

Study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP

Final report

June 2024



Funded by
the European Union

Copyright notice

© European Union, 2024

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Recommended citation:

EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2024): Study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP.

Disclaimer:

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this report. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.



The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP is responsible for providing support to monitoring and evaluation activities at the EU and Member State level. It works under the guidance of DG AGR's Unit A.3 'Policy Performance of the European Commission (EC)'. The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building and communicating with network members on evaluation-related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP is available on the Internet through the Europa server <https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/support/evaluation>

European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP

Rue Belliard 12, 1040

Brussels, Belgium

+32 2 808 10 24

evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu



Table of contents

List of figures	v
List of tables	vii
List of acronyms	viii
Acknowledgements	viii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Objectives of the study	1
1.2 Contents of the report	1
2. Background	1
2.1 Regulatory and conceptual framework	1
2.1.1 Regulatory framework under the 2014-2022 programming period	1
2.1.2 Regulatory framework under the 2023-2027 CAP	3
2.1.3 EIP criteria and conditions for more productive and sustainable agriculture and forestry	3
2.2 Key terms and concepts	4
2.2.1 Defining OG project outcomes and types of innovative solutions	4
3. Methodological approach	6
3.1 Study questions	6
3.2 Scope and levels of analysis	6
3.3 Data collection methods and tools	7
3.3.1 Data collection at EU level	7
3.3.2 Selected case studies	9
3.3.3 Data collection at case study level	13
3.4 Limitations of the proposed methodology and data	14
4. Overall results	15
4.1 Overview of previous relevant studies	15
4.2 Overview of EIP OG projects' implementation during 2014-2024	18
4.3 Results of the OG survey	26
4.4 Results of the Stakeholder survey	29
5. Answers to study questions	33
5.1 Q1 – To what extent have EIP OG projects produced the expected outcomes: Project outcomes, wider uptake of innovation, community outcomes?	33
5.1.1 Description of study question 1	33
5.1.2 JC 1.1-JC 1.2 – OGs have produced the expected project outcomes and innovative solutions have been created and tested within OG partnerships	35
5.1.3 JC 1.3 – Innovative solutions have been spread outside the OG partnerships	42



5.1.4	JC 1.4 – OG projects have contributed to strengthening communities and developed opportunities for further cooperation.....	44
5.1.5	Conclusions of study question 1	50
5.2	Q2 - What are the main drivers and barriers to the achievement of EIP OG outcomes and what lessons can be learned?	51
5.2.1	Description of study question 2	51
5.2.2	Q.2.1 – What are the main drivers and barriers to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions and the possibility of scaling up EIP-OG project outcomes?	54
a.	JC 2.1 – The process of cooperation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up	54
b.	JC 2.2 – The process of project preparation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up	60
c.	JC 2.3 – The support provided to OGs has facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up	62
d.	JC 2.4 – Exogenous factors influencing OG activity	66
5.2.3	Q.2.2 – To what extent have communication and dissemination activities contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes?	66
a.	JC 2.5 – Communication activities have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes	66
b.	JC 2.6 – A variety of communication and dissemination channels have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes	67
c.	JC 2.7 – Spreading of information by the MA and NRN have contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes	69
5.2.4	Conclusions of study question 2	71
5.3	Q3 – To what extent did Member States/regions’ approaches to EIP OG calls favour/limit the achievement of outcomes?	73
5.3.1	Description of study question 3	73
5.3.2	Analysis and findings	76
a.	JC 3.1 – EIP OG calls have enabled projects in sectors, themes and topics that address identified needs/innovative opportunities	76
b.	JC 3.2 – The conditions of the EIP OG calls have facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions.	78
c.	JC 3.3 – EIP OG calls have increased the possibilities of a wider uptake of innovative solutions and development of new connections and further cooperation	84
d.	JC 3.4 – The administrative and/or technical requirements of the call have reduced administrative burden and simplified project implementation	86
5.3.3	Conclusions of study question 3	90
6.	Overall conclusions	93
7.	The way forward: further development and improvement	95
8.	References	97
9.	ANNEX I	99



List of figures

Figure 1: Logic framework of EIP-AGRI OG	4
Figure 2: Distribution of OG projects by Member State (%)	18
Figure 3: Number of OGs by Member State vs. 2014-2022 target (*)	19
Figure 4: Number of OGs and completed projects as notified by Member States	20
Figure 5: Distribution of EIP OG projects' public expenditure by Focus Area	23
Figure 6: OG average budget by Member State and EU (EUR)	24
Figure 7: Financial execution of EIP OG projects (by 31/12/2022)	25
Figure 8: Number of lead partners by category (% on total number of OGs)	26
Figure 9: Distribution of OG survey responses by Member State	27
Figure 10: Distribution of OG survey responses by type of OG partner and number of responses per OG project	27
Figure 11: Distribution of OG survey responses by category of OG partner	28
Figure 12: Distribution of OG survey responses by sector (number) (*)	28
Figure 13: Distribution of replies according to OG projects year of completion (*)	29
Figure 14: Distribution of Stakeholder survey responses by Member State	30
Figure 15: Stakeholder survey respondents by geographical level of expertise	30
Figure 16: Stakeholder survey respondents by participation in EIP OG projects	31
Figure 17: Distribution of Stakeholder survey respondents by category	31
Figure 18: Distribution of Stakeholder survey respondents by main area of expertise and/or interest regarding innovative solutions	32
Figure 19: Extent to which OG projects have developed an innovative solution according to what was planned according to OG respondents (%)	35
Figure 20: Extent to which OG projects have developed an innovative solution beyond/different from what was planned according to OG respondents (%)	35
Figure 21: Main reasons why the OG did not achieve planned outcomes (partly or fully) (% of responses)	36
Figure 22: Extent to which OG innovation projects deliver successful outcomes and disseminate innovative solutions according to Stakeholder survey respondents (%)	38
Figure 23: Type of innovative solution developed by OG projects* (%)	39
Figure 24: Extent to which OG projects reached the planned objectives by category of innovative solution (%)	42
Figure 25: Use of tools to communicate the project and encourage the use of the innovative solution (total number)	43
Figure 26: Entities with which the OG project has collaborated or is planning to collaborate (overall OG survey)	45
Figure 27: Further development of OG project outcomes	47
Figure 28: The extent to which OGs have developed concrete follow-up steps for improving or further expanding the project outcomes	48
Figure 29: Contribution of OG projects to strengthening interactive innovation-oriented communities that support constant change and cooperation for innovation	49
Figure 30: Survey respondents' judgements about the relevance of different types of expertise for OG projects	54
Figure 31: Survey respondents' judgements about organisational aspects that contribute to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects	55
Figure 32: Survey respondents' judgements about social aspects contribution to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects	57
Figure 33: Survey respondents' judgements about contribution of social aspects to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects	57
Figure 34: Survey respondents' judgements about factors for initiating, developing and spreading innovative solutions	58
Figure 35: Survey respondents' judgements about factors that generate barriers for farmers/foresters/other end users to implement innovative solutions	58
Figure 36: Survey respondents' judgements about factors that contributed to spreading innovative solutions/opportunities by the OG	59
Figure 37: Survey respondents' judgements about factors/drivers facilitating the dissemination of successful innovative solutions	60
Figure 38: OG survey respondents' satisfaction with project implementation reflecting the needs and aspirations of all project partners	61
Figure 39: Survey respondents' satisfaction with the support received	63



Figure 40: Changes to the project due to external factors	66
Figure 41: Use of tools to communicate the project and encourage the use of the innovative solution (frequency)	68
Figure 42: Survey responses on the extent to which the communication and dissemination channels contributed to the spreading of the project outcomes	69
Figure 43: OG survey responses on the tools/events of the NRN and MA providing information about the OG project (no. responses)	70
Figure 44: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls addressed the concrete needs of practitioners	77
Figure 45: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls helped to better define project's focus	77
Figure 46: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls set too strict limitations in relation to project themes	78
Figure 47: Influence of OG calls on creating partnerships with a balanced mix of complementary expertise	81
Figure 48: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls pushed OGs to include more partners than needed	81
Figure 49: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls did not sufficiently request the inclusion of necessary partners ...	82
Figure 50: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls helped to ensure participation of partners at an equal level.....	82
Figure 51: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls requested a plan for, and delivery of, communication and dissemination activities	85
Figure 52: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls limited the administrative burden and simplified implementation .	87
Figure 53: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls forced OGs to comply with unnecessary and burdensome requirements	87
Figure 54: Degree of satisfaction with administrative aspects	88
Figure 55: Degree of satisfaction with administrative aspects (details)	88
Figure 56: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls set too strict budget limitations	89
Figure 57: Call's drivers to the achievement of OG project outcomes	92



List of tables

Table 1: Classification of types of innovative solutions	5
Table 2: Data collection tools/sources by level of analysis	7
Table 3: Selected case studies	10
Table 4: Keywords and relative proportion in OG projects	21
Table 5: Keywords applicable to OG projects in 2023-2027 CAP	22
Table 6: OG partners per category	25
Table 7: Analytical framework for answering Q1	34
Table 8: Keywords that best describe the topic of OG projects that fully or partially developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase (no. and %)	37
Table 9: Categories and types of innovative solutions developed by OG projects (no;%).	40
Table 10: Implementation by farmers/foresters/other end users of project outcomes	42
Table 11: Collaboration of OG projects with other entities	44
Table 12: Entities with which the OG project has collaborated or is planning to collaborate	45
Table 13: Types of collaboration OGs engage in	46
Table 14: Further development of OG project outcomes	46
Table 15: Follow-up steps for improving or further expanding the project outcomes	48
Table 16: Evidence of continuation of OG project activities after project completion	49
Table 17: Analytical framework for answering Q2	52
Table 18: Evidence from MA and OG interviews on support provided and valorisation of this support	64
Table 19: Analytical framework for answering Q3	74



List of acronyms

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
DG AGRI	Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EIP-AGRI	European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Sustainability and Productivity
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
FG	Focus group
GHG	greenhouse gases
JC	judgement criteria
MA	Managing Authority
MAP	Multi-actor Projects
MAPP	Method for impact Assessment of Projects and Programmes
NRN	National Rural Network
OG	Operational Group
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SCO	Simplified Cost Options
SFC	System for Fund Management
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
TWG	Thematic Working Group

Acknowledgements

The EIP-AGRI study was conducted by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP of the EU CAP Network, under the guidance of Carlotta Valli. It was carried out by the experts: Patrizia Borsotto, Steven Knotter, Marco Mazzei, Marili Parissaki and Carlotta Valli. Valuable input for case studies was provided by Vincenzo Angrisani (SE), Jacques Carrillo and Valentin Bernard (FR), Wiesław Lopaciuk (PL), Steven Knotter (NL), Marili Parissaki (ES), Andreas Resch and Filip Bojic (AT, DE), Pedro Serrano (ES, PT), Vyara Stefanova (BG), Paola Torcia (IT), Stephanie Vella and Victoria Mintoff Apap (IE), and Neringa Viršilienė (LT).

Support provided by Evaluation Helpdesk colleagues at different stages of this project is gratefully acknowledged. Bianca Abbagnano Trione and Romeo Pavesi provided valuable contribution to survey and data management, data analysis and other activities.

The study would not have been possible without the valuable information provided by many EIP Operational Groups taking part in the dedicated survey and case studies, EIP/innovation stakeholders, representatives of DG AGRI and the EU CAP Network.

Representatives from DG AGRI contributed to the coherence of the study with the EU's policy framework.



1. Introduction

This is the final report of the 'Study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP'. The study aims to analyse the outcomes achieved by Operational Group (OG) projects in the context of the European Innovation Partnership

(EIP) approach during the 2014-2020 (extended to 2021-2022)¹ programming period, in order to assess whether and to what extent this policy instrument has influenced the creation of innovation and its spreading in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The study focuses on the analysis of the outcomes achieved by Operational Group (OG) projects in the context of the EIP approach during the 2014-2022 programming period. Its objectives are:

1. To assess outcomes achieved by OG projects in the 2014-2022 programming period; acquire a better understanding of the process of co-creation and spreading innovative solutions and identify pathways for further development of the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) intervention.

2. To identify the main drivers and barriers in achieving EIP OG projects' outcomes, including the assessment of the extent to which communication and dissemination activities have contributed to the achievement of project outcomes.

3. To compare different approaches to EIP calls at Member State/regional level in order to assess the extent to which the calls have facilitated or, conversely, limited the achievement of outcomes.

1.2 Contents of the report

The contents of the report are organised in the following chapters.

The second chapter illustrates the background to the study, including its legal and conceptual framework, and provides definitions of key terms and concepts.

The third chapter describes the methodology, illustrating the three study questions, scope and levels of analysis, the proposed methods for data collection including the different levels of analysis, a case study approach, an overall analytical approach, and the limitations of methods and data.

The fourth chapter illustrates the study's overall results, based on data and other information collected through documentary research, surveys, case studies and interviews.

The fifth chapter contains the analysis and answers to the study questions.

The sixth chapter illustrates the overall conclusions of the study, while the seventh chapter provides suggestions for further development and improvement of the EIP-AGRI instrument.

2. Background

2.1 Regulatory and conceptual framework

2.1.1 Regulatory framework under the 2014-2022 programming period

The Commission has been engaged in laying solid foundations for improving the dialogue and collaboration between farmers/foresters, advisors, researchers and other relevant actors in agriculture and forestry innovation and rural development. While rural development policy has a long-standing record of stimulating innovation through measures for knowledge transfer and through investments, the EIP-AGRI was launched by DG AGRI in 2012 as a new 2014-2022 rural development policy element (COM (2012)79).

Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishes the aims of the EIP-AGRI

(Article 55). Article 55(3) states that the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) will contribute to the aims of the EIP-AGRI by supporting OGs. Articles 56 and 57 lay down the types of actions to be undertaken by the OGs. The EIP 2014 guidelines² further refined how to interpret what is considered 'innovation' under the EIP and how to implement the interactive innovation model rather than the linear model – which was still common at that time but much less effective and impactful. Many other EIP related issues were also clarified in those guidelines.

The EIP aims to promote a resource efficient and competitive agricultural and forestry sector. OGs are meant to bring together complementary innovation actors to co-create innovative solutions/approaches. Farmers, forest managers, researchers and other types

¹ This programming period will be hereinafter indicated as the '2014-2022 programming period'.

² European Commission, DG AGRI H.5., Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation to the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability, Programming period 2014-2020 – Updated version, December 2014. [Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability | EU CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](#)



of experts, advisors, businesses, environmental groups, consumer interest groups and NGOs, etc. could constitute an OG upon the initiative of one of these innovation actors.

The Commission has been engaged in laying solid foundations for improving the dialogue and collaboration between farmers/foresters, advisors, researchers and other relevant actors in agriculture and forestry innovation, and rural development. While

Box 1: Tasks of EIP Operational Groups

1. EIP Operational Groups shall draw up a plan that contains the following:
 - a. a description of the innovative project to be developed, tested, adapted or implemented;
 - b. a description of the expected results and the contribution to the EIP objective of enhancing productivity and sustainable resource management.
2. When implementing their innovative projects Operational Groups shall:
 - a. make decisions on the elaboration and implementation of innovative actions; and
 - b. implement innovative actions through measures financed through the Rural Development Programmes.
3. Operational Groups shall disseminate the results of their project, in particular through the EIP network.

Source: Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 57.

As stipulated by Articles 55 and 56 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, the focus of EIP in the 2014-2022 period was on agriculture and forestry. The EIP covers the supply of food, feed and biomaterials, the preservation of the environment and adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

The cooperation measure (M16)³ (Article 35(1)(c)) on the establishment and operation of an OG is the basis for the implementation of the EIP OGs. Programming authorities could combine the OG measure M16.1 with other measures to promote innovation, such as knowledge transfer and information actions (Article 14), advisory services (Article 15), investments in physical assets (Article 17), farm and business development (Article 19), investments in forestry technology, processing and marketing of forestry products, and setting up producer groups (Article 27).

Under sub-Measure 16.1, support can be given both for setting up an EIP OG and for the implementation of its project through the actions mentioned under Article 35(2) (a) to (k), for instance, for the development of new products or practices, pilot projects, supply chain cooperation, joint environmental project approaches or climate change actions, cooperation in biomass provision or renewable energy, forest management and much more.

Cross-border OGs could also be funded under Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) through different approaches (see Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability.).

Specific innovation support services and innovation networking are considered key to capturing grassroots innovative ideas, raising awareness, and fostering participation in innovative actions. They also help overcome difficulties in finding partners and preparing OG projects.

rural development policy has a long-standing record of stimulating innovation through measures for knowledge transfer and through investments, EIP-AGRI was launched by DG AGRI in 2012 as a new and project based 2014-2022 rural development policy element (COM (2012)79).

Box 1 describes the tasks of EIP OGs as established in Article 57 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

As part of innovation support services, 'innovation brokering' can have an important role in discovering innovative ideas and facilitating the start-up of OG projects, notably by connecting innovation actors around the objective of the potential project (farmers, researchers, advisors, NGOs, etc.). An innovation support service aims to discover bottom-up initiatives, helps to refine innovative ideas, and provides support for finding the right partners and funding. Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 offers different possibilities to fund innovation brokering by supporting innovation networking under National Rural Networks (Article 54(2)(d) and Article 54(3)(iii) and (iv)), through the cooperation measure (Article 35(1)(c)), and by supporting innovation advice or the setting up of farm advisory services focusing on innovation (Article 15(1) and (2)).

The EIP policy instruments implemented under the 2014-2022 programming period include OGs and synergies with European research programmes (i.e. Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe), which connect research with practitioners via the implementation of **multi-actor projects** (MAP) and **thematic networks** (TN). Article 53 of the regulation introduces the EIP network, which, together with the 'EIP Service Point' facility, has the function of a European helpdesk for collecting and disseminating information and organising innovation events such as seminars, workshops and focus groups (FG). FGs at the European level are temporary groups of selected experts focusing on a specific subject, creating a forum for sharing knowledge and experience, and producing a report after two meetings. FGs are moderated by DG AGRI and the EIP-AGRI Service Point (called 'Support Facility'⁴ for the 2023-2027 programming period).

In addition, some FGs at the national level are organised according to the example of the European ones but coordinated by National Rural Networks (called National CAP Networks under the 2023-2027

³ The project of an OG will usually match the description of one of the sub-Measures 16.2-16.10 but should always be linked to sub-Measure 16.1 for the sake of monitoring (European Commission, DG AGRI H.5., Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation of the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability, Programming period 2014-2020, 2016).

⁴ A coordinating expert from the EIP-AGRI Support Facility drafts both the inception paper and the EIP-AGRI report and coordinates the content-related work of the Focus Group experts. The final report of every Focus Group is published on the EU CAP Network website.



programming period). For instance, Italy organised four FGs respectively on animal husbandry, viticulture, green chemistry and cereal cultivation ([Focus della Rete Rurale Nazionale \(innovarurale.it\)](#)). Spain organised five FGs on access to land, advice on agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS), digitalisation and big data in the agri-food and forestry sector and in rural areas, forestry innovation, irrigation, energy and environment ([Grupos Focales RedPAC](#)). Portugal organised seven FGs on agricultural production, forest valorisation, forest management, short agri-food circuits, productive sectors, boosting rural territories, innovations and LEADER ([Rede Rural Nacional - Metodologia de constituição dos GTT](#)).

2.1.2 Regulatory framework under the 2023-2027 CAP

The EIP-AGRI is further strengthened in the 2023-2027 programming period, through the CAP Strategic Plans.

Under the CAP Strategic Plans, financing of OG projects and networking are continued and even intensified. The scope of the OGs is widened, covering all nine CAP Specific Objectives. The cooperation type of intervention for preparing and implementing EIP OGs (Article 77 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) aims to provide support to a range of actors with specific complementary expertise, who co-develop an innovative solution to a specific challenge. An overall Cross-Cutting Objective (CCO) (Article 6(2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) is established to support the nine CAP Specific Objectives. Indeed, the nine Specific Objectives, “shall be complemented and interconnected with the cross-cutting objective of modernising agriculture and rural areas by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas, and by encouraging their uptake by farmers, through improved access to research, innovation, knowledge exchange and training” (Article 6(2)).

EIP OG projects are meant to speed up innovation creation and sharing, as well as knowledge exchange, and as such, they are a key element of the AKIS strategic approach. OGs form part of EIP-AGRI (Article 127 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115), which aims to:

- support AKIS by connecting policies and instruments to speed up innovation;
- contribute to one of the nine CAP’s Specific Objectives (Article 6(1)) or to the CCO (Article 6(2)) and in particular:
 - create added value by better linking research and farming practices and encouraging the wider use of available innovation measures;
 - connect innovation actors and projects;
 - promote faster and wider transposition of innovative solutions into practice, including farmer-to-farmer exchange; and
 - inform the scientific community about the research needs of farming practices.

EIP OGs shall draw up a plan for an innovative project to be developed or implemented.

The innovative project shall be based on the ‘**interactive innovation model**’ and the following **key principles**:

- a. Developing innovative solutions focusing on farmers’ or foresters’ needs, while also tackling the interactions across the whole supply chain where useful.
- b. Bringing together partners with complementary knowledge such as farmers, advisors, researchers, enterprises or NGOs in a targeted combination as best suited to achieve the project objectives.
- c. Co-deciding and co-creating during the duration of the project.

EIP OGs may act at a transnational level. Envisaged innovative solutions may be based on new practices, but also on traditional practices in a new geographical or environmental context.

EIP OGs shall disseminate a summary of their plans and results of their projects, particularly through national and European CAP networks.

The main objective of OGs is thus to develop solutions to real needs and ensure that they are usable and spread. To achieve this, transdisciplinary collaboration and peer learning are deemed critical to success.

2.1.3 EIP criteria and conditions for more productive and sustainable agriculture and forestry

EIP-AGRI was launched by DG AGRI in 2012 (COM (2012)79) with the aim to **strengthen innovation within the agricultural ecosystem** while **improving its connections with research** and **contributing to the necessary transition to a more competitive and sustainable agriculture and forestry sector** i.e. ensuring the supply of food, feed and biomaterials, and to the sustainable management of the essential natural resources on which farming and forestry depend. EIP-AGRI operates within the broader AKIS.⁵

EIP-AGRI applies what can be defined as an overarching ‘open innovation’ concept based on the **interactive innovation model** applied in CAP OGs and Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects.⁶ As previously illustrated, the **basic approach and functional concept revolve around the collaboration between various actors to make the best use of complementary types of knowledge** (scientific, practical, organisational, etc.) **in view of co-creation and diffusion of solutions/opportunities ready to implement in practice.**

OG interactive innovation projects are funded by national or regional Rural Development Programmes through calls managed by the Managing Authority (MA).

Concerning OGs, the main features of this new specific approach are:

- **Pooling expertise** i.e. bringing together various AKIS actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, NGOs, etc.) in OGs to incentivise innovation processes and knowledge exchange. The chosen actors are those who can best contribute to the objectives of the project. As researchers are often involved as experts, OGs also help **build bridges between research and farming practice.**

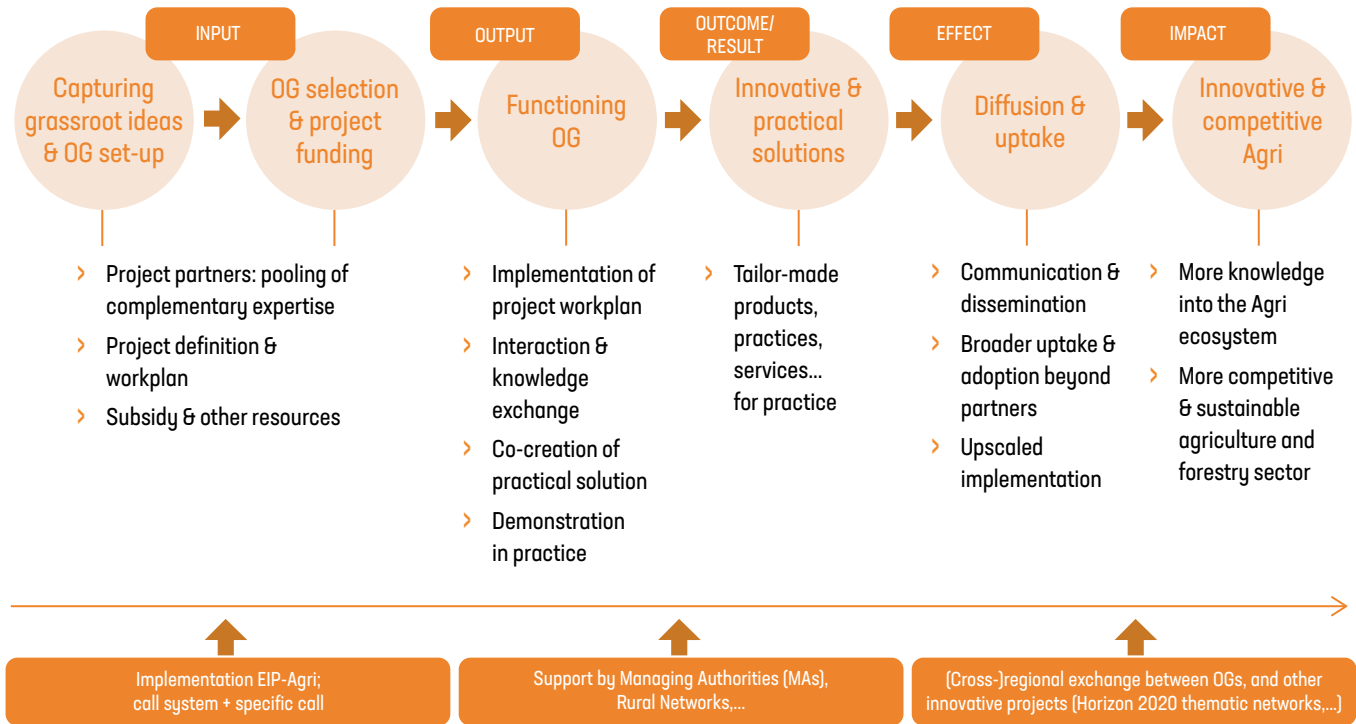
⁵ AKIS is defined in Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 as the “combined organisation and knowledge flows between persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge for agriculture and interrelated fields”.

⁶ European Commission, DG AGRI H.5., ‘Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation to the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability’, Programming period 2014-2020 - Updated version, December 2014. [Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability | EU CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](#).



- > **Mixing different types of complementary knowledge and ensuring cross-fertilisation between practice and other expertise** (practical, scientific, technological, social, organisational, financial, etc.) in an **interactive** way.
- > **Working together on innovative and practical solutions** for specific issues or needs – tailor-made products, practices, services and processes adapted to the problem at hand and ready to use in practice.
- > **Creating a solid joint work plan** including **active communication and dissemination** of practical outcomes and results of OGs' work. The aim is to stimulate feasibility, uptake and sharing of the results of the project.
- > **Networking:** EIP-AGRI also encourages **the exchange of knowledge and information between OGs and their cross-regional connection to other innovation projects**, Horizon 2020 thematic networks, advisory networks and multi-actor research projects.

Figure 1: Logic framework of EIP-AGRI OG



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

2.2 Key terms and concepts

EIP-AGRI OGs carry out innovation projects that aim to address specific practical issues and opportunities according to the needs of the agricultural and forestry sector.

Aspects considered in this study concern:

- > **The way the project is structured:** linking with farming practices is key and the problems and/or opportunities that the project addresses should be relevant to the farmer/end user. Experiments by researchers without consultation and collaboration with complementary actors in the project are not the aim.
- > **The partnership composition** must serve the objectives of the project. Often, there is at least one farm holder or more, plus others who play an important role in the success of the project, such as advisors, research institutes, SMEs and NGOs etc.
- > **The OG's working method** is based on the 'interactive innovation model' i.e. collaboration between various actors to make the best use of complementary types of knowledge (scientific, practical, organisational, etc.) with a view to co-creating and disseminating solutions/opportunities that are ready for practical implementation. All partners of the OG are equal in the decision-making process.

There should not be a hierarchical relation between them, where one simply executes the plans of another. All expertise and views are treated on an equal basis.

- > **The OG's project results.** The outcomes vary depending on the type of project built by the OG. It could be solutions for problems or results from testing an innovative idea/opportunity. The objective can also be knowledge exchange/innovation by itself (under the CCO), leading to OGs creating knowledge hubs or preparing CAP interventions, for instance.
- > **The communication and dissemination of results.** The activities of the project are adapted to its objectives, partnership, results and context. However, communication during the process and dissemination of the outcomes are key to the successful sharing of results.

2.2.1 Defining OG project outcomes and types of innovative solutions

For the study to be properly framed, a definition of what constitutes an 'outcome' of OG projects is necessary. Below, three levels for the shared definition of project outcomes are proposed.



The first level of outcomes is the **innovative solutions** that have been **produced in the context of the OG and successfully tested and spread**. More specifically, project outcomes produce changes in farming practices, production processes, the supply chain organisation, the environment or social related aspects, etc. This serves the main objective of an OG which is to develop an innovation within the OG that can successfully satisfy the need identified at the beginning, considering opportunities/difficulties, context and the OG's partnership.

The developed innovative solutions are therefore tailor-made and can relate to different typologies. A proposed classification of the main types of innovative solutions is shown in Table 1. The classification was developed for the sole purpose of the present study, based on references found in innovation literature and in collaboration with DG AGRI.

A second level of outcomes refers to spreading the produced innovative solutions and their suitability for implementation by

end users beyond the project partnership. This is the stage of **wider uptake of innovation**. In more detail, it aims to identify the innovative solutions that: (1) are shared during the phase of dissemination by demonstration farms, advisors, cross-visits, workshops, etc.; and/or (2) have been implemented by other actors (farmers or other end users).

A third level of outcomes refers to **community outcomes**. At this level, the aim is, on one hand, to raise awareness on the fit of the innovative solution and, on the other hand, to assess whether OG projects have helped strengthen connections and networks or create new ones, favouring the development of further cooperation (e.g. sharing the interactive innovation model, launching joint initiatives, expanding the community, meeting similar projects, using the project outcome as a starting point of a new OG, other nationally/regionally/EU funded projects etc.).

Table 1: Classification of types of innovative solutions

<p>1. Knowledge exchange</p> <p>This category refers to innovations consisting predominantly of innovative knowledge capturing, exchanging and spreading via tools and services for the provision, storage, communication and dissemination of information. Examples include brochures, guidelines, training, toolboxes, advice, knowledge exchange and discussion groups, knowledge hubs and back offices.</p>
<p>2. Product innovation</p> <p>Product innovation refers here to new or improved goods that differ significantly from already existing goods. Product innovation can be further divided into:</p> <p>Inputs e.g. fertilisers, bio-stimulants, new/specific plant varieties or improved animal genetics, feed additives, etc.</p> <p>Outputs e.g. new products such as bio-based products, protein products for human consumption, etc.</p>
<p>3. Service innovation</p> <p>Service innovation refers to new or improved services for (rural) communities beyond those mentioned under other specific categories.</p>
<p>4. Technological innovation</p> <p>This category refers to new or improved technologies that bring about significant advancements or changes in agriculture. It covers technological innovation that spearheads advancements in machinery, tools and equipment as well as digital innovations, such as applications, mobile technologies and devices, data management, digitally delivered platforms, smart tractors and harvesters, drones, GPS and sensors.</p>
<p>5. Agronomic practices and process innovation</p> <p>This category refers to improvements or changes in the way tasks, activities or operations are carried out in the sector. It revolves around enhancing methods, practices, techniques and processes. It can focus on different aspects, for instance, sustainable farming practices for plant production, animal husbandry, and forestry, as well as biodiversity preservation, soil health and water management, and practices to optimise resource use or mitigate environmental footprint.</p>
<p>6. Organisational innovation</p> <p>Organisational innovation materialises through novel forms of organisation and collaborations among farmers and other stakeholders, boosting productivity and/or sustainability, as well as fostering resource sharing and risk mitigation.</p> <p>This category also covers value chain innovations, such as logistics, storage, distribution, marketing and other organisational services.</p>



7. Rural social innovation

Social innovation can cover both **innovation on social issues** and the **social aspects of innovation**. It can emerge through new forms of promoting entrepreneurship, new employment opportunities and generational renewal, meeting social needs and creating new social relationships and collaborations. Rural social innovation also entails partnerships reinforcing community-oriented, sustainable farming (e.g. community supported agriculture). Further examples are social farming (integrating physically or mentally disabled people in farm work), rural classes or other educational projects (bringing pupils closer to agriculture).

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

3. Methodological approach

This chapter illustrates the methodological approach to the study. It first illustrates study questions designed to answer the study's objectives. Then, the scope and levels of analyses are laid out. Data collection methods and tools, including the case study approach, are described. The last section of the chapter examines the limitations of the methodology and data, suggesting possible solutions.

3.1 Study questions

The study develops according to three main study questions aimed at fulfilling the objectives of the study.

The first question '**Q1 - To what extent have EIP OG projects produced the expected outcomes: Project outcomes, wider uptake of innovation and community outcomes?**' aims at acquiring information about the degree of success of the innovative solutions developed by EIP OG projects, therefore, to assess the extent to which OG projects have achieved the planned outcomes according to the three different levels previously illustrated in [section 2.2.1](#). This study question is split into two sub-questions to examine the different elements:

- > Q1.1 - To what extent have EIP OG projects produced innovative solutions that were successfully tested by end users and spread beyond the project partnership?
- > Q1.2 - To what extent have OG projects succeeded in strengthening and widening communities and developing opportunities for further cooperation?

The second study question '**Q2 - What are the main drivers and barriers to the achievement of EIP OG outcomes and what lessons can be learned?**' aims to identify the main drivers that

have facilitated the achievement of OG project outcomes and, conversely, the main barriers hindering the achievement of successful outcomes. Two sub-questions are proposed to answer Q2 and identify key lessons for the future:

- > Q2.1 - What are the main drivers and barriers to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions and the possibility of scaling up EIP-OG project outcomes?
- > Q2.2 - To what extent have communication and dissemination activities contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes?

The third study question '**Q3 - To what extent did Member States/regions' approaches to EIP OG calls favour/limit the achievement of outcomes?**' aims to assess the role played by the design of the EIP delivery model under RDPs and of EIP calls for the selection of OGs and OG projects. Q3 therefore analyses the ways in which application and selection procedures may have favoured or, conversely, hindered both the selection of good OGs/projects and the achievement of project outcomes.

Answers to the study questions are presented in [chapter 5](#).

3.2 Scope and levels of analysis

The study's geographical scope is the EU-27 excluding the RDPs in Member States not implementing EIP OG projects i.e. Luxembourg and Denmark⁷, but with the addition of the UK, which implemented the EIP measure until 2020⁸.

The analysis is carried out at two levels. At EU level, RDPs across the EU-27 are examined to illustrate the context and overall level of

execution of the EIP-AGRI measure within the RDPs. The focus of analysis then moves to EIP OGs and their projects, which represent the core of the study, to provide answers to the study questions. The second level of analysis is carried out at the case study level with 15 OG projects selected across different Member States/regions of the EU.

⁷ Luxembourg did not plan EIP-AGRI in their RDP, whereas Denmark included the EIP-AGRI measure but never activated it under the RDP.

⁸ UK OGs and innovation experts were invited to contribute to the OG survey and to the stakeholder survey respectively (see following section [3.3.1](#)).



3.3 Data collection methods and tools

The study uses a combination of primary and secondary data sources. Documentary research represents the main source of secondary data. Primary data were collected through a survey of OGs, a survey of other EIP/innovation stakeholders, 15 case studies covering a selected number of OG projects and additional interviews with DG AGRI and the EU CAP Network.

Primary data play a central role in the present study. Such data were collected through different tools designed for the different levels of analysis (i.e. EU and case study level), which are described in detail in the following sections. The table below provides an overview of data collection tools and data sources for each level of analysis.

Table 2: Data collection tools/sources by level of analysis

Level of analysis	Documentary research	Primary data	Secondary data
EU level	Documentary research at RDP level	OG survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > System for Fund Management (SFC) EIP OG database > Annual Implementation Reports (AIR) 2022
	Literature review	Innovation stakeholders survey	
		Interviews with Commission officials	
Case study level	Documentary research at case study level:	Interviews with RDP Managing Authorities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Implementation of EIP under national /regional RDP; > Calls for selection of OGs and OG projects; > Evaluations and studies; > OG published materials. 	Interviews with OG lead partners	
		Focus groups with OG partners	

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

3.3.1 Data collection at EU level

At EU level, the analysis is based on information collected from various sources, as detailed below.

Documentary research at EU level

Documentary research was conducted on national and regional 2014-2022 RDPs to collect information about the design and implementation of the EIP-AGRI instrument under RDPs, including EIP calls for selecting OGs and OG projects. In the analysis, the collected information is used to illustrate the context of the intervention within RDPs and to contribute to answering study questions (in particular, Q3).

Documentary research also includes a review of relevant literature on EIP-AGRI OGs within AKIS such as published EIP-AGRI evaluations and studies, workshop materials, and case studies carried out at EU and Member State level. The websites of EIP-AGRI and the EU CAP Network⁹ were also consulted.

Secondary data

Secondary data are sourced from DG AGRI databases and from Member States OG databases, where available.

The SFC database of EIP OG projects (source: DG AGRI) is continuously updated, thus providing the state of play of EIP OG projects. The most recent update of SFC data was requested to DG AGRI on 20 February 2024 and received on 7 March 2024.

Annual Implementation Report (AIR) database (source: DG AGRI) provides annual monitoring data for all RDP measures. The latest available data are sourced from AIR 2022 (delivered by RDP Managing Authorities in June 2023). These data, last updated on 12 March 2024) are used to illustrate progress of executing EIP through RDP Measure 16.1 (see section 3.3).

Financial implementation data (ESIF_2014-2020_Finance_Implementation_Details; source: DG AGRI) were also requested. However, these data provide information on the financial execution only at the overall level of RDP M16 (Cooperation) but not on the details of EIP implementation.

Other databases: European database [EIP-AGRI OG projects](#) (source: EU CAP Network), Member States EIP OG databases where available (e.g. Italy, Ireland, Spain, France, Portugal, Poland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Germany, Czechia, Belgium, Finland, Austria), and the Horizon Europe project '[EU-Farmbook](#)'.

⁹ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe-creating-knowledge-and-innovation-sustainable-agriculture-forestry-and-rural_en.



Survey of EIP Operational Groups

The survey, hereinafter 'OG survey', was directed to all OG project partners across the EU-27 (plus the UK but excluding Member States not implementing the EIP measure or not recording any EIP OG projects in the SFC).

The questionnaire¹⁰ contains 32 questions. OG lead partners were asked to answer all 32 questions, whereas all other OG partners (i.e. not project coordinators) responded to a sub-set of 17 questions. In

essence, factual questions about project theme/sector, partnership composition etc. were asked only once for each OG project to OG lead partners, whereas informed views and opinions were collected from all OG partners.

The questionnaire mostly used multiple-choice questions with pre-coded answers aiming to collect easily quantifiable information that can be compared across respondents and groups of respondents. Box 2 illustrates the structure and contents of the survey questionnaire.

Box 2: Structure and contents of OG survey questionnaire

- 1. General information**, questions to collect information on the state of the project (completed, not completed), topics and types of innovative solutions developed by the OG project.
- 2. Partnership structure** (composition, type of expertise/experience, type/level of involvement, division of roles and tasks, degree of interaction/collaboration etc.).
- 3. Achievement of project outcomes** (degree of achievement, relevance of achievements with respect to partner/sectoral needs, factors facilitating/hindering the co-creation and spreading of innovative solutions etc.).
- 4. Collaboration with other entities** (type of entities, type of collaboration, rationale for non-collaboration etc.).
- 5. Support received**, notably type and quality of support received from national or regional authorities, rural networks, innovation support services and advisors.
- 6. Project modifications** resulting from internal and external factors.
- 7. Communication and dissemination** (role of partners in communication/dissemination, approach and channels/tools used, target groups, contribution of communication/dissemination to project outcomes etc.).
- 8. Selection of OG projects** (call provisions and administrative procedures favouring/hindering the achievement of outcomes).

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

The EU Survey online tool was used for the OG survey. The survey was launched on 16 January 2024 by invitation issued to a total of 11 747 email contacts¹¹ sourced from the European Commission EIP OG projects database (SFC) covering the EU-27 (except Denmark and Luxembourg for not implementing the EIP-AGRI measure and Cyprus and Slovakia for not recording any projects in the SFC database) and the UK. The online OG survey was closed on 20 February 2024.

For Cyprus, a list of five OG project contacts was received at a later date from DG AGRI (7 March). Invitation to complete the survey was sent by email to all five OG coordinators and one completed questionnaire was received for Cyprus.

A total of 989 survey responses were collected from EIP OG partners, for 768 corresponding OG projects.

Survey of EIP/innovation stakeholders

A second survey was **directed to a wider EIP/innovation stakeholder group**, hereinafter the 'Stakeholder survey', including advisors, innovation brokers, representatives of innovation support services and others who may not be directly involved in EIP OG projects. The aim of this survey was to collect complementary data to the EIP OG survey, such as views and opinions of actors external to OGs, which should allow the triangulation of findings and help mitigate possible response biases.

The Stakeholder survey focused on factors facilitating the development and spread of OG project outcomes and vice versa, and on factors hindering the successful implementation of OG projects' innovative solutions. It also aimed to help assess the extent to which OGs have strengthened innovation communities.

The questionnaire¹² contained 12 questions, most of which were multiple-choice with pre-coded answers aimed at collecting easily quantifiable information and facilitating responses.

Again, the EU Survey online tool was used for the Stakeholder survey. The survey was launched on 1 February 2024 to a total of 10 788 email contacts sourced from the EU CAP Network, covering the EU-27 and the UK. The list of contacts used is very broad, probably also including CAP stakeholders not specifically involved with EIP-AGRI, but it was not possible to further differentiate the available contacts. The survey was closed on 23 February 2024 and **233 completed questionnaires** were received.

Interviews with the European Commission and EU CAP Network

Three interviews were conducted: two interviews with European Commission officials involved in managing the EIP-AGRI strategy respectively under the 2014-2022 programming period and under the 2023-2027 CAP, and one interview with a representative of the EU CAP Network.

¹⁰ Included as Annex I of the inception report.

¹¹ The SFC database available at the time of the OG survey included about 17 600 contacts across 3 226 OG projects. After eliminating duplicates and unusable email contacts, the final list included 11 747 email contacts.

¹² Included as Annex III of the Inception Report.



The interviews were aimed at exploring the main lessons learned from the implementation of EIP-AGRI through OG projects during 2014-2022, how the approach has changed in the 2023-2027 CAP, how changes were motivated and what are the expectations for the current programming period. The following topics were explored:

- > Effective dissemination/spreading of OG project outcomes. At what stage of a project should outcomes be disseminated and how? What are the most effective dissemination tools?
- > Role played by advisors in the 2014-2022 programming period. What should the role of advisors be and what is going to change in the current CAP programming period?
- > Role played by innovation support services and rural networks in transferring the principles of EIP-AGRI (interactive innovation model, bottom-up approach, dissemination of results, etc.) to Member State level and in favouring the creation of OG partnerships and projects.
- > In some cases, the implementation of OGs was delayed or even failed, mainly due to administrative procedures. Administrative burden is brought up as a hindering factor to the success of OG projects. What is currently being done or should be done to reduce these problems?

The collected information is used in the analysis to further explore and triangulate key findings emerging from the two surveys and case studies.

3.3.2 Selected case studies

A case study approach was used to complement the other information from primary and secondary data sources and to gain further insight into the working of OGs, the implementation of EIP OG projects, the ways in which innovative solutions are co-created and spread, drivers of and barriers to the process of co-creation, and dissemination of OG project outcomes.

As previously mentioned, **15 case study EIP OG projects** were selected. The choice was largely based on information available in the SFC¹³ EIP OG database, complemented with information obtained from national EIP portals, and national and EU public authorities where needed (e.g. Bulgaria, Poland and Portugal).

All **selected case study OG projects are completed projects**. The main criteria used to select case studies include:

- > **Project execution:** Case studies were selected among EIP OGs that completed their projects in the past two to three years (between 2020 and 2022, except for one project completed in 2019 and one in 2023). This criterion satisfies the need of the study to examine achieved outcomes and results.
- > **Geographical representation** of different areas of the EU. The 15 case studies have been selected across 12 Member States (corresponding to 14 RDPs) representing all different geographical areas of the EU. DG AGRI and the respective national Managing Authorities provided information about completed projects in Poland and Bulgaria, although it was not yet available in the SFC database at the time of selection. OG projects from those two Member States have also been included in the selection to ensure adequate coverage of the Eastern European area.
- > **Proportionality according to the number of OG projects across Member States:** Two case studies were selected in each of the three Member States with the highest number of OGs i.e. Spain, Germany and the Netherlands. As for Member States with regional RDPs, i.e. Spain and Germany, two case studies from different regions were selected in each Member State.
- > **Type of OG lead partner and composition of the partnership:** The case study selection shows different characteristics in relation to the number of partners (from small to medium-size groups, with one 41 partner OG), the category of partners involved (all six main categories are represented in different combinations within the 15 case study OG projects), the category to which the lead partner (LP) belongs (LPs of the selected case studies are advisors, research institutes, farmers, SMEs or other) and the participation of farmers/foresters (from zero to 29 partners).
- > **Themes and sectors:** The selection has also taken into account the OGs' choice of keywords to ensure adequate coverage of sectors and topics. The case studies include OGs targeting plant production, animal husbandry and two forestry projects. Seventeen keywords out of 19 are represented within the 15 case studies.

[Table 3](#) shows the OG projects selected as case studies and provides summary information for each.

¹³ System for Fund Management of the European Commission.



Table 3: Selected case studies

Case study no.	MS	EIP CCI English title	First year	Last year	Total budget amount (€)	No. partners	LP category	Selected keywords
1	AT	Geographic Information Systems for Site-Specific Management Aimed at Increasing Efficiency and Greening in Austrian Agriculture	2018	2021	475 162.00	10	Research institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Agricultural production system › Farming practice › Farming equipment and machinery › Plant production and horticulture › Landscape /land management › Fertilisation and nutrient management › Soil management/functionality
2	BG	Digitising the value chain of organic beekeeping products	2020	2023	419 298.00	9	Farm holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Farming practice
3	DE - Baden-Württemberg	Improvement of animal welfare and environment protection in pig husbandry by innovative structural solutions with the objective of dissemination	2016	2022	1 009 435.05	41	Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Farming practice › Animal husbandry and welfare
4	DE - Hesse	Added value of social farming for agricultural production	2018	2020	244 890.00	11	Research institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Farming practice › Animal husbandry and welfare › Plant production and horticulture › Biodiversity and nature management › Supply chain, marketing and consumption
5	ES - País Vasco	2018-001 - IMIÑE: Creation of a collaboration network between farmers and ranchers (crops-livestock) for processing quality forages in Basque Country	2018	2020	79 965.00	9	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Agricultural production system › Farming practice › Animal husbandry and welfare › Climate and climate change › Farming/forestry competitiveness and diversification



Case study no.	MS	EIP CCI English title	First year	Last year	Total budget amount (€)	No. partners	LP category	Selected keywords
6	ES - Cataluña	Development and adaptation of rice dry seeding in the Ebro Delta	2017	2019	228 120.00	5	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agricultural production system > Plant production and horticulture > Climate and climate change > Water management
7	FR- Bourgogne	REVA, soil biology for agricultural production	2019	2021	268 184.00	10	Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Farming practice > Soil management/functionality
8	IE	Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS)	2018	2022	1 950 000.00	12	Farm holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agricultural production system > Farming practice > Animal husbandry and welfare > Landscape /land management > Biodiversity and nature management > Farming/forestry competitiveness and diversification
9	IT- Liguria	Innovative energy models for the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises and for the enhancement and protection of the Ligurian territory	2020	2021	N.A.	7	SME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Agricultural production system > Farming practice > Climate and climate change > Energy management > Plant production and horticulture > Farming/forestry competitiveness and diversification
10	LT	Improvement and dissemination of innovative technologies for breeding and maintenance of larch, spruce, birch and black alder plantation forests	2018	2020	187 549.00	3	Research Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Forestry



Case study no.	MS	EIP CCI English title	First year	Last year	Total budget amount (€)	No. partners	LP category	Selected keywords
11	NL	Precision with technology in grassland management	2019	2022	627 485.00	3	Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Animal husbandry and welfare > Fertilisation and nutrient management > Soil management/functionality > Water management
12	NL	Seaweed in healthy dairy farming	2018	2020	250 000.00	5	SME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Animal husbandry and welfare > Climate and climate change > Food quality/processing and nutrition
13	PL	Building a system of connections in the area of innovative technologies for breeding calves and final fattening	2019	2021	1 587 702.54	13	Farm holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Animal husbandry and welfare
14	PT-Continental	PLATISOR - Methods for the management of cork oak forest with <i>Platypus cylindrus</i> attacks in the region of Sor	2018	2021	318 190.72	6	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Pest/disease control > Forestry
15	SE	Breakbox	2017	2019	90 000.00	4	Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Farming practice > Soil management/functionality

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



3.3.3 Data collection at case study level

Case study data collection was carried out by the Evaluation Helpdesk's geographic experts using a combination of in-depth interviews and focus groups, based on guidance documents and templates designed by the study team. Geographic experts were briefed on how to conduct data collection and on the basics of the EIP-AGRI OGs, such as the definition of project outcomes and the guiding principles of the interactive innovation model. Documentary research was also used to collect complementary information.

The case study approach, using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and documentary research, allows for the gathering of detailed information on experiences and practices, the building of an overall picture and the triangulation of the collected information.

The tools used for data collection are further described in the following paragraphs.

Documentary and web research at case study level

The following sources of information were used to collect the required data:

- National/regional 2014-2022 RDPs seeking information about the design of the EIP-AGRI measure and the adopted model of EIP implementation.
- EIP calls for the selection of OGs and OG projects under each examined RDP.
- Evaluation reports and other studies examining the implementation of the EIP-AGRI under the RDP.
- Published information about case study OG projects, their activities and results (e.g. workshops, dissemination events, seminar reports, articles, databases, etc.).

