



# Virtual Networking Strategy

## (Cost Action CA18138)

August 2021



## **A. ACTION OVERVIEW**

The main goal of Riseup-PPD COST Action is to establish a Pan-European multidisciplinary network of researchers dedicated to the understanding of Peripartum Depression Disorder (PPD), from its prevention and assessment to its treatment and global impact (<https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA18138>).

Currently available European estimates, show that PPD prevalence ranges from 4% to 38%, carrying significant consequences for women, newborn-infants, and family systems, representing a socioeconomic burden to society.

Riseup-PPD aims to fill gaps in PPD research, practice and social awareness by developing updated reviews fostering research efforts on the standardization of diagnostic criteria, the development of adequate screening tools and cost-effectiveness evaluation of prevention and treatment programs. Additionally, the Action seeks to bridge multidisciplinary knowledge on the determinants of depressive symptoms in the peripartum period, and the mechanisms of action and change. This will be achieved by supporting a network capable of conducting innovative, translational projects on the neuropsychological mechanisms and biomarkers involved in the onset, maintenance and impact of PPD on women, newborn-infants and families, combined with cost-effectiveness analysis and evidence-based and implementation research projects. Finally, Riseup-PPD aims at building a shared database providing research teams with large quality-controlled datasets.

Ultimately, the network will provide new implications for clinical practice, increasing cost-effectiveness and promoting the quality of innovative health care services in PPD, reaching a real impact on end-users.

Riseup-PPD will strengthen Europe's leading position in PPD by means of a network that supports Early Career Investigators, particularly from Inclusiveness Target Countries and female researchers, assuring a geographical and gender balanced Pan-European network.

## **B. VIRTUAL NETWORKING STRATEGY**

The present document entails a proposal for the virtual networking strategy of the Action. COVID-19 has impacted regular networking practices across COST Actions and research communities, with the use of virtual networking tools being critical to the project's success. So far, the COVID-19 timeline impact has been managed by implementing hybrid and multiple site activities, as well as increasing participation at local sites by members from neighboring countries. The Action's interdisciplinary Working Groups have also continuously planned and engaged in virtual meetings and internal communication tools, enabling the establishment of virtual collaboration, and ensuring the progress of the Action's deliverables and objectives. However, Riseup-PPD would benefit from the further implementation of digital tools in the context of the pandemic, such as the new COST Virtual Networking Tools.

The proposed strategy establishes a set of approaches to ensure the continuity of Riseup-PPD’s work activities and the promotion of virtual collaboration, taking into account the Action research coordination and capacity building objectives (cf. Memorandum of Understanding).

The Virtual Networking Strategy aims to address activities that will:

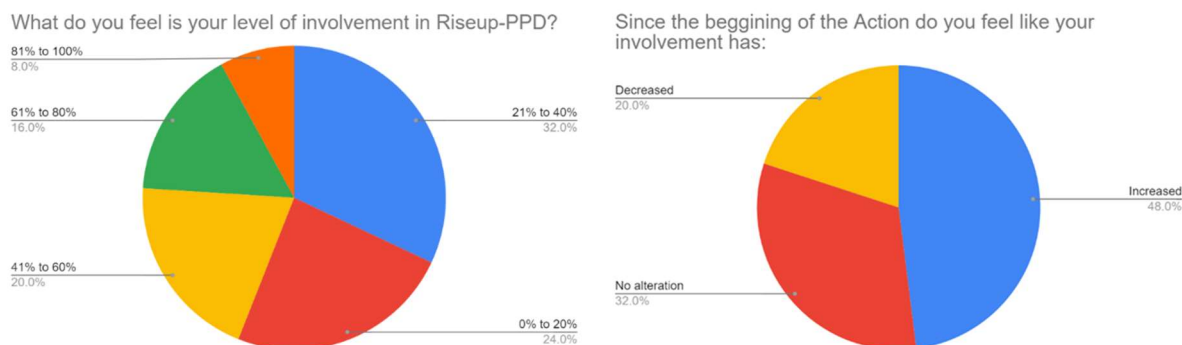
1. Support virtual collaboration across Riseup-PPD members and stakeholders;
2. Increase the Action’s awareness;
3. Optimize current work activities and events.

The activities herein proposed will run until the end of the current Grant Period, 31 October 2021.

### C. ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS

Management Committee members were surveyed regarding the challenges and needs underlying the accomplishment/progression of Action deliverables and objectives. The main results are showcased below and highlight the basis for the implementation of Riseup-PPD’s Virtual Networking Strategy.

In total, 25 Management Committee Full Members (out of 52) completed the survey (<https://forms.gle/GtDK9eziU3efe6Gf8>). Overall, the majority reported low levels of involvement in Riseup-PPD, with only 44% reporting levels of involvement between 40% to 100%.



Despite this, the majority of members feel that their involvement has either increased (48%) or suffered no alteration (32%) across the past two years, with a lower percentage (20%) decreasing.

