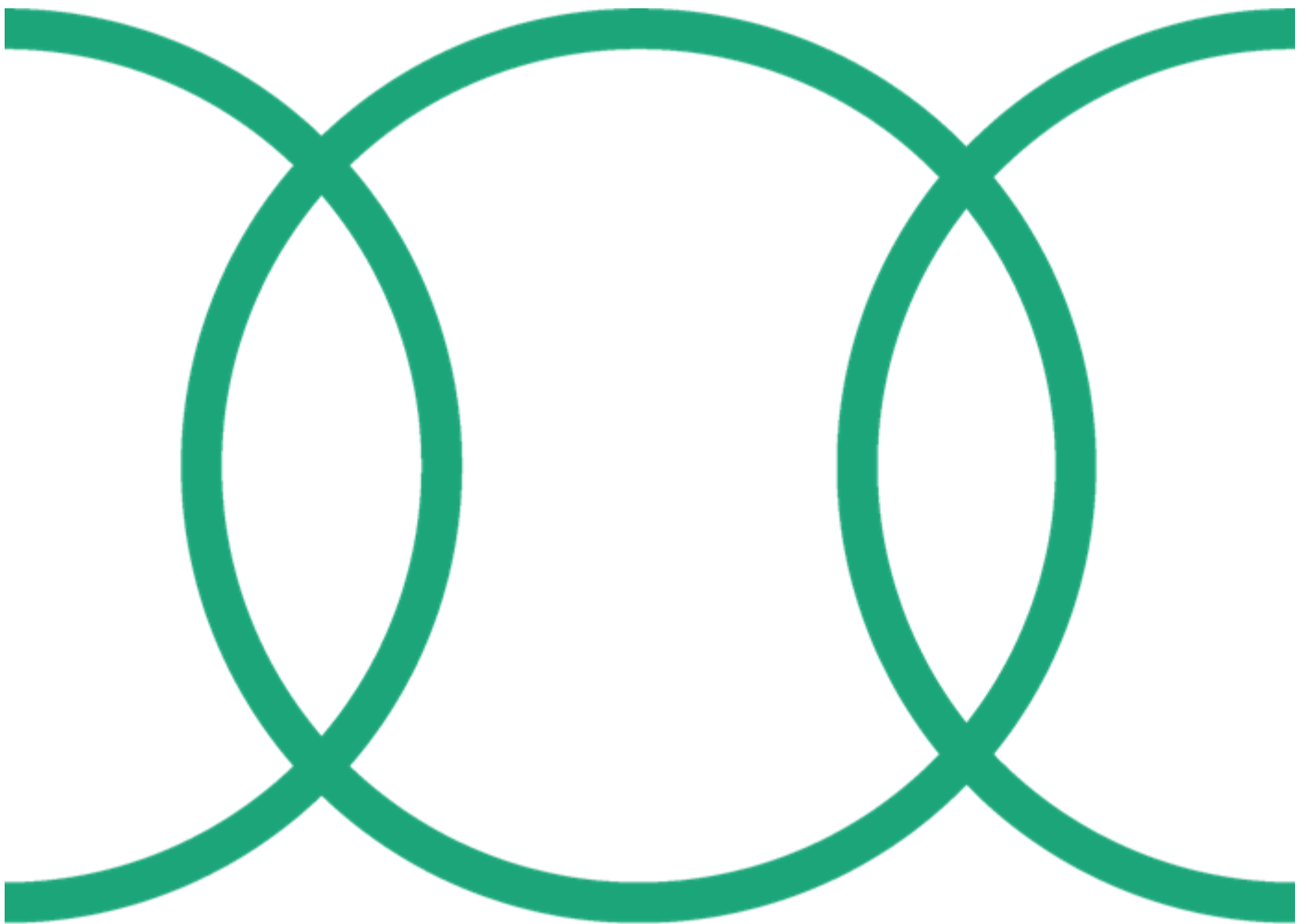


# D2.4. First report on creation and animation of ITHubs



## Document control sheet

<b>Project</b>	FOREST4EU – European innovation partnership network promoting operational groups dedicated to forestry and agroforestry
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### Executive Summary

Deliverable 2.4, “First report on creation and animation of ITHubs,” presents the process undertaken to create and animate the five thematic innovation Hubs (ITHubs) and the transversal Hub within the FOREST4EU project. This report includes a detailed description of each ITHub's structure including the project partners, stakeholders from Operational Groups (OGs) and other relevant stakeholders involved in each ITHub.

Additionally, this report provides a comprehensive overview of the functioning of the ITHubs including the roles of each partner within the ITHubs, their responsibilities, internal operations (meetings, communication strategies, etc.), and the methods used to engage stakeholders from OGs and not belonging to OGs. Moreover, this report includes an overview of the profiles and interests of the stakeholders engaged in the project during the first 18 months. It also details all activities conducted with stakeholder participation, such as the collection of innovations, expert consultations, national prioritization workshops, policy focus groups, and an innovation survey. For each activity, the report includes a brief description, the results, and the profiles of the stakeholders that participated. Finally, this deliverable outlines the strategy that will be followed in the next months to continue animating the five thematic innovation ITHubs and the transversal Hub.

