



# EU CAP Network brokerage event

## Get involved in Horizon Europe advisory networks



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# 1. Executive summary

This report gives an overview of the programme and main results of the EU CAP Network Brokerage event 'Get involved in Horizon Europe advisory networks'. The event was held on 17-18 January 2023 in Sofia, Bulgaria, to support applicants in preparing their proposals for EU advisory networks under the Horizon Europe calls 2023-2024.

Member States have just started implementing the AKIS Strategic Approach under their CAP Strategic Plans. Integrating their advisors in EU advisory networks and spreading practical knowledge more widely across Member States can help improve the functioning of their national AKIS.

This report describes how information on the Horizon Europe calls for advisory networks was delivered to participants at the event, and how conditions were created to exchange ideas and build consortia. The brokerage event's many interactive activities stimulated participants to get to know each other, and build a basis for future cooperation.



This report shows that the event not only helped participants to increase awareness on the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024, but also helped to increase practical knowledge on how to create successful cooperation, and how to prepare proposals for Horizon Europe calls.

## 2. Introduction

The EU Research and Innovation Programme Horizon Europe - Cluster 6: 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment' was published in December 2022. It includes a call for proposals for EU-wide advisory networks. The information days for the Work Programme 2023-2024 took place on 13-14 December 2022.

The main objective of the EU CAP Network brokerage event 'Get involved in Horizon Europe advisory networks' was to support applicants in preparing their proposals for EU advisory networks under the Horizon Europe calls 2023-2024.

Specific objectives were to:

- > Improve the functioning of the Member States' AKIS strategic approach under their CAP plans, by integrating their advisors in the EU advisory networks and by spreading the collected practical knowledge more widely across Member States;
- > Support advisory applicants in finding partners, specifically for the EU advisory network topics;
- > Improve the overall awareness among advisors and farmers on the possibilities to participate in Horizon Europe projects, and the opportunities offered under its calls;
- > Increase understanding of the 2023-2024 multi-actor topics under the [Horizon Europe Cluster 6](#) Work Programme, with a view to improve the quality of multi-actor proposals and the complementarity of participants and actors involved in such consortia.

The event welcomed relevant speakers to help provide a better understanding of the need for EU advisory networks, and their usefulness within the context of Member States' AKIS strategic approaches. The presentations supported the building of call proposals and provided relevant insights on the requirements as set out under these advisor-oriented topics. A few practical examples, networking opportunities and brokerage activities among participants were also a key part of the event.

The event programme presented a balance between delivering the necessary information (context, procedures, examples) and actual interactive matchmaking (the actual 'brokerage' goal of the event).



### 3. Participation

The identification and selection of participants started with an open call for expression of interest to participate. This call was disseminated amongst subscribers of the Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Newsletter, in combination with direct messages to relevant stakeholders from the broader EU CAP Network who could further disseminate the call. The following steps were taken:

- > Newsflashes to all subscribers of the Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Newsletter;
- > Direct messages to members of EUFRAS;
- > Direct messages to 87 Horizon Europe National Contact Points (NCPs);

- > Personal messages to Managing Authorities and members of the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SoIKE) with a request to further disseminate the call to advisory organisations;
- > Reminders to those who did not open their e-mails;
- > This open call finally resulted in 600 applicants.

In total, 93 participants attended the event. The mix of attendees was composed of farm advisors, experts from organisations, participants from the hosting organisation (the Bulgarian National Agricultural Advisory Service – NAAS), innovation support agents, NCPs, farmers, researchers, civil servants, and others (see Figure 1 below). Of these participants, 55 had some experience in writing proposals under a Horizon Programme, while 23 indicated they did not.

