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WP 8 – Socioeconomic impact & stakeholder engagement

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Responsible Partner	**VITO**		
Responsible Author	Jos Bessems	E-mail	jos.bessems@vito.be
	Partner	VITO	Phone	00 32 14 33 51 57
Other authors	Natasha Wauters		

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Introduction

This deliverable describes the development of the EIRENE PPP Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), engagement that needs to start already during EIRENE PPP but will continue in the next phase, i.e., the EIRENE Implementation Phase (IP). A strategy is set up to organize engagement, but it does not detail the actual execution of some of the listed actions to organize the engagement. Neither does it describe the actual engagement and the results of the engagement. This plan will aim to increase the engagement of stakeholders in the EIRENE IP, thereby increasing involvement and support in the broader community of all categories of stakeholders, from researchers to policymakers to budget holders. In this development process, EIRENE PPP will closely align with the International Human Exposome Network (IHEN) project that just kicked off (February 2025) and continues to build on the results of EHEN, the European Human Exposome Network.

EHEN is a cluster of 9 research projects under Horizon 2020: HEDIMED, LONGITOOLS, REMEDIA, ATHLETE, EPHOR, EXIMIOUS, EQUAL-LIFE, EXPANSE and HEAP. EHEN is currently the world's largest network of projects studying the impact of environmental exposure on human health, but the individual research projects will all be finished by 1 July 2025.

From this perspective, IHEN started as a follow-up and to expand the human exposome network to a global scale. The objective of IHEN is to improve global research and cooperation on the exposome through establishing an international network on human exposome. The key aims of IHEN are (1) to design the organizational structure of a sustainable international human exposome network to strengthen cooperation and coordination of exposome research in Europe and foster and align cooperation globally and (2) to develop a roadmap for future exposome research and innovation including the formulation of an operational definition of exposome research and an interim research agenda. Other objectives are the identification of exposome tools, metadata, and resources and making them available globally in a FAIR toolbox, including tool inventories and data catalogs.

As such, IHEN and EIRENE PPP are complementary in a broader perspective. Regarding stakeholder engagement, they need to fully align due to the almost identical stakeholders. Joint planning of engagement will enable a smooth-running communication with the stakeholders and will hopefully also prevent stakeholders from being contacted and questioned by two projects about similar issues.

This deliverable is not the final SEP but will be elaborated further during the 2nd half of EIRENE PPP (up to September 2025).

Narrative

Direct users of RI in the Environment & Health domain in the member countries of EIRENE PPP have been engaged already via their national nodes in EIRENE PPP WP2 (on availabilities and needs of exposome services) and WP6 (on human resources dedicated and/or planned for those exposome services). In the next phase, also indirect users (e.g. agencies at national, European and global scale) and strategic partners such as authorities

and funding agencies at all level will be engaged. But before concrete stakeholder engagement and communication can be started on a broad scale, EIRENE PPP and IHEN will prepare clear narratives on the potentials and the necessity of exposome research. will start These narratives, aligned but maybe not fully identical, need to be clear and ready before communication with stakeholders is established.

General Approach

Experience with the involvement of direct users via the EIRENE National nodes via questionnaires will be used in the next phase of planning the broader stakeholder engagement.

Since this is the first formal communication of the plan and we are still in the early phase of the IHEN project, this deliverable is brief, providing just general ideas. As EIRENE PPP progresses, the SEP will be adapted using input from IHEN and enhanced to provide a robust plan for EIRENE IP.

Identification of stakeholder groups

The first step to take in working out a strategy for stakeholder engagement is to identify the different stakeholder groups. The engagement of a stakeholder group will need to be targeted for each stakeholder group. Their needs for engagement and information will be different, as well as the best way to approach them and the kind of information and input that can be collected from them. It's therefore critical to have a thorough picture and understanding of the stakeholder groups and subsequently, to map their interest in and potential impact on EIRENE. And here, the potential impact is based on a combination of interest in EIRENE and power regarding EIRENE-relevant issues. Based on that, the stakeholders can be categorized and prioritized. In that way, an engagement plan catered to the stakeholder groups can be drafted.

