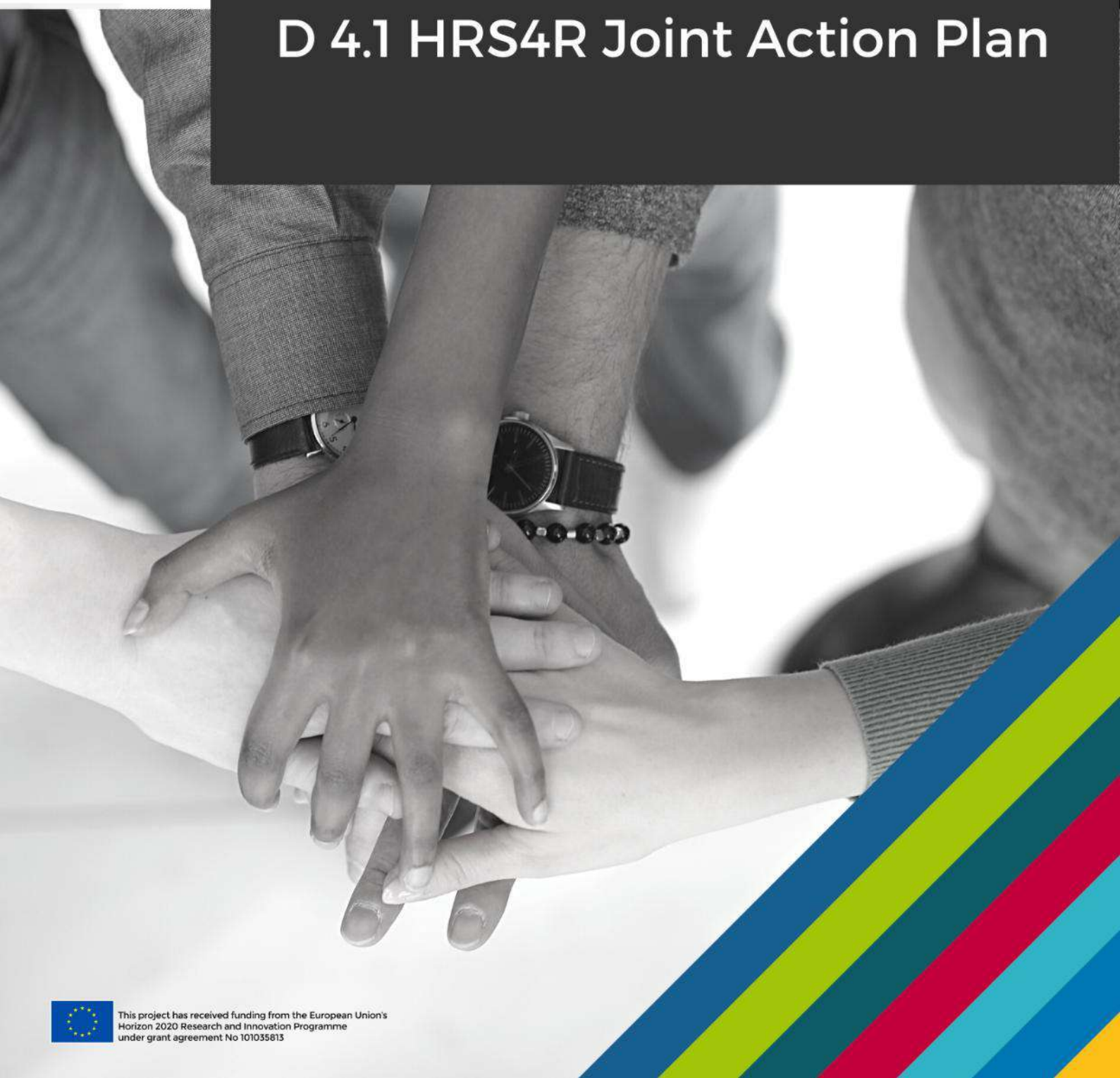




# D 4.1 HRS4R Joint Action Plan



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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

