



Stairway to AI: Ease the Engagement of Low-Tech users to the AI-on-Demand platform through AI, H2020

Community Kickoff Workshop

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1. Introduction

The StairwAI project is funded under the H2020 call ICT-49-2020: Artificial Intelligence on demand platform” that seeks to extend the services, exploitation and sustainability of the AI on demand platform (AI4EU). The objective of the community Kickoff Workshop of StairwAI was to reach the communities of projects under the umbrella of the European AI Strategy, but especially sister IA projects funded under ICT49 and Europe's Network of AI Excellence Centres, four RIA projects and one CSA project, under the H2020 call ICT48.

To position the core services of the StairwAI project for the AI on demand platform, it is first necessary to provide to the reader with a general overview of the European AI landscape. A key feature of the landscape is the fragmentation into multiple projects, initiatives and communities depending on topics, market verticals, focus, etc.

Figure 1 below shows this European AI landscape as a refinement to the one presented by the AI on demand platform. This is structured with the European Commission at the centre with StairwAI positioned as an offshoot from Horizon 2020.

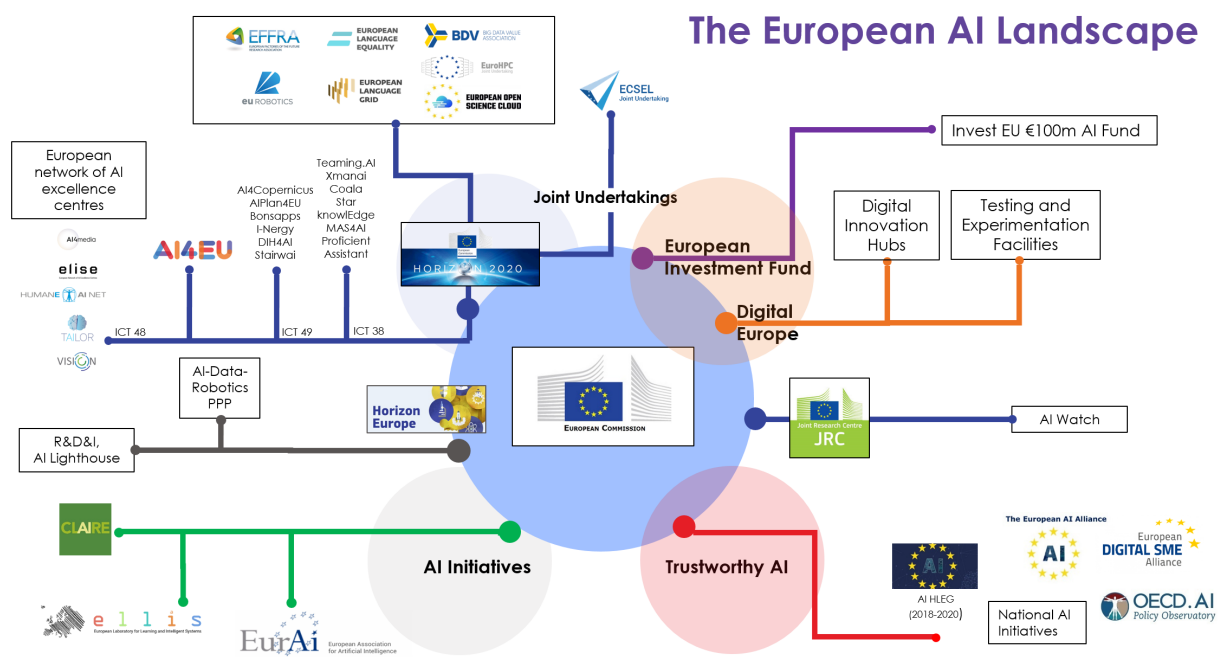


Figure 1 The European AI Landscape and positioning of StairwAI project

Due to the participation of several StairwAI partners in different representative communities and related projects, during proposal development it was considered that there would be some value in the project hosting a Kickoff Community Workshop to connect and align organizations with which partners have strong connections. The original objective for the Workshop – as part of the work package where this document / task was envisioned – was to act as a transversal activity for dissemination. However, immediately from the start of the project, StairwAI partners quickly identified that more value could be offered to the community by StairwAI acting to initiate a joint



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action and effort to synchronize and to align StairwAI to the other ICT49 projects as well as the AI on demand platform.

