

Brussels, 24 March 2020

COST 020/20

## DECISION

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Subject: **Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action  
“Researcher Mental Health” (ReMO) CA19117**

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The COST Member Countries and/or the COST Cooperating State will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action Researcher Mental Health approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 24 March 2020.

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## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

### **COST Action CA19117 RESEARCHER MENTAL HEALTH (ReMO)**

The COST Member Countries and/or the COST Cooperating State, accepting 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 (the 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 new document amending or replacing them:

- a. "Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities" (COST 132/14 REV2);
- b. "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval" (COST 133/14 REV);
- c. "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment" (COST 134/14 REV2);
- d. "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation" (COST 135/14 REV).

The main aim and objective of the Action is to understand how mental health and wellbeing can be characterised and improved, and how progress and outcomes can be measured across and within the unique workforce of researchers. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The economic dimension of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, at EUR 96 million in 2019.

The MoU will enter into force once at least seven (7) COST Member Countries and/or COST Cooperating State have accepted it, and the corresponding Management Committee Members have been appointed, as described in the CSO Decision COST 134/14 REV2.

The COST Action will start from the date of the first Management Committee meeting and shall be implemented for a period of four (4) years, unless an extension is approved by the CSO following the procedure described in the CSO Decision COST 134/14 REV2.

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**OVERVIEW**

**Summary**

ReMO will focus on wellbeing and mental health within academia, a theme of strategic importance for the European Research Area. Previous research shows that low levels of wellbeing and mental health problems have a negative impact on individual, team and organizational performance, triggering significant costs. In addition, institutional context, organizational structure and culture, as well as managerial practices have significant impact on wellbeing and health of employees. Therefore, general insights on the causes of workplace wellbeing and mental health need to be refined with contextual specifics (i.e. in academia) in order to develop tailored, effective and efficient prevention and action programs.

ReMO wants to address these limitations using a threefold approach: (1) We aim at developing a conceptual framework and tools that are tailored to the academic context taking into account the specifics and challenges of academia and academic work (e.g. performance management of academics, an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees, increasing challenges of dealing with diversity and internationalization, job insecurity, etc.); (2) We take a multilevel perspective on problems and problem generating mechanisms, but also on positive organizational behavior in support of meaningful work and wellbeing; (3) We use a diversity of methods with short feedback loops between theory and practice.

The proposers of ReMO are academics, practitioners, policy makers and consultants for higher education institutions. They represent an international mix of scientific knowledge and practice on researcher mental health and a much needed interdisciplinary (e.g. psychology, sociology, business administration), multilevel (individual, organizational, system) and intercultural perspective.

<p><b>Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sociology: Sociology of science</li> <li>● Psychology: Social psychology</li> </ul>	<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researcher Mental Health</li> <li>● Academia</li> <li>● Research policy</li> <li>● Wellbeing</li> </ul>
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**Specific Objectives**

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

Research Coordination

- Establish a sustainable research network
- Collect and synthesise existing knowledge, information, data and evidence gaps on factors that affect academics' mental health across countries and systems and associated support services
- Develop a strategic, coordinated, interdisciplinary and comparative research agenda
- Support both theoretical and practical knowledge, evidence and information exchange
- Transfer and apply evidence-based insights and intervention requirements through robust dissemination protocols and an evidence-based forum

Capacity Building

- Bridge research present in different disciplines
- Bring together stakeholders from academia, practitioners, private sector, civil society, management of academia and researchers
- Create institutional links for regular knowledge and best practices transfer between countries
- Contribute to building the research capacity of at least 100 early career researchers to serve as ambassadors for mental health and wellbeing in their organisations and communities.

- Offer mental health support network for Early Career Researchers
- Stimulate science-practice exchange, fostering co-development of knowledge

# 1 S&T EXCELLENCE

## 1.1 SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

### 1.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

In the past decade, institutions such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Commission (EC) have increasingly endorsed governments and organizations to include mental health among their top priorities. Compared to industry, the academic sector is lagging behind, both in terms of practical and scientific evidence on wellbeing and mental health within academia and research. In fact, outside the public sector, approaches have moved on from providing targeted mental health provision (to individuals in need with low to moderate levels of psychological distress), to actually acknowledging the significant role of mental health and wellbeing in work performance. Performance enhancement programmes - primarily aiming at enhanced mental health and wellbeing of employees - have been developed and widely implemented across the industrial sector. The content of these programmes is derived mostly from evidence established in the academic literature, where, ironically, mental health and wellbeing programmes are still a rare find (compared to industry). Given that recent research has highlighted alarming numbers of distressed doctoral researchers (one in three) being at risk of developing a mental disorder [1], it is time for academia to have a closer look at its own ranks and face the present mental health challenge.

### 1.1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

Mental health issues present a significant challenge in the EU. A systematic review of data across the EU, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland shows that **more than a quarter (27%) of the adult population has experienced mental health disorders** in the past year - which would be an estimated 83 million people [26]. This is further emphasised by the latest Eurostat data which suggests 4% of all deaths in the EU in 2015 resulted from mental and behavioural disorders; and that in 2014, 7% of the EU population reported having chronic depression [27].

This challenge is also present within the research community. A review across different occupational groups [2] suggests that **academics are among the occupational groups with the highest levels of common mental disorders** (alongside social services staff and teachers). The review estimated the prevalence of **common mental disorders among academics and teachers at 37%**, compared with a prevalence of approximately 19% in the general population. Across a number of studies based on the GHQ-12, a well-validated screening tool for psychological distress, the evidence suggests that **between 32% and 42% of academic employees are 'at risk of having or developing a common psychiatric disorder'** [3]. A number of studies have looked at this issue specifically for postgraduate students, finding similar levels of mental ill-health [1,4,12]. However, there are few studies breaking this down for other groups - for example postdoctoral researchers, who might also face many similar workplace challenges.

In addition, there is **limited evidence on what constitutes effective practice to address mental health challenges in academia**, with most interventions reported in the literature on a small scale, with a limited population; and **often the quality of evaluations conducted is poor** [3]. Although it is likely that activities are ongoing in many institutions, based on anecdotal evidence from the participants in this COST Action, **there is little reported in the literature and capacities are limited to share best practices across the European research community**. Although there is evidence from

other sectors regarding mental health in the workplace [13], this needs to be understood in the context of the unique work environment in which researchers are operating. This can be characterised in a number of ways including: high levels of mobility [5] leading to potential cultural differences and language barriers; a diverse workforce; high levels of job insecurity and short term contracts [6,14,15]; limited management and mental health training in leadership typically [7]; and challenges in measuring productivity and outcomes [8].

