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WORKING PAPER

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WORKING DOCUMENT

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	Informal videoconference of ERAC (3-4/06) - Item 3.4 Horizon Policy Support Facility - Mutual Learning Exercise on Citizens' science

Dear ERAC delegates,

Please find enclosed the document from the European Commission on above mentioned subject, with a view to the ERAC videoconference on Thursday 3 June (agenda item 3.4).

Best regards,

ERAC Secretariat



Note to ERAC Delegates

**Proposal for a Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE)
on "Upscaling citizen science actions across the European Research Area"**

under

Horizon Policy Support Facility

PSF Challenge

Date: 31-05-21

Research and
Innovation

A. Aim

This concept note aims at:

1. Asking ERAC delegates of countries willing to participate to nominate a national representative for the proposed MLE.
2. Asking the countries willing to participate to identify priority topics they wish to address in this MLE and to describe their expectations.

ERAC delegates from the countries willing to participate are kindly asked to provide their feedback (via Annex I) by 21 June 2021.

The results of the questionnaire will be used to define the priority topics to be addressed within the scope of the MLE. The MLE will run from Autumn 2021 to Spring 2022.

B. Horizon Policy Support Facility (PSF)

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

Mutual Learning Exercises, now organised within the *PSF Challenge* service, are one of the type of activities offered by the PSF to the Member States and Associated Countries. Their aim is to facilitate the flow of information, experiences and lessons learned, as well as the identification of good/ bad practice and success factors, around a specific R&I topic of interest to several countries.

C. Proposed scope of the MLE: Upscaling citizen science actions across Member States

An increasing number of citizen science projects and initiatives are being implemented across Europe – mostly taking place at local or national levels, but some also being co-ordinated internationally. This rapidly emerging mode of research and innovation shows substantial potential in terms of boosting citizen engagement and trust in science by the public, increasing scientific research and knowledge, scientific literacy of participants, as well as raising environmental awareness and fostering European cooperation.

Many of these citizen science projects have the potential to be upscaled to a cross-country European level so as to bring additional benefits: for instance, enabling research on

transnational or even global issues to be conducted across borders, broadening the sets and types of data gathered, sharing and improving practices in scientific methodology and outreach, and building a cross-border community of citizen scientists.

One example for successfully upscaling a citizen science project is “Plastic Pirates - Go Europe!” (<https://www.plastic-pirates.eu/>) initiated by the Trio-Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The project addresses the problem of plastic litter in inland waterways by involving more than 775 schools and youth groups uploading data-sets to a central data entry point on the Plastic Pirates’ website compiling and analysing sources, pathways and fate of plastic litter floating down rivers. However, rivers often cross national borders and data collection, societal awareness, and appropriate policy responses to plastic litter will be more effective if coordinated across Europe.

To upscale the project, the national ministries of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia responsible for research and education have taken a “federated bottom-up” approach in policy diffusion among Member States. While this approach combined with a coherent methodology has proven to be successful under certain conditions, the question remains if it could serve as a good practice example:

- for upscaling citizen science projects to the European level; and
- for creating win-win situations enabling excellent science and concrete societal improvements.

While the starting point of the MLE will be to take stock of ongoing policies and practices related to citizen science at national level, different approaches are possible for further defining the scope and objectives of the MLE. Building on the previous work of the COST Action 15212 and of the Joint Research Center on citizen science, it is proposed to have a very hands-on approach, focused on the transnational dimension and aimed to lay the foundations for a European pathway to upscale national citizen science campaigns across the European Research Area, in line with the Council Conclusion on the New European Research Area of 1 December 2020.

If this approach is followed, the MLE would in particular aim to 1) mutually learn about the similarities and differences in approaches to citizen science in Member States and Associated countries, as important elements to consider for developing transnational projects; 2) to exchange information, experiences and lessons learned on existing transnational citizen science projects; 3) to identify other national citizen science projects suitable for upscaling to a European level with “Plastic Pirates - Go Europe!” as a good practice example.

While providing answers to the questionnaire in Annex I, all countries interested to participate in the MLE are invited to indicate to what extent they fully agree with such an approach or have complementary/alternative ideas to propose. For instance, topics related to the national policies for supporting the development of citizen science projects outside of a focus on transnational upscaling might also be suggested.

D. Preliminary identification of priority topics

It is important that the specific topics / policy challenges to be addressed by the MLE are well focused. Moreover, the MLE should add value and link up to the activity of the Joint Research Centre and the work of COST Action 15212, complement its debates and avoid duplications.

