



D2.1 Stakeholders Identification



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101136910

Document information

Key information	Data
Project reference number	101136910
Project acronym	PoliRuralPlus
Project title	Fostering Sustainable, Balanced, Equitable, Place-based and Inclusive Development of Rural-Urban Communities' Using Specific Spatial Enhanced Attractiveness Mapping ToolBox
Work package (WP) & deliverable number & name	WP2 – D2.1 Stakeholders Identification, V2.0
WP leader and co-leader	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
Deliverable leader & key author(s)	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
Contributors and authors	MAC SUA SRY AUA GAIA TIN MYA SML P4A DIT SINNO VPR AL
Peer reviewers	David Pesek (CVUT), Karel Charvat (CCSS)
P.R. approval date/version	07-10-2025 Version 2.0
Document type	DATA — data sets, microdata, etc
For public dissemination	Yes, PUB – Public
Brief abstract	The stakeholders to be identified in this deliverable D2.1 database of the PoliRuralPlus project include local communities, governments, farmers, SMEs, industry associations, research institutions, NGOs, civil society groups, infrastructure providers, digital technology companies, financial institutions, and tourism sector representatives. These stakeholders play crucial roles in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. The database of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders in the 9 pilot regions is defined, and how communication channels will be established with them, as the basis for the project's analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the Impact of COVID19, to identify the most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies. This version 2 of D2.1 incorporates improvements requested from the mid-term project review, including updated stakeholder counts (surpassing project target), added gender-disaggregated data, refined stakeholder database, categorisation & engagement framework

Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Document history

Version	Date	Main measures/changes	Responsible
0.1	05/01/2024	Initial version	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
0.2	28/02/2024	Improvements, upload for collaborative editing	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
0.3	08/06/2024	Non-technical information, structure improvements, example of source specification	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
0.4	06/05/2024	Details elaboration	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
0.5	16/05/2024	Review feedback and suggestions	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
0.6	22/05/2024	Final updates	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
1.0	28/05/2024	Final version for submission	Coordinator
1.1	26/09/2025	Updated stakeholder counts (surpassing project target), added gender-disaggregated data, refined stakeholder categorisation & engagement framework, included pilot-specific examples, and strengthened links to KPIs and EU best practices.	John O'Flaherty (MAC), WP2 Leader
1.2	30/09/2025	Review feedback and suggestions	John O'Flaherty (MAC)
2.0	07/10/2025	Final version for submission	Coordinator

<u>Action</u>	<u>Adaptation of the Deliverable</u>
Sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and Annex C added in.	The database structure as defined in section 3 has now been updated to an operationalised version 2, with the database already populated with well over the target of 300 stakeholders across the 9 pilots. The initial proof of concept analysis is shown in Annex A. While now the Annex C proof-of-concept vignettes illustrate and inspire the pilots in their use of the operationalised version 2 of the stakeholders database and proactively address the gender dimension, as discussed in the new sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 of version 2 of this deliverable.

Table of content

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Rural-Urban Linkages and Stakeholders	8
2.1 Rural-Urban Linkages	8
2.2 Rural-Urban Stakeholders.....	9
2.3 Regional Networks Communications Channels	11
2.4 Examples of organisations in each group of stakeholders	13
3. PoliRuralPlus Database of Regional Stakeholders	14
3.1 Use of the PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database.....	16
3.2 PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database Security	17
3.3 Status of the PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database	17
3.4 Gender Analysis of Stakeholders.....	20
3.5 Stakeholder Prioritisation Framework.....	21
3.6 Regional Engagement Pathways	23
4. Conclusions and Recommendations	25
Annex A Proof of Concept Example of using the Stakeholders Database	26
Annex B Examples of organisations in each group of stakeholders	30
Annex C: Tiered Stakeholder Engagement Examples	38
Annex D: RAP Methodology Categories.....	41

List of Tables

Table 1: PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders
Table 2: PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders full Database Structure
Table 3: Initial PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database
Table 4: Stakeholder Targets
Table 5: Updated Stakeholder numbers by region
Table 6: Updated Stakeholders' gender data by region
Table 7: Mapping of Strategic Priorities to RAP Categories
Table 8: Comparative Stakeholders' Engagement

Abbreviations

Acronym	Title
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
DL	Deep Learning
DoA	Description of Action (Annex in the GA).
EAFRD	EAFRD
ENRD	Rural Network for Rural Development
GA	PoliRuralPlus Grant Agreement
GenAI	Generative AI
GIS	Geospatial Information System
H2020	Horizon 2020 EU funding programme
HE	Horizon Europe EU funding programme of this project
LAG	Local Action Groups
LEADER	EU Programme, Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRN	National Rural network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RAP	Regional Action Plan
PM	Person Month
SDM	System Dynamic Modelling
SME	Small and Medium sized Enterprise
WP	Workpackage

Executive Summary

This executive summary provides an overview of the key Sections in the deliverable, "D2.1 Stakeholders Identification".

The stakeholders to be identified in this deliverable D2.1 database of the PoliRuralPlus project include local communities, governments, farmers, SMEs, industry associations, research institutions, NGOs, civil society groups, infrastructure providers, digital technology companies, financial institutions, and tourism sector representatives. These stakeholders play crucial roles in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. The database of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders in the 9 pilot regions is defined, and how communication channels will be established with them, as the basis for the project's analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the Impact of COVID19, to identify the most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies.

Version Update

This updated version 2 of Deliverable D2.1 incorporates the improvements requested during the mid-term project review. The stakeholder database has been revised to include the most recent figures, demonstrating that the consortium has already surpassed the original project target. Gender-disaggregated data have been added to strengthen inclusiveness and monitoring. Stakeholder categorisation has been refined using explicit prioritisation criteria and a tiered framework (Primary, Secondary, Peripheral), with accompanying regional mapping and engagement logic to ensure operational relevance. Furthermore, pilot-specific examples illustrate how prioritised stakeholders can be integrated into the development of Regional Action Plans. These enhancements increase the strategic and practical value of the database and align the deliverable with both project KPIs and EU best practices on inclusiveness, data transparency, and participatory governance.

Section 1: Introduces the project and its work.

Section 2: Discusses urban-rural linkages, and the stakeholders relevant to PoliRuralPlus.

Section 3: Describes the PoliRuralPlus database structure in detail.

Section 4: Draws conclusions and makes recommendations for the project.

1. Introduction

The PoliRuralPlus project aims to improve the quality of life for people living in urban and rural areas across the EU by promoting coordinated and collaborative development within the regions. It is doing so by fostering a sustainable, balanced, equitable, place-based and inclusive development of rural and urban areas through improved connections, governance arrangements, and integrated territorial policies that prioritise experimentation and innovation in domains that favour bi-directional urban-rural synergies and the development of a well-being economy, driven by foresight, planning and implementation of integrated urban-rural strategies.

This deliverable D2.1 is a database, that identifies the relevant stakeholders, including among others farmers, urban consumers, local authorities, businesses, NGOs, and community groups, and establish communication channels with them, as the basis for the project's analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the Impact of COVID19, to help the PoliRuralPlus pilots to identify their most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies in the development of their Regional Action Plans (RAP).

The PoliRuralPlus objectives are:

- 01** To develop and implement a foresight-based framework for interregional cooperation and coordination, aimed at overcoming policy barriers and improving governance arrangements to foster integrated and smart rural-urban development strategies.
- 02** To develop and implement integrated strategies and action plans that enhance the availability of business and innovation opportunities in rural areas, while promoting a more proximate, circular, and green economy and revitalising rural places through better connectivity, improved valorization of cultural and natural heritage, and stronger innovation ecosystems.
- 03** To enhance mutual access to services and social connectivity between rural and urban areas, as well as build resilience and capacity for innovation through the implementation of regional action plans and pilot initiatives.
- 04** Contribute to the implementation of the European Green Deal, with a specific focus on the farm-to-fork and biodiversity strategies, the organic action plan, the common agricultural policy (CAP), the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, the flagship initiative "Research and innovation for rural communities," and the EU territorial agenda for 2030.
- 05** To enhance cross-disciplinary collaboration and leverage the full potential of European Research Infrastructures, EOSC, EU Data spaces, INSPIRE, Copernicus, DIAS, Eurostat, FAO, and other relevant data sources for integrated rural-urban development.
- 06** To facilitate mission-oriented experimentation and innovation by leveraging data-driven decision-making, collaborative analysis, and system dynamics to advance the development of a well-being economy based on proximity, circularity, green economy/society, services, culture, landscape and heritage, and mobility.
- 07** To create synergies with the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and other EU-funded projects, facilitating ideas flows from urban to rural settings and vice versa.

The PoliRuralPlus project aims to improve the quality of life for people living in urban and rural areas across the EU by promoting coordinated and collaborative development within the regions. The project is supporting 9 pilots



(including pilots in 8 regions from the previous PoliRural project and 1 new project region) that focus on developing rural-urban partnerships¹. The aim is to increase the resilience and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas.

In terms of financing, the project will demonstrate successful application of funding mechanisms to support these partnerships, including public-private partnerships, crowdfunding, and other innovative financing models. The goal is to find sustainable financing solutions that can support the long-term development of these partnerships.

To help address O1, PoliRuralPlus will validate an EU-wide regional-driven integrated territorial planning and implementation Action-Foresight Process and Tool Box, by extending the latter's Innovation Hub through the European Digital Innovation Hubs using open-source System Dynamic Modelling and a GIS collaborative online service called Map Whiteboard, enhanced by up-to-date Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning (AI/DL) applicable algorithms.

In pursuit of O7, the project has an ambition to become an integral part of the New European Bauhaus due to its lighthouse success of gradual buildup of hands-on experience using up-to-date tools supporting decision-making process based on foresight principles.

PoliRuralPlus is looking especially at:

- **Urban-rural interaction:** Policies that encourage and facilitate the interaction between urban and rural areas, such as the development of integrated transport systems and the promotion of mixed-use development.
- **Governance:** Innovative governance structures and mechanisms that facilitate cooperation and collaboration between different levels of government, stakeholders and citizens, such as the use of participatory approaches and multi-level governance.
- **Transparency:** Policies that promote transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, including the use of open data and participatory budgeting.
- **Citizen participation:** Policies that encourage and support citizen participation in decision-making processes, such as participatory planning, citizen juries, and community-led development initiatives.
- **Promoting inclusive action for change:** Policies that promote equity and social justice in urban-rural development, such as the inclusion of marginalised and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes and the promotion of social entrepreneurship.
- **Financial mechanism innovation:** Policies that promote innovative financial mechanisms to support integrated urban-rural development, such as the use of public-private partnerships, green bonds, and crowdfunding.

This report is the first of 4 deliverables from WP2 "Analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities + Impact of COVID19", as described in the DoA. WP2 is the foundational phase of the project. It is establishing the groundwork by forming the multi-actor community and conducting thorough research on rural-urban linkages. Its research will identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges within these linkages, setting the stage for subsequent activities. The outcomes of WP2 help define the direction and objectives for the rest of the project (WPs 3, 4 and 5).

¹ The 9 place-based pilots cover a wide typology of regions. Seven of them are located in predominantly rural regions, and two in intermediate or predominantly urban regions (Malta and Italy). Three pilots are in rural-coastal areas (Greece, Italy, Malta), four in the border region (Ireland, Czechian, Latvia, and Malta), two in the mountain region (Greece and Czechia), four in sparsely-populated regions (Slovakia, Czechia, Spain, and Latvia), and one, i.e. Malta in the island region.

2. Rural-Urban Linkages and Stakeholders

In the context of urban-rural linkages, there is no universal definition of what is urban, and the global data is based on each country defining what it considers urban, and the population within it². The definition can vary from a cluster of five households or more to an administrative boundary defined by population density and built-up area. In addition, the definition of urban within a country can change over time.

To address geographical or rural-urban inequalities to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development more effectively with regard to populations and sectors in a given geographical area, territorial policy approaches are most appropriate³. They can help coordinate and concentrate efforts to address the spatial concentration of poverty and food insecurity in some less developed areas, reflecting vast spatial inequalities. Given widely differing conditions across regions within countries, territorial approaches provide tools to recognize the spatial dimensions of development and to better understand the great diversity of people and resources across territories and use these to define development goals that address this diversity. Moreover, as they embrace both urban centres and rural areas in an area, territorial approaches provide valuable opportunities to bring the rural dimension into debates surrounding urbanisation and promoting a more sustainable urbanisation.

