

Best Practice Hens

Pilot project on best practices for
alternative egg production systems

2021-2023



**Funded by
the European Union**

European Parliament pilot project

- Since 2012, ban on conventional cages in EU (1999/74/EC)
- Furnished cages and cage-free systems
- Limited space and limited opportunities for natural behaviour in furnished cages
- Improving laying hen welfare by stimulating transition to non cage systems



Variation in use of cage and cage-free systems

— EU market situation for eggs September 2020

	Enriched cage	Barn	Free range	Organic
The Netherlands	14%	61%	18%	7%
Denmark	13%	47%	8%	32%
Germany	6%	61%	21%	12%
France	54%	12%	23%	11%



Main objective

Help EU egg producers by providing practical guidance on [how to transition](#) to alternative higher-welfare cage-free systems



Consortium and focus countries

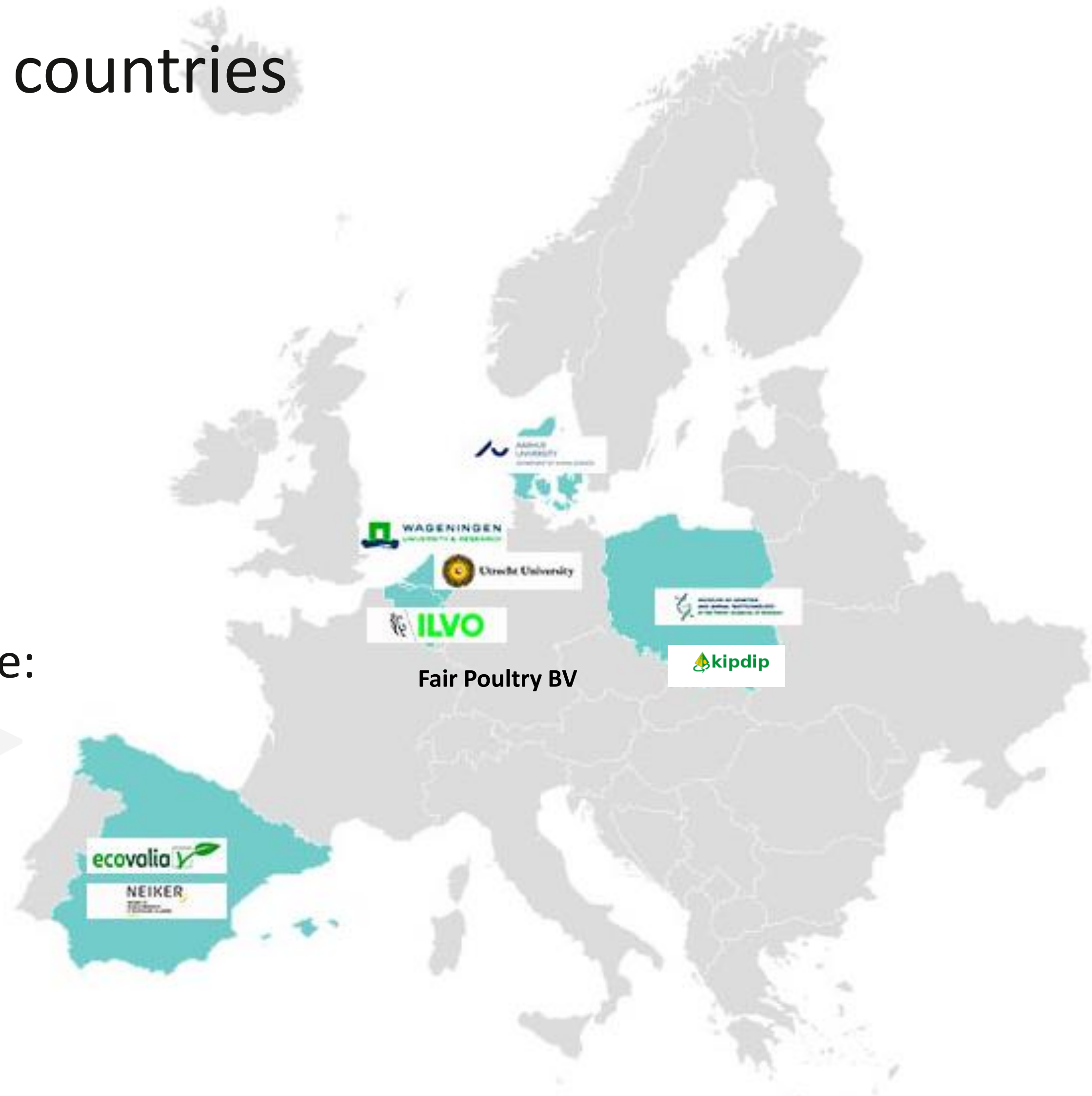
Consortium: 7 Partners +
2 Subcontractors

