



Delivery mechanisms for the AKIS strategies

AKIS-in-practice! 2.12

Enhancing Transnational Cooperation for innovation through EIP-Agri Projects



Keywords/Tags



Operational Group



Transitional cooperation



Peer-to-learning



Potential users



Farmers



AKIS Coordination Bodies



Managing Authorities



Advisors



Operational Group coordinators



CAP Networks



RATIONALE



The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) Operational Groups have been instrumental in facilitating knowledge exchange and fostering collaboration among farmers, researchers, and businesses across Europe. These groups, by addressing key challenges in the agricultural sector, have driven the development of innovative solutions tailored to local contexts. Despite their success in promoting national-level innovation, there remains a significant gap in terms of formalized administrative structures and procedures for transnational cooperation, including cross-border ones. Although, since the CAP programming period 2014-2020 the opportunity for transnational cooperation for innovation has been mooted by many and promoted by EC, still, even under the CAP 2023-2027, there's not a dedicated framework to support structured transnational EIP-Agri OGs. In fact, this lack has hampered the efforts by both managing authorities and of potential partners of transnational OGs to search for collaborations in other member states of EU aimed to address common issues and opportunities.

On this regard, experiences, regulatory and administrative arrangements already put in practice under other EU funding schemes, like LEADER (Transnational and transregional cooperation among LAGS) and INTERREG (transnational and cross-border cooperation among MS) can represent relevant framework to refer to when arranging such cooperation within the EIP-Agri.

Estonia has a solid track record in fostering transnational cooperation, leveraging its experience from previous LEADER projects and its active CAP Network. The Estonian CAP Network has played a vital role in matchmaking and facilitating innovation-sharing events, such as joint workshops and field visits, aimed at promoting collaboration with neighboring countries like Finland. Such initiatives have set a precedent for future transnational projects, emphasizing the added value of cooperation and knowledge exchange.

SOLUTION



Similarly to other EU funding schemes, already under the Rural Development policy 2014-2022, Nordic-Baltic Countries held the joint decision to launch a call for EIP-AGRI OGs that was explicitly targeted to possible cross-border/transnational cooperation projects.

This initiative required project partners from the adhering countries to plan and implement their activities in unison while applying for funding through their respective national Managing Authorities.

For the upcoming call for transnational OGs (in 2025), Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Sweden are working closely to ensure smooth coordination of transnational calls. Several workshops, both online and in person, have been organized to facilitate collaboration and understanding between the participating countries.

Moreover, a survey conducted among Managing Authorities (MA), Paying Agencies (PA), and National CAP Networks in these four countries provided valuable insights into the following areas:

1. Managing Authorities: Questions focused on project topics from the previous programming period, the budget, calls (e.g., thematic, transnational, continuous), and experiences with transnational OGs.
2. Paying Agencies: These questions covered the application process, changes in the new programming period, feedback from applicants, and potential challenges for transnational OGs.
3. National CAP Networks: Questions addressed networking between OGs, the dissemination of project results, supporting the uptake of results by farmers, and other types of support offered during the EIP process.

The survey highlighted that the projects address a diverse array of topics, which vary considerably based on national contexts but also share significant commonalities, reinforcing the importance of cross-border and transnational collaboration. MAs and PAs at the national level have introduced several updates to streamline application and implementation processes, reducing administrative complexities. Additionally, national networks are focused on extensively sharing the outcomes of these projects, both domestically and internationally, to promote wider adoption of practical solutions and contribute to enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of farms.

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In practical terms, MAs of the CAP SPs of different MSs launch the respective call for applications for EIP-Agri OGs that have just a national relevance but enable possible transnational cooperation by including some common key requirements for projects:

- **Justification of Transnational Cooperation:** Applicants must demonstrate the added value of transnational collaboration, particularly how it is meant to address common agricultural challenges.
- **Funding Applications:** applications must address the call for applications held under the CAP Plan of own member state. This foresees as eligible for support the costs occurred for coordination, including planning, joint events, and project management.
- **Written Agreement:** A written agreement between transnational partners is recommended to ensure clear communication and distribution of responsibilities.
- **Joint Project Planning and Execution:** The planning phase must involve collaborative goal setting, joint activities, and clearly defined roles for each partner in the different Member States.
- **Clear distinction, within the project plan, between transnational and in-country activities:** So that, each OG partnership remains the primary responsible for own in-country activities as they are planned by the innovation project.
- **National scope of regulations, administrative procedures and eligible costs:** The paying agencies (PA) in each country were responsible for instructing the project partners about national regulations, administrative procedures, and eligible costs.

Moreover, formalized through a Letter of Intent (LOI) between potential partners from different countries agreeing on the cooperation for innovation in the specific project have been resolutive to deal with the not-fully synchronization of the calls of applications of the Member States.

Following these processes, two transnational collaboration (TNC) projects were successfully established between the EIP OGs of Estonia and Finland. The main beneficiary in Estonia had additional funding specifically allocated for the coordination of transnational cooperation, while the Finnish EIP OG had a travel budget for field trips to Estonia.

Eventually, it's worth noting that, national CAP Networks played a pivotal role in facilitating transnational partnerships, reducing barriers such as language differences, and promoting networking opportunities through joint events and initiatives.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY



To ensure the successful replication of such initiatives across different regions/Member States, the following factors are crucial:

- **Coordination:** Effective cooperation between MAs, PAs, and CAP Networks is essential throughout both the application and implementation phases. Information exchange regarding timing, themes of calls, and specific national requirements for EIP projects is key to aligning efforts.
- **Language Barriers:** The inclusion of translation costs as eligible expenses would encourage greater participation and ensure smoother communication between partners.
- **National CAP Networks:** These networks can serve as strategic facilitators by helping project applicants find partners from other Member States and by organizing joint events to foster collaboration.
- **Joint organization of brokerage events** with cross border countries can enable the creation of networking opportunities.

BENEFITS



Engaging in cross-border/transnational EIP-AGRI projects offers multiple benefits:

- **Addressing cross-border/transnational challenges:** Such projects provide an opportunity to tackle shared agricultural issues collaboratively, leading to more robust and scalable solutions.
- **Enhanced knowledge exchange:** Actors from different AKIS in various Member States can share best practices, which strengthens the overall agricultural innovation capacity.
- **Innovation synergies:** By working across borders, OGs can draw on a broader range of expertise and resources, resulting in more innovative and effective project outcomes.
- **Adaptation:** Despite the absence of a joint budget for transnational EIP-AGRI projects, the flexibility of these calls allows partners to adapt to the different timelines and funding mechanisms in each participating country.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



- Call for applications in Estonia – Year 2017
- EIP Measures in Nordic-Baltic Countries: A Reflection on the Past and a Glimpse into the Future – Survey Results
- Materials of the workshop: “Towards Transnational Cooperation in EIP – What Does It Mean?” – 17/09/2024
- Presentation of Nordic-Baltic TNC EIP cooperation during the Subgroup on Innovation & Knowledge Exchange (SoIKE) 4 th meeting Brussels 27 October 2023



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