Report on the implementation of Virtual Networking Support[1]

Action number: CA19130

Grantee name: Codruța MARE

Virtual Networking Support Details:

Title: Meeting and working online for the success of CA19130

Start date: 01.03.2024

Reference to the Action strategy on virtual and hybrid networking (MC approved)

Specify URL below if Action strategy on virtual networking is published online (e.g. Action web-site). If not public, upload the document on e-COST as a supporting document to this report.

The VNS Strategy is uploaded on the FinAI google drive:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bkoc6MwKZEs8ywRdiRnTo185vqlTwYh_/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=108963250213695216069&rtpof=true&sd=true

and is to be found as an appendix to this report.

Description of Action benefits realised through virtual and hybrid networking activities

Focus should be on:

- Progress towards the Action objectives and deliverables.

- Contribution to COST Strategy: how the VNS will contribute to promoting and spreading excellence, fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science, and empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators.

(max.500 words)

As outlined in the VNS application, the VNS grantee consistently supported all members of COST Action CA19130 in organizing online and hybrid events, ensuring diversity and inclusivity in line with the Action's objectives. By making all events hybrid, the VNS provided every member, regardless of location, the opportunity to participate in the Action's activities. Given the Action's large membership base of over 400 individuals from more than 50 countries, it would have been challenging for everyone to attend on-site. The VNS addressed this by assisting local organizers with logistics, such as scheduling Zoom meetings and creating online forms, making virtual participation seamless. This inclusivity enabled researchers of all levels—both junior and senior—to interact with one another, as well as with representatives from the business sector. The VNS also contributed to the Action's goal of sustainability by reducing travel and promoting greener practices through

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the increased use of online platforms. For example, the VNS played a key role in supporting the Romanian and Bulgarian FinTech Report 2023 (launched in April 2024), by facilitating the collection of data online. It enabled the research team to gather responses from Romanian and Bulgarian FinTech companies through digital questionnaires, further promoting remote collaboration. Following this, the VNS also supported the VMGs and other Actions that were meant to treat the goals, objectives and deliverables of the Action. The evaluation criteria were introduced to better align with both the COST Association's goals and the specific objectives of the Action. These criteria considered whether applications involved at least five countries or focused on one of the Action's deliverables. Additionally, the evaluation procedure was continuously improved, including the online forms that allowed evaluators from around the world to participate in the VMG evaluation process remotely. This form can be accessed here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1hZJo8jP5YoXBnitNFEdjshx3NA-e-5YyLIe5HCqNUBk/edit.

A similar online form was created to facilitate the evaluation of VMG reports by the evaluation committee, available here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1wbJTpnqhbVpIXRXLG2gsC7TK89_tkCoo53CWvmrmZrs/edit.

The VNS also played a crucial role in supporting the hybrid organization of various Action events, including conferences, training schools, workshops, core group meetings, and more. For example, as a follow-up of some of the Diversity Team members, the VNS supported the new Empower Women ij Fintech initiative, meant to increase women's participation in the FinTech sector.

Through these efforts, the VNS grantee not only contributed to the inclusivity, efficiency, and sustainability of the Action's events but also supported key advancements toward the Action's strategic goals.

Applicant enters max. 500 word summary here.

Description of virtual and hybrid networking activities supported by the VNS

Description of virtual and hybrid networking activities carried out by the VNS grantee in support to the COST Action to develop capacity in virtual and hybrid collaboration and networking and to increase Action impact and reach.

(max. 500 words)

The VNS has supported:

1. All Action's events for the hybrid organization (12 for this GP).
2. The organization of online informal meetings for the organization of these events (like the Cluj-Napoca, Iceland, Brussels, Calabria, Rethymno events, etc.), using different types of applications: Zoom, Google Meet, Whatsapp, etc.
3. Young researchers by providing support for the organization of hybrid training schools (Enschede, Naples).
4. The online participation/ presentation diploma issuance.
5. Support for the Science communication part, by posting on social media platforms.
6. The evaluation process for all networking tools, by constructing and updating the STSMs and VMGs folders on the Action's drive.
7. The evaluation process of the VMGs by setting clearer evaluation criteria and constructing online forms for the evaluation of both applications and final reports.
8. The implementation of STSMs and VMG by supporting the applicants in their online path (for example scheduling online meetings for the applicants, helping them with the monitoring of the online forms and activity of the groups involved, helping them with survey applications, etc.).
9. The stakeholders relationship by facilitating online meetings with their representatives.

10. The Romanian and Bulgarian FinTech Report for 2023. The VNS has provided support for the construction of the online form for the survey and other forms necessary for the fulfilment of this deliverable.
11. The Science communication part, by supporting all grantees and event organizers to have podcasts with Prof. Vasile Strat on the respective topics.
12. The work of the Diversity team through the inclusion of young researchers and treatment of gender issues in financial inclusion, followed by the support for the organisation of online activities under the idea of Empower Women in FinTech.
13. Fulfilment of the Action's deliverables. Many were treated through the VMGs awarded in this Grant Period.

This GP there were more than 20 VMG applications that needed to be evaluated. More than 25000 EUR were allocated to VMGs treating the deliverables of the Action.

Grantee enters max. 500 word summary here.

Other Activities performed in support to the Action

Description of any other activities performed by the VNS grantee, if relevant.

(max. 500 words)

The VNS has continuously improved the evaluation process for the VMGs and other networking tools.

Through the online environment, the VNS participated in and organized several meeting with the stakeholders, along with presentations from their part. Such an example is the IBM presentation on GenAI that took place on the 23rd of April 2024 in Cluj-Napoca, or the Endava presentation on the 22nd of April, that wad international public from all over the world for the presentation of the outputs of COST FinAI and joint work possibilities.

Grantee enters max. 500 word summary here.

Virtual Network Strategy (VNS)

The objectives of the VNS are:

1. to increase both internal and external visibility of the COST ACTION,

2. to give more structure to the large network virtual activities and events.

The activities that will be performed within this strategy are:

Online activities:

1.   Cross-publish content from Wiki, Webpage and MeetUp on LinkedIn and Twitter.

2.   Identify social media Champions for each WG so that more visibility can be produced for the activity of the WGs.

3.   Develop with the help of VMG content for the social media, Wiki, Webpage and Meetup of the Cost Action.

4. Diversify information published on social media of the Project in order to engage external stakeholders.

Marketing material:

1. Create podcasts with action members and VMGs grantees

2. Support the engagement with external stakeholders (hybrid events and Podcasts)