To avoid trying to define a “one size fits all” definition of what are urban or rural areas, following the recommendations of the European Commission’s Thematic Working Group for Regional Development Programmes⁴, and the fundamental approach of PoliRuralPlus of being user-driven by the regional stakeholders in each pilot, the project uses the local stakeholders' own definition of which of their local regions they consider to be rural or urban⁵.

2.1 Rural-Urban Linkages

Rural-urban linkages are essential for fostering sustainable development and enhancing the overall quality of life in the European Union. Rural-urban linkages are essential for the economic, social, and environmental development of both rural and urban areas in Europe⁶, as follows:

- **Economic development:** Rural-urban linkages support economic development in both rural and urban areas. For example, food production and supply provide jobs and income in rural areas, while tourism attracts visitors and revenue to rural communities.
- **Social development:** Rural-urban linkages also promote social development. For example, education and training opportunities help people to develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century economy.
- **Environmental development:** Rural-urban linkages also support environmental development. For example, research and innovation in agriculture and energy can help to reduce pollution and conserve natural resources.

² “Better Food Systems For Better Rural-Urban Linkages”, [Rural21_4_2018.Pdf](#)

³ [Territorial approaches, rural-urban linkages and inclusive rural transformation \(ifad.org\)](#)

⁴ “Building Blocks for a Revised Typology of Rural Areas”, [D438E7EF-0810-7B5E-49F2-8DA65CD7F698.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ See discussion in section 1 of D2.2 “Rural-Urban Linkages & Opportunities post COVID-19”,

⁶ See discussion in section 1 of D2.2 “Rural-Urban Linkages & Opportunities post COVID-19”,

2.2 Rural-Urban Stakeholders

Regional stakeholders in Europe's rural and urban areas can create a more sustainable and prosperous future for all, particularly with the use of the proposed PoliRuralPlus tools and supports.

The stakeholders who have a significant impact on driving and shaping rural-urban linkages across Europe with their power to:

- (a) Influence the policies and programs that impact rural-urban linkages,
- (b) Connect rural and urban communities.
- (c) Develop new products and services that benefit both rural and urban residents.

Are identified by in the PoliRuralPlus Grant Agreement (GA) to be explored in its 9 pilot regions, are the following:

Stakeholders	Commentary and anticipated impact effects
1. Local communities:	- Local communities are the backbone of rural and urban areas. They are the ones who live, work, and raise families in these communities. Local communities play a vital role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by identifying the needs of their communities and working together to find solutions. - Local communities are at the heart of rural-urban linkages. Their support, engagement, and needs are central to the success of any initiative that aims to bridge the divide between rural and urban areas. Particularly using the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and LEADER Local Action Groups (LAG) approach.⁷ - Impact by end of project: Increased access to resources, improved quality of life, and participation opportunities.
2. Governments:	- Governments at all levels, from local to national, play a critical role in shaping rural-urban linkages. They develop and implement policies and programs that impact both rural and urban areas. For example, governments can invest in infrastructure, education, and healthcare to improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas. - Government bodies at the local, regional, and national levels play a critical role in shaping policies, regulations, and investments that impact rural-urban development. They provide the necessary framework for collaboration and resource allocation. - Impact by end of project: Evidence-based policy insights, increased public trust, and replicable models for successful initiatives.
3. Farmers:	- Farmers play a vital role in rural-urban linkages by producing the food that we eat in our cities. Farmers and forest owners play an important role in protecting the environment and managing natural resources. Agricultural Organisations: These groups represent farmers, forester owners and agricultural interests. Agriculture is a significant economic sector in rural areas, and the influence of agricultural organisations is essential for shaping policies that support rural-urban connections, sustainable farming, and food supply chains. - Impact by end of project: Access to training, new market opportunities, and increased profitability through sustainable practices.
4. SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and Entrepreneurs:	SMEs are the backbone of both rural and urban economies. They create jobs and provide essential goods and services to their communities. SMEs play an important role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by developing innovative products and services and by connecting rural and urban markets. As well as traditional rural production, food, wood, tourism, etc, innovative SMEs create new opportunities in ICT and other services.

⁷ [LEADER/CLLD explained | The European Network for Rural Development \(ENRD\) \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/rural-development-network/enrd/)

	• SMEs, including businesses in both rural and urban areas, are often the drivers of economic growth. They create jobs and contribute to innovation. Their success directly impacts the livelihoods of residents in both settings. • Technology and Innovation Hubs: These hubs foster entrepreneurship, innovation, and the development of digital solutions. They play a pivotal role in bridging the rural-urban divide through digital transformation, knowledge sharing, and economic growth. • Impact by end of project: Support for green businesses and startups, access to funding and mentorship, and collaboration opportunities.
5. Industry associations:	• Industry associations represent the interests of businesses in a particular sector. They play an important role in advocating for policies and programs that support their members. Industry associations also play an important role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by facilitating collaboration between businesses in rural and urban areas. • These associations represent various sectors and businesses. They have a strong influence on policies that support industries and economic growth in rural and urban regions, thus contributing to their mutual development. • Impact by end of project: Greater influence on policy-making, access to data and insights to advocate for member interests.
6. Research & Educational institutions:	• Research institutions play a vital role in developing new technologies and solutions that can benefit both rural and urban communities. For example, research institutions are developing new ways to produce food more sustainably and to reduce pollution. • Universities and research organisations provide knowledge, expertise, and innovation. They conduct research that informs and improves rural-urban development, sustainability, and economic opportunities. • Impact by end of project: Opportunities to apply research, contribute to data collection and analysis, and disseminate findings.
7. NGOs:	• NGOs work on a wide range of issues, including poverty, hunger, education, and environmental protection. NGOs play an important role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by advocating for policies and programs that support the most vulnerable members of society. NGOs also play an important role in delivering essential services to rural and urban communities. • NGOs often focus on specific challenges, such as poverty, healthcare, education, and the environment. Their work can address disparities and advocate for the needs of rural and urban communities, making them key stakeholders in driving change. • Impact by end of project: Increased capacity to advocate for marginalized communities, implement projects, and measure impact.
8. Civil society groups:	• Civil society groups represent the interests of a wide range of groups, including environmental groups, women's groups, and youth groups. Civil society groups play an important role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by advocating for policies and programs that support their members. Civil society groups also play an important role in holding governments and businesses accountable to the public. • Organisations dedicated to sustainability and environmental conservation advocate for responsible practices in both rural and urban settings. Their work contributes to a greener and more balanced approach to development. • Impact by end of project: Increased awareness of sustainable practices, advocacy opportunities for nature-based solutions, and data-driven evidence of environmental impact.
9. Infrastructure providers and transportation authorities:	• Infrastructure providers and transportation authorities play a vital role in connecting rural and urban areas. They develop and maintain roads, railways, and other infrastructure that is essential for the movement of people, goods, and services. • These entities oversee the development of critical infrastructure, including transportation networks and utilities. They ensure efficient connectivity between rural and urban areas, supporting economic growth and reducing isolation. • Impact by end of project: Data-driven insights on infrastructure needs, collaboration opportunities on smart city/village projects, and potential for increased demand due to rural revitalization.

10. Digital technology companies:	• Digital technology companies are playing an increasingly important role in rural-urban linkages. Digital communications, products and cloud-based services can be used to improve access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in rural areas. Digital technologies can also be used to connect rural and urban businesses and to develop new markets for rural products and services. • Impact by end of project: Opportunities to pilot and implement technologies, access a wider customer base, and contribute to digital transformation.
11. Financial institutions:	• Financial institutions play an important role in providing loans, insurance and other financial services to businesses and individuals in both rural and urban areas. Financial institutions play an important role in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages by supporting the development of rural businesses and by helping rural residents to access the financial resources they need to improve their lives. • Banks, credit unions, and microfinance organizations provide funding and financial services. They are essential for supporting businesses and individuals in both rural and urban regions, stimulating economic growth and development. • Impact by end of project: New investment opportunities in sustainable projects, potential for increased lending activity, and reputation enhancement.
12. Tourism sector representatives:	• Tourism sector representatives play an important role in promoting rural and urban areas as tourist destinations. They also play an important role in developing sustainable tourism products and services that benefit both rural and urban communities. • Tourism is a powerful economic driver in both rural and urban areas. Stakeholders in this sector promote tourism linkages, creating economic opportunities and cultural exchange between regions. • Impact by end of project: Increased tourism revenue, diversified offerings, and collaboration with local communities. • Impact by end of project: Increased awareness of sustainable practices, advocacy opportunities for nature-based solutions, and data-driven evidence of environmental impact.

Table 1: PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders

These groups of stakeholders are considered crucial drivers because they are directly involved in key aspects of rural-urban linkages, such as policy development, economic development, technological innovation, knowledge sharing, infrastructure development, and social services. Their involvement is critical in addressing the challenges and opportunities that arise from increasing the resilience and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas, and their actions can have a substantial impact on the well-being and prosperity of both rural and urban communities in the EU. Hence, they will be explored in the PoliRuralPlus pilots.

2.3 Regional Networks Communications Channels

Regional networks built on the database of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders in the 9 pilot regions, will be central to the pilots' communication channels to their stakeholders in their WP5 activities. This will provide a solid basis for the project's WP2 analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the impact of COVID19, to identify the most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies.

Given the greater resources of urban areas a critical requirement to ensure successful rural-urban linkages is active rural development in line with the EU Long Term Vision for Rural Areas to be stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous⁸.

Stakeholder involvement in the Rural Development policy context means engaging individuals ranging from policy designers to project beneficiaries in all stages of the policy cycle: from policymaking to better implementation on

⁸ [Long-term vision for rural areas \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/101136910/long-term-vision-for-rural-areas.pdf)



the ground. The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) has categorised this wide range of stakeholders to be broadly characterised in three main groups⁹:

- A. **Policy and programme designers and implementers:** political decision-makers; public administrators in national, regional and local authorities and European institutions; and LEADER Local Action Groups.
- B. **Interest group representative bodies:** organisations representing farmers, landowners, forest managers, rural businesses, actors along the food chain, environmentalists, researchers, rural communities, and disadvantaged groups.
- C. **Actors on the ground:** potential and actual beneficiaries and participants in EAFRD projects, with farmers and land managers at the forefront.

Rural networks, both at the national (NRNs) and European (ENRD) levels, can add the most value in bringing the wide range of stakeholder groups together in a common platform. In particular, rural networks can:

- Act as a bridge between public authorities and interest group representatives and actors on the ground;
- Support coordination, communication and capacity building among public authorities on all levels;
- Help build capacity and develop common positions among actors on the ground and their representative bodies;
- Help reach out to and inform a broader concerned audience of the benefits of the policy.

The EU Rural Review 'Improving Stakeholder Involvement'¹⁰ recommendations emphasise the importance of a structured, strategic, and user-centric approach to stakeholder involvement including:¹¹

- Utilize Network Expertise - NRNs have experience in stakeholder involvement, particularly in LEADER implementation. Leverage this expertise to improve coordination and communication among stakeholders at all levels.
- Connect Diverse Stakeholders - Rural networks should bridge the gap between different stakeholder groups, particularly between civil society (with broader social needs) and technical policy implementers. This involves facilitating dialogue, creating shared understanding, and developing common positions.
- Link Stakeholder Involvement to Implementation - Stakeholder involvement should not be a token gesture. NRNs need to ensure that their activities directly contribute to better policy design and implementation. This means focusing on thematic areas that are relevant to policy decisions and creating strong links between network activities and Monitoring Committees.
- Utilize Existing Network Tools More Effectively - maximize the use of existing tools like thematic working groups, communication channels, good practice sharing, and technical workshops. These tools can be adapted to specific contexts and used to address specific challenges in stakeholder involvement.
- Build Trust and Expertise Gradually - Stakeholder involvement requires trust and expertise, both of which take time to develop. A step-by-step approach is necessary, especially in contexts with limited experience in participatory practices. Start small, learn from the experience, and gradually expand involvement.

⁹ [Stakeholder Involvement | The European Network for Rural Development \(ENRD\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

Their groupings map to the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders above as follows:

A. Policy & programme designers & implementers	2,9,
B. Interest group representative bodies	5,6,8,
C. Actors on the ground	1,3, 4,7,10,11,12

¹⁰ [EU Rural Review 19 'Improving Stakeholder Involvement' | The European Network for Rural Development \(ENRD\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹¹ [tg_stakeholder-involvement_final-report.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



- Identify the Right Entry Points - Stakeholder involvement should be integrated throughout the programming cycle, from design to implementation. Identify the most impactful points of entry for different stakeholder groups at different stages. This requires flexibility and adaptability to specific contexts.
- Adopt a User-Led Approach - Stakeholder involvement should be driven by the needs of the users themselves, not by preconceived notions or top-down agendas. Listen to stakeholders, understand their priorities, and tailor their engagement strategies accordingly.
- Ensure Continuity Between Programs - Stakeholder involvement should not be interrupted during transitions between programming periods. They should continue their work during these transitions to ensure that stakeholders can influence the design of new rural development programs.
- Promote European Networking and Exchange - Sharing experiences and best practices among European countries can accelerate learning and inspire new approaches to stakeholder involvement. Actively participate in European-level exchanges to learn from each other and adapt successful strategies to their own contexts.

