



D1.2 - Project road map, handbook and action plan for project management and Ethics appraisal framework and handbook for the management of ethics



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Disclaimer

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Definitions, Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Title
AG	Administration Group
CA	Consortium Agreement
CO	Coordinator; except when referring to a deliverable, in which case it refers to “Confidential”, i.e. only for members of the consortium (including EC Services)
CR	Change Request
DL	Deliverable Leader
DoA	Description of Action
Dx	Deliverable (where x defines the deliverable identification number e.g. D1.1.1)
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FM	Financial Manager
GA	General Assembly
GRA	Grant Agreement
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MSx	project Milestone (where x defines a project milestone, e.g. MS3)
Mx	Month (where x defines a project month, e.g. M10)
PCO	Project Coordinator (CVUT)
PO	Project Officer
PM	Project Manager
PU	Public
QA	Quality Assurance
QAP	Quality Assurance Plan
REA	European Research Executive Agency
R	Report
SYGMA	System for Grant Management - EU Funding & Tenders Portal
TL	Task Leader
TM	Technical Manager
WP	Work Package
WPL	Work Package Leader
WPS	Work Package Structure



Term	Definition
Beneficiary	EC term used to designate the legal entity which has signed the Grant Agreement. This term is often substituted by the common language term 'partner'.
Consortium	Group of beneficiaries that have signed the Consortium Agreement and the Grant Agreement (either directly as Coordinator or by accession through the Form A).
Consortium Agreement (CA)	Contractual document signed by all the beneficiaries (and not the EC), explaining how the Consortium is managed and works together.
Deliverable Leader	Responsible for ensuring that the content of the deliverable meets the required expectations, both from a contractual point of view and in terms of usage within the project. Is also responsible for ensuring that the deliverable follows the deliverable process and is delivered on time.
Description of Action	Annex 1 to the Grant Agreement. It contains information on the work packages, deliverables, milestones, resources and costs of the beneficiaries, as well as a text with a detailed description of the action. The DoA is made of Part A (structured data collected in web forms and workplan tables) and Part B (text document describing the action elements).
Dissemination	EC term for communication of information to a wide audience.
Foreground	The results, including information, whether they can be protected or not, which are generated under the project. Such results include rights related to copyright, design rights, patent rights etc.
Grant Agreement (GRA)	Contractual document which defines the contractual scope of the PoliRuralPlus project. It is signed between the EC and the beneficiaries.
Third party	Any legal entity which does not sign the EC Grant Agreement. A subcontractor is a type of third party, but not the only one. In special circumstances the GRA accepts third parties whose costs may be eligible. Third parties are specified in the DoA, GRA and CA.



Management Summary

To start, we outline the Work Plan, which establishes the overarching framework and timeline for the project's activities. This section covers the key processes involved in achieving the desired outcomes, outputs, and long-term impacts. It provides a high-level view of the project's progression, highlighting critical milestones and deliverables that guide the consortium toward success.

Next, we delve into the Governance Structure, illustrating how the project management will be organized. This section describes the roles and responsibilities of each team member, outlining the decision-making hierarchy and the channels of communication among stakeholders. It ensures that all participants understand their duties and the structure for addressing issues that may arise during the project.

Following the Governance Structure, we move on to more detailed chapters focusing on specific aspects of the project's operation. The first of these is Monitoring, which encompasses two key layers: Technical and Financial. In the Technical Monitoring section, we provide guidelines for sharing and exchanging information among Consortium, emphasizing best practices for maintaining data integrity and confidentiality. This section also addresses the methods and tools used to track project progress and ensure alignment with the Work Plan.

The Financial Monitoring section explores the core objectives and processes for managing project finances. This includes an overview of budgeting practices, expense tracking, and financial reporting requirements. By clarifying these processes, we aim to ensure transparency and accountability throughout the project's lifecycle.

After covering the technical and financial aspects, we proceed to a dedicated chapter on Ethics. This section addresses any ethical considerations related to the project's activities, outlining the measures in place to maintain compliance with relevant regulations and ethical standards. It also provides guidance on handling sensitive information and respecting the rights of all stakeholders involved in the project.

Following the Ethics chapter, we discuss Risk Management. This section identifies potential risks that could impact the project's success and describes the strategies in place to mitigate these risks. It also outlines the processes for risk monitoring and contingency planning, ensuring the project can adapt to unexpected challenges.

At the end, the document presents a comprehensive set of attachments. These supplementary materials include various tables and supporting information, such as a recap of the Financial and Administrative Rules, offering a concise summary of the regulations that govern the project's financial and operational activities.



1. Introduction

The purpose of the deliverable **Project Handbook, Quality Plan & Risk Management**, which is essentially the **Quality Assurance Plan (QAP)** of the **PoliRuralPlus** project, is to provide a single point of reference on the quality that will be governed during the course of the project.

This document serves as a detailed guide to the project's organisational structure, outlining the roles and responsibilities of each participant. A key focus is placed on quality control and quality assurance, ensuring that the project adheres to the highest standards at every stage. The deliverable describes the processes and activities that will be carried out to maintain quality in the project's daily operations. It emphasises the importance of defining standards and procedures and ensuring their proper implementation through continuous monitoring and refinement.

The document also delineates the mechanisms and frameworks established for effective management and administrative coordination. This includes an overview of the governance structure, which defines the hierarchy and decision-making processes within the project. By clarifying these elements, the deliverable ensures that all partners understand their roles and can operate within a well-defined framework that supports successful project execution.

Moreover, the document outlines the project's approach to change management, a crucial aspect when dealing with evolving requirements or unforeseen circumstances. This section describes how changes are proposed, evaluated, and implemented, with an emphasis on maintaining transparency and ensuring that all stakeholders are informed throughout the process.

Communication plays a central role in project success, and this document details the communication plan designed to facilitate smooth information exchange among all project participants. It covers the various communication channels, the frequency of meetings, and the methods used to disseminate information to internal and external stakeholders. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and that project updates are shared in a timely and consistent manner.

The document also addresses the project's calendar, outlining the key stages and milestones that will guide the project's progress. This section provides a timeline of critical events and deliverables, allowing partners to understand the project's pacing and anticipate upcoming tasks. The emphasis on milestones ensures that the project remains on track and that any deviations are quickly identified and addressed.

The Progress Monitoring and Reporting chapter discusses the reporting roles and responsibilities for all project partners. This section details the expected reports, their frequency, and the individuals or teams responsible for their preparation. By establishing clear reporting structures, the deliverable aims to foster accountability and ensure that the project's progress is accurately documented and communicated to stakeholders.

This document sets the foundation for the entire project, detailing the organisational structure, quality control mechanisms, change management processes, communication plan, project timeline, and reporting responsibilities.



It provides a comprehensive overview of how the project will be managed, ensuring a clear path toward achieving the desired outcomes and maintaining high standards throughout the project's lifecycle.

1.1 Project overview

PoliRuralPlus builds on the success of the PoliRural H2020 project, which introduced an action-focused foresight process and an ICT toolbox validated through 12 regional action plans (RAPs) centred on rural development.

The PoliRural project highlighted the need for an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to rural-urban development. It emphasised coordinated efforts at local, regional, national, and European levels to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. Key recommendations included:

- **New Governance Models:** Developing governance approaches that address the complex challenges of rural and urban areas.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthening local and regional authorities to develop effective integrated strategies.
- **Improved Collaboration:** Fostering better communication among stakeholders, such as government, local communities, civil society, and the private sector.
- **Promotion of Innovation:** Encouraging innovation in digital technologies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy to boost rural development.
- **Inclusion in Policy Frameworks:** Ensuring rural areas are integrated into national and European policies, with tailored approaches to meet their unique needs.
- **Evidence-Based Development:** Strengthening the evidence base for integrated rural-urban development through rigorous research.

PoliRuralPlus will focus on two main efforts:

Foresight, Planning, and Implementation of Integrated Urban-Rural Strategies

PoliRuralPlus aims to improve quality of life in both rural and urban EU regions by promoting coordinated development. The project will support nine pilot projects, eight from the original PoliRural project and one new one, focusing on developing rural-urban partnerships to strengthen resilience and interconnectedness. The project will explore innovative funding mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships and crowdfunding, to sustain these partnerships over time.

Digital Tools and Data-Aided Decision and Policy Making

PoliRuralPlus will develop the Digital Innovations Tool Box, building on the original PoliRural toolbox while incorporating new AI/ML, GIS, visualisation, IoT, and analysis tools. These tools will integrate various data types from different sources, allowing decision-makers to make more informed choices. This innovation aims to improve policy-making by providing more comprehensive data analysis capabilities to guide integrated rural-urban development.



1.2 Background

PoliRuralPlus, initiated in 2024, extends over a three-year period, incorporating a mid-term progress report and review to assess progress and realign objectives as necessary. This project builds upon the foundations established by the PoliRural project, integrating previous findings and methodologies to enhance its approach to rural-urban development. The PoliRural project highlighted the necessity for integrated, multidisciplinary strategies across various governance levels to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. PoliRuralPlus adapts and extends these methodologies, applying learned lessons to better address current and emerging challenges in rural development. It refines these strategies to improve alignment with evolving demographic and economic conditions in target regions. A key aspect of PoliRuralPlus is the strategic integration of advanced digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI). The project employs AI to facilitate data-driven decision-making and enhance policy-making processes. This involves the use of AI for complex data analysis, providing insights that support strategic planning and operational efficiency in rural development initiatives.

The transition from PoliRural to PoliRuralPlus marks an evolution from basic data processing to advanced analytical methodologies capable of predictive analytics and real-time data interpretation. This technological advancement is intended to support the project's objectives of improving the socioeconomic conditions of rural areas.

PoliRuralPlus is structured around an adaptive management framework that incorporates continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms. This approach ensures that the project remains flexible to adjustments based on performance data and evolving external conditions. The mid-term reporting and review processes are integral to this framework, allowing for timely assessments of strategy effectiveness and necessary recalibrations.

This iterative evaluation process is designed to maintain the project's relevance and maximize its impact, ensuring that deliverables are both effective and reflective of the latest in rural development practice and theory.

PoliRuralPlus leverages the groundwork laid by the PoliRural project to advance rural development strategies. By integrating advanced technologies and iterative learning processes, the project aims to enhance the adaptive capacity and resilience of rural communities across Europe.

2. Project scope and objectives

The complexity of the PoliRuralPlus project requires a clear breakdown of tasks and activities. The work is organised in 8 Work Packages (WP), which in turn consist of tasks and deliverables. In addition, six milestones have been scheduled to mark the progress of the project and highlight important project achievements across the Work Packages.

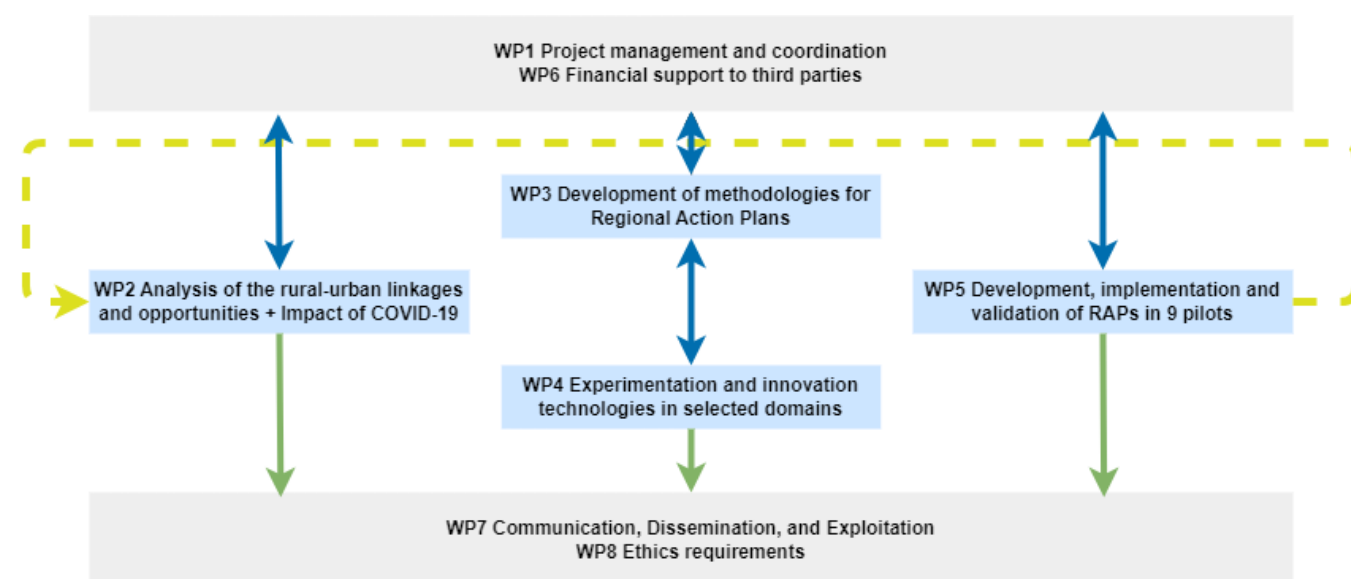


Figure 1: Work structure

The project **Gantt Chart** provides a clear division of WPs, tasks, deliverables, and milestones, together with their timing and responsibilities. The **Project Manager** keeps the Gantt updated in the shared cloud storage folder.