In-depth interviews

For each case study, in-depth interviews were organised with:

- a. RDP Managing Authorities;
- b. EIP OG project coordinators (i.e. lead partners).

Interviews were used to explore how successful the implementation of EIP OG instrument is considered by national/regional authorities and how it will be approached in the future. In addition, interviews with OG project coordinators were designed to examine the issues raised through the OG survey in more detail (see [Box 2](#) above).

Focus groups

A focus group was organised to gather in-depth information in 14 out of the 15 selected case study OGs¹⁴. Focus groups were organised to involve all or as many OG partners as possible. The method used is applied in mixed groups; therefore, a wide representation of project partners is advised.

Focus groups were conducted based on the **Method for impact Assessment of Projects and Programs (MAPP)**, which is an innovative method based on group discussions used in recent years for rural development evaluations. It is a methodological framework combining a qualitative approach with participatory assessment instruments, but it also includes a quantification step. It orients itself towards principles and procedures of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology¹⁵, such as:

- **Triangulation:** The collection of distinct data with different tools to prove or raise the validity of the data.
- **Optimal ignorance:** The capability to select relevant data and to avoid information overkill.
- **Common learning:** The findings of an assessment are the result of a discussion process among relevant actors.

MAPP uses several interactive tools, three of which were adapted and used for EIP OG case studies:

- **Life curve** was used to show the overall development trends in the OG's community/territory over a certain timeframe, starting before the project began and ending at the time of project completion or the time of conducting the focus group in case project activities were still ongoing.
- **Relevance analysis** was used, based on a matrix in which participants rate the project's outcomes over the same time period. The participants defined the most relevant outcomes.
- **Influence matrix** was used to evaluate the influence of all aspects of OG calls on each defined outcome.

The combination of the above tools can help reach conclusions on:

- the overall context and how it influenced the implementation of the OG project;
- the main project outcomes and their relevance for reaching the objectives of the project and addressing the needs identified by the OG at the outset; and
- the aspects of the EIP OG that influenced the achievement of outcomes, including the conditions of the call, partnership composition, communication and dissemination activities.

OG interviews and focus groups enabled the collection of data, informed views and opinions from 82 OG partners across 15 case studies.

[Table 3](#) summarises the main characteristics of the selected case study OG projects. Annex I presents an overview of the 15 case study OG projects through factsheets containing a summary of case study information such as project objectives, OG partnership characteristics and main findings. The information presented is sourced from interviews with OG lead partners and focus group discussions involving all OG participating partners.

¹⁴ In Sweden, it was not possible to organise a focus group due to unavailability of the OG partners.

¹⁵ [Participatory rural assessment - techniques to improve communication with the rural people \(worldbank.org\)](#).



3.4 Limitations of the proposed methodology and data

The review of previous relevant studies provides little evidence of OG project outcomes at EU level for the 2014-2022 programming period. Indeed, most studies and evaluations have been realised at the earliest stages of EIP OG implementation when results have not yet been achieved. Other studies and evaluations focus on OGs and projects only at case study level.

As the present study on OG project outcomes could not extensively rely on literature-based findings, the OG survey, the Stakeholder survey and case studies represent key sources of data and other information for a comprehensive analysis at both the EU and case study levels.

The first general challenge relates to differences in the level of knowledge or interpretation of what constitutes innovation. For the purpose of reducing inconsistencies in the collection of primary data, the study team has developed a classification of types of innovation to be specifically used in this study (see [Table 1](#)).

For each data collection tool implemented, the following paragraphs briefly describe the main challenges the team faced and, where appropriate, the solutions adopted.

OG survey

One of the problems encountered relates to the quality and precision of the available email contacts for OG project coordinators and partners reported by the Member States in the SFC database of EIP OG projects, including generic, no longer existing¹⁶ and unusable email addresses. Where detected, unusable and changed email addresses were substituted or complemented with email contacts sourced from National CAP Networks or other national databases (i.e. Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal) and new survey invitations were issued.

Moreover, it was not possible to detect all the email addresses that no longer existed¹⁷ in the EIP OG projects database (SFC), making it impossible to precisely assess the OG survey response rate.

A further challenge was due to a unique survey identifier being assigned to each respondent using the email address as the identifier, meaning that one email address could only be used once to complete one questionnaire. This approach was used to avoid respondents outside OG partnerships answering the survey. However, it became apparent that in various cases the same person/entity is involved in or coordinates several OG projects. When this issue was reported, we asked for alternative different email contacts (as many as the number of OG projects) to issue new survey invitations through the EU Survey tool. The decision to use a unique respondent identifier in this survey may have affected the total number of responses that could be obtained. A more general limitation common to most surveys can be generated by the so-called 'self-selection bias'¹⁸ by which it can be assumed that those deciding to take part had views and opinions they were happy to share. For instance, in the OG survey, respondents' self-selection

probably determined the large participation of OG partners of completed projects who probably had more results and outcomes to communicate compared to OG partners of ongoing projects. In the case of surveys, interviews and focus groups, a common limitation can also be generated by 'response bias'¹⁹. Both types of bias are very common and usually difficult to avoid when carrying out research based on the collection of primary data.

Stakeholder survey

The large mailing list provided by the EU CAP Network (over 10 000 contacts that were not all necessarily EIP-AGRI stakeholders) made it impossible to ascertain the response rate to the Stakeholder survey.

Case studies

The case studies were selected among EIP OGs that completed their project to examine the achieved outcomes and results. A consequence of this approach is that these cases reflect a bit more than average the initial understanding of the EIP and the interactive innovation model. Since then, Managing Authorities and OG partners have improved their understanding of the concept.

In some instances, it was difficult to get a hold of the OG project coordinator and for projects long completed and/or dissolved OGs it proved difficult even for the project coordinator to reach all or most partners and gather them together for focus groups. For some case studies, it has been difficult to engage farmers as they are busy with their activities and rarely available or only at specific times of the day, such as early morning or late evening. In most cases, the problem was solved thanks to the assistance of the Managing Authority or by the OG project coordinator, together with the perseverance of the geographic experts. In one case (Sweden), the initially selected case study OG had to be substituted.

Moreover, for OGs with a small number of partners (i.e. fewer than seven to eight participants), it was not possible to run the designed focus group procedure, which required 8 to 12 participants. The focus group guide was therefore adapted for these cases to conduct collective interviews, while still following the MAPP approach to the best extent possible.

Documentary research has also played an important role in examining national/regional approaches to the implementation of the EIP OG instruments in RDPs and calls (study question 3). However, as EIP OG calls are not systematically available across all 2014-2022 RDP websites to be readily downloaded, the study team has searched for alternative sources of information to the extent possible (e.g. RDP Monitoring Committee reports, information provided by National Rural Networks and other available materials). In any case, this part of the analysis was systematically carried out at a case study level and is presented in the answer to study question Q3.

¹⁶ A file containing 330 unusable email contacts within the SFC database of EIP OG projects was shared with DG AGRI on 8 March 2024.

¹⁷ The invite to fill in the survey was sent through the EU Survey online tool. The EU Survey automatic emailing does not provide information on mail delivery failures.

¹⁸ It refers to the bias introduced when participants choose whether to participate in a project, as the group that chooses to participate may not be equivalent (in terms of the research criteria) to the group that opts out.

¹⁹ Response bias is the tendency of a person to answer questions untruthfully or misleadingly or simply inaccurately. For example, people may feel pressure to give answers that are socially acceptable as they want to portray themselves in the best light. Response bias can also generate from the way questions are formulated, as respondents may not answer the questions in the way the researcher intended.



Secondary data

The SFC database of EIP OG projects in which Member States notify OGs including periodical data elaborations made available by DG AGRI, provides useful and up-to-date information about OGs and projects. However, there are some shortcomings in this database both in terms of completeness and timing. Under the 2014-2022 programming period, the reporting in SFC was recommended in the EIP guidelines for Member States²⁰. For the 2023-2027 period, reporting in SFC has become part of CAP legislation²¹. In terms of timing, it appeared that some Member States have only recently (in 2024) started uploading data (e.g. Cyprus) whilst others may have not updated information for some time, as the period will only close by the end of 2025. Partial or delayed updating of information currently results in an unclear picture of projects' status as to the number of projects completed today. By 29 February 2024²², the database reports 903 completed projects compared to 2 719 that, according to the planned time frame, should have been closed by 2023.

AIRs provide information on the number of EIP OGs and projects supported under each RDP with details by Focus Area. The latest available EIP financial and physical implementation information is that contained in AIR 2022 reports (i.e. financial execution achieved by 31/12/2022). As regards financial information, AIRs report the total expenditure for the EIP instrument. However, because national/regional approaches to EIP OG may involve a variety of measures and sub-measures, detailed information concerning planned expenditure, or the total budget of selected projects is not available. Similarly, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) financial execution data (source: DG AGRI) only report aggregated data for M16 Cooperation under EAFRD funding, but no further detail for sub-measures (i.e. M16.1 EIP).

4. Overall results

This chapter provides an overview of the data and other information collected and analysed within the study. [Chapter 5](#) presents the analysis and answers to the study questions.

4.1 Overview of previous relevant studies

This section is dedicated to an analysis of the literature relevant to the objectives of the present study and a review of the available information sources, including published articles, studies and evaluations carried out on EIP OG projects. The aim is to provide background to the study and proposed study questions and report on evidence from other similar studies examining outcomes of OG projects with a view of identifying areas for which the present study can provide complementary or more in-depth information.

At the EU level, three studies were carried out recently, two of them focusing specifically on EIP-AGRI and one with a broader focus on AKIS.

The first is an evaluation study of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability conducted in 2016 for DG AGRI²³. The objective was to examine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value of the two main aspects of the EIP: the EIP as implemented under RDPs and the support for the EIP provided by the EIP network. The evaluation was carried out at a time when most RDPs were only just beginning to become operational, which meant that the first OGs had been set up and final project results were not yet available. Therefore, this evaluation is not able to provide useful information on OG project outcomes. However, the study assessed the EIP's premise on incentivising innovative farming practices to foster a competitive and sustainable agriculture and forestry sector as valid and important. The study found that EIP bridges a gap between

research and practice through its aim to solve practical problems and by helping farmers play a role in innovation and supporting co-creation. Member States and regions were enthusiastic about the EIP-AGRI from those early stages onwards, among others as EIP helps to share lessons across borders. Overall, an important asset of the EIP policy was assessed to be a flexible tool that can be easily adapted to divergent circumstances and policy contexts.

The second study, 'Assessment of the Operational Groups (OG) that were approved and running under the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI)' across the EU, was carried out in 2018²⁴. The assessment focuses on the state of play of setting up and implementing OGs, their results and how these are disseminated.

The assessment involved a clustering exercise of OGs based on a variety of information, such as sectors covered, type of agricultural activity and type of challenge derived from the project descriptions. The analysis was based on data collected through: (1) a survey of all funded OGs across the EU; and (2) case studies of nine OGs to gain a better understanding of different aspects of their functioning, such as setting up an OG, organisation/partnership, implementation, cooperation and connections to other OGs, and different EU funding and dissemination. The study offers some insights on expected outcomes, based on the data collected through the EU-wide survey (601 OG projects) and nine case studies. The main findings can be summarised as follows:

²⁰ [Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability | EU CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](#).

²¹ Article 127 of Reg.(EU) 2115/2021 and Article 8 and 13 of Reg. (EU) 1475/2022.

²² Data received from DG AGRI services on 7 March 2024

²³ European Commission. Evaluation study of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP), 2016. Written by Coffey International Development (Coffey) in partnership with AND International, Edater, SQW and SPEED.

²⁴ Knotter, S., Kretz, D. and Zeqo K., Operational Groups Assessment 2018, Final report for EIP-AGRI, Agriculture & Innovation delivered by IDEA Consult nv, 2019. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/eip-agri-operational-groups-assessment-2018_en#section-resources.



- › Case studies show that for some OG partnerships, three ‘concentric circles’ exist: (1) a small number of core partners responsible for project execution; (2) the second group for all partners directly involved in performing the project tasks; and (3) up to 100 interested non-partner farmers, informed during communication actions of the project, who follow the project closely and even test and already apply outcomes of the project. **The existence of such a third circle, thanks to frequent and strong communication activities during the project, leads to the broad sharing of outcomes and results.**
- › The ‘circles’ showcase the **importance of involving a wider community of targeted end users beyond the OG during the project to ensure the efficient and effective dissemination** of the project outcomes.
- › OGs devote substantial attention to dissemination throughout the project using their own regular communication channels (e.g. websites and newsletters) and professional publications to make the project results available, which usually ensures reaching the target audiences. In most interviewed OG projects, **‘Info Days’ or ‘Open Days’ are seen as the most efficient way to disseminate** their project results to a wider audience.
- › OGs act as a vehicle to **link the rural-agricultural community to other sectors and industries.**
- › OGs also appear to have a strong interest and potential for further cooperation to connect with other relevant initiatives beyond the scope of single projects. In this respect, OGs stress the **need for a more structured way to identify potentially related projects and initiatives to connect with.**

The third study ‘Evaluation support study on the CAP’s impact on knowledge exchange and advisory activities’, published in 2020²⁵, focuses on the impacts of 2014-2022 CAP instruments and measures on knowledge exchange, advisory activities and innovation in areas under the direct influence of the CAP to assess the extent to which the objective of “fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas” has been achieved. Although the study had a broader AKIS focus, this evaluation study offers some insights on EIP success factors and critical factors, in particular:

- › The **success of EIP-AGRI is often linked to the efforts of individuals**, notably within **innovation support services**, carried out under a National Rural Network (NRN), Regional Rural Networks (RRN) or **other actors**. At the European level, the EIP-AGRI network plays an important role.
- › **Strengthening of information flows with researchers**. Case studies show that: (1) making a link between research and farmers is a challenge in all Member States; and (2) in some Member States, the information flow between researchers and advisors is weak.
- › **The information flow between advisors and farmers is generally good but depends on the availability, number and quality of impartial advisors** and, in some Member States, where advice is charged for, on the ability of farmers to pay for the service.
- › **The involvement of all farmers is not simple**. Only a very small minority of farmers, those who are already reflecting on farming

practices, engage in OGs and related projects. The adoption of new farming practices confirms that there is always a relatively small share of front-runners (pilots) who try out new ideas/solutions, while most farmers prefer to wait for outcomes.

- › **Dissemination and knowledge-sharing beyond the own OG activities remained limited**, despite the obligation for each project to provide a publicly available report. The main **constraints** identified at this level are language barriers, **a low level of involvement of farm advisors in EIP-AGRI and a lack of active promotion of project activities and results during and beyond the project life** to interested farmers, both within the country or region and across the EU. The importance of the last two aspects has been emphasised by Commission services in many meetings and events since 2020.

At the level of individual Member States or regions, various interim evaluations were carried out more recently (2021 to 2023).

In **Sweden** a follow-up study on innovation support under the 2014-2022 RDP was carried out in 2022²⁶ to disseminate knowledge about outcomes and results of EIP OG projects.

The study reports that only a small part of the innovation projects have been completed. This means that the basis for investigating whether innovation has reached the market is limited. Most completed projects have basically had an innovative idea, but it is too early to see to what extent these ideas will lead to actual marketable innovations.

The report shows that larger institutions and companies are usually responsible for applying for aid to implement innovation projects largely aimed at strengthening agricultural competitiveness and diversification. The study also finds that communication efforts have only been carried out to a small extent, mainly via websites, social media or other digital channels. Both aspects may be linked to the particular type of mostly marketable innovation sought in Sweden.

The main recommendations are to investigate the achievement of objectives for different types of project owners and to focus more on all dimensions of sustainability, not only or mostly on economic sustainability.

In **Germany** (region of Brandenburg and Berlin), an interim evaluation completed in 2023 focusing on the results and effects of EIP support was conducted in preparation for the ex post evaluation²⁷. The key question is whether the supported innovation processes have produced specific results and these results have led to higher performance and sustainability in the programme area or whether such an impact can be expected at least in the medium term. Using the example of the first five EIP projects that have been completed, this report examines possible effects to draw initial conclusions from and recommendations for the further design of the funding measure.

The evaluation states that the first five completed projects have achieved their pre-defined project objectives. Detailed results are presented for each case study. In general, the cooperation measure within the framework of EIP can thus be assessed as successfully implemented in the design, as demonstrated in Brandenburg. The evaluators conclude that cooperation research can, in many cases,

²⁵ European Commission. Evaluation support study on the CAP’s impact on knowledge exchange and advisory activities. October 2020. Written by ADE S.A., CCRI and OIR.

²⁶ Jensen, I. Innovation support under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2022. Follow-up of support under the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability, 2022:4.

²⁷ Stegmann S. (Bonneval). EIP funding – Results and effects. Interim RDP 2014-2022, March 2022



“be regarded as the most effective and thus most important form of interaction between research and business. Long-term cooperation creates mutual trust as a basis for unimpeded exchanges of information and can thus increase the likelihood of success”.

A second conclusion is that the initiated innovation processes could lead to “reasonably large changes” if they were widely applied in practice. This is linked to the eligibility requirement “targeting on productivity and sustainability in agriculture”, which seems to promote an effective selection of projects both in terms of the relevance of the concepts for practice and in terms of the thematic orientation.

A third conclusion is that, where it occurs, one reason why the potential effects of successfully completed projects have not yet occurred is due to the lack of maturity of the expected results, even after the completion of the projects. In order to ensure that the results of the project are timely and usable in practice, certain aspects should be taken into account in the selection of projects, such as the required technological maturity level at the start of the project and proof of method to achieve the sought technology maturity level at project completion. The composition of the OG partnership should attach particular importance to the presence of specific figures necessary for reaching the required technological maturity.

In terms of dissemination of findings, the evaluation finds that OG partners implemented an exemplary publication practice. However, there is no systematic input of results after project completion in AKIS.

Another interim evaluation was carried out in 2021-2022 in the German region of Hessen ²⁸, based on two questions: 1) To what extent were the RDP interventions responsible for innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas?; and 2) To what extent have RDP interventions fostered links between agriculture, food production and forestry, as well as research and innovation, with a view to improving the environment and achieving better environmental performance?.

The findings of this interim evaluation are not particularly relevant to the present study. However, they provide some general conclusions for the EIP OG projects in the region. The evaluation shows that all projects have essentially achieved their objectives and that all EIP projects provide solutions and development opportunities for agricultural sector problems and their further development. The transfer of knowledge and innovation to practice has already begun during the project period.

In **Italy** (region of Tuscany), a thematic evaluation was conducted in 2022 ²⁹ to assess the effectiveness of EIP OG projects connected with the competitiveness and productivity objectives of the regional agricultural sector. In this region, the partnership's involvement in project design was above the national average (40.4% as compared to the Italian average of 27.3%). The regional context is particularly suited to this type of initiative on which OGs were mostly formed, based on already existing partnerships that have been further consolidated.

The evaluation provides some findings of interest for the present study, which are summarised below:

- The structure of the call for applications, which assigns specific objectives and costs to each project partner, has stimulated active and effective participation of the various actors involved in the design and implementation of the project.
- A difficulty was reported in involving non-professional farmers (those that do not have a VAT number) who the call excluded from training activities. In some Tuscan production areas (e.g. chestnut cultivation), non-professional farms represent a large share of the production base.
- With regard to the achievement of objectives at farm and sector level with respect to the tested innovations, there were no cases of ‘failure to start’ or failure altogether (also in terms of the relevance of innovations to the needs of the territory) among the selected case studies. Even in cases where innovation has not become fully operational, the research and experimentation developed have made it possible to expand knowledge or attempt collaborative approaches towards other sectors (agro-industrial, industrial, energy, etc.).
- In many cases, the quality of the collaboration established between the production and research sectors meant that innovation became part of the business routine, improving the management of the farm or providing the opportunity to expand the farm's production.
- The dissemination activity has significantly impacted the quality of the collaboration established between the different OG partners. In general, the creation of knowledge networks is instrumental in accessing a multiplicity of information that, if shared in a structured manner, facilitates the creation of innovative partnerships.

More general publications on the design and implementation of EIP-AGRI are also found in Italy. Most of these publications are produced by the NRN (replaced by the ‘National CAP Network’ in the 2023-2027 period). A publication of 2022 ³⁰ reports the results of a survey of EIP-OG at national level, which is useful to understand the functioning of the OGs and the relationships that are established between partners and other subjects outside the groups. One of the conclusions of the study regards the key role played by the lead partner for the construction of OGs, often deriving from previous existing relationships. This finding appears to be consistent with the above findings of the EIP evaluation carried out in the Tuscan region. The results of the survey highlighted that greater interaction between partners favours good functioning of the OG and, even more so, a constant exchange of information. According to most survey respondents, the OG managed to achieve the desired results not only with specific reference to the innovative solution to be adopted but also to the wealth of knowledge and relationships that they were able to generate.

UK-Wales. An interim evaluation was commissioned by the Welsh Government Rural Communities to assess the implementation and impact of EIP Wales. The final report in 2023 concerns mostly the implementation process, but also considers the impact of completed

²⁸ Thünen Institute for Living Conditions in Rural Areas. Implementation of the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-Agri) – Interim Report 2021/22 Rural Development Programme 2014-2022 of the country Hessen. June 2022.

²⁹ Lattanzio KIBS Regione Toscana Innovazione in Agricoltura – I Piani Strategici dei Gruppi Operativi Terza Relazione di valutazione tematica – Analisi e Giudizio (C3.2), 2022.

³⁰ Rete Rurale Nazionale, IL MODELLO PEI-AGRI IN ITALIA – I risultati dell'indagine sui Gruppi Operativi (prepared by CREA-PB), July 2022.



projects. The evaluation is based on information from a survey of 84 OG members and non-beneficiaries, interviews with delivery personnel, innovation brokers (IB), and external stakeholders, together with a review of the scheme's monitoring information³¹.

While the size of grants was judged as appropriate, some concerns were raised about the strategic impact of the investments, as no mechanism exists to ensure that the impact would be felt more broadly throughout the sector. A recommendation was therefore made to consider setting up a separate follow-up fund, which could be ringfenced for the most successful and most scalable projects.

The level of collaboration was judged as overall positive, with examples of businesses working with organisations from other sectors for the first time, while the vast majority indicated that they

intended to maintain these relationships beyond the project delivery period. However, there has been less collaboration with other OGs.

The vast majority of OG members believe that their project has been a success. Most have introduced changes and stated that they have received the benefits that they hoped the projects would generate. In some instances, in which projects had not achieved what they planned, the learning of what does not work was also considered as a positive outcome.

In **Latvia** a study on the impact of the RDP on innovation published in 2020³² examines the implementation of the EIP-AGRI measure among other M16 sub-measures does not appear to offer interesting insights. Similarly, in **Spain** (Basque Country³³), an assessment of M16 does not provide relevant information for the present study.

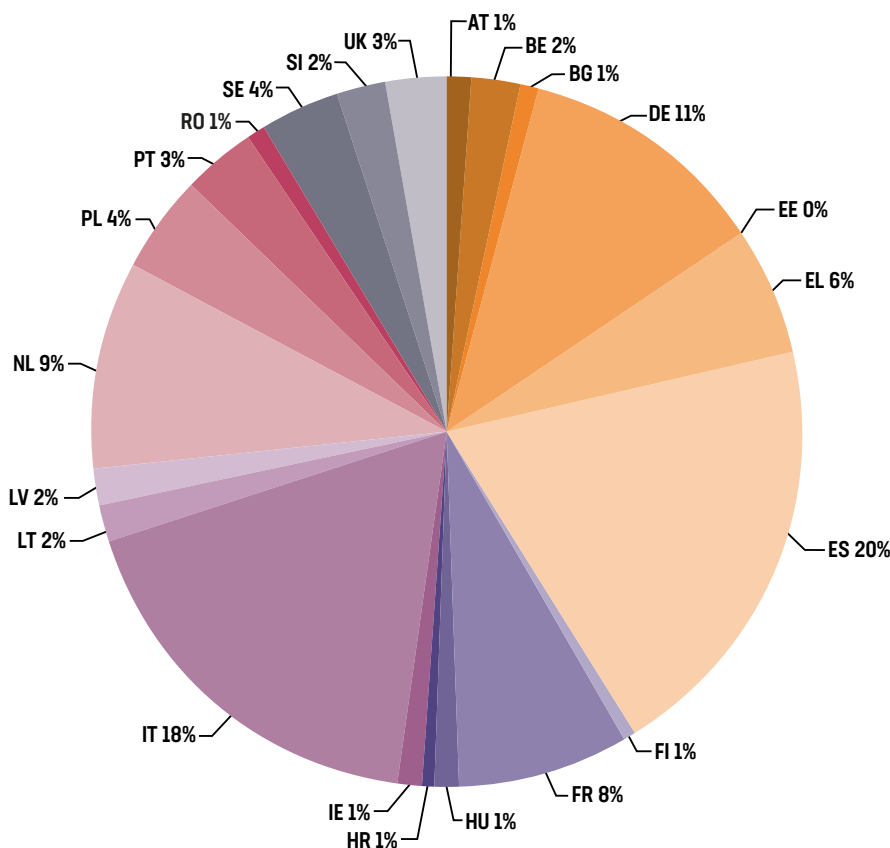
4.2 Overview of EIP OG projects' implementation during 2014-2024

Under the 2014-2022 programming period, 98 RDPs included support for EIP OG innovative projects in 27 Member States (including the UK and excluding Luxembourg) for a total of 3 180 OG projects planned³⁴. Only Denmark did not make use of the planned measure.

The overview of the implementation of EIP OG projects draws on two main sources of information: (1) RDP 2022 AIRs showing the progress of RDP measures associated with OG projects in relation to physical and financial indicators; and (2) the SFC database dedicated to OGs, containing data about projects, their objectives,

keywords, time frame, budget and the composition of partnerships, including breakdown by Member State. A complementary source of data is provided by national portals usually maintained by National CAP Networks (formerly rural networks). The EIP OG database in SFC collects data uploaded by Member States. Periodical data elaborations carried out by DG AGRI (particularly the 'OG facts figures' file) usefully show the main trends and characteristics of OG projects throughout the EU. The following analysis refers to the latest available data (update of 29 February 2024, received on 7 March 2024).

Figure 2: Distribution of OG projects by Member State (%)



Source: DG AGRI elaboration based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024), N=3 438

³¹ The final evaluation report was completed in 2023 and primarily sought to provide an impact assessment of the EIP projects and of the scheme in terms of the overall aims, performance indicators and outcomes.
³² Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics. The report impact on innovation - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, December 2020.
³³ University of the Basque Country. Assessment Report on Measure 16 Cooperation. 2015-2020, April 2021.
³⁴ I.e. targets 2020 as in the latest adopted version of the RDPs in January 2020 (source: SFC, 29/02/2024).



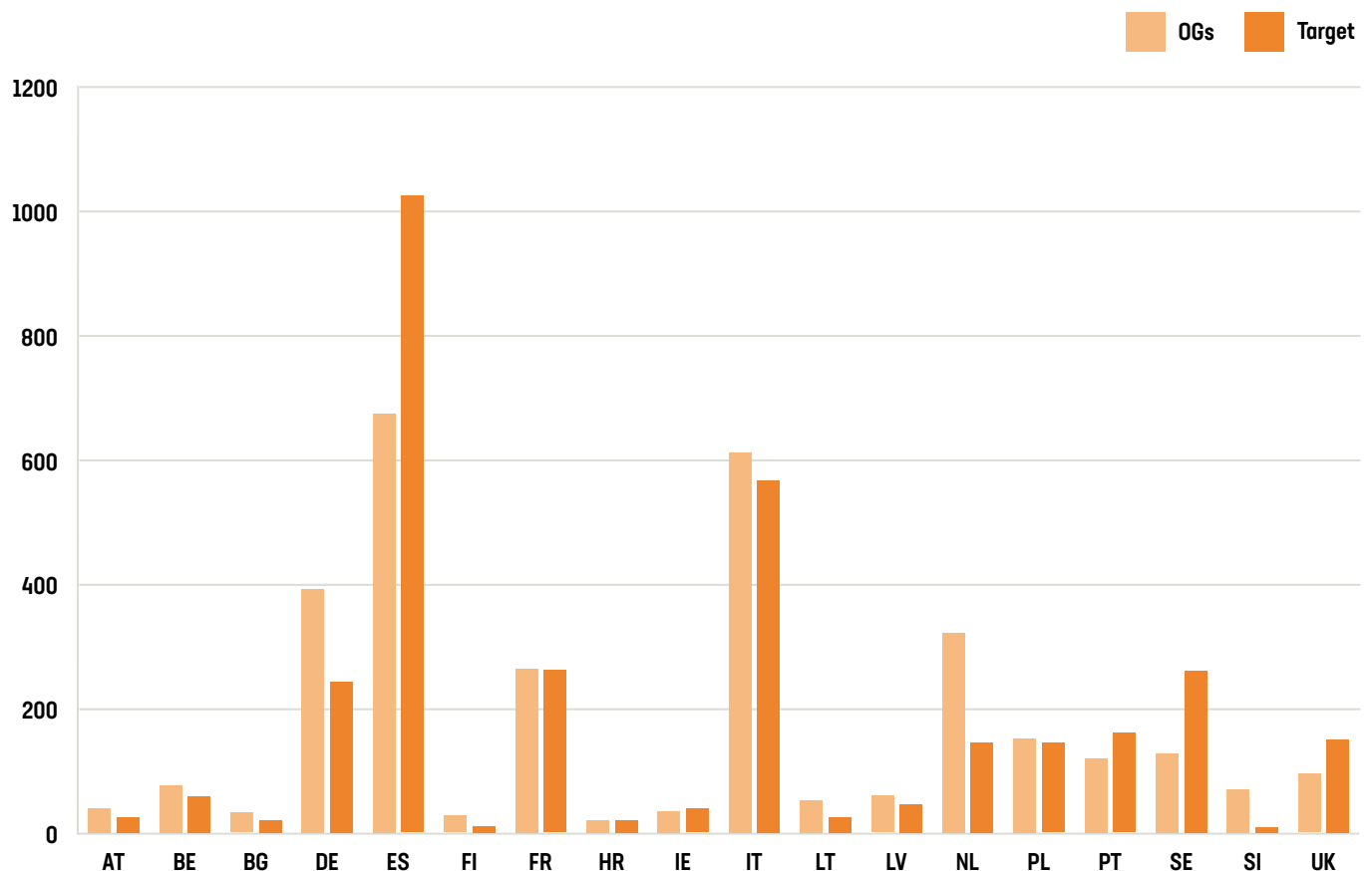
The SFC reporting system currently accounts for 3 461 OGs (for a corresponding budget of EUR 1.15 billion) in 25 Member States (including 94 OGs in the UK). Further OG calls are expected to be launched by Managing Authorities until the end of the programming period in December 2025. In the online reporting system (SFC database), 903 OG projects are reported as completed. Further (completed) projects may not yet be notified in the SFC database e.g. Slovakia did not report any projects in this database.

The larger Member States with regional RDPs (Spain, Italy, Germany and France) obviously account for the largest shares of EIP OG projects, but it is interesting to note that relatively small Member

States, such as the Netherlands, account for a respectable share of total OG projects across the EU.

In several Member States, the number of notified OG projects (ongoing or completed) has met or even exceeded the planned targets (see [Figure 3](#)). This is the case for Germany, Italy, France, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands and Poland. Despite having notified a very ambitious national target (1 023 OGs), Spain accounts for 673 notified OGs, which still represents approximately 20% of the total number of OGs across the EU, the highest share of all Member States.

Figure 3: Number of OGs by Member State vs. 2014-2022 target (*)

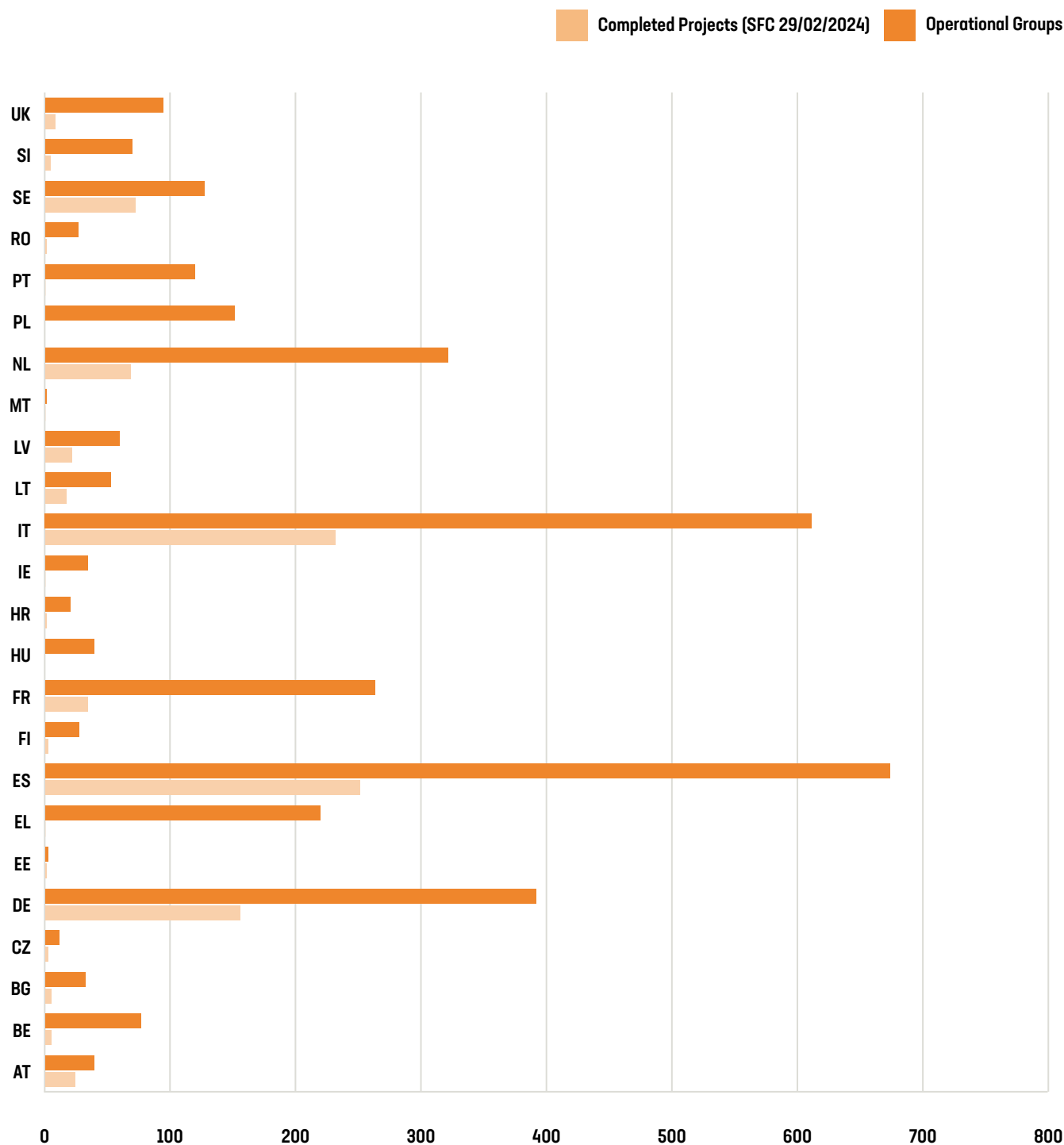


(*) Member States not indicating a target value are not reported in the chart (i.e. CY, CZ, EE, EL, HU, MT, RO, SK)
Source: DG AGRI elaboration based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024), N=3 184

According to the planned year of completion, a total of 2 719 projects should have been completed by 2023. However, information about the status of notified projects reports 903 completed projects across 24 Member States (including 8 projects in the UK), with Spain and Italy together representing 53.4% of them. It is expected that a substantial number of further notifications of completed projects will follow in the last 1.5 years before the 2014-2025 period expenditure closes.



Figure 4: Number of OGs and completed projects as notified by Member States



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024)

When uploading information on the SFC database, OG projects should be identified according to relevant project themes, i.e. by indicating relevant keywords within a list of 19 given items.

A total of 10 471 keywords were selected, corresponding to an average of three keywords per OG project. Some keywords have a broader scope, and this results in a more frequent use by OGs. For instance, 'Farming practice' has been selected by 33% of OGs, and 'Agricultural production system' and 'Plant production and horticulture' by 28% each.

Other keywords more explicitly refer to specific issues, needs or challenges, such as 'Pest disease/control' and 'Water management'.



Table 4: Keywords and relative proportion in OG projects

Keyword	No. OGs	Relative proportion of all keywords	Proportion of OGs containing keyword
Farming practice	1 157	11%	33%
Plant production and horticulture	971	9%	28%
Agricultural production system	967	9%	28%
Animal husbandry and welfare	793	8%	23%
Farming/forestry competitiveness and diversification	786	8%	23%
Food quality/processing and nutrition	729	7%	21%
Supply chain, marketing and consumption	646	6%	19%
Pest/disease control	572	5%	17%
Fertilisation and nutrient management	547	5%	16%
Climate and climate change	498	5%	14%
Soil management/functionality	477	5%	14%
Biodiversity and nature management	437	4%	13%
Farming equipment and machinery	402	4%	12%
Water management	358	3%	10%
Waste, by-products and residues management	330	3%	10%
Landscape/land management	298	3%	9%
Genetic resources	193	2%	6%
Forestry	163	2%	5%
Energy management	147	1%	4%
Total	10 471	100%	

Source: DG AGRI elaboration based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024)

For the 2023-2027 CAP programming period, the list is widened to 31 keywords designed to allow for a more targeted labelling, as shown in the table on the next page. 'Animal husbandry and welfare', for example, is replaced by three keywords: 'Animal husbandry', 'Animal welfare' and 'Fodder and feed'. Furthermore, relevant themes such as 'digitalisation' and 'social innovation' are to be captured through new keywords.



Table 5: Keywords applicable to OG projects in 2023-2027 CAP

Code	Label
1	Animal husbandry
2	Animal welfare
3	Fodder and feed
4	Arable crops
5	Outdoor horticulture and woody crops (incl. viticulture, olives, fruit, ornamentals)
6	Greenhouse crops
7	Forestry
8	Aquaculture
9	Genetic resources
10	Pest/disease control in plants
11	Pest/disease control in animals
12	Plant nutrients
13	Soil
14	Water
15	Energy
16	Climate change (incl. GHG reduction, adaptation and mitigation, and other air related issues)
17	Organic farming
18	Agro-ecology
19	Crop rotation/crop diversification/dual-purpose or mixed cropping
20	Biodiversity and nature
21	Landscape/land management
22	Circular economy, incl. waste, by-products and residues
23	Equipment and machinery
24	Competitiveness/new business models
25	Farm diversification
26	Supply chain, marketing and consumption
27	Food security, safety, quality, processing and nutrition
28	Digitalisation, incl. data and data technologies



Code	Label
29	AKIS, incl. advice, training, on-farm demo, interactive innovation projects
30	Rural issues
31	Social innovation

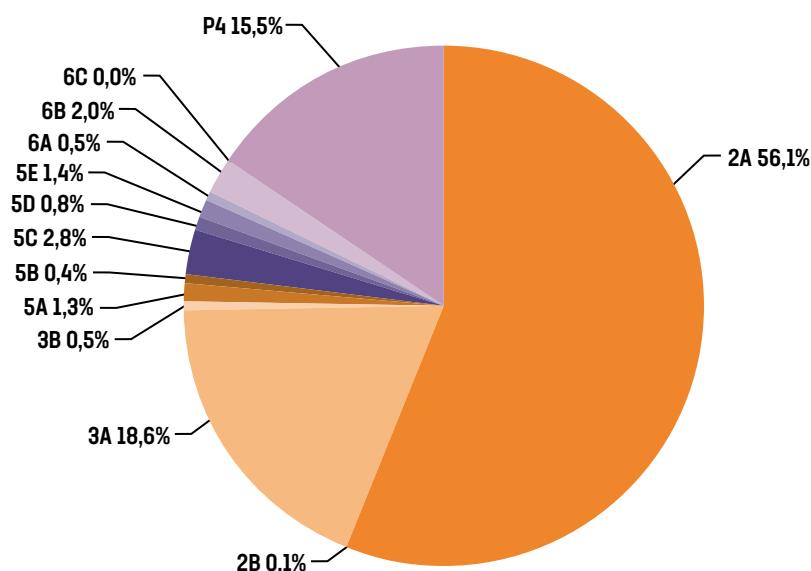
Source: DG AGRI (2024)

Data extracted from the SFC database indicate that, based on the 19 keywords used to classify EIP OG projects, **about two thirds of the projects focus on environmental topics.**

The classification of EIP OG projects based on AIR 2022 execution data (see [Figure 5](#)) shows that the vast majority of projects (about 75% of total public expenditure) are designed to contribute to improving the economic performance of farms (Focus Area 2A)

and to improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them in the agri-food chain (Focus Area 3A). A further 15.5% of OG projects' expenditure contributes to environmental Priority 4 (Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry)³⁵ and 6.7% contributes to Priority 5 (Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors).

Figure 5: Distribution of EIP OG projects' public expenditure by Focus Area



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP based on AIR 2022

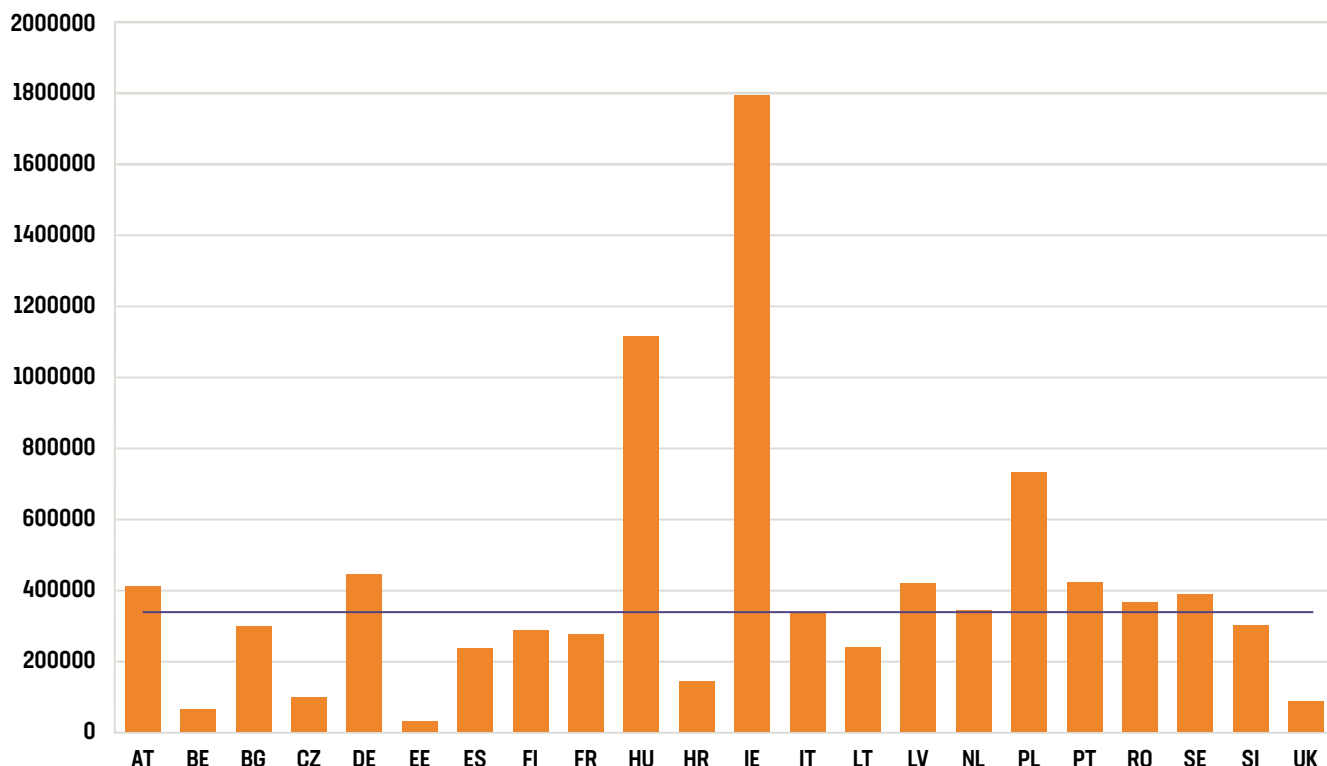
At the EU level, the average budget of OGs, as indicated by the horizontal line in the following figure, is approximately EUR 335 000. The analysis of the financial size (i.e. the budget) of OG projects shows significant differences, as OG average budget ranges from less than EUR 30 000 (Estonia) to EUR 1.8 million (Ireland), emphasising different national approaches to EIP OG projects. The average budget for a Member State can hide substantial differences between regions and calls which have different purposes and

geographical scales. A typical example is Ireland, having two pre-defined thematic nationwide OGs respectively of EUR 10 million and EUR 25 million, as well as a series of smaller bottom-up projects below EUR 2 million. Various Member States also changed the maximum budget per OG project during the 2014-2022 period, some making it higher and others reducing it because it was considered too high for the type of project.

³⁵ The classification of EIP projects by Focus Area in the 2022 AIRs concerns already implemented projects and can provide a somewhat different picture from SFC data.



Figure 6: OG average budget by Member State and EU (EUR)



Source: DG AGRI elaboration based on SFC (data updated 29/02/2024)

Based on AIR 2022 financial execution data, by 31 December 2022 the total public expenditure on the EIP measure at EU level amounted to EUR 555.4 million (i.e. 49.2% of the total budget allocated to the OG projects which are notified in SFC so far). It should be remembered that EIP allocated financial resources need to be used by the end of 2025. This means that from the AIR data of 31 December 2022 until the end of 2025, there are still three years in which many OGs – whether notified in SFC or not – need to get their final payments, which may be the largest part of expenditure as advance payments were not allowed in 2014-2022. Final expenditure data will only become available in AIR reports delivered by 30 June 2026.

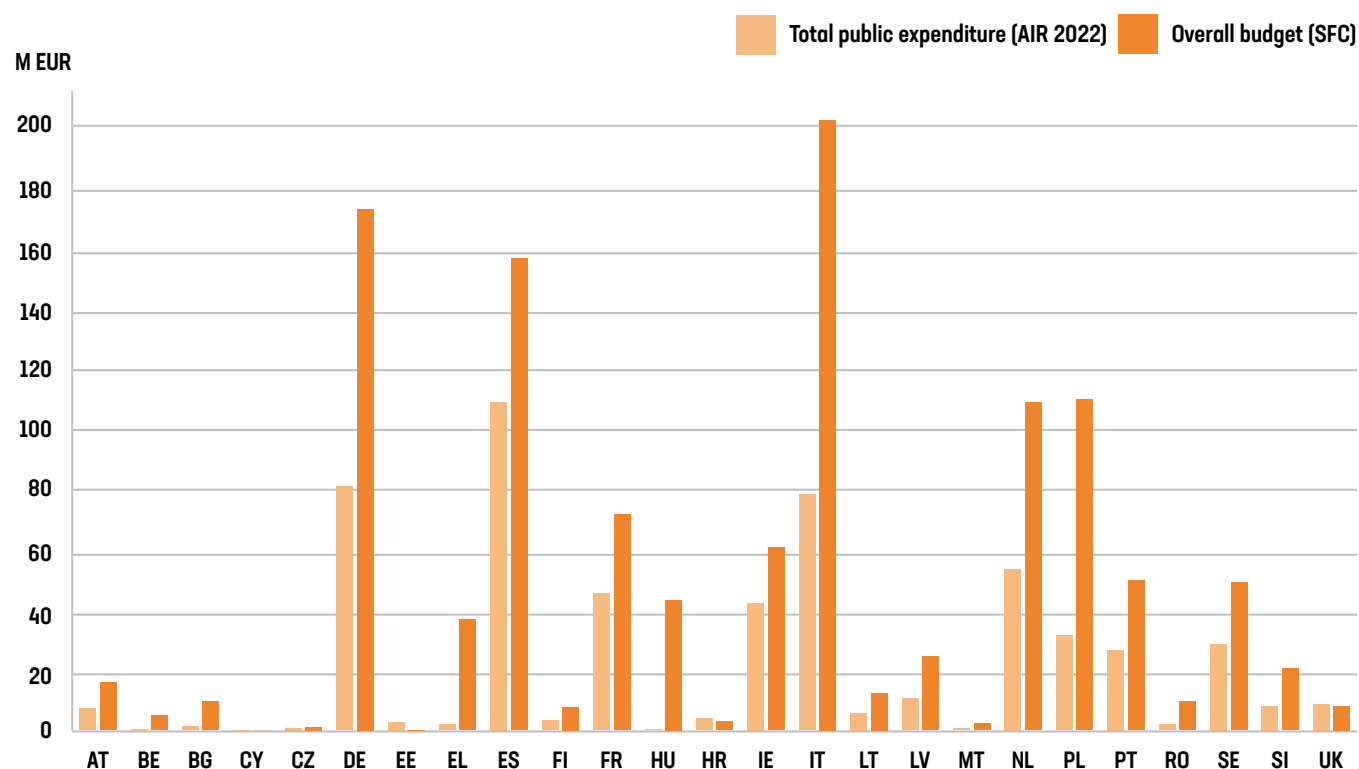
As shown in the following figure, the rate of execution varies quite considerably across Member States, with four Member States

showing less than 10% rate of financial execution (Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary and Greece), six Member States with over 50% execution rate³⁶ (Czechia, France, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden) and the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and Lithuania just short of 50%. Member States with very low execution rates are typically those who were late with starting the OG measure, while those with higher execution rates often started earlier with OG calls and selection. In the words of a DG AGRI official, this illustrates the **importance of launching OG calls early in the programming period**. Towards the end of the execution period, the Member States who started late, will still need to pay considerable amounts to the projects. Also, other Member States may be waiting for the final report to pay the full amount to the OG.