Therefore, it is important to understand how mental health and wellbeing can be characterised and improved; how progress and outcomes can be measured across and within this unique workforce; building shared learning and communities of practice at all levels, from those researching the topic, through institutions and policymakers, to those practically providing support on the ground and putting interventions into practice. To address this challenge, this COST Action has three main objectives:

1. **Building an Evidence Hub:** The Evidence Hub (E-HUB), a newly established network of researchers, practitioners, research managers and funders, aims to extend the limited evidence base on mental health and wellbeing provision in academia. Activities of the E-HUB include: a) systematic evaluation of the current mental health situation in the academic sector by country, organizational and individual levels; b) examination of perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health and wellbeing provision, as well as performance enhancement strategies, with respect to cultural, political and institutional differences across the countries; c) development of new collaborative pathways between researchers as a means to increase awareness, knowledge and mutual support around mental health, wellbeing and performance enhancement strategies.
2. **Setting up a Training and Dialogue Network (TDN):** The network aims to build awareness around mental health and performance issues in academia and provide a platform for researchers, practitioners and policymakers alike to engage in dialogue on these issues. A training programme will help members learn about and implement effective wellbeing and performance enhancement strategies.
3. **Developing institutional policy and best practice guidelines:** The E-HUB and TDN will allow us to formulate and disseminate evidence-based, implementable best practice guidelines. Guidelines for mental health provision, wellbeing and performance enhancement in academia will be developed, detailing aspects around assessment, evaluation, intervention and prevention approaches to ensure lasting, impactful institutional policies.

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

### 1.2.1 APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE & PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

ReMO's focus on mental health and wellbeing provision, in relation to performance enhancement in academia addresses a theme of strategic importance for the European Research Area (ERA). Research evidence consistently emphasizes the **negative impact of low levels of wellbeing and mental health on individual, team and organizational performance, thereby triggering significant costs for all stakeholders** [7, 16]. Work-related stress can lead to lower levels of commitment to not just the institution but research as a whole, which can be seen in high levels of dropout and turnover [9, 17]. Work-related stress can also impact on life outside of work, limiting the ability of researchers to perform their family and social roles; and leading to irritability, withdrawal and sleeping difficulties [10]. Furthermore, it has been shown that institutional context, organizational structure, culture, as well as managerial practices all have a significant impact on various mental and physical health domains of employees [18, 19, 20, 24]. Therefore, context specific insights need to be gained around the mental health and wellbeing determinants/covariates in the academic workplace. **The enhanced understanding of the relevant mental health and performance determinants within the academic context will allow us to develop tailored, effective and efficient prevention and action programs.**

As mentioned above research has only recently provided insights into key internal and external sources of doctoral researchers' completion, achievement and overall wellbeing. Further research on doctoral researchers' mental health has highlighted work and organisational contexts as significant predictors for doctoral researchers' mental health [1]. Nonetheless, there remain **significant knowledge and action gaps concerning prevalence, causal mechanisms, contextual variations, intervention and prevention programmes, and policy implications** for EU researchers across all career stages. In particular, very little is known about the mental health and wellbeing of postdoctoral researchers, professors or other specific researcher populations.

ReMO wants to address these limitations using a threefold approach:

1. **Develop a conceptual and assessment framework tailored to the academic context** taking into account the specific challenges of academia (e.g. performance management of academics, an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees, increasing challenges of dealing with diversity and internationalization, job insecurity, psychological stress due to harassment etc.). ReMO will allow for psychological, sociological, political, organisational and human-computer interaction (HCI) perspectives underpinning the often disputed concepts of mental (ill-)health, wellbeing and performance;
2. Take a multilevel (research, practitioner, management and policy) perspective on problems and problem generating mechanisms, but also on positive organizational behaviour in support of meaningful, sustainable work both in terms of performance and wellbeing;
3. Use a **diversity of methods with feedback loops between theory and practice** (e.g. online WG discussions around E-HUB content). The multilevel perspective and theory-to-practice feedback loops across the various measurement techniques concerning these concepts are anticipated to allow stakeholders to navigate the likely institutional, financial or path dependent barriers to policy change. Similarly these diverse multidisciplinary perspectives will assist in situating the role of current practice in academic settings to support researcher mental health into the overall COST mission.

ReMO is supported by participants from number of COST Countries, including Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC). Therefore, facilitating comparative data on researcher mental health and wellbeing and good practice collection and analysis across countries with different researcher integration practices, diverse experiences with former researcher cohorts, and distinct working conditions, will be possible. In this regard, it is especially fruitful that ReMO spans Western, Eastern and Southern European countries. This diverse and inclusive participation will ensure bidirectional transfer of practical interventions, institutional policies, and state-of-the-art methods in research.

## 1.2.2 OBJECTIVES

### 1.2.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

1. **Establish a sustainable research network** that includes multiple stakeholder groups (researchers from different disciplines, practitioners, employers, civil society representatives) from different countries with a common goal of identifying the key issues relating to mental health and wellbeing provision in academics and recommendations for institutions and policy makers.
2. Collect and synthesise existing knowledge, information, data and evidence gaps on factors that affect academics' mental health across countries and systems and associated support services - including funding structures, career pathways, workplace policies, and socio-political barriers and legislative differences across countries. This can be done with utilizing outputs of past and existing COST networks active in health care systems (e.g. ADAPT).
3. **Develop a strategic, coordinated, interdisciplinary and comparative research agenda** prioritizing the most urgent research gaps and questions that cannot be answered from existing data sources. By bringing together researchers from rarely linked research areas (e.g. Psychology, Higher educational Policy, Computer Science, etc) who focus on different aspects of mental health and wellbeing (e.g. policies, institutional barriers, effective practice, social and workplace discrimination, job search and employability, well-being and distress, skill mismatch), ReMO will be able to answer overarching and substantial questions. Such a coordinated research effort will result in **comparable methodologies and findings across different contexts**, moving the current state of the field beyond diluted, ad hoc research efforts.
4. **Support both theoretical and practical knowledge, evidence and information exchange** across the network of stakeholders, disjointed disciplinary areas, and countries. ReMO will foster collaboration between multiple fields in which aspects of mental health and wellbeing are studied, with particular focus on connecting researchers, practitioners, civil society representatives and employers to identify effective practice and produce actionable outcomes.
5. Transfer and apply evidence-based insights and intervention requirements through robust dissemination protocols and an evidence-based forum. Through involving practitioners, institutional policymakers, institutions and civil organization representatives in ReMO events (see section 4), technology-supported forms of networking, and research, ReMO will facilitate the creation of a continuous feedback loop between different actors, increase awareness and educate stakeholders

on how they can effectively support mental health and wellbeing of researchers both on individual and organisational levels.

