

# Report on Functionality of PANAP CollabNet Platform

StEPPFoS Deliverable Report: D3.4



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<p><b>Abstract</b></p>	<p>This deliverable presents a comprehensive overview of the Network4Collaboration Platform, developed under the StEPPFoS project to enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange among members of the PANAP Network.</p> <p>The platform is designed as a virtual space that facilitates networking between researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders from Africa and Europe working on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. The development process followed a participatory and co-creation approach, beginning with a workshop involving key PANAP members to identify user needs and expectations. These inputs shaped the platform’s core functionalities, including a multilingual interface, user profiles, collaborative tools, a marketplace for sharing news, events, and opportunities, a resources library, and a training section.</p> <p>The report details the platform’s design, implementation, and validation phases, including stakeholder engagement and feedback collection. It also outlines limitations identified by users such as connectivity, language barriers, and user engagement and proposes mitigation strategies for future improvements. The Network4Collaboration Platform serves as both a functional collaboration tool and a strategic asset for strengthening transcontinental partnerships in sustainable agriculture and food systems.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p>	<p>Online platform, collaborative tool, evidence-based policymaking, food system transformation, Africa</p>

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## Abbreviations

AU-EU	African Union - European Union
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PANAP	Pan-African Network for economic Analysis of Policies
StEPPFoS	Strengthening Evidence-Based Policy Practice for Sustainable Food Systems under the EU-AU Partnership
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
WP	Work Package

# 1 Introduction

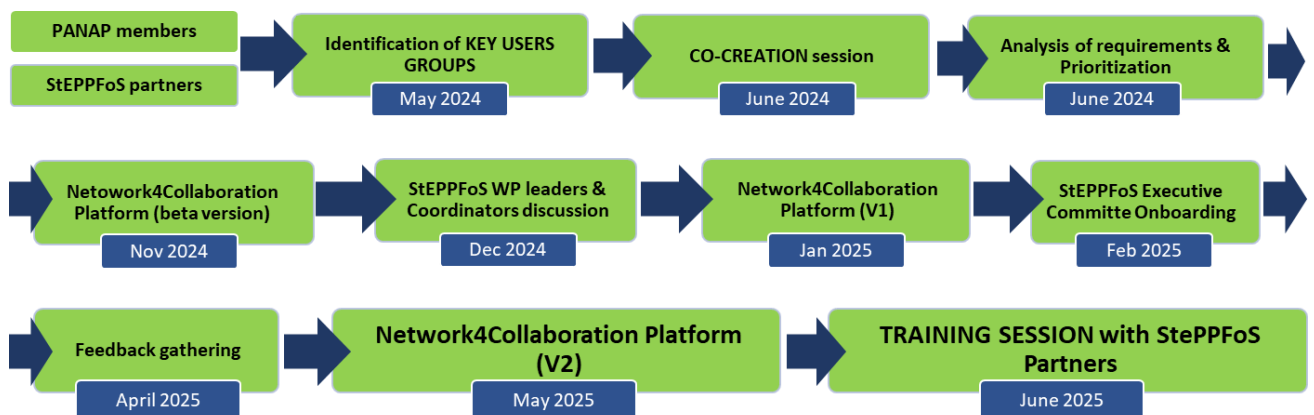
This report provides a comprehensive overview of the functionalities of the Network4Collaboration Platform, developed within the framework of the StEPPFoS project to enhance collaboration and knowledge exchange among members of the PANAP Network. The platform is designed as a Virtual Networking and Collaboration Space that connects researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders across Africa and Europe working on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture.

The report begins by presenting the process followed for the creation and implementation of the platform. It also outlines the participatory process followed including the discussion with a key users' groups, validation of the platform with the StEPPFoS Steering Committee and the training to the whole StEPPFoS project community.

The report also provides details about the specific features and components of the Network4Collaboration Platform, showcasing how the design responds to user needs. These include networking tools, collaborative workspaces, a marketplace for opportunities and a resources and training components. This documentation serves both as a reference for ongoing platform development and as a foundation for future enhancements aligned with user expectations and project goals.

# 2 Methodology

To create the platform, we followed the process outlined in Figure 1. We first identify a subgroup of stakeholders (so called key user groups) from both PANAP Network and the StEPPFoS Project. In a co-creation workshop held in Seville, we identify the general needs and functionalities that they would expect from such a platform. We assessed their requirements and prioritized them and started developing the first beta version of the platform. This version was discussed with key project partners, and the first version of the platform was implemented and presented to the Executive Committee Meeting on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025. After a period of feedback collection, we generated the second version of the platform that was presented during a training session to the whole StEPPFoS project community held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025. During that session project partners were shown how to use the platform, their questions were addressed, and feedback was collected.



**Figure 1.** Process followed to design the Network4Collaboration Platform.

### 3 Requirements assessment

Before initiating the development phase of the platform, as mentioned in previous session, we organized a co-creation working session to assess and identify end user’s requirement, analyze and prioritize the main functionalities of the Platform that will be developed to enhance the collaboration among researchers, policy makers in Africa and Europe. The session took place the 20 of June 2024 at the facilities of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in Spain.

14 members belonging to the PANAP Network participated in the session. They belonged to 9 different African-EU countries.

**Table 1.** List of PANAP members participating in the requirement assessment session.

Name	Organization and country
Joshua Laichena	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) Kenya
Emanuel Mbazi Msemu	Sokoine University of Agriculture Tanzania
Dr. Arbogast Bernard Moshi	University of Dodoma Tanzania
Kenneth Malot	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) Kenya
Oluwasola Emmanuel Omoju	National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NIDS) Nigeria
Mgeni E. Msafiri	University of Dodoma Tanzania
Saadatou Alkassoum Sangare	CAPEG Niger
Sanoussi Ibrahim Oumarou	CAPEG Niger
Bhekani Sandile Zondo	National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) South Africa
Souleymane Sadio Diallo	CIRES Cote d'Ivoire
Asiya Maskaveva	University of Dodoma Tanzania
Kwaku Antwi	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) Ghana

Vesta Nunno	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) Ghana
Dorothee Flaig	University of Hohenheim Germany

### 3.1 Working session methodology

The session last for around 1.5 hours and was structured in three major parts. In a first short section entitled “What is Virtual Networking Platform?” we present what a Virtual Networking Platform is the major aims of these type of networks. In the second section “What is PANAP Network?” we discussed the PANAP Network and the interactions that tend to take place among the Network participants. Lastly, we started the brainstorming section to assess how the Network4Collaboration Platform could support interactions and connections among the network.

This last section took most of the working session and aimed at defining the requirements and conditions to develop a useful Virtual Network Platform. The discussion was open and spontaneous and participants were asked to think and write their ideas in post-its to share them following a 4 steps structure based on the following questions:

1. What NEEDS of the PANAP Network can be covered by this Virtual Networking Platform?
2. What kind of OUTPUTs do you expect from the Virtual Networking platform?
3. One of the main benefits of the Platform is the possibility of sharing RESOURCES/DATA/KNOWLEDGE. What kind of data might you be able to share, expect to be shared?
4. What are the INCONVENIENCES you see to implementing this virtual tool?