|                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| <i>PUT</i>     | - | <i>Poznan University of Technology</i>                          |
| <i>BTU C-S</i> | - | <i>Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg</i> |
| <i>UC</i>      | - | <i>University of Cantabria</i>                                  |
| <i>UMONS</i>   | - | <i>University of Mons</i>                                       |
| <i>UNICT</i>   | - | <i>University of Catania</i>                                    |
| <i>UPHF</i>    | - | <i>Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France</i>                 |
| <i>UVA</i>     | - | <i>University of Vaasa</i>                                      |
| <i>EUNICE</i>  | - | <i>European University for Customised Education</i>             |
| <i>EWG</i>     | - | <i>Expert Working Group</i>                                     |
| <i>HR</i>      | - | <i>Human Resources</i>  |
| <i>HRS4R</i>   | - | <i>Human Resources Strategy for Researchers</i>                 |
| <i>IRO</i>     | - | <i>International Relation Office</i>                            |
| <i>JAP</i>     | - | <i>Joint Action Plan</i>  |
| <i>MSCA</i>    | - | <i>Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions</i>                           |
| <i>OTM-R</i>   | - | <i>Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment</i>            |
| <i>WP</i>      | - | <i>Work Package</i>   |



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## 1. Introduction

Work package (WP) 4 serves as crosscutting item to deliver services and tools to other work packages, focusing on the development and implementation of strategies for strengthening human resources in research.

### **Description of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers and its aims**

As stated by the European Commission, the 'HR Strategy for Researchers' support research institutions and funding organizations in the implementation of the Charter & Code in their policies and practices. This European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers was established in 2005 and consists of 40 principles, created for researchers at any career stage and independent of their respective activities (e.g. basic research, transfer of knowledge or scientific journalism). As described in the Charter, the aim "is to ensure that the nature of the relationship between researchers and employers or funders is conducive to successful performance and technological development, and to the career development of researchers. The Charter also recognizes that value of all forms of mobility as a means for enhancing the professional development of researchers"<sup>1</sup>. The latter is in general important for European university alliances and for the European University for Customised Education (EUNICE) in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2005). EUR 21620 — The European Charter for Researchers. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment



## 2. Work Package 4: Joint Action Plan on Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

### Work package 4.1: framework conditions (Joint Strategy based on HRS4R)

The European Commission launched the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) in 2005. HRS4R is a seal of excellence for those institutions that commit to elaborate strategic plans to implement the Charter & Code principles for research.



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Figure 1: Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) – “the award of the HRS4R identifies those research institutions and organizations that support a favourable and supportive work environment.”  
(Source: [www.euraxess.es/spain/services/human-resources-strategy-researchers-hrs4r](http://www.euraxess.es/spain/services/human-resources-strategy-researchers-hrs4r))

Moreover, it becomes a guideline within Horizon Europe for all HR-related actions such as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). As indicated in the description of actions for the REUNICE project, EUNICE members are at different stages of HRS4R implementation: while some institutions such as the University of Cantabria (UC), the University of Mons (UMONS), and the University of Vaasa (UVA) have already obtained the HRS4R seal, others are still engaged in the development of their strategic plans. Partners that have not yet obtained the HRS4R seal will be able to take advantage of the experience of others. Partners beginning to implement concrete measures of their action plans will benefit from best practices shared by more experienced EUNICE members. Universities that are more advanced in implementing HRS4R action plans will propose concrete actions that all EUNICE members can implement jointly to achieve a higher level of excellence for their respective university and the benefit for the alliance as a whole.

#### Actions planned for work package 4.1

1. Analysis of the current status of HRS4R implementation at all EUNICE member universities
2. Creation of an Expert Working Group to support individual HRS4R strategies
3. Search for common points in the action plans to implement jointly
4. Define a Joint Action Plan for EUNICE



### 3. Analysis of the current status of Human Resources Strategy for Researchers implementation at EUNICE member universities

As part of task 4.1, an analysis of the status quo of the HRS4R implementation was conducted. A LimeSurvey questionnaire was created, focusing on both similarities and differences between the universities of the EUNICE alliance. The questionnaire consisted of a maximum of 17 questions, depending on the level of experience on HRS4R of each university. Sent out as invitation to all EUNICE partners in April 2022, results were assessed and discussed in online sessions and workshops in June 2022. The following table provides a brief summary of given answers and main similarities as well as differences between EUNICE universities.





