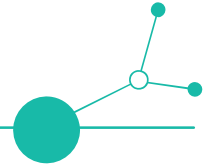


## D3.1.3 Regional Action Plans for AFNs support in participating regions (IT)



12 2024





Food4CE

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[www.interreg-central.eu/food4ce/](http://www.interreg-central.eu/food4ce/)



## 1. The Food4CE Project in a nutshell

Food4CE is a European project funded by the INTERREG Central Europe Programme, aimed at supporting Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in their efforts to create sustainable and resilient food supply systems. AFNs are essential for promoting short food supply chains and reducing the carbon footprint of food distribution. However, they face challenges such as lack of knowledge on logistics collaboration, digitalisation and distribution/delivery systems, which are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food4CE seeks to address these challenges by establishing 5 local and 1 Transnational Innovation Hub (IH), bringing together actors from different sectors including researchers, business experts, food producers, logistic and transport operators, and policy makers. These hubs will focus on advancing AFNs logistics efficiency through the development of innovative tools and solutions.

Two innovative tools are being jointly developed within the project: the Knowledge Transfer Platform and the Matchmaking Platform. The former is intended for sharing logistics best practices and solutions, while the latter is intended for creating new B2B and B2C logistics solutions and services. The aim is to facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange between different regions and actors, and to create a unique mutual support network for AFNs in Central Europe.

Food4CE will also provide jointly developed regional action plans for each participating region and transnational (CE) policy guidelines for AFN support. The project aims to establish a sustainable and lasting AFN support mechanism, which will continue working even after the project end. This will be achieved through the integration of the Transnational Innovation Hub into the existing European Network of Logistics competence centres.

Food4CE is a vital initiative that seeks to support AFNs in their efforts to create sustainable and resilient food supply systems. By establishing local and transnational Innovation Hubs and developing innovative tools and solutions, the project aims to facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation between different actors and regions, leading to a sustainable and lasting AFN support mechanism.



## 2. Purpose of the document

The purpose of the regional action plan, titled “D.3.1.3 Regional Action Plans for AFNs Support in Participating Regions,” is to outline concrete strategies and steps for enhancing Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) within each participating Central European region. Each regional action plan serves as a targeted roadmap for implementing specific activities and interventions that respond to the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities identified in that region. The objectives of the deliverable include defining clear policy recommendations, proposing actionable measures, and identifying key stakeholders necessary for effective implementation.

These plans aim to ensure that Innovation Hub activities are translated into region-specific actions that promote sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems. Through detailed tasks, timelines, and milestones, the action plans will foster stakeholder collaboration, increase support for AFNs, and facilitate tangible policy and systemic changes to strengthen local and regional food systems.

## 3. General Information

### 3.1. Overview of the Region

Emilia-Romagna, located in north-central Italy, is a region of significant geographical and economic diversity. Covering an area of approximately 22,446 square kilometres, it comprises nine provinces: Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena, Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Ravenna, Reggio Emilia, and Rimini. The region is bordered by the Adriatic Sea to the east, and shares land boundaries with Lombardy and Veneto to the north, Piedmont to the west, and Liguria, Tuscany, and the Marche to the south.

#### Geographical Features

Emilia-Romagna's region is divided into distinct zones:

- **Plains:** Approximately 48% of the region consists of plains, primarily in the northern part, forming a significant portion of the fertile Po Valley.
- **Hills:** About 27% of the area is hilly, characterized by rolling landscapes that transition between the plains and mountainous regions.
- **Mountains:** The remaining 25% is mountainous, dominated by the northern Apennines, which feature unique geological formations such as badland erosion (calanques) and caves.

#### Resources

In terms of **freshwater**, Emilia-Romagna's extensive network of rivers, including the Po, Reno, Secchia, and Panaro, is complemented by a system of artificial canals designed for irrigation, drainage, and flood control. Beneath the region lies a multi-layered aquifer system, supplying over 30% of its freshwater resources. The Geological, Seismic, and Soil Survey (SGSS) has identified and mapped three primary groundwater bodies within the superficial aquifer. However, increasing drought frequency and severity, linked to climate change, may lead to higher reliance on groundwater to meet freshwater demands.



Agriculture is very water-intensive in the region (especially considering the livestock specialization), with a high freshwater footprint. Moreover, the intensive and livestock-based agricultural regional model results in high nitrate concentration in soils and often groundwater nitrate contamination. Droughts and extreme weather events caused by climate change are posing serious challenges to the management of freshwater resources, which are becoming scarcer.

Moving to **land and soil**, the Region has experienced decades of fast urbanization, resulting in land use change from agricultural and natural land to sealed land. In 2023, sealed land accounts for 8.91% of the total land, whereas agricultural land accounts for 54%. Soil consumption is considered a major environmental problem in the region, due to its negative trend (compared to other Italian regions), population patterns and recent extreme weather events.

Agricultural soil is generally fertile, with good levels of soil organic matter, in particular the alluvial soils of the Po Valley (where most agro-industrial crops are located). In the hills and Apennines, soil is more diversified in terms of fertility.

Apart from the shift to urban use (sealing), agricultural land faces several pressures, including soil erosion (one of the highest in Europe) due to droughts, tillage practices and precipitation patterns (caused by climate change). Moreover, agro-industrial practices in the Po Valley are associated, in the long run, with decreased soil organic matter, challenging the sustainability of the long-term agricultural model.

In terms of **biodiversity**, the region hosts a variety of ecosystems and over 2,200 plant species and 40% of Italy's animal species. In the region, there are 11 protected Regional Parks, and 7 Nature Reserves, which cover 12.5% of the region's total land area. Threats to biodiversity off and on field are soil consumption, industrial agriculture (due to pesticide use and monocropping) and climate change (due to changes in temperature and weather patterns)<sup>1</sup>.

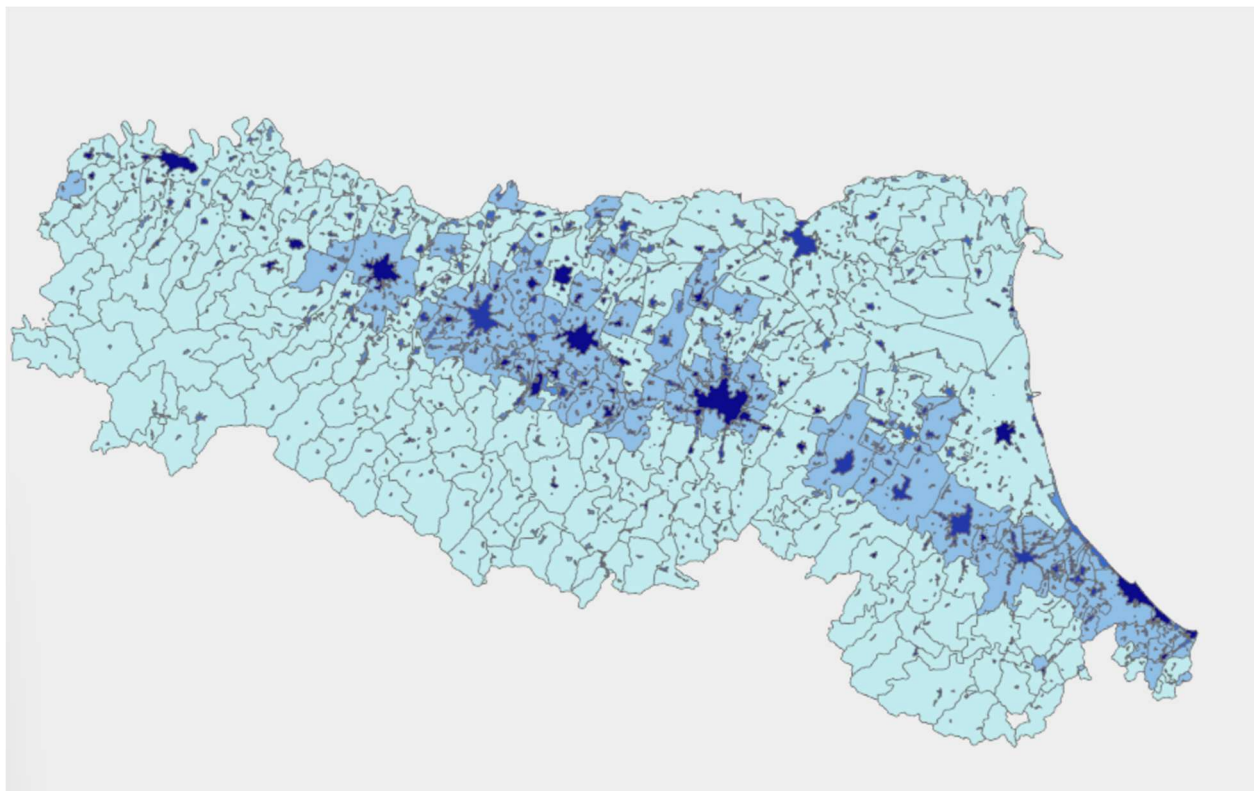
Climate change is not only caused by the regional agro-industry (and the livestock sector specifically) but has also impacted the quantity and quality of resources that allow agricultural activities to take place. In particular, the increase in temperatures, and change in precipitation patterns is making freshwater less available and more difficult to manage (due to alternations between droughts and high-intensity precipitations), it is making soil less available and poorer in nutrients, and it is changing ecosystem equilibria and biodiversity.

