

Brussels, 27 May 2022

COST 064/22

DECISION

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action “Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability” (Sustainability@Leave) CA21150

The COST Member Countries will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 27 May 2022.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA21150 PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY (Sustainability@Leave)

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 advance and disseminate research and knowledge about the significance of paid parental leave for the social sustainability of societies. The main challenges are to identify and fill gaps in parental leave research, to develop a future-oriented PPL terminology, and to facilitate data expansion for future research.. 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

The Action aims to advance and disseminate research and knowledge about the significance of paid parental leave (PPL) for the social sustainability of societies. Our aim is to set the scene for future PPL research from the new perspective of social sustainability while making the field more coherent across disciplines and beyond academia. The main challenges are to build the network, identify and fill gaps in PPL research, develop a future-oriented and cross-disciplinary PPL terminology, and facilitate future research by closing the PPL data gap. Five Working Groups (WGs) will be established to focus on: (1) The development of a theoretical framework; (2) the identification of social inequalities through PPL policies; (3) the relevance of PPL for child development; (4) providing a future-oriented PPL terminology and (5) the expansion of PPL data.

The initial network will consist of 32 members from 22 countries. The Action is dedicated to making the network more interdisciplinary, involving more Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC), Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) and International Partner Countries (IPCs), and attracting participation from Young Researchers. The network will actively engage in efforts to minimize the gender gap in European PPL research and also ensure timely and close collaboration with Specific Organisations relevant to PPL research and policymaking. To fill the PPL data gap, stakeholders from European survey organizations will be approached. The network will disseminate knowledge of PPL policy as a component of social sustainability for academics at all career stages as well as for stakeholders from Specific Organisations, policymakers, companies, and the broader public.

<p>Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sociology: Social structure, inequalities, social mobility, social exclusion, income distribution, poverty ● Political Science: Social policies, welfare state 	<p>Keywords</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paid Parental Leave ● Social Sustainability ● Inequalities ● Early Childhood ● Welfare State
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Specific Objectives

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

Research Coordination

- Build an interdisciplinary, open, comprehensive and inclusive network to develop a common theoretical perspective on the significance of PPL for Sustainable Societies.
- Identify research gaps in PPL research from the perspective of social sustainability together with academics and stakeholders across Europe and beyond, and coordinate collaboration to fill these gaps.
- Coordinate the development of a common and sustainable PPL terminology to improve the evaluation and comparison of research findings on PPL policy design and their implications for the development of (in-)equalities in societies.
- Identify and compile existing PPL research across disciplines and make a thematic categorised compilation of the literature accessible via the Action website to provide a unique and comprehensive interdisciplinary PPL research database.
- Interact with key stakeholders from European surveys to discuss data gaps in PPL data and to coordinate

joint data enlargement proposals.

- Coordinate sessions at international conferences, Training Schools and Workshops to advance the academic discussion of the theoretical perspective on PPL and its relevance for social sustainability, systematically including Early Career Investigators (ECIs) and other young researchers to sustain innovative PPL research.
- Coordinate interdisciplinary and cross-country third-party funding proposals to enhance future PPL research with a perspective of social sustainability.
- Coordinate a series of scientific publications which are suitable for advancing the knowledge and the discussion of the relevance of PPL policy design for sustainable societies.
- Cooperate with stakeholders and policymakers and coordinate the provision of timely information on research findings for these groups in an easily accessible form, e.g. in the form of short videos, policy briefs and white papers.
- Support EU Institutions in monitoring the Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Capacity Building

- Exchange knowledge between scientific disciplines and stakeholders to drive scientific progress of research on PPL policy design and its implications for socially sustainable European societies.
- Identify and invite academics and stakeholders to contribute to the Action's discussion on the importance of PPL policy design for sustainable societies, either through their participation in the Action or through keynote speeches.
- Invite (former) members of other COST Actions (e.g. A19/CA19103) and currently ongoing topic-related research projects for knowledge exchange through keynote speeches in the WGs.
- Monitor the gender balance in Action members and attract particularly male ECIs for participation in the Action, since European PPL research currently is female-dominated.
- Develop an Action website and act as a stakeholder platform for academics, national or international policymakers, stakeholders from Specific Organisations, ECIs, students and the broader public.
- Bring together Action members from various disciplines with stakeholders in international surveys to further develop the European database for PPL research.
- Initiate Sessions and Roundtables at international conferences to enrich the discussion on PPL policy design and its consequences for social sustainability.
- Invite in a targeted manner ECIs and students from countries with less capacity in the field of PPL research to the Workshops for ECIs and the Training school/ the online Workshop for students.
- Develop and carry out a mentoring program for ECIs, aimed at all genders.
- Organise a Conference with the inclusion of stakeholders and policymakers at the end of the Action to foster the discussion of future challenges and provide a platform for further collaboration beyond the Action.

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1. S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1. SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

Over the last two decades, the role of parental leave entitlements for the employment protection and financial security of parents and their children has become more important in the European Union. In 2019, the EU agreed on minimum standards for parental leave in the “Directive on improving the work-life balance of parents and carers” (Council of the European Union, European Parliament, 2019), which to a great extent aims at harmonising parents’ social security across the European Union before, during and after the birth of a child. Still, there are large differences between European countries regarding parents’ social protection after the birth of a child. There is a need for systematic scientific discussion and research on the significance of PPL policies and their design for the development of European societies.

Parental leave entitlements can be classified into three different types: Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave. Maternity leave is exclusively for mothers and designed to ensure the health and financial support of mother and child shortly before, during and after the birth. Paternity leave is only for the father with the intention of enabling the father to spend time with his partner, the new-born child and other children in the family shortly after the birth of a child. Parental leave, on the other hand, can be taken by either the mother or father (and, in some cases, both). In general, these different forms of leave serve as a measure to allow parents time off work to care for their new-born and young child/ren without negative consequences for their employment. These types of leave are differently available in the various European countries, reflecting country-specific paths in employment and gender equality strategies. In particular, Paternity leave and Maternity leave do not exist in all European countries, which is rooted either in gender neutral legislation or, in contrast, in traditional ideas about the gendered division of labour. In all European countries, however, parents receive some benefits from the state, health insurers and/or employers during their childbirth-related leave. In this proposal, we refer to Paid Parental Leave (PPL) to encompass all paid leave policies that aim to provide social security for parents and their children.