### 3.1. Brief summary of similarities and differences among EUNICE universities regarding HRS4R

Table 1 - Key statements of EUNICE alliance universities about experiences on HRS4R (from April 2022)



| University                                 | Brandenburg Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg | University of Vaasa   | Université de Mons   | Universidad de Cantabria  | Université Polytechnique des Hauts-de-France | University of Catania | Poznan University of Technology |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Implementation status of HRS4R</b>      | No, but planned  | Yes, since 12/2014  | Yes, since 02/2011   | Yes, since 06/2020  | No, but planned                              | No                    | No                              |
| <b>Phase of HRS4R implementation</b>       |  | Implementation of the Improved Action Plan (Award Renewal Phase)  | Implementation of the Improved Action Plan (Award Renewal Phase)   | Implementation of the Action Plan (Implementation Phase)  |  |                       |                                 |
| <b>Reasons for HRS4R implementation</b>    |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong recommendation by the ministry</li> <li>• Assessed as useful tool for internal HR development</li> <li>• Helpful for self-assessment of current practices and future development needs</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate the mobility of researchers</li> <li>• Recognition gained by the seal, highlighted when applying for EU grants</li> <li>• More successful recruitment of the most outstanding researchers within and outside the European Research Area</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of a strategic plan to attract and keep talents</li> <li>• Improvement of the research productivity evaluation system</li> <li>• Promotion of “Open Access” and “Open Science” codes</li> </ul>  |  |                       |                                 |
| <b>Impacts by HRS4R</b>                    |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear development of certain HR related processes and practices</li> <li>• HRS4R processes gained more visibility, widely accepted and appreciated</li> <li>• Cross-cutting actions and promotion of other accreditations with similar strategic objectives</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous enhancement of working conditions and career opportunities as top priority of the university</li> <li>• Embedding HRS4R processes in wide array of current activities and human resources policies</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieved commitment of institutions and community for HRS4R</li> <li>• Established an Action Plan with 19 actions to improve the implementation of the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the University of Cantabria Recruitment Code</li> </ul>   |  |                       |                                 |
| <b>Challenges while implementing HRS4R</b> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of information of the program in the university</li> <li>• Low awareness as HR topic</li> <li>• Assessment of progress (of the action plan) and to gather information from relevant process owners</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missing actions while aligning means to the ambitions described in the first action plan</li> <li>• Institutional barriers for implementing some actions like the OTM-R policy</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain survey responses from specific consulted groups</li> <li>• Research staff partly unfamiliar with used tools (to address ethical and professional issues)</li> <li>• Recruitment procedures do not fully comply with C&amp;C and OTM-R elements</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge/ information about working conditions among research staff</li> </ul> |  |                       |                                 |



|   |  |  |  |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Developed solutions during implementation</b></p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong commitment and support for HRS4R processes of the university management to develop entire organization, not only individual units</li> <li>• Identifying responsible process owners</li> <li>• Appropriate composition of the steering group</li> <li>• Appropriate time to present the program and its objectives to the wider community</li> <li>• Suitable tool for following-up processes</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely new developments on existing mechanism or bodies, reinforcing them or broadening their field of action (sustainability of results will be ensured)</li> <li>• Establishment of a small working group to simplify exchange of ideas and report on progress to the steering committee</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an action plan as response to identify challenges and to addressing weaknesses with 19 actions</li> </ul>  |   |  |  |
| <p><b>Planned actions within the next 12 months</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of internal working group meetings on further procedure for the application</li> <li>• Intensify involvement of academics and implementation of the data collection</li> <li>• Preparation and dispatch of the Letter of Endorsement to EU Commission</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awaiting and preparing for the external assessment / renewal of the HR Excellence label</li> <li>• Many actions ongoing, also by using Thinking Portfolio tool for follow-ups</li> <li>• Operationalizing actions into even more detailed sub-actions</li> <li>• Presentation of the follow-up to the steering group</li> <li>• Adjusting the action plan according to the feedback from the external assessment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring the implementation of the present action plan</li> <li>• Follow-up of the expert remarks on the action plan</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrying out the measures included in the proposed action plan</li> <li>• Submission of "internal review" for the "Interim Assessment"</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiation of the process</li> <li>• Gathering stakeholders and their expectations, especially from laboratory staff and HR managers</li> <li>• Development of an action plan</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No actions are currently planned</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific actions has been introduced to implement HRS4R at the university</li> <li>• Internal assessment and processes are set-up</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Required support of EUNICE alliance</b></p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice examples</li> <li>• Common difficulties while applying for and while implementing the action plan</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When more coordination and input is requested from the university, additional (personnel) resources are required</li> <li>• Especially for small universities with small HR department, coordination of time-consuming tasks important</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion and communication about the strategy on university and EUNICE level could be an asset</li> <li>• Gathering expertise at EUNICE level to improve own OTM-R strategy</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of best practices among alliance partners</li> <li>• Advice from partners with more experience, e.g. on implementation of the Action Plan and in internal and mid-term reviews</li> <li>• Sharing most successful or best received actions, also actions difficult to implement</li> <li>• Sharing main barriers</li> <li>• Opportunities to redirect the strategy to maintain HRS4R label</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological support for the development of the action plan</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help is required, when starting the work on this issue</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise on implementation of the strategy</li> </ul>  |



