

Brussels, 25 May 2021

COST 055/21

DECISION

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action “European Network on International Student Mobility: Connecting Research and Practice” (ENIS) CA20115

The COST Member Countries will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action European Network on International Student Mobility: Connecting Research and Practice approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 25 May 2021.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA20115
EUROPEAN NETWORK ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY: CONNECTING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE (ENIS)

The COST Members through the present Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wish to undertake joint activities of mutual interest and declare their common intention to participate in the COST Action, referred to above and described in the Technical Annex of this MoU.

The Action will be carried out in accordance with the set of COST Implementation Rules approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), or any document amending or replacing them.

The main aim and objective of the Action is to address the pressing need for systematic interdisciplinary and international exchange of knowledge on theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, findings, and best practice examples in the field of ISM. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The present MoU enters into force on the date of the approval of the COST Action by the CSO.

OVERVIEW

Summary

Over the past decades, international student mobility (ISM) in higher education has expanded rapidly. This growth has sparked a considerable interest in ISM within different disciplines, research communities, and circles of practitioners and policy makers. However, there is surprisingly little connection and exchange among researchers across these spheres. In addition, ISM scholarship remains strongly restricted to scientific circles, despite the relevance that scientific knowledge on ISM has for policy and daily practice. This Action responds to the pressing need for systematic interdisciplinary and international exchange of knowledge on theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, findings, and best practice examples, and for translating scientific findings into recommendations for ISM practice. It is organised around five working groups, four of them addressing themes in need of scientific development, and a fifth one bringing together recommendations for practice:

- (1) Global ISM flows and trends at the macro-level;
- (2) Social inequalities in access to and during ISM;
- (3) The social and cultural integration of international students in their host countries;
- (4) The impact of ISM on graduates' careers;
- (5) Connecting research and practice.

The Action brings together established researchers, early-career investigators (ECIs) and PhD students from different scientific disciplines, countries, and research communities as well as stakeholders from international offices, international student and study abroad organizations, and different policy levels. The Action will offer comparative and practical insights into ISM dynamics by bringing fragmented knowledge together, with the main aim of generating new interdisciplinary and innovative empirical perspectives on the phenomenon and translating these into tangible recommendations for stakeholders.

<p>Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sociology: Migration, interethnic relations ● Sociology: Social structure, inequalities, social mobility, social exclusion, income distribution, poverty ● Other social sciences: Databases, data mining, data curation, computational modelling ● Sociology: Work and professions ● Sociology: Population dynamics, demography 	<p>Keywords</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● international student mobility ● study abroad ● international student migration ● internationalisation ● exchanges
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Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective described in this MoU, the following specific objectives shall be accomplished:

Research Coordination

- To review and advance existing global scholarship on the four main topics of the four thematic WGs
- To review and advance scientific knowledge on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ISM dynamics
- To stimulate more extensive and collaborative research on ISM

- To translate research findings into recommendations for practice
- To stimulate knowledge creation and research mobility of ECIs, PhD students, and stakeholders
- To coordinate the timely organisation of events throughout the duration of the Action to maximise the insights gained from participants' respective work

Capacity Building

- To facilitate systematic exchange of ideas and develop research agendas on the four main topics of the four thematic WGs
- To enhance researchers' awareness of the importance of looking for complementary findings across disciplines and countries
- To present research results to both a scientific and non-scientific audience
- To develop research-to-practice partnerships across Europe and beyond
- To attract and train ECIs into research on ISM
- To place members of the Action, and in particular women, in a position to successfully compete for large-scale research funding
- To establish a vibrant and self-sustaining international community of engaged researchers and stakeholders that will continue to work together even after the official end of the Action

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1. S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1. SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

International student mobility (ISM) in higher education has expanded rapidly over the past decades. Today, international students are the fastest growing group of all international migrants (Czaika 2018) – even when compared to labour migrants, family migrants, and refugees (Riaño and Pigué 2016). Their number grew at a constant average annual rate of approximately 6% between 1998 and 2017 (OECD 2019). In European policy documents on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and on the development of the European Education Area by 2025, ISM – and in particular exchange programmes such as ERASMUS+ – has been strongly promoted as a crucial means to support both Europe’s economic and social prosperity and the labour market potential of graduates (e.g. European Commission 2011, 2020; European Council 2017). Furthermore, fees from (non-EU) international students have become a significant source of revenue for higher education institutions in several countries and attracting international students from outside the EHEA has been a key motivation during the Bologna Process (Shields 2016; Universities UK 2017). Finally, international students have become an important target group for institutional strategies on internationalisation-at-home and inclusive internationalisation. Such strategies intend to enable international experiences for all students, regardless of their eventual participation in ISM. In sum, ISM is a phenomenon of considerable societal relevance and impact today.

Against this background, ISM – which in this Action is defined to comprise both long and short stays abroad (often referred to as degree and credit mobility) – has become a popular topic in various academic disciplines, including Economics, Educational Sciences, Foreign Language Studies; Human Geography, Political Sciences, Psychology, and Sociology (see e.g. Abdullah et al. 2014; Gümüş et al. 2020; Jing et al. 2020; Lipura and Collins 2020; Pisarevskaya et al. 2020). Despite the increased interest in ISM *within* different disciplines and research communities, there is little interdisciplinary connection and exchange among ISM researchers *across* these spheres. ISM research is also dominated by single-country studies – which often focus on Anglophone receiving countries. This is unfortunate, as scholars within different disciplines and research communities often focus on similar questions, leading to the reproduction of similar knowledge within different disciplines. As ISM scholars tend to work disconnected from each other, the considerable potential of interdisciplinary approaches for analysing such a complex phenomenon is currently not exploited. Consequently, to truly *advance* our scientific knowledge on ISM and go beyond these singular perspectives, new approaches broadening and connecting research on ISM across disciplines, research communities, and countries, are imperative.

By combining and integrating theories and methodological approaches from different disciplines, researchers will be able to assess whether findings documented within disciplines, research communities, and countries are generalisable or specific to certain settings. Importantly, it would also allow to expand our knowledge to geographical regions that have been less studied – in particular Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs). This will lead to a more holistic scientific understanding of ISM and its societal impacts. This urgent need for interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches and for internationally comparative research has already been indicated by several authors as a means to substantially advance the current state-of-the-art of research on ISM (e.g. Findlay 2011;

King and Raghuram 2013; Lipura and Collins 2020). Nevertheless, there is so far only very little coordination of research initiatives and systematic exchange of scientific results between researchers across disciplines, research communities, and national borders. This illustrates the relevance and timeliness of this COST Action.

