



# ACTIONS TO ACTIONS

POLICY BRIEF

*This policy brief is based on the information, recommendations, tips and good practices that were shared by (former) Chairs, Vice-Chairs and participants of 10 highly successful COST Actions in the workshop 'COST Actions and Policy Impact', held on 17 November 2020. This event provided participants with a platform to share their experiences on the process of achieving policy impact and working together with policy stakeholders.*



In a time when we observe an increasingly important role for science informed policy advice, the topic of this policy brief is highly relevant. In an attempt to offer guidance to running Actions that wish to increase their policy impact, this policy brief is structured around the steps necessary when trying to achieve policy impact. As such, the sections below provide a comprehensive overview of success factors, tips, and good practices, covering a range of topics, including when and how to approach stake-

holders, effective ways of communicating (complex) research findings relevant for policy, and the need to consider the timeliness of your messaging. The final section highlights inspirational examples of policy impact achieved by the Actions that participated in the workshop.

Consisting of concrete advice, this policy brief may offer a source of inspiration for potential new activities organised by running COST Actions.

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# 10 COST Actions invited to the workshop



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COSTACTION

# Key insights from 10 COST Actions

*Where to start? How to gain and maintain interest? How to keep the momentum going? And the key question: how to achieve policy impact?*

*The discussions during the workshop resulted in several interesting insights, which offer valuable sources of inspiration to running COST Actions looking for advice on how to increase their policy impact. The insights listed below can help to structure your Action's activities when it comes to realising policy impact.*

## HOW TO ENSURE AN EFFECTIVE POLICY APPROACH BY THE ACTION

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- > There is a need for a strong interest and commitment throughout the Action.
- > Involve participants who are good at communicating with policy makers.
- > Involve participants with different careers behind them. This has proven to be useful in engaging with policy makers.

Tip from ENRESSH

**"Recruit participants with 'double hats', for example a researcher with experience in the policy sector or an academic active in industry."**

Tip from ASF-STOP

**"Kick off your Action with a workshop identifying the problem and attracting key persons that have footing in both research and policy."**

- > Include, from the start, a wide variety of stakeholders, including policy advisers, evaluators, funders, civil society, and make them co-creators of new perspectives and approaches. Many participants promoted a co-creative approach: as you need to work with policy makers over time, it is important to recognise that policy makers are "part of the solution" and make them co-creators of the policy impact of your Action.

Tip from ENRESSH

**"We included stakeholders as part of the ENRESSH team from the start and fully engaged them in research and drafting our reports. We organised ENRESSH as a co-creating team, blurring the frontiers between stakeholders and researchers."**

- > Consider setting up a dedicated working group to deal with policy.
- > Be aware of the scope of contacts available in your Action and make sure to use them for the benefit of the Action. This joint network of contacts will help facilitate access to relevant policy stakeholders.

Tip from InDust

**“Several Action members are part of scientific expert committees of several UN agencies and initiatives.”**

- > Organise several policy meetings throughout the Action to keep the momentum going.
- > Keep seeking to make impact until the Action is complete.
- > Be precise on what and where you want to make an impact.

Tip from SAREP

**“Think about whether you want to go for macro- vs micro-level impact, where micro-level impact would be considered influencing your organisation directly, while macro-level impact would be achieved at the level of (political) administrations, e.g. by influencing policy makers.”**

- > Consider publishing a roadmap.

Tip from NQO

**“Put together a roadmap, especially if your Action is science oriented, as it may help the Action to structure its messages. Make sure to publish the roadmap on your website, to increase visibility”**

## WHICH POLICY STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE WITH

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The workshop participants had engaged with an impressive number of (policy) stakeholders, ranging from EU, national and regional administrations, to UN agencies, civil society, funding organisations, and NGOs.

In general, the advice was that the type of policy stakeholders your Action should engage with depends on the topic and nature of your Action as well as on the type of policy impact (e.g. micro- or macro level) you foresee. In order to focus and plan your Action's policy activities, it is advisable to agree early on whether you want to engage with stakeholders at EU, national, regional and/or local level.

