



COST Action CA19104

“advancing Social inclusion through Technology and  
EmPowerment”

Communication Strategy



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[http://underground4value.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ACA18110\\_communication\\_final.pdf](http://underground4value.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ACA18110_communication_final.pdf)

## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Action Description</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Action Implementation</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Scope of Work and Objectives</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>5. Targeted Groups</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>6. Action Visual Identity</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>7. Communication Strategy</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>8. Communication Plan</b> .....	<b>11</b>
8.1. <b>Internal Communication</b> .....	<b>11</b>
8.2. <b>External Communication</b> .....	<b>11</b>
8.3. <b>Online Communication</b> .....	<b>14</b>
8.4. <b>Social Media</b> .....	<b>15</b>
8.5. <b>Flyer</b> .....	<b>15</b>
8.6. <b>Newsletter</b> .....	<b>15</b>
8.7. <b>Media</b> .....	<b>16</b>
8.8. <b>Conferences and Events</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>9. Monitoring</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>10. Risks and Mitigation Measures</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>11. Role of the Partners</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>12. Data Processing</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>13. Contacts</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Annex 1</b>	

## 1. Introduction

This document describes the dissemination and communication strategy for the COST Action "a-STEP". The strategy also defines the dissemination strategy's target groups and outlines important dates for planned actions and events. It contains the main strategic and operational guidance that will manage the general Action dissemination and communication activities. These guidelines will ensure that relevant information is shared in the most effective ways, in a timely manner, and with appropriate audiences. The dissemination activities will be continuously monitored during the Action. The communication activities' primary objective is to raise awareness about the Action activities, disseminate information consistently and coherently about its results, and maximize its impacts. It will establish criteria for the dissemination strategy. Additionally, this document is a guideline for all relevant stakeholders to develop their dissemination plans within their local context. This is a "live document" that will be updated during the Action period.

## 2. Action Description

A-STEP aims to build an interdisciplinary, intersectoral pan EU and beyond network which will work to enhance social inclusion and empowerment of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or Intellectual Disability (ID) and their families.

This aim will be achieved by;

- Evaluating (E) and accelerating the development of novel, easy-to-use assistive technology (AT) for enhancing social inclusion by fostering/providing an interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration between users, researchers, scientists, developers, practitioners, using a translational approach and establishing standardized frameworks and practice guidelines for design, development, and deployment of AT. This will be achieved by synthesizing

challenges and innovative practices across the entire network, including partners from high- and low-income countries.

- Identifying gaps in and creating (C) knowledge by initiating a study that will provide a database of current AT technologies and their match to employment and educational contexts for users with ASD and/or ID. This will be generated via an interdisciplinary context seeking to include a range of voices and perspectives; ensure that users are placed central to the collaboration network.
- Promoting (P) the adoption of evidence-based practices and guidelines concerning the use of AT across settings and populations (e.g., less vs. more severe disabilities) and propagating the use of inclusive design and rigorous research approach. Additionally, fostering and adapting solutions that are feasible in both high- and low-income countries.

### 3. Action Implementation

The Action is carried out by a high-quality network of different actors from thirty-two (32) different countries, led by the COST Action Chair Dr Geraldine Leader from the National University of Ireland Galway. Dr Leader is also the director of the Irish Centre for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Research and an Institute for Lifecourse and Society member.

The Action is carried out through six working groups (WG). WG1 is aimed to; ensure the interdisciplinary collaboration within the network to enhance and exchange knowledge and expertise; enlarge network during the Action and build collaborations with external experts; proactively involve ECIs, ITCs, under-represented gender, etc.; foster collaboration between research and industry to create an interdisciplinary and translational approach for the achievement of improved outcomes in education and employment and explore and promote subsequent funding possibilities based on the Action's content.