### 3.2. Implications of survey results

Table 1 shows clearly, EUNICE alliance universities are at different stages when it comes to the implementation of HRS4R. While three universities implemented HRS4R already, associated with gained experiences and strategies to overcome identified obstacles, four universities did not implement the strategy (status September 2022). While HRS4R awarded universities are intensively optimizing their HR processes and structures, other universities are in the process of preparing their HRS4R application.

By analyzing the survey results for universities with the HRS4R seal, certain common points and positions could be made visible. Regardless of when the universities applied for the HRS4R seal, they want to push forward their international ties and integration of international students and researchers. For this reason, processes were assessed not only in the human resources (HR) department but also throughout the university in order to optimize specific action plans. Despite a challenging start for each university and limited impact at the beginning of the process, persons in charge stick to their action plans, defined clear responsibilities and implemented measures with strong commitment. In addition to clear action plans, monitoring schemes, and a reporting system, each university has developed individual tools and processes, e.g. to disseminate information or spread the word about the importance of HRS4R. It is therefore not surprising that the perceived contentedness is growing with the duration of HRS4R implementation measures and related impact, despite the constant workload and increasing demands.

Universities without the HRS4R seal were so far not able to commit themselves to this long-term obligation, linked to required assessments, planning, monitoring, and reporting schemes. However, these universities have individual strategies in place to support international researchers or to foster specific HR related topics. Nevertheless, these activities might not be in line with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers or were not part of a unified process. As explained in the survey, finding an appropriate starting point and getting the required long-term commitment of the university management is another critical obstacle. The overarching significance has also been recognized by the HR department there and by the experts in the working group, but has not yet spread to all levels of the university. Therefore, necessary HRS4R related activities are still widely considered as HR related issues only, without acknowledging their importance to the university as a whole and optimizing the associated processes and structures when necessary.

#### **Impact**

However, even between universities that are on similar stages, considerable differences were found e.g. on reasons for the implementation of HRS4R or the solutions developed to perceived challenges. In general, colleagues from universities at later stages (e.g. at the stage of implementing an improved action plan) showed much more experiences,



confidence and especially strong impact as other universities. Outcomes cited include e.g. improved processes in the HR department, new career opportunities and crosscutting actions across the university. The influence of actions related to HRS4R and their impact seems to intensify and spread over time. Universities with less experience and a shorter implementation period seem less committed and less confident about the expected results.

### **Reasons**

EUNICE universities cited a variety of reasons for adopting HRS4R. This includes external factors such as the urging governmental bodies or predicted advantages for EU funding applications. Nevertheless, internal goals were also set and pursued with HRS4R. The hunt for the brightest and most creative minds is already reality for universities worldwide, associated with a shortage of specialists and skilled workers in many sectors. Basically, the EUNICE universities also want to optimize their internal HR processes and adapt them to changing framework conditions.

### **Challenges**

The changes associated with the implementation of HRS4R and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers are not always easy and quickly to assimilate for the EUNICE universities and associated HR departments. While on the one hand, main challenges were identified in the dissemination and collection of information regarding HRS4R and associated processes, especially from key stakeholders and process owners. On the other hand, a lack of information and interest in the research community and other involved stakeholders was identified. It appears that universities struggle to find proper communication channels in order to convey the importance of HRS4R, its crosscutting nature, and to motivate stakeholders for an active involvement. Other important challenges are related to the development of action plans. This includes difficulties in assessing the progress of implementation as well as identifying missing actions that supposed to be important to execute and that have been started as an institutional strategy. Institutional barriers and internal processes are partly in conflict with elements or objectives of the Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) principles, leading to inevitable discussions and modifications.

### **Solutions**

Over the years, EUNICE universities have developed useful solutions to overcome existing obstacles and address upcoming challenges. As a general basis, a strong and long-term commitment from the entire university leadership has been highlighted as a fundamental requirement. To disseminate relevant information regularly to key stakeholders, it is necessary to identify important process owners and to establish specific governance structures. This typically includes a steering committee with supervision function and one or even more working groups to coordinate relevant activities. The establishment of ad-hoc working groups was also mentioned, taking into



account the complex nature of involved topics and widely distributed responsibilities in complex governance structure such as universities.