³⁶ In addition to these, the UK appears to have used 100% of the allocated financial resources.



Figure 7: Financial execution of EIP OG projects (by 31/12/2022)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP based on SFC (OG budget data updated 29/02/2024) and 2022 AIRs (total public expenditure as of 31/12/2022)

According to the SFC reporting system (data received 7 March 2024), Operational Groups involve a total of 18 850 partners, distributed into six categories as shown in the table below. In SFC only information about the lead partner is required. Member States can optionally decide to introduce information on the other partners too. Therefore, the figures on the overall number of partners and their breakdown by category are only indicative.

Table 6: OG partners per category

OG partner category	No.	Share (%)
Farm holder	5 949	31.6%
Other	4 033	21.4%
Research institute	3 878	20.6%
SME	2 573	13.6%
Advisor	1 879	10.0%
NGO	538	2.9%
Total	18 850	100%

Source: DG AGRI elaboration based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024)

The category 'Other' is somehow distorting the picture as it may include a range of subjects (depending on how Member States have encoded them in SFC) e.g. consultants, veterinarians, farmers associations/consortia, producers associations/organisations,

agricultural chambers, technology centres, municipalities, local development companies, regional agencies, schools and educational/training centres, multimedia/communication companies, processing companies, marketing companies, trade



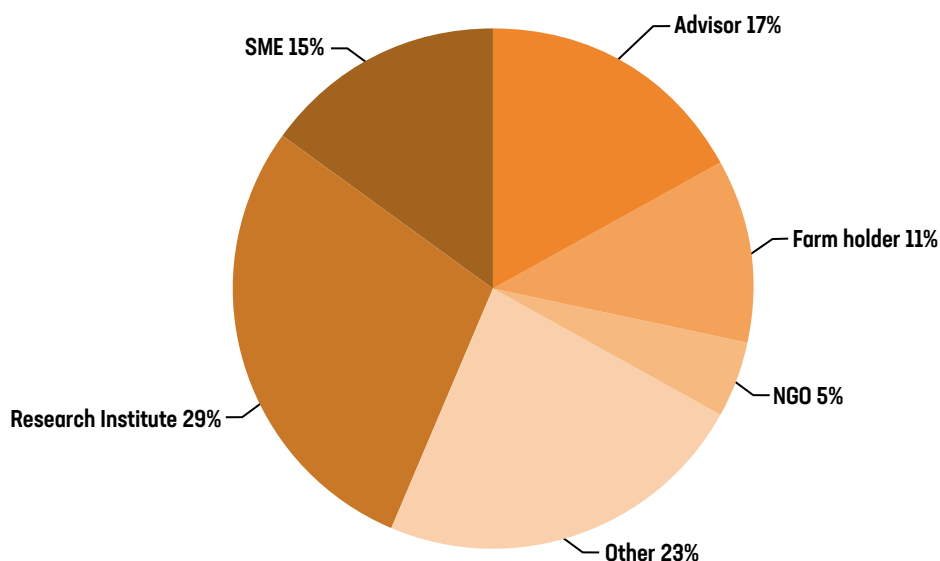
unions, individual farm holdings, natural parks, nature conservation organisations, IT companies and other individuals, companies or legal entities not better identified. Part of these subjects can overlap with other categories, especially 'Advisor', 'SME' and 'NGO', and therefore be underestimated.

On average, each OG consists of 5.45 partners, but country breakdown reveals significant differences between national approaches. OGs involve 11 partners on average in Belgium, 10.5 in Slovenia, 2.3 in Sweden and 2.7 in the Netherlands. Different national averages also explain the higher number of total OG partners in Italy (4 600 OG partners, 7.5 partners per OG) compared to Spain (2 552 OG partners, 3.8 per OG).

Finally, the SFC database reports data related to 3 484 lead partners. Inconsistencies compared to the number of OGs are due to double reporting of the same partner data or, in a few cases, to the recording of two different lead partners for the same OG in the database.

In 29% of OGs, a research institute acts as the lead partner. Advisors, SMEs and farmers play a leading role in 17%, 15% and 11% of OGs respectively. NGOs are the lead partners in 5% of cases. Again, a large share of OGs (24%) is led by partners belonging to the 'Other' category, possibly again leading to an underestimation of the categories 'Advisor', 'SME' and 'NGO'.

Figure 8: Number of lead partners by category (% on total number of OGs)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP based on SFC data (updated 29/02/2024)

4.3 Results of the OG survey

As previously stated, **989 completed questionnaires** were collected through the OG survey from 24 Member States and the UK corresponding to **768 OG projects**. As expected, there is no survey contribution from the Member States not implementing the EIP-AGRI measure (i.e. Denmark and Luxembourg) and from the Member States not yet communicating EIP OG project data in SFC (i.e. Slovakia³⁷). There is also no survey response for Malta for which only one EIP project is recorded in the SFC database.

For Cyprus, a list of five OG project contacts was received from DG AGRI on 7 March 2024. The invitation to complete the survey was sent by email by the study team to all five OG coordinators on 11

March asking them to return the completed questionnaires by 15 March at the latest.

The **survey response rate based on the number of OG projects** for which survey response was obtained (768) **relative to the total number of OG projects** reported in the SFC database by 13 October 2023³⁸ (3 226) **is 23.8%**.

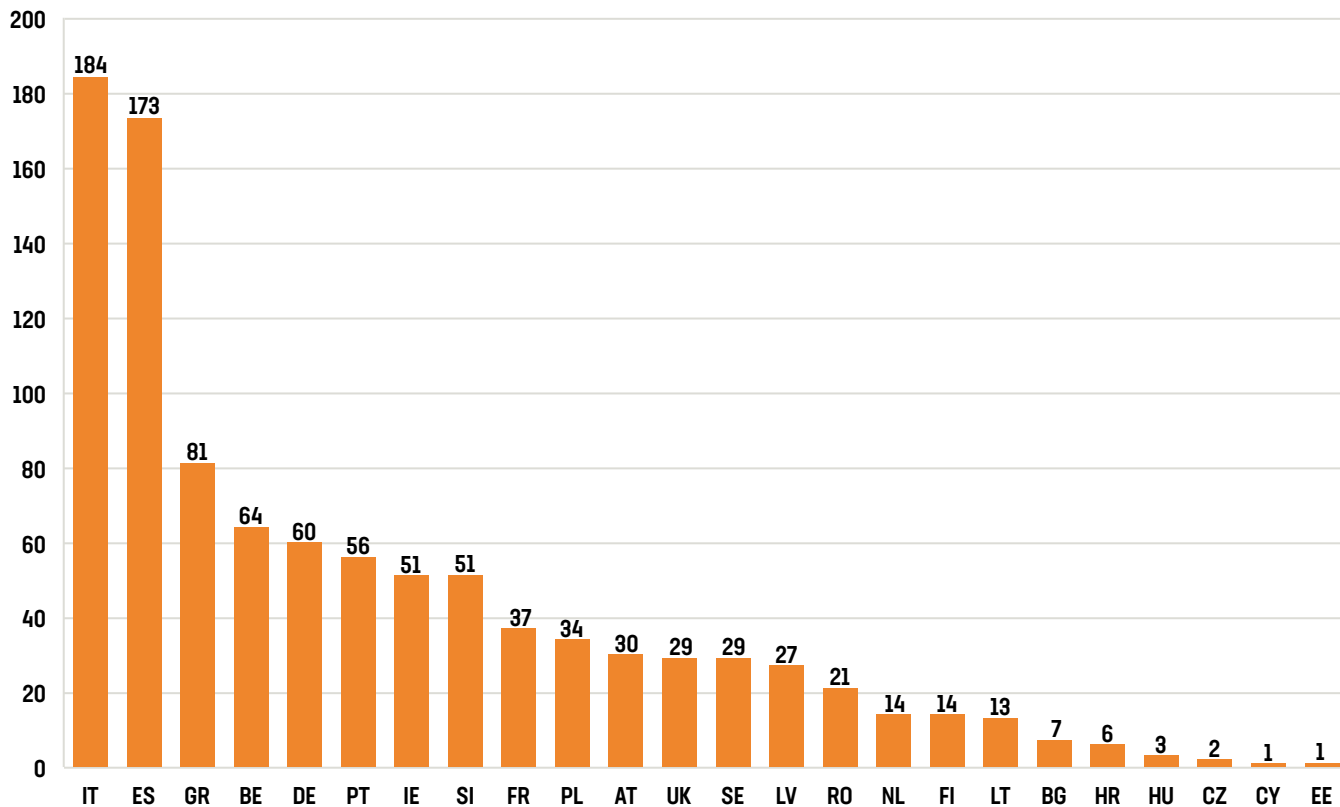
The main survey statistics are reported to provide an overview of the distribution of respondents by main characteristics such as distribution by Member State, by OG lead partners versus other OG partners, respondent category and sector.

³⁷ For this Member State, no email contacts were available at the time of launching the survey.

³⁸ The database from which email contacts for the survey were sourced.



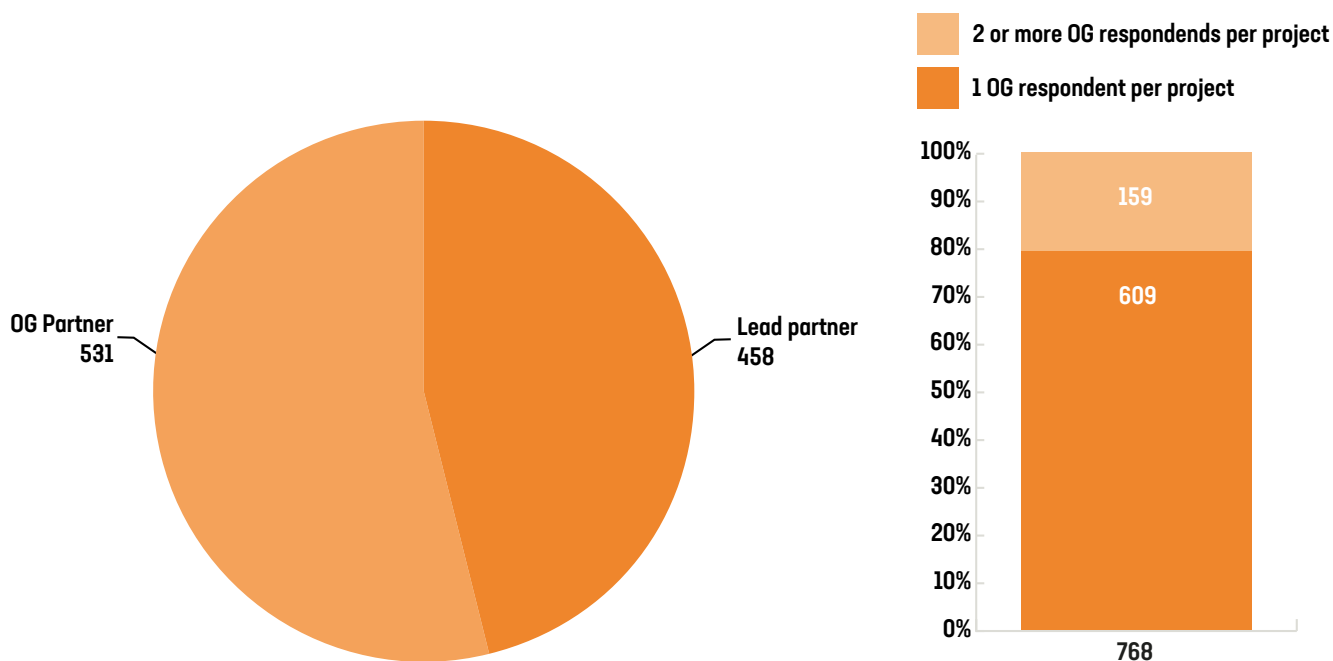
Figure 9: Distribution of OG survey responses by Member State



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)

As shown in the figure above, the survey has allowed coverage of OG projects across nearly all Member States, also including questionnaire responses from the UK. Some Member States appear to be more represented than others, Italy and Spain in particular, consistently with their relatively larger share of finalised EIP OG projects within the EU. As previously reported, according to SFC data, Italy and Spain account for 53.4% of the 903 completed OG projects (29 February 2024).

Figure 10: Distribution of OG survey responses by type of OG partner and number of responses per OG project



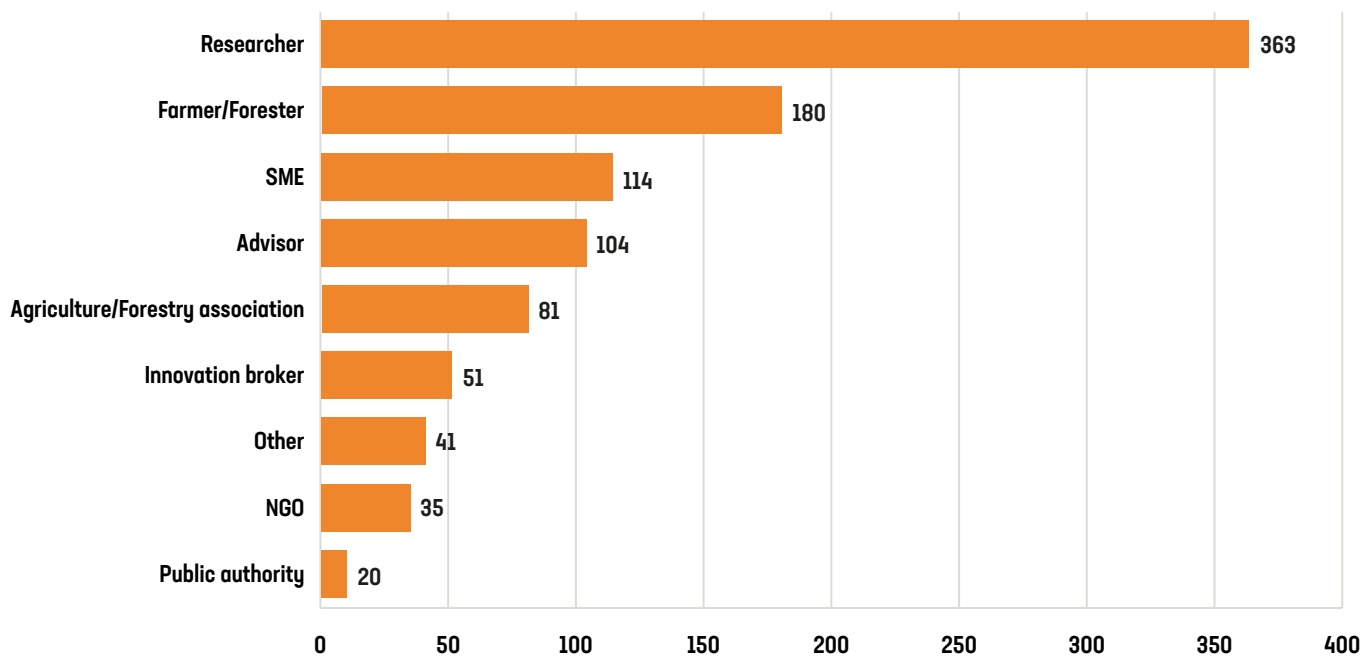
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)



Both OG lead partners and other OG partners are well represented in the OG survey. The analysis carried out to answer the three study questions provides further insight into a possible differentiation of survey responses between the two respondent groups (see [chapter 5](#)).

For most OG projects, the survey was completed only by one project partner. For about 20% of OG projects for which data were collected in the survey, responses were provided by two or more OG partners.

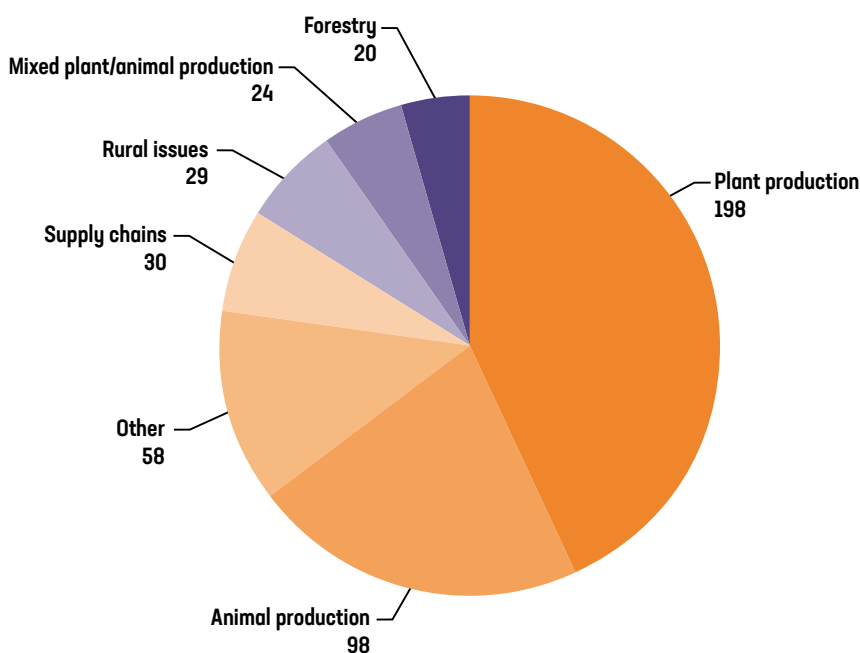
Figure 11: Distribution of OG survey responses by category of OG partner



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)

As shown in the figure above, the composition of the survey sample is clearly skewed towards the 'researcher' category. However, farmers/foresters seem to be well represented and all other OG partner categories are included.

Figure 12: Distribution of OG survey responses by sector (number) (*)

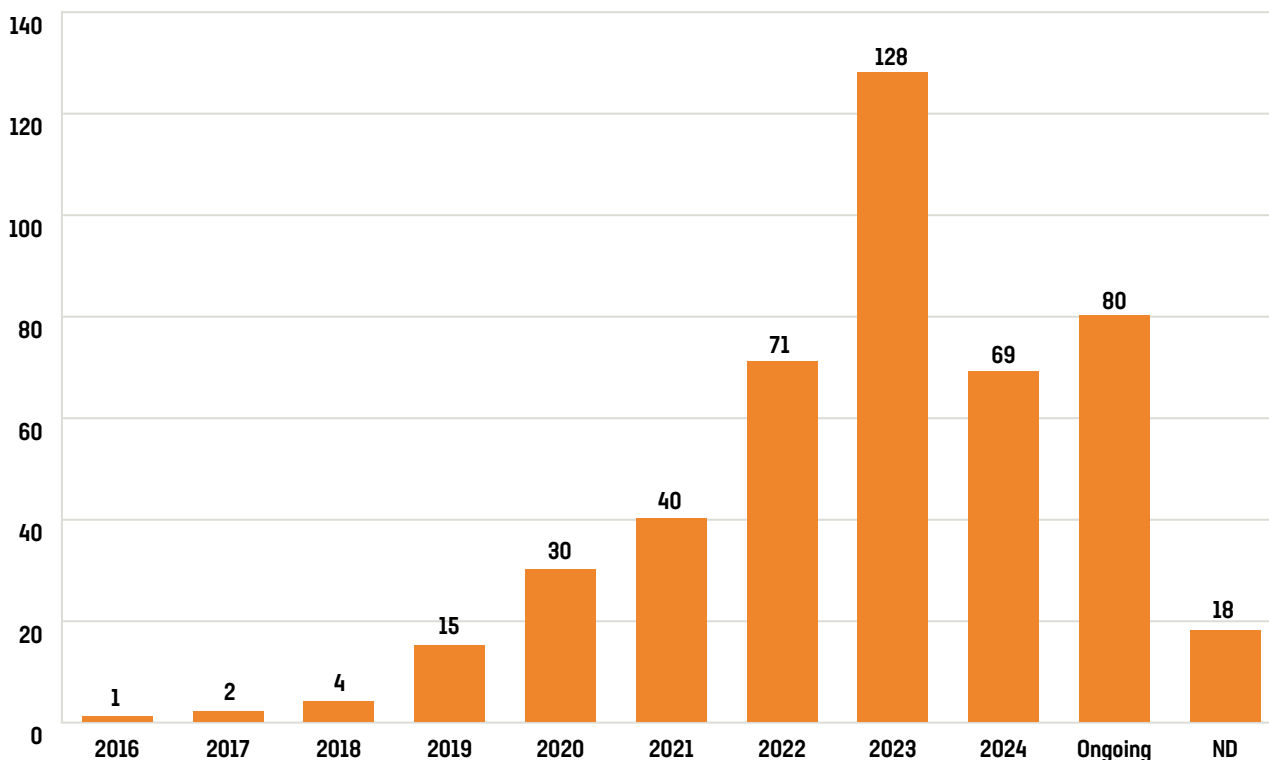


(*) Survey question is only for lead partners. N=457 survey responses
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of OG survey data



As shown in the above figure, OG projects related to crop production dominate the survey sample, followed by projects centred on animal production. All other sectors are however represented in the survey, albeit with smaller OG project numbers.

Figure 13: Distribution of replies according to OG projects year of completion (*)



(*) Survey question is only for lead partners. ND = Not determined (missing responses)
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of OG survey data (N=458 survey responses - Lead partners)

The majority of survey responses refer to OG projects that have been completed or are nearing completion. According to survey responses, only 17.5% of projects are still ongoing.

It is probably not surprising that most survey responses concern

more recent projects completed in the past couple of years (see [Figure 14](#)) and for which OG partnerships probably still exist. Relatively fewer responses were collected for older projects, perhaps due to some OGs having dissolved and/or email contacts no longer existing.

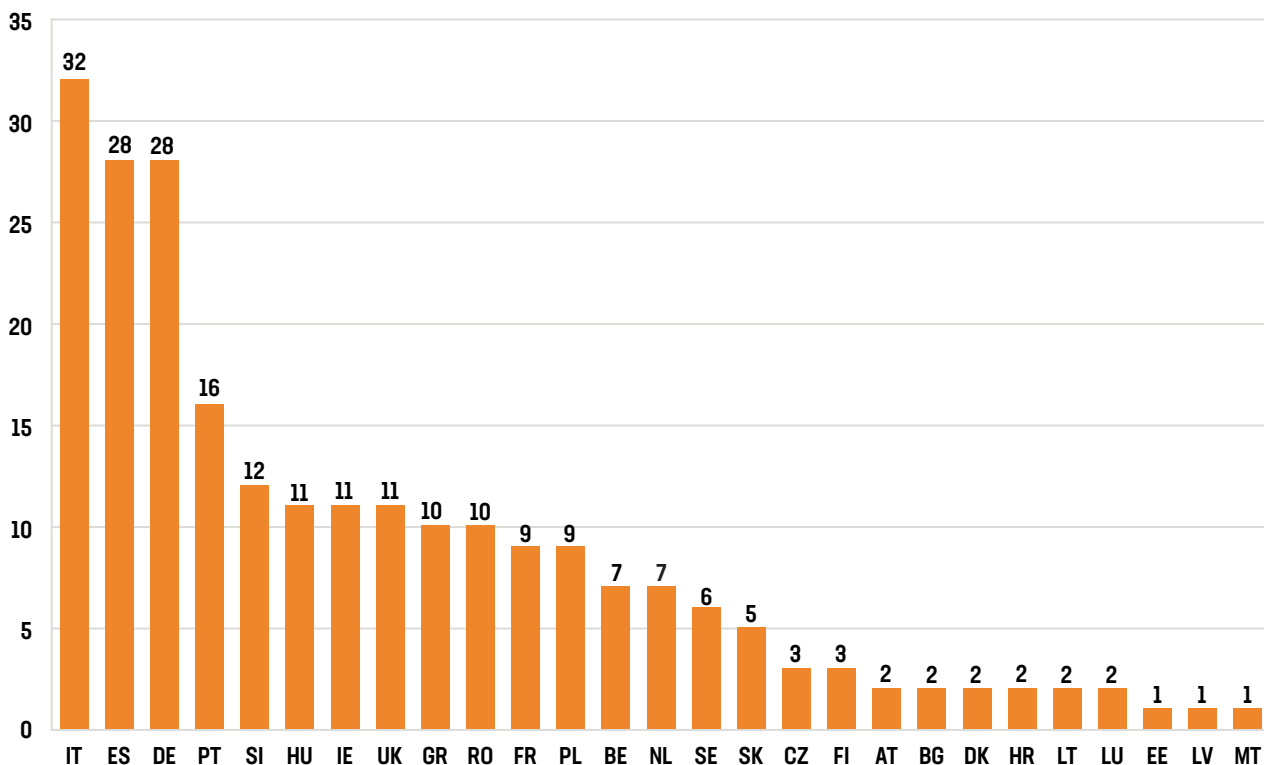
4.4 Results of the Stakeholder survey

A total of **233 completed stakeholder questionnaires** have been received. Given the breadth and composition of the contact list used to issue survey invitations, it is not possible to compute a meaningful survey response rate as it remains unknown how many of the given email contacts were indeed relevant for this specific survey.

The following pages show a few survey statistics to provide an overview of the distribution of respondents according to their main characteristics, such as distribution by Member State and respondent category.



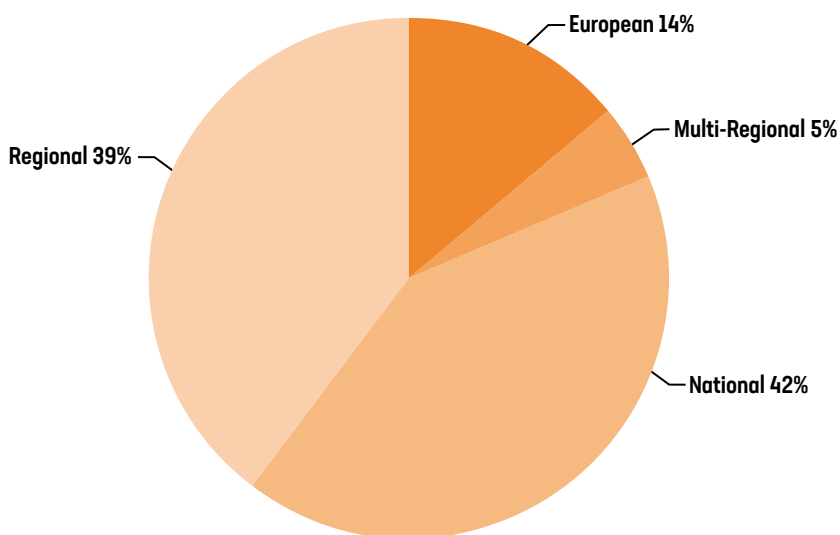
Figure 14: Distribution of Stakeholder survey responses by Member State



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP elaboration of Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses)

The survey is widely representative of the EU-27 as responses have been collected from innovation stakeholders across all Member States except Cyprus. The larger Member States, such as Italy, Spain and Germany, have a relatively larger share of respondents possibly due to the existence of regionalised programmes.

Figure 15: Stakeholder survey respondents by geographical level of expertise

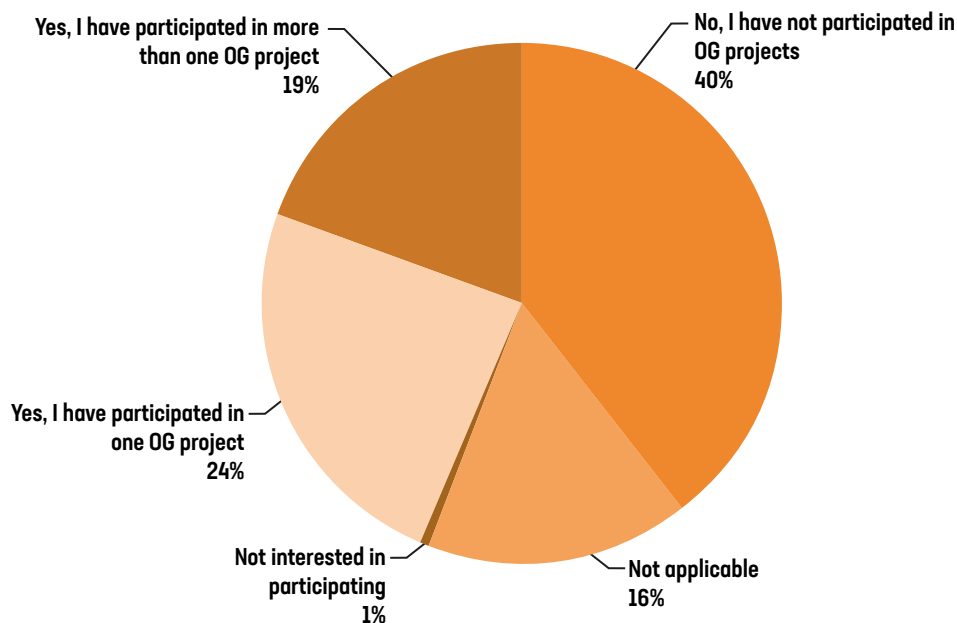


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses)

Most respondents operate at national, multi-regional or regional level. About 14% of respondents operate at the broader European level.



Figure 16: Stakeholder survey respondents by participation in EIP OG projects

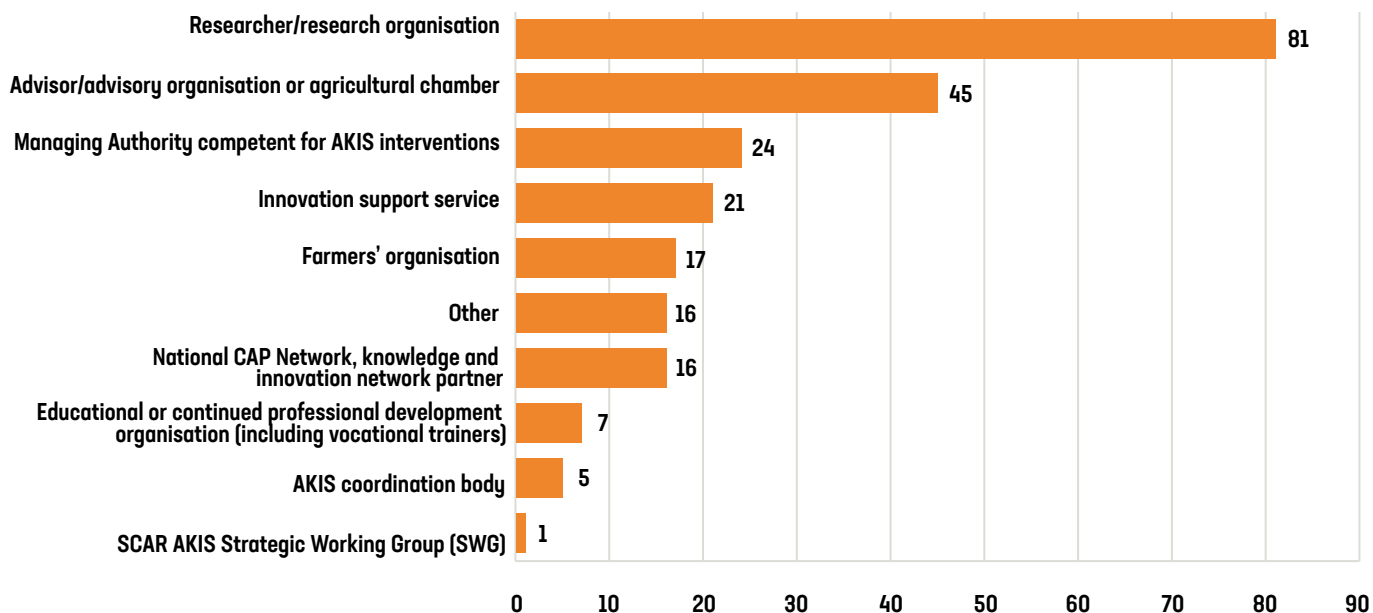


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=232 survey responses)

The above figure shows that although most stakeholder respondents operate outside EIP OGs, 43% have participated in at least one OG project. It is expected that this group of respondents replied to the Stakeholder survey with insights reflecting their ‘hands-on’ experience of OG projects, therefore somewhat complementary to OG survey responses.

Similarly to the OG survey, the ‘researcher/research organisation’ category overall dominates the Stakeholder survey sample (figure below). However, all other categories are represented in the survey, with advisors, representatives of innovation support services, public authorities, National CAP Networks and knowledge and innovation networks being somewhat better represented³⁹.

Figure 17: Distribution of Stakeholder survey respondents by category



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses)

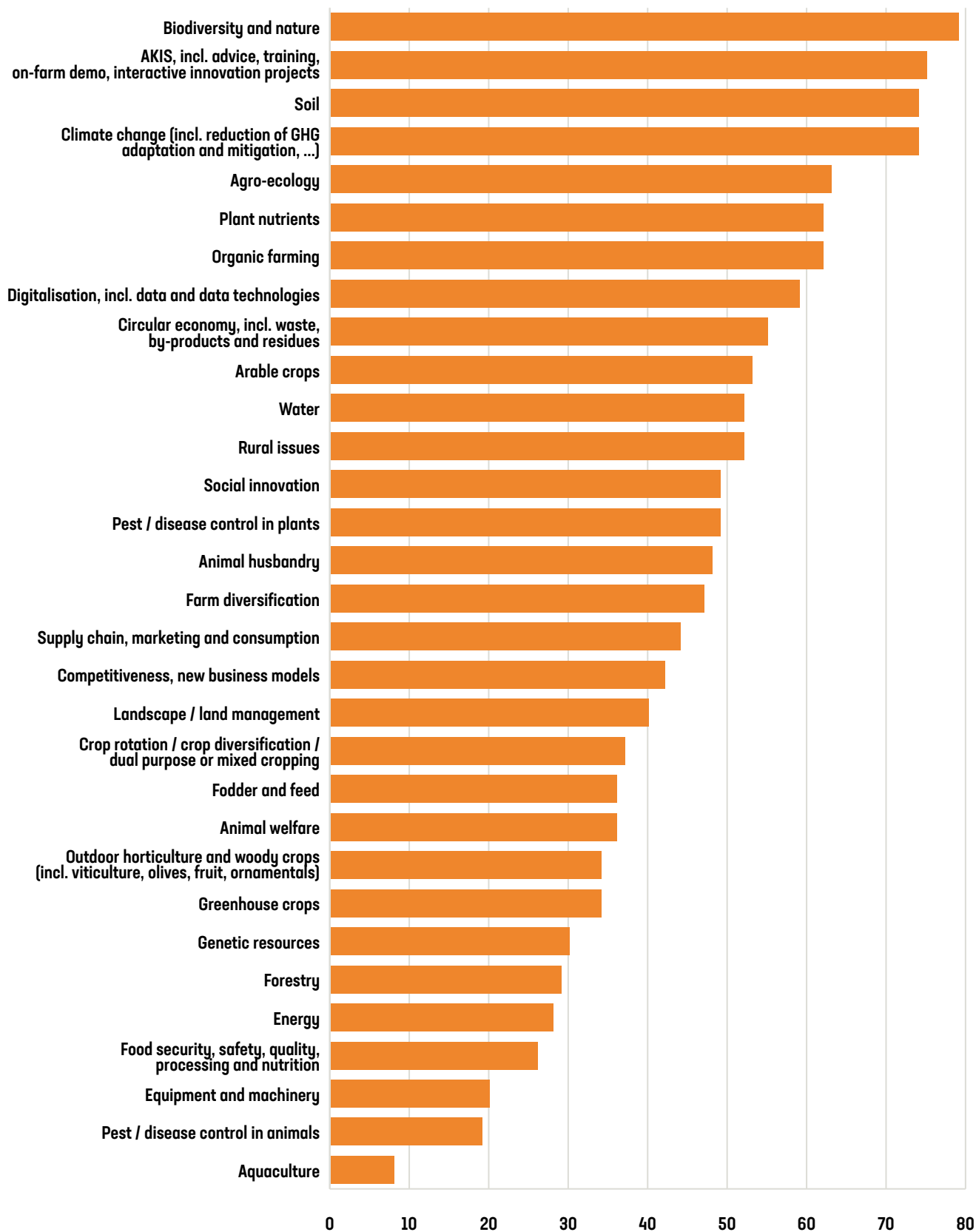
Stakeholder survey respondents were also asked to indicate their main areas of expertise using keywords (i.e. 31 keyword list). Respondents were allowed to select as many areas of expertise as they chose.

The figure below shows the distribution of answers according to the respondents’ areas of expertise. The most frequently mentioned expertise relates to climate change and environmental issues. However, unsurprisingly, 75 out of the 233 survey respondents report ‘AKIS, incl. advice, training, on-farm demo, interactive innovation projects’ as one of their main areas of expertise.

³⁹ In the questionnaire, respondents had to indicate only one category from a given list. We cannot therefore exclude that some stakeholders may have more than one function/profile.



Figure 18: Distribution of Stakeholder survey respondents by main area of expertise and/or interest regarding innovative solutions



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses)



5. Answers to study questions

5.1 Q1 - To what extent have EIP OG projects produced the expected outcomes: Project outcomes, wider uptake of innovation, community outcomes?

5.1.1 Description of study question 1

To answer this question, the study used two sub-questions to analyse the extent to which expected OG project outcomes were achieved. The analysis is based on the definition of project outcomes according to the three levels illustrated in section [2.2.1](#).

Q.1.1 -To what extent have EIP OG projects produced innovative solutions that were successfully tested by end users and spread beyond the project partnership?

The first sub-question examines the degree of success of innovative solutions that have been tested and spread by farmers/foresters of the OG.

The inception report identifies the factors to be considered in the analysis, for which the surveys as well as the case studies provide insights regarding:

- > OG projects for which the foreseen outputs and outcomes have been realised;
- > OG projects in which the innovative solution has been developed and tested;
- > OG projects classified by type of innovative solution;
- > OG projects for which the created project outcomes are implemented by farmers/foresters and/or other end-users outside the OG; and
- > steps undertaken by OG partners to spread and encourage the uptake of the innovation solution beyond the partnership.

Q1.2 - To what extent have OG projects succeeded in strengthening and widening communities and developing opportunities for further cooperation?

The second sub-question addresses the effects of EIP-AGRI and OG projects on the wider community beyond the project functioning and its outcomes. Central here is the extent to which the OGs succeeded in improving the overall (agricultural) innovation system and agricultural practice in their wider context and in the domain in which they were active.

Based on survey data as well as case studies, the analysis focuses on the following elements:

- > use of the OG outcomes by farmers/foresters and other end-users outside the OG or in new projects;
- > networking from OG projects with actors outside the partnership (farmers/end-users of the solutions and other actors);
- > development of follow-up projects and further development of project outcomes by OG partners;
- > types of collaboration between OGs and external actors;
- > involvement of OG partners in other projects thanks to the OG;
- > relations created between OG partners and other agricultural or research actors or networks through the functioning of the OG;
- > extension of the partnership to other actors, particularly farmers; and
- > OG project partners continue collaboration after the end of the project.

In order to answer Q1 and its two sub-questions, the following analytical framework is used.



Table 7: Analytical framework for answering Q1

Study question	Judgement criteria	Indicators/type of information	Data sources
Q1	1.1 OGs have produced the expected project outcomes	1.1.1 Number of projects that realised expected OG outputs and outcomes.	OG Survey Stakeholder survey
Q1.1	1.2 Innovative solutions have been created and tested within the OG partnership	1.2.1 Number of OGs in which the innovative solution has been developed and tested vs. cases in which the innovative solution was not implemented and why. 1.2.2. Number of innovative solutions developed by OG (by type): 1. Knowledge exchange 2. Product innovation 3. Service innovation 4. Technological innovation 5. Agronomic practices and process innovation 6. Organisational innovation 7. Rural social innovation 1.2.3 Opinions of OGs of the factors contributing to the co-creation of innovative solutions	OG Survey Case studies
Q1.1	1.3 Innovative solutions have been produced and spread outside the partnership	1.3.1 Number of OGs whose project outcomes are implemented by farmers/foresters and/or other end users outside the OG. 1.3.2 Evidence of steps undertaken by OG partners to spread and encourage the uptake of the innovation solution beyond the partnership: > dissemination > communication > advice and guidance > training on the OG outcomes > exchange with other relevant R&D projects about mutual results and outcomes > development of follow-up projects building on the project outcomes, commercialisation steps > other	OG Survey Case studies
Q1.2	1.4 OG projects have contributed to strengthening communities	1.4.1 Evidence of farmers/foresters and other end users outside the OG or new projects (i.e. Horizon 2020, Interreg, etc) that have made use of OG outcomes. 1.4.2 Number of OG projects that have networked with actors outside the partnership (farmers/end users of the solutions and other actors). 1.4.3 Number of OG partnerships that have developed follow-up projects and further developed project outcomes. 1.4.4 Types of collaboration between OGs and external actors.	OG Survey Stakeholder survey Case studies

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP



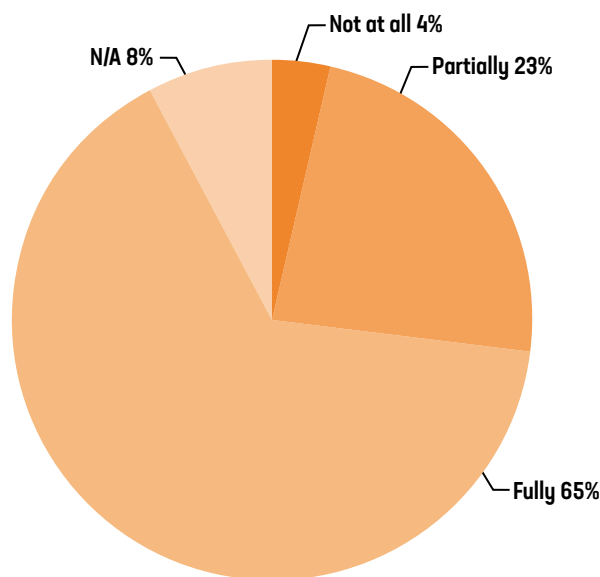
5.1.2 JC 1.1-JC 1.2 - OGs have produced the expected project outcomes and innovative solutions have been created and tested within OG partnerships

This section reports the results of the analysis carried out under the first two judgement criteria based on the information collected through the OG survey, the Stakeholder survey and case studies.

The OG survey shows that 65% of total respondents consider that their project has developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase, 23% of them consider that the project has partially reached the planned outcomes and only 4%

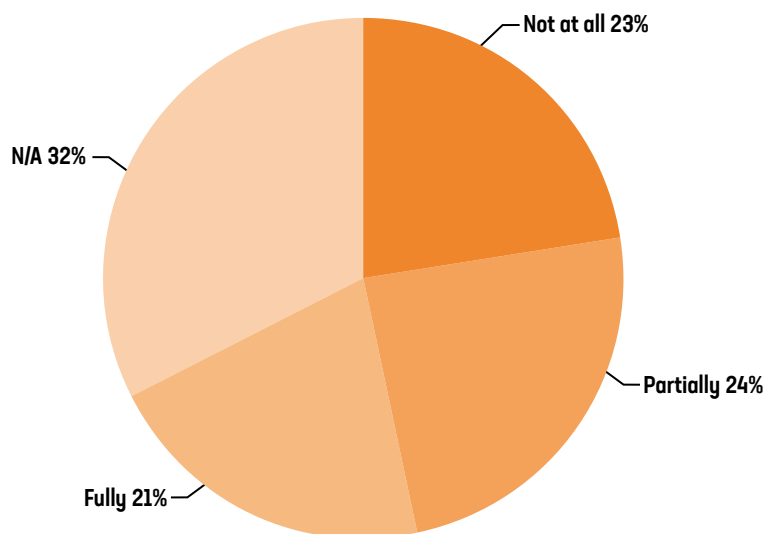
answer that the project has not at all reached the planned outcomes (Figure 19). Survey respondents were also asked whether their project had developed an innovative solution beyond or different from what was initially planned (Figure 20). About one fifth of respondents (21%) answered that their project had developed an innovative solution beyond or different from what was initially planned, 24% indicated that their project had partially developed an innovative solution beyond or different from what was initially planned, whereas 23% of respondents reported that their project did not develop an innovative solution beyond or different from what planned.

Figure 19: Extent to which OG projects have developed an innovative solution according to what was planned according to OG respondents (%)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=989 survey responses; N/A=I do not know)

Figure 20: Extent to which OG projects have developed an innovative solution beyond/different from what was planned according to OG respondents (%)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=989 survey responses; N/A=I do not know)

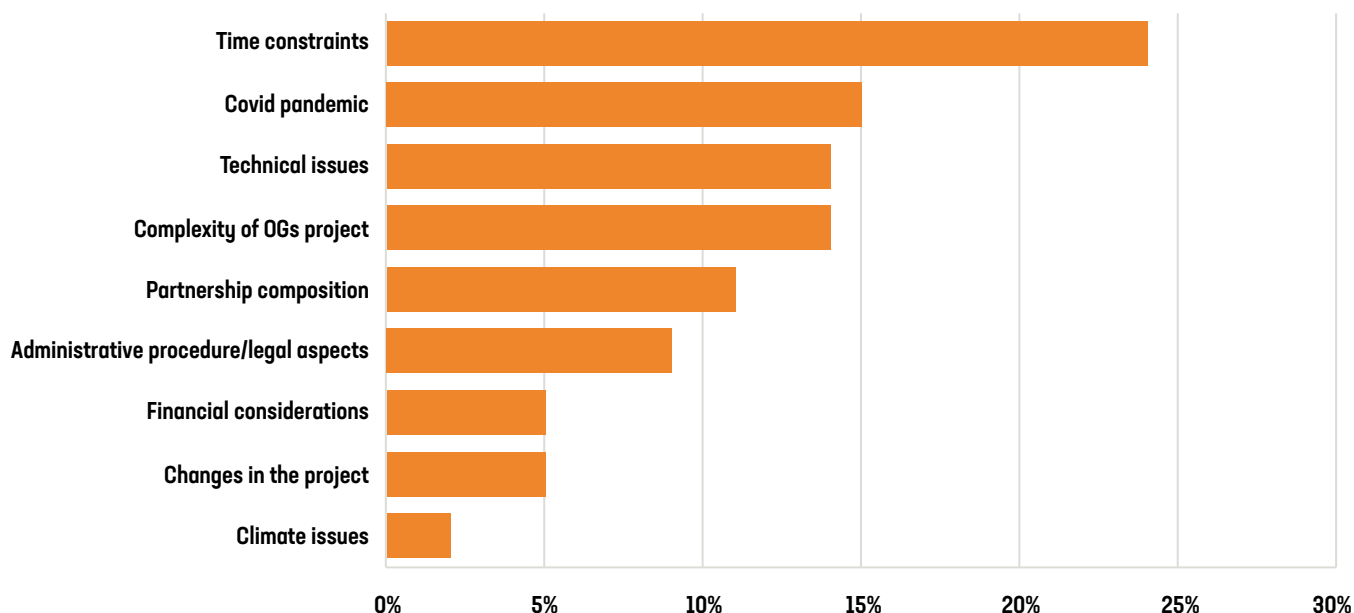


Responses provided by OG lead partners and other OG partners to the same survey question are overall consistent: 67% of lead partners and 63% of other partners consider that their project has developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase; planned results are partially reached for 23% of lead partners and 24% of other partners; only 2% of OG project leaders and 5% of other partners state that project outcomes were not achieved.

Responses from OG lead partners and other OG partners related to the extent to which their OG project had developed an innovative solution beyond or different from what was initially planned also appear to be quite consistent. Several factors have contributed to the OGs not achieving their objectives as defined in the application. A breakdown of the main reasons according to respondents indicating that their project has not reached or only partially reached the outcomes is illustrated in the figure below: **time constraints** (i.e. the project needed more time to achieve the planned outcomes)

seem to be the most prominent issue, indicating a need for better time management strategies and/or longer periods for OG projects to be foreseen in the call; the **complexity of the project** has posed challenges in execution, requiring more resources or expertise to overcome, as well as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, that has affected various aspects of project implementation (fieldwork and testing in particular) and **technical issues** (e.g. innovative solutions not performing as expected during testing) that needed to be further addressed. Other important factors were **partnership composition and dynamics** (i.e. insufficient expertise within the OG, poor coordination and insufficient cooperation among partners) and **administrative processes or legal aspects** (e.g. water quality requirements, restrictions in feed preparation, etc.) that played a role in project implementation. **Financial considerations** (i.e. the need for partners to pre-finance activities and difficulty in accessing funding), **project changes** required during implementation and **weather conditions** also impacted the project results.

Figure 21: Main reasons why the OG did not achieve planned outcomes (partly or fully) (% of responses)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=178 survey responses declaring the OG has not or only partially achieved planned outcomes)

The keywords that best describe the topic of OG projects that developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase (fully or partially) are largely linked to climate and environmental topics: climate change (including reduction of GHG, adaptation and mitigation, and other air related issues); digitalisation, including data and data technologies; biodiversity

and nature; soil; and agro-ecology. However, the table below clearly shows that all keywords are represented by OG projects for which survey responses were collected. Only 'Forestry', 'Pest/disease control in animals' and 'Aquaculture' are reported with lower recurrence.