By implementing these recommendations, the PoliRuralPlus pilots will be able to empower their local communities, enhance collaboration, optimise pilots' communication channels to their stakeholders in their WP5 activities and drive more effective and sustainable rural and urban regional development outcomes.

2.4 Examples of organisations in each group of stakeholders

To help the pilots to begin targeting suitable stakeholders in their regions, Annex B lists examples of organisations in each of the 12 PoliRuralPlus groups of stakeholders and their potential impact on urban-rural linkages.

These are just a few very diverse examples of organisations that are working in Europe to drive and shape rural-urban linkages, from a mainly top-down perspective. However, PoliRuralPlus, through its pilots, will focus on the bottom-up from their regional stakeholders. By collaborating and working together, and meeting in the middle, PoliRuralPlus's regional stakeholders can play a significant role in bridging the urban-rural divide and creating more inclusive and sustainable societies.

3. PoliRuralPlus Database of Regional Stakeholders

As discussed in section 2.2, this deliverable D2.1 aims to identify the PoliRuralPlus Pilots' stakeholders that play crucial roles in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. For the PoliRuralPlus pilots these are defined in the GA Description of the Action (DoA) to include:

1. Local communities,
2. Governments,
3. Farmers,
4. SMES & Entrepreneurs,
5. Industry associations,
6. Research & Education institutions,
7. NGO's,
8. Civil society groups,
9. Infrastructure providers,
10. Digital technology companies,
11. Financial institutions,
12. Tourism sector representatives

The previous PoliRural project¹² developed regional panels of stakeholders for its pilots. Each of the PoliRural panels used tables that evolved through experience to a structure which proved to be extremely useful for analysis. Building on that stakeholders' table and working with and driven by the 9 PoliRuralPlus pilots, task T2.2 developed a database of their relevant stakeholders, including farmers, urban consumers, local authorities, businesses, NGOs, and community groups, as the basis for the project's analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the impact of COVID19, to identify the most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies.

Extending the proven PoliRural table and given the focus of PoliRuralPlus and listed stakeholders in D7.1 "Comprehensive handbook, guidelines and materials for communication and dissemination", its initial Stakeholders database structure was discussed and agreed by the Partners to provide a solid basis for capturing essential information about each stakeholder involved in the analysis is as follows:

ID	Stakeholder	Options	Topic
1.	Organisation	Official name	Stakeholder
2.	Stakeholder Type	* Local communities* Governments* Farmers* SMEs & Entrepreneurs* Industry associations* Research institutions* NGOs* Civil society groups* Infrastructure providers* Digital technology companies* Financial institutions* Tourism sector representatives	
3.	Location:	Rural, Urban The geographical location where the stakeholder is based (e.g., city, region, country).	
4.	Sector:	Primary sector, Manufacturing & Industry, Tourism, Services, Regional & Local Development, Youth issues & Education, ICT, Environment & Bioresources, Business & Farming support, Other	
5.	Level	Level of operation: Local, Regional, National, International	
6.	Website	The website URL of the stakeholder organisation for further reference.	
7.	Description	A brief description of the stakeholder's role, mission, and activities.	

¹² <http://polirural.eu>

ID	Stakeholder	Options	Topic
8.	Organisation size	Micro, Small, Medium, Large	
9.	Strategic Priority	Primary – a stakeholder with high influence & direct relevance to pilot implementation (e.g., local authorities, funding bodies, leading farmer associations). Secondary - moderate influence; important collaborators, but not central decision-makers (e.g., SMEs, NGOs, community groups). Peripheral - broad ecosystem actors with potential long-term value but limited immediate relevance (e.g., tourism networks, pan-European umbrella bodies).	
10.	Employees & Revenues	Low, Medium, High	
11.	Funding Sources	Specify sources of funding, grants, or financial support received by the stakeholder.	
12.	Link to Project	External, Partner Organisation (not a direct team member), Direct project team member)	
13.	Position	As defined in the organisation	Contact
14.	Contact Person	The primary contact person within the organisation.	
15.	Contact Email	The email address of the primary contact person.	
16.	Contact Phone	The phone number of the primary contact person.	
17.	Gender:	Male, Female, Other / Prefer not to say	Rural-urban linkages
18.	Potential for Integrated Urban-Rural Strategies	Description of how integrated urban-rural strategies could support the stakeholder, including specific opportunities and benefits. Document the stakeholder's strategies for integrated urban-rural development and their approaches to address COVID-19's impact	
19.	Partnerships/ Collaborations	Detail any existing partnerships, collaborations, or memberships with other stakeholders or organisations.	
20.	Opportunities Identified	Note any opportunities or potential areas for growth and collaboration.	
21.	Key Projects/ Initiatives	List any key projects or initiatives the stakeholder is currently involved in related to rural-urban linkages and COVID-19 impact.	
22.	Publications/ Reports	Document any relevant publications, reports, or studies produced by the stakeholder.	COVID impact
23.	COVID-19 Impact	Description of the impact of COVID-19 on the stakeholder, including both positive and negative impacts. Describe how the stakeholder has been affected by or responded to the impact of COVID-19. This can include changes in operations, initiatives, or challenges posed by the pandemic.	
24.	Challenges Faced	Identify any challenges, obstacles, or issues the stakeholder is encountering in their involvement with rural-urban linkages and COVID-19 impact.	Other
25.	Additional Notes	Any other relevant notes or details about the stakeholder, e.g. Consent Given	

Table 2: PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders full Database Structure



The database is implemented as a spreadsheet in the PoliRuralPlus shared space which is the coordinator's secure, password protected structure shared only with PoliRuralPlus partners.

This database structure allows for a comprehensive analysis of rural-urban linkages and opportunities, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and the potential for integrated urban-rural strategies in the pilots. The additional fields, over those from the previous PoliRural database, enable more filtering and detailed analysis of the data, depending on the specific needs of the analysis.

3.1 Use of the PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database

Using the PoliRuralPlus Knowledge Space of the references database being developed in task T2.1, some initial examples of how the stakeholders database could be used to analyse rural-urban linkages and opportunities, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and the potential for integrated urban-rural strategies are:

- Identifying opportunities for integrated urban-rural strategies:
 - The database could be used to identify opportunities for integrated urban-rural strategies that could benefit both rural and urban stakeholders. For example, the database could be used to identify rural businesses that could partner with urban businesses to develop new products or services.
- Identifying the most vulnerable stakeholders to COVID-19:
 - The database could be used to identify the stakeholders that have been most negatively impacted by COVID-19. This information could then be used to develop targeted support measures for those stakeholders.
- Developing evidence-based policy recommendations:
 - The database could be used to develop evidence-based policy recommendations for integrated urban-rural development. For example, the database could be used to assess the impact of different policy measures on rural-urban linkages and opportunities.

By using the database to analyse rural-urban linkages and opportunities, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and the potential for integrated urban-rural strategies, stakeholders can develop more effective and informed policies and programs to support sustainable and inclusive rural and urban development.

Annex A is a proof of concept specific example of such an PoliRuralPlus analysis, using GenAI, the stakeholders database and communication channels with them, to support the pilot regions in the development of their Regional Action plans (RAP) in WP5, as described in WP3.

The specific example is the Finnish PoliRuralPlus Päijät-Häme region pilot, whose current stakeholders' database was analysed. From their stakeholders' feedback so far the GenAI analysis identified:

1. For the region,
 - a. A list of the most suitable Key Strategies for Integrated Rural-Urban Development and post-COVID linkage opportunities for their RAP.
 - b. Potential Key Exploitable Results (KER) that the Päijät-Häme region might generate by the end of the project. These KERs are organised within the five PoliRuralPlus spheres of exploitation, i.e.
 - i. Societal & Social,
 - ii. Research & Innovation,
 - iii. Capacity Building, Education & Training,
 - iv. Business, Innovation & Finance, and
 - v. Policy-Making



2. For the project,
 - a. the functions that the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools should provide to best support and become a powerful support for Finnish stakeholders, empowering them to craft innovative, collaborative, and impactful strategies for integrated rural-urban development. These user requirements can feed into the functional and technical specifications of the Dashboard (in T2.3) and Tools (In WP4).

In WP5 the pilot can decide which, if any, of the suggested strategies and KERs its stakeholders wish to pursue in their RAP. While in WP7 the pilot can explore potential deployment plans or business models for these KERs. In particular, explore ways to make them sustainable and impactful. However, in the co-creative activities of WP3 and WP5, the pilot with its stakeholders can refine and develop the potential KERs in collaboration with end-users to ensure maximum utility, and choose their top priority KERs most relevant to their needs and resources.

3.2 PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database Security

The risks associated with working and sharing the database amongst all Partners, as described above, provides transparency and smoothness in the project work. The consequences of the risk of people unintentionally erasing or distorting the database are mitigated by keeping backups.

However in compliance with the (EU) 2016/679 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹³, the pilots' partners, will anonymise their stakeholders' personal data recorded in the shared database, e.g. using initials rather than full names. The partners will keep their own local "master copy" of the minimal and necessary personal data of each of their stakeholders securely stored in their own password protected and encrypted repositories.

3.3 Status of the PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database

Using the agreed structure defined above, the 9 pilots reached out to their urban and rural communities, and established the initial PoliRuralPlus Pilot Stakeholders Groups which are currently populated with 83 stakeholders, distributed as follows:

¹³ [Regulation - 2016/679 - EN - gdpr - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

Distribution of PoliRuralPlus Pilots' Stakeholders

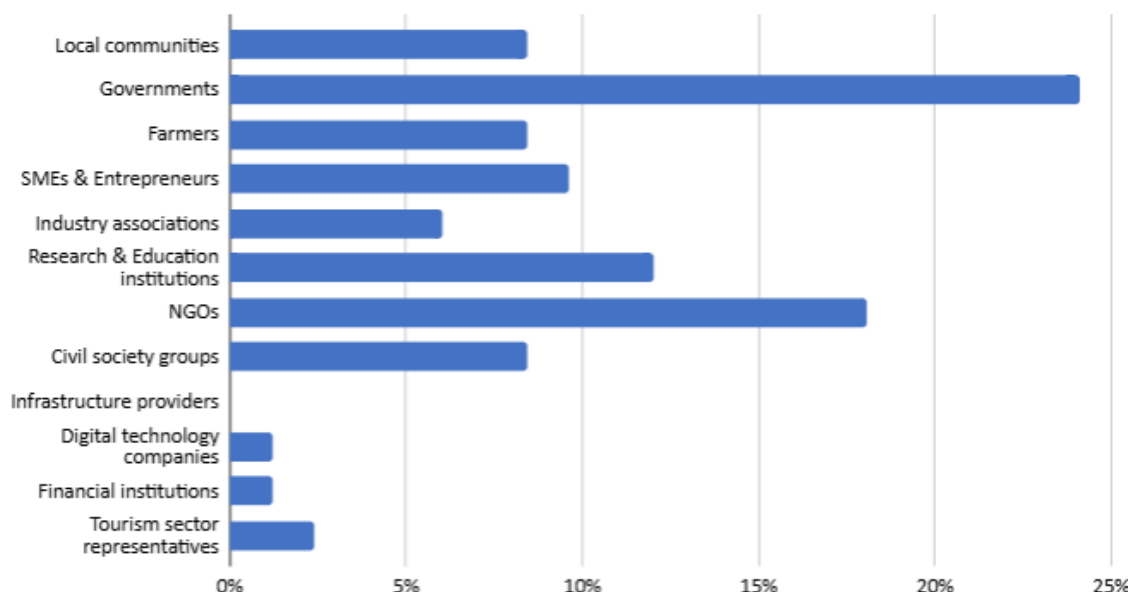


Table 3: Initial PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders Database

Stakeholder Targets

The targets for each pilot's Stakeholders Group, is calculated based on the WP7 agreed overall target of 300, each region's population, and a minimum of 20 stakeholders in each region, is as follows:

Pilot	Population	Stakeholders Group Members
Czech Bavarian Border / Plzeň Region	578,931	25
Finland – Päijät-Häme Region	200,629	22
Greece – Central Greece Region	608,140	25
Ireland / Monaghan County	61,133	22
Italy – Apulia region	4,055,152	55
Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region	276,449	22
Malta	516,532	24
Slovakia -	5,444,184	67
Spain – Segobriga / Castile-La Mancha Region	2,043,532	38
TOTAL	13,784,682	300

Table 4: Stakeholder Targets

So already in version one of this deliverable the pilots had recruited 28% of that target indicating their support on the ground in their regions.