### 1.2.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

1. **Bridge research** (e.g. occupational health and wellbeing, cross-cultural psychology, organizational behaviour, HR management, education, Higher Education (HE) governance) **present in different disciplines**. This includes the creation of a knowledge community that can generate scientific breakthroughs and lead to innovative policy measures.
2. **Bring together stakeholders from academia, practitioners, private sector, civil society, management of academia and researchers**, to actively and effectively exchange input on experienced challenges, best and worst practices, knowledge gaps and needs. This will be done over the course of four years through different online and in-person networking channels of ReMO.
3. Create **institutional links for regular knowledge and best practices transfer between countries** that have a leading role in the field, such as the UK, Belgium or the Netherlands; but have different levels of wellbeing service development, both policy and research-wise.
4. Contribute to building the research capacity of at least 100 Early Career Investigators to serve as ambassadors for mental health and wellbeing in their organisations and communities. This is done by organizing at least five workshops and three Training Schools.
5. Offer **mental health support network for Early Career Investigators** (ECIs), especially for ECIs having access to less developed infrastructure in the domain.
6. **Stimulate science-practice exchange, fostering co-development of knowledge**, skills and output co-creation in the area of researcher wellbeing and mental health by: a) offering short-term research visits for researchers at stakeholder organizations; b) offering the network at least one high quality training for research team leaders in HE.

## 2 NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

### 2.1 ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

#### 2.1.1 ADDED VALUE TO EXISTING EFFORTS - EUROPEAN OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Existing supranational policy initiatives, such as the European Agenda for Research and Innovation, or the Bratislava Declaration of Young Researchers, do not take into account the different contexts and circumstances that surround researchers. Hence, research focused on researchers' life and work seems to be carried in isolation. The findings around researchers' mental health and wellbeing are not well disseminated to practitioners and policy-makers. One of the messages of the Declaration of Sustainable Researcher Careers is that lack of **inclusion of policies that focus on mental health and wellbeing is key to decrease the quality of the work and the retention of researchers in the academic field** [25]. This is where the **E-HUB will aim to make a long-lasting contribution: it will constitute a 'go-to' platform for policymakers and companies alike, across all countries involved, facilitating the communication and cooperation between diverse stakeholders**. The aggregation that such a platform can create will facilitate the dissemination and also the comprehension of data as it will be elaborated from researchers to researchers with teams that included some of the most recognised experts in the field of mental health in academia. Hence, the platform will not be understood as "only" a platform, but rather a platform with real data and expert knowledge that anyone can access, especially policy and decision-makers that can shape new strategies to tackle the issues around mental health and wellbeing.

There is significant scope to **learn through sharing best practices and experiences across borders**, both at the national and local level, and to draw on research methods across disciplines. This is an aspect that ReMO aims to tackle by connecting stakeholders to learn from one another, be that in terms of research, practice or policy measures; and providing a coordinated approach to improve the community's research and management skills in this area. **This network has the advantage of reaching beyond the borders of the EU** through the involvement of international organisations. Therefore, the visibility of best practices and evidence increases further through exposure to such varied contexts. The intention is to promote better sharing of evidence on what interventions have been applied, and their effectiveness, to promote a more **open dialogue on what is considered a**



**sensitive and ‘taboo’ topic**, and to share data and evidence to understand the picture across contexts and for specific researcher population segments. A lack of openness, limited transparency and evidence-sharing, and socio-political challenges across borders has characterised this topic, and The network intends to work collectively to break down these barriers so the network can make progress on this crucial issue. Recognising this as a systemic challenge, the Action needs to collectively focus across Europe rather than individually within institutions or specific research departments. The Action will build on existing initiatives by high level, global scientific platforms like Nature or Science, which are already providing platforms for wide range of contributions on mental health.

ReMO will gather scholars from a wide range of disciplines and contribute to creating a platform for the exchange and development of multidisciplinary and international projects around the issue of researchers’ integration. Comparative results and meaningful insights on this issue are necessary and only possible through multinational and multidisciplinary investigation. Also, **through contact, discussions and development of collaborative research projects, scholars will be empowered to step out of their disciplinary boundaries and address overarching questions.**

## 2.2 ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

### 2.2.1 SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE

This network is comprised of **academics, practitioners, civil sector representatives, policymakers and consultants** in and around academia, higher education institutions and research. They **represent already a critical mass of stakeholders**: an **international mix of scientific knowledge and practice** on researcher mental health and much needed **interdisciplinary** (e.g. psychology, sociology, business administration, political science, labour economics, human resource management (HRM), HCI, computer and data science), **multilevel** (individual, organizational, system) and **intercultural** (a wide range of European and global partners, e.g. EURODOC, MCAA, SciLink) perspectives. The expertise in the network is provided by both senior researchers and ECIs. ReMO participants’ combined knowledge and strategic position at levels of international academic communities, European policy, and daily practices guarantees that this **ReMO network will address the interplay between research, practice, and (institutional) policy** in the European and global higher education ecosystems. Lastly, the network will ensure representatives from governments, companies and industries (for instance through informing National Contact Points) will be involved in the process. They will be invited to participate to all ReMO events, will have access to the E-HUB and will be involved in research and policy initiatives.

### 2.2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The added value of the Network is found in the **systematic involvement of different stakeholder groups** relevant for ReMO’s structured discussions (see Working Group description - Section 4), including researchers and practitioners. The latter group is usually most attuned to the experiences and needs of researchers, as it often works closely with them. This knowledge is essential for policymakers who need to be responsive to these needs. Moreover, the internationality of ReMO participants enables researchers and practitioners in member countries, to learn from each other and be aware of good practices. The initial critical mass to achieve systematic involvement of specific stakeholders across all different countries is present through the **involvement of existing key organizations with a strong local embeddedness**. Therefore, the Action will work with strategic partner organizations that can function as strategic crossroads to boost an efficient dialogue. Eurodoc, MCAA and LERU for instance are international associations with national chapters across the European and global area and is therefore ideally positioned to facilitate an efficient communication between the large number of stakeholders, institutes and policymakers.

It is not often that scientists and practitioners in this field get a chance to closely collaborate. While they are working towards a common goal, their methodologies and strategies can differ greatly. Researchers are focused on validating theoretical constructs and testing hypotheses, while job assistance providers apply experience-driven strategies that might vary with each specific case. Neither of the approaches can provide efficient, sustainable and systematic solutions used in isolation, thus sharing of knowledge and practice may lead to more effective and sustainable change across academia.