From a sociological perspective, PPL is a social policy measure that, to a considerable extent, affects the degree of “decommodification” and “defamililisation” (Esping-Andersen 1999) in households. PPL is thought to have a decommodifying effect when parents who wish to care for their babies are given rights regulating their absence from the labour market and are entitled to state compensation during this period. Thus, PPL schemes significantly define social protection against labour market risks for parents after the birth of a child. At the same time, parental leave can have a defamililising effect if it counteracts gender inequalities that may emerge from a traditional gendered division of labour. The crucial elements of PPL policies in this regard are leave periods that do not cover more than one year of absence from work, equal parental leave entitlements for both genders and exclusive PPL periods for fathers (Brandth & Kvande 2020). PPL policies may also have a stratifying effect with consequences for social inequalities in welfare states if certain population groups are systematically excluded from these measures (Dobrotic & Blum 2020) or if the amount of parental leave benefits paid varies considerably

between socioeconomic groups. Thus, PPL schemes and their specific design can significantly reduce or increase vertical and horizontal inequalities in Europe with both short and long-term consequences for European societies.

It is now beyond question that PPL policy entitlements are important elements of a welfare state, affecting both the economic and the social development of a society and thus contributing to the sustainability of societies. The concept of Sustainability was first proposed in the Brundtland Report, where three “pillars” of sustainability for “Our Common Future” are outlined (WCED 1987). Per definition, “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). In the recent UN “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (UN 2015), 17 sustainable development goals are set and more than half are concerned with social and institutional dimensions of sustainability. However, the use of the term sustainability is currently mostly equated with environmental issues or economic growth (Vallance et al. 2011). Accordingly, the importance of PPL policies for the social sustainability of societies has hardly been systematically discussed and researched so far.

Although this has not yet been done explicitly, various aspects of Social sustainability have been addressed in PPL research, namely (in-)equalities according to gender, economic status, diverse family forms or health. In particular, gender inequality in access to PPL and its uptake has been a focus in PPL research. So far, it has been found that specific PPL design elements, such as the length of parental leave or fathers’ exclusive entitlement to a specific portion of parental leave, affect the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. In terms of duration, it was found that particularly moderate durations of leave have a positive effect on women’s labour participation (Dearing 2016). With regard to exclusive entitlements to parental leave, it has been shown that fathers are more likely to take parental leave if a legal entitlement to a specific duration of parental leave is reserved for them and that such entitlements for fathers increase fathers’ uptake of leave as well as their long-term engagement in childcare (Bünning 2015; O’Brien & Wall 2017). As was shown for Norway, exclusive PPL entitlements for fathers contribute to turning leave taking into a norm of modern fathering and if fathers have generous PPL options, they emphasise the dual-carer norm (Brandth & Kvande 2020). This norm is a decisive factor in fathers’ use of parental leave (Almqvist & Duvander 2014). In contrast, however, exclusive entitlements for fathers on a low level may also serve as a basis for reinforcing inequalities in gender relations through the implication that the minimum entitlement is also the maximum to take (Trappe 2013), which in turn contradicts the original goal of more gender equality through exclusive PPL entitlements for fathers.

PPL research addressing economic status generally focuses almost exclusively on employed parents, resulting in a research gap regarding inequalities in access to PPL for other groups in society such as self-employed, students, migrants or unemployed (Dobrotić & Blum 2020). With regard to diverse family forms beyond the traditional heterosexual nuclear family, there is still very little research explaining PPL policy design and uptake. A recent study showed that the consideration of diverse family forms in PPL policy design is largely determined by country-specific political discourses and that, accordingly, family forms such as the lone-parent family or same-sex parents are considered differently in the PPL policy design of different countries (Nygård & Duvander 2021). Accordingly, another report on “Leave policies and practices for non-traditional families” conducted by Picken and Janta for the European Commission (2019) also found that across European countries, the access to PPL for same-sex parents, adoptive parents and lone parents differs significantly. There have been some recent comparative studies on access to PPL for same-sex parents and adoptive parents or single parents (e.g. Jou et al. 2020). However, the significance of PPL policies with respect to more equality for diverse families is understudied.

PPL policies also affect the well-being of families. Generous parental leave is related to healthy families (Wall & Escobedo 2013) and the length of maternal parental leave has a significant impact on mothers' long-term well-being and their closeness to their child (Whitehouse et al. 2013). In contrast, when PPL is not available, existing parental health conditions may be exacerbated (Jou et al. 2018). Furthermore, recent research found that mothers' health benefits when the father uses some PPL days at the same time as the mother during the first months (Persson & Rossin-Slater 2019). The impact of PPL policy design on parental health and well-being is, however, still under-researched, especially with regard to children's and fathers' health. Here, interdisciplinary academic exchange between Sociology, Health Sciences and Psychology is needed to further explore the implications of PPL use on parental health.

Surprisingly, the significance of PPL for child development and the consequences of PPL policies for vertical and horizontal inequalities between children have rarely been centre stage. Currently, the focus is rather on effects of PPL policy design on parents than on children (Daly 2021). The underexposed perspective of the implications of PPL policies for vertical and horizontal inequalities between children is surprising, as the importance of parental care in the first months of a child's life is unquestioned. In PPL research, some studies have, for instance, examined the importance of breastfeeding for children's health and their physical development. However, there are hardly any studies on the importance of PPL policy design for the mental health of children, their cognitive development or their well-being during childhood. The rare perspective of the significance of PPL for children might be explained by the fact that in contemporary European welfare states PPL policies are primarily seen as a welfare state entitlement for working parents and not as a measure for safeguarding the best interests of the child. However, a country's parental leave regime is an important facilitating context for achieving an optimal infant quality of life (O'Brien 2009). A recent study has shown that the length of PPL is correlated with significant reductions in neonatal, infant and under-five mortality (Khan 2020). This effect can be observed over a period of at least two years (ibid. Khan 2020), which indicates that generous PPL policies are of significance for children's healthy development even beyond the sensitive first months period. Thus, it is not surprising that UNICEF (2019) considers generous PPL policies indispensable for children's well-being. In the recent "EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child" (EC 2021), however, children's rights to PPL is not a specifically named dimension and also the recent EU Directive on work-life balance does not provide for the consideration of the child's perspective. Given the diversity of PPL policies across Europe, the inequalities in access to PPL, and the wide disparities in the level of PPL benefits, it is clear children in Europe face major inequalities from the outset. Research discussions and collaborations are urgently needed that focus on the significance of PPL policy design for children's development and their well-being as a matter of social sustainability.