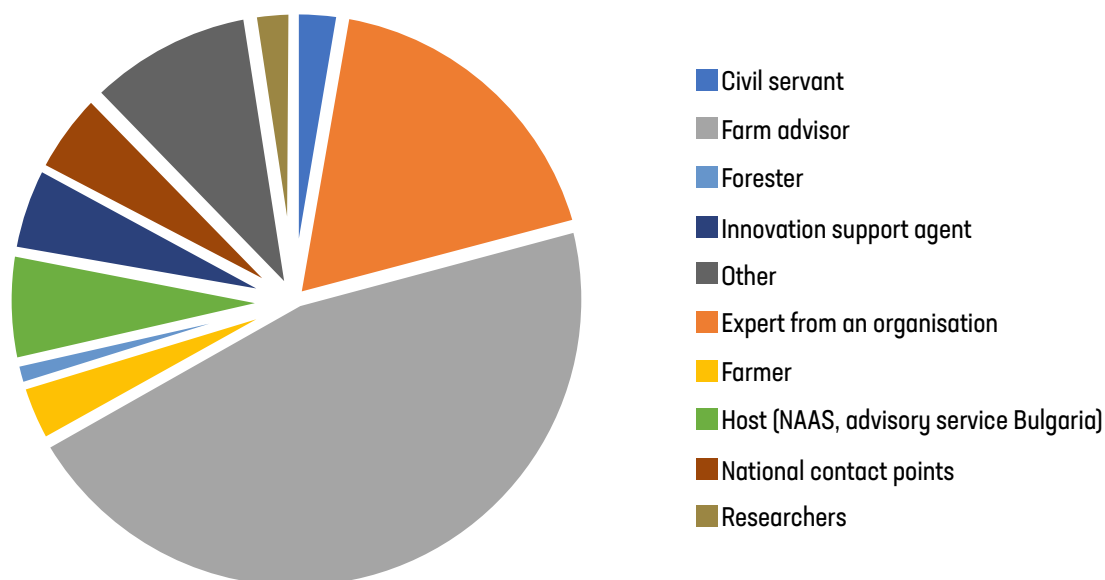


Figure 1: Attendees by professional background

The event aimed to include advisors and advisory organisations from as many countries as possible. Finally, people from 26 EU Member States participated, as indicated in Figure 2 below.

Country	Number of participants
Austria	2
Belgium	4
Bulgaria (host)	6
Croatia	2



Country	Number of participants
Cyprus	2
Czechia	2
Denmark	1
Estonia	3
Finland	1
France	6
Germany	5
Greece	5
Hungary	2
Ireland	4
Italy	4
Latvia	1
Lithuania	2
Malta	2
The Netherlands	3
Poland	6
Portugal	5
Romenia	4
Slovak Republic	2
Slovenia	2
Spain	4
Sweden	1

Figure 2: Attendees by country (organising team and European Commission excluded)



## 4. Event

The event was structured into two half-day blocks with a networking dinner in between. The main building blocks of the agenda included an introduction, an informative session, breakouts, a networking dinner and a matchmaking block. All these activities were designed to foster interactions among participants using different methodologies.

### 4.1 Introductory session - setting the scene

**Georgi Sabev** | Deputy Minister of Agriculture of Bulgaria: *'Welcome'*

Mr. Sabev warmly welcomed participants to Bulgaria, referring directly to climate change as the temperature during the event was far above the annual average in January: 10° C instead of 0°C.

He started by providing a short introduction to the role of agriculture and its socio-economic position in Bulgaria. Then, he further elaborated on the challenges for the country's agriculture and the benefits of EU cooperation. He stressed that Bulgaria takes part in various European networks for the benefit of Bulgaria and that of Europe.



**Inge Van Oost** | European Commission, DG AGRI: *'Introduction to the event'*

On behalf of the European Commission, Mrs. Van Oost also welcomed the participants to the EU CAP Network brokerage event. The Commission was very happy to have participants from 26 Member States following an overwhelming response of over 600 applicants. She wished participants a fruitful event with lots of new contacts. She also expressed the hope that the event would lead to good proposals for Horizon Europe advisory networks, with partners from many countries.



**Dimitar Vanev** | Bulgarian National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS): *'NAAS and international cooperation'*

Mr. Vanev gave an overview of the origin of NAAS and its structure. He indicated that NAAS addresses both farmers and foresters. NAAS has been participating in various international (EU-funded) projects for several years, which helped to develop new skills and (technical) knowledge and tools. He then elaborated on the recently developed concept of Mobile Municipal Centers for providing advisory services.



## 4.2 Informative sessions

### EU advisory networks, Horizon Europe, CAP AKIS plans

**Ana Patricia Lopez Blanco** | European Commission, DG AGRI: *'Basic requirements for EU advisory networks under Horizon Europe calls'*

Ms. Lopez Blanco started with a sketch of the position of Horizon Europe calls for advisory networks within the scope of the European Green Deal. The aim is to have five advisory networks set up during the Work Programme for 2023-24. The main objective is to develop advisory exchanges across the EU to increase the speed of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, capacity building, demonstration of innovative solutions, and to bring them into practice. Ms. Lopez Blanco explained the expected outcomes, the common elements and the scope of the calls. Then she presented the details of the different advisory network calls, in which a majority of advisors is expected to participate. Her presentation ended with the proposal deadlines for the five calls:

- > 23 March 2023 - topics: organic, fertilisers, pesticides;
- > 28 February 2024 - topics: forestry, livestock systems.