For more details on the work plan and WPs, please refer to the **Grant Agreement**, Annex 1, Part A.

2.1 Objectives and success criteria

In order to achieve its objectives and provide the best quality in the day-to-day management of the tasks, PoliRuralPlus will apply a strict and regular quality assessment during the course of the project. This process is based on measurement progress towards project objectives by the means of the Success criteria defined in the Grant Agreement, Annex 1, Part B, chapter 1. This chapter presents the objectives and derived Success criteria that have been defined in the Grant Agreement and the agreed methodology to monitor the progress towards their fulfilment.

Related Project Milestone	Project Month / date
1 Preliminary Setup	M9 / September 2024
2 First Year Analysis	M12 / December 2024
3 Mid-project Review	M18 / June 2025
4 Pilot Conclusions	M24 / December 2025
5 System Finalization	M30 / June 2026
6 Project Wrap-up	M36 / December 2026

Table 1: Success Criteria Reporting towards the EC

The status of the success criteria will be monitored regularly at the consortium's management board meetings.



3. Project Governance Structure

3.1 Project Organisation

Overall, project management encompasses operational, technical, financial and administrative coordination as well as the supervision of various activities within the project. To manage a project of the size and complexity of PoliRuralPlus, a professional and flexible management structure is vital. Transparent decision-making processes are required to both encourage project development and foster confidence amongst the project consortium. Clear and pragmatic decision-making and communication pathways and prompt reporting mechanisms are necessary.

The PoliRuralPlus project management takes into account all the partners' interests and expertise, in order to ensure an effective project's time-plan and execution. The main objectives of the project management that have been defined are to:

- Ensure the effective administrative, financial and technical management of the project.
- Identify quantifiable and targeted measurement criteria of project progress and clear milestones.
- Ensure that the project results are achieved within the proposed resources (time, cost, resources).
- Apply quality assurance measures to all project related procedures and products.
- Provide successful dissemination of project's results and apply efficient exploitation activities and finally.
- Strengthen the cooperation of all project partners and external participants.

For this reason, each consortium partner has nominated a **Management Representative** (often referred to as partner project manager or primary contact). If necessary, one person can fulfil more than one role.

Furthermore, the **Consortium Coordinator** (CVUT) nominated the **Project Coordinator**, the **Project Manager**, the **Financial Manager**, the **Technical Manager**, the **Project Results Sustainability Manager**, and the **Dissemination and Communication Manager**. Together they constitute the PoliRuralPlus **Project Management Office**, as shown in the figure below.

The roles and responsibilities are assigned to the following personnel:

- Project Coordinator: Pavel Kordik (CVUT)
- Project Manager: Petra Ritschelova (CVUT)
- Financial Manager: Petra Skalska (CVUT)
- Technical manager: Karel Charvat (CCSS)
- Project Results Sustainability Manager: David Pesek (CVUT)

To tackle its coordination and technical goals, PoliRuralPlus is organised in 8 Work Packages (WPs). WPs are further divided into WP Tasks. Therefore, a **Work Package Leader** per WP and a **Task Leader** per Task are nominated, according to the project plan. WP leaders and Task leaders are responsible for coordinating efforts in the WP and Task level accordingly.

The figure below illustrates the coherent and highly structured management scheme that has been designed for the effective management and coordination of the PoliRuralPlus project.

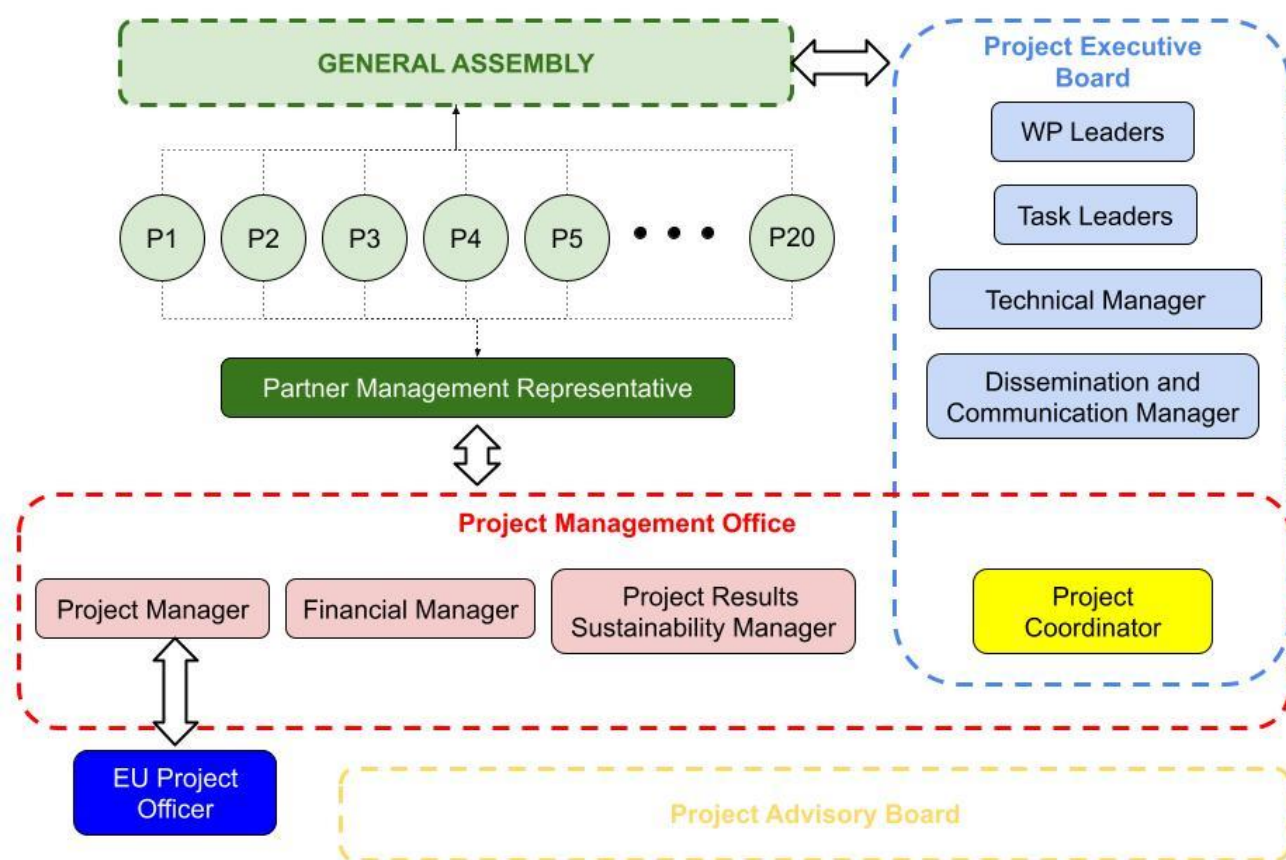


Figure 2: Project management structure of the PoliRuralPlus project

The **PoliRuralPlus** hierarchical organization positioned above is comprised of the:

General Assembly (GA); consists of one representative from each partner accountable for taking decisions for her/his organisation chaired by the Project Coordinator.

Executive Board (EB); consists of the Project Coordinator and all **Work Package Leaders**, the **Technical Manager**, the **Dissemination and Communication Manager** chaired by the **Project Coordinator**.

Advisory Board (AB); consists of independent qualified experts nominated by the members of the Executive Board, who provide indispensable advice on crucial matters as stated in the T1.2.

The basic philosophy of this structure is that, although the **General Assembly** has the ultimate responsibility for the project, the day-to-day management is delegated to the **Project Management Office (PMO)**.

Each **Work Package/Task** is led by the **Partner** most competent in the domain concerned as identified within the Annex 1 of the DoA. **Work Package leaders** and **Task leaders** are responsible for coordinating efforts in the Work



Package level and Task level accordingly. Reporting on the successful completion of tasks, progress on deliverables, and on problems, delays and conflicts and proposals for decision making start from the partners involved at the **Task level** and escalate up to the final decision body that is the **General Assembly**. Active support will be given and formal controls will be applied to ensure sufficient feedback loops and close, effective, and efficient inter-relation and co-operation of all parties involved, through the quality and risk management, the **Project Management Office** and the **Executive Board**.

The roles and responsibilities of **Work Package Leaders** are assigned to the following individuals:

- **WP1 lead:** Pavel Kordik (CVUT)
- **WP2 lead:** John O’Flaherty (MAC)
- **WP3 lead:** Patrick Crehan (CKA)
- **WP4 lead:** (Stein) Runar Bergheim (AV)
- **WP5 lead:** Daniel Molina (SINNO)
- **WP6 lead:** Tomas Mildorf (P4A)
- **WP7 lead:** Tuula Löytty (SML)
- **WP8 lead:** Pavel Kordik (CVUT)

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The **Project Coordinator** retains the responsibility to intervene at any point of the management structure if the cohesion of the project is threatened. More specifically, in case of:

- decisions which have broader project implications and/or involve communication with the Project Officer and contradict the DoA,
- delays, costs overruns or other lack of project progress against the objectives described in the DoA,
- Conflicts, which the Work Package leader is unable to resolve or whose resolution remains elusive for an extended period of time, threatening overall project progress,
- coordinating the development of any contingency plans,
- following closely the developments in study areas,
- monitoring closely and controlling the quality of the Project deliverables,
- directing and motivating the members of PMO and Beneficiaries as Project team,
- in cooperation with the whole Executive Board monitoring that the Project is implemented properly, by controlling project progress at a strategic level,
- quality assurance,
- ensuring that risks are being tracked and mitigated as effectively and early as possible,
- organising and chairing project meetings in accordance with this Consortium Agreement,
- conducting final quality checks for all deliverables,
- final approval of deliverables before uploading them to the online system,
- being in general the key decision maker with advice from others.



Project Manager

- is the contact person when the Financial Manager is not present,
- the day-to-day operations manager of the Project,
- is responsible for preparing and sending the 14-day report of implementation of the Project activities by email,
- processing external and internal requests,
- ensuring coherence of organisational structure & drafting of deliverables following approval procedures,
- managing the production of Project deliverables within the time frame,
- organising and chairing project meetings in accordance with this Consortium Agreement,
- keeping the Contact list of Beneficiaries and other contact persons updated and available,
- reviewing all deliverables, assuring their timely delivery as well as approval to progress to the project's next stage,
- collecting, reviewing to verify consistency and submitting reports, other deliverables,
- submitting the deliverables and reports to the Funding Authority,
- transmitting documents and information connected with the Project to the Beneficiaries,
- ensuring that all payments are made to all beneficiaries without unjustified delay,
- informs the Project Officer in case of change of project work-plan and provides the Project Officer with the new project plan,
- requesting any documents required by the EC from Beneficiaries and verify their completeness and correctness before passing them to the Project Officer.

Financial Manager

- is the contact person when the Project Manager is not present,
- organises the project's resources and controls the project's budget. Handles the financial aspects of the project (contracts, payments) in collaboration with the Project Manager,
- responsible to manage the administrative and financial part of the project. Conducts, in cooperation with the Project Coordinator and Project Manager, the Cost Statements and Financial reports and resolves any relative issues,
- transmitting documents and information connected with the Project to the Beneficiaries,
- administering the financial contribution of the Funding Authority and fulfilling the financial tasks .

Technical Manager

- coordinates the technical work in Project, providing leadership to the technical resources and efforts,
- works closely with the Project Coordinator to cooperate with him in order to formulate the PoliRuralPlus strategic objectives,
- is responsible for the overall project technical implementation, in order to ensure that project milestones are met and the delivered technical results are of high quality and timely,
- oversees the overall consistency of the technical objectives and the relevant WP plans, ensuring alignment of the project pilots and other work with the project vision and objectives, identifies & handles technical risks,



- oversees the organisation of technical workshops and meetings, organises and prepares the technical deliverables in conjunction with the WP Leaders and supervises the quality of technical deliverables produced by the WPs,
- is responsible to schedule, coordinate and assess activities related to Project development effort and consult technical resources.

Project Results Sustainability Manager

- oversees the general sustainability of project results, their output performance resulting in foreseen impact,
- is responsible for ensuring that the project partners have identified exploitation opportunities and planned investments for the PoliRralPlus results.

Dissemination and Communication Manager

- is appointed by the Coordinator and is responsible for coordinating the dissemination activities of the project in close cooperation with the Project Coordinator and WP7 leader.

3.3 Internal communication

Internal communication between the Consortium is provided by PMO, specially by the Project and Financial Manager regarding the subject.

Meeting of:	Time schedule	Minutes of Meeting are stored at cloud storage, folder:	Organised by:
General Assembly	In general once a year	03 Consortium Body	Project Coordinator
Executive Board	In general quarterly	03 Consortium Body	Project Coordinator
Project Management office	Weekly	02 Legal, Admin and Finance	Project Manager
WP leader's meeting	1x per two weeks	WP1-WP8 folder	WP leader

Table 2: Summary of the project meetings

The Consortium Agreement sets the responsibilities and operational procedures of the General Assembly and of the Coordinator as the main consortium bodies.