During the proposal phase of EIRENE PPP, three groups of users of/stakeholder groups regarding research infrastructures were defined: (1) direct users, (2) indirect users, and (3) the broader stakeholder community. This was the basis for identifying possible stakeholders and allowed us to make a first list of stakeholders. This was needed to form a first idea about the stakeholders and also to be able to collect the information needed to categorize them further within the three existing stakeholder groups and prioritize them. Subsequently and perpendicular to the 3 user/stakeholder groups, three interaction levels are proposed: (A) core scientific exposome researcher, (B) collaborative partners = connected research fields and infrastructures and (C) broader stakeholder community. For this last group further stakeholder inventories not only from EHEN but also from the partnership for the assessment of risks of chemicals (PARC) and the project 'Health and Environment Research Agenda' (HERA; which has continued now as the network SPHERA – Single Planet HERA) will be used as many of the partners in these activities have continued specific work for RI (as well/now) within EIRENE PPP.

Table 1 provides a first overview of the stakeholder groups, clustered along the 3 'user groups' including some clear examples and the proposed interaction level. Figure 1 gives a visual representation of the table.

In the coming months a more extensive inventory of stakeholders will be build, which will evolve into a shared address book between EI and IHEN.

Table 1: Categorisation of EIRENE RI stakeholders

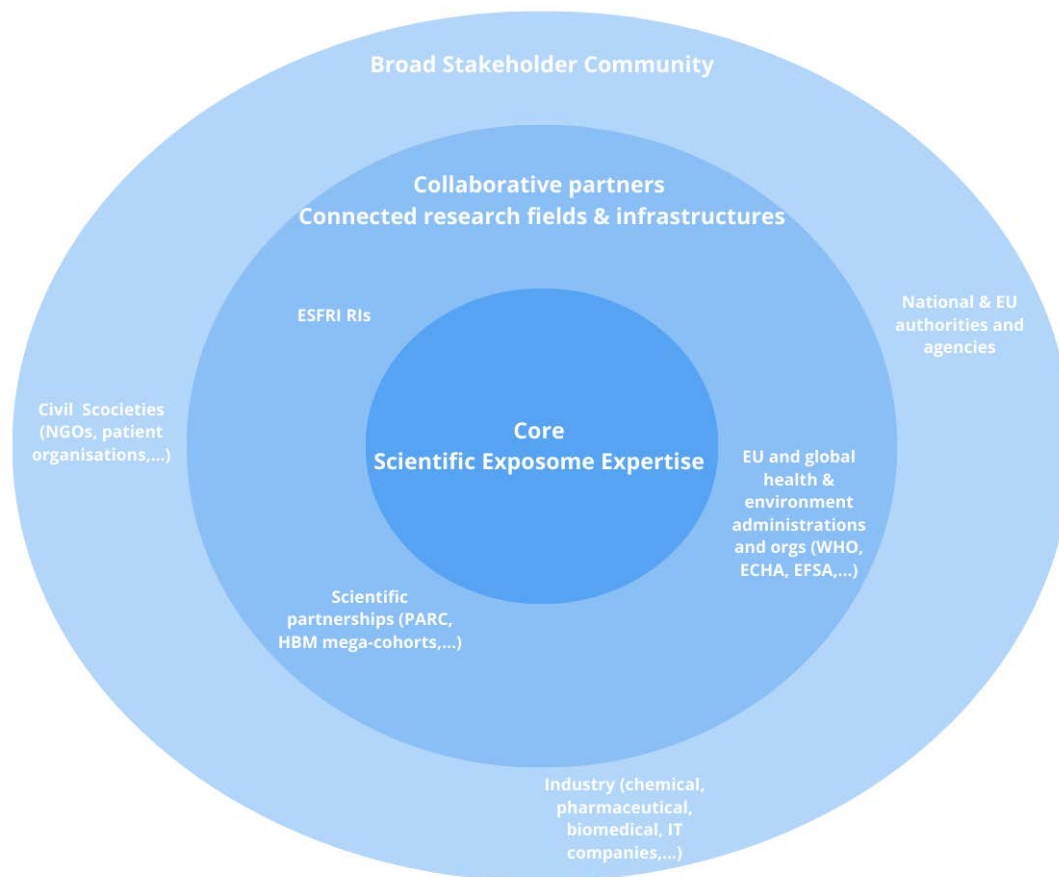| User level	Stakeholder Groups	Examples	Proposed Interaction Level