5 Countries (BE, DK, ES, NL, PL)

Countries with high % cage-free:
DK, NL, DE, FR

Dissemination countries
(defined in call):

ES, PT, PL, BE



Project tasks (May 2021- May 2023)

Task 1 Work plan + methodology

Task 2 Collecting and assessing
information

Task 3 Drafting best practices

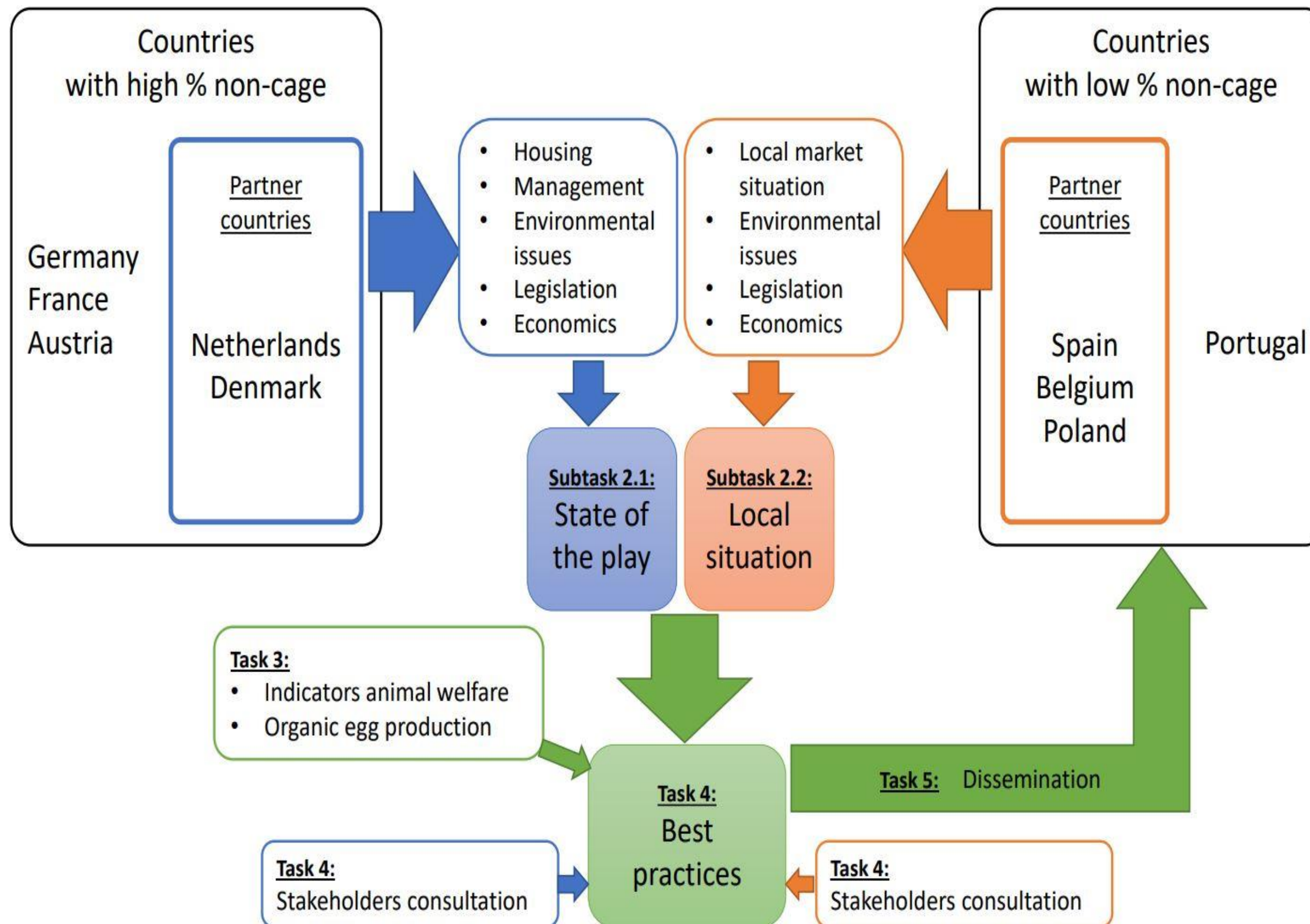
Task 4 Consulting stakeholders

Final Best Practices + Practice Abstracts

Task 5 Dissemination



Task 1 Work plan + methodology



Task 2 Collecting and assessing information

Scientific literature (separate for pullets and laying hens):

- Web of science
- Timespan: 2005-2021
- Peer-reviewed original research and review articles
- In English
- Removal of duplicates
- Abstract reading
- Categorization or rejection (incl. reason)
- Full paper reading, report writing

