS	PRACTICAL	FINANCIAL GAINS	SUBSISTENCE	RISK MITIGATION	CULTURAL PRACTICES	SOCIAL BONDING
International Shooters	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
National Shooters	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	3
Local Shooters	2	3	3	1	3	2	2	3
National Trappers	2	2	3	1	3	3	3	3
Local Trappers	2	2	3	1	3	3	1	2
National Takers	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	3
Local Takers	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	3
Poison Users	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	3

Figure 2. Motivations by actor type

Top: Blue-cheeked Bee-eater trapped in a net (© Nature Conservation Egypt)  
 Bottom: Stonechat on limestick (© RSPB Images)  
 Right: Eurasian Buzzards illegally poisoned in the UK (© Jeremy Durkin/Shutterstock)



Figure 3. Motivations by Country

### MOTIVATIONS OVERLAP RATHER THAN OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY

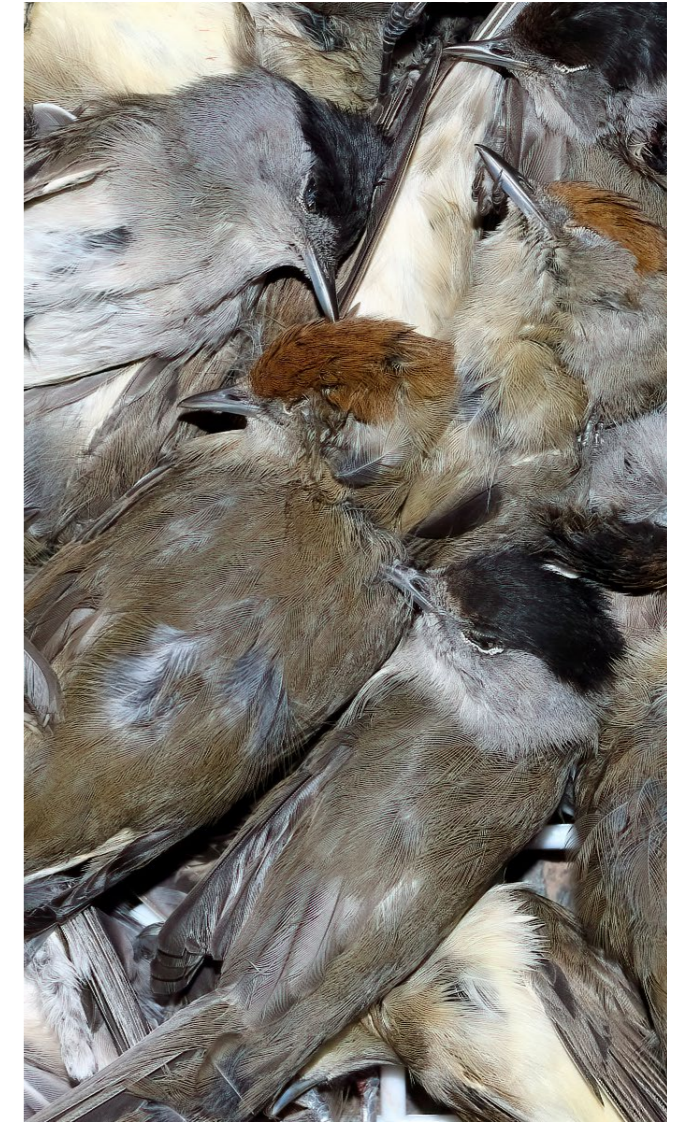
Across countries, motivations frequently cluster. Financial incentives often coexist with cultural practices (e.g. Croatia, Egypt, Italy), while experiential motivations among shooters are reinforced by social recognition and bonding (e.g. Bosnia, France, Italy, Spain). Risk-based motivations are narrow but highly concentrated, primarily affecting poison users and specific shooting contexts. Practical motivations linked to food appear in a small number of countries but are consistently ranked lower than financial or experiential drivers.

Taken together, findings demonstrate that IKB persists not because of a single dominant motivation, but through a combination of different clusters of motives that are more prevalent across certain actor types yet vary according to each country's context. This underscores the need for differentiated country-sensitive policy responses that account for the specific motivational profiles of key actors

## WHAT ARE THE BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES BEHIND IKB?

This section examines why individuals feel it is acceptable or justified to engage in IKB. People who share similar motivations can still rationalise their behaviour in very different ways: seeing it as an economic necessity, a cultural tradition, or a form of resistance to authority. These distinctions matter for policy: the same behaviour may require a very different response depending on the beliefs behind it (Michie *et al.*, 2011; 2014; Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019).

Respondents were asked to select from eight justification categories - with multiple selections permitted. The response options provided were: necessary for livelihood or survival; everyone does it; tradition or heritage; gains outweigh risks; act of protest against the government; birds are perceived as a resource; don't know; and other.



Eurasian Blackcaps illegally trapped in Cyprus (© BirdLife Cyprus)

