

**Interreg
Danube Region**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



COOPOWER

Methodology for Stakeholder mapping

A Practical Step-by-Step Guide

Contents

1	Introduction and Definition	2
2	Deadline of Stakeholder Mapping	4
3	Types of Stakeholders based on the Quadruple Helix model	5
	3.1. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Local, National and International Policymakers.	5
	3.2. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Educational Institutions as Key Stakeholders.	6
	3.3. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Business sector representatives, including SMEs.	6
	3.4. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Civil society organizations, including NGOs and citizen groups.	7
4	How to create a Stakeholder map	7
	Step 1: Apply the Quadruple Helix Framework.	8
	Step 2: Categorize Stakeholders by Helix and Identify Them Based on Relevance.	8
	Step 3: Iterate and Validate the Stakeholder Map.	12
	Step 4: Assess Relevance and Role.	12
	Step 5: Complete the Stakeholder Mapping Excel Template.	13
5	References	14

1. Introduction and Definition

The purpose of this methodology is to ensure that all relevant actors - especially those connected to vulnerable youth and NEETs - are systematically identified, categorized, and meaningfully engaged throughout the project.

A stakeholder map is a visual tool to help identify, organize and understand the key societal actors who are involved or affected by the COOPOWER project. The map will allow us to identify who needs to be engaged for each of the four sectors in the Quadruple Helix model which will be used for mapping in COOPOWER. This model will help each mapping team to understand how important each stakeholder is to the successful outcome of the project as well as how to involve the stakeholders. The map for each partner country will take the form of an excel spreadsheet (to be filled out for each partner country) with layers of color-coding to be applied to each stakeholder with possible selection between three levels of relevance to the goals of the respective pilots and the COOPOWER project as a whole.

Importantly, per the concept note for Activity 2.1, the key stakeholders selected through the mapping process at national and transnational levels could be featured (if they agree) on the official project website. Such visibility will not only recognize the stakeholders, but will also promote their involvement, enhance transparency and encourage further stakeholder and public engagement.

The COOPOWER project uses the Quadruple Helix model¹ which brings together four key societal sectors - academia/research, industry, government/policymaking community, and civil society because it is particularly well-suited to complex, multidimensional challenges such as youth unemployment and social exclusion. These challenges cannot be addressed by single-sector interventions; instead, they require coordinated, cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation.

Furthermore, the challenges of vulnerable young people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment stem from structural mismatches between educational systems, labor market demands, public policies, and the everyday realities these young people navigate. The Quadruple Helix model recognizes that sustainable solutions must draw from:

- Education providers who shape skills and pathways to employment;
- Employers and business actors who offer job opportunities and drive demand;
- Governmental/policymaking actors who design and implement labor and education policies;

¹ Carayannis, E. G., & Campbell, D. F. J. (2009). "Mode 3" and "Quadruple Helix": Toward a 21st century fractal innovation ecosystem. *International Journal of Technology Management*, 46(3–4), 201–234.

<https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2009.023374>

- Civil society and NGOs who work closely with marginalized youth and can articulate their needs.

The Quadruple Helix approach emphasizes collaborative innovation, where all four sectors co-create solutions rather than act in isolation. Traditional top-down approaches often fail to engage young people meaningfully and civil society actors play a critical role in amplifying youth voices and ensuring that policies or programs are relevant, inclusive, and accessible².

Youth employment is a key pillar of sustainable regional development. The Quadruple Helix model supports the development of local innovation ecosystems that are tailored to the specific needs and capacities of regions. This aligns well with COOPOWER's focus on local stakeholder engagement and regional strategies for economic and social inclusion of NEETs.

By integrating diverse stakeholders, the model facilitates policy coherence and better use of local resources. It encourages the alignment of educational outputs with labor market needs, the design of public policies informed by field experience, and the mobilization of private sector and civil society resources in the support of common goals.

For projects like COOPOWER that aim to empower marginalized groups (such as NEETs and other unemployed youth), the Quadruple Helix model offers a framework for participatory governance. It opens channels for continuous dialogue and feedback among stakeholders, increasing both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of interventions.