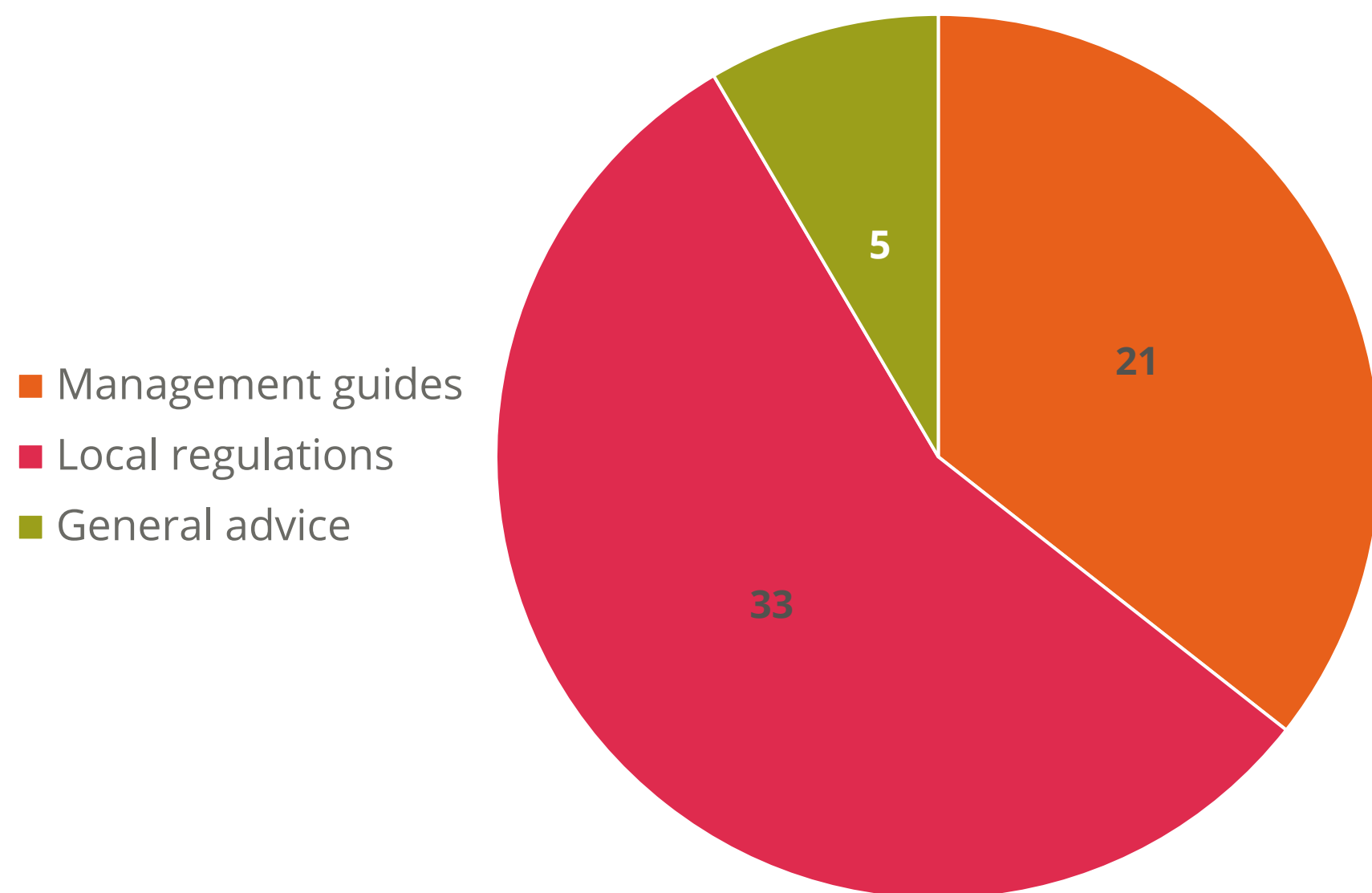


→ 39 papers pullets
167 papers laying hens

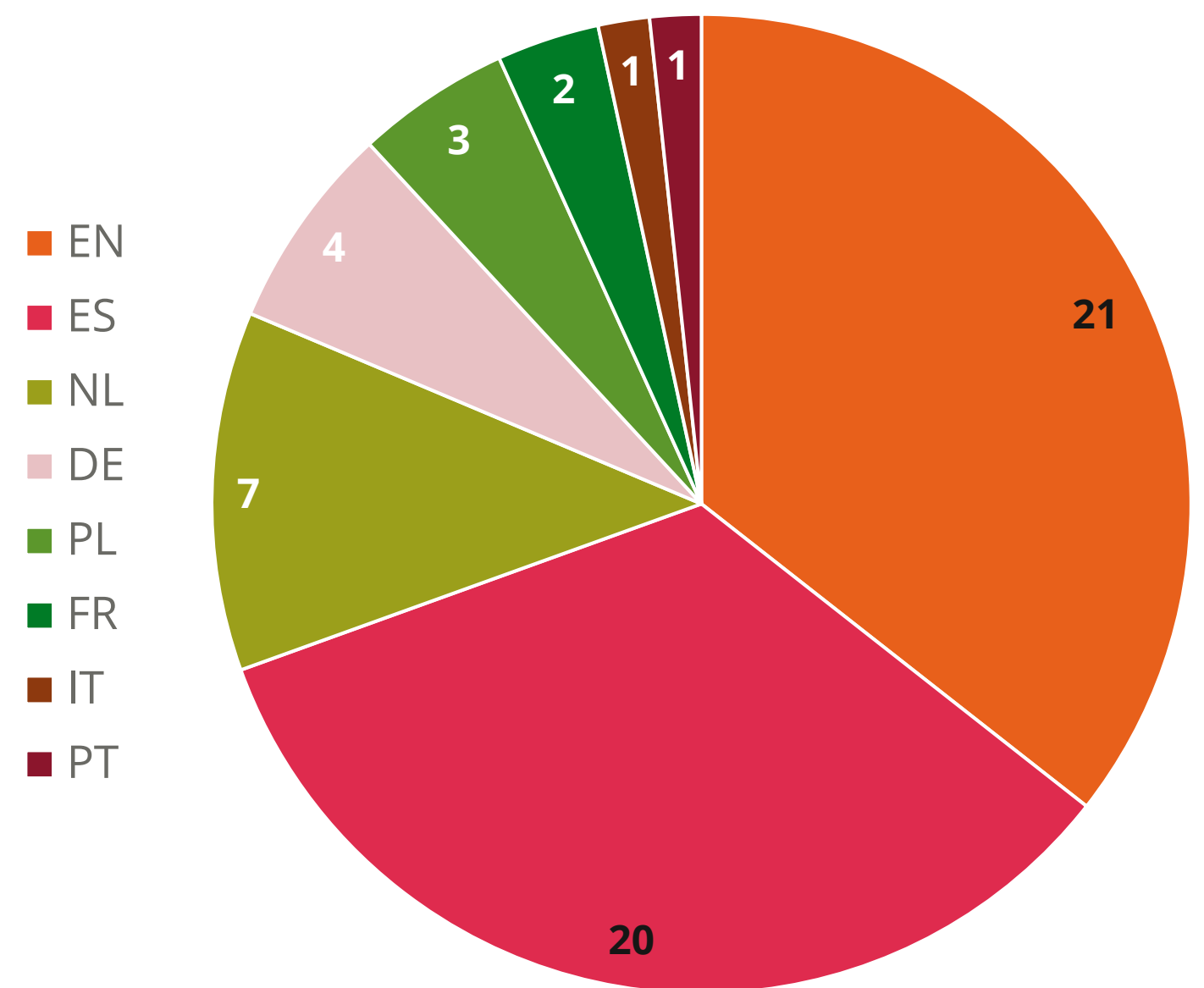


Task 2 Collecting and assessing information: Technical information

Number of references



Number of references




Task 3 Drafting Best Practices

- 68 best practices in total (based on scientific literature)
 - **24 Pullets**
 - 10 All systems
 - 4 Floor / single-tier system
 - 4 Multi-tier system
 - 1 Covered veranda / free range
 - 5 Organic
 - **44 Laying hens**
 - 12 All systems