## Demographics

As of January 1, 2024, Emilia-Romagna has a population of approximately 4.4 million people. The region exhibits a population density of about 194 inhabitants per square kilometre, with the urban centres located on the Via Emilia, including Bologna, Modena, and Parma, serving as major population hubs<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, rural and mountainous areas, particularly in the Apennines, are experiencing depopulation, which poses challenges to local economies and cultural preservation.

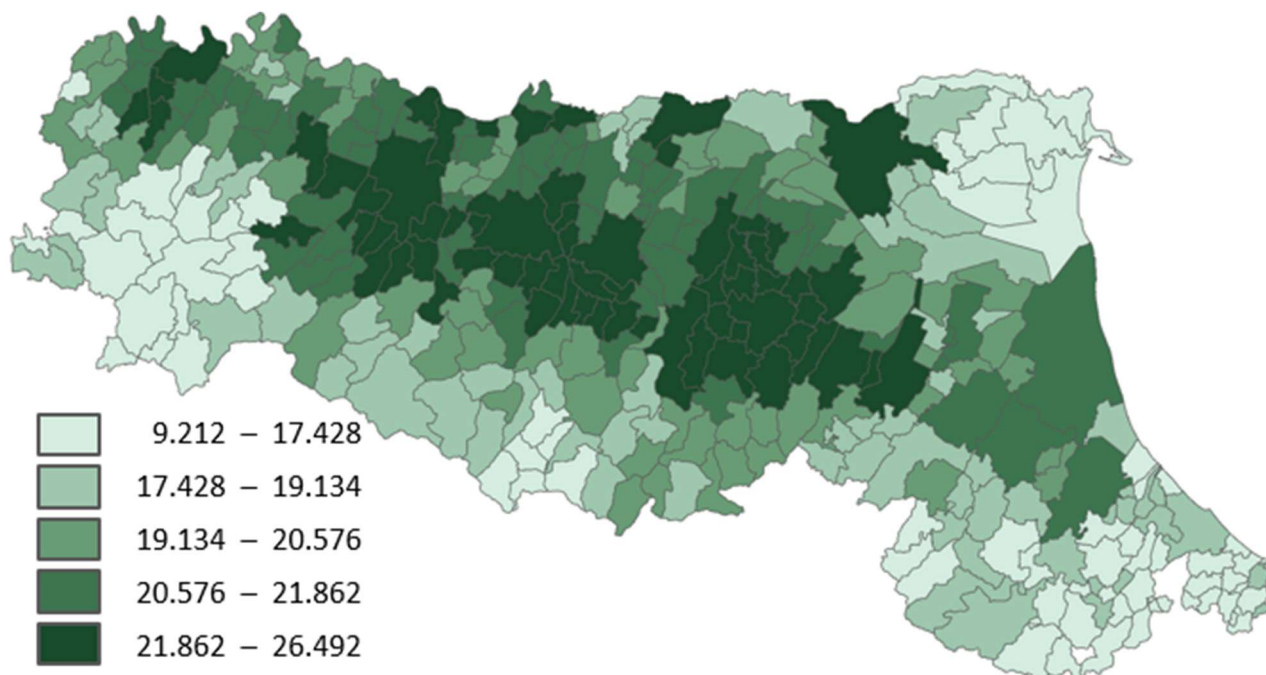
<sup>1</sup> <https://ambiente.regione.emilia-romagna.it/it/notizie/attualita/2024/dicembre/la-qualita-dellambiente-in-emilia-romagna-dati-2023>

<sup>2</sup> [https://statistica.regione.emilia-romagna.it/studi-analisi/2024/censimento-permanente-popolazione-istat-emilia-romagna-2023?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://statistica.regione.emilia-romagna.it/studi-analisi/2024/censimento-permanente-popolazione-istat-emilia-romagna-2023?utm_source=chatgpt.com)



Population density per municipality (2011), source: [https://servizimoka.regione.emilia-romagna.it/mokaApp/apps/DDRER\\_H5/index.html](https://servizimoka.regione.emilia-romagna.it/mokaApp/apps/DDRER_H5/index.html).

The geography of income and wealth presents three major divides: urban areas (on the Via Emilia) are richer than rural areas. In addition, among rural areas, the municipalities that are better connected to the major cities, especially those in the Po Valley are considerably richer than the territories in the Apennines. Eventually, the western part of the region (Emilia) is richer than the eastern (Romagna).



Fonte: Elaborazioni Regione Emilia-Romagna su dati MEF - Dipartimento delle Finanze

Average Taxable Personal Income by Municipality. Emilia-Romagna - Tax Year 2020 (Quintiles of Average Values per Taxpayer, in Euros)

The major cities on the via Emilia, especially Piacenza, Parma, Reggio-Emilia, Modena and Bologna are the most important markets for organic and higher quality food. Agricultural activities tend to develop and prosper more in areas that are better connected to these markets, mainly in the Po Valley and lower hills.

In 2024, 13% of the total population of the Region has a foreign citizenship, making the region quite diverse in terms of ethnic composition, increasing the diversification of the food demand (especially in the main cities)<sup>3</sup>.

### Agricultural Practices and Economic Indicators

Agriculture plays a pivotal role in Emilia-Romagna's economy, with the region being a leading producer of various agri-food products in Italy. The aggregate production was 5.3 billion € in 2023, with a strong decrease compared to the previous year due to extreme weather events. The agricultural sector has a specialization the fruits and vineyard production, being the first Italian region by fruit production (23% of the total).

Despite the negative trend of agricultural production, the economic trend of the agri-food industry is increasing, with exports reaching 9.7 billion € in 2023 (15.7% of Italy's total food exports). Emilia-Romagna is indeed specialized in high-value food products, mainly high value-added wines and animal products as cheese and meat and is a major exporter of food products to EU, UK, and US markets. The region is a leader in quality food products, holding over 40% of Italy's turnover for Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) products.

The vast majority of agricultural enterprises are SMEs, with a high concentration of family-run farms. The average size of agricultural enterprises in the region is around 10 hectares, with high variability. However, SMEs are mostly organized in producers' organizations and cooperatives (a very typical feature of the agro-

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.anci.emilia-romagna.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Presentazione-Vanelli-18giu2024\\_def.pdf](https://www.anci.emilia-romagna.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Presentazione-Vanelli-18giu2024_def.pdf)



industrial regional model), which organize food processing, distribution, warehousing, and marketing activities, and allow SMEs to be particularly competitive on international markets.

The large majority of lands are under conventional agriculture and breeding. However, the share of land under organic agriculture is increasing, driven by a niche market demand for environmentally friendly products. The total land under organic farming is 19% in 2022, with a recent high increase. Agriculture activities are more productive and mechanized (capital-intensive) in the Po Valley, whereas in the hills and mountains they focus on more labour-intensive, high value-added crops such as vineyard for wine production, and/or organic products.

Agricultural work in Emilia-Romagna is characterized by relatively low wages compared to other sectors, a significant presence of migrant labour, and challenges related to irregular employment and worker safety. Wages in agriculture remain among the lowest across sectors, and migrant workers make up a large portion of the workforce, with up to 45% being non-EU nationals. While irregular labour is less prevalent than in other regions, cases of labour exploitation and illegal recruitment persist. Health and safety risks are also concerns, particularly for migrant workers facing language barriers and inadequate training. Authorities are implementing measures to improve labour conditions, combat exploitation, and enhance workplace safety in the sector<sup>4</sup>.