**Inge Van Oost** | European Commission, DG AGRI: *'Contribution of the EU Advisory Networks to Member States' CAP AKIS Plans'*

Mrs. Van Oost explained the concept of AKIS and its role at the heart of the agri-innovation ecosystem. She then showed the connection of the AKIS policy with the EIP-AGRI, Horizon Europe, and Operational Groups. In the new CAP Regulation, AKIS is part of the CAP Strategic Plans, with advisory services integrated into the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems. She elaborated on

several points, such as: the contribution of advisors and advisory networks to the AKIS at Member State level, the AKIS action points at Member State level, the support from AKIS Coordination Bodies and CAP Networks for advisors, the role of advisors in multi-actor projects, and the preparation of knowledge reservoirs for practice. She then called all participants to speed up creativity and the uptake by practice through improved connectivity and quicker circulation of information.

### Building proposals and consortia for Horizon Europe EU advisory networks

**Patrick Pasgang** | Innovation Support Centre, Belgium (Flanders): *'Practical experiences on building a proposal for the first EU advisory network call under the Horizon Europe format: COREnet'*

Mr. Pasgang first introduced Boerenbond/Innovation Support Service. This organisation is the Belgian AKIS innovation support service. Focusing on COREnet, he explained the origin of the consortium. He mentioned some success factors such as the type of advisory services, the degree of direct contact with farmers, the added value of an experienced coordinator, the position in European networks and the organisations' activity in AKIS-related Horizon projects. Then he gave a methodology of 13 steps going from starting on time and meeting with connected partners, to different phases of writing proposals and defining work packages. He provided an abundant amount of 'tips and tricks', and advised participants to evaluate their own project before submitting the proposal. At the end, he informed the audience that COREnet was looking for AKIS national contact points.



## Sylvain Sturel | APCA, France: 'Tips and tricks from the Horizon 2020 EU advisory network i2Connect'

Mr. Sturel shortly introduced the network of i2Connect, which is a partnership of 42 partners from 21 countries. It connects advisors with the aim to boost interactive innovation and support the transition of agriculture and forestry. Therefore, the project aims to strengthen the role and skills of individual advisors in the wider AKIS. Another objective is to create a European network of innovation advisors. Mr. Sturel presented some tips both for preparing project proposals and for the implementation of a project. He also specially asked the advisors in the room to subscribe to the [Advisory Service Database](#).



## Tom Kelly | Teagasc, Ireland: 'Tips and tricks from the Horizon 2020 EU advisory network FAIRshare'

Mr. Kelly introduced the FAIRshare project, a Horizon 2020 project that aims to ensure that farm advisors and their organisations effectively use Digital Advisory Tools and Services (DATS) to support a more sustainable agriculture into the future. Advisors can get involved in the project by documenting a digital advisory tool or service to the project's [online inventory](#). FAIRshare is a project with 23 partners from 15 countries. Mr. Kelly then shared experiences on the development of a project, concluding with issues to be aware of, such as the relevance of good communication through several channels and (digital) meetings, which is key to maintaining the commitment of all partners. An important challenge is to actually be relevant for advisors. He finalised by warning potential project partners that there can always be unexpected challenges to cope with.



## 4.3 Breakout sessions

### 4.3.1 Breakout session - Motivating advisors to join EU advisory networks

After the presentations on basic requirements of advisory networks and on the contribution of advisory networks to national AKIS plans, a first breakout session was organised. It focused on how advisors can be motivated to join EU advisory networks. The breakout session started with an icebreaker where participants were asked to introduce themselves to their neighbours. The group then split into smaller groups, where participants briefly introduced themselves to the other group members and started to work on four questions:

- What enables an advisor to join an advisory network?
- How and where can you best reach advisors to join your EU advisory network consortium?
- What are advantages for an advisor to join an EU advisory network?
- How can advisors share the benefits of taking part in an EU advisory network? E.g. communicating and disseminating results with other advisors, farmers, and AKIS knowledge hubs?

The outcomes were presented to the other groups in each breakout room.

### Main outcomes of the breakout session

Awareness on the benefits of participating in an advisory network was highlighted as an important factor to stimulate the involvement of advisors. In addition, there needs to be a match in terms of the advisory expertise on the relevant topic.





Besides, it is important that advisors are supported by their own organisation, both in terms of time constraints and financially. A good connection with farmers is highly valued.

There is a broad range of possibilities to reach advisors, such as face-to-face or online events, already existing networks and personal connections, and contact with formal entities (like chambers of agriculture, authorities at regional or national level, universities, etc.). Also websites, databases and social media could help.