Altogether, current research indicates that PPL policy design affects the sustainability of societies and its citizens in various regards. Just recently, Khan (2020) stated that when paid family leave is not available, the social and economic costs to the family as well as the society can rise. However, contemporary PPL research does not employ a systematic perspective on PPL as a component of social sustainability, which means that assessing the importance of PPL policy design for societies currently remains a challenge. A new theoretical framework is needed that captures the relevance of PPL policy design for the sustainability of societies and advances the focus in PPL research. The advancement of knowledge on PPL policy design elements and their impact on societies is crucial to making the right choices that improve 1) gender equality, 2) income equality, and 3) children's welfare, all affecting the sustainability of current and future European societies. Therefore, there is a need for interdisciplinary collaboration and the systematic inclusion of Specific Organisations and policymakers into the discussion regarding the scope and the strategies for deriving new knowledge on PPL research.

1.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

The Action aims to build an international network that includes perspectives from different countries, academic disciplines and stakeholders to address the systematic development of research and knowledge on PPL policies. Here, the aim is to gather a critical mass of Action members consisting of academics from different disciplines and at various career stages as well as stakeholders from international organisations and national/international policymakers. The challenge for this network is to jointly develop a new perspective on PPL policy as a component of social sustainability that incorporates European ideas of fundamental human rights as well as to create the basis for a common understanding of the importance of PPL policies to societies. To achieve this, several sub-challenges need to be tackled with regard to the further development of PPL research. Thus, the Action addresses the following questions:

- (1) Which theoretical framework is suitable for capturing the relevance of PPL policy design to the social sustainability of societies?
- (2) Which research gaps can be identified that need to be filled from a perspective of PPL policy design as a component of the social sustainability of societies?
- (3) How does PPL policy design influence vertical and horizontal inequalities in Europe?
- (4) How does PPL policy design and parents' uptake of PPL affect children's development and their well-being?
- (5) Which terminologies are appropriate to capture PPL policy design for current and future societies and can also to be used across countries and disciplines?
- (6) Which data are needed to examine the significance of PPL policy design for Sustainable Societies and how can these data gaps be filled?
- (7) How can the network contribute to comprehensively transferring knowledge to European policymakers and the wider public?

Answering these questions is important to systematically advance knowledge and research on PPL policy. There is a need to survey and evaluate the development and the implications of PPL policies over time, in particular because so much is currently changing in this field. The Action will help provide the structures for this change. Since current knowledge regarding the impact of PPL policy design on societies is limited in various regards, the network aims at advancing research perspectives and technologies for PPL research. To meet these challenges, a network of experts in PPL research from various disciplines, young researchers and stakeholders is needed to confront the gap in PPL research and develop and innovate PPL research in a timely manner.

The Action is convinced that the systematic perspective of PPL policy as a component of social sustainability is needed to identify previously understudied vertical and horizontal inequalities affecting particular groups or life stages and arising from PPL policy design. While the relevance of PPL policy design for the social sustainability of societies in terms of gender equality has been well documented, other dimensions such as inequalities deriving from PPL policies for low-income groups, students, self-employed or new family forms are understudied. Hardly anything is known about how PPL policy design affects the development and the well-being of children and how the design of PPL policies may contribute to more horizontal and vertical equality between children in Europe. Filling these research gaps is important for systematically identifying groups that are at risk of being disadvantaged by PPL policy design and for informing policymakers seeking to develop PPL policies towards social sustainability.

A further challenge is to overcome misinterpretation and ambiguity in the assessment of differences in PPL policy design and their impact on individuals and societies. For example, the term "maternity leave"

is often equated with parental leave, which makes it difficult to evaluate the findings. Such confusion also exists in relation to paternal access to parental leave, caused by the different titling of exclusive parental leave entitlements for fathers in PPL legislation across European countries. Thus, for future PPL research, there is an urgent need to create a consistent PPL terminology that captures policy design elements adequately and is suitable across academic disciplines. Furthermore, new elements in PPL policy design, such as part-time parental leave, are hardly taken into account in quantitative PPL research, also due to a lack of data to examine them. There is an urgent need to expand European data with detailed information on PPL uptake to assess the implications of PPL policy design for European societies.

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 builds on previous research on PPL policies and their effects on individuals and societies from the fields of sociology and political science as well as on comparative descriptive analysis of PPL policy design and the take-up of PPL from stakeholders and policymakers such as the International Network on Leave Policies & Research, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and the European Commission (EC). The Action coordinates PPL research for the future by systematically advancing theory and research on PPL policies in five Working Groups (WGs). The WGs are dedicated to further develop PPL research under the following headlines:

WG1: Theoretical understanding of PPL policies in the context of social sustainability

WG2: PPL policies and social inequalities

WG3: PPL policies and their significance for children's development and well-being

WG4: Sustainable PPL terminology

WG5: Sustainable PPL data

By adopting the perspective of PPL as a component of social sustainability, an innovative theoretical framework will be developed that can capture the relevance of PPL policy design for European societies. With the identification of research gaps in PPL research by an interdisciplinary network, the Action forms the basis for future research that captures the relevance of PPL policies more comprehensively, which is needed to inform national and transnational policymakers. Research gaps are already apparent in the topics of inequalities deriving from PPL policies for low-income groups, students, self-employed or new family forms such as gender diverse families, which the Action will address. Further research gaps on dimensions of inequality through PPL policy design need to be explored, particularly with regard to the consequences of PPL policy design for children and future societies. Together, the Action sets an innovative focus on considering the connection between PPL policies and the development of European societies towards social sustainability. Building on existing PPL terminologies, the network will develop a new terminology that can capture recent developments in PPL policy design and harmonise future research. The Action will identify data gaps in European surveys and on this basis will draft and submit applications for the extension of data sets with variables for PPL leave design elements and further individual data needed to fill research gaps. In order to gather new information and research on the

importance of PPL for children's development, the Action will prioritize to initiate a collaboration for an international and interdisciplinary research proposal shortly after the start of the Action.