The PPs responsible for the mapping in the respective countries will consider a number of criteria when selecting the stakeholders who should be involved in the change effort. The process of stakeholder designation will be iterated until the PP team arrives at a "full list" of stakeholders³. The process of stakeholder mapping may result in a different number of stakeholders for each partner country, depending on the specific context. There is no expectation for a minimum or maximum number of stakeholders per national map as the pilot location and the nature of the planned pilots are different for each partner. Such openness allows for the partners to expand their mapping as much as possible (note that mapping will be a continuous process during the project, with the possibility of adding or taking out stakeholders from the maps). It is better that partners work with a large possible list for stakeholders who can be engaged in the LCI and HUB activities coming up later in the project.

Only stakeholders which can contribute to the legitimacy, representation and credibility of the project should be included in the stakeholder list.

²European Commission. (2016). Open innovation, open science, open to the world – A vision for Europe. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2777/061652>

³ More information of group formation or stakeholder designation can be found in Step 2 of subsection 4. "How to create a stakeholder map"

2. Deadline of Stakeholder mapping

The Stakeholder Mapping activity is part of Deliverable D2.1.1 and is scheduled for implementation during Period 2 of the project, which runs from October 1st, 2025 to March 31st, 2026.

The CSD team is responsible for developing this Stakeholder Mapping Methodology. The methodology will be drafted and made available to all PPs by September 1st, 2025, to be finalized by the end of September 2025.

Table 1. Timeline of Deliverable 2.1.1

Timeline	Activity
September 1st 2025	CSD shares the final draft of the Stakeholder Mapping Methodology with all project partners (PPs).
September 1st – September 12th 2025	PPs review the methodology and provide feedback and/or questions.
September 15th to September 25th 2025	CSD responds to questions, offers consultations, and organizes meetings (if needed) to support partners in applying the methodology. Finalization of the Stakeholder Mapping Methodology.
October 1st 2025	PPs begin work on their individual Stakeholder Maps as part of Deliverable D2.1.1.
October 31st 2025	All PPs submit their finalized Stakeholder Maps (<i>Note: this deadline is internal; see note below about the internal and official deadlines for the maps</i>)



While this timeline may be adjusted slightly to accommodate partner needs, **October 31st, 2025** is the internal deadline for the stakeholder maps so that they can lay the foundation for the rest of the tasks in Activity 2.1, the official final deadline for submission of the stakeholder maps to JEMS is **March 31st, 2026**.

3. Types of Stakeholders based on the Quadruple Helix model

In the context of COOPOWER, a stakeholder is an institution, organization, an individual or a group of people who has or have influence on or interest in enhancing employment opportunities for vulnerable youth in socio-economically challenged regions. Institutions, organizations, groups, and individuals who play a key role in the implementation of the project, have a vested interest in its activities, possess relevant knowledge and experience critical to the project's execution and outcomes, as well as those whose participation in discussions can contribute to the project's long-term impact, should be considered key stakeholders. There may be local key people who should also be considered for inclusion in the key stakeholder subgroup lists as well as other figures with diverse voices on youth inclusion.

3.1. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Local, National and International Policymakers

Local, national and international policymakers are institutional stakeholders operating at different levels of governance who are engaged in the development, deliberation, implementation, and financing of legislation, national regulatory frameworks, and strategic plans - particularly in areas such as access to education, youth inclusion, and related social policies.

Through their legislative and regulatory instruments, these entities shape the foundational legal and policy environment within which the project is implemented. Moreover, they play a critical enabling role by designing and providing funding mechanisms that allow local authorities to participate in and support initiatives tailored to the specific needs and challenges of their respective regions.

At the local level, these policies are typically operationalized through various municipal departments or agencies that address issues such as education, employment, social inclusion, and related community needs. Examples of local policymakers may be: municipal directorates that are involved in the economic

and business development of the regions, directorates that are responsible for implementing educational or youth related policies, etc.

Examples of national policymakers might be: ministries of education, ministries of social policy and labor, ministries of youth and sports, national labor force agencies, bureaus of labor directorates, national committees on youth unemployment, etc.

Examples of international policymakers can include organizations and alliances that shape policies across nations, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the European Union (EU), etc. International donor organizations which are active in youth employment and youth inclusion could also be added to this group (e.g., USAID, GIZ, UNICEF, etc.).

3.2. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Educational Institutions as Key Stakeholders

Educational institutions, in the context of the COOPOWER project, refer to all organizations providing formal or non-formal education at the local level that are accessible to project participants. Given the project's target group - individuals aged from around 15 to 30 – institutions serving youth in these age groups will be considered for inclusion in the stakeholder maps.