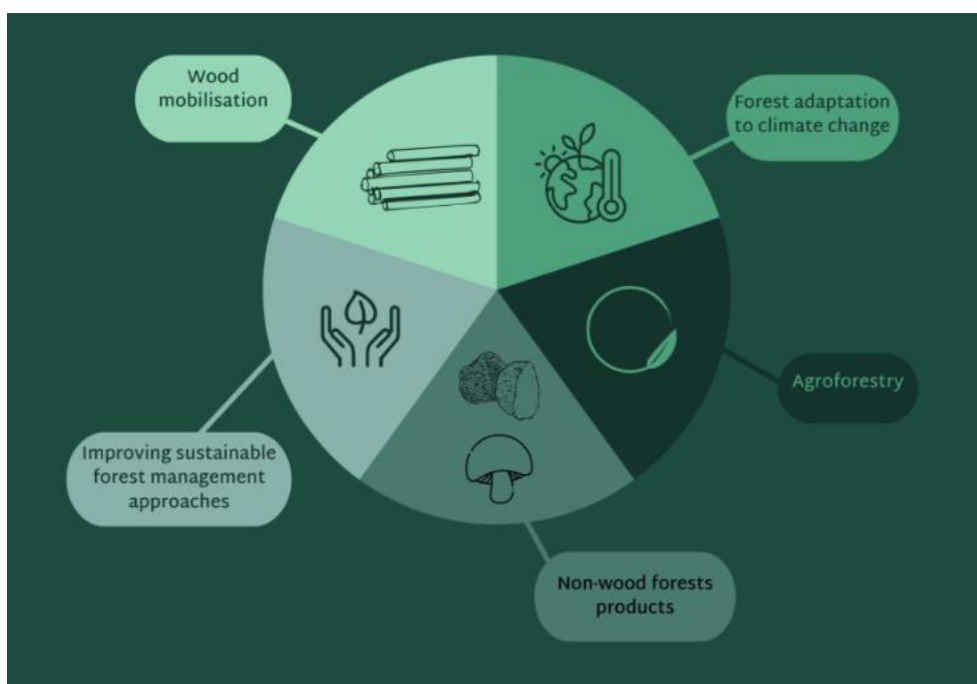
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## 1. Introduction

Deliverable 2.4, “First Report on Creation and Animation of ITHubs,” details the approach used to create and animate the five thematic Hubs and the transversal Hub established within the FOREST4EU project following the methodological guidelines outlined in D.1.1, “Methodological Approach for the Management of the Five ITHubs.”

The five ITHubs are multi-actor, inter-regional Innovation Topic Hubs focused on five key priority topics. The goal of each ITHub is to ensure that knowledge and innovations produced by Operational Groups (OGs) reach the forestry and agroforestry sectors at the EU level. The topics addressed by the ITHubs are: 1) Wood Mobilisation, 2) Forest Adaptation to Climate Change, 3) Sustainable Forest Management and Ecosystem Services, 4) Non-Wood Forest Products, and 5) Agroforestry Systems (Figure 1). The Transversal Hub addresses issues related to more than one of the thematic Hubs.



**Figure 1:** Overview of the five thematic Hubs created in the context of the FOREST4EU project.

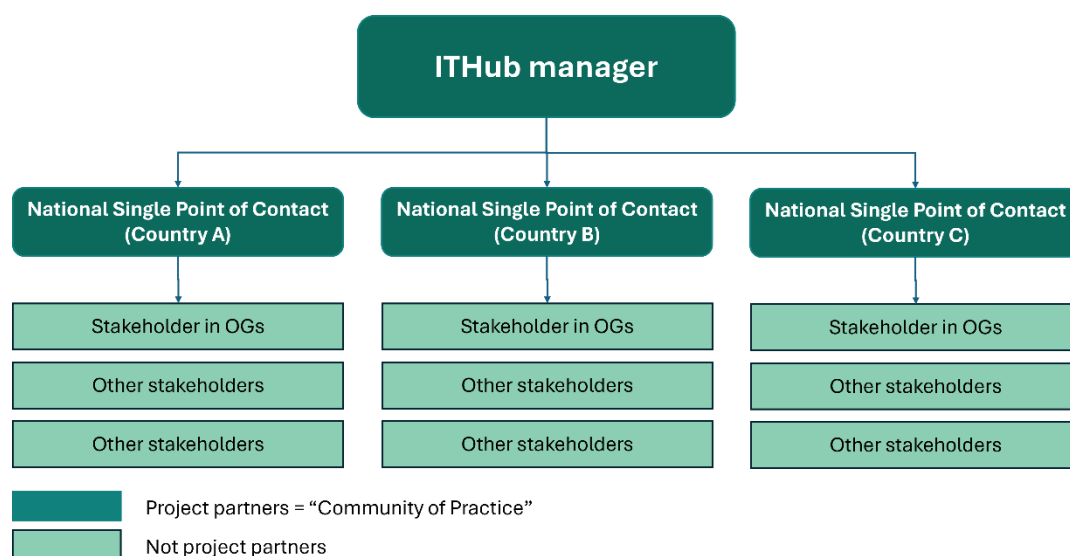
The five thematic and the Transversal ITHubs are designed to create an interregional “network of networks” that encompass researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, aiming to significantly increase the multi-directional information flow along the innovation topics across EU regions. Moreover, the ITHubs allowed the project to better organize tasks internally and to engage with local stakeholders to collect, process, and disseminate the practical knowledge generated by local EPI-AGRI OGs to all EU regions.

The constitution of the five thematic ITHubs and the Transversal IHub began before the project’s official start and continued throughout its duration, involving several sequential steps. First, actors from selected OGs related to the forestry and agroforestry sector in various EU countries (i.e., Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Latvia, and Slovenia) were engaged across the five identified innovation topics. Second, additional OG members (practitioners on a voluntary basis and policymakers - non-official FOREST4EU partners), were engaged during the first year of the project. Third, stakeholders from all project countries and beyond were involved by registering them in a confidential stakeholders database. Fourth, the exchange of information about the innovations developed was and will be fostered through

regions by creating easy-to-use knowledge materials and by fostering exchange events. These activities will continue in the successive phase of the project as outlined in D.1.1, where it is indicated that the results of OGs will be scaled up at the EU level, including in countries where they have not yet been adopted, thus strengthening the network cross-sectional and at the EU scale.

## 2. ITHubs structure and function

In the context of the FOREST4EU project, the ITHubs are formed by the community of practice (i.e., ITHub managers, National Single Point of Contact, and other project partners as ITHub members) and by non-project partners (i.e., stakeholders from OGs and other stakeholders from project partner countries or other countries sharing the same language) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Overview of the structure of the ITHubs.

Each member of the community of practice has a distinctive role:

**1. ITHub Manager:** It is in charge of the coordination but also participates in all activities carried out within the ITHub. ITHub Managers also act as the intermediary in all communications between the specific ITHub and the FOREST4EU coordinator & work packages leaders.

**2. National Single Point of Contact (NSPOC):** One NSPOC has been appointed for each country involved in each ITHub. The NSPOC are in charge of implementing the project activities.

**3. Member:** For each ITHub with more than one member per country, the corresponding ITHub Manager or NSPOC are joined by Members, supporting the different activities of the specific ITHub.