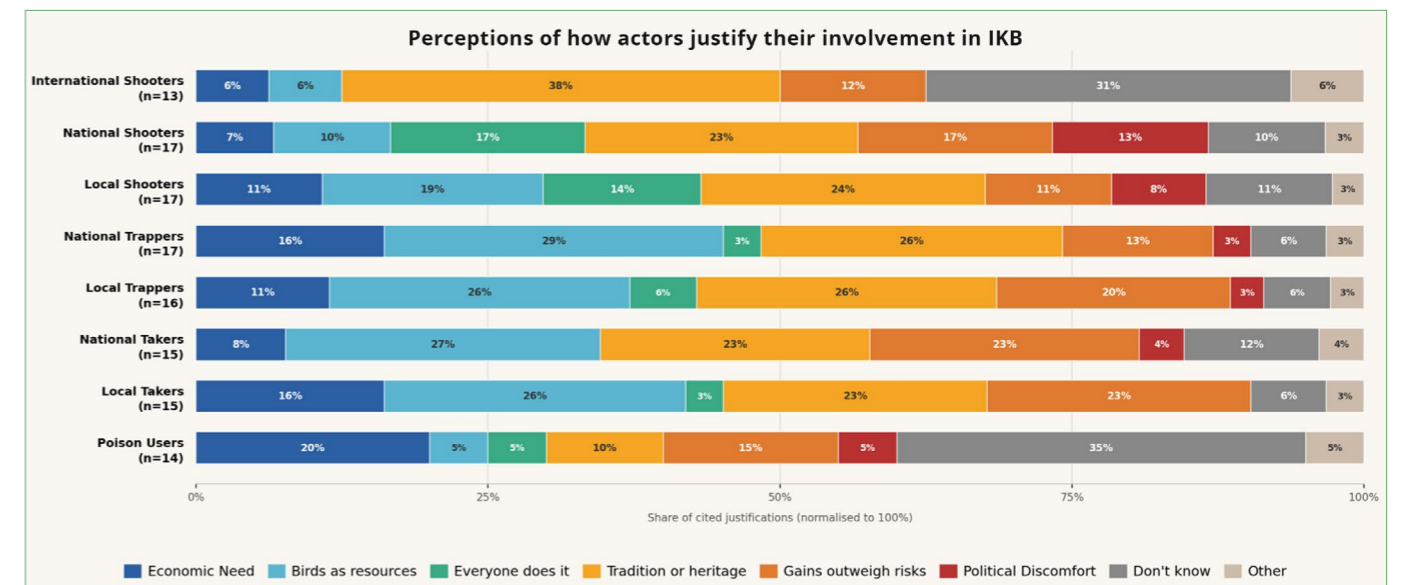


Figure 4. Perceptions of How Perpetrators Justify Their Involvement in IKB

**TRADITION, COMMODIFICATION AND SOCIAL NORMS (“EVERYBODY DOES IT”) UNDERPIN IKB MOTIVATIONS.**

IKB is justified by a combination of traditions, utilitarian attitudes towards wildlife, and — for some actor groups — economic necessity.

**Tradition and social identity** are the most frequently cited justifications across nearly all actor types. Local shooters and trappers (both 24%), national trappers (23%), local takers (23%), and national shooters (23%) all rank tradition as a primary justification, suggesting that in many contexts IKB is deeply embedded in social identity and group norms and may not be experienced as wrongdoing. Where tradition dominates, awareness-raising or legal deterrence alone is unlikely to be effective, and interventions must engage with community identity and cultural practice directly (Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019)

**Commodification** — the view of birds as a harvestable resource — is among the strongest perceived justifications overall, particularly among trappers and takers. Since this framing does not require actors to neutralise a sense of wrongdoing, it is especially challenging to design initiatives to change this behaviour (Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019). The fact that it ranks closely alongside tradition across multiple actor types underscores how entrenched the utilitarian view of birds is perceived to be across the Mediterranean.

**Economic necessity** is cited most frequently in relation to poison users (20%), local takers (16%), and national trappers (14%), reflecting the financially motivated perceived profile of actors operating at local and national levels. Economic necessity is cited least in relation to international shooters (6%), consistent with their predominantly recreational and lifestyle-driven profile.



Blackcaps and other small song birds are a sought after as the delicacy *ambelopoulia* despite being banned in 1974 (© RSPB Images)

**Social norms** (“everyone does it”) is a frequently cited justification in relation to national shooters (17%) and local shooters (14%), but rarely in relation to trappers or takers. This highlights the role of peer influence and perceived collective behaviour in sustaining illegal shooting practices and suggests that social norm messaging, making non-participation visible and normal, may be a more effective lever for shooters than for other actor types (Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019).

**Situational cost-benefit reasoning** (“gains outweigh risks”) is most prominently cited in relation to national and local takers, indicating a degree of conscious calculation that may be more amenable to deterrence-based measures, provided enforcement is strengthened. **Political discomfort** is a minor but distinctive justification, cited almost exclusively in relation to national shooters (13%) and local shooters (8%). In these contexts, IKB appears to function as symbolic defiance against government rather than as an economic or subsistence activity, a framing that makes it particularly resistant to regulatory approaches and may require engagement with underlying political grievances.

A notably high proportion of “**don’t know**” responses, especially in relation to poison users (35%) and international shooters (31%), signals significant gaps in understanding the motivations of these groups, either in how justifications are articulated or how they are captured.

**WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND DRIVERS OF IKB?**

The COM-B behavioural framework identifies “opportunity” as one of the key forces shaping behaviour, referring to the external factors that make a behaviour possible, easier, or more likely to occur (Michie *et al.*, 2011). In this study, we refer to these factors as drivers. Drivers matter because they can shape people’s engagement in IKB, by lowering the barriers to participation, normalising the practice within a community, or creating incentives. Understanding these drivers is essential for policy: interventions that focus solely on changing individual attitudes or motivations will have limited impact if the external factors enabling the behaviour remain in place.



Shrike caught in mist net, Cyprus (© RSPB Images)

The figure below illustrates the distribution in percentages of respondents’ agreement and disagreement with each statements concerning the key drivers of IKB. In the right column of the graphic are the percentages of agreement and in the left column the levels of disagreements.