 - 3 Floor / single-tier system
 - 9 Multi-tier system
 - 14 Covered veranda / free range
 - 6 Organic



Task 3: Refined to best practices across housing systems



15 BEST PRACTICES FOR PULLET REARING




Practices to consider when an egg producer transitions to alternative housing systems, particularly from cage to cage-free systems.


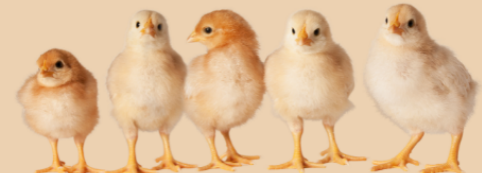
- 01 CHOOSE THE REARING SYSTEM
 1. Litter (single-tier)
 2. Aviary (multi-tier)
 3. Moveable platforms (multi-tier)

Optional: covered veranda / free-range / organic production
- 02 CHOOSE GENETICS
- 03 TRAINING OF FARMER AND STAFF
- 04 INSPECTION AND STOCKMANSHIP
- 05 WELFARE ASSESSMENT
- 06 PULLET HEALTH
- 07 FEEDING EQUIPMENT AND FEEDING
- 08 DRINKING EQUIPMENT
- 09 ENRICHMENT
- 10 LITTER
- 11 PERCHES
- 12 LIGHTING
- 13 STOCKING DENSITY
- 14 AIR QUALITY AND THERMAL ENVIRONMENT
- 15 BEAK TRIMMING

USE THE QR CODE TO ACCESS THE PRACTICE ABSTRACTS WITH MORE INFORMATION ON EACH BEST PRACTICE. + INFORMATION ON THE WEBSITE.