Furthermore, particular emphasis is given to the collaboration between researchers, practitioners and institutions, and to understand the needs and concerns of organisations, which are eventually the job providers for many researchers, and the main actors to provide them long-term employability. To this end, representatives of research-intensive organisations and relevant sector-level bodies will be invited to attend ReMO conferences and workshops; and the Action will facilitate meetings between them, civil society, and researchers.

Through **involvement of governmental and non-governmental organisations** that are active in researcher employment issues, ReMO will facilitate: a) collection of best practices in the field; b) identifying research projects of practical relevance; and c) disseminating research evidence back to practitioners in these organizations. By setting the ground for better coordination of institutional policies across member states, ReMO will provide the first step in taking stock of what is being done in terms of researcher mental health across the EU, and recommendations on gaps that need to be addressed.

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

Research and academia is a highly international and networked environment, therefore international organisations, near-neighbors and international partner countries have equally large stakes in researcher mental health and wellbeing. Research cooperations with these actors often depend on the individual mental fitness of researchers and in case problems arise in this respect, that problem impacts the whole research team. One can observe at least two distinct examples. Firstly, research across geographies promotes dislocation or sometimes relocation. Mental health practitioners who are part of the ReMO network have observed and presented at ESOF 2018 regarding the needs and obstacles within mental health that academics who relocate during a certain period of time overcome. Secondly, it is possible to observe the differences between ECIs and senior researchers regarding their obstacles within mental health. These are very distinct, however, it is important to provide strategies. Researcher mental health and wellbeing therefore is a global issue, and requires global answers.

## 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

Research on wellbeing and mental health in academia is of societal importance for three main reasons: (1) Universities' main asset is human capital and therefore the cognitive, intellectual and emotional potential of its employees are key resources to academic success; (2) Although some top universities can rely on significant financial resources, the challenge to retain talent means that many universities are financially less well-equipped compared to industry to attract and talent across both junior and senior roles. Therefore, management practices that invest in the promotion of soft skills which are the base of positive wellbeing and mental health, in addition to performance and excellence, trigger strategic advantage (e.g. resilience, health literacy and stress management skills developed during an academic career also benefits academics moving to the non-academic labor market); (3) In recent years, research policy observers and academics have increasingly voiced concerns about clinical issues such as depression, anxiety, burnout and suicide within academia. In the past year, a recurrent frame has been the "mental health crisis in academia". Even though the official entry numbers of the prevalence of mental health problems in universities' remain low, consensus suggests this is largely related to underreporting. In many universities, institutional support is simply lacking, inaccessible or inadequate. As a consequence, many academics are reluctant to seek help or disclose their problems, fearing the stigma, social retaliation or potential negative impacts on their future career. This issue is observed across career stages [15]. For example, some of the proposers in this application presented data at ESOF 2018, identifying at least five key clusters of wellbeing that need to be addressed: isolation (26%), depression (16%), anxiety (21%), despair (14%) and burnout (23%). Data was gathered from participants who were academics from all levels.

The main driving force behind ReMO's mission therefore is a **valid social and economic need, which has not yet been fully addressed on a European level**: (1) collecting and assessing needs in the field of mental health within academia, and (2) providing answers to the present limitations and the structural problems around researcher mental health. The network expects the implications of Action to have short- and long-lasting effects, both theoretical and practical; and mostly related to policy support for future guidelines and implementation.

Existing initiatives, like the European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing, the Declaration on Sustainable Researcher Careers or talks on the 1st conference on mental health of PhD students in 2019 in Brighton, UK, point out the **need to recognize the workplace as both a major factor in the development of mental health problems and as a platform for the introduction and development of effective methods that combat these problems**. These methods should combine statutory occupational safety and health regulations with measures by employers that are tailored to the specific sector. Both the aforementioned documents stress the need to develop supportive infrastructures, along with networking and mutual coordination among the stakeholders as key to disseminating good practices.

The potential societal impact of ReMO is further illustrated by the worldwide reaction to the aforementioned paper by Levecque et al. in Research Policy. **ReMO's network involves several of the (European) players that have taken up a significant role related to the topic** since the publication of the paper, either by doing pioneering research or by putting it on the agenda of policymakers and funding bodies at the university, regional/national and European level (cfr. position papers of EURODOC and MCAA on FP9). At the same time, **ReMO gathers internal expertise to analyze the central theme from different perspectives**: the biopsychosocial perspective on health, a psychological perspective, the HRM perspective, and the higher education governance and management perspective. ReMO would significantly contribute to the partnership by firmly embedding the collaboration in a well-established research community that is structurally anchored. However, expert practitioners and stakeholders' organizations are equally important. Hence, ReMO would capitalize on existing experience of organisations as CWTS, EURODOC, MCAA, or SciLink. Their strategic position in Europe is key to ReMO as they provide direct links to both European policy makers and to researchers across Europe and worldwide.

#### 3.1.1.1 Short term impact

In terms of fundamental research, ReMO has high potential to increase both the quantity and quality of ERA research on wellbeing and mental health in academia. As such, it strengthens the leading academic position of Europe with regard to this topic. ReMO will enable to attract and motivate new resources (both from the EU and the partners' national funding sources like NWO (NL), FCT (PT) or DFG, BMBF (DE)) and foster dialogue, researcher mobility and international research collaboration from a much-needed interdisciplinary perspective on the topic. As the topic has many links to other issues in which researchers of ReMO have shown excellence (e.g. e-health, motivation, educational psychology), new research collaborations extending the borders of the Action are feasible.

In terms of practice, ultimately, ReMO aims to **promote wellbeing and mental health enhancement of the academic employees**, which in turn will create a highly positive impact on performance at individual, team and organizational levels. Support offered will take the form of tailored actions that significantly broaden and deepen the existing evidence base and support the further development of efficient and effective action programs, such as training that can be deployed internationally, spreading good practice developed through ReMO's operational work.

In terms of education, ReMO will add value in several ways. First, ReMO's ambition to optimize wellbeing and mental health amongst university research and teaching staff will positively impact teaching and mentoring performance. Existing research suggests this will likely have a positive impact on the wellbeing and performance of those who are educated or mentored (i.e. BA, MA and doctoral researchers). Second, interdisciplinary and multi-perspective training will be set up, targeted at developing the capacity to address wellbeing and mental health by academics involved in educating and mentoring. This capacity does not only include health awareness and health literacy, but also the ability to overcome stigma and taboos, and refer to the proper services if needed. Such competencies include awareness of intercultural differences.