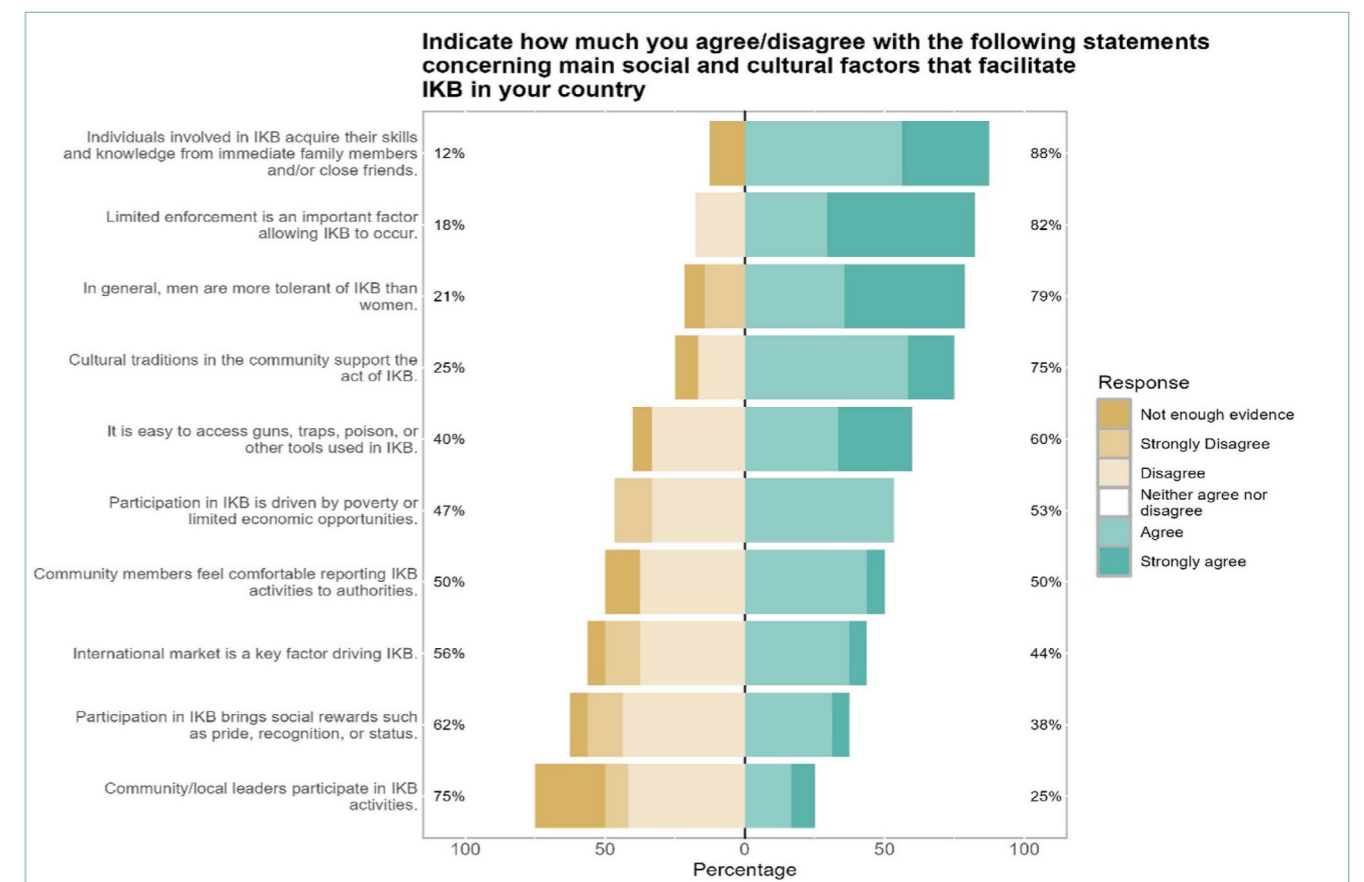


Figure 5. Economic, Social and Cultural Factors influencing country-level IKB

## FAMILY AND PEER NETWORKS ARE THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF IKB KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Most respondents (88%) reported that IKB skills and knowledge are acquired through family members or close friends, pointing to deeply embedded social transmission as a core mechanism sustaining the behaviour across generations. In COM-B terms, this reflects the capability dimension, the knowledge and skills needed to engage in IKB are not individually acquired but passed down through trusted social networks (Michie *et al.*, 2011). Where capability is rooted in close relationships and community norms, awareness-raising campaigns targeting individuals in isolation are unlikely to achieve lasting change, particularly where those same social circles remain tolerant of or involved in the practice (Rare & The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019).

Limesticks in a tree (© BirdLife Cyprus)



## IKB IS CULTURALLY TOLERATED BUT LACKS ACTIVE ENDORSEMENT AND SOCIAL PRESTIGE

**Cultural tolerance:** 75% agreed that cultural traditions in communities support IKB, while 25% disagreed (78% response rate). This indicates that culture can act as an enabling factor by making the behaviour socially acceptable. At the same time, the 25% disagreement indicates that support is not universal across all countries or communities.

**Community leadership:** 75% disagreed that community or local leaders participate in IKB, while 25% agreed (85% response rate). This suggests that, although IKB may be tolerated, it is not widely seen as actively endorsed by community leaders. However, the 25% who perceive leader involvement point to areas where leadership complicity could be a significant barrier and may require targeted approaches.

**Social rewards:** 62% disagreed that participation in IKB brings social rewards such as pride, recognition or status, while 38% agreed (90% response rate). Overall, this suggests that while IKB may be tolerated, it does not consistently confer strong social prestige. The overall finding is one of passive permissiveness rather than active endorsement. Three quarters of respondents recognise cultural traditions as a supporting factor, yet community leaders are largely not seen as participants, and social prestige is not consistently attached to the practice (although it may be a factor in specific types of IKB). This suggests that IKB is generally tolerated rather than celebrated, which reflects that culture is a real but uneven driver.

## GENDER AS A DRIVER OF IKB TOLERANCE AND NORMALIZATION

The majority of respondents (79%) agreed that men are more tolerant of IKB than women, pointing to a gendered dimension in how the behaviour is normalised. Notably, this statement received a low response rate (68%) indicating that gender is a sensitive, contested or under-researched issue.

This finding should be read alongside a broader recognition that social, economic, and cultural disparities between genders remain significant

across the region (Union for the Mediterranean, 2023). These disparities can have important effects on the roles, attitudes, and perceptions of women regarding IKB, as well as on the possibility of working with this group to address this issue. There are several layers to consider in this regard. First, women, as partners, family members, and community actors, may represent an important entry point for designing interventions in some contexts. However, interventions should account for local power dynamics: even where women hold views that could positively influence outcomes towards bird conservation, limited political and social power may constrain their ability to effect change, and interventions must avoid reinforcing marginalisation. This is not a reason to overlook their potential contribution, but rather a call to understand it more fully and to design support accordingly.

## WEAK ENFORCEMENT AND EASY ACCESS TO TOOLS ARE IMPORTANT DRIVERS OF IKB OPPORTUNITIES

**Institutional conditions strongly influence opportunity:** Weak or inconsistent enforcement was identified by 82% of respondents as a key factor enabling IKB. The lower response rate for this statement (68%) suggests some caution or sensitivity in assessing government performance.

**Access to tools used in IKB remains a significant enabler:** 60% of respondents reported that guns, traps, or poison are easy to obtain, though variation across countries and regulatory environments is substantial.

**Trust in institutions varies between countries.** Responses were evenly split on respondents' perceptions of whether people feel comfortable reporting IKB to authorities. Where institutions are strong, trusted and responsive, this can increase detection of IKB through public reporting and constrain behaviour of perpetrators; where they are weak or distrusted, this can enable IKB by reinforcing a perception of impunity. Effective policy responses therefore need to go beyond reporting mechanisms and focus on rebuilding institutional relationships and community trust (Michie *et al.*, 2014).