### Tip from SAREP

**SAREP has generated micro- and macro-level impact through engagement on policy and practice around international education and study abroad matters. At micro-level, events included participation by local study abroad students, instructors, organisers and planners, including International Office personnel. Their contribution served the dual purpose of informing our understanding of wide-ranging factors impacting study abroad organisation, experiences and opportunities, while in tandem hearing about the findings emanating from the Action's work on different facets of study abroad research, especially in relation to enhancing foreign language learning opportunities and outcomes. At macro-level, the Action benefited from exchange with representatives of various national and international institutions involved in the study abroad enterprise, such as the European Commission's Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency, national Erasmus offices, along with some international education organisations and consortia such as the International Association of Universities, Aurora, and the Erasmus Mundus Association. Their representatives attended and contributed to a number of our meetings.**

## WHEN TO APPROACH POLICY MAKERS: START EARLY!

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This was one of the key take aways from the workshop, where all participants stressed the need to start engaging with policy makers at an early stage, preferably right after the start of the Action. At the same time it was considered important to bear in mind that it takes time to influence policy, as this is not a process that takes place overnight. If you are prepared to invest time in developing productive relationships, the impact of your Action is likely to increase.

- > It is recommended to organise small workshops and invite relevant stakeholders not long after the start of the Action, so you can involve them early on. In order to effectively plan follow-up policy activities, it helps to ask for written feedback right after the workshop.

## HOW TO APPROACH POLICY MAKERS

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After you have established which policy makers are relevant for your Action and when to approach them, it is time to reflect on how you will convince them of the need to engage with your Action. Some practical hints and tips are listed below:

- > If possible, 'sell' your previous successes (e.g. high-level meetings and events, your impact on policy documents) to the new policy maker to get them interested.
- > Contact should be established and followed up by participants with excellent communication skills, suitable experience and expertise for engaging with policy makers (this is linked to the 'double hat' point of advice above).
- > It is essential to understand the needs of the stakeholders you want to approach: explain why they should listen to you and why your Action's results are relevant for them.

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH POLICY MAKERS

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Closely linked to the previous section, the following suggestions on how to convey your messages are based on the key recommendation, shared by all participants, that you should formulate **clear, concise, honest and pragmatic** messages, responding to policy needs at European, national or regional level:

- > Identify the key message that your Action wants to convey.
- > Create a first wave of interest.
- > Formulate clear, small and pragmatic objectives that are commonly agreed and feasible to put into practice.
- > Agree on a common language (possibly outlined in a 'Management Committee agreement') to effectively communicate 'messy' scientific results.
- > Adapt your message depending on the audience.
- > Consider drafting a communication strategy on how to address different types of audiences.
- > Prepare influential materials (e.g. papers, videos) and recommendations, including interim ones.

Tip from ENRESSH

**"Be present where it counts", indicating the importance of choosing your platform and audience carefully.**

- > Arrange Brussels visits (if and when this is possible again) to promote recommendations to well placed, high-level EU officials.

#### Tip from SACURIMA

**Several Action members met with EU Commissioner Gabriel, responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture, Innovation and Youth, and relevant MEPs, to promote their recommendations with the aim to influence the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).**

#### Tip from Gender, Health and Extended Working Life

**The Action organised a high-level policy event in the European Parliament, during which specifically prepared summary policy briefs were presented. The event was attended by MEPs and senior officials from the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion; and DG Justice and Consumers), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and Age-Platform Europe.**

- > Promote high-level policy meetings, events, workshops and conferences on national, local and social media, via radio and TV interviews, newspaper articles, Twitter feeds and Facebook.

## CONSIDER THE TIMELINESS OF YOUR MESSAGE

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In view of the key message that timing is essential, please consider the following:

- > Find out as soon as possible what the national and European policy cycles in your area are and try to ensure that the Action's policy messages are brought to the attention of policy makers at the optimal time.
- > Make sure to approach policy stakeholders with clear messages. If you don't know what you want to get from them, it's better to wait until you do. The science behind the policy impact must be completed first.

