



Report on
2nd European Stakeholder Platform
meeting for
National CAP Managing Authorities

15 February 2024, 9.30 – 12.30 CET

Online



Preparatory Action - Smart Rural Areas in the 21st Century - Contract No:
AGRI-2020-0332



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1. Context

The **purpose** of the meeting was to provide an update on the state-of-play of the CAP Strategic Plan analysis on Smart Villages carried out by the project, as well as to discuss and plan for the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (to be held on 18-19 March 2024 in Brussels – more information [here](#)).

The main target group of this session was CAP Managing Authorities. **21 participants registered from 12 Member States** (see Figure 1), from which 13 were representatives of Managing Authorities. Other involved stakeholders were representatives of DG AGRI geographical units.

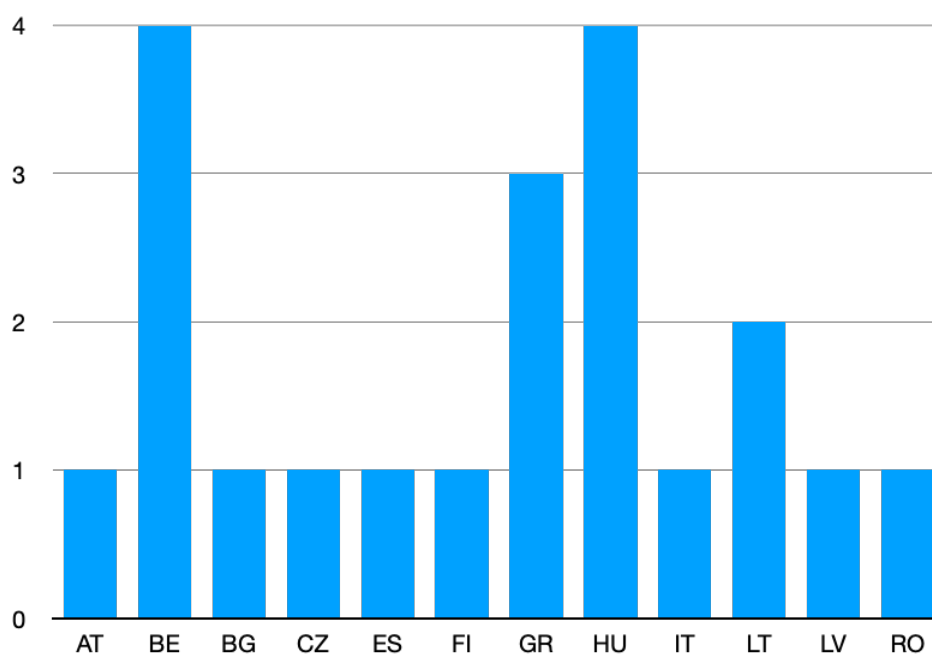


Figure 1, Participants by countries

Before the meeting, registered participants **received preparatory questions** (see Figure 2) they were invited to reflect on, depending on the way Smart Villages are programmed through the CAP Strategic Plan of the given Member State, either through LEADER, through a dedicated intervention or both.

A. SMART VILLAGES IMPLEMENTED THROUGH LEADER

- How CAP MA makes sure that the 3 principles of Smart Villages concept are respected (participatory approach, setting up of a strategy, smart solutions) or the principles of the national definition as defined in the CSP during the planning and the implementation of smart village interventions?
- Are there any specific provisions laid down for the implementation of Smart Villages (e.g. selection criteria of villages, selection criteria of projects, procedures etc.)?
- How LAG's are going to implement smart village strategies?
- How many smart villages strategies or projects are expected for R.40? Please clarify if the value concerns strategies or projects.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will LEADER budget cover exclusively smart village strategies or are there any additional funding sources?
<p>B. DEDICATED SMART VILLAGES INTERVENTIONS (under investments, cooperation beyond LEADER)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How CAP MA makes sure that 1) the 3 principles of smart villages concept are respected (participatory approach, setting-up of a strategy, smart solutions) or the principles of the national definition as defined in the CSP during the planning and the implementation of smart village interventions? • Is there any call for proposals during 2023 or planned for 2024? • Are there specific selection criteria already laid down for smart village strategies? • Are there specific selection criteria already down for smart village projects?