At this same time, the level of maturity of the four projects ICT48 were evaluated, and each were contacted to understand the best possible format and topics of interaction. However, to achieve the impact expected and to develop sustainable collaboration channels, it was clear that the first quarter of 2021 was not the right timing. Many of the NoEs were creating and advancing their own specific topics and activities and thus it was decided to let these projects reach a higher level of maturity before engaging in closer collaboration. For StairwAI, the timing was also not perfect, with the priority instead to clearly define the core objectives and value of the project before it was appropriate to create engagement activities or join those of the ICT48 projects.

Instead of developing a standalone Workshop that was not aligned in focus or suitably timed with other key stakeholders, it was clear that much most value could be offered by realigning this deliverable towards the design and implementation of a joint community strategy with the sister ICT49 projects.

Given the role of the ICT49 projects is to enrich and sustain the AI on-demand platform, StairwAI sought to initiate the development of a sustainable supporting community among these projects, developing communication channels and sharing of commonalties and challenges to ease engagement of the projects with one another and with the on-demand platform.

This document provides an overview of a series of actions and meetings organised with the aim of establishing StairwAI within the European AI landscape and assisting the integration of all ICT49 projects within the AI on demand platform.

The subsequent Deliverable, D8.4 (Month 18) will report the follow up activities on the actions here described and will present activities planned with respect to the networking strategy that it is envisioned once the StairwAI service is under testing and ready to reach a broader part of the AI ecosystem.

This brief document is structured as follows. Section 2 opens by presenting the background to the decision of StairwAI to initiate a supporting action for the ICT49 projects. It continues by proving information on the activities to date including the outputs of the coordinators meeting and the establishment of connected Working Groups. the section ends with an overview of the activities of StairwAI in facilitating engagement of the ICT 49 projects with the on-demand platform. Section 3 of this document points to the forthcoming actions that are planned to further support activities already initiated and mentions some challenges that have been identified.



2. Coordinating and support actions for the ICT49 projects

In December 2020, the European Commission organised a pre-kick off meeting, where all ICT 49 coordinators were brought together with several representatives of the AI on demand platform. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the projects to the AI4EU project and to share the respective objectives of each of the ICT49 projects. The meeting was important in offering a first bridge between the projects. However, this initial meeting also revealed the need for a set of follow-on actions to address issue of common interest among the projects.

A clear follow up to this meeting was the requirement that the ICT49 project needed to establish an effective line of communication between one another and between each of them and the on-demand platform. Without such as a channel(s), there was a potential for much duplication of actions with different projects having no visibility on the plans of others and with several similar or identical requests being made to the Technical partners with AI4EU.

While the StairwAI Description of Work describes Deliverable 8.1 as a Community Kickoff Workshop, it was clear that instead of offering a broader set of stakeholders some very initial plans of the project and pointing to the future role of StairwAI within the community, given the positioning of project partners, a more valuable use of resources, and one with greater long-term impact, would be to act to support the ICT49 project to communicate with one another and to engage coherently with the on-demand Platform.

An additional factor supporting this direction was feedback received from other key stakeholders (AI4EU and NoEs), suggesting that a supporting action with the ICT49 would be more useful than a once off workshop. In engaging with the EC and the coordinators of the ICT49 projects, it was agreed that this connecting role was needed, would be of value, and that StairwAI was well positioned to undertake this action. Furthermore, by creating a bridge between with the other ICT49 projects, StairwAI will benefit of each of these concrete communities on: Earth observation, DIH, Planning, Energy, and cyberphysical systems.

The remainder of Section 2 of this document presents a chronological account of the workshop meetings and actions undertaken by StairwAI to create meaningful collaboration and engagement both between the ICT49 projects, and between these projects and the on-demand platform.

2.1 Meetings of the ICT49 Project Coordinators

Since the commencement of the ICT49 projects in January 2021, StairwAI has organized several workshop meetings with the ICT49 project coordinators and the EC. The following subsection presents details of the meetings including, the structure, content, and outputs of the meetings.

2.1.1 Workshop meetings frequency and rational

These workshop meetings have been designed to continue over the duration of the three-year projects. The timing and frequency of the meetings has so far been based on the perceived need for engagement between the project coordinators. To date, there have been four workshop meetings, taking place on 05 Feb 2021: 3-4pm (CET), 19 Feb 2021: 3-4pm (CET), 05 March 2021: 3-4pm (CET)



and 09 April 2021: 3-4pm (CET). Demonstrating the relevance and support for the series of meeting, on each occasion, all the project coordinators (or a selected nominee) of the six projects have been in attendance.