In addition, scholarship on ISM is still strongly confined to scientific circles, despite the relevance that it has for developing policy recommendations and for transferring best practices to daily work, for example, in the European Commission, national governments and EU national agencies, stakeholder and student organisations, as well as international offices of higher education institutions (Ogden et al. 2021). This is unfortunate, as stakeholders (that is, policy makers as well as practitioners in higher education institutions and study abroad organisations) often base ISM strategies on long-held assumptions about ISM, which are often not supported by solid scientific evidence. This problem is not unique to, but rather pronounced in, research on ISM. Given the potential that research on ISM has to inform ISM policies and daily practice, ISM researchers should engage more in the formulation of practical and policy recommendations. Equally, insights from practitioners can also be informative for the formulation of a new ISM research agenda. The Action will facilitate this connection between research and practice.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic created severe challenges for higher education institutions and international students themselves. It could mark the beginning of an era in which ISM is governed and carried out differently compared to the past. However, scientific knowledge on how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced and will influence macro-level flows of international students, their micro-level decision-making processes, experiences, and the outcome of ISM is still extremely scarce. Therefore, the Action will also explore the impact of the pandemic on ISM dynamics. Besides focusing on physical mobility – the traditional focus of most ISM research – scholars focusing on virtual mobility will also be part of the Action, as this is a phenomenon that, in the current and post-COVID world, will most likely assume growing importance.

1.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

The Action will address the pressing need for systematic interdisciplinary and international exchange of knowledge on theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, findings, and best practice examples in the field of ISM. It will also translate scientific findings into recommendations for ISM practice. To this end, it will bring together established, Early Career Investigators (ECIs) and PhD students from different scientific disciplines, research communities, and countries, as well as stakeholders from international offices, international student and study abroad organisations, and different policy levels.

The Action will be organised around five Working Groups (WGs). Four of them address themes in need of scientific development, and a fifth one will bring together and condense the recommendations of each WG. Details on the contents of each WG are illustrated in section 1.2.1.

- WG1: Global ISM flows and trends at the macro level.
- WG2: Social inequalities in access to and during ISM.
- WG3: The social and cultural integration of international students in their host countries.
- WG4: The impact of ISM on graduates' careers.
- WG5: Connecting research and practice.

These four thematic areas are also of significant interest to stakeholders. On the one hand, they address important challenges that stakeholders are currently facing – for example the goal of increasing the number of internationally mobile students, the participation of traditionally disadvantaged groups in ISM, and the persisting difficulties regarding international students' integration in their host communities,

which the COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated. On the other hand, the WGs focus on some of the dominant rationales that are used for promoting mobility, such as the assumed benefits of ISM for graduates' careers. As such, the four areas are of significant importance both for science and society.

Focusing on these four thematic areas, the main aims of the Action are to:

- (1) Explore and develop the interdisciplinary and internationally comparative potential of institutionally, regionally, and nationally funded ISM research across Europe and beyond.
- (2) Formulate and disseminate tangible recommendations for daily practice based on solid scientific evidence. This will significantly improve ISM policies, daily practice in international offices and higher education institutions, and ultimately students' international experiences.

The Action will enable its members to exchange ideas and research findings, write joint research papers, and develop common research proposals. Thereby, it will generate new interdisciplinary methodological, empirical, and theoretical insights on ISM. Each WG will develop joint empirical – interdisciplinary and/or internationally comparative – work, based on qualitative and quantitative databases that can be used to analyse ISM. These databases will be defined in the first year of the Action by each WG and developed throughout the Action lifetime. Furthermore, each WG will conduct a thematic review of recent research on their respective sub-topic in the first year of the Action. Moreover, each WG will analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their respective WG topic. Last but not least, the Action will allow to share and disseminate good practices and formulate new tangible recommendations for stakeholders, by pooling and further developing knowledge that is not yet clearly linked to practice today.

In sum, knowledge on ISM is currently rather fragmented, and scientific insights are not commonly transferred into practice. This is unfortunate during a time when international students are the fastest growing group of international migrants, when ISM is one of the most important components of the internationalisation of higher education, and when large parts of common knowledge on ISM and the policy achievements of ISM stakeholders are currently in need of re-assessment because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Action addresses these challenges, by offering scientifically robust and practical insights into ISM dynamics. It will bring together the fragmented knowledge on ISM, with the aim of generating new interdisciplinary and innovative perspectives on the phenomenon. On this basis, it will inform stakeholders. This will ultimately benefit students in higher education, and thus the future workforce of European countries.

1.2. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

1.2.1 APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

The Action aims at bringing together an interdisciplinary group of scholars and stakeholders from COST Countries, Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPC). As such, it will be well-placed to generate systematic knowledge exchange, innovative interdisciplinary and internationally comparative perspectives on ISM and tangible recommendations for stakeholders' daily work. To achieve this, the Action is organised in the above-mentioned WGs, which cover major thematic areas that only relatively recently gained popularity within ISM research and, therefore, need significant theoretical and empirical development (see e.g. Jing et al. 2020). These areas are also of significant interest to stakeholders given the rationales, aims, and challenges that surround them. Besides the four thematic WGs, a fifth group (WG5) will bring together and condense the recommendations of each WG. This will generate accessible, concise, and tangible recommendations for stakeholders that are applicable across and beyond the thematic areas of the WGs. Importantly, stakeholders' participation

will not be limited to WG5, as they will also be actively involved in the thematic WGs. Below, the five WGs are presented in more detail.

WG1: Global ISM flows and trends at the macro level. This WG will focus on describing and analysing the latest developments in terms of ISM flows and trends. In addition to producing a thematic review of the extant literature, new insights will be generated through the exploration of quantitative datasets and indicators that allow to map and explain past and current flows and patterns of ISM. Suited sources include macro-level data from UNESCO Educational Statistics and micro-level data on the full population of participants in the Erasmus+ programme. Possible theoretical and methodological starting points to generate interdisciplinary work are migration systems theories, gravity models, social network approaches and conditional choice models at the macro level, as well as value expectancy and rational choice theories at the micro level. In this WG, the scientific understanding of the dynamics and determinants of ISM on a global level will be advanced, allowing – for example – explanation of the rise of new education hubs and the modelling of the impact of disruptive events such as Brexit or the COVID-19 pandemic on flows and patterns of ISM.