All the comments provided by the different participants where annotated by them in sticky notes analyzed in a second step by grouping them by categories of the platform application. No limit was established in the number of comments and suggestions.



**Figure 2.** Photo of the co-creation working session at JRC Seville (4<sup>th</sup> June 2024).

## 3.2 Requirement assessments results

This section presents the results of the participatory discussion elements addressed during the workshop.

### 3.2.1 Needs (expected outputs) and Resources

Working session participants identified, by means of sticky notes, the difference elements that they consider the virtual platform should include to be adapted to their needs and requirements. Outputs were not assessed as they were perceived by participants as similar to needs. The elements mentioned by participants were categorized following the general potential key functionality sections of the virtual platform and its frequency was quantified (table 2). The share of the specific needs mentioned by participants for each general category was also calculated (table 2).

**Table 2.** Identification of the main requirements and functionalities needed by PANAP members during the Working Session.

<b>FUNCTIONALITIES REQUIRED BY PANAP MEMBERS</b>	<b>Count (%)</b>
Marketplace –a virtual space for network by sharing and looking for collaboration opportunities	15
Share News (e.g. scholarships, funding opportunities, training opportunities, new releases, events)	47%
Share experiences and ideas for collaboration (e.g. brainstorming on modelling options, request support for modelling doubts, learning from other PANAP members experience)	40%
Preparation of documents, reports, papers in collaboration	13%
Resources –a virtual space to provide documents and information of interest for PANAP Network	14
Publications (such as peer reviewed, technical reports, policy briefs)	32%
Data and databases	27%
Code & models' information	14%
Training material (such as video, documents, meeting rooms)	9%
StEPPFoS deliverables	5%
Inspiration practices (e.g. experiences of implementation policies success and failure)	5%
Other resources (e.g. list of research institutions in Africa)	5%
Methodologies	5%
Training & capacity building - a space to facilitate interaction between trainers & learners to enhance education delivery & management	13
Mentorship (such as collaboration and guidance in e.g. modelling related issues, the preparation of documents, manuscripts a and reports, technical support)	43%
Development of a training portal (to organize online trainings, creating connections between students and professors and informing about training and capacity building materials and resources)	36%
Capacity building material deposition (e.g. training resources and material)	21%
Matchmaking and user profile – as a space to look for, connect, interact and network with peers and stakeholders of interest	5
Obtain formation of relevant actors for PANAP (contact details, interests, experiences)	40%
Find research collaborators to work on specific related PANAP topics	20%
Ease access to information of PANAP team of experts (Profiles)	20%
Group researchers by research areas/research focus	20%

The requirements specified by the Key user group of the PANAP members can be organized in the 4 mayor groups i.e. Marketplace, Resources, Training & capacity building and matchmaking and user profile (highlighted in green in Table 1).

### 3.2.2 Limitations

The limitations mentioned by the key user group together with the corrective measures to reduce the risk of those potential limitations on of the platform are specified in table 3. While not all corrective measures will be able to be implemented during StEPPFoS projects, they will be considered in future developments.

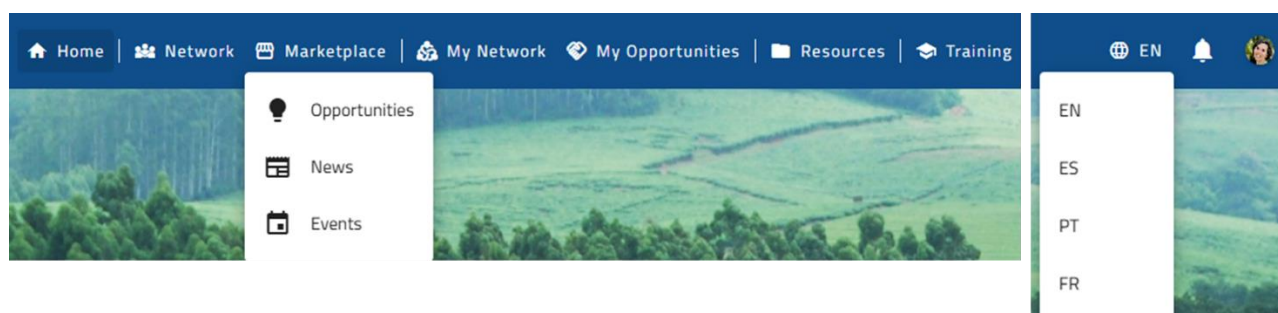
**Table 3.** Potential limitations of the Virtual Platform and its corrective measure.

Limitations of a Virtual Collaboration Platform	N	Potential corrective measures to prevent those limitations
Lack of connectivity – poor internet connection in some locations	4	Information included in the platform will be stored to be checked any time (including requests of connection).
Complexity to engage all members of the network to be in	2	Have an onboarding session with end-users
Time differences among users from different countries	1	When users are not connected simultaneously, Information included in the platform will be stored to be checked any time (including requests of connection)
Low response to requests	1	An onboarding of the platform will take place to explain objectives and reason for this platform. Additionally, reminder will be allowed to be send.
Language barriers (English, French, Portuguese)	1	The platform will have an automatic translation possibility
Irrelevance of the shared material	1	Each platform member will be allowed to share the information of interest
Maintenance (Keeping information updated)	1	Each platform member will update and include the information of relevance
Data protection and security	1	The access to the platform is restricted and only allowed members will be able to access the platform and its content
Membership fees	1	No membership payment will be requested to any user/member of the platform

## 4 Functionalities of Network for collaboration Platform

The Network4Collaboration Platform has been designed to facilitate knowledge sharing and research and policy dialogue. This section presents and describes the various elements and functionalities developed (see figure 3) to create an operational and user-friendly platform. The main functionalities offered by the platform, which are explained below, include:

- Multilingual navigation
- Restricted access to the platform
- User profile
- Home page
- Network
- Marketplace
- My Network
- My collaboration Opportunities
- Resources
- Training



