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and shared in the e-platform**

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Acronyms

AKIS	Agricultural and Knowledge Innovation Systems
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CB	Coordination Body
ccCOP	cross country Communities of Practice
C, D & E	Communication, dissemination and exploitation
CNA	Capacity Needs Assessment
CP	Cohesion Policy
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
Dx.x	Deliverable x.x
EIP	European Innovation Partnerships
ESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EAFRD	European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development
F2F	Face to Face
MS	Member State
SCAR	Standing Committee on Agricultural Research
SCO	Simplified Cost Option
SP	Strategic Plan
SAAF	Sistema de Aconselhamento Agrícola e Forestal
Tx.x	Task x.x
WPx	Work Package x
WP1	Impactful framework for transformative AKIS journeys
WP2	Framing and setting up a network of AKIS coordination bodies and other actors
WP3	Enabling AKIS Systems Thinking and AKIS conceptualisation
WP4	AKIS strategy, planning and implementation
WP5	Wider dissemination and engagement for impact

Executive Summary

This document, Deliverable 4.1 of the modernAKIS project summarizes the results of the activities carried out within Task 4.1 and partly Task 4.2. The objective of Task 4.1 generating common understanding of the key issues and challenges Member States are facing in relation to organise their Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and AKIS Coordination Bodies (CBs), as well as strengthen capacities to design and implement policy models to create an enabling environment for a well-functioning AKIS.

The AKIS strategic approach has gained importance for agricultural policies and sustainability during the 2023-2027 budget period. Member States must include their AKIS strategies in their CAP Strategic Plans to achieve modernization, knowledge sharing, innovation, and digitalization. This involves describing the organizational setup of AKIS coordination, and how advisory services, research, and CAP Networks will cooperate. The introduction of AKIS CBs aims to foster cooperation, enhance knowledge flows, and ensure effective AKIS functioning. While the CAP Regulation details the objectives and tasks of national networks, it does not define the organizational setup or responsibilities of AKIS CBs. Proposed tasks for AKIS CBs include acting as contact points for the European Commission, organizing advisors, and ensuring comprehensive advisory services. The flexibility in the regulatory framework allows for tailored solutions but in some cases caused initial uncertainty and delays in setting up and fully functional AKIS CBs. WP4 focuses on understanding key issues and challenges, and strengthening capacities to create an effective AKIS environment, through the delivery of cross-country Communities of Practice.

This deliverable (D4.1) is focusing on the results achieved through the implementation of the ccCoP1 events. The main focus of ccCoP1 is policy, governance and CAP interventions – the continuous improvement of the AKIS strategies. The main target group of the events are the AKIS CBs and policy makers. Task4.1 and partly Task 4.2 has been implemented through setting up and implementing three ccCOP1 event during 2023 and 2024.

This document summarises the policy context, the logical frame and the exploratory work that underpinned the selection of the themes and methodologies of the cross-country Communities of Practice¹ (ccCoP1) events. It also presents the results and conclusions of these events as a good basis for further co-creation on governance and policy models.

This document is the first in a series of biannual updates. The first 30 month served as an introductory phase, during which several methodological and content issues have been discussed and addressed.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context

The **AKIS strategic approach** has become more significant for agricultural policies and the sector's sustainability performance in the current budgetary period (2023-2027). According to the CAP Regulation, Member States must set up their AKIS strategic approach¹ in their CAP Strategic Plans to contribute to the achievement of the Cross-Cutting Objective (CCO) of modernisation, knowledge sharing, innovation, digitalisation as well as their improved uptake by farmers. All 9 CAP specific objectives shall be complemented and interconnected with the CCO².

To this aim, MSs must provide a description of the organisational set-up of their AKIS coordination infrastructure as well as a description of how advisory services, research, and the national CAP Networks will cooperate to provide advice, knowledge flows, and innovation services³. (Cristiano et al. D1.1 p. 18-19.)

This new legislative frame highlighted the importance of the CAP networks and a newly introduced actor, the '**AKIS Coordination Bodies**' (AKIS CBs). In principle, these stakeholders should facilitate an environment conducive to a well-functioning AKIS by fostering cooperation, enhancing, facilitating knowledge flows and knowledge exchange, effectively combining the relevant interventions of the CAP Strategic Plans, and addressing the need for a more expeditious, qualitative, and inclusive AKIS.

Comparative analysis of the AKIS in EU (Fanos et al. 2023; D1.10) and D1.1⁴ provides an overview on the diversity of the AKIS systems and the coordinating mechanisms in place in the different Member States. The analysis underscores the need for practical activities to strengthen AKIS by enabling decision-makers and practitioners to identify with their AKIS and link it to systemic improvements.

While the AKIS related objective⁵ and tasks of the national networks are reinforced and detailed in the CAP Regulation⁶, the AKIS CBs are not defined, concerning neither organisational setup, nor responsibilities/tasks in the relevant CAP legislation. Tool 8.1 Tool for the CAP Cross-Cutting Objective (EC, 2021) proposes three main tasks to be fulfilled by the AKIS CBs such as

- 1) acting as the contact point for all AKIS related issues towards the European Commission (governance and coordination of the AKIS strategic approach, overview on the progress and performance, overview how AKIS is going forward);
- 2) organising the advisors and the advice based on and above the conditions laid down in the regulation⁷;
- 3) ensuring that the specific fields of advice⁸ are covered by the advisory services;

In order to fulfil the tasks above, it is expected that this coordinator is in close and regular contact with the main AKIS (regional) coordinators and actors in the country

¹ Recital 85 of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115 and Sections 8.1 and 8.2 of the CAP SP according to Article 114 of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115.

² Article 6(2) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115.

³ Article 114 of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115.

⁴ D1.1: Conceptual and Methodological Framework for transformative/evolutionary AKIS journeys

⁵ Article 126(3)(e) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

⁶ Article 126 (4) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

⁷ Article 15 (1) and (3) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

⁸ Article 15 (2) and (4) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

which can help assess and guide the improvement of the AKIS in the country by giving suggestions for encouragement of more effective knowledge exchange activities (advice, training, ...), including in particular also the generation and co-creation of innovation (EIP OGs) and the broad sharing of it. (Tool 8.1 Tool for the CAP Cross-Cutting Objective (EC, 2021), p 16.)

The freedom inherent in the regulatory framework concerning the configuration and the responsibilities of the AKIS CBs allows suitable solutions originating in the differences of the Member States, however it can also lead to a degree of uncertainty and time delays at the beginning of the introductory process.

As it is stated in D1.1 representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture that have the responsibility to officially nominate the AKIS CBs compose the modernAKIS partnership. Therefore, the projects' activities, more particularly **Task 4.1** and **Task 4.2** focus on generating a common understanding of the key issues and challenges Member States are facing in relation to organise their AKIS and AKIS CBs, as well as strengthen capacities to design and implement policy models to create an enabling environment for a well-functioning AKIS.

Annex1 contains the structure and thematic focus of the five ccCoPs according to the definitions of the WP4 ccCoP alignment document. Based on this document **the main focus of ccCoP1 is policy, governance and CAP interventions – the continuous improvement of the AKIS strategies**. The **main target group** of the events are the **AKIS CBs** and policy makers. **Task4.1** and partly **Task 4.2** has been implemented through setting up and implementing three ccCoP1 event during 2023 and 2024.

This deliverable (D4.1) is focusing on the results achieved through the implementation of the ccCoP1 events. It **summarises the policy context, the logical frame and the exploratory work that underpinned the selection of the themes and methodologies of the cross-country Communities of Practice1 (ccCoP1) events. It also presents the results and conclusions of these events as a good basis for further co-creation on governance and policy models.**

This document is the first in a series of biannual updates. The first 30 month served as an introductory phase, during which several methodological and content issues have been discussed and addressed.

1.2.Relation to the other activities of the project

The leadership of **T4.1** and **T4.2** is carried out by AKI (Institute of Agricultural Economics), with FEUGA (Land Use and Economic Development Association) fulfilling the co-lead role.

The overall capacity development strategy of WP4 is implemented through T4.3 along with T4.1 and T4.2. These tasks form the foundation for developing the **Cross-Country Communities of Practice (ccCoPs)**. These communities of practice represent a dynamic platform where capacity-building efforts converge, enabling seamless integration of tasks and objectives. (D4.7, p 9.) Task 4.1 and 4.2 are closely related and strongly linked to the ccCoP1.

As part of **T4.3** WP4 work package leader FEUGA conducted **D4.7 Report on activities to increase AKIS actors' involvement** which is a comprehensive description of the capacity building strategy under WP4. It details the theoretical and methodological background, purpose and structure of the ccCoPs, as of the central elements of this strategy. In addition, it presents the methodology of the events – including ccCoP1 events - implemented, summarising their content and conclusions. To avoid overlapping

this document (D4.1) complements the above (D4.7) by focusing on the preparatory work and the conclusions of the ccCoP1 events.