WG2: Social inequalities in access to and during ISM. This WG will focus on social inequalities in the context of ISM – along the lines of, for example, students' gender, age, socio-economic background, and ethnicity. The thematic literature review and collaborations within this WG will focus on explaining social inequalities in access to different types of ISM, cumulative (dis)advantages accruing over students' life courses, the influence of institutional, national, and international policies on reducing or increasing ISM-related social inequalities. Moreover, the current state of research will be advanced by examining how inequalities arise due to group-specific patterns of engaging with international and local students, and the ways and extent to which students acquire scientific and soft skills whilst abroad. Possible starting points in this WG for interdisciplinary discussions are life-course approaches, cultural and social reproduction theories, as well as value expectancy and rational choice theories. Methodologically, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are expected to be relevant for explaining the role of social inequalities in ISM. The knowledge generated in this WG will be particularly relevant for stakeholders who are involved in developing strategies for making ISM more inclusive, and for broader efforts at higher education institutions to further inclusive internationalisation at home.

WG3: The social and cultural integration of international students in their host countries. This WG will focus on international students' social and cultural integration experiences in their host country. In spite of the relevance of integration for students' well-being and learning outcomes, little research has been conducted in this area. Besides the thematic review of the literature on social and cultural integration processes during ISM, possible starting points for advancing interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological discussions in this WG are contact theory, intercultural development theory, realistic and perceived group threat theory, as well as homophily and social capital theory. In this WG as well, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are expected to provide relevant and complementary insights. Particular attention will be devoted to the identification and collection of effective and less effective practices that have been put in place by higher education institutions. The goal is to improve and facilitate the social and cultural integration of international students, which is an issue that many higher education institutions have been struggling with.

WG4: The impact of ISM on graduates' careers. This WG will focus on the value that ISM can have for the careers of internationally mobile students. The positive effect of ISM on the labour market performance is a long-held assumption that underpins many campaigns to promote ISM – but which has only recently been examined by theory-guided and methodologically sound scientific research. This topic covers a range of sub-themes, such as skill development through ISM, the later labour market performance, social inequalities in the labour market returns to studying abroad and employers' perspectives on the value of ISM during recruitment processes. Possible starting points for theoretical

discussions and interdisciplinary research efforts are human capital theory, signalling theory, segmentation theory, and career identity theory. In this WG as well, qualitative and quantitative approaches are expected to provide complementary insights, which will lead to a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms at work when considering education-to-work transitions of graduates, conditional of whether they have gained study abroad experience.

WG5: Connecting research and practice. The fifth WG will focus on the development of tangible recommendations for a range of stakeholders, including policy makers, study abroad organisations, higher education institutions, and international offices. The decision to establish a specific WG for connecting research and practice is based on the observation that researchers often do not thoroughly elaborate on the potential implications of their findings for stakeholders' daily practice. Moreover, when such implications or recommendations are formulated, they are often not feasible for those who professionally engage with ISM on a daily basis. The academic research agenda is often not in tune with practitioners' needs, because they currently do not have established fora to convey their experiences and research ideas to academic scholars. The WG will further elaborate on the recommendations made in each WG (see section 4.1.1). It will receive input from a stakeholder advisor to be appointed by each WG. In WG5, participants will work on the development of strategies to improve the connection between ISM researchers and practitioners to cooperate in empirical research projects. Many stakeholders (e.g. the Erasmus Student Network, the European Association for International Education, the European Commission) collect relevant data, but these datasets are so far insufficiently used for scientific analyses – partly because of the loose connection between stakeholders and scholars. Consequently, bringing stakeholders and scholars together will promote cross-fertilization, as it will enable academic scholars to engage more easily with relevant stakeholder data for research purposes. In a similar vein, stakeholders will benefit from scientific databases and projects they were previously unaware of. As a long-term consequence, it could lead to the inclusion of variables and/or themes that are of importance for both stakeholders and scholars during data collections on both sides.

Individual research projects exist on the four thematic areas in a range of European countries. The WGs will systematically bring these findings together, consolidate and elaborate upon them to generate new knowledge, as well as tangible recommendations for practice. This scientific and practical knowledge will be disseminated widely and consistently through the different networks of the Action's members. Ultimately, the Action aims to lay the foundation for a long-term scientific and societal impact, by summarising established and identifying new cutting-edge topics, by stimulating and generating further innovative research lines, and by establishing partnerships across countries, disciplines, research communities, as well as science and daily practice. These new research lines and partnerships will continue even after the Action officially ends. Each WG will study the specific sub-topics in an interdisciplinary and internationally comparative manner and synergise key findings and approaches with the other WGs through workshops and seminars. Finally, the Action will also pay explicit attention to (1) gender equality in the Action's management and activities by fostering female leadership roles, which will contribute to gender equality in science and practice; and (2) to supporting the career development of ECIs and doctoral students, who in many cases do not have ISM experts in their direct professional environment to support their research activities through networking, training, coaching, and integration into ongoing research collaborations.

1.2.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

The Action will form the first large-scale interdisciplinary international network on ISM. The main research coordination objectives of this Action are to facilitate interaction between ISM researchers and stakeholders across countries, disciplines, and research communities, and to bridge the gap between

research and practice. Involving an international team of researchers working in different disciplines and stakeholders working for a variety of organizations, the Action specifically aims to:

1. Review and advance existing global scholarship on each of the four key ISM topics. The thematic reviews that will be produced in each thematic WG and the participation of ITCs in this Action will be of crucial importance in this respect, as well as new interdisciplinary research that will draw upon the combined expertise and (quantitative and qualitative) datasets that are accessible to the Action's members.
2. Review and advance scientific knowledge on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ISM dynamics. Each thematic WG will address changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Stimulate more extensive and collaborative research on ISM, which goes beyond the traditional focus on single institutions or countries. The participation of ITCs in this Action will be especially relevant in this regard.
4. Translate research findings into recommendations for practice. This will happen in close cooperation with the stakeholders who are involved in the Action to ensure their feasibility.
5. Stimulate knowledge creation and research mobility of ECIs, PhD students, and stakeholders.
6. Coordinate the timely organisation of events throughout the duration of the Action to maximise the insights gained from participants' respective work.