Lastly, ReMO will impact and add value in terms of service to society. ReMO has high potential to impact science/research policy in Europe (and beyond) and will impact and add value at the societal level as the wellbeing and mental health of employees have significant spillover effects in employees' private lives. In economic terms, the benefits at the level of society at large are to be found in more effective use of government funding (e.g. better performance, less absenteeism and presenteeism) as well as lower health care and wider societal support costs.

### 3.1.1.2 Long-term impact

At the research level, **ReMO will reinforce the frontrunner position of Europe in the growing research on wellbeing and mental health in academia.** One of the aforementioned papers on mental health of PhDs in Flanders went viral last year, triggering worldwide reaction on social (#2 in Altmetric Top 100) and traditional media (e.g. Nature, Science). In addition, these research opportunities will be reinforced by the combined scientific expertise of ReMO partners. The reinforced international reputation will be based on a developed framework and toolkit that do not suffer from the highly prevalent "theory-practice gap". This is ensured by the local embeddedness of ReMO. These central offices provide short theory-practice feedback loops in addition to bridges to the central offices of other universities and to the operational officers of international stakeholders such as EURODOC and MCAA. These latter organizations, representing the majority of researchers (especially ECIs) across Europe, carry out valuable work on raising awareness of mental health issues among academics. In addition, ReMO would be one of the first actors to **provide practical solutions and interventions on the EU level** for individual researchers with mental health problems. With ReMO as the interface for the available expertise, this will lead to innovative research extending far beyond the current borders of the occupational stress perspective on which the occupational wellbeing and health research tradition is based.

ReMO will also support current management practices in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, turning universities from an early adopter into an innovator, and as such into an international benchmark. This will be achieved by having the framework and tools that are developed globally, and implemented and tested in other European universities. This will enable to refine the Action and tools by adding institutional and cultural variation, while offering a unique opportunity to assess the quality of mental health interventions. The resulting multilevel framework and toolkit will have high potential of being implemented across institutions in the academic sector that have the ambition to develop and/or optimize evidence-based management strategies directed at the wellbeing and mental health of their employees. As ReMO aims not only to better understand the determinants of mental health issues, but also to present a toolkit of evidence-based practices to assess the quality of mental health interventions.

Finally, by improving the effectiveness of research, retaining talent, and improving efficiency through reducing time lost to presenteeism and absenteeism, ReMO can significantly **contribute to the progress of science and research across Europe** by helping to provide an environment in which researchers can work better to achieve new knowledge and important breakthroughs benefitting society as a whole.

## 3.2 MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

### 3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A clear understanding of the most suitable mechanisms for integration leads to innovative measures and policies, and contributes in the long-term to better socio-economic outcomes for researchers in particular. There are numerous pockets of research on researcher issues from various disciplines, across numerous countries, yet there is very little dialogue between them. ReMO will address this gap by establishing and maintaining an innovative interaction cycle (see Fig. 1). In order to establish this cycle, an unprecedented value-adding feature of ReMO will be the **involvement of multiple level stakeholders**, and the creation of an international **E-HUB** (a web-based database) and best practice concerning researcher mental health and wellbeing. At present, there is no such tool available for researchers, practitioners and policymakers. The aim is to keep both the Interaction Cycle and the E-HUB maintained after the lifetime of the Action.

The Interaction Cycle comprises the following elements: **i) Dialogue:** through the kick-off meeting, workshops, and conferences, ReMO will ignite and enhance multi-stakeholder dialogue based on evidence and data; hence leading to increased collaboration between disciplines and countries in the field; **ii) Education:** through working groups and Training Schools, the Action will make an effort to establish a **common language, knowledge and discourse** - with a special focus on ECI needs and organisational bottlenecks - in the areas of evidence around systems (WG I), well-being practices (WG II) and well-being

infrastructures (WG III). The establishment of the E-HUB will also constitute an important part of the education process; **iii) Matching:** Through the processes of dialogue and education, Action will **match stakeholders and scientists** together, on the basis of their knowledge and experience in certain domains (e.g. based on WG participation), methods used and data available; **iv) Evidence:** the matching process will **facilitate evidence generation. New evidence will enrich the content already available in the E-HUB.** This method will impact ECI training, countries with low levels of expertise and boost the interchange of knowledge across COST Member States..

Since academia takes individual mental wellbeing for granted, researchers might not recognise unhealthy working environments and stress levels. The Action as a foundation for local and global awareness campaigns that target researchers in this respect. Since researchers organize themselves increasingly with the help of digital tools (Twitter, Slack, Google Docs, etc.) independent of their location (e.g., Eurodoc, Max Planck PhDnet, N<sup>2</sup>, Marie Curie Alumni Association) and they even gather their own data on mental health (e.g. see survey Max Planck PhDnet and Helmholtz Juniors), ReMO has potential to push these activities to the next level.

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

The results of ReMO will be of special relevance to stakeholders, such as representatives from **academia** (e.g. scholars from psychology, economics, management, sociology, cultural anthropology, law, data science); **practitioners** (e.g. counsellors, therapists, coaches); **civil society** (researcher associations); and **policy-makers** (e.g. Ministries of Education, research funding bodies), working on the topic of enhancing the impact of research and researchers during the times of increasing competition for talent.

The approach towards stakeholder involvement is twofold. First, **cooperation with a number of external stakeholders** representing the different levels of implementation will be initiated. For this, specific **contacts have already been made** with, for instance, the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA), Eurodoc, Max Planck PhDnet, N<sup>2</sup>, RUMO.Solutions, PARSUK, ASPPA, APEI BeNeLux, AGRAFr, or TROPO UK. Second, ReMO will involve and expand the existing range of stakeholders from EU countries and beyond through inclusive involvement and participation, which will sharpen the Action's outcomes and will lay the foundation for broad application(s) in the future. **Already established relationships of Action members with organisations like OECD, EC Joint Research Center (JRC), and national level organisations and initiatives will be exploited.** The interactions will provide a knowledge base for a multi-level and multidisciplinary research agenda. For both approaches, partners taking both an in-depth involvement, and those which are more peripheral are considered, including:

1. **Policy-makers and local authorities, national authorities**, such as ministries responsible for education, and **European organisations** such as JRC, EuroScientist, or the European University Association (EUA), will be involved by direct calls from Network members. These authorities will be in the best position to adopt the outcomes of ReMO. It is therefore crucial to collect their opinions and recommendations.