The agenda for the workshops has been developed University College Cork (leader of WP8) representing StairwAI. The chair of the calls and minuting has also been undertaken by UCC. While there has been a distinct focus in each meeting, there have also been some core areas of collaboration that have been addressed on each occasion. Presented in the following sub-sections are three key target outcomes as result of cooperation channels but also several working groups as spin offs of the original idea to satisfy the needs of the projects.

2.1.2 ICT49 Project Timelines

In the absence of a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) to accompany the ICT49 projects, there was no natural organization to offer support in aligning the efforts of the projects towards shared goals. A starting point for any action to support each project activities would be to identify the respective commonalities and complementary actions of the selected projects over their three-year timeline.

Among the first points of discussion in the opening meeting of the ICT49 coordinators was agreement that something of value would be to have increased visibility of the key actions and associated timeline of the other projects. Without greater transparency on the respective plans of the different projects, it would be next to impossible to begin to identify potential areas of collaboration, such as communications, events, Open Calls, service releases, integration activities etc.

To create a comprehensive and insightful presentation of the different actions of the projects, UCC shared a draft template for each project to complete. Following some bilateral engagements, and iterations over subsequent meetings of the larger group, the figure presented is the current version of the timeline of activities of the six ICT49 projects.

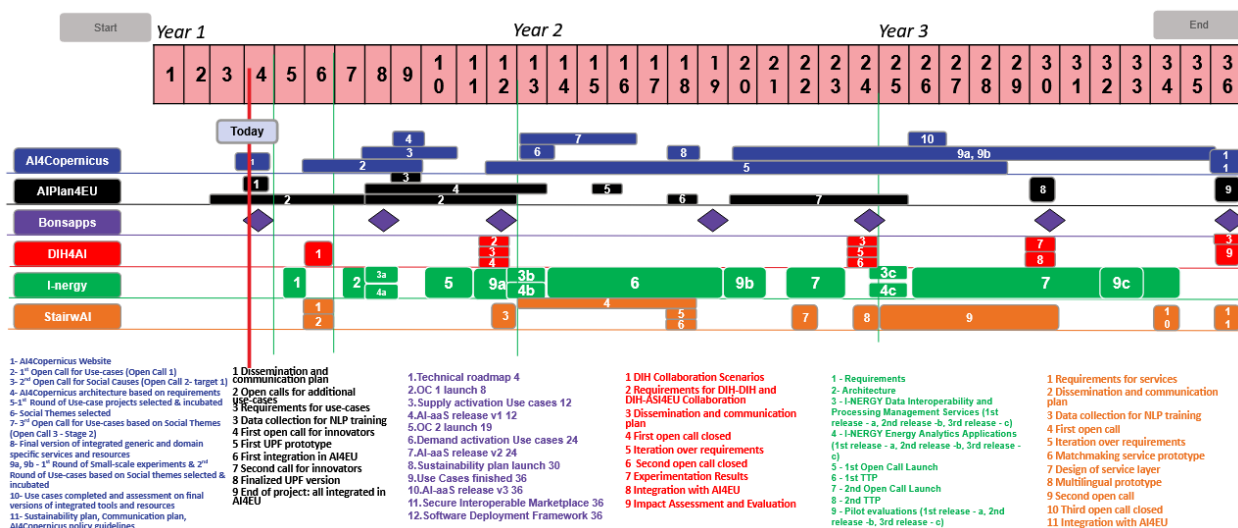


Figure 2 Timeline of the key actions of the six ICT49 Projects



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While requiring some effort to complete, it was immediately apparent to all projects that this clear presentation of the timeline of activities would be extremely useful.

Previously unknown activities and potential synergies became immediate evident, and it opened several collaborative opportunities that would not otherwise have been possible. As the meeting of the project coordinators continue, the timeline will also be helpful to understand the immediate and forthcoming priorities of each project. It is expected that as the projects advance, and an increasingly number of actions are executed in a more concentrated timeframe, this visualisation will grow in importance, helping all projects to easily track the actions of the others.