In addition, the Action will analyse similarities and differences in the paths EU countries are taking in response to the new EU Directive 2019/1158. It will explore the reactions of various actors, such as governments, political parties, social partners (trade unions and employers organisations), and the various types of tensions that may arise in relation to the Directive's implementation.

1.2.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

The initial Action consists of 32 members from 22 European countries and Israel and engages in enlargement towards a well-balanced network across European countries with the inclusion of pan-European academics and stakeholders to develop a common definition of PPL terminology and a theoretical perspective on the significance of PPL policy design for Sustainable Societies. The Action is science-based; however, systematic inclusion of other stakeholders such as EU Institutions, International Organisations and child protection alliances is sought.

The research coordination objectives of the Action are as follows:

- Build an interdisciplinary, open, comprehensive and inclusive network to develop a common theoretical perspective on the significance of PPL for Sustainable Societies.
- Identify research gaps in PPL research from the perspective of social sustainability together with academics and stakeholders across Europe and beyond, and coordinate collaboration to fill these gaps.
- Coordinate the development of a common and sustainable PPL terminology to improve the evaluation and comparison of research findings on PPL policy design and their implications for the development of (in-) equalities in societies.
- Identify and compile existing PPL research across disciplines and make a thematic categorised compilation of the literature accessible via the Action website to provide a unique and comprehensive interdisciplinary PPL research database.
- Interact with key stakeholders from European surveys to discuss data gaps in PPL data and to coordinate joint data enlargement proposals.
- Coordinate sessions at international conferences, Training Schools and Workshops to advance the academic discussion of the theoretical perspective on PPL and its relevance for social sustainability, systematically including Early Career Investigators (ECIs) and other young researchers to sustain innovative PPL research.
- Coordinate interdisciplinary and cross-country third-party funding proposals to enhance future PPL research with a perspective of social sustainability.
- Coordinate a series of scientific publications which are suitable for advancing the knowledge and the discussion of the relevance of PPL policy design for sustainable societies.
- Cooperate with stakeholders and policymakers and coordinate the provision of timely information on research findings for these groups in an easily accessible form, e.g. in the form of short videos, policy briefs and white papers.
- Support EU Institutions in monitoring the Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

1.2.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

The initial Action consists of experts in PPL research and is dedicated to a further expansion and saturation of the network. This includes the enlargement of Early Career Investigators' (ECI) participation, particularly from ITC countries, to form the basis for further innovative European PPL research. The Action is particularly interested in building collaboration with academics from disciplines outside the Social Sciences, from COST countries not currently listed as members of the Action and selected trans-European countries. All Meetings, Workshops and the Conference will provide the possibility for online participation to enable the participation of experts from Pan-European countries, stakeholders from Specific Organisations or governments as well as Action members with care obligations or other travel impairments. The capacity-building Objectives of the Action are as follows:

- Exchange knowledge between scientific disciplines and stakeholders to drive scientific progress of research on PPL policy design and its implications for socially sustainable European societies.
- Identify and invite academics and stakeholders to contribute to the Action's discussion on the importance of PPL policy design for sustainable societies, either through their participation in the Action or through keynote speeches.
- Invite (former) members of other COST Actions (e.g. A19/CA19103) and currently ongoing topic-related research projects for knowledge exchange through keynote speeches in the WGs.
- Monitor the gender balance in Action members and attract particularly male ECIs for participation in the Action, since European PPL research currently is female-dominated.
- Develop an Action website and act as a stakeholder platform for academics, national or international policymakers, stakeholders from Specific Organisations, ECIs, students and the broader public who are interested in PPL policy theory and research findings.
- Bring together Action members from various disciplines with stakeholders in international surveys to further develop the European database for PPL research.
- Initiate Sessions and Roundtables at international conferences to enrich the discussion on PPL policy design and its consequences for social sustainability.
- Invite in a targeted manner ECIs and students from countries with less capacity in the field of PPL research to the Workshops for ECIs and the Training school/ the online Workshop for students.
- Develop and carry out a mentoring program for ECIs, aimed at all genders.
- Organise a Conference with the inclusion of stakeholders and policymakers at the end of the Action to foster the discussion of future challenges and provide a platform for further collaboration beyond the Action.
- Monitor the interdisciplinarity and the gender balance in the MC and the WGs and its leadership positions.

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

The Action responds to the core principle of sustainable development contained in the Treaty on European Union. It responds particularly to 5 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained in the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which the EU has committed to implement in all its policies: 1 – No poverty; 3 – Good health and well-being; 5 – Gender equality; 8 – Decent work and economic growth; 10 – Reduced inequality. The Action also relates closely to the EU Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (EU 2019/1158), which is dedicated to improving gender equality in Europe through setting minimum standards in PPL policies by obliging all EU Member States to reserve at least two months leave for the second parent and to guarantee payments at a relatively high replacement rate during the leave period, at the latest by 2024. At a transnational level, the Action corresponds to the 2019 OECD report “Changing the odds for vulnerable children”, which highlights the importance of investing in the well-being of vulnerable children as a central action for inclusive growth.