Best Practice Hens: To support egg production in non-cage systems and improve animal welfare, a consortium consisting of 7 partners will develop Best Practices for Non-cage Egg Production Systems as a European Commission, DG SANTE pilot project. These Best Practices will provide practical support to egg producers to encourage them to convert from cage to non-cage systems, including organic production.

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16 BEST PRACTICES FOR LAYING HENS

Practices to consider when an egg producer transitions to alternative housing systems, particularly from cage to cage-free systems.

- 01 CHOOSE THE REARING SYSTEM
 1. Single-tier
 2. Aviary (multi-tier)

Optional: covered veranda / free-range / organic production
- 02 CHOOSE GENETICS
- 03 TRAINING OF FARMER AND STAFF
- 04 INSPECTION AND STOCKMANSHIP
- 05 WELFARE ASSESSMENT
- 06 LAYING HEN HEALTH
- 07 FEEDING EQUIPMENT AND FEEDING
- 08 DRINKING EQUIPMENT
- 09 ENRICHMENT
- 10 LITTER
- 11 PERCHES
- 12 NESTS
- 13 LIGHTING
- 14 FREE-RANGE AND COVERED VERANDA
- 15 STOCKING DENSITY
- 16 AIR QUALITY AND THERMAL ENVIRONMENT

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Task 4 Consulting stakeholders

- Collected input and feedback on best practices
- Stakeholder Advisory Board
- Cage-free countries: Germany, Denmark
- Target countries: Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Poland
- **Additions: useful practical advice for farmers**



Task 5 Best practices developed into 28 practice abstracts (EIP-AGRI)



**PRACTICE
ABSTRACT**

Training for farmers and staff to handle and care for hens in cage-free housing systems

Problem
The care for pullets and laying hens in cage-free housing systems places high demands on farmers and staff. Caretakers who have only experience with managing hens in cages are often not sufficiently trained for this new task. Therefore, problems may arise particularly during the transition phase from cages to cage-free systems.

Solution
Farmers and staff having the daily responsibility for pullets and laying hens in cage-free systems need to receive appropriate training, tailored to the specific cage-free system and adapted to the context of the farmer.

Benefits
Competent handling and management of hens in cage-free systems improve production performance, animal health and welfare. This leads to economic benefits and job satisfaction.

Practical recommendations
Farmers need to ensure that they and their staff, who have the daily responsibility for the pullets and laying hens in cage-free housing systems, have the necessary knowledge and skills in good management procedures regarding these systems. They need to have a proper understanding of the welfare, including the health and the behaviour, of pullets and laying hens. These skills can be acquired and maintained by appropriate training, tailored to the cage-free housing system in place (barn, free-range, organic production). Training should cover the following aspects:

- How to comply with relevant (local) legislation
- How to recognize normal behaviour and signs of good health
- How to recognize abnormal behaviour and signs of disease
- How to quickly take effective corrective measures
- How to seek additional help from experts (e.g. veterinarian, feed advisor) if necessary

APPLICABILITY BOX

Theme
Training of farmer and staff, animal husbandry


Keywords
Farmer, personnel, caretaker, education, laying hens, and pullets.

Context
Transition to and operating cage-free housing systems for pullets and laying hens

Best in
All cage-free housing systems (barn, free-range, organic production) for pullets and laying hens

Target audience
Farmers, farm advisors, policy makers










Training for farmers and staff to handle and care for hens in cage-free housing systems. Utrecht University. Best Practice Hens.