Table 8: Keywords that best describe the topic of OG projects that fully or partially developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase (no. and %)

Keywords	Answers (no.)	Answers (%)
Climate change (incl. reduction of GHG adaptation and mitigation and other air related issues)	88	5%
Digitalisation (incl. data and data technologies)	87	5%
Biodiversity and nature	86	5%
Soil	77	5%
Agro-ecology	75	5%
Animal husbandry	72	4%
Pest/disease control in plants	71	4%
Equipment and machinery	70	4%
Competitiveness, new business models	70	4%
Water	66	4%
Organic farming	66	4%
Outdoor horticulture and woody crops (incl. viticulture, olives, fruit, ornamentals)	65	4%
Food security, safety, quality, processing and nutrition	64	4%
Animal welfare	58	4%
Plant nutrients	51	3%
Arable crops	51	3%
Supply chain, marketing and consumption	49	3%
Landscape/land management	47	3%
Farm diversification	47	3%
Circular economy (incl. waste, by-products and residues)	45	3%
Crop rotation/crop diversification/dual purpose or mixed cropping	35	2%
Fodder and feed	34	2%
AKIS (incl. advice, training, on-farm demos, interactive innovation projects)	34	2%
Social innovation	33	2%
Greenhouse crops	32	2%
Rural issues	31	2%
Genetic resources	29	2%

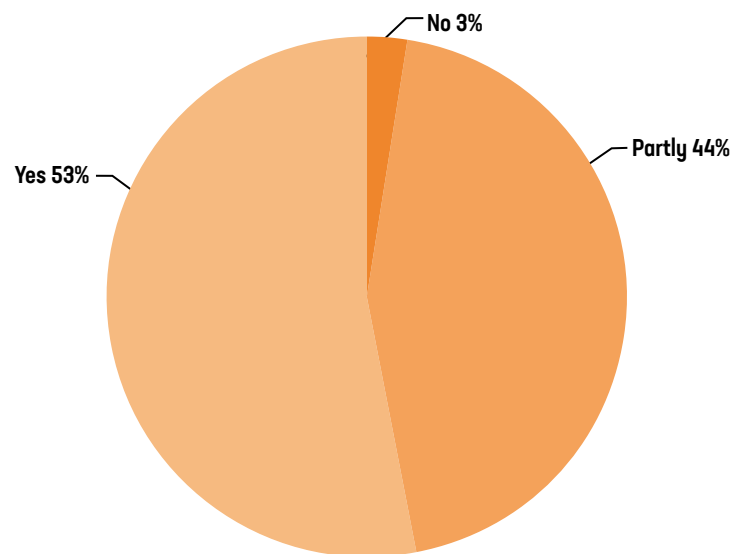


Keywords	Answers (no.)	Answers (%)
Energy	28	2%
Forestry	22	1%
Pest/disease control in animals	17	1%
Aquaculture	6	0%
TOTAL	1.606	100%

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP-OG survey data. The question was directed to lead partners only and they could select as many keywords as they saw appropriate

Compared to OG partners' judgements, the opinion of innovation stakeholders as to the achievement of EIP OG project outcomes appears to be slightly less positive. Just over half of surveyed stakeholders (53% of respondents) believe that OGs' innovation projects have yielded positive results and disseminated innovative solutions, another 44% believe that the objectives were only partly achieved and only 3% believe that they were not achieved at all (see [Figure 22](#)).

Figure 22: Extent to which OG innovation projects deliver successful outcomes and disseminate innovative solutions according to Stakeholder survey respondents (%)

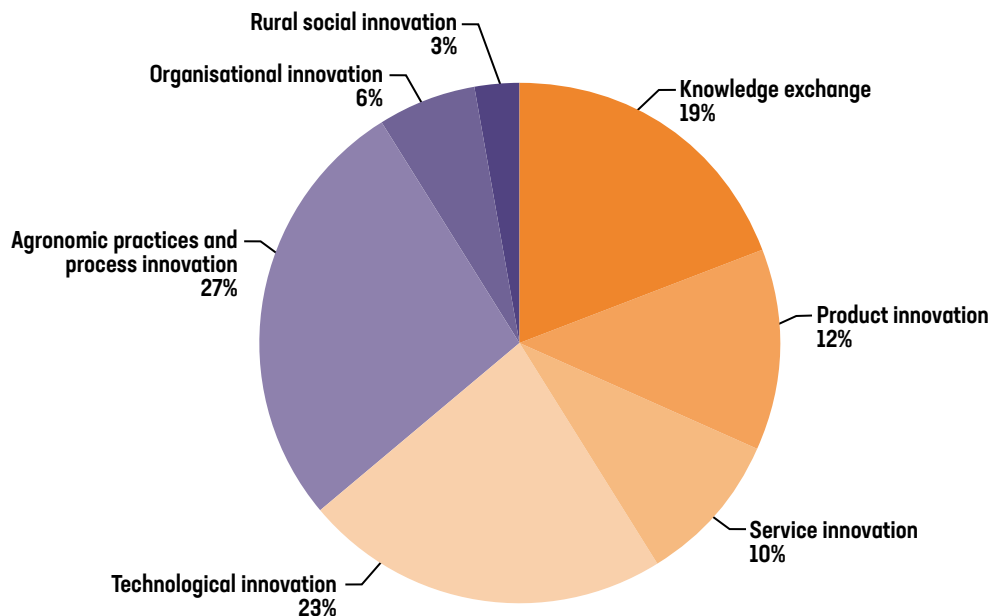


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=151 survey responses covering who answered YES to Q5: "Are there any active or completed EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects in your area of expertise or in your country?")

As shown in the [figure below](#), according to responses provided by OG lead partners, projects related to 'agronomic practices and process innovation' account for 27% of the innovative solutions developed by the surveyed OGs, 23% of the implemented solutions concern 'technological innovation' and 19% 'knowledge exchange'. 'product innovation' represents 12% of the solutions, 'service innovation' 10%, 'organisational innovation' 6% and 'rural social innovation' only 3%.



Figure 23: Type of innovative solution developed by OG projects* (%)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=458 survey responses – OG lead partners)
*Multiple answers allowed

Table 9 below provides further details for the different types of innovative solutions developed by OG projects within the proposed categories, according to answers provided by surveyed OG lead partners. Respondents were allowed to select up to three categories of innovative solutions and, for each category, up to two types of innovative solutions.

Based on survey responses, most innovative solutions are classified under the agronomic practices and process innovation category (232 in total), the technological innovation category (191), the knowledge exchange category (164) and the product innovation category (105). Service innovation, organisational innovation and rural social innovation are less frequently indicated categories.

Within the knowledge exchange category, respondents identified tools/materials such as the production of toolboxes, information brochures, databases, guidelines (66%), and services, such as training, consultancy, etc. (79%) as results of their OG project. Within the product innovation category, OGs realised both new

inputs (bio stimulants, genetic resources, new plant varieties) and new outputs (especially new products). Regarding Service innovation, respondents mainly chose Agricultural service (70%) and Agrifood service (21%), while for technological innovation, outcomes refer both to mechanical technology and digital technology and among 'other' outcomes is the application of biotechnology tools, novel chemical process, prototypes, etc. In the area of agronomic practices and process innovation, 47% created innovation in crop management, 16% in nature-oriented agriculture, 14% concerned agroecology, 13% integrated pest management and 12% the circular economy, including waste, by-products and residues. Finally, new forms of collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders (67%) and value chain innovation (41%) play an important role among organisational innovations, while in rural social innovation, educational projects (e.g. rural classrooms) concerned 32% of the OGs and the other forms of innovation i.e. community-oriented farming, entrepreneurship and new employment opportunities, and social farming concerned on average 20% of the OGs surveyed.



Table 9: Categories and types of innovative solutions developed by OG projects (no;%)

Category of innovative solution	Type of innovative solution	Answer (no.)	Answer* (% total for the category)
1. Knowledge exchange	a. Tools/Materials (e.g. toolboxes, brochures, information databases/platforms, guidelines, etc.)	108	66%
	b. Service (e.g. training, advice, knowledge exchange, discussion groups, knowledge hubs, back-offices etc.)	129	79%
	c. Other	4	2%
	Total	164	100%
2. Product innovation	a. Input (e.g. fertilisers, bio stimulants, new plant varieties or improved animal genetics, feed additives, etc.)	59	56%
	b. Output (e.g. new products, such as bio-based products, new protein for human consumption, etc.)	57	54%
	Total	105	100%
3. Service innovation	a. Agricultural service	56	70%
	b. Agri-food service	17	21%
	c. Non-agricultural service (e.g. agritourism; recreation)	7	9%
	d. Other	13	16%
	Total	80	100%
4. Technological innovation	a. Mainly mechanical technology (e.g. weeding machine, radiometers, sensors, etc.)	83	43%
	b. Mainly digital technology (e.g. apps, mobile technologies and devices, data management, digital platforms, GPS, etc.)	102	53%
	c. Other technology	39	20%
	Total	191	100%
5. Agronomic practices and process innovation	a. Animal husbandry	24	10%
	b. Crop management	110	47%
	c. Mixed farming	6	3%
	d. Forestry	8	3%
	e. Agro-food processing	23	10%
	f. Circular economy, incl. waste, by-products, residues	27	12%
	g. Nature oriented farming	37	16%
	h. Conservation/Regenerative agriculture	24	10%



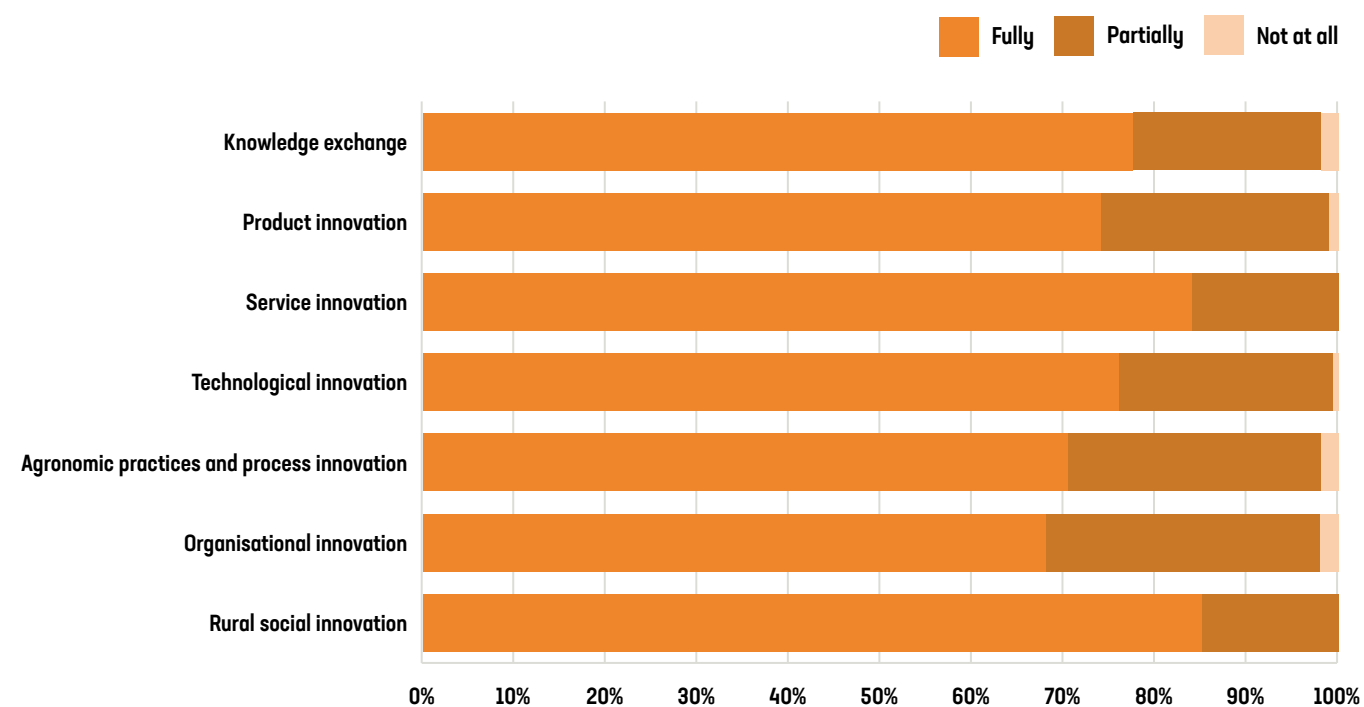
Category of innovative solution	Type of innovative solution	Answer (no.)	Answer* (% total for the category)
5. Agronomic practices and process innovation	i. Agroecology	33	14%
	j. Agroforestry	6	3%
	k. Integrated pest management	29	13%
	l. Biological control	12	5%
	m. Hydroponics or aeroponics	1	0%
	n. Other	14	6%
	Total	232	100%
6. Organisational innovation	a. New forms of collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders	34	67%
	b. New forms of collaboration among farmers/foresters, for instance resource sharing	8	16%
	c. Value chain innovation	21	41%
	d. Other organisational	5	10%
	Total	51	100%
7. Rural social innovation	a. Community-oriented farming (e.g. community supported agriculture, allotments, etc.)	5	23%
	b. Entrepreneurship and new employment opportunities	5	23%
	c. Social farming (e.g. integrating disabled people in farms)	5	23%
	d. Educational projects (e.g. rural classes)	7	32%
	e. Other	6	27%
	Total	22	100%

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=458 survey responses - OG Lead partners)
*Multiple answers allowed

In the graph below, the degree to which OG projects achieved their planned objectives was assessed according to the type of created innovative solution. **For all categories of innovative solutions, the share of OG projects fully achieving the planned outcomes is overall high** (roughly 70-80%), however **projects under service innovation and rural social innovation appear to perform better in achieving their objectives.**



Figure 24: Extent to which OG projects reached the planned objectives by category of innovative solution (%)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=458 survey responses - OG Lead partners)

5.1.3 JC 1.3 - Innovative solutions have been spread outside the OG partnerships

Whether it is classified as knowledge exchange, product innovation, service innovation, technological innovation, agronomic practices and process innovation, organisational innovation or rural social innovation, an outcome becomes an innovation if it is widely adopted/implemented and it proves useful in practice.

According to the OG survey, 64% of respondents state that the project outcome has been implemented by farmers/foresters or other end users. Only 9% of responses state that their project outcome has not been implemented, 21% do not know (i.e. mostly other OG partners) and a further 6% do not provide an answer to the survey question (see Table 10). Responses of OG lead partners and of other partners appear to be overall consistent.

Table 10: Implementation by farmers/foresters/other end users of project outcomes

Response	Respondent	No.	%	Total no.
Yes	Lead partner	299	47%	631
	OG partner	332	53%	
No	Lead partner	52	57%	91
	OG partner	39	43%	
I do not know	Lead partner	80	38%	210
	OG partner	130	62%	
No reply	Lead Partner	27	47%	57
	OG partner	30	53%	

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)



According to the case studies, the main factor facilitating the implementation of project results by farmers/foresters/other end users can be found in the existence of already established partnerships because partners were already active in previous projects. This confirms the findings of previous studies carried out in Italy (Lattanzio KIBS, 2022; Rete Rurale Nazionale, 2022) where partnerships were found to have the possibility to continue improving the innovative idea after the end of the project. Another successful element is the presence of producer organisations in the partnership who have the opportunity to share the project results with the members of the organisation outside the OG partnership (i.e. Bulgaria, ES-Pais Vasco). Finally, a factor facilitating the implementation of the project is the possibility for farmers in the OG partnership to exchange information and interact with other farmers who are also part of the project (i.e. FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté) as farmers would not have the same opportunity outside of OG projects.

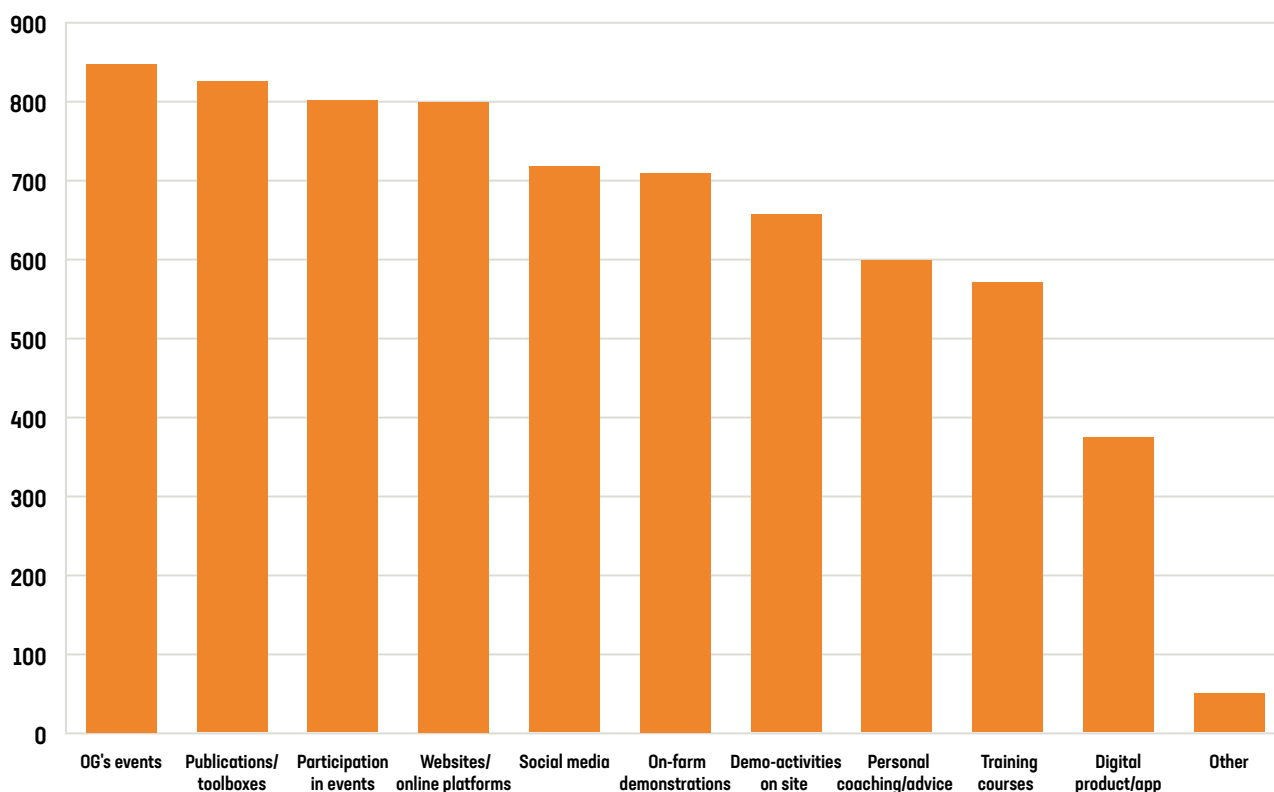
Furthermore, the **promotion of project results through events or dissemination** in general (i.e. Ireland and Poland) and on-farm demonstrations (i.e. IT-Liguria and Lithuania) **are successful elements**. One case study also reports that the **lack of technicians (i.e. advisors) or, in any case, the inadequacy of the training and**

advisory system severely limited the dissemination potential of proposed innovations in the area (i.e. IT-Liguria).

The effectiveness of different communication/dissemination channels is perceived as a factor to be emphasised. The combination of research, practice, counselling and training is good practice for the further development of project ideas, innovation and practice. The interviewees indicated that some of the **more frequently used channels for dissemination of outcomes to other farmers and foresters** include **video tutorials, training courses and seminars, events and workshops, websites and social media, articles in farmers' newspapers, technical publications, practice sheets, information brochures, information leaflets, meetings to present results to focal groups, and field trials and farm demonstrations.**

OG survey respondents stated that their OG used different types of dissemination channels to spread and encourage the uptake of the innovation solutions beyond the partnership (see [Figure 25](#)). The most widely used channels were events organised by the OG (86% of respondents), publications/toolboxes (83%), and participation in events and websites/online platforms (81% each), with digital product/app for practitioners (38%) being the least used.

Figure 25: Use of tools to communicate the project and encourage the use of the innovative solution (total number)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=989 survey responses). Respondents could indicate as many communication tools as appropriate

The analysis of communication and dissemination of project outcomes is further developed under Q2.



5.1.4 JC 1.4 - OG projects have contributed to strengthening communities and developed opportunities for further cooperation

The analysis in this part provides insight into the extent to which OGs have collaborated with other entities beyond the partnership. Table 11 below shows that 50-60% of projects have collaborated with other entities outside the partnership. This result suggests that many projects look to extend their functioning beyond the partnership and take steps to do so, even though developing relations for such cooperation was clearly very difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study did not obtain further insights into planned collaborations, as they may take place in the future. Some of the case studies do indicate that it is not common practice for MAs to stimulate

structured cooperation with other entities or projects and it has often been initiated by the OG project itself (i.e. Bulgaria, Austria and IT-Liguria).

The extent to which MAs facilitate extending relations beyond the partnership varies across Member States. In some cases, collective meetings, seminars, etc. are organised to connect the project with partners (i.e. the Netherlands and ES-Pais Vasco). There are also a few cases that indicate that their project, despite a general dissemination obligation for OGs, does not lend itself very well to cooperation with other entities during the project, as the foreseen solution is intended to be developed in a closed circuit before it enters the dissemination phase (i.e. Portugal and Sweden).

Table 11: Collaboration of OG projects with other entities

Results		
Yes	541	54.8%
No	324	32.8%
I do not know	94	9.5%
No reply	30	3.0%
Total	988	100%

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=988 survey responses)

The main external partners of OGs are other agricultural actors, as well as research institutes within the project's own region/country. Out of the 989 OG survey respondents, 45% indicate that they work or plan to work together with agricultural actors and 32% with research institutes.

Other cooperation partners are much less prevalent. Apparently, only 15% are connected to other OG projects in the same region and collaboration with actors in other countries did not happen

too often in the first years of the 2014-2020 period. Still, for local projects such as OGs, having already 12.7% of agricultural actors and 5% of OGs collaborating across borders is an achievement. A few OGs indicate to have cooperated with SMEs/private companies.

[Table 12](#) shows the reported collaborations by type of entity with responses of OG lead partners being quite consistent with those of other OG partners.

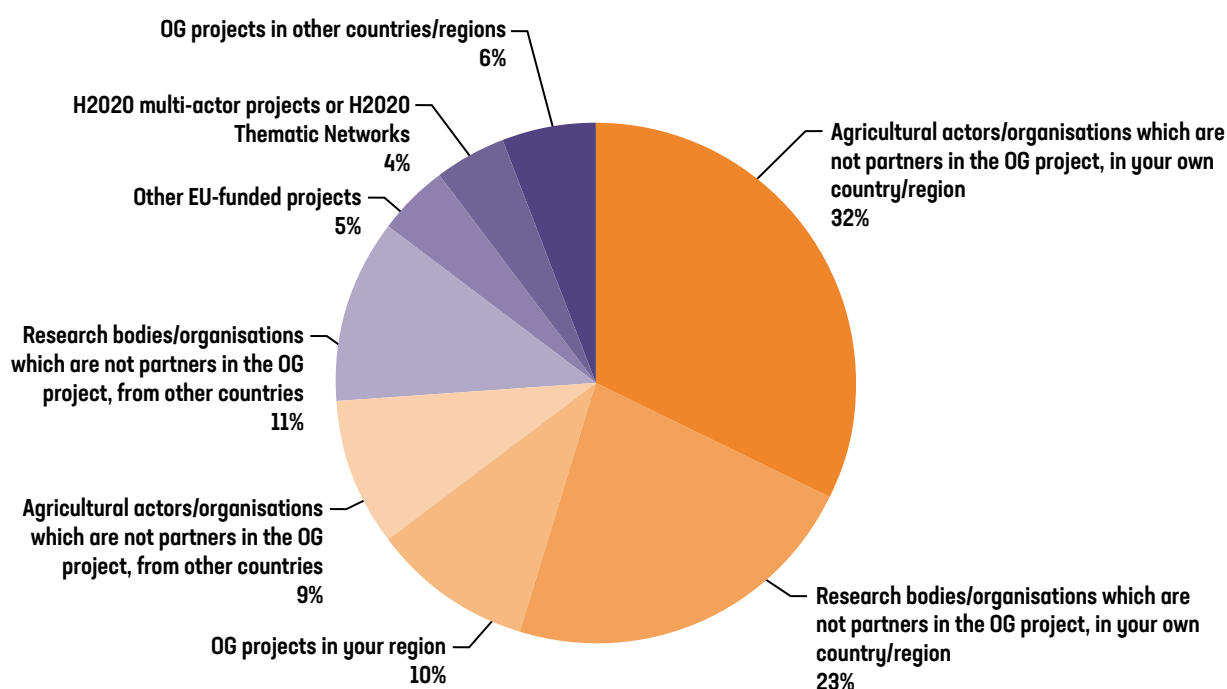


Table 12: Entities with which the OG project has collaborated or is planning to collaborate

Entities	Total		Lead partners	Other OG partners
Agricultural actors/organisations which are not partners in the OG project, in your own country/region	447	45.2%	209	238
Research bodies/organisations which are not partners in the OG project, in your own country/region	316	32%	145	171
OG projects in your region	153	15.5%	64	61
Agricultural actors/organisations which are not partners in the OG project, from other countries	125	12.7%	60	48
Research bodies/organisations which are not partners in the OG project, from other countries	108	10.9%	73	80
Other EU-funded projects	82	8.3%	29	21
H2020 multi-actor projects or H2020 Thematic Networks	52	5.3%	28	24
OG projects in other countries/regions	50	5.1%	37	45

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)

Figure 26: Entities with which the OG project has collaborated or is planning to collaborate (overall OG survey)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=458 survey responses – Lead partners)

Information on the type of collaboration provides some more colour to the overall share of **OGs that have cooperated beyond the OG project**. The collaboration mostly focuses on (informal) exchange of knowledge and expertise, while in a substantial number of cases, this already includes **joint participation (27%) or organisation of events (17%)**. Such activities seem to take place for the communication and dissemination of results beyond the partnership, which obviously is a positive effect of the EIP-AGRI framework.



Table 13: Types of collaboration OGs engage in

Type of collaboration	Total		Lead partners	Other OG partners
Exchange of knowledge/expertise	441	44.6%	230	211
Joint participation in events organised by others	268	27.0%	130	138
Informal regular contact	235	23.8%	110	125
Co-organisation of events	170	17.2%	85	85
Informal limited (one-off or targeted) contact	145	14.7%	59	86
Planned, but not concrete yet	75	7.6%	39	36
Other	19	1.8%	13	6

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)

In terms of further development, **upscaling and transfer of OG project outcomes, the survey shows that the OGs themselves see a large potential and are also eager to take steps to realise this. Three quarters of respondents (76%) indicate that project results create new development opportunities and/or can be implemented on a larger scale** (with a score over 4 on a scale of 1 to 5) and 70% of them see potential for implementation in another context than the

project (score close to 4). This is confirmed by case studies, although a few of them mention the difficulty of scaling up or replicating the project outcomes in different contexts, as the developed innovative solution has a very specific purpose in a certain local area or because the regulatory framework would need adapting (ES-Cataluña, FR-Bourgogne, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Sweden).

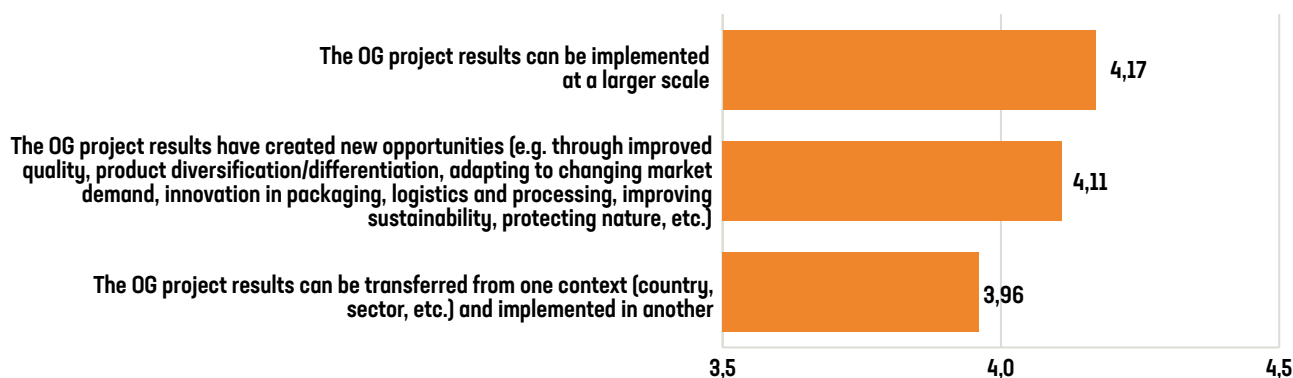
Table 14: Further development of OG project outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	4+5 (%)	Total no. responses	N/A
The OG project results have created new opportunities (e.g. through improved quality, product diversification/differentiation, adapting to changing market demand, innovation in packaging, logistics and processing, improving sustainability, protecting nature, etc.)	13	36	172	339	383	76.6%	943	46
The OG project results can be implemented at a larger scale	11	48	162	266	452	76.5%	939	50
The OG project results can be transferred from one context (country, sector, etc.) and implemented in another	39	65	166	277	380	70.9%	927	62

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses). Scale from 1 (to no extent at all) to 5 (to a very large extent). N/A: Not applicable



Figure 27: Further development of OG project outcomes



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=927, N=939 and 943 survey responses respectively for the three items top to bottom). Scale from 1 (to no extent at all) to 5 (to a very large extent)

There seems to be quite a lot of follow-up activity after the end of projects – about half of the OGs work to a (very) large extent either on further development of outcomes or on follow-up projects (or both). Less than 10% do not do this at all (8% follow-up projects; 4.5% further development of outcomes).

Case studies confirm the general high interest to continue the development started, and almost all of them have taken steps to follow-up their project in some form, either through a tangible outcome that is widely available for the target group/community, or through further development of the outcome internally or in another project (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, ES-Pais Vasco, FR-Bourgogne, IT-Liguria, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal).

However, the question remains open whether this will indeed effectively lead to actual further projects and results, even if the data confirm enthusiasm for follow-up actions.

Remarkably, **35% of projects indicate that they also take steps to commercialise the project outcome** (to a large/very large extent) – only 15% do not aim at commercialisation at all. This indicates that the potential to develop the outcome into upscaled solutions and applications is certainly there, according to the project partners, to be realised outside of the scope of the project (see also Stegmann, 2022). However, this would probably require the involvement of other types of funding (more commercially oriented, such as SME funding instruments) other partners (e.g. marketeers) and other processes than the OG project setting.

Important and interesting is that **many projects have also developed guidelines or tools that are available to other farms free of charge and thus support the transfer of knowledge to a wider audience**. This helps **accelerate further innovation and knowledge flows within AKIS, contributes to the culture of cooperation and innovation, enhances training and advice**, and thus, to the overall knowledge and innovation system (DE-Hessen, ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, Ireland, the Netherlands). Furthermore, some of the cases show that the project results are translated into **policy recommendations** and disseminated to policymakers and other stakeholders (DE-Hessen, Ireland).

Dissemination and wider uptake of technological applications and solutions beyond the projects remain a point of attention.

The wider spreading of innovations developed in OG projects and desired community effects can possibly be strengthened even more. At the time that the surveyed OG projects were running, there were no specific mechanisms in place to connect different OGs and the NRNs were mostly active in raising awareness for OGs. This finding is aligned with what was reported by a recent evaluation study on CAP's impact on knowledge exchange and advisory activities (European Commission, 2020). Currently, with the 2023-2027 CAP, the actions of the National CAP Networks in the framework of Member States' AKIS strategies are expected to have an overall strengthening effect with regard to dissemination and wider application of OG outcomes. The 2023-2027 approach under Horizon Europe also includes new concepts, such as advisory networks and thematic networks, built on OGs introduced in 2021, of which a number of projects are currently running. Moreover, several Horizon projects are now dedicated to learning from AKIS knowledge flow actions (e.g. for AKIS coordination bodies how to tackle their tasks and give them practical examples, for innovation support services training and exchanges on which tools to use, an EU database for sharing knowledge across the EU, etc). These inputs may probably not yet be sufficiently known to National CAP Networks as the AKIS strategies are only starting up now.

Some projects may be relatively small in scale to immediately reach a substantially wider audience beyond the direct network of the project partners. Therefore, dissemination and communication of results within the AKIS through professional channels (e.g. advisors, trainers) should become a common practice.

Specific initiatives for demonstration and sharing outcomes could be a solution, as agricultural innovation remains a small-scale endeavour to be developed in close interaction with farmers and their individual daily practices (the Netherlands, Poland). Strengthening the connectivity of OGs within the AKIS supported by specific funding for sharing outcomes, also beyond the project period, and for more than one OG, would help.

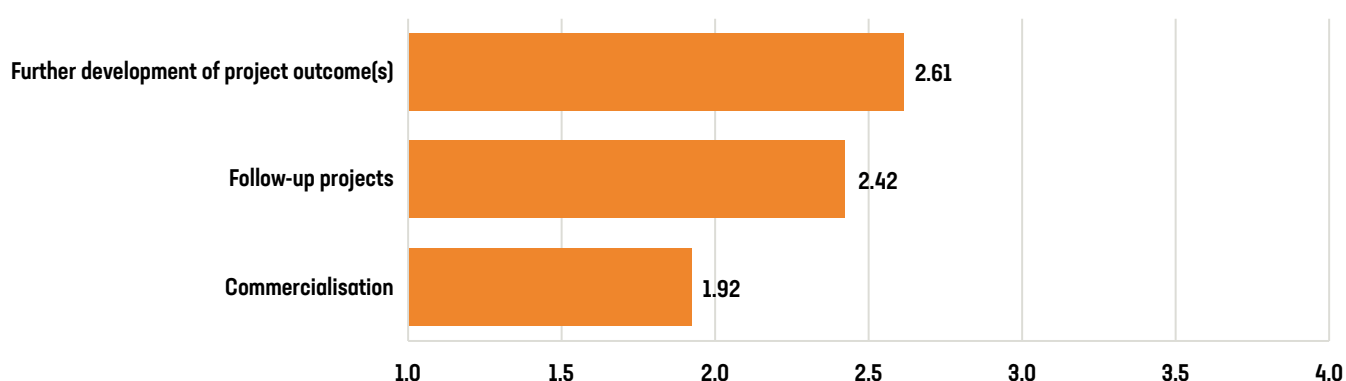


Table 15: Follow-up steps for improving or further expanding the project outcomes

	Follow-up projects	Further development of project outcome(s)	Commercialisation
To a very large extent	182	204	109
To a large extent	224	258	148
Share 'large + very large extent'	49.3%	55.0%	35.1%
To some extent	244	264	192
To a small extent	107	76	140
To no extent at all	66	38	143
TOTAL	823	840	732
Not applicable + no answer	166	149	257

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses) (Values: 0 (to no extent at all), 1 (to a small extent), 2 (to some extent), 3 (to a large extent) and 4 (to a very large extent))

Figure 28: The extent to which OGs have developed concrete follow-up steps for improving or further expanding the project outcomes



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (988 survey responses) (Values: 0 (to no extent at all), 1 (to little extent), 2 (to some extent), 3 (to a large extent) and 4 (to a very large extent))

Finally, **the survey indicates the clear appetite and actions by OG partners to stay involved in collaboration with the other partners.** Less than 10% of respondents have stopped fully collaborating after the project. There is of course a substantial share of respondents – about one third – for which this question is not applicable or answerable, but still **over 50% of respondents continued working together in some form after the end of the project.** These cases indeed show that although the project partnership was disbanded after the project, the involved actors are often still in contact and cooperate on the same or on another theme (Austria, Germany, ES-Cataluña, FR-Bourgogne, Ireland, IT-Liguria, Poland, Portugal, Sweden). The project case MERLIN (IT-Liguria) will continue in an interregional project under the ALCOTRA programme with French partners, building further on the created 'Renewable Energy Communities'.

It is important to note here that **partners and beneficiaries experience the added value of cooperating towards innovation,** leading to follow-up activities and own initiatives, as well as an enlargement of groups and entities involved in such projects and thus of the overall system (ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, Germany, the Netherlands).

As to be expected, several cases express the difficulty of maintaining active contacts with the farmers involved in the project, as often they are obliged to put their primary focus on day-to-day business for viability reasons (ES-Pais Vasco, the Netherlands, Poland).



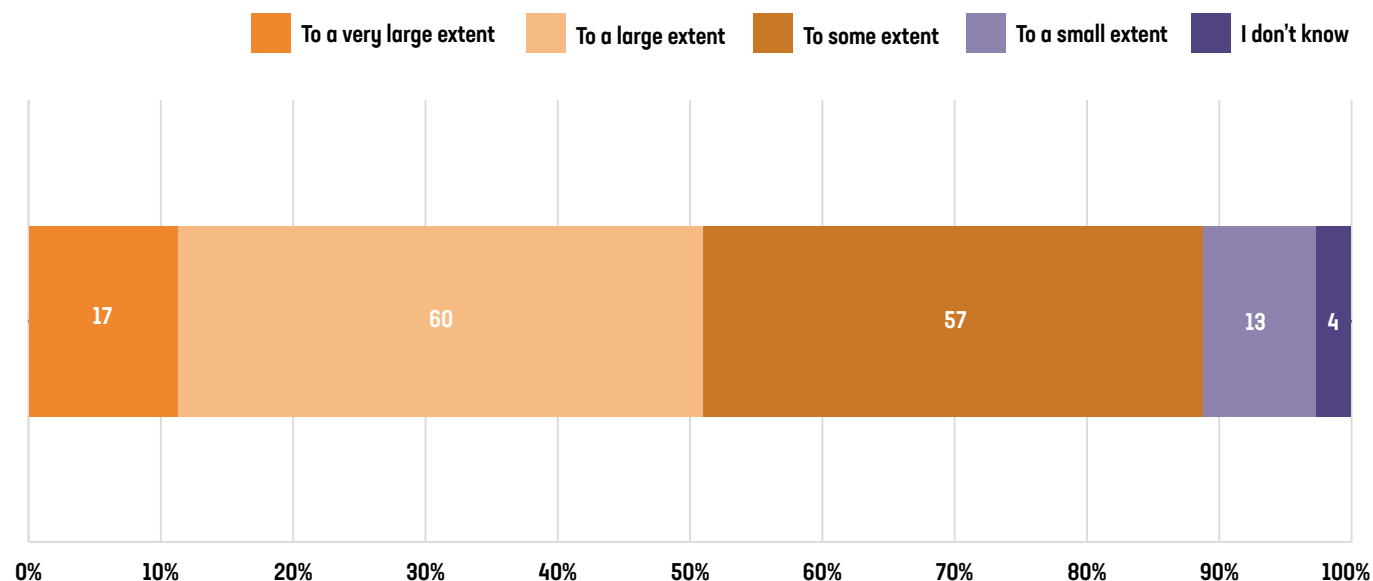
Table 16: Evidence of continuation of OG project activities after project completion

	Total	%
Partners continued working together on the same topic, but in another project	331	33.5%
Partners continued working together, but on another topic	172	17.4%
Partners stopped collaborating	90	9.1%
Other	71	7.2%
I don't know	95	9.6%
Not applicable (or project still ongoing)	195	19.7%
No reply	35	3.5%

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses)

The survey clearly demonstrates that OGs have created opportunities for further development and cooperation, and that OGs also take active steps in this respect. Below, the study delves deeper into the contribution of OGs to strengthening communities. The stakeholders directly address this question positively, with over **50% of them indicating that OG projects strengthen innovation-oriented communities to a (very) large extent** and less than 10% perceiving this to only a small extent. This outcome is important as innovation-oriented communities are key for transition and future agriculture with plenty of challenges.

Figure 29: Contribution of OG projects to strengthening interactive innovation-oriented communities that support constant change and cooperation for innovation



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – Stakeholder survey data (N=151 survey responses only covering who answered YES to Q5: "Are there any active or completed EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects in your area of expertise or in your country?")



5.1.5 Conclusions of study question 1

Conclusions about the extent to which EIP OG projects have produced innovative solutions successfully tested by end users and spread beyond the project partnership

In summary, **most EIP OGs have developed an innovative solution according to what was planned in the design phase**: 65% of OG questionnaire respondents report that their project fully reached their objectives and a further 23% consider objectives were partially met, with only 4% of OG respondents replying the planned solution was not achieved. About 53% of Stakeholder survey respondents reported that OG innovative projects have fully achieved the planned results. Moreover, **45% of surveyed OGs report having developed project outcomes beyond/different from what was initially planned, fully or partially**.

Among the various types of innovations, agronomic practices and process innovations, in particular crop management and nature-oriented farming, are the ones most implemented according to the OG survey (i.e. a question asked only to lead partners) followed by technological innovations, mainly digital technology (apps, mobile and devices, data management, GPS, etc.). Organisational innovations and rural social innovations have seen the least involvement of OGs. The categories that refer to rural social innovation and service innovation are the ones in which OG projects reached the planned objectives to the largest extent (over 80% of OGs) and OGs developing technological innovations and knowledge exchange reached the planned objectives in over 70% of projects.

An outcome becomes an **innovation if it is widely adopted/implemented and if it proves its usefulness in practice. This seems to happen quite frequently with the outcomes of OGs**. According to the OG survey, 64% of respondents state that the project outcome has been implemented by farmers/foresters/other end users.

According to the case studies, **an important factor facilitating the implementation of project results by farmers/foresters/other end users is the existence of already established partnerships** because partners were already active in previous projects. **This suggests that AKIS actions/events and innovation support service activities are needed to connect partners who have not yet met but have potential to co-create innovation**.

Again, according to case studies, **the main factors that enabled OG project implementation are to be found above all within the partnership**. For instance, the presence of producer organisations and direct contact among farmers. Conversely, the lack of technical skills or, in any case, the inadequacy of the training and advisory system severely limited the dissemination potential of the proposed innovations in the interested areas, which again points to the importance of focusing on improving the whole knowledge and innovation system (AKIS).

The analysis of the effectiveness of the different channels for the communication/ dissemination of results was based on the analysis of the data collected from the OG survey, which shows that **the channels considered to be the most important for this purpose are events**, whether they are organised by OGs or third parties; **websites/online platforms** and **publications/toolboxes**. In addition to these channels, the **case studies also reveal the importance of demonstration activities both on farms and at other sites**.

The combination of research, practice, counselling and training is good practice for the further development of project ideas, innovation and practice. Among the **channels more frequently used for dissemination of outcomes to other farms and foresters**, case study interviewees identified **video tutorials, training courses and seminars, events and workshops, websites and social media, articles in farmers' newspapers, technical publications, practice sheets, information brochures, information leaflets, meetings to present results to focal groups and also field trials and farm demonstrations**.

Conclusions on the extent to which OG projects have succeeded in strengthening communities and developing opportunities for further cooperation.

In terms of **opportunities for further development and community effects**, the case studies confirm the rather positive assessment from the OG survey, be it with some reservations and experienced risks:

- > Clearly, **successful new collaborations have emerged from the OG projects**, particularly between science and agricultural practice, but also with other experts involved in the innovation process. Agricultural practice in general was able to benefit from the exchange of complementary knowledge between these experts (DE-Hesse, DE-Baden-W., ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, the Netherlands).
- > An **EIP setup allows for practical problems to be addressed and dealt with in a targeted manner with the direct involvement of agricultural practitioners. Through the interactive nature of the projects and emphasis on dissemination**, the outcomes are **effectively spread to a broader target group beyond the partnership** – and certainly in the immediate proximity of the participating partners (DE-Baden-W., Ireland).
- > **The EIP instrument has recognised and rewarded the innovative capacity of agricultural practitioners and encouraged them to engage in such endeavours, even those less inclined to innovate**. The interviews and case studies also confirm the impression that **interest in innovation and the development of new sustainable business models has increased among farmers**, and the willingness to invest in this and participate in innovation projects has grown (ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, Germany).
- > According to the interviewees, **the main success factor but, at the same time, also a risk factor, for the success as well as follow-up of the projects is the composition of partnerships**. Indeed, balanced OG partnerships must allow for inclusion of research and technology centres and intermediary organisation (producer associations, management centres), besides farmers/foresters; collaboration with Innovation Brokers, leading to **the right complementarity of knowledge, capabilities and experiences within the partnerships** (Bulgaria, DE-Hesse, ES-Pais Vasco, Ireland, Poland).
- > While the participation of research centres has proved useful for OG projects, both because of their specialised expertise and their administrative capacity, there is also a **risk** that they become too dominant in partnerships. Some interviewees hinted at the **tendency to finance scientific research instead of innovative, practical solutions relevant to farmers**, where the **researchers use farmers/ farms as a subject of their research instead of creating practical solutions** (Lithuania, FR-Bourgogne).



- › In this respect, **the involvement of innovation support services and/or technical consultants is considered as beneficial to ensure co-creation and stimulate the implementation and spreading of ready to apply innovative solutions.** The involvement of such actors should be further encouraged to address the needs of farmers and maintain the motivation of farmers to implement innovations (the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, FR-Bourgogne) even more directly.
- › Some projects may be relatively small in scale to better reach a substantially wider audience beyond the direct network of the project partners. Therefore, dissemination and communication of results within an AKIS through professional channels (e.g. advisors, trainers) should become common practice. Strengthening the connectivity of OGs within an AKIS by specific funding for sharing outcomes would help, also beyond the project period and for more than one OG.

5.2 Q2 - What are the main drivers and barriers to the achievement of EIP OG outcomes and what lessons can be learned?

5.2.1 Description of study question 2

This question aims to identify the drivers that have facilitated the achievement of EIP OG outcomes in relation to co-creating and spreading innovations, and the main barriers hampering them. Communication and dissemination activities are included in the analysis of drivers and barriers.

To answer this question and identify lessons for the future, the study used two sub-questions:

Q.2.1 - What are the main drivers and barriers to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions and the possibility of scaling up EIP-OG project outcomes?

This question deals with strategic aspects of the EIP OG approach in view of future programming – what is key to spreading innovations, which elements allow a wide uptake of certain innovative solutions and which ones hinder it?

The identification of the main drivers and barriers implies considering internal and external factors within the call and project process. First, the analysis considers the process of cooperation for innovation in which OGs are built, projects are designed and implemented, results are achieved, and critical issues are dealt with. Drivers and barriers can be found at the level of cooperation and co-creation (e.g. organisational/social issues), implementation of the specific solutions, communication/dissemination, etc. The analysis therefore focuses on OG projects that did not succeed in creating innovative solutions to assess what can be learnt.

Second, the wider uptake of innovative solutions also depends on external factors such as market-related and context-related factors (see section 2 of the Commission's guidelines for data on EIP OGs, version 2.0, 2023). These factors can interact with each other in ways that are hardly or not at all predictable and actually determine whether the innovative solution turns into a mainstream innovation or not.

Q2.2 - To what extent have communication and dissemination activities contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes?

This question aims to understand whether an OG has recognised the proper value of communication/dissemination activities in

its projects. It explores which tools were most often used and establishes a link between communication and dissemination activities used and outcomes achieved by OG projects to determine the success of such activities.

The Commission's guidelines for EIP-AGRI⁴⁰ emphasise the importance of communicating about OG projects from their onset and throughout their implementation. Dissemination of results at the end of projects is equally crucial since dissemination generates and multiplies project outcomes.

Communication and dissemination contribute to OG project outcomes because – if well designed – favour sharing and spreading innovations to the biggest possible audience. Communication is an effective tool in preparing dissemination. Moreover, communication and dissemination maximise the visibility of OG projects and help identify opportunities for further networking and cooperation. OG projects may have different approaches to communication and dissemination, among others depending on the specific expertise available within the OG (e.g. communication experts and advisors) and the use of key channels (such as those provided by farmers' and sectoral organisations, including farmers' journals and cooperatives' communication, as well as government ministry's websites, agricultural radio and TV popular in certain Member States). The role of Managing Authorities and the EU (especially through EIP-AGRI and the EU CAP Network, since October 2022) is also important to spread information about OG projects, for instance through proper design of the calls ensuring common communication and dissemination tools in various ways. National Rural Networks (National CAP Networks since 2023) are also a good tool to help with communication and dissemination.

The analysis presented here aims to assess the contribution of OGs' approaches to communication and dissemination in achieving outcomes. It focuses on specific communication and dissemination activities that contributed the most, such as on-farm demonstrations, trainings and advisory actions, social media and media channels from farmers' organisations, advisors and ministries.

In order to answer Q2 and its two sub-questions, the following analytical framework is used.

⁴⁰ [Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability | EU CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu/guidelines-on-programming-for-innovation-and-the-implementation-of-the-eip-for-agricultural-productivity-and-sustainability)



Table 17: Analytical framework for answering Q2

Study question	Judgement criteria	Indicators/type of information	Data sources
Q2.1	2.1 The process of cooperation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up.	<p>2.1.1 Evidence of organisational aspects of OGs that facilitate or impede co-creation of innovative solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Competence of partners; > Inclusion of advisors and farmers in the partnerships; > Relevant and complementary expertise of partners; > Other. <p>2.1.2 Evidence of social aspects of OGs that facilitate or impede co-creation of innovative solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Existence of a partner or service provider knowledgeable on co-creation methods to facilitate activities among partners (innovation support service); > Level and quality of interaction among partners; > Equal treatment of partners in decision-making; > Other. <p>2.1.3 Evidence of aspects that facilitate or impede the spread of innovative solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Continuation of collaboration between partners after the end of funding/OG project; > Evidence of collaboration with other entities/other projects, by type of collaboration; > Evidence of reaching out towards end users; > Evidence of showcasing the benefits and practical use of the innovative solution; > Other. 	OG Survey Stakeholder survey Case studies DG AGRI interviews
	2.2 The process of project preparation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up.	<p>2.2.1 Number of OG in which the project preparation reflects the needs and aspirations of all project partners.</p> <p>2.2.2 Judgement on the relevance of the created innovative solutions for the end users covered by the OG.</p>	OG Survey Stakeholder survey Case studies
	2.3 The support provided to OGs has facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up.	<p>2.3.1 Evidence of support (by type of support) provided to the OG project during application and implementation by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. public authorities (in charge of the EIP intervention implementation); b. rural networks; c. innovation support services; d. advisors. <p>2.3.2 Judgment on whether the lack or inadequacy of such support impeded the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions.</p>	OG Survey Case studies



Study question	Judgement criteria	Indicators/type of information	Data sources
	2.4. Exogenous factors have influenced the OG activity (e.g. COVID-19, market imbalances, extreme weather conditions, energy price fluctuations, policy changes).	2.4.1 Evidence of changes made by the OG in response to exogenous factors, of which: a. changes to project activities; b. changes to the partnership composition; c. changes to project duration; d. other.	OG Survey Case studies
Q2.2	2.5 Communication activities have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes.	2.5.1 Existence of a communication plan/strategy for the OG project at its inception. 2.5.2 Existence of communication expertise in the OG partnership.	OG Survey Case studies
	2.6 A variety of communication and dissemination channels have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes.	2.6.1 Type and frequency of communication and dissemination channels, of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Websites/online platforms; > Publications/toolboxes; > Dedicated events by the OG project; > Participation in events organised by others; > Personal coaching and advice/training of practitioners; > Project's digital product/app for practitioners > Social media; > On-farm demonstrations; > Other. 2.6.2 Stakeholders/MA opinions on communication and dissemination channels most effectively contributing to the spreading of OG outcomes.	OG Survey Stakeholder survey Case studies DG AGRI interviews
	2.7 Spreading of information by the MA and NRN has contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes.	2.7.1 Types of MA/NRN activities/events that provide information on the OG project.	OG Survey Case studies

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



5.2.2 Q.2.1 – What are the main drivers and barriers to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions and the possibility of scaling up EIP-OG project outcomes?