- The General Assembly is the decision-making body of the consortium.
- The Project Coordinator shall be the intermediary between the Beneficiaries and the Funding Authority and shall perform all tasks assigned to it as described in the Grant Agreement and in the Consortium Agreement. For details on the responsibilities and operational procedures, please refer to the Section 6 of the Consortium Agreement.



The "specific topic open time slots" will enable project members to tailor the dissemination of knowledge according to the needs of different stakeholders. During these sessions, participants can discuss the best methods for conveying project outcomes, whether through reports, presentations, or other communication channels. This level of customization ensures that the knowledge shared is relevant, impactful, and aligned with the project's overall objectives. By dedicating time to focus on dissemination, the team can create a cohesive strategy that resonates with the intended audience.

For more details on the responsibilities of the different bodies, please refer to the Grant Agreement, Annex 1, Part B, section 3.

3.4 Project management approach

Overall, project management encompasses operational, technical, financial and administrative co-ordination as well as the supervision of various activities within the project. To manage a project of the size and complexity of PoliRuralPlus, a professional and flexible management structure is vital. Transparent decision-making processes are required to both encourage project development and foster confidence amongst the project consortium. Conflict management should be focused on prevention and be apparent from project commencement. Contingency plans have to be derived. Clear and pragmatic decision-making and communication pathways and prompt reporting mechanisms are necessary. For this reason, each Beneficiary will nominate one representative (primary contact). If necessary, one person from Beneficiary can fulfil more than one role.

The PoliRuralPlus project management takes into account all the Beneficiaries' interests and expertise, in order to ensure an effective project's time-plan and execution. The main objectives of the project management:

- Ensure the effective administrative, financial and technical management of the project,
- Identify quantifiable and targeted measurement criteria of project progress and clear milestones,
- Ensure that the project results are achieved within the proposed resources (time, cost, resources),
- Apply quality assurance measures to all project related procedures and products,
- Provide successful dissemination of project's results and apply efficient exploitation activities,
- Strengthen the co-operation of all project Beneficiaries and external participants.
- Facilitate internal communications

Communication Calendar Overview

The project management office is responsible for creating a comprehensive communication calendar that will guide all key activities and individuals involved in the project. This calendar will serve as a central tool for coordination, ensuring that everyone is aware of important deadlines, meetings, and project milestones. By publishing and sharing the calendar with all project beneficiaries, the management office promotes transparency and enables better planning for all stakeholders. The calendar will also be regularly updated to reflect any changes in project timelines or activities, ensuring that it remains a reliable source of information throughout the project's lifecycle.



Coordination and Collaboration

The communication calendar will provide designated time slots for discussions related to project deliverables and results, allowing individuals involved in producing these outputs to engage in meaningful conversations. This structure encourages collaboration among team members, creating a space for sharing ideas and feedback. By having these scheduled discussions, team members can address any issues early in the process, reducing the risk of last-minute delays or misunderstandings. The calendar fosters a collaborative environment, where each participant understands their role and how it contributes to the overall project objectives.

Facilitating Continuous Improvement

In addition to promoting coordination and collaboration, the communication calendar will help the project coordinator identify areas for improvement and implement changes proactively. By having scheduled interactions, the coordinator can collect input from various stakeholders and incorporate their feedback into the project's planning and execution. This approach ensures that the project remains flexible and adaptable to evolving circumstances, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The calendar's structure allows the project team to maintain focus on the overarching output goals while incorporating valuable insights from across the project.

Structured Knowledge Transfer

To ensure seamless internal knowledge transfer, the project management team will implement "specific topic open time slots" within the communication calendar. These dedicated sessions will provide a structured platform for discussing critical project knowledge, allowing team members to focus on adapting and refining content for various dissemination purposes. This approach not only ensures that essential information is shared effectively but also fosters a collaborative environment where insights and expertise are exchanged freely.

Encouraging Collaborative Learning

The planned open time slots will also encourage collaborative learning among project team members. By gathering to discuss key topics, individuals can share their experiences, insights, and suggestions for enhancing the quality and reach of the project's knowledge dissemination. This collaborative approach helps break down silos and promotes a sense of collective ownership over the project's outcomes. As a result, the knowledge transfer process becomes more dynamic, with each session providing an opportunity for team members to learn from one another and build a stronger foundation for successful project completion.

3.5 Change management and Conflict Resolution

Change Management

Change management is a process for requesting, reviewing, approving, carrying out and controlling changes to a project's direction or core deliverables that will affect the end result, whether its impact, budget or timeframe.

Any beneficiary in PoliRuralPlus may raise a Request for Change (RFC). The Project Manager and Project Coordinator will then ensure it is captured and proactively managed to conclusion.



There are several types of change that may be requested and considered for the PoliRuralPlus project. Depending on the extent and type of proposed changes, changes to the project documentation (i.e. project contract, internal or external deliverables, reports and other documentation) may be required. Additionally, the communication of these changes may need to include any approved changes into the project plan and ensure all consortium beneficiaries are notified.

Based on the review, a recommended action would be proposed which would be one of three possible courses:

1. Minor changes within scope can be approved by the Project Coordinator and the Project Manager and will subsequently be presented at the Executive Board meeting.
2. Medium changes affecting the deadline or deliverable or outcome would need to be reviewed by the Project Coordinator and shared with the General Assembly to agree the necessary revisions to get the project back on course.
3. Major changes of scope and Grant Agreement revisions would require the approval of the European Commission and might need to be approved by a formal process of the Grant Agreement amendment.

All changes are clearly communicated to the Project Coordinator and Project Management Office and examined for their impact to scope, budget/effort, schedule and quality.

The Project Coordinator (PCO) ensures that any approved changes are communicated to the consortium beneficiaries. Additionally, as changes are approved, the Project Coordinator ensures that the changes are captured in the project documentation where necessary and is ultimately responsible for their changes. These document updates are then be communicated to the consortium beneficiaries as well.

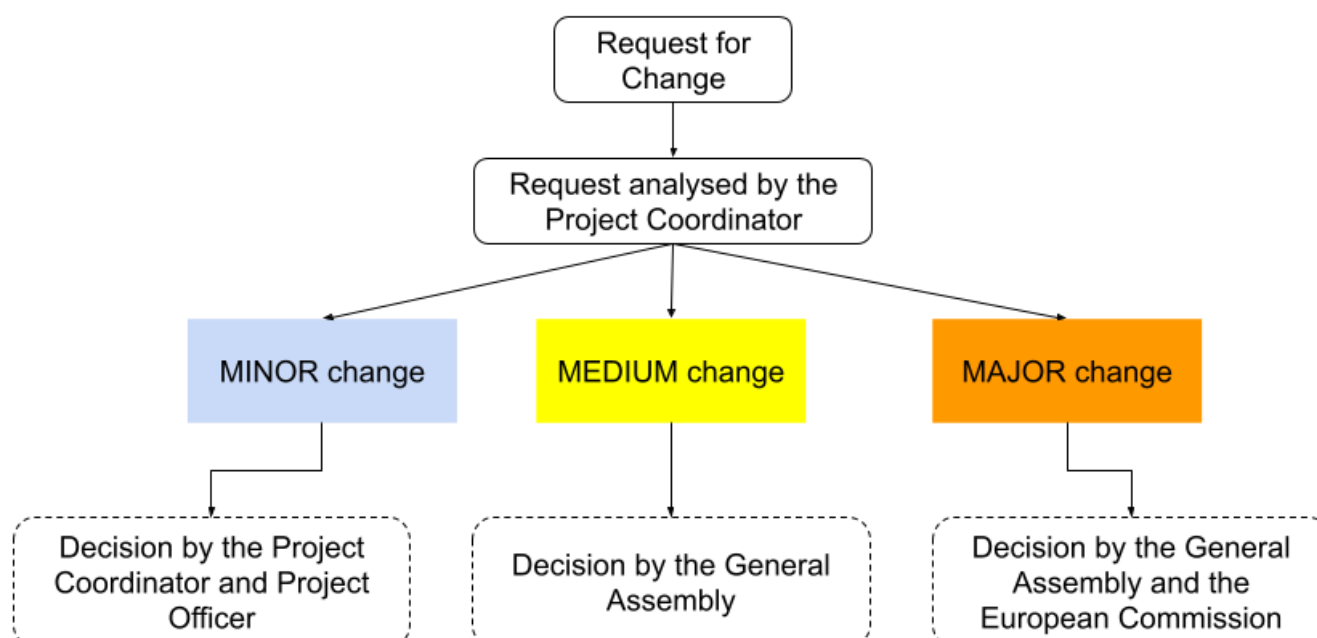


Figure 3: PoliRuralPlus approach to change control



Conflict Resolution

In the course of the PoliRuralPlus project beneficiaries will seek agreement on various scientific, technical, and exploitation/sustainability actions. Agreement will be sought first through informal contact, followed by a confirmation via email and agreed in an official meeting minutes or a formal letter. For issues that are critical, any agreement may take the form of a short report or memorandum that is signed by the General Assembly representatives. Non-technical factors such as resource allocation and contractual terms will also need to be agreed and documented in writing.

In case of a conflict, the respective WP lead shall immediately inform the Project Coordinator and the Project Manager to coordinate actions to best address the situation.

1. Conflicts related to technical issues within the specified contractual commitments that do not involve a change in the Description of Action or a change of budget (or resource allocation) will be discussed in the regular monthly management calls. Decisions will normally be sought by reaching consensus. However, if after a reasonable amount of time there has been no resolution and beneficiaries are defending incompatible and conflicting positions, to avoid deadlock and associated operational risk, the General Assembly shall decide by a two-third majority of the votes cast. The General Assembly shall not deliberate and decide validly unless two-thirds (2/3) of its Members are present or represented (quorum).
2. Major conflicts that involve changes to the Grant Agreement and its annexes will be discussed and resolved at the General Assembly level directly. Please refer to section 6.3. of the Consortium Agreement for details on General Assembly's operational procedures.

3.6 Document Repository and Online Collaboration

The consortium uses cloud storage, an enterprise subscription of the cloud storage's cloud collaboration platform, as a main tool for the online collaboration and document repository.

The shared cloud storage folder named „HE – PoliRuralPlus consortium“ has been shared with all beneficiary's contacts provided in the shared table Contact List. The online repository is managed by the Project Manager who makes sure that all the project documentation is uploaded and up-to-date.

The shared folder named “HE – PoliRuralPlus consortium” appears under this name on your cloud storage.

Please do not change the names of the first two levels of folders in your cloud storage since your change applies to all.

The project online repository has been structured in multiple sub-folders for easier navigation when searching for the project files (00 Key Project Documents, 02 ..., etc.). Each Work Package has a dedicated folder which shall be used by all consortium beneficiaries for online collaboration within the WP teams.



The 00 Key Project Documents folder contains key project documents such as Contact list, budget, Gantt chart, resources allocation, critical risk, dissemination database and the list of the deliverables with the responsibility Beneficiaries.

PLEASE NOTE: an email address linked to a One drive account is needed to access the PoliRuralPlus repository. If any partner wants to use an email address (e.g. your Google email) that is different from the one to which the access was provided, please contact the Project Manager (Petra Ritschelova, CVUT) or the Financial Manager (Petra Skalska, CVUT) or request the access to the folder online.

Folder structure of the cloud storage:

00 Key Project Documents

01 Proposal and Grant preparation

02 Legal, Admin and Finance

03 Consortium Body

04 Templates and Logos

05 Communication and dissemination

06 Deliverables

07 Results

08 Publications, IPR

WP1 - Project management and coordination

WP2 - Analysis of the rural-urban linkages and opportunities + Impact of COVID 19

WP3 - Development of methodologies for Regional Action Plans

WP4 - Experimentation and innovation technologies in selected domains

WP5 - Development, implementation and validation of RAPs in 9 pilots

WP6 - Financial support to third parties

WP7 - Communication, dissemination and exploitation

WP8 - Ethics requirements

- The **00 Key Project Document's folder** contains key project documents such as Contact list, budget, gantt chart, resources allocation, critical risk, dissemination database and the list of the deliverables with the responsibility Beneficiaries.
- The **01 Proposal and Grant preparation's folder** contains key project documents before the receiving the grant.
- The **02 Legal, Admin and Finance's folder** contains key project documents such as Grant Agreement, Consortium Agreement and the templates for the internal reporting. Also the Minutes of meeting of PMO.
- The **03 Consortium Body's folder** contains documents related to the General Assembly and Executive Board (Minutes of Meetings, etc.)
- The **04 Templates and Logos's folder** contains documents such as template of PowerPoint presentation, template of Deliverable, template of Milestone, logo of the project, etc.