2.1.3 ICT49 Collaboration points – needs and topics

From a conceptual perspective, each project is intended to build either specific services on top of the on-demand platform or to create a bridge with other existing communities. Therefore, and apart from the 2.1.2 section where timelines were identified for alignment of communications, integration, or other topics, it was the need to find those aspects or matters where the projects could be supportive of one another, or external communities, that necessitated interproject communication.

As early as the first meeting with the EC, each of the different projects had a basic understanding of the respective focus and plans of the different projects. However, short project overview presentations were not of sufficient depth to explore all the various areas of collaboration that the projects make have with one (or more) of the others and together with the AI on-demand platform.

A second key action that was initiated in the opening meetings of the project coordinators was to map the areas of common collaboration that might exist between the various projects and to show existing or planned connections between different aspects of each project and other leading AI initiatives. Iteratively over the several meetings, each project contributed more information that feed into the map below.

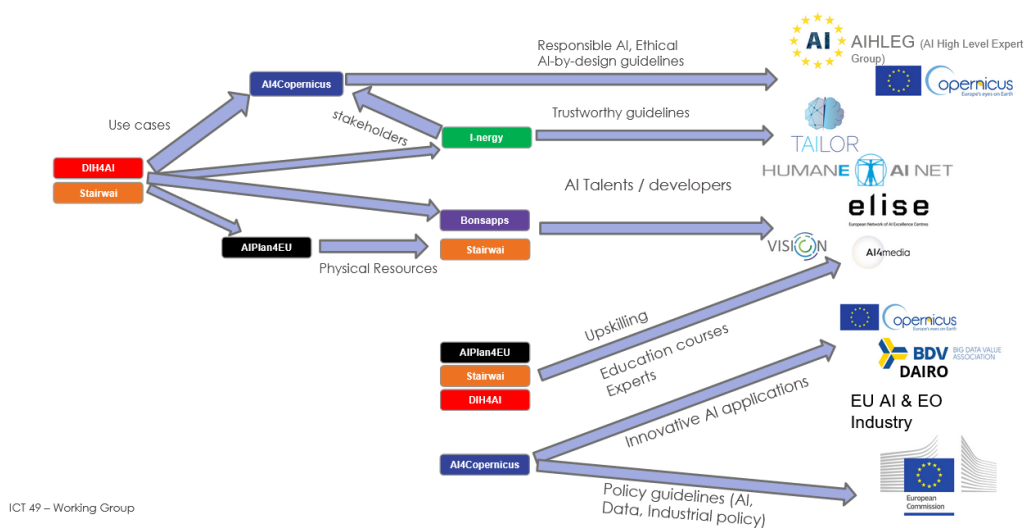


Figure 3 Overview of collaboration between the projects and other initiatives



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What the map reveals are several common features of each project where there is potential to work together. An example includes the upskilling features of DIH4AI, StairwAI and AIPlan4EU. While such overlaps of interest may have become apparent over time, by identifying these commonalities within the opening weeks of these projects, the actions of StairwAI to develop this map has opened the possibility of much greater collaboration between the ICT49 projects and with the broader AI R&D&I community. By revealing these shared interests, it is expected that the ICT49 projects will be able to achieve greater impact that might otherwise have been the case.

2.1.3 ICT49 Stakeholders

Given the diverse focus of the six ICT49 projects and the different services that each plan to add to the on-demand platform, another matter that was considered important through each of the meeting that have taken place to date, was the specific set of stakeholders being targeted. Having more clarity on the exact profiles or groups of organizations that these new services were being built for would allow the project coordinators to see if there were overlaps or if their respective projects were alone in targeting a specific group. The figure below was developed with the inputs of each project and it helps to reveal the user groups that each project seeks to engage with as it develops its solutions or launches its Open Calls.