The Action consists of experts in parental leave research and is dedicated to the deepening of European PPL research by means of the innovative perspective of investigating the implications of PPL policies for social sustainability. This new perspective on the relevance of PPL policy design needs to be developed together with academics and stakeholders from and beyond Europe in order to develop a common understanding of the importance of PPL policy design across disciplines and institutions. So far, PPL research has tended to focus on economic and gender issues, both in academia and in the work of various organisations and institutions. In this regard, PPL policies have been studied and documented by international networks and organisations such as the EU, the OECD, the International Network on Leave Policies & Research, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the WHO or UNICEF. However, knowledge exchange between these networks and institutions has been sparse and only related to sub-topics. In the academic field, there has been little exchange between disciplines, which has led to researchers using different PPL terminologies, which makes it difficult to evaluate findings on the consequences of PPL policy design consistently. The Action is convinced that a systematic consideration of the importance of PPL policies for Sustainable Societies under the umbrella of the Sustainable Development Goals and employing various disciplines and perspectives is needed to both advance PPL research as well as to generate new insights for EU policymakers. The Action’s efforts to address the importance of PPL policy design for children’s development will lay the groundwork for future research into this relationship and form the basis for a new discussion of children’s rights as citizens in the first years of life. Furthermore, since current PPL research suffers considerably from the lack of sufficient micro-level data, which significantly limits research on the consequences of PPL policy design elements, the Action will aim at adapting existing databases and generating new data for future PPL research needs. For the study of the relationship between PPL policy design and inequalities as well as children’s development, it is of great importance that data are available in a timely manner, which is why the Action will initiate a collaborative interdisciplinary research project proposal on the relationship between children’s well-being and PPL policy design in its very early phase.

2.2. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1. SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE

The initial Action network consists of 32 members from 22 EU countries, the United Kingdom and Israel. More than half (54,5%) are from less research-intensive COST member states (ITCs). The initial Action members are experts in research on parental leave policies and thus suited to address the Action’s Challenges and achieve the Action’s Objectives. The core expertise of the initial members consists of

Sociology and other social sciences. Other expertise comes from Economics and Business, Other Humanities, Political Science, Economics and business, Social and economic geography and Psychology. In addition, the network of proposers consists of members from Government/ Intergovernmental Organisations beyond Higher Education institutions (4), NGOs (1) and Standards Organisations (1).

The academic expertise includes both qualitative and quantitative research as well as both macro and micro perspectives. The Action members are experienced in working with EU data, national data and/or have conducted their own surveys. They have successfully acquired international, national and private third-party funds. Some of the Action members have engaged in advising governments, organisations and companies. Beyond their academic expertise, some members have engaged in their University's gender equality or diversity units.

To go beyond PPL research dominated by Social Sciences it is crucial to capture the full breadth of the importance of PPL policies for sustainable societies and to enable interdisciplinary collaboration for future PPL research. Therefore, one of the first tasks of the MC will be to identify expertise gaps and invite selected experts to participate in the Action. In a first step, the network is to be expanded to include further members from academic fields such as Law, Health Sciences, Educational Sciences and Psychology. Another major aim of the Action is to have members from each European country in order to include the national expertise and the particular national perspectives as comprehensively as possible. The Action also aims at including academics and stakeholders from non-European countries such as Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs) and International Partner Countries (IPCs) in the network. In this respect, it is important for us to seek members from countries where PPL is still either not existent, on a very low level, has been introduced recently, or countries where there is already a wealth of experience with PPL. With regard to the Objective of a standardisation of the PPL terminology, in addition to the goal of interdisciplinarity, the involvement of stakeholders from Specific Organisations is also being sought in order to enrich the discussion on PPL policy research and to achieve a harmonisation of the PPL typology beyond the scientific community. For the Action's Objective of expanding PPL data, it is essential to seek contact with key stakeholders from European surveys and to invite them as experts to WG5 meetings.

The Action is dedicated to establishing a well-balanced network. With regard to gender, the gender balance will be monitored; academics from the underrepresented gender will be actively sought and invited to join the network. For ensuring sustainable and innovative PPL research, ECIs engaged in research on PPL and/or children's well-being will be invited to participate. In addition, the Action will actively seek out stakeholders who can contribute to the Objectives and who can benefit from the Action's collaborations. To attract further ECIs, stakeholders or academics to participate, the Action website will provide an informative video presenting the benefits of joining the network and an invitation to apply for membership. The involvement of members who are not eligible for travel funding is made possible by enabling digital participation in all Action Meetings and Conferences. The trainings for students and ECIs provided during the Action will strengthen future PPL research in Europe and beyond.

2.2.2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Action will invite key stakeholders from Specific Organisations to participate in the Action after it has started. These include global organisations, EU Institutions, national governments and statistical representatives at EU level, as well as stakeholders from groups and organisations with an interest in PPL knowledge. We view the cooperation with these stakeholders as a process that enables the

exchange of knowledge during the Action, but also creates a solid basis for future collaboration and knowledge transfer. Cooperation with these specific organisations and stakeholders is aimed at mutual benefit. The key stakeholders for involvement in the Action are as follows:

(1) The International Labour Organization (ILO): Some of the Action's members have had contact with ILO representatives in the past and were involved in joint projects. ILO representatives will be invited to join the Action, particularly with regard to the development of PPL data and PPL terminology. Through its membership, the ILO will benefit from early access to the Action's research findings, the joint work on a future-proof PPL terminology and advancing PPL data to the needs for future research.

(2) The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): The MC will invite EIGE representatives with expertise on parental leave to participate in the Action once it has started. Discussions with EIGE experts will focus in particular on recent developments in research on the relationship between PPL policies and gender equality as well as the harmonisation of PPL terminology.

(3) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): Based on previous cooperation between Action members and an OECD representative in the past, the question of the significance of PPL for children's well-being and socially sustainable societies will be discussed as well as the question which research gaps need to be filled in this regard. Collaboration is also planned for the research proposal on the relationship between PPL policy design and children's well-being.

(4) UNICEF Office of Research Centre for Children: The MC will approach UNICEF representatives to invite them to join the network and participate in WG3 to discuss the impact of PPL policy design on children.