### Environmental Impact and Climate Change

The intensive agricultural activities, especially in the livestock sector, contribute significantly to the region's environmental footprint. This includes elevated greenhouse gas emissions and increased nitrogen levels in the soil, leading to concerns about sustainability and long-term soil health. Balancing economic reliance on these sectors with environmental considerations presents a complex challenge for policymakers and stakeholders.

In recent years, Emilia-Romagna has faced a series of extreme weather events, including severe droughts and catastrophic floods. Notably, in May 2023, the region experienced unprecedented rainfall, leading to devastating floods that affected thousands of agricultural producers and livestock breeders, and disrupted agri-food supply chains. These events have prompted multiple emergency declarations and substantial financial aid packages to support affected farmers.

### Social and Cultural Dynamics

Food is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Emilia-Romagna, reflecting a rich heritage of culinary traditions. Upon this fabric, an economic system based on tourism, exports, and competitiveness on markets produces growth and wealth for the regional territories.

However, the very agri-food production practices that have sustained this culture are often both contributors to and victims of ecological and climate crises. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that honours cultural traditions while promoting sustainability.

In this sense, besides its strong export-oriented agroindustry, Emilia-Romagna is also home to a dynamic ecosystem of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) that promote short supply chains, and sustainable and community-driven food systems. These include Solidarity Purchasing Groups (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale, GAS), peasant networks, cooperative economic models, and short supply chains that prioritize local, ecological, and fair-trade practices. In particular, the region hosts the first Solidarity Purchase Groups born in the late 1990s, which aimed to promote ethical consumption and sustainability. More recently, Community Supported Agriculture models spread in its territories, and the first Italian food-coop was born

<sup>4</sup> <https://agricoltura.regione.emilia-romagna.it/agricoltura-in-cifre/rapporto-agroalimentare/rapporto-2023/sistema-agroalimentare-emilia-romagna-rapporto-2023>



in the region in 2019. Even after the rise of the large-scale food distribution model, peasant markets remained more common, as compared to other territories in Europe and Italy.

In short, the local food economy is not only shaped by markets, but also by culinary and socio-political traditions. A mixture of cooperative economic and business models and historical agro-industrial practices is used to adapt to a changing global environmental, economic and social context.

### Supply chain and distribution networks

In Emilia-Romagna, the agrifood supply chain is predominantly controlled by large-scale food distributors, such as supermarkets and hypermarkets, which account for a significant portion of food retail sales. This dominance often results in reduced bargaining power for producers, making economic sustainability challenging, especially for organic farmers who face higher production costs. Conversely, alternative distribution channels, including farmers' markets, specialty organic shops, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives, have emerged primarily in major urban centres like Bologna, where consumers are more willing to invest in higher-quality and sustainable products. While these Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) operate effectively, they predominantly serve wealthier, larger cities. In contrast, rural and internal areas rely more heavily on supermarket chains and have limited access to organic products due to their dispersed populations and lower market demand. According to data from the Emilia-Romagna Agrifood Report 2022, supermarkets and hypermarkets represent a substantial share of the food retail sector, reflecting a national trend where these outlets dominate the market.

## 3.2. Stakeholder analysis

### Stakeholder identification

There different type of stakeholders. First, the main stakeholders, directly engaged in the Innovation Hub activities were identified among AFNs (including local producers, consumer groups, and network organizations connecting them), policymakers (municipality council members), NGOs (Open Food Network), associations (Agrifood Clust-ER), research and innovation institutions (Art-er, University of Bologna). Non-AFN stakeholders are selected because of their relevance in the research and innovation ecosystem of the Emilia-Romagna Region, especially focusing on the agri-food sector, and/or because of their role in the process of policy formulation and implementation.

In addition, some stakeholders are identified as actors that are not engaged in all the Innovation Hub activities, but are kept informed about the project activities and are considered as relevant players for the development of the Regional Action Plan and/or networking for specific activities to carry out to reach the project's goals. Among these, ITL interacted with two EU projects, Lowinfood, coordinated by Università della Tuscia, that carried out a pilot on food logistics and waste in the territory of the region, and ZeroW, coordinated by Inlecom. During the participation in their events, the objectives and activities of Food4CE and Localog were shared.

In addition, regular communication is carried out with the DG Agri-food of the Regional Administration. Eventually, the participation to the Festival of Agrifood innovation organized by Foodhub srl, was an opportunity for giving visibility to the Innovation Hub among a larger network of stakeholders in the agri-food industry in Italy.

### Engagement Strategy

A list of all relevant stakeholders was prepared by all partners and categorized based on their interest in the project and their decision-making power.



The key aspect of the engagement strategy for AFNs was to stay in touch with them frequently, attending meetings and events organized by their network, getting to know the vision of their network and deeply understand the points of alignment between the Innovation Hub and their interests and ongoing projects.

Frequent informal talks with AFNs in the solidarity economy ecosystem of the region were accompanied by targeted phone calls with key representatives.

Stakeholder	Power/Interest	Role and contribution
<b>Campi Aperti per la Sovranità Alimentare</b>	Low power / Medium interest	Involved as an AFN, peasant association of >100 small farmers organizing peasant markets with PGS. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>Slow Food (Bologna e Appennino Bolognese)</b>	Medium power / Medium interest	Involved as an AFN, peasant association of >100 small farmers organizing peasant markets with PGS. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>Biodistretto dell'Appennino Bolognese</b>	Medium power / Low interest	Involved as an AFN, association of agri-food organic local actors of mountains. Interested in following some activities of the IH.
<b>Mercatiamo Parma</b>	Low power / medium interest	Involved as an AFN, peasant association of >100 small farmers organizing peasant markets with PGS. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>GasBo</b>	Low power / medium interest	Solidarity purchase group in Bologna. Interesting in working on logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>DES Parma</b>	Medium power / high interest	Solidarity purchase groups in Parma. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>Forum Regionale dell'Economia Solidale Emilia-Romagna</b>	Medium power / high interest	Coordination of all solidarity economy actors in the Region. Interested in discussing how logistics can improve solidarity economy in the region and to find solutions to propose to regional and local policymakers. Member of Advisory Board.
<b>Camilla</b>	Low power / high interest	Food-coop. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>Arvaia</b>	Low power / medium interest	CSA. Interested in working on their logistics improvement, co-designing solutions with other networks and policymakers.
<b>Trasp-Orto</b>	Low power / high interest	Digital platform for local agrifood products. Interested in following IH workshops.
<b>Municipality Council Bologna</b>	High power / medium interest	One council member part of the Advisory Board, interested in developing solutions from the side of public administration.
<b>Department of Agri-food sciences and technologies - University of Bologna</b>	Low power / low interest	Part of the Advisory Board, supporting with facilitation of the process and suggesting relevant stakeholder.



<b>Art-er</b>	Medium power / medium interest	Part of the Advisory Board, facilitating innovation activities for the Emilia-Romagna region, facilitating the implementation for S3 strategy, carrying out the mapping of alternative peasant networks in the region. Interested in follow-up projects on alternative food networks.
<b>Clust-ER AGRIFOOD</b>	Medium power / medium interest	Part of the Advisory Board, cluster association of the agri-food sector, interested in networking activities between innovation actors in the sector in the region.
<b>Open Food Network</b>	Medium power / High interest	Foundation producing open-source software to empower local food systems (short food supply chains). Interested in working on innovation projects.
<b>CAL Parma</b>	High power / low interest	Agrifood logistics hub in Parma. Interested to work on EU projects and potentially supporting with spaces for co-designing cooperative solutions for the logistics of the solidarity economy chain.
<b>Mercato Ritrovato</b>	Low power / low interest	Privately owned peasant market of organic products in the centre of Bologna, not interested in the process.
<b>COLDIRETTI</b>	High power / low interest	Main small and medium size agricultural producers' organization, organizing farmers markets and carrying out lobbying activities for farmers. Not interested in the process
<b>CIA</b>	High power / low interest	One of the main agricultural producers' organization, carrying out training, capacity-building, and lobbying activities for farmers. Not interested in the process
<b>CAAB</b>	High power / low interest	Main agri-food logistics hub and retail market in Bologna.
<b>Emilia Romagna Mercati</b>	High power / low interest	Business network of agri-food logistics hubs and retail markets in Emilia-Romagna (including CAAB Spa, CAAR Spa, CAL srl, F.O.R. Spa).
<b>Rete Appenninica</b>	Low power / medium interest	Informal network of communities living in the Bologna Appennines and carrying out community projects with organic agriculture.
<b>Producers Organizations (OPs)</b>	High power / low interest	Producers' organizations in the Region (several), they carry out networking, capacity-building, lobbying, distribution, marketing, coordination activities for agricultural producers in the region. Not interested in the process.
<b>Food Banks</b>	Medium power / low interest	No-profit organizations collecting and distributing food before expiration to prevent food loss and waste.
<b>Emilia Romagna Region - DG Agri</b>	High power / low interest	Division of the Regional Administration in charge of agricultural and rural development policy, important stakeholder to engage for the development of the Regional Action Plan.
<b>Emilia Romagna Region - Solidarity Economy</b>	High power / low interest	Offices of the Regional Administration in charge of the solidarity economy, important stakeholder to engage for the development of the Regional Action Plan.
<b>Food hub srl</b>	Low power / low interest	Organization facilitating open innovation in the agrifood system in Emilia-Romagna, useful for increasing the network of stakeholders.