- The **05 Communication and dissemination's folder** contains documents related to the activities of each Beneficiary (e.g. the attendance list (physically signed by the participants, or a screenshot of the online seminar from MS Teams or Zoom, the PPT presentations, and 2-3 photos in case of off-line meetings) are stored here.
- **Beneficiary is responsible for the filling the data in the EC portal** (SYGMA - System for Grant Management). Don't forget to include the date of event in the text description of the activity.
- The **06 Deliverables's folder** contains list of the deliverables related to the Project and folders for each deliverable. This folder contains **ONLY final version** of the deliverables.
- The **07 Results's folder** and the **08 Publications, IPR's folder** see the details in the chapter 6.3. Continuous Reporting.

The individual **WP folders (WP1-WP8)** on cloud storage serve as a shared workspace for the preparation of tasks, deliverables and other outputs as results, impact etc.

Online Collaboration

For the sake of an effective collaboration, the whole PoliRuralPlus consortium is requested to:

- always upload all the documents to the cloud storage starting already with their early drafts version,
- use the online editing tools when working on all project documents.

Document templates

To ensure the high quality of all the project's (both internal and external) documentation, the Project Management Office has provided templates of documents that shall be used by all partners. The templates have been stored in the "04 Templates and Logos" folder. Please make first a copy of the template before starting to edit it and move it to your WP folder.

3.7 Mailing Lists

The Consortium mailing lists contain all contact emails of all partners provided to the Project Manager in the table Contact List. This mailing list shall be used for all communication that is relevant to the whole Consortium.

PLEASE NOTE: Emails to the mailing lists can only be sent from the email addresses which have been subscribed to the list. If someone needs to be added to the Consortium mailing list, please update the Contact List and inform the Project Manager (Petra Ritschelova, CVUT).

Other mailing lists used by WP Leaders and Task Leaders should be set up in close coordination with the WP7 Leader.



4. Progress Monitoring and Reporting

4.1 Progress Monitoring and reporting

Progress monitoring and reporting is implemented as continuous and periodic. Technical project progress monitoring is closely linked to the quality control process. Quality control is a two-stage process, including internal reporting and checking of deliverables (see chapter Deliverable Quality Management).

Financial monitoring is carried out on the basis of regular internal and periodic reporting by all partners to the Coordinator and REA.

4.1.1 Periodic Reporting

The key function of the periodic reporting is to communicate the ongoing progress of the **PoliruralPlus** project to the Commission.

This chapter describes the framework for continuous and periodic reporting, outlining the reporting requirements for both financial and technical aspects of the project. It provides a timeline for reporting and details the roles and responsibilities of the project team in preparing these reports.

The project action is divided into two reporting periods (RP):

- RP1: from M1 to M18 - from 01/01/2024 to 30/06/2025
- RP2: from M19 to M36 - from 01/07/2025 to 31/12/2026

Periodic report will be submitted via EU Platform EU Funding & Tenders Portal. The Project and Financial Managers will coordinate the work on the technical a financial report:

- All Partners will be requested to report on the work carried out during the reporting period.
- Work Package Leaders will provide the report on the progress of the WP consisting of progress towards WP objectives, major achievements of the WP, contribution of Partners to the WP results, report on results achieved in each of the WP tasks, justification of deviations between DoA and work performed (if it is relevant).

For the financial report, **each Partner is responsible for their own financial reporting**. Partners will fill in the internal financial report on cloud storage directly to the shared template (cloud storage, folder 02 Legal, Admin and Finance). The internal financial report will contain information about the number of person-months (PM) spent under each relevant WP and related costs incurred during the corresponding period. Reporting of PM efforts shall be consistent with planned DoA activities and schedule. Any deviations shall be justified and discussed in advance with the WP Leader and Coordinator. Explanation comments will be required for the Technical report. Partners fill in the Financial statement for the Reporting period in the EU Platform EU Funding & Tenders Portal. Once the partner's financial statement is signed by its FPSIGN, the Coordinator includes it in the common financial report and



sends it to the REA. The financial statement also includes the PM effort for each WPs. Explanation of the use of resources, subcontracting and in-kind information (if applicable) may be required. Information on how to complete the Financial statement is given in Annex 3 Financial and Administration Rules.

4.1.2 Continuous Reporting

The key function of the Continuous reporting is to be an internal tool to the Consortium to lean on for excellent delivery of the **PoliRuralPlus** plan.

The project beneficiaries will continuously or periodically report on the progress of the action (e.g. deliverables, milestones, outputs/outcomes, critical risks, indicators, etc; if any), in the **Portal Continuous Reporting tool** (a set of tables, created in the **Cloud Storage** for this purpose) and in accordance with the timing and conditions it sets out in the GRA.

The reporting process includes the following tasks:

- progress in achieving milestones (responsibility of the relevant Partners, reporting by the Project Manager),
- updates to the publishable summary (responsibility of the Project Coordinator),
- risks management monitoring (responsibility of the Project Coordinator),
- reporting on publications via OpenAIRE (responsibility of Main Author),
- communications and dissemination activities as stated in D7.1, chapter 5, (responsibility of all Partners, reporting by the Project Coordinator),
- IPRs (responsibility of all beneficiaries),
- upload and submit the deliverables and results (responsibility of the Project Manager and the Project Coordinator),
- Impacts (SYGMA),
- Datasets (SYGMA),
- Results (SYGMA):
 - Results
 - Other Results
 - Key Exploitable Results.

Parties shall report every six months each time on the 25th day of the month following the six-month internal reporting period.



Terms of Internal reporting periods are following:

Internal report no	Start month	End month	From	To
1	M1	M6	01/01/2024	30/06/2024
2	M7	M12	01/07/2024	31/12/2024
3	M13	M18	01/01/2025	30/06/2025
4	M19	M24	01/07/2025	31/12/2025
5	M25	M30	01/01/2026	30/06/2026
6	M31	M36	01/07/2026	31/12/2026

Table 3: Internal reporting periods

The internal report shall consist of two parts:

1. Technical part – description of activities and deliverables (e.g. sum of deliverables).
2. Financial part (e.g. Person months, personnel costs and other costs, etc.).

Each Party/Partner shall submit their internal reports to the Consortium Coordinator for review.

To provide a financial overview of the project costs, the partners submit an internal financial report to the coordinator. The report template is available on the cloud storage. The internal financial statement is to be filled in periodically after every 6 months period of the project. Based on the financial overview of each Partner the Coordinator will monitor and evaluate the spending within the consortium in relation to project activities.

Milestones and Deliverables Reporting

The relevant authors will use the relevant tools. For internal continuous reporting the **Portal Continuous Reporting tool**, for the MID-TERM and FINAL reporting mainly the SYGMA portal.

Outputs and Results Reporting

The relevant authors will use the relevant tools. For internal continuous reporting the **Portal Continuous Reporting tool**, for the MID-TERM and FINAL reporting mainly the SYGMA portal.

4.1.3 Dissemination Reporting

PoliRuralPlus uses the cloud storage both for facilitating the access to dissemination assets and for the reporting of any dissemination activity occurring during the project.



Dissemination Assets and Templates

Cloud storage shall be used by Beneficiaries to share their dissemination assets.

- The **05 Communication and dissemination folder** has been created to store presentation template and a promo slide deck for use at external events. The deck contains a collection of slides about the project, its solution, pilots and vision.
- The logos of all members of the consortium are stored under **04 Templates and Logos**.

Reporting dissemination activities

As well as providing tools and assets to create new disseminations, “HE – PoliRuralPlus consortium” folder is the place to keep track of any dissemination activity happening during the course of the project. Each Beneficiary is responsible for:

- reporting their own dissemination activities regularly and
- for uploading any material that could be beneficial for others to use.

The procedure for generating and validating results is given at D7.1 Comprehensive handbook, guidelines and materials for communication and dissemination, chapter 5. Partners continuous DECS reporting.

Reporting Other Results and Impacts

The relevant authors will use the relevant tools. For internal continuous reporting the **Portal Continuous Reporting tool**, for the MID-TERM and FINAL reporting mainly the SYGMA portal.

Rules to all Beneficiaries:

it is always necessary to comply with the elements of mandatory publicity (see deliverable D7.1 Comprehensive handbook, guidelines and materials for communication and dissemination which is available at the Cloud Storage, folder 06 Deliverables).

For the deliverables, results and other results, publications and IPR, each WP leader/partner is responsible for their upload to cloud storage, folder 06 Deliverables or 07 Results or 08 Publications, IPR. These folders are used to store **the final documents in word and PDF format** (upload by the Project Manager to the EC portal).

The individual **WP folders (WP1-WP8)** on cloud storage serve as a shared workspace for the preparation of tasks, deliverables and other outputs as results, impact etc.

Results - the details about the project results have to be uploaded to the EC portal by the Project Manager. WP leader or Task leader or a representative of the Beneficiary will save the documentation on cloud storage, folder 7 Results first.

The procedure for generating and validating results is given at D7.1 Comprehensive handbook, guidelines and materials for communication and dissemination, chapter 5. Partners continuous DECS reporting.

4.2 Deliverable Quality Management

4.2.1 Deliverable Templates

To standardise the procedures and format of the outputs, templates in .doc, .ppt, .xls format are prepared and shared with the Beneficiaries on a shared cloud storage “HE - PoliRuralPlus consortium”, 04 Templates and Logo folder. If standardised templates are required for deliverables, they will be also saved here.

These templates shall be used by all project Beneficiaries. Copy the templates listed in the folder before use and then edit the copied template already directly in the folder of the respective Deliverables or WP.

4.2.2 Deliverable Approval Process

To ensure the highest quality of the deliverables as well as ensuring their delivery on time the Consortium has developed a two-stage deliverable control process (Figure 4).

Each Beneficiary / Lead Beneficiary which is in charge of any Deliverable in accordance with the DoA shall nominate two persons involved in the production of the Deliverable, who shall produce and submit a Deliverable Implementation and Availability Report (DIAR). The DIAR is available at shared One drive in the folder **04 Templates and Logos**.

Nominated persons for each Lead Beneficiary are listed on cloud storage – Contact list.

The Lead Beneficiary is entitled to autonomously manage and collaborate with the project Beneficiaries involved in the given tasks and the associated deliverable.

The DIAR together with the latest version of the deliverable available at the time shall be submitted to the relevant WP Leader no later than 45 days before the deadline for the relevant deliverable. A table of WP leaders and lead beneficiaries involved in the respective deliverables is available on cloud storage 00 Key Project Documents.

In the first stage of the deliverable control, the relevant Work Package Leader reviews the DIAR and deliverable and provides comments to the Lead Beneficiary of this Deliverable within 15 days of receipt at the latest. If needed, after receiving comments from the WP Leader the Lead Beneficiary amends the report/deliverable and submits them to the WP Leader for review and approval no later than 30 days before the deadline for the relevant



deliverable. All comments and edits should be recorded in revision mode on cloud storage. Once approved, the WP Leader shall submit the DIAR and deliverable for review to the Consortium Coordinator, no later than 15 days before the deadline for the relevant deliverable.

If the Lead Beneficiary and WP leader is also the Project Coordinator, the same procedure as above will apply, where level 1 control is ensured by partners No 12 (CCSS) and No 13 (P4A).

The Lead Beneficiary is responsible for sharing the deliverable with project Beneficiaries involved and for resolving their comments until a common agreement is reached on the final draft to be submitted to the WP leader.

The Lead Beneficiary and the WP leader are responsible for the quality of the deliverable, that the deliverable will be in accordance with the project objectives, DoA and other project documents.

In the second stage of the deliverable control, the DIAR and deliverable are reviewed and approved by the relevant manager (nominated Beneficiary No 1) in cooperation with the assistant manager (nominated Beneficiary No 2), and are then submitted to the Coordinator no later than 7 days before the deadline for the relevant deliverable. The Project Coordinator together with the Project Manager and the Technical Manager (CCSS) are the supervisors who review all reports and deliverables submitted by the relevant managers. Finally the Project Coordinator submits the deliverables to REA.

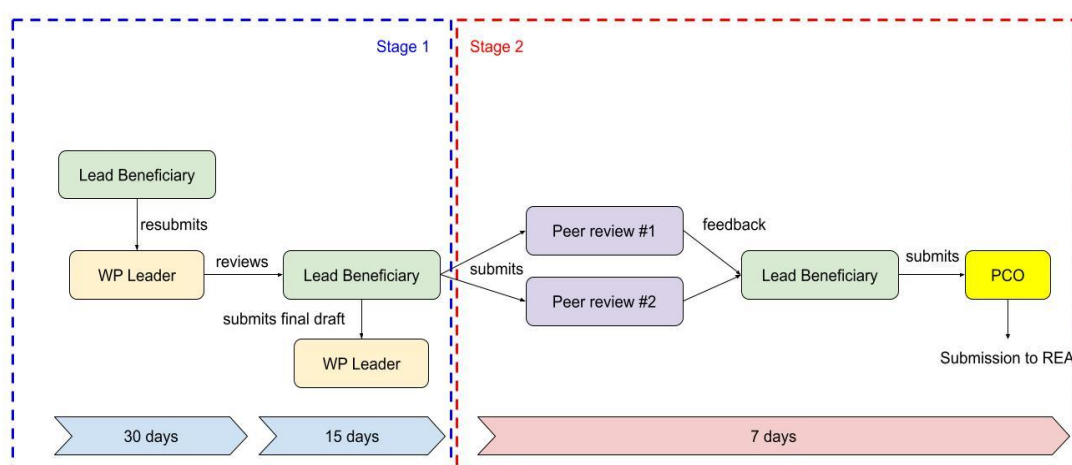


Figure 4: Deliverable control process

The Project Management Office check is also an integral part of the inspection. The PMO reviews the technical and scientific progress and performance made by each of the partners with three-month checkpoint intervals and decides in detail the onward actions for the subsequent project phase.