(5) UNESCO Center for Child and Family Research: The MC will approach stakeholders in the UNESCO Center for Child and Family Research and invite them to participate in the Action.

(6) Statistical office of the EU (Eurostat): The Action MC will contact representatives of Eurostat microdata in the first year of the Action to discuss the possibilities and conditions for extending datasets with selected variables. Representatives of Eurostat will be invited particularly to WG5 meetings as keynote speakers.

(7) National and international policymakers: Some members of the network have in the past advised national or international policymakers or policy consultants from governments. The Action aims to improve communication with these stakeholders by inviting them to become members of the network, also so that they can communicate their knowledge needs on specific PPL topics in a timely manner and receive first-hand information on the progress of the Action.

(8) Non-academic stakeholders relevant for parental leave policy design and implementation: One crucial challenge of the Action is to engage in knowledge transfer from/to women's and parenting organisations, representatives of gender equality departments and employers' associations. Cooperation with stakeholders from these interested groups ensures that the work of the Action is linked back to current challenges in relation to the implementation of PPL policy legislation in practice. In this way, the Action can aim at a targeted transfer of knowledge for these groups. Therefore, the Action website is dedicated to providing easily accessible and tailored information for these groups. The Action serves as an information point for specific questions from these groups and opens up the Conference for their participation, with a dedicated session related to these groups' interests.

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

The exchange on the importance of PPL policies for the social sustainability of societies is also of great interest beyond the EU, which is why we expect that non-EU countries will also have a strong motivation to participate in the Action. The Action itself will benefit from the participation of other countries, as other perspectives on PPL policy design will expand and enrich the discussion. In particular, countries such as Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia, South Africa or the USA are actively sought partners here due to the culturally very different situation of PPL policymaking and its use. This also includes NNCs such as Russia, the Ukraine or Morocco. The network aims to facilitate collaboration on publications and research proposals with these countries and to provide a basis for collaboration beyond the Action.

In addition, the involvement of International Organisations is crucial for sharing knowledge and creating a sustainable basis for communication and collaboration between academics and stakeholders. Of particular interest in this regard is building a bridge between academic PPL research and the work of organisations involved in PPL and child well-being research.

3. IMPACT

3.1. IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGHS

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

Short-term impact:

- An interdisciplinary European network of PPL experts that is capable of addressing the Challenges and Objectives as listed above.
- A theoretical framework describing the interplay between PPL policy design and social sustainability.
- A comprehensive and sustainable PPL policy design terminology that harmonizes the interpretation of PPL research in the future.
- The systematic identification of research gaps in PPL research that uncovers previously hidden inequalities generated or perpetuated by PPL policy design.
- Collaborations for research project proposals to fill some of these research gaps.
- A knowledge bank on PPL policies and their impact on the sustainability of societies via the Action website for academics at all career stages, stakeholders and the broader public.
- A mentoring programme that supports Young Researchers and initiates future PPL research.
- Knowledge transfer to policymakers and policy advisors through (a) the possibility to join the Action as a member, (b) the Action website, (c) a newsletter targeted to these groups, (d) policy briefs and white papers, and (e) through Conference participation.

Long-term impact:

This Action will contribute to keeping PPL a relevant subject for academia, politicians, stakeholders, media, and the broader public. With its emphasis on social sustainability, the Action offers a new perspective on the meaning of PPL policy design and advances sociological theory. The findings and activities of the Action will provide European governments with new information to further develop PPL policy design. With the identification of possible systematic inequalities arising through existing PPL policies, the Action ensures that certain aspects of injustice in European societies are moved to the foreground, which will stimulate the discussion of the social consequences of PPL policies in academia, politics and the broader public. The particular perspective on PPL as a children's right enriches the previous parents-as-workers perspective on PPL policies and will contribute to the so far neglected dimension of PPL as a citizen right for children. The Action will also actively address PPL policy design and its relation to diverse genders and family forms, thus contributing to the future discussion of LGBTQI+ issues and social inequality in the context of PPL policy design.

The Action will develop PPL terminologies to provide a basis for making international PPL research more comparable, which is important for future discussions of PPL policy design. The Action's efforts to generate new data for PPL research will advance future research on PPL policies by facilitating much needed, more detailed analyses on the consequences of PPL policy design elements. The collaborations for research proposals initiated by the Action will fill knowledge gaps and thus advance PPL research. The publications based on the Action's perspective on social sustainability will advance sociological theory and provide a new perspective on PPL as a socially sustainable welfare institution in the academic field and beyond.

The inclusion of non-European countries in the Action will generate global exchange on the importance of PPL and will thus create a basis for global knowledge exchange concerning the development and/or innovation of PPL legislation. With the systematic inclusion of ECIs, the Action provides the basis for innovative PPL research in the future.

3.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge creation: Taking a perspective that views PPL as one core dimension of social sustainability is innovative and contributes to knowledge regarding the sustainable development goals of the UN Agenda 2030. With the inclusion of various scientific disciplines relevant to PPL research in the Action, the knowledge exchange is appropriate for generating new perspectives and new knowledge within and across scientific communities. The creation of a new comprehensive, detailed and sustainable PPL terminology will provide new means for harmonising PPL research and can be considered a new technology for PPL research. This will benefit future scientific research as well as research by Specific Organisations, also beyond Europe. The Action's efforts towards PPL data enlargement will make the need for detailed PPL research more visible and inform the relevant stakeholders about these data gaps. The new detailed data on PPL use will enable much needed research on the consequences of PPL policy design for individuals and societies. Collaboration in joint proposals for research projects according to the identified gaps in PPL research will create new knowledge in the future, which will be important to the development of PPL research as well as future PPL policies.