Additionally, the **Transversal IHub** is composed by the five ITHub Managers, allowing a strong collaboration and an efficient exchange of information and experiences.

The structure of each ITHub in the FOREST4EU project is presented in Figure 3.

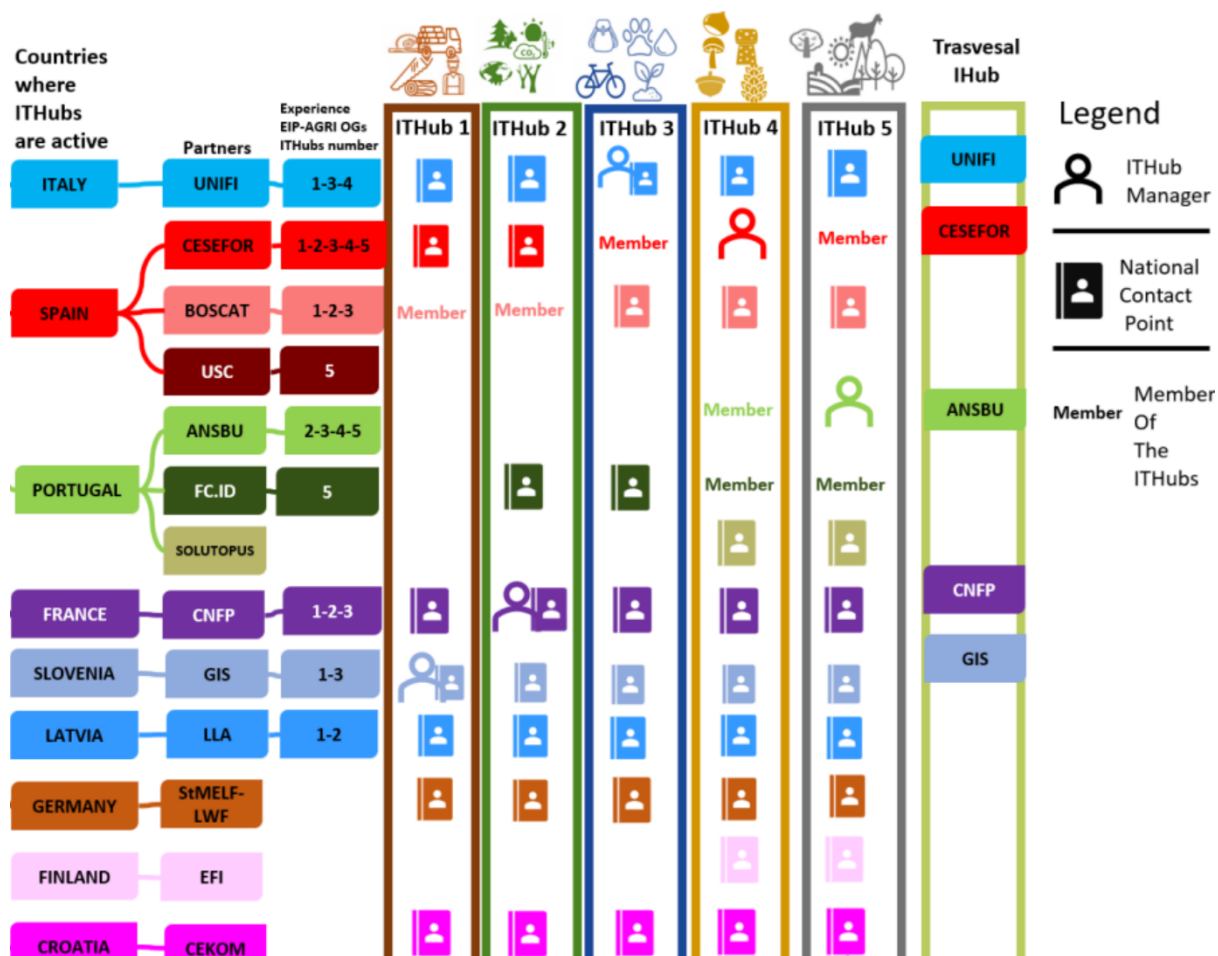


Figure 3: Structure of the ITHubs in the FOREST4EU project including the name and role of each project partner.

### 3. Functioning of the ITHubs

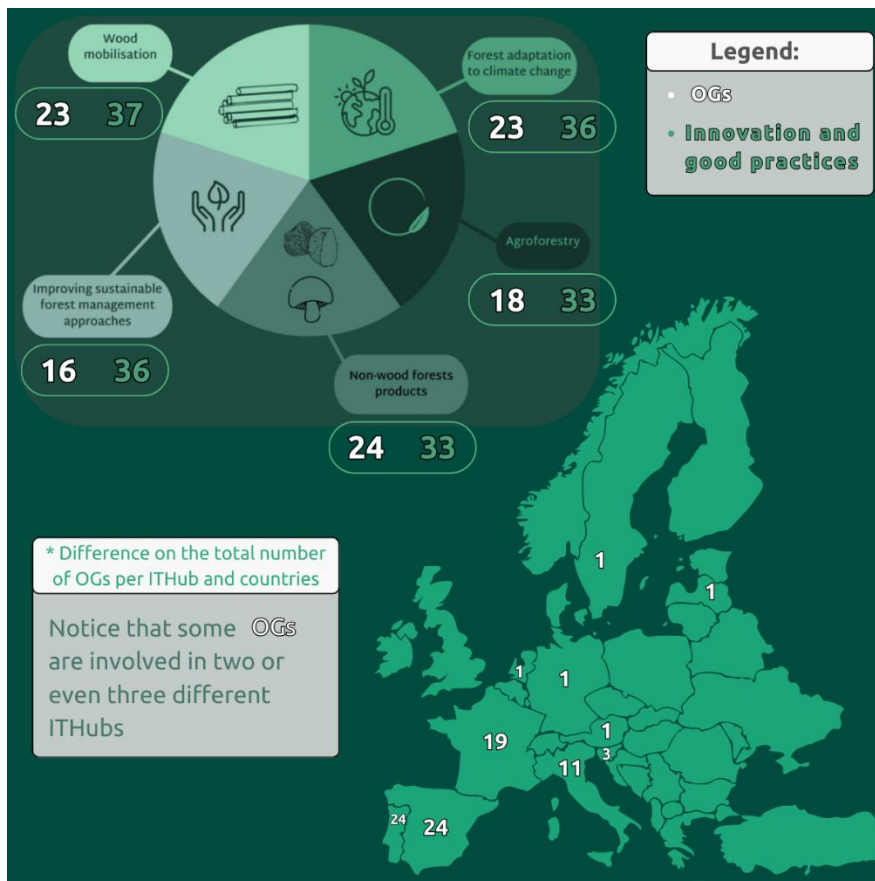
#### 3.1. Communication within the ITHubs and between the ITHubs