This part of the analysis aims at answering the first sub-question, Q.2.1, based on the indicators presented in the analytical framework developed for study question 2 sourced from a variety of collected data (see [section 3.3](#)).

a. JC 2.1 – The process of cooperation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up

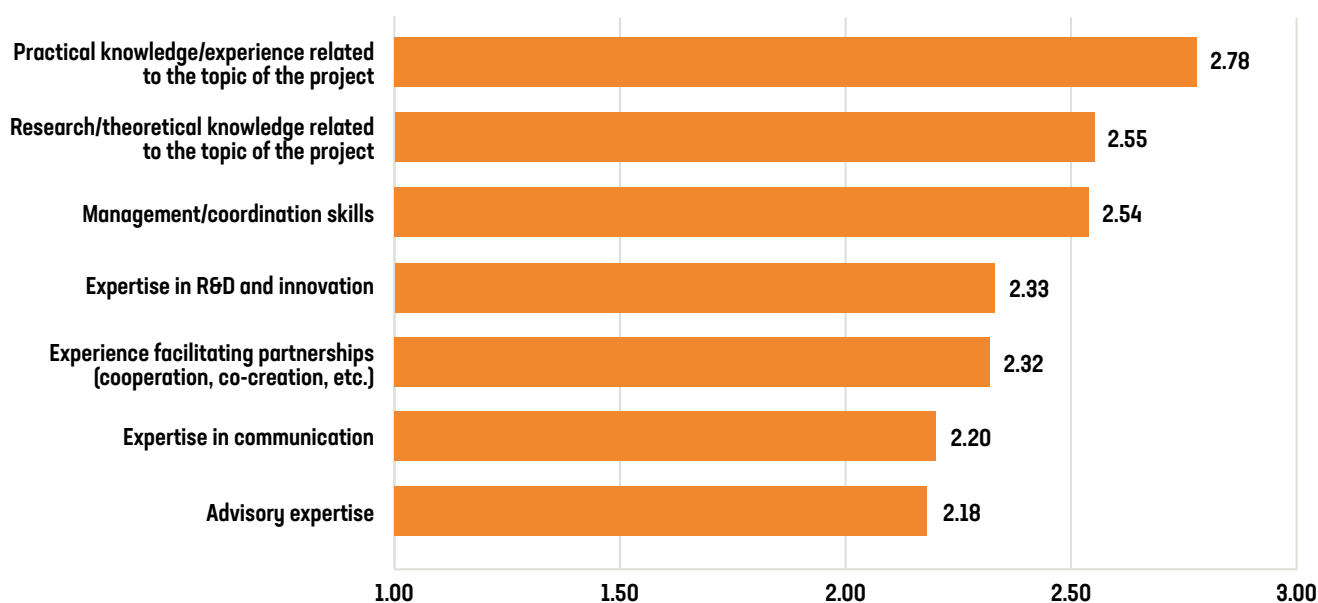
To assess the contribution of the process of cooperation to the co-creation of innovative solutions, the analysis takes into account evidence of organisational and social aspects that facilitate or impede the co-creation of innovative solutions. To assess the

contribution of the process of cooperation to scale up innovative solutions, the analysis considers evidence of aspects that facilitate or impede the spreading of innovative solutions.

Organisational aspects for the co-creation of innovative solutions

In relation to organisational aspects, the OG survey shows that the **expertise of partners** is generally considered quite relevant (on a scale of 1 to 3, all values are above 2.00 as shown in the figure below) for the co-creation of innovative solutions in the context of the OG project. The most relevant type of expertise is knowledge or practical experience related to the topic of the project, followed by theoretical knowledge or research experience related to the topic, as well as management and coordination skills.

Figure 30: Survey respondents' judgements about the relevance of different types of expertise for OG projects



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not very relevant, 2 relevant, 3 very relevant)

Other factors emerging from the OG survey are the awareness of the central role of the farmer in the adoption of innovative solutions as well as the presence of a lead partner with good administrative capacities. The partnership is particularly successful when the **project is developed jointly** between scientists, service providers, advisors, processors and farmers, **starting from the farmers' needs** and, in the absence of genuine innovation support, it helps if there are already good relations between the participants (e.g. partners from a previous project). Conversely, the elements that contribute negatively to co-creation are related to the presence of partners who do not contribute as originally planned and therefore provide very little benefit. This confirms the **importance of thorough preparation support for the project at the time when the partners are chosen**.

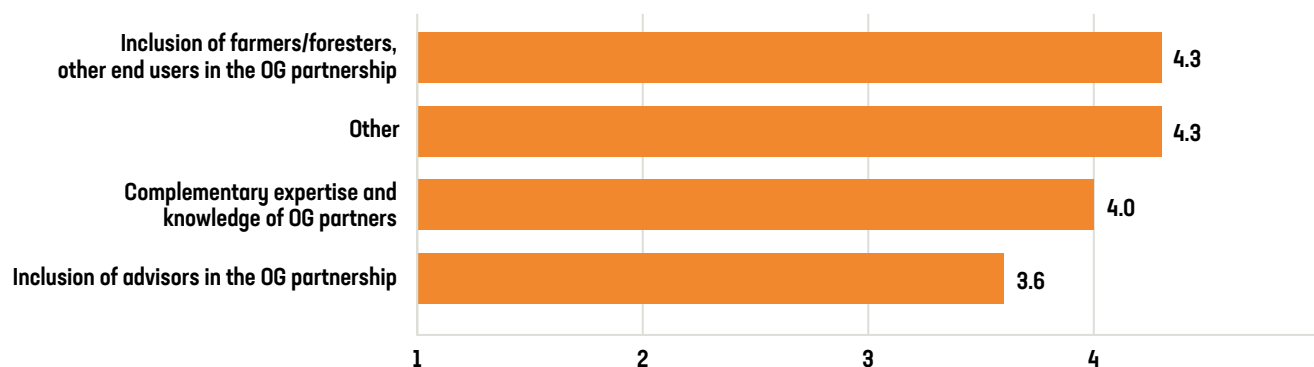
Therefore, projects jointly developed by partners with complementary expertise, including farmers with a central role in the project, as well as knowledge of the topic and management/coordination skills, can be considered key factors for the co-creation of innovative solutions in OG partnerships.

Again, stakeholders surveyed confirm the importance of expertise since they consider **partners' complementary expertise as a factor contributing to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions to a large extent** (Figure 31). In addition, the **inclusion of advisors** is an important contributing factor, but even more so is the **inclusion of farmers and foresters** in OG partnerships. A very small number of respondents (nine out of 213) consider different factors that contribute to a large or very large extent. They include the participation of market actors (stressed by a farmers' organisation in Sweden) and stakeholders from outside common circles, including social innovators for regenerative practices (stressed in Portugal). Balanced representation of partners is emphasised by a business organisation in Italy.

In conclusion, **the participation of farmers/foresters, followed by advisors, is very important for the successful co-creation of innovative solutions, but the OG also needs to have complementary expertise on the topic covered by the OG**.



Figure 31: Survey respondents' judgements about organisational aspects that contribute to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - elaboration of Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not at all, 2 to a small extent, 3 to some extent, 4 to a large extent, 5 to a very large extent)

Information gathered through the case studies makes it possible to gain a more in-depth understanding of which organisational aspects contributed most to the co-creation of innovative solutions.

Interviewed MAs and coordinators of OG projects as well as the focus groups with OG partners, identified the **partnership composition, size, complementarity within the group representing different sectors and topics, balanced governance and adequate leader/coordinator and their expertise**, as well as the topic/sector covered, as **the main factors contributing to achievement of outcomes**.

Concerning the **OG composition**, the **inclusion of farmers was crucial to the success** of the project in Austria, FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, IT-Liguria and Lithuania. To illustrate this, the Lithuanian MA, for example, considers that OGs that include medium and large farms, managed by young farmers with a higher level of education in agriculture, are both more receptive to innovation due to their understanding and awareness of the benefits it offers and have better financial capacity to invest in innovations.

The **involvement of more advisors** is another key aspect, highlighted in the interviews with the Commission, as they are **often closer to farms and better understand their needs**, since not every farm is willing to enter an OG. Advisors and facilitators play a crucial role as innovation brokers thanks to their strong practice-oriented expertise. This is evidenced in the increased proportion of advisors involved in OGs in recent years, indicating a growing awareness of their importance for enhancing the dissemination and implementation of innovative solutions.

The Austrian case reveals that OG partners should come from both practical (e.g. farmers, foresters), scientific backgrounds as well as expertise from other relevant areas (e.g. counselling, training, NGOs, etc.). Therefore, what is important is the **combination of different and complementary types of partners**, for instance:

- The combination of farmers, research organisation and a software company contributed to identifying technology solutions that could meet the needs of beekeepers in Bulgaria.
- The combination of farmers and a partner (service provider) knowledgeable on co-creation methods played an important role in IT-Liguria.
- The combination of agro-forestry production and investigation/innovation entities is considered very efficient (Portugal), while

the participation of producers has led to quick implementation.

- The EIP approach is considered excellent in DE-Hessen as it enables transdisciplinary approaches i.e. application-orientated research and development work by practitioners, consultants and academics.
- OGs where at least one single advisor/animator participates are more successful than others, as well as those in which a trade association participates (Bulgaria).
- On the inverse, but further supporting this point, the lack of a certain type of partners can be a hindering factor as indicated in the case of the Netherlands. The partnership lacked a knowledge centre with researchers involved. Students performed part of the analyses but were not able to go beyond their prescribed tasks and were not familiar enough with agricultural practices.

The combination of different types of partners brings in **complementary experience and skills**, which is another critical factor for achieving and disseminating project outcomes. Specific examples include the good administration and communication skills of the lead partner (DE-Hessen, the Netherlands), which also enabled good contacts with local partners (DE-Baden-W.), the involvement of agricultural advisors for the dissemination of innovative solutions in DE-Hessen, the experience of farmers and their attitudes and the selection of scientific unit, and research staff playing a crucial role in the achievement of the project in Poland, complementary expertise of research actors, advisors, farmers in FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté and IT-Liguria, and various expertise spanning areas such as ecology and water quality among others in Ireland or various expertise in market access, commercialisation, as well as manufacturing in Sweden. Furthermore, the inclusion of technology centres and intermediary agents (producer associations, management centres), bringing different expertise/competencies along the value chain, with different points of view on the same aspect, but with a common interest was a key factor for the successful co-creation of innovative solutions in ES-Pais Vasco.

Experience and local knowledge are equally important, notably the existence of a group which learnt from a previous project, as well as the presence of a network of agricultural consultants who, knowing the area well, were able to quickly identify farmers who might have been interested in participating in an OG project (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté). Previous experience of the lead partner from



other OGs, in combination with skills in advisory and R&D applied to agriculture, was crucial for the achievement of project outcomes in Sweden. In one case (ES-Cataluña), the experience of partners was not a critical success factor since they did not have experience in cooperation or in the technical components of the topic. However, it was this lack of experience that brought them together to try and collectively address a common need. In one case (DE-Hessen), the late addition of partners who were not involved in the design of the project resulted in them having conflicting expectations and therefore impeded the achievement of common goals.

While in general the case studies show that diversity in **partnership composition and its complementary knowledge and expertise** is a successful element in achieving the results of the OG, **there is no common trend regarding the size of partnerships**. On one hand, there are examples where smaller partnerships were less successful, such as the case of ES-Cataluña where the partnership was large enough to ensure good representativeness of the sector and availability of high-level technical experts, as well as for the Netherlands where small projects failed to reach a wider audience beyond the project partners and its direct network. On the other hand, large partnerships proved to be more complex to manage and coordinate (DE-Hessen, Lithuania, Poland, Austria). For example, Portugal initially considered it preferable to have many partners, and even promoted it in the projects' selection criteria, but in practice realised that smaller partnerships worked much better and with greater involvement of all partners, allowing good organisation and interaction. Whereas larger partnerships were often less efficient, with a more difficult coordinating role and less involvement of many partners (e.g. farmers provided only a few plots of land for field trials, but no relevant participation). Similarly, according to Poland "the more the better", but as the OG grows it creates organisational challenges. According to the Austrian MA, a large number of partners can be a challenge and create difficulties, whereas smaller OGs that focus on specific aspects of innovation and put them into practice have worked very well. Balancing the two positions, partners in ES-Pais Vasco consider that the partnership can be large but not too large. In conclusion, it **may be a good approach to start small and in a second project, when the feasibility of the initial idea has become clear, enlarge the number of participants and refine to share the solution more widely**.

Another element that has influenced the achievement of outcomes is **the approach with which the project was constructed. The ones initiated by farmers (bottom-up approach) were more successful than others** (Bulgaria, Ireland, FR-Bourgogne/ Franche Comté, Poland). The importance of the bottom-up approach is confirmed by Commission experts, indicating that ideas originating from farmers themselves can be implemented more successfully because farmers are natural innovators, constantly seeking solutions to problems they encounter. The OGs in which the needs of local farmers are at the centre of the project achieved their objectives and thanks to the involvement of the farms, the research was based on real needs closely related to the territory (Ireland). Less success was reported for those OGs where farmers have limited motivation to participate in projects and implement innovations. In these cases, researchers and advisors are seen as one of the most important factors in ensuring success, but it also entails the risk that OGs are misused for funding scientific research instead of innovative, practical solutions relevant

to farmers (Lithuania). The preparation of a sound and realistic work plan is also seen as a factor influencing the success of the OG and thus the achievement of results (DE-Baden-W.).

In some projects, **partner changes** e.g. changing ownership of farms/companies proved to be a challenge for their implementation (Portugal), as well as the absence of persons due to external factors (departure, pregnancy, etc.) (DE-Hessen, DE-Baden-W.). The exit of a partner from the OG may influence project implementation (Sweden). Also, being able to include in the OG an energy service company played an important role in the success of the project in IT-Liguria. Conversely, in the case of Bulgaria's OG project, an ineligible partner according to the call (i.e. software house), was an element delaying the success of the project.

Bureaucracy was mentioned as a factor that hindered the development of the innovative solution. For example, the long time taken by the MA and paying agency to analyse and pay the requests for payment was an important issue for the beneficiaries (Portugal, IT-Liguria, DE-Baden-W.). Also, prefinancing, in particular for small partners, was an issue (DE-Baden-W.). Project management was mentioned as a factor generating administrative burden as it requires specialised expertise and takes up a lot of time that is often not budgeted for (DE-Hessen). At the same time, for farmers who are not used to administrative aspects of EIP projects, bureaucracy can be a barrier (ES-Pais Vasco). Lack of personnel to deal with the administrative and organisational aspects is considered to be a hindering factor in IT-Liguria and Austria.

The **topic/sector covered or needs identified** was indicated as a factor of success in several cases. For instance, in ES-Cataluña, the most critical factor that influenced the success of the OG project was the identification of a real and critical need. The topic reflected a common need of rice producers in the Ebro Delta of Cataluña. The choice of a subject that addressed a specific problem in the sector was very important in ES-Pais Vasco, IT-Liguria and Portugal. In one case (Poland), the choice of the topic (beef production) was a challenge to get through the selection criteria as this did not represent a large branch of agricultural production.

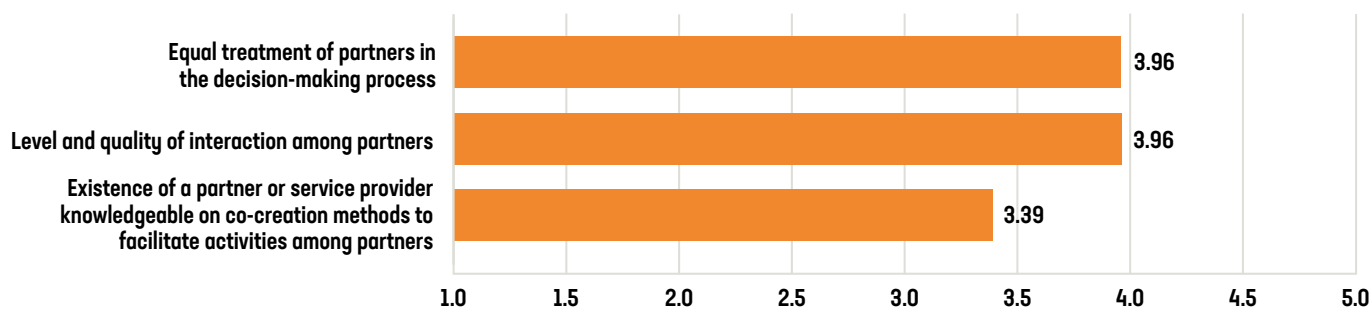
Other factors that contributed to the success of the projects include the motivation or commitment of partners (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, Bulgaria, Lithuania, ES-Pais Vasco) or conviction of farmers (DE-Baden-W.). For instance, in Bulgaria, farmers believe that the innovation will be very useful for their daily activities and will improve their profitability. Another factor was the additional support rate, which allowed for investing in sustainable cattle barn concepts (DE-Baden-W.).

Social aspects for the co-creation of innovative solutions

In relation to social aspects, the OG survey shows that the **level and quality of interaction** among partners and the **equal treatment of partners in the decision-making** process contribute to a large extent to the co-creation of innovative solutions (see [Figure 32](#)). The existence of a partner or service provider knowledgeable on co-creation methods to facilitate activities among partners (innovation support service) is also a factor that contributes but to a slightly lesser extent than the other two. This may be due to the fact that at the time the surveyed OGs ran their project, very few competent innovation support services were available and their positive influence was not yet well understood.



Figure 32: Survey respondents' judgements about social aspects contribution to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects

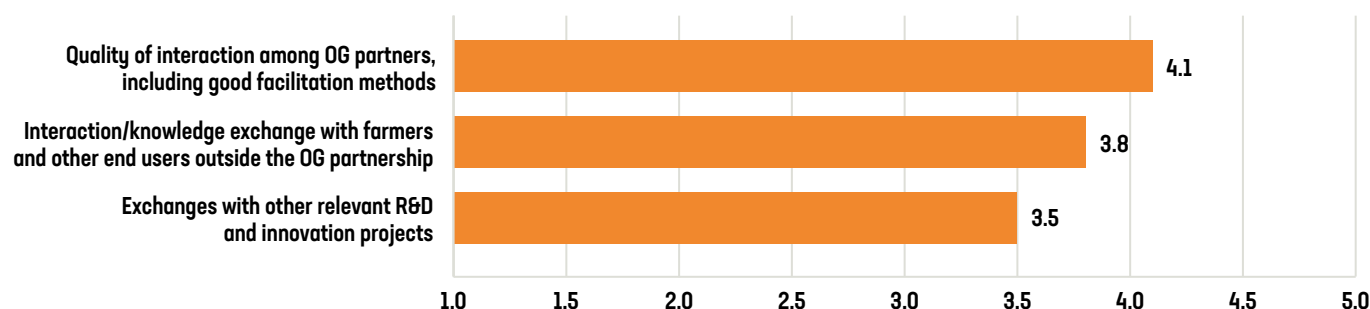


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=988 survey responses) - (values are on a scale from 1 - to no extent at all to 5 - to a very large extent)

At the same time, stakeholders surveyed confirm that the **quality of interaction among partners** is the most relevant factor that contributes to successful co-creation of innovative solutions. It is followed by **interaction/knowledge exchange with farmers and other end users outside the OG partnership**. Exchanges with other relevant R&D and innovation projects is also a facilitating

factor but to a lesser extent. These results confirm **the centrality of interactions**, with interactions contributing more to the successful co-creation of innovative solutions if they take place amongst OG partners than if they take place between OG partners and actors outside the partnership.

Figure 33: Survey respondents' judgements about contribution of social aspects to successful co-creation of innovative solutions in OG projects



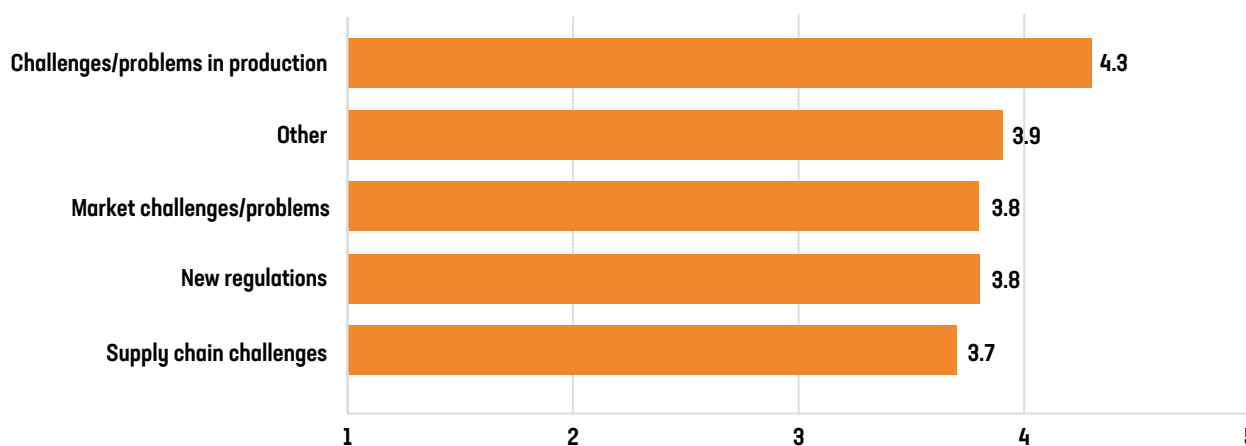
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not at all, 2 to a small extent, 3 to some extent, 4 to a large extent, 5 to a very large extent)

Furthermore, the Stakeholder survey gives insights into the **factors that have driven the initiation, development and spreading of innovative solutions** (see [Figure 34](#)). **Challenges/problems in production**, such as pests, diseases, etc, are an important factor. Further important factors are the **new regulations** that Member States must comply with such as the nitrates directive, **market challenges** such as low market prices and **supply chain challenges**, such as insufficient cooperation along supply chains. A multiplicity of **other factors** are also considered as important by 25% of the respondents, for instance, especially with regard to safeguard the farm against climate change and switch to the use of renewable

energy (Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Greece), but also the need to study new business models and achieve farm process optimisation (Italy), address digital transformation challenges (Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria), the promotion of biodiversity in cultivated fields (France), address ecological transition challenges (Belgium, Italy), share knowledge and help to build a positive image of the livestock sector (Portugal), soil management and protecting grasslands (Italy, Denmark), address consumer concerns such as animal welfare, organic farming (France) and shortage of resources e.g. raw materials, seeds, feed, fertilisers, water (Italy).



Figure 34: Survey respondents' judgements about factors for initiating, developing and spreading innovative solutions

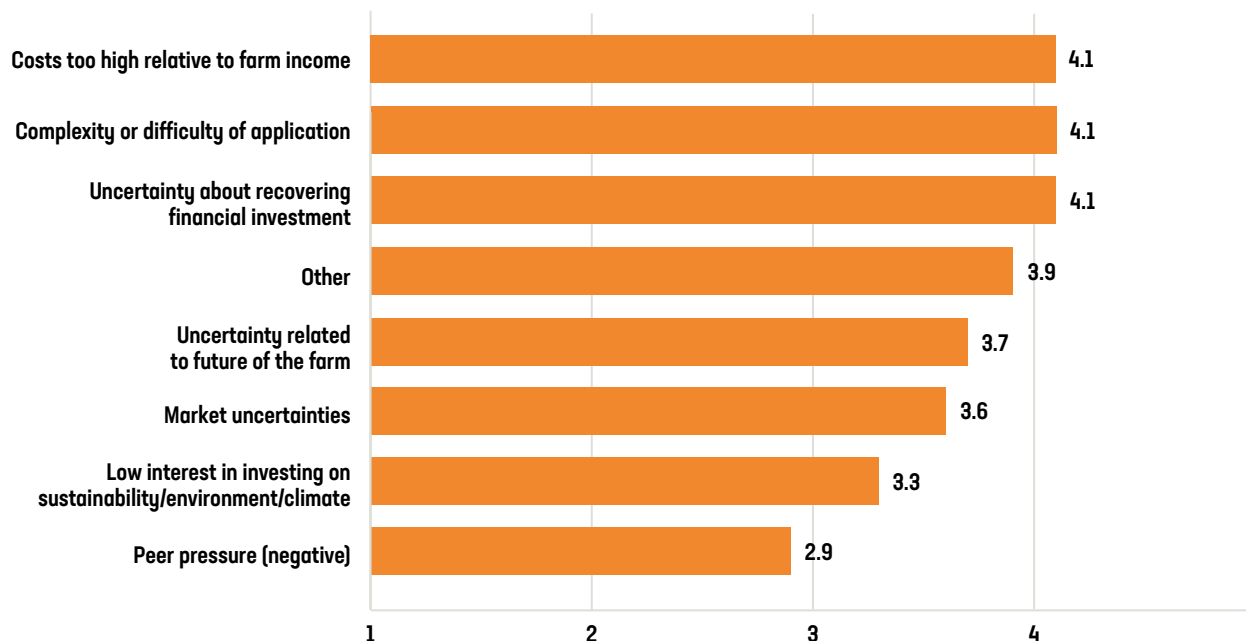


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not important at all, 2 slightly important, 3 neither important nor unimportant, 4 important, 5 very important)

The Stakeholder survey identifies **barriers** that farmers/foresters and other end users face in the implementation of innovative solutions (see [Figure 35](#)). The complexity or difficulty in the application, uncertainty about recovering the financial investment and the high cost of the investment relative to farm income are often mentioned as barriers. Uncertainties related to the future of the farm or market are also important barriers. Low interest in investing in sustainability, environment or climate and negative peer pressure are not considered overly important barriers. Additionally,

a variety of other barriers are considered important but only by 10% of respondents. They include reluctance to change (Italy, Poland, Netherlands, France), lack of skills (Spain, Germany), the usability of the innovation when it is a digital tool that requires the development of interfaces which are expensive (Germany), generational renewal challenges (Sweden), the short implementation of EIP projects makes it difficult to evaluate the economic viability of a new idea (Germany), uncertainty about the relevance of the innovation to farmers and end users (Ireland).

Figure 35: Survey respondents' judgements about factors that generate barriers for farmers/foresters/other end users to implement innovative solutions



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not important at all, 2 slightly important, 3 neither important nor unimportant, 4 important, 5 very important)

The results gathered through the case studies make it possible to identify which social aspects contributed most to the co-creation of innovative solutions.

Managing Authorities stress the importance of collaboration

between project partners as one of the main factors that contribute to the effective co-creation of innovative solutions.

More specifically, the **interactive innovation model turns out to be a key tool for achieving positive outcomes**. The most successful



OG projects are those in which the people involved are trained in cooperation, whereas very often projects immediately focus on the technical dimension to the detriment of cooperation (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, IT-Liguria), and that in which there was involvement of all OG stakeholders in decision-making and implementation processes, the cooperation between the stakeholders in the OG working cohesively to achieve the desired outcomes (Ireland, IT-Liguria, Portugal), finding a common language and good internal communication during the project period (DE-Baden-W.). Collaboration with the innovation broker is seen as elements that favour the achievement of results (ES-Pais Vasco). The cooperation between farmers (practitioners) and R&D units facilitated by advisors in shortening of the innovation transfer path gave tangible benefits in this respect (Poland).

The **coordinator and other OG partners** also reported that **social aspects contributed to the achievement of project results, related to the level and quality of interactions between partners** and their equal participation in decision-making processes.

Equal treatment or equal participation of partners in the decision-making process is an important success factor (Bulgaria, IT-Liguria, Portugal, DE-Baden-W.). This is facilitated when there are clear roles and responsibilities e.g. lead partner for coordination and others for data collection, advice, testing and reporting of results, etc. (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté), and clear roles and responsibilities already identified at the application (Lithuania). This **again illustrates the importance of providing funding for a thorough preparation of the project proposal.**

Another strong element is the existence of a partner (**service provider**) who is familiar with co-creation methods and who has played an important role in fostering interaction between partners (IT-Liguria, Portugal). Partners with **previous experience from working together** tend to collaborate better (ES-Cataluña, FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté).

The level and quality of interactions are considered a key factor for the co-creation of innovative solutions in all case studies, including the trust of farmers versus other partners (Poland). This confirms the findings of an Italian study carried out by the NRN (Rete Rurale Nazionale, 2022). Effective **cooperation and decision-making** when many different partners are involved can be **facilitated by**

committees, as in the case of DE-Baden-W., where a technical team was created composed of a lead partner, scientific institutions and farmers, which helped deal with technical issues of the project. In the case of FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, **a network** of technicians in the chambers of agriculture was essential for linking the farmers on the ground. In the Netherlands, **a working group** was established in each of the three provinces involved in the project, including an advisor, contractor and farmer to coordinate and steer the project. They proved to be very important as sounding boards for all partners, where interests would be explained, connected and aligned based on evidence of testing/results and needs of the farmer. **Scheduled meetings** between OG partners throughout the implementation of the project have also been useful for better collaboration (DE-Hessen, FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, Sweden), which can be complemented with inter-ministerial workshops to promote cross-sectoral support for social farming (DE-Hessen). Furthermore, exchanges between farmers were facilitated through the **use of group apps** (including sharing videos), which served as an immediate, operational and efficient learning method adapted to the farmer's daily practice (the Netherlands).

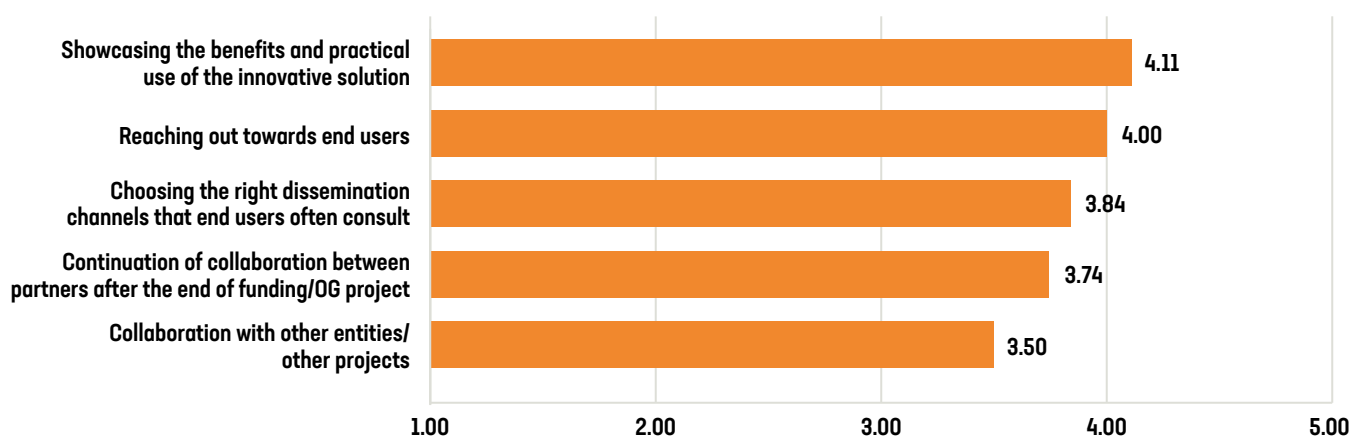
Communication between the lead partner and MA/PA can be a hindering factor (Bulgaria) **when existing procedures do not cover advisory activities or innovation support services that could help** with the preparation and implementation of the project.

If **researchers** bring forward the idea of a project, it is difficult for them to attract farmers or foresters to participate (Lithuania).

Aspects that facilitate or impede the spreading of innovative solutions

OG partnerships do not end at the co-creation of innovative solutions. Scaling up or spreading these solutions outside the partnership is an objective of EIP projects. The OG survey reveals that **showcasing the benefits** and the practical use of an innovative solution **contributes largely to scaling up and spreading solutions to more end users.** The choice of the **right dissemination channels** that end users can consult is also relevant to a large extent. **Collaboration** between partners after the end of the project and with other entities or other projects are relevant factors, albeit to a smaller extent than the previous ones.

Figure 36: Survey respondents' judgements about factors that contributed to spreading innovative solutions/opportunities by the OG

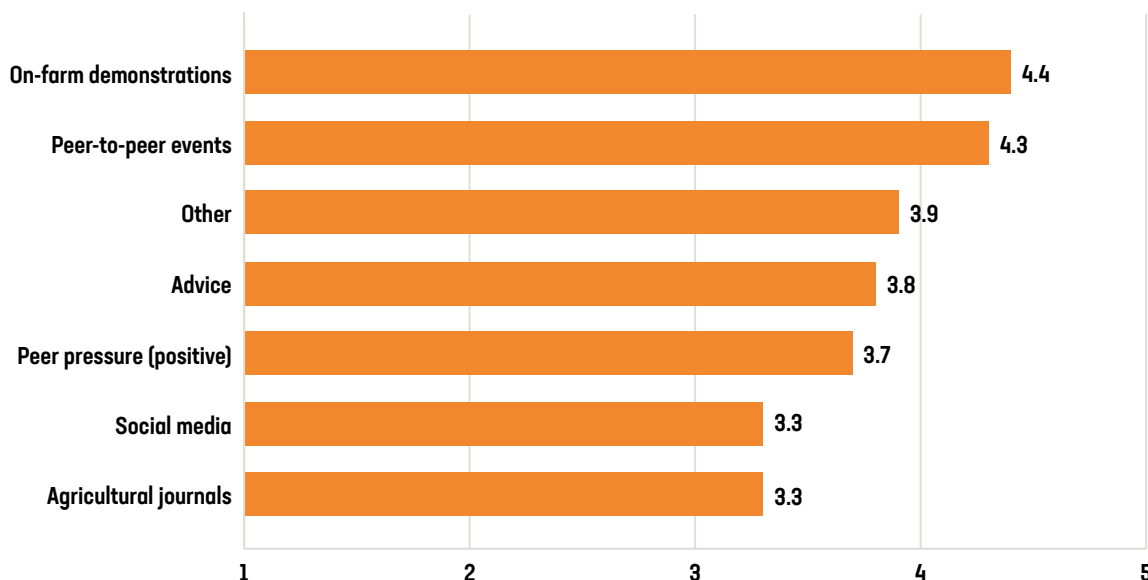


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=988 survey responses) - [values are: 1 not at all, 2 to a small extent, 3 to some extent, 4 to a large extent, 5 to a very large extent]



The Stakeholder survey confirms the importance of showcasing the benefits as it shows that **on-farm demonstrations** and **peer-to-peer events** (e.g. fairs, discussion groups, farmers' meetings) are the most important factors facilitating the dissemination of successful innovative solutions. The **role of advice** is also important whereas social media and agricultural journals seem to be the least relevant factors for spreading innovative solutions. These results suggest that **the most relevant factors are those that involve interactions** (events), **rather than one way channels** (social media).

Figure 37: Survey respondents' judgements about factors/drivers facilitating the dissemination of successful innovative solutions



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - Stakeholder survey data (N=233 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not important at all, 2 slightly important, 3 neither important nor unimportant, 4 important, 5 very important)

The case studies complement the survey findings by giving further insights and identifying new factors that facilitate or hinder scaling up innovative solutions. According to the interviews and focus groups with OG partners, **continuation of collaboration between partners** is found in IT-Liguria, where the partners are preparing a project with the French partners in the same field of energy transition and for large-scale application of the tested innovations. Also, in Portugal, continued relations between the partners are expected to result in future projects as dissemination of the project results covered some of the most common questions by producers. **Choosing the right dissemination channels** has helped scale up results, as illustrated in the case of DE-Baden-W. where the project website is regularly visited and offers interested farmers a unique opportunity to obtain details that are not available elsewhere. A dissemination roadmap in ES-Pais Vasco, based on the identification of targeted agents and events by each partner, was important in spreading the project's results.

Further factors emerging from interviews with case study OG lead partners include trust, notably the **trust of farmers towards their cooperatives/associations**, as a factor that facilitated dissemination and scaling up of innovative solutions among members of cooperatives (ES-Cataluña) and members of the association (Bulgaria). High interest in plantation forests observed in Lithuania is likely to be the result of the traditional dissemination activities like **leaflets and publications** summarising the outcomes of the project on the website of the Forestry Institute which continues after the end of the project.

Factors that **hindered** the spreading of innovative solutions according to the MAs, are related to the lack of mechanisms to

connect different OGs and spread innovative solutions among them (the Netherlands), the small scale of projects to actually reach a substantially wider audience beyond the project partners and its direct network (the Netherlands) and the lack of experience in the implementation of EIP when projects were implemented at the beginning of the programming period (Poland). The OG interviews and focus groups identified further hindering factors, such as the project in DE-Hessen that focused on the university's interest in gaining knowledge rather than the needs of farms, which prevented the project from scaling up despite peer-to-peer visits. Similarly, the scope of the project in the Netherlands, where the strategies for fertilising and mowing were very individual, could not be replicated on other farms. Other hindering factors included the **lack of technicians, inadequacy of the training and advisory system, and lack of demonstration farms** where innovation can be applied on a significant scale, which severely limited the potential for disseminating proposed innovations in IT-Liguria. In DE-Baden-W., the extent to which the results from the EIP project can be applied to other farms depends on further market and political developments.

b. JC 2.2 – The process of project preparation has contributed to the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up

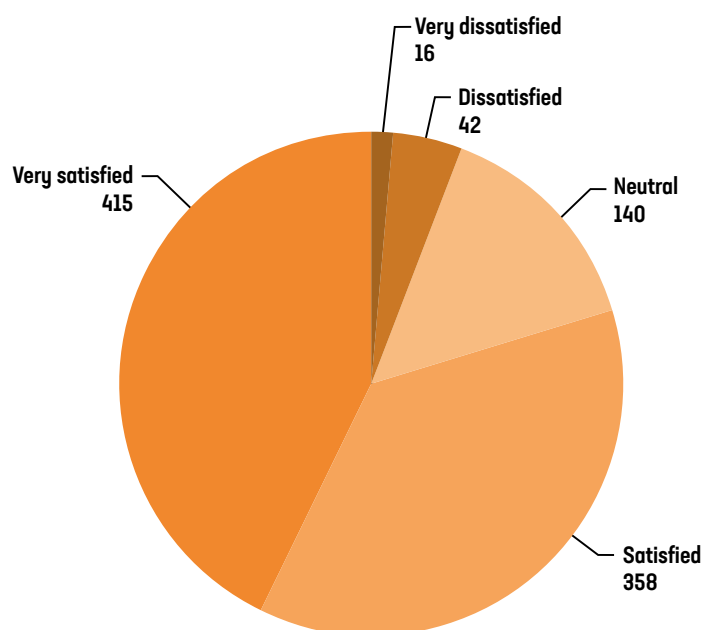
To assess the contribution of the process of project preparation to the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions, the analysis looks at the number of OGs in which the project preparation reflects the needs and aspirations of all project partners and assesses the relevance of the created innovative solutions for the sector covered by the OG.



Number of OGs in which the project preparation process reflects the needs and aspirations of all project partners

The OG survey reveals that the vast majority of OGs (80% of respondents) were satisfied (358) or very satisfied (415) with the project preparation reflecting the needs and aspirations of all project partners. This judgement reflects the views of both OG lead partners (457) and other OG partners (531) who participated in the survey (see [Figure 38](#)).

Figure 38: OG survey respondents' satisfaction with project implementation reflecting the needs and aspirations of all project partners



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=971 out of 989 survey responses)

There are suggestions for improving the design of OGs, that reinforce some of the results of the previous analysis on the preparation of the collaboration in the OG, in order to fully comply with the interactive innovation model. These are:

- > **More emphasis on farmers in the preparation process of OG projects.** Farmers or associations of farms should be active participants and even leaders of OG projects (several suggestions related to this from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium and Luxembourg). Some advocate for less advisors and more farmers, while some prefer more involvement of agricultural advisors, but the general view is that **academic institutions should not be on the lead** as they do not have the networks that farmers have, and they also lack dissemination channels to reach farmers. **Farmers can also play a key role in dissemination to engage their peers** to scale up innovative solutions.
- > **More collaboration can be sought through a region's existing AKIS.** Success depends on how a region is organised in terms of the farming community. **The better the collaboration is within a region's existing AKIS, the more impact OGs can have** (suggestion from a farmers' organisation in Italy).
- > **The presence of innovation brokers and innovation support services is necessary to ensure unbiased innovation expertise** is available in a group (Hungary, Germany, Ireland).
- > **Broaden the perspective in the composition and reach of a group** through improved collaboration and consultation with primary stakeholders, including policy officers, during the design and implementation stages (Ireland, Slovenia) or involving 'unexpected' stakeholders – dare for fundamental change, not incremental steps (Belgium).
- > Think ahead, placing more emphasis on **expected results from the preparation process and project design phase** and identifying who will oversee knowledge transfer. Take into account, and preferably include in the OG, the expected implementer of an innovative solution and have a clear picture, from the outset, of the expected economic and social benefits for the farmer (Finland, Ireland, Italy).

Relevance of the created innovative solutions for the end users covered by the OG

Evidence from the case studies suggests that the project preparation process has ensured innovative solutions are relevant for the end users covered by the OG.

OG projects should be **based on the needs of farmers who participate in the project** in order to create innovative solutions for end users covered by the OG. For example:

- > The idea behind the case study OG project in ES-Cataluña was to **bring together all entities that represent the rice farming sector** in the Ebro Delta region who were **facing the same problem** – an aquatic plague that destroys rice fields. They included companies that had already developed a few trials on their own with a scientific and research partner that would conceive and conduct trials.
- > Two farmers and two livestock farmers participated in the OG project of ES-Pais Vasco who were not used to meeting/networking in the past. Even if they were not used to working together in the past, the focus on their needs and their complementary experiences contributed to increased **co-decision and co-creation of innovation**.



- > The OG partnership in Bulgaria fully addresses the needs of the farmers and consists of partners with different knowledge (farmers and researchers, but also producers' organisations). As a result, the software developed combines the needs of the beekeepers, but also meets the needs for organic production.
- > The project in FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté is based on **a need for farmers to better know their soils** (already a continuation of a previous project), which reflects a true bottom-up approach. This approach legitimises the role of chambers of agriculture, whose activities aim to diagnose and respond to the needs of farmers.
- > The project in IT-Liguria was designed based on audits to identify farmers' needs. On this basis, the other partners (university, service provider, research institute) developed and experimented with some energy-saving innovative solutions, which were then tested on the field by the farms themselves.
- > Precision farming and its implementation in practice were the central topics in Austria, and therefore, **broad participation of farmers** and research institutes with technical knowledge on the topic was sought.

On the contrary, the **design of OG projects stemming from or serving the needs of research or advisors may only narrow down the relevance for farmers/foresters**. For example, in Lithuania, a project idea (plantation forest breeding technology) was developed by a research institute which had an interest in the topic but encountered difficulties in attracting farmers or foresters. Similarly, a project idea (precision farming for a more sustainable and healthy food production system) stemming from a private advisory company in the Netherlands, produced solutions for individual farms, which tested them, but were not part of the decision-making processes, therefore no real co-creation took place. A project developed in Poland by a university and the Association of Beef Cattle Producers only attracted farmers when offering a cost refund, while the role of the advisor was limited. Therefore, the real needs of farmers were not integrated in the design of the project, even if the subsequent solution for reducing calf mortality can be used by the sector.

The **bottom-up approach ensures that not only the needs of farmers but also the needs of other end users, such as the local community**, are met. For instance, in Ireland, an innovative element was adopted that reflected the needs and realities of the local community. The idea continued to develop as the project progressed, with constant feedback and input from the OG and other stakeholders, leading to the successful formation of commonage groups and the implementation of sustainable land management practices in the Wicklow uplands.

With the aim to develop, build, optimise and study innovative pig housing, the members of the OG in DE-Baden-W. were selected on this basis and consisted of **representatives from practical agriculture, research, education and business**. To ensure the relevance of the project, planned investments in stable buildings were considered in the application stage.

Partners who are **active/experienced in the field or sector covered by the OG project can ensure the relevance of the created innovative solution**. For instance, most of the OG members in DE-Hessen were already active in the field of social farming and consisted of farms, research, and consulting. In Portugal, the lead partner, an association of forestry producers, has experience from other OG projects and good knowledge of the area, farmers and their

challenges. It involved its members in the project, thus producing results that can be used by the OG members, other forest producers in the region and even those outside the study region.

c. JC 2.3 – The support provided to OGs has facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaling them up

To assess the effectiveness of the support provided to OGs, the analysis looked at the types of support provided to OG projects during application and implementation (provided by public authorities in charge of the EIP intervention implementation, rural networks, innovation support services, advisors) and assessed the adequacy of this support for facilitating the co-creation of innovative solutions and their potential for scale.

Evidence of types of support provided to OGs

The support provided to OGs is grouped into the following categories: (1) Support to capture actual needs of farmers/foresters and allow innovative ideas to emerge; (2) Information about the application for RDP funding; (3) Information on how to prepare the application; (4) Support to find partners; (5) Information on other OG projects/good examples; (6) Support to connect with other OG projects in the same region; (7) Support to connect with other OG projects in another region/country; and (8) Support to connect with Horizon 2020 projects.

The OG survey indicates that during the 2014-2020 RDP period, when there was no CAP obligation to provide innovation support services, the **support provided by public authorities** in charge of the EIP (national/regional authorities) is the one valued as most important for three types of support (see [Figure 39](#)). This is particularly relevant for capturing the actual needs of farmers/foresters and allowing innovative ideas to develop, the information provided about the application for funding (i.e. timing, themes, selection criteria, financing rates) and for the information for drafting applications. For these three issues, OG members indicate higher satisfaction rates with public authorities than other providers of support. This reflects the fact that, in the early EIP implementation period, public authorities were the most knowledgeable and visible on OG calls and requirements.

The **support to find partners is better offered by innovation support services and National Rural/CAP Networks**, followed by support provided by advisors, while national/regional authorities are assessed to be less important for finding partners.

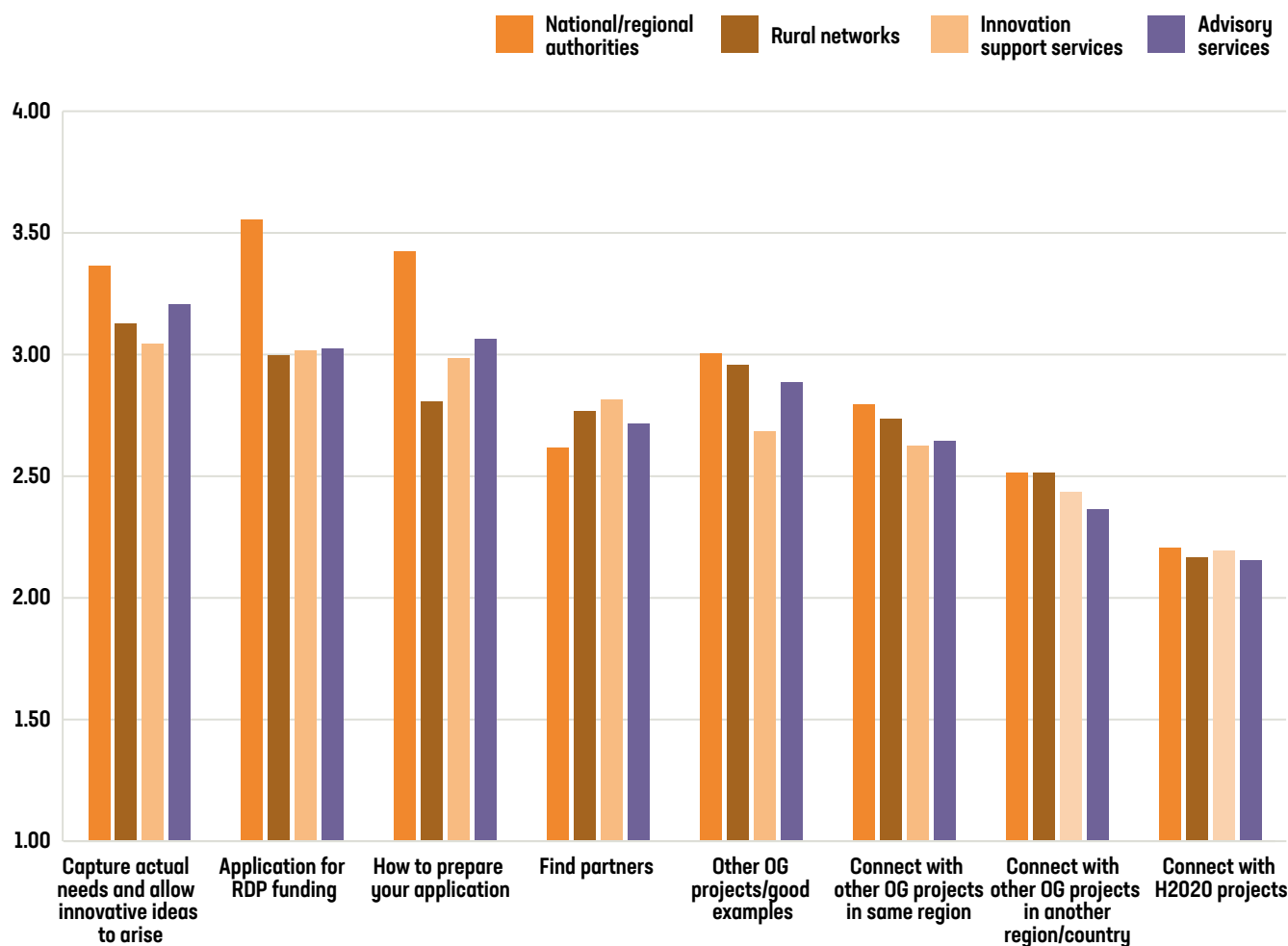
The next most valued providers of support and/or information are advisors who can help capture farmers'/foresters' actual needs and allow innovative ideas to emerge, and provide information about the funding application (i.e., timing, themes, selection criteria, financing rates) and for drafting the application.