To ensure sustainable processes, the use of existing processes and mechanisms was recommended, if needed with a reinforcement for the new tasks. In addition, one EUNICE university developed a broad communication strategy in order to share information and to raise awareness. Accordingly, the HRS4R implementation process can be quite lengthy. Stakeholders should not expect all-encompassing changes in the short term. Rather, it is recommended to identify suitable management tools to assess the progress of developed action plan, to create follow-up activities and an option to transfer these into further initiatives.

### ***Plans for the next 12 months***

Existing short- and medium-term goals differ considerably among EUNICE alliance universities. Basically, this is due to the fact that they are in different HRS4R implementation phases. Some universities are simply continuing established processes and tasks, including regular reviews, monitoring, internal assessments, and submission of reports. This clearly indicates that even after a successful HRS4R certification and complete implementation of initial action plans, committed universities are continuously improving their processes and optimize their results. Other universities are almost ready to apply for the first time and set-up all necessary requirements. This includes the identification of responsible stakeholders and process owners, but also the establishment of internal workflows and aforementioned governance structures. No concrete measures are planned for the remaining universities in the next twelve months. These universities had installed their own processes, which are partly congruent with OTM-R regulations and processes. However, they are closely observing current developments and using the EUNICE alliance network to gather information and experiences from the other partner universities with HRS4R seal.

### ***Required support***

Based on the low-threshold and intensive networking in the EUNICE alliance, dissemination of best-practice examples is strongly required. This includes not only examples of concrete action plans, but also tools to assess the progress of concrete actions and ideas to overcome specific obstacles. Taking into account the different stages of the universities involved, also best-practice examples of reporting schemes, how to improve existing actions and existing strategies has been requested.

With regard to the aforementioned challenges, involved experts asked for successful long-term communication and information sharing strategies. The implementation and related processes of HRS4R is manageable also by medium-sized and smaller universities. However, offering generous support to other universities becomes more difficult, if no large HR department exist as underlying working unit. With regard to an immanent importance of sustainable processes and governance structures, additional support was required, if substantial assistance needs to be assured to university without HRS4R seal.



## 4. Presentation of the Expert Working Group

Since EUNICE universities are facing similar as well as different challenges with HRS4R, an exchange of information and experiences was identified as priority. In addition, a supporting network for the development of the planned Joint Action Plan (JAP) was needed to integrate shared objectives and to develop a joint strategy for the future.

### 4.1. Composition of the Expert Working Group

As the leading university of WP 4, BTU C-S invited participants from all EUNICE universities to join in the established Expert Working Group (EWG). Each university was invited to nominate at least one expert, e.g. from the HR departments, International Relation Offices (IRO) or other experienced or interested key stakeholders to join the group. The following list includes the function of each expert in the EUNICE HRS4R Expert Working Group.

**Table 2 - Nominated persons in the EUNICE HRS4R Expert Working Group**

| No. | Function  | University |
|-----|---|------------|
| 1   | Head of management for personnel matters at HR department | BTU C-S    |
| 2   | Consultant at IRO   | BTU C-S    |
| 3   | Head of management for junior researchers                 | BTU C-S    |
| 4   | EU liaison officer  | BTU C-S    |
| 5   | REUNICE project manager                                   | BTU C-S    |
| 6   | HR specialist   | UVA        |
| 7   | HR specialist   | UVA        |
| 8   | Research manager  | UVA        |
| 9   | Specialist, research services                             | UVA        |
| 10  | Specialist, quality team                                  | UVA        |
| 11  | Project manager   | UMONS      |
| 12  | Project manager   | UMONS      |
| 13  | European project officer                                  | UC         |
| 14  | REUNICE project leader                                    | UC         |
| 15  | Head of HR  | UPHF       |
| 16  | REUNICE project officer                                   | UPHF       |
| 17  | REUNICE project officer                                   | PUT        |
| 18  | Project manager   | UNICT      |



The list shows a considerable diversity of involved persons. About one third of the persons are related to HR departments and another third to European projects such as EUNICE and REUNICE. The other involved persons are related to specific projects or are, e.g. staff members of the IROs. With 18 members, most of the universities nominated at least two persons for the EWG. Since BTU C-S is the lead university in WP 4, these members took over the organization and preparation of the meetings. However, all members of the group were invited to suggest other or additional topics for the proposed agenda.