4.2.3 Deliverables Versioning

For clarity of the workflow on the deliverables, the individual DIAR versions shall be numbered. The Lead Beneficiary of the deliverables is responsible for the version numbering. It will be numbered sequentially from version 0.0 to the final version number 1.0 which will be sent to the REA.



For clarity, in addition to the version numbering, the document title will include the date in the format:

DX.Y_Name of deliverable_version_0.1_01-01-2024.docx

All versions shall be stored on the cloud storage, in the Deliverables folder of the respective deliverable.

4.2.4 Grant Payments Schedule

Funding of costs included in the Consortium Plan will be paid by the Project Coordinator to the Parties after receipt of payments from the Granting Authority in separate instalments as agreed below.

The **initial prefinancing** reduced by the Mutual Insurance Mechanism as defined in Grant Agreement will be paid by the Coordinator to the Parties in two instalments:

- 67.5% of the maximum grant amount - on receipt of the initial pre-financing;
- 7.5 % of the maximum grant amount - after approval of Periodic report No 1.

*The interim and final payments will be paid by the Coordinator to the Parties after receipt of payments from the Granting Authority without undue delay and in conformity with the provisions of the Grant Agreement.
More details are listed in the Consortium Agreement, chapter 7.2*



5. Ethics and Legal Framework for Ethics

Within the course of the PoliRuralPlus project we foresee to especially cater for ethical issues that might arise, i.e. issues of data privacy, potential for infringement of human rights, personal data collection and misuse of technologies developed. Both **Project Management Office and WP8 leader** will ensure that each beneficiary strictly adheres to the highest privacy and ethical standards regarding all activities that will be carried out within the design and functional implementation during the project, making sure that they conform to the legislation regulations in force in the countries where the research will be carried out, as well as to the EC Ethical Legislation.

Regarding data collection, storage, protection, retention and destruction, it is hereby confirmed that these activities will be rigorously implemented in compliance of the privacy and data collection rules and regulations as they are applied nationally and in the EU, as well as with the HE rules. **Project Management Office and WP8 leader** will safeguard the Privacy and Data Protection, as well as Human Data Collection as follows.

Data will be:

- Fairly and lawfully processed.
- Processed for limited purposes.
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive.
- Accurate.
- Not kept longer than necessary.
- Processed in accordance with the data subject's rights.
- Secure.
- Not transferred to countries without adequate protection.

Given that research in the PoliRuralPlus project includes pilot studies that involve collecting data from research with human participants, specific measures for their identification, recruitment, informed consenting and data protection will be applied. Regarding the identification and recruitment of the various research participants, we foresee the following procedure: First, a pool of users generally willing to participate in user studies will be created. This pool will be filled by promoting the possibility to participate through different means and channels, such as online advertisements and leaflets. Also, we foresee to approach and use the already existing pools of project partners. Then, specific users from this pool will be invited to participate in the first trial based on criteria that ensure optimal outcomes from the study. Selection criteria for contacting users will include age, gender, as well as living within the pilot sites area.

Regarding the **informed consent procedure** that is required in order to be able to participate in the PoliRuralPlus studies, we foresee that all potential participants should read and sign an informed consent form before starting the participation. This form aims to fully inform the participants about the study procedure and goals in order to guarantee that they have basic information to make the decision about whether to participate or not in the project.



5.1 Project management approach from the ethical point of view

The PoliRuralPlus project integrates ethical management as a core component in its deployment of Copernicus and GNSS services, along with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data, within an international framework. This approach is tailored to meet rigorous ethical and legal standards, with a particular emphasis on data protection and privacy, which are crucial in the realm of advanced technology applications.

Integration of Ethical Guidelines: Ethical guidelines are thoroughly integrated into PoliRuralPlus operations, underscoring the project's commitment to the ethical handling and safeguarding of data. This ensures comprehensive management practices that extend to all aspects of the project, from the initial data collection using Copernicus and GNSS services to the processing and analysis via AI and Big Data technologies, all conducted with a prioritisation of ethical considerations.

Specific Focus Areas for Ethical Consideration:

- **Personal and Other Data:** Acknowledging the differentiation between personal and other types of data, the project establishes distinct protocols for handling, with an aim to ensure transparency, security, and respect for individual privacy rights.
- **AI Utilisation:** AI technologies are applied with caution, recognizing their potential for bias and the necessity for ethical algorithms that do not compromise data integrity or privacy.
The main ethical requirements for AI systems are the following:
 - AI systems shall not negatively affect human autonomy, freedom or dignity.
 - AI systems shall not violate the right to privacy and to personal data protection. They shall use data which is necessary, non-biased, representative and accurate.
 - AI systems shall be developed with an inclusive fair, and non-discriminatory agenda.
 - Steps shall be taken to ensure that AI systems do not cause individual, social or environmental harm, rely on harmful technologies, influence others to act in ways which cause harm or lend themselves to function creeps.
 - AI systems should be as transparent as possible to their stakeholders and to their end-users.
 - Human oversight and accountability are required to ensure conformance to these principles and address non-compliance.
- **Participant Consent:** The project adopts rigorous measures for the ethical recruitment and informed consent of participants, safeguarding their privacy and personal data to uphold high ethical standards in research involving human subjects.

Adherence to Ethical and Legal Compliance: The project's leadership is committed to ensuring all activities comply with GDPR, Horizon Europe (HE) regulations, and relevant national laws. A proactive approach is taken to navigate the complexities of data protection regulations across different jurisdictions, ensuring the application of the most restrictive regulation when multiple laws are applicable.



Stakeholder Engagement: Ethical considerations are deeply woven into the fabric of stakeholder engagement strategies, ensuring respectful and transparent involvement of end-users, industry partners, and policymakers. This structured approach to engagement underscores the project's dedication to ethical governance.

Technological Deployment: In deploying technologies such as Copernicus, GNSS, AI, and Big Data, the project emphasizes ethical innovation. Efforts are focused on developing and implementing these technologies in a manner that is both advanced and ethically responsible, reflecting a balanced approach to technological advancement and ethical integrity.

5.2 Ethics Handbook

The Ethics Handbook for the PoliRuralPlus project is the guide for a focused approach adopted, prioritizing the management of private data and the utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data technologies. This adjustment aligns with feedback for a more concrete and targeted strategy in addressing ethical concerns, particularly emphasizing the safeguarding of stakeholder privacy and the ethical use of geospatial data.

Introduction to Ethics Management: Targeted Strategies The project's commitment to ethical management is exemplified through specific strategies that prioritize the protection of personal data and the responsible use of AI. PCO ensures a vigilant oversight of these aspects, focusing on precise actions and reducing generalized statements. This includes maintaining an up-to-date communication channel with all partners regarding their ethical obligations and any changes in standards or practices, especially those pertaining to data privacy and geospatial data usage.

Ethics Appraisal Framework: Defined Actions and Responsibilities The ethics appraisal framework has been updated and communicated to clearly define the actions and responsibilities of project partners in relation to key ethical considerations:

1. **Preemptive Identification of Ethical Concerns:** In management meetings, WPLs collaboratively identify upcoming activities that may pose ethical concerns, with a special focus on the handling of personal data and the application of Copernicus services.
2. **Oversight by Task Leaders:** Task leaders are responsible for ensuring that activities within their task comply with ethical guidelines, particularly those concerning the protection of personal data and the ethical use of AI.
3. **Reporting and Collaborative Resolution of Ethical Issues:** Should potential ethical issues be identified, task leaders are required to promptly report these to the PCO. This facilitates a proactive approach to resolving ethical concerns, particularly those related to privacy and AI utilization.
4. **Routine Evaluation and Response to Ethical Risks:** Regular management body meetings provide a forum for updating on and evaluating potential ethical risks. Discussions focus on the development and implementation of mitigation strategies, especially in relation to data privacy and the use of AI.

Concrete Steps for Addressing Ethical Challenges Adapting to feedback, the project's methodology for handling ethical challenges now clearly outlines realistic procedural steps, emphasizing the protection of private data and the conscientious use of AI. This approach ensures that the project's ethical management strategy is both practical and focused, offering clear guidelines for maintaining ethical integrity in handling sensitive data and utilizing geospatial information.



Through these specified measures within the Ethics Handbook, the PoliRuralPlus project underscores its dedication to ethical practices, ensuring the protection of private data and responsible utilization of AI as important aspects of its international collaboration efforts. This refined focus aims to navigate the ethical complexities associated with technological innovation, ensuring compliance and accountability in all project activities.

5.3 Description of the procedures and criteria used to identify participants for project activities

Recruitment of participants (end-users and stakeholders, participants in workshops and hackathons) shall be equitable and include participants from a variety of institutional, professional, social, ethnic and academic backgrounds. The following criteria are of high importance:

- Participant's knowledge and experience,
- The role the participant plays in the target domain of the region - agriculture, land management, forest management, education.

Relevant participants include but are not limited to:

- Associations and persons that represent agricultural professions, such as farmers, advisors, young farmers, women farmers, and entrepreneurs of any age and gender,
- Associations and persons that represent land management professions, such as urban planners, geologists, hydrogeologists, and water management experts of any age and gender,
- Authorities and public sector actors, including those that deal with policies related to agriculture and land management, rural development,
- Higher education institutions - universities, colleges, long-life education institutions - students and lecturers of any age and gender.

The PoliRuralPlus project follows a strict non-discrimination policy meaning that no one will be discriminated against to participate on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, sexual orientation or nationality, respecting the Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01, article 21). Overall, apart from people who cannot provide legal consent, no other exclusion will be made, and there will not be any discrimination in the processing of data.

5.4 AI Utilization in PoliRuralPlus: Mitigating Bias in Large Language Models Text Generation

The PoliRuralPlus project leverages Large Language Models (LLMs) for automatic text generation, aiming to improve text extraction, summarization, and understanding. Recognizing the potential for these models to introduce biases—related to age, gender, and race—into the results, the project prioritizes ethical AI use and fairness.

Bias Mitigation Strategy

A focused bias testing and mitigation framework is established to identify and address biases in LLM-generated code. This framework includes:



- One-Shot and Few-Shot Learning: Techniques to guide LLMs towards generating unbiased text by providing a few example tasks that are bias-free.
- Chain-of-Thought (CoT) Prompts: Utilizing prompts that lead LLMs to consider ethical implications in their text generation process.

Ethical Oversight and Continuous Improvement

The project will maintain ongoing ethical oversight and continuous improvement of AI models, with regular updates to the bias mitigation framework based on the latest research. All actions and outcomes related to bias mitigation will be transparently documented and shared, promoting ethical AI practices within the broader community.

WP2 is currently drafting the D2.2. See Chapter 1. Introduction.

5.5 Description of the informed consent procedures

All stakeholders in project activities will be given an informed consent form and a detailed information sheet (GRA: Informed Consent will be sought and confirmed that has been obtained whenever partners involve stakeholders in IA activities). The stakeholders shall obtain the subject's voluntary, informed, specific and unambiguous consent. The subject's consent shall be given in a clear statement. The consent is revocable at any point.

The informed consent form contains:

- The identity and contact details of the participant.
- The purposes of the processing for which the personal data are intended, as well as the legal basis for the processing.
- The recipients or categories of recipients of the personal data, if any.
- Where applicable, the fact that the participant intends to transfer personal data to a non-EU country or international organisation.
- The period for which the personal data will be stored, or if that is not possible, the criteria used to determine that period.
- The existence of the right to request from the participant access to and rectification or erasure of personal data or restriction of processing concerning the data subject or to object to processing as well as the right to data portability.
- The existence of the right to withdraw consent at any time, without affecting the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.



Consent forms will be written in the language of the subject, and will be clear and concise. The controller will ensure confidentiality and security of the processing of personal data under his/her control. Signed consent forms will be held securely by the controller. If participants are unable to sign consent forms, the researcher will provide alternative methods of obtaining consent (e.g. digital approval, silent approval, verbal consent with a witness, recording etc.) If applicable, data transfers to non-EU countries will comply with applicable legislation, as described in Article 45 of Regulation 2016/679, the Commission Decision 2001/497/EC and 2004/915/EC.



6. Risk Management

Risk management is a crucial component of the PoliRuralPlus project, given its innovative approach to fostering sustainable rural-urban development. Recognizing the inherent risks associated with such a comprehensive project, the PoliRuralPlus risk management strategy is designed to identify, evaluate, and mitigate potential risks. This proactive approach aims to prevent unnecessary disruptions, budget overruns, scheduling delays, and any deviations from the project's objectives as outlined in the Description of Action (DoA).