**Figure 3.** Main functionalities offered by the Network4Collaboration Platform.

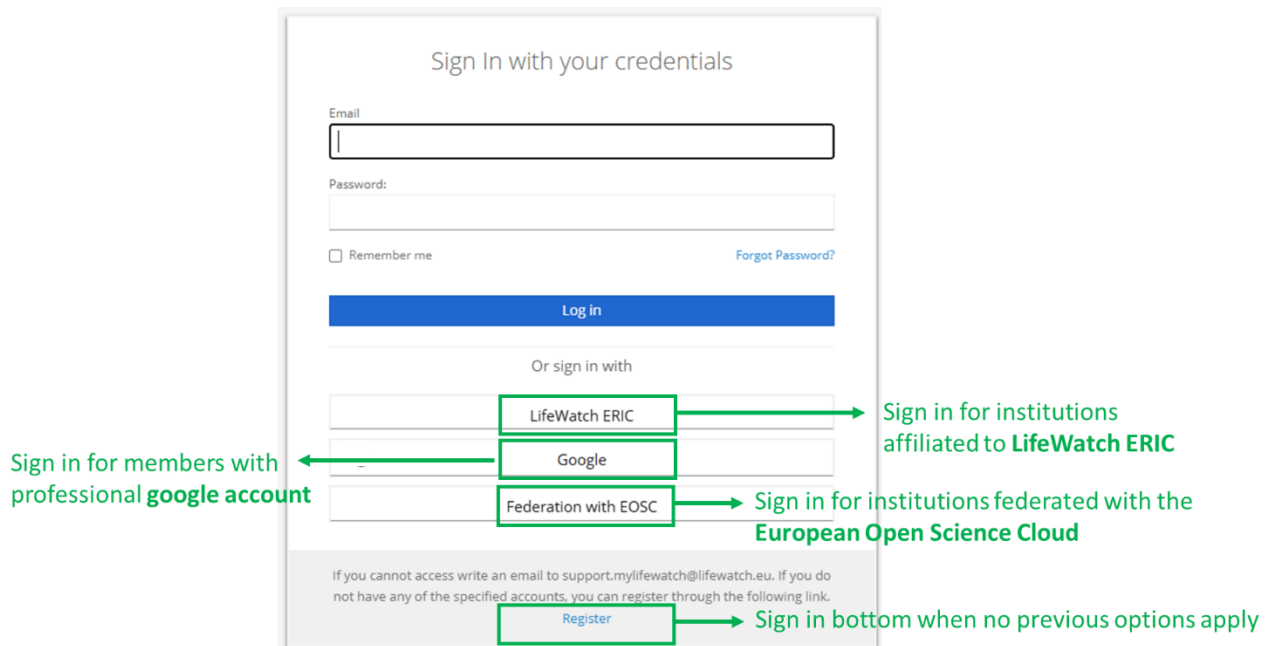
### 4.1 Platform language

The platform supports multilingual navigation, allowing users to access content and functionalities in multiple languages, including English, French, Spanish and Portuguese (see figure 3). This feature ensures inclusivity and improves accessibility for all members of the PANAP network, fostering seamless collaboration across diverse linguistic backgrounds. Users can easily switch languages through the language selector integrated into the platform interface.

### 4.2 Platform access

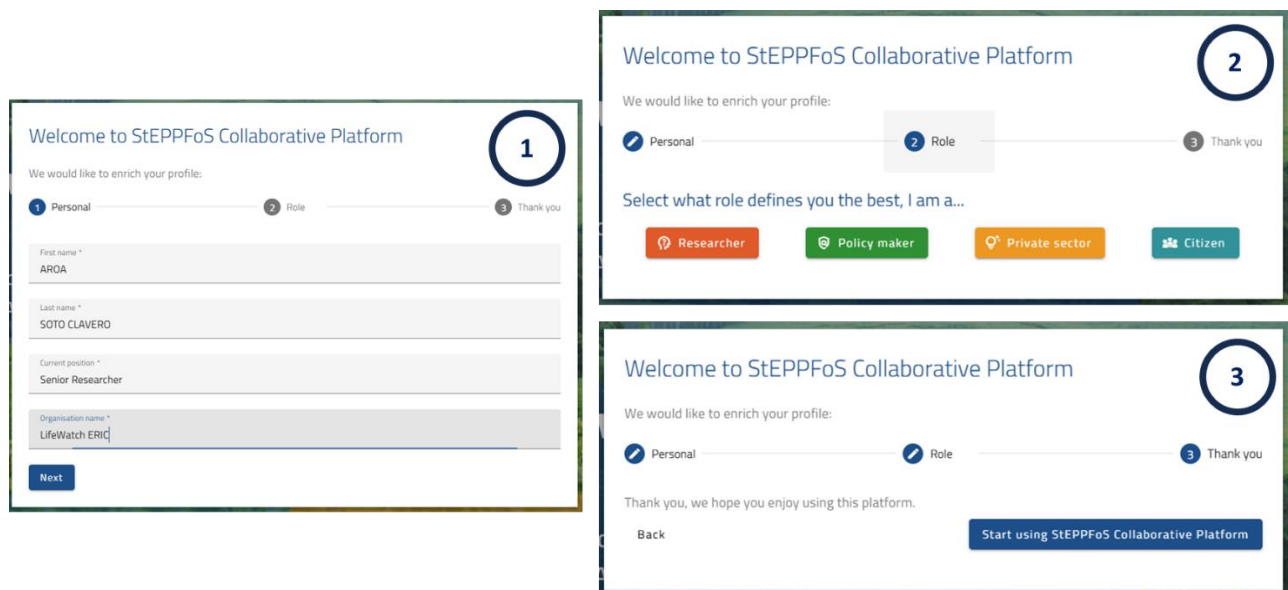
To get access to the Network4Collaboration plan, users need to navigate to the platform website <https://steppfos.network4collaboration.lifewatch.eu/> and request access by using the “request access”

button allocated at the end of the home page or in the header banner. A sign-in pop-up is then opened and members are able to join the platform by using 4 different procedures: using LifeWatch ERIC account, a Google account, an account federated with EOSC or any other account (see figure 4).



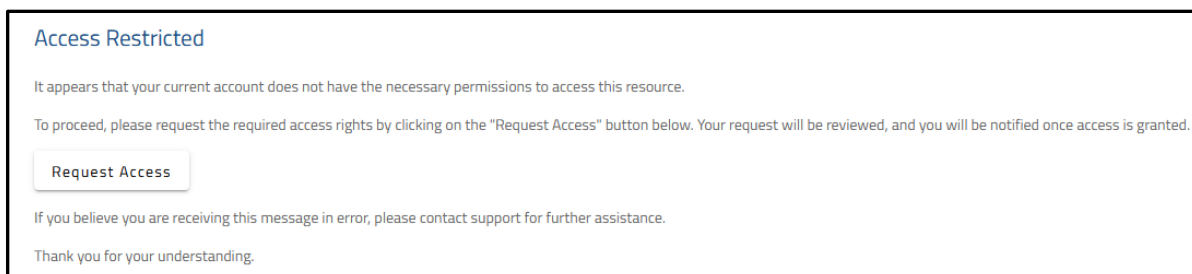
**Figure 4.** Explanation of the different sign-in options provided by the platform.

During the initial sign-in process, platform members are required to complete a three-step registration (see figure 5). First, they must provide their personal details and indicate their role (i.e. researchers, policy makers, private sector or citizen). Once completed, they will be able to sign-in the platform.



**Figure 5.** Three step process to register to the Network4Collaboration platform.

After registering, users will see a pop-up window (figure 6) requesting access when they use the platform for the first time. Platform administrators will then verify their email and access rights before granting or denying permission to enter the application



**Figure 6.** Pop-up window displayed when the user first attempts to access the platform's functionalities

### 4.3 Users profile

To ensure proper use of the platform, members are required to complete their profiles by providing the necessary information (figure 7). The profile includes the following different fields: Name, organization, current position, email address, phone number, personal web, address, nationality, birthday, level of education, description of your activity, areas of expertise and areas of interest.

