

Communication, Dissemination & Exploitation in Twinning Projects

Audience: EU Funding Agencies and EU Research Executive Agency (REA)



Effective communication, dissemination, and exploitation are essential to maximise Twinning projects' impact on Widening excellence. However, evidence collected from the coordinators of 16 sister Twinning projects [HE Twinning call HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-03 (HORIZON Coordination and Support Actions, HORIZON-CSA)]¹ reveals several critical gaps. Persistent confusion exists between communication and dissemination activities, further reinforced by overlapping templates (especially regarding the type of activity) for reporting purposes. Additional gaps include misalignment of the reporting framework with capacity-building actions, which are central in HORIZON-CSA actions, constraining the recognition of less conventional exploitation pathways; omission of educational communities as a standard target audience;

inadequate key performance indicators (KPIs) for efficiency measurement; underdeveloped exploitation routes for non-commercial results; and neglect of Research Management and Administration (RMA) specific metrics.

Strategic Relevance *Why this and why now?*

Article 17 of the HORIZON Europe Grant Agreement clearly establishes communication and dissemination as mandatory, while exploitation is strongly encouraged. These activities should raise awareness of the projects' results and maximise their uptake. Ongoing simplification efforts by the Research Executive Agency (REA), together with programme impact assessment needs for future funding frameworks, provide a timely window to consider targeted recommendations.

¹Santiago et al. (2026). Good practices guide for widening projects' management, <http://hdl.handle.net/10773/46857>; Santiago & Pereira (2026). Survey data: experience in practice regarding the management of Twinning projects, <https://doi.org/10.48527/MJ5D4N>

Key Evidence:

Insights from the experience of sister Twinning projects



Confusion between communication and dissemination persists.

With ongoing difficulties in distinguishing the type of activities appropriate to each, as well as their primary audiences. In fact, the European Commission (EC) provides foundational definitions²: communication aims to inform, promote and communicate activities and results to citizens, stakeholders and the media; dissemination focuses on sharing results with those who can learn and benefit from them (e.g. scientific community, industry, policymakers); and exploitation refers to the reuse and/or practical application of those results. These definitions and target audiences create some ambiguity in practice. For example, as “stakeholders”, typically those who benefit from project results, appear under both communication and dissemination in EC definitions, rendering the distinction vague in practice. Reporting templates further reinforce this overlap by listing identical event types (conferences, workshops, meetings) and similar target audiences under both communication and dissemination record requests. This overlap leads 53% of the 16 surveyed projects to double-report activities, increasing administrative burden and obscuring true impact measurement.

Research communities are lumped as a single, undifferentiated audience in reporting templates, while policy actors and industry benefit from more granular categorization.

Evidence from Twinning coordinators suggests a much more nuanced reality. Many coordinators apply targeted communication strategies to attract top students to their research groups, as well as to recruit researchers into their teams and networks (15.9% and 14.8% priority, respectively), these are hence two different audiences requiring tailored communication activities and channels. A similar distinction applies to dissemination activities, where coordinators differentiate between researchers within the consortium and those beyond it, each requiring specific strategies; as well, early-career researchers, beyond PhD students, need to be distinguished from senior researchers aiming for the design and implementation of targeted, effective communication and dissemination strategies. Despite this nuanced context, the reporting framework lumps all into a generic “Research communities” category. This lack of granularity within the research community hinders WIDERA’s core talent mobility and retention objective. In addition, RMA professionals, essential for institutional capacity-building and remarked by sister coordinators as clear target audiences for communication and dissemination, remain invisible in the current reporting templates, which is inconsistent with Twinning objectives. Altogether, this contrasts with policy (EU/local) and industry (innovators/SMEs) audiences, which are provided with clear options within reporting templates.

Educational communities are absent as a communication audience.

This audience is listed only for dissemination purposes despite the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework requiring projects to actively engage society, including the education sector. Among the eight surveyed Twinning projects that are not dedicated to educational research, coordinators reported the implementation of outreach activities specifically targeting schools, but the classification of these activities as communication or dissemination was unclear.