Direct RI users	Scientific community	Research institutes (e.g. VITO, Sciensano, UBA RIVM,…), Universities	core
	Exposome networks and projects	EHEN, IHEN, SPHERA?	core
	European scientific partnerships	PARC, HBM4EU	collaborative partner
	HBM cohorts	See EU HBM Dashboard, JACS, mercury cohort, ESTEBAN	collaborative partner
	ESFRI RIs	BBMRI, EATRIS, ACTRIS	collaborative partner
	(Associations of) Chemical companies and manufacturers	Essencia, Fedustria (National BE), Cefic (EU)	community
	Biochemical/biomedical companies/association	beMedTech (National BE), MedTechEurope (EU)	community
	Pharmaceutical companies/associations	EFPIA, Pharma.be (National BE)	community
	IT companies		community
Indirect RI users	EU agencies environment/ health	EEA, ECHA, EFSA, EMA	collaborative partner
	National health agencies	Inspection Health Care (IGZ, NL)	community
	National environment agencies	Environment Inspection (NL)	community
	EU Health administration - policy makers	ECDC?, DG SANTE?	collaborative partner
	EU Environment administration - policy makers	DG ENV	collaborative partner
	Global institutions	WHO, UNEP	collaborative partner
	National environment administrations	National Environment Inspections	collaborative partner
	National health administrations	Ministries of Health; Ministries of Environment	collaborative partner
	NGOs	HEAL, ChemSec	community
	Patient Organisations	EuroHealthNet, ECO (cancer), EKPF (kidney),	community
Strategic partners	National authorities	Ministries of Environment and/or Health	community
	EU authorities	Health Commissioner, Environment Commissioner	community
	EU funding agencies	DG RTD	collaborative partner
	National funding agencies	NWO (NL), FWO (BE)	collaborative partner