	AI4Copernicus	AIPlan4EU	Bonsapps	DIH4AI	I-Nergy	StairwAI
Value chain stakeholders	<p>AI-centric community & EO-centric community covering the following segments: (1) Research, (2) Academia, (3) Industry (SMEs, start-ups), Industrial Associations (AI, EO & various sectors, i.e., health, energy, security, agriculture), DIASes, TEPs, DIHs/EDIHs, (4) Policy Officers, Public sector representatives, (5) Civil Society, citizen science communities</p>	<p>(1) The main target is companies/SMEs/practitioners that could use planning in their business (2) Academics or researchers with target on technology transfer and expertise in planning (3) DIHs / EDIH</p>	<p>AI-as-a-Service (AI-aas) value chain</p> <p>which will allow end users (specially SMEs and non-tech users lacking internal innovation capacities) to easily engage with AI Talents ('data scientist', 'developers' 'integrators') into an open innovation cycle leading to the development and pilot deployment of AI at the Deep Edge Apps and Solutions,</p>	<p>AI community covering the following key segments: (1) DIH; (2) Candidate EDIH; (3) Research & Academia; (4) Industry (SMEs, start-ups), Industrial Associations (AI and various sectors, i.e., health, energy, manufacturing); (5) Public administration, public service providers, Gov-tech companies (6) Policy Officers, policy community representatives i.e., think tank & associations; (7) Civil Society, citizens</p>	<p>Generators, suppliers, TSOs, DSOs, aggregators, consumers (municipalities, building operators, local energy communities, etc.), suppliers, ESCOs, facility manager, RES plants (Operation and Maintenance)</p>	<p>(1) The main target is low tech SMEs with low knowledge on AI. (2) Academics or researchers with target on technology transfer (3) HW providers (4) Public authorities (5) DIHs / EDIH</p>
AI Industry Players	<p>Primary: AI Industrial community, and EO (Earth Observation) Industrial community, SMEs, start-ups (focusing both on high-technology and low/no-tech companies)</p> <p>Secondary: Industry players from various sectors including Energy, Security, Health, Agriculture, Maritime, etc., IT companies, web entrepreneurs, software engineers of solutions for AI domain, Industrial Manufacturers, EO intermediaries, etc</p>	<p>Industry players, bot SMEs and companies, in fields where planning can be applied such as Agriculture, Flexible Manufacturing, Robotics and Space.</p>	<p>Innovators who are looking to solve industry challenges using data-driven software systems and incorporating Artificial Intelligence into solutions. Sectors of focus: Automotive, Health, Smart cities, Robotics</p> <p>Companies who want to either integrate AI into their products or services who may or may not be technology users themselves or act as service providers who want to value-added services to the target end-users of the platform</p> <p>Developers and data scientists who want to access Artificial Intelligence to build AI Applications and Solutions to then sell their products and services to companies.</p> <p>Integrators who can build a AI solution on the target platform by integrating one or more AI apps</p>	<p>Primary: IT companies, SMEs, start-ups, gov-tech companies</p> <p>Secondary: Industry players from various sectors including energy, health, manufacturing, etc.</p>	<p>IT companies, web entrepreneurs, software engineers of solutions for AI domain</p> <p>Industrial Manufacturers of smart energy grid devices (e.g., smart meters, transformers, breakers, automation devices)</p>	<p>(i) Low Tech SMEs: the StairwAI primary focus is to enable easy access to AI tools for low-tech companies</p> <p>(ii) Distributed edge/cloud, and HPC actors: including all types of organisations, but with a specific focus on SMEs and research centres/universities providing hardware resources and services.</p>