### 3.3. Innovation Hub overview

#### Preparation Activities

Localog, the Innovation Hub set up in Emilia-Romagna for supporting AFNs with their logistics capacity, was designed based on in-depth research of the Emilia-Romagna AFN context carried out within the Food4CE project.

A database of more than 60 actors representing Alternative Food Networks was produced carrying out desk research, and snowballing additional contacts. The AFNs included CSAs, solidarity purchasing groups, food-coops, peasant markets, local e-commerce platform, agri-food producers selling locally.

A list of stakeholders from local and regional administrations, research institutions, associations and NGOs who have a role and/or interest in the local AFN ecosystem was sketched and continuously updated.

A continuous one-to-one communication was held with the different stakeholders to grasp their potential interest in participating in capacity-building and networking activities on agri-food logistics, and to tailor a suitable organization and communication structure for the Innovation Hub.

#### Governance

The activities carried out within Localog are defined based on the needs of the group of AFNs involved, that contribute to the definition of the topics and calendars of the workshops and meetings. The AFNs are engaged via email, with in-person meetings, as well as videocalls and filling in forms.

In addition to the AFNs, an Advisory Board was set up to facilitate the definition of a calendar of activities in the IH based on the needs of the AFNs and provide additional stakeholder lists based on the topics of each session.

Members of the Advisory Board were selected to include the main institutional actors representing and/or working with AFNs at the regional level, including organizations carrying out research and facilitating innovation activities in the field of agri-food, working with EU funds, and coordinating the “solidarity economy”.

#### *Localog IH Governance Structure / Advisory Board*

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##### Advisory Board Members

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Fondazione Istituto sui Trasporti e la Logistica

Regional Forum on Solidarity Economy

Cluster AGRIFOOD

Art-er

Department of Agrifood sciences and technologies - University of Bologna

Bologna Appennine Biodistrict

Municipality Council of Bologna

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#### Objectives

The vision of Localog is to become the logistics and digitalization knowledge and networking hub for alternative food networks and solidarity economy networks in Emilia-Romagna.

The specific objectives are:

- Increasing the knowledge on the AFN ecosystem in the Region, and its needs;



- Facilitating knowledge sharing on logistics and digitalization to support AFNs;
- Facilitating networking between AFNs and other stakeholders to improve the sustainability of the logistics of the alternative food system in the region;
- Producing policy recommendations to local and regional policymakers for supporting regional AFNs.

## Activities

The Innovation Hub activities are divided into three phases:

1. The **needs analysis** and **group-building** phase.
2. The **capacity-building** and **networking** phase.
3. The **policy recommendations** and **idea development** phase.

During the first phase (November to December 2024), a set of one-to-one interviews, a focus groups, and an online form were used to create a group of regional Alternative Food Networks and analyse their logistics characteristics and needs, in order to create a common vision of the context.

During phase two (January to April 2025), a series of workshops covering multiple topics, including *definition and mapping of Alternative Food Networks in the region*, *transportation in AFNs*, *digitalization of AFNs*, were organized online, with the goals of capacity building and creating potential cooperations among actors.

Phase three (May to November 2025) further developed the capacity-building activities in specific directions, based on the engagement of the actors. During this phase, policy recommendations are produced and potential ideas of cooperative actions are developed.

Throughout the phases, communication between the Advisory Board and the AFNs was constant and inputs were gathered to produce policy recommendations and adapt the process to the changing composition of the group and changing context (arising opportunities, interests, and connections).

## 3.4. Identification and prioritisation of regional needs

The regional needs of AFNs concerning their logistics capacity, and their prioritisation, were investigated carrying out a Focus Group and several interviews and online surveys within the Localog Innovation Hub.

A Focus Group was carried out in December 2024 with 8 AFNs (including a CSA, a food-coop, some Solidarity Purchase districts and groups, a digital platform, and a producers association). The objective was to identify major logistical challenges for Alternative Food Networks that could benefit from collaboration with other actors. Explore existing ideas, past attempts, and feasibility elements.

### Emerging Ideas, Themes, and Challenges:

- **Spaces:** The need for one or more managed spaces (either co-managed by stakeholders or outsourced) for sorting, storage, repackaging, and consolidation, including fresh products. These spaces should be close to delivery points (potentially forming a network of spaces) and have accessible costs. They could also serve as retail points.
- **Geographical dispersion** of production and consumption increases logistical complexity and costs for alternative food networks. There is potential to develop cooperative networks of shared spaces and information among different networks (including mobile markets, collaborative transport, etc.).
- **Ethical, sustainable, and solidarity-based transport** (e.g., full load, consolidation, reverse logistics), following the model of a solidarity van.



- **Joint planning** of both production (small producers, farmers' markets, etc.) and consumption (GAS groups, food co-ops, etc.).
- **Urban transport:** Bologna's heavy traffic creates a barrier between producers and consumers in alternative networks, as the high logistics costs of entering the city make exchanges difficult. Possible solutions include streamlining urban transport, reducing inefficiencies, and increasing last-mile bicycle deliveries.
- **Information sharing within and across alternative food networks** regarding product availability and location, to improve transport coordination, reduce waste, and encourage collaborative solutions.
- **Collaborative transport and distribution**, such as carpooling for deliveries, also leveraging digital tools.
- **Integration of digital tools** into alternative food networks, developing digital and physical infrastructures for managing flows and hubs.

#### Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Feasibility:

- **High costs of transport decarbonization.**
- **Potential collaboration with local administrations** for managing logistics spaces for alternative food networks (existing forums and working groups such as Food Policy, Solidarity Economy, etc.).
- **Legal frameworks need adaptation** to accommodate collaborative solutions and alternative food networks (e.g., regulations on collaborative transport, shared hub management, resale of certain producers' goods at farmers' markets, legal structures to access public funding, digital platform regulations, etc.).
- **Diversity of alternative food networks (both producers and consumers)** and their differences make systematization difficult in Bologna (compared to Parma, for example).
- **Resistance and lack of digital skills** among actors, requiring training efforts.
- **Centralized hubs are often inefficient in terms of emissions and transport**, while decentralized hubs, despite being more sustainable, are often too small to be economically viable.
- **A centralized digital platform may be inaccessible to many actors;** instead, open communication spaces integrating different communication modes (virtual, phone, etc.) could be more effective.
- **Small and fragmented volumes within "alternative networks"** make efficient, cost-effective, and accessible logistics solutions challenging.
- **Collaborative logistics solutions (transport, storage, distribution) among different networks** already exist at a local level in small informal initiatives (e.g., carpooling, shared spaces).

In addition, one-to-one interviews and an online survey were conducted with the AFNs, confirming a lot of elements identified in the focus groups.

A prioritisation is difficult due to the extreme diversity among AFNs, the differences in business and network model, the values, and resources characterizing each actor. Different needs concerning transportation, distribution, storage, and digitalization were highlighted by different actors, including the energy transition of transportation within their network, as well as improved distribution efficiency, and so on. The key takeaway from the needs analysis is that the stakeholders were eager to explore different innovative and cooperative solutions that might benefit their network, and to narrow down the selection based on the synergies and collaborations they could form within the Innovation Hub.

In this sense, a sub-group of stakeholders involved in the Innovation Hub, part of the **Regional Coordination of Solidarity Economy**, decided to carry out a process of exploration and selection of innovative and



cooperative interventions on the logistics aspects of their AFNs. During this process, various AFNs shared their main logistics and distribution models, as well as their visions, values, and goals.

