

Mutual learning exercise (MLE) on national practices in widening participation and strengthening synergies

Draft Modus operandi



MLE Widening participation and strengthening synergies: Modus Operandi

European Commission
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation

Directorate A Policy Development and Coordination
Unit A.4 — Analysis and monitoring of national research and innovation policies
Contact Marta Truco Calbet
E-mail marta.truco.calbet@ec.europa.eu

Directorate B Open Innovation and Open Science
Unit B.5 – Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation
Contact Dionysia Lagiou
E-mail dionysia.lagiou@ec.europa.eu

RTD-PUBLICATIONS@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

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1 Context

To support countries in reforming their research and innovation (R&I) systems, DG Research and Innovation has set up a 'Policy Support Facility' (PSF) under Horizon 2020, aimed at "improving the design, implementation and evaluation of R&I policies". The PSF provides best practice, leading expertise and guidance to Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (on a voluntary basis) through a broad range of services to address their specific needs.

In this way the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility replies to the strong need expressed by the Member States (i.e. ERAC consultations) to offer more customer-oriented services to support evidence-based policymaking.

There are three main services offered by the Horizon 2020 PSF to the Member States and Associated Countries:

- Peer reviews of national R&I systems which are in-depth assessments of a country's R&I system carried out by a panel of experts and leading to concrete recommendations to the national authorities on reforms necessary to strengthen their R&I system.
- Specific support to countries which can take form of 'pre peer review' (providing a solid evidence-base and focus areas for a subsequent full peer review), 'post peer review' (providing concrete advice on how to adjust and strengthen the implementation of peer review recommendations) and 'ad-hoc requests' (providing a set of concrete recommendations on how to tackle a specific issue R&I policy issue and how to implement the accompanying reforms).
- Mutual learning exercises which are demand-oriented, focused on specific R&I topics of interest to several volunteering countries, more hands-on, and translated into a project-based exchange of good practice.

2 BACKGROUND

Research and innovation are recognised as key drivers of economic growth and competitiveness. Within the European Union, however, there are still significant internal disparities in terms of research and innovation performance, despite the efforts deployed at national and European level. The slight pre-2008 convergence was slowed down due to the adverse effects of the financial crisis on public research and innovation budgets, and is almost at a stall since 2010.

Several independent studies point to some of the main reasons for the innovation divide such as lower level of R&D investment on a national level (particularly in relation to business sector R&D) or a less efficient research policy system at country-level that does not provide neither attractive environment for researchers and entrepreneurs nor sufficient linkages in innovation between the public and the private sectors.

The EU can play a significant role to help close the innovation divide through Horizon 2020 (H2020) and even more so through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), particularly in high fiscal consolidation countries. However, participation and performance in H2020 depends on reforms to be implemented by the Member States.

Widening Participation in Framework Programme (FP):

A strong participation in FP is the result of a strong national/regional R&I system but, at the same time, helps the EU countries to tap into their unexploited potential in research and innovation and step up their R&I performance. It is therefore understandable that

Member States are eager to see their participation maximised, and that excellence and research results are spread more widely across Europe.

While no single indicator can provide a complete picture of participation in EU FP, the low participation of a certain group of EU Member States and associated countries in terms of application success rate and the EU funding received, is a recurring pattern. This was already highlighted in FP7, and triggered a first in-depth analysis of its causes through a Commission study which was concluded in 2011.

Even if specific measures (ERA Chairs, Twinning, Teaming, Policy Support Facility) were on this basis introduced in part IV of the H2020 programme targeting the 'low R&I performing countries'² (so called 'Widening countries'), their budget is limited and they will display their positive impact mainly in the longer-term.

It is therefore important that each country, besides underpinning the necessary structural reforms, identifies specific bottlenecks that hinder a stronger and better participation in EU Framework Programmes and puts in place measures to increase the success of their participants (such as specific national strategies, dedicated budgets for participating in FPs, information and communication systems, etc...).