1.2.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

The Action will bring together early career and senior investigators working on a wide range of topics, as well as stakeholders who deal with ISM in their daily work. As the involved experts represent different scientific disciplines, work in different sectors (academia versus policy or administration), and originate from different countries, the sharing of scientific and practical insights is facilitated in a way that would not be possible on a smaller scale or nationally oriented projects. By looking at the four main thematic areas through an interdisciplinary lens, and by drawing on the expertise of a range of specialists in their respective area, the potential for a more profound development of the themes is far greater. The specific objectives for capacity-building are to:

1. Facilitate systematic exchange of ideas and develop research agendas on the four main topics of the four thematic WGs. This will be achieved, for example, by writing the thematic reviews in each thematic WG.
2. Enhance researchers' awareness of the importance of looking for complementary findings across disciplines and countries. The inclusion of a significant number of ITCs is especially relevant in this regard, as research findings from these countries do not always reach a broader scientific public.
3. Present research results to both a scientific and non-scientific audience through academic and non-academic publications as well as dissemination events.
4. Develop research-to-practice partnerships across Europe and beyond by forging linkages between academics and stakeholders.
5. Attract and train ECIs into research on ISM through collaboration with senior researchers, workshops, Training Schools, and Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs). STSMs will be particularly relevant for enabling scholars' access to approaches, data, and cutting-edge methods from different disciplines that are not available at their home institutions.
6. Place members of the Action, and in particular women, in a position to successfully compete for large-scale research funding. The Action will lead to further innovative research projects and initiatives, contribute to deepening and broadening knowledge on ISM, and foster female leadership roles.
7. Establish a vibrant and self-sustaining international community of engaged researchers and stakeholders that will continue to work together even after the official end of the Action.

2. NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

2.1. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

2.1.1. ADDED VALUE IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Within specific fields such as Linguistics, Migration Studies, and Educational Studies, some networks with a specific focus on ISM have recently emerged. For example, Study Abroad Research in European Perspective (SAREP), a COST-Action that ended in 2020, focused on second language learners who participate in international exchanges. Furthermore, within the International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe (IMISCOE) network, a research cluster on ISM existed between 2016 and 2019. In the United States, the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) established a 'Special Interest Group' on ISM in 2018. These initiatives illustrate the growing popularity and significance of research on ISM. Importantly, they also focus on very specific topics within their respective disciplines. In contrast to this Action, they do not explicitly focus on connecting researchers from different disciplines or on consistently bridging theory and practice.

The COST Action will go beyond these previous and existing initiatives by bridging different research traditions, approaches, and contents, and by systematically connecting researchers and stakeholders. There is an increasing interest among practitioners to learn from academic research and vice versa, which is exemplified by a number of study programmes and research initiatives. In Italy, the PhD Programme of the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI) at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore explicitly targets practitioners in international offices and study abroad organisations. The MappED! project and its spin off InclusiveMobility project aim to provide equal opportunities to disabled students for participating in the Erasmus+ exchange programme based on scientific research. And the EUROSTUDENT project aims to provide policy-makers, managers, researchers, and students with insights on the social dimension of European higher education, but is not yet used for advanced scientific analyses of ISM. The Action will integrate and further develop such initiatives by connecting researchers from various disciplines and stakeholders who are working on a broader variety of topics related to ISM.

2.2. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1. SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE

The Action's scientific and societal impact will be secured by the diversity and quality of the scholars and stakeholders involved. In terms of disciplinary and regional expertise, the initial network of proposers involved scholars from Anthropology, Economics and Business Studies, Educational Studies, Migration Studies, Political Sciences, Social and Economic Geography, and Sociology from 18 COST Countries, including 10 ITCs. The initial network included several pioneers of ISM research with a wide range of methodological and theoretical expertise, and a significant number of influential practitioners working in a variety of organisations (e.g. international offices, study abroad organizations).

To ensure that a broad range of perspectives and voices are taken into account, the Action will promote the inclusion of new members during its lifetime. Particular attention will be paid to the incorporation of PhD students working on ISM. This will lay a foundation for a future generation of interdisciplinary ISM scholars. More generally, an important criterion for Action members is to be well-integrated in the international academic and practitioner's world: through the involvement in research projects in and

outside Europe, they will be able to consult with other colleagues with similar expertise outside the Action. The described diversity and reach of Action members is essential for achieving the Action's main objectives.

2.2.2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Action will connect a large number of stakeholders, ranging from policy makers, members of higher education networks, professionals working in study abroad organisations, and staff of international offices. As the Action aims to bridge theory and practice, different stakeholder organisations will be involved in the Action from the start. This ensures the feasibility of the Action. Discussions with representatives of several organisations already indicated the considerable need and enthusiasm for the work of the Action. At the first MC meeting, a list of relevant stakeholder organizations to be invited to join the Action will be prepared to start with a broad base of stakeholders.

Through a dialogue between scholars and stakeholders, each WG will elaborate one-page leaflets summarising the main findings of the thematic reviews and new research in the respective WGs, together with concrete recommendations for ISM practice. In WG5, these recommendations will be brought together and elaborated upon. In addition, a website and social media accounts will form a key part of the dissemination strategy of the Action (see also section 3.2.1). They will allow to also reach stakeholders who are not directly involved in the Action. The Action will also present findings at major practitioner conferences, such as the conferences of the European Association for International Education, the Forum on Education Abroad, and the Association of International Educators. The Action will organise a number of Training Schools, which will also target stakeholders. Finally, the overarching recommendations for practice formulated in WG5 will be presented at the final conference of the Action.

2.2.3. MUTUAL BENEFITS OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF SECONDARY PROPOSERS FROM NEAR NEIGHBOUR OR INTERNATIONAL PARTNER COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

In other world regions, such as North America, South-East Asia, and Oceania, scholarship on ISM has developed significantly as well over the past decade. As ISM is a global phenomenon, several academic and non-academic partners from COST NNC and IPC will be included in the Action. In particular, the Action will seek collaboration with partners based in countries with significant experience in ISM such as Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Russia, Singapore and the United States. This will be mutually beneficial for them and all Action members, as it will allow them to be inspired by research and best practice from other world regions. At the start, the Action already includes scholars from New Zealand, Singapore and the United States.