## ECONOMIC DRIVERS PLAY A CONTEXT-DEPENDENT ROLE RATHER THAN A UNIFORM ONE

**Poverty and limited opportunities:** The proposition that participation in IKB is fundamentally driven by poverty or restricted economic opportunities yielded a polarized response, with 53% agreement and 47% disagreement (90% response rate). This lack of consensus may reflect the genuinely heterogeneous role of economic drivers across the different countries and regions explored. For some actors, particularly those operating at the local level, limited economic opportunities may play real and significant enabling conditions, creating situations where IKB becomes a rational economic strategy to increase income (Duffy *et al.*, 2016). For example, one country reported that national shooters mainly join international shooters in exchange for money as these actors cannot operate independently. For others, particularly recreational or internationally connected actors, economic necessity plays little or no role, and the behaviour is sustained by cultural, social, or experiential motivations instead, as was confirmed in the previous section regarding motivations.

**International market is not always a dominant driver:** The findings reveal that 56% of respondents do not consider international market demand to be a primary driver of IKB in their country, while 44% do (with a 95% response rate). This suggests that domestic market forces and local consumption patterns are very important drivers. Combining these findings with the ones previously discussed, it is possible that markets are deeply embedded within domestic economic structures and cultural systems. International market demand also appears to be recognised as an important driver in many countries and the fact that 44% of respondents felt that it was- suggests this is an important topic for further research. It appears likely that for some types of IKB (like illegal take and trade for falconry) international markets are the dominant force shaping IKB, with a need for international collaboration to address the issue successfully. These findings also show the importance of targeted interventions based on the realities of each national context with specific interventions for different types of IKB.

## SECTION 2: IKB DEMAND

In this section we describe the key findings regarding the demand side of IKB.

### WHO IS BEHIND THE CONSUMPTION, USE AND TRADE OF IKB

This study also covers those who acquire or sell illegally obtained birds eggs, referred to here as Consumers and Traders. For the purposes of this study, these groups were broken down into five distinct profiles: Local Consumers, National Consumers, and International Consumers, reflecting the geographic reach of demand; and Subsistence Traders and Commercial Traders, distinguishing those trading to meet basic needs from those operating at a larger commercial scale. Recognizing these different roles matters, as each group sits at a different point in the supply chain and is likely to require a tailored response.

International consumers and commercial traders remain the least understood groups in the dataset, with high rates of unknown responses that constrain meaningful profiling. International consumers are the only group with a notable high-income profile, with 42% falling into this bracket, suggesting that their demand is perceived as driven by status and preference rather than economic necessity. National consumers are seen as predominantly middle-income and urban or mixed urban-rural, indicating that demand among this group is shaped by access and lifestyle factors rather than subsistence need. Local consumers, by contrast, are more rural and middle-to-low income, reflecting a distinct demand context. Subsistence traders are seen as predominantly male, low-income, and trading primarily for economic need.



Left: BirdLife Malta outdoor learning (© Kristina Govorukha)  
Above: Live decoys used to trap finches (© BirdLife Malta)

#### Data Limitations —“Don’t Know” Responses:

A significant proportion of respondents were unable to characterise actors across key socio-demographic variables, with unknown response rates increasing from local to international actors. Area of Origin recorded the highest uncertainty, peaking at approximately 80% for International Consumer/User profiles and 35–40% for traders, reflecting the limited visibility that in-country respondents have over geographically distant or anonymous actors. Socio-Economic Status also showed uniformly high unknown rates across all actor types (25–40%), suggesting it is systematically difficult to assess regardless of actor proximity. Sex and Age showed lower uncertainty overall, with Age being the most reliably reported variable across all groups. These findings should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive, and data gaps should be acknowledged in any comparative analysis.

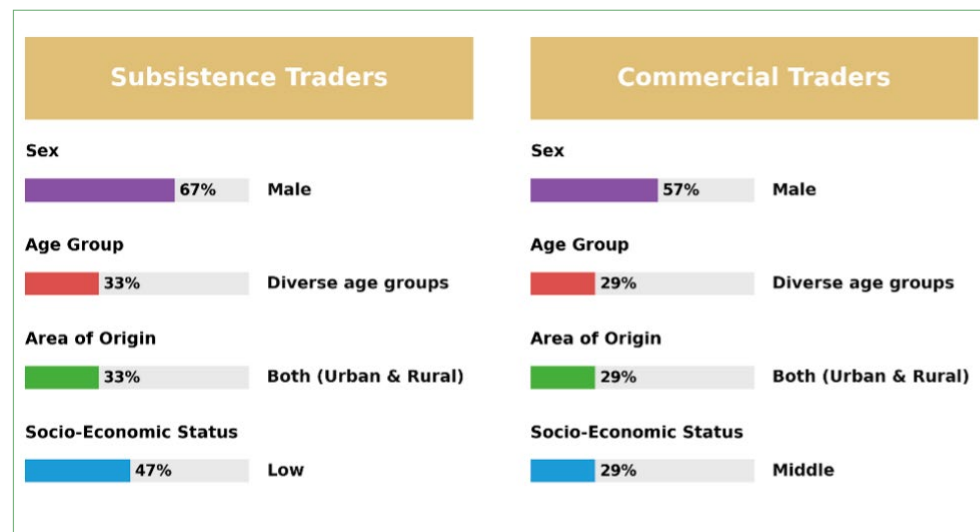
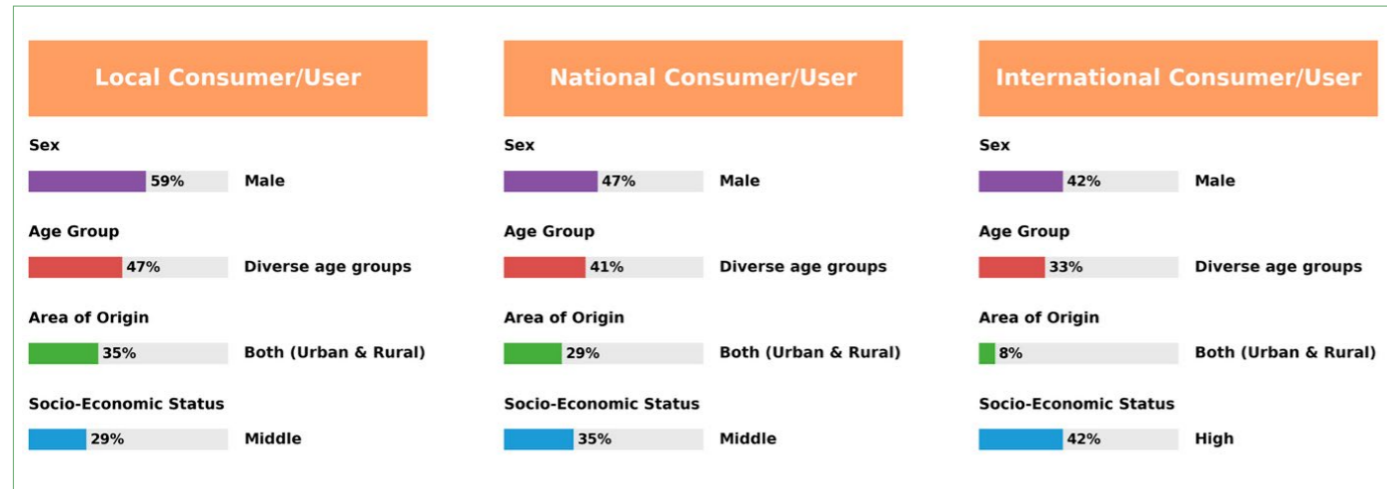