Educational institutions may be classified as key stakeholders if their primary mission is to equip learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for labor market entry. This includes, but is not limited to: higher education institutions operating in the region; secondary vocational schools offering professional qualifications that enable direct access to employment; schools with dual education systems that combine theoretical instruction with practical training; retraining centers; centers providing formal and non-formal education focused on labor-market-relevant skill development.

3.3. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Business sector representatives, including SMEs

Given the COOPOWER project's objective of enhancing opportunities for young people who are not in employment or in danger of becoming unemployed, local business partners play a critical role as potential key stakeholders. Businesses that actively recruit young people, have staffing needs, or demonstrate an interest in facilitating youth entry into the labor market are particularly well-suited for engagement.

It is especially valuable to involve representatives of industry associations or chambers, as they can provide broader insights into sector-wide practices related to youth employment, participation in EU or state-funded employment initiatives, and recruitment challenges or opportunities within their industries.

Additionally, though with certain caveats, the inclusion of social innovation enterprises can be of value under the COOPOWER framework in the cases when such organizations pioneer inclusive and sustainable employment models that align with the project's goals. However, the mapping teams can keep into consideration that social enterprises are not always sustainable without public financing and may not always be capable of acting as reliable stakeholders.

3.4. Definition and Inclusion Criteria for Civil society organizations, including NGOs and citizen groups

Non-governmental and civil society organizations often operate at the intersection of public policy and its practical implementation, addressing gaps and challenges that disproportionately affect underprivileged youth. These organizations possess deep, field-based insights into the complex and interrelated factors that contribute to youth unemployment, especially in disadvantaged territories.

Given their direct engagement with marginalized communities and their experience in tackling barriers to youth inclusion in the labor market, their involvement in the COOPOWER project is both valuable and necessary.

All NGOs - whether local, national, or international - that are actively working with underprivileged youth in the region may be considered key stakeholders. Particular emphasis should be placed on organizations with targeted programs or expertise in supporting vulnerable youth, as they can offer essential perspectives and contribute meaningfully to the project's objectives.



IMPORTANT!!! We are expected to include (national) representatives of the EUSDR (EU Strategy for the Danube Region) in the stakeholder maps. We are expected to engage EUSDR representatives throughout the project.

4. How to create a Stakeholder map

To support partners in identifying relevant stakeholders for the COOPOWER project - particularly those who can contribute to empowering vulnerable youth - we propose a step-by-step process outlined below.

Step 1: Apply the Quadruple Helix Framework

Use the Quadruple Helix model as a guiding structure. It brings together:

- Education and research institutions;
- Businesses and employers;
- Government, policymakers and public authorities;
- Civil society, including NGOs and youth groups.

This ensures that interventions are co-created, inclusive, and aligned with the real needs of marginalized groups.

Step 2: Categorize Stakeholders by Helix and Identify Them Based on Relevance

Bring together your core project team to:

- Brainstorm all possible stakeholders;
- Consider different types of influence, interests, and representative roles;
- Include stakeholders who can enhance the credibility, representation, and ethical soundness of the project.

In this step, you can be guided by a few questions which can help you in the stakeholder selection. These can be used as indicators to assess relevance, alignment, and potential engagement.

Table 2. Table of guiding questions for stakeholder selection based on relevance

No. of Question	Guiding Question	Purpose of the Question
1	Does the stakeholder have direct or regular contact with vulnerable youth (or NEETs) in your pilot region?	To identify actors with firsthand access to the target group.
2	Does the stakeholder provide education, training, or career guidance services to young people?	To include key actors in the education and skills development space.
3	Is the stakeholder involved in employment, job placement, or entrepreneurship support for youth?	To identify partners from the labor market side.
4	Does the stakeholder influence public policy or funding related to education, employment, or youth welfare?	To ensure involvement of actors who shape structural conditions.

5	Is the stakeholder trusted and recognized within disadvantaged communities or among marginalized youth?	To leverage trusted community relationships.
6	Does the stakeholder have networks, infrastructure, or platforms that can help reach and engage vulnerable youth?	To include partners who can expand project outreach.
7	Does the stakeholder represent youth voices or advocate for their rights and needs?	To ensure youth-led or youth-representing organizations are present.
8	Is the stakeholder active in research, data collection, or monitoring related to youth inclusion, education, or employment?	To engage knowledge-based institutions with relevant expertise.
9	Is the stakeholder likely to influence public opinion or community attitudes toward youth or NEETs?	To identify influencers or communicators in the ecosystem.
10	Is the stakeholder strategically aligned with the goals of the COOPOWER project?	To ensure synergy and reduce resistance or mission drift.
11	Does the stakeholder have an existing relationship with any of the PPs?	To include stakeholders with whom a working relationship has already been established and in this way facilitate easier access/contact to them.
12	Is the stakeholder willing to engage in the activities of COOPOWER?	To ensure that stakeholders who wish to be involved in COOPOWER are selected for participation in any activities.

