

DELIVERABLE 6.4

Final Plan for the Exploitation and Dissemination of Results, including Communication Activities



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1. INTRODUCTION

GEMSTONE is a project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe research programme, within the Twinning scheme. As one of the projects selected under this initiative, GEMSTONE aims to strengthen the research capacity and international competitiveness of Acibadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University (ACU) within the European Research Area (ERA).

The project was designed to create the conditions, knowledge, and skills necessary for ACU to fully realise its research potential in the field of neuroscience and neurodevelopment. Through capacity-building activities such as short-term visits, mentoring, training workshops and scientific exchanges, GEMSTONE fostered collaboration with internationally recognised experts in neuroscience, genetically engineered models (GEMs), and advanced experimental techniques.

Research and capacity-building actions were intended to enhance research excellence, expand international networks, increase scientific output in high-impact journals, and improve ACU's ability to attract competitive funding and talented researchers.

Within this framework, Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation (DCE) activities were conceived as a strategic and integral component of the project and were designed to ensure that the knowledge generated, skills developed, and collaborations established through GEMSTONE translated into tangible and sustainable impact. In particular, the DCE strategy aimed to raise visibility of the project and communicate its benefits and achievements to defined target groups; to share knowledge through tailored and stakeholder-specific dissemination approaches; to strengthen ACU's reputation, public image and credibility within the scientific and industrial communities; and to establish concrete pathways for the exploitation of GEMSTONE's results.

Work Package 6 (WP6) was dedicated to the implementation of these activities. It ensured coordinated and targeted outreach towards the neuroscience community, early-career researchers, students, research policy actors and the wider public.

At project start, a dedicated communication toolkit was developed, including the visual identity, website and social media channels. Moreover, an initial exploitation, dissemination and communication strategy was proposed, providing a consistent framework for engagement throughout the project duration.

While the initial plan (D6.2) outlined key messages, tools and channels, geographical scope and timeline of activities, and established dissemination pathways, including monitoring mechanisms to assess outreach, engagement, and impact on target audiences, this final plan reports on how the DCE strategy was implemented and how it evolved in alignment with the project's progress, highlighting the results achieved and the contribution of these activities to GEMSTONE's overall objectives.

Following this Introduction, Section 2 presents a concise summary of the initial exploitation, communication and dissemination strategy defined at project start. It recalls the Key Exploitable Results (KERs), target audiences and stakeholders, as well as the main objectives, key messages and measures originally planned.

Section 3 constitutes the core of the document and details how the strategy has been implemented over time. It is organised by stakeholder groups (e.g. neuroscience community and professionals, young students and researchers, and other relevant audiences). For each group, the document describes the dissemination and engagement measures carried out, explicitly linking them to the relevant KERs to demonstrate how these activities supported the uptake and re-use of project results. Each subsection also includes a reflective analysis of what was achieved compared to what was initially foreseen, highlighting impact, deviations from the original plan, and the rationale behind strategic adjustments. Communication activities directed to more general audiences are also showcased in this section, presenting how the communication toolkit, website and social media channels, together with other audio-visual and editorial formats, have been used during the project.

Finally, Section 4 provides the main conclusions, summarising key achievements, lessons learned and the overall evolution of the DCE strategy in alignment with the project's progress and objectives.

2. SUMMARY OF THE INITIAL EXPLOITATION, COMMUNICATION, AND DISSEMINATION STRATEGY

2.1. Identification of Key Exploitable Results

The identification of Key Exploitable Results (KERs) constituted the cornerstone of the GEMSTONE Project's exploitation strategy. From the outset, the consortium systematically identified, mapped, and monitored project outputs with clear potential for use beyond the project duration.

KERs were selected based on their potential to generate downstream benefits, support further research and innovation, inform policy and funding strategies, or contribute to education and institutional capacity building. The portfolio of KERs covered complementary domains, including advanced models and datasets (e.g. double transgenic mice, experimental datasets, SOPs), scientific knowledge advancement, and a wide range of capacity-building and research management outputs (e.g. training materials, competence matrices, methodologies, databases, and best practices).