Knowledge transfer: The Action members will collaborate to fill research gaps to advance PPL research and provide policymakers with the necessary information on the consequences of PPL policy design for current and future societies. One of the Action's challenges is to promote exchange of knowledge across various scientific disciplines and methodological strands. Usually, diverse scientific fields and users of different methods rarely come together. This is a particular hindrance in relation to PPL research, as the different perspectives, research questions and research findings can be of great importance for the better understanding of the significance of PPL policy design for current and future societies. The Action will counteract these knowledge gaps by creating an interdisciplinary network and thus also providing a basis for future cooperation in PPL research across disciplines. Various International Organisations have been engaged in PPL research beyond academic research. Although there has already been cooperation in individual cases, there has been no systematic collaboration between key stakeholders from different Specific Organisations with international scientists. The network responds to this with an invitation to participate in the Action to enable collaboration during the Action and beyond. Knowledge transfer will take place at various levels in the Action. This includes the exchange of knowledge between different research strands and methodological approaches as well as the exchange with stakeholders from Specific Organisations or interest groups. The organisation of this knowledge transfer will take place through the MC and WG Meetings, the Conference and the database on PPL research available on the Action website. The Action website will document the process of developing the PPL terminology and provide the constant possibility for Action members and third parties to comment. In order to make the topic and current findings easily accessible to those outside the Action, the Action website will provide short input videos by Action members presenting summaries and recent PPL research findings. In addition, the Action will issue press releases to arouse public interest in the Action's work and events.

Career development: Within the academic field, the transfer of knowledge to researchers at early career stages is a core issue. The Action will facilitate this transfer by a call for membership for ECIs and through a call to present at Workshops to inspire future research on PPL. Also, the Action will generate a mentoring programme and ECIs will be encouraged to join proposals for collaboration in third-party funded project applications so that they can benefit from the experience of scientists who have already been successful in project fundraising. ECIs are encouraged to apply for funds with respect to Short Term Scientific Missions (STSM). The Action's website will provide a chat forum for ECIs where they can exchange news, information and ideas regarding the topics related to PPL and career development.

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

Research conducted by the Action will be published in Open Access formats to provide full access in a timely manner to all groups in society. Action members will be encouraged to spread shortcut information on the Action's work through social media accounts such as Twitter and the platform ResearchGate.

The Action will engage in the planning of sessions at international conferences to stimulate the discussion in the scientific community outside the Action and to enlarge the network. Participation in the Action Conference will be widely advertised and a livestream will be set up so that passive participation in the Conference is possible. The Action Meetings will be characterised by interdisciplinarity and the targeted inclusion of stakeholders, which will enhance the dissemination of research findings and invigorate the dialogue regarding the relevance of PPL policies for sustainable societies across European research institutions.

The creation of the Action website is another means of disseminating, exploiting and discussing research results, either those that already exist or will be generated by the Action. An interdisciplinary

literature repository will be established to provide comprehensive insights into PPL research for academics, students, ECIs, stakeholders and the wider public. In addition, shortcuts in the form of videos and policy briefs will provide easy access to the topic in the form of overviews or the presentation of new findings. The Action website will contain information on past and upcoming events and promote participation in the Action. There will be secured access for Action members for internal discussions and updates, as well as a discussion and question forum for ECIs, students and the broader public. The continuous maintenance of the Action website is a priority to ensure keeping scientists, stakeholders and the broader public interested in the development of the Action.

To ensure the involvement of the various groups and representatives with an interest in PPL research beyond academia (such as policymakers, stakeholders, media, broader public) throughout the Action period, email distribution lists with information geared to the interests of the different groups of stakeholders with summaries of recent research findings and information on upcoming events will be established. Furthermore, selected information on the Action's activities will be communicated through relevant email distribution lists already in place. Via the website's contact form, the Action MC will serve as an intermediary between experts on PPL topics and stakeholders, media, companies, and interest groups.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORKPLAN

4.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

The Action's work plan is organised in Tasks and Activities in five WGs, supported by the MC.

Common Tasks and Activities of all WGs are as follows:

1. Develop research: Initiate collaborations for publications and research project proposals.
2. Dissemination: Write a policy brief and make a short video with an executive summary.
3. Provide online training sessions for students.

WG1: Theoretical understanding of PPL policies in the context of social sustainability

With WG1, the Action addresses the current challenge to systemise PPL research employing a social sustainability perspective, which has not yet been done. This overarching and interdisciplinary perspective of PPL policies and PPL policy design as a core dimension of social sustainability will enrich recent research on PPL in terms of an explicitly normatively informed perspective to uncover possible dimensions of inequalities arising through PPL policies.

1. Develop a theoretical framework for PPL and social sustainability.
2. Initiate collaboration for a book publication on a theoretical framework for PPL policies and their significance for sustainable societies with chapters provided by various academic disciplines.
3. Make a session proposal for an international conference in 2023, together with WG4.

WG2: PPL policies and social inequalities

With WG2, the Action addresses the dimension of inequalities arising through PPL policy design. One main issue of this WG is to detect the to date understudied dimensions of inequalities arising through

PPL policies with an overarching and interdisciplinary perspective on PPL policy as an instrument of social sustainability and to identify key PPL policy design elements that contribute to (in-)equality in societies.

1. Identify gaps in PPL research regarding inequalities.
2. Report these gaps to the other Action members at an Action meeting.
3. Produce a report on knowledge gaps in PPL and social inequalities research.
4. Organize a Workshop for PhD students.

WG3: PPL policies and their significance for children's development and well-being

WG3 corresponds to the past Action A19 'Children's Welfare', which was dedicated to understanding the relationship between welfare states and children's rights. The Action expands the findings and discussions of Action A19 by focussing on PPL policy design and its consequences for children's development and well-being. This focus is innovative and aims at filling a research and discussion gap by the following means:

1. Contact European child protection / children's rights organisations and seek collaboration.
2. Identify PPL policy design dimensions and characteristics relevant to children's development and children's rights.
3. Collaborate on a proposal for a research project investigating the significance of PPL for children with members from at least 4 European countries and participation of at least 50% ITCs.
4. Write a White Paper on "Sustainable PPL policies for children".