Figure 1: Three interaction levels of stakeholders with some examples per level

Categorizing stakeholder groups according to power and interest

As mentioned above categorizing the stakeholders will make it possible to determine not only the way we approach the stakeholders but also what can be asked of them. A useful methodology for analysing the stakeholders for the optimal interaction is by determining their interest in the project as well as determining their level of influence (power) on the project. Both might be different in the different stages of the project. Those two parameters can be used in a power interest analyses, where the combination of those two parameters generates four categories. A power interest grid can be used to visually assign the stakeholders to those four categories. Those four categories determine the level of engagement.

Stakeholders with high power and interest are decision makers and have the biggest impact on the success of the project hence why their expectations should be managed closely. Stakeholders with high power but low interest have very little interest but can yield power, which is why they need to be kept satisfied. When they are not kept satisfied, they could negatively impact the project. When stakeholders have low power but high interest, they should be adequately informed and communicated with to intercept any problems or issues early on. These stakeholders can often be helpful in working out the details of the project. Stakeholders that have low power and interest should be monitored with as little communication as required (*Stakeholder Analysis Using the Power Interest Grid*, 2023).

Since there are so many stakeholders for EIRENE and IHEN, many of which are not yet identified, we will in this phase prioritize stakeholder groups and members but not individual stakeholders. Additionally, we will determine their power and interest based on prior knowledge of the stakeholder groups. Ideally, a desktop search to collect information on interest and power could be done to more accurately determine these parameters. Or it could be included in a questionnaire. However, in this phase we consider our judgement adequate. Table 2 proposes the grouping of the stakeholders in the power/interest grid.
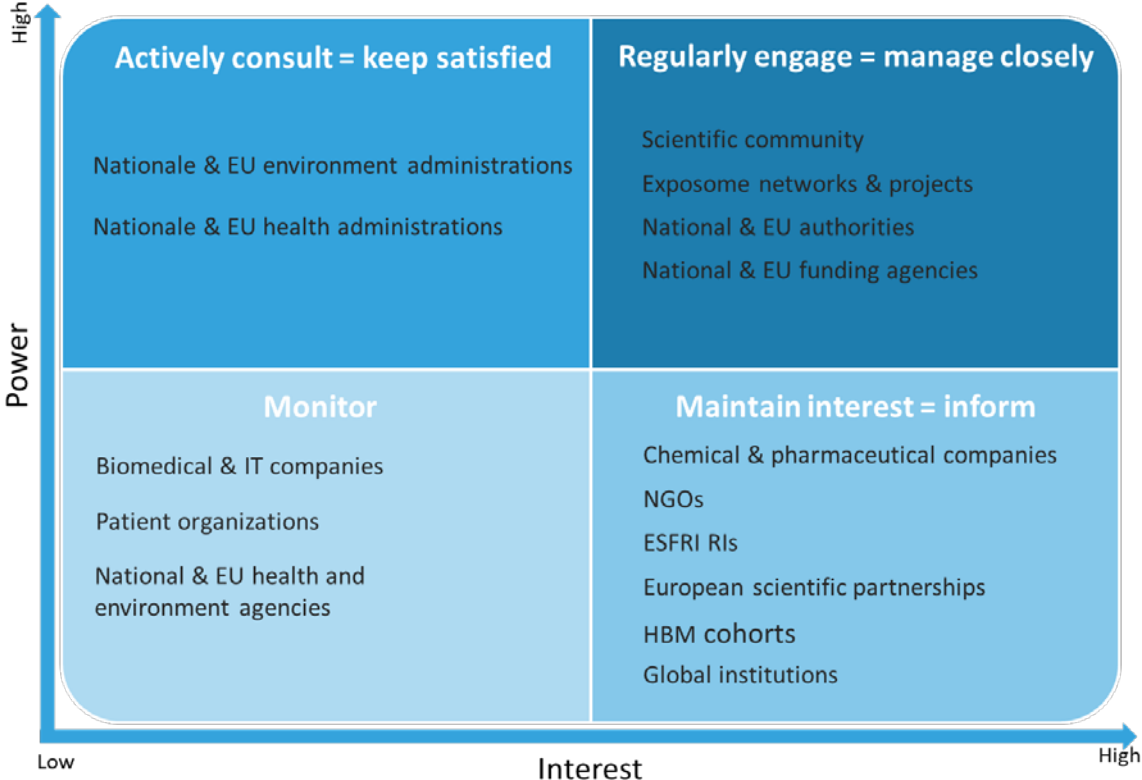

Figure 2: Categorization of stakeholder groups according to the power interest grid

First ideas on how to engage

We can define two types of stakeholder's engagement: (1) informing and raising interest in EIRENE and (2) collecting input from stakeholders (e.g., via questionnaires, etc.). Both the type of stakeholder and their priority inform how the stakeholders should be engaged and what channels are appropriate to engage with stakeholders. Additionally, the information that can be collected from and delivered to the stakeholders will also differ.

Next, there are quite some actual channels that can be used for specific interaction dependent of the specific user level, the specific interaction level and the (proposed) position in the power-interest grid: newsletters, meeting, website, intranet etcetera. The EIRENE PPP 9.1 deliverable details a dissemination and communication plan including a dissemination and communication channel matrix (Table 3). The target groups in this channel matrix are slightly differently divided from the stakeholder groups as in that most of those groups in the table are considered stakeholders for stakeholder engagement. However, the channels are applicable for stakeholder engagement. These channels are obviously more intended for informing and keeping stakeholders engaged with EIRENE either passively or actively. From the power interest analysis above, we can determine that passive engagement is only suitable for the informed and monitored categories. The other two categories, manage closely and keep satisfied, should be actively informed. That does not mean that they cannot also be informed through more passive channels on information that does not directly pertain them. But close management and satisfaction can only be succeeded by a more active engagement.