Figure 2, Preparatory questions

2. Agenda

Time	Agenda item
9.30 – 10.00	Overview on the state-of-play of CAP SP analysis and factsheets' development & Smart Rural 27 recommendations on MA and CAP Network activities on Smart Villages by Edina Ocsko (E40, Smart Rural27 project Coordinator)
10.00 - 11.00	Joint discussion on the state-of-play of SV interventions' implementation (dedicated Smart Villages interventions and LEADER) and discussion on the current needs of MAs in terms of improving the implementation of Smart Villages.
11.00 - 11.10	Presentation on the planning of the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (18-19/03/24, Brussels) & specific workshops on the implementation of CSP interventions on Smart Villages by Edina Ocsko (E40, Smart Rural27 project Coordinator)
11.10 – 11.30	Discussion on the Final Conference

3. Outcomes

3.1. Joint discussion on the state-of-play of SV interventions' implementation and the current needs of Managing Authorities

Marianne Selkänaho (*Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland*) emphasised the need for municipalities and villages to cooperate more closely as in Finland, the municipalities are quite large (in terms of territorial scale), therefore, the cooperation with villages is particularly important, especially in sparsely populated areas. The call for Smart Villages dedicated intervention has been launched and there are currently around 50 applications in the system, half of which are under the regional authority (ELY Centers, SV intervention), and half under LEADER (LEADER intervention). Many of these applications are from small (in terms of number of residents) municipalities. There is a large regional change happening in Finland, which affects mostly municipalities, Smart Villages tool is important for the municipalities to reconnect with the local level. There are selection criteria for smart villages, that are in Finnish (that can be shared with those interested). Smart Villages can include digital components, but it is not an obligation. Results to date show that digitalisation is part of almost every



application submitted. Marianne emphasised the importance of “being brave”, trying new things, and collaborating with new partners, also from different countries. In Finland, there is also a possibility to use a lump-sum €5,000 preparatory fund under the Smart Villages intervention (i.e. there is the possibility to apply for the preparatory lump sum funding or Smart Villages project funding under the same intervention). Obtaining preparatory funding does not automatically trigger the Smart Villages funding.

Rita Trattnigg (*Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, Austria*) presented the Austrian approach of supporting Smart Villages and emphasised the importance of the LEADER approach as the main intervention, complemented by other dedicated interventions. The criteria for Smart Villages are based on the EU definition and include digitalisation and new technologies. Based on the Smart Villages analysis of LDSs (carried out under the Smart Rural 27 project), almost all LAGs included SV strategies and/or projects. Smart Village strategies and projects might also be supported under other interventions, such as the European Innovation Partnership (EIP), the interventions on Rural Innovation Network management, and the vacant building rehabilitation. In Austria, ‘smart’ is connected to digital and technological innovation (e.g. digital communication tools dedicated to citizens within municipalities), and the local community level is very important (these characteristics also distinguish SV from the LEADER). It is planned to have a Smart Village laboratory in September 2024 to help municipalities to match with other good practice examples. Smart Village criteria is elaborated for different interventions and can be translated and shared with those interested. Smart village strategy preparation under LEADER is expected to be covered under the LEADER scheme (with no specific additional funding). Other (than LEADER) dedicated interventions could provide extra funding for projects, but it's not clear yet where they are heading (i.e. how the Smart Villages dimension will be reflected in these projects). Rita also mentioned that the most advanced municipalities have applied for other interventions where they could get extra funding for the preparation of SV strategies.

Jelena Dokudovič (*Ministry of Agriculture, Lithuania*) explained that in the case of Lithuania they have a dedicated intervention, in which LAGs will be the main applicants and will submit the Smart Village Strategy (SVS) to the Paying Agency. All projects selected by LAGs will be part of the overall SV strategy. Multiple LAGs can be partners in proposing an SVS, so the strategy can cover an entire LAG or multiple LAG areas, but the SV projects will be at the municipality level, with a maximum of 6,000 inhabitants. The SVS is not directly linked to the LDS, even if they can have similar components. A budget of 8 million euro is planned for the first call.

Attila Nagy (*Ministry of Agriculture, Hungary*) provided an overview of the criteria and selection process for the call for Smart Villages under the dedicated cooperation measure in Hungary. The call is planned to be published in the autumn of 2024 (most likely in October or November). The preparatory phase has not yet started, but eligibility and selection criteria are already specified in the CAP Strategic Plans. These criteria include having at least two partners to cooperate (out of which at least one municipality), reaching a population of at least 1,000 with the cooperation project, and having a connection to LDSs. The most important criterion is having an SV strategy (on average 5 smart village strategies expected per cooperation project). Other selection criteria include the number of municipalities in the cooperation, the territorial coverage, and the number of inhabitants covered by the project. The call will also consider business or project plans, digital solutions, job creation, and social aspects. The financial allocation for the first call is around 4.5 million euro, with the possibility of



an increase if needed (from national top-up funds). In the context of an EU CAP network data collection exercise, information on Smart Villages in the LDSs is collected in Hungary (upon request of the EU CAP Network). The results of this survey will provide more details on how SV are being addressed by LEADER across Hungary.