## DEALING WITH COUNTERINTUITIVE MESSAGES

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Some interesting insights were shared regarding effective ways in which unpopular messages can be communicated.

### Insight from E-READ

**“The Action’s findings were counterintuitive. In a time when policy makers are fully focused on the digitisation of education, the Action’s key finding that the use of printed text books sometimes still makes more sense than using digital textbooks was an unpopular one. In order to get the policy makers on our side, we engaged with stakeholders from an early stage and we fully informed them of every step in the research process. At the same time, we were conscious of the need to build a network of stakeholders that were interested in hearing our messages.”**

### Insight from Net&Me

**“Our Action had a complex message to get out, taking into account the trend of everyone exploring the virtues of online meetings while considering the fact that for some people there is an addictive factor which needs to be monitored. We were invited by the European Commission (DG SANCO) to talk about encouraging telemedicine and online psychological treatments, so it was not easy for us to get our message across that too much online use might be dangerous.”**

- > **Tip:** Be aware that there may be alternative points of view on what you’re proposing so you need patience and be very clear in what you’re saying.

# Challenges highlighted by the COST Actions

*While solutions may not always be easily available (though some are outlined in the sections above), the challenges below may offer some useful points for reflection.*

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

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- > Identifying key stakeholders, institutions, channels from public and private sectors.
- > Understanding the needs of the stakeholders in the field and responding effectively to these.
- > Formulating an effective message: how to communicate without oversimplifying science?
- > Conveying a message that is likely to result in implementation of change.
- > Deciding on how to communicate findings that were to an extent counterintuitive and against the assumptions of target groups.
- > Trying to align the strive for uniformity in the EU context while respecting the diversity of various national contexts.
- > Identifying common language and understanding of the Action's themes among participants with different backgrounds and from various disciplines.

Tip from ICSHNet

**ICSHNet addressed this challenge by including WG leaders in the Action Core Group, with the aim to identify a shared approach that takes into account the diversity of views within each WG.**

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO TIME INVESTMENT

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- > The mandate for a research network does not necessarily involve a mandate to instruct policy makers, which means that time has to be specifically dedicated to the policy process.
- > It is useful to be aware that the translation of science to policy is time consuming.

## CHALLENGE RELATED TO IMPACT

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- > It is difficult to see the direct policy impact of the Action, such as new regulations.

# Successful examples of policy impact

*The key question to address is how to define policy impact. In this policy brief we embrace the notion that various ways of policy impact are possible and valuable. Examples of policy impact include the communication of Actions' policy recommendations, including examples of their adoption by international, EU or national administrations; the use of data or scientific results, produced by the Action, by policy makers; (high-level) meetings and events with (EU) policy makers; involving and engaging with policy makers in Action meetings; and building an effective network of a variety of stakeholders that remains active beyond the lifetime of the Action.*

## THE COMMUNICATION OF ACTIONS' POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING EXAMPLES OF THEIR ADOPTION BY INTERNATIONAL, EU OR NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS

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**ASF-STOP:** National governments were informed by experts from the Action, who consulted them by producing brochures on biosecurity, helped to raise awareness of regulations and how to incorporate research on biosecurity into policies.

**ICSHNet** contributed to a consolidation of the research and policy agenda on the multifaceted threat posed by Industrially Contaminated Sites (ICS), at national and international level, also highlighting the profound relationship between health, environment, occupational, social and economic issues. More specifically, the Action contributed to the **inclusion of "contaminated sites", for the first time, as a priority area in the Declaration of a Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health** (Ostrava, Czech Republic, 2017), signed by the Ministries of Health and of Environment of the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, with a commitment towards "preventing and eliminating the adverse environmental and health effects, costs and inequalities related to ... contaminated sites". In addition, an **Action Consensus Statement** (in English and in Russian) was published on contaminated sites and health, **recognised by the UN European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF)** as a guiding example for Member States in preparing their national portfolios of action in this priority area.

**SACURIMA** has provided input into the **EUROSTAT Farm Injury Survey**; the **EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) Policy inclusions** at national level; the **Horizon Europe work programme** on 'assessing and improving labour conditions and health and safety at work in farming'; and the **EU Information Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)** foresight study on the 'future of agriculture and implications for OSH'.