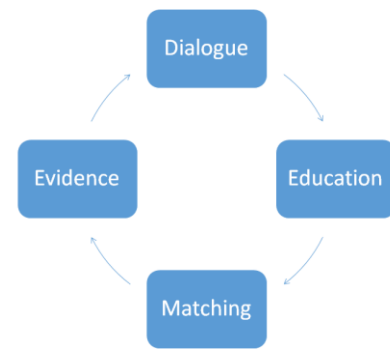


Figure 1. Interactive cycle of involving stakeholders

2. **Organisations exchanging between science, industry and policy communities**, such as Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) or KOWI (European Liaison Office of the German Research Organisations) will be involved through co-organisation of events and by sharing networks.
3. **Practitioners** will be involved through professional organisations, who will be active in the ReMO network. They will be actively involved in research activities and also in the evaluation of the E-HUB.
4. Through funds specifically assigned to **ECIs and underrepresented gender**, ReMO will promote gender equity and the participation of young researchers.

### 3.2.2.1 Dissemination and/or Exploitation Plan

In terms of dissemination, a **designated website** will serve as the interface between different ReMO stakeholders. **ReMO will use social media** including: **Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Webinars, and eLearning Outreach**. Furthermore, the public outreach offices of the different institutions will be actively involved to maximize the dissemination of knowledge. ReMO will produce a **quarterly e-newsletter** comprising all the latest news and activities, and press releases will be circulated to relevant media outlets.

**Dissemination to the Scientific Community** will be through i) three ReMO Training Schools; ii) three ReMO workshops, three pre-conference workshops, and four conferences; iii) establishing three Working Groups, which will each publish at least four articles in high-quality scientific journals; iv) disseminating ReMO workshop and conference proceedings; v) making the E-HUB available online; vi) partners visiting high-profile, peer-reviewed international conferences and workshops (at least 12 events, e.g. European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology (EAWOP), European Group of Organisational Studies (EGOS), Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF), and Online Educa (OE)).

**Open Data and Open Science policy:** One of the objectives is to provide and promote a barrier-free picture of the current state of knowledge and propose research priorities. In order to make these conclusions widely known in the scientific community, open-access peer-reviewed publications in the form of opinion and review as well as methods papers will be produced; these publications will be advertised on ReMO website, and are expected to be available before the end of ReMO (year 4). **Open Access** publications will strictly follow the ERC Scientific Council Guidelines. Moreover, a dissemination register will be available, allowing the sharing of contact information between network participants to better coordinate dissemination activities.

**Dissemination to Policy Makers** will be through policy briefs (one per year), access to the online E-HUB, and a dedicated policy conference that will be held in Brussels. For this, all partners will be encouraged to target their relevant national policy organisations and actors. ReMO will also aim to be present at major policy conferences (e.g. ESOF, MSCA, OE) and workshops at national and European levels.

**Dissemination to the general public and other indirect stakeholders** relevant for researcher well-being will be involved through extensive dissemination campaigns through social media. Together with the documentary theater group “tg space”, extracts from the E-HUB will be given to theatre makers. Using this piece of evidence, theatre makers will prepare and video record a short theatre play or flash mob for the general public (ReMO will organize at least 1 event).

## 4 IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK PLAN

#### 4.1.1 DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

The activities developed under ReMO will be carried out by **three Working Groups (WGs)**, whose complementary work will help achieve the overall goals of the Action to create a link between different research pockets, facilitate continuous communication and collaboration between currently discon-

nected stakeholders and fill the knowledge gap regarding the determinants of researcher mental health and wellbeing. The basis of these groups are the ingredients of a healthy research environment. Although the WGs do overlap, each brings different integration challenges and issues. Therefore, at each WG, different research, policy and intervention questions are posed and different stakeholders are involved to various degrees. The WGs are based largely on a typology of the levels at which action can be taken to address mental health and wellbeing in the research workplace [3], which is based on previous such typologies and structures identified in the literature [21, 22]. The levels are:

1. **Interventions intended to address those workplace factors that impact on mental health:** These are the most challenging types of interventions, aiming to address the factors that may contribute to mental health challenges in the workplace environment. At the most challenging level, this could include systemic change aimed to improve the working conditions and job security of postdoctoral researchers. At a simpler level, it could include training and incentives around effective leadership and people management for senior research staff.
2. **Interventions aimed to improve policies and address stigma around mental health for those in the workplace with mental health conditions:** This is the next most challenging approach. Work could be done to better understand what policies are in place across the sector and understand whether these meet standards such as those set out in the 'Charter for employers'[23]. Changing practice and perceptions at the institutional level would be key here.
3. **Interventions aimed to provide support for groups of individuals with mental health conditions** (or to more generally improve wellbeing): These are the most commonly reported types of intervention in the literature and can range from the availability of counselling services within institutions to specific interventions for groups to improve wellbeing, such as yoga, meditation or physical activity. Though a number of such interventions are included in the literature, most of the evidence around their effectiveness is limited in quality and scope, and there is likely much more happening at a local level which is not reported.

Each working group would act to bring together knowledge and expertise at one of these three levels to support pooling of knowledge, data and experience, and to build the case for action across Europe:

**WG1: System level - the ERA working environment:** The objective of WG1 is to connect researchers' representatives from at least four disciplines, civil organizations and policymakers who are relevant actors at a first stage of researcher mental health and wellbeing, and offer evidence-based understanding of the factors that affect adaptation in the research environment (e.g. dealing with feedback, integration into the research culture). Potential areas of research within this WG are: discourse and public opinion of researchers; physical and mental health consequences of research work; researcher management and legal procedures; cultural and gendered dimensions of research; barriers and consequences of prolonged researchers' employment. As such, WG1 intends to focus on systemic issues beyond any particular organisation or discipline and start to bring together cross-institutional evidence on prevalence, characteristics of the working environment (and how these differ by role and context), and what can be done at a system level. The aim for this group would be to encourage system level actors (e.g. national and European funding agencies) to explore what can be done at a system level to improve mental health.

**WG2: Institutional level - Wellbeing Practices in Research Institutions:** The objectives of WG2 are to provide connections between stakeholders active in well-being policies in research environments. Researchers, national and local governmental organizations and institutional actors that are involved in developing and implementing policies within institutions to address mental health understand prevalence within institutions, reduce stigma and mandate support within institutions will be brought together in order to create evidence-based understanding of what 'best practice' looks like, what the practical challenges are and how they can be addressed. Sharing this institutional learning can assist to break down barriers and taboos in institutions recognising and addressing challenges within their workplace environments.