6.1 Continuous Risk Management Approach

The risk management plan for PoliRuralPlus is established at the project's onset and includes a detailed risk log. This log is continually updated to reflect new situations and challenges as the project progresses. The core elements of our continuous risk management approach include:

1. **Identify:** WP Leaders proactively identify potential risks before they materialise.
2. **Analyse:** Risks are analysed to transform identified concerns into actionable data.
3. **Plan:** Strategies are developed to mitigate identified risks.
4. **Track:** Ongoing monitoring of risks and the effectiveness of mitigation strategies.
5. **Control:** Implementation of corrective measures as required.
6. **Communicate:** Regular communication among consortium members regarding the status of risks.

This structured approach ensures that risks are managed systematically to minimise their impact on the project.

6.2 Risk Monitoring Responsibility

WP Leaders are tasked with closely monitoring the critical risks identified within their respective WPs and implementing necessary mitigation measures. They are also responsible for identifying any new risks. All critical risks and emergent issues are reported immediately to the Project Coordinator and Project Manager, who are responsible for the overall management of external risks with inputs from all consortium partners. Effective risk management requires timely awareness and responses to potential problems, thereby maintaining project integrity and alignment with planned objectives.

6.3 Risk Assessment

At PoliRuralPlus, both internal and external risks are considered, with a risk exposure matrix used to assess each risk based on its impact and likelihood. This matrix helps in prioritising risks and tailoring mitigation strategies effectively:

IMPACT	LIKELIHOOD		
	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
HIGH	critical	critical	moderate
MEDIUM	critical	moderate	low
LOW	moderate	low	low

Table 4: Risks exposure assessment matrix

This initial assessment and subsequent updates are documented and stored within the project's cloud storage, folder 00 Key Project Documents, for transparency and accessibility.

6.4 Reporting on the Critical Risks Status

Risk management is an essential part of project management and project leadership. PoliruralPlus Risk management plan will lay out a strategy for effective identification and mitigation of all possible risks that can in one way, or another undermine Project success.

The Project Coordinator will monitor and evaluate each potential external and internal risk during the project implementation. The List of critical risks will be updated regularly. The consortium Partners are involved in the identification of incipient risks and will bring this to the attention of the relevant WP leads and the Coordinator. WP leaders are responsible for risk management within their own WP. The WP Leaders shall implement the mitigation measures as well as screening procedures for possible new risks and inform the Coordinator.

Identified risks are continuously tracked and monitored throughout the project duration to minimise potential impacts. Risk prioritisation is dynamically adjusted based on probability and impact assessments. Regular updates on risk status and management efforts are included in the periodic reports submitted to the European Commission, ensuring ongoing transparency and oversight.



7. Useful Documents

PoliRuralPlus Grant Agreement

- stored at cloud storage folder **02 Legal, Admin and Finance**

PoliRuralPlus Consortium Agreement

- stored at cloud storage folder **02 Legal, Admin and Finance**

Important Deliverables

- stored at cloud storage folder **06 Deliverables**
 - **D8.1 OEI - Requirement No. 1 (Ethics Advisor)**
 - **D1.1 Project Web Pages Update**
 - **D7.1 Comprehensive handbook, guidelines and materials for communication and dissemination**
 - **D6.1 Open Calls Detailed Strategy and Timeline**
 - **D6.2 Open Call Package**
 - **D1.3 Project's Data Management Plan, edition 1**

Horizon Europe, EU Grants, **AGA - Annotated Grant Agreement**, EU Funding Programmes 2021-2027, version 1.0 - draft, 01042023 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/aga_en.pdf

HE Online Manual

[Online Manual - Online Manual - Funding Tenders Opportunities \(europa.eu\)](#)



List of Annexes

1. Legal Framework of Ethics
2. Ethics and Appraisal Framework
3. Financial and Administration Rules
4. Project Gantt Chart



Annex 1: Legal framework of Ethics

The beneficiaries shall carry out the action in compliance with ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and with applicable EU, international and national law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

- Regulation (EU) N° 1291/2013 of the EU parliament and the council of 11 December 2013
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02)
- Council of Europe. European Convention on Human Rights

All activities implemented in the Horizon EU framework shall comply with Article 19 of the Regulation (EU) N° 1291/2013, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02), European Convention on Human Rights, and the ethics provisions set out in the Grant Agreement. The legal framework governing the PoliRuralPlus project is primarily based on Regulation (EU) 2016/679, known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was enacted by the European Parliament and the Council on 27 April 2016. This regulation focuses on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data, replacing Directive 95/46/EC. A corrigendum was issued on 23rd May 2018 to address specific amendments.

In January 2012, the European Commission initiated a comprehensive reform of the EU's 1995 data protection rules through proposal 2012/0011 (COD), aiming to strengthen online privacy rights and foster Europe's digital economy. This reform underscores the European Union's commitment to enhancing data protection standards and adapting to technological advancements.

Directive 2006/24/EC, issued by the European Parliament and the Council on 15 March 2006, mandates the retention of data generated or processed in connection with publicly available electronic communications services or public communications networks, amending Directive 2002/58/EC. This directive relates to the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector.

Additionally, the Handbook on European data protection law, published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe in 2013, provides further guidance on data protection laws within the EU context.

National regulations within states of consortium partners also play a crucial role in the legal framework. In instances where multiple regulations may apply, particularly in the context of data imports and exports, the project adheres to all applicable laws, applying the most restrictive regulation to ensure the highest level of data protection. For each beneficiary, the following national legislation applies, f. e.:

Czech Republic

- Project Coordinator (CVUT) and Beneficiaries no. 12 (CCSS) and 13 (P4A) – Data Processing Act No. 110/2019 Coll. and Act No. 111/2019 Coll., amending certain acts in connection with the adoption of the Act on Personal Data Processing)

Ireland



- Beneficiaries no. 2 (MID) 3 (MAC) - are subject to Ireland's Data Protection Acts 1988-2018¹, particularly the Data Protection Act 2018²

Latvia

- Beneficiary no.19 (VPR) are subject of the Law of the Republic of Latvia on Processing of Personal Data; Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data; and Privacy Policy of Vidzeme Planning Region approved on 30 August 2018.

Finland

- Beneficiary no. 21 (MYA) and 22 (SML) are subject of the following legislation: GDPR (FINLEX, 5.12.2018/1050). Beneficiaries comply as applicable with recommendations of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity Tenk³ and Open Science⁴.

Spain

- Beneficiary no. 17 (SINNO) is subject of the following legislation: REGULATION (EU) 2016/679 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 27 April 2016 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), including corrigenda published in OJEU L 127 of 23.5.2018 and OJEU L 74 of 4.3.2021, and Organic Law 3/2018, of December 5, 2018, on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights (LOPDGDD)⁵.

Slovakia

- Beneficiary no. 4. (SLOVAK UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE IN NITRA (SUA)) and 5. (SLOVAK RURAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT (SRY)) are subjects of the following legislation: Act No. 18/2018 Coll. on the Protection of Personal Data and on Amendments to Certain Acts (hereinafter referred to as 'Act No. 18/2018 Coll.')

Greece

- Beneficiary no. 7 GAIA EPICHEIREIN ANONYMI ETAIREIA PSIFIAKON YPIRESION (GAIA), no. 8 NEUROPUBLIC AE PLIROFORIKIS & EPIKOINONION (NP) and no.6 GEOPONIKO PANEPISTIMION ATHINON (AUA) are subjects to: 1. Constitutional provisions (articles 4, 5, 5A, 9A, 10, 19, 25), 2. GDPR (L.4624/2019, L. 2472/1997, L. 3741/2006, L.3783/2009, Dir 2006/24/EK), 3. EU DATA AC (EU/2023/2854), 4. DSA ACT (EU/2022/2065), 5. DMA ACT (EU/2022/1925)

and Others.

¹ [Data Protection - DETE \(enterprise.gov.ie\)](https://enterprise.gov.ie)

² [Data Protection Act 2018 – No. 7 of 2018 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

³ Finnish National Board on Research Integrity Tenk, <https://tenk.fi/en/advice-and-materials>

⁴ Open Science, Finland <https://avointiede.fi/en/open-science-and-research-policies>

⁵ Spanish LOPDGDD: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2018/12/05/3/con>



Furthermore, the European Parliament, during its 2019-2024 term, adopted the Artificial Intelligence Act on 13 March 2024, under legislative resolution P9_TA(2024)0138. This act proposes harmonized rules on Artificial Intelligence (AI), amending certain Union Legislative Acts, signifying a significant development in the regulation of AI technologies within the EU. This legislation, along with the GDPR and other relevant directives, forms the comprehensive legal framework that guides the PoliRuralPlus project's adherence to data protection and privacy standards, ensuring compliance with both existing and emerging regulations on data protection and AI.



Annex 2: Ethics appraisal framework

Ethics Appraisal Framework: Overview

Explanation of the Components of the Ethics Appraisal Framework

The ethics appraisal framework comprises several key components designed to ensure the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) within the project. First, there's a **Code of Conduct** that outlines expected ethical behavior for all project stakeholders, including respect for privacy, data protection, and fairness. This code serves as a guiding principle for all AI-related activities. Second, the **Ethical Review Expert** oversees the ethical considerations, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards. The ERB is responsible for evaluating project proposals, identifying potential ethical risks, and recommending measures to mitigate those risks. Third, **Ethical Guidelines** are provided to establish best practices for AI development and deployment, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and the avoidance of bias.

Purpose and Scope of the Framework

The purpose of the ethics appraisal framework is to create a robust mechanism for monitoring and ensuring ethical compliance throughout the project. It aims to foster public trust in the use of AI and guarantee that the technology is developed and used in a way that respects human rights and societal values. The framework's scope encompasses all aspects of the project where AI is utilized, from data collection and analysis to AI-driven decision-making processes. It also covers interactions with stakeholders, ensuring their rights and privacy are protected. This framework is designed to be flexible, allowing for adjustments as new ethical challenges emerge during the project's lifecycle.

Guidelines for Implementing the Framework Effectively

To implement the ethics appraisal framework effectively, the project should adhere to several key guidelines. First, ensure **transparency** in all AI-related activities, including clear communication about data usage and AI processes with stakeholders. This openness promotes accountability and builds trust. Second, conduct **regular ethical reviews** to identify and address potential risks. These reviews should be comprehensive, involving input from various stakeholders and considering the impact of AI on different groups. Third, provide **training and education** to Consortium on ethical issues related to AI. This training should focus on promoting ethical awareness and understanding of the framework's components. Finally, establish a process for **reporting and addressing ethical concerns**. This process should allow stakeholders to raise issues confidentially and ensure prompt and appropriate responses to any ethical violations.

Key Components of the Ethics Appraisal Framework

Identification of Ethical Risks and Vulnerabilities

Identifying ethical risks and vulnerabilities is the foundation of an effective ethics appraisal framework. This involves pinpointing areas within the organization where ethical breaches could occur. Conduct a comprehensive risk assessment to evaluate various aspects of the project, such as data handling, decision-making processes, and



stakeholder interactions. This step includes assessing internal and external factors that could lead to unethical behavior and implementing safeguards to mitigate these risks.

Evaluation of Organizational Culture and Its Impact on Ethics

Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping ethical behavior. An evaluation of the culture examines the shared values, beliefs, and practices that influence how employees conduct themselves. This component involves collecting feedback from employees through surveys or focus groups to understand their perceptions of the organization's ethical climate. The goal is to identify cultural elements that either promote or hinder ethical practices, allowing for targeted interventions to strengthen ethical values.

Assessment of Policies and Procedures for Ethical Compliance

Assessing the organization's policies and procedures is crucial to ensure ethical compliance. This involves reviewing existing guidelines, codes of conduct, and standard operating procedures to determine whether they align with ethical standards and legal requirements. An effective assessment checks for consistency, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the policies. Additionally, it identifies gaps or outdated practices that could pose ethical risks, recommending updates or new procedures to enhance compliance.

Role of Leadership in Fostering an Ethical Environment

Leadership has a significant impact on fostering an ethical environment. This component assesses the role of leaders in promoting ethical behavior and maintaining accountability. It examines how leaders demonstrate ethical values through their actions and decisions and whether they actively support a culture of ethics. Leadership's role includes setting a positive example, encouraging open communication, and providing the necessary resources for ethical training and development. By reinforcing ethical practices at the top, leaders can create a ripple effect that strengthens the ethical framework across the organization.

Implementing the Ethics Appraisal Framework

Steps for Conducting an Ethics Appraisal Within a Project

An ethics appraisal involves a structured approach to evaluating a project's ethical aspects. The first step is to define the scope of the appraisal, identifying key areas where ethical considerations are crucial, such as data privacy, stakeholder interactions, and AI usage. Next, establish a team to lead the appraisal, ensuring it includes members with expertise in ethics, project management, and legal compliance. The Consortium should then gather relevant data and perform a thorough analysis to identify potential ethical risks or violations. Finally, the results should be reviewed, and appropriate recommendations for improvement should be made.