ITL took part in these meetings in order to tailor the work of the *Localog* Innovation Hub to the needs of these AFNs, and to collect additional contributions for the policy recommendations.

## 4. Policy Context

### 4.1. Existing Policy Context

As extensively outlined in Deliverable D3.1.1, the range of policies influencing agri-food systems and AFNs is broad. At the highest level of governance, the European Green Deal and its Farm to Fork Strategy set overarching objectives of sustainability, resilience, and food security, while introducing innovative principles such as the integration of the entire food chain and the promotion of healthy and sustainable diets. These frameworks provide fundamental reference points for any reflection on the future of food in Europe.

However, this section does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of all the policies influencing AFNs at every level of governance - this task was already carried out in Deliverable D3.1.1. Instead, the focus here is on those policies that have the greatest impact on Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) at the regional level. Since this is a Regional Action Plan, attention is directed to those policies with the highest operational relevance for concretely supporting alternative food networks in the local context.

#### National Level

##### a. Italy's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-27

Italy has tailored the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to national needs, emphasizing sustainability, competitiveness, and rural development. Italy's CAP allocates nearly €37 billion (2023-27), with 40% dedicated to environmental and climate-related measures.

#### Key Areas Relevant to AFNs:

##### 1. Support for Small & Young Farmers

- **Redistribution of CAP funds:** At least 10% of direct aid is allocated to small and medium-sized farms.
- **Young Farmer & Rural Business Support:** Financial assistance (up to €100,000) is available for young farmers, new agricultural entrants, and rural business start-ups, including non-agricultural businesses (e.g., food processing, cooperative services, and local distribution).

##### 2. Cooperation & Short Supply Chains

- **Producer Organizations (POs) & Associations:** Support for the creation of producer organizations to strengthen market access for small farmers.
- **LEADER Program & Local Development Strategies:** Funding for territorial governance and rural development initiatives, encouraging small smart communities and short supply chains.
- **Support for Quality Labels:** Encouragement of participation in EU and national quality schemes (e.g., organic certification, PDO/PGI labels).
- **Generational Renewal Cooperation:** Programs connecting elderly farmers with younger entrants to facilitate knowledge transfer.

##### 3. Innovation & Advisory Support



- **Agri-Food Innovation:** Grants for pilot projects testing sustainable innovations, digitalization, and resilient rural development.
- **Business Advisory Services & Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS):** Consulting and training services for farmers, cooperatives, and local food networks, supporting sustainability transitions, fair labor, and social inclusion.

#### b. Organic Districts or Bio-Districts

**Bio-districts, or organic districts, are territorial governance initiatives in Italy that bring together farmers, institutions, citizens, and other stakeholders to promote sustainable development based on organic farming principles.** These districts go beyond organic supply chains by fostering participatory local development, emphasizing environmental restoration, sustainable resource management, and socio-economic resilience. Currently, Italy leads Europe and the world in bio-district initiatives, with 55 active districts covering 651 municipalities and nearly 35,000 square kilometres.

Bio-districts are particularly relevant for Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) as they promote localized, sustainable food systems. Their emphasis on short supply chains, local markets, and collective purchasing aligns with AFNs' commitment to fair trade and direct producer-consumer relationships. By facilitating land access for young farmers and simplifying organic certification, **bio-districts strengthen the viability of small-scale, sustainable agriculture.** Furthermore, their integration with Italy's CAP Strategic Plan, which provides financial support for organic conversion and maintenance, reinforces AFNs' role in fostering ecological and socially just food systems.

### Regional Level

#### a. Regional Programming Complement for Rural Development (CoPSR)<sup>5</sup>

Emilia-Romagna's Regional Programming Complement for Rural Development (CoPSR), approved in 2022, aligns with national and EU strategic policies, including the CAP 2023-2027, the PNRR, and the region's broader socio-economic and environmental goals. With a €913.2 million budget, it prioritizes competitiveness, sustainability, and rural revitalization through investments in agriculture, environmental conservation, and marginal territories.

For Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), this strategy presents key opportunities:

- **Support for short supply chains and local markets,** enhancing the economic viability of small-scale farmers and cooperatives.
- **Funding for sustainable agricultural practices,** which can benefit AFNs promoting agroecology and organic production.
- **Leader programs and rural development incentives,** potentially aiding AFN initiatives in marginalized areas.
- **Integration with regional digital and environmental strategies,** supporting AFN-related innovations in logistics, digital tools, and cooperative models.

This policy framework strengthens AFNs by fostering a resilient and equitable local food system, reinforcing their role in regional sustainability and community-driven food governance.

<sup>5</sup> <https://agricoltura.regione.emilia-romagna.it/sviluppo-rurale-23-27/programma/complemento-programmazione/testo-complemento-di-programmazione-per-lo-sviluppo-rurale-del-programma-strategico-della-pac-2023-2027-copsr>



## b. Food Districts<sup>6</sup>

**Food Districts (*Distretti del Cibo*)** are national initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable territorial development by supporting agriculture, supply chains, and local economies. These districts include rural quality districts, peri-urban agricultural initiatives, integrated agricultural-business zones, and organic districts, all of which promote environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Recognized by the Regions and registered at the national level, Food Districts benefit from networking opportunities, funding access, and increased attractiveness, particularly for agri-tourism and organic production.

In Emilia-Romagna, there are five recognized Food Districts:

- Piacenza PDO cured meats.
- Romagna Bio Symbiotic District (focused on organic farming).
- Modena PDO ham.
- Balsamic Vinegar of Modena.
- The Pear District of Emilia-Romagna.

AFNs could benefit from collaboration with and support from Food Districts concerning territorial branding and market access, funding and institutional recognition, as well as synergies on organic farming.

## c. Organic Districts (Bio-districts)<sup>7</sup>

**Bio-districts (Organic Districts)** are local production systems where organic farmers, processors, and other stakeholders collaborate within a defined territorial, historical, and landscape identity to promote sustainable organic farming. The Emilia-Romagna Region has taken a legislative step to support these initiatives through Regional Law No. 14 (October 3, 2023), which encourages the formation of organic districts and outlines recognition criteria via Executive Order No. 2049 (November 27, 2023).

Key participation requirements include:

- Mandatory membership for organic farmers and processors within the district.
- Eligibility for associations, cooperatives, public and private entities.
- A minimum representation of 20% of the total organic land in the district's municipalities or at least 30 farmers managing 400 hectares of organic farmland (including those in conversion).

In Emilia-Romagna, there are 6 recognized bio-districts:

- Romagna Distretto Bio Simbiotico.
- Bio-distretto Appennino Bolognese.
- Distretto Biologico Valli del Panaro e Appennino Modenese
- Bio Reggiano Distretto Biologico
- Consorzio del Biodistretto delle Alte Valli
- Distretto Parma Bio Valley.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.masaf.gov.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/14159?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.masaf.gov.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/14159?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>7</sup> [https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er%3Aassemblealegislativa%3Alegge%3A2023%3B14&utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er%3Aassemblealegislativa%3Alegge%3A2023%3B14&utm_source=chatgpt.com)



AFNs could benefit from organic districts as they might provide a structured framework for financial support, policy recognition and technical assistance (especially those in remote areas). They also foster synergies and collaboration among farmers, processors and communities.

#### d. Regional strategy for the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development<sup>8</sup>

Referring to the Global Development Goals, the Emilia-Romagna Region (RER) generally demonstrates positive performance. Nevertheless, there is a recognized need for improvement in Affordable and clean energy, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Life on Land (RER, 2021). Efforts and enhancements in these specific domains are identified as essential to further align with and contribute to the global sustainability objectives. Specifically, the measures with an impact on alternative food networks involve shortening the food supply chain, promoting subsidies for agribusinesses in research and digitalization, and advocating for increased integration within the supply chain. These initiatives aim to enhance the efficiency, sustainability, and resilience of alternative food networks by streamlining processes, fostering innovation, and creating more cohesive and responsive supply chains as reported in the following table.