#### 4.2. Meeting dates and content of the Expert Working Group

The EWG met two times online via Webex before this report was finalized and submitted. The first meeting was held on June 16 and the second on August 17. The first meeting consisted of an introductory section, getting to know each other, a presentation of the HRS4R survey results and a presentation on how to proceed with the EWG. During the second meeting, the created Guiding Document (see chapter five) and content of the JAP were presented and discussed. This was accompanied by an intense debate about possible mentoring and support structures in the EUNICE alliance for both, universities with and without HRS4R seal. A third meeting of the EWG is planned, but was not yet scheduled by the time the report was submitted.

#### 4.3. Outcome and findings of the Expert Working Group meetings

The EWG on HRS4R for EUNICE alliance universities was established, to facilitate communication and information exchange between stakeholders and experts involved. Due to the varying stages of EUNICE universities regarding HRS4R, several members requested this exchange on an informal basis. In addition, the communication and exchange of information among the partners was fostered through a structured data collection based on the HRS4R survey and gathering of additional information and experiences with the help of a so-called Guiding Document. A proposed separation of EWG into two subgroups, in particular for a better communication among universities on a more equal level regarding the implementation of HRS4R, was not desired. This became clear during the discussions, especially through direct communication between individual stakeholders and universities.

The benefits of the EWG became noticeable for all participants during the first and second meetings. The informal exchange of experiences, including the presentation of suitable tools and measures, was fruitful for all partners, but especially for those who are currently planning to apply for the HRS4R seal.

During the second meeting of the EWG, members of the BTU C-S presented the draft JAP and put the content up for discussion. The direct feedback and feedback via e-mail has subsequently been implemented in the final version of the JAP.





## 5. Joint Action Plan for HRS4R

The JAP on HRS4R is not intended to lead to standardized processes in all EUNICE partner universities, nor to a standardized application or implementation process at the European level. Rather, the action plan is intended to guide EUNICE universities through the varying HRS4R processes and support all partners, regardless of their current status in the HRS4R implementation process. This includes the exchange of information as well as presentation of purposive tools and workflows. In the first year, the BTU C-S will take responsibility and work on the implementation of the JAP. Subsequently, it is planned to pass on the responsibility to a partner institution on a rotating basis.

By supporting all universities, the JAP will also serve as constant reminder and trigger for universities without HRS4R seal to apply for the award and start the implementation. External experts from other experienced universities, EURAXESS or familiar stakeholders can support this initiative, share their experiences, and contribute with new ideas. Furthermore, by developing HRS4R into a joint initiative of the EUNICE alliance, the consortium can act as feedback group for new activities and measures.

Finally, the JAP will help to boost individual activities of all universities and raise the awareness of HRS4R at the local level for each university as well as at supranational level through the EUNICE alliance.

### 5.1. Implementation of the Joint Action Plan (Phase I – II)

The JAP is divided into four different implementation phases. In particular, against the background of unrealistic long-term planning, a constant evaluation and update of the action plan is essential. The first two phases cover a timeframe of one year (each about six months). They will be carried out from October 2022 until September 2023.

The **Guiding Document (1)** that has already been created will be extended and supplemented by all partners. The goal is to create a living document where all partners can add questions or information and request answers from other alliance partners. By working with an open, transparent, and easy-to-use document, all partners can share and gather information regardless of their status in the HRS4R implementation process. In the second phase, the Guiding Document will be further enhanced and transformed into an **information catalogue**. In this catalogue, EUNICE partners can search and find useful answers to general and partly specific questions related to the HRS4R application and implementation processes, obstacles, and developed solutions.

The established **Expert Working Group on HRS4R (2)** will be continued and support a constant communication process among all partners. The working group as regular communication channel is already a productive tool for an informal exchange among all partners. Due to the stable composition of the group, people became already more familiar and appreciate the exchange. The EWG will form the basis for a comprehensive communication and as a discussion platform for ongoing and future activities. Currently, the EWG consists of 18 experts from the seven EUNICE alliance universities (see chapter

four), but is open for new members from the seven EUNICE partners. In the first and second phase, the focus will change to the developed implementation measures for the OTM-R policy and more specific about the 40 principles of the Charter and Code.