Updated Status of Stakeholder Recruitment (September 2025)

Since the submission of version 1.0, the number of identified stakeholders has significantly increased. While the initial database documented 83 stakeholders (~28% of the target), updated figures from the nine pilot regions, in the following table confirm that the consortium has now surpassed that project target:

Pilot Region	Target Stakeholders	Initial Documented Stakeholders (May 2024)	Updated Stakeholders (Sep 2025)	% of Target Achieved
Czech Bavarian Border / Plzeň Region	25	1	46	184%
Finland – Päijät-Häme Region	22	24	23	105%
Greece – Central Greece Region	25	0	26	104%
Ireland / Monaghan County	22	3	40	190%
Italy – Apulia region	55	16	35	64%
Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region	22	19	42	191%
Malta	24	0	28	117%
Slovakia -	67	20	69	103%
Spain – Segobriga / Castile-La Mancha Region	38	0	42	111%
TOTAL	300	83	351	117%

Table 5: Updated Stakeholder numbers by region

The following figure shows that there is a reasonable spread of stakeholders across most target sectors, except for Infrastructure providers, digital technology companies and financial institutions. These are now being addressed by the pilots during the second period of the project.

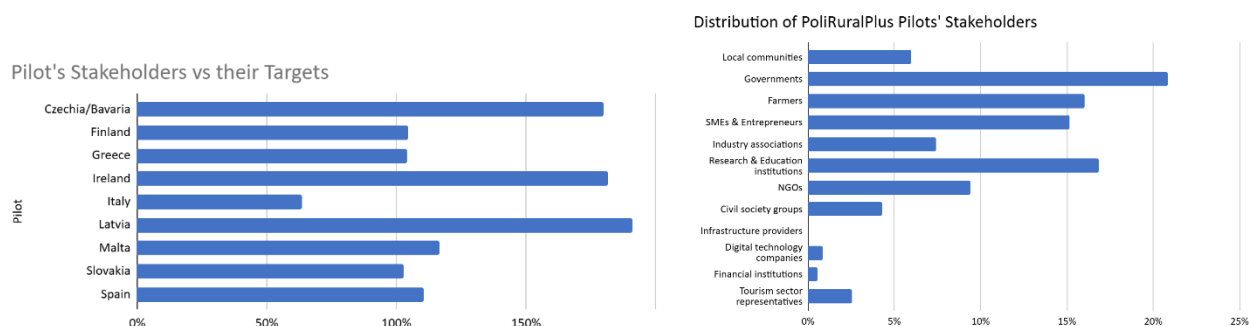


Figure 2: Current status of stakeholder numbers and target groups by region

3.4 Gender Analysis of Stakeholders

To strengthen inclusiveness and monitoring, gender-disaggregated data has been integrated into the database (field 17, “Gender”). The numbers at September 2025 are as follows:

Pilot	Male	Female	Other / Prefer not to say /Not reported
Czech Bavarian Border / Plzeň Region	27	18	1
Finland – Päijät-Häme Region	8	14	1
Greece – Central Greece Region	19	7	0
Ireland / Monaghan County	28	12	0
Italy – Apulia region	18	4	11
Latvia - Vidzeme Planning Region	15	27	0
Malta	16	6	6
Slovakia	21	32	16
Spain – Segobriga / Castile-La Mancha Region	30	12	0
TOTAL	182	132	35

Table 6: Updated Stakeholders’ gender data by region

The following figure shows that the ratio of male / female stakeholders is 58% / 42% which is a reasonable gender balance, but needs to be improved to 50%/50% during period 2. In addition, the stakeholders who identified as “other”, preferred not to say or were not recorded, is 10% of the total stakeholders. So the database has been modified to include the option “Prefer not to say & the pilots will review their stakeholders during period 2.

Gender Profile of Stakeholders

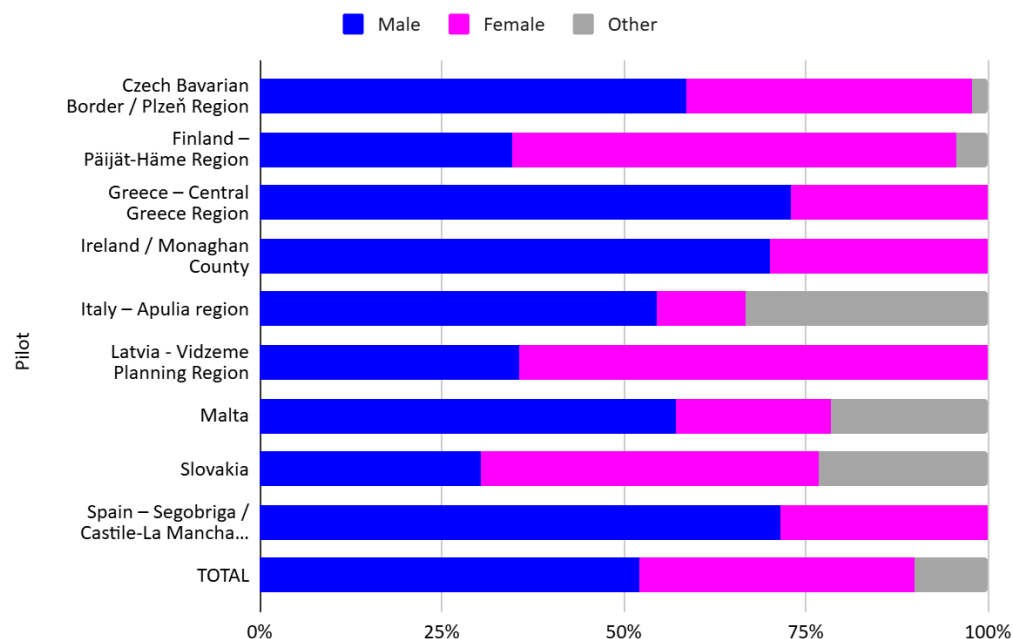


Figure 2: Gender profile of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders at September 2025



This analysis provides evidence that the PoliRuralPlus stakeholder panels do reflect that women and underrepresented groups are active in shaping rural–urban linkages, which directly supports the EU’s commitment to inclusiveness standards. For example, the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)¹⁴ calls for the empowerment of women and girls to “participate and lead equally in social, economic, and political life,” alongside systematic gender mainstreaming and data collection for monitoring. By including gender-disaggregated stakeholder data in the PoliRuralPlus database, the project aligns with this EU mandate.

3.5 Stakeholder Prioritisation Framework

At the start of the project, a broad descriptive classification of stakeholders was used in the first version of this deliverable (e.g., farmers, SMEs, NGOs, governments, etc.). To improve operational value for the remainder of the project, this is now being enhanced with a strategic prioritisation in a tiered framework in which stakeholders are now classified into three tiers:

- **Primary Stakeholders:** High influence and direct relevance to pilot implementation (e.g., local authorities, funding bodies, leading farmer associations).
- **Secondary Stakeholders:** Moderate influence; important collaborators, but not central decision-makers (e.g., SMEs, NGOs, community groups).
- **Peripheral Stakeholders:** Broad ecosystem actors with potential long-term value but limited immediate relevance (e.g., tourism networks, pan-European umbrella bodies).

Criteria include:

- Relevance to pilot objectives (direct vs. indirect).
- Decision-making capacity.
- Mobilisation potential (resources, networks).
- Innovation/knowledge contribution.

This is implemented by combining fields 9 and 10 of the version 1 of Table 2 into the revised field 10 “Employees & Revenues” as these have been found to match each other for most stakeholders, thus adding little separate value, and redefining field 9 to be “Strategic Priority” with the options of “Primary”, “Secondary”, “Peripheral”. This simple implementation avoids disrupting existing interfaces to the database by retaining the structure of the original database,

This listing approach provides a clear operational logic for engagement and operational value for the pilots. Allowing detailed regional mapping, and prioritisation of stakeholder groups according to their relevance and potential role in the pilots. For instance, in a visual stakeholder mapping matrix (inspired by Annex A) to show “Influence vs. Relevance”, for instance, the following figure illustrates stakeholder classification by influence and relevance.

¹⁴ [Gender Action Plan III – a priority of EU external action](#)

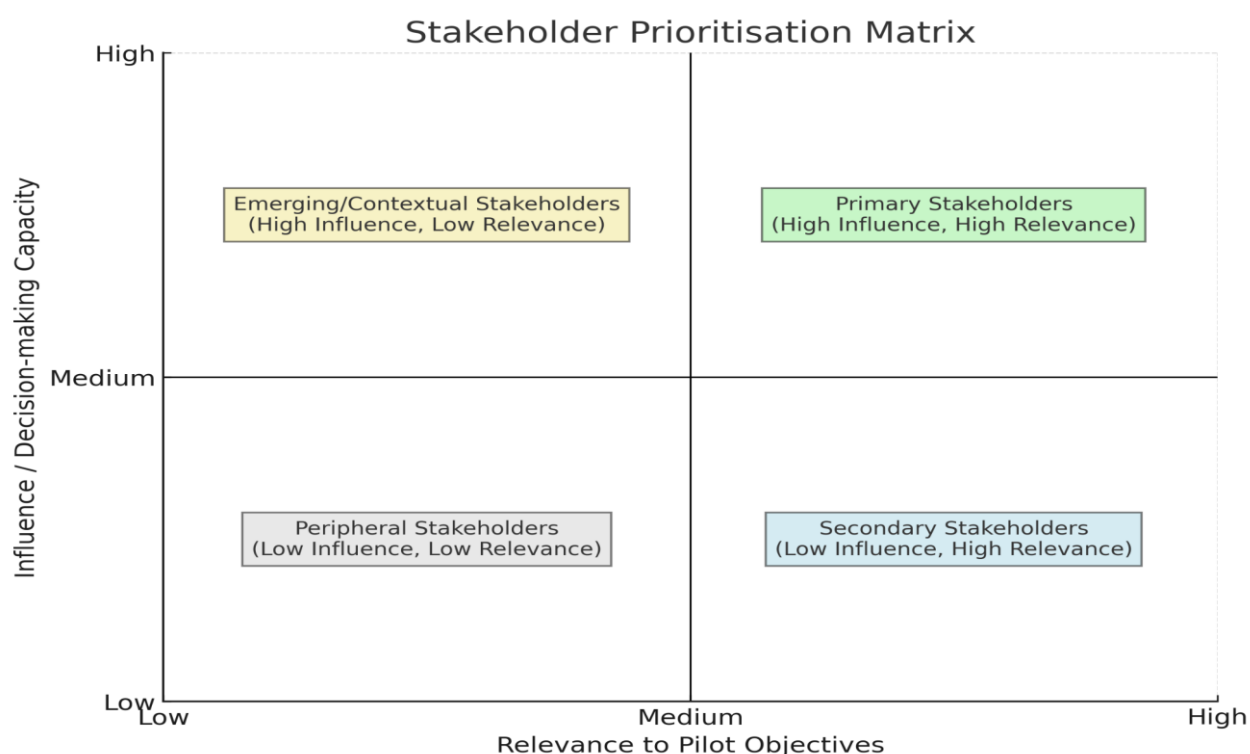


Figure 3: Stakeholder mapping matrix

These prioritisations map to the 4 categories defined in the D3.1 “RAP Methodology”¹⁵ as follows:

D3.1 Categories Priorities	Beneficiaries	Actors	Enablers	Others
Primary	Yes	Yes		
Secondary	Sometimes depending on the RAP context		Yes	
Peripheral			Sometimes depending on the RAP context	Yes

Table 7: Mapping of Strategic Priorities to RAP Categories

¹⁵ As discussed in Annex D, those are defined as follows:

- The Beneficiaries: Are those who will benefit from the RAP on the basis of training, legislation, funding, investment, market access or any other ‘benefit’ that they will enjoy as a result of the implementation of that measure.
- The Actors: Are those who will ensure the delivery of those benefits. That includes the investors, donors, funding agencies, program managers, relevant policy officers and legislators, as well as those who act or speak on their behalf.
- The Enablers: These are the individuals, consultants, institutions, research teams, that support the process of developing the RAP, including the design of the policy process, the onboarding and engagement of stakeholders, the drafting of briefs and background documents as well as the editing of the ‘package’ intended for ‘endorsement’ by the beneficiaries and ‘adoption’ for implementation by the actors.
- The others: Anyone one involved in the process that does not clearly fall into one of the above categories.