Figure 6. Socio Economic Profile of Consumers/Users and Traders

Eurasian Blackcap on limestick. (© BirdLife Cyprus)



## HOW ARE BIRDS AND EGGS SOURCED (DRIVERS)?

Understanding how illegally killed and taken birds and eggs are sourced and sold helps identify some of the main drivers sustaining IKB. The way goods move through the trade chain reveals the practical and social opportunities that make the practice not only possible, but easy and accepted within communities (Phelps *et al.*, 2016; Michie *et al.*, 2011). This matters for policy: reducing IKB requires tackling the environment in which it takes place, not just the choices of the individuals involved.

Respondents were asked how consumers typically obtain illegally killed, trapped, or taken birds and eggs, broken down by purpose of use. Use categories were defined based on their prevalence in the region: food, cage birds/pets, falconry, competitive bird singing, and other uses. For each category, respondents selected the most common acquisition channel from six options: directly from the poacher or trapper; local market; urban market; international market (exported or trafficked); unknown/insufficient information; or other channels. Multiple selections were permitted.

### DIRECT FROM PERPETRATOR IS THE MAIN SOURCING CHANNEL OF IKB

Across all use categories, direct acquisition from the perpetrator is the dominant sourcing channel, particularly for food, falconry, and bird singing. This pattern highlights that IKB is primarily driven by local demand supported by informal social networks, rather than by formal or visible markets. Such trust-based transactions create conditions of shared complicity and low perceived risk, limiting the reach of conventional enforcement (Phelps *et al.*, 2016).

Local and urban markets play a secondary but important role, varying by use. Falconry shows higher reliance on local markets, while bird singing and

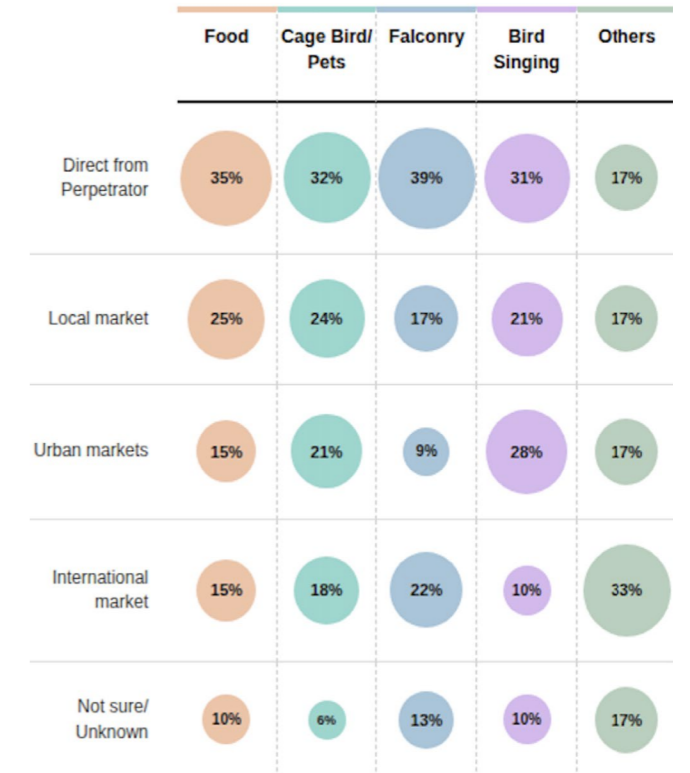


Figure 7. Channels for Sourcing Birds and Eggs by Categories of Use

food are more frequently sourced through urban channels, reflecting culturally embedded demand.

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE: NICHE BUT SIGNIFICANT

International sourcing is less common overall but becomes significant for certain “other uses” (42%) and for falconry (22%), pointing to niche but potentially high-value cross-border trade routes, as described by other studies (Ribeiro, J. *et al.*, 2019). The prominence of international markets specifically for falconry is a particularly significant finding, suggesting that the supply of these wild birds is embedded in a distinct, globally connected trade network rather than primarily local supply chains. These figures are likely underestimates, as international trafficking operates covertly and is largely invisible to in-country respondents, compounding the broader underreporting typical of illegal wildlife markets (Phelps *et al.*, 2016).

High levels of “not sure/unknown” responses, particularly for food (19%) and other uses (17%), may underline how little countries know about the supply side of IKB.

## WHAT ARE THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE DEMAND FOR IKB?

In this section, we examine how consumers, users, and traders describe their motivations for engaging with IKB, using five categories: luxury and delicacy, wild origin and rarity, birds' physical traits, high market price, and easy access. These categories capture both the functional motivations: what the behaviour delivers to the individual, what are the birds attributes the individual is looking for, and what external drivers are most influential.

