



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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IS THE RECOVERY OF WOLF IN EUROPE REFLECTED BY THE LATEST REPORTS? A SUCCESS STORY LOST IN THE DATA

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BACKGROUND – Every six years, the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive has to be reported on by all EU Member States (MS), with particular attention to the conservation status of habitats and species covered by the Directive. During this round of reporting covering the period from 2013 to 2018, all MS were required to submit their reports to the EU by August 2019.

These reports are currently being reviewed and assessed by the EU. As part of this process a [public consultation on the reports](#) is open until the 8th of March 2020. The MS reports are divided into individual assessment of populations by biogeographical region, but are not aggregated to EU level assessments per species.

Based on the reports as submitted by MS, FACE conducted an initial analysis focusing on the conservation status, the population trend, the range trend and the habitat trend of the four large carnivore species in Europe.

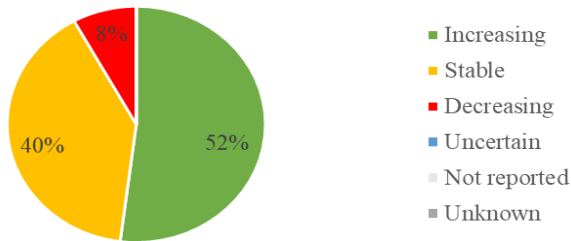
In general, the individual status assessments of most of the large carnivore populations remained rather constant with some minor deterioration.

The situation on wolf populations in the EU is particularly interesting.

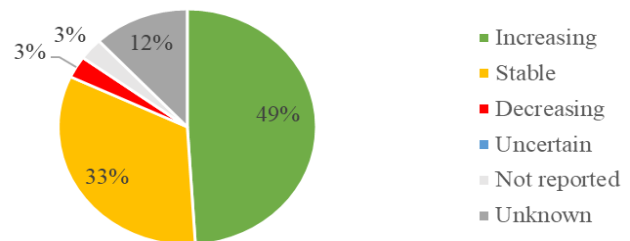
WOLF POPULATION, RANGE, AND HABITAT

In the winter of 2018, the first wolf in 100 years returned to Belgium, and completed thereby the animals' return to all mainland countries in Europe. The wolf is now widely established and reproducing successfully resulting in an exponential population increase. **But, is this increase in population size and range also reflected in the outcomes of the species assessments under Article 17?** On one hand, yes. Since the first reporting period (2001 – 2006), **20 new wolf populations** have been added to the reports. For the 2019 report, in total, 45 wolf populations have been listed under the species assessment. Moreover, the population trend (short-term) of the vast majority of wolf populations is considered positive. The trend in population size indicates changes in the overall numbers of individuals in the biogeographical populations over the reported period. Fluctuations are not a directional change of a parameter, and therefore should be not considered. If the change of the trend results from a change in monitoring methodology or improved knowledge about the size of a population, it also should not be regarded as a trend. Hence, for all three reporting periods, the population trend of **at least 80%** of all biogeographical wolf populations were considered by the MS as increasing or stable (see fig. 1).

Population trend of wolf populations (2001 - 2006)



Population trend of wolf populations (2007 - 2012)



Population trend of wolf populations (2013 - 2018)

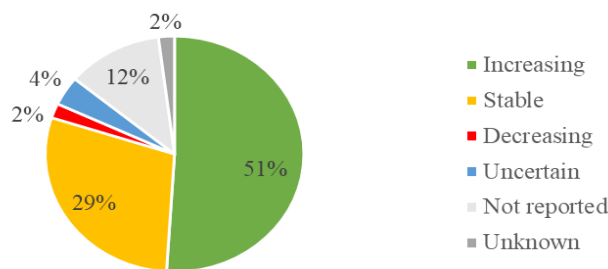
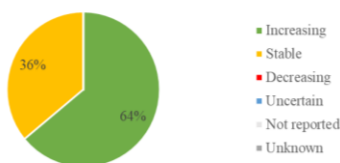


Figure 2 Development of the short-term population trend of wolf populations from the 1st to the 3rd reporting period; data derived from the MS reports.

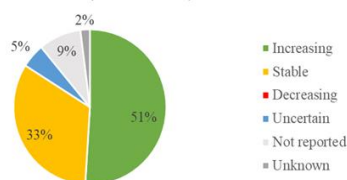
In **at least 82%**, MS considered the range trend of wolf populations as either increasing or stable during the three reporting periods - with the highest percentage in the 2019 report¹ (see fig. 2). Also, the steady increase in the number of wolf population units assessed from 25 in the first reporting period, then 33, then 45 in the most recent assessment highlights the expansion in the range of the wolf.