3. IMPACT

3.1. IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAK-THROUGHS

3.1.1. SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS (INCLUDING POTENTIAL INNOVATIONS AND/OR BREAKTHROUGHS)

The Action will substantially advance the current state-of-the-art of research on ISM. The focus of each WG on a key area in need of further research and the interdisciplinary and internationally comparative approach of the Action will stimulate new scientific knowledge on each topic in conceptual, methodological, and empirical terms. Networking and seeking comparative approaches allow the Action members to answer complex and pressing research questions on ISM that are invisible to higher education actors within a single country, academic discipline, or higher education institution. In this way, more narrowly conceived approaches to study ISM can be overcome. This will entail the pooling of existing research, systematic exchange of ideas and research findings, and the development of new scientific knowledge on ISM. It will also enhance the quality of future research projects. Thereby, it can ultimately contribute to raising Europe's international competitiveness in Science and Technology. In addition, the Action will also provide insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ISM-dynamics. For many international students, the pandemic was a disruptive event. Yet, little is known about its consequences on ISM.

The Action also has a significant societal relevance: The focus on ISM fits European policies on youth mobility, the internationalisation of higher education, and graduates' employability. Today, triumphant discourses on ISM often prevail among policy-makers and in international offices of higher education institutions, throwing a discrete veil on potential imbalances in access to, experiences, and benefits of ISM. Participation benchmarks for international student exchanges, for example, are not met in many European countries – sometimes even where sufficient funding for such exchanges is available. Furthermore, many strategies and programmes are based on scarce or biased empirical evidence. Consequently, the new insights that will be generated in this Action and its explicit research-to-practice perspective will be very relevant for stakeholders, for example, in addressing social inequalities, improving international students' ISM experiences, supporting social integration processes and promoting graduates' career development. Furthermore, the consideration of both physical and virtual ISM will help stakeholders make informed decisions on ISM modalities (in person, blended, or online) during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the empirical insights of the Action will indirectly benefit higher education students, as the project will allow stakeholders to implement amendments of ISM policies and practices.

3.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge creation

By coordinating, pooling, and elaborating upon the bottom-up, nationally, and regionally funded research approaches that are already implemented in empirical studies across Europe, the Action will (1) stimulate the integration of research findings across Europe, for example through the thematic reviews and joint publications, and make them accessible to all actors working in the field of ISM; (2) advance our understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ISM-dynamics; (3) stimulate in-depth interdisciplinary and internationally comparative research, thereby specifically including the often neglected perspectives of Inclusiveness Target Countries; (4) develop an agenda for future ISM

research and, thereby, improve scientific knowledge on ISM topics that are still understudied; and (5) foster knowledge that can be applied by stakeholders.

This will result in advancing comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and comparative knowledge on the drivers and obstacles to ISM, the role of social inequalities in access, experiences, and outcomes of ISM, the social and cultural integration process of international students, and the impact of ISM on graduates' career. By bringing together academic and stakeholders' knowledge within Europe, the Action will be uniquely positioned to generate robust knowledge which will also be broadly applicable by stakeholders.

Transfer of knowledge

The knowledge created within the network will be transferred through the following activities:

- Joint publications (e.g. research articles, special issues, and edited volumes) in high-ranked international journals and publishing series.
- Research reports and methodological documentations to be developed within and across WGs, which will be published on the Action's website.
- The organisation of WG meetings, workshops, webinars, and conferences across the lifetime of the Action (see also section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 for more details on the organisation and timing of these activities). The in-person events will be offered in a blended form, whereby participants can also take part online. In this way, a much broader audience will be reached compared to mere in-person formats.
- Presentations at key academic and practitioner conferences, within as well as outside Europe (e.g. Association for the Study of Higher Education, British Association for International and Comparative Education, Comparative and International Education Society, European Association for International Education, European Sociological Association, Forum on Education Abroad, IMISCOE, International Sociological Association, and NAFSA: Association of International Educators).
- Guest lectures, keynotes, and seminars at academic institutes and stakeholder organisations, both nationally (e.g. Nuffic in the Netherlands, German Academic Exchange Service in Germany) and internationally (e.g. Compostela Network, Erasmus Student Network, Joint Research centres; SGroup; European Parliament).
- Database inventory (lists of available qualitative and quantitative data that can be used for joint publications, which will be kept up to date throughout and after the Action).
- Policy briefs and practical recommendations informing practitioners and policy-makers.
- Articles and commentaries in the press and on social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, ResearchGate, VoxEU).
- A website with discussion of news, events, and developments regarding ISM – through input from the different WGs.
- An electronic newsletter to be circulated twice a year.
- Support of doctoral students and dissertation research projects to ensure a new generation of qualified researchers on ISM, who can build upon the knowledge generated in the Action.
- Workshops and Training Schools across partner institutions in COST Countries.
- Successful joint funding applications to support research in several COST Countries to ensure the sustainability of the Action beyond the duration of its funding.

Career development

Part of the Action's activities will be devoted to career development. Researchers working on ISM very often express that they are working in a rather isolated manner in their academic institutions and departments. Hence, the Action will provide them with a soundboard from an international research community by connecting them with scholars that work on similar topics. A substantive part of the network are ECIs from across Europe. In order to foster career development, each WG will appoint an ECI for either the role of WG leader or vice-leader. Similarly, the Action will aim for gender equality in

these leadership positions to support the career development of female scholars and practitioners. By leading and/or participating in WGs, workshops, and Training Schools, the Action will boost the professional network, international reach, and further professional development of these ECIs, and of women in particular. The Action will also include PhD students and young professionals from across Europe, who will benefit in a similar way. The STSMs will constitute another way to increase researchers' mobility within these groups, and allow scholars and stakeholders from ITCs to gain experience in countries that have been dealing with ISM for a longer period. Furthermore, the close involvement of stakeholders in the network will ensure access to relevant non-academic organisations, and training in research valorisation – i.e. concerning how to communicate scientific findings to a non-scientific public. Such access and skills are of increasing importance to career development inside and outside of academia. The participation in international consortia to apply for competitive research funds will increase chances of receiving competitive funding and hence stimulate upward career mobility of the scholars in the network.

3.2.2 PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY

The Action will have the following key dissemination activities. These will be coordinated by the Science Communication Manager.