Tools and Techniques for Gathering Data and Assessing Ethical Performance

Effective data gathering is key to a successful ethics appraisal. Use a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools to collect information on ethical practices. Surveys and interviews can provide insights into employee perceptions of ethics, while audits and compliance checks offer quantitative data on adherence to ethical standards. Techniques such as scenario analysis and risk assessments help identify potential ethical challenges



before they escalate. The choice of tools should align with the project's specific requirements and ethical focus areas.

Integration of Findings into Organizational Strategies and Practices

The final step in the ethics appraisal process is to integrate the findings into organizational strategies and practices. This involves translating appraisal outcomes into actionable recommendations. The organization should update policies, processes, and training programs to address identified issues and improve overall ethical performance. Additionally, ensure that these changes are communicated clearly to all stakeholders, reinforcing the importance of ethics in the organization's culture. By embedding the appraisal findings into daily operations, organizations can create a sustainable framework for ethical conduct and continuous improvement.

Training and Development for Ethical Awareness

Importance of Training Programs in Promoting Ethical Awareness

Training programs are crucial for cultivating ethical awareness within an organization. These programs educate employees about ethical principles, company policies, and relevant legal frameworks. They help establish a common understanding of expected behavior, reducing the risk of unethical actions. Effective training builds a strong ethical culture and empowers employees to make ethical decisions.

Designing and Delivering Effective Ethics Training Sessions

Creating effective ethics training sessions involves a careful approach. Start by identifying the key ethical challenges relevant to the organization and design training that addresses these specific issues. Use interactive methods like role-playing, case studies, and group discussions to engage participants. Deliver training in a format that is accessible and understandable to all employees, and ensure regular updates to keep content relevant.

Incorporating Ethical Considerations into Employee Development Plans

To maintain a focus on ethics, integrate ethical considerations into employee development plans. This involves setting ethical goals, tracking progress, and providing feedback on ethical behavior during performance evaluations. Including ethics as a component of career development ensures that ethical awareness remains a priority, guiding employees' growth and advancement within the organization.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Ethical Practices

Establishing Metrics and Indicators for Monitoring Ethical Performance

To effectively monitor ethical performance, organizations should establish clear metrics and indicators. These may include tracking the number of ethical complaints, measuring employee satisfaction with ethical practices, and evaluating compliance with ethical guidelines. These metrics provide a quantitative basis to assess the organization's ethical health.



Regular Assessment of Adherence to Ethical Standards

Regular assessments are crucial to ensure ongoing adherence to ethical standards. These assessments might include internal audits, third-party evaluations, or employee surveys. They help identify gaps in compliance, uncover areas needing improvement, and ensure that ethical practices remain a top priority within the organization.

Continuous Improvement Processes Based on Evaluation Results

The process of monitoring ethical practices should lead to continuous improvement. After assessing ethical performance, organizations should use the results to refine policies, enhance training programs, and address identified weaknesses. This continuous feedback loop ensures that ethical practices evolve and improve, fostering a culture of ongoing ethical excellence.

Addressing Ethical Challenges

Strategies for Addressing Common Ethical Challenges

Organizations should develop clear strategies to tackle common ethical challenges, such as maintaining confidentiality, respecting privacy, and ensuring fairness. These strategies should include training programs to increase ethical awareness, robust policies to guide behavior, and consistent enforcement to ensure compliance.

Handling Conflicts of Interest, Ethical Dilemmas, and Misconduct

Managing conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas requires a transparent process for identifying, disclosing, and mitigating such issues. Organizations should establish guidelines for resolving ethical conflicts and ensure all employees understand the steps to report and address misconduct. A confidential system for reporting ethical concerns helps prevent misconduct and ensures accountability.

Case Studies Highlighting Successful Resolution of Ethical Issues

Case studies can be valuable tools for illustrating effective ways to resolve ethical issues. By analyzing real-world scenarios where ethical challenges were successfully addressed, organizations can learn practical approaches to applying ethical principles. These case studies should demonstrate how ethical challenges were identified, the corrective actions taken, and the lessons learned to prevent similar issues in the future.

Promoting a Culture of Ethics

Building Ethical Leadership at All Levels

Ethical leadership is essential at every level of the organization. This involves training leaders to exemplify ethical behavior and make decisions that reflect the organization's values. By setting a strong example, leaders can inspire others to act with integrity and foster an ethical environment.



Encouraging Open Communication and Transparency

An ethical culture thrives on open communication and transparency. This means creating channels for employees to voice concerns without fear of retaliation and ensuring that all organizational processes are clear and understandable. Transparency helps build trust and encourages accountability.

Recognizing and Rewarding Ethical Behavior

Acknowledging and rewarding ethical behavior reinforces the importance of ethics within the organization. This can be done through formal recognition programs or simple gestures of appreciation. By valuing ethical actions, organizations motivate employees to consistently act with integrity.



Annex 3: Financial and Administration Rules

This section shall give PoliRuralPlus partners an introduction in the HE project financial and administration rules. It only provides basic information. For details and examples, please refer to the Grant Agreement and Annotated Model Grant Agreement (AMGA) provided by the European Commission.

COSTS - GENERAL RULES

The **general eligibility conditions** are the following (art. 6.1 GRA), for actual costs:

- they shall be actually incurred by the beneficiary,
- they shall be incurred in the period set out in Article 4 (with the exception of costs relating to the submission of the final periodic report, which may be incurred afterwards; see Article 21 GRA),
- they shall be declared under one of the budget categories set out in Article 6.2 and Annex 2 GRA,
- they shall be incurred in connection with the action as described in Annex 1 GRA and necessary for its implementation,
- they shall be identifiable and verifiable, in particular recorded in the beneficiary's accounts in accordance with the accounting standards applicable in the country where the beneficiary is established and with the beneficiary's usual cost accounting practices,
- they shall comply with the applicable national law on taxes, labour and social security and
- they shall be reasonable, justified and shall comply with the principle of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

For **unit costs** or contributions (if any):

- they shall be declared under one of the budget categories set out in Article 6.2 and Annex 2 GRA.
- the units shall:
 - be actually used or produced by the beneficiary in the period set out in Article 4 (with the exception of units relating to the submission of the final periodic report, which may be used or produced afterwards; see Article 21 GRA),
 - be necessary for the implementation of the action and
- the number of units shall be identifiable and verifiable, in particular supported by records and documentation (see Article 20 GRA).

For **flat-rate costs or contributions** (if any):

- they shall be declared under one of the budget categories set out in Article 6.2 and Annex 2 GRA
- the costs or contributions to which the flat-rate is applied shall:
 - be eligible,
 - relate to the period set out in Article 4 (with the exception of costs or contributions relating to the submission of the final periodic report, which may be incurred afterwards; see Article 21).

For **lump sum costs or contributions** (if any):



- they shall be declared under one of the budget categories set out in Article 6.2 and Annex 2 GRA,
- the work shall be properly implemented by the beneficiary in accordance with Annex 1 GRA,
- the deliverables/outputs shall be achieved in the period set out in Article 4 (with the exception of deliverables/outputs relating to the submission of the final periodic report, which may be achieved afterwards; see Article 21 GRA).

For **unit, flat-rate or lump sum costs or contributions** according to usual cost accounting practices (if any):

- they shall fulfil the general eligibility conditions for the type of cost concerned,
- the cost accounting practices shall be applied in a consistent manner, based on objective criteria, regardless of the source of funding.

For **financing not linked to costs** (if any): the results shall be achieved or the conditions shall be fulfilled as described in Annex 1 GRA.

In addition, for direct cost categories (e.g. personnel, travel & subsistence, subcontracting and other direct costs) only costs that are directly linked to the action implementation and can therefore be attributed to it directly are eligible. They shall not include any indirect costs (i.e. costs that are only indirectly linked to the action, e.g. via cost drivers).

In-kind contributions provided by third parties free of charge may be declared as eligible direct costs by the beneficiaries which use them (under the same conditions as if they were their own, provided that they concern only direct costs and that the third parties and their in-kind contributions are set out in Annex 1 GA (or approved ex post in the periodic report, if their use does not entail changes to the Agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or breach the principle of equal treatment of applicants; 'simplified approval procedure').

A. Personnel costs regarding to GRA

A.1 Costs for employees

(or equivalent) are eligible as personnel costs if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are related to personnel working for the beneficiary under an employment contract (or equivalent appointing act) and assigned to the action.

They shall be limited to salaries (including net payments during parental leave), social security contributions, taxes and other costs linked to the remuneration, if they arise from national law or the employment contract (or equivalent appointing act) and be calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred, in accordance with the following method:

{daily rate for the person multiplied by number of day-equivalents worked on the action (rounded up or down to the nearest half-day)}.

The daily rate shall be calculated as:



{annual personnel costs for the person divided by 215}.

The number of day-equivalents declared for a person shall be identifiable and verifiable (see Article 20 GA).

The actual time spent on parental leave by a person assigned to the action may be deducted from the 215 days indicated in the above formula.

The total number of day-equivalents declared in EU grants, for a person for a year, cannot be higher than 215, minus time spent on parental leave (if any).

For personnel which receives supplementary payments for work in projects (project-based remuneration), the personnel costs shall be calculated at a rate which:

- corresponds to the actual remuneration costs paid by the beneficiary for the time worked by the person in the action over the reporting period,
- does not exceed the remuneration costs paid by the beneficiary for work in similar projects funded by national schemes ('national projects reference'),
- is defined based on objective criteria allowing to determine the amount to which the person is entitled

and

- reflects the usual practice of the beneficiary to pay consistently bonuses or supplementary payments for work in projects funded by national schemes.

The national projects reference is the remuneration defined in national law, collective labour agreement or written internal rules of the beneficiary applicable to work in projects funded by national schemes.

If there is no such national law, collective labour agreement or written internal rules or if the project-based remuneration is not based on objective criteria, the national project reference will be the average remuneration of the person in the last full calendar year covered by the reporting period, excluding remuneration paid for work in EU actions.

If the beneficiary uses average personnel costs (unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices), the personnel costs shall fulfil the general eligibility conditions for such unit costs and the daily rate shall be calculated:

- using the actual personnel costs recorded in the beneficiary's accounts and excluding any costs which are ineligible or already included in other budget categories; the actual personnel costs may be adjusted on the basis of budgeted or estimated elements, if they are relevant for calculating the personnel costs, reasonable and correspond to objective and verifiable information

and

- according to usual cost accounting practices which are applied in a consistent manner, based on objective criteria, regardless of the source of funding.



A.2 and A.3 Costs for natural persons working under a direct contract other than an employment contract and costs for **seconded persons by a third party against payment** are also eligible as personnel costs, if they are assigned to the action, fulfil the general eligibility conditions and:

- work under conditions similar to those of an employee (in particular regarding the way the work is organised, the tasks that are performed and the premises where they are performed)

and

- the result of the work belongs to the beneficiary (unless agreed otherwise).

They shall be calculated on the basis of a rate which corresponds to the costs actually incurred for the direct contract or secondment and shall not be significantly different from those for personnel performing similar tasks under an employment contract with the beneficiary.

A.4 The work of SME owners

for the action (i.e. owners of beneficiaries that are small and medium-sized enterprises not receiving a salary) or **natural person beneficiaries** (i.e. beneficiaries that are natural persons not receiving a salary) may be declared as personnel costs, if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are calculated as unit costs in accordance with the method set out in Annex 2a GRA.

For personnel costs: time worked for the beneficiary under the action shall be supported by [declarations](#) signed monthly by the person and their supervisor, unless **another reliable and consistent time-record system** is in place (shall be dated and signed at least monthly by the person working for the action and their supervisor). A chosen option shall be applied consistently, i.e. using the same option at least per group of personnel employed under similar conditions (e.g. same type of contract, same cost-centre). If you do not use the monthly declaration of days, and instead record the time worked in hours, you shall convert the total hours worked into day-equivalents to calculate the personnel costs for the grant (see Article 6.2.A.1 of GRA). A conversion normally needs to be done only once per person per reporting period for the purpose of reporting to the granting authority. It is not required that you keep a parallel record system that directly converts hours into day-equivalents. The granting authority may accept alternative evidence supporting the time worked for the action declared, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance. The records and supporting documents shall be made available upon request (see Article 19 of GRA) or in the context of checks, reviews, audits or investigations (see Article 25 of GRA).

B. Subcontracting costs regarding to GRA

Subcontracting costs for the action (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as nondeductible or non-refundable value added tax (VAT)) are eligible, if they are calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred, fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are awarded using the beneficiary's usual purchasing practices — provided these ensure subcontracts with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and that there is no conflict of interests (see Article 12).



Beneficiaries that are ‘contracting authorities/entities’ within the meaning of the EU Directives on public procurement shall also comply with the applicable national law on public procurement. Subcontracting may cover only a limited part of the action.

The tasks to be subcontracted and the estimated cost for each subcontract shall be set out in Annex 1 and the total estimated costs of subcontracting per beneficiary shall be set out in Annex 2 GRA (or may be approved ex post in the periodic report, if the use of subcontracting does not entail changes to the Agreement which would call into question the decision awarding the grant or breach the principle of equal treatment of applicants; ‘simplified approval procedure’).