Selected 'RER Agenda 30' measures having an impact on AFNs

Measure from the AGENDA 30	
-	Supporting short supply chains, organic farming, and integrated production with the goal of covering over 45% of the Utilized Agricultural Area (SAU) with low-input practices by 2030. This includes targeting over 25% for organic farming.
-	Supporting the income, competitiveness, and production efficiency of agricultural enterprises, agri-food, fisheries, and aquaculture by enhancing their position in the market through investments in research, innovation, and digitalization.
-	Encouraging increased supply aggregation and the integration of both vertical and horizontal supply chains aims to ensure a more equitable distribution of value and fair pricing
-	Promoting the environmental sustainability of food systems, particularly by emphasizing improvements in agricultural and livestock production.
-	Supporting businesses to improve animal welfare, biosecurity, and resource optimization in agriculture and livestock production.
-	Promoting organic products in collective catering, advancing the environmental sustainability of food systems

#### e. Regional Law 19/2014 on Solidarity Economy<sup>9</sup>

The Regional Law No. 19 of July 23, 2014, on Solidarity Economy, establishes a legislative framework aimed at promoting and supporting economic practices rooted in social justice, environmental sustainability, and democratic participation. It also created and organizes the "Regional Forum of Solidarity Economy," which brings together solidarity economy actors and most of the region's AFN best practices around shared interests. Other key elements of the law relevant to AFNs include:

- it values and supports relational economic models and short supply chains, as well as organic and biodynamic farming;

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/agenda2030>

<sup>9</sup> <https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er:assemblealegislativa:legge:2014;19>



- it explicitly recognises and defines “Solidarity Purchasing Groups” as well as “Participatory Guarantee Systems”;
- it supports the establishment of “Centers for the Solidarity Economy”, including through the provision of spaces and facilities to Solidarity Economy entities, free of charge.

Beyond its explicit provisions, the law also serves as the legal basis for two funding channels made available in support of the Solidarity Economy and, by extension, Alternative Food Networks:

- A yearly grant of €25,000, made available for the Regional Forum of Solidarity Economy to pay for its coordination and mediation services as well as small projects defined within the Forum;
- A fund that, from 2020 to 2025, relied on €450,000 to cover interest expenses on debts contracted by actors in the solidarity economy.

The following table provides a list of Regional laws with secondary impact on the promotion of AFNs.

Selected laws
→ LR 29/2002 - Rules for guiding consumption and food education and for the qualification of collective catering services.
→ LR 12/2007 - Promotion of the activity of recovering and distributing food products for social solidarity purposes.
→ LR 4/2009 - Regulation of agritourism and the multifunctionality of agricultural enterprises.
→ PSR 2014-2020 extended to 2022 - Rural Development Program 2014-2020 extended to 2022.
→ PSN (National Strategic Plan of the CAP) 2023-2027 - National Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027.
→ Operational programs OCM Fruits and Vegetables, Wine, Oil, and Bees (Reg. EU 1308/2013).
→ PAIR2020 (Integrated Regional Air Plan) - Regional Integrated Air Plan 2020 (DAL 115/2020).
→ Discipline on the creation of organic districts.
→ Protection and promotion of PDO, PGI, and Mountain products (Reg. EU 1151/2012 and Reg. EU 1144/2014).
→ Regional program for guiding consumption and food education 2020-2022 (DAL 18/2020).
→ Regional Prevention Plan.
→ DGR 1855/2020 for the reception of the agreement between the State and the Regions concerning the "National Prevention Plan (PNP) 2020-2025."
→ DGR 367/2014 Approval of the "Guidelines for the recovery, distribution, and use of food products for social solidarity purposes.

## 4.2. Policy Gaps and Challenges

While the previous section focused on the existing policy instruments that currently support Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in the region, it is equally important to highlight the gaps and challenges that limit



their effectiveness. These shortcomings hinder AFNs from fully benefitting from available frameworks and from strengthening their role within sustainable food systems.

A major policy gap affecting Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in the Emilia-Romagna region concerns the absence of a clear and shared definition of AFNs, as well as the lack of an agreed classification of actors that can be formally recognised as belonging to these networks. This ambiguity is particularly evident in Regional Law 19/2014 on solidarity economy, which provides a detailed list of qualities and values currently associated with AFNs but does not cluster them into a coherent typology of AFN actors. The law was drafted before the term AFN became widely used in the regional context, and therefore falls short of offering an operational framework for their recognition and policy support.

The lack of a definition creates significant obstacles for AFNs in linking to major strategic policy documents, such as the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), the Complement for Rural Development (CoPSR), and the National Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy (PSP). These instruments mobilise substantial financial resources - for example, the CoPSR allocates €913 million, and initiatives under the S3 channelled approximately €2.3 billion during the 2021-2027 programming period. By contrast, the funding streams currently accessible to AFNs through the Solidarity Economy Forum, established under Regional Law 19/2014, amount only to a few tens of thousands of euros annually, shared among the wider solidarity economy network. The inability to anchor AFNs to the aforementioned policy instruments therefore results in a severe underutilisation of potential EU and national funding opportunities.

Beyond this structural funding gap, other policy gaps hinder AFNs' development:

- Scarcity of interest in the logistics of the solidarity economy (also by the absence of logistics actors from the solidarity economy network), which weakens opportunities for professionalised distribution, collaboration and green transition. As a result, AFNs receive little to no support in adopting sustainable transport solutions such as electrification, cargo-bikes, or route optimisation, which are crucial to reduce environmental impact and improve efficiency.
- Absence of intersectoral governance mechanisms to integrate the Solidarity Economy framework with agricultural, mobility, innovation, and ecological transition policies, limiting coherence and coordination across regional strategies.
- Difficulties in accessing public spaces, despite the provisions of Regional Law 19/2014, as decisions often depend on municipal administrations rather than the Regional authority.
- Limited interest in digitalisation, with insufficient focus on digital tools for logistics coordination, consumer engagement, and scaling-up potential.

In summary, AFNs are confronted with both structural and operational policy gaps. Addressing the definitional vacuum and linking AFNs to major strategic policy frameworks (S3, CoPSR, PSP) would enable them to access significant funding, while tackling challenges in logistics, public space access, green transition, and digitalisation would strengthen their resilience and long-term viability.

## 5. Regional Policy Recommendations

### 5.1. Policy objectives

The overall aim of this Action Plan is to support Alternative Food Networks in Emilia-Romagna in gaining greater recognition, access to infrastructures, and governance tools that enhance their logistical and



organizational sustainability. To this end, we encourage the regional stakeholders to align around the following policy objectives, based on the previous analysis:

- I. Provide formal recognition to AFNs to facilitate their support and institutional mainstreaming.
- II. Support research, training, and governance of innovation within AFNs, ensuring stronger connections between these networks and the regional ecosystem of research and development.
- III. Encourage innovation in logistics and facilitate the incubation of new initiatives to replicate successful AFN models and foster start-ups in sustainable food distribution.
- IV. Provide operational measures to strengthen existing AFNs, particularly in relation to physical infrastructures, energy transition, and urban distribution facilities.

## 5.2. Proposed policy changes

Within each objective, several policy changes and initiatives are proposed.

### I. Provide formal recognition to AFNs

The region should support and validate the outcomes of a participatory, evidence-based process aimed at identifying and formalizing their organizational forms. This definition should encompass – though not be limited to – models such as Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Solidarity Purchasing Groups (GAS), and self-managed food cooperatives. The region should recognize the actors—both formal and informal—that represent AFNs and differentiate support schemes tailored to the specific strengths and limitations of each model. This recognition would allow for their broader diffusion, facilitate their inclusion in regional and European funding schemes (e.g., FEASR, FESR, ESF), and help formulate concrete interventions to increase their overall sustainability, following an approach similar to that adopted for Italian Renewable Energy Communities. To this end, an amendment to regional Law 19/2014 may be required in order to incorporate the new definition.

### II. Research, training, and governance

Second, to support research, training, and governance of innovation, the region should enhance AFNs' access to the existing research and innovation ecosystem, fostering structured collaboration between the Forum for Solidarity Economy, universities, research centers, Art-ER, and Clust-ER Agrifood. Dedicated research should focus on improving the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of AFN logistics, supported by scholarships and tailored training programs.

A permanent working group should also be established, composed of regional authorities, Art-ER, Clust-ER, universities, Fondazione ITL, and the Forum of solidarity economy, with the mandate to monitor AFN logistics, gather needs and proposals, and translate them into targeted policy measures, training opportunities, and updates of regional strategies (e.g., S3, rural development complement, digital agenda).