**ENRESSH** has raised awareness of the diversity of research evaluation systems, impact assessment, bibliographic databases and publishing patterns. Moreover, the Action **impacted national discourses (Poland, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and North Macedonia) on research evaluation in the social sciences and humanities (SSH)**, and **advised national funders and ministries** on national evaluation procedures. Their work was communicated to stakeholders at the **2018 EU Presidency Conference** in Vienna. Moreover, ENRESSH launched the **Helsinki initiative on multilingualism in scholarly communication**, initiated together with stakeholders and signed by many research funders, learning societies, researchers, universities and others.

**E-READ:** The **Stavanger Declaration** with the Action's key findings on the future of reading in the era of digitisation, signed by well over one hundred scholars and scientists, was presented at the closing conference of the Action. The Declaration was presented to several stakeholder organizations, including the **European Commission** (DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC)) and the 'PISA and Beyond' conference organised under **Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU**.

**SAREP** has generated **micro- and macro-level impact**, in the sense that study abroad policies were influenced at the level of the institution (students, instructors, organisers and planners) as well as at the level of the **European Commission and national Erasmus offices**, who were informed of the Action's key findings in relation to studying abroad and the internationalisation of higher education.

## THE USE OF DATA OR SCIENTIFIC RESULTS, PRODUCED BY THE ACTION, BY POLICY MAKERS

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**ASF-STOP:** Key policy stakeholders such as the **European Commission**, the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)** and the **UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**, had an active role in the Action's meetings and conferences, where they contributed with recommendations and ended up **using data/results produced by the Action**. This successful cooperation resulted in the Action receiving invitations to join EFSA and other animal health organisation projects.

## (HIGH-LEVEL) MEETINGS AND EVENTS WITH (EU) POLICY MAKERS

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produced **25 policy reports** on gender and health impact on policies extending working life, of which seven specifically prepared one-page summary policy briefs were presented at a **high-level event in the European Parliament**, which was attended by several MEPs.

**SACURIMA:** Several Action members met with **EU Commissioner Gabriel**, responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture, Innovation and Youth, and relevant **MEPs**, to promote their policy recommendations.

## INVOLVING AND ENGAGING WITH POLICY MAKERS IN ACTION MEETINGS

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InDust

organised an impressive number of events involving key stakeholders from the European Commission and national agencies. In addition, several Action members are part of **scientific expert committees of several UN Agencies** and initiatives, thereby sharing their expertise and influencing the direction of UN policies in the area of airborne dust.

NQO

benefited from the **Action's joint network of contacts**, in particular provided by the Chair, for the promotion of the Action's main achievements (i.e. the development of new scientific fields by merging different fields; the development of new technology) to national authorities and industry.

SAREP

organised a number of events, including an end-of-Action meeting on the theme of the interface between study abroad policy and practice, where relevant stakeholders involved in the study abroad enterprise participated, such as representatives of the **European Commission, university international offices, international student organisations (e.g. the Erasmus Mundus Association)**, and the **International Association of Universities**.

## BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE NETWORK OF A VARIETY OF STAKEHOLDERS THAT REMAINS ACTIVE BEYOND THE LIFETIME OF THE ACTION

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ENRESSH

built an **active network (Evalhum)** of SSH scholars, evaluators, funders, policy makers and societal stakeholders, which continues to be active.

SAREP

sustains its work through its network of members which includes international education officers and study abroad organisers spread across a range of European countries through the organisation of regular **online meetings and events**, aimed at building on the work conducted during the lifetime of the Action and ongoing **dissemination of its work in publication form**.

# Special thanks

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- > Prof. **Naomi Fineberg** – European Network for Problematic Usage of the Internet (Net&Me) (CA16207)
- > Dr **Martin Howard** – Study Abroad Research in European Perspective (SAREP) (CA15130)
- > Dr **Ivano Iavarone** – Industrially Contaminated Sites and Health Network (ICSHNet) (IS1408)
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