

**WG1 Dynamic Exchange
D1.1 Plan on Activities Report
Establishing the a-STEP Network and Mentorship Schemes
COST Action CA19104
2020-2021**

Executive Summary

This report outlines the establishment of the a-STEP network and mentorship schemes during the first year of the Action. The network successfully brought together participants from diverse backgrounds across 27 countries, including 14 ITCs, with a strong focus on inclusivity and support for Early Career Investigators (ECIs).

1. Network Establishment

1.1 Network Composition

Based on survey and progress report data, the network achieved broad representation across stakeholder groups:

- Academic/Research: 32 research institutions
- Service Providers: Multiple providers across countries
- Industry Partners: 6 industry representatives
- NGOs: 17 organizations
- Policymakers: 3 representatives
- Early Career Investigators: 17 ECIs

1.2 Geographical Distribution

- Total countries represented: 27
- ITC participation: 55% of members
- Gender distribution: 62% female representation
- ECI participation: 30% of MC members

1.3 Expertise Areas

The network brought together experts in:

- Assistive Technology development and implementation
- Psychology and developmental disorders
- Special education
- Health sciences
- Rehabilitation
- Social inclusion research



- Policy development

2. Mentorship Scheme Implementation

2.1 Mentorship Needs Assessment

Based on the survey results, key areas identified for mentorship include:

- Research Design (identified by 65% of ECIs)
- Writing funding proposals
- Systematic Reviews
- Participatory Methods
- Quantitative and Qualitative Methods
- Inclusive Design
- Technological Skills

2.2 Mentorship Structure

The following mentorship activities were established:

1. One-to-one mentoring partnerships
2. Group mentoring sessions
3. Skill-specific workshops
4. Research collaboration opportunities
5. Training schools focused on identified needs

2.3 Support for ITC Participants

Special provisions for ITC participants include:

- Priority access to STSMs
- Dedicated mentorship matching
- Additional support for conference participation
- Targeted training opportunities

3. Implementation Timeline

Phase 1: Network Building (Months 1-4)

- Initial participant recruitment
- Working Group formation
- Communication platform establishment

Phase 2: Mentorship Program Development (Months 4-8)

- Mentorship needs survey
- Mentor-mentee matching
- Program structure development

Phase 3: Program Launch and Monitoring (Months 8-12)

- Mentorship program initiation



- Regular check-ins and support
- Progress monitoring and adjustment

4. Key Performance Indicators

- Network diversity metrics achieved:
 - 55% ITC participation
 - 62% female representation
 - 30% ECI participation
- Mentorship program engagement:
 - Number of mentor-mentee pairs established
 - Training sessions conducted
 - STSMs facilitated

5. Future Recommendations

1. Increase industry participation
2. Expand mentorship opportunities in technological skills
3. Enhance support for cross-border collaborations
4. Develop additional training programs based on identified needs
5. Strengthen links between academic and practical applications

6. Conclusion

The first year of the a-STEP network successfully established a diverse and inclusive community of researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders. The mentorship scheme has been structured to support ECIs and ITC participants while fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across the network.