Strengthening Synergies:

Developing and putting in practice synergies between FP and the ESIF (which provide substantial funding for R&I under the current programming period 2014-2020) is a mechanism for stepping R&I performance by pulling together resources for the efficient implementation of R&I activities. While the development of synergies was already an increasing priority during the previous programming period 2007-2013, it has gained further strength in the current period 2014-2020, as both Horizon 2020 and the Common Provisions Regulation of ESIF include for the first time a legal mandate to maximise synergies (not only between these two instruments, but also with other programmes such as COSME, Erasmus+ and the Connecting Europe Facility).

Synergies between ESIF and Horizon 2020 programme are therefore strongly encouraged in order to maximise the impact of investment in R&I and ensure the efficient use of the available funding. Furthermore, the ecosystem synergies, at all levels (policy, instruments, cross sector), are similarly important. The synergy approach, aimed at coordinated investment in R&I in priority fields supporting competitiveness and growth, is considered crucial for the Widening countries, which often face an uncertain future of public financing for R&I and which receive a high share of ESIF. Strategic cooperation between the various public authorities responsible for the design of programmes is indispensable for this purpose.

To encourage and help the implementation of synergies, DG Regional Policy and DG Research and Innovation developed a guide in 2014 "Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes"³. DG Research and Innovation with support of DG Regional Policy has also published on paper and online a brochure with many real-world example of synergies, coming mostly from the previous programming

¹ *Commission analysis of September 2011, at the request of the Polish Presidency, see <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014728%202011%20INIT>*

² Member states and Associated countries whose composite research excellence indicator is below 70 % of the EU average. The detailed scores of the composite indicator can be found on p. 5 (Excellence in S&T 2010) of the "Research and Innovation Performance in EU Member States and Associated Countries 2013" at http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/state-of-the-union/2012/innovation_union_progress_at_country_level_2013.pdf

³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/synergy/synergies_en.pdf

period (2007-2013)⁴. However, many countries (and notably the Widening countries) lack experience in the implementation of ESIF and still have difficulties in implementing synergies in a smooth and efficient manner, as a whole set of obstacles hinder such implementation.

The study of the European Parliament "Research for REGI committee "Maximisation of synergies between ESIF and other EU instruments to attain Europe 2020 goals"⁵, conducted in 2016, identified some of the challenges in the implementation of synergies "on the ground". It points out that the scope for cumulative funding appears to be constrained. Even though it is allowed from a legal point of view (providing ESIF and H2020 do not cover the same cost items) the challenges remain as regards the development of joint project proposals, synchronisation between project application procedures, coordination of joint management, different funding rates and eligibility rules, among others. All of these challenges mean that it is easier to use successive projects that build on each other or parallel projects that complement each other than to combine H2020 and ESIF funds in the same project in order to increase impact and efficiency.

The study suggests that "it is crucial to monitor and evaluate what has been achieved, so as to identify potential best practices and successful lessons for the future". In addition to that, the recently published recommendations from the High Level Expert Group on monitoring simplification for beneficiaries of ESI post 2020 Funds emphasise that it is time to break down the "practical difficulties limiting synergies with Horizon 2020".

3 SCOPE AND PRIORITY TOPICS

The Horizon 2020 PSF MLE on "National Practices in Widening Participation and Strengthening Synergies" implements one of the conclusions of the Cab-DG meeting of 28 October 2016: "A dedicated PSF MLE on Widening is to be launched in 2017 aiming to improve the participation of Widening countries in Horizon 2020 by helping them design and implement targeted programmes that support the participation of national R&I stakeholders in Horizon 2020 projects with funding/advice/dedicated teams/ etc."

While the original concept of the MLE was focused exclusively on the 'Widening' aspects, it was later on extended to cover 'Synergies' as well, as a response to an initiative taken by several Member States, coordinated by Croatia and Slovenia. Indeed, on 14 February 2017, a request was submitted by a group of Member States to DG RTD with an application for a MLE on Synergies between H2020 and ESIF. Following contacts between those Member States and RTD, an agreement was reached to cover the 'Synergies' topic in the MLE addressing Widening.

The Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE) should help address the growing innovation divide within the European Union by widening participation to the EU Framework Programmes for research and innovation (FP) and by facilitating the implementation of synergies between Horizon 2020 (H2020) and the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

On 4 April 2017, a concept note was circulated to ERAC to explore countries' interest in the MLE on "National practices in widening participation and strengthening synergies".

16 countries (France, Denmark, Cyprus, Finland, Turkey, Sweden, Belgium, Croatia, Spain, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Hungary and Germany –as observer-) informed that they would take part in it. 10 out of these (Croatia, Belgium, Turkey,

⁴ <http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/eu-funds-working-together-for-jobs-growth-pbKI0116339/>

⁵ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/585872/IPOL_STU\(2016\)585872_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/585872/IPOL_STU(2016)585872_EN.pdf)

Finland, Cyprus, Denmark, Slovenia, Hungary and France) provided feedback to the Concept Note on the main challenges the MLE should address and their expectations.

Scope of the exercise:

On 30 May 2017, the Scoping Workshop took place with the participation of 15 countries. Member States agreed on the "*what's in*" in relation to the **scope of the exercise**:

- Exchanges of national practice at the operational level and learning by peers around concrete existing examples on how to widen participation in H2020 and on synergies.
- Successful (and unsuccessful) practice that improves participation in Horizon 2020, including by examining targeted programmes or actions that support potential participants.
- Successful (and unsuccessful) practice on how to make best use of the Structural Funds for R&I purposes, and maximise interaction with Horizon 2020.
- Discussions shall keep a clear focus on how to best exploit the possibilities provided under the current programming period.

Member States agreed as well on the "*what's out*" in relation to the **scope of the exercise**, and notably on the fact that the MLE is not designed and is not the adequate forum to discuss about changes in the set-up of existing or future EU instruments⁶.

Priority topics:

Member States also agreed on the following **priority topics** for the MLE:

- **In relation to Widening**, the MLE will look at national practice and measures to:
 - **Topic 1: Attract qualified R&D staff, including in the business sector.** Examples of schemes supported through national (including ESIF) and bilateral programmes could be shared, as well as analyses of their impact (in quantitative and qualitative terms) on reversing the brain drain and possibly attracting prominent international scientists to the low-performing R&I countries both in the public and private sector
 - **Topic 2: Encourage science-business cooperation. Examples of** specific measures and incentives for encouraging academia-business cooperation at national and EU level which can contribute to a better participation in FP could be shared and analysed.
 - **Topic 3: Improve networking through participation in various actions** (including through macro-regional initiatives) at EU level. The EU countries have different priorities, levels of participation and experience as regards COST, public-public partnership initiatives (ERA-NETs, JPIs, Art. 185 initiatives), infrastructure networks, etc. Examples of the impact of such participations on the visibility and the new partnerships established and consequently, on the participation and success rates in the FPs could be presented. The level of utilisation of major infrastructures by national and foreign researchers and the spill-over effects it creates could also be presented and analysed.

⁶ With the exception of any technical and practical issues that appear during the discussions as limiting the scope for operational actions around the topics addressed by the MLE, within the frame of existing programmes.

- **Topic 4: Support skills development, information, communication and training** as well as better management of ESIF funding). Experience could be shared on initiatives related to the development of skills in science administration and management of R&I projects, which are deemed crucial for the successful application for EU and other international projects. Countries could also exchange experience related to the operation of their NCPs (resources, range of tasks, visibility). Measures to enhance the institutional, organisational and strategic management capacities of countries to participate in multilateral research programmes and activities, including best practices related to Public Sector Innovation, could also be of interest.
- **In relation to Synergies**, the MLE will look at national practice, taking also into account the references made in the Communication "Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth" (COM(2017) 376) adopted on 19 July 2017, in relation to:
 - **Topic 5: How to enable an effective and structured dialogue** between national Managing Authorities of the Structural Funds and the Framework Programme R&D authorities ("breaking silos").
 - **Topic 6: Synergies at policy and strategy level:** S3, JPIs, JTI/JU's, macro-regional strategies, etc ...
 - **Topic 7: Synergies at operational level:** formulation and implementation of synergies on the ground, on their scope and limitations. Financial sources at the programming level of ESIF and FP (i.e. how to implement State aid rules and rules for participation, how to deal with differences as regards the cost models and eligibility of researchers' salaries payments, Interreg, Cofund, EIB, EFSI).