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Practice Abstracts

Laying Hens and Pullets

-  The choice of genetics for hens for cage-free systems
-  Training for farmers and staff to handle and care for hens in cage-free housing systems
-  How to decide which protocol to use for assessing the welfare of laying hens in cage-free systems?
-  Challenges to keep hens healthy in cage-free housing systems
-  Challenges to keep hens healthy in cage-free housing systems: endoparasites
-  Perching opportunities and characteristics
-  Preparation of drinking equipment for hens transitioning from rearing to laying phase in cage-free housing systems
-  Litter provision and management for pullets and laying hens in cage-free systems
-  Free-range access for laying hens PART 1

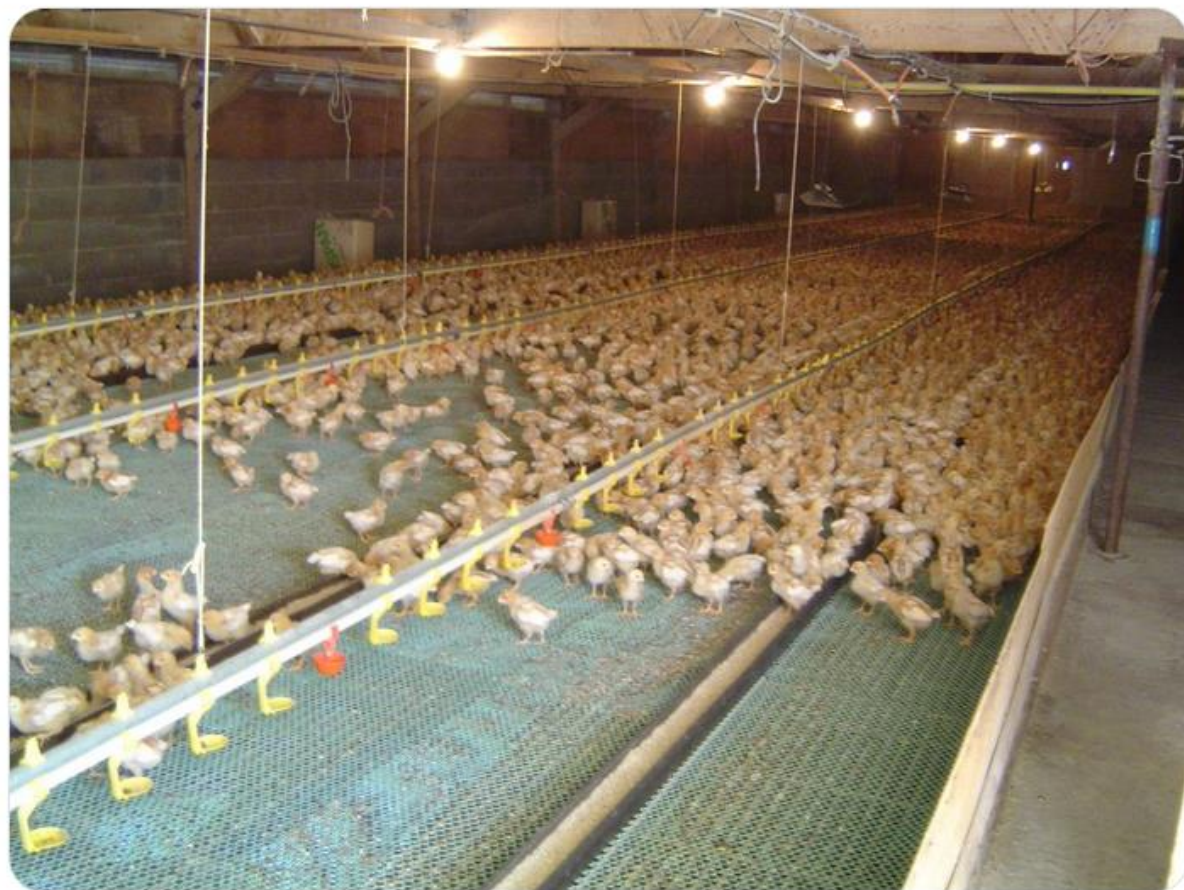




Task 5 Practice abstracts on social media

@BestHens on **Twitter** and @bestpracticehens / Best Practice Hens on **Facebook** and **LinkedIn**

 **Best Practice Hens** @BestHens · Nov 2
Adequate stocking densities during rearing reduce the risk of feather pecking in the laying phase by enabling #pullets to perform natural behaviours.
Click on the link to read practical recommendations for pullets:
bit.ly/3WgOoKi
#hens