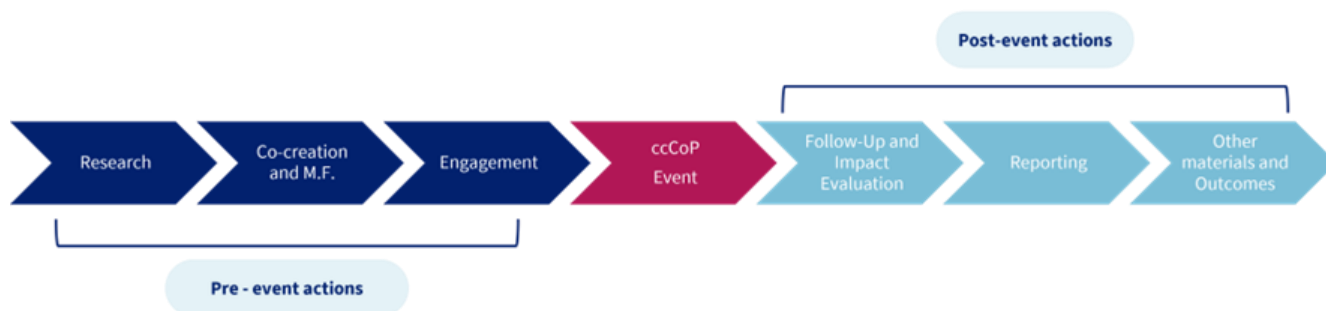
Other related tasks:

- *T1.1: Conceptual and Methodological Framework for transformative AKIS journeys:* This task sets the frame for the Transformative AKIS Journeys (TAJs) to be realized through all project activities, including the networking and knowledge exchange (WP2), the capacity development activities (WP3 and WP4) and the dissemination and exploitation activities of the project (WP5) and by engaging the AKIS coordination bodies and the other key actors of change of the AKISs in Member States. It provides the theoretical basis, the methodological approach and key overarching principles for the development of all project activities. **Topical priorities of the ccCoP1 events are defined on yearly basis, building upon the needs assessment in T1.1.**
- *T1.2: Identification of insightful and ready-for-practice solutions:* This task will entail collecting and making practice-oriented knowledge (new know-how, insights and practical solutions) better available, shared and accessible and enabling policy makers and other AKIS actors improving knowledge flows and developing a well-functioning AKIS in their countries. So far, some of the AKIS-in-Practice! provided by the two deliverables D1.3 and D1.4 have been used to feed the activities of WP4, particularly during the ccCoP meetings, as well as **some best practice tools and insights discussed in ccCoP1 events were fed back to D1.2.**
- *T1.3: Comparative analysis of the various types of AKIS within the EU at national, regional and local levels and identification of benchmarks:* A comparative analysis examined the AKIS models of Member States based on various criteria, and the results of this analysis provided input for capacity development activities.
- *T2.2. Setting up the modernAKIS network:* The General Assembly primarily addresses the AKIS coordination bodies and other key AKIS actors, and the **ccCoP1s are organized within the framework of the General Assembly.** Additionally, T2.2 is responsible for maintaining the list of AKIS Coordination Bodies and tracking personnel changes, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are included in the capacity-building activities.
- *T2.3. National/Regional AKIS Communities of Practice:* Within the framework of T2.3., organizations and individuals are designated as members of national CoPs. National CoP delegates represent their respective countries at cross-country CoPs. In this way, **delegates ensure the creation of synergies between national and EU knowledge transfer.**

1.3. Methodological approach

The overall methodological approach for the management and implementation of the ccCoPs is detailed in D4.7. In general, the process followed the steps identified within WP4 and presented on Figure1.

1. Figure: ccCoP delivery process



Source: WP4 ccCoP alignment document, FEUGA

- The selection of topics was primarily based on the results of the CNA carried out within the framework of T1.1 in 2023.
- The final identification of themes, scopes and content was preceded by the analysis and synthesis of the literature, legal frameworks and other relevant sources as well as the identification of exemplary practices.
- The engagement phase was preceded by several internally discussions within WP4 as well as with the project partners working on other related activities such as WP1 and WP3.
- The methodology of each event was determined with the primary objective of ensuring authenticity: the presentation of practical cases by practitioners and facilitation of interactivity and collaborative creation.
- The events were followed by processing feedback, groupwork and discussion results summarized in the events reports.

The **context** outlined in **chapter 1.1** significantly influenced the selection of the topics and the structuring of the flow of the ccCoP1 events. At this stage of the project's implementation designation of AKIS CBs and structuring their institutional set up had not yet been completed in many Member States. In those countries where this had already been done, the interpretation of roles and responsibilities as well as defining the portfolios to be assigned were still in progress.

Therefore, the **first ccCoP1 event** took a holistic approach to the tasks and challenges of the AKIS CBs by discussing the definition of fundamental terms such as knowledge, knowledge transfer and knowledge flow. The presentations and group work helped participants realize their roles and impact within their organizations on knowledge flow, thereby contributing to a better AKIS.

The choice of the theme for **the second ccCoP1 event** was significantly influenced by the condition that it was held in the framework of the General Assembly focusing on the role of the advisors and the integration of AKIS. Given the number of participants, this event therefore focused on this one actor.

The **third ccCoP event** processed the issue of a concrete technical instrument on simplification. The timing of this topic assumed that Member States need information and first-hand experience on Simplified Cost Options (SCO) at the beginning of the CAP implementation period, to be able to integrate it into their implementation procedures.

The following three capacity-building activities were implemented under T4.1 starting from PM9 (start of WP4):

- How do they flow, the knowledge flows? Knowledge flow within and beyond the CAP (joint event with ccCOP4).
- Policy Lab: interactive discussion between AKIS Coordination Bodies (CB) and advisors (joint event with ccCOP2).
- Application of simplified cost options for AKIS related measures.

CNA results confirmed the relevance of the selected topics: 80% of the respondents considered the issue of knowledge exchange and information to be extremely or very important, while 74% of them found the same regarding the advisory services. The delivery mechanisms and procedures for the AKIS-related interventions were considered extremely or very important by 58% of the respondents.

2. Context, rationale and objectives of the events

1st ccCOP1: How do they flow, the knowledge flows? Knowledge flow within and beyond the CAP (joint event with ccCOP4)

A common understanding of information/knowledge, knowledge exchange/transfer/flows within the agricultural context is essential for contributing in a well-functioning AKIS. However, CAP regulations, guidelines, and research projects do not consistently define these terms, resulting in inconsistent usage. As a basis for the further ccCOPs, the main aim of the first ccCoP1 was to clarify and systematise the meaning of the commonly used terms above. Furthermore, to collect, discuss and structure effective tools, methodologies and practices that are already used or planned to be introduced in agriculture to facilitate the flow of knowledge.

2nd ccCOP1: Policy Lab: interactive discussion between AKIS CBs and advisors

The legislative changes introduced in the CAP Regulation concerning the provision of the farm advisory services⁹ and knowledge exchange and dissemination of information¹⁰ result in number of new tasks to be fulfilled entirely or partly by the AKIS CBs as well as opens up some new opportunities. The aim of the sessions was to facilitate the exchange systematize questions, challenges, and understandings regarding the CAP requirements concerning farm advisory services. This session sought to explore and discuss the evolving needs of AKSI CBs and the advisory ecosystem through collaborative capacity building.

3rd ccCoP1: Application of simplified cost options for AKIS related measures

The European Commission supports the use of Simplified Cost Options (SCO) to simplify the administration of EU funds. SCOs allow expenditure to be reimbursed based on pre-defined methods, such as flat rates, standard scales of unit costs and lump sums, rather than actual costs. This approach aims to significantly reduce the administrative burden for both managing authorities, paying agencies and beneficiaries, minimising the risk of error and speeding up the reimbursement process. By simplifying the audit trail and focusing on the achievement of policy objectives, SCOs facilitate access to funds, especially for smaller beneficiaries. Since the current programming period, the CAP and the CP operate through different legal frameworks and funding mechanisms. This raises several questions regarding the use of SCOs within the CAP.

According to a study commissioned by Directorate General Regional and Urban Policy in 2018, regarding the EAFRD "around 80% of respondents who do not use SCOs cite legal uncertainty, and the investment needed to set up SCOs as the main reasons for not using SCOs"¹¹. With EAFRD being exempted from the Common Provision Regulation (CPR), this legal uncertainty has increased, especially for those MSs that did not use SCOs in the previous programming period.

The issue of SCOs was also raised in the CNA carried out by CREA within WP1. As a result, the compendium addresses this topic, including examples of unit costs, which is one of the three SCO types. In the context of ccCoP1 it was considered beneficial to

⁹ Article 15 of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

¹⁰ Article 78 of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

¹¹ Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy: Use and intended use of simplified cost options in European Social Fund (ESF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund (CF) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (2018)

discuss the other types of SCOs, as well as to integrate these practices to the Compendium.

At the General Assembly of the modernAKIS project in Madrid in April 2024, AKI invited representatives of the CBs to answer questions related to the implementation of AKIS strategies, including the use of SCOs. Several country representatives expressed their interest in discussing the topic of SCO, not only in relation to unit costs. As a result of the exploratory work of the AKI, number of "off-the-shelf" and other SCO solutions were identified as operational practices.

The primary objective of the ccCoP1 event was to enhance the capacity of CBs, MAs and Paying Agencies (PA) in the effective implementation of SCOs:

- by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the SCOs and the questions around its implementation;
- by presenting concrete, real-world examples of successful implementation;
- by providing a platform to address specific questions and concerns.

The other not less important objective was to formulate common questions and possible policy solutions for the wider use of SCOs.

3. Summary of the exploratory work

3.1. How do they flow, the knowledge flows? Knowledge flow within and beyond the CAP

The event was preceded by a preliminary survey on:

- existing (or planned) methods and activities of knowledge flows and knowledge transfer applied by and beyond the CAP.
- knowledge exchange activities supported under Art. 78/2 CAP SP intervention.

Interpretation of knowledge

Two main types of knowledge are differentiated by Klerkx and Proctor (2013).

- **Scientists' knowledge (codified and tacit knowledge, often referred to as know-what and know-why):** it is a standardized knowledge, which can be systematized, written, stored and transferred. It can be reported and documented (e.g. through scientific publications). However, it may require translation and adaptation for practical application.
- **Farmers' knowledge (implicit or tacit knowledge, often referred to as know-how):** it is deeply rooted in local contexts, personal experience, and practical skills. This knowledge is inherently intangible, shaped by day-to-day practices, adaptation to environmental conditions, and accumulated expertise over time.