Ioannis Kovanis (*Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Greece*) shared information about the implementation of SV in Greece. He mentioned that they don't have a strict definition for SV but have some basic implementation and eligibility criteria. They are focusing on cooperation projects in a limited area and are open to various types of innovation, with a preference for digital innovation. They have selected the LAGs and the LDSs are approved – they are optimistic that all LAGs foresee the support of at least one smart village. To support the LAGs, there is a report prepared with information and case studies about SV, and MA is planning a conference for capacity-building by the end of February 2024. LAGs will be asked to revise their targets for SV implementation. Selection criteria will be decided by the LAGs, but MA will assist through guidance. They hope to have the first round of proposals by the end of the summer, but it depends on the LAGs. They are aiming for SV, not just cooperation projects, therefore, the call for proposals will be designed to select SV projects.

Andra Karlson (*Ministry of Agriculture, Latvia*) told that they have selected 33 LDSs, and Smart Villages are mentioned in all of them at various degrees. Few of these LDSs have separate actions / SV projects, with most integrating these projects into broader community activities. The applicants for SV projects can be associations, NGOs, or municipalities. There are also criteria set by LAGs that can result in increased support intensity for SV, particularly those that align with the definition of SV set by national regulations. In January, the Ministry had discussions with LAGs and the national CAP network about the need for capacity-building for communities. The national CAP network is preparing guidelines for communities in becoming SV, which could help LAGs. However, there is still a need for capacity-building beyond just financial investments, and Andra mentioned that they are still working on how to address this issue. There is also the possibility of implementing international or transnational cooperation projects to address capacity-building needs.

Tereza Jedličková (*Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic*) mentioned that they are in the process of developing LDSs, which will include a description on the contribution to SV – LAGs have to describe how they contribute to the concept of SV. However, there are no specific criteria set for SV at the moment. Additionally, there is no separate budget allocated for SV projects, but they may be supported by other funds. Tereza mentioned that she can only speak for the Ministry of Agriculture, she didn't provide further details on the specific initiatives or plans in place for Smart Villages under other programmes / funds in Czechia.

Luminita Sasu (*Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Romania*) mentioned that they are currently in the process of evaluating LDSs, with nearly 250 strategies to evaluate, but the final number of selected LAGs is not yet determined. Within these strategies, there will be support for SV strategies. However, the exact number of SV interventions are not available at the moment as they are still in the middle of the evaluation and selection process. LAGs can have supplementary points in the selection process for including SVs in their strategies.



3.2. Discussion on the Smart Rural 27 Final Conference (18-19 March, Brussels)

The conversation continued with Edina Ocsko **providing an overview of the upcoming Final Conference of Smart Rural 27**, which will take place in Brussels on the 18th and 19th of March 2024. The first day will focus on inspiring approaches from different communities, with presentations from lighthouse examples and discussions about Communities Knowledge Clusters. The second day will feature presentations on the outcomes of National Smart Villages Taskforces, with discussions on supporting SV through dedicated interventions and workshops on practical recommendations for improving the framework.

Edina then asked the participants to share their thoughts on what they would like to hear more about from other Member States or what kind of information would be useful for them in the future. Participants shared suggestions for the upcoming event and future collaboration:

- Luminita Sasu (Romania) expressed interest in **understanding the typology of smart village projects**, meaning the types of projects being implemented in different areas.
- Ioannis Kovanis (Greece) highlighted the **importance of knowing the selection criteria used by other countries**, as it would provide valuable insight into the types of projects being funded. This information could help Greece in shaping its own project selection criteria.

Edina Ocsko acknowledged these suggestions and **emphasised the importance of collecting and sharing this information among the participating countries**, especially the details of the implementation of SV interventions (including selection and eligibility criteria). She also mentioned the need to work on the dedicated interventions and encouraged further collaboration and information sharing in the future.

4. Conclusions

In the concluding remarks, Edina Ocsko (E40) thanked all the participants for their contributions and active participation. She highlighted the importance of continued collaboration and information sharing among the participating countries to further support SV across Europe. She encouraged those who haven't signed up for the Final Conference to do so and expressed the willingness of the project team to provide any information needed from the Smart Rural 27 project.