Main target audience(s)	Planned activities
Academics & stakeholders, also beyond the network	Compose a mailing list of a large number of relevant practitioners, scholars (including PhD students), and policy-makers, to inform regularly about the Action, activities, and achievements (through, for example, the newsletter and calls for conferences), inviting them to actively participate in the Action.
Academics & stakeholders, also beyond the network	Distribute a newsletter at least twice a year. Besides relevant information about activities and achievements of the Action, it will always briefly feature the work of two ECIs or PhD students as well as one senior scholar, to give them the chance to present themselves to a larger network of ISM scholars and practitioners.
All audiences	Set up an Action website dedicated to informing researchers, practitioners, and the broader public about the latest developments within the network and in the field of ISM.
Academics & stakeholders	Organise presentations and discussions at relevant academic and stakeholder conferences across the many disciplines of the Action members. Short reports of these sessions will be circulated within the network. To enhance the impact and efficiency of dissemination and enable joint panels and roundtables, some Action events will be planned to coincide with major European conferences that are relevant to ISM researchers and stakeholders. By explicitly focusing on academic and stakeholder conferences, the Action ensures the establishment of a dialogue between researchers and stakeholders beyond the Action.
Academics & stakeholders	Organise workshops, seminars, and webinars at different locations across Europe – including in ITCs, to allow participants to get involved and be informed from a distance. External practitioners and policy-makers will be selectively invited to these events, and attendees will be asked to use their own networks to disseminate the gathered knowledge widely. The Action will offer these events in a blended form, as the situation and travel regulations

	with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic might continue to be in place and significantly vary across the participants' countries. Even if the COVID-19 situation improves, providing the option to follow these events online will lead to an engagement with a larger audience and a reduction of travel costs and environmental pollution.
Academics	Produce reports and academic publications in national and international academic journals and with established publishers. To facilitate this, the WG leaders will engage with editors of relevant international journals to negotiate the publication of special issues related to the research area of their WG.
Stakeholders	Produce regular policy briefs and recommendations for practice, written by network members, and coordinated by the Science Communication Manager together with the WG5 leader. This will provide helpful practical knowledge to stakeholders working in international offices, international academic organisations, as well as higher education and science policy (e.g. in the European Commission and the European Parliament).
General Public	Use media channels and connections, through (1) involvement of journalists at major news outlets and broadcast channels within Europe to which the participants have connections and invite them to the organised activities; (2) social media to disseminate the main outputs of the Action.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN

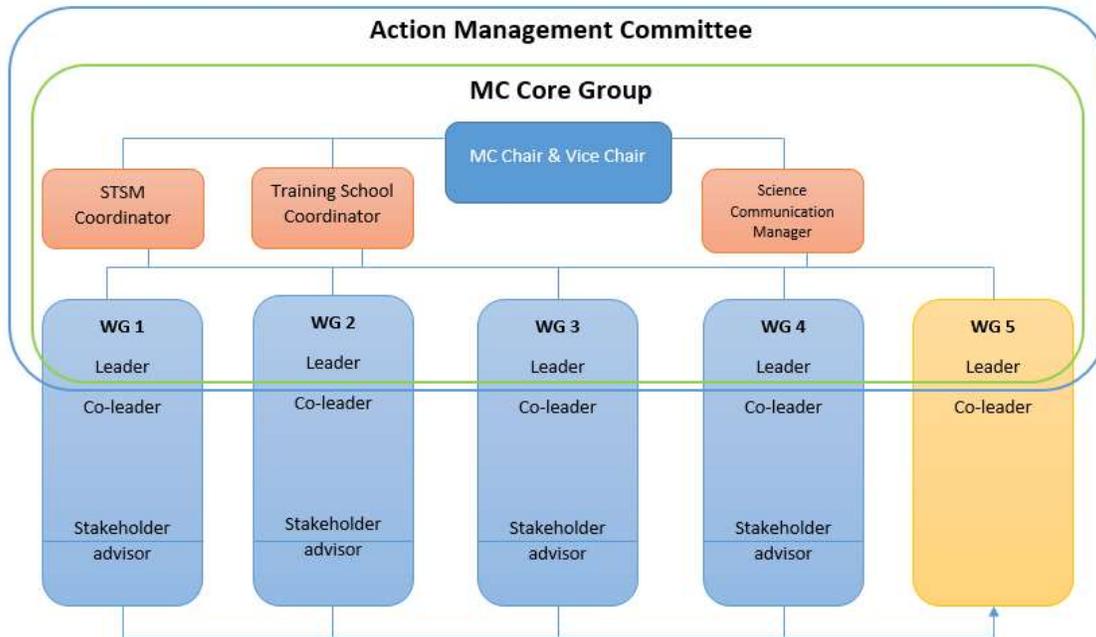
4.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

Management structure, tasks, and WGs

As Figure 1 illustrates, the Action will be coordinated by the Action Management Committee (MC). Within this decision-making body, the MC Core Group consists of the MC Chair and the MC Vice Chair, the WG leaders, the Science Communication manager, the STSM coordinator, and the Training School coordinator. Supported by the MC Chair and MC Vice Chair, the Action MC will involve senior researchers, ECIs, and stakeholders (e.g. the leader of WG5). It will strive for an equal gender balance and the inclusion of participants from ITCs.

The Action MC is responsible for the development, organisation, and monitoring of the whole project. It will hold bi-annual meetings in a blended form. These meetings are crucial to track progress and to ensure the timely delivery of results and the on-going planning of deliverables, such as events, reports, and publications. The Action MC will be responsible for the overall management of the Action's work, while overseeing the work of the WGs in terms of their planning and direction of their work. After each WG meeting, the WG leaders report to the Action MC on the progress of the WGs objectives, activities, and possible challenges encountered. If necessary, the Action MC adjusts the strategies and organisation to attain the objectives of the Action. The Action MC will also plan the annual budget, and define the associated activities (e.g. number of STSMs, workshops, training schools, and conferences) needed to achieve the Action's objectives.