The proposed topics remain broad in nature. It was therefore decided that Member States would reflect on proposals for the specific priority topics that they wish the MLE to address under these broad topics.

As agreed, the second round of discussions to agree on the final priority topics for the MLE will take place at the Kick-Off meeting in October 2017.

4 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The MLE will facilitate the exchange of national practices at the operational level both in relation to how to best support national participation in EU Framework programmes and use ESIF and exploit synergies between both EU funds.

The final aim of this MLE is to support MS in designing, implementing and/or evaluating different policy instruments in relation to the sub topics identified under Section 3 on widening and synergies. The exercise will adopt a hands-on "*learning by doing*" approach supported by external expertise.

In addition to the tacit learning, there will be a final report written report drawing lessons for policy design/implementation/evaluation covering the different topics. The report will identify good practices, include a set of concrete operational recommendations, lessons learned and success factors based on robust evidence about the impacts of the measures and the contextual factors that may explain the impacts. It will contain a solid policy-oriented Executive Summary.

5 MEETINGS

The MLE will be structured around six meetings, plus one dissemination event:

| MLE Widening & Synergies Time schedule | | |
|--|---------------|---|
| 27 | October 2017 | Kick off meeting MLE with MS and independent experts |
| 14-15 (tbc) | December 2017 | First meeting in Brussels or Country Visit on 2 topics |
| 6-7 | February 2018 | Second meeting in Brussels or Country Visit on 2 topics |
| 22-23 | March 2018 | Third meeting in Brussels or Country Visit on 2 topics |
| 14-15 | May 2018 | Fourth meeting in Brussels or Country Visit on 1 topic |
| 27-28 | June | Final meeting |
| tbc | July | Dissemination event |

6 WORKING APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The MLE will follow the standard methodology for conducting Mutual Learning Exercises in the context of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility "Mutual Learning Exercise- a new methodology"⁷.

As a *Member State driven* and *policy challenge*-based activity the MLE will promote mutual learning between the participating countries.

The participating countries will get together to explore the best ways to tackle the identified policy challenges on widening participation and strengthening synergies, acknowledging a need of change in the design and/or implementation of policy instruments and wishing to learn from experiences in other countries.

It will take the form of a project-type of collaboration for a set period of time, in principle, up to 7 months, with defined resources and goals.

Each participating country is expected to gain tailored information and expertise from the process, and is also open to other participants to learn from their circumstances/experiences. Thus, the project is based on open, frank, and confidential knowledge exchange between the participating countries. All participating countries are expected to participate actively, in a forthright manner, and to collect and synthesise the necessary empirical evidence in a timely manner and provide friendly peer support for mutual learning. The specific knowledge interests around the identified policy challenges may vary to some extent between the participating MS, but they are sufficiently close in order that the process can benefit all participants and that learning is mutual. This process is called *peer-supported learning*.

⁷ Mutual Learning Exercises in the context of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility "Mutual Learning Exercise- a new methodology, Terttu Luukkonen, DG RTD

7 DISTRIBUTION OF WORK

MLE on National practices in Widening Participation and Strengthening Synergies require:

- Participating countries: 15 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, France, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain Turkey, and Germany –as observer-) have confirmed their interest to actively participate in the MLE (Denmark who participated in the Scoping Workshop informed Commission services that would not continue in the MLE). Participating countries will appoint as their participant a sufficiently high-level person with experience and knowledge on the policy challenge, providing resources -in terms of labour- to contribute, provide data and information as the process require, allotting time to attend meetings and potential country visits, among others.
- Independent Experts: The MLE will be supported by 4 independent experts: Gonzalo León (Chair, selected by the Commission), Ken Guy (Rapporteur), Claire Nauwelaers (expert on "widening"), Lena Tsipouri (expert on "synergies") and Helena Acheson (expert on research and innovation policies in Ireland).
- Commission services. The Directorate General for Research & Innovation will actively support the work of this MLE. The Policy Support Facility Team within Unit A4 – 'Analysis and monitoring of national research policies', closely cooperates with Unit B5 – 'Spreading Excellence and Widening participation'. The contacts are Marta Truco from Unit A4 and Dionysia Lagiou from Unit B5.
- Project Manager: The PSF contractor will provide full support to the Chair and the Rapporteur, and notably be in charge of the operational and logistic tasks in relation to the organisation of meetings, country visits and overall development of the MLE. The Project Manager, Viola Peters, will make sure that all official and working (non-confidential) documents will be prepared for upload on the RIO/PSF website.

8 TASKS OF THE INDEPENDENT EXPERTS

- Chair: Gonzalo León, the Chair of the MLE will steer the MLE ensuring focus and incentivizing engagement and ownership of participating countries, providing guidance at all stages, identifying information needs and planning (together with participating countries) the activities according to the policy challenges addressed.
- Rapporteur: Ken Guy will assist the Chair and the Commission in providing support to the MLE. With a strong proactive support from the project manager he will carry out the following tasks:
 - Coordination and organisation:
 - Support the Chair in the preparation of the MLE meetings, country visits and activities;
 - Support the Chair in keeping track on MLE progress and help to solve potential content specific problems encountered;
 - In close interaction with the representatives of each participating country help them to provide their contribution and identify information needs.
 - Interact with experts and ensure that they will timely prepare appropriate material and provide support throughout the process as envisaged.
 - Moderate dedicated parts of the workshops/country visits/meetings; identify suitable discussants for his/her session of the workshop/meeting and brief them to ensure a constructive debate.

- Help identifying relevant stakeholders and discussants which may participate in the process.
- Writing together with the Chair agendas and preparing presentations.
- Reporting:
 - Report of the "Modus Operandi" on the basis of the agreements reached at the Kick off meeting;
 - Provide all support needed to participating countries, Chair and experts and take an active part for an effective mutual learning (preparing and analysing surveys to participant countries, presentations, moderation of debates, etc.).
 - Actively contribute and provide input to the challenge papers and thematic reports of the other Experts.
 - Draft and final Report on MLE Widening participation and strengthening synergies with contributions of the Experts and participating countries with identified good practices, lessons learned and success factors based on robust evidence about the impacts of the measures.
 - Prepare qualitative and quantitative information needed throughout the process.
- Expert on Widening: Claire Nauwelaers will assist the Chair, the Rapporteur and the Commission in providing support to the MLE by carrying out the following tasks:
 - Provide all support needed to participating countries, Chair and Rapporteur and take an active part for an effective mutual learning on the four topics on "Widening Participation" (preparing and analysing surveys to participant countries, presentations, moderation of debates, etc.).
 - Provide or contribute to the Challenge Papers and Topic Reports where the "Widening topics" will be addressed, with the contributions from participating countries, the rapporteur and the expert on Synergies. The Challenge Paper will identify the main policy challenge. The Topic Report will identify policy messages, good practices and lessons learnt.
 - Actively contribute and provide input to the draft and final Report on "Widening participation and strengthening synergies".
- Expert on Synergies: Lena Tsipouri will assist the Chair, the Rapporteur and the Commission in providing support to the MLE by carrying out the following tasks:
 - Provide all support needed to participating countries, Chair and Rapporteur and take an active part for an effective mutual learning on the three topics on "Synergies" (preparing and analysing surveys to participant countries, presentations, moderation of debates, etc.).
 - Provide or contribute to the Challenge Papers and Topic Reports where the "Synergies topics" will be addressed, with the contributions from participating countries, the rapporteur and the expert on Widening. The Challenge Paper will identify the main policy challenge. The Topic Report will identify policy messages, good practices and lessons learnt.
 - Actively contribute and provide input to the draft and final Report on "Widening participation and strengthening synergies".