WG4: Sustainable PPL terminology

With WG4 the Action brings added value to the harmonisation of PPL terminologies across scientific disciplines and stakeholders. PPL policies have been studied and documented by supranational organisations like the EU, the OECD, the WHO, UNICEF, the EIGE and the ILO or the International Network on Leave Policies & Research. The Action aims at harmonising PPL terminologies used by these organisations and networks to foster a common understanding of the description of PPL in the future. The harmonisation of PPL terminologies is important for the assessment of PPL policy design and the consequences of PPL policies for European societies in international comparison. The Action brings these different networks and organisations together and makes an important contribution to PPL research in and beyond Europe.

1. Create a comprehensive terminology for PPL policies and their uptake.
2. Publication in a Scientific Journal concerning the measurement of PPL in PPL research.
3. Create a comprehensive report on PPL policy design elements in European countries.
4. Make a session proposal for a sociological conference in 2023, together with WG1.

WG5: Sustainable PPL data

With WG5 the Action seeks to expand existing European cross-sectional and longitudinal data to include data essential for precise and in-depth PPL research. Thus, the Action ensures the development of data sets towards future challenges. The variety of expertise in the Action ensures the identification of data gaps and the united efforts to overcome these gaps. Filling these gaps is crucial to understanding the effects of specific PPL policy designs for sustainable societies.

1. Write a short report on currently available PPL data and the PPL data gap.

2. Identify stakeholders of quantitative survey data and invite them to the WG5 Workshop.
3. Workshop: Methodological challenges in PPL research.
4. Develop PPL data enlargement proposals for selected European surveys.

Selection of specific Tasks and Activities of the Management Committee (MC):

1. Attract scientists and stakeholders to the Action from diverse scientific disciplines, European countries (especially from countries not yet being listed as members of the Action) and non-European countries, ECIs, and stakeholders from Specific Organisations related to the topic of PPL.
2. Organise a Conference.
3. Make a short video with an executive summary of the Action's purpose.
4. Send newsletters to EU Institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.
5. Maintain the literature repository (implementation & update).
6. Organize a press release online event.
7. Monitor the gender balance in Action members and leading positions of the Action.
8. Design and implement a mentoring programme.
9. Organize a Training School for PhD Students and ECIs.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

The deliverables are listed below with a timetable for implementation.

Aiming at intensifying collaborations

- Identify and invite academics and stakeholders to the Action (MC) (Months 2-5)
- Make a short video with an executive summary of the Action (MC) (Months 6-9)
- Contact European child protection/children's rights organisations for collaborations (WG3) (Months 4-7)
- Identify stakeholders of quantitative survey data; invite them to WG5 Workshop (WG5) (Months 10-16)
- Seek collaboration for an interdisciplinary research project on PPL & children (WG3) (Months 10-22)

Aiming at knowledge production

- Identify gaps in knowledge on PPL and inequalities (WG2) (Months 4-22)
- Identify PPL policy design elements relevant to children (WG3) (Months 4-34)
- Literature repository (MC) (Months 12-48)
- Book publication (WG1) (Months 16-42)
- Short report on currently available PPL data and the PPL data gap (WG5) (Months 4-10)
- Publication on PPL terminology (WG4) (Months 17-30)
- Short reports on knowledge gaps regarding PPL policy design and inequalities (WG2) (Months 22-40)
- Report on PPL design elements in Europe (WG4) (Months 31-46)
- White paper ("Sustainable PPL policies for children") (WG3) (Months 35-46)
- Policy Briefs (all WGs) (Months 35-40)

Aiming at generating new technologies

- Theoretical framework for PPL policies in the context of social sustainability (WG1) (Months 4-22)
- Comprehensive and sustainable PPL terminology (WG4) (Months 4-22)
- PPL data enlargement proposals (WG5) (Months 28-42)

Aiming at knowledge dissemination (beyond publications)

- Mentoring program (MC) (Months 2-10, 16, 28, 40))
- Organize a Conference (Months 27-42)
- Coordinate a session on international conference (WG1 & WG4) (Months 8-10 & 22)
- Send newsletters to EU Institutions (MC) (Months 10-12, 22-24, 34-36, 45-47)
- Workshop for PhD students (WG2) (Months 10-22)
- Organize a Workshop: Methodological challenges in PPL research (WG5) (Months 21-28)
- Organize a press release online event (MC) (Months 44-46)

Beyond these Tasks and Activities, the Action will – throughout the entire funding phase – serve as an open and inclusive network, monitor the gender balance and the compliance with the Code of Conduct, maintain the Action website, serve as an expert pool in PPL knowledge, and seek collaboration-building for interdisciplinary and international research among members.

4.1.3. RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

The network consists of some very experienced scientist who have agreed to join the MC. However, there are several risks to the project as outlined in the following:

- Covid-19 still continues to limit the possibilities for coming together and the risk must be planned for that meetings cannot take place in person. The meetings will therefore be designed from the outset so that they can also take place online. If only single or very few countries are affected by restrictions, a hybrid form of event will be aimed for. However, it has been shown that virtual meetings do not have the same quality in terms of networking, so the aim is to have one meeting per year with physical attendance, the Conferences and the Workshops.
- There is a risk that Young Researchers will hesitate to join the Action. In order to prevent this, part of the website will be dedicated to precisely this group of people within the framework of an information page and an exchange forum. In addition, a call for participation will be published via email distribution lists.
- The Action's purpose is to enable and consolidate cooperation beyond the Action period. There is a risk here that ITC countries will again be proportionately less involved than other EU countries beyond the funding phase. This will be counteracted by increasing the visibility of participants from ITC countries through systematic, at least proportionally equal consideration for leadership positions in the WGS and other highly visible positions in the network.
- The WG5 project faces a higher risk of not achieving its objective because the possibilities for expanding international data sets are always limited. Here, however, it is precisely these possibilities that are to be exhausted and the case will be made for the importance of advancing PPL data.
- Ensuring the participation of countries across the globe in Meetings and Conferences is a challenge, since travel expenses cannot be reimbursed to some of the members of the Action or due to different time zones. Here it is necessary to find appropriate concepts that also enable participation in the discussions, such as taking time zones into account in the event times or inviting the experts from other continents, whenever necessary.

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