WG2 is aimed to; identify and evaluate existing A T including, but limited to, computer AT, virtual reality technologies, wearable technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, and apps for enhancing the social inclusion of individuals with ASD and/or ID; achieve a better understanding of AT abandonment issues to inform the development of practice guidelines; gain a better understanding of the factors impacting the use of AT within the ASD and/or ID community across cultures, populations, and contexts; and facilitate the acceleration of the knowledge translation from research to practice.

WG3 is aimed to; establish a new framework of guidelines to promote best practices of AT applications within the education and employment contexts; create a joint roadmap with the inclusion of users, research, industry, and policy in the design, development and deployment of AT; develop AT practice guidelines with considerations of ethical, regulatory, and policy issues; facilitate the development of new assessment methods of matching between the person and AT and create an online AT toolkit that will support benchmarking for policymakers to enable them in providing

advice to feed up and down into service provision.

WG4 aimed to; provide access to resources to enable users, caregivers, and practitioners in making informed choices leading to appropriate uptake of AT; provide an open space for communication and ideas exchange among the proposers/partners within the network and beyond to encourage transfer and exploitation of new insights; promote a range of AT applications (including, but limited to, computer AT, virtual reality technologies, wearable technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, and apps) with a particular focus on users and those who interact with them (e.g., caregivers, service providers).

WG5 is aimed to; promote the use of AT and facilitate the adoption of best practices for enhancing social inclusion; foster joint dissemination of knowledge and experience resulting from this network, and provide education and training opportunities for the a-STEP network.

WG6 is aimed to establish sound management, governance, and quality assurance procedures.

#### 4. Scope of Work and Objectives

This document describes an overall communication strategy and specific activities dedicated to communicating the COST Action a-STEP. The Communication and Dissemination Strategy aims to address activities and communications that will:

- Inform and engage the relevant stakeholders in Europe and beyond,
- Raise awareness around the Action and its communication activities, objectives, and impact,
- Reach the widest dissemination of the Action outcomes among policymakers, experts, industry, academics, service providers, people with disabilities, and the general public.

This activity's content includes all the relevant tasks that will allow the accomplishment of the highest level of dissemination of the Action objectives, actions, and results. This activity will continue throughout the Action.

The specific activities suggested are:

- communicating with the stakeholders and dissemination of the Action results,
- updating the Action's website continuously,
- developing and distributing informative material (newsletters, flyers, posters, etc.).
- Publication of papers in national and international scientific and technical journals and conference proceedings,
- Social media deployment,
- Organizing and participating in workshops, conferences, and other events.

The objectives of the Communication and Dissemination Strategy are to:

- Identify target groups, communication tools, and distribution channels to disseminate the Action and communication activities.
- Establish an identity to the Action through graphically coherent materials.

- Plan how the information gained in the Action will be shared, i.e., to which target groups each activity and results are relevant and how adequate channels will be shared to address them.
- Define the period and the responsible partner for the implementation of dissemination and communication activities.
- Engage with a broad audience through the internet, promotional materials, and events.