Based on the approach proposed under C, the following topics have been identified as potentially interesting for discussion in the context of this MLE:

1. Differences and similarities in national citizen science projects, strategies, programmes, instruments, and implementation plans in the participating Member States and Associated countries (objective of mapping of approaches and their potential for generalisation).
2. Identifying good practices and obstacles for upscaling citizen science projects across multiple countries, with “Plastic Pirates - Go Europe!” as an example
 - a. Design elements of citizen science projects as prerequisites for upscaling (e.g. project leaders/champions, main actors involved and respective roles, project activities and interfaces with other groups/projects, institutional arrangements in research performing organisations, funding modalities)
 - b. Socio-technical contexts (e.g. matter of concern, legal norms, social values, incentive and reward frameworks for researchers)
 - c. Elements of the scaling & spreading process (e.g. transnational nature of the subject, decomposability of activities, reusability of tools, degree of cooperation between national authorities)
3. Laying the foundations including taking first concrete steps on a European pathway to upscale national citizen science campaigns in line with the Council Conclusion on the New European Research Area of 1 December 2020.

The final selection of topics will be decided at the kick-off meeting, based on the answers of the participating countries to the attached questionnaire (Annex 1).

E. Expected outcomes

With its emphasis on policy learning, the MLE process will **identify good practice, lessons learnt and success factors** based on the available evidence and collective experience in implementing citizen science projects. If the approach proposed under C and D is followed, it will in particular reflect on the potential, the challenges and the conditions for success when diffusing, spreading and scaling up citizen science activities across the European Research Area.

F. Working approach

The MLE on “Upscaling citizen science actions across the European Research Area” will involve:

- *Participating countries*: They are expected to actively participate, contribute and exchange experiences on an equal basis. The project is based on open, frank and confidential knowledge exchanges between the participating countries. It requires that each participating country is willing to provide detailed information on its experience in view of allowing other participants to learn from it.
- *External experts*: Experts will support the MLE by providing expertise and advice. They will work under the guidance of the Chair, who will steer the whole MLE process. One of the experts will act as Rapporteur.
- *Commission services*: Unit A.4 “Open Science” and the Policy Support Facility Team in Unit A.1 – “European Semester & Country Intelligence”, as well as Unit B.4 “Healthy Ocean & Seas” (all in the Directorate General for Research & Innovation) and Unit B.6 “Digital Economy” of the Joint Research Centre will actively support the work of this MLE.

In order to ensure effective exchange of experience and information and to achieve the best outcome and impact, the number of participating countries should be limited to those willing to actively engage and contribute to the exercise.

As an input to the kick-off meeting, all countries willing to participate to the MLE are asked to provide their initial written contributions as specified in Annex I.

Responses should be sent by 21 June to RTD Unit A.1 Annamaria Zonno (Annamaria.ZONNO111@ec.europa.eu) and Unit A.4 Linden Farrer (linden.farrer@ec.europa.eu).