Figure 1: Summary of GEMSTONE KERs

| KER and type | Exploitation pathway | Target audience |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| KER1: Double transgenic mice (Model) | <p>Non-commercial: through publications, patents, generating new collaborative research based on project results, integration of knowledge in university courses, MSc and PhD theses, new services and commercial products from SMEs.</p> <p>Commercial: leverage on results obtained for new therapeutic neuropeptide strategies, adoption/adaptation for other diseases, such as autism and Alzheimer's disease. These will be further detailed. At the moment, the data set is not identified.</p> | International neuroscience community, clinical neurology community, SMEs |
| KER2: Datasets (Dataset) | | |
| KER3: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) (Procedure) | | |
| KER4: Research reports (Advancement in knowledge) | | |
| KER5: Report on short-term visits (Advancement in knowledge) | | |
| KER6: Training material and booklets of internal events (Advancement in knowledge) | <p>Non-commercial: leveraged to ensure replication in other universities and research centres dealing with health and neuroscience in the Widening countries.</p> | Rectors, university administrations, research project offices |
| KER7: Competences and skills matrix for Research Project Office upgrade (Model/methodology) | | |
| KER8: Methodology used for the mapping exercise (Methodology) | | |
| KER9: Plan of mentorship activities (Plan/model/methodology) | | |
| KER10: Database and roadmap of funding opportunities (Dataset) | | |
| KER11: Best practice book (Best practices) | | |

2.2. Target Audiences, Key Messages, and Dissemination and Communication Formats

At project start, stakeholders were defined as individuals, organisations, or entities with a direct or indirect interest in the project and its outcomes, either influencing or being influenced by its results and applications. Identifying these groups was a key prerequisite for effective DCE activities.

A structured stakeholder mapping process was implemented to support targeted engagement and maximise project impact. By analysing stakeholder interests, needs, and potential roles, the consortium was able to design focused dissemination and communication activities and involve relevant external actors during both the project implementation and post-project planning phases. This process provided strategic guidance for the execution of the Plan for the Exploitation and Dissemination of Results (PEDR), informing the selection of target groups, engagement channels, and potential partners to support the sustainable uptake of GEMSTONE results.

Given the diversity of target audiences addressed by the GEMSTONE Project, a set of tailored key messages was developed to clearly convey the project’s core objectives. These messages were adapted to specific stakeholder groups to ensure relevance, engagement, and effective knowledge transfer. Different communication materials and formats have been planned to effectively circulate information and promote project’s results

Table 2: Target audiences, key messages, and formats and channels

| Target audience | Stakeholders | Key messages | Formats and channels |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Neuroscience community and professionals at EU and global level | Neuroscientists in academia and R&D centres | "ACU strengthens research excellence in neuroscience by advancing state-of-the-art techniques and international collaboration, enabling high-impact and competitive research." | Scientific publications, website, social networks, leaflets, press and news releases |
| | Clinical neurologists in hospitals and clinical centres | | |
| | Students, early-stage researchers or clinicians interested in a career in neuroscience | "By acquiring scientific knowledge and technical skills, you can reinforce your profile as a researcher."; "ACU is a good place to complete your education and perform your research." | Website, social networks, leaflets, press and news releases, video production |
| Research support personnel in Widening countries | Research managers | "With the right training, you can create efficient support services for researchers." | Best practice book, website, social networks, leaflets, press and news releases |
| | Staff of research project offices | | |
| | University administrations | | |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policy actors and decision makers in Widening countries | Ministries of universities and research | "With the right training, you can create efficient support services for researchers."; "By strengthening researchers' soft skills, you can increase the visibility of your organisation and in your relevant community and increase networking capacities and opportunities." | Best practice book, annual magazines, website, social networks, media multipliers, leaflets, press and news releases |
| | University rectors | | |
| | Scientific directors of research organisations in neuroscience | | |
| | Head of neuroscience departments and other related departments in health sciences | | |
| Stakeholders and experts working in similar EU projects | Consortia of H2020 and HE projects addressing animal models in neuroscience, especially those working in absence epilepsy and Parkinson's disease | "By collaborating with GEMSTONE, you can create synergies, exchange best practices, and overcome common challenges in the Widening countries."; "Clustering initiatives with GEMSTONE offer opportunities for mutual learning, visibility, and coordinated dissemination." | Website, social networks, leaflets, press and news releases |
| Initiatives and platforms | The International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE), Dana Foundation, European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), BestPRACT, IMMUPARKNET (CA21117) | | |
| Industrial community | SMEs operating in neuroscience and pharmaceutical companies | "GEMSTONE generates knowledge and tools that can support innovation in neuroscience."; "ACU is strengthening its expertise and infrastructure in neuroscience, creating new opportunities for research-industry collaboration." | |
| General public | European citizens with an interest in neuroscience | "Absence epilepsy and Parkinson's disease represent significant challenges for patients and families and neuroscience research is essential to better understand and address them."; "Scientific research using advanced experimental models helps us uncover the mechanisms behind neurological disorders and improve future care." | Annual magazines, website, social networks, media multipliers, press and news releases |
| | Epilepsy and Parkinson's disease patients' associations | | |
| | European patients suffering from epilepsy and PD | | |
| | Epilepsy and PD patients' family members and informal carers | | |
| Media | Journalists and local/international media | | |