- Expert on Ireland: Helena Acheson will contribute to the work of the group by bringing in the experience of IE in developing a research and innovation policy and instruments in support of a knowledge base economy. She will assist the Chair, the Rapporteur and the other experts in providing support to the MLE by carrying out the following tasks:
 - Actively contribute in all discussions where the Irish experience can bring added value and interact with representatives of the countries to encourage mutual learning.
 - Actively contribute and provide input to the challenge reports, topic reports and Final report on the Irish case.
 - Support the Chair, rapporteur and project manager in the organisation of a country visit in IE.

9 MEETINGS: INPUTS AND DELIVERABLES

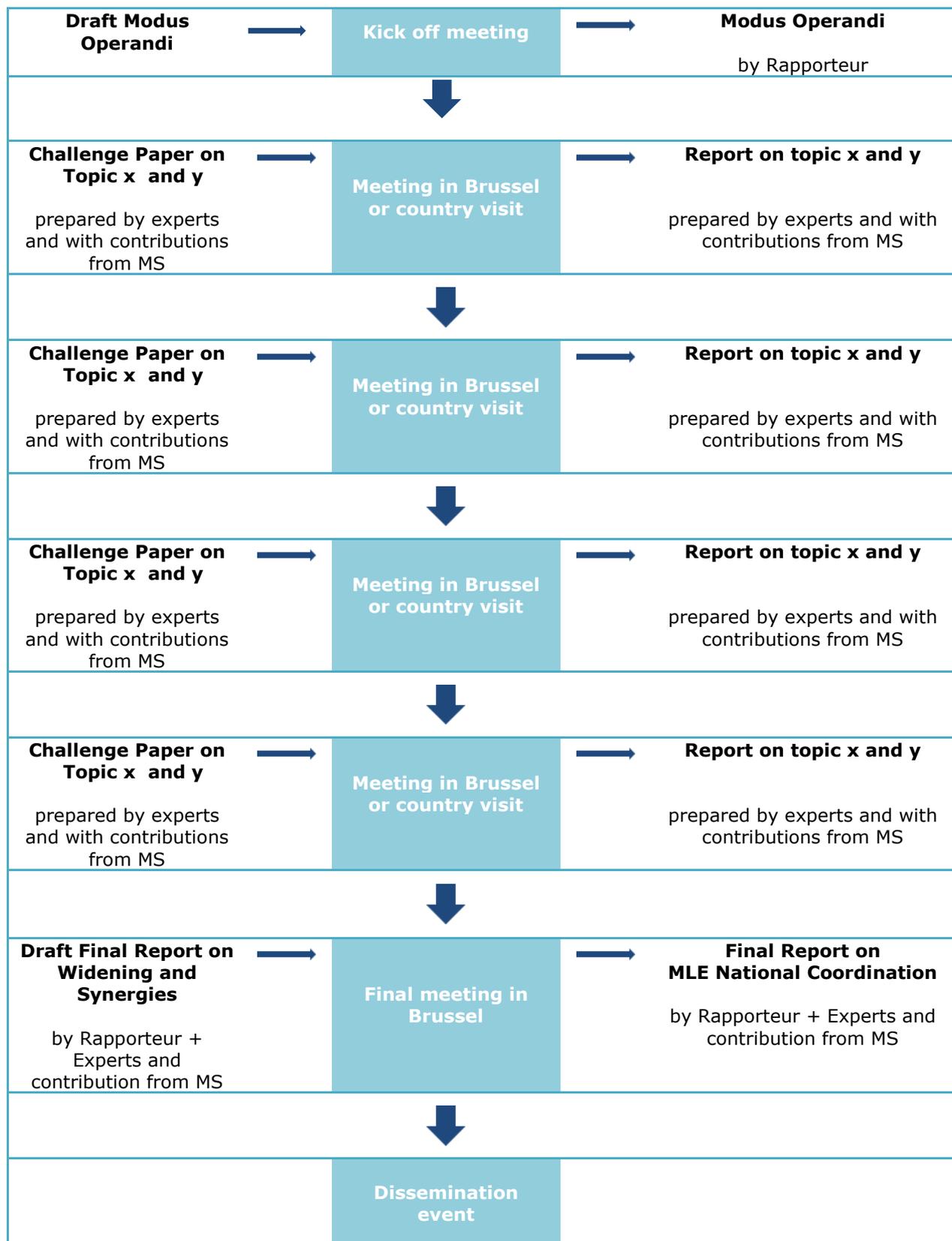
The timetable in the last column is indicative and will need to be agreed at the kick off meeting.