National Rural Networks are the second most important providers of information and support in relation to other OG projects in another region or country. This confirms that national networks fulfil their role in terms of helping actors within and outside their regional/national boundaries. **Innovation support services** are the second most valued provider of support to connect with Horizon 2020 projects, which is within their remit of facilitating contacts in this field.



The support received by OGs in order to capture the actual needs of farmers/foresters and allow innovative ideas to emerge is the one receiving the highest satisfaction rates by OG survey respondents, followed by the provision of information about the application for RDP funding and support on how to prepare the application. The type of support with the lowest satisfaction rates is the support to connect with Horizon 2020 projects. This is expected, as it is not always essential for the preparation of an OG project.

Figure 39: Survey respondents' satisfaction with the support received



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=989 survey responses) - (values are: 1 not satisfied at all, 2 slightly satisfied, 3 neither satisfied not dissatisfied, 4 satisfied, 5 very satisfied)

Judgement on whether lack or inadequacy of support impeded the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions

The interviews with MAs and OG project leaders indicate differences between the different case studies. In most cases, the support provided is considered **very helpful and useful**, especially during the **application phase** (ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, Ireland, IT-Liguria, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden). Only in a couple of cases there is evidence of support provided during implementation (the Netherlands, Portugal) or to connect with other OG projects (the Netherlands). Support was offered by a variety of providers, notably innovation support services and the MA, NRN and also advisors, while the MA website was used in most cases as a means to offer information on the EIP and EIP calls. Evidence suggests that the expertise of innovation brokers (ES-Pais Vasco, ES-Cataluña) or of the MA staff dealing with the EIP (ES-Cataluña, ES-Pais Vasco, Lithuania) has been fundamental for the provision of useful support during the application phase. IT-Liguria stands out as a case where support in relation to the application was very good, whereas support to find other OG project examples or connect with other OGs was unsatisfactory, notably due to the lack of support from regional services and the rural network.

In some case studies, support was considered very scarce (Bulgaria), not sufficient (e.g. more thematic focus would have been more helpful in DE-Baden-W.), unsatisfactory (Austria, DE-Hessen) or no support was provided (FR-Bourgogne Franche Comté). In these cases, a lack of information support services is highlighted (Bulgaria, DE-Baden-W.) or no direct contact with the MA (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté), which may explain the lack of or inadequacy of support.

There are also some cases of contradictions where an MA indicates that they or innovation service providers provided support, but the OG did not notice it (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, DE-Hessen).

Generally, focus groups with OG partners **highly value the support provided to the OG**, mainly **for the creation and testing of innovative solutions and their dissemination** outside the partnership. This is indeed at the core of an OG project. Support was considered a less important factor in producing community benefits or for developing opportunities for further cooperation. The exception is FR-Bourgogne where the support provided to the OG is the least determining factor influencing project outcomes.



Table 18: Evidence from MA and OG interviews on support provided and valorisation of this support

OG project	MA interview	OG interview	Valorisation of support received (OG)
Austria	Website, authorisation office and innovation broker.	Authorisation office and innovation broker.	Not helpful
Bulgaria	Website, no dedicated information campaign. Any questions must be submitted through the information system for the management and monitoring of EU funds.	Meeting organised by the MA on the requirements of implementation. No information support services in Bulgaria. Visits to the EIP-AGRI website for information on other OG projects.	Support was very little
DE-Baden-W.	Website, information events. Intensive support, personal counselling and monitoring of the projects. Workshops organised once a year with OG lead partners.	No information support services in the region at the beginning. EIP desk staff helpful but EIP new and bureaucracy challenging.	More thematic focus of support would be helpful.
DE-Hessen	Website, newsletters, information sheets, regular information events and information provided in various regional events. The innovation service provider supported OGs throughout the application and implementation phase.	From the regional office and authorisation council. Innovation service provider.	Unsatisfactory.
ES-Cataluña	MA website, on-demand online or in-person meetings by the MA to provide clarification on the requirements of the calls and application procedures. Advisors and innovation brokers provided support on the application preparation.	From the regional government Agrifood Innovation Service ; clarifications of any questions regarding project preparation and application, including informing partners about upcoming calls and any changes in eligibility and selection criteria.	Very important and useful.
ES-Pais Vasco	MA website, guidelines and FAQs, MA permanent support by telephone and email. Innovation broker Katilu also provided support on request, as well as innovation coaching and training.	MA helps transform the idea into practice. Katilu also helped in the preparation and submission of the application.	Very satisfied. However, support could be extended to the implementation of the project, which does not currently occur.
FR-Bourgogne/ Franche Comté	Website, MA animation support and meetings, to provide information and help in the application stage.	No direct contact with the MA.	No support.



OG project	MA interview	OG interview	Valorisation of support received (OG)
Ireland	Website, some existing projects shared their knowledge and experience.	From the regional council (Wicklow Uplands Council) throughout the implementation process. Also support and backup from various stakeholders. The OG leveraged their networks to secure support and connect with partners possessing the required skills and expertise.	Consistent and comprehensive support. MA suggests that training newly established OGs would enhance co-creation and the spreading of innovative solutions.
IT-Liguria	Regional website, information event and measure manager provided support.	Information about the application for RDP funding and information on how to prepare the application provided by the region.	Very good.
		Support to find information on other OG projects/good examples or to connect with other OG projects in the same region.	Unsatisfactory. Lack of support from regional services and rural networks.
Lithuania	Website, MA and PA support applicants during the application process.	Internal support available inside the EIP OG lead partner organisation.	Dedicated person who develops applications and administers projects.
Netherlands	Information events and round tables on the application stage - each province has a contact point for promoters.	Provincial and national management agencies offered support for the application, implementation and connecting with other OG projects. The intrinsic motivation of the farmer to participate and learn in the project is the most important.	Good advice and guidance.
Poland	MA events with most support from advisors and branch organisations.	Farmers were initially reluctant to participate and implement innovations within OG, but the support available finally convinced them to do so.	Crucial and critical.
Portugal	Website, NRN dissemination activities, MA and NRN support during the application phase to answer questions.	No additional support needed either in designing the application or in finding additional partners. During the implementation stage, the MA helped the OG resolve any issues through direct contact.	Close collaboration between OG and MA.
Sweden	NRN dissemination activities, Innovation Brokers and EIP advisors' support/advice during the application stage.	The MA support team was experienced and helped in forming the OG and preparing the application.	Positive.

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



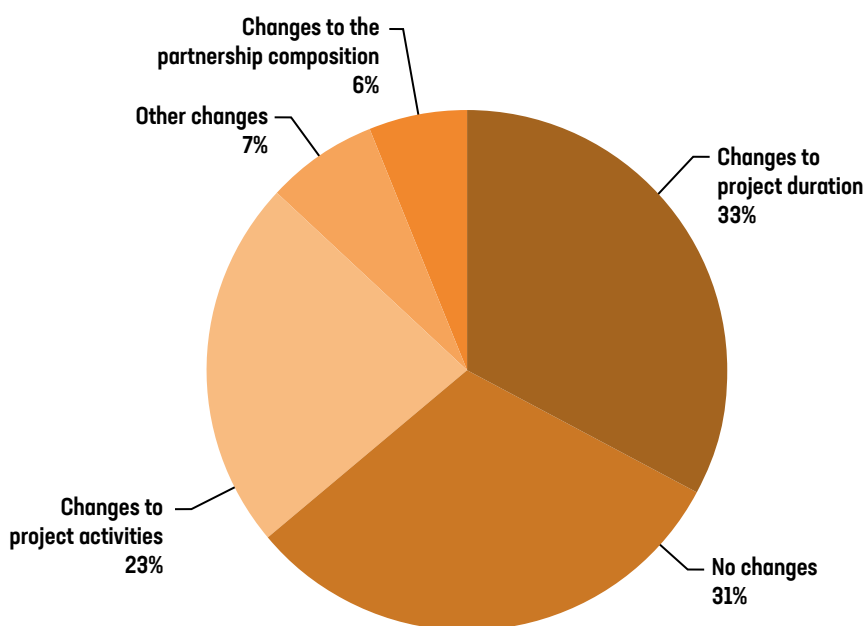
d. JC 2.4 – Exogenous factors influencing OG activity

Exogenous factors such as market imbalances, extreme weather conditions, energy price fluctuations, policy changes and other occurrences may influence OG activity and lead to changes in project activities, the partnership composition, the project duration and other changes.

According to the OG survey, around 70% of respondents report changes to the project because of external factors. The COVID-19

pandemic is the external factor most frequently mentioned. This links to most changes to the duration of the project, followed by changes to project activities and changes to the composition of partnerships. There is only a small percentage of other types of changes (7%), which include changes to the budget (e.g. due to inflation or to the costs of supplies/raw material) and changes in communication dissemination activities (e.g. mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Figure 40: Changes to the project due to external factors



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=989 survey responses) -% of respondents

The interviews with MAs and OG lead partners in the case studies confirm the same types of changes. For example, one partner leaving and being replaced by another (Austria), changes to the project’s duration (in most cases due to COVID-19), political instability (Bulgaria), weather conditions (ES-Cataluña) or changes to project activities (e.g. carrying out tests in FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté and the Netherlands).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a factor mentioned by all, affecting, for example, public procurement procedures and the availability of supplies/material (Bulgaria), the timing of events and some delays in implementation (DE-Hessen, DE-Baden-W., ES-Pais Vasco, IT-Liguria, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal), establishing contact with participating farmers (Ireland) or the format of communication and dissemination (DE-Baden-W., Austria, Poland). However, all projects managed to adapt to the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and complete their activities successfully despite the difficulties. The pandemic did not affect the OG project in ES-Cataluña because it was implemented before COVID-19 broke out.

5.2.3 Q.2.2 – To what extent have communication and dissemination activities contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes?

This part of the analysis aims to answer the second sub-question

Q2.2, based on the indicators presented in the analytical framework developed for study question Q2 sourced from a variety of collected data.

a. JC 2.5 – Communication activities have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes

To assess the contribution of communication activities to the achievement of OG outcomes, the analysis looks at the extent to which the OG project has a communication plan or strategy from the outset and at the extent to which there is communication expertise in the OG partnership.

Existence of a communication plan/strategy for the OG project from the start

According to the OG survey, the vast majority of respondents (83%) indicate there is a communication plan or strategy for their project and only 10% indicate there is none.

The interviews with OG lead partners confirm that many OG case studies have some type of communication plan, mostly due to the requirement of the calls. They consist mainly of websites and a variety of communication channels, as described below. The exceptions are FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, IT-Liguria, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, which have no specific communication plan and Ireland, which had a dissemination plan



instead, based on dialogue for capacity building and for local stakeholder engagement. In Sweden, a full commitment to further dissemination of results was not possible due to a lack of funds.

Interviews with Commission experts further stress that there must be a clear emphasis on communication channels and strategies in the call requirements and selection criteria (as reflected in the application form) to involve a broader audience beyond just project partners.

Existence of communication expertise in the OG partnership

According to the OG survey, expertise in communication was somewhat relevant to OG projects. Other types of expertise are considered more relevant, notably thematic knowledge or experience, especially practical but also theoretical, as well as management and coordination skills. This outcome may be linked to the fact that not many Member States explicitly require a dissemination plan to be included in the project proposals.

b. JC 2.6 – A variety of communication and dissemination channels have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes

For the purpose of this study, **communication** refers to activities realised to raise awareness about the project while it is running, whereas **dissemination** is related to activities spreading results after the project has been completed. Communication throughout the project is expected to pave the way for later dissemination⁴¹. Given the similarity of channels used by OGs for communication and dissemination, and to avoid repetitions, the data collection jointly addressed communication and dissemination.

To assess the contribution of communication and dissemination channels to the achievement of OG outcomes, the analysis looks at the type and frequency of communication channels and the opinions of stakeholders/MAs on communication and dissemination channels that contribute most effectively to the spreading of OG outcomes.

Type and frequency of communication and dissemination channels

An analysis of the frequency of use of the different communication systems that may have fostered the spread of innovative solutions shows that 'events organised by the OG' and 'participation in events organised by others' are used each year by more than 30% of the respondents, closely followed by 'training courses for practitioners', 'on-farm demonstrations' and 'demo-activities on site' (see [Figure 41](#)). 'Social media', 'on-farm demonstrations' and 'websites/online platforms' are channels that may remain active even after the end of the project and therefore facilitate the dissemination of innovations to others. The frequency of the use of 'personal coaching and advice for dissemination' varies widely within the sample of respondents.

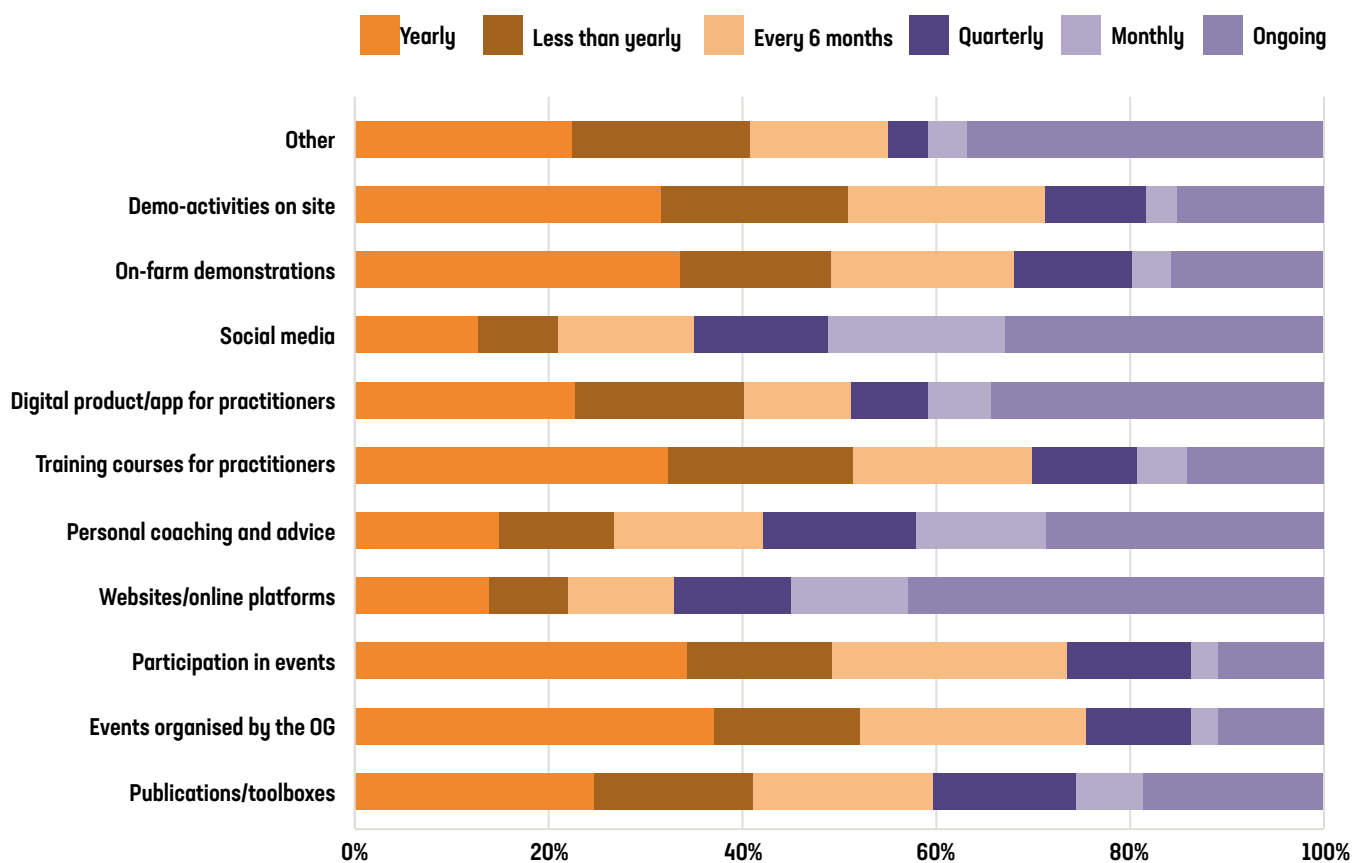
The OG survey and OG interviews in case studies provide further insights and examples for each type of channel. They include the following:

- › **Websites/online platforms** were used in all case studies to communicate the content and results of the project as widely as possible and make them publicly accessible. Project reports are published on the websites along with information about the project's activities.
- › **Publications/toolboxes** include various types such as articles and media contributions in DE-Baden-W., publications in scientific journals in DE-Hessen, press releases in ES-Cataluña, brochures in ES-Pais Vasco and Portugal, articles in FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, Lithuania and the Netherlands, leaflets/brochures in IT-Liguria and Lithuania, project reports in Poland and Portugal.
- › **Dedicated events by the OG project** include workshops, conferences, seminars, physical and online meetings, workshops and field visits. For example, an open day event for visitors and consumers in DE-Baden-W., working groups in the Netherlands at provincial level, and study tours and fairs in Poland.
- › **Presentation of OG projects in events organised by others** took place in several case studies, for example, participation in agricultural trade and fairs (DE-Baden-W.) and other events (FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, Ireland, Poland, Portugal).
- › **Personal coaching and advice** examples include Austria, IT-Liguria and Portugal, where a collaboration with the University of Evora encompassed participating in training sessions and field demonstrations). Commission experts also stress the importance of training and advice for communication and dissemination purposes to reach a broader group of end users.
- › **Project's digital product or applications for practitioners** include for example, video tutorials in Austria as an introduction to the topic for people not familiar with it, drone videos of the barns in DE-Baden-W., videos on the project in ES-Pais Vasco, FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté and Portugal.
- › **On-farm demonstrations or visits** include, for example, visits to several farms in Poland and DE-Hessen visits to the floriculture institute in IT-Liguria and a study event in the Netherlands.
- › Other channels are mentioned in case studies, such as **farmer-to-farmer communication** (DE-Baden-W.) and integration into the German Social Farming Association. In fact, the interviews with the Commission stress the importance of direct **peer-to-peer communication** and engagement, not solely relying on databases or similar online tools.
- › The **role of 'champions' and 'multipliers'** is also emphasised. Champions are defined as people who act as antennas on the ground to promote and set an example for others to follow. There were also champions among organic farmers, such as German and Italian organic farmers. Multipliers include advisors who took a proactive approach to reach out to partners across borders.

⁴¹ Disseminating the results of OG projects is a legal requirement, as established in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, Article 57(3).



Figure 41: Use of tools to communicate the project and encourage the use of the innovative solution (frequency)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP – OG survey data (N=988 survey responses)

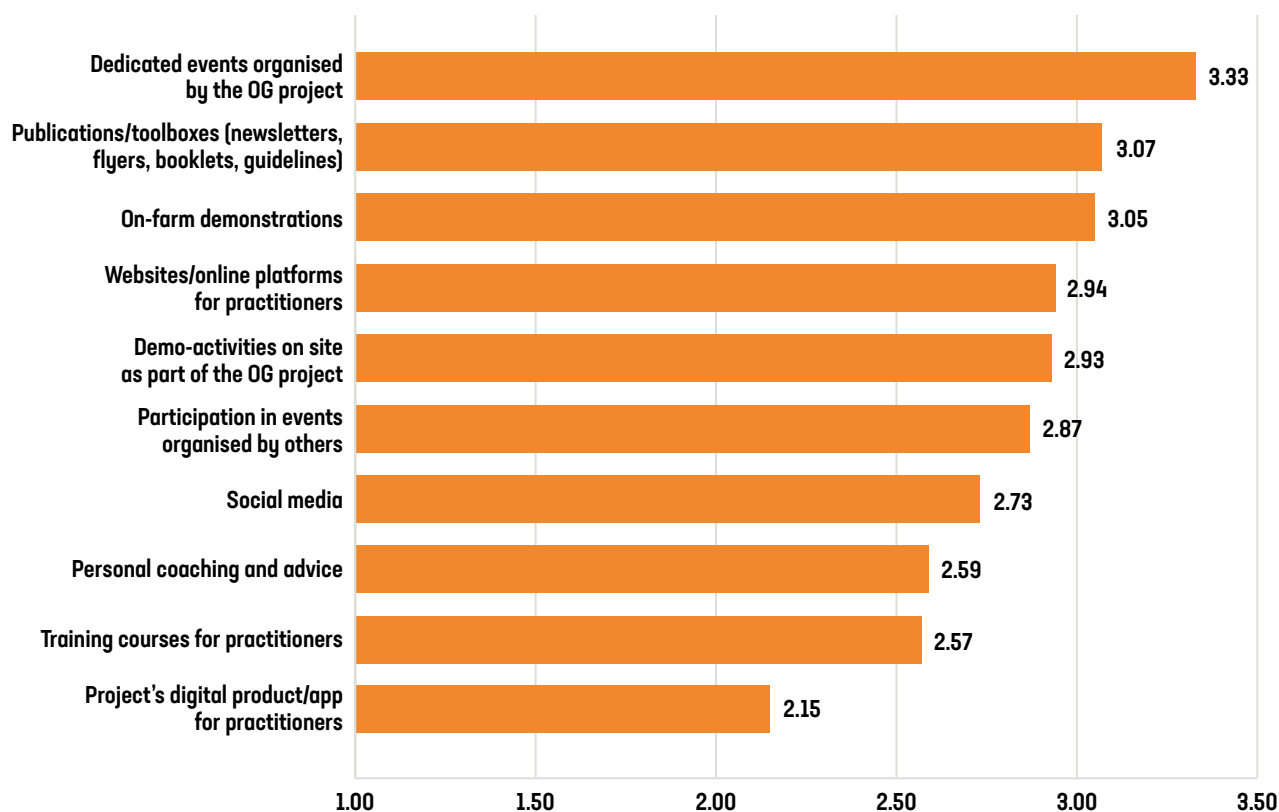
Finally, what matters most, as highlighted by Commission experts, is **active communication throughout the project lifecycle and beyond**, using the best channels for dissemination and seeking the support of actors like advisors, trainers and National CAP Networks to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration at both national and EU levels. In fact, National CAP Networks and other stakeholders, like advisors and ministries, can be used as multipliers through their websites and events to reach a large mass of practitioners.

Stakeholders/MA opinions on communication and dissemination channels most effectively contributing to the spreading of OG outcomes

According to the OG survey (see [Figure 42](#)), the communication and dissemination channels that contributed most effectively to spreading OG outcomes were dedicated physical events organised by the OG project. These are followed by publications such as newsletters, flyers, booklets or guidelines, on-farm demonstrations, websites or online platforms and demo-activities on site as part of the OG project. The project’s digital product or application for practitioners was considered less relevant for spreading project outcomes.



Figure 42: Survey responses on the extent to which the communication and dissemination channels contributed to the spreading of the project outcomes



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=988 survey responses) Values from 1 (no contribution) to 4 (very high contribution)

The case studies offer more insights into the contribution of communication and dissemination channels to spread OG outcomes. **Dedicated events** organised by OGs are considered the most effective (Bulgaria, Ireland, ES-Cataluña, Lithuania, Austria) and include workshops and conferences. The final conference/seminar of the project (ES-Cataluña, Portugal) led to many interested parties searching for more information on the project and directly contacting the lead partner.

The Commission services stressed the **importance of communication and dissemination throughout the project to attract potential end users at an early stage**. This allows to reach out to users while the OG project is still running or assist with any information searches.

Publications, such as scientific journals in Bulgaria, were considered effective, but they had to be developed after an innovative solution had been created. In DE-Hessen, the most successful tool has been the newsletter of the German Working Group for Social Farming.

Personal coaching and advice are considered the most effective in the Netherlands because of their direct link to farmers. Advisors functioned as channels from the project to the outside world which helped actors take lessons from the project and embed them into their advisory package. Similarly, in ES-Cataluña, personal interactions with technical staff (advisors) of partner entities and farmers were very effective in getting them to trust and implement new farming practices.

Some case studies show that the **combination of communication channels contributes to the effective dissemination of OG project outcomes**, for instance, personal coaching and advice combined with demo-activities on-site in IT-Liguria, workshops that include on-farm demonstrations in Lithuania and direct face-to-face exchange of information, ideas, etc., linked with farm visits/demonstrations in Poland. FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté agreed that **dissemination channels are complementary, but their effectiveness depends on the target audience** – for young people, the ‘mini videos’ format is more relevant (e.g. TikTok, etc.).

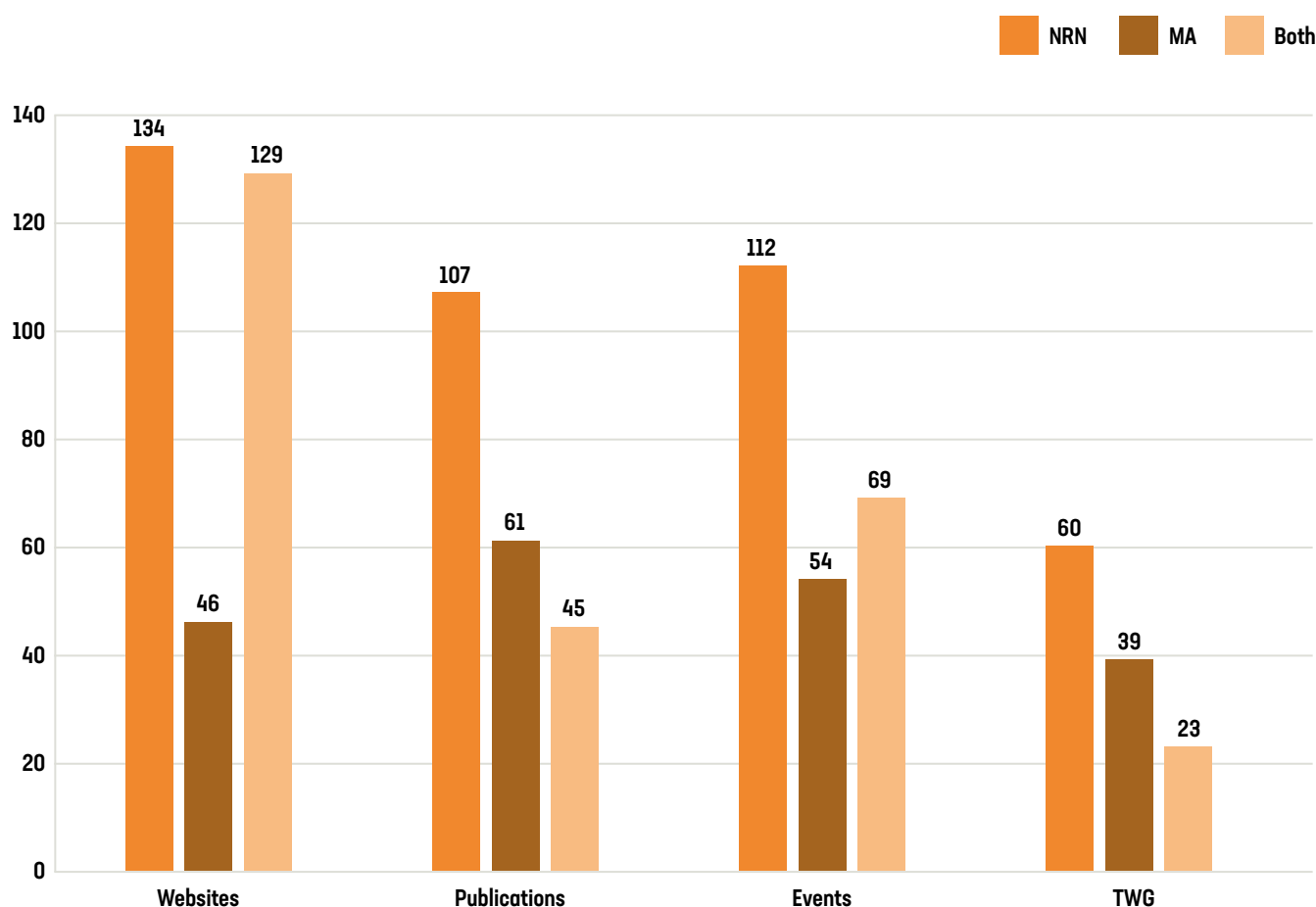
Digital tools and social networks were necessary due to COVID-19 and worked well in some cases. For example, a digital barn tour in DE-Baden-W. saved travelling time and allowed farmers from many places to have access to it. However, online tools are generally not considered as effective, especially in cases where farmers do not have access to digital tools (e.g. in ES-Pais Vasco some farmers do not even have smartphones).

c. JG 2.7 – Spreading of information by the MA and NRN have contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes

A closer look at the role the MA and NRN play in providing information on the OG project through their activities and events reveals that both use their websites to inform about OG projects. The NRN uses events and publications more than the MA, as well as Thematic Working Groups (TWG) [see Figure 43]. Overall, the NRN appears to be more engaged than the MA in spreading information about OGs.



Figure 43: OG survey responses on the tools/events of the NRN and MA providing information about the OG project (no. responses)



Source EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=457 survey responses - Lead partners)

The key role of the NRN in spreading information about OG project outcomes is confirmed in the case studies, notably through interviews with MAs and OG lead partners. Generally, it is not one single activity that the NRN undertakes but a combination of them, including information on the website, publications and events. TWGs were mentioned less in the case studies.

Examples of such combinations of activities of the NRN include:

- > The NRN in Ireland works with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to support and build networks between Ireland's OGs, as well as promote research and dissemination of information on Ireland's EIP projects. It also provides networking opportunities, case studies, seminars and conferences to spread information on the outcomes of Ireland's OG EIP projects to RDP stakeholders.
- > In Portugal, the NRN sent emails to all OGs reminding them of the need to conduct communication and dissemination activities and organised a number of regional and national events with the same purpose.
- > In Bulgaria, the NRN carried out dissemination activities through its website and various communication events.
- > In Sweden, the NRN publishes articles about OG projects on its website, social media accounts and in newsletters. It also sends press releases to help OGs reach the local public and help them participate in trade shows to meet potential customers and business partners, which has proved to be a very effective way to disseminate results.

- > In Lithuania, the NRN website and workshops organised by the NRN present outcomes of each EIP OG project.

The MAs have also played a role in spreading information, notably through their websites, which contain OG project reports, databases or videos, but also through a combination of other activities such as:

- > In DE-Baden-W., the MA organised annual events for EIP project coordinators and lead partners, as well as a trade fair every four years, involved OGs in the annual education and counselling week of the German Ministry for Rural Areas and Consumer Protection, published reports of project results in regional agricultural trade press (including agricultural weeklies).
- > In DE-Hessen, the MA disseminated information via the national database of the German Networking Centre for Rural Areas, press releases, the ministry website, specialist journals or relevant newsletters (e.g. EIP Newsletter of the EIP-AGRI Service Point).
- > In ES-Cataluña, the MA incorporated project results into technical files, organised physical and online meetings/events, and launched calls for the **transfer of knowledge to highlight synergies of different OGs**.
- > In Bulgaria, the MA uses various communication and information events at each phase of the project implementation to serve different purposes e.g. to inform about projects aims, implementation progress, the achieved results, etc.



- › In IT-Liguria, the MA and NRN promoted a conference on the new AKIS and its implementation at regional level, as well as on the results achieved by OG projects financed by the RDP.

Even in cases where the MA did not take a significant role, some activities were still undertaken:

- › In ES-Pais Vasco, the MA sent project fiches to be published on the NRN and EIP network websites and presented successful projects every year in the RDP's annual Monitoring Committees.
- › In FR-Bourgogne/Franche Comté, the MA produced a project booklet that was distributed at each meeting and organised events, such as showcase days, testimonials, workshops, etc.

5.2.4 Conclusions of study question 2

Conclusions on the process of cooperation and its contribution to the co-creation of innovative solutions and their scaling up

In relation to organisational aspects, several elements **facilitated** the co-creation of innovative solutions. All sources of information indicated that **partnerships established using a bottom-up approach and composed of complementary partners**, including farmers or foresters, research/technology organisations or universities, advisors and other relevant actors, such as NGOs, innovation brokers and associations, have facilitated the achievement of project outcomes. In particular, **the role of farmers as central actors and the inclusion of advisors are stressed in the composition of partnerships**. The experience and skills of the partners are also widely recognised as critical factors for success, notably, the management and organisational skills of lead partners, previous experience of all partners and complementary expertise in the topics/sectors covered by an OG. Therefore, **the participation of farmers/foresters, followed by advisors, is very important for the successful co-creation of innovative solutions, but the OG also needs to have complementary expertise on the topic covered by the OG**.

In some cases, the motivation and conviction of partners added to the expertise and made partnerships more effective in achieving outcomes. The size of partnerships differs substantially between OGs, as well as their significance for achieving results. There are cases where 'small is more manageable' and 'large is complex and difficult to manage', but also cases where 'more is better'. Therefore, **it may be more effective to spread an innovative solution by starting with a small partnership and later, when the feasibility of the initial idea is clearer, enlarging and refining it, potentially in a second project**. The topic or sector covered is also a factor of success, but addressing real and important needs is considered more important. Finally, the motivation of farmers who believe in the usefulness of the innovative solution is, in some cases, another factor of success.

There were also a few **hindering organisational aspects**, which were stressed in the case studies. Bureaucracy is mentioned as a hindering factor. Partner changes also posed a challenge to implementation, for instance, the change of farm ownership or the exit of partners from the OG partnership. In some cases, lack of expertise among partners or lack of partners with required expertise hindered the achievement of outcomes. In others, the lack of involvement of partners in the design of the OG reduced their commitment and engagement towards a common goal. Therefore, the bottom-up approach should be encouraged.

In relation to social aspects, several factors **facilitated** the co-creation of innovative solutions. All the sources of information indicated that the level and quality of interactions among partners and the equal treatment of partners in decision-making processes are key factors for facilitating the co-creation of innovative solutions. For example, the interactive innovation model is a key tool for achieving project outcomes. Past experiences from working together and the use of coordination mechanisms, such as committees, working groups, networks and frequent meetings, also contributed to effective cooperation and decision-making. The main **hindering factors** are related to the complexity of applications and financial and market uncertainties, while reluctance to change is also mentioned as an important barrier in a few Member States. A noteworthy hindering factor is the reliance on researchers for the project idea. In this case, when a project idea is initiated by researchers, it may not be easy to attract farmers to the project.

In relation to the scaling up of innovative solutions, all sources indicate that the **continuation of collaboration between partners is a key facilitating factor. Showcasing the benefits and practical use of an innovative solution is considered the most relevant facilitating factor**. Another factor is the **trust of farmers towards their cooperatives or associations, which play a key role in the dissemination and scaling up of an innovative solution among their members**. Generally, **the most effective channels for scaling up innovative solutions are those that involve interactions** (e.g. peer-to-peer, champions and multipliers, showcasing, etc.) rather than traditional dissemination channels (e.g. websites, leaflets and publications), although the case studies identified situations where traditional dissemination channels may also contribute.

Scaling up innovative solutions can be hindered by the size of projects (small ones cannot easily reach a wider audience if they are not supported by a well-functioning AKIS), the scope of projects (if they focus more on researchers rather than farmers interests or if the innovative solution is very individualised and cannot be replicated) and the lack of mechanisms (lack of technicians/advisors, inadequate training and advisory systems).

Conclusions on the process of project preparation and its contribution to the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions

Overall, OG projects reflect the needs and aspirations of all partners. However, a number of improvements are still possible in the process of project preparation, such as ensuring more emphasis on farmers and intermediary organisations, more links with AKIS to ensure more effects of the OG in that region, a more proactive approach in the design phase in terms of identifying and engaging those who will ensure the knowledge transfer in the end, and a more open-minded approach in terms of collaborating with primary stakeholders and actors who can bring fresh perspectives.

Thorough and early preparation is important to select the right partners and ensure the success of the project. Examples from the case studies stress how projects based on the needs of farmers are more relevant for creating innovative solutions for farmers and the sector covered by the OG. Examples of projects that do not serve the needs of farmers from the outset show that they are instead driven by researchers or advisors. The bottom-up approach during project preparation serves both the needs of farmers and local communities. Finally, experience and active involvement in a field or sector covered by the OG project is another factor that contributes to the creation of relevant solutions.



Conclusions on the extent to which the support provided to OGs has facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions and scaled them up

Support to OGs has been offered by a variety of providers. Public authorities seem to be the dominant provider of support to OG projects in the earlier years of the 2014-2020 programming period, especially during the application phase, because it helps capture the actual needs of farmers/foresters and transform them into practice. Due to the lack of competent innovation support services, rural networks have been very relevant to what falls under their remit, notably networking, i.e. they help OG partners connect with other OGs within and outside their regions. At the same time, innovation support services play a key role in connecting projects with Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe projects.

It appears that OG partners value the support related to preparing their own project more (i.e. refining the idea and application for funding) than support for connecting with other OG projects within and outside their region. Connecting with Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe projects is an even more remote need.

All sources of information indicate that support was mainly provided during the application phase, which was generally valued as a positive factor contributing to the creation and testing of innovative solutions, while support during implementation was limited and would have been beneficial. More specifically, the expertise of the MA or innovation support services is a factor that contributes to the usefulness of support provided. The lack of innovation support services or contacts within them or the MA has led to a lack of or inadequacy of support.

COVID-19 is the most frequently mentioned exogenous factor that has influenced OG projects. However, despite the changes mentioned as a consequence of the pandemic, most common changes during the project are not considered to have negatively affected the achievement of the final outcomes i.e. the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions.

Conclusions on communication activities that have contributed to the achievement of OG outcomes

When OGs only had a communication plan or strategy for their project, rather than clear dissemination requirements concerning the use of adequate channels and frequency of communication during the project, it appeared that this was largely due to the drafting of the calls. Communication expertise is the least valued as a relevant type of expertise by OG members, while thematic knowledge and management and coordination skills appear to be more relevant

for the success of OG projects. Therefore, communication expertise and activities can be concluded as relevant but not decisive for the achievement of OG outcomes. They are, however, very important for spreading the outcomes to end users and ensuring a well-functioning AKIS. Sufficient communication and dissemination may also help OG partners establish new partnerships because they are more visible.

Conclusions on the contribution of communication channels to the achievement of OG outcomes

A variety of communication and dissemination channels were used in OG projects. The most common communication and dissemination channels were websites. Other channels include dedicated events by the OG project as well as presentations in events organised by others, mostly on a yearly basis, publications with a variety of frequencies, social media used mostly on an ongoing basis and yearly on-farm demonstrations.

The most effective channels appear to be dedicated events organised by the OG, especially final conferences or seminars of projects. Personal coaching and advice, peer-to-peer communication and the role of 'champions' and 'multipliers' indicate the importance of personal links and interactions these channels entail, which motivate others to become interested in the OG outcomes and contribute to their dissemination.

It appears that the combination of communication and dissemination channels, taking into account the direct contact with farmers and the typology of the target audience, can be most effective in spreading OG project outcomes.

Conclusions on the contribution of the MA and the NRN to the achievement of OG project outcomes

MA and NRNs have generally been active in spreading information about OG project outcomes. They have done so through their websites, publications and events, and mostly through a combination of these. The role of the NRN has been more prominent in some case studies as an important communication network ensuring information and lessons learned from EIP projects are communicated to stakeholders across a region, Member States or wider EU agricultural sector. In other cases, the MA has also contributed to the communication of results through its website and the organisation of communication and dissemination events. As a consequence of this variety of communication activities, it is expected that the MA and the NRN contribute to the dissemination of OG project outcomes, although there is no direct evidence to link these activities with the actual dissemination of OG outcomes.



5.3 Q3 – To what extent did Member States/regions’ approaches to EIP OG calls favour/limit the achievement of outcomes?

5.3.1 Description of study question 3

This question addresses the governance of EIP-AGRI instrument at national and regional level. In particular, it explores how Member States’ strategic choices, implementation models and administrative procedures are linked – either strongly, weakly, positively or negatively – to the overall success of OGs.

This situation is made more complex by the variety of approaches within the 25 Member States that have programmed and executed EIP OG measures. For them, the instrument and approach were new and not easily adapted to well-established delivery systems.

Yet, EU regulations⁴² and Commission guidelines⁴³ and day-to-day communication work have progressively paved the way for a common understanding of the EIP-AGRI instrument, therefore ensuring, as the analysis will show, that basic principles and key directions apply regardless of national and regional differences.

The EIP-AGRI network, which has been part of the EU CAP Network since 2021, innovation support services and National Rural Networks (now National CAP Networks as of 2021) have also played a crucial role in connecting EIP-AGRI stakeholders, providing guidance to authorities and practitioners, and, eventually, supporting a shared interpretation of this policy tool.

The interviews with the Commission and EU CAP Network representatives clearly show the scale of the challenge of building a shared interpretation of a new and diverse policy tool.

This question specifically focuses on the national and regional calls for the establishment and functioning of OGs. The calls lay down the rules, timeline, procedures and budget ceilings that enable the OG’s project design and execution. Calls can be left open without any theme preference or predefine projects’ scope, themes and objectives in a broad or narrow manner. Calls can be permanently open to capture grassroots ideas and help them develop in an OG project immediately or at fixed dates. Through eligibility conditions, calls draw the perimeter of what can or cannot obtain EAFRD funds in terms of beneficiaries, projects and expenditure. The eligibility criteria should be in line with the CAP rules. For instance, in the 2023-2027 programming period, OGs are required to follow the interactive innovation principles⁴⁴. Selection criteria are then used to assess and prioritise OGs and OG projects in order to support those proposals that are more consistent with the strategic principles set by national/regional authorities. Selection criteria should assess the quality and coherence of the project (e.g. composition of

the partnership as best for the objectives of the project, chosen communication and dissemination activities).

From this brief description, it is clear that, depending on the specific approach, calls influence how an OG is set up and its design, partners and execution of OG projects, as well as their communication and dissemination efforts and thus their outcomes to some extent.

It should be noted, however, that calls represent only one tool of a more complex implementation model. It is worth outlining its general features.

First, calls are expected to transpose, with all necessary details and specifications, the strategic principles set out in the respective RDP, including the fulfilment of the cross-cutting objective of innovation/modernisation. In the case of EIP OGs, for instance, RDPs may define the territorial needs that the EIP OG instrument should respond to – if any – the combination of policy objectives (focus areas), the principles to be used for the selection of projects, the financial resources allocated to OG projects and the expected number of OG projects supported during the programming period.

Second, calls are usually issued based on planning that establishes the number and timing of calls for a given measure or policy tool. Moreover, the formal launch of calls may be preceded or accompanied by preparation and information activities that serve to raise potential applicants’ awareness and promote a specific project design. In the case of the EIP OG instrument, the need to boost cooperation and allow the emergence of grassroots ideas has frequently taken the shape of a two-step call procedure, where the first step is dedicated to the preparation of the OG project and the second to select OG projects.

Third, calls function within specific administrative contexts within the Member State that are defined by definite national legal frameworks, decision-making processes and operational tools. This adds variables that may favour or limit the smoothness of project selection, execution and payment. For instance, the use of concise application forms or simplified cost options to reduce the administrative burden for OG projects and MAs.

Therefore, when focusing on approaches to EIP OG calls, the analysis has considered elements from the wider EIP-AGRI national/regional governance systems, such as the strategic choices of RDPs, the role of preparatory actions/projects and the main causes of administrative burden.

⁴² Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. Articles 53 to 57 lay down provisions concerning EIP-AGRI instrument and Operational Groups.

⁴³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability, 17 February 2016. It should be noted, however, that guidelines were not translated into all EU languages and this has certainly undermined a full awareness of the model.

⁴⁴ Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, Article 127.



Box 3: Number and timing of OG calls (case study level)

Of the 14 RDPs included in the selection of case studies, only Sweden has issued a **permanent open call** with approximately seven to eight selection stages per year in relation to the first application step and approximately three to four selection stages per year referred to the second application step. The Commission emphasised the importance of having frequent or permanently open calls in order to capture grassroots needs more easily and not demotivate farmers with innovative ideas or urgent problems to solve.

Permanently open calls, coupled with financial and technical support for preparation, represent the most flexible and OG-friendly solution, as OGs always have an opportunity to apply for funding as soon as they feel ready.

In other case studies, RDPs issued between five and eight calls, with the exception of Bulgaria and IT-Liguria (two calls) and Portugal (one call). In the Netherlands, a total of 94 calls were issued at both provincial and national level with sensible variations among single provinces.

OG participants in focus groups sometimes pointed out issues with the **timing of calls**. In Poland, OG partners consider this a factor that influenced the overall performance of M16 and give the example of the first call, which opened for two weeks only and had few applicants respond to it.

In Portugal, the (only) call for applications was open from 8 August to 30 November but the OG lead partner mentioned that this was **not enough time** to comply with the call provisions and there was little information about the call (it should be noted that one application per partner was requested. This will no longer be the case in 2023-2027 programming period, according to the MA representative).

In ES-Pais Vasco, both the lead partner and OG participants in the focus group pointed out that the call's timing and duration of the selection process **did not match with the crop calendar**, which brought some rescheduling and delays to the project.

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

To assess whether EIP OG calls have favoured or hindered the achievement of OG project outcomes, four judgement criteria (JC) have been considered.

The first JC refers to the capacity of OG calls to **address the concrete needs of practitioners** (farmers, foresters and companies in the agri-food sector) and allow innovative ideas from the grassroots to come into the EIP system.

The second criterion investigates whether **OG calls**, thanks to their design, have **facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions**.

The third JC analyses the extent to which **OG calls have favoured**

a wider uptake of innovative solutions and created opportunities for further cooperation.

These JCs are clearly related to the objectives of Q1 and Q2 of the study but take a different perspective, looking at OG project outcomes through the lens of implementation features specific to different national and regional contexts.

The fourth JC focuses on **administrative burden arising from OG calls**, postulating that simpler rules and procedures help OGs to execute their projects and maximise positive effects.

The following table illustrates the Q3 analytical framework.

Table 19: Analytical framework for answering Q3

Study question	Judgement criteria	Indicators/type of information	Data sources
Q3	3.1 EIP OG calls have enabled projects in sectors, themes and topics that address identified needs/innovative opportunities .	3.1.1 Evidence of open calls that allow new bottom-up ideas to be developed and respond to the actual needs of farmers/foresters. 3.1.2 Evidence of calls that promote projects in key sectors, themes or topics, reflecting the innovation needs of the territory covered (e.g. open vs thematic calls).	Documentary research OG survey Case studies



Study question	Judgement criteria	Indicators/type of information	Data sources
	<p>3.2 The conditions of EIP OG calls have facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Evidence of eligibility and selection criteria that favour bringing together partners with complementary knowledge, such as farmers, advisors, researchers, enterprises or NGOs in a targeted combination for achieving the project objectives.</p> <p>3.2.2 Evidence of call's provisions (e.g. specific obligations or format/guidelines for the drafting of partnership agreements) that ensure real co-creation, taking all types of complementary knowledge into account at an equal level.</p>	<p>Documentary research</p> <p>OG survey</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>MA interviews</p> <p>Stakeholders' survey</p>
	<p>3.3 EIP OG calls have increased the possibilities of a wider uptake of innovative solutions, the development of new connections and further cooperation.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Evidence of call provisions that require the project to adopt a structured communication/ dissemination plan.</p> <p>3.3.2 Evidence of call provision that require the project to carry out specific communication/ dissemination activities or use specific communication/ dissemination channels.</p>	<p>Documentary research</p> <p>OG survey</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>MA interviews</p>
	<p>3.4 The administrative and/ or technical requirements of the call have reduced administrative burden and simplified project implementation.</p>	<p>3.4.1 Evidence of tools and procedures aimed at simplification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 'light' application forms; > use of SCOs; > fast selection and granting; procedures; > administrative support during implementation. <p>3.4.2 Evidence of burdensome procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > burdensome application phase – long time between application and selection or first and second selection steps or selection and granting; > many administrative requirements during implementation; > long payment times. 	<p>Documentary research</p> <p>OG survey</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>MA interviews</p> <p>Stakeholders' survey</p>

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



5.3.2 Analysis and findings

a. JC 3.1 – EIP OG calls have enabled projects in sectors, themes and topics that address identified needs/innovative opportunities.

One of the basic principles of EIP-AGRI is the bottom-up approach. OG projects should target needs that arise from the hands-on experience of practitioners, particularly farmers and address these needs through the interactive cooperation of different skills and types of knowledge.

When issuing a call for projects, MAs usually build upon the relevant RDP measure fiche, considering the objectives and priorities set in the programme strategy.

Balancing the bottom-up principle with strategy-driven priorities, MAs have frequently chosen to combine **open calls** i.e. calls with no predefined themes, and **thematic calls** addressing specific sectors, topics or needs. While open calls more easily favour the circulation of new ideas coming from the ground⁴⁵, thematic calls allow the pursuit of strategic national/regional objectives in a targeted way.

This is the approach adopted in Bulgaria where two open calls ran in parallel (with dedicated budget allocation) to two thematic calls focused on livestock health issues. For the MA, open calls precisely served **not to limit the flow of proposed innovations and ideas in a given sector**. This view is confirmed by the lead partner of the OG who said an open call was the right choice for them because “all sectors need innovative solutions”.

The representative of the Swedish NRN, interviewed in the context of the case study, expressed the same idea as they noted that the way calls were designed did not limit potential innovative ideas and awarded proposals which gathered various types of actors. To complement this, the leader of the OG said that it can be difficult to identify the problems and trends of the agrifood system beforehand. Therefore, predefined themes in a call can be too limiting.

Similar to Bulgaria, an open/thematic combination of OG calls was chosen by Ireland. Here, some calls covered general/competitiveness projects or relevant environmental/climate issues, while other calls were used to target very specific topics nationwide in large OG projects (e.g. developing measures in specific zones where habitats for freshwater pearl mussels and the hen harrier needed to be protected).

In Portugal, the case study OG made no effort to frame the project within the wide scope of the call. ES-Cataluña published open calls within the scope of the targeted focus areas which, as emphasised by the MA representative, allowed for a totally bottom-up approach, with the beneficiaries being the ones choosing the innovation topic.