For members that felt their involvement had decreased during the past two years, reasons included: online participation/decrease in interest; increased workload; COVID-19 impact in professional and personal life (e.g., new burdens of teaching and country restrictions); lack of involvement in a specific Riseup-PPD task; and lack of motivation in the Working Group.

Accordingly, the following strategies were presented for improvement in participation: (a) face-to-face meetings; (b) **better networking opportunities**, (c) **collaborative work** across Working Groups/subgroups, (d) **increase of the number of meetings** (e.g., frequently organised Working Group meetings), and (e) novelty and interest of activities.

These results highlight the **need for further implementation of strategies that increase**

**member's involvement in Riseup-PPD.** However, the Action should strive for a balance between virtual networking and in-person meetings, as possible, due to the “online” fatigue/burden.

## **D. Strategy Outline – Virtual Networking**

The implementation of the Virtual Networking Strategy should result in well-prepared virtual (and eventually hybrid) Riseup-PPD events (e.g., upcoming Workshops, Working Group meetings) and tasks (e.g., development of content, publications, significant progress on delayed deliverables).

Considering the MC survey results, Riseup-PPD should aim for the continuous implementation of **regular online meetings**, especially for Working Groups, according to the availability of leaders and members and the present workload (e.g., monthly, tri-monthly). This would allow for the better establishment and follow-up of the collaborative work needed to accomplish the underlying objectives, as well as giving participants several opportunities to engage in their Working Group/subgroup and, consequently, in Riseup-PPD.

Besides maintaining or extending the current virtual networking strategies (regular Working Group meetings, regular task-related subgroup meetings, hybrid/virtual events), Virtual Mobility Grants can be awarded to significantly progress on Action deliverables while incentivizing the involvement and collaboration from members.

### ***Virtual Mobility Grants***

Virtual Mobility (VM) Grants aim to strengthen the existing networks by allowing individual participants to foster collaboration, to exchange knowledge, to learn new techniques, etc. The successful applicants will be selected to perform activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence. These activities may include surveys, questionnaires or preparation of protocols, virtual mentoring of activities that can generate capacity, build new skills, etc.

Riseup-PPD would benefit greatly from incorporating VM Grants into its activity plan. For example, VM Grants could help foster the collaboration needed for tasks underlying the process of conducting reviews, other publications, and concrete guidelines/recommendations, related to Action deliverables and objectives (e.g., Publication of systematic reviews/meta-analysis results in prevention and treatment strategies for Peripartum Depression Disorder (WG1), Proposals for concrete guidelines or input to standards for the assessment of each intervenient and dimension(WG2)).

The proposed strategy establishes an approach for the coordination of VM Grants, namely opening calls and managing the evaluation process, as approved by the Core Group. An open continuous call will be implemented, with VM Grants activities to be completed before the end of October 2021 (maximum until 15 October 2021, exceptionally until 31 October 2021). The call will be disseminated in the same format as other Riseup-PPD networking tools, in collaboration with Working Group 6, namely through social media platforms and on the website. Applications will be evaluated and later approved on a Core Group Meeting, taking place on 14 September 2021.

Thus, after validating the applications received, the Virtual Networking Support Manager forwards them to the Action's Core Group, who evaluates and selects grantees based on the following criteria:

- The contribution of the proposed VM to the overall objectives and deliverables of the Action;
- Scientific quality and feasibility of the VM plan;
- Balance of grantees and topics related to the different Action Working Groups.

Priority will be given for Working Group leaders/co-leaders / Task leaders in their applications, as well as to already **undergoing activities**, such as:

- Preparation of content or other tasks related to Riseup-PPD events that require collaboration from two or more members (e.g., Training Schools, Workshops/Seminars, Scientific Meetings);
- Tasks related to the development and implementation of the Riseup-PPD Guidelines Group;
- Systematic reviews or other publications;
- Development of questionnaires or surveys directly related to the work by Working Groups or Action deliverables.

To guarantee a fair evaluation, evaluators that hold an affiliation with the institution of the applicant in question cannot be involved in the decision-making process.

To support and advise the beneficiaries of the VM Grants, after the approval of the corresponding applications, an online meeting (through Zoom) will be scheduled with the involved parties, to assess the needs and possible challenges in the completion of the proposed activities. After the meeting and for the remaining duration of the VM Grant, grantees would be encouraged to contact the VNS Manager through e-mail or by scheduling subsequent meetings. The VNS Manager will then report on the progress of VM grants to the Core Group and Management Committee. The VNS Manager will also be available to assist in the development of VM applications, as needed.

## **Coordination and Reporting of Online Events**

In collaboration with scientific organisers and the Grant Holder Manager, the VNS Manager would assist in the successful execution of all virtual events, performing different tasks across time, as required. The VNS Manager can also assist in the selection of the best tools for the specific needs of the event and the planning and moderation of underlying networking activities. Post-event surveys can eventually be prepared and conducted across events for participants/organisers to assess the efficacy of the virtual events, evaluating the arising challenges and suggestions for future events.

## Note

Once approved by the Core Group and Management Committee, the Virtual Networking Strategy will be published on the Action website and disseminated to Action members by email via e-COST and mailing lists.