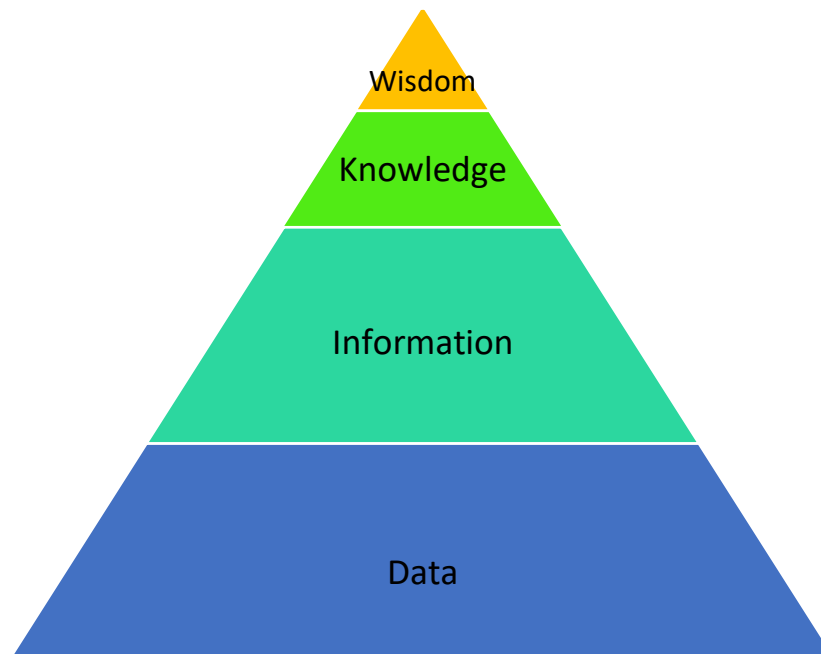
The two different forms of knowledge are **complementary**, and one knowledge form may **transform** into another form through **different types of interactions**.

To effectively analyse the role of knowledge exchange and its effectiveness, it is essential to consider the DIKW (Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom) pyramid, a widely recognized model for knowledge management and data value (Ackoff, 1989; Rowley, 2007). The DIKW pyramid, also referred to as the DYKW hierarchy, refers to models for representing purported structural and/or functional relationships between data, information, knowledge, and wisdom.

As a result of the exploratory work, several good practices were highlighted, some of which were presented in the ccCoP1 plenary session. To better understand the role of knowledge in these practices, the DIKW pyramid was introduced as a framework.

The following figure represents the DIKW:

2. Figure: DIKW pyramid



Baskarada and Koronios (2013) argue that **data** exists as physical symbols and lacks inherent meaning, as it resides external to the human mind. It characterizes data "as being discrete, objective facts or observations, which are unorganized and unprocessed and therefore have no meaning or value because of lack of context and interpretation.

Within the DIKW framework **information** is transformed into knowledge when it is articulated in a meaningful manner. In contrast to raw data, information is systematically organized and structured, enhancing its utility. It acquires significance when processed for a specific purpose or context, thus becoming meaningful, valuable, and applicable. **Knowledge** is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, expert insight and grounded intuition that provides an environment and framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information.

Terminologies of the different terms were collected as follows:

- **Knowledge flows:**

Definition: According to Nonaka (1994), knowledge flows constitute a continuous and dynamic process of knowledge creation, dissemination, and transformation within an organizational context. This process occurs through the interaction between tacit (personal, experience-based) and explicit (formal, codified) knowledge, facilitated by the SECI model (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization). Encompasses the movement of knowledge across people, organizations, places, and time, reflecting changes and applications with a multi-dimensional perspective.

Purpose: To visualize and manage the diverse dimensions of knowledge and enabling effective circulation across global organizations and contexts (Nissen, 2007).

- **Knowledge exchange:**

Definition: Involves the dynamic processes of generating, sharing, and utilizing knowledge tailored to the context and participants involved (Fazey et al., 2013).

Purpose: Enable effective sharing, co-production, and management of knowledge among participants, promoting collaborative learning and decision-making, innovation (Fazey et al., 2013).

- **Knowledge sharing:**

Definition: The process of encouraging individuals to collectively appropriate knowledge through open sharing and discussion, without insisting on absolute truth (Dernat et al., 2021).

Purpose: The purpose of knowledge sharing is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among individuals and within organizations (Wang & Noe, 2010).

- **Knowledge transfer:**

Definition: A linear model of knowledge uptake that requires “effective packaging and communication” suggesting that knowledge transfer to be successful, the information needs to be presented in a way that is easily understandable and applicable for the recipients. (Pütz & Brassel, 2021). In this context, knowledge transfer primarily focuses on the one-way flow of information, where one party (the source) imparts knowledge to another party (the recipient).

Purpose: Generate, share, and effectively utilize knowledge across various contexts and participants (Jensen & Szulanski 2004). The goal is for the recipient to acquire and apply the knowledge effectively.

Legislation has been changed since the previous programming period concerning the terminology, the supporting actions as well as the focus of knowledge sharing initiatives as presented in Table 1. While Art. 14 of EU Regulation 1305/2013 uses the terms of knowledge transfer, which is as mentioned above the transfer of practical knowledge, skills, and information from one entity (the provider) to another (the beneficiary) through various educational and informative activities. In the current programming period Art. 78 of EU Regulation 2115/2021 uses the term knowledge exchange, which involves the active sharing and distribution of information, expertise, and knowledge resources to facilitate innovation, training, and advisory services for the improvement of agriculture, rural areas, and the environment.

Table 1: Changes in the legal framework

1305/2013 art. 14 – Knowledge transfer and information actions		2021/2115 art. 78 – Knowledge exchange and dissemination of information
Action	Vocational training and skills acquisition actions, demonstration activities and information actions.	Any relevant action to promote innovation, training and advice and other forms of knowledge exchange and dissemination of information.
Focus	Transferring knowledge and skills	Contributing to achieving one or more of the specific objectives particularly emphasizing environmental protection and the development of rural business and communities.
Example	Providing training courses, workshops, or coaching as well as short-term farm and forest management.	Providing innovation, training, advice, and other forms of knowledge exchange and dissemination of information, including through the drawing up and updating of plans and studies with the aim of knowledge exchange and dissemination of information.

Tools and methods for knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange were grouped as follows:

Table 2: Main knowledge transfer methods

Training formats	
E-learning	E-learning is to be delivered training online , allowing teams to easily access it via electronic devices.
In-person training	The training takes place face-to-face , traditional learning style where a trainer leads groups sessions.
Blended training	Blended learning combines the benefits of traditional in-person training with the flexibility and customization of digital learning .
Field visit	A field visit in agriculture is an on-site examination to assess and gather information about farming activities or conditions.
Role-playing	This technique is usually executed with a trainee and facilitator (or trainer), where each participant is allowed to act out different potential work scenarios .
Films and videos (guides and handbooks)	Vide has quickly gained popularity as an effective training technique, the approach include: animation, live-action, to-camera, etc.
Forms of Advice	
One-to-one advice	Personalized guidance or recommendations given by an expert to an individual farmer, addressing specific farm issues or challenges.
Group advice	Providing guidance or recommendations to a collective of farmers or group , addressing common issues or topics relevant to their farming practices and needs.

Table 3: Main knowledge exchange methods

Knowledge exchange	
Focus groups, thematic networks	These gatherings focus on one or more specific topics , allowing different types of participants to share knowledge in a structured way, to further deepen and broaden their understanding of the topic, to create and publish common knowledge and to collaborate in the field.
Discussion groups (group coaching)	These groups of farmers meet regularly to discuss practical issues , share information, ideas and solve problems. These groups are facilitated by specially trained advisors.
Peer-to-peer learning networks	Individuals with similar interests or expertise share knowledge, experiences , and insights, enabling mutual learning and skills development. One way of doing this, is to demonstrate farms on the spot to interested groups.
Farm demonstration events	These events are held directly on farm sites that provide hands-on demonstrations and first-hand insights into farming techniques, technologies, and practices for farmers agricultural professionals and interested parties.

Farm laboratory	Field labs are practice-oriented experiments that are open to all. They are designed to bring together a group of like-minded farmers or farmers facing a similar problem, with the help of leading researchers and practitioners, to gain a deeper understanding of specific problems and possible innovative solutions to the challenge by experimenting and testing in a real-life environment through hand-on learning.
Communities of practice	A community practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common concern, a set problem, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfil both individual and group goals. Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice. Interaction on an ongoing basis is an important part of this.

3.2. Policy Lab: interactive discussion between AKIS CBs and advisors

In the current programming period, MSs are required to provide advisory services under Article 15(1) of the CAP Strategic Regulation within the framework of their AKIS system. In practice, this means that advisors (including public and private) must be mobilised to provide advice covering the economic, environmental, and social dimensions, as well as the areas indicated in Articles 15(2) and (4). The selection of the advisors eligible for support is up to the MS, as long as the advisors are suitably qualified, have no conflict of interest, and the advice is impartial (Article 15(3)). Regular training of advisors is also mandatory to ensure the provision of up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by research and innovation activities.

The certification/administration¹² of advisors is not required under the new legislation, but a transparent platform is proposed to be set up where all impartial advisors and their fields of expertise are visible/available.