Open calls were the preferred solution in DE-Hessen too and the representative of the MA pointed out that, **thanks to this, the thematic breadth of projects is very interesting and matches the needs of the RDP**. Contrary to this view, the OG leader thinks that calls did not sufficiently address the topic of social innovation, and this made it very hard to obtain funds for their project (three attempts were made, the first two being unsuccessful). The Commission has suggested that stricter rules on state aid notification for projects dealing with non-agricultural projects may have played a role in limiting the opportunities for those projects.

As emphasised by the lead partner of DE-Hessen case study, some OGs have certainly benefited from a thematic approach to EIP

calls. This was also the case in IT-Liguria where the topic of energy efficiency (being among the ones addressed by the thematic call) decisively favoured the decision to start the project.

A quite contrasting experience is reported by the Polish OG lead partner. In his words, the production of high-quality beef is not widespread in Poland, which very much restricted the possibility of competing with the most popular crops in open calls (Poland also issued thematic calls dedicated to short supply chain projects). To obtain funding, the project had to be designed in a very careful way to ensure that the maximum score was obtained. This last consideration, however, implies that the open call and the selection process also allowed a niche project to get support.

DE-Baden-W. defined priority topics in EIP calls addressing current challenges in the agricultural sector (e.g. climate change and digitalisation). However, according to the MA, themes were broad enough to favour the emergence of bottom-up ideas and projects.

Together with the combination of open and thematic calls, the identification of **broad themes** is a frequently used solution, as it allows for the consideration of strategic priorities without limiting ideas that emerge from the ground. ‘Broad themes’ may, for instance, coincide with RDP focus areas or with general EU or EIP objectives.

In other cases, such as in Lithuania, the selected topics appear to be flexible enough to enable a variety of different OG projects. While the first 2015 call only covered three themes, the next Lithuanian OG calls already addressed between eight and 12 themes ranging from soil management to short supply chains, animal welfare to farm management and horticulture to energy production.

In the Netherlands, EIP OG calls were mainly issued at the provincial level within the coordination of the national Managing Authority. In total, 52 open calls and 32 thematic calls have been documented, plus 10 (thematic) calls published at national level.

The approach to calls can change during the programme implementation, learning from experience. In Austria, **after four thematic calls, the fifth was kept open following a recommendation made by internal evaluators**.

Managing Authorities may use **selection criteria to provide some thematic scope of calls** where no predefined topics are set (open calls). Here, again, national and regional approaches vary slightly. In Portugal, for instance, an additional score (up to 10% of the total) was attributed to projects targeting, in order of importance, resource efficiency, improved agriculture and forestry systems, improved market integration and valorisation of rural areas. As the MA representative points out, these priorities were identified in the RDP programming phase, which included a public consultation.

Similar criteria were used in Bulgaria and Austria where selection criteria prioritised projects according to their relevance for the predefined themes of calls.

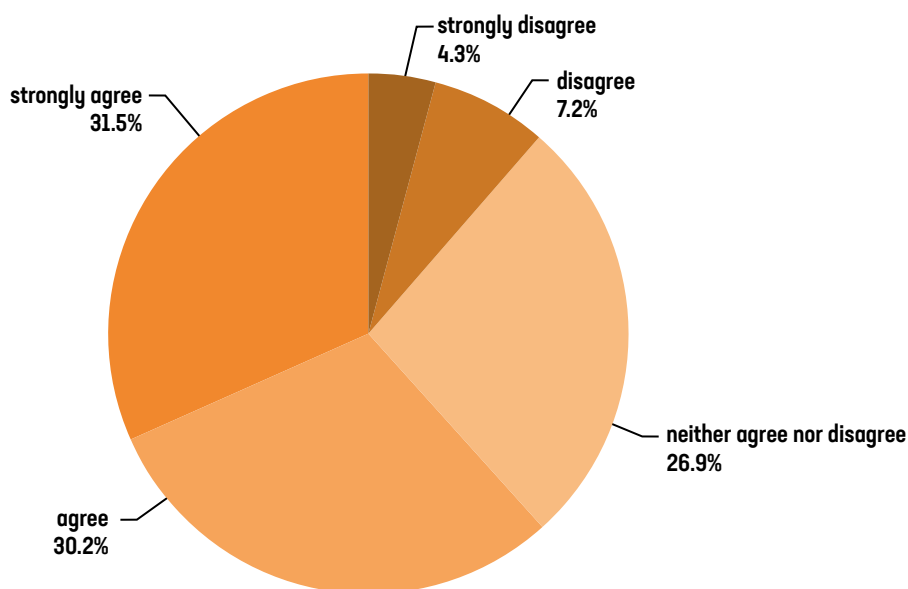
In other cases (e.g. ES-Pais Vasco, FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, IT-Liguria, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden), projects were scored on the basis of their contribution to (or consistency with) regional strategies such as the ‘Smart Specialisation Strategy’ (S3), RDP key priorities/focus areas and/or EIP objectives.

The topic of how OG calls addressed grassroot needs can be further analysed through the OG and Stakeholder surveys.

⁴⁵ EIP-AGRI seminar ‘Moving EIP-AGRI implementation forward’, Athens, Greece, 10-11 May 2017, Final report.



Figure 44: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls addressed the concrete needs of practitioners



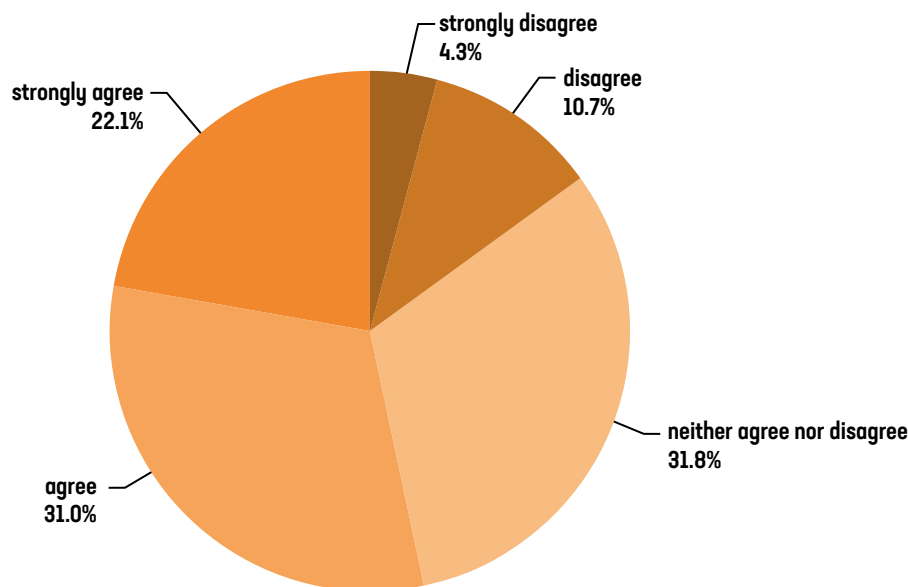
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=391 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

More than 60% of OG lead partners responding to this specific survey question, strongly agree or agree that EIP OG calls “requested to address the concrete needs/innovative opportunities of farmers/foresters”.

This percentage is slightly lower (56.8%) when lead partners are farmers or foresters and slightly higher (62.2%) when lead partners belong to other categories. Therefore, **farmer/forester lead partners tend to be comparatively less optimistic about OG calls' capacity to capture grassroots needs** although the outline is always positive.

To be noted that a quite remarkable 26.9% of respondents “neither agree nor disagree” with the proposed statement, therefore considering that OG calls did not really make the difference in addressing bottom-up needs.

Figure 45: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls helped to better define project's focus



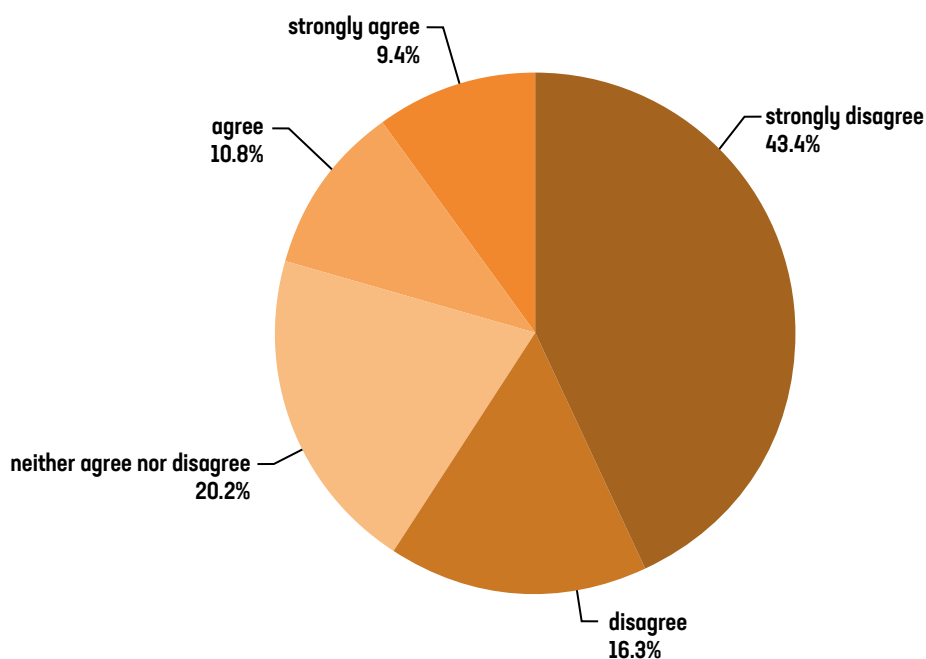
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=393 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

In addition, more than 50% of respondents (53.2%) strongly agree or agree that calls “helped to better define the project's scope and focus”. In relation to this statement, farmers/foresters are comparatively a bit more positive than non-farmers/foresters (57% against, 52% strongly agree or agree). However, neutral respondents (those who neither agree nor disagree that calls helped to better define a project's focus) take the first place in this question, with almost one third of the answers.



Around 60% of respondents (53% of farmers/foresters) strongly disagree or disagree when asked whether calls had “set too strict limitations in relation to the eligible sector/themes/topics, not allowing the OG to address the real needs of farmers and to capture innovative opportunities”. Around 20% of respondents (22% of farmers/foresters) agree or strongly agree with this statement.

Figure 46: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls set too strict limitations in relation to project themes



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=362 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

For the respondents of the Stakeholder survey, the most frequently mentioned key element through which OG could favour successful project outcomes is addressing “what the end users assess as real problems or opportunities for which there is an urgent need”. This item occurred 191 times, meaning that it was selected by 81% of EIP stakeholders answering the survey.

One could see a potential source of conflict between an EIP OG grassroots-oriented approach and programme-driven priority topics. However, the analysis shows that **MA use open and thematic calls in complementary rather than contrasting ways**. Representatives of the EU CAP Network and the Commission have positively commented on the decision to allow full flexibility in Member State approaches to calls.

A combination of both call types, or the definition of broad themes, allows for fairly open participation among the solutions found in national and regional approaches.

Open calls may be more difficult in some cases by raising the level of competition, particularly for niche sectors (DE-Hessen, Poland), but the opportunity to freely address the desired topic is considered relevant to innovation by MAs (Bulgaria, DE-Hessen, DE-Baden-W., ES-Cataluña, Sweden) and by OGs (Bulgaria, Portugal, Sweden). This issue is also linked to the capacity and specific expertise of the selection committee to assess which project themes indeed have the potential to solve farmers' needs or produce innovation prospects ⁴⁶.

In the opinion of OG lead partners responding to the survey, **OG calls generally succeeded in addressing concrete grassroots needs without limiting the choice of themes too much**, even if lead partners belonging to the farmer/forester category are a bit less positive in this respect (conversely, they are more positive in assessing the call's capacity to help OGs define the focus of the project).

However, proper attention should be paid to the fact that **OG calls set too strict limitations in relation to eligible or priority topics for 20% of respondents**, thus reducing the opportunity to capture bottom-up needs and innovative ideas.

b. JC 3.2 - The conditions of the EIP OG calls have facilitated the co-creation of innovative solutions.

This JC analyses how calls have favoured the process of cooperation within OGs and, in particular, how call provisions have influenced:

1. The setting up of the OG partnership and the mobilisation of all necessary types of knowledge and skills.
2. The actual implementation of an interactive innovation model where all partners have a voice in the project and co-create innovative solutions.

To favour the creation of complementary partnerships cooperating in a democratic way, OG calls have used a combination of tools. Eligibility conditions have required to involve given types or a

⁴⁶ The (crucial) role played by the OG selection committees - and the need for MAs to secure knowledgeable expertise for this task - was among the topics of the EIP-AGRI seminar 'Moving EIP-AGRI implementation forward', Athens, Greece, 10-11 May 2017.



minimum number of partners and observe precise cooperation rules. These requirements have been reinforced through the selection criteria. Moreover, guidelines and formats have been provided to prioritise a shared interpretation and application of the EIP OG cooperation model.

The most common requirement throughout OG calls is to **include at least one farmer** within the OG (Bulgaria, DE-Hessen, Poland) or one forester where forestry projects are foreseen (Austria, IT-Liguria, Lithuania, Portugal).

This eligibility condition may be defined in slightly different ways to take into account national/regional peculiarities. In some cases, e.g. in the Netherlands, the presence of a farmer association (rather than a single farmer) fulfils the condition. In ES-Pais Vasco and Portugal, an agrifood company may be included instead of a farmer.

Other mandatory OG partners can be **researchers**, research centres or technology institutes, as it is the case in Bulgaria, IT-Liguria, Lithuania and Portugal. As noted by the Commission, this may indirectly restrict the scope of open calls, as not all potential OG objectives contain research capacity while other type of expertise is more important in some cases (for example, short food supply chains).

Looking closer at some of the case studies, the analysis highlights different approaches to eligibility conditions and selection criteria, together with their tangible effects on OGs and OG projects.

In Portugal, a **minimum of three partners** was required, including a farmer/forester/agrifood company, an association of farmers/foresters/agrifood companies, and a public or private research body. Furthermore, a higher proportion of companies within the OG was prioritised through a dedicated selection criterion. This incentive to the participation of more companies is seen in a very positive way by the MA representative.

Lithuanian OG calls required the participation of an **advisor**, besides a farmer/forester and a research partner. Selection criteria awarded a higher score if more farmers were involved (more than five farmers got 20 points out of 100, three to five farmers got 10 points respectively). However, this criterion has reportedly been changed to 'appropriateness of partnership' in the most recent calls, which rewarded the involvement of other types of partners, such as NGOs and young farmers).

Such an approach is seen by the Lithuanian OG lead partner as **challenging but effective**. In their view, the obligation to include three types of partners has allowed different experiences and skills to come within the OG. Also, the inclusion of more foresters belonging to different eco-climatic regions is perceived as strongly positive for the achievement of project outcomes.

ES-Pais Vasco used selection criteria to promote **multidisciplinary and high-skilled partnerships**. Calls awarded up to 15 points for the participation of a technology or research centre and up to 15 points for the **'interaction' with an innovation broker**. An additional score (slightly increased after a revision of selection criteria) was given to other criteria related to the quality and diversity of the partnership and to the quality and frequency of interaction among the partners. For the representative of the MA, OGs should be composed of a minimum of three partners while it is mandatory to include members from the primary sector. The participation of innovation centres, although strongly recommended, may not be necessary in certain

cases and should not be obligatory. The interview with the OG lead partner confirms that the call elements have had positive effects on the project, as **the OG was pushed to involve livestock farmers and establish daily contact with partners**. The participation of a research centre helped to design the project.

In Ireland, around one-third of the score assigned to the OGs in the different calls was related to the qualification and experience of partners, to their representativeness (which should **include people 'on the ground'**) and, where relevant, to the number of local authorities and agri-food sector involved. The 'Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme - SUAS' OG was consequently set up with a **balanced mix of expertise and practical experience leading, in the lead partner's view, to the successful implementation of the project**.

However, call provisions on partnership composition may not yield positive results according to other OGs.

During the focus group of the Bulgarian case study, OG partners highlighted the fact that some partners that would have been strategic in the project, particularly IT SMEs and research/technical centres not working in the agrifood sector, were not eligible within the call, which is perceived as a limiting factor for the development of the innovation.

In the DE-Hessen case, the OG lead partner reported that the group was larger than initially planned due to an administrative request and **newer partners had different expectations compared to those that had designed the project**.

Compared to the previous cases, the Provincial Model Regulation (PMR) in the Netherlands adopted a more flexible approach in relation to OG composition. Apart from the mandatory presence of a farmer or farmer association, eligibility conditions and selection criteria did not stress the quantitative and qualitative composition of partnerships to a large extent. For example, the participation of research centres was not a requirement, which led to other partners (e.g. advisors, sectorial or cluster organisations, depending on the project) taking up the 'knowledge' role. Provinces could then add further conditions, for example, Northern Netherlands required a minimum of six partners per OG.

In Sweden, an eligibility condition required the participation of at least two of three types of partners; farmer or food sector operator, researcher and advisor. Selection criteria awarded up to five points to the level of **collective competence of the partnership** in the project matter. The representative of the MA added an element to this picture, emphasising that "it is also strongly recommended, and deemed very positively, if the group includes representatives with expertise in market access, commercialisation, as well as manufacturing". According to the Swedish OG lead partner, **the call requirements favoured academic participation**, which would have had problems in forming with the OG otherwise due to the lack of contacts.

It should be noted that some of the interviewees, from both the MA and OG side, raised doubts about the capacity of the calls and overall selection process to make a difference in relation to the achievement of project outcomes. According to the representative of the Polish MA, although the call assured a relevant composition of OGs "on paper", the MA could not effectively assess the quality of the OG in the application phase. Consistently with the MA's views,



the OG lead partner adds that the quality of an OG depends very much on the individuals in charge of the project preparation rather than on the call rules. Besides influencing the number and types of partnership members through eligibility rules and selection criteria, OG calls also addressed the challenge of ensuring implementation of the “interactive innovation model” and equal participation of all partners in projects. Compared to the composition of groups, this is a less tangible and a somewhat slippery issue, as calls can force OGs to interact on a democratic basis only to a certain extent. Representatives of the Commission have emphasised that sufficient details need to be asked about this in the application.

Article 56 (2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013⁴⁷ foresees that “EIP Operational Groups shall establish internal procedures that ensure that their operation and decision-making is transparent and that situations of conflict of interest are avoided”. Being a regulatory provision, all RDPs and OG calls recall it, and many MAs have prepared guidelines and templates to ensure a common understanding and application of rules.

In addition, from information collected at the case study level, all MAs have adopted solutions to foster EIP cooperation principles in OG projects. These have taken the form of:

- Requirements to include a **description of roles, responsibilities and tasks** assumed by each partner (e.g. Bulgaria, DE-Baden-W., FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, Lithuania, Portugal) within the project file, action plan, cooperation agreement or other project documents.
- **Limitations to the amount of budget per partner** (in ES-Pais Vasco, no more than 60% of the total project budget while further limitations are applied to the costs of research, set at 30% maximum of the total budget) or obligation for each partner to provide resources for the project (Portugal).
- **Selection criteria** prioritising a clear and balanced involvement of OG partners, the quality of internal procedures or the quality and frequency of interactions within the group. Examples of this are reported from Austria, Bulgaria, DE-Baden-W., ES-Pais Vasco, Ireland.

Lithuanian calls were very prescriptive on this matter and provided for a number of **internal communication rules**. In particular, they required that all partners be aware of the application and their rights and obligations in the project. This includes that the beneficiary (i.e. the lead partner) regularly consults with partners and informs them of all reporting steps (e.g. payment claims submitted, information requested by the Paying Agency) within three working days, and agrees with partners on any change to be made to the project. Furthermore, before submitting the aid application, OG partners must agree on the property rights of project results and assets purchased with project funds⁴⁸.

Sometimes, **call provisions seem to have been effective in ensuring the uptake of an ‘interactive innovation model’ even if the concept itself was not known or consciously considered by an OG**. In three of the case studies, ES-Pais Vasco, Lithuania and Portugal, similar answers are reported from OG Lead partners. The interviewee was not familiar with the principle of ‘interactive innovation model’ but, after receiving clarifications, he/she confirmed that this was actually the way cooperation worked within the OG (“he does not know the term, but they have used it”).

This might be seen as a good example of how carefully drafted call provisions discreetly yet concretely shape the nature and outcomes of projects.

Besides the **call requirements, the interactive innovation model, the bottom-up approach and an equal participation of all partners can be successfully embedded within OG projects if they are genuinely understood and knowingly valued by all partners**.

The experience of FR Bourgogne/Franche-Comté illustrates the effort of transferring theoretical and methodological tools even before issuing calls, in the early stage of preparing EIP OG cooperation (regarding the value of preparation, see also [Box 4](#)).

In the words of the MA representative, the bottom-up innovation aspect was highlighted since the beginning, also to mark the difference with traditional projects, i.e. those led by chambers of agriculture. Support was provided to explain the EIP instrument and the objective to bring together practical skills and research. The bottom-up and cooperation topics were also included among selection criteria.

The MA representative added that, in the light of experience, **the most successful projects are those in which the individuals involved are trained to collaborate** – conversely, projects are very often immediately focused on the technical dimension to the detriment of collaboration.

Training on collaboration, as highlighted by the Commission, may be organised by National CAP Networks, based on some training material and tools made available during dedicated Horizon projects⁴⁹.

The results of the OG survey show that calls were generally successful in favouring the creation of good partnerships and ensuring equal participation of partners within OGs.

Almost 75% of respondents agree or strongly agree that calls “helped to create a partnership with a balanced mix of complementary expertise” while 17% neither agree nor disagree (which seems to reflect a view of OG calls as a rather ‘neutral’ tool, as expressed by some case study interviewees). Less than 10% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the proposed statement.

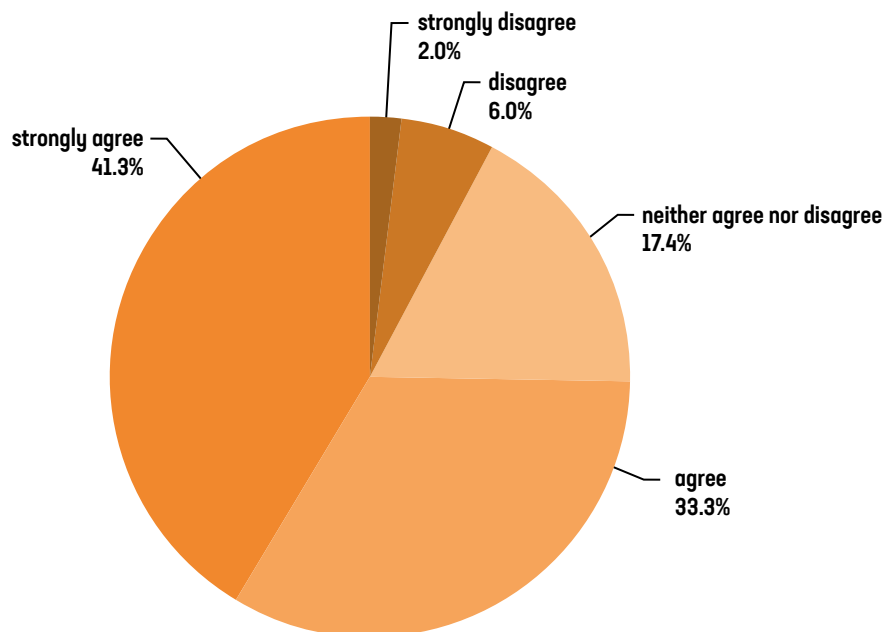
⁴⁷ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

⁴⁸ Such property rights are included in the OG partnership ‘Joint Activity Agreement’.

⁴⁹ Some Horizon projects, such as i2Connect, have trained advisors in the interactive innovation model. ATTRACTISS will also help innovation support services with tools to ensure interactive innovation approaches.



Figure 47: Influence of OG calls on creating partnerships with a balanced mix of complementary expertise



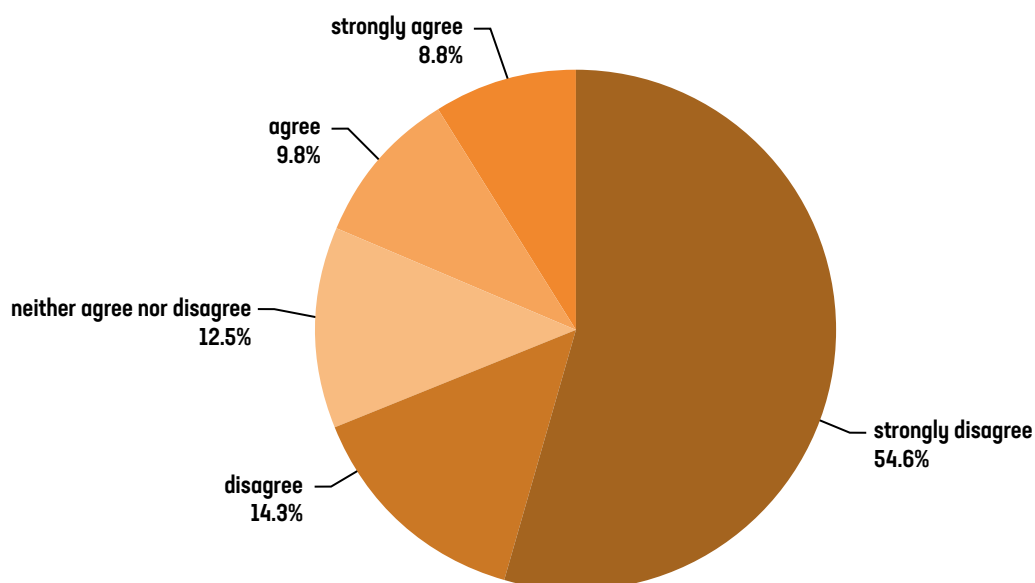
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=402 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

Participants in the OG survey were also invited to look at the calls' influence on partnerships from the opposite perspective and provide their opinion as to whether requirements "pushed the OG to include more partners than what was needed for/functional to the project" or "did not sufficiently request to include the necessary partners".

As a result, almost **70% of answers express strong disagreement or disagreement (meaning that calls did not push OGs to excessively extend partnerships)** with the former item and almost 80% with the latter.

However, an extremely prescriptive approach of calls, requiring the involvement of many partners or many types of partners as an eligibility condition or through selection criteria, is an issue for 18% of respondents. One example of this was also represented in case studies (DE-Hessen) and negatively influenced the project execution.

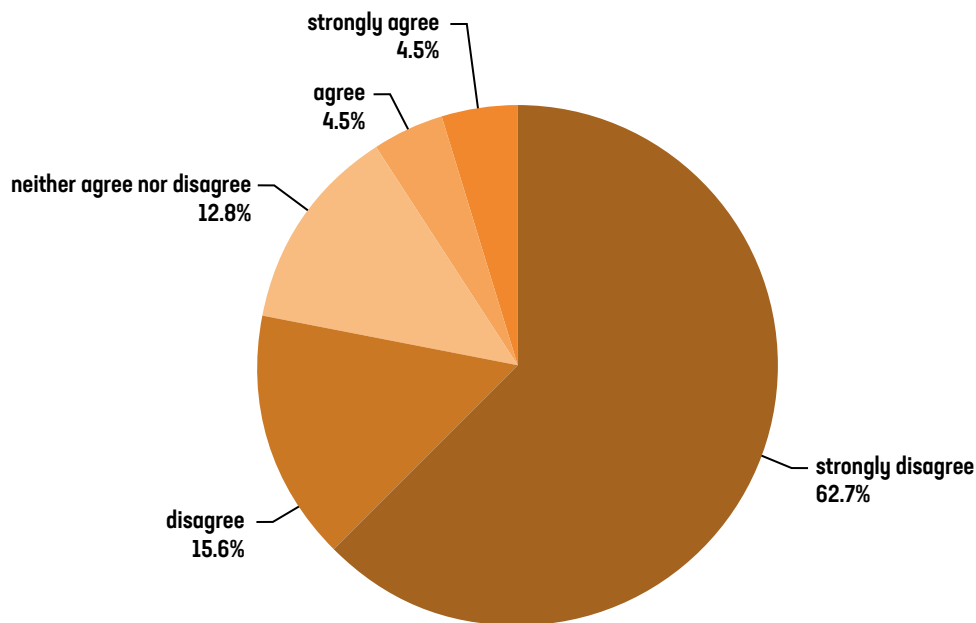
Figure 48: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls pushed OGs to include more partners than needed



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=377 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)



Figure 49: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls did not sufficiently request the inclusion of necessary partners



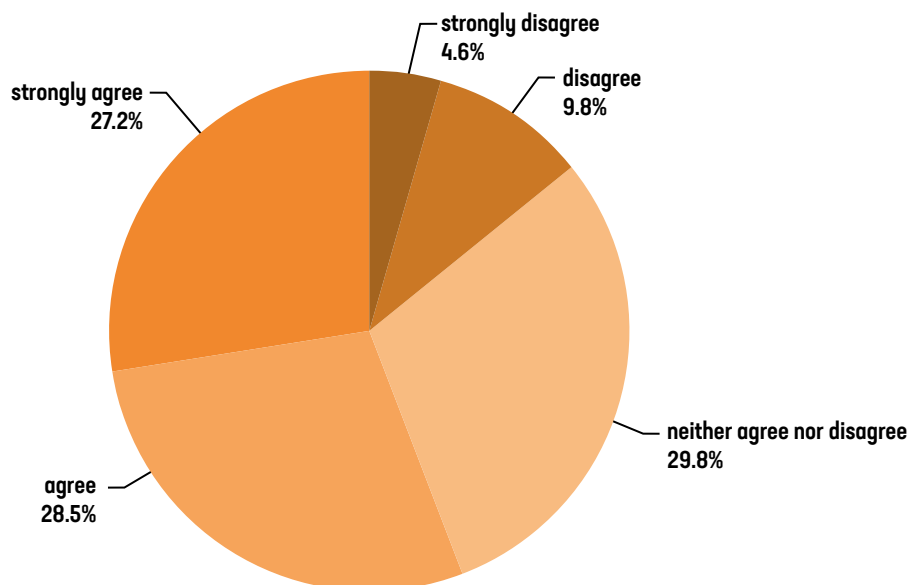
Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=359 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

A little more than 55% of respondents agree or strongly agree that OG calls “helped to ensure participation of partners on an equal level”. It has already been emphasised that calls can be less effective in this respect, although instructions and templates provided by MAs and commitments set in the calls seem to have sufficiently implemented the interactive innovation model. This finding seems to confirm what has been pointed out by the Commission in relation to the crucial role played, besides the calls, by the wider AKIS ecosystem - that

enabling activities within AKIS (information meetings/trainings organised by MA, National Networks, advisors or information support services) are very important to complement the call rules and help OGs to sufficiently implement the interactive innovation model.

Yet, neutral (neither agree nor disagree) and negative opinions on this issue account for around 30% and 14% respectively.

Figure 50: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls helped to ensure participation of partners at an equal level



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=389 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

Among the “elements of OG calls that could favour the achievement of project outcomes”, 98 participants in the Stakeholder survey indicated that calls should include “requirements for OGs to create partnerships with a balanced mix of complementary expertise” and 82 respondents selected the item “requirements for OGs to ensure that all partners participate on an equal level”. These two items are the third and fourth most frequent options, respectively.



The 'cooperation' factor, crucial to the EIP-AGRI instrument, has been considered by all MAs and introduced into calls as an eligibility condition and/or selection criterion.

The case studies show that **calls succeeded in guiding OGs towards the creation of complementary partnerships** (ES-Pais Vasco, Lithuania, Portugal) even if **this added complexity to the project's management**. The positive influence of calls on the quality and complementarity of partnerships is overall confirmed by the OG survey respondents.

It should not be underestimated, though, that a strong proactive administration approach risks producing undesired effects on OG projects or altering the balance within partnerships. Such a case

was reported for Bulgaria and DE-Hessen and confirmed by almost 20% of respondents to the OG survey.

The interactive innovation model and democratic approach within the OGs were promoted through calls, showing a genuine effort by MAs to safeguard the principles of the EIP-AGRI approach.

Although the results are satisfactory to a large extent, case studies (FR Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, ES-Pais Vasco, Lithuania, Portugal) show that **full awareness and a shared understanding of the interactive innovation model could be further improved e.g. with awareness raising actions and training, advice and innovation support to be organised within AKIS.**

Box 4: Preparing OGs and OG projects

The design and implementation of a partnership-based, (often) multi-annual project is complex by nature. Furthermore, a project of a genuinely experimental nature (i.e. testing innovative solutions) involves a degree of uncertainty and may need progressive adjustments.

Knowing this, EIP-AGRI regulations and guidelines have emphasised the value of good preparation and designed a two-step approach for OG project selection. The first step should be dedicated to preparing OG projects and the second to executing OG projects.

Innovation support services and advisors are expected to help stakeholders identify innovative ideas, find relevant partners, familiarise themselves with the interactive innovation model and carefully design the project. The purpose of the preparation step is to ensure compliance with the interactive innovation model in the OG project, handle complexity and prevent shortcomings in the cooperation process and project execution, to the maximum possible extent.

Many interviewees, both on the MA and OG sides, acknowledge the importance of preparation to ensure that cooperation and project activities run smoothly. This was the case in Ireland, where the OG lead partner clearly highlighted that **thorough preparation, more careful and detailed than required, proved remarkably advantageous during implementation** (the project progressed swiftly without delays).

The Irish Department of Agriculture also provided **financial support for the application phase, which was highly beneficial**. The Commission also remarked on the role of preparatory actions as a factor favouring the smooth implementation of projects (for instance, in relation to compliance with the interactive innovation model and careful budget planning).

For the MA representative in the Netherlands, sufficient preparation time and coordination are important to get parties on the same page. In FR-Burgundy/Franche-Comté, **going through**

the preparation process of the OG emergence phase, although not compulsory, proved to be a success factor for project implementation.

Mentioning the results of a 2019 survey, the MA representative in Sweden agrees that applications that have gone through both steps of the selection process are approved to a significantly greater extent, adding that experts note that **the creation of the OG behind an innovation is often a more important success factor than the innovation itself.**

In PT-Mainland, a preparation step called 'Bolsa de Iniciativas', managed by the NRN, allowed to capture interest from the stakeholders, better design the call for applications and prevent duplication of OGs in the same thematic areas. This tool was spread through extensive communication actions.

Both Austria and Lithuania emphasise the role of preparatory steps in the 2023-2027 programming period. In Austria, only the OG implementation (step 2) was funded in 2014-2022 RDP. In the current period, preparation (step 1) will be separately funded through dedicated calls for each step, to ensure more time and flexibility to build effective OG projects. In Lithuania, there will be a three-step selection procedure (selecting potential project ideas, preparing project plans and implementing projects, respectively) with the aim of encouraging farmers to be more active in proposing ideas tailored to their needs.

A partially different experience is described in IT-Liguria where, according to the MA representative, **the double step selection procedure delayed the implementation of OG projects** from an estimated time of 18 months to four-five years, saying that "after four years, an innovation can no longer be considered as such". It is to be mentioned, however, that the OG lead partner deems the first phase useful because it allowed to better define the OG. On this issue, the Commission has suggested that the preparation (step 1) should be kept limited in time (max one year), and the selection of the projects for implementation (step 2) should follow swiftly without delay.

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)



c. JC 3.3 – EIP OG calls have increased the possibilities of a wider uptake of innovative solutions and development of new connections and further cooperation

Article 57 (3) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013⁵⁰ states that OGs shall disseminate the results of their projects, in particular, through the EIP Network. In addition to this obligation, the annex to the EIP-AGRI guidelines⁵¹ provides a format to be used “both for dissemination of results after the project and for communication on a project while it is running”.

Communication and dissemination are crucial to circulate information about OG projects and, through this, strengthen and extend EIP-AGRI communities.

Besides transposing the regulatory requirement related to the dissemination of results, OG calls generally contain eligibility conditions, commitments and selection criteria focusing on communication and dissemination.

At the level of eligibility conditions, some MAs required the inclusion of a **communication plan** in the application or to describe communication and dissemination activities as part of the project plan. In the study's case studies, examples of this are provided by Bulgaria, ES-Pais Vasco, FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, IT-Liguria, Netherlands and Portugal.

Other calls included a **general commitment to communicate/disseminate** while other made more specific requests to report periodically about the project activities and results (DE-Hessen, while Ireland had a selection criterion rewarding ‘regular updates’ about the OG project) or to include **NRNs and/or EIP AGRI network as a communication/dissemination channel** (Austria, DE-Baden-W., IT-Liguria, Portugal).

As reported by the MA, the Austrian OG calls set a specific list of communication/dissemination requirements including half-yearly reports, a project website, and the uploading of information on EU and NRN databases.

In ES-Pais Vasco, dissemination actions were to be carried out no later than two months after the final payment.

Selection criteria were often used to prioritise communication and dissemination by rewarding the **quality of the communication plan** (Austria, ES-Pais Vasco, ES-Cataluña, FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, IT-Liguria); the **number of actions and channels** that the project planned to use (Lithuania gave a higher score for the use of at least three different channels while the MA representative from Portugal mentioned that calls specified the different channels to be used in order to get a higher mark: websites, conferences, focus groups and specialised publications); and a **wider level of communication and dissemination** (IT-Liguria awarded a progressively higher score to communication/dissemination activities carried out locally, nationally or at EU scale respectively; Lithuania did the same for communication and dissemination targeting sectorial, regional or transnational level).

The **involvement of NRN and EIP-AGRI network**, which some Member States have required as an eligibility condition (as requested in the

regulation for the EIP network, have been prioritised by other MA through selection criteria). Portuguese calls rewarded an annual dissemination of OG project activities and results through the NRN (in this specific case, all OG members must be members of the NRN). Ireland awarded points to OGs establishing links with NRN and participating in the national EIP-AGRI conference in 2022.

Another common **selection criterion relates to the number and relevance of recipients** targeted by communication and dissemination (ES-Pais Vasco, ES-Cataluña, FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, Ireland, Sweden). Formulated in broader or in more specific ways, this criterion aimed to measure the potential for a wider uptake of innovative solutions and the spillover effect of OG projects.

In Poland, this criterion was used to prioritise OG projects based on economic and social benefits as well as the sectorial and geographical scale for applications of innovative solutions.

It should be noted that the Commission considers this type of criterion very useful if correctly used. However, representatives of DG AGRI have also pointed out that some innovations need time to grow and be accepted by the average farmer. Selection criteria prioritising the prompt diffusion of innovative solutions may disfavour innovations on very novel issues or projects addressing promising niche markets.

Lithuania had an eligibility condition requiring the demonstration of project results in at least 10 holdings and a selection criterion prioritising a wider application of innovative solutions (more than 20 holdings were awarded the maximum score).

Portugal set a higher level of ambition and rewarded **transnational OG projects**, which, in the MA representative's words, was very positive as it allowed a richer exchange of experiences with OGs from other countries.

OG calls have certainly contributed to attracting OGs' attention to communication and dissemination, which, in the absence of specific requirements and incentives, risked being perceived as a secondary or marginal objective of OG projects, particularly after the project completion. According to the OG lead partner of the IT-Liguria case study, the **rules set by the call were a deciding factor for the “few” actions realised**, saying “next time we'll do better”. What specifically prevented the group from investing in communication and dissemination was the lack of a dedicated professional figure within the partnership.

This opinion seems to be confirmed by the experience of the Lithuanian OG, where a consultant played the key role of ensuring communication and dissemination throughout the project. In the Bulgarian OGs, communication and dissemination were frequently taken over by research institutes and spread through their websites.

In the Netherlands (‘Seaweed in healthy dairy farming’ project) several partners used their own communication channels to inform about the project. As suggested by the Commission, communication and dissemination carried out by research institutes may not be the ideal channel to reach farmers and other practitioners, while farmers and advisors using their own communication tools as members of an OG spread information and results more effectively.

⁵⁰ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013.

⁵¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability, 17 February 2016.



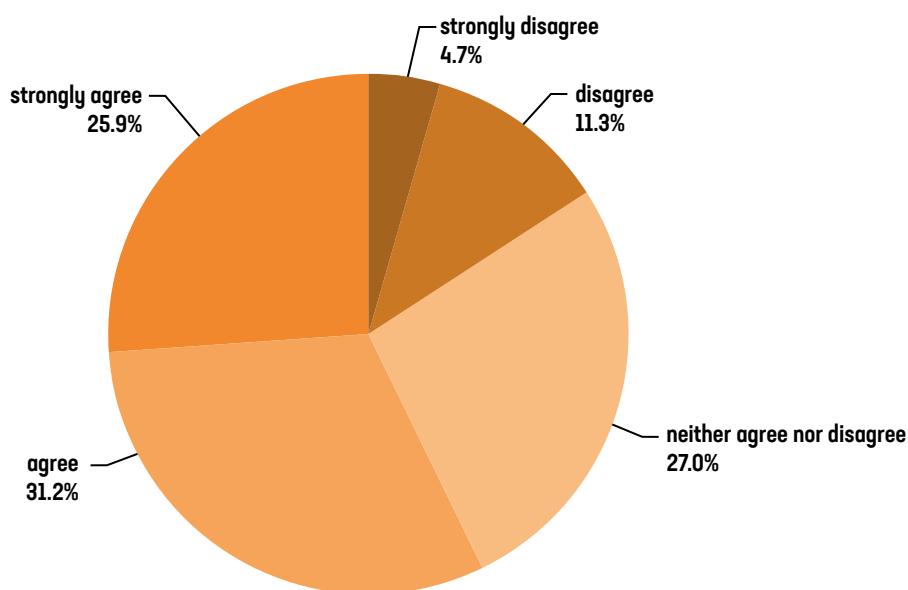
The lead partner of one of the case studies in the Netherlands ('Precision with technology in grassland management') states that a description of communication and dissemination was included in the project, and related activities executed, as required by the call. Similarly, one of the findings of the focus group conducted with OG partners in ES-Pais Vasco, points out that **eligibility and selection criteria were mainly relevant for project dissemination**, as it was made mandatory.

The representatives of MAs in FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté and in Poland found it difficult to assess the actual impact of calls favouring

communication and dissemination. In the latter case, **all calls defined rules for communication and dissemination, but the results of these activities strongly depended on the quality of specific OGs**. This could indicate that the rules were not specific enough to influence the selection in terms of quality of dissemination.

About 57% of respondents to the OG survey agree or strongly agree that calls have played a role in requesting "to plan and realise communication and dissemination activities". A further 27% of respondents are neutral, while 16% disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 51: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls requested a plan for, and delivery of, communication and dissemination activities



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=382 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

When asked which elements of OG calls and procedures could favour successful project outcomes, only 57 out of 233 respondents to the Stakeholder survey put the requirement to "draft and execute a communication and dissemination plan" among the three most important elements that OG calls should include.

Among the 57 prioritising communication and dissemination, all respondent categories are represented, but about one third (18) are researchers and 23 are 'institutional' EIP-AGRI actors (e.g. MAs, National CAP Networks, EIP-AGRI coordination bodies and innovation support services). Also, seven advisors/advisory bodies recognised the role of communication/dissemination requirements in OG calls. More specifically, drafting and executing a communication and dissemination plan was prioritised by 24 of the 101 respondents who previously participated in OG projects.

This result does not imply that, according to the stakeholders, OG calls should not foster communication and dissemination. In this survey question, the requirements 'competing' for the top three were all key factors of the EIP OG approach (i.e. addressing the needs of end users, creating partnerships with complementary expertise,

using simplification tools and ensuring democratic participation within the OG). Yet, this figure complements the overall study finding that OG calls should focus on communication and dissemination even more in the future.

Beyond call drafting, **MAs have further effective and direct tools to improve the visibility of OG projects**, as interestingly witnessed by the findings of German, Irish and Swedish case studies.

In Germany, regional authorities have created an **institutional AKIS environment that maximises opportunities for OGs to focus on communication and networking**.

As explained by the DE-Baden-W. MA representative, applicants to OG calls are initially made aware of the importance of **presenting projects and their interim results at information events**. For example, at the start of the implementation of a project (funding application and approval), each time when applying for payment and at **annual networking events**. Additionally, the German Ministry for Rural Areas and Consumer Protection organises an **annual EIP-AGRI results' transfer event** where OGs can present the results



of their projects to a wide audience of scientists, associations, administrators and other interested parties. OGs are also required to **present project outcomes to relevant ministry departments** and to communicate/disseminate project results via the EIP web page of the ministry.

In DE-Hessen, the MA representative points out the role of the German Networking Centre⁵² that gave OGs the opportunity to **produce short videos**. Information about **networking events, open days**, etc. was circulated by various regional actors. The **ministry's webpage** published fact sheets, posters, and an interactive map with all funded OG projects.

In Ireland, the **National Rural Network has been a key networking and dissemination actor for EIP-AGRI**. A non-exhaustive list of interesting services and tools provided to Irish OGs are all available on the NRN website and include:

- > A 'One-Stop-Shop' interactive database.
- > The EIP-AGRI national conference in November 2022.
- > An EIP-AGRI guest blog providing a platform to showcase and highlight the diversity of innovative initiatives by various actors.
- > A **YouTube participating farmer video** blog series featuring farmers involved in Ireland's OG projects located throughout the country.
- > A booklet titled 'EIP-AGRI: Ireland's Operational Groups 2019'. The purpose of this booklet was to highlight and promote the 23 Irish EIP-AGRI OGs funded under Ireland's 2014-2020 RDP.

In Sweden, the MA points out that OGs are invited to NRN meetings taking place approximately twice a year and offered **trainings** on how to work with the media and disseminate results. Also, the MA is exploring new, more informal ways for OGs to meet regularly, exchange experiences and address common issues.

Even though OG calls require communication and dissemination actions, sometimes in very specific terms, some OGs have focused on such activities only to a limited extent.

As some case study interviewees made clear (IT-Liguria, Lithuania), for farmers and other stakeholder categories, communication and dissemination are not ordinary 'business as usual' tasks and are not always perceived as being at the core of OG projects. Conversely, **the mobilisation of relevant skills within the partnership may be crucial** in helping OGs reach a wider audience and create opportunities for further cooperation. Bulgaria's OG project and the seaweed project in the Netherlands provide examples of partnerships where communication and dissemination expertise and channels were available.

Also, skilled people beyond the partnership within the wider AKIS can be sought to help OGs (NRN communication staff, innovation support services, advisors, trainers etc).

While maintaining the general requirement to focus on communication and dissemination (e.g. through a specific plan), **future OG**

calls might use selection criteria to prioritise the involvement of relevant partners for communication and dissemination (e.g. advisors) or the recruitment of experts for the implementation of the communication and dissemination plan. The role of advisors as key actors in spreading information about OG projects to a wider audience was emphasised by the Commission and the EU CAP Network representative, pointing at the need to ensure better training and advisors. In this sense, **the 2023-2027 CAP's cross-cutting AKIS objective, linking cooperation to training and advisory interventions, has the potential to realise a more integrated innovation environment**.

Besides calls, case studies (Ireland, Germany, Sweden) have already emphasised the role of institutional actors (NRN, MAs, governmental bodies) in spreading information about OGs.

d. JC 3.4 – The administrative and/or technical requirements of the call have reduced administrative burden and simplified project implementation

OG projects have been selected and funded in the framework of RDPs, following the conditions set by EAFRD regulations. The ordinary administrative process foresees that OGs prepare and submit an application (either in a two- or single-step procedure), go through the selection process and, if successful, be granted a subsidy to implement their projects and report expenditures by submitting one or more payment claims.

The selection process provided for by Article 49 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013⁵³ applies to EIP-AGRI cooperation. In the case of OG projects, the **need to guarantee transparent procedures has frequently required securing relevant expertise⁵⁴ and appointing ad hoc evaluation procedures and committees with sufficient expertise on the ground**. For instance, in FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, the selection process has been accompanied by hearings arranged by the General Assembly to understand OG projects more in-depth, which the MA representatives consider a factor of success for implementation.

The complexity and length of these processes vary significantly due to national/regional administrative systems and to other variables (exogenous factors such as COVID-19 have certainly influenced the progress of many projects).

Simplification measures have however been identified both in the framework of EU regulations and in practice⁵⁵. Among them are light application forms, the use of templates, digitalised procedures and simplified cost options (SCOs). The following analysis will show to what extent simplification options were applied and how this influenced OG projects.

Only 21% of respondents to the OG survey agree or strongly agree that OG calls "limited the administrative burden on the OG and simplified implementation". Conversely, 55% of respondents strongly disagree (this option is chosen by one-third of respondents) or disagree with this statement.

⁵² German Networking Centre for Rural Areas: Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle Ländliche Räume, DVS, <https://www.dvs-gap-netzwerk.de/>.

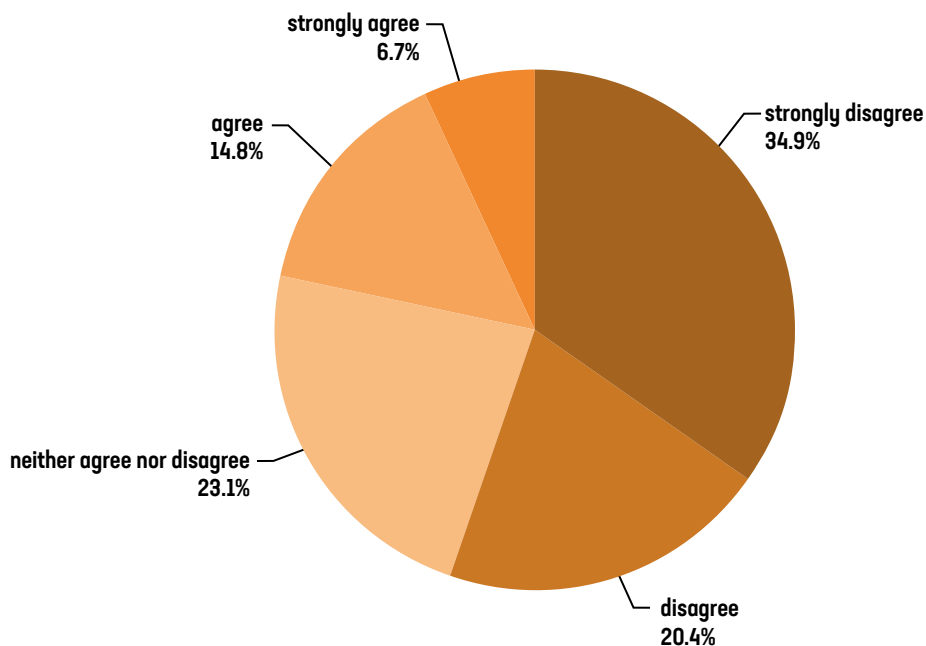
⁵³ Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. Article 49 provides for the definition and use of selection criteria in order "to ensure equal treatment of applicants, better use of financial resources and targeting of measures in accordance with the Union priorities for rural development".