3. HOW THE STRATEGY HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED ALONG THE PROJECT DURATION

3.1. Exploitation Pathways and Maturity of Key Exploitable Results

For selected KERs, exploitation planning moved beyond conceptual mapping and resulted in concrete follow-up actions. These included the identification of specific research gaps requiring further investigation, clarification of institutional responsibilities for post-project continuation, and preliminary exploration of follow-up funding opportunities at national and European level. In selected cases, discussions were initiated with external stakeholders regarding potential future testing and replication of developed approaches.

Where project results were not subject to intellectual property protection, open-access principles were systematically applied. Peer-reviewed publications were deposited in recognised repositories (Zenodo and DSpace) in line with Horizon Europe requirements, and datasets were made available under FAIR principles to enable reuse by the scientific community. This open dissemination approach supported early-stage exploitation through knowledge uptake and citation in subsequent research initiatives.

Overall, capacity-building and research management KERs have already entered active exploitation, particularly through institutional integration of newly developed practices and sustained international collaborations. Research-related KERs remain at an early stage of exploitation, as their maturation and validation require further time beyond the project duration. However, the foundations for future uptake have been established.

3.2. Dissemination Activities to Promote Project Results

3.2.1. Neuroscience Community and Professionals (including Experts from Other Projects)

This target was reached to disseminate the research project results (KER1-4, see Table 1) and favour their non-commercial exploitation.

The animal model (KER1) was disseminated through open-access publications and oral/poster presentations during conferences, the organisation of project dissemination events, bilateral exchanges, networking activities. They were also used for MSc/PhD thesis work.

Datasets (KER2) have informed manuscripts under review or in preparation; and some selected datasets were made openly available through open-access repositories to support reuse. SOPs (KER3) were adopted by partner laboratories and transferred through short-term visits, hands-on training, and capacity-building activities.

Scientific Publications

The project generated scientific results that were disseminated through the following open access publications:

- Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat, Evgenia Sitnikova. "Astrocytes as a Target for Therapeutic Strategies in Epilepsy: Current Insights." *Frontiers in Molecular Neuroscience*, Vol. 16, 2023. doi.org/10.3389/fnmol.2023.1183775.
- Aylin Toplu, Nursima Mutlu, Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Özge Sarıyıldız, Musa Çelik, Devrim Öz Arslan, Özlem Akman, Zoltán Molnár, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat. "Involvement of Orexin Type-2 Receptors in Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats." *Frontiers in Neurology*, Vol. 14, 2023. doi.org/10.3389/fneur.2023.1282494.
- Filiz Onat, My Andersson, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz. "The Role of Glial Cells in the Pathophysiology of Epilepsy." *Cells*, Vol. 14, 2025. doi.org/10.3390/cells14020094.
- Pablo M. Casillas-Espinosa, Jennifer C. Wong, Wanda Grabon, Ana Gonzalez-Ramos, Massimo Mantegazza, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Manisha Patel, Kevin Staley, Raman Sankar, Terence J. O'Brien, Özlem Akman, Ganna Balagura, Adam L. Numis, Jeffrey L. Noebels, Stéphanie Baulac, Stéphane Auvin, David C. Henshall, Aristeia S. Galanopoulou. "WONOEPA Appraisal: Targeted Therapy Development for Early Onset Epilepsies." *Epilepsia*, Vol. 66, 2025. doi.org/10.1111/epi.18187.