To facilitate effective internal communication among all partners involved in the five thematic hubs (ITHub Manager, NSPOCs, and ITHub Members) and to ensure the smooth progress of the project activities according to the guidelines outlined in D1.1, regular communication is conducted through email and monthly meetings via the official FOREST4EU TEAMS channel. Additionally, complementary online meetings are arranged as per partners' requests. The monthly ITHub meetings took place during 2023 every fourth Wednesday of the month at 15:15 CET, and during 2024 every third Thursday of the month at 10:00 CET. Issues related to the transversal ITHub are addressed during the monthly online Steering Committee meetings, which occurred every first Wednesday of the month at 15:00 CET in 2023 and every first Thursday of the month at 10:00 CET in 2024.

### 3.2. Engagement with stakeholders from Operational Groups

All partners involved in the five thematic ITHubs (ITHub Manager, NSPOCs, and ITHub Members) reached out to the local OGs in the forestry and agroforestry sector by leveraging their knowledge of OGs and consulting the EU-CAP-Network database of projects ([https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/projects\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/projects_en)). Moreover, OGs from countries outside the consortium were also contacted and engaged with the project. As a result of these efforts, the number of OGs involved in the project increased from 52 at the beginning of the project to 103 by May 2024, distributed across the five ITHubs (Figure 4).

The involvement of OGs was crucial for the development of essential activities of the project, such as Task 1.2 “Collection of Existing Practical Knowledge from Selected EIP-AGRI OGs.” For this task, each project partner contacted the coordinator or another OG partner and collected all relevant information about the innovations they developed. Based on the information collected, extended summaries (Task 1.2) and practice abstracts (Task 1.3) were elaborated.



**Figure 4:** Overview of the number of OGs, their localization across Europe and the number of innovations collected in each ITHub.

### 3.3. Engagement with other relevant stakeholders

As stated in D1.1., all the project partners involved in the five ITHubs (i.e. ITHub Managers, NSPOCs and ITHub Members) engaged stakeholders (non-official FOREST4EU partners) acting as professional multipliers towards forest owners (not exclusively coming from OGs): managers, advisors, associations, agencies, chambers of agriculture and

forestry and companies in the forestry and agroforestry fields, from the countries where the ITHubs are present, plus from other countries that share the languages used by the FOREST4EU partners.

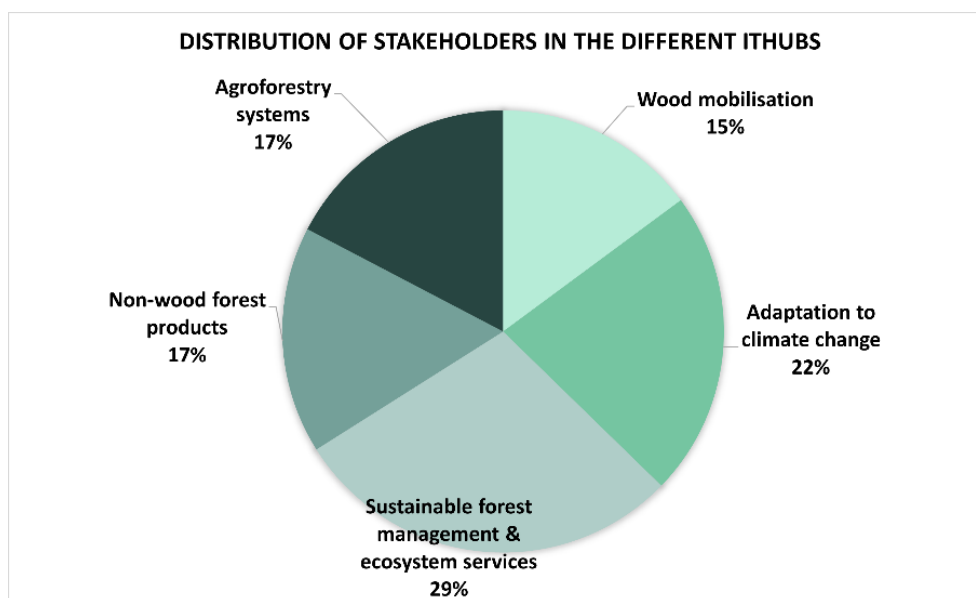
In general, the strategy followed by the partners was to share information about the project and the possibility of becoming a stakeholder in the broad sense through:

1. Partners networks and contacts
2. Direct contact with OGs linked and not directly linked to the project
3. Communication campaigns using the FOREST4EU website and social media (e.g. LinkedIn) and project partners communication tools (i.e X, LinkedIn, Newsletter, etc.).

The interested stakeholders were consensually registered into an online database respecting the General Data Protection Regulation. To this end, a specific online form was developed and made available online (see Annex 1). The database was used to require the stakeholder's participation in the project's activities and it was incrementally populated since the beginning of the project.