Members also have the option to upload a profile picture and attach additional documents (such as a CV) to enrich their profile and provide further context about their background.

The screenshot shows a user profile completion form for IRIA SOTO. The form is divided into two main sections: 'About you' and 'Additional information'.

**About you:**

- First name: IRIA
- Last name: SOTO
- Organisation: LifeWatch ERIC
- Current position: Researcher
- Email address: iria.soto@lifewatch.eu
- Telephone number: 0034616812552
- Personal website: (empty)
- Address: Sevilla, Andalucía, España
- Nationality: Spanish
- Birthday: 27/06/1981
- Level of education: Doctoral or equivalent level
- Description of your activity: I am a biologist and forest engineer with a PhD on Bioeconomics. My research activity is framed in sustainable agriculture and agroecology. I'm particularly involved in stakeholders engagement process and methods and monitoring approaches.

**Additional information:**

- Select what role defines you the best: Researcher (selected), Policy maker, Private sector, Citizen
- Areas of expertise: agroecology, living lab, Sustainable Agriculture, adoption of innovations, microeconomics, impact evaluation, GHG emissions from the agricultural sector
- Areas of interest: agroecology, stakeholders engagement, data management, food value chain
- Want to share more details about your profile (e.g. curriculum vitae)? Attach your files here: Collapse all, Expand all, Public profile documents

Figure 7. Information fields required to complete a user profile.

#### 4.4 Home page

The StEPPFoS Collaborative Platform homepage (figure 8) presents, with text and figures, a short overview of the StEPPFoS projects activities (call *what we do* section), its partners (*who we are* section) and a link to the project webpage. It provides comprehensive overview of the Network4Collaboration platform (at the *what is the StEPPFoS Collaborative Platform* section) describing it as an interactive online space designed to support collaboration, knowledge exchange, and policy engagement around sustainable agriculture and food systems in Africa and Europe. The homepage also provides platform’s mission (to connect stakeholders including researchers, policymakers, farming associations, and private sector professionals engaged in the StEPPFoS project and the PANAP network). Thus, the platform acts as a bridge between evidence-based research and real-world policy implementation.

The homepage outlines the key functionalities of the Network4Collaboration (at the *How does the StePPFoS Collaborative Platform work?* section) such as News, Events, and Opportunities, which provide users with the latest updates, upcoming activities, and potential collaborations. This structure promotes networking, professional growth, and the co-creation of innovative solutions. Finally, the platform outlines its inclusive code of conduct, fostering a respectful and collaborative environment for all users.

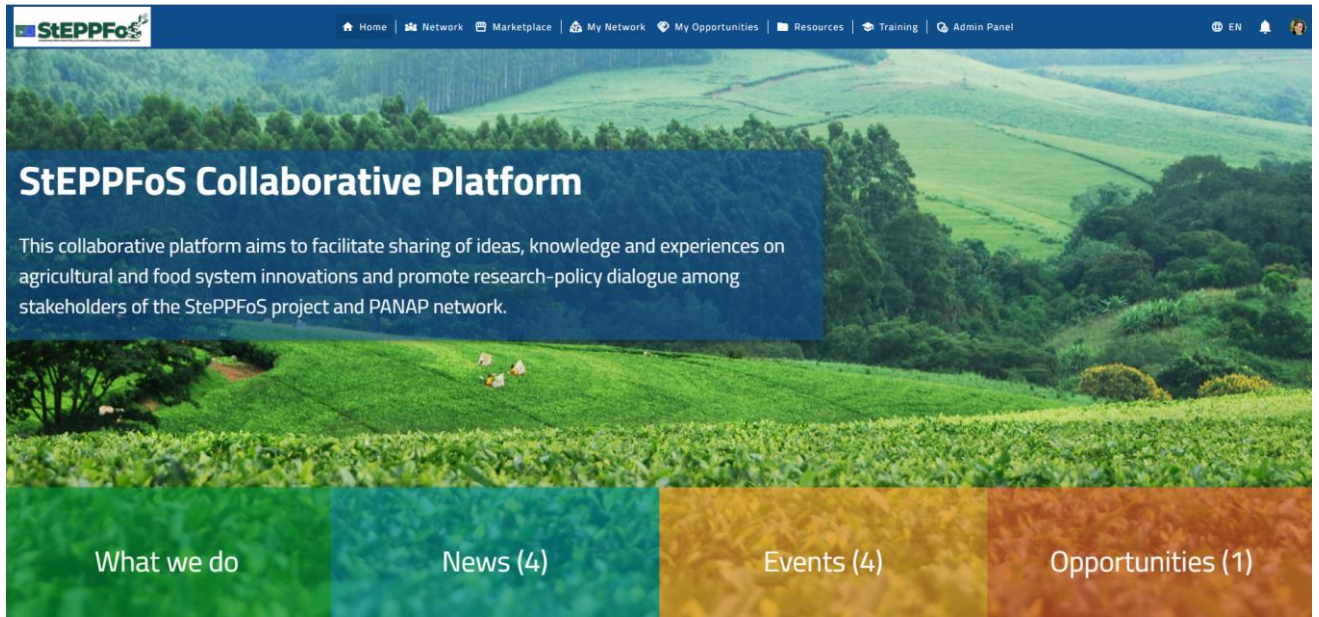


Figure 8. Visualization of the upper section of the homepage

## 4.5 Network

The networking functionality (figure 9) allows platform members to explore others member profiles within our community. This functionality allows to generate and stay connected with stakeholders that meet each member needs.