Some of the benefits of joining an advisory network that were mentioned include the possibility to share good practices and to further develop existing knowledge, to establish a common language, to bring together different capacities and find synergies, to learn from a multidisciplinary approach, to be part of a community where different actors work on an equal basis and where knowledge is shared, or to find cross-viewers on your ideas. Joining such types of networks also helps to prepare for future cooperation and to get prepared for new challenges.

Advisors can disseminate the benefits of joining an advisory network in various ways, for instance through media channels, during events, in specialised networks, and by sharing experiences when training other advisors.



### 4.3.2 Breakout session - Building proposals and consortia for Horizon Europe EU advisory networks

After the presentations on experiences with setting up a proposal for advisory networks, a breakout session was organised on starting to prepare proposals and consortia.

The breakout session started with an icebreaker where participants were asked to introduce themselves to their neighbours. The group then split up into smaller groups and participants briefly introduced themselves to the other group members and started to work on four questions:

- > How to find interested advisors, possible partners and the right content to develop? Which approach could help?
- > What roles are needed in the consortium, and how to attribute roles to partners within the consortium?
- > How to write a good proposal, analyse how to distribute the work into which work packages that are needed and useful? How to make them synergetic?
- > Which type of activities to extend the outcomes of the advisory network beyond the consortium? What dissemination and communication activities?

The outcomes were presented to the other groups in the breakout room.

#### Outcomes of the breakout session

Participants pointed out that there are many possible ways to find potential partners, such as creating a forum to connect stakeholders and National Contact Points (NCP), being in contact with key actors and making use of already existing networks. It was recommended as a good practice to check out all projects related to the call (e.g. through the reports or proceedings of former events or by consulting expert panels), and to translate the expected outcomes of the call into deliverables. It is maybe also interesting to reach out to existing consortia to see if they are interesting to also join.

In a consortium, various kinds of roles can be found, as different types of tasks have to be addressed. Examples are the lead partner and project coordinators or managers. Advisors, educators and practitioners (such as farmers or foresters) are needed. Besides, experts on the technical aspects of the call, on the topic and on data management may be helpful. Also communication, finance and administration officers are an essential part of the team. Finally, a good writer needs to put all information together and tell a good story.



From a different angle, attention should be paid to how to combine 'old' knowledge partners with 'new blood', and how to organise the partnership and its broader structure, including associated partners, sub-contractors, affiliated partners, etc.



Writing a good proposal needs a good starting point. Several ideas and points to keep in mind were mentioned, such as: writing a concept note, and discussing with potential partners how each partner understands the call; developing the project concept based on a joint vision; coming together to have a better understanding; reaching a consensus and sharing responsibilities; making a SWOT analysis before dividing tasks; setting the right structure; being realistic, setting SMART targets and starting with the budget allocation in time.

More than a website is needed to disseminate the outcomes of the network. Ideas that were brought forward include: adapting communication to end users and their needs, showing results in practice (e.g. demonstration farms, field visits, training of advisors, toolkits), using communication channels of aligned organisations or projects (like EU-Farmbook), AKIS platforms, the Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI newsletter, NCPs, relevant national organisations, and making use of various social media. The hope was raised to be able to keep the networks alive, to be able to interact with running projects and set up new projects.



## 4.4 Matchmaking block

The second day of the brokerage event started with a short presentation with tips and tricks from the FAIRshare project. The remaining part of the morning was dedicated to matchmaking, to let participants get to know each other further, discuss the call topics and explore possibilities to build consortia.

For the matchmaking activity, high tables were available for one-on-one meetings in the plenary room. Through a virtual event platform, participants could plan one-on-one meetings prior to the start of the event: about 146 one-on-one meetings were organised through this platform. In addition, the plenary room had chairs for participants to have a seat and have informal discussions.



On top of the one-on-one meetings in the plenary, the four breakout rooms were available for meetings for bigger groups. Members of the organising team were available to facilitate these meetings.

Further, there were possibilities for informal meetings at the coffee corner outside the plenary room.



Four National Contact Points attended the event (from Portugal, France, Poland and Malta) and they had desks available at the coffee corner, to meet participants. They supported participants by clarifying the 2023-2024 Work Programme and by providing information on the application process.



## 4.5 Closing of the event

To finalise the event, participants shared their impressions in plenary and completed an evaluation poll. Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI, European Commission) closed the event, thanking all participants for their active contributions. She also encouraged them to find a lot of partners and apply to the call together.



## 5. Main findings of the evaluation poll

The majority of the respondents (84%) were satisfied with the format and organisation of the event.