² EC (2023): European Research Executive Agency, Communication, dissemination & exploitation what is the difference and why they all matter. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/289075>

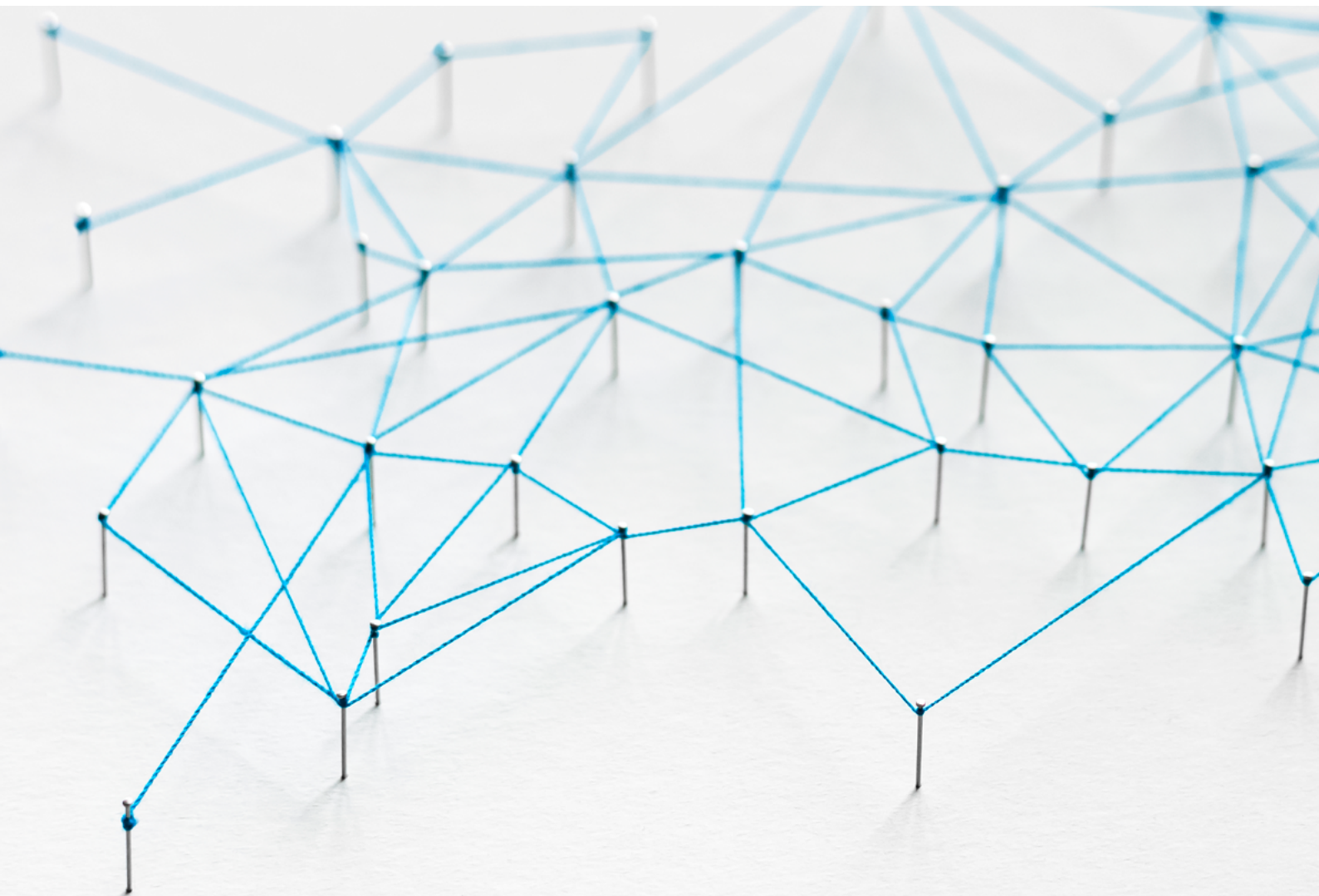


Inadequate KPIs for Efficiency Measurement.