Based on the above, **AKIS CBs may have several new tasks in relation to the integration of advisors into AKIS:**

- organise advice and advisors in line with the new advisory approach of the CAP 2023-2027: as part of the AKIS and in a transparent manner (public platforms where advisors are visible) – art. 15(1)
- ensure that the advisory support remains open to qualified and impartial public and private advisors,
- ensure frequent and effective training of advisors
- cover all new topics listed in the CAP SP regulation Art 15. (2) and (4)

Knowledge exchange and dissemination of information (art. 78) is included in the CAP SPs and is an integrated part of the MSs AKIS. Wide range of activities can be carried out under this intervention such as vocational or specific training courses for farmers or advisors; setting up an advisory service for instance for promoting

¹² Systems applying input requirements

innovation; coaching; on-farm demonstration activities; information actions; short-term farm exchange and visit schemes etc.

Art. 15 sets the frame of the knowledge exchange and dissemination measure (Art 78.) and thus causes significant changes in relation to its content and implementation. Apart from new requirements, the changes also open up new opportunities and perspectives. Some of the major changes are listed below:

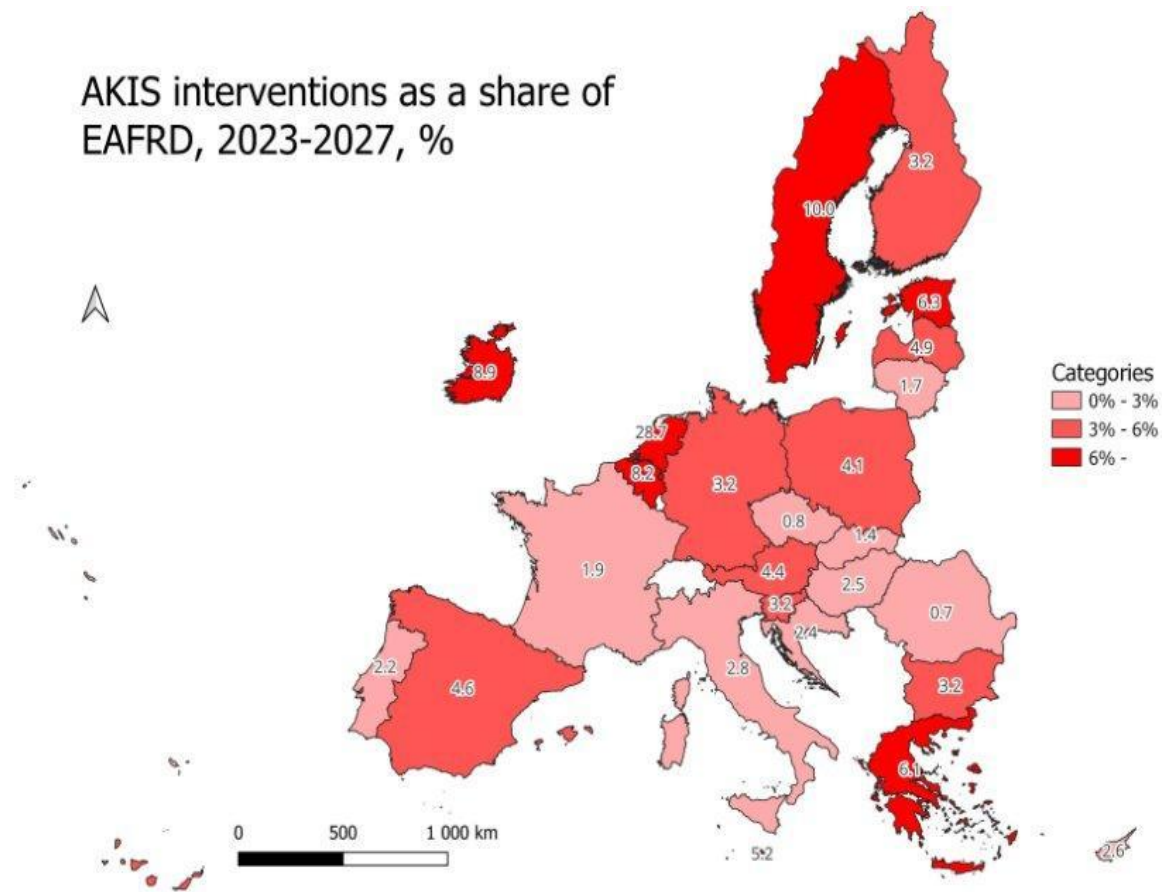
- MSs are no longer limited in terms of the forms of the intervention.
- The limitation that "Bodies providing knowledge transfer and information services shall have the appropriate capacities in the form of staff qualifications and regular training to carry out this task" was taken out.
- The obligation to "choose them through calls for tenders" no longer exists. There can be different methods for the selection of the advice service/project and of the service provider (call for applications, call for tenders, "in house" provision of services, etc.).
- MSs are free to decide how much training they will provide to advisors and how to qualify and choose service providers (Art 15(3) and Art 102) based on their integration within the AKIS.
- MSs have no limits regarding the budget spent on advice and on the training of advisors.

The exploratory work was primarily based on T4.2. Within this task CAP SP data from the European Commission's Agri-food Data Portal was synthesized, focusing on "AKIS-related" measures. Additionally, a comprehensive questionnaire was carried out to gather information on AKIS interventions, covering topics such as advisory services, training programs, and funding mechanisms. D4.4 details the methodology and results of this work.

Key results:

- The share of funds allocated to AKIS related interventions has quadrupled (from 1% to 4%) compared to the last programming period, while the full EAFRD budget has increased by only 9%.
- The highest increases were reached in the Netherlands, Ireland, Finland and Poland.
- The highest rates of AKIS interventions are in the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland, Greece and Estonia, while Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, France have a low percentage of AKIS interventions.

3. Figure: Share of AKIS interventions



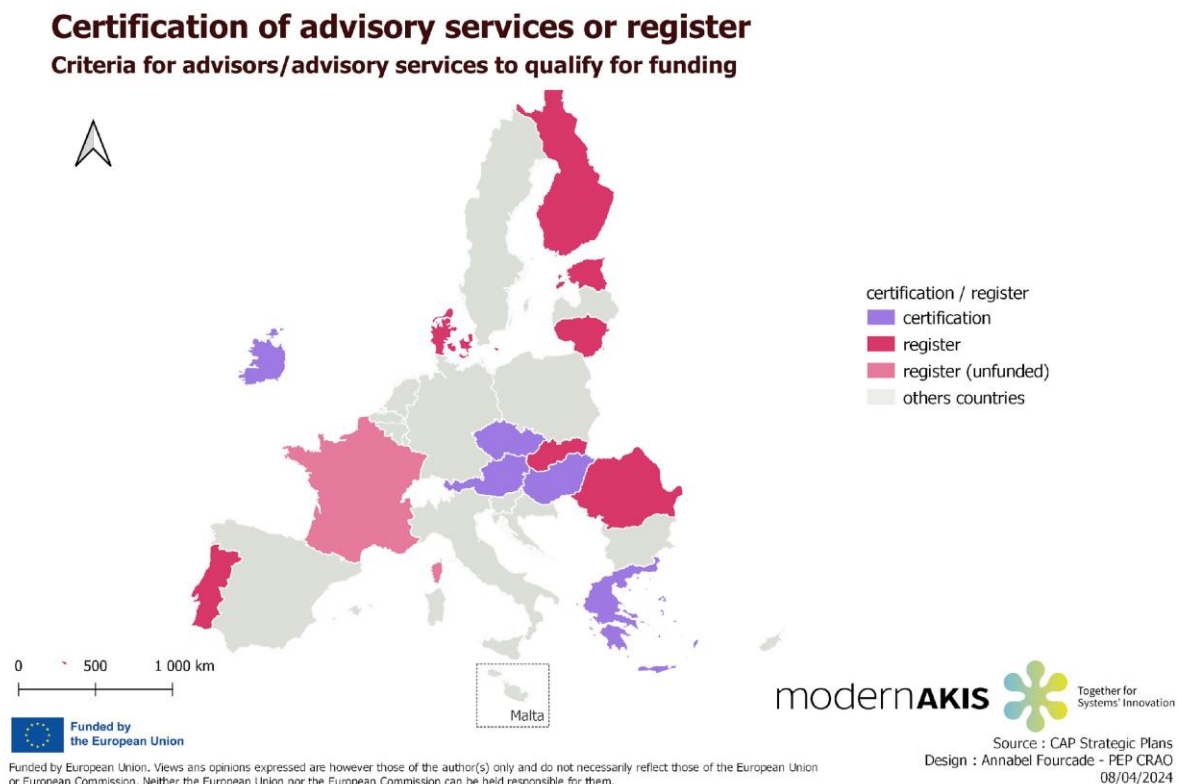
Source: AgriData CAP intervention catalogue

Out of the 27 Member States, Cyprus, France, Malta, the Netherlands, and Sweden do not implement a classical advisory support measure (at least in terms of the names of the measures).

Annex 1 shows the types of advisory services (public and/or private) that are available in each country and the subject areas that these services typically cover. The data was assembled from the CAP Strategic Plans and corrected and completed by the audience of the 2nd General Assembly in Madrid.

Regarding the certification of advisory services, 5 countries apply certification as an eligibility criteria for funding: Austria - licence under public or trade law; Czech Republic - ADVIGREEN Certification Scheme for companies and individuals; Greece - ELGO-DIMITRA Register; Hungary - the Chamber of Agriculture is responsible for the certification, Ireland - Ministry website, advisors must have minimum qualification and complete CPD. Many other countries or regions advisory must comply with national and regional quality criteria.