To categorize each stakeholder, ask the following specific questions about each of the stakeholders:

Table 3. Questions to help in categorizing the stakeholders into helices

No. of Question	Questions	Possible categorization or implications for categorization
1	What sector do they represent?	Education providers, employers and business actors, governmental actors or civil society and NGOs.
2	Where do they have influence or relevance in relation to vulnerable youth who are unemployed or at risk, especially in the disadvantaged region which will be the place of the pilot in your country and your country more generally?	
2.1	At what level do they operate?	National / regional / local? This can help in identifying overlaps or gaps within each helix and ensure local voices (especially in disadvantaged pilot regions) are not overlooked.
2.2	Does the stakeholder specifically work with: NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)?	
2.3	Does the stakeholder specifically work with: Unemployed youth in general?	
2.4	Does the stakeholder specifically work with: Vulnerable or marginalized youth groups (e.g., Roma, refugees, rural youth)?	
2.5	Does the stakeholder specifically work with: Youth as part of a broader population (not targeted)?	
3	Does their core work focus on education/training, economic activity, policy-making, or social/community support?	This will help categorize their work focus as belonging to one of the four helices.
4	Who funds or governs this stakeholder?	Are they publicly funded or regulated? (that might mean they are part of the government helix) Are they privately owned or funded? (that might put them into the business category) Are they community-based, donation-funded, or member-driven? (this will indicate a civil society organization).

4.1	Are they publicly funded or regulated?	This may mean they belong to the government helix.
4.2	Are they privately owned or funded?	This may mean they belong to the business helix.
4.3	Are they community-based, donation-funded, or member-driven?	This may mean they belong to the NGO/Civil society helix.
5	Who is the stakeholder accountable to?	Government ministries, boards, or voters? (that would put them into government category) Shareholders, customers, or industry groups? (business). Beneficiaries, community members, or donors? (civil society). Educational councils, research agencies, or students? (academia).
5.1	Government ministries, boards, or voters?	This may mean they belong to the government helix.
5.2	Shareholders, customers, or industry groups?	This may mean they belong to the business helix.
5.3	Beneficiaries, community members, or donors?	This may mean they belong to the NGO/Civil society helix.
5.4	Educational councils, research agencies, or students?	This may mean they belong to the Academia and Research helix.
6	How do they interact with vulnerable youth or NEETs?	Do they provide direct services (e.g., job training, youth counseling)? (that would put them into the academia/educational institutions category or NGO category). Do they create opportunities (e.g., jobs, apprenticeships)? (that would make them a member of the business Helix). Do they shape the environment (e.g., set policies, design curricula)? (that would make them a part of the governmental Helix).
6.1	Do they provide direct services (e.g., job training, youth counseling)?	This may mean they belong to the business helix or the NGO helix.
6.2	Do they create opportunities?	This may mean they belong to academia or NGO helix, or business (if it is about the creation of jobs).
6.3	What kinds of opportunities do they create?	May mean opportunities for education, opportunities for upskilling, job opportunities, civic participation opportunities.
6.4	Do they shape the environment?	This may mean they belong to the government helix.
7	What expertise or value do they bring to the project?	Knowledge production or evaluation? (academia) Practical experience in

		employment or innovation? (business). Policy-making or regulatory power? (government). Advocacy, trust, or access to marginalized communities? (civil society).
7.1	Knowledge production or evaluation?	This may mean they belong to the Academia and Research helix, or in some rare cases to NGO/Civil Society if the focus is on monitoring and evaluation.
7.2	Practical experience in employment or innovation?	This may mean they belong to the business helix.
7.3	Policy-making or regulatory power?	This may mean they belong to the government helix.
7.4	Advocacy, trust, or access to marginalized communities?	This may mean they belong to the NGO/Civil society helix.



Some stakeholders may be considered as belonging to two categories. Choose the one that reflects their primary function in your context.