The assessment of habitat for the species considers both quality and area. Habitat for the species refers to the resources necessary at all stages in the life cycle of the species. Habitat quality includes elements like the availability of prey but also fragmentation where appropriate for the species. In the case of Europe, landscapes and habitats have been profoundly altered and fragmented owing to the expansion and intensification of

Range trend of wolf populations (2001 - 2006)



Range trend of wolf populations (2013 - 2018)



Range trend of wolf populations (2007 - 2012)

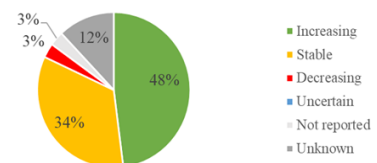


Figure 1 Development of the short-term range trend of wolf populations from the 1st to the 3rd reporting period; data derived from the MS reports.

¹ According to the Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for the period 2013–2018, range is defined as ‘the outer limits of the overall area in which a habitat type or species is found at present’. The range

should be calculated based on the map of the actual wolf distribution using a standardized algorithm.

human land use. Hence, even though, Europe is the continent **most affected** by human-caused fragmentation, the habitat trend for wolf

populations remained rather stable over the years covering the reporting periods (see fig. 3). This is largely because the wolf is a habitat generalist.

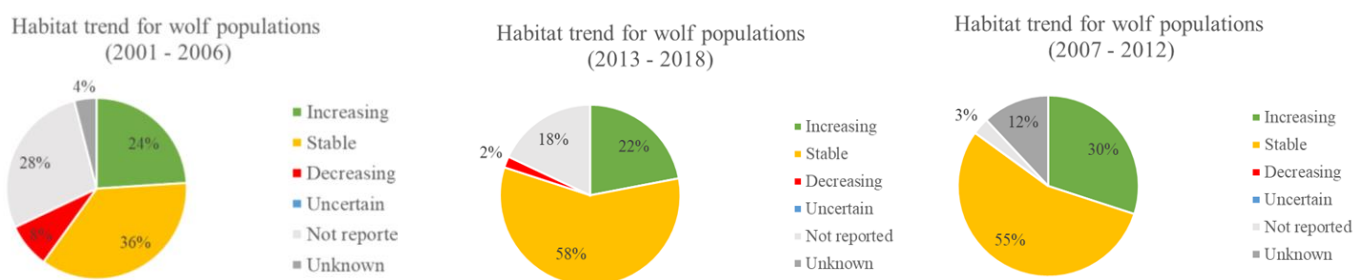


Figure 3 Development of the short-term habitat trend of wolf populations from the 1st to the 3rd reporting period; data derived from the MS reports.

A MISLEADING IMAGE

Summarized, the trend of population size, range and habitat are generally considered as stable or in a lot of populations, even as increasing. However, this largely positive trend is not reflected in the overall conservation status of the biogeographical populations. The conservation status given to a population is of particular importance since it greatly influences the management and conservation of the wolf population.

Despite the fact that wolf populations are doing better, for the 2019 report, the wolf populations with a favourable conservation status decreased from **58% (2007 – 2012) to 40%**. At the same time, the number of wolf populations with an unfavourable conservation status increased from 39% to 43% (see fig. 4).

So, to answer the question: **Is this increase in population size and range also reflected in the outcomes of the species assessments under Article 17?**

The answer is no; the increase in population size and range of wolves during recent years is not/hardly reflected in the outcomes of the MS species assessments under the Habitats Directive.

The main reasons include unknown data, different methods or improved knowledge/more accurate data as reported for some Spanish wolf populations or even highly contested [data](#) as in the case of Bulgaria.

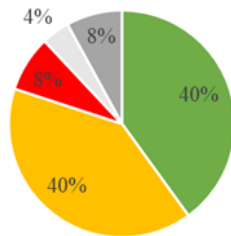
Comparing the data of the second and third reports, it is obvious that there is an increase in the population of wolves in Bulgaria. But in its general conclusion, the report nevertheless states that the future prospects of these populations are poor and will even disappear in the coming years.

However, the inclusion of newly established populations such as the wolf population of Luxembourg that naturally cannot yet obtain a favourable conservation status, increased the number of populations with an unfavourable conservation status. All of these reasons lead to a misleading impression of the conservation status of Europe's wolf populations.

Thus, the recovery of wolf populations in Europe is to a great extent unheard and unseen.

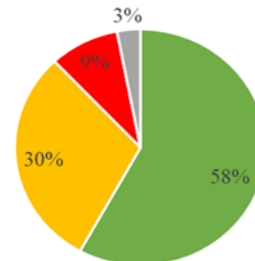
A success story lost in the data!

Conservation status of wolf populations in %
(2001 - 2006)



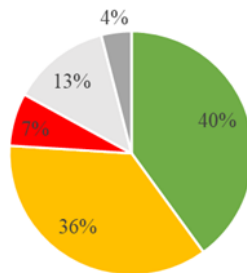
■ FV ■ U1 ■ U2 ■ Not reported ■ Unknown

Conservation status of wolf populations in %
(2007 - 2012)



■ FV ■ U1 ■ U2 ■ Not reported ■ Unknown

Conservation status of wolf populations in %
(2013 - 2018)



■ FV ■ U1 ■ U2 ■ Not reported ■ Unknown

Figure 4 Development of the conservation status of wolf populations from the 1st to the 3rd reporting period; data derived from the MS reports.