At the end of September 2025 the overall distribution of Primary, Secondary and Peripheral stakeholders was 15%, 56% and 29%, respectively, across each of the pilots as follows:

Pilot's Stakeholders Prioritization

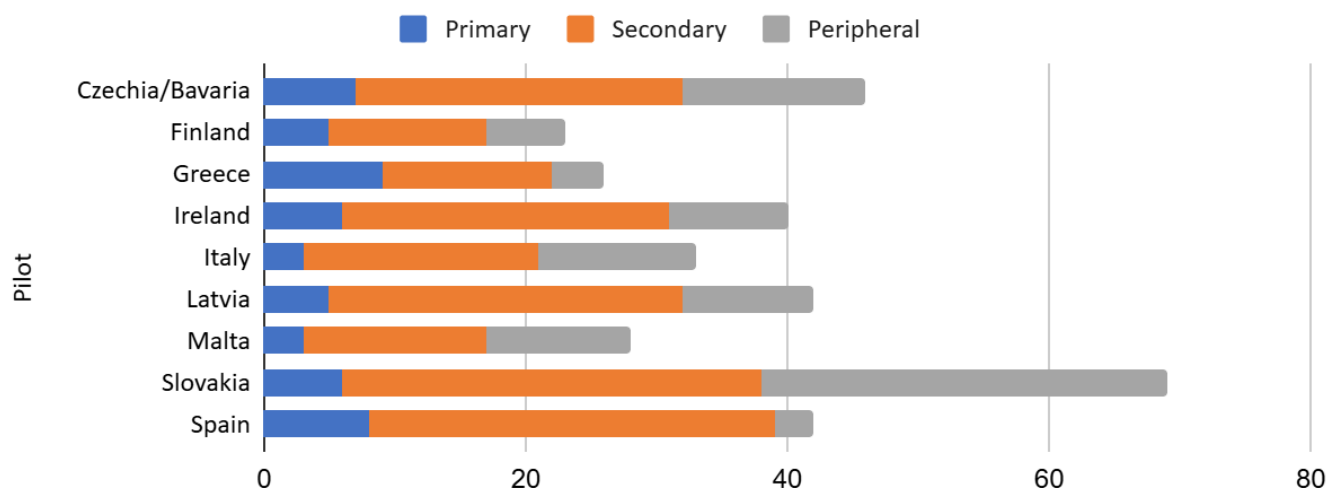


Figure 3: Distribution of prioritised stakeholders in each of the pilots

The update of the database described in section 3.5, now provides operational logic to design and plan engagement with each tier of stakeholders.

3.6 Regional Engagement Pathways

Engagement strategies will vary by tier and stakeholder type:

- Primary: Direct participation in co-design workshops, foresight exercises, and RAP drafting (via WP5 MAAT tool).
- Secondary: Periodic consultations, surveys, and thematic roundtables.
- Peripheral: Information sharing via newsletters, online dashboards, and open calls for input.

This tiered approach moves beyond just listing stakeholders to creating a clear operational roadmap for engagement. This is illustrated in Annex C which provides illustrative operational examples for each of the pilots, such as.

- Initial database entry identified farmer cooperatives, municipal planners, and SMEs.
- Prioritisation showed municipal planners (Primary) as crucial for RAP zoning alignment.
- Gender analysis revealed women-led SMEs as an underrepresented but high-potential group (Secondary).
- Engagement strategy: Dedicated co-creation workshop to integrate female entrepreneurs' digitalisation needs into the RAP.

The following table summarises prioritisation and gender aspects across all of the pilots.

Pilot Region	Primary Stakeholders	Secondary Stakeholders	Peripheral Stakeholders	Gender Notes
Finland – Mallusjoki	Municipal planners, regional development agencies	SMEs in rural event industry	Tourism associations	Women-led SMEs underrepresented; corrective workshops added
Ireland – Monaghan	County Council, broadband providers	Farmers, youth organisations	National trade associations	Young women underrepresented in development groups; targeted inclusion
Latvia – Vidzeme	Regional municipalities, planning authorities	Youth NGOs, climate organisations	Umbrella organisations	NGOs balanced, municipalities male-dominated; women leaders consulted
Greece – Central	Regional government, farmer cooperatives	Universities, researchers	Pan-European agricultural bodies	Low female presence in cooperatives, stronger in academia
Italy – Apulia	Regional authorities, agri-food SMEs	Farmers’ associations, tourism operators	Cultural heritage groups	Farmers male-dominated, women leaders in tourism/culture
Malta	Government ministries, rural councils	NGOs (sustain- ability-focused)	National umbrella orgns	Civil society women active, local councils male-heavy
Slovakia	Ministries, municipalities	Youth groups, farmer associatns	NGOs, tourism bodies	Youth diverse, municipalities male- dominated; youth leaders inc
Spain – Segóbriga	Local councils, farmer cooperatives	Cultural heritage groups, SMEs	Cross-regional networks	Women strong in heritage, weak in farming cooperatives
Czech-Bavarian Border / Plzeň	Cross-border councils, county councils, development agencies,	Universities, SMEs, Innovations hubs in U-R context	Cultural groups, Umbrella organizations	Academia balanced, local government male-dominated; female academics engaged

Table 8: Comparative Stakeholders’ Engagement

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This deliverable's PoliRuralPlus stakeholders database identifies the relevant stakeholders, including local communities, governments, farmers, SMEs, industry associations, research institutions, NGOs, civil society groups, infrastructure providers, digital technology companies, financial institutions, and tourism sector representatives, as defined in the DoA. These stakeholders play crucial roles in driving and shaping rural-urban linkages and opportunities within the project area. The structure of the database of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders in the 9 pilot regions is defined, as the basis for the project's analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities as well as the Impact of COVID19, to help the PoliRuralPlus pilots to identify their most appropriate integrated urban-rural strategies in the development of their Regional Action Plans (RAP). The regional networks built on the database of the PoliRuralPlus stakeholders in the 9 pilot regions, will be central to the pilots' communication channels to their stakeholders in their WP5 activities.

The database structure as defined in section 3 has now been updated to an operationalised version 2, with the database already populated with well over the target of 300 stakeholders across the 9 pilots. The initial proof of concept analysis is shown in Annex A. While now the Annex C proof-of-concept vignettes illustrate and inspire the pilots in their use of the operationalised version 2 of the stakeholders database and proactively address the gender dimension, as discussed in the new sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 of version 2 of this deliverable.

These updates also directly support project KPIs (engagement diversity, gender inclusiveness, stakeholder satisfaction) and align with the Participatory AI principles (multi-actor involvement, inclusiveness, transparency) described in WP2 and WP7.

From this foundation and continuing the work of task T2.2, each of the pilots will continue to populate their database of stakeholders in WP5, as follows:

1. Choose appropriate PoliRuralPlus Stakeholders for their pilot, as defined in D7.1.
2. Establish communication channels with them, as defined in D7.1.
3. Filling in their data in the database.
4. Continue to enhance the contents for each

Then throughout the remainder of the project, the pilots will enrich their database and develop communications channels with their stakeholders by using the database for surveys and interviews with stakeholders in their pilot area to gather feedback on the current state of rural-urban linkages and opportunities.

As described in the GA, PoliRuralPlus will continue into implementation of the 9 pilots' Regional Action Plans (RAP)s, to validate an EU-wide regional-driven integrated territorial planning and implementation Action-Foresight Process and Tool Box, by extending the latter's Innovation Hub through the European Digital Innovation Hubs using open-source System Dynamic Modelling and the Map Whiteboard GIS collaborative online service, enhanced by up-to-date Artificial Intelligence and Deep Learning (AI/DL) applicable algorithms. This will leverage data and services available through the European Research Infrastructures federated under the European Open Science Cloud and will be real-time linked to the common European Data Spaces (esp. for Public Administrations).

Annex A Proof of Concept Example of using the Stakeholders Database

The current Mallusjoki pilot's stakeholders' database was analysed using Gemini Advance GenAI using the domain knowledge space of the PoiRuralPlus database of reference (as described in D2.2) for its key urban-rural strategies, post-COVID linkage opportunities and how the PoliRuralPlus dashboard and tools might best support the Finnish users. Mallusjoki is a village of Orimattila city which is in Päijät-Häme region. The PoliRuralPlus report was as follows:

1. Key Strategies for Integrated Rural-Urban Development

- **Smart Specialization Strategy:** Leveraging the unique assets of rural areas in collaboration with cities for specialised products and services (example: Orimattila city strategy) and regional spearheads e.g. food and beverage (Example: Smart Specialisation Strategy in Päijät-Häme Region)
- **Demand-Responsive Services:** Public transportation, healthcare, and education tailored to serve both urban and rural populations for better accessibility and cost efficiency. (Example: the Regional Council of Päijät-Häme strategy).
- **Balanced Population Distribution:** Making rural areas more attractive through integrated strategies to help counterbalance over-urbanization. (Example: Päijät-Häme region strategy)
- **New Economic Opportunities:** Strengthen urban-rural links to boost agribusiness, ecotourism, and renewable energy. (Example: Orimattila city strategy and Päijät-Häme region strategy).
- **Circular Economy & Resource Optimization:** Cities and rural areas collaborate on sustainable resource flows, with cities sourcing food and renewable energy from rural areas and rural areas benefiting from urban expertise in waste management and infrastructure (Example: Päijät-Häme region strategy).
- **Sustainable Practices:** Integrated strategies prioritise local food production, reduce transportation needs, and promote overall resource efficiency. (Example: Orimattila city strategy (potential) and Päijät-Häme region strategy).

2. Opportunities

- **Strategic Planning & Development**
 - **Orimattila:** Integrate the needs of both the town centre and rural surroundings into a comprehensive plan. Improve public transportation, consider mixed-use zoning, and invest in green infrastructure.
- **Economic Development & Business Collaboration**
 - **Rural Business Incubator:** Mentorship, co-working, marketing and e-commerce support for rural entrepreneurs.
 - **Local Food Systems:** Farmers markets, CSAs, and farm-to-table initiatives.
- **Community Development & Social Cohesion**
 - **Rural Skills Workshops:** Bring rural skills to urban residents for interaction and appreciation.
 - **Volunteer Programs:** Connect urbanites to rural volunteer opportunities.
 - **Cultural Events:** Host events celebrating both urban and rural heritage.
- **Technology & Innovation**
 - **Digital Access:** Invest in user-friendly digital platforms for accessing municipal services, especially in rural areas.
 - **Online Healthcare Services/DigiDoctor & Remote Education:** Partner with providers to improve healthcare and education access in rural areas.
 - **Smart City Initiatives:** Integrate smart technologies, such as smart grids that connect urban systems with rural renewable energy.

3. Insights for the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard (T2.3) and Tools (WP4)

By addressing the following insights, the PoliRuralPlus Dashboard and Tools (in task T2.3 and WP4) can best support and become a powerful support for Finnish stakeholders, empowering them to craft innovative, collaborative, and impactful strategies for integrated rural-urban development.

1. Stakeholder Mapping and Connection:
 - **Comprehensive Database:** Create a searchable database of Finnish rural development stakeholders, categorised by type, location, sector, and areas of interest.
 - **Collaborative Tools:** Facilitate virtual collaboration spaces, discussion forums, and knowledge-sharing platforms where stakeholders can connect, exchange ideas, and explore joint projects.
2. Integrated Rural-Urban Strategy Support:
 - **Best Practice Showcase:** Highlight case studies of successful integrated rural-urban development strategies from Finland and other European regions.
 - **Data Visualization:** Provide data visualisation tools that help stakeholders analyse demographics, connectivity, infrastructure, and resource patterns for both urban and rural areas within the same region. This informs the design of their integrated strategies.
 - **Impact Assessment:** Offer guidance and tools for conducting impact assessments of integrated development projects, covering social, economic, and environmental factors.
3. Addressing Key Challenges and Opportunities:
 - **COVID-19 Support:** Include resources specifically targeted at rural recovery from the pandemic, such as case studies, grant opportunities, digital transformation tools, and mental health support programs.
 - **Digital Divide:** Integrate a focus on digital literacy training programs, high-speed internet infrastructure development, and support for remote work and innovation in rural areas.
 - **Sustainability Focus:** Provide tools and data related to circular economy models, bioeconomy value chains, renewable energy solutions, and innovative approaches for sustainable rural development.
4. Supporting Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange:
 - **Funding Expertise:** Integrate a section for Finnish stakeholders on accessing and applying for relevant EU funding programs (like the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) for integrated development initiatives.
 - **Partnership Facilitator:** Develop features that enable stakeholders to identify potential collaborators, including filtering mechanisms for finding partners based on shared interests or complementary skills.
 - **Project Management Tools:** Provide basic project management templates and tools to assist multi-stakeholder collaboration on integrated rural-urban projects.
5. Additional Considerations
 - **Tailored for Finland:** While the core functionalities of PoliRuralPlus will be applicable globally, adding Finland-specific data, case studies, funding resources, and policy context will make it even more valuable for stakeholders within the country.
 - **Language Options:** Consider providing the interface in both Finnish and English to increase accessibility and reach.