Overall, participants considered that all parts of the agenda were interesting to very interesting. The presentations by DG AGRI and the matchmaking session were valued the highest. 52.3% found the content of the brokerage event very relevant and useful, and 31.8% found it relevant and useful.

The participants scored the breakout sessions high or highest - by 72.7% (4 and 5 of maximum 5 points) - in offering them the opportunity to exchange with other participants on possible future projects.



For 47.4% of the participants, the one-on-one meetings offered very good opportunities to exchange with other participants on possibilities to create future consortia, and for 31.8% these were good opportunities.

41 participants indicated that they would follow up contacts for future consortia, on an average of 5.9 intended contacts.



## 6. Conclusions

This brokerage event was entirely devoted to promoting the submission of good proposals for the call on advisory networks. Therefore, the participants received a lot of information on the calls under the Horizon Work Programme 2023-2024. It was emphasised that it would be preferred to have consortia with partners from a significant number of EU Member States. The event created an interactive environment for participants to exchange information on the call and its topics, and it also contributed to an improved understanding on the Work Programme and the calls through different presentations, breakout discussions and meetings with Horizon NCPs.

As a result of the selection process, participants represented a wide range of European countries, with a significant number of advisors. Attendants proved to be very interested in matchmaking, and were very active in all parts of the programme.

The event succeeded in creating an adequate open atmosphere for participants to get in touch with each other and discuss potential partnerships, encouraging them to intervene and interact in many forms.

The brokerage event was an opportunity for participants to learn more about the Horizon calls, to find new partners, to further develop consortia and proposals for the call on advisory networks and to involve newcomers. The high number of applications (600 compared to normally 200-250) proved the need for this kind of activity, making this a very desirable tool to support other calls in the future.

[All presentations and brokerage event results are available on the event page on the EU CAP Network website.](#)



## 7. Annex – Questions and answers

### Questions to Ana Patricia Lopez Blanco:

**Should all 20 Member States participate directly as a partner / is 27 better?**

*The level - what kind of representatives we need - that is not set. Those who manage to have relevant goals and organisations and serious involvement of Member States have an advantage. It is an evaluation process. The more Member States the better.*

**Eligibility - The scope of the project is to connect advisors. Since in Romania there isn't a network of advisors, how can we (they) apply?**

*The description is 'advisor' with field experience. We will talk about this later.*

**How to involve the Member States – activities and cooperation between partners – that participated in the i2Connect project? It was very successful.**

*The evaluation of the proposals will be based on how strong the link is with the advisory service at national level. We will have a specific training and discussions with evaluators to decide how all these elements will be taken into account (in case we have more than one application). Please take into account the i2Connect database for advisors – this is open for all advisors. You just need to register!*

### Questions to Inge Van Oost:

**Is it possible to envisage a budget for translation, as the language is a barrier when training the trainers?**

*Inge: We have to look for a balance in the budget; too much for translation is not reasonable. Many people use partner organisations to translate and cover these needs. You can work with other connections, for instance, National CAP Networks often help to translate texts into the native language.*

### Questions to Patrick Pasgang:

**Comment DG AGRI:** We need to share knowledge and talk to other potential AKIS points about the synergies between projects. What are the lessons learnt from those projects? We want to add and not duplicate.

*It is very important to connect with your AKIS Coordination Body and National CAP Network and present yourself. They will be interested*

*to know that you are involved in an EU-wide advisory network, thus being able to bring in knowledge from abroad and experiences that are useful for the national/regional level.*

### Who analyses the work done? What is the role of science?

*In the beginning we worked with the available information. It is important to have a good coordinator to deliver everything on time, and all partners have to be involved to be sure that what you've put on paper is really possible. You need to have financial capacity available. There was no specific need for science in this project, first of all because it is an advisory network aiming to connect advisors, and also because we focus on practice-oriented information using already existing projects, including scientific projects.*

**Comment DG AGRI:** This is about enabling and putting in place Short Supply Chains, which is a very practical subject. The aim is not to conduct research on such chains, but to focus on sharing the good practices across the EU by those who are closest involved in practice, which are most often advisors or innovation support services.

*In another type of Horizon multi-actor topic, more research involvement may be useful, on the condition that researchers co-create with the practice partners. This is the basis for multi-actor projects.*

### Question to Sylvain Sturel:

**Can we use the tools already developed by other projects, instead of using your own tools?**

*You can use the advisory services, the database is open, we have a lot of Greek advisors that have already registered. The facilitation tools – we recommend to try and join an i2Connect meeting to learn how to use the tool/database. You should use all the tools available!*



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