4. Figure: Certification and registration of advisory services



Below are some specific examples of platforms to make advisory services visible:

- Website of advisory service providers is maintained e.g. in Austria, Slovenia, Hungary.
- In Flanders an e-desk (new) is operating. Customer satisfaction system: farmers feedback not the quality of advice. 8 independent certification organisations.
- Italy – The Innovarurale portal serves as a valuable tool for Italian advisors, providing information and support for the agricultural sector (<https://www.innovarurale.it/it>). There is also a regional and national back-office service available.
- A list of entities and individual advisors are organized in the [SAAF portal](#) in Portugal.
- The Czech Republic has a visible website where all certified advisors are available: <https://agronavigator.cz/certifikacni-organ-zemedelstvi/seznam-certifikovanych-subjektu>
- In Poland the Agricultural Advisory Centre in Brwinów manages the list of advisors. There is a web page for public advisory services as well as a Rural Network for innovation brokers.
- In Spain, the AKIS Platform of Advisory Professionals manages at national level, which covers the regions as well.

3.3. Application of simplified cost options for AKIS related measures

When using SCOs, the eligible costs of an operation are calculated according to a predefined method based on outputs, results or some other costs clearly identified in advance either by reference to an amount per unit or by applying a percentage. **Simplified cost options are, thus, an alternative method for calculating the eligible costs of an operation opposed to the traditional method: calculation on the basis of the costs actually incurred and paid.** (Commission Notice Guidelines on the use of simplified cost options within the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) – revised version (2021/C 200/01))

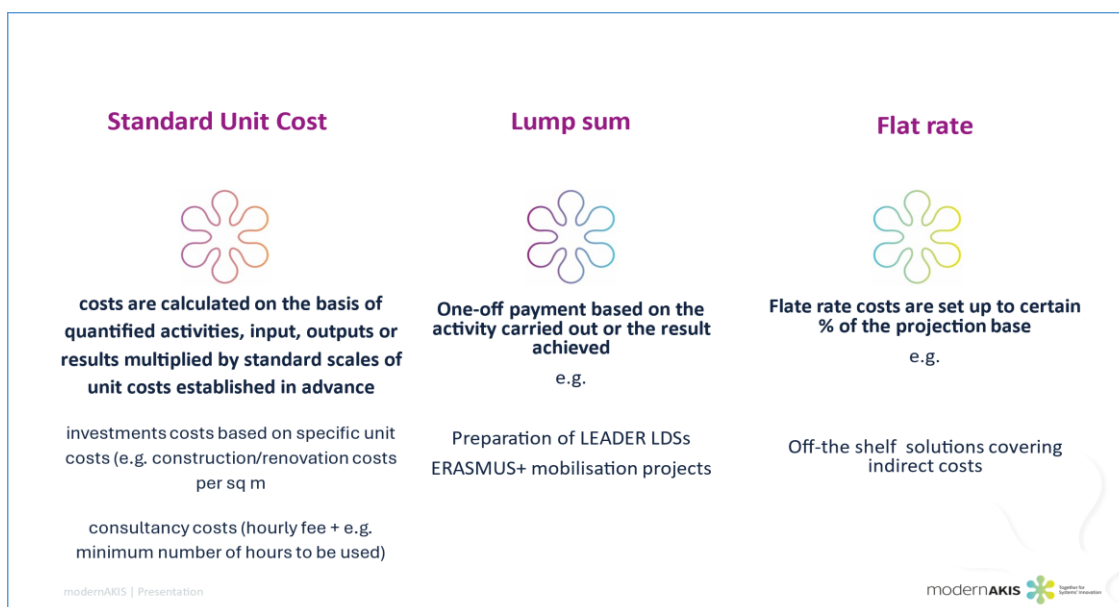
According to Art. 83 of the CAP Regulation, grants may take the any of the following forms:

- (a) reimbursement of eligible costs actually incurred by a beneficiary;
- (b) unit costs;
- (c) lump sums;
- (d) flat-rate financing.

The Common Provision Regulation (CPR) includes the possibility of the combination of those as well.

Figure 5 presents the short definitions and a few typical examples for the three types of SCOs.

5. Figure: Definitions and examples



In the previous programming period (2014-2020), the EAFRD was part of the European Structural and Investment Funds so rural development interventions were also subject to the rules of the Common Regulation 1303/2013 (CPR) for the application of SCOs.

For the current programming period (2023-2027), the EAFRD is not covered by the CPR, with some exceptions. The CAP Regulation has its own rules for the application of SCOs.

These rules are very similar to those of the CPR Regulation, but in many respects it is less detailed. It follows from the above that the 2021 detailed guidelines for ESI funds do not apply to the EAFRD.

According to Art 83. of the CAP Regulation, the amounts for the SCOs shall be established in one of the following ways:

- (a) a fair, equitable and verifiable calculation method based on:
 - (i) statistical data, other objective information or an expert judgement;
 - (ii) verified historical data of individual beneficiaries; or
 - (iii) the application of usual cost accounting practices of individual beneficiaries;
- (b) draft budgets established on a case-by-case basis and agreed ex ante by the body selecting the operation;
- (c) in accordance with the rules for application of corresponding unit costs, lump sums and flat rates applicable in Union policies for a similar type of operation;
- (d) in accordance with the rules for application of corresponding unit costs, lump sums and flat rates applied under schemes for grants funded entirely by the Member State for a similar type of operation.

The CPR and the Commission Notice have provisions for so-called "off-the-shelf" solutions. The so called off-the-shelf SCOs can be used immediately by Member State authorities without any need to substantiate the amounts or rates used by means of a methodology or calculation. (European Court of Auditors Special Report No11: New options for financing rural development projects: Simpler but not focused on results (2018)). This minimises the audit risk associated with their implementation and the time and cost required to prepare for their application. Since EAFRD is not subject to the CPR Regulation, these solutions can only be applied based on Art 83. (c) of CAP Regulation, which requires demonstration that the intervention for which the SCO is to be introduced is "of a similar type of operation" to that for which the SCO has already been used. The definition of "similar type of operation" is not provided by the CAP Regulation.

According to the Commission Notice (2021) as a general principle, all elements of the methodology that may have an impact on the unit cost/lump sum /percentage flat rate should be considered. A case-by-case assessment is required.

Elements may be included:

- Type of activity supported (e.g. research, investment, consultancy, etc.)
- Type of beneficiaries
- Cost structure (scope of eligible costs to determine the items to be included in the projection base)

Table 4: "Off-the shelf" and other solutions

	Flat-rate	Standard Unit Cost	Lump sum
"off-the-shelf"	1. Indirect costs up to 7% of the eligible direct costs. 2. Indirect costs up to 15% of eligible direct staff costs. 3. Direct staff costs up to 20% of the direct costs other than the direct staff costs. 4. Eligible costs other than direct staff costs up to 40% of eligible direct staff costs.	Hourly rate for direct staff costs: 1. The latest annual gross employment costs/ 1 720 hours. 2. The latest monthly gross employment costs/average monthly working time.	(non)

Semi "off-the-shelf"	Indirect costs up to 25% of eligible direct cost. Calculation method study needed!	(non)	(non)
DIY SCO	% and type of costs and flat-rate costs are defined and justified by the MS Calculation method study needed!	Unit-based costs Calculation method study needed!	Outcome-based costs Calculation method study needed!

The special report conducted by the European Court of Auditors on the new options for financing rural development projects highlights that "SCOs can keep the costs of rural development projects under control, but only if set at the right level and based on a fair, equitable and verifiable methodology. However, as the role of the Certification Bodies in auditing SCOs is not specified, this creates a risk which needs to be addressed." (Source: European Court of Auditors Special Report No11: New options for financing rural development projects: Simpler but not focused on results (2018).

The report also noted that the spending through SCOs remain a marginal part of rural development expenditures. Similarly to the study commissioned by DG Regio, this report sees the diverse nature of rural development projects and the investment needed for developing methodologies as the main reason for the low uptake.

The ECA recommendations are summarized as follows:

- The Commission should update its guidance on SCOs to cover key principles for developing methodologies.
- The Commission should clarify who is required to check the methodology and calculations for SCOs.
- To facilitate the appropriate use of SCOs, the Commission should explore the options for developing more optional off-the-shelf SCOs and update its definitions of key and ancillary controls to reflect the use of SCOs.
- The Commission should examine the potential for moving away from reimbursement of costs incurred towards reimbursement based on results, taking on board experience gained to date. (Source: European Court of Auditors Special Report No11: New options for financing rural development projects: Simpler but not focused on results (2018)

4. Summary of the events

4.1. How do they flow, the knowledge flows? Knowledge flow within and beyond the CAP

This event was incorporated into the second General Assembly of the modernAKIS project with the main objectives to provide space for exchange on the set-up and operation of AKIS and AKIS CBs, and to deepen knowledge about the theory and the practice enhancing knowledge flows. The main target group of the event was AKIS CBs.

The ccCoP1 session was structured into three parts:

- presentation on the theoretical background;
- presentations on practical cases;
- interactive session: role play scenario to experience different challenges to be solved regarding knowledge exchange;

A short Mentimeter interaction was conducted to assess participants' prior knowledge of the concepts to be introduced. Participants were asked to differentiate between information, knowledge, knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer. While most answers were correct, some confusion arose due to similar terms. Knowledge transfer was often used synonymously with knowledge exchange, knowledge sharing and knowledge flows. A preliminary conclusion was drawn that, although participants were somewhat familiar with the concepts, there is a need for further clarification and deeper integration into their learning process through active engagement and practical application. A presentation on the theoretical background of concepts related to knowledge exchange and transfer was given at the beginning of the session. It highlighted that differentiation between is essential. While knowledge transfer involves a one-way flow of information, where one party transfers knowledge to another, knowledge exchange is a multi-directional, dynamic process. A shift in the legislative framework has occurred where the EU Rural Development Regulation for 2014-2020 supported knowledge transfer, whereas the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation for 2023-2027 introduced knowledge exchange, emphasizing its role in fostering innovation processes.