**WG3: Local actors - Promoting researcher well-being on a practical level:** The objectives of WG3 are to link actors that deal with developing and promoting a sustainable and enjoyable research climate through particular activities and provide deep insight on the determinants of sustaining employment and long-term integration within workplaces. Research questions of interest for this WG will focus on matters such as counselling support, peer-to-peer support, online networks and activities, mindfulness, yoga and other tools for mental health, their effectiveness (in context) and how they can be practically implemented.

WGs will meet at least once a year and will contribute to the two Training Schools, 12 workshops and 2 conferences organized by ReMO. Each WG is expected to produce a book or a journal special issue, as well as producing working papers and collaboratively publishing journal articles. A special emphasis will be placed on co-authored works between ReMO members from different disciplines, countries and/or career stage. The research within ReMO will build on existing initiatives on researcher integration that members of the network have undertaken in the past. The main activities that will be performed within the Network are grouped around the interaction cycle described in Section 3.2.

#### 4.1.1.1 ReMO Management

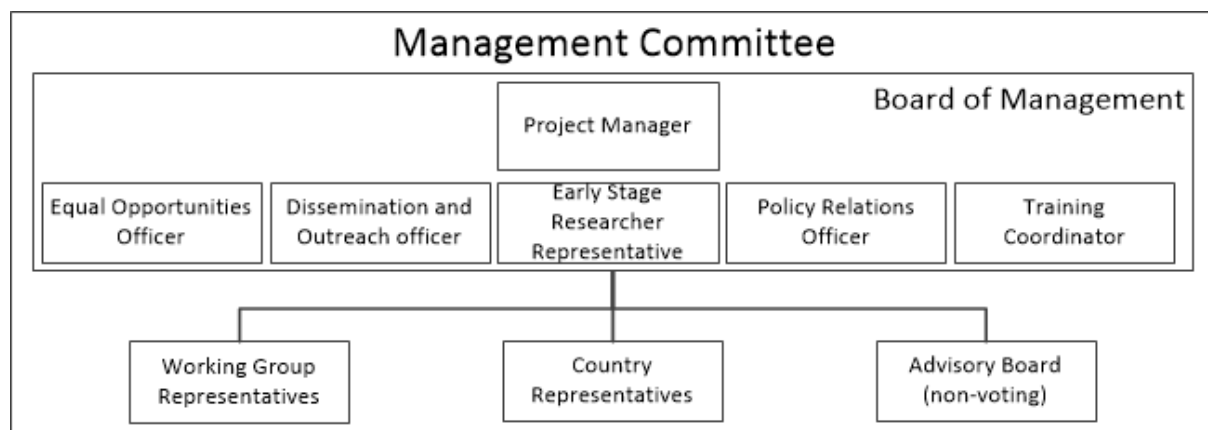


Figure 2. ReMO management structure

**Management Committee (MC)** of the Action is responsible for supervising the appropriate use of funds, coordinating the activities, expanding the network and managing the progress of the results. Moreover, **3 Working Groups (WG)** will be established, each led by a WG Leader who will report on a regular basis and will be in contact on an ongoing basis to organize the activities presented in Section 4 and to monitor the development of the objectives stated throughout the application. Furthermore the MC will elect: Chair of the Action who coordinates the MC meetings; a **Dissemination and Outreach Manager**, supervising the dissemination and exploitation of results; a **Training School Coordinator**, responsible for the organisation and execution of training activities; an **Early Career Investigator Representative**, representing the voice of young researchers; a **Policy Relations Manager** to communicate and manage relations and coordinate dissemination of ReMO's results to policymakers; and an **Equal Opportunities Manager**, to monitor issues regarding gender balance and the equal representation of underprivileged stakeholder groups.

An **Advisory Board (AB)** will be established from the members of stakeholder groups, in order to represent the wider stakeholders' agenda in ReMO. This AB consisting of **5 representatives from relevant stakeholder bodies** (NGOs dealing with researchers, policy advisors, representatives of European bodies (e.g. European Parliament), etc.) will monitor ReMO and provide feedback on the progress, quality of outputs and stakeholder involvement. They will also work closely with the researcher Dissemination Manager and the Policy Relations Coordinator.

The **MC will meet annually** during the life time of the Action, and WGs at least twice a year face-to-face. In addition, regular **online video conferences** will be held (at least once every two months). During the MC meetings elected leaders Action will report to the MC on progress and plans.

In terms of procedures, **online communication, data management and organizational software** (e.g. Skype, Asana and Google Drive) will be set up, so that all members will be aware of developments within the Action. Conflict generated by divergent views of the Action's roll-out strategies, encompassing issues such as medium-term objectives and longer-term exploitation policies may arise at any point during the Action life time.



#### 4.1.2 DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

**The first year is dedicated to Dialogue**, which will be started by the **Documentation and Synthesis** of existing policies across the EU Member States; best practices from companies and organizations; and up-to-date research evidence and data sources at national or local levels. Collected best practices will be adjusted to the specific character of academic society with specific focus on: working conditions, career prospects, and institutional support. Stakeholders as defined in section 2.2.1 will be invited to discuss the most important focus points and set research targets. Research questions at every integration stage will be specified and plans for common training established. Additional effort will be focused on creating integrative synthesis of the present resources from different disciplines at research stage one.

The second year is for education through knowledge sharing and creation. Through this step WGs will set up their goals, analyse the common gaps in knowledge with respect to methods and theories (across psychology, sociology, political science and cognitive sciences). Also, available (secondary) data sources will be identified, with the help of stakeholders (NGOs, local governments) and primary data collection methods will be discussed together with researchers, organisations and local civil society representatives. the Training School. WGs will track individual and group research projects within the network and develop the foundations of joint transnational and interdisciplinary research with Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs). WG workshops will have a strong training component at this stage, through Early Career Investigators and doctoral researchers involvement.