Figure 1. Management structure



Each WG will have a leader and a co-leader, who will be elected at the 1st Management Committee meeting of the Action. At least one (co-)leader in each WG should be an ECI. Moreover, an even gender balance will be strived for. The WG leader and the co-leader will be in charge of the implementation of the workplan, monitoring and reporting on WG activities, assisting the MC Chair in preparing scientific reports. At the end of the second year of the Action, when the number of participants will be consolidated, the MC may assess its leadership roles and consider a rotation system among leaders/vice-leaders or replacements. Although new participants can join the Action during its lifetime, the Action aims to establishing the necessary critical mass of researchers and stakeholders in COST Countries during its first year. At their first meeting, the WGs will decide upon a more precise division and planning of the tasks to be carried out to attain their specific goals. They will discuss and agree on the implementation of the activities envisaged in the annual work and budget plan, taking into consideration the progress made on tasks and deliverables. For each WG, the MC will also appoint a stakeholder advisor. This role will be taken up by a stakeholder to maximise the utility of the policy recommendations to be translated from research into practice. The stakeholder advisor will be responsible for reporting the recommendations of the respective WG to WG5, where they will be condensed, connected, and further elaborated. Triannual meetings are envisaged for the WGs. If the COVID-19 situation allows for it, at least one of the meetings will be in person. All meetings will also be accessible online. If the need for new WGs emerges, the MC will establish a new WG. As research on ISM is a rapidly developing field, the Action needs to be flexible to respond to changes in the landscape in a meaningful way. Each WG is responsible for the dissemination of their findings beyond the network. In collaboration with WG5, they will make sure that the developed recommendations for policy and practice are viable.

The involved researchers will participate in the WG closest to their area of expertise. However, Action members will be allowed to be members of several WGs and to temporarily join an activity of another WG. The composition of the WGs will guarantee an interdisciplinary and international approach, and a combination of stakeholders and senior and Early Career Investigators. This will ensure the inclusion of

different viewpoints to the development of new knowledge. There will be mutual interactions between the WGs, theoretically, methodologically, and empirically, in particular through the workshops, webinars, and Training Schools. Moreover, each WG will have at least one representative at another WG to ensure synergy between the WGs. In addition, the WGs will provide regular input (e.g. working papers, news items) to the Action's website. In this way, participants in the WGs will be kept informed about new developments and initiatives in the field. Access to the website will not be limited to the participants in the Action, so other researchers and stakeholders may also benefit from it. In this way, the Action engages in the creation of knowledge with significant and sustainable added scientific and societal value.

Activities

In addition to ongoing conversations online, WGs will meet at least three times a year (physically and virtually) to keep a continuous flow of exchange and collaboration. Ensuring this is the responsibility of each WG leader. One of these annual meetings will coincide with a MC meeting. Two times, they will be organised independently from the MC. The in-person meetings will be hosted at convenient locations – with a preference for ITCs. The WGs will aim to organise these meetings to coincide with major European conferences relevant to ISM to increase dissemination and impact of the Action. These meetings will be accessible through a video conferencing tool. They will be announced in time within the network. In addition, WGs will hold interim video conferences to keep track of activities of their members, collect relevant input and ideas regarding substantive research and topics for STSMs and ways to expand the network and its activities. Each WG meeting will result in short reports prepared by the WG leaders and co-leaders, with input from meeting participants. They will be circulated to the entire network. Activities and news will be extracted for the website and newsletter from these brief reports. During each WG meeting, at least one time slot will be devoted to presenting (the progress of) doctoral dissertation projects, which will offer a soundboard for all kinds of research-related difficulties that can arise throughout a PhD project. This will support a next generation of qualified researchers on ISM across Europe. It will also ensure that their research builds upon existing evidence, allowing future studies to address pressing new research questions on ISM rather than overly repeating research that has already been carried out.

Each WG will organise at least one workshop alongside its meetings around a certain topic or method discussed within the WG. These workshops are open for all Action members and external participants to maximize the impact: researchers (PhDs, ECIs and senior investigators), young professionals, stakeholders, and policy makers. The overall aim of the workshops is to exchange findings and insights of the interdisciplinary WGs, to create synergies and to develop recommendations for practice and policy related to the main research areas of the Action.

WGs will also organise a webinar at least once a year on a sub-topic within their WG, which will be open to anyone – and consequently advertised widely, to reach a larger audience. It will also be cost-effective.

The Action also aims to organise Short-Term Scientific Missions, at least 3 to 4 each year. The STSMs are aimed to establish more sustained and in-depth exchange among the researchers, stakeholders, and institutions involved in the Action. The STSMs will enhance cooperation within and across WGs as well as between participating institutions. STSMs aim to stimulate joint research and publications between the visiting scholars and receiving institutions. ECIs and PhDs as well as senior investigators and stakeholders are encouraged to participate in these STSMs. The STSM coordinator is responsible for the organisation and announcements of these STSMs and has the responsibility to collect and assess the STSM reports from the STSM grantees.

Training Schools for ECIs, PhDs, and stakeholders will be organised on a yearly basis at various locations in Europe. The Training Schools will in particular focus on the development of interdisciplinary research projects, transferable skills, specific methodologies, the valorisation of scientific findings for the public, and the interpretation of scientific findings (which particularly focuses on the participating stakeholders). Therefore, the Training Schools are organised by experts from different disciplines and involve at least one non-academic member of the Action. During the first year of the Action, one Training School will focus on conducting interdisciplinary research and issues of comparability and harmonisation of qualitative and quantitative datasets. Such a Training School is necessary to ensure that the members of the Action can fully engage in interdisciplinary knowledge exchanges and make maximal use of the database inventories. The Action will strive for the organisation of at least 2 Training Schools in ITCs.

Finally, throughout the lifetime of the Action, three conferences will be organised in a blended format. At least one of these conferences will be organised in an ITC. They will be open to everyone interested. Members from WGs will actively participate and contribute to these events. The conferences will serve as flagship events, placing the Action, that will highlight its aims (first conference, year 1) and achievements (second and third conference in year 3 and 4). They will also attract high-level external speakers from across the world as keynotes, and participants from academic and stakeholder organisations. This will ensure a substantive dissemination of the results of this Action.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

The Action aims to produce the following milestones (M) and deliverables (D):

	Description of milestones and deliverables	Month(s) of delivery
M1	Kick-off meeting. This meeting allows all Action members to meet for the first time and engage in a discussion of the Action's course for the following years.	1
M2	Bi-annual MC Meetings. These are important moments to assess the progress of the Action, the WGs, the STSMs, Workshops, Training Schools and the dissemination activities.	1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43
M3	Tri-annual WG Meetings. WGs report back to the MC on the progress, key accomplishments, and challenges met within the WG.	1, 5, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 33, 37, 41, 45
M4	Annual Action workshop for all Action members. Each workshop will be organised by a different WG in different locations across Europe, ensuring synergy and exchange across the WGs as well as dissemination to a wider academic and stakeholder community. These are important indications of the substantive progress of the Action and the extent to which meaningful exchange and cross-fertilisation will have been realised. Progress on academic publications and the content of the website (events, news, member profiles, and datasets) are milestones for the transfer of knowledge.	13, 25, 31, 37, 45
M5	Annual WG webinar. Each WG will organise one webinar per year.	11, 23, 35, 47