Five invited speakers, involved in the implementation of knowledge exchange practices, shared their background and their experiences of the practices below:

Ana Almand (Soil Association, UK) presented an on-farm approach to research and innovation in UK, called Innovative Farmers (IF). IF is a programme dedicated to the creation of a network of farmers and crofters, and running on-farm trials on their own terms to test innovative new practices. It is a proven model to engage farmers, researchers and other industry professionals to collaborate on-farm trials that are called field labs.

Susanna Lahnamäki-Kivelä (LUKE, Finland) presented the experience of AgriHubi, as a networking tool. AGRIHUBI is a Finnish network that brings together agriculture and horticulture operators, including farmers, advisors, educators, and researchers, to collaborate and improve profitability and sustainability in farming.

Dimitar Vanev (National Agricultural Advisory Service NAAS, Bulgaria) presented the on-farm demonstration system implemented by NAAS in Bulgaria. NAAS provides free consultations, training, and technical assistance to farmers to enhance crop production, animal husbandry, and agricultural economics. Its objective is to

transfer knowledge in practice, spread innovations as well as set up network, communication and social links between farmers.

Myriam Gaspard (CRAO/CDAF, France) explained the operation and the benefits of the so called mixed technological networks (Réseaux Mixtes Technologiques), which are equal to national thematic networks in France. There have been 30 ongoing mixed technological networks on diverse topics such as adaptation to climate change, crop & livestock production, agroforestry, circular economy, food processing, research & development methods & tools, social and economic issues. The main objective of the initiative is to encourage the networking of AKIS actors as well as bridge the gap between research and practices. The thematic network approach has proved its benefits and has been promoted by EU programs as well.

Mark Gibbson (TEAGASK, Ireland) presented the farmer discussion groups as an important platform for farmers to learn and to develop support networks with other like-minded farmers. Discussion groups are farmer led and supported by group facilitators. Activities include field trips, visits to each other's farms and invited speakers.

The importance of expert facilitation as well as the focus on real on-farm priorities were commonly highlighted by all presenters.

Another key lesson is that overly prescriptive support schemes don't work. Minimizing the administration and streamlining the payment methods is an important success factor.

The plenary session was followed by an extensive interactive block within which the World Café method and the Role Play tool was combined.

Role play scenario

Participants engaged in a proposal discussion on how they manage knowledge in their imaginary countries, defending roles that typically did not represent their real positions.

Objectives addressed included:

- improving knowledge exchange with farmers
- introducing new technologies demonstrated on a permanent demonstration farm to speed up the implementation of digital solutions in practice
- improving food security
- tackling climate change
- improve competitiveness of the agri-sector
- foster transnational exchange through exchange programmes
- implementation of regular networking events
- enforcing cooperation between actors
- creation of expertise-centres that bring together different stakeholders that address various projects (e.g. climate change, carbon farming, biodiversity, plant protection, precision agriculture, digitalisation, economy, etc.)

Each group was assigned a "made-up country" to work with, and different roles as AKIS actors from what they would usually have. The groups discussed and agreed on an effective tool/method for enhancing knowledge flow according to the conditions described in each country card. Participants defended their positions based on the roles

they played, which had to be different than that of the real life. Key leading questions were:

1. Who needs to be involved?
2. What will be done and when?
3. How will it be done? Who has responsibilities and what are they?
4. How will information be shared with the target groups? What types of indicators are needed to know whether the initiative is meeting its objectives?

The event successfully developed a shared understanding of the terminology used, supported by practical examples. The interactive session allowed participants to engage in a dynamic simulation of AKIS across nine different country contexts and roles (advisors, farmers, researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and private associations), enhancing their understanding of the complexities of knowledge exchange and collaboration in real-world scenarios.

4.2. Policy Lab: interactive discussion between AKIS CBs and advisors

Similarly to the previous ccCOP1 event, the second occasion was also integrated in the programme of the modernAKIS project third General Assembly. The main objective of the two days event was to deepen the shared knowledge on the role of advisors and innovation support services (ISS) in AKIS, by exploring challenges, ways and methods to better integrate advisors, advisory network projects and ISS in the AKIS as well as how the results can be applied in the AKIS strategies. The audience composed of representatives from AKIS CBs, policy makers, advisory organisations and CAP networks.

The main objective of this session was to discuss of questions, challenges, and insights related to the latest requirements of the CAP for farm advisory services.

The methodology selected for this session was a Policy Lab workshop, as stakeholders representing different aspects of the problem and different fields of expertise came together to explore and co-create solutions to complex policy challenges.

The Policy Lab is structured around five topics and seven questions related to farm advisory services, their integration and new legislative requirements:

1. Farm advisory services must address economic, environmental, and social dimensions, delivering up-to-date technological and scientific information, particularly from research and innovation projects, including public goods provision (2021/2115, Art 15(2)).

What changes does the above new obligation require compared to the previous system?

2. Farm advisory services must integrate advisors, researchers, farmer organizations, and other stakeholders into the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) (2021/2115, Art 15(2)).

How is this requirement interpreted and met? How is the integration of advisors in the AKIS promoted?

How can private advisors be effectively involved?

3. Member States (MS) are tasked with selecting suitably qualified advisors who operate impartially and without conflicts of interest (2021/2115, Art 15(3)).

How should "suitably qualified" be defined, and how can MS ensure advisors meet these criteria?

How can conflicts of interest and impartiality be defined and maintained for supported advisors?

4. Advisory services are required to cover multiple fields such as antimicrobial resistance, innovation, digital technologies, and employment conditions (2021/2115, Art 15(4)).

What changes does this new obligation require compared to the previous system?

5. Although certification or administration of advisors is not mandatory, a transparent platform must be established to list impartial advisors and their fields of expertise.

How can the requirement to maintain a transparent and updated platform be met effectively?

Main outputs of the interactive discussion:

- Most MSs focus heavily on the economic aspect of advisory services. In several countries, the economic dimension refers to support for the submission of CAP aid. The environmental dimension is also well covered by all represented MSs, and it has a long history and significant experience. However, it was stressed that environmental issues need improvement, as the environmental dimension is very broad, comprising many aspects such as soil, crop protection, etc. Environmental problems need to be better explained, and advisors need new knowledge and skills to provide updated information, and address farmers' resistance to environmental issues. Most participants identified gaps and issues in addressing the social dimension, such as young people leaving the sector, health and labour conditions, employing disabled people, integrating migrant workers, farmers's wellbeing, and digitalization. Most MSs reported a lack of financial tools and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for these new tasks. The EU4Advice and COREnet projects highlighted that the short supply chain is an opportunity linked to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions bringing producers closer to consumers with quantifiable benefits. In conclusion, most MSs are still in the early stages of addressing the social dimension in farm advisory services, and integrating economic, environmental, and social aspects presents a significant challenge.
- Integration of advisors into AKIS varies by country and region. In order to serve this objective, importance of regular capacity-building activities was highlighted as well as collaboration with universities and research institutions to keep advisors updated with scientific advancements.
- Training in soft skills is critical, highlighting the need for strong interpersonal abilities alongside technical expertise. Training should also address social issues such as health and labour conditions, employing disabled people, integrating migrant workers, farmers's wellbeing.
- Trainings focusing on sustainability, economics, nitrogen management, and crop protection, aligning with global agricultural challenges were mentioned as it was mentioned in the discussion of the first topic.

- Different approaches to transparent advisory platforms emerged during the debate. Lithuania emphasizes maintaining a repository of around 450 advisors while ensuring their impartiality and transparency. They suggested involving farmers in the process to evaluate advisor effectiveness. Latvia suggests using simplified processes for registering advisors and connecting them through dynamic databases. Croatia emphasized the role of chambers and family associations in maintaining advisor lists and stressed the need for regular updates and verification of these lists. They also pointed out that service providers should demonstrate both impartiality and expertise to maintain trust in the system. Finland and Portugal propose integrating platforms with paying agencies for transparency and accessibility. Overall, the recommendations call for clear frameworks, dynamic updates, and collaboration with farmers and regulatory bodies to ensure effective and trustworthy platforms.

4.3. Application of simplified cost options for AKIS-related interventions

The event centred on implementing SCOs in AKIS-related interventions, with a focus on Coordination Bodies, Managing Authorities, and Paying Agencies. Among these, Coordination Bodies are the main participants, as they constitute the core group of the ccCoP1. Discussions explored the modifications in simplified cost methodologies for the 2021-2027 programming period, including flat rates, unit costs, and lump sums. These financial instruments aim to streamline administration, simplify financial oversight, and enhance support consistency.

The methodology was structured to ensure a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of the topic. The key concepts and practical examples were shared by external experts involved in the implementation in their respective countries. After the block of presentations, they acted as panellists throughout the discussion.

The identification of relevant SCO examples was the result of the exploratory work done by AKI.

Krisztina Magócs (AKI Institute of Agricultural Economics, Hungary) summarized the change in the legal framework of SCOs, comparing the 2014–2020 period with the current budgetary cycle and its consequences. Key topics included the distinctions between standard unit costs, lump sums and flat rates, the ways the amounts for the forms of support shall be established and the questions around the application of the “off-the shelf solutions” provided under CPR.

Valentina Carta (CREA, Italy) explained the purpose of the modernAKIS Compendium, which contains ready for practice solutions regarding the application of SCOs as well. The scope of these SCOs as well as the main benefits such as reduced administrative burdens, fewer errors and enhanced support consistency was explained.