4. Potential Key Exploitable Results (T7.4)

For task T7.4 “Exploit and integrate PoliRuralPlus results” and in particular deliverable D7.4 “Exploitation plans and business models, edition 1” the stakeholders data was analysed to produce the following list of potential Key Exploitable Results (KERs) for the Finnish pilot, organised within the five PoliRuralPlus spheres of exploitation, addressing the specific needs of the Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village.

1. Societal & Social

- **KER: Stakeholder Collaboration Platform**
 - An enhanced version of the database analysed, turned into an online space for virtual discussion, project idea generation, and ongoing relationship-building between diverse rural-urban stakeholders.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Supports greater cohesion, addresses social capital decline post-COVID, aligns with regional focus on integrated strategies.
- **KER: Community-Led Data Collection Tools**
 - Simplified digital tools for citizen science initiatives, enabling rural residents to gather data on service gaps, environmental changes, etc.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Informs needs-based decision-making, increases resident engagement, potentially reduces urban-rural knowledge gaps.

2. Research & Innovation

- **KER: Comparative Analysis Framework**
 - A methodology allowing researchers to compare how integrated development strategies impact different types of rural communities in Finland compared to elsewhere in Europe.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Could generate insights on what makes strategies successful specifically in the Finnish context, valuable for future policy recommendations.
- **KER: Rural-Focused Remote Work Trend Analysis**
 - A research study leveraging PoliRuralPlus data and external data sources to analyse how the pandemic has impacted remote work adoption in rural Finland, identifying opportunities and challenges.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Informs strategies to capitalise on this trend for population balance and economic revival.

3. Capacity Building, Education & Training

- **KER: Upskilling Program: Rural Event Industry**
 - Training for Rural Event Industry operators in e-commerce, digital marketing, and data analysis, helping them modernise businesses.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Aligns with economic opportunity focus, supports the region's local food systems and agribusiness development goals.
- **KER: Simulation-Based Planning Tool**
 - An interactive tool allowing less technical users to visualise how different land-use or service delivery changes might impact the region.



- Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Increases public understanding of trade-offs in integrated planning, improves the quality of participation.

4. Business, Innovation & Finance

- **KER: Investment Prospectus Template**
 - A tool guiding rural communities to create materials highlighting their assets, needs, and project ideas in a way attractive to investors or funders.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Supports entrepreneurial activity and could address lack of international worker attraction if a multilingual option is included.
- **KER: "Made in Rural Finland" Certification**
 - A branding initiative with defined criteria, raising visibility of businesses with strong rural ties, emphasising quality or sustainability focus.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Benefits agribusiness and tourism sectors, builds regional reputation in line with the region's focus on sustainability, food and drinks.

5. Policy-Making

- **KER: Integrated Planning Success Metrics**
 - A set of indicators developed with stakeholder input to measure the progress of integrated rural-urban development in Finland.
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Can inform the region's own evaluation and advocacy at the national level for policies supporting this type of holistic planning.
- **KER: Replicable Policy Toolkit**
 - Case studies and templates documenting how specific local policy changes fostered integrated development (e.g., zoning reform, transportation innovation).
 - Relevance to Päijät-Häme region, Orimattila city and Mallusjoki village: Saves other municipalities time and effort, builds regional reputation as a policy innovator.

In task T7.4 the pilot will explore potential deployment plans or business models for these KERs.

In particular ways to make them sustainable and impactful. However, in the co-creative activities of WP3 and WP5, the pilot with its stakeholders can refine and develop the potential KERs in collaboration with end-users to ensure maximum utility, and choose their top priority KERs most relevant to their needs and resources.

Annex B Examples of organisations in each group of stakeholders

To help pilots to start targeting suitable stakeholders in their regions, the following are examples of organisations in each of the 12 PoliRuralPlus groups of stakeholders and how their potential impact on urban-rural linkages, are as follows:

1. Local Communities

- **European Rural Parliament (ERP)**¹⁶: The ERP is a network of rural communities and their organisations from across Europe. It serves as a platform for rural communities to share experiences and promote rural interests at the European level.
- **Rural Youth Europe**¹⁷: This organisation focuses on empowering young people in rural areas and creating opportunities for their engagement and development. It plays a role in building connections between rural youth and urban centres.
- **European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)**¹⁸: ENRD is an EU initiative that involves local communities, governments, and various stakeholders in rural development projects. It aims to strengthen rural-urban linkages through its activities.
- **National Rural Networks (NRNs)**: Many European countries have established NRNs that work at the national level to connect rural communities with governmental agencies, fostering rural-urban cooperation in various projects. Examples include the Swedish NRN¹⁹.
- The Irish Rural Link (IRL)²⁰: is a network of community-based organisations that support rural development. IRL works to promote the sustainable development of rural areas and to improve the quality of life for rural people. One way in which IRL impacts urban-rural linkages is by fostering collaboration between rural communities and urban businesses and organisations.

2. Government Authorities

- The European Agricultural Rural Development Fund (EARDF) is a financial instrument of the European Union that supports rural development in EU member states²¹. The EARDF supports a wide range of projects and initiatives, including those that aim to improve rural-urban linkages. For example, the EARDF has funded projects to develop rural broadband infrastructure, to improve access to rural public transportation, and to support rural businesses to connect with urban markets. The EARDF plays a significant role in shaping the landscape of rural-urban linkages in Europe²².
- **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Affairs (Germany)**²³: This ministry is involved in shaping policies and initiatives that impact rural-urban development in Germany, such as supporting rural agriculture and infrastructure.
- **Department of Rural and Community Development (Ireland)**²⁴: This department plays a key role in coordinating rural development initiatives, fostering community engagement, and addressing rural-urban linkages.

¹⁶ [European Rural Parliament](#)

¹⁷ [Home – Rural Youth Europe](#)

¹⁸ [ENRD home page | The European Network for Rural Development \(ENRD\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁹ [Rural Network - Collaboration for development \(landsbygdsnatverket.se\)](#)

²⁰ [Home | Irish Rural Link](#)

²¹ [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development \(EAFRD\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

²² https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-fund-rural-development-eafrd_en

²³ [BMEL - Homepage](#)

²⁴ [gov.ie - Department of Rural and Community Development \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

- **Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forestry (Italy)**²⁵: In Italy, this ministry influences policies that support rural areas, promote sustainable agriculture, and enhance connections with urban regions.
- **French Rural Network (France)**²⁶: As part of the ENRD, the French Rural Network connects local communities with government agencies and other stakeholders to promote rural development and improve rural-urban linkages.
- **Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (Estonia)**²⁷: This ministry in Estonia is responsible for rural development strategies and policies, with a focus on promoting the well-being and economic growth of rural regions.

3. Farmers & Agricultural Organizations

- The European Confederation of Farmers and Agricultural Cooperatives (Copa-Cogeca)²⁸ is the largest organisation representing farmers and agricultural cooperatives in the European Union. Copa-Cogeca advocates for the interests of its members at the European level, and works to promote sustainable and productive agriculture. One way in which Copa-Cogeca impacts urban-rural linkages is by promoting the value of locally produced food and agricultural products. Copa-Cogeca also works to support the development of rural businesses and to improve access to rural markets. <https://copa-cogeca.eu/>
- **European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)**²⁹: CEJA represents the interests of young farmers across Europe. By advocating for supportive policies and creating networking opportunities, they foster the development of a new generation of farmers and their connections with urban markets.
- **European Landowners' Organization (ELO)**³⁰: ELO brings together landowners, including farmers, to influence EU policies on land use, agriculture, and rural development, working to bridge the gap between rural and urban stakeholders.
- **European Coordination Via Campesina**³¹: This organisation promotes the interests of family farmers and smallholders in Europe, focusing on issues like sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty. They play a role in shaping policies that impact rural areas.
- **National Farmers' Unions**: Each European country has its own National Farmers' Unions (such as the Irish Farmers Association³² and Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association³³ in Ireland), which advocate for the interests of farmers at the national level, contributing to rural-urban linkages through local and regional agricultural initiatives.

4. SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and Entrepreneurs

- The European Small Business Alliance (ESBA)³⁴ is a network of organisations that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Europe. ESBA works to promote the interests of SMEs at the European level, and to support their growth and development. One way in which ESBA impacts urban-rural linkages is by helping SMEs to access new markets and resources. ESBA also works to promote the benefits of doing business in rural areas.

²⁵ [Masaf - homepage \(politicheagricole.it\)](http://politicheagricole.it)

²⁶ [French Rural Network, A network at the crossroads of territories \(reseaurural.fr\)](http://reseaurural.fr)

²⁷ [Front page | Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture](#)

²⁸ [Copa Cogeca \(copa-cogeca.eu\)](http://copa-cogeca.eu)

²⁹ [CEJA - European council of young farmers](#)

³⁰ [European Landowner Organization - European Landowners' Organization](#)

³¹ eurovia.org

³² [Home - Irish Farmers' Association \(ifa.ie\)](http://ifa.ie)

³³ [ICMSA | Family Farm Organisation focusing on Solutions.](#)

³⁴ [ESBA - The Independent Voice for European Entrepreneurs \(esba-europe.org\)](http://esba-europe.org)

- **SMEunited, the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises**³⁵: represents the interests of SMEs in Europe, influencing policies that support these businesses, which often play a vital role in local economies and bridging rural-urban divides.
- **European Digital Innovation Hubs Network**³⁶: These hubs connect SMEs and other organisations with digital technologies and expertise. They stimulate innovation, digitalization, and competitiveness, impacting both rural and urban areas.
- **SmartAgriHubs**³⁷: a pan-European network of Digital Innovation Hubs that fosters digital transformation in agriculture and rural areas through knowledge exchange, networking, and innovation support. Work with its members to increase collaboration between farmers and businesses, improve access to markets and enhance rural development.
- **EU CAP Network**³⁸ is a forum through which National CAP Networks, organisations, administrations, researchers, entrepreneurs and practitioners can share knowledge and information (e.g. via peer-to-peer learning and good practices) about agriculture and rural policy.
- **Rural SMEs**³⁹: **an Interreg Europe project that** aimed to improve the policies on regional support systems for entrepreneurs through exchange of experiences and identification of good practices, implementing the lessons learnt in regional action plans to increase the creation of innovative SMEs in rural areas.

5. Business and Industry Associations

- The European Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Eurochambres)⁴⁰ is the association of the chambers of commerce and industry of the 27 member states of the European Union. Eurochambres represents over 20 million businesses across Europe. Eurochambres works to promote the interests of its members at the European level, and to support their growth and development. One way in which Eurochambres impacts urban-rural linkages is by advocating for policies that support the development of rural businesses and communities. Eurochambres also works to promote the benefits of doing business in rural areas.
- **BusinessEurope**⁴¹: represents industry sectors across Europe, advocating for growth and competitiveness at European level, standing up for companies across the continent and campaigning on the issues that most influence their performance. A recognised social partner, they speak for enterprises of all sizes in 36 European countries whose national business federations⁴² are direct members.
- **European Tourism Association (ETOA)**⁴³: ETOA represents the European travel and tourism industry, including rural destinations. They work to promote tourism linkages between urban and rural areas.
- **European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)**⁴⁴: EPSU represents public service workers across Europe. Their influence on policies and labour issues can impact both rural and urban communities.

6. Research & Academic Institutions

- The European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON)⁴⁵ is a pan-European network of research institutes and experts in spatial planning and territorial development. ESPON provides research and policy

³⁵ [SMEunited | Crafts & SMEs in Europe](#)

³⁶ [Home | European Digital Innovation Hubs Network \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁷ [About Us | SmartAgriHubs](#)

³⁸ [Welcome to the EU CAP Network! | European CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁹ [Rural SMEs | Interreg Europe](#)

⁴⁰ <https://www.eurochambres.eu/>

⁴¹ [BusinessEurope](#)

⁴² [Members | BusinessEurope](#)

⁴³ [ETOA | Better tourism in Europe | 1,100+ members - ETOA - European tourism association | 1,100+ members : ETOA – European tourism association | 1,100+ members](#)

⁴⁴ [Homepage | EPSU](#)

⁴⁵ <https://www.espon.eu>

support to the European Commission, EU member states, and other stakeholders. ESPON's research has helped to improve understanding of the challenges and opportunities of rural-urban linkages, and has informed the development of policies and programs to support these linkages.