### III. Initiative Incubation

The region should foster the dissemination of successful AFN models across other territories, supporting peer-to-peer training, local feasibility studies, business planning, and communication campaigns. An incubator of communities should be created to assist GAS, food co-ops, and other emerging AFNs, offering guidance on logistics, operations, and management. The incubator should also encourage the creation of



cooperative start-ups for sustainable logistics (e.g., cycle logistics, AEQUOS-type models), in collaboration with Legacoop, universities, and local institutions. Furthermore, the region should fund the design and experimentation of an ecological micro-logistics platform serving CSA, farmers’ markets, food co-ops, and GAS, with the potential to integrate local public procurement. Investments should also be directed to digital tools that are accessible, cooperative, and interoperable, such as open-source platforms (e.g., Open Food Network), ensuring inclusiveness, transparency, and decentralized technological control.

#### IV. Operational measures

Finally, there is a group of material common goods that are necessary for the sustainability of logistics activities. These include spaces, warehouses, energy infrastructures, etc. In this area, recommendations are more limited and constrained by the concrete context of the current AFNs ecosystem and solidarity economy actors. However, other concrete forms of support and visions for sustainability transition of food systems will emerge as AFN models spread, and the Region will need to equip itself with tools to continuously identify needs and potential solutions.

The Emilia-Romagna Region should promote directives for municipalities to make spaces available for storage and urban distribution at reduced costs, through:

- free use or subsidized rent of public buildings;
- contributions to rental expenses;
- installation of containers and/or modular warehouses (including refrigerated ones) in urban or peri-urban contexts.

In supporting the energy transition of logistics and transport for solidarity economy actors the Emilia-Romagna Region should fund feasibility studies and micro-investments for transport electrification (e.g. purchase of electric cargo bikes, electric vans, installation of shared charging stations, etc.).

## 6. List of actions

### 6.1. Action overview

Having outlined the overarching policy objectives and the key changes required to support the development of Alternative Food Networks at the regional level, this section presents a list of concrete actions that can help produce the desired changes.

ACTION PLAN proposed changes	Supporting Actions
I. Provide formal recognition to AFNs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 1: Participatory process</li> </ul>
II. Research, training and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 2: Permanent Observatory</li> <li>• Action 6: Educational content on AFNs</li> </ul>
III. Initiative Incubation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 3: Innovation broker</li> <li>• Action 5: Incubation of new social enterprises</li> <li>• Action 6: Educational content on AFNs</li> <li>• Action 4: Dissemination and mainstreaming</li> </ul>



**IV. Operational measures**

- Action 7: Regional Directive

## 6.2. Detailed action plan

### Action 1: Definition participatory process

**Description:**

Define clear and concrete models of Alternative Food Networks through a participatory, evidence-based process. In this context, the definition of Alternative Food Networks itself should take the form of an **agreed classification of actors** who can be legitimately considered part of these networks. This classification, built on the integration of existing mapping and F4CE project results, should include models such as Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Solidarity Purchasing Groups (GAS), and self-managed food cooperatives.

**Task and activities:**

- Integrate findings from existing mapping and F4CE project.
- Facilitate participatory consultations with stakeholders to discuss and refine the proposed models.
- Reach consensus on typologies to be included under the AFN umbrella
- Draft a policy brief recommending formal recognition and legislative adjustments.

**Timeframe:** Short-term.

**Leads:** Forum for Solidarity Economy, ART-ER, universities.

**Required resources:** stakeholder facilitation, research staff.

**Funding sources:** contributions from participating actors.

**KPIs:** number of AFN models validated through participatory process; stakeholder consensus on AFN typology; inclusion of AFN definition in policy proposals or legal drafts.

### Action 2: Permanent observatory

**Description:** Establish a Permanent Observatory on Alternative Food Network to monitor their evolution, analyze models and sustainability and connect research with policy. The Observatory will regularly collect and assess data on AFNs and translate findings into targeted policy measures, training opportunities, and updates to regional strategies—ensuring that field needs directly inform institutional action.

**Task and activities:**

- Organize quarterly or semi-annual meetings with key stakeholders to assess trends, challenges, and opportunities.
- Establish a mailing list to facilitate information sharing, event coordination, and the dissemination of relevant materials.



- Produce an annual report on the state of AFNs, including agreed indicators for economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

**Timeframe:** Long-term.

**Leads:** Forum for Solidarity Economy, ART-ER, universities.

**Funding sources:** Regional funds; research grants.

**KPIs:** Number of scholarships awarded and research outputs produced; Number of meetings held and stakeholders involved

### Action 3: Innovation broker

**Description:** Establish an *Innovation Broker* to act as a bridge between AFNs and the broader research and innovation ecosystem. The role of the broker is to match the concrete needs of AFNs—logistical, governance-related, digital, and organizational—with existing innovation opportunities, research institutions, and international best practices.

**Task and activities:**

- Monitor EU funding opportunities (e.g., Interreg, Horizon, Erasmus+, LIFE) and develop project proposals aligned with AFNs priorities.
- Organize thematic workshops for AFNs on innovations in logistics, governance, digital tools, and process improvement.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges, study visits, and twinning programmes with national and European counterparts.

**Timeframe:** Long-term.

**Leads:** ART-ER, Clust-ER Agrifood.

**Funding sources:** Regional funds; research grants; European funds.

**KPIs:** Number of AFN-targeted EU projects submitted and funded; adoption rate of digital tools among AFNs; number of workshops and study visits delivered.

### Action 4: Dissemination and mainstreaming

**Description:** Promote the regional dissemination and mainstreaming of existing AFN models by supporting the creation of new networks—such as CSA initiatives and food co-ops—based on already successful experiences. This action will enable broader access to AFN models through peer-to-peer learning, targeted guidance, and support services.

**Task and activities:**

- Develop and update user-friendly guides (one per AFN model) outlining key steps, challenges, and success factors for network creation.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer support between emerging AFNs and experienced actors (e.g., existing AFNs, researchers, local administrators).



- Create a pool of professionals to offer affordable consultancy and training services (e.g., accounting, legal, HR) to both emerging and existing AFNs.

**Timeframe:** Long-term.

**Leads:** Forum for Solidarity Economy, universities.

**Funding sources:** Regional funds; Municipal funds; European funds; research funds.

**KPIs:** number of new AFNs initiated with structured support; number of guides published and disseminated.

## Action 5: Incubation of new social enterprises

**Description:** Promote the creation and incubation of new social enterprises offering sustainable logistics and operational services tailored to the needs of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). By leveraging university-led research, incubation programs, and third-sector financing (e.g., Legacoop, Banca Etica), this action will foster the emergence of mission-driven businesses that enhance the economic and environmental sustainability of Solidarity purchasing groups, food co-ops, CSAs, and farmers' markets.

**Task and activities:**

- Develop university-level research projects focused on business model design for logistics platforms serving AFNs (e.g., PhD theses in management, social economy).
- Promote promising business ideas through participation in incubation, pitching, and spin-off programs.
- Identify and engage private or third-sector actors (e.g., Legacoop, Banca Etica) to co-finance selected initiatives

**Timeframe:** Long-term.

**Leads:** universities; Forum for Solidarity Economy; ITL.

**Funding sources:** Regional funds; European funds; research funds.

**KPIs:** number of research projects, feasibility studies or theses developed; external funds leveraged from cooperative/third sector actors.

## Action 6: Educational content on AFNs

**Description:** Develop and disseminate advanced, multidisciplinary training materials to promote a deeper understanding of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) across the education and training ecosystem. Targeting students, educators, professionals, and institutional stakeholders, this initiative aims to strengthen the long-term capacity of the AFN sector by embedding its principles, practices, and challenges into formal education pathways

**Task and activities:**

- Design training modules, webinars, handbooks, and educational content for various levels (e.g., high schools, ITS, universities).



- Identify curricula, particularly in courses related to food sustainability, cooperative economics, and agroecology where the AFN topic could be integrated.
- **Timeframe:** Medium-term.

**Leads:** universities; ITL.

**Funding sources:** Regional funds; contributions from participating actors.

**KPIs:** number of students and educators engaged; number of training modules developed and implemented; participant satisfaction.

### Action 7: Regional directive

**Description:** Promote the adoption of *regional directives* implementing the provision of Regional Law 19/2014. These directives will be directed to municipalities across Emilia-Romagna for facilitating access to spaces and infrastructures essential to the logistics activities of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs).

**Task and activities:**

- Draft a *regional directive* under the framework of Regional Law 19/2014, outlining procedures for municipalities to allocate public spaces and facilities to AFNs and solidarity economy initiatives.