The establishment of KPIs to measure the efficiency of the Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation activities, beyond implementation numbers, is key to materializing the overall impact of the project. However, survey data indicate that such efficiency is very poorly measured in practice. For example, website tracking is limited (82% monitor visits; only 18% monitor unique visits/downloads/visitor countries); social media monitoring is often absent or vague ("400 engagements"); no standard efficiency metrics are considered for clustering (joint deliverables, publications), conferences (non-widening attendee ratio), or education/training events (material reuse, pre/post assessments).

Underdeveloped Exploitation of Results.

Key Exploitable Results (KERs) remain underdeveloped or poorly valorised for non-commercial outputs such as guidelines, Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (FAIR) datasets, and institutional procedures within current reporting templates and official guidelines. Consistently, surveyed projects with no commercial KERs tend not to appraise alternative exploitation routes that could clearly raise the project impact at the institutional level and externally in broader non-commercial contexts.





Recommendations for EU Funding Agencies and REA

1

Clarify definitions of Communication and Dissemination

This challenge can be addressed by revising existing official definitions to eliminate or significantly reduce overlap, and by aligning guidance and reporting templates accordingly. One suitable basis for the purpose is the characterization of the flows: one-way flows from the project to the audience configure Communication; two-way flows between the project and the audience (bi-directional benefit) configure Dissemination. Then, the reclassification of entries as Dissemination activities entailing two-way flows (e.g. conferences, meetings, workshops, clustering and education/training events) or Communication activities entailing one-way flows (e.g. websites, social media, brochures, media articles, newsletters, print materials) would become facilitated, especially if mirrored in the reporting templates.

Clarification in guidance and templates adjustment would improve planning and eliminate double-reporting, saving Coordinators substantial effort and maximizing the monitoring/evaluation of the project performance regarding measures to maximize impact.

2

Granularize "Research communities" in reporting frameworks

By introducing subcategories within "Research communities", including graduation and post-graduation students, early career researchers, senior researchers, and RMA professionals. Such differentiation would better capture the relevant audience' details, aligning reporting with WIDERA's talent attraction and retention objectives, as well as RMA capacity development, both critical dimensions for sustained Widening excellence.

This reveals true talent pipelines and institutional strengthening, positioning Twinning as WIDERA's talent attraction and retention benchmark and matches the granularity of other audience categories towards better comparability across the European Research Area (ERA).

3

Include "Educational communities" as communication audiences

By including "educational communities" as a standard option for Communication reporting, aligning it with its existing consideration as Dissemination audiences and further supporting the RRI outreach purpose.

This allows Coordinators to clearly classify student/school outreach directly both during project planning and reporting, ensuring RRI framework compliance across pre- and post-award stages, while also supporting the REA in tracking the program-wide scientific literacy efforts.

4

Promote the consistent use of efficiency KPIs

By establishing expected KPIs to assess the impact and/or efficiency of Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation activities, beyond implementation numbers. Understanding the actual reach dimension and/or relevance of a given activity for the institution, consortium, or the ERA is an invaluable tool to manage effort and promote efficiency in resource management.

This approach shifts the focus from activity volume to outcome quality, additionally generating robust evidence for REA programme evaluation.

5

Dedicated HORIZON-CSA exploitation templates

By developing KER definition guidance tailored to HORIZON-CSA outputs, such as guidelines with tracked policy uptake, FAIR datasets with reuse metrics, and institutional procedures documenting governance adoption.

Integrating these KERs with the wider Advance Facility promotes seamless support and leverages the HORIZON-CSA-type actions of the WIDERA program.



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- 1- EPIBOOST (GA 101078991)
- 2- TWIN2PIPSA (GA 101079147)
- 3- NanoCAT (GA 101079142)
- 4- FONDA (GA 101079134)
- 5- TwinVECTOR (GA 101078935)
- 6- SUPRALIFE (GA 101079482)

EPIBOOST Twinning Project (GA 101078991)