- The Rural Pact Community Platform⁴⁶: is an online collaborative tool where users can find all latest information about the Rural Pact⁴⁷ and rural revitalisation⁴⁸ and interact.
- **European Association of Research and Technology Organizations (EARTO)**⁴⁹: EARTO represents European research and technology organisations. They contribute to innovation, research, and development that can improve rural-urban linkages.
- **European Network of Living Labs (ENOLL)**⁵⁰: is a network of living labs that engage local communities and stakeholders in research and innovation projects, often focusing on urban-rural interactions.
- **The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)**⁵¹: EIT fosters innovation and entrepreneurship by supporting innovation hubs and connecting research with market needs, influencing rural-urban innovation linkages.
- **The European Forest Institute (EFI)**⁵²: EFI conducts research on forest-related topics, contributing to sustainable forestry and rural development, particularly in regions with significant forest resources.

7. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- **Friends of the Earth Europe**⁵³: Friends of the Earth Europe is an environmental NGO that advocates for sustainable policies, affecting rural and urban regions by promoting green practices and conservation.
- **BirdLife Europe** works on biodiversity conservation, influencing policies that impact both rural and urban areas by preserving natural landscapes and habitats.
- **CARE International**⁵⁴: CARE International focuses on poverty alleviation, disaster response, and community development. Their work often bridges the rural-urban divide through programs that impact both settings.
- **European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR)**⁵⁵: ENCR is a network of organizations working on cancer registration and research. Their efforts influence healthcare policies that can affect both rural and urban health services.
- Age Action Ireland⁵⁶: empowering older people to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high-quality services according to their changing needs.

8. Civil Society Groups

- The European Environmental Bureau (EEB)⁵⁷ is a network of over 170 environmental organisations in over 30 European countries. The EEB works to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in Europe. One way in which the EEB impacts urban-rural linkages is by advocating for policies that support the development of sustainable rural communities. The EEB also works to raise awareness of the environmental challenges and opportunities of rural areas.

⁴⁶ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

⁴⁷ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-pact_en

⁴⁸ https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-revitalisation_en

⁴⁹ [EARTO | European Association of Research and Technology Organisations](#)

⁵⁰ [Home - European Network of Living Labs , Living Labs networkEuropean Network of Living Labs \(enoll.org\)](#)

⁵¹ [European Institute of Innovation & Technology \(EIT\) | EIT \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵² [| European Forest Institute \(efi.int\)](#)

⁵³ [Home - Friends of the Earth Europe](#)

⁵⁴ [CARE International | CARE works to fight poverty and achieve social justice. \(care-international.org\)](#)

⁵⁵ [ENCR | European Network of Cancer Registries](#)

⁵⁶ <https://www.ageaction.ie/>

⁵⁷ [EEB - The European Environmental Bureau](#)

- **The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)⁵⁸**: CEMR represents local and regional authorities in Europe, contributing to local governance and community development that fosters rural-urban ties.
- **The European Cultural Foundation (ECF)⁵⁹**: ECF supports cultural initiatives that strengthen the social fabric in rural and urban areas, promoting a sense of belonging and community engagement.
- **Slow Food Europe⁶⁰**: Slow Food promotes sustainable and local food production, affecting rural and urban communities by encouraging responsible consumption and supporting small-scale producers.
- **European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE)⁶¹**: EUSE works to create job opportunities for people with disabilities. Their efforts enhance social inclusion in both rural and urban areas.

9. Infrastructure Providers and Transportation Authorities

- The European Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE)⁶² is responsible for developing and implementing EU policy on transport. DG MOVE works to improve the efficiency and sustainability of transport in Europe. One way in which DG MOVE impacts urban-rural linkages is by supporting the development of rural transport infrastructure and services. For example, DG MOVE has funded projects to improve rural roads and public transportation, and to develop new mobility solutions for rural areas. <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/>
- **European Network of Public Employment Services (EURES axis of EaSI)⁶³**: collaborates with governments to provide employment and training services, impacting labour markets in rural and urban areas.
- **European Investment Fund (EIF)⁶⁴**: EIF supports SMEs, innovation, and entrepreneurship, often influencing infrastructure development and economic growth in both rural and urban settings.
- **European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics, and Customs Services (CLECAT)⁶⁵**: CLECAT represents logistics and transport companies, contributing to efficient logistics and supply chain management that impact both rural and urban businesses.

10. Digital Technology Companies

- **Agricolus (Italy)⁶⁶**: provides a platform for precision farming, using data analysis and AI to help farmers optimize crop management and resource use. Increased agricultural productivity in rural areas can lead to higher incomes for farmers and increased food security for urban populations.
- **eAgronom⁶⁷** (Estonia): This company offers a farm management software that helps farmers to plan, track, and analyze their operations. By increasing the efficiency and profitability of farming, eAgronom can help to revitalize rural economies and make them more attractive places to live and work.
- **N2 Applied⁶⁸** (Norway): This company has developed a technology that converts nitrogen from the air into fertilizer, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers and promoting sustainable agriculture. By reducing the environmental impact of agriculture, N2 Applied can help to protect rural landscapes and water resources, while also providing farmers with a more cost-effective and sustainable way to fertilize their crops.

⁵⁸ [CEMR: home \(ccre.org\)](https://ccre.org/)

⁵⁹ [Home – European Cultural Foundation](#)

⁶⁰ [Our Global Structure - Slow Food](#)

⁶¹ [EUSE](#)

⁶² [Mobility and Transport - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶³ [EURES axis of EaSI - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶⁴ eif.org/index

⁶⁵ [CLECAT | European Association for Forwarding, Transport and Customs Services](#)

⁶⁶ [Agricolus – The platform for precision farming](#)

⁶⁷ [eAgronom](#)

⁶⁸ [Home - N2 Applied](#)

- **Skytree**⁶⁹ (Netherlands): This company develops air purification technology to remove harmful pollutants from the air, improving air quality in both urban and rural environments. By improving air quality in rural areas, Skytree can enhance the health and well-being of rural residents, making rural areas more attractive places to live and work.
- **Too Good To Go**⁷⁰ (Denmark): This app connects consumers with surplus food from restaurants and stores, reducing food waste and providing affordable meals. While primarily urban-focused, Too Good To Go can also help to reduce food waste in rural areas by connecting farmers and food producers with consumers.
- **Telefónica**⁷¹ is a Spanish multinational telecommunications company that provides fixed-line and mobile telephony, broadband internet, and television services in Europe and Latin America. Telefónica is committed to reducing the digital divide between rural and urban areas. For example, Telefónica has launched a number of initiatives to improve rural broadband access, including its Rural Fiber Plan and its 4G for Rural Areas program. Telefónica is also working to develop innovative digital solutions for rural areas, such as smart farming applications and rural e-commerce platforms.
- **Siemens**⁷²: is a global technology company that provides digital solutions for urban and rural areas, influencing digital transformation and innovation.
- **IBM Europe**⁷³: IBM offers a wide range of technology solutions, including IoT and AI, that have applications in both rural and urban contexts, supporting digitalization and connectivity.
- **Ericsson**⁷⁴: Ericsson is a leader in telecommunications and 5G technology, impacting connectivity in both rural and urban regions.
- **Cisco Systems**⁷⁵: Cisco provides networking and technology solutions, enhancing digital connectivity and smart solutions in various settings, including rural and urban areas.
- **SAP**⁷⁶: SAP offers software solutions that support businesses and governments, fostering innovation, data analytics, and digital transformation in both rural and urban environments.
- **ATOS/Evident** - ATOS, with its acquisition of Evident, likely leverages Evident's expertise in digital security to bolster cybersecurity for rural ICT infrastructure. ATOS, a major IT provider, could combine its experience with large-scale projects with Evident's (potentially) existing focus on rural areas to deliver and support ICT infrastructure in remote locations.
- **AIRBUS** - Airbus DS GEO SGSA offers geospatial information services using data captured by the Airbus constellation of satellites. This high-resolution imagery can be crucial for planning and deploying ICT infrastructure in rural areas. Engineers can use it to assess terrain, identify potential locations for towers or base stations, and even monitor construction progress.
- **INTRASOFT** - INTRASOFT, develops software solutions specifically tailored to the needs of rural ICT infrastructure management. This might include tools for inventory management, maintenance scheduling, or even network monitoring systems designed for remote locations with limited resources.
- **IDC** - IDC's involvement in Data Spaces (Green Deal & Tourism) focuses on its role as a thought leader and data analyst.
- **OHB** - While OHB (OHB SE) isn't directly involved in deploying rural ICT infrastructure like cell towers or internet cables, their role in DestinE and Digital Twins offers some potential connections to rural regions

⁶⁹ [Skytree - Stable, Reliable & Sustainable CO2 Supply](#)

⁷⁰ [Fight food waste with us - Too Good To Go](#)

⁷¹ <https://www.telefonica.com>

⁷² [Siemens](#)

⁷³ [IBM Innovation Studio](#)

⁷⁴ [Ericsson - Helping to shape a world of communication](#)

⁷⁵ [Networking, Cloud, and Cybersecurity Solutions - Cisco](#)

⁷⁶ [SAP UK and Ireland: Business Software Solutions](#)

11. Financial Institutions

- The European Investment Bank (EIB)⁷⁷ is the lending arm of the European Union. The EIB provides long-term financing for a wide range of projects, including those that aim to improve rural-urban linkages. For example, the EIB has funded projects to develop rural infrastructure, to support rural businesses, and to improve access to rural financial services. The EIB plays a significant role in supporting the economic development of rural areas.
- **European Investment Fund (EIF)**⁷⁸: EIF provides financial support to SMEs and startups, driving economic development and job creation in both rural and urban regions.
- **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)**⁷⁹: EBRD finances projects that promote economic development, infrastructure, and sustainability, impacting both rural and urban areas.
- **KfW Group**⁸⁰: KfW, a German development bank, provides financing for projects that support regional development, including rural and urban areas.
- **Rural Credit Institutions**⁸¹: Many European countries have specific rural credit institutions that provide loans and financial services tailored to the needs of rural businesses and communities, promoting economic development in rural regions.

12. Tourism Sector Representatives

- **European Travel Commission (ETC)**⁸² is the marketing arm of the European Union for tourism. The ETC works to promote Europe as a tourist destination to the world. One way in which the ETC impacts urban-rural linkages is by promoting rural tourism destinations. The ETC also works to support the development of sustainable tourism products and services in rural areas. ETC promotes Europe as a tourist destination, impacting rural and urban areas by encouraging tourism and economic opportunities.
- **City Destinations Alliance**⁸³: The alliance of Tourist Boards, Convention Bureaux and Destination Management Organisations in Europe, contributing to tourism linkages between rural and urban areas.
- **European Tourism Association (ETOA)**⁸⁴: ETOA represents the European travel and tourism industry, including rural destinations. They work to promote tourism linkages between urban and rural areas.
- **Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS)**⁸⁵: ATLAS focuses on tourism and leisure research and education, impacting tourism practices and strategies in both rural and urban regions.
- **EUSBSB EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Policy Area (PA) Tourism**⁸⁶ aims to mobilise the full potential for sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea region by facilitating coordination with stakeholders through joint actions, workshops and communication. It facilitates networking and clustering of tourism stakeholders, strengthening their tourism-related project initiatives and activities.
- **Booking.com** - Booking.com offers a user-friendly experience to search, compare, and book accommodation, often with flexible cancellation policies.

⁷⁷ [Homepage | European Investment Bank \(eib.org\)](https://www.eib.org)

⁷⁸ eif.org/index

⁷⁹ [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development \(EBRD\)](https://www.ebrd.org)

⁸⁰ [Responsible Banking | KfW](https://www.kfw.de)

⁸¹ [AVHGA – AECM](#) See also [Agricultural Credit Market Institutions: A Comparison of Selected European Countries. Factor Markets Working Paper No. 33, January 2013 - Archive of European Integration \(pitt.edu\)](#)

⁸² <https://www.visiteurope.com>

⁸³ [Home - City Destinations Alliance](#)

⁸⁴ [ETOA | Better tourism in Europe | 1,100+ members - ETOA - European tourism association | 1,100+ members : ETOA – European tourism association | 1,100+ members](#)

⁸⁵ [ATLAS – ATLAS Europe Home \(atlas-euro.org\)](https://atlas-euro.org)

⁸⁶ [About \(eusbsr.eu\)](https://eusbsr.eu)



These are just a few very diverse examples of organisations that are working in Europe to drive and shape rural-urban linkages, from a mainly top-down perspective. Other examples can be found in consortia of related Horizon Europe funded projects such as modernAKIS⁸⁷, ATTRACTISS⁸⁸, EU-FARMBOOK⁸⁹ and the many other projects analysed in D2.2. However, PoliRuralPlus, through its pilots, will focus on the bottom-up stakeholders in their region. By collaborating and working together, and meeting in the middle, PoliRuralPlus's regional stakeholders can play a significant role in bridging the urban-rural divide and creating more inclusive and sustainable societies.