**Timeframe:** short term.

**Leads:** Forum for Solidarity Economy, Emilia-Romagna Regional Authority.

**Funding sources:** contributions from participating actors.

**KPIs:** Number of public spaces and infrastructures made available to AFNs and solidarity actors; feedback from AFNs; efficiency indicators (cost/km).

## 6.3. Risk management

### Action 1: Participatory process

Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	Medium	Medium	Involve facilitators to moderate meetings as much as possible; manage resource limitations
Lack of agreement among stakeholders	Medium	High	High	Facilitate a participatory process led by a neutral facilitator;



define flexible yet minimum shared criteria

### Action 2: Permanent observatory

Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Resource limitations	High	Medium	High	Vary funding channels; prioritise the activities and avoid overcommitting; build on top of already existing activities like the informal coordination session of the Forum (CRESER)
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	Medium	Medium	Make focus group (with AFNs), dissemination (with mailing list) and participation to local processes (Solidarity Economy coordination activities) priorities of university research project; manage resource limitations

### Action 3: Innovation broker

Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Resource limitations	High	Medium	High	Vary funding channels; prioritise the activities and avoid overcommitting
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	Medium	Medium	Manage resource limitations
Misalignment between AFN needs and innovation ecosystem offerings	Medium	Medium	Medium	Invest in tailoring innovation to AFNs through academic research

### Action 4: Dissemination and mainstreaming



Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Resource limitations	Medium	Medium	Medium	Vary funding channels; prioritise the activities and avoid overcommitting; Access regional funding programs made available for initiatives with educational potential and social value.
Stakeholder Disengagement	Low	Medium	Medium	Manage resource limitations

### Action 5: Incubation of new social enterprises

Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	High	Medium	Manage resource limitations

### Action 6: Educational content on AFNs

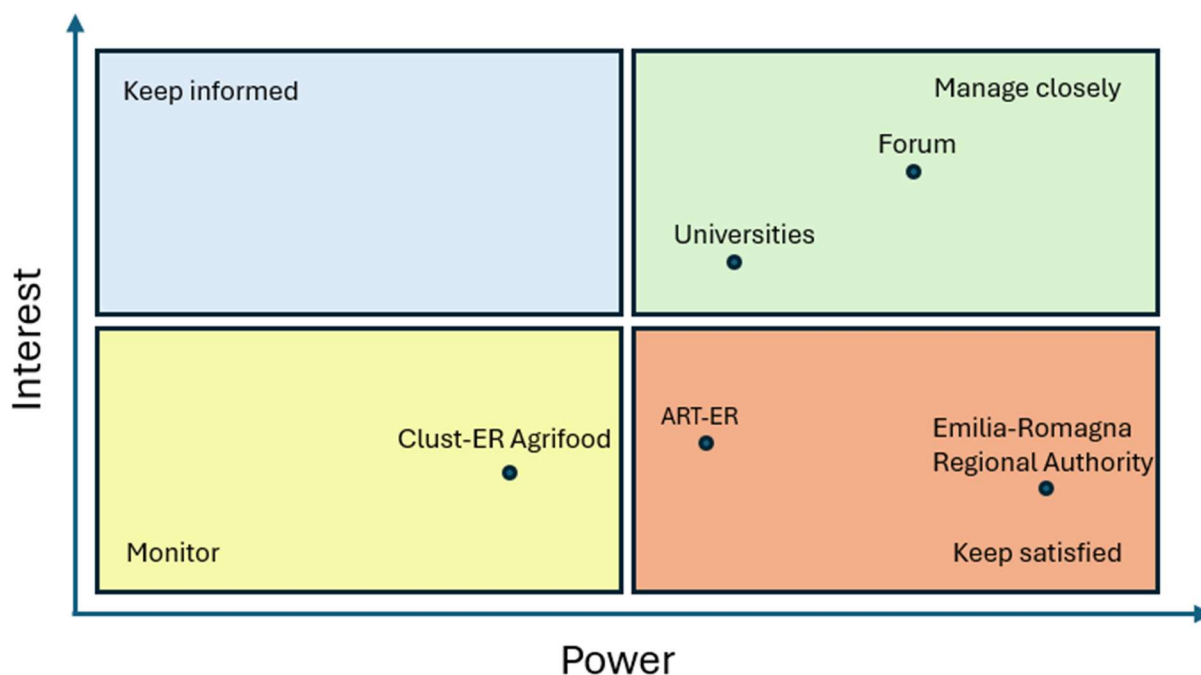
Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	Medium	Medium	manage resource limitations

### Action 7: Regional directive

Risk	Probability	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	High	High	Seek multipartisan support from Regional DG

## 6.4. Stakeholder engagement

Each of the stakeholders mentioned as having a part in the implementation of the action plan, we suggest, should be engaged following a power/interest approach as shown in the map below.



On the Y-axis, the **Interest** dimension is represented, understood as a combination of the number of action points the stakeholder contributes to and the level of engagement demonstrated throughout the Innovation Hub activities. On the other hand, the X-axis reflects the **Power** dimension, which refers to the stakeholder's capacity to influence the successful implementation of the action plan.

**Monitor (keep an eye on these stakeholders, but engagement can be minimal unless their power or interest levels change)**

Clust-ER Agrifood, a strategic interest group that brings together research centers, businesses, and public institutions in the agrifood sector, should be monitored due to its privileged access to agrifood innovation. However, its focus remains largely on conventional agriculture rather than on Alternative Food Networks.

**Keep satisfied (maintain regular communication with these stakeholders to keep them informed and satisfied, but avoid overburdening them with unnecessary details)**

ART-ER, a research organization established by the Emilia-Romagna Regional Authority, should be strategically engaged given its role as the technical secretariat of the Forum for the Solidarity Economy, its broad research expertise, and its strong influence within the regional institutional landscape.

The Emilia-Romagna Regional Authority holds substantial political and financial power and should therefore be kept satisfied to ensure the success of the action plan. However, its involvement is often limited and uncertain, as it is influenced by broader political dynamics.

**Manage closely (actively engage these stakeholders through regular communication, involve them in decision-making processes, and ensure their concerns and inputs are addressed)**

Universities of the area should be managed closely as they play a crucial role in deepening the understanding of AFNs and driving innovation within them, especially considering the difficulties these networks face in adopting solutions from the mainstream agri-food industry and in attracting private investment.

The Forum for Solidarity Economy, which brings together key actors from the solidarity economy and many of the region's most established AFN best practices around shared interests, is the stakeholder with the



greatest potential to contribute to the action plan. This is due to its strong interest in AFNs and its established relationship with the Regional Authority, which regularly takes its proposals into consideration. For this reason it should be closely managed.

## 7. Conclusion

This Regional Action Plan for Emilia-Romagna represents a major outcome of the Food4CE project, translating analytical insights and participatory processes into a coherent framework of policy recommendations and concrete actions. It draws on both the broader policy analysis developed in D. 3.1.1 and the outcomes of the participatory process carried out through Localog, the regional Innovation Hub.

The first section provides an overview of the regional landscape, describing Emilia-Romagna's geographical, socio-economic, and environmental characteristics, as well as its agricultural and food systems. It highlights both the strengths of a highly productive and export-oriented agri-food sector and the environmental and social challenges that accompany it, including soil degradation, climate impacts, and the vulnerability of small-scale producers. The analysis also underscores the diversity of local food actors and traditions, which form the basis for a dynamic AFN ecosystem.

The stakeholder analysis and Innovation Hub overview describe how Localog has served as a collaborative platform connecting AFNs, research institutions and policymakers. Through this participatory engagement, a set of common challenges emerged, including limited access to logistics infrastructures, inadequate digital tools, and fragmented governance mechanisms. These discussions directly informed the design of the policy and action framework presented in this plan.

At the heart of the document lie the policy recommendations and the action plan, which together form the strategic and operational core of this work. Grounded in an assessment of the regional and national policy context, the recommendations propose a set of measures to strengthen AFNs' role within regional food policies: (1) granting formal recognition to AFNs and their organisational forms; (2) Support research, training, and governance of innovation within AFNs; (3) Encourage innovation in logistics and facilitate the incubation of new initiatives to replicate successful AFN models; (4) Provide operational measures in relation to physical infrastructures, energy transition, and urban distribution facilities.

The Action Plan then translates these directions into a set of initial, concrete and measurable steps, outlining responsibilities, timeframes and monitoring indicators to serve as a first roadmap towards the desired changes.



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