### 3.4. Overview of stakeholders database

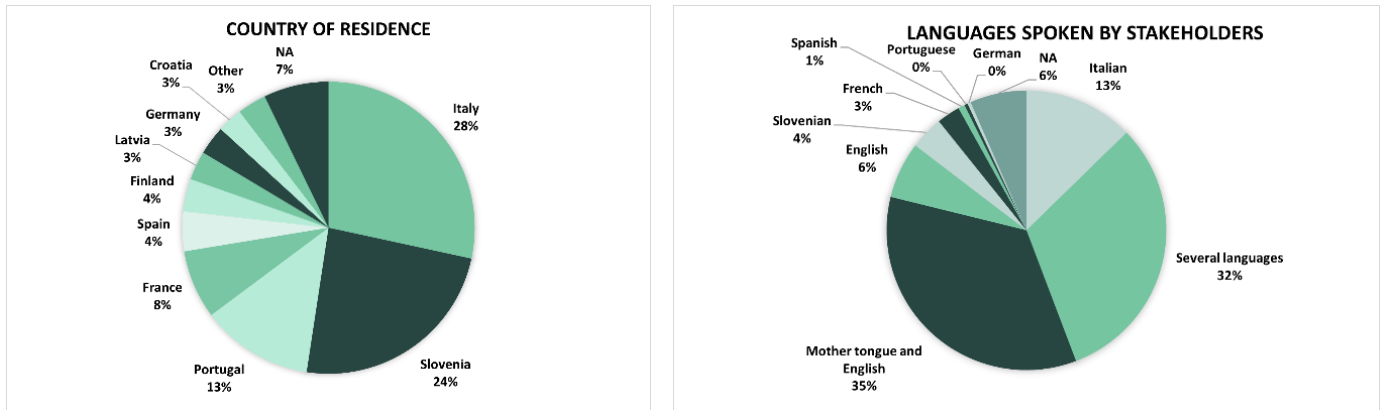
By May 10, 2024, the stakeholders' database contained a total of 250 stakeholders, with more than 100 stakeholders registered in each of the ITHubs, as many stakeholders expressed interest in more than one ITHub. In general, there was relatively even interest across the five ITHubs. However, the share of stakeholders registered in the ITHub "Sustainable Forest Management and Ecosystem Services" and the ITHub dedicated to "Adaptation to Climate Change" was slightly higher than in the other ITHubs (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** Overview of the distribution of the stakeholders across the ITHubs.

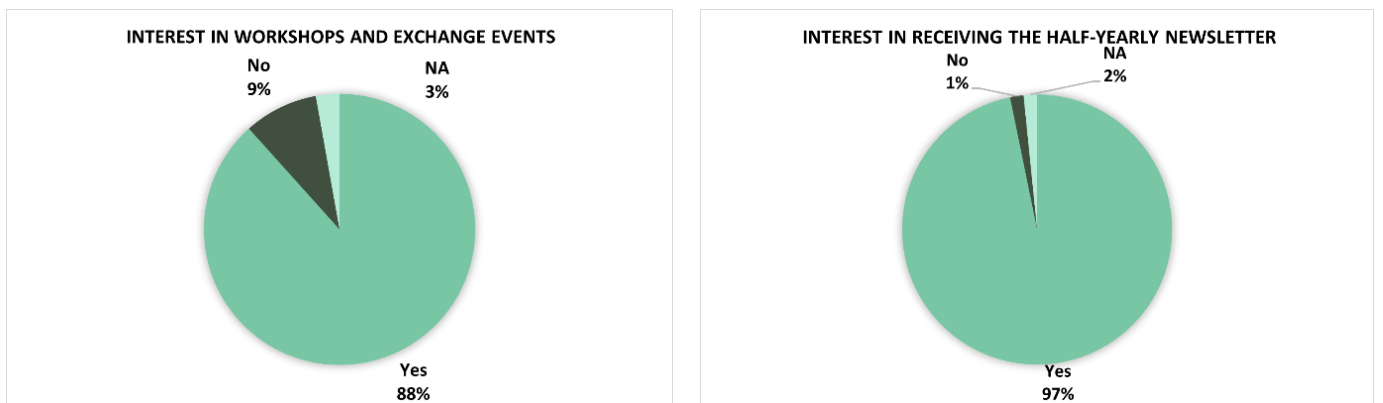
Most of the stakeholders registered in the project's database live in project partners countries. The largest share of stakeholders came from Italy, followed by Slovenia, and then Portugal. Moreover, most stakeholders declared proficiency in several languages. In addition to their mother tongue, most stakeholders spoke English. A similar percentage of stakeholders indicated proficiency in several languages, which often included English (Figure 6).





**Figure 6:** Overview of the country of residence of the stakeholders and the languages they speak.

The vast majority of the stakeholders indicated to be interested in getting actively involved in the project by participating in workshops and other exchange events organized in the context of the FOREST4EU project (88%) and in receiving the newsletter of the project (97%) to be informed about the project activities and events (Figure 7).



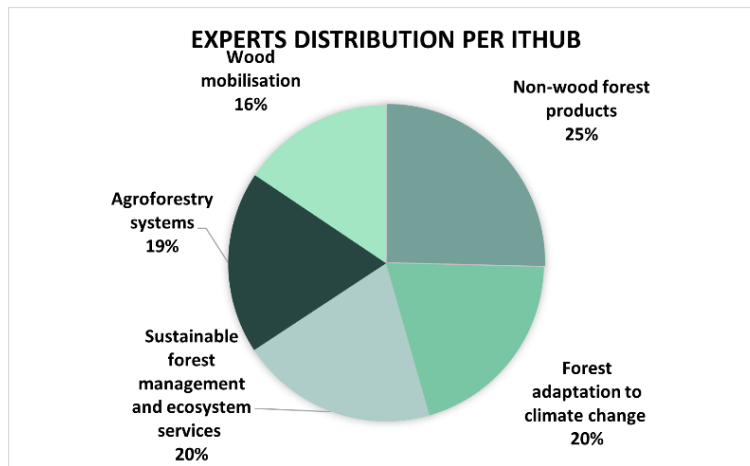
**Figure 7:** Overview of the interest of the stakeholders in participating in workshops and exchange events organized in the context of the FOREST4EU project and on receiving the project newsletter.