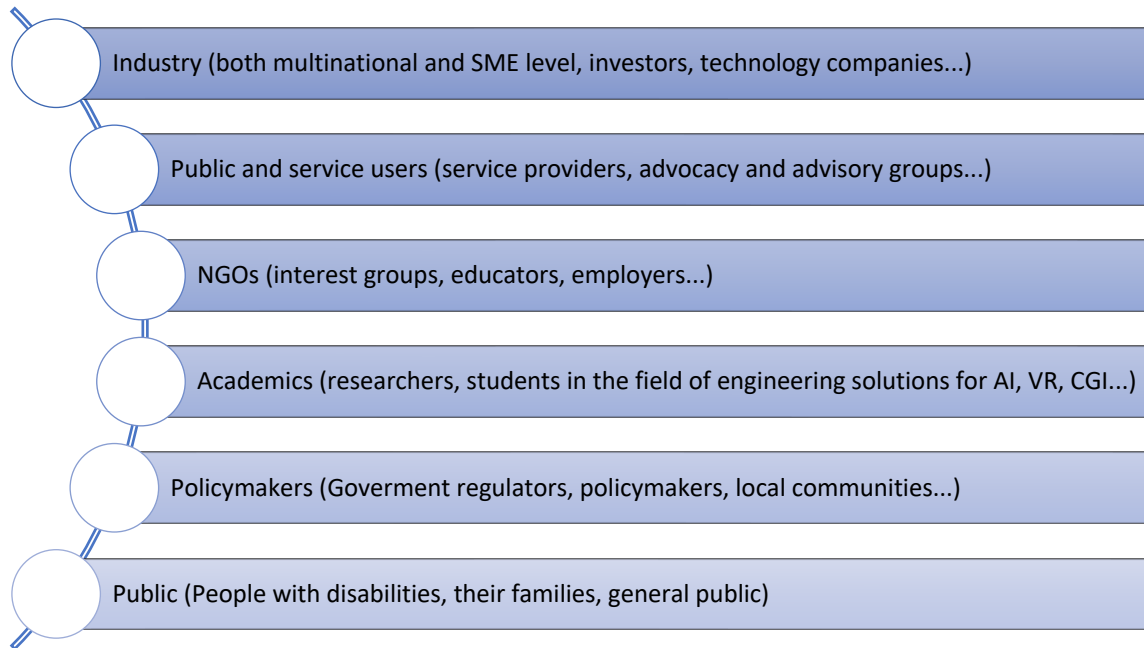
The Science Communication Manager (SCM), Dr Zeynep Sahin Timar from Turkey, will be in charge of developing, maintaining, and managing the Communication Strategy of a-STEP. Key responsibilities of the SCM are to:

- Plan and coordinate the implementation of communication activities at the Action level.
- Set the tone for internal and external communications.
- Maintain records of communication activities.
- Be the central point of contact with the COST Association for communication activities only.
- Provide information to interested partners and other stakeholders in a convenient format.

## 5. Targeted Groups

The main stakeholders of the Action are as follows:





The Action's communication activities will target the groups above, with the primary purpose of giving support to dissemination activities by:

- Raising the level of awareness about the importance of AT in the social inclusion of individuals with ASD and/or ID.
- Promoting the interest in adopting AT across settings and populations to enhance social inclusion and empowerment of individuals with ASD and/or ID,
- Engaging with the stakeholders during conferences, workshops, training schools, and other targeted events,
- Sharing the results and outcome of the Action.

## 6. Action Visual Identity

The Action logo will be used with the COST logo. All dissemination materials will be prepared according to the Action's visual identity to ensure sufficient "branding" of the Action. The design of the Action website will also represent the Action's identity. To increase the action's visibility, logos will be used in all public documents, publications, etc. Participants will be provided with useful working tools to be used and adopted with the Action implementation, such as:

- Template for PowerPoint presentations
- Template for Word documents
- Template for posters, programs, banners
- Template for Zoom

## 7. Communication Strategy

This document is designed to support the Action's overall and specific communication and visibility goals. Specifically, it seeks to detail the structure and objectives of the two basic levels of the Action's communication strategy:

- Internal communication
- External communication

The strategy identifies approaches and tools to keep the stakeholders regularly informed and ensure the Action's visibility. On visibility, the strategy contains the requirements to be undertaken by all implementing members of the COST Action and suggests activities that may be incorporated to build a strong communication and visibility plan. Communication objectives are the following:

- Ensuring effective communication between groups,
- Providing timely notifications for requirements/meetings,
- Ensuring optimum results for all communications and Action expectations,
- Measuring the results of the communication strategy implementation and revising accordingly,
- To maximize the impact of communication efforts:
  - Activities need to be timely,
  - Information used must be accurate,
  - Messages should interest the target audience(s),
  - Activities should be appropriate in terms of resources (human and financial),

- Effective communication is critical to the successful implementation of the Action to ensure that the Action results are disseminated to the broadest possible audience,
- Communication activities will, when appropriate, be implemented in partnership relations with other relevant/similar programs or initiatives.