⁸⁷ <https://modernakis.eu/>

⁸⁸ [ATTRACTISS - Empowering Innovation Support Services](#)

⁸⁹ [EU-FarmBook \(eufarmbook.eu\)](#)

Annex C: Tiered Stakeholder Engagement Examples

The following are proof-of-concept vignettes to illustrate and inspire the pilots in their use of the operationalised version 2 of the stakeholders database and proactively address the gender dimension as discussed in the new sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 of version 2 of this deliverable.

1 Finland – Mallusjoki (Päijät-Häme)

The Mallusjoki pilot built its stakeholder panel by combining municipal authorities, local SMEs, and community organisations. Initially, all stakeholders were listed without distinction, but through the new prioritisation framework, municipal planners and regional development agencies were classified as Primary stakeholders, given their influence over zoning and service delivery. SMEs in the rural event industry were marked as Secondary stakeholders, while broader tourism associations were categorised as Peripheral.

A gender gap was identified: many women-led SMEs were present but underrepresented in formal consultation. To address this, the pilot organised a dedicated workshop for female entrepreneurs, ensuring their needs (digitalisation support, micro-finance access) were integrated into the Regional Action Plan (RAP).

By mapping influence and relevance, the pilot avoided a “list-everyone” approach and created a clear operational pathway: Primary actors co-create, Secondary actors are consulted, and Peripheral actors are informed. This has made the stakeholder database a living tool for policy and planning, directly feeding into the MAAT tool for scenario testing.

2 Ireland – County Monaghan

In Monaghan, the initial stakeholder list included farmers, small enterprises, NGOs, and local government. Using the refined classification system, the County Council and broadband providers were designated as Primary stakeholders, reflecting their pivotal role in tackling rural connectivity gaps. Local farmers and youth organisations were treated as Secondary stakeholders, while national-level trade associations were placed in the Peripheral group.

A gender review highlighted that young women in rural areas were underrepresented in leadership roles within local development groups. The pilot addressed this by incorporating gender-disaggregated monitoring into its database and inviting women from youth and creative sectors into foresight workshops.

This prioritisation improved the focus of engagement: broadband rollout strategies were co-designed with Primary stakeholders, while Secondary groups contributed perspectives on digital literacy and rural youth needs. Peripheral stakeholders were kept informed through newsletters. This layered engagement ensured that RAP actions for rural broadband and co-working spaces were both technically feasible and socially inclusive.

3 Latvia – Vidzeme

The Vidzeme pilot originally compiled a broad list of public authorities, civil society organisations, and SMEs. With the new prioritisation framework, regional municipalities and planning authorities became Primary stakeholders, as they directly shape territorial strategies. NGOs focused on climate and youth issues were classified as Secondary, while umbrella organisations operating nationally or internationally were placed in the Peripheral group.

The gender-disaggregated review revealed balanced male–female representation among NGOs but a strong male dominance in municipal and planning bodies. To counteract this, the pilot initiated a consultation series specifically targeting women leaders in rural NGOs, ensuring their perspectives fed into foresight dialogues.

A case example involved integrating youth climate NGOs into RAP discussions on sustainable mobility. By elevating them to Secondary priority with targeted workshops, the pilot ensured that environmental perspectives were not sidelined. The result is a RAP that combines top-down planning authority with grassroots civic input, demonstrating the practical utility of the database for inclusive, evidence-based policy design.

4 Greece – Central Greece



The Central Greece pilot engaged regional authorities, farmer cooperatives, chambers of commerce, agronomists, and support centres. Using the prioritisation framework, regional authorities (OPEKEPE) and key cooperatives (e.g., Agronomists' Association) were classified as Primary stakeholders, given their influence over policy and resources. Business support centres and chambers, among others, were treated as Secondary stakeholders, while cultural groups, tourism actors, and local media were placed in the Peripheral tier. This prioritisation helped sharpen the focus of the RAP. The tiered engagement logic ensured resources were focused on those with both influence and relevance, while still maintaining openness to a broader ecosystem.

A gender review showed women underrepresented in cooperatives but more active in agronomy and consulting. To address this, the pilot organised round tables with women representatives to feed into RAP policymaking.

This structure focused engagement: Primary actors co-created strategies on resilience, Secondary stakeholders added input on innovation and advisory practices, and Peripheral actors were kept informed through outreach.

5 Italy – Apulia

The Apulia pilot began with an extensive list of SMEs, farmers, local councils, and tourism operators. Without prioritisation, engagement risked being too diffuse. The new classification identified regional authorities and leading agri-food SMEs as Primary stakeholders, given their capacity to drive investment and policy uptake. Farmers' associations and tourism operators were placed as Secondary, while wider cultural heritage groups were categorised as Peripheral.

Gender analysis showed a concentration of male-dominated networks among farmers, while female leadership was stronger in tourism and cultural sectors. To balance this, the pilot organised joint foresight sessions where both groups contributed to shaping RAP actions on sustainable food and tourism.

The operational value of prioritisation was clear: Primary stakeholders co-created the RAP's innovation actions, Secondary groups validated feasibility through workshops, and Peripheral groups were kept engaged via online fora. This approach has produced a RAP that bridges agriculture, tourism, and sustainability with clear stakeholder alignment.

6 Malta

Malta's stakeholder pool included government ministries, rural councils, NGOs, and tech start-ups. Through the prioritisation framework, government ministries and rural councils were designated as Primary, given their authority over land use and service delivery. NGOs focused on sustainability were considered Secondary, while national umbrella organisations were assigned to the Peripheral group.

Gender analysis indicated strong participation of women in civil society but lower representation within local councils. The pilot addressed this by creating targeted consultations for women-led NGOs, whose priorities (e.g., coastal sustainability, youth entrepreneurship) were then integrated into RAP themes.

Operationally, Malta applied the engagement flow logic: ministries co-designed policies with researchers, NGOs contributed via roundtables, and Peripheral actors were updated through newsletters. This layered system avoided duplication, ensuring that the RAP development process was streamlined yet inclusive.

7 Slovakia

The Slovak pilot's initial stakeholder list included ministries, municipalities, rural youth groups, and farmers. With prioritisation applied, ministries and municipalities became Primary stakeholders, while youth and farmer associations were categorised as Secondary. Broader NGOs and tourism bodies were placed in the Peripheral tier. Gender balance was a central theme: while youth associations showed good gender diversity, municipal councils remained male-dominated. As a corrective step, the pilot ensured that both male and female youth leaders were actively represented in foresight workshops.

This prioritisation enabled the RAP to integrate both structural reforms (driven by ministries) and bottom-up innovation (from youth and farmers). The MAAT tool was used to test scenarios with different stakeholder mixes,



demonstrating that the refined stakeholder database could serve as a practical foresight engine rather than just a static list.

8 Spain – Segóbriga (Castile-La Mancha)

In Spain, stakeholders ranged from local councils and farmer cooperatives to cultural heritage associations. The refined database identified local councils and agricultural cooperatives as Primary stakeholders, due to their influence on land and resource management. Cultural heritage groups and SMEs were placed as Secondary, while cross-regional networks were assigned to the Peripheral tier.

Gender-disaggregated review showed strong female involvement in cultural heritage organisations but underrepresentation in farming cooperatives. To correct this imbalance, the pilot held a joint cultural–agricultural foresight session, which allowed women in heritage sectors to influence broader rural development strategies. Operationally, this led to a RAP that integrates agricultural modernisation with cultural tourism development, supported by Primary actors’ decision-making power and Secondary actors’ creative input. Peripheral actors continued to provide feedback via online channels.

9 Czech-Bavarian Border / Plzeň

This cross-border pilot initially listed government authorities, universities, SMEs, and cultural groups from both Czechia and Germany. Without prioritisation, engagement risked fragmentation. The refined framework classified cross-border councils and development agencies as Primary stakeholders, universities and SMEs as Secondary, and broader cultural groups as Peripheral.

Gender-disaggregated analysis showed balanced representation in some areas but male dominance in others. To address this, the pilot introduced joint foresight workshops with female academic leaders, ensuring their expertise influenced territorial cohesion strategies.

Operationally, the prioritisation framework streamlined cross-border dialogue: Primary actors co-led RAP design, Secondary actors provided innovation and research insights, and Peripheral cultural groups enriched community perspectives. This tiered approach ensured that the RAP addressed both economic integration and cultural cohesion in the border region.

Annex D: RAP Methodology Categories

The RAP methodology (D3.1) attaches particular importance to two categories of stakeholder involved in the creation and implementation of the RAPs. These are referred to as the 'beneficiaries' and the 'actors.' It also refers to a third category of stakeholder, the 'enablers' and a fourth category intended to capture edge cases and others involved in the exercise, simply entitled 'others.'

Paraphrasing what is written in D3.1 (page 23 and 24, the section entitled 'stakeholder analysis'), and taking account of the evolution in language and thought that has occurred over the course of the project, these are defined as follows:

- The Beneficiaries: Are those who will benefit from the RAP on the basis of training, legislation, funding, investment, market access or any other 'benefit' that they will enjoy as a result of the implementation of that measure.
- The Actors: Are those who will ensure the delivery of those benefits. That includes the investors, donors, funding agencies, program managers, relevant policy officers and legislators, as well as those who act or speak on their behalf.
- The Enablers: These are the individuals, consultants, institutions, research teams, that support the process of developing the RAP, including the design of the policy process, the onboarding and engagement of stakeholders, the drafting of briefs and background documents as well as the editing of the 'package' intended for 'endorsement' by the beneficiaries and 'adoption' for implementation by the actors.
- The others: Anyone one involved in the process that does not clearly fall into one of the above categories.

This categorisation was already developed during the POLIRURAL project. It was a response to the fact that the local Foresight teams, often fail to adequately engage with funders, programming agencies, legislators and others whose support is needed to Implement the action plan and roadmap. The result of this failure being a policy process that never goes beyond the planning stage to implementation. It was also a response to the fact that there was a tendency to rely exclusively on the LEADER program as the only resource available to support the implementation of the action plan. The categorisation of stakeholders as enablers, actors and beneficiaries was intended to highlight the need for the 'enablers' to engage early and often with the 'actors' as a key step to secure the implementation of measures that made up the action plan. A further step in that direction was the key distinction made between the 'action plan' and the 'roadmap.' The action plan is where the measures needed to realize the vision are described along with their intervention logic. While the roadmap specifically identifies the 'actor' or 'actors' which must take responsibility for the implementation of each measure.

It should be clear that the categorisation of a stakeholder may depend on the measure under consideration. It may arise that a stakeholder might be categorized as both an 'enabler' and a 'beneficiary' of a given measure, as both an 'actor' and a 'beneficiary' of another and as both an 'actor' and an 'enabler' for a third.

The project continues to give importance to the need for early engagement with 'actors' in the project as a pre-requisite for a successful outcome.

In WP3 of the POLIRURAL plus project via the piloting of two new methods:

- The RIA or Review of institutional Arrangements whereby the enablers identify the government actors whose supported is needed to ensure the implementation of the action plan. This method is intended to help the 'enablers' identify the 'actors' which may need to be involved in the RAP development process. This is especially important given the focus of the project on rural-urban policy coordination and integration.
- F4F or Foresight for Finance process, whereby the entire landscape of financing option is reviewed to identify mechanisms which may be required to ensure the implementation. This step is intended to help the enablers go beyond a reliance on LEADER as their preferred funding mechanism, to consider a much



wider range of options available to both urban and rural areas, such as the cohesion funds, and alternative financing based on EIB loans, hybrid funding, impact investment, green bonds and crowdfunding. And to anticipate the need for new thinking and new approaches under the next MFF.

This is now being pursued via the buddy meetings of WP3, of which 12 have taken place so far. BM11 and BM12 were devoted almost exclusively to a discussion of the actors identified via a RIA exercise, and preparation being made for RAP implementation based on the findings of F4F.

It is also being pursued via the use of specific templates to present the pilots in WP5. These templates have been designed to emphasize the role of institutions in RAP design and implementation, the potential sources of funding and other needed support, as well as the synergies being sought between urban and rural policy and programming agendas.