### CONSUMERS

**International consumers/users** are primarily motivated by wild origin and rarity, with exclusivity and provenance emerging as the key drivers of demand for this group. **National consumers/users** show a different motivational profile, in which luxury status and species-specific attributes are most prominent. Aesthetic preference and

social status play a more significant role for this group than for other consumer types. These social drivers are harder to address through enforcement alone and require demand-reduction strategies that target the social value attached to illegal wildlife products. **Local consumers/users** are distinguished by accessibility as their primary motivation, suggesting that consumption is driven less by preference or aspiration and more by availability. Birds are used because they are easy to obtain. This points toward physical opportunity as the key enabling driver: the behaviour is sustained not by strong demand, but by the structural condition of ready availability.

### TRADERS

For both subsistence and commercial traders, motivations are predominantly economic. However, an important distinction emerges between the two groups. **Subsistence traders** cite easy access more frequently than high market price, suggesting that opportunity plays a more influential role than profit maximisation in their involvement. **Commercial traders** display a highly concentrated profit-oriented profile, in which revenue potential and high market price together dominate and all other motivations are marginal.



Figure 8: Consumers, Users and Traders Motivations

Right: Wildlife Crime Academy training in IKB investigation (© Vulture Conservation Foundation)



# Links Between Report Findings and Objectives of the Rome Strategic Plan (RSP)



Above: Bird ringing (BirdLife Cyprus)

Right: Sovereign Base Area police (©BirdLife Cyprus)

The main report summarised in this document provides a regional overview of IKB motivations and drivers in the Mediterranean in contribution towards Rome Strategic Plan Objective 1 (Understanding the **scope, scale and motivations** behind illegal killing, taking and trade of birds). The recommendations section of this report focuses further on providing insights about how to address the high level issues relating to motivations and drivers of IKB already identified in this regional overview report, but further work is needed nationally in each country to reduce knowledge gaps and better target interventions. There are many objectives of the RSP for which a full understanding of motivations and drivers nationally is needed to target interventions effectively including under any National IKB Action Plan, the key process objective of the RSP.



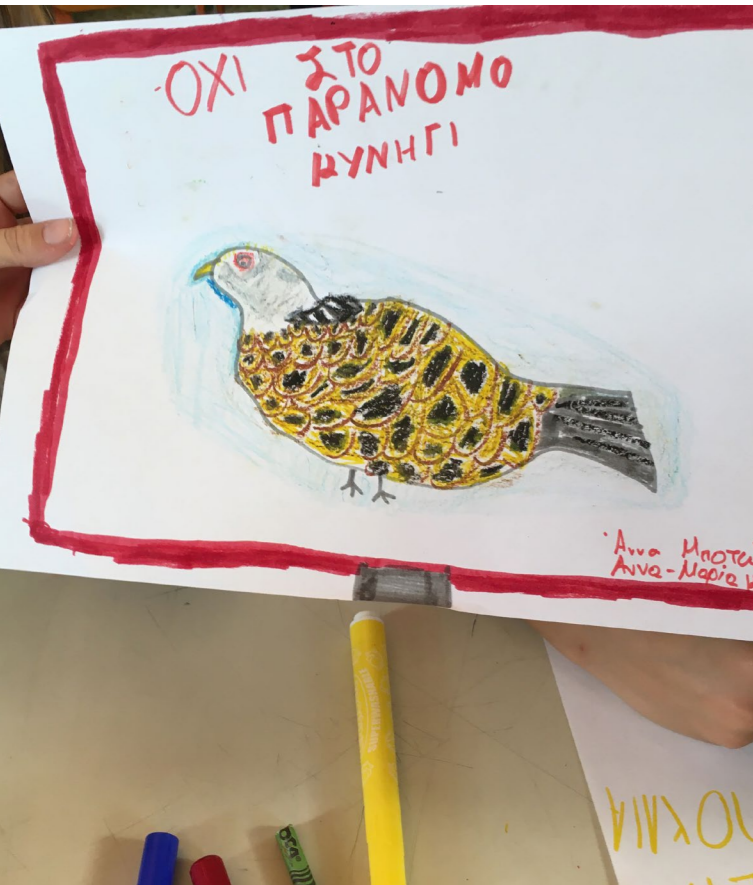
There may be additional entities such as universities/ research institutes, social science experts or NGOs within the national context who could help develop strategies to fill knowledge gaps, ensure intervention strategies could be well-targeted to be effective and could be valuable contributors to any multi-stakeholder committee formed to oversee development and implementation of the National Action Plan. Understanding fully the motivations and drivers behind IKB is essential to delivering national prevention strategies, the key focus of RSP Objective 2 (*Establishing an active prevention of the illegal killing, taking and trade of birds*).

While achieving compliance of IKB perpetrators with the laws and regulations is of critical importance and a key aim of IKB prevention efforts, a dominant theme across responses is that weak enforcement enables IKB, as does the ready availability of the tools used to enact IKB. This point links to RSP Objective 4 (*Ensuring that effective and efficient enforcement of relevant*

*legislation is undertaken*); and points to an urgent need to reinforce enforcement mechanisms. Some countries identified direct and visible enforcement as the primary requirement for reducing IKB.

Legal and regulatory frameworks must not only be robust on paper but be effectively implemented in practice. Relating to RSP Objective 3 (*Ensure that the illegal killing of birds is addressed effectively and efficiently in national legislation*); and Objective 5 (*Ensuring effective and efficient justice for IKB-related offences*). Respondents for example emphasised the importance of deterrent legislation, particularly effective financial sanctions, and ensuring that judicial procedures are followed through to completion. Some stressed that the judiciary must recognize the seriousness of IKB cases to ensure meaningful prosecution and sentencing and recommended the establishment of centralised national databases integrating enforcement and judicial data to ensure consistency and accountability.