## 8. Communication Plan

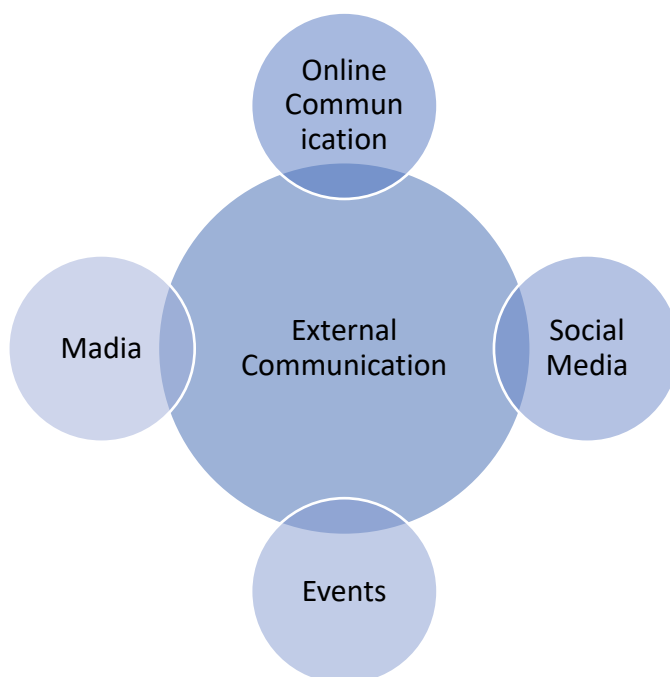
### 8.1. Internal Communication

The Action aims to be transparent to the Action's participants and the stakeholders. Action's back-office tool (Trello) will be used for internal communication throughout the Action. These online collaboration environments enable storing, organizing, and sharing information accessible from almost all devices. Only Action members using a password that will be provided to them will use it.

Zoom will also be used as a complementing tool to Trello for communication among the Action partners.

### 8.2. External Communication

The external communication and dissemination activities will be implemented using different approaches to diversify and maximize the outreach to the target groups and all the stakeholders accordingly. They include:



The table below summarizes the different channels, methods, tools, and materials, which will be used during the Action.

Target Group	Channel	Tools
MC and Members	Online Communication- Internal Communication	Trello, E-mail Groups
	Online Communication- Action web site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated pages for researchers and ECI (MoU)</li> <li>• Dedicated non-specialist pages</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>
All Stakeholders and Public	Online Communication- Partners' website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to the Action website</li> <li>• News about the Action</li> </ul>
	Online Communication- Partners' newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News about the Action</li> <li>• Links to the Action website</li> </ul>

	Media- newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Newsletter in every six months</li> </ul>
	Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 public awareness events (MoU)</li> <li>• Posters (MoU)</li> <li>• Host 4 conferences supported by podcasts and webinars (MoU)</li> </ul>
All Stakeholders	Events- Workshops, conferences, training schools, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of a Delphi study (MoU)</li> <li>• Organization of Training Schools, STSMs (MoU)</li> <li>• Organizing specific panels and user-testing events (MoU)</li> <li>• Presentation of action activities, posters, flyer dissemination, guidelines, etc.</li> </ul>
	Scientific Publications- Journals, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 4 articles and book chapters (MoU)</li> <li>• Special issue in Journal of Enabling Technologies (MoU)</li> </ul>
The network of Action Members	Social Media- Twitter, LinkedIn Facebook	Dedicated Cost Action accounts, members' posts using agreed hashtags

### 8.3. Online Communication

Online communication includes all channels through which target groups and stakeholders can reach the project over the internet. This will be done via the project website. The Science Communication Manager will monitor the results based on the Action member and the Core Group's information. Moreover, the website will be constantly updated with news about the Action activities, such as STMS and training schools, and announcements will be made on the website a few weeks before these events. The newsletter and press releases will be distributed to the members/action participants' communication networks via the project website. Press releases will be prepared by the Science Communication team in collaboration with the Core Group members. The Newsletter Editor will prepare the news bulletins with the contributions of other members.