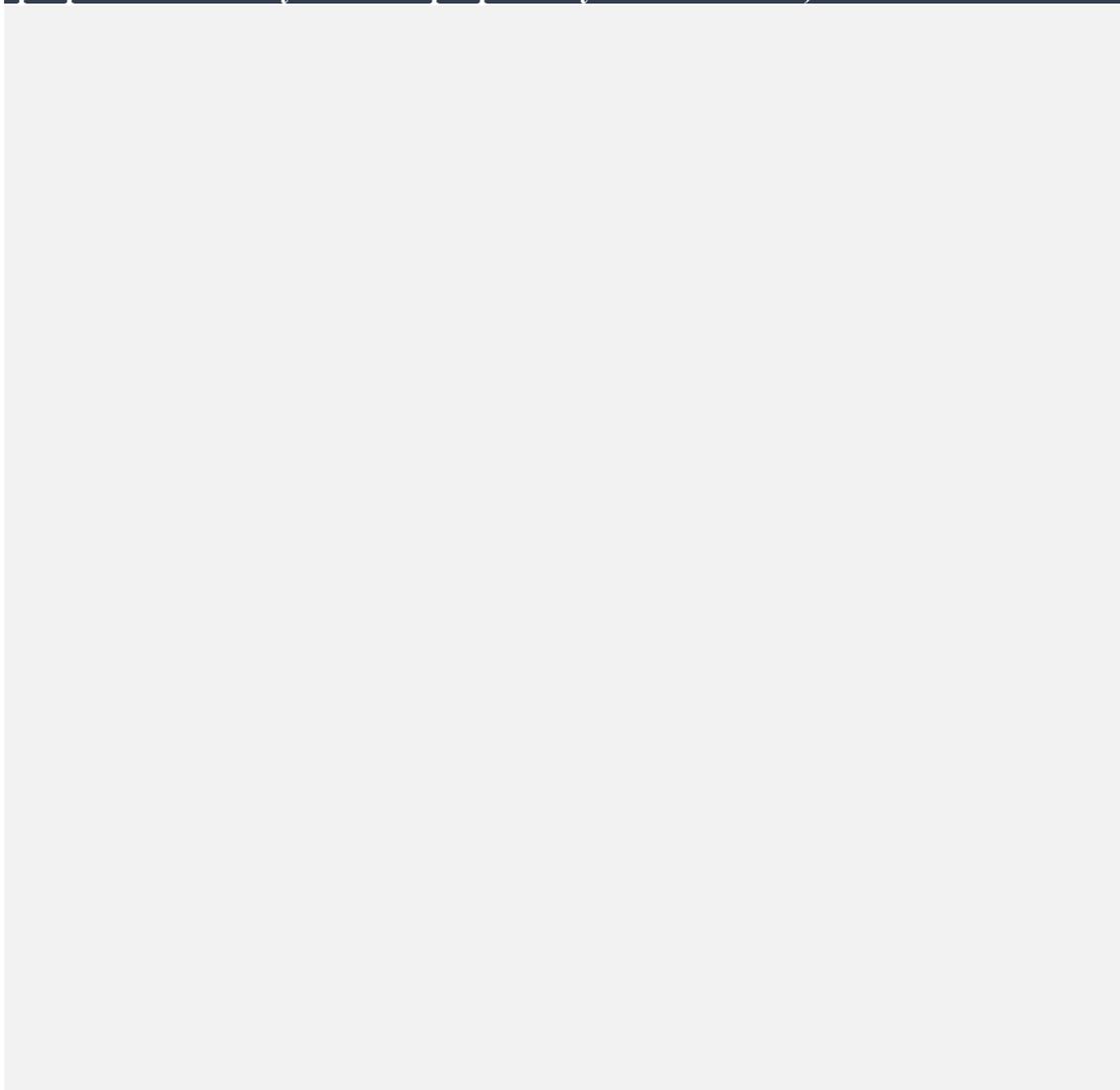
Annex 1:

MLE “Upscaling citizen science actions across the European Research Area”

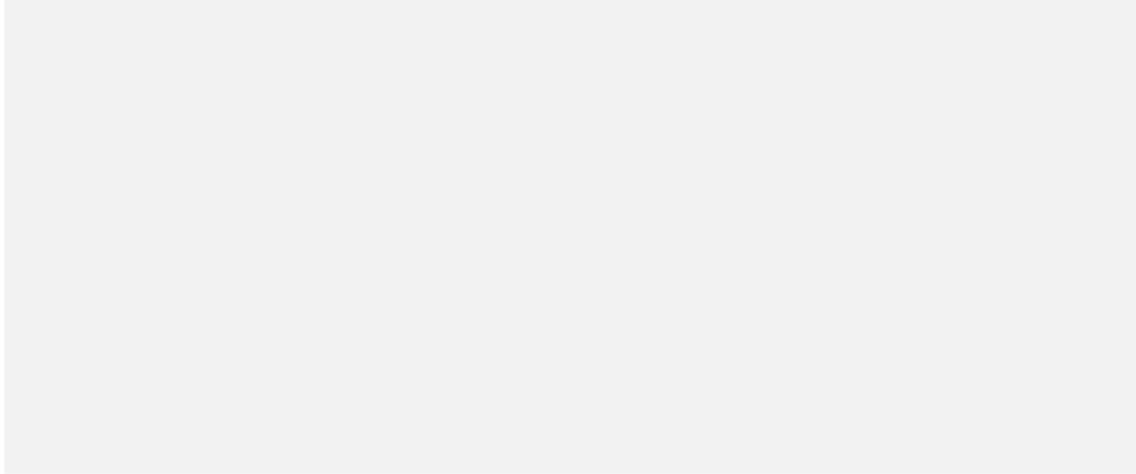
During the preparatory phase of the MLE “Upscaling citizen science actions across Member States”, volunteering countries are kindly asked to provide the following information:

- 1. Country:**
- 2. National Representative:**
- 3. Suggestions for scope and topics, expectations:** please fill in the two boxes below.

Overall approach, definition of objectives and priority topics you wish that the MLE addresses (please see the approach and objectives mentioned under point C and the list of three topics proposed under point D: do you agree with what is proposed or would you like to propose any modifications?)



What are your key expectations from the MLE:



Responses should be sent by 21 June to RTD Unit A.1 Annamaria Zonno (Annamaria.ZONNO111@ec.europa.eu) and Unit A.4 Linden Farrer (linden.farrer@ec.europa.eu).