M6	Short Term Scientific Missions. They will take place at least 3 to 4 times each year.	4-48
M7	Training Schools on interdisciplinary and internationally comparative ISM research, transferable skills, and valorisation.	6, 18, 30, 42
D01	Action Website featuring news, events, and member profiles.	4-48
D02	Social media profiles (Linkedin, Twitter).	1
D03	Newsletter, distributed twice a year.	6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42,48
D04	List of available datasets for both qualitative and quantitative research across COST Countries, compiled by each WG and indicating clearly the data availability. This list will be kept up-to-date throughout the Action.	10, 24, 36, 48
D05	Submission of annual report of each of the four thematic WGs to the MC. The annual reports provide an overview of the annual progress of the WGs, indicating the key achievements of the WG in the previous year, and provide input for deliverable 6.	11, 23, 35, 47
D06	Policy briefs and recommendations for daily practice. The input for these briefs and recommendations will come from the reports as well as the webinars and publications of the WGs.	15, 27, 39
D07	Submission of at least four joint papers for publication in (indexed) peer-reviewed journals.	36
D08	Action conferences. At the three Action conferences, key findings of the Action will be presented to scientists and practitioners	12, 36, 46
D09	Submission of four thematic reviews (1 per WG) to peer-reviewed outlets	46

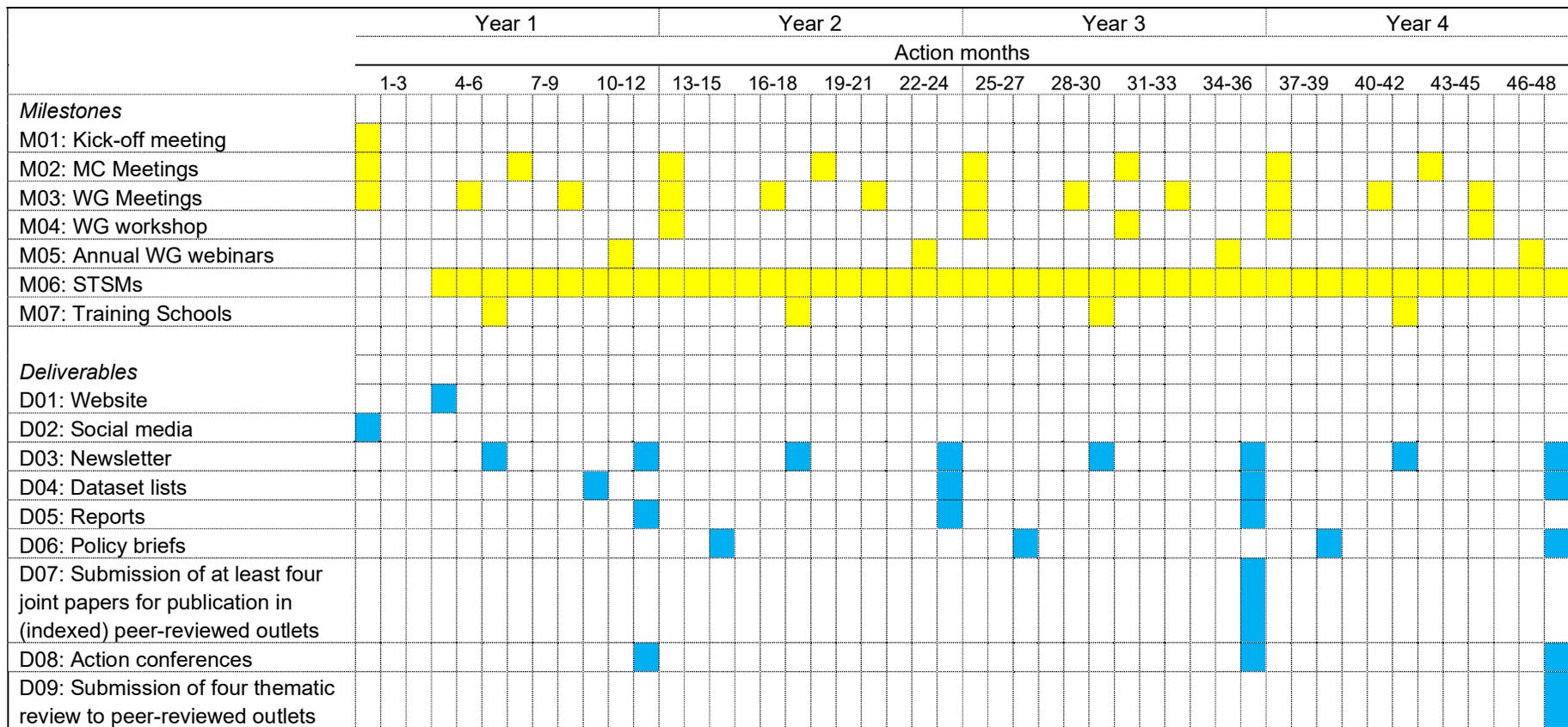
4.1.3. RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

The Action involves the following risks:

Risk	Likelihood of occurrence	Mitigation plan
Diverse procedures and research methods impede good	Medium	Participants will be encouraged to communicate their methodological procedures as transparently as possible; and make an inventory of research methods and databases to investigate comparability; the Training School on interdisciplinary research in the first year of the Action will

collaboration and exchange		identify for complementarities in research practices; best practices will be identified and learnt from.
Underdeveloped network leads to lack of coherence in activities	Medium	Create subgroups with the same interests within the WG; restructure parts of the Action if necessary; create easy communication methods to share information.
Insufficient attendance of workshops and meetings	Medium	Split up the Action members into smaller WGs, making the organisation more flexible; set up video conferencing tools to ensure participation through webinars; ensure clearly defined tasks and commitments of each partner in the work plan.
Insufficient use of STSMs among the Action members	High	Shorten time span of STSMs; announce vacancies more broadly through the academic networks of Action members; provide an overview of all the institutions and their key expertise available for STSMs.
Incompatibility of the qualitative and quantitative databases	High	Training school on harmonisation of data from different countries in the Action's first year. Regular discussions in the WG and MC meetings.

4.1.4. GANTT DIAGRAM



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