Academic partners led the preparation and submission of publications presenting key research findings and ACU monitored and documented all scientific and technical publications produced within the project. High-impact journals in the fields of neuroscience and neurological disorders were targeted, ensuring scientific quality and visibility. Information on published articles was communicated through the project website and social media channels to support dissemination and outreach.

To promote accessibility and reuse, all open-access publications, including selected datasets, were deposited in the ACU's DSpace-based open-access repository and the GEMSTONE Project's Zenodo community. More information is available in Deliverable 1.4.

Event Organisation

Targeted events were designed for neuroscientists, academics, and early-career researchers to disseminate project results at national, regional, European, and international levels. Renowned scientists were invited to contribute to scientific discussions, strengthening the quality and visibility of the exchange. In order to further enhance outreach and maximise participation, the consortium considered organising these events in collaboration with relevant third-party organisations and stakeholders working in related fields. An overview of the dissemination events organised within the project is provided below (Table 3).

Clustering and networking activities with other EU-funded projects in similar topics contributed to the dissemination of project results. Synergies were established with the IMMUPARKNET and ERNEST COST Actions, and ACU researchers participated to their activities, thus supporting knowledge transfer, complementarity of results, and mutual learning.

Table 3: Dissemination events targeting the neuroscience community

| Event | Date | Location | Target audience | Number of participants |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Regional Symposium on the Neurodevelopmental Aspects of Brain Disorders and Genetically Engineered Models (in collaboration with the Brain Research Association) | 2 to 3 October 2023 | ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus | National and international scientists, industry representatives, early-career researchers | 102 |
| Translational Approach in Epilepsy: Epilepsy from Clinical to Basic Sciences (in collaboration with the Turkish Association for the Fight against Epilepsy) | 23 December 2023 | ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus | Neuroscience community, clinicians, early-career researchers | 52 |
| Challenges and Developments in Parkinson's and Neurodegenerative Diseases (in collaboration with IMMUPARKNET) | 2 July 2024 | ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus | Neuroscience community, researchers, academics, students | 62 |
| "Chemogenetic Method in Neuroscience Research" course during the 22nd National Neuroscience Congress (organised by the Brain Research Association) | 3 September 2024 | Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Avcılar Campus | Neuroscientists | 15 |

Students and early-career researchers have been offered the opportunity to attend dissemination events (see Table 3 above). Further events have been also organised by ACU at the ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus, targeting specifically students and young researchers (see Table 4 below).

Project communication materials and printed project outputs were distributed at these events.

Table 4: Dissemination events targeting students and early-career researchers

| Event | Date | Target audience | Number of participants |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Neuroscience Symposium: Approach to Epilepsy | 23 November 2024 | Students and early-career researchers or clinicians interested in neuroscience | 154 |
| How to Develop Your Research Capacity for Chemogenetic Experiments from Scratch: Disseminating the Impact of GEMSTONE Project at ACU | 17 to 18 June 2025 | Early to mid-career neuroscientists, research managers | 36 |
| ACU NeuroConnect: Connecting Young Minds with the Frontiers of Neuroscience | 15 November 2025 | Students and early-career researchers or clinicians interested in neuroscience | 352 |

Participation to Scientific Events with Oral/Poster Presentations and Invited Lectures