⁵⁴ EIP-AGRI seminar 'Moving EIP-AGRI implementation forward', Athens, Greece, 10-11 May 2017, Final report.

⁵⁵ EIP-AGRI seminar 'Moving EIP-AGRI implementation forward', Athens, Greece, 10-11 May 2017; EIP-AGRI seminar 'From Operational Group project to impact. Building the innovation ecosystem for the future', Umbria, Italy, 17-18 October 2018. Final report.



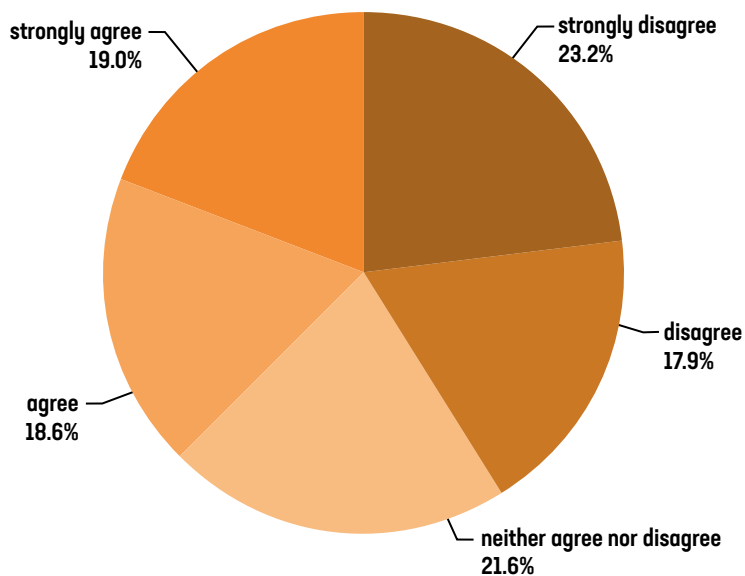
Figure 52: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls limited the administrative burden and simplified implementation



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=372 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

Responses to the question of whether calls hindered the achievement of results because they “forced the OG to comply with unnecessary and burdensome requirements” are more nuanced. Some 37% of answers strongly agree or agree with this statement while 41% strongly disagree or disagree. These results could be seen as partially contradicting the previous ones but could also mean that **administrative burden did not prevent projects from achieving the outcomes (i.e. outcomes were achieved despite administrative burden).**

Figure 53: OG partners' opinions about the extent to which OG calls forced OGs to comply with unnecessary and burdensome requirements



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=379 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)

The last survey question asked OG partners about their degree of satisfaction with six administrative elements: application content requirements, the time between the call and application deadline, the time between application and selection, the time between selection and the first payment, requirements to receive payments and the time needed to receive payments.

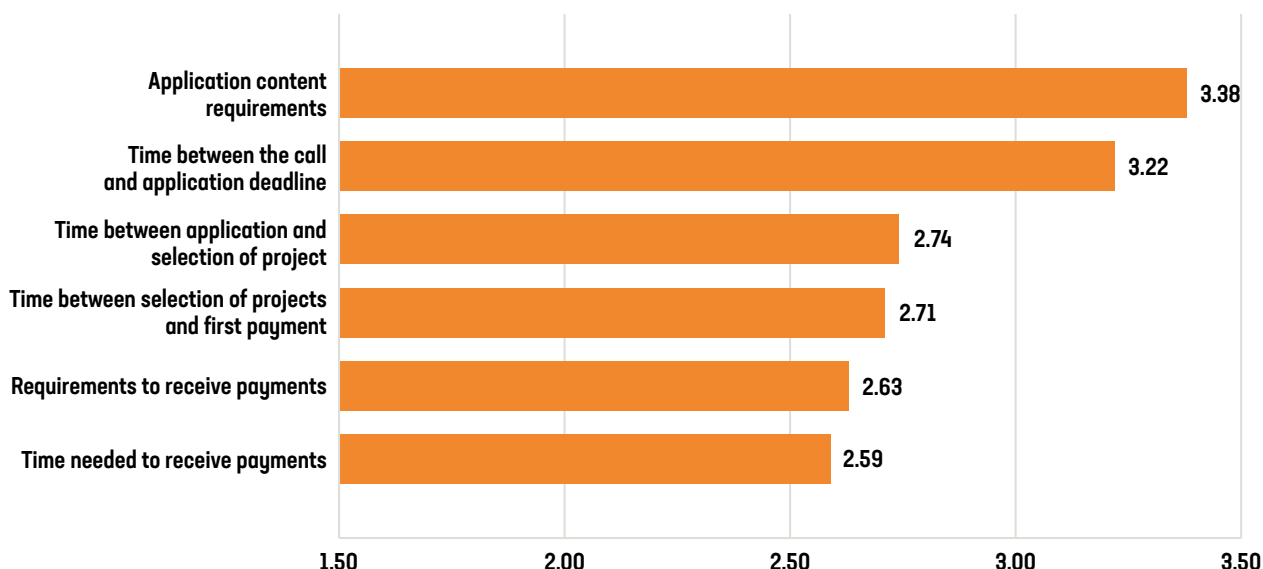
The highest degree of satisfaction is related to application content requirements (only 18% is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) and

time between the call and application deadline (with a less positive performance, though: dissatisfied or very dissatisfied respondents are 27%).

Although their average score is always over 2.5 on a 5-point scale, when it comes to the four administrative elements left, the dissatisfied or very dissatisfied respondents are more than the satisfied or very satisfied ones.



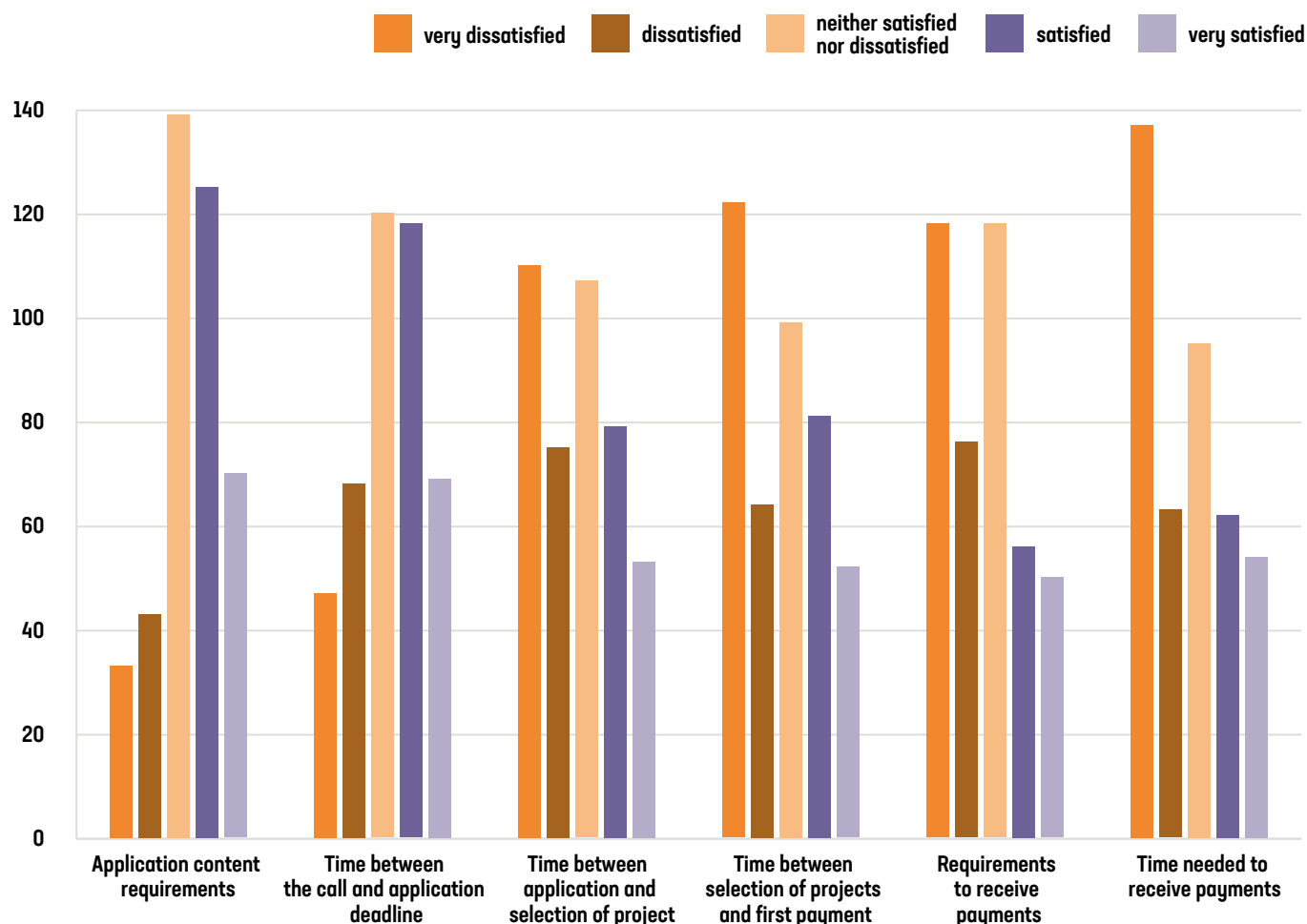
Figure 54: Degree of satisfaction with administrative aspects



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=458 survey responses - Lead partners) (On a scale from 1, very dissatisfied to 5, very satisfied)

In relation to the time between application submission and project selection, and between selection and first payment, negative responses are 43-44%, while positive ones are 31%. **The gap is even larger as regards satisfaction with requirements to receive payments (46% negative marks against 25% positive ones) and time needed to receive payments (48% negative and 28% positive).**

Figure 55: Degree of satisfaction with administrative aspects (details)



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=458 survey responses - Lead partners). No. of respondents



Forty-eight (48) respondents further commented on the last two questions of the survey and most comments target administrative burden. In particular, **OG lead partners complain about the length of procedures, the difficulty of complying with rules of paying agencies, the instability of rules from call to call or year to year, too much bureaucracy and paperwork associated with application, registering and reporting processes.**

Some comments highlight that innovation projects should be allowed more flexibility in relation to budget and expenditure rules. Others deem the administrative burden for OGs higher than Horizon programmes.

For EIP-AGRI stakeholders responding to the second survey, **simplification is the second most preferred option that could favour successful project outcomes.** Among the 163 stakeholders who included simplification in their top-three factors list, 119 are professionals, companies or organisations that could potentially be OG partners while 44 are institutional actors, including MAs.

Case studies provide deeper insights into administrative burden issues, exploring how they influenced OG projects and what solutions are being found to simplify implementation.

All case studies see administrative burden for OGs as an issue, except for Ireland, where no major problems were mentioned.

Project administration is generally perceived as a time consuming, stressful activity that is reportedly “more complex than the technical development of the project” (OG lead partner in DE-Baden-W.) or “a kind of stranglehold with no flexibility whatsoever” (focus group participants of the seaweed OG project in the Netherlands). Sometimes, administrative issues are a factor pushing to abandon the project (as reported by the Bulgarian lead partner interview) or give up on applying for new projects (lead partner in DE-Hessen).

Applications, although burdensome in some cases (reportedly “not very simple” in ES-Cataluña, “easy but required a lot of work” in

Sweden and “very time-consuming” in DE-Baden-W.), **are never specifically mentioned as the most challenging aspect.** This finding is consistent with the results of the OG survey.

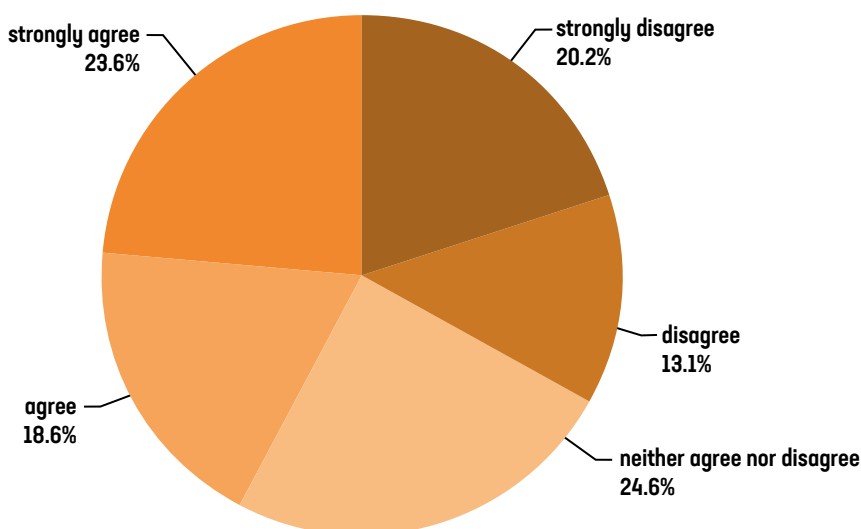
The MAs interviewed in the context of case studies have provided several **simplification tools specifically, but not exclusively, for the application stage.** These include templates, instructions and digital tools for budgeting (e.g. Bulgaria, IT-Liguria, Portugal, Sweden), electronic applications or information systems performing automated checks (e.g. IT-Liguria, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden), procedures to reduce the number of documents requested to applicants (in Bulgaria, the MA receives documents from other public services rather than applicants; in Lithuania, the Paying Agency never asks beneficiaries for documents or certificates that can be found in national registries) and ‘light’ application forms (e.g. Portugal).

In the words of MA representatives, lead partners and OG partners, a more troublesome aspect is associated with budget issues, eligibility of expenditure, **reporting and payments.** The main concerns refer to delays/long times in the approval of financial reports (Bulgaria, IT-Liguria, FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté, Portugal, Sweden), difficulties in reporting (Austria, DE-Baden-W., Portugal), issues with ineligible digital invoices (DE-Hessen) and specific requirements (in IT-Liguria, it was necessary to notify attendees five days before meetings in order for related hourly costs to be eligible).

In ES-Cataluña, where the OG lead partner considers payment times between three and six months as normal, both the MA representative and OG lead partner mention the requirement to submit three offers to prove that the proposed costs are reasonable as a challenging and burdensome aspect.

Drawing again on the OG survey results, 42% of OG lead partners strongly agree or agree that “OG calls set too strict budget limitations”. Most respondents, though, are more neutral or positive about this issue.

Figure 56: OG partners’ opinions about the extent to which OG calls set too strict budget limitations



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP - OG survey data (N=382 out of 458 survey responses - Lead partners)



SCOs, addressed by Article 67 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013⁵⁶ are an important driver of simplification as their application reduces administrative burden both for beneficiaries and administrations.

In the context of the 15 case studies, nine MAs have applied a **flat rate for indirect costs** (usually calculated on the total eligible cost for personnel or on total eligible direct costs). In ES-Cataluña, coordination and personnel costs are paid on a flat-rate basis within certain budget ceilings.

Two Member States (Poland and Sweden) have used **lump sums**. In Poland this form of simplified costs was applied to short supply chain and local market projects. Austria pays to set up OGs through a lump sum since 2023 while Bulgaria had planned to use lump sums for preparatory costs, but then decided not to implement the OG preparatory phase.

Three MAs (DE-Hessen, IT-Liguria, Lithuania) have applied **unit costs** to cover personnel expenditure. In the Netherlands, a flat rate has reportedly been applied to 'unpaid labour' from company owners and volunteers. In FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté unit costs have been introduced in the new programme and will **allow to pay farmers the time they spend working for the project (according to the MA representative, this was not possible in 2014-2022 RDP, limiting the participation of farmers in OG projects)**.

One of the administrative issues frequently raised by OGs concerns flexibility in relation to project modifications and budget rules. OG calls require detailed project planning, including the identification of expenditures and costs, from the beginning. However, in the experience of some OGs, MA's openness to adapt and agree on reasonable modifications, particularly in case of unexpected events, would be highly welcome.

For some OGs, requesting an amendment to the project proved a particularly burdensome process. In Austria, participants in the focus group note that innovation projects, being naturally subject to adjustments and adaptations, would need special flexibility as regards assessment and clearance. A similar point on the unpredictability of costs in innovation projects is raised by the lead partner in DE-Baden-W.

In the Netherlands, the seaweed project submitted a request to reallocate part of the project funds, which, according to what was reported, was rejected after a long and stressful discussion with the authorities.

In the framework of 2014-2022 RDPs, advance payments for cooperation measures are usually not eligible or very limited. Both in Bulgaria and in DE-Baden-W., this led to OGs or lead partners borrowing money from a bank or from other OG members to start project activities. **In the 2023-2027 CAP, however, advance payments are eligible for cooperation projects, and this is an incentive for the participation of small farmers and companies that can hardly provide their own funding.** The issue of not remunerating farmers for the time spent working in OG projects – because it was not an eligible cost in some cases – has also been raised during interviews with the Commission and EU CAP Network representatives as a factor hindering the active involvement of farmers.

The case studies also showed positive findings as regards simplification. **Many interviewees emphasised that things have improved since the beginning of the programming period** and

further improvements are foreseen, or already implemented, in the 2023-2027 period.

In FR-Bourgogne/Franche-Comté and Poland, Managing Authorities have successfully dealt with frequent errors initially observed in payment claims and applications, respectively. In DE-Baden-W., screenshots from websites are now accepted as evidence of cost reasonableness. Austria and Bulgaria have put in place procedures to ensure the closure of projects where innovative solutions would not deliver on promises, without major financial consequences for OGs. IT-Liguria plans to reduce the number of documents requested in the application stage.

Survey data and case studies confirm that **administrative burden is a challenging aspect for EIP OG projects and a potentially hindering factor in relation to the achievement of project outcomes.**

The number and nature of requirements, the complexity and length of reporting and paying processes, and the perceived lack of flexibility in implementation rules are the most common concerns among OG partners.

Nevertheless, positive changes have been witnessed during the programming period (administrative burden issues were progressively recognised and tackled at MA level) and lessons have been learnt for the future.

A potential for further simplification lies in a more widespread adoption of SCO, particularly unit costs to cover salaries and expertise costs and lump sums, at least for preparatory costs. A larger use of SCOs is also strongly recommended by the Commission.

5.3.3 Conclusions of study question 3

This question has focused on national and regional **approaches to the EIP OG instrument**, i.e. the comprehensive implementation environment including RDP strategies, calls for the preparation and execution of OG projects and administrative systems designed for OG project selection and funding.

The analysis has found that **MAs have made genuine efforts to understand and apply the principles of EIP OG** – namely, the bottom-up approach to the identification of needs, the interactive innovation model and the emphasis on communication and dissemination.

Although the Commission guidelines have not been translated, EU institutions and the EIP-AGRI network have worked hard to transfer the basic ideas of this new policy instrument which has been transposed into implementation systems and boosted through calls' eligibility conditions and selection criteria with a good level of consistency overall.

In general, it should be noted that **calls – if regarded as the only source of obtaining good results with OGs – have not always made a difference.** Other factors also influence the success of OGs. In most survey questions, the option 'neither agree nor disagree' is chosen by 20-30% of respondents meaning that the contribution of the call to a particular aspect is not evident or easily assessed.

In the case studies too, MA and OG representatives do not always consider a call as a deciding factor in favouring or hindering the achievements of OG projects.

OG participants in focus groups valued the contribution of eligibility conditions and selection criteria to the achievement of outcomes

⁵⁶ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.



in different ways. They are identified as very important factors in ES-Cataluña and Ireland, but deemed less relevant in ES-Pais Vasco and Poland.

In Portugal, the focus group considered eligibility conditions and selection criteria important for the co-creation of project outcomes and uptake of innovative solutions beyond the OG but not relevant for community outcomes and opportunities for further cooperation.

In Bulgaria, they were rather perceived as having a negative impact on the project. In the words of the lead partner: "Eligibility and selection criteria made us include in the project what was eligible, and not what we actually needed."

In other cases, specific call provisions have been identified as decisively influencing OG projects, particularly in the context of partnership composition and communication/dissemination. Sometimes, the role played by calls has emerged from data collection even if not explicitly recognised during interviews and focus groups.

Calls have also brought challenges and burdens to OGs, particularly in terms of administrative requirements and payment times.

The analysis has **acknowledged the value of a thorough preparation of OGs and OG projects.** With almost no exception, both MAs and OG partners have emphasised the **importance of a separate (funded) step for preparing OG projects and providing support to create partnerships and allow innovative ideas to emerge and develop.**

OG survey data show that, in relation to the general quality of calls, more than half (53.8%) of OG lead partners strongly agree or agree that OG calls "provided clear guidelines for project design and implementation" while 18% express a negative opinion on this statement.

To assess calls' contribution to the achievement of OG project outcomes, the analysis has taken JCs into account and looked at calls' capacity to:

1. Address grassroots needs and the combination of open and thematic calls.
2. Enable partnerships with complementary expertise, cooperating in a democratic way.
3. Require OGs to focus on communication and dissemination.
4. Reduce the administrative burden for OGs.

With reference to the first point, MAs have sought a balance between the need to encourage bottom-up themes and projects, and the policy objective to focus on strategic priorities set by RDPs. This has **frequently taken the form of a combination of open and thematic calls, a definition of broad themes and/or the use of selection criteria to prioritise strategic topics.**

According to the findings, **national and regional approaches to open/thematic calls have generally met the objective of targeting both grassroots and theme-driven needs.** Positive feedback from the case studies has been confirmed by the results of OG survey.

However, it should be noted that around 20% of survey respondents think that calls "set too strict limitations in relation to the project's theme". This suggests a completely free flow of innovative ideas emerging from the ground depends on **applicants being given**

opportunities to participate in calls without a 'thematic' focus on eligibility and selection criteria.

The quality of partnerships was actively pursued by MAs by requiring the involvement of a given number or type of partners (most frequently farmers/foresters) and **prioritising complementary and high-skilled partnerships.**

Although **excessive or very strict requirements may be counterproductive** as they alter the preferred or most functional composition of OGs (examples of this are reported in the case studies), **OG projects have, in some cases, benefited from call provisions that have helped them create more diverse and complementary partnerships.**

Eligibility conditions and selection criteria have also tried to foster an 'interactive innovation model' and democratic cooperation within OGs. Again, additional requirements have sometimes proved burdensome, but overall, **calls have positively influenced the quality of cooperation in realising 'interactive innovation' even beyond the concrete awareness or understanding of OG partners.**

Although more than half of survey respondents feel that "OG calls have ensured that all OG members participate on an equal level", good cooperation is less tangible than partnership composition and administrations do not have full control over it. This is why, in the words of one MA, **cooperation requires training**, which stresses the **value of preparatory actions** and, as emphasised by the Commission, an **enabling AKIS environment.**

OG calls have **requested communication and dissemination actions** and valued them in relation to the channels used, the audience or recipients reached, and the geographical scope covered.

These rules **have certainly pushed OGs to focus on communication and dissemination to some extent**, although these activities were sometimes perceived as not being a priority to the project or properly planned and conducted, unless relevant skills were available within the partnership. Further awareness raising at the level of beneficiaries may be needed.

As shown by the case study analysis, **MAs, NRNs and other institutional actors have played an important role as multipliers of OG activities and outcomes.**

The role of communication and dissemination as an essential element of the EIP-AGRI approach does not seem fully recognised yet, as confirmed by the results of the Stakeholder survey.

From the experience of case studies, the **inclusion of communication and dissemination expertise (e.g. advisors) within OGs is strongly recommended** as it can ensure effective communication during the project, dissemination of project results and continuity or further development of innovative solutions. This should be considered case by case and will depend on the available OG project budget. Advisors, being partners in the OG, can take up such a role for communication, as well as specific agricultural communication experts, such as agricultural journalists.

Administrative burden has been identified as the main reason for concern for OGs. Even without concretely undermining or impeding the projects' success, it has been considered a risk factor for projects.



The analysis has shown that **administrative steps related to project execution and reporting have been deemed particularly challenging**. Issues have also been raised regarding eligible expenditures, long paying times and project amendment procedures.

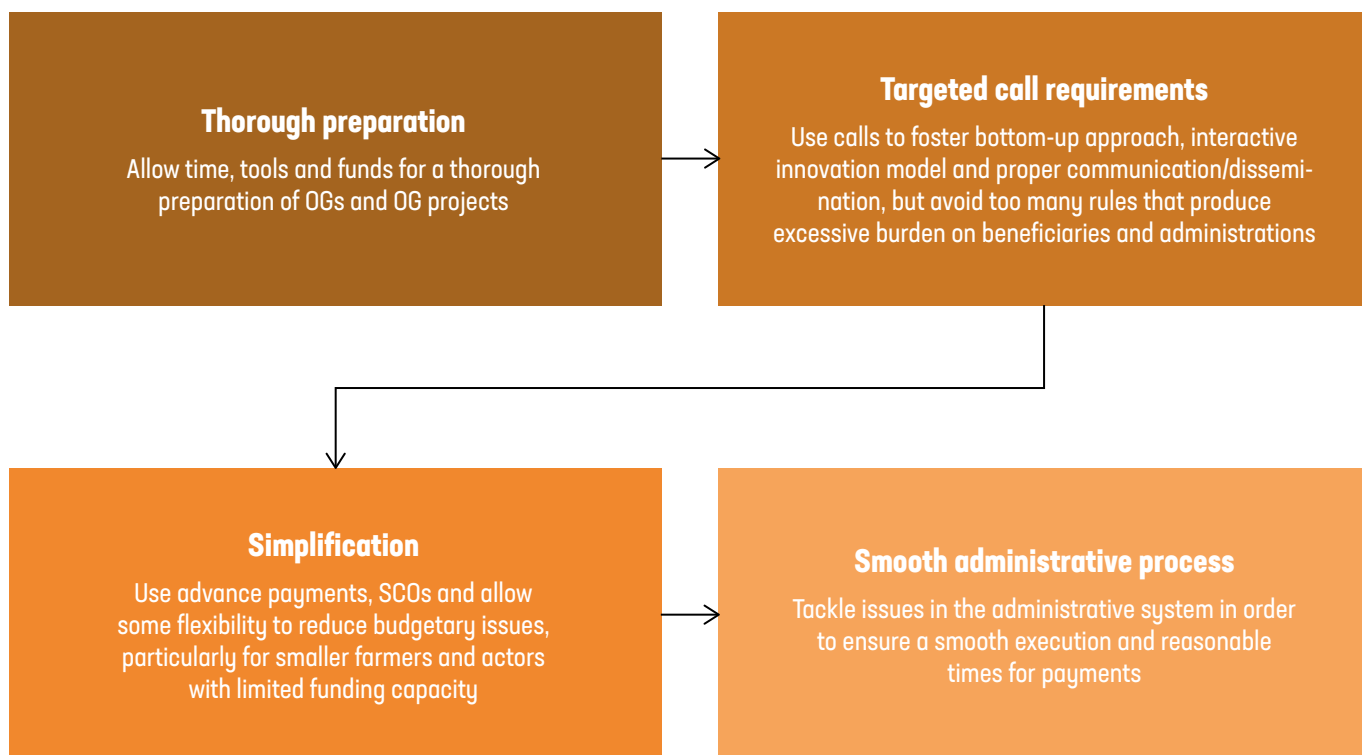
However, case studies have highlighted that MAs are tackling administrative burden and have progressively implemented simplification measures. **Lessons learnt have already produced changes and simplified approaches in the 2023-2027 programming period**.

SCOs have been used only to a limited extent, unit costs and lump sums in particular, but they have the potential to reduce administrative burden for both stakeholders and administrations.

Besides foreseeing advance payments for cooperation projects (which will be a stimulus for participation in OG projects and support OG project implementation), the legal framework of the 2023-2027 CAP⁵⁷ provides new options and methods for SCOs (e.g. budget drafts).

To summarise, **four main drivers** have been identified based on the findings from the case studies and surveys regarding calls' (and national/regional implementation systems in general) ability to contribute to the achievement of OG projects. They refer to **thorough preparation, targeted call provisions (including the interactive innovation principles), simplification and a smooth administrative process**.

Figure 57: Call's drivers to the achievement of OG project outcomes



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024)

⁵⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/2116. Article 44 allows advance payments up to 50% of the support for interventions related to investments and cooperation (including OG projects).



6. Overall conclusions

This study aimed at assessing whether the EIP-AGRI OGs supported under 2014-2022 RDPs have achieved their expected outcomes and to what extent.

For the purpose of the study, OG project outcomes have been defined according to three levels, namely: **project outcomes**, referring to innovative solutions tested and spread within OG partnerships, **wider uptake of innovative solutions** outside the initial partnership, **community outcomes** related to the enlargement of EIP-AGRI communities and further development of cooperation.

The geographical scope of the study is the EU-27 excluding the RDPs of Member States not programming or implementing EIP OG projects, i.e. Luxembourg and Denmark, and including the UK, which implemented the EIP strategy until 2020.

The analysis for the purpose of the study was carried out at two levels. The analysis at EU level was based on RDP data, a questionnaire-based survey directed to all EU EIP OG partners, a survey of other innovation stakeholders not necessarily involved in OG projects and interviews with DG AGRI and EU CAP Network representatives. At the case study level, the analysis was based on a range of data collected through documentary research, interviews with RDP MAs, interviews and focus groups with OG partners of the 15 selected case study projects.

The analysis was developed according to three main study questions aimed at fulfilling the objectives of the study.

First, the analysis focused on the outcomes achieved by the OG projects (Q1). Subsequently, it investigated the main drivers behind the achievement of outcomes as well as the barriers that have undermined the success of OG projects (Q2). Finally, it has adopted a governance perspective by looking at national and regional approaches to OG calls and OG project implementation to assess whether they have favoured or limited the achievement of outcomes (Q3).

In relation to the **achievement of outcomes by OG projects**, the following main conclusions can be drawn:

- > OG survey results showed that **most OGs (88%) have successfully developed, tested and spread innovative solutions consistently with what was planned**. Indeed, 65% of respondents to the OG survey state that their OG projects have fully achieved the planned results and 23% of respondents consider their objectives as partially achieved. This result is overall confirmed by informed opinions gathered from innovation stakeholders participating in the dedicated survey. Additionally, 45% of OG survey respondents have developed project outcomes either fully or partially beyond or different from what was initially planned.
- > Regarding the **types of innovative solutions**, OG survey data showed that **most OG projects focused on farming practices and process innovations, particularly related to crop management and nature-oriented farming**. Technological innovations, mainly digital ones (e.g. apps, mobile and devices, data management, GPS) are also frequent. **Organisational, social and rural innovative solutions appear to be less represented** in the OG survey sample.

- > **The EIP OG approach has enabled new forms of collaboration between the different actors involved, particularly linking science and agricultural practice**. Farmers clearly benefited from cooperation and the analysis showed that their interest towards innovation has increased. A risk factor has however been identified in relation to the role of research institutes that may become too dominant, in contrast with the bottom-up, practice-oriented nature of the OG instrument and the principles of the interactive innovation model.
- > **Innovative solutions have been spread to broader target groups beyond OG partnerships and mostly in the immediate vicinity of the partnerships**.
- > **Communication of project activities, dissemination of results and the wider uptake of innovative solutions remain an issue for further improvement**. Case study findings showed that the calls' requirements for communication and dissemination had a positive impact, but sometimes communication has been limited due to a lack of specialised skills within or in connection with partnerships (e.g. training and advisory services), the small scale of projects and the perceived absence of mechanisms to connect OGs with each other. Therefore, there is scope for a wider distribution of innovations developed in OG projects while the desired community effects can be further strengthened, provided that the AKIS is well organised for stimulating knowledge flows and ready to connect and support OG partners.

In relation to the **drivers and barriers for the successful co-creation of innovative solutions and the possibility of scaling up EIP-OG project outcomes**, the overarching contributing factor is partnership set-up, including partnership composition, approach to collaboration and project preparation, involving both organisational and social elements of OG partnerships. In more detail, findings suggest that:

- > The **complementarity of partners** encompassing farmers/foresters, researchers, advisors and other relevant actors, such as NGOs, associations and innovation brokers, **ensures that the needed expertise to achieve project objectives is brought into the partnership**.
- > The **experience and skills of partners** are also important drivers, including thematic knowledge on the topic covered by the OG, experience from previous projects and management/organisational skills.
- > Another key driver for success is partnerships set up with a **bottom-up approach**, based on ideas from motivated farmers/foresters, and targeting critical needs and objectives. The **role of farmers/foresters and advisors** is central to the co-creation of innovative solutions. Farmers are natural innovators, seeking opportunities or solutions to their problems, so ideas should therefore originate from them. Findings show that **advisors are also an important source of practical knowledge and important facilitators** as they are close to farmers and understand their needs.
- > The **interactive innovation model contributes to a good level and quality interactions among partners** and their equal treatment in decision-making. The **quality of interactions is enhanced through good coordination mechanisms** (e.g. committees, working groups, etc.) and **frequent and timely exchanges** (meetings, events, etc.).



Various factors contribute to scaling up innovative solutions, notably **showcasing their benefits and practical use, and continuation of collaboration of partners after a project is completed. Trust of farmers towards their cooperatives or associations** also enables them as channels for scaling up among their members/clients.

The **support provided to OGs** to capture the actual needs of farmers/foresters and help transform these needs into practice, especially during the application phase, assists in facilitating the creation and testing of innovative solutions. The providers of support contribute to different steps in OG projects. For example, MA support mainly facilitates the application phase, innovation support services help find the right partners, National Rural/CAP Networks help OG partners connect with other OGs within and outside their regions. Innovation support services may also play a key role in connecting with non-EIP projects, notably, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects. This suggests that the role of advisors, National CAP Networks and innovation support services within an AKIS is more pertinent for facilitating the scaling-up of innovative solutions by linking OG projects to others outside the partnerships.

Case studies indicate that the lack of any of the above aspects can hinder the co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions e.g. lack of relevant expertise, lack of involvement or motivation of partners, lack of effective coordination mechanisms or lack of a bottom-up approach. In relation to the latter, **the study shows that where partners were not involved in the design of the project or in the partnership from the beginning, there was reduced commitment and engagement to address common critical needs.** In addition, support for OGs during implementation has been less prominent compared to the design and application stages and could be further promoted within the AKIS, particularly through the work of advisors.

Finally, the **size of partnerships** can either be a facilitating or a hindering factor. For instance, in some cases small partnerships fail to reach a wider audience if their communication and dissemination are not well organised nor well integrated in the AKIS activities. Vice versa, large partnerships may be too difficult to manage. Therefore, it may be more effective to start from smaller size partnerships that can gradually expand as the feasibility of the idea becomes clearer, so as to further refine and share the innovative solution.

At the same time, **exogenous factors**, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have produced some changes, mainly to project duration, but they **do not seem to have negatively affected the achievement of final outcomes**, i.e. co-creation and scaling up innovative solutions.

With reference to the **extent to which communication and dissemination activities contributed to the achievement of OG project outcomes**, active communication throughout the project lifecycle and beyond, using the best channels for dissemination and seeking support from 'multipliers', contribute to sharing OG outcomes, and, in particular, to scaling up innovative solutions. Key lessons can be learned for the future so that OGs improve the use of communication and dissemination for scaling up innovative solutions. This can be achieved by capitalising on several facilitating aspects related to the communication activities, channels and providers, including:

- › The use of traditional dissemination channels (website, leaflets, publications) is widespread, but the **most effective channels and tools are those involving interactions**, such as **peer-to-peer communication and showcasing of project outcomes** through practice-oriented tools and activities (on-farm demonstrations, etc.).
- › **The use of 'champions' and 'multipliers'**. More specifically, champions can be OG partners and, more generally, people on the ground who set examples for others to follow and induce peer-to-peer effects. Multipliers, such as advisors, can take a proactive approach to reach farmers. Multipliers can also be found within National CAP Networks and ministries, including the MA, that can reach further than the OG and spread results through their own networks.
- › **Communication and dissemination are most effective** in spreading OG project outcomes **when different tools and channels are combined**, taking into account the direct contact with farmers and the typology of the target audience.

In summary, **there is no single factor that acts as a driver for the successful co-creation and scaling up of innovative solutions.** What works best is the composition of partnerships with the right complementary expertise targeted to the objectives of the project, the project development based on a bottom-up approach and interactive management, engaging farmers/foresters and advisors at the design phase and combining different communication and dissemination channels from the OG's inception, giving emphasis to those channels that involve interactions amongst relevant end users and other stakeholders.

In relation to the **national/regional approaches to OG calls** and related implementation models, **the analysis has looked at the factors favouring or hindering the achievement of OG project outcomes**, concluding that:

- › MAs, strongly supported by the Commission, and networking actors at both EU and national level have made significant efforts to implement the principles of the EIP OG instrument in a shared and consistent way, creating, in the words of an EU CAP Network representative an "effective governance environment". Such an environment has allowed for the activation of over 3 400 OG projects throughout the 2014-2022 programming period.
- › The **value of careful preparation of OG projects has emerged as a decisive factor for a successful implementation.** The two-step procedure, including a (funded) preparation step, applied in most EIP implementation models, has been positively assessed by MAs and OG representatives with almost no exception.
- › As already pointed out in relation to drivers and barriers for the achievement of project outcomes, the support provided by MAs, innovation support services and other actors for the preparation of OG projects and the application stage, in terms of funds, tools and networking actions, is highly valued by OGs. A well-functioning AKIS is the best guarantee to create effective OG projects.
- › **OG calls have addressed bottom-up needs through open calls** (e.g. calls with no predefined theme) that have frequently been combined with thematic calls, with either a broad or narrow scope. According to survey data and case studies, such flexible approaches have generally succeeded in capturing the needs expressed by practitioners. However, cases of overly restrictive targeting have been reported.



- > **OG calls' eligibility conditions and selection criteria have aimed to prioritise partnerships with a balanced mix of complementary expertise** and favour a democratic approach to cooperation with all partners being involved on an equal level. They were successful in most cases, for instance by ensuring participation of farmers, through the inclusion of key figures such as advisors or innovation brokers, through the creation of partnerships with relevant skills and experience serving the objective of the project, constant interaction among partners and active involvement of all OG members.
- > In some cases, too strict requirements have undermined the balance of OG partnerships and altered cooperation mechanisms. In other cases, OG stakeholders and authorities did not feel that calls' provisions were particularly relevant in relation to the composition of the OGs or the success of OG projects.
- > **Overall, OG calls have fostered communication and dissemination by requiring specific activities** (eligibility conditions) **and by rewarding more active and structured communication and dissemination activities** (selection criteria). The analysis has demonstrated a clear influence of calls in this respect as many OGs have focused on communication and dissemination precisely because it was required by the call. This finding suggests that OGs' awareness of the crucial role played by communication and dissemination in the context of the EIP OG instrument should be further improved. Also, greater participation within OGs of actors such as advisors, with communication and dissemination skills, and a better understanding of how to reach target audiences should be incentivised. However, the study has also illustrated the AKIS factor: intense activity of some institutional actors (MAs and NRNs) in communicating about OGs and disseminating OG project results has significantly helped communication and dissemination. Further integration of OG projects with training and advisory services is expected in the 2023-2027 CAP programming period thanks to the strengthened role of AKIS (cross-cutting objective).
- > For OGs, **administrative burden represents a concern in most cases**, with OGs indicating several issues, such as reporting obligations and rules, long payment times, funding limitations and poor flexibility within the overall implementation process. However, the administrative burden did not generally prevent OGs from achieving their objectives, but it did add complexity and sometimes risked projects' execution.
- > In parallel, MAs have been actively engaged in tackling administrative burdens during the 2014-2022 RDP implementation period and have planned or introduced simplification measures in the 2023-2027 programming period (also based on new CAP provisions, e.g. use of advance payments for OG projects). Among other solutions, foreseeing procedures to pay farmers for the time they spend working for the OG project, has the potential to increase the active participation of practitioners.
- > To sensibly reduce administrative burden both on beneficiaries and administrations, a larger use of SCD, particularly, lump sums and unit costs, is being reported and should be further developed. Further efforts are needed with regard to reporting, payment procedures and flexibility to make modifications to the project proposal if necessary.

7. The way forward: further development and improvement

The findings of the study point to certain elements that could represent **opportunities for further development** and improvement of the current and future implementation of the EIP measure. They also highlight **weaknesses that should be overcome**. The overall conclusions (Chapter 6) have already covered a number of these. Here we aim to summarise the main elements and provide some considerations as possible ways forward.

The first element emerging from the study findings is the **importance of the OG partnership composition and of the involvement of all partners at all project stages**. In line with the principles of the interactive innovation model, the findings confirm the need to **ensure a balanced mix of relevant complementary expertise in OG partnerships** and that all partners are engaged from the onset of a project (identification of needs or opportunities, design of the project, etc.) and throughout its execution. The aim is to **ensure partners' motivation at all stages** and that **effective coordination mechanisms are in place within partnerships**. In addition, the **status and role of farmers in the partnerships should be safeguarded** to avoid projects being dominated by other partners who may not prioritise farmers' interests.

Linked to this, evidence from the study indicates that support provided to OGs facilitates the creation and testing of innovative solutions, as actual needs of farmers/foresters are more effectively identified and then translated into practice and disseminated.

Support for the preparation of OGs and their projects by MAs can be further strengthened. At the same time, the **support provided by advisors, rural networks, innovation support services and brokers within the AKIS system should be ensured at different stages of OG projects** to facilitate the creation of innovative solutions and their spreading and scaling up. Moreover, for smaller projects to immediately reach a wider audience beyond the direct network of OG partners, **dissemination and communication of results within an AKIS through professional channels** (e.g. advisors and trainers) **should become common practice**. A well-functioning AKIS is also key to stimulating knowledge flows and improving **wider community effects**.

According to case study findings, **another important factor facilitating the implementation of project results by farmers/foresters and other end users can be found in the existence of already established partnerships** because partners were already active in previous projects. This suggests that **AKIS actions/events and innovation support service activities are needed to connect partners who have not yet met, but have the potential to co-create innovation**.

The findings overall suggest that **communication of project activities, dissemination of results and the wider uptake of innovative solutions could be further improved**. The most effective tools should be favoured, such as peer-to-peer communication,



hands-on demonstrations and other tools involving interactions with targeted end users, as well as the use of 'multipliers' and 'champions'. In this respect, **it is important that supporting AKIS actions are organised and, therefore, it is very beneficial to have specific AKIS staff in National CAP Networks.**

The study also shows that **communication and dissemination are most effective** in spreading OG project outcomes **when different tools are combined**. In this respect, **AKIS actions dedicated to sharing OG outcomes should be undertaken.**

Furthermore, a large proportion of OG survey respondents (i.e. 57%) stated that **calls requiring structured planning and carrying out of communication and dissemination activities had a positive effect on project preparation and later on achieving project outcomes**. Therefore, such an approach to call requirements could be further spread. In addition, further improvements could be achieved by **strengthening call requirements regarding more frequent use of practice-oriented channels**. The presence of communication expertise in the OG, provided, for instance, by advisors, could also be beneficial to increase awareness of the importance of communication among OG partners and the effectiveness of actions

taken to communicate OG projects and disseminate their results.

As previously indicated, the value of careful preparation of OG projects has emerged as a decisive factor for successful implementation. In this respect, findings indicate that **the two-step procedure**, including a (financed) preparation step, **has been positively assessed by MAs and OG representatives and could be more widely used for the EIP intervention.**

Finally, the **need to reduce administrative burden** on beneficiaries, as well as on administrations, clearly emerges from the study. The analysis also shows that certain **administrative procedures related to project execution and reporting** (e.g. complex rules, slow paying times and project amendment procedures) **are regarded by OGs as particularly challenging. Further application of SCOs** has the potential to reduce administrative burden and is therefore desirable. **Further efforts are also needed with regard to reporting, payment procedures and flexibility to make changes to the project proposal.** Additionally, **foreseeing procedures to pay farmers for the time they spend working for the OG project is likely to increase the active participation of practitioners.**



8. References

1. Carayannis, E.G. and Campbell, D.F.J., *Mode 3 Knowledge Production in Quadruple Helix Innovation Systems*, vol. 7, Springer Briefs in Business, New York, 2011.
2. Etzkowitz, H. and Leydesdorff, L., *The dynamics of innovation: from National Systems and "Mode 2" to a Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations*, *Research Policy*, 29 (2), 2000, p. 109-123. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(99\)00055-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(99)00055-4)
3. EU CAP Network. EIP-AGRI seminar 'Moving EIP-AGRI implementation forward', Athens, Greece, 10-11 May 2017, Final report. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/eip-agri-seminar-moving-eip-agri-implementation-forward-final-report_en#section--resources
4. EU CAP Network, EIP-AGRI seminar 'EIP-AGRI: From Operational Group project to impact. Building the innovation ecosystem for the future', Umbria, Italy, 17-18 October 2018, Final report. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/operational-groups-and-innovative-projects-represented-seminar-eip-agri-og-project_en#section--resources
5. EU CAP Network. EIP-AGRI seminar 'Fostering an effective and integrated AKIS in Member States', Vilnius (Lithuania), 14-15 June 2023. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/fostering-effective-and-integrated-akis-member-states_en
6. European Commission, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations, World Bank, *System of National Accounts 2008*, United Nations, New York, 2009.
7. European Commission, (2012a), *Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability*, COM(2012) 79 final, Brussels.
8. European Commission, (2012b), *Agricultural knowledge and innovation systems in transition - a reflection paper*, EU SCAR, Brussels.
9. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, *Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability*, programming period 2014-2020. Updated version December 2014. <https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/guidelines-programming-innovation-and-implementation-eip-agricultural-productivity-and-en>
10. European Commission, (2016a), *Evaluation study of the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability*, Final report. Written by Coffey, AND, SQW, Edater and SPEED.
11. European Commission, (2016b), DG Agriculture and Rural Development, *Guidelines on programming for Innovation and the Implementation of the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability*, programming period 2014-2020.
12. European Commission, (2019a), *Building Stronger Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) to Foster Advice, Knowledge and Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/about/akis-eip-agri-spotlight.html>
13. European Commission, (2019b), *Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe*, EU SCAR AKIS, Brussels. https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/preparing-future-akis-europe_en
14. European Commission, *Evaluation support study on the CAP's impact on knowledge exchange and advisory activities*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021. Final report. Written by ADE S.A., CCRI and OIR. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/67034571-7718-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
15. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, D.1 - Rural areas and networks, *Guidelines for data on European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups (OGs)*, Version 2.0, 2023.
16. Knotter, S., Kretz, D. and Zeqo K., *Operational Groups Assessment 2018*, Final report for EIP-AGRI, Agriculture & Innovation delivered by IDEA Consult nv, 2019. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/eip-agri-operational-groups-assessment-2018_en#section--resources
17. Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics, *Report: Impact on innovation - Latvia Rural Development Programme 2014-2020*, 2020.
18. Jensen, I., *Innovation support under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2022*. Follow-up of support under the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability, Sweden, 2022, p. 4.
19. Klerkx L., Hall A., Leeuwis C., *Strengthening Agricultural Innovation Capacity: Are Innovation Brokers the Answer?*, vol. 8, *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology*, 2009, p. 409-438.
20. Klerkx, L., van Mierlo, B., and Leeuwis, C., *Evolution of Systems Approaches to Agricultural Innovation: Concepts, Analysis and Interventions*, *Farming Systems Research Into the 21st Century: The New Dynamic*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, p. 457-483.
21. Lattanzio KIBS, Servizio di valutazione del programma di Regione Toscana Sviluppo Rurale 2014-2020, *Innovazione in Agricoltura - I Piani Strategici dei Gruppi Operativi*. Terza Relazione di valutazione tematica - Analisi e Giudizio (C3.2), Regione Toscana, 2022.
22. McFadden, J., et al., *The digitalisation of agriculture: A literature review and emerging policy issues*, OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Papers, No. 176, OECD Publishing, Paris. 2022 <https://doi.org/10.1787/285cc27d-en>
23. OECD, *Digital Opportunities for Better Agricultural Policies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019.
24. Ramsak-Noemi K., *EIP Operational Groups, AKIS and EU CAP Network within CAP 2023-2027 carbon farming: a key contribution to*



carbon neutrality and food security, 31 March 2023 Emilia-Romagna Region – Delegation to the EU, European Commission, DG AGRI, Unit D.1, 2023.

25. Rete Rurale Nazionale, *IL MODELLO PEI-AGRI IN ITALIA - I risultati dell'indagine sui Gruppi Operativi*, Document produced within the framework of the National Rural Network Programme 2014-23, CREA Project Sheet 25.1, 2022.
26. Stegmann, S., *EIP funding - Results and effects*. Interim RDP 2014-2022, Bonneval, 2022.
27. Thünen Institute for Living Conditions in Rural Areas, *Implementation of the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-Agri) – Interim Report 2021/22*, Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 of the country Hessen, 2022.
28. University of the Basque Country, *Assessment Report on Measure 16 Cooperation*. 2015-2020, 2021.
29. Van Oost, I., & Vagnozzi, A., *Knowledge and innovation, privileged tools of the agro-food system transition towards full sustainability*, Italian Review of Agricultural Economics, 75(3), 2020, p. 33-37.

EU Legislation

30. Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320-469.
31. Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Official Journal of the EU L347/487.
32. Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013, Official Journal of the EU L435/1.
33. Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, OJ L 435, 6.12.2021, p. 187-261.



9. ANNEX I

Provided in a separate document.



European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP
Rue Belliard 12, 1040
Brussels, Belgium
+32 2 808 10 24
evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu