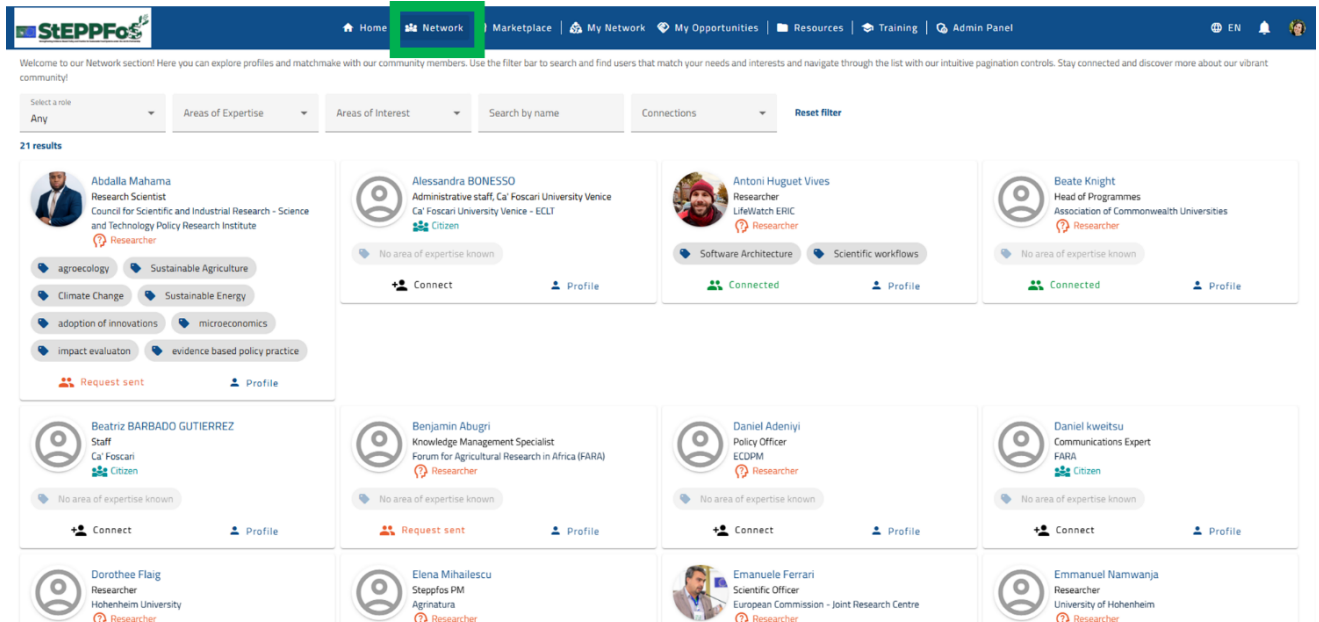
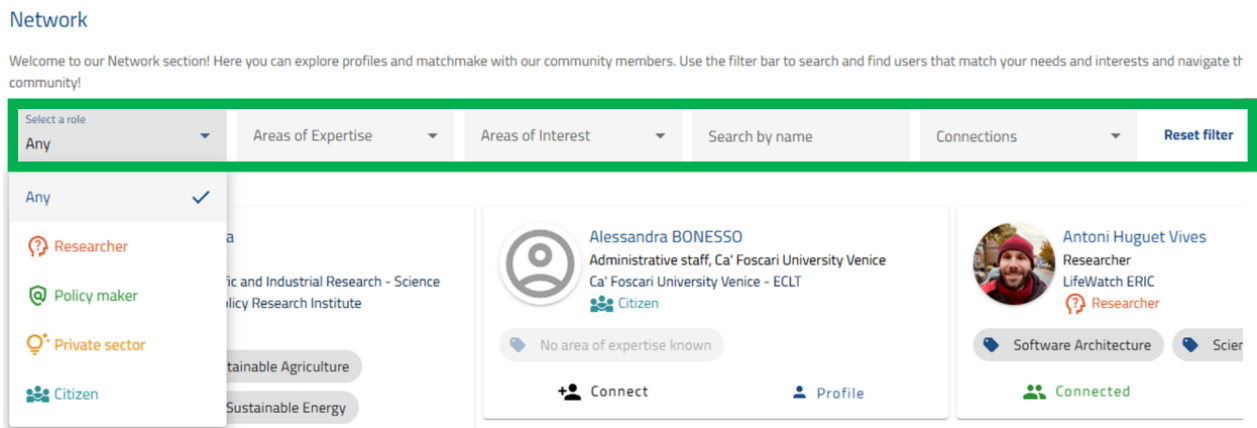


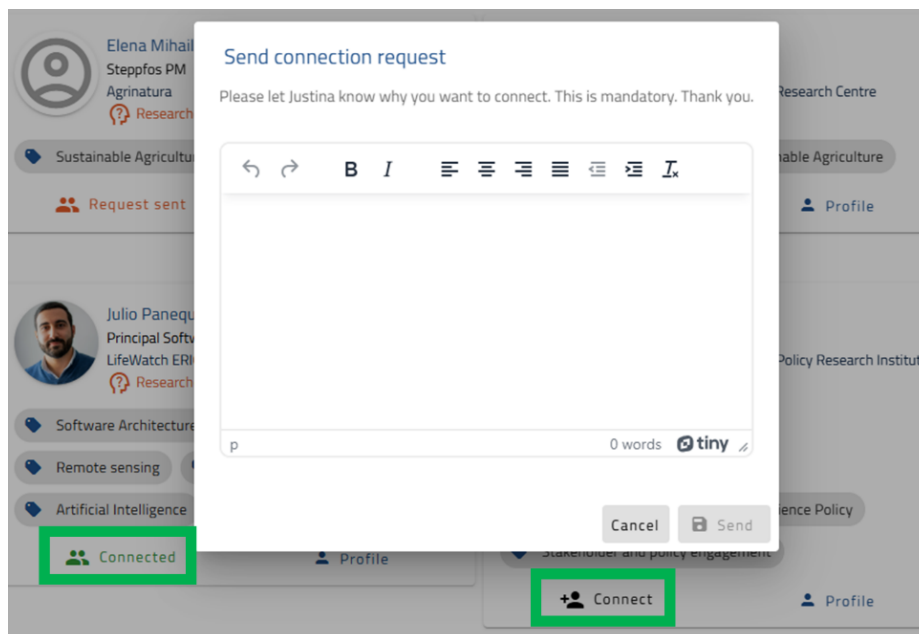
Figure 9. Overview of the network section of the StEPPFoS Network4Collaboration Platform

Members of the platform can use the search and filter bar to find specific users, and navigate the member list with user-friendly search bar (figure 10). The specific filters to find other users are: role, areas of expertise (as keywords), areas of interest (as keywords), name, connection (differentiating between first and second level).



**Figure 10.** Filter bar of the StePPFoS Network4Collaboration Platform Networking Section

Members of the platform can send messages to other users (see Figure 11) to initiate a connection. Once the recipient accepts the request, both users will be connected and can begin exchanging information, such as collaboration opportunities.



**Figure 11.** Pop-up window that appears when connecting with other members of the platform.

Filter bar of the StePPFoS Network4Collaboration Platform Networking Section

## 4.5.1 My Network

In this section users can visualize and manage the members they are connected with and the members that invited them to be part of their specific network (figure 12).

Name	Organization	Actions
Jose-Manuel Avila Researcher	LifeWatch ERIC	Withdraw
Antoni Huguet Vives Researcher	LifeWatch ERIC	Withdraw
Beate Knight Head of Programmes	Association of Commonwealth Universities	Withdraw
Emanuele Ferrari Scientific Officer	European Commission - Joint Research Centre	Withdraw
Maite Irazabal Researcher	lifewatch eric	Withdraw
Julio Paneque Principal Software Engineer	LifeWatch ERIC	Withdraw
Emmanuel Namwanja Researcher	University of Hohenheim	Withdraw

Items per page: 10 1 - 7 of 7 |< < > >|

Manage invitations

Name	Organization	Actions
0 of 0		

Items per page: 10 0 of 0 |< < > >|

**Figure 12.** Visualization of my network section with the different contacts.

## 4.6 Marketplace

This section of the platforms facilitates members the exchange, discovery and promotion of activities of interests for the partnership. The section is composed by news, events and opportunities for collaboration.

### 4.6.1 News

In this subsection (figure 13) members can find the latest updates and announcements included by platform members. It counts with a search bar to locate specific articles, and browse older updates effortlessly.

Members can also include new articles by clicking in the “create a new article” (marked in green in figure 13). A title, short description, full new article text, expiration data and image are the fields establish to publish a news article (figure 14).

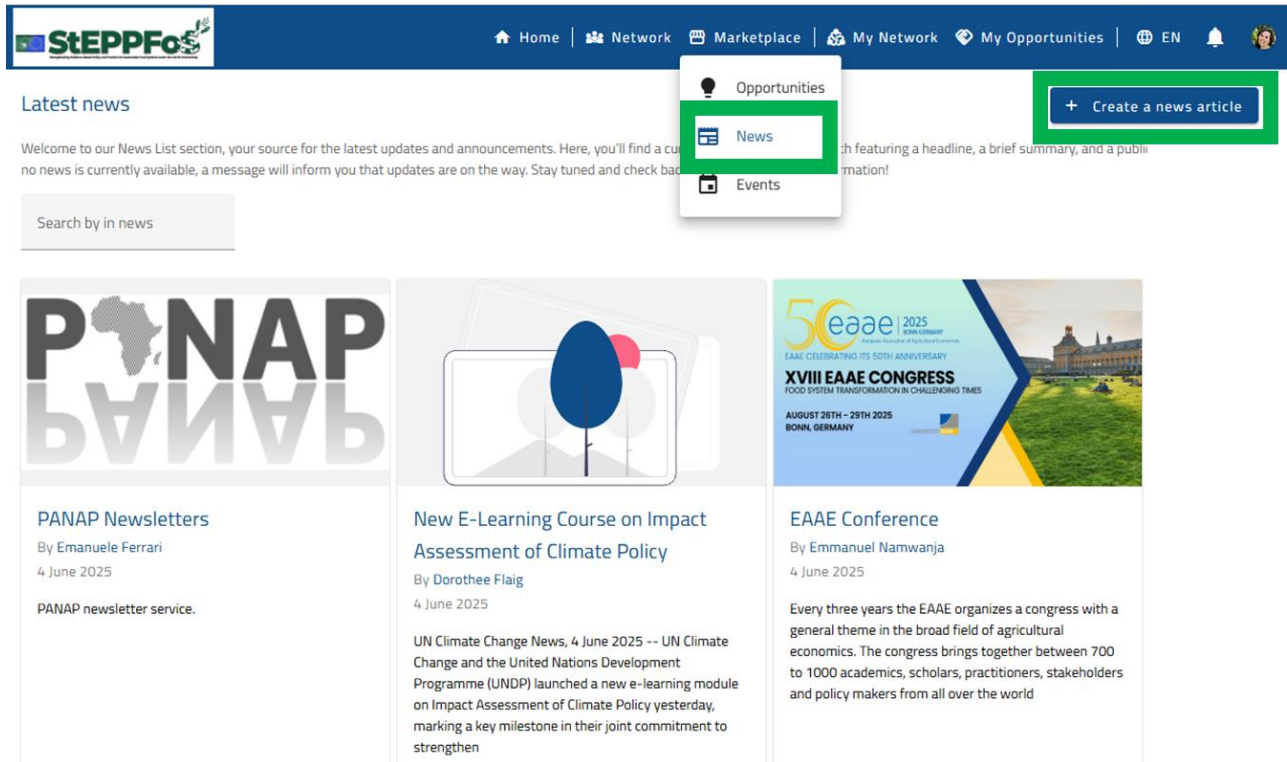


Figure 13. Visualization of the news section of the Marketplace.

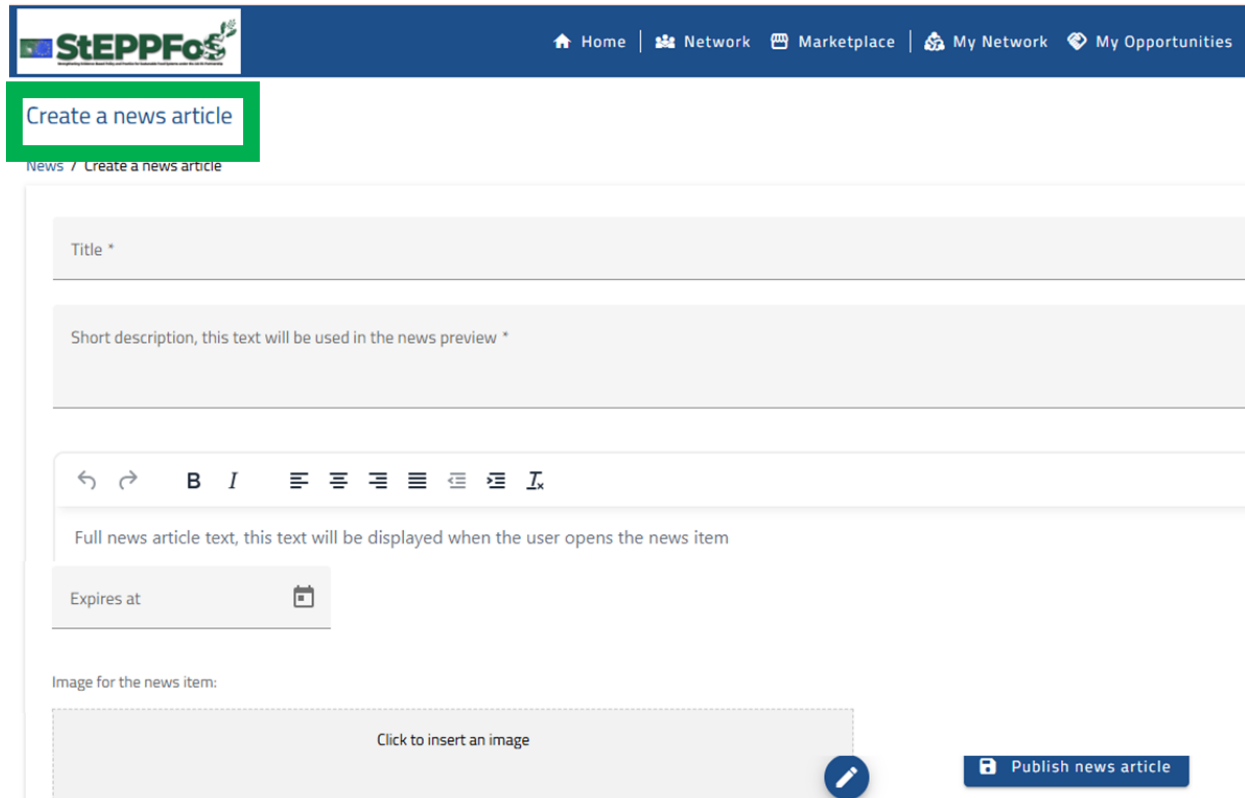


Figure 14. Visualization of the pop-up window that appears when creating a new article.

## 4.6.2 Events

In this subsection (figure 15) members can explore upcoming events, both online and in person. By using the search bar, they can easily search for specific events and browse past or future listings.

Members can also include new events by clicking in the “create event” (marked in green in figure 15). A title, short description, full description of the event, start and end date and time, participation mode (i.e. physical, hybrid or online), event url, address and image are the fields required to publish a new event (figure 16).

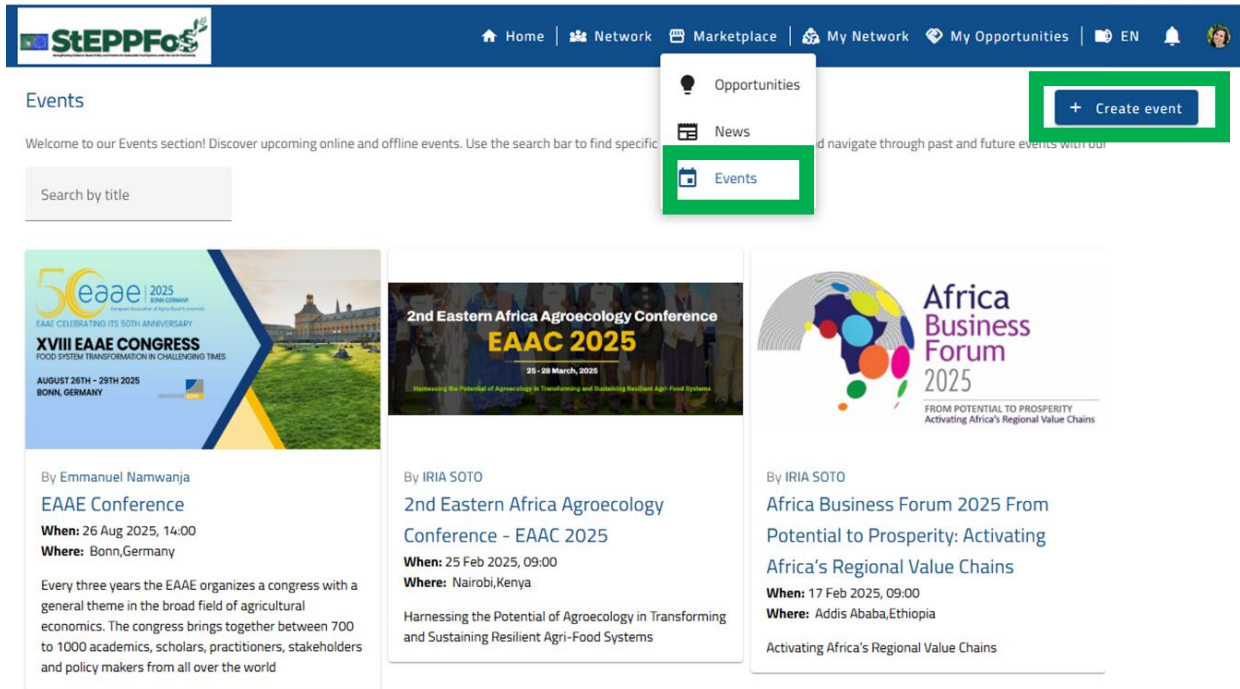


Figure 15. Visualization of the events section of the Marketplace.

Figure 16. Visualization of the pop-up window that appears when creating a new event.

### 4.6.3 Opportunities

In this subsection (figure 17) members can discover unique collaboration opportunities shared by community members. They can search for specific opportunities that match their interests or expertise and explore them using simple filter. Areas of expertise, key words and name are the 3 defined search parameters.

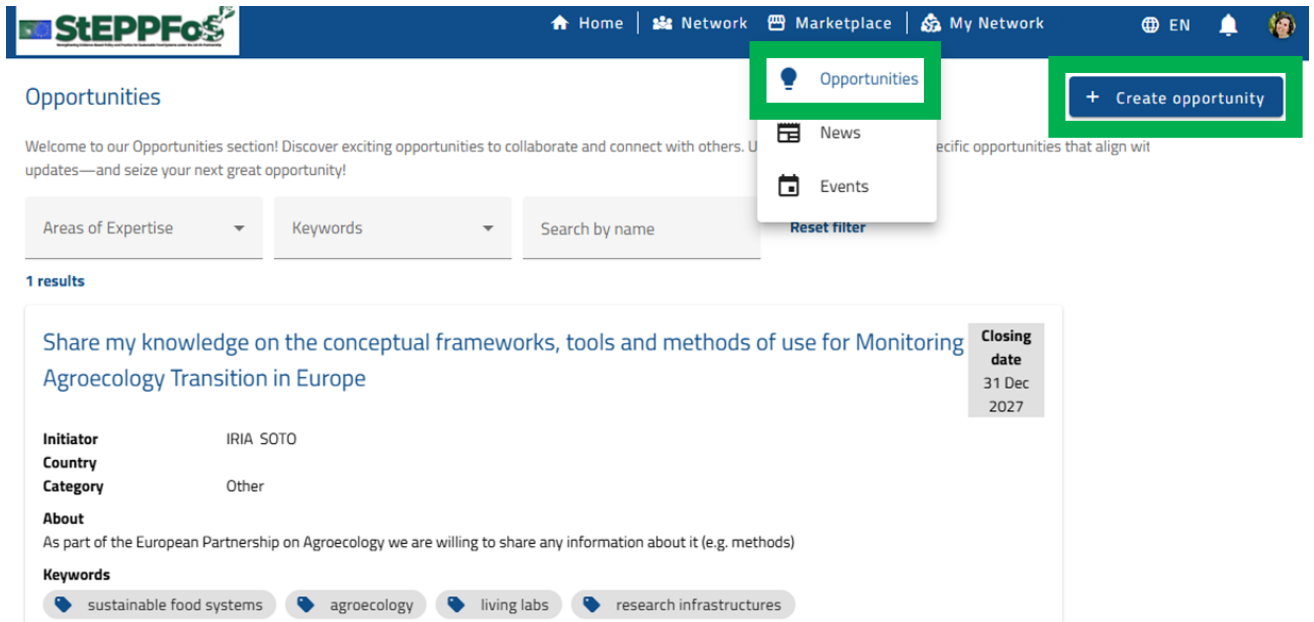


Figure 17. Visualization of the opportunities section of the Marketplace.

#### Create opportunity

My opportunities / Create opportunity

Figure 18. Visualization of the pop-up window that appears when creating a new opportunity.

Members can also include new events by clicking in the “create opportunity” (marked in green in Figure 17). A title, short description, full description of the opportunity, closing date, category (i.e. policy paper, funding opportunity, inspirational practice, research project, service, challenge, other), areas of expertise (as open text), key words (open text), location and website are the fields required to publish a new opportunity (figure 18). Additionally, members can attach files for sharing more details about the opportunity characteristics.