C. Purchase costs regarding to GRA

Purchase costs for the action (including related duties, taxes and charges, such as non-deductible or non-refundable value added tax (VAT)) are eligible if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions and are bought using the beneficiary’s usual purchasing practices — provided these ensure purchases with best value for money (or if appropriate the lowest price) and that there is no conflict of interests (see Article 12 GRA).

Beneficiaries that are ‘contracting authorities/entities’ within the meaning of the EU Directives on public procurement shall also comply with the applicable national law on public procurement.

C.1 Travel and subsistence

Purchases for travel, accommodation and subsistence shall be calculated as follows:

- travel: on the basis of the costs actually incurred and in line with the beneficiary’s usual practices on travel,
- accommodation: on the basis of the costs actually incurred and in line with the beneficiary’s usual practices on travel,
- subsistence: on the basis of the costs actually incurred and in line with the beneficiary’s usual practices on travel.

C.2 Equipment

Purchases of equipment, infrastructure or other assets used for the action shall be declared as depreciation costs, calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred and written off in accordance with international accounting standards and the beneficiary’s usual accounting practices.

Only the portion of the costs that corresponds to the rate of actual use for the action during the action duration can be taken into account.

Costs for renting or leasing equipment, infrastructure or other assets are also eligible, if they do not exceed the depreciation costs of similar equipment, infrastructure or assets and do not include any financing fees.

C.3 Other goods, works and services

Purchases of other goods, works and services shall be calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred.



Such goods, works and services include, for instance, consumables and supplies, promotion, dissemination, protection of results, translations, publications, certificates and financial guarantees, if required under the Agreement.

D. Other cost categories

D.1 Financial support to third parties

Costs for providing financial support to third parties (in the form of grants, prizes or similar forms of support; if any) are eligible, if and as declared eligible in the call conditions, if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions, are calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred and the support is implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in Annex 1 GRA.

These conditions shall ensure objective and transparent selection procedures and include at least the following:

For grants (or similar):

- the maximum amount of financial support for each third party ('recipient'); this amount may not exceed the amount set out in the Data Sheet (see Point 3) or otherwise agreed with the granting authority,
- the criteria for calculating the exact amount of the financial support,
- the different types of activity that qualify for financial support, on the basis of a closed list,
- the persons or categories of persons that will be supported and
- the criteria and procedures for giving financial support.

For prizes (or similar):

- the eligibility and award criteria,
- the amount of the prize and
- the payment arrangements.

This cost will not be taken into account for the indirect cost flat-rate.

D.2 Internally invoiced goods and services

Costs for internally invoiced goods and services directly used for the action may be declared as unit cost according to usual cost accounting practices, if and as declared eligible in the call conditions, if they fulfil the general eligibility conditions for such unit costs and the amount per unit is calculated:

- using the actual costs for the good or service recorded in the beneficiary's accounts, attributed either by direct measurement or on the basis of cost drivers, and excluding any cost which are ineligible or already included in other budget categories; the actual costs may be adjusted on the basis of budgeted or estimated elements, if they are relevant for calculating the costs, reasonable and correspond to objective and verifiable information

and



- according to usual cost accounting practices which are applied in a consistent manner, based on objective criteria, regardless of the source of funding. 'Internally invoiced goods and services' means goods or services which are provided within the beneficiary's organisation directly for the action and which the beneficiary values on the basis of its usual cost accounting practices.

This cost will not be taken into account for the indirect cost flat-rate.

E. Indirect costs

Indirect costs will be reimbursed at the flat-rate of 25% of the eligible direct costs (categories A-D, except volunteers costs, subcontracting costs, financial support to third parties and exempted specific cost categories, if any).

Keeping records

The beneficiaries shall — at least until the time-limit set out in the Data Sheet (see Point 6) — keep records and other supporting documents to prove the proper implementation of the action in line with the accepted standards in the respective field (if any).

In addition, the beneficiaries shall — for the same period — keep the following to justify the amounts declared:

- for actual costs: adequate records and supporting documents to prove the costs declared (such as contracts, subcontracts, invoices and accounting records); in addition, the beneficiaries' usual accounting and internal control procedures shall enable direct reconciliation between the amounts declared, the amounts recorded in their accounts and the amounts stated in the supporting documents,
- for flat-rate costs and contributions (if any): adequate records and supporting documents to prove the eligibility of the costs or contributions to which the flat-rate is applied,
- for the following simplified costs and contributions: the beneficiaries do not need to keep specific records on the actual costs incurred, but shall keep:
 - for unit costs and contributions (if any): adequate records and supporting documents to prove the number of units declared,
 - for lump sum costs and contributions (if any): adequate records and supporting documents to prove proper implementation of the work as described in Annex 1 GRA,
 - for financing not linked to costs (if any): adequate records and supporting documents to prove the achievement of the results or the fulfilment of the conditions as described in Annex 1 GRA,
- for unit, flat-rate and lump sum costs and contributions according to usual cost accounting practices (if any): the beneficiaries shall keep any adequate records and supporting documents to prove that their cost accounting practices have been applied in a consistent manner, based on objective criteria, regardless of the source of funding, and that they comply with the eligibility conditions set out in Articles 6.1 and 6.2.

Moreover, the following is needed for specific budget categories:

- for personnel costs: time worked for the beneficiary under the action shall be supported by declarations signed monthly by the person and their supervisor, unless another reliable time-record system is in place; the granting authority may accept alternative evidence supporting the time worked for the action declared, if it considers that it offers an adequate level of assurance



The records and supporting documents shall be made available upon request (see Article 19) or in the context of checks, reviews, audits or investigations (see Article 25 GRA).

If there are on-going checks, reviews, audits, investigations, litigation or other pursuits of claims under the Agreement (including the extension of findings; see Article 25 GRA), the beneficiaries shall keep these records and other supporting documentation until the end of these procedures.

The beneficiaries shall keep the original documents. Digital and digitalised documents are considered originals if they are authorised by the applicable national law. The granting authority may accept non-original documents if they offer a comparable level of assurance.

Certificates on the financial statements (CFS)

The beneficiaries shall provide certificates on their financial statements (CFS), in accordance with the schedule, threshold and conditions and submit the CFS via the coordinator as part of the periodic report.

Conditions:

Schedule: only **at final payment**, if threshold is reached

Standard threshold (beneficiary-level):

- financial statement: requested EU contribution to costs \geq **EUR 430 000.00**.

Special threshold for beneficiaries with a systems and process audit(see Article 24 GRA):

- financial statement: requested EU contribution to costs \geq **EUR 725 000.00**.

The certificates shall be drawn up using the **template published on the Portal**, cover the costs declared on the basis of actual costs and costs according to usual cost accounting practices (if any), and fulfil the following conditions:

- (a) be provided by a qualified approved external auditor which is independent and complies with Directive 2006/43/EC (or for public bodies: by a competent independent public officer),
- (b) the verification shall be carried out according to the highest professional standards to ensure that the financial statements comply with the provisions under the Agreement and that the costs declared are eligible.

If a beneficiary does not submit a certificate on the financial statements (CFS) or the certificate is rejected, the accepted EU contribution to costs will be capped to reflect the CFS threshold.

The certificates will not affect the granting authority's right to carry out its own checks, reviews or audits, nor preclude the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) or the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) from using their prerogatives for audits and investigations under the Agreement (see Article 25).

Financial Statements

The financial statements are the official financial reports collected after the end of each project period (M18 and M36) via the the Grant Management System of the Research & Innovation Participant Portal. The financial



statement is a pre-condition for receiving the EC payment for the period; the payments are only processed based on the official cost claim via the Grant Management System.

The financial statement consists of the Individual financial statements and the Explanation of the use of resources. It shall be submitted via the Grant Management System no later than 60 days after the end of the period. The 'Project financial signatory' role is needed to submit the financial statement on the portal (see the next chapter for details on how to assign the FSIGN role for the project).

All beneficiaries complete their own financial statement via the portal, e-sign and submit it to the Coordinator.
The Coordinator approves the reports and submits to the EC.

Guidelines on submitting of the financial statement

Detailed instructions are available:

[Reports & payment requests - Online Manual - Funding Tenders Opportunities \(europa.eu\)](#)

Assigning the FSIGN role

In order to finalise the cost claim, you might need to assign the financial signatory role within your organisation at the project level (PFSIGN). More details follow (if you already have assigned the FSIGN role for your organisation, you can skip directly to point 2):

1. LEAR has to first assign the financial signatory role at the organisation level (FSIGN)

- A. You need to be logged to the Participant Portal with the LEAR account
- B. Go to My Area/My organisation/click on your organisation/Roles
- C. Add FSIGN at the organisation level

2. The "Project financial signatory (PFSIGN)" role at project level needs to be assigned as well (to be done

by the participant contact of your organisation). To assign the PFSIGN to a project:

- A. Login to the Participant Portal
- B. Go to MY AREA tab and click on My Project(s), choose the project;
- C. Click on Actions/Manage consortium on the PoliRuralPlus's line.
- D. Click on "edit roles" next to your organisation
- E. At the bottom of the new page, click on the "add roles" button;
- F. Enter the contact details, and select the role "Project Financial Signatory" in the drop-down list, enter the name of the person you want as PFSIGN.

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- G. Click on OK to save your changes.
- H. On the project roles page, the FSIGN will be seen as Project Financial Signatory.
- I. Log-out and close all browsers
- J. Log-in again
- K. The Project Financial Signatory can finalize the financial statement

Annex 4: Project Gantt Chart

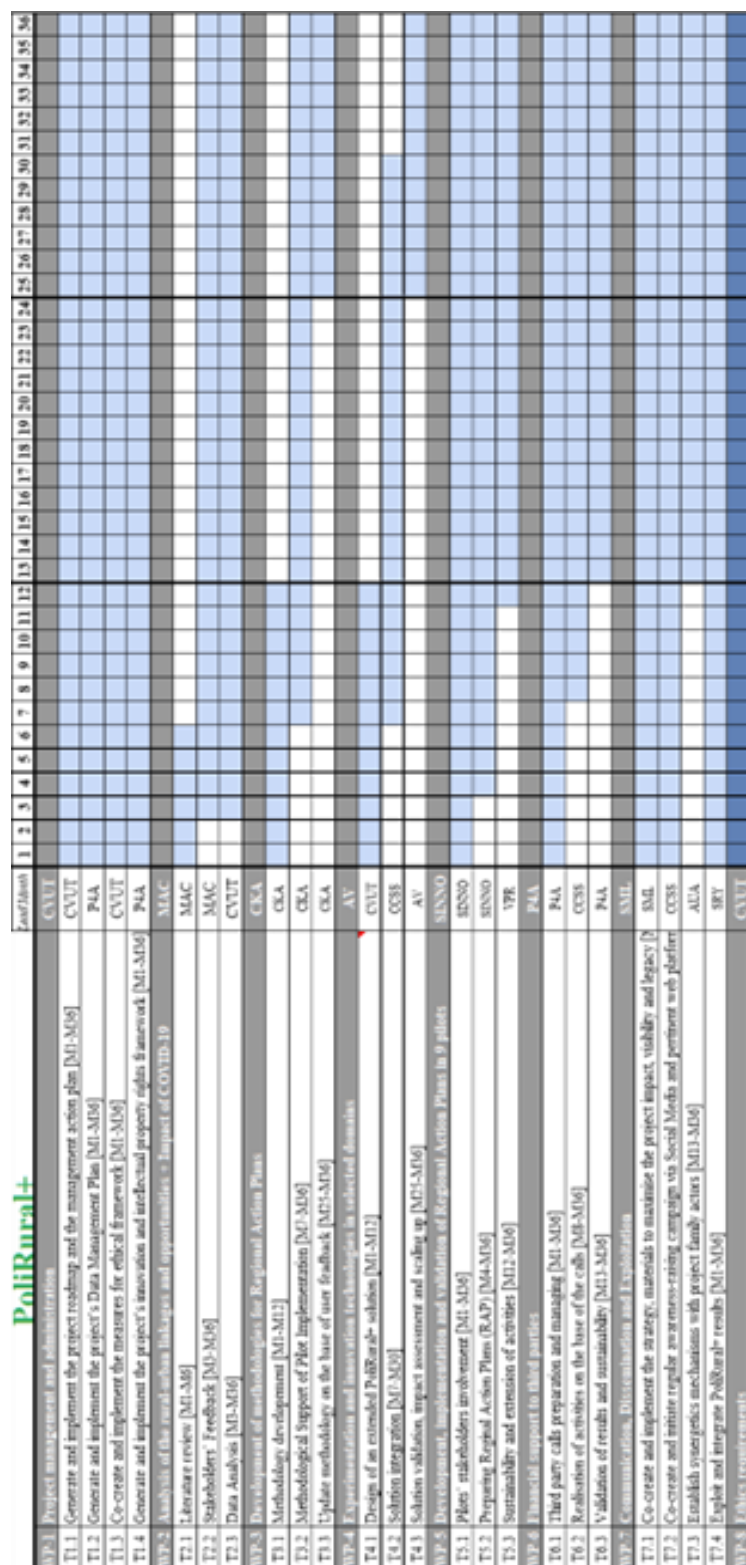


Table 5: Project Gantt Chart