Noora Pehkonen (Finnish Food Authority, Finland) presented the use of flat rates for European Innovation Partnerships and standard hourly rates for agricultural advisory services, offering valuable lessons from Finland’s experience. The legal basis for both options is the CPR Regulation. The modification in the flat rate value compared to the previous period was based on an external study ordered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The aim of the study was to elaborate methods and models of simplified cost options including flat rate and other options as well. The revision of the 15% and

24% flat rate model was also part of the study. Based on this study 19% and 40% flat rate model was selected by the Ministry. The study suggested to use not more than two alternatives, to keep it simple for the beneficiaries. The 19% flat rate is based on (EU) 1060/2021 Art. 53 and Art. 54. Flat rate is used to cover indirect costs of an operation. According to Art. 54 indirect costs can be financed up to 25% of eligible direct cost, provided that the rate is calculated in accordance with point (a) of Article 53(3). The 40% flat rate is based on (EU) 1060/2021 Art. 56, which says that a flat rate of up to 40 % of eligible direct staff costs may be used to cover the remaining eligible costs of an operation. The Member State shall not be required to perform a calculation to determine the applicable rate.

New element is that 5000 euro preparation support can be applied by e.g. formulating EIP Operational Groups on a lump sum base. It is used for partner search and for preparing the application.

Also new rule that the percentage for covering holiday pay, holiday compensation and employer's social security contributions is standard, 39 % in all cases.

Applicants can choose between the real cost based and the two flat rate-based methods. The granting authority makes the decision on the cost model for the entire project implementation period. IT-system calculates automatically the percentage for covering holiday pay, holiday compensation and employer's social security contributions and the share of chosen flat rate.

Main benefit is the significantly reduced administrative burden. There is no need to submit and control receipts and accounting documents for flat rate indirect costs. The focus of project implementation is much more on the results.

Els Lapage (Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, Flemish Government, Belgium) presented the application of flat rates and unit costs in European Innovation Partnerships, demonstration projects and vocational training during the 2014–2020 CAP period in Flanders.

The Belgium (Flanders) CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 allows for the financing of indirect costs up to 15% of direct personnel costs on a flat-rate basis for the European Innovation Partnership operational groups and the demonstration farms intervention. Point 2 of Article 83(1) of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation sets out the methods for determining the amounts applicable to SCOs, which includes the possibility of applying SCOs used in similar types of operations in Union or national policies based on the rules for the application of unit costs, lump sums and flat rates. These points are almost identical to the corresponding points in the CPR Regulation. However, the latter includes 6 fully and 1 semi "off-the-shelf" SCOs which can be used in Structural and Cohesion Fund programs without any justification. One of these fully "off-the-shelf" solutions is that where the flat rate is used to cover indirect costs up to 15% of direct staff cost. The main benefits are more flexibility and reduced administrative burdens for beneficiaries; the same method can be used for several funding instruments thus becoming a practice for applicants and implementing institutions; less time spent on checking payment claims by managing authorities since real costs do not have to be checked.

The other Flemish example presented was the hourly staff rate as a standard scale of unit cost for European Innovation Partnerships and demonstration projects in Flanders. Hourly staff rate, as a form of unit cost was applied by the previous period rural development program (2014-2020) for EIP operational group projects and farm demonstration. This practice continued in the current period (2021-2027) under the

CAP Strategic Plan. The method is based on a similar type of operation applied in another funding measure as it is allowed by the CAP Regulation Art. 83(2)(c). The hourly staff rate methodology ("Standard Hourly Rate") is developed for Flemish beneficiaries of the funding instruments of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) (Interreg). The methodology is based on an external study and approved by the European Commission. The result was taken over by the CAP implementation.

One of the main benefits is that financial control only addresses correct application of the methodology, which leads to major simplification and reduction of error rate.

Markus Stadler (Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Austria) presented the application of unit costs for agricultural advisory services in Austria. The amount of the unit cost was calculated based on verified historical data (2115/2021 art 83 (2) a(a) ii). The eligible cost for unit cost is personnel cost. Calculation was based on historic salary data for advisors of Chamber of Agriculture and Bio Austria (gross wages, extent of employment of the advisors. In the presentation the method of calculation was explained. The result is a unit costs/hour: EUR 54.57. As for further simplification, introduction of lump sum is planned.

Questions addressed the methodologies behind SCO calculations and their approval processes. Experts shared that external studies conducted by research institutions or commissioned firms like KPMG are the backbone of SCO validation and are subject to audit. These studies are in most cases not available for public.

Detailed descriptions of the above cases are included in *D1.4 Compendium of insightful new know-how and ready-for-practice solutions*.

5. Results and conclusions

5.1. How do they flow, the knowledge flows? Knowledge flow within and beyond the CAP

The ccCoP1 session in Zagreb was the first one and included several AKIS CBs as well as key AKIS actors from Member States, which had not yet nominated an AKIS CB. Because the implementation of the CAP SPs had barely begun and the attributions of AKIS CBs were quite foggy, it was difficult to derive any policy recommendations for the next CAP from this meeting. However, for the implementation of the current CAP several actions, respectively recommendations, could already be derived:

1. Knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer: there was an awareness about the difference, however "knowledge transfer" was often used synonymously with knowledge exchange, knowledge sharing and knowledge flows.
Potential activities: prepare a fact-sheet presenting the differences; share it widely among practitioners and key AKIS actors, to make sure that in discussions everybody means the same.
2. The role-play game also resulted in some ideas, which might be used in order to foster knowledge flows through activities:
 - 2.1. On-farm demonstrations
 - 2.2. Open days on research facilities and research stations (especially for private actors)
 - 2.3. Working groups/discussion groups between researchers and advisors
 - 2.4. Innovation hubs providing a selection of activities fostering knowledge flows (including trainings); they act as facilitators for networking sustainably bringing the relevant AKIS actors together
 - 2.5. Online platform with practical cases, videos, experiences from farmers
 - 2.6. Update educational (vocational) programs and adapt curricula allowing for more flexibility
 - 2.7. Student farm visits/stays (potentially also for credits) to improve educational level
 - 2.8. Lighthouses (farms) become attractions for other farmers (see Soil Mission)
 - 2.9. Farmers as ambassadors; reward farmers in competitions
 - 2.10. Create knowledge hubs for priority topics
 - 2.11. Exhibitions for the sector
 - 2.12. Brokerage sessions
 - 2.13. Business lunches
 - 2.14. Buddy system
 - 2.15. Mentoring and coaching of innovators
3. Recommendation of activities to be financed by 78 intervention:
 - 3.1. Farmers for on-farm demonstrations (especially with peers)

- 3.2. Transnational visits (cross-visits, peer-to-peer exchange) of farmers and advisors – pay for language support, travel, accommodation

5.2.Policy Lab: interactive discussion between AKIS CBs and advisors

The integration of advisors into the AKIS presents new challenges for member states, particularly in terms of expanding the role of advisors and their contributions to new thematic areas (Art. 15). In most countries, the economic dimension is currently primarily limited to assist the submission of RDP/CAP support applications. Therefore, it is essential to develop the capacity of advisors in financial and business planning. Additionally, continuous training of advisors on new economic trends, market-oriented perspectives, and innovation-supporting services is of paramount importance.

Supporting digitalization is also a key area of economic advisory services. The application of digital technologies, precision farming, and data-driven production systems requires specialized knowledge and skills that can be provided through targeted training for advisors.

Addressing environmental issues also requires complex and continuously updated knowledge. Specialized training in soil protection, plant protection, biodiversity, and climate protection is essential to enable advisors to effectively support farmers in implementing sustainable farming practices. Providing practical tools, such as accessible and easily applicable guidelines, demonstration farms, and interactive online materials, is also crucial for promoting environmental sustainability.

The social dimension is underrepresented in most MSs, yet there is an increasing demand for support in this area among farmers. Therefore, the following measures are suggested:

- Strengthening workforce integration: Providing targeted advisory programs and legal support for employing people with disabilities, migrant workers, and disadvantaged groups.
- Improving health and working conditions: Providing assistance for advisors on the field of early recognition of problems regarding mental health and workplace safety.

Soft skills training is seen as critical, highlighting the need for advisors to possess strong interpersonal abilities alongside technical expertise.

The aforementioned programs and targeted support options are provided under Articles 77 and 78 of the CAP, thus the framework is in place. However, it is observed in several countries that the lack of strategic approach regarding AKIS hinders the incorporation of certain important thematic areas into policy measures. Where AKIS measures do not have clearly defined objectives, numerous specialized, so-called "niche" thematic areas are marginalized, which impedes the effectiveness of knowledge transfer and the adequate realization of innovation in these areas.

In the next budgetary period, special attention is suggested to be paid to strengthen the above-described strategic thinking. To this end, targeted support and calls embedded in the AKIS strategic approach must ensure that advisory services are adequately developed, accessible, and effective in all relevant areas.

5.3.Application of simplified cost options for AKIS-related measures

Speakers with practical experience on using simplified cost options unanimously confirmed that the use of these tools has achieved its purpose. It has significantly reduced the administrative burden for both managing authorities and beneficiaries, thereby allowed a shift from collecting, controlling and verifying financial documents to achieving the planned results. It has also reduced the error rates and accelerated the reimbursement procedures.

It was highlighted that the fact that the legal framework allows to establish the amounts for the forms of support in accordance with the rules for application of corresponding unit costs, lump sums and flat rates applicable in Union policies or national support schemes for a similar type of intervention¹³ made the introduction of SCOs faster, cheaper and reduced the audit risk. This also applies to off the shelf solutions. Other major benefit is that it allows the same method to be used for several funding instruments thus becoming a practice for applicants and implementing institutions.

The special report of the European Court of Auditors noted that the spending through SCOs remain a marginal part of rural development expenditures. One reason given for this was the investment needed for developing methodologies for establishing the values. The workshop discussions confirmed this finding, adding that the introduction of a new SCO is also hampered by the fact that -if the involvement of the Certifying Body in the validation process is not ensured – the audit risk of a newly introduced SCO is high. These obstacles would be greatly eased by the provision of tools and guides that provide detailed instructions on how to develop methodologies to underpin the values.