#### 4.6.4 My Opportunities

In this section you can visualize the state of both the opportunities placed by the member (not only the active ones but the archives) as well as the opportunities the member applies for (figure 19). Here the member can modify them as well as to assess the status and take action if needed.

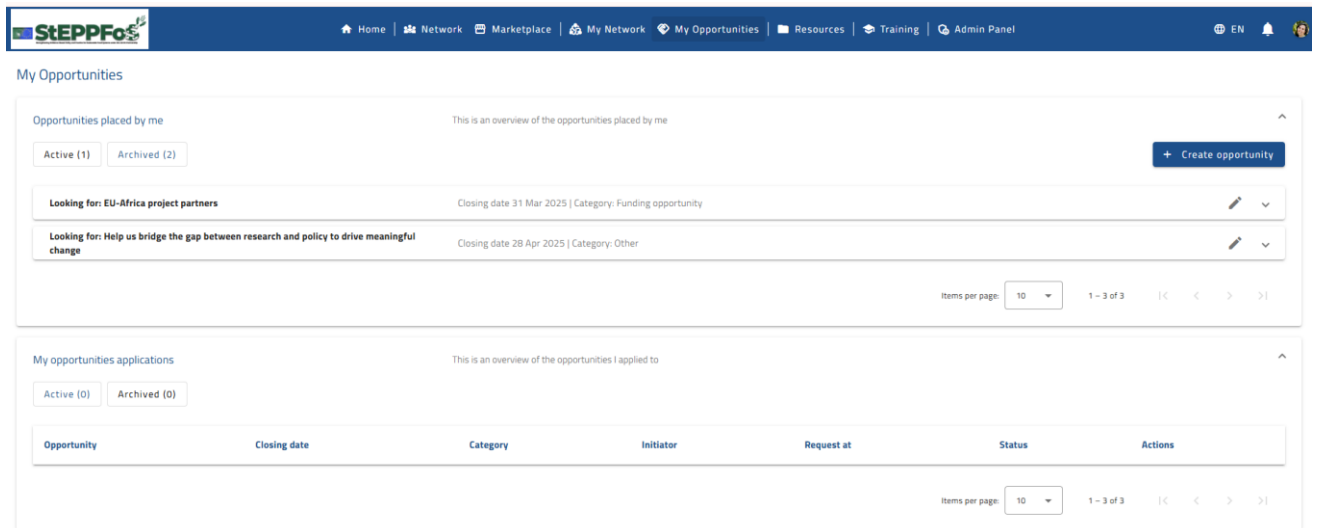
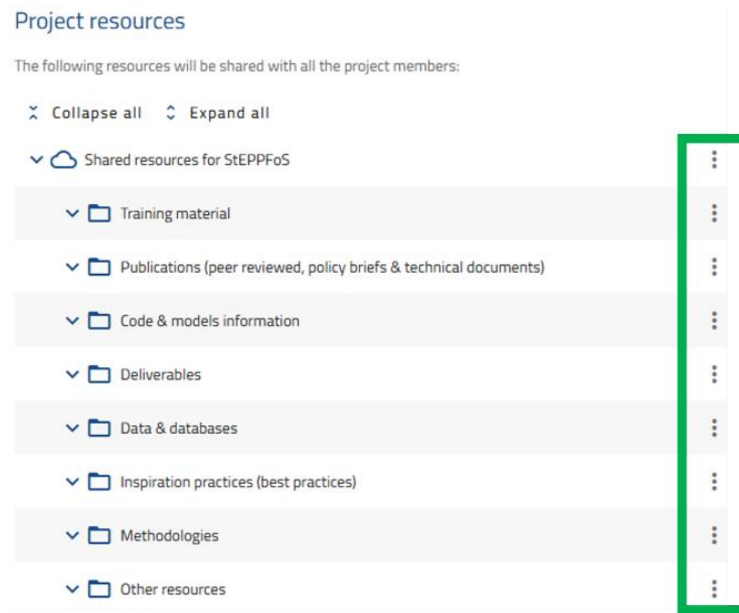


Figure 19. Visualization of “my opportunities” section of the platform.

#### 4.7 Resources

In this section members can explore all the content and reference documents uploaded by other members. Members can find articles, guides, videos among others (see figure 20 for the full list of resources categories identified during the co-creation session). Additionally, platform members are allowed to generate and share a complete folder by clicking in the 3 dots highlighted in green in figure 20.



**Figure 20.** Visualization of the full list of resources categories.

## 4.8 Training<sup>1</sup>

In this section of the platform (figure 21), members will be able to find educational and skill-development content generated, managed and delivered mainly in the framework of WP2 but also in other WPs such as WP1. This section is designated to centralize the allocation of webinars, courses and any other training content developed under StEPPFoS project.

The content of this section is currently under development waiting for WPs to perform their training activities and provide the training related material. A template to inventor and identify the training and capacity building activities has been generated to plan the information content. The information requested is the following:

- Training Topic Related WP
- Resource person/Contact person (name and email)
- Organization providing content
- Training Title
- Training Contents to be covered
- Target group
- Expected Learning Outcome
- Training Format (course, webinar, workshop, tutorial, guides, etc.) Delivery

<sup>1</sup> The development of this functionality was initially not foreseen in the Grant Agreement. However due to the interest showed by the key user group and the need of a training platform from the WP2.Training and Capacity Building, we develop it as agreed with FARA, the project coordinators.

- Mode (online/presence, live, recorded, asynchronous, etc.)
- Training Level (e.g., beginner, intermediate, advanced)
- Internal/external
- Project period (M)
- Related Stakeholders Engagement Event (if any)
- Notes/Comments



**Figure 21.** Visualization of the home page of the training platform

## Conclusions

The development and implementation of the Network4Collaboration Platform mark a significant achievement in advancing virtual collaboration within the framework of the StEPPFoS project and the broader PANAP Network. Through a participatory and iterative approach, the platform has been carefully designed to reflect the specific needs and expectations of its key users i.e. researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders working on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture across Africa and Europe.

The collaborative process, including co-creation workshops, stakeholder validation, and user training, ensured that the platform is not only technically functional but also user-centered. It addresses key challenges and barriers to virtual engagement by offering multilingual support, inclusive access, secure user management, and intuitive tools for communication, knowledge sharing, and professional networking.

The platform's main functionalities i.e. the Marketplace, Resources, Training, and Networking features respond directly to the priorities identified by users. These tools support active collaboration, the exchange of best practices, and the dissemination of relevant opportunities and resources. Moreover, by addressing common limitations (e.g., internet connectivity, language barriers, engagement

challenges), the platform lays a solid foundation for long-term sustainability and value creation.

Looking ahead, the Network4Collaboration Platform serves not only as a functional digital space but also as a strategic instrument to strengthen partnerships, foster innovation, and promote policy-relevant research. It represents an evolving ecosystem that will continue to grow in alignment with the dynamic needs of the PANAP Network and the objectives of the StEPPFoS project.



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