Table 1 Overview of meetings

| Meetings | Date |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <p>Kick off meeting (Brussels)</p> <p>Each MS will provide additional inputs on main challenges / topics to be addressed. The EC will present a preliminary roadmap.</p> <p>Input: Draft MLE Modus Operandi</p> <p>Deliverables: Agreement on Modus Operandi (final agreement on the scope and topics roadmap, workplan, expected outcomes, country visits, stakeholder's involvement and distribution of tasks).</p> | <p>27 October 2017</p> |
| <p>1st meeting in Brussels or Country Visit</p> <p>The Experts on the basis of MS contributions, will present a Challenge Paper on topics x and x. Good practices will be presented by participating countries with specific emphasis on the host country if the meeting is a Country Visit. Experts and participating countries discuss their experiences on the specific topics.</p> <p>Input: Challenge Paper on topics x and y</p> <p>Deliverable: Report on topics x and y (overall challenge, lessons learnt, good practices and policy suggestions)</p> | <p>14-15 December 2017 (tbc)</p> |
| <p>2nd meeting in Brussels or Country Visit</p> <p>The Experts on the basis of MS contributions, will present a Challenge Paper on topics x and x. Good practices will be presented by participating countries with specific emphasis on the host country if the meeting is a Country Visit. Experts and participating countries discuss their experiences on the specific topics.</p> <p>Input: Challenge Paper on topics x and y</p> <p>Deliverable: Report on topics x and y (overall challenge, lessons learnt, good practices and policy suggestions)</p> | <p>6-7 February 2018</p> |
| <p>3rd meeting in Brussels or Country Visit</p> <p>The Experts on the basis of MS contributions, will present a Challenge Paper on topics x and x. Good practices will be presented by participating countries with specific emphasis on the host country if the meeting is a Country Visit. Experts and participating countries discuss their experiences on the specific topics.</p> <p>Input: Challenge Paper on topics x and y</p> <p>Deliverable: Report on topics x and y (overall challenge, lessons learnt, good practices and policy suggestions) .</p> | <p>22-23 March 2018</p> |
| <p>4nd meeting in Brussels or Country Visit</p> <p>The Experts on the basis of MS contributions, will present a Challenge Paper on topics x and x. Good practices will be presented by participating countries with specific emphasis on the host country if the meeting is a Country Visit. Experts and participating countries discuss their experiences on the specific topics.</p> <p>Input: Challenge Paper on topics x and y</p> <p>Deliverable: Report on topics x and y (overall challenge, lessons learnt, good practices and policy suggestions)</p> | <p>14-15 May 2018</p> |

| Meetings | Date |
|---|-----------------|
| <p>Final meeting (Brussels)</p> <p>The Rapporteur will present the draft final report of the MLE and discuss it with participating countries and other experts to agree on the final findings, experiences, conclusions or recommended policy suggestions.</p> <p>Input: Draft Report on MLE "Widening Participatoin and Strengthening Synergies".</p> <p>Deliverable: Final Report MLE on National Practices in Widening Participation and Strenthening Synergies</p> | 27-28 June 2018 |
| <p>Dissemination workshop:</p> <p>The results of the MLE will be presented to a wider audience. It will also highlight possible follow-up initiatives of the MLE.</p> | TBD |

10 FLOW OF MEETINGS AND REPORTS



11 STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PROCESS

The MLE participants will consider the ad hoc involvement of stakeholders to provide additional expertise which may contribute to the learning and purpose of this MLE. The format (workshop, specific session, etc...) timing and level of involvement will be discussed and agreed at the kick-off meeting.

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[Summary about 10 lines]

Studies and reports