It should also be considered to provide more easy-to use off the shelf solution to facilitate the appropriate use of SCOs.

Collecting, structuring and making publicly accessible operating SCO practices within rural development would most likely be inspiring for actors who are not familiar with these options, who are hesitating and looking for some reinforcement.

Suggestions included deeper dives into the calculation methodologies of different SCOs. Most of these calculations are not public as they are, however the logic and the method can be shared and can be quite beneficial. Continued capacity development on this issue is justified involving Certifying Bodies, auditors and consultants with references on the field of calculating different SCOs. In the later stages of the implementation of the CAP SPs, it would be reasonable to organise further learning and policy shaping events around this theme.

¹³ Article 44 (2) c), d) of the Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115

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Annex 1: ccCoP alignment

The following description of the ccCoPs is provided in the WP4 ccCoPs alignment working document:

ccCoP 1: Policy, governance and CAP interventions - AKIS Strategic Plans continuous improvement. Target group: CB, policy makers (others could be involved). This ccCoP is particular in that it originates from Task 4.1, and that Coordination Bodies are fostered by Task 2.2. Its interactions are therefore aligned from the get-go.

ccCoP2: Advisors - integration of advisors into AKIS and in particular the integration of innovation support. Target group: advisors. It is managed by T4.3.

ccCoP3: Connecting research and practice - informing research on needs from practice and finding ways to reward scientific for results usable in practice. Target group: farmers and researchers (other could be involved). It is managed by T4.3.

ccCoP4: Knowledge access and knowledge flows - improving knowledge flows by making information and knowledge more readily available and accessible. Target group: CBs, other intermediary agents. Also, farmers and researchers (other could be involved). It is managed by T4.3.

ccCoP5: Education – exchanging best practices on life-long-learning education and the engagement with the different stakeholders (educators, advisors, researchers...). Target group: trainers and potential future trainers at different levels (other could be involved). It is managed by T4.3.

Annex 2: Overview of type and scope of main advisory service providers

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental dimensions and economic, social	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
AT	Public (semi)	X	The Chambers of Agriculture (LK) is the backbone of the Austrian AKIS. In organic farming consultancy, the agricultural chambers collaborate under the umbrella of ARGE Bioberatung with BIO AUSTRIA, the largest Austrian organic association.	Cover economic, environmental and social dimensions.	X	X	X	X	X
	Private								
BE-FL	Public (semi)				X	?			
	Private	X	A mix of public, research-based (ILVO), farmer-based (Boerendbond), non-governmental and private organisations	Private advisors, specializing in their expertise and experience on one or more themes, and covering economic environmental and social dimensions . Advisory services ensure that all themes are covered that are mentioned in Article 15.		X	X	X	X
BE-WAL	Public (semi)	X	Walloon Public Service Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment (SPW ARNE) and Walloon Centre for Agronomic Research (CRA-W)						
	Private	X	A mix of private organisations such as farmer-based, non-governmental and private organisations (ABS, FWA)	A certain number of advisory organizations address economic and environmental dimensions . The social theme is covered by a smaller number of advisory organizations. All themes required by Article 15 are covered by these advisory organizations.	X	X	X	X	X
BG	Public (semi)	X	National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS) provides public advisory services.	NAAS has an active role in economic and environmental dimensions .			X	X	
	Private	X	Advisors from the private sector, and other organizations including sectoral ones providing agricultural advice within AKIS.	Special attention will be paid to advisors providing advice related to environmental dimensions .					

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental and economic, and social dimensions	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
HR	Public (semi)	X	Advisors are predominantly present in Croatia as a public service, a part of the Ministry of Agriculture - Directorate for Expert Support to Agricultural Development.	Knowledge transfer system and support for innovation is provided by the public advisory service within the Ministry of Agriculture			X		
	Private	X	Private consultants are small in number but present.	Special attention of the entire advisory services is directed towards topics related to environmental dimensions .	X				
CY	Public (semi)	X	The Extension Section, Department of Agricultural in the Ministry of Agriculture plays a dominant role as service provider.						
	Private	X	Other entities providing farmers with all kinds of advice as well.						
CZ	Public (semi)								
	Private	X	There are private consultants, Semi-state-funded organizations (Universities, Research institutes); Farmer based organizations; Producers group; Private advisory organizations	There are areas of accreditation in agriculture, plant medicine and forestry covers economic and environmental dimensions .	X	X	X	X	X
DK	Public (semi)								
	Private	X	Farmer based, owned and controlled Danish Agricultural Advisory Service (DAAS) cooperation dominates the market; SEGES private non-profit advisory (part of DAAS); other main sources: private independent companies, input suppliers companies.	Professional advice is available on all relevant aspects of economic, environmental and social dimensions .			X	X	
EE	Public (semi)	X	Within METK (Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge) AKIS centre is the implementing body for AKIS activities and responsible for coordinating the advisory services, knowledge exchange and innovation support.		X	X	x	X	X
	Private	X	There are private advisory organizations.			X		X	X

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental and economic, and social dimensions	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
FI	Public (semi)								
	Private	X	Primary production is the main focus of the country-wide, not-for-profit, primary producer-owned advisory organisations ProAgria and the Finnish Forestry Centre. Breeding services are organized by FABA. There are few other operators selling services	ProAgria provides economic and environmental related advice.			X	X	
FR	Public (semi)	X	As public institutions under the supervision of the State, the Chambers of Agriculture are involved in many areas. The forestry sector also has advisory structures, with the National Centre for Forest Property and the Chambers of Agriculture.	Cover economic, environmental and social dimensions as well as all themes mentioned in Art 15.	X	X	X	X	X
	Private	X	As private advisors are farmers' cooperatives and private traders; as well as associations (FNCUMA, TRAME); Downstream industries can also be key actors.						
DE	Public (semi)	X	There is a pluralism of actors (Public, Private, Chamber of Agriculture) that offer services, which are organized on a regional level (Länder).	Professional advice is available on all relevant aspects of economic, environmental and social dimensions .			X	X	
	Private	X					X	X	
EL	Public (semi)								
	Private	X	Plenty of private Companies/Cooperations				X	X	
HU	Public (semi)	X	Chamber of Agriculture is operating the public advisory services.	Topics are mainly related to the economic dimensions .					
	Private	X	There are many private advisors (both individual and companies), who are registered and certified also by the Chamber of Agriculture.	Topics are related broad scope of agricultural activities - including economic and environmental dimensions .			X	X	
IE	Public (semi)	X	Teagasc, has a predominance in the Irish AKIS, and in advisory services.	Cover economic, environmental and social dimensions .	X		X	X	
	Private								

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental and economic, and social dimensions	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
IT	Public (semi)	X	Regionally and nationally articulated back-office service provides specialised information and support.	The back offices cover economic and environmental dimensions (meteorological services, tools for soil protection, market analysis, DSS, AI models etc.)	X		X		
	Private	X	A diverse range of advisory services are available in the country, predominantly provided by private organisations.	Advisory services covers economic, and environmental dimensions and fulfills the requirements of Art 15(4).	X	X		X	X
LT	Public (semi)	X	The main provider of agricultural advice in the country is Lithuanian Agricultural Advisory Service (LAAS).	LAAS provides clients with complex economic (accounting, business), environmental and social (work safety and fire safety services) services.	X	X	X	X	X
	Private	X	Private institutions, as well as impartial advisers provide agricultural advice in the country.	Advisors selected shall provide advice on land management and farm management, covering economic, environmental and social aspects and the themes set out in Article 15(2) and (4).	X	X	X	X	X
LV	Public (semi)	X	The main advisory organization Latvian Rural Advisory and Education Centre (LRATC) is covering the big part of the advisors services	Advisory services cover environment and climate issues, innovation and technology, as well as economic and competitiveness aspects and social legislation.	X	X	X	X	X
	Private	X	There are other service providers (eg. eAgronom or freelancer advisors).						
LU	Public (semi)	X	Nine public accredited advisory organisations (PAAO) exist in Luxembourg and their accreditation is in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Viticulture (MAAV)	Services offered are aimed at optimising the economic and environmental performance of farms.	x			x	x
	Private								
MT	Public (semi)	X	The public bodies are represented by AgriConnect and a few other governmental departments, under the authority of the Ministry.	AgriConnect provides advice related to environmental (conditionality, agri-environment climate measures), and other economic issues .					

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental and economic, and social dimensions	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
	Private	X	There are registered impartial private advisors as well as farmer-based organisations.						
NL	Public (semi)								
	Private	X	All advisors in the Netherlands are private organized, but independent private advisors are paid by the government, with use of the voucher system or other corresponding subsidies. LTO, The Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association, is the umbrella organisation of the three regional associations LTO Noord, ZLTO and LLTB.	Cover economic, environmental and social dimensions.	X		X	X	X
PL	Public (semi)	X	Public advisory services supervised by MARD: 16 regional advisory centres and Agricultural Advisory Centre (CDR)						
	Private	X							
PT	Public (semi)	X	Mostly private advisory organizations		X				
	Private	X					X	X	X
RO	Public (semi)	X	The establishment and the coordination of the agricultural advisory service is MARD responsibility.						
	Private								
SI	Public (semi)	X	CAFS is the umbrella interest organisation (Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia)		X	X	X	X	X
	Private								X
SK	Public (semi)	X	Public and private bodies are included						
	Private	X							
ES	Public (semi)	X							

MS Code	Public/private advisory services		Main advisory service providers	Coverage of environmental dimensions and economic, and social	Antimicrobial resistance	Risk prevention and management	Innovation support	Digital technologies	Sustainable management of nutrients (FaST tool)
	Private	X	Heterogeneous public-private advisory system model						
SE	Public (semi)	X	Commercial advisory services, free advisory services						
	Private	X							