Aarhus University and 4 others



3 reposts 4 likes

 **Best Practice Hens**
236 followers
6d · 
Best Practice Hens developing the best practice in the transition phase to cage-free. ...see more



13 · 4 reposts

Like Comment Repost Send

 **Best Practice Hens**
236 followers
1w · 
An adequate and well-balanced diet supports the egg-laying performance and health of the ...see more



7 · 1 repost

Like Comment Repost Send



Task 5 Dissemination meetings in target countries

- Half-a-day meetings in Poland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and final event in Brussels
 - Introduction to the project
 - Transitioning to cage-free systems, economics
 - Local situation in the target country
 - Introducing the best practices
 - Roundtable with stakeholders on topics of interest



Agenda

Belgium 12 January

Portugal 9 March

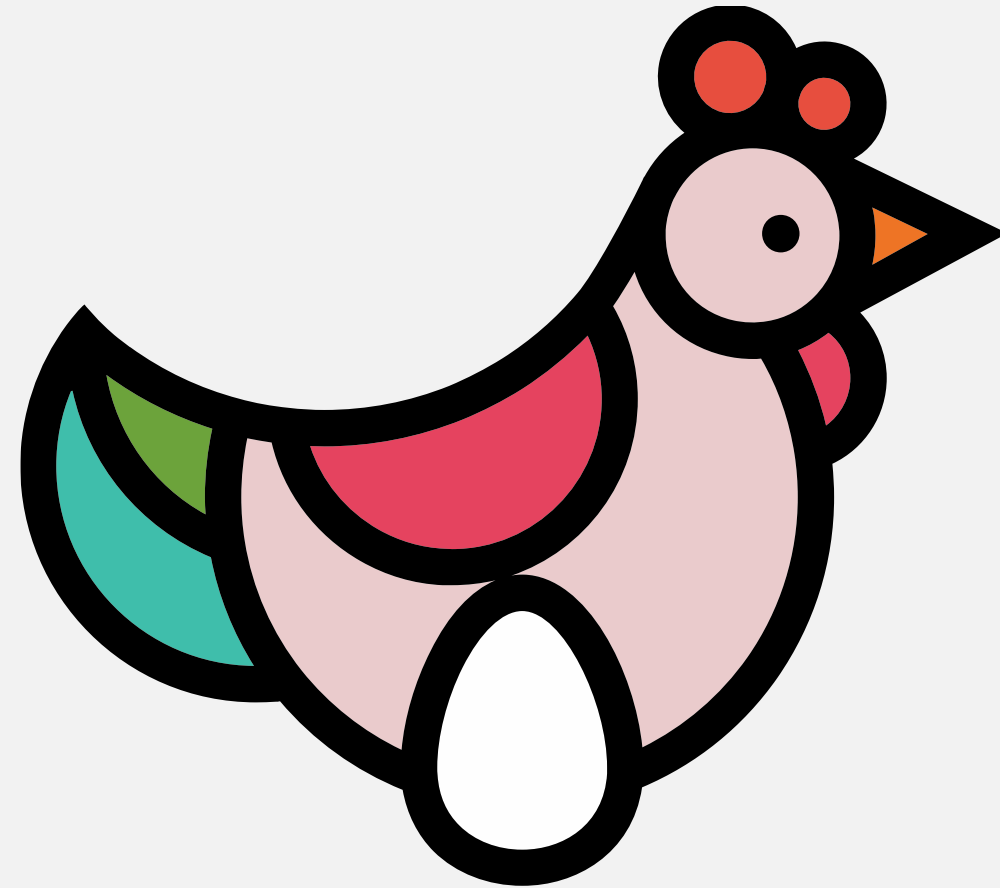
Poland 15 March

Spain 30 March

Brussels 3 May 2023



<https://bestpracticehens.eu/>



Best Practice Hens

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