## 4. Overview of stakeholders’ participation in project activities

### 4.1. Prioritization activities: Experts consultation

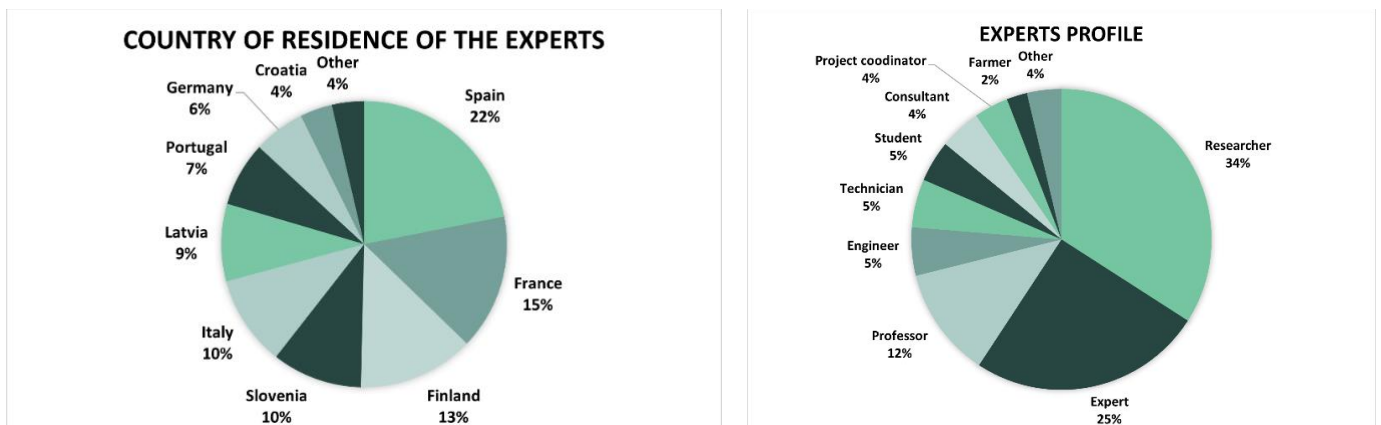
A selection of stakeholders, considered "experts" in the context of the project (e.g., researchers, advisers, consultants, past OG coordinators, public servants, practitioners with vast experience in one or more of the topics addressed by the ITHubs), were invited to participate in a process aimed at identifying the most relevant innovations developed by OGs and collected in the framework of the FOREST4EU project. In this process, the experts were invited, on a voluntary basis, to review the collected innovations, discard knowledge unsuitable for a given country, and prioritize the innovations using a score from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest priority (November 2023 – December 2023). This activity was crucial in identifying the most relevant innovations to be conveyed as capacity-building

material in each of the project partner countries. A total of 139 experts participated, with a relatively even distribution across the ITHubs, although slightly more experts on non-wood forest products participated in this activity (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Overview of the distribution of the experts’ participation across the ITHubs.

Most of the experts contacted were from Spain, followed by France and Finland (Figure 9). The majority were researchers, followed by a category of “experts” that included public servants, company directors, NGO directors, followed then by university professors (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Overview of experts’ country residence and profile.

#### 4.2. Prioritization activities: National workshops

Another group of stakeholders was invited to participate in national prioritization workshops organized in Slovenia, Spain, Latvia, Portugal, Italy, Finland, Germany, France, and Croatia between February and April 2024. In these workshops, local stakeholders from a variety of organizations, with diverse profiles and promoting gender balance, were invited to evaluate and prioritize innovations that had already been deemed relevant by local experts (as described earlier). The goal was to retain the most relevant innovations per ITHub and to gather information about the best formats and channels to disseminate the capacity-building material to be created for these innovations as part of the project activities. Additionally, during these meetings, local stakeholders were asked to indicate which OGs they would like to visit in the context of the FOREST4EU project. The results of these workshops are reported in detail

in D2.1, "Action Plan for Capacity Building Material and Activities and Selected Formats, Channels, and Practical Knowledge to be Transferred as Capacity Building at National Level."

In all the workshops the project partners secured a high participation of local stakeholders. Nevertheless, the workshop with the higher participation was the organized in Italy with a total of 53 stakeholders followed by Slovenia with 48 stakeholders (Figure 10 and Figure 11).



**Figure 10:** Workshops organized in the nine project partner countries (online, in person and hybrid).



**Figure 11:** Overview of the share of stakeholders that participated in the different national prioritization workshops.

### 4.3. Policy focus groups

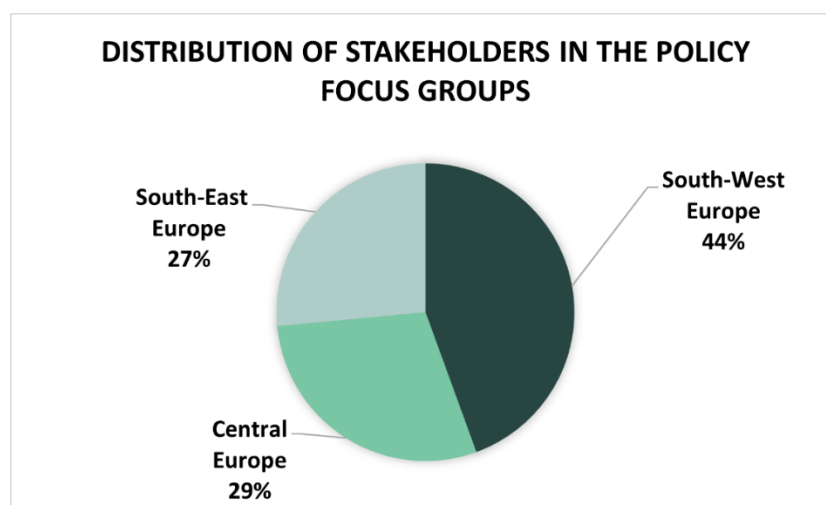
Three Policy Focus Groups were created by the FOREST4EU project, covering: (1) Central Europe, (2) South-East Europe, and (3) South-West Europe. These groups link the policy community with research on innovation practices in forestry and agroforestry, accounting for regional patterns of forest management, including multipurpose forestry and

ecosystem management, and the different uptake of CAP funding for EIP-Agri OGs in forestry and agroforestry for lesson-learning.

The policy focus groups aim to:

1. Provide feedback on survey findings about facilitators and barriers of innovation.
2. Discuss relevant policy developments at the EU level affecting innovation in forestry and agroforestry sectors.
3. Make recommendations for EU policymakers to enhance the adoption of OGs in forestry and agroforestry.

In the three policy focus groups a total of 117 stakeholders are registered. Most of the stakeholders (44%) are registered in the South-West policy focus groups while the number of participants in the South-East and Central Europe is very similar (Figure 12).