Industry Associations & Technology Clusters	EARSC (European Association of Remote Sensing Companies), GEO (Group on Earth Observation), European SME Cluster Alliance, European initiatives (BDVA/DARIO, etc), European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), SME Clusters, EU Green Tech Clusters, Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs), European DIHs focusing on AI, EO and across industrial domains, research communities, Industrial Federation of Robotics (IFR), National AI Associations & Technology Clusters	European initiatives such as BDVA and GAIA-X. National, European, and international associations focusing on AI (i.e., AAAI, AlxA, Claire-AI), as well as Technology Clusters (i.e., networks of AI DIHs, DIHs, candidate EDIHs)	European Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs), DIHNET, I4MS Previous/ongoing Research & Innovation activities related with AI@Edge (Aloha, PULP, etc.) EU associations (CLAIRE, ELLUS, BDVA, etc.) Industry associations (in automotive, edge computing, health) Open-source hardware associations (RISC-V, OpenSourceHW)	National, European, and international associations focusing on AI (i.e., AAAI, BDVA/DARIO, AlxA, Claire-AI), as well as Technology Clusters (i.e., networks of AI DIHs, DIHs, candidate EDIHs)	European initiatives and clusters (like BDVA, FIWARE), research communities, associations, federations	(European platforms and agencies) a. Big Data PPP (BDVA) and the subsequent AI, Data and Robotics PPP b. ETP4HPC c. EGI European Grid Infrastructure d. ELG European Language Grid e. European Open Science Cloud projects, EOSC-hub, and its follow-up project (under the call INFRAEOSC 03)
Researchers and Academia	Research and academia focusing on AI research, EO Research as well as those conducting research across various industrial domains (i.e., health, energy, security, agriculture, etc.)	Researchers, post-doc, and PhDs in planning and related fields such as reinforcement learning and operations research, the ICAPS community	Research organisations focusing on Edge AI, ML model optimization, benchmarking of cyberphysical systems Data scientists in research organization acting as specialist AlaaS supply side on marketplace	Research organisations and Academia focusing on AI and its applications	Individuals engaged in research initiatives and/or working in research/academic institutes, most notably with respect to ML and AI (including especially AI4EU)	Broader scientific community (including universities and R&D centres, R&D teams, PhDs/post-doc candidates, etc.)
Investors	Investors/Venture capitalists, Banks, Crowdsourcing & Crowdfunding platforms, EU funding, National Authorities	Investors/Venture capitalists, Banks, Crowdsourcing & Crowdfunding platforms, EU funding, National Authorities	Deep tech venture funds, Strategic investor funds, EU VC funding programs	Investors/Venture capitalists, Banks, EU funding, National Authorities, Crowdsourcing & Crowdfunding platforms	Banks, RES/EE Investors/Venture capitalists, Crowdsourcing platforms	EU funding, National Authorities
Policy Makers & Standardisation Organisation (SDO)s	Policymakers across EU level (i.e., EC Directorates), Regional and National level (Ministries, Governments, Regulatory Agencies), Standardisation Organisations, etc.	Policymakers across EU level (i.e., EC Directorates), Regional and National level (Ministries, Governments, Regulatory Agencies), Standardisation Organisations, etc.	EU strategic decision makers, National authorities to develop exploitation model for services	National and European policy makers, ISO, IEEE SA and other standardization organisations dealing with AI	Policymakers at any level like EC Directorates and Units, Ministries and Governments, Regulatory Agencies, Standardisation Organisations (CEN, ISO, ETSI, etc.)	direct contact and networking with relevant departments of the European Commission, such as DG ENER, DG DIGIT, DG RTD, DG MOVE, DG CLIMA, DG ENV. CEN and CENELEC also as standardisation bodies.
General Public	Civil society representatives, general public, NGOs, Citizen Science Associations	Civil society representatives and general public (for training and awareness measures), Workers with jobs in increasingly automated sectors.	Making AI deployment accessible to general public through marketplace tools	Professionals, civil society, think tank, professional and citizen associations, citizens	Civil society representatives, general public and anyone interested in the project	-

Figure 4 Stakeholder Mapping of ICT49 projects

By revealing these target audiences and making them accessible to each of the other projects, the potential to enter collaboration was created. While the ICT49 projects are at a very early stage of development, the same mapping of stakeholders revealed to the larger group some targets that were not immediately obvious. This has allowed project coordinators to suggest connections and synergies between other initiatives in which they are involved or are aware of, allowing the respective projects to reach specific stakeholders more effectively, freeing up resources and potentially resulting in greater impact than originally envisioned.

2.2 ICT49 Work Groups on Communications and Open Calls

The ICT49 project coordinators quickly realised the value joining forces to try to achieve greater impact for their respective projects. As the outputs mentioned above demonstrate, each project could see added value from strong collaboration. For this reason, early in the process, there was a strong support for developing an additional set of Working Groups (WGs) between the projects. These cross-project WGs would operate like the coordination group and could meet to share plans and challenges and to explore potential areas of collaboration. An indicative list of Working Groups areas was discussed but initially two areas were considered to be of immediate relevance and offering shared benefits for the projects. These were the topics of communication and Financial Support for Third Parties (FSTP).



2.2.1 Communications

To align efforts and to create synergies between the different projects, it was agreed that the development of a Working Group on Communications would be beneficial to all projects. The first meeting to the Communities WG took place on **12 March 2021 from 2-3pm (CET)** and was chaired by University College Cork representing StairwAI.

The agenda of the meeting covered several diverse topics including establishing an effective communication channel between participants, the merits of a promotional video, social media management, sharing visual identity materials and engagement in events.