Step 3: Iterate and Validate the Stakeholder Map

Repeat the process until:

- You have a **comprehensive list** of stakeholders;
- More or less, the majority in your team agrees on how stakeholders are grouped (e.g., by role, influence, or sector);
- There is a shared understanding within the PP teams of **who of the stakeholders matter the most and why.**

Step 4: Assess Relevance and Role

For each stakeholder, briefly note:

- What is their interest in the project?
- What role could they play (e.g., data provider, implementation partner, amplifier, advisor)?
- How directly are they connected to NEETs or youth employment?

Step 5: Complete the Stakeholder Mapping Excel Template

The stakeholder mapping will be done in a stakeholder mapping excel file - a generic template which will be uploaded to the COOPOWER shared drive. The partner(s) from each partner country will complete a separate stakeholder mapping excel template for its(their) country context, more specifically the area of the pilot location (in the case of pilot countries, we are interested in stakeholders who may have close, but also remote relevance to the pilot activities which will be happening in the pilot location). When completed, each stakeholder map excel will be uploaded to the shared drive of COOPOWER in Google, which is accessible only to the consortium partners, and it will be updated on a regular basis for the remainder of COOPOWER. If there are specific GDPR-related concerns of any partner regarding uploading their country’s stakeholder map to the shared drive, this partner can instead store the map on a password-protected computer to be accessible only to the respective team at its organization working on COOPOWER.

The stakeholder mapping excel file consists of three sheets, each of which is to be completed for each country:

- Sheet A (“Stakeholder information”) – asks that basic information about each selected stakeholder is included, such as: name of stakeholder, contact person information, type of stakeholder, scope of activity, etc.;
- Sheet B (“Helix Categorization”) – asks that the questions in Table 3 above are answered for each selected stakeholder so that each stakeholder is assigned to the most appropriate helix it belongs to;
- Sheet C (“Relevance Assessment”) - asks that the questions in Table 2 about relevance are answered regarding each selected stakeholder. To facilitate the process, we propose that this assessment applies a color-coding scheme to indicate how essential each stakeholder is to involve in the project. See table 4 below for instructions on color-coding.

Table 4. A visual representation of color-coding scheme used in the Stakeholder Mapping Template

Color	Importance scale	Example
	Light yellow – Less essential to involve (but still valuable). These stakeholders may not have direct influence, but their participation can enhance inclusiveness, trust, or local relevance.	Community volunteers, small local actors.
	Medium yellow – Moderately important to involve. These stakeholders bring valuable support, insights, or networks, but are not central to every stage of the project.	Training providers, youth organizations, local service providers.

	<p>Dark yellow – Very important to involve. These stakeholders are critical for the project's success due to their role, resources, authority, or access to target groups.</p>	<p>Government bodies, funders, large employers, lead NGOs.</p>
--	---	---

Within each color palette, the **level of importance** is represented through **transparency**:

- High importance = fully opaque color;
- Moderate importance = semi-transparent color;
- Lower importance = more transparent color.

This coding system makes it easy to **quickly assess the stakeholder's priority level** within the project.



In the process of stakeholder mapping, it might be beneficial for pilot partners to make use of the good practices they identify in Activity 1.2 so they can pinpoint currently running projects in the pilot area which target the target group of their pilot. The identified good practices in Activity 1.2 could lead to finding additional key stakeholders to be included in the stakeholder maps. They may strengthen the project through their own experience and may also receive more visibility to their own work through their engagement as stakeholders in COOPOWER.

5. References

1. Alexander, E. R. (2000). Rationality revisited: Planning paradigms in a post-postmodernist perspective. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 19(3), 242–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X0001900305>
2. Carayannis, E. G., & Campbell, D. F. J. (2009). "Mode 3" and "Quadruple Helix": Toward a 21st century fractal innovation ecosystem. *International Journal of Technology Management*, 46(3–4), 201–234. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTM.2009.023374>
3. Eden, C., & Ackermann, F. (1998). *Making strategy: The journey of strategic management*. Sage.
4. Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9711022105>
5. Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>

6.Thomas, J. C. (1993). Public involvement and governmental effectiveness: A decision-making model for public managers. *Administration & Society*, 24(4), 444–469.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009539979302400403>

7.Thomas, J. C. (1995). *Public participation in public decisions: New skills and strategies for public managers*. Jossey-Bass.

8.Vandermaesen, T. (2022). Stakeholder prioritization frameworks for participatory governance in youth inclusion projects.