# Recommendations



While national contexts differ, several recurring themes emerge across countries highlighting a clear set of priorities for action. International-scale recommendations across the region converge around the need to close critical knowledge gaps, strengthen awareness-raising, education and behaviour change efforts, address livelihoods and financial gain as drivers, promote international cooperation, experience sharing and national multistakeholder collaboration:



Left: Environmental education on the issue of IKB in Greece  
(© Hellenic Ornithological Society)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING DRIVERS AND MOTIVATIONS

**1** In many Mediterranean countries the issue of IKB would benefit from more government involvement in awareness-raising, and behavioural change work

Many countries view awareness raising and behavioural change interventions as solutions to shift attitudes and reduce illegal practices. The report showed that IKB skills are learned through family/peers and enabled by community tolerance or ambivalence, a pattern that must be disrupted through targeted behavioural change initiatives. When well-designed and properly resourced, behaviour change can be more effective than enforcement alone: not by compelling people to stop, but by shifting what their communities consider normal. To achieve this, programmes must work with local culture rather than against it. Interventions must be tailored to the specific motivations driving IKB in each context; someone acting out of economic need requires a very different response than someone motivated by tradition, sport, or status. Since IKB is carried out predominantly by men and boys, programmes should try to reach them through people they already trust, rather than through official channels alone. Critically, in contexts where IKB is motivated by financial gains, behaviour change initiatives must be paired with practical alternatives, as asking people to stop without addressing the underlying need rarely proves effective (Rare & The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019). In some countries, behaviour change strategies developed and implemented by NGOs or other national stakeholders could be expanded by government authorities to reach a larger scale or be replicated in other locations.



Looking for IKB evidence (© Leanne Quille)

**2** Countries should ensure that a mechanism for collaborative stakeholder engagement to address IKB is in place nationally and that social science expertise is included

Given the complexity of IKB, many countries emphasised the need for coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches. This aligns well with the RSP process Objective to develop and deliver National Action Plans (NAP) with involvement from a multistakeholder NAP committee. These committees, combining all relevant stakeholders can facilitate greater cooperation between responsible agencies and institutions enabling IKB to be addressed at multiple levels for greatest impact. Valuable contributors to any multi-stakeholder committee include universities and research institutes, social science experts or NGOs within the national context who could help develop strategies to fill knowledge gaps and ensure intervention strategies are well-targeted.

This reflects a broad recognition that isolated efforts are insufficient and that structured cooperation enhances impact. National Action Plans provide the key tool for addressing the issues raised above – outlining shared priorities, assigning responsibilities to relevant stakeholders and facilitating coordinated action.

**3** Financial gain, including profit from commercial trade, emerges as a key motivator for several types of IKB, highlighting the need for stronger proactive detection and enforcement to reduce opportunities and increase risks to perpetrators, alongside more deterrent prosecution rates and penalties.

This finding aligns well with non-governmental responses on motivations and drivers, who identified profit and commercial gain as the most important motivation behind IKB across 21 countries in North Africa, Europe and Middle East (BirdLife International and EuroNatur 2025). In this study 'gains outweigh risks' was perceived by respondents to be a key justification for IKB perpetrator behaviour. Increasing detection and enforcement efforts, as well as the chance of prosecution and the scale of penalties, could all help tip the balance for potential perpetrators thinking about whether to engage in IKB. Nationally, focussing efforts on physical local and urban markets, key channels for the sale and procurement of IKB, could increase the perceived risk for perpetrators and help to disrupt relatively local illegal supply chains. In contrast, international collaboration will be crucial for reducing IKB for falconry where international markets were found to be a significant channel. In situations where there is an organised crime element to IKB innovative investigative techniques used in other areas of crime could be relevant, as could use of nonenvironmental legal instruments more focused on prosecuting organised crime, which may have stronger associated penalties.

**4** The equipment used for IKB are too easily available to perpetrators and more focus is needed on addressing this through legislation, regulation and enforcement

With 60% of respondents reporting that guns, traps, or poison are easy to obtain, finding means to restrict their availability and use by perpetrators is very important. The Legislative Guidance for Assessing the Efficiency of National Legislation on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Wild Birds (2022) provided by MIKT, UNEP, CMS, and Bern Convention contains important guidance in this regard. (Links are provided in the reference section).

**5** In countries with significant IKB, education in schools is a vital tool to prevent future IKB and create a step-change between generations. National authorities are well-positioned to engage with education authorities and work with other stakeholders to ensure the curriculum covers relevant environmental topics.

The report showed that IKB skills are learned through family/peers – a dynamic that needs to be addressed through education. Across countries, education is framed not merely as information dissemination, but as a tool for long-term cultural and behavioural transformation. Younger generations can develop a more positive relationship with environment and their natural heritage through the curriculum taught at all levels of education from nursery, through primary, secondary and tertiary education and opportunities for field excursions to experience nature can be transformative.

**6** Tradition emerges as a strong perpetrator justification for IKB across the region, further work is needed to develop and share effective interventions to address this common issue.

Where tradition is a strong element, awareness raising and enforcement/ judicial deterrence are unlikely to be sufficient. There are good examples across different areas of social science of cultural practices and traditions being successfully addressed and there may be opportunities to apply some of the techniques from these wider examples to IKB. This is especially relevant in contexts where IKB is culturally tolerated but not actively promoted by local leaders, nor reinforced through social rewards or status, factors that may create meaningful openings for changing how people think and act regarding IKB. There are also many emerging examples of behaviour change and other interventions having success in tackling tradition-related motivations, where the approaches could be scaled up or modified and applied in other national contexts.

Traditions can be difficult to change, but in many cases the traditions driving IKB may be specific to particular groups within society and tolerance of IKB among other groups may be much lower, providing opportunity to target interventions to address the traditions among perpetrators, while building support and awareness against IKB among other groups to reduce perpetrators perception that their activities are endorsed by society.

The finding that perpetrators are overwhelmingly male and that perpetrators pass on the tools and knowledge for IKB through family and close friends indicates strong peer and family influence particularly perhaps among boys and young men. It may be important to find ways to counteract this influence within perpetrator families and communities, to encourage younger generations to think differently about IKB. It could be beneficial to provide education, awareness raising and positive opportunities to engage with environment and natural heritage to children in these communities

or geographic areas where IKB is prevalent. One route to engaging wider families could be to target positive nature-based events towards women and children in these communities. Further research into women's roles and attitudes towards IKB, and why some men see it as part of their cultural identity, could help to find ways to amplify the voices of those opposed to IKB and identify practical ways to shift attitudes within these communities.

**7** Although subsistence needs were not a major driver identified in this study, for some specific communities where levels of IKB are high and socio-economic status is very low there is a need to research and develop alternative livelihood interventions to address IKB.