As part of the renewal application of EUNICE, the network of universities will be extended by three additional universities. These **three new partner universities** will be **invited on a voluntary basis (3)** to join the EWG, associated measures and ongoing actions (incl. the Guiding Document or awareness raising activities). Assuming a continuation of EUNICE in 2023 and a successful renewal process, the new universities may also be added on a mandatory basis and become regular members with the second or third phase of the JAP (04/2023 – 09/2023). The new partner will contribute their experiences and information, but on the other side, can add questions and benefit from already collected and shared information about the HRS4R and related processes of the respective universities.



Figure 2 - Overview of the REUNICE Joint Action Plan on HRS4R, different phases, and planned actions

As requested by the partners in the survey (see chapter three) and discussions within the EWG, **external experts will be invited (4)** for further input, new insights, ideas, and discussions. The invitation of experts outside EUNICE and the EWG will be based on an irregular but repeatedly basis. A first speaker (Isabelle Halleux (tbc)) has already confirmed her participation and willingness for the end of 2022. The EUNICE alliance is willing to support the invitation of renowned experts from other universities, the EURAXESS network or other institutions.

Another challenge identified in the survey and discussions is the lack of attention and low awareness regarding HRS4R and related activities. As an additional part of the JAP, **joint communication activities (5)** will be developed and disseminated through the existing communication channels of all universities. The creation of new channels or parallel structures must be avoided. By providing the same or similar content about HRS4R and related activities, EUNICE partners and stakeholders will be able to enhance their efficiency and use already available resources repeatedly. Partners will share



information and materials for website posts, blog content, and social media content. This activity is planned to raise the awareness of HRS4R in general and associated activities in particular. In addition, the increased communication will provide a transparent and open basis for further cooperation's and improvements of the respective implementation activities at each university.

As collective initiative, the JAP proposes the production of a **EUNICE HRS4R promotional video (6)**, in which different partners provide insights in different activities, processes, and opportunities related to HRS4R at their respective universities. The video will be distributed through the EUNICE website, social media channels of each university, and during events where appropriate. In accordance with the general responsibility of the JAP, the BTU C-S will be in consultation with the EUNICE partners, in charge and responsible for the organizational planning of the video and its content. A first draft of the video is planned for November 2022 and will be presented and discussed at a meeting of the EWG.

In the first phase of the JAP, experts and partners will brainstorm ideas for a **joint awareness-raising event (7)**. Initial ideas include a joint conference (online or hybrid), an on-site networking meeting of members of the EWG at a EUNICE location or the preparation of creative content for other local events (e.g. input for the European Researchers Night such as quizzes). The joint awareness-raising event will take place in the second phase (04/23 – 09/23) of the JAP and will later be transferred into an annual event. Also with regard to the sustainability of the measures to be implemented, a close link between the various EUNICE / REUNICE and the additional HRS4R events will be ensured.

After the second phase, a **joint evaluation and update (8)** of the JAP by all partners is foreseen. The evaluation, initially led by the BTU C-S, will form the basis for the aforementioned update and improvement. The partners of all universities will be invited to reflect and to identify existing obstacles, appropriate solutions and potential improvements, which will be integrated in phase III and IV of the JAP.

## 5.2. Implementation of the Joint Action Plan (Phase III – Phase IV)

Phase III and IV of the JAP Action Plan comprises activities starting from October 2023 and open towards the end. Both, the **Guiding Document / Catalogue of information (1)** as well as the **Expert Working Group (2)** as tools for information sharing and exchange will be continued. As several partners will have improved the catalogue of information continuously since phase I, the collected information will likewise provide a valuable resource and enrichment for other alliances or partners outside the EUNICE network. Therefore, a **shared publication about the HRS4R processes (9)**, common obstacles and developed solutions is planned for phase IV.

The constant dissemination of information about the HRS4R and related activities in phase I, II, and III will be further enhanced to an efficient **HRS4R information campaign (5)**. The central objective is to disseminate information to a wide audience throughout



the entire EUNICE network and to raise awareness about the importance of the strategy in general and ongoing activities in particular. In addition, this campaign will also serve as a constant reminder for ongoing implementation and monitoring processes involving a broader audience.

Closely linked with the structured dissemination of information or later the HRS4R information campaign, are local or online awareness raising events. After the initial launch in phase I and II, it will be transformed into an **annual awareness-raising event (7)** with activities at each participating university. Dependent on the evaluation results and updates, these events will be further improved and increase the attention on the HRS4R and related activities.

Similar to phase II, the JAP will be evaluated at each subsequent phase to identify successful measures and improve items where necessary. The **evaluation and update (8)** of the JAP will initially be led by the BTU C-S, but should later rotate among the participating universities and their members.