There were several positive outcomes to the first meeting of the WG on Communications. These include ongoing engagement on the development of promotional videos for each project, the identification of leadership of social media in each project, and a commitment to develop a shared timeline on communications activities. To date there has been just one meeting of this Working Group, but all participants expressed an interest in continuing to engage, with many expressing their appreciation for setting up what they considered to be a useful mechanism to allow better overall engagement of their respective projects with their target stakeholders.

2.2.2 Financial Support for Third Parties

To gain insights into the planned activities of each ICT49 project around the topic of FSTP, a dedicated WG was established. To enhance the reach and involve relevant stakeholders, partners from ICT48 projects were also invited to participate and contribute. The first meeting to the FSTP WG took place on **24 March 2021 – 11-12pm (CET)** and was chaired by Funding Box representing StairwAI.

Open Calls presentations

Project	Call	Coordinator	FSTP Partner
AI4EU	ICT26	Thales	FBOX
StairwAI	ICT49	Uni Bologna	FBOX
AI4Copernicus	ICT49	IIT Demokritos	IIT Demokritos
DIH4AI	ICT49	Politecnico Milano (POLIMI)	Innovalia
AIPlan4EU	ICT49	Fondazione Bruno Kesler	f6s
BonsAPPs	ICT49	HES-SO	FBOX
I-nergy	ICT49	Institute of Coms & Comp systems	FBOX
Elise	ICT48	Aalto	FBOX
AI4Media	ICT48	CERTH	f6s
Humane AI	ICT48	DFKI	NA
Tailor	ICT48	Linkopings University	
Vision	ICT48	University Leiden	NA

Figure 5 Presentations delivered at first meeting of FSTP Working Group

The first meeting sought to introduce each participant and to share presentations of each one of the open calls framed in the ICT 48 and ICT 49. There were discussions on alignment of the topics, timing, and homogeneity of the open calls to favour SMEs and applicant. The decision was to keep



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periodic meetings to continue the alignment as a WG as outcome of the first workshop. The next meeting is due to take place in early May 2021.

2.3 Engagement with the AI on-demand platform

In addition to offering support and allocating effort to align the work of the ICT49 projects, StairwAI has also acted as a bridge between these IA projects and the on-demand platform. Beyond the workshop meeting described above, within WP8 of StairwAI, partners have executed another set of activities to facilitate cooperation with AI4EU. Specifically, there are two important actions that were initiated.

(1) In order to facilitate the **integration** of the ICT49 projects within the AI on-demand platform, StairwAI facilitated the invitation and presentation of each of the six projects at the Technical Governance Board (TGB) of AI4EU. Split across two meeting, in these presentations, each project presented their integration needs from a technical perspective. Subsequently, the outcome generated 1-to-1 meetings between the leading organisations of the on-demand platform responsible for the technical activities and their equivalent with the different ICT49 projects.

(2) During several of the ICT49 coordinators meetings, an important issue that emerged was how to make the contents and knowledge discoverable. As result, a **workshop on the AI4EU ontology** (22 March) was prepared with a dedicated session on the ICT49 projects. There were 64 participants, and the six projects presented their extensions to the ontology and how they were planning to proceed and their needs from with AI on demand platform. The outcome was a commitment to continue the cooperation to avoid duplication of effort and achieve a stronger outcome.