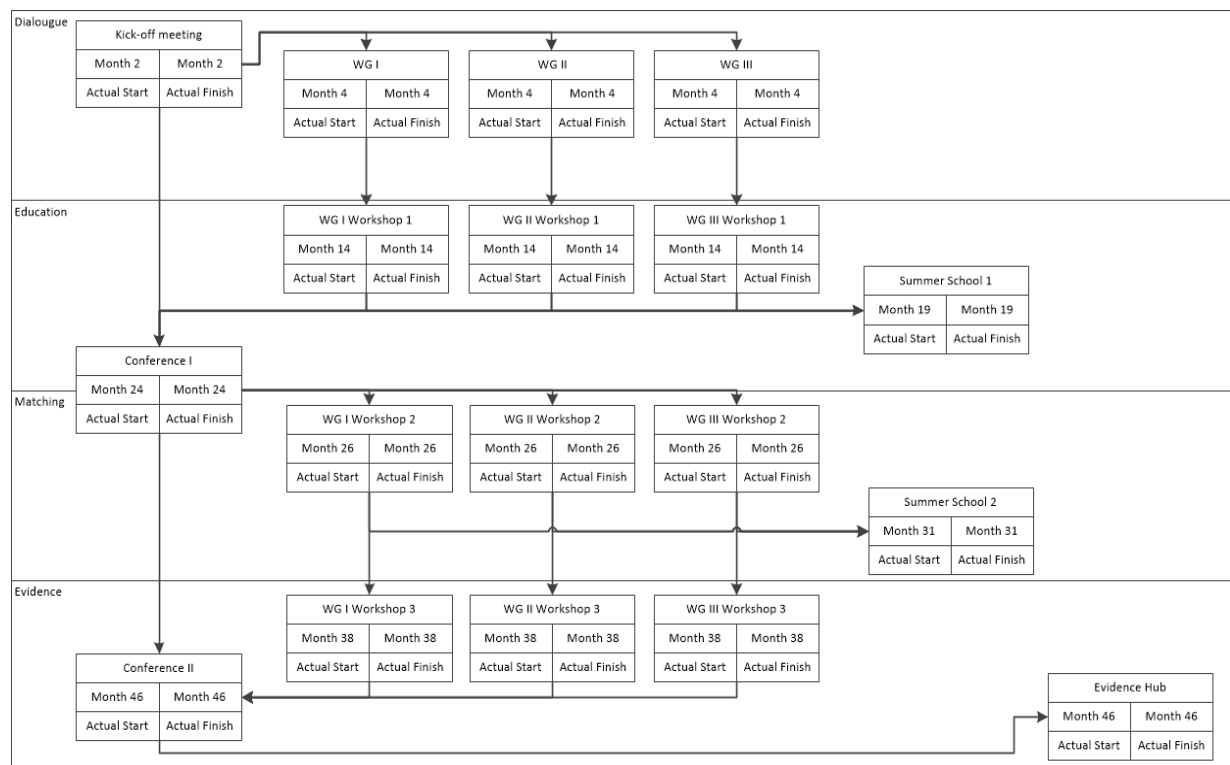


Figure 3. ReMO's timeline and event planning (Pert Chart)

**The third year is focused on Matching**, which can also refer to cooperative **Implications and Solutions Development**. The focus will be on WG activities, generating evidence, solutions and insights that might be applied to support work activities of different stakeholders. This is done through WG workshops and at least 12 STSMs. In addition, a Training School will be organised to **facilitate methodological discussions** on data analysis. The first demo of the E-HUB will be delivered (see details below).

**The fourth year is for Evidence generation** together with **Integration and Dissemination** of the results. The final task of the WGs is to communicate the final insights back to the stakeholders and the wider population. The **most significant output of ReMO will be the E-HUB** on the ReMO website, where relevant papers, reports, sources of data, case studies, and best practices on researcher men-

tal health will be centralized for concerned stakeholders and citizens alike to access freely. The E-HUB will be organized in three major sections, following the topics of the WGs. Also the Action is expected to deliver the content of the 3 WG books/special issues. Stakeholders will be involved to disseminate the output of the Action. For the public, a **theatre play or flash mob will be organised** on the basis of E-HUB content with the involvement of ReMO community at the final conference. **This event will be video recorded and disseminated by all members.** Additionally, at least one high quality training for the companies and team leaders will be provided.

#### 4.1.3 RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Owing to the established interest in this topic across the network, the overall risk of this Action is relatively low. Specific risks associated with the Action are presented in table 1 below:

Nr	Risk description	Mitigation
1	Inability to attract/communicate with key stakeholders	i) Dedicated leaders appointed within MC to engage key stakeholder groups; ii) Organise one of our conferences in Brussels with a local partner; iii) Change setup of Advisory Board (to include a stakeholder representation body).
2	Inability to converge/agree on terminology	i) Working groups to dedicate additional meeting(s) to this issue; ii) Involve additional experts by the MC; iii) Appoint a dedicated manager within the MC if needed.
3	Researchers in overlapping areas do not communicate	i) Kick-off meeting aims to prevent this with subsequent Action meetings helping maintain commonality, creating opportunities for Participants to communicate; ii) The MC will continuously monitor networking, based on reports from WGs.
4	Scientific quality of the inputs for ReMO's publications is low	i) Scientific quality will be ensured through a feedback system within ReMO, using short surveys after meetings and events; ii) All publications subject to independent peer review; iii) All WG MTs must monitor quality; iv) Stakeholder views on quality and impact collected by Advisory Board and shared with all
5	WGs do not connect sufficiently	i) MC will take action by engaging feedback from WG participants and making the necessary changes in the WG MT to ensure best practice multi-level interaction between WGs.
6	Technical problems with publishing the E-HUB	i) MC will appoint a consortium member with relevant expertise and experience in publishing such databases; ii) Before publishing, the E-HUB will go through usability and technical robustness checks.
7	Low conference attendance	i) Conference calls will be open to the wider stakeholder communities. ii) Early stage researchers and practitioners will be incentivised to participate; iii) Conference proceedings will be peer-reviewed and published as Open Access; iv) MC will look at the opportunities to disseminate and communicate the events to a larger audience with the help of the stakeholder relation leaders.
8	Only small number of young researchers involved	i) MC appoints an Early Stage Researcher Representative in order to involve young researchers better; ii) Organising network building events (PhD seminars, Training Schools) where young researchers meet and network.

Table 1. ReMO's main foreseen risks and their mitigation strategies

#### 4.1.4 GANTT DIAGRAM

Figure 4. ReMO's timeline of main activities, milestones and deliverables

	Q1/2021	Q2/2021	Q3/2021	Q4/2021	Q1/2022	Q2/2022	Q3/2022	Q4/2022	Q1/2023	Q2/2023	Q3/2023	Q4/2023	Q1/2024	Q2/2024	Q3/2024	Q4/2024
MC meetings	█				█				█				█			█
WG meetings		█				█				█				█		
ReMO Training School							█				█					
ReMO conference							█									█
STSMs					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
Workshop proceedings		█				█				█				█		
Evidence Hub Demo												█	█	█	█	
Evidence Hub																█
Dissemination	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Book/special issue																
Theater play/flash mob																
Policy briefs				█				█				█				
ReMO website		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

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