**Figure 12:** Overview of the share of stakeholders registered in each of the policy focus group.

The participants in the policy focus groups have very variable fields of expertise, all very relevant for the policy analysis in the context of the FOREST4EU project. However, a clear majority declared to have expertise in “forest ecosystem services” and “adaptation to climate change” in both forestry and agriculture. Moreover, also a high share of the stakeholders of the policy focus groups declared to work in the field of “agroforestry” and “rural development” (Figure 13).

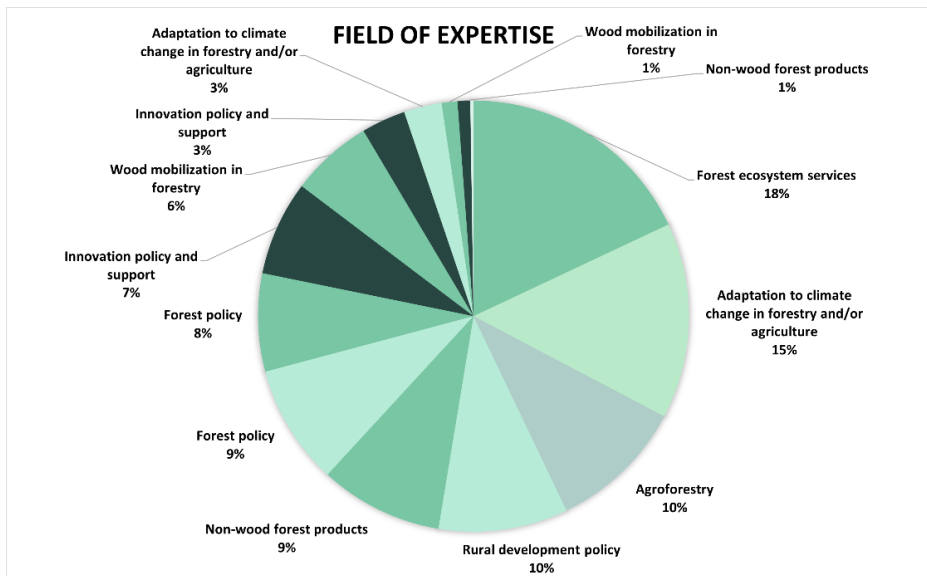


Figure 13: Overview of the field of expertise of the stakeholders in the policy focus groups.

#### 4.4. Innovation survey

A European-wide survey was implemented to learn from practitioners, policymakers, interest groups, and other stakeholders (including OG members) about how innovation in the forest sector can be improved was conducted online. The survey contained three general topics:

1. Personal view of general conditions for innovations in the forest sector.
2. OG-specific influencing factors for innovation in the forest sector (questions only for past or present OG members).
3. Application procedure for OGs.

The survey was implemented in the 10 languages of the project partners plus Swedish, and 326 persons have fully answered it, 73 of whom are or have been members of OGs. Answers were obtained from 21 countries, including all the project partner countries. For the partner countries, a participation of ca. 30 fully answered questionnaires was pursued, which was achieved in most cases except for Spain, Latvia, and France.

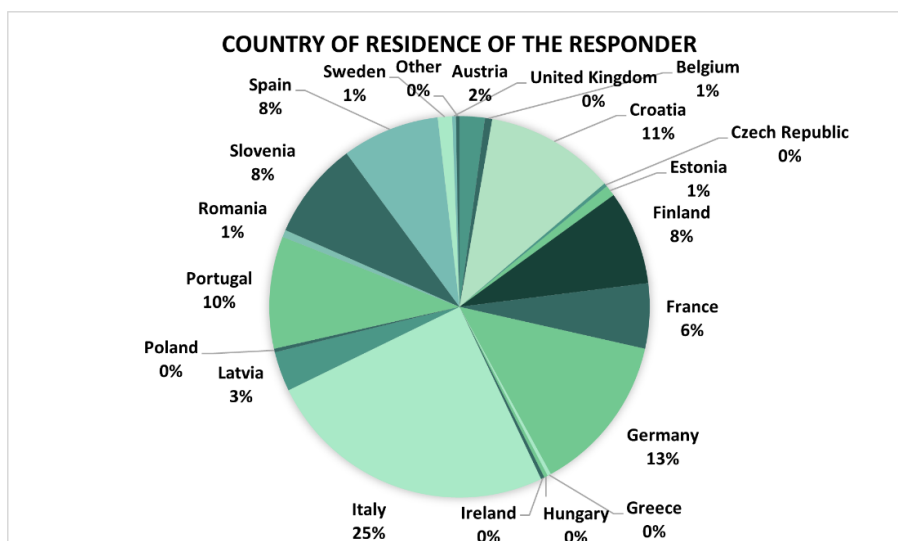
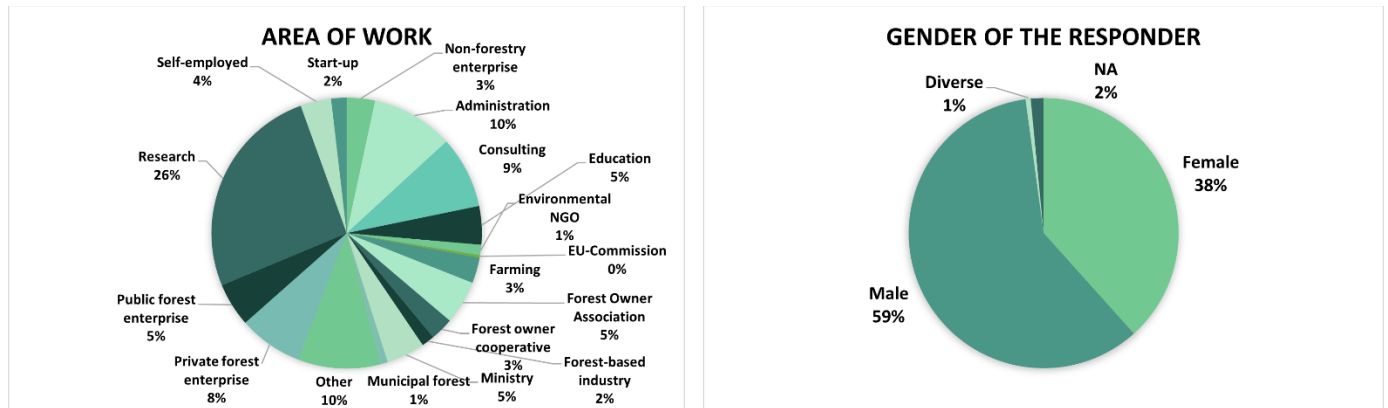


Figure 14: Overview of the country of residence of the survey's responder.