As a final goal, the **HRS4R will be mandatory for all EUNICE universities (10)**. This will not only demonstrate the strong long-term commitment of all members, but it also aims to ensure that all HR-related processes are conducted at a common European level and according to the same guidelines. This will improve the quality and impact of research as well as facilitate an open labor market for researchers.



## 6. Summary

The HRS4R Joint Action Plan, state as Deliverable 4.1 in the REUNICE project, is an important tool to align the varying strategies of the universities in the EUNICE alliance. The action plan will begin with phase I immediately after the submission of the deliverable in October 2022 under the coordination of BTU C-S. The initial survey revealed that each university reached a different point in the preparation or implementation process of the HRS4R so far. Whereas some universities debate internally about the pros and cons of HRS4R for their own institutions, others are in the process of preparing their application or applied several years ago and implemented already various action plans.

Despite the varying stages of EUNICE members, several common challenges and barriers have been identified, especially at crucial points before and during the application, and implementation phase. All universities struggle to disseminate or collect information about HRS4R, related activities and to address relevant stakeholders or people in charge. Others experienced difficulties in performing the needed gap analysis and derive appropriate action plans from the analysis. Associated are challenges to identify suitable indicators, especially for the assessment and monitoring of ongoing action measures and related achievements. HRS4R active universities developed in recent years a series of useful tools and create solutions to address these challenges and overcome mentioned obstacles. Starting from permanent working groups and steering groups for an extensive information exchange and varying process management tools up to dissemination actions, involved universities went successfully through the implementation and award renewal phases. Accordingly, universities with the HRS4R seal are satisfied with the impact achieved through the HRS4R. Based on their guidance, developed solutions, and support, other universities currently without the HRS4R seal can force the pace of implementation and prevent themselves from past mistakes.

Independent of their status, experts and stakeholders involved in the EWG are interested in role models and to get examples how other institutions dealt with similar topics and challenges. A notable example is the challenge to raise awareness for HRS4R, related actions and how to get key stakeholders involved. Interestingly, the need to focus on awareness-raising activities diminishes over time. It seems that with an increasing impact of HRS4R actions and well-established structures, the appreciation of HRS4R is likewise increasing and so the attention people spend on related actions and processes. A strong commitment of the university leadership was identified as fundamental requirement. In general, as long-term process, HRS4R is typically integrated into major university or institution-wide strategies and is treated likewise. The established EWG has shown, that an informal platform across the universities to share information, discuss ongoing activities and exchange ideas is rewarding for all members of the group. However, due to the different stages of HRS4R implementation at the universities, the efficiency of the working group and its meetings can be improved



in future. An important factor for an effective exchange of information is given with the Guiding Document. This online document represents an open, transparent, and flexible tool to share information and ask questions among colleagues. In the progress of the JAP, the Guiding Document will be extended to an Information Catalogue where stakeholders can easily find the most required information and support for various challenges within the implementation phases of HRS4R. In the future, this catalogue should be published to spread the information more widely.

The derived JAP as a result of the initial survey, the Guiding Document and the EWG has been divided into four different phases. In particular, the integrated evaluation and update plan will assure that future actions are realistic and adapted to upcoming requirements and possible new conditions. The implementation of the JAP will be led by the BTU C-S for the first year, but should ideally rotate among EUNICE partners on an annual basis. As part of the enlargement of the EUNICE alliance with three new partners, the EWG will be likewise extended with key stakeholders from these three universities, initially on a voluntary basis.

As a response to the low awareness level, several actions are planned to increase the attention and the level of recognition. In phase I, a joint promotional video on EUNICE HRS4R will be recorded. The video will give insights and news about HRS4R activities in the alliance and its importance. It will be released by all universities within the EUNICE network, using existing and already well-established communication channels. Additional promotional events are planned (e.g. a conference or participation on fairs) to boost the awareness of HRS4R and increase the involvement of relevant stakeholders. Due to the planned sustainability of those measures, a close integration with EUNICE and REUNICE events will be ensured.

At the end of phase IV, the implementation of HRS4R should be transformed into a mandatory process for all EUNICE alliance members. This will not only show the strong commitment of all EUNICE partners, but also ensure that all institutions work under the same framework and with similar quality assurance. With an immediate launch of the JAP after the submission of Deliverable 4.1 at the end of September 2022, EUNICE universities are smoothly continuing their work on HRS4R, fostering the engagement of all institutions and supporting them in their different actions for more unified HR processes and exchange of researchers and staff.