#### **Action's web site**

For COST Action, a professional and user-friendly website will be developed to make the project results publicly available, provide easy access from all over the world, and work as a powerful dissemination tool for all stakeholder groups. The website will be linked to the e-COST, future database, and back-office environment (Trello). The website will provide information on project results, project activities, and other topics related to events. The website will be regularly updated. The website's focus will be on providing relevant information to relevant stakeholders, including information for different working groups. The website will include the COST features, the COST logo, the EU emblem, and accompanying text outlined in the program's Dissemination Guidelines.

#### **Newsletters**

The newsletter and press releases will be distributed to the members/action participants' communication networks via the project website and via mailshots. Press releases will be prepared by the Science Communication team in collaboration with

the Core Group members. The Newsletter Editor will prepare the news bulletins with the contributions of other members.

#### 8.4. Social Media

It is aimed to interact with target groups related to the Action by providing timely and up-to-date information on Action activities through social networks. All content to be uploaded to the action's website will also be shared with the action's social media accounts. Thus, it aims to expand the Action's scope and increase the action's visibility by improving the Google search ranking.

Action members will use their corporate social media accounts (LinkedIn and Twitter) to distribute the news regularly.

SCM will manage the social media accounts of the action.

News about the action will be posted by tagging related hashtags such as # CA19104 and associated accounts such as @COSTprogramme.

#### 8.5. Flyer

The texts will be short and straightforward in the informative flyers, and photographs will be used where possible to explain the action and its context. All materials produced in paper form will also be available electronically to be sent by e-mail. Informative flyers will contain general information about the Action, the working groups, and the activities' topics and will include information on how to participate in the action. The flyer will be distributed mainly in electronic format. A poster explaining the Action will also be arranged so that the flyer design is consistent.

#### 8.6. Newsletter

A newsletter will be published every six months to report on Project activities, raise awareness of the issues addressed, and raise awareness about the Action and the network.

The first newsletter will be published in April 2021.

## 8.7. Media

Both stakeholders and the public can be reached through the media. Links to articles published by Network members on the Action in both local and European journals will be available in the Action newsletter and on the Action's Web site.

## 8.8. Conferences and Events

To ensure the highest level of disclosure of the Action results and encourage stakeholder participation, members of the Action will present the a-STEP at key conferences and workshops in collaboration with WG leaders and the Head of Action. The table below has been created to describe and list upcoming events. The list will also serve as a reference for an ITC Conference Grant request for PhD students or Early Career Researcher (ECR) from an institution in an ITC country participating in the action. This list will be updated continuously with new events. The list of upcoming conferences and events will be shared with Action participants as a separate document to facilitate this process.

Title	Date	Location	Action Member

## 9. Monitoring

Communication can be defined as "effective and efficient" when it reaches its goal and meets it correctly. SCM will follow the indicators set out below to measure the tools' effectiveness in this Plan and determine whether the Communication Plan has been effectively implemented.

- The appearance of the logo in all material and dissemination activities created within the scope of the Action



- The number of visits to Action’s website.
- Amount appearances in media (e.g., articles published in press/online, interviews, etc.).
- The number of events attended by network members relevant to the Action.
- The number of newsletters and flyers disseminated.
- The number of recipients/subscribers of the Action’s Newsletter.
- The number of conferences and workshops organized.
- The number of followers on the Action’s Twitter account.
- Number of Tweets on the Action’s Twitter account and re-tweets.
- The number of members on the Action’s LinkedIn account.
- The number of members on the Action’s Facebook account
- The number of presentations of the Action at conferences or events (presentation, poster, paper).
- The number of scientific publications.