The respondents work in a wide variety of areas with the vast majority working in research, followed by administration, and then by private forests. Additionally, although there was a slightly higher representation of male opinions, the participation of females and diversities accounted for 39% of the responses obtained.



**Figure 15:** Overview of the country of residence and gender of the responders.

The survey results will be presented in D3.2 “Drivers in Policies and Administration for Innovation in Forestry and Agroforestry” (M18), discussed with the Policy Focus Groups members, and further elaborated for D3.3 “Update of Drivers in Policies and Administration for Innovation in Forestry and Agroforestry” (M21). Additionally, the survey results will be analyzed for scientific publications.

## 5. Conclusion

The creation and animation of the five thematic innovation hubs (ITHubs) have been pivotal in fostering collaboration, knowledge gathering and sharing and in identifying of the most relevant innovations for the forestry and agroforestry sector in the context of the FOREST4EU project. In the framework of this project, a comprehensive stakeholders database was established, which includes a diverse range of participants such as industry experts, researchers, policy makers, farmers, and community leaders. The database serves as a vital resource for connecting with stakeholders, facilitating communication, and promoting synergies and participation in the different project activities. Several activities were organized to engage stakeholders, including online consultations and surveys, workshops, and policy focus groups while in the coming months capacity building material will be disseminated and international field visits will take place. Moreover, the project stakeholders are continuously informed about the project activities by the project newsletter and social media. The project activities worked also as platforms for stakeholders to meet, exchange ideas and points of view, learn about innovations developed for the forest and agroforestry sectors and express their concerns and demands about policy aspects. The active participation and positive feedback from stakeholders underscore the importance and effectiveness of the established ITHubs and the key role of the project partners (ITHub managers, NSPOC or ITHub members) to engage local stakeholders in the different project partner countries and beyond.

## 6. Next Steps

To build on the momentum and success of the project, the following next steps will take place:

**Expand the Stakeholder Database:** Continue identifying and including new stakeholders to ensure the database remains comprehensive and up-to-date. Maintain the communication channels, especially social media and newsletter, to keep stakeholders engaged.

**Enhance Communication and Collaboration:** Continue updating the project website to facilitate easy access to the stakeholder's database, to information about project events (in person and online), project resources (e.g. capacity building material), etc. Encourage regular virtual and in-person meetings to sustain the collaborative spirit fostered by the ITHubs.

**Organize International field visits:** During the second half of 2024 and 2025, five international field visits (one per ITHub) will be organized with the collaboration of the OGs that will be visited. They will allow foreign practitioners to directly learn knowledge from OGs that they can use and transfer into their countries. Attendees will be carefully selected to maximize and multiply the impact at their home countries. To optimise the impact, the international study visits will last at least three days, will visit several OGs of the same ITHub and, whenever possible, will encompass several countries.

**Exchange events with other relevant projects:** In 2024 exchange events with sister projects including key stakeholders will take place (e.g. during the 8<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Forest Week – Barcelona November 2024) in order to increase the impact of the project and to have the possibility to reach out to the other projects' stakeholders and organize joint activities looking to potentiate synergies.

**Promote Knowledge Sharing:** Capacity building material will be created for the innovations that were considered the most relevant by the experts and local stakeholders. The material will be created in several languages, in the preferred format and disseminated in the preferred channel and will include reports, manuals, and videos, among others. Moreover, all the material produced will be made available in the project website, advertised in the newsletter and social media and uploaded in the knowledge repository EU-FarmBook increasing the visibility of the material produced.

By implementing these next steps, we can ensure the sustainability and growth of the ITHubs, ultimately driving forward innovation, efficiency, and sustainability in the forestry and agroforestry sectors. Continued collaboration and proactive engagement with stakeholders will be key to achieving these goals and maximizing the impact of the project.

**Monitor and Evaluate Progress:**

All the activities will be monitored and as well as the incremented population of the stakeholder's database.

## 7. Annex 1: Structure of the stakeholders' database

- Please confirm you would like to be included in the FOREST4EU stakeholders' database
- Please confirm you would like to hear from us by email  
Consent form
- I have read the Consent form and hereby authorize the use and processing of my personal data in compliance with EU Regulation no. 2016/679 GDPR.

1. Full name

2. Organization or company

3. Field of work (more than one is possible)

- Wood mobilisation
- Adaptation to climate change
- Sustainable forest management & ecosystem services
- Non-wood forest products
- Agroforestry systems

4. Interested in (more than one is possible):

- Wood mobilisation
- Adaptation to climate change
- Sustainable forest management & ecosystem services
- Non-wood forest products
- Agroforestry systems

5. Role/ position

- Director
- Advisor
- Manager
- Forest owner
- Administrator
- Association member
- NGO member
- Researcher
- Other (specify)

6. Country of work (drop-down list with all the countries names)

7. Are you part of a present or past Operational Group (OG)?

- Yes
- No

If yes, indicate the name of the OG

8. Are you interested in participating in the workshops and exchange events in the context of the FOREST4EU project?

- Yes
- No



9. Do you have previous experience participating in the workshops and exchange events?

- Yes
- No

10. Are you interested in receiving the half-yearly newsletter from the FOREST4EU project?

- Yes
- No

11. Are you a member or stakeholder in another project?

- No
- Yes (please select)
  - ResAlliance
  - AF4EU
  - Nutricheck-Net
  - EUNetHorse
  - Nutri-know
  - TRANSITON
  - REFOREST

12. Country of residence (drop-down list with all the countries names)

13. Languages spoken/preferred for communication – multichoice

- English
- Italian
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- French
- Slovenian
- Latvian
- German
- Finish
- Croatian
- Other (specify)

14. Preferred channel to access information

- radio
- podcasts
- TV.
- Internet
- Social media
- Email
- Other (specify)

15. Preferred format of information

- Video

- Image
- Audio
- Text

16. Age

17. Gender (m, f, d)

18. Email address