Such interventions need to be context-specific and based on a thorough understanding of the communities concerned, and the interventions developed need to create long term solutions. Some of the communities where subsistence needs are driving IKB are in remote areas or areas where conflict and security issues are a concern. This may limit the options for some livelihood opportunities like eco-tourism to work and country-to-country experience exchange paired with local knowledge may assist with innovation.

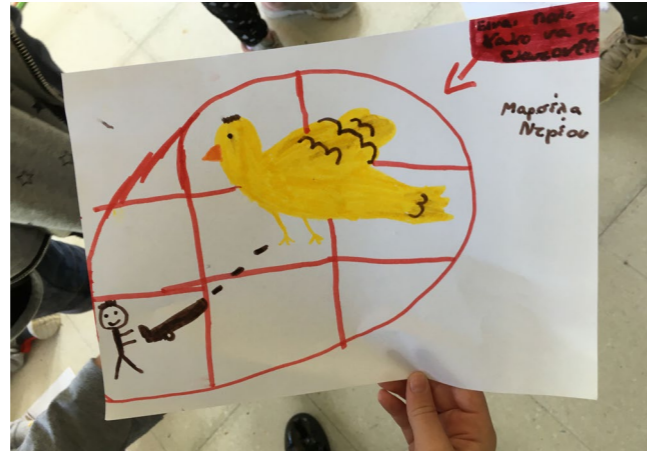
## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND SHARING EXPERIENCE

### 1 Further work is needed to identify and fill knowledge gaps at national level working with other stakeholders and making use of available guidance

This first regional assessment of perceptions on IKB provides an overview of the current state of knowledge and some interesting insights into what may be motivating and driving IKB in different countries. However, the results are perception, rather than data-based, and responses indicate that in many countries in the Mediterranean there are few other sources of information on the motivations and drivers behind IKB. In some countries, this prevented completion of this perception-based survey, while responses from others contained a high proportion of 'don't know' responses. The lack of direct accounts from perpetrators further limited the ability to fully assess the three categories influencing behaviour: motivations, opportunities, and capability, with capability, meaning the knowledge and skills that enable the behaviour, representing the most significant gap in this study. Such accounts are critical to deepening the understanding of why and how IKB occurs, and to designing targeted, context-specific interventions.

National stakeholders are encouraged to:

- Identify, articulate and address national knowledge gaps under their NAP
- Make use of the available guidance developed under MIKT (CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals) (2022) *Legislative Guidance for Assessing the Efficiency of National Legislation on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Wild Birds*, And CMS



(2023), Suggested Methodology for Carrying Socio-economic Research into the motivation behind IKB. This guidance includes approaches to address sensitive topics including types of language to use in the design and delivery of such studies and methods which allows individuals to provide sensitive information without admitting involvement (the link to the methodology are included in the reference section).

- Identify other entities such as universities, research institutes and NGOs who have useful expertise to assist (in contribution to RSP Objective 1.2b)
- Develop studies to check assumptions and strengthen the evidence base, focusing on direct accounts from individuals involved in IKB. This will improve understanding of the capabilities enabling participation and further explore the motivations of those who travel elsewhere to engage in these activities. Questions should be designed to better inform the development of effective actions under the country's NAP, while advancing with 'no-regret' measures to tackle IKB.
- Consider gender dynamics and different roles, and the potential for stakeholders in urban/ rural environments or stakeholders of different ages to differ in motivations/ drivers and consider what information could help in the formulation of strategies to prevent future IKB among children as well as target current perpetrators/enablers.

### 2 International cooperation and experience sharing between countries will continue to be vital to catalysing and enabling progress towards reducing IKB in the Mediterranean and beyond

While the context of IKB in each country is different, there are many commonalities among IKB perpetrators, IKB methods, the contexts of culture and tradition, the economic drivers and potential strategies to tackle the issue between countries. In addition, there is sometimes a cross-border element to IKB, so further efforts to share experience and work to address IKB in cooperation would be beneficial. This could include:

Environmental education on the issue of IKB in Greece  
(© Hellenic Ornithological Society)

- Sharing and translating methodologies, reports, tools and plans from different countries within MIKT/ Bern
- Dedicated sessions within MIKT/ Bern Convention meetings, webinars or workshops to share this experience or specific approaches or develop capacity
- Specific expertise exchange between countries with similar interests in relation to understanding motivations and drivers and using this to develop IKB intervention strategies
- Specific collaborative work to identify drivers and motivations behind cross-border IKB and develop joint strategies between countries for interventions tackling the issue
- Encouragement to international bodies to facilitate cross-border enforcement or judicial cooperation, particularly where coordinated action in more than one country is necessary.



# Conclusions

The Rome Strategic Plan sets out a clear long-term vision: the eradication of IKB, with a commitment to reduce IKB in the Mediterranean by at least 50% by 2030 to drive progress towards this vision. At the midpoint of the plan, success depends upon effective, coordinated and sustained action to address IKB in every country of the Mediterranean, with particular urgency needed in countries with high levels of IKB severity. Achieving the 2030 goal requires each country to develop a robust

understanding of the drivers and motivations of IKB in their national context to inform effective strategies designed to address these drivers and motivations. Learning from each other to capitalise on collective progress internationally will be important and will accelerate impact across the region. Strong, national multistakeholder collaborations will be essential to mobilise the full range of skills, resources and influence required to successfully address IKB.



# Acknowledgements

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The CMS Secretariat MIKT Coordinator contributed valuable insights to support this work and its review.

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The full, detailed report can be found on the CMS MIKT website alongside other key documents.

[www.cms.int/taskforce/mikt](http://www.cms.int/taskforce/mikt)



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## What is CMS?

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is a legally binding international treaty under the United Nations. CMS is one of the most important global frameworks for wildlife conservation and plays a vital role in addressing the global biodiversity crisis. By fostering international collaboration, supporting research, and developing conservation agreements and actions among the Range States in which these species are found, CMS ensures the long-term survival of migratory species of wild animals and their habitats, and the vital benefits they provide.

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Left top: Spring traps set near Peregrine Falcon's nest (© RSPB)

Left bottom: Shot peregrine x-ray, England (© RSPB)





The summary report  
and full report will be  
available here:



White Stork, Sweden (© Lars Petersson)



The European Union was recognised as Champion Plus for their generous support and commitment towards addressing Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Migratory Birds in the Mediterranean for the period 2015 - 2028.