The table below suggests the indicators to be used for monitoring the activities undertaken for communication purposes, and it will be updated on an annual basis by the SCM.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>Indicators</b> (in numbers)	<b>(14.10.2020 – 13.10.2021)</b>	<b>(14.10.2021 – 13.10.2022)</b>	<b>(14.10.2022 – 13.10.2023)</b>	<b>(14.10.2023 – 13.10.2024)</b>
Logo				
Action’s website visitor numbers				
Appearances in media				
Events attended by network members relevant to the Action				
Newsletters and flyers disseminated				

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Recipients/subscribers  
of the Action's  
Newsletter

Conferences and  
workshops organized

Followers on the  
Action's Twitter  
account

Tweets on the  
Action's Twitter  
account and re-tweets

Members of the  
Action's LinkedIn  
account

Members of the  
Action's Facebook  
account

presentations of the  
Action at conferences  
or events

Scientific publications

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The SCM developed a spreadsheet (Annex 1) to document all the dissemination activities carried out during the Action and monitor them using different metrics. The spreadsheet will be available in the back-office environment (Trello) and can be edited by all partners at any time. The SCM will remind the members to update it, particularly before reporting and MC meetings. The file is divided into the following sections:

- Publications
- Events
- Website references
- References in social media
- Mailshots (i.e., newsletters or informational material sent, etc.).

## 10. Risks and Mitigation Measures

Both internal and external factors can influence the implementation of the communication plan. The possible risks and the mitigation measures for them are as follow:

Possible risks	Risk-mitigation measures
Low level of engagement/disengagement of the Action members	Engage frequently with all Action members to get regular updates.
Low level of awareness of target groups about the activities of a-STEP	Regular updating of the activities related to the action in the existing Communication Channels (Action Website and Social Media Platforms)
Lack of structure in the communication activities	Set up regular editorial meetings with the Core Group members to define the communication activities' content and schedule.
Noncompliance to the agreed templates and/ or formats of documents, reports, etc.	Agreed templates and/or formats will be made available to everyone. The Science Communications Manager will monitor throughout the Action and intervene to take corrective action as needed.
Insufficient efforts of the partners to publicize the Action and its results at the national / European level	The Science Communications Manager will monitor the effort at regular intervals to prevent or correct such incidents and discuss progress during MC meetings with the Core Group and President/Vice President.
Lack of interest of stakeholders on the Action	Efforts will be made during the Action through meetings, workshops, etc., to engage and interact with stakeholders to prevent or correct such incidences.
Low quality of printed or other material delivered by a sub-contractor	In this case, the Science Communications Manager will ask the subcontractors to replace the products free of charge according to the initial instructions.

## 11. Role of the Partners

In close cooperation with the Chair of the COST Action, the SCM will be responsible for the Action dissemination and communication plan, guarantee consistency in the messages delivered, and ensure all the targets are successfully reached. All Action partners will contribute to implementing the stakeholder and public engagement strategy and play a key role in networking with stakeholders.

Specifically, the Action participants will themselves be responsible for:

- Creating bridges between the Action and the national/local networks they are involved in,
- Providing input to the content of the Action website, communication materials, and media channels; o Translating relevant action documents to national languages,
- Disseminating the activities and results of the Action through to own social media channels,
- Disseminating the activities and results of the Action at events/fairs where they participate.

## 12. Data Processing

Data from the Action website usage, social media, dissemination, and networking activities will be electronically stored. Action members will also directly provide information about specific companies, contact people, etc., from the Action's target groups of interest. No personal information beyond name, corporate email address, and the company address and telephone will be stored. The network and the COST Association officers will have access to this information. No use of this information unrelated to the Action will be made. The dissemination will take a position of 'in principle' to offer open access to all Action tools and publications and accept the demand of aggregation from other initiatives (where feasible with initiatives that are already up and running). Third parties can use any public data published on the

website. Network members only, with a password provided by the Action Chair, on the other hand, can use the back office environment (Trello).

## 13. Contacts

### Action Chair

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Type of reference	Website	Network member	Notes
1			
2			
3			

Type of mailshot (e.g. newsletter, press release)	Date	Target audience	Network member	Number of recipients	Notes
1					
2					
3					