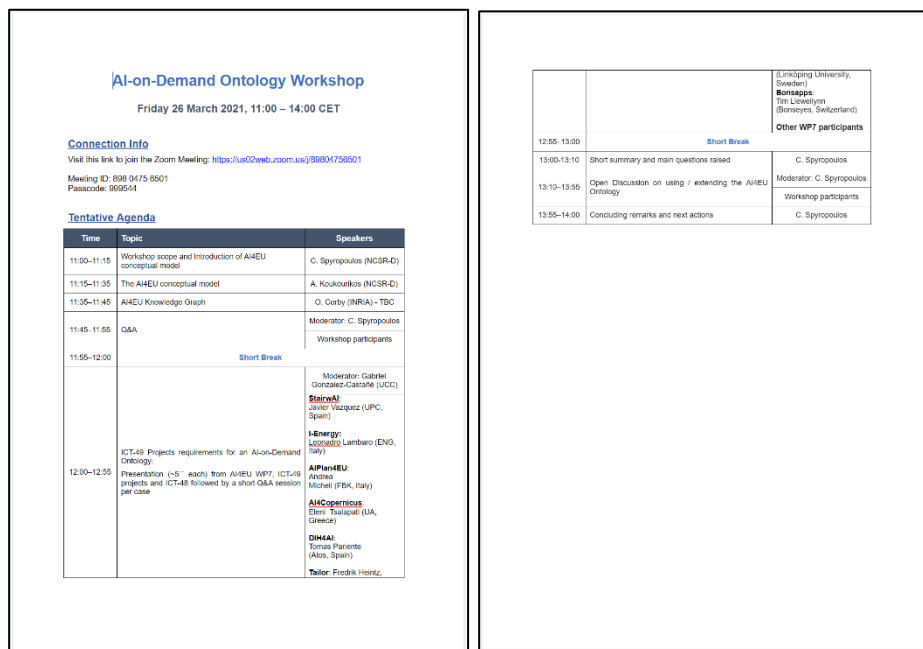


Figure 6 Agenda of AI4EU ontology workshop involving a dedicated session on the ICT49 projects



3. Next steps

Through the organization and support of the various meeting and actions described above, the StairwAI project has provided the ICT49 community of projects with several opportunities while easing some challenges associated with engaging with the AI on-demand platform.

As mentioned, the workshop meeting with the coordinators of the ICT49 project are scheduled to continue over the coming months and years, as will the Working Groups on Communications and FSTP. It makes sense to continue to support such meetings if there is an appetite for ongoing collaboration and tangible outputs are achieved.

Indeed, given the success of the meeting to date, there have been discussion about extending the WGs to cover additional topics and connecting to the activities of related projects including AI4EU and the NoEs. A slide from the most recent meeting of the ICT49 coordinators meeting outlining potential WGs is presented below. Those highlighted in green are those that are already active while those in blue are to be explored.

A forthcoming action discussed during the meeting of the project coordinators of 05 March 2021 was the idea of developing and coordinating a shared event between the six projects. The concept is strongly supported and there is ongoing discussion on the timing and agenda of the meeting. The

outputs of the first set of meeting between the projects has created a situation where there is a strong understanding of the focus of each of the different projects – in terms of the services they plan to develop, the interconnections between the projects and the target stakeholders. These preparatory actions will ease the development of this planned event, facilitate the creation of an agenda of interest to the target audiences, and lead to a stronger impact for the ICT49 projects, be it in terms of community inputs or dissemination.

The most recent topic raised at the coordinators meeting immediately preceding the creation of this deliverable was a discussion initiated by StairwAI on the engagement of the ICT49 projects with the on-demand platform over the coming number of months but more importantly following the end of the AI4EU project in December 2021.

An immediate challenge for all these projects is how to **integrate** its solutions into the current platform. While this is being addressed through the TGB mentioned above, there is a great deal of uncertainty about which entity/organization the projects will be engaging with beyond this year. This issue is strongly connected to the issue of **Governance** and the project coordinators agreed that it was prudent that this matter be discussed in detail as a group.

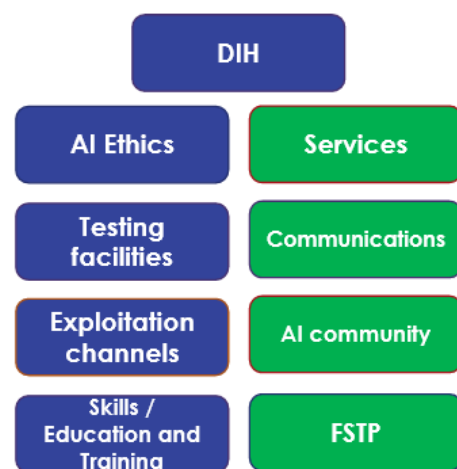


Figure 7 Working Groups overview



Finally, it is clear the ICT49 projects should have a part to play making inputs to the preferred structures that need (or should) be in place to facilitate their engagement with the on-demand platform. For that reason, the issue of **sustainability** was also raised at the most recent meeting, with all coordinators offering views on potential contributions that might be possible. This issue of sustainability is one that will continue to be discussed in future meetings. The forum provided by StairwAI through the development of these meetings has been crucial in allowing these important discussions to take place and the project considers the allocation of effort to be well spent given the strong outputs to date.