A closer involvement of stakeholders for collecting input and data from them will be organized differently. National and regional stakeholders will need to be approached via the national hubs. For European and international stakeholders this will naturally not be the case. The channels via which they will need to be approached need to be worked out in the coming months.

In addition to how stakeholders are approached and engaged, the content that is brought to the stakeholders will be different based on type and priority but also on engagement type. Informing stakeholders should initially cover EIRENE in general to familiarize stakeholders with the project and what it offers. Here the narrative will be particularly important. When stakeholders are satisfactorily informed about EIRENE in general, more catered information to their interests and needs can be delivered. When stakeholders are involved to provide input, the input expected from the stakeholders and thus also the prompts will be different between stakeholders. Input can for example be asked via a questionnaire and the questions asked and thus input will be different between stakeholder types.

Table 2: Dissemination and communication channel matrix (based on D9.1)

Dissemination channels	Target group	Feedback/effects expected
Website	All	Increased visibility of RIs
Intranet	Internal	Enhancing internal culture/spreading information
Newsletters	Internal, users, policy, public	Increased visibility of RIs and informed stakeholders
Workshops, training activities	EIRENE RI-members[1] and relevant experts on the themes	Stimulate innovation in exposome tools via open contact with instrument/devices/sensor builders, improved protocols, and exchange of lab experiences
User's workshops	Users, stakeholders	Discuss the needs of users, the scope, performance, capacity and quality of the services, and the processing procedure of TNA or VA applications
Specialized websites	Users, policymakers, media	Attracted users and policymakers, increase of contractual research and applications
Events for public	Students, the public, the media	Increased visibility of RIs, and popularised research topics
Events for professionals	Users, policymakers, media	Attracted users and policymakers, increase of contractual research and applications.
Events for industry	Users, policymakers, media	Interaction with industry, translation of results to innovation
Printed media	All	Increased visibility of RIs, popularised research topic;
Public media	All	
Social media	Internal, students, users, public	Attracted students, Increased visibility of RIs, popularised research topic
Scientific papers	Students, users, policymakers	Affecting research community, increased awareness of RIs;
University channels	Internal, students	Increased internal knowledge about the EIRENE RI research and activities.

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[1] States that constitute EIRENE ERIC.

Survey

We plan to develop a number of surveys and survey questions for the various stakeholder groups in dependence of the user level (direct, indirect, strategic), the expected level of interaction (core, collaborative, community), their interest and their power regarding funding and priority setting. With these surveys, we aim to obtain a better insight into the stakeholder's interests in exposome research and EIRENE in particular and also what their expectations and needs are for stakeholder engagement in EIRENE RI. Depending on the input, we can try to capture information on their power and finetune the power interest analysis. In the Annex we provide already some first ideas of questions we would ideally pose to the stakeholders.

Annex

Potential survey questions

1. Are you familiar with human exposome research?
2. What are your expectations regarding exposome research, results and impact?
   - o What are your concerns? Do you see challenges?
3. What would optimal research infrastructure for exposome research look like?
4. Are you familiar with the European EIRENE Initiative?
5. Are you familiar with the concept of national hubs in EI RI.
6. At what level would national hubs need to work together?

- Chairing information on RI's?

- Exchange of experience/problems/challenges with the use of RI's?

7. Where do you place your organisation in the 3 user levels?
   - o Direct user
   - o Indirect user
   - o Strategic level
8. Where do you place your organisation in the 3 interaction levels?
   - o Core
   - o Collaborative
   - o Community
9. What is your interest in exposome research?
   - o High interest
   - o Low interest
10. What is your mandate regarding funding or priority setting when it comes to research infrastructure for exposome research?
11. What are your expectations regarding stakeholder engagement in the

- implementation phase?

- and operational phase?

Please select the desired communication channels and add frequency with which you would wish to participate/receive said communication.

   - o networking
   - o webinars
   - o emails
   - o newsletter
   - o dedicated online meetings
   - o forum
   - o other
12. Does your organisation/company wish to be involved during the preparatory, implementation and/or operational phase of EIRENE? Yes/No.

In case of yes →

13. In case you prefer we contact another person in your organisation/company for future communications, please indicate this below by providing their contact details.