Table 5: Scientific presentations delivered by the GEMSTONE team

| Title | Type | Authors | Event | Date/location |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| "Injection into the Intracerebroventricular or Thalamus, or Cortex: Effects on Absence Epilepsy Seizures" | Oral | Aylin Toplu, Nursima Mutlu, Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Özge Sarıyıldız, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Zoltán Molnár, Filiz Onat | 27th National and 2nd International Pharmacological Congress | 23 to 26 November 2023 (Antalya, Turkey) |
| "Impact of Orexin-B Injection into the Intracerebroventricular Region on Absence Epilepsy Seizures" | Oral | Aylin Toplu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Rezzan Gülhan, Filiz Onat | 22nd Turkish Neuroscience Congress | 3 to 6 September 2024 (Istanbul, Turkey) |
| "Orexin-A Dose Dependently Suppresses Spike-and-Wave Discharges in Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats: The Role of Orexin Signalling in Absence Seizures" | Oral | Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Filiz Onat, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz | 15th European Epilepsy Congress | 7 to 11 September 2024 (Rome, Italy) |
| "Investigation of Orexin Type-1 Receptor Protein Levels in the Somatosensory Cortex of Rats with Absence Epilepsy" | Oral | Nursima Mutlu, Devrim Öz Arslan, Merve Çavuş, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | 8th Epilepsy Symposium | 16 to 18 May 2025 (Muğla, Turkey) |
| "Immunohistochemical Analysis of Orexin-A Expression in the Lateral Hypothalamus in Rats with Absence Epilepsy" | Oral | Aylin Toplu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Rezzan Gülhan, Deniz Kırık, Filiz Onat | 8th Epilepsy Symposium | 16 to 18 May 2025 (Muğla, Turkey) |
| "Optimisation of Superovulation, Embryo Collection, Embryo Laboratory, Culture Media and In Vitro Development Rate in Animal Experimental Facilities: Preliminary Study" | Oral | Samed Özer, Aslı Önder Gül, Meltem Kalgazi, Filiz Onat | 6th National Congress on Laboratory Animal Science | 4 to 6 September 2025 (Aksaray, Turkey) |
| "Intracerebroventricular or Intraparenchymal Administration of Orexin Type-2 Receptor Agonist on Spike-and-Wave Discharges of Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats" | Poster | Aylin Toplu, Nursima Mutlu, Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Özge Sarıyıldız, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Zoltán Molnár, Filiz Onat | 35th International Epilepsy Congress | 2 to 6 September 2023 (Dublin, Ireland) |
| "The Effect of Intracerebroventricular Orexin-A Injection on Spike-and-Slow-Wave Discharges in Rats with Genetic Absence Epilepsy of Strasburg Origin" | Poster | Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Nursima Mutlu, Özge Sarıyıldız, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | 27th National and 2nd International Pharmacological Congress | 23 to 26 November 2023 (Antalya, Turkey) |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| "GEMSTONE: Enhancing Research Support Services" | Poster | Melike Şahiner, Serena Cogoni, Eda Tanoğlu, Filiz Onat | EARMA Conference 2024 | 23 to 25 April 2024 (Odense, Denmark) |
| "Distribution of Orexin Type-2 Receptor in Cortical Layers of Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats" | Poster | Nursima Mutlu, Merve Açikel Elmas, Neval Sevinç Özdemir, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Zoltán Molnár, Filiz Onat | 14th National Epilepsy Congress | 16 to 19 May 2024 (Muğla, Turkey) |
| "The Role of the Thalamic Orexinergic System in Absence Epilepsy" | Poster | Talat Taygun Turan, Nursima Mutlu, Merve Açikel Elmas, Neval Sevinç Özdemir, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Zoltán Molnár, Filiz Onat | 14th National Epilepsy Congress | 16 to 19 May 2024 (Muğla, Turkey) |
| "Orexin-2 Receptor Protein Levels in the Thalamocortical Axis in Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats from Strasbourg" | Poster | Devrim Öz Arslan, Nursima Mutlu, Özge Sarıyıldız, Musa Çelik, Zoltán Molnár, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | FENS Forum 2024 | 25 to 29 June 2024 (Vienna, Austria) |
| "The Effects of Swimming Training on High-Fat Diet-Induced Brain Damage in Rats" | Poster | Dilek Akakin, Merve Açikel Elmas, Ayça Karagöz Köroğlu, Özlem Bingöl Özakpınar, Filiz Onat, Feriha Ercan | 17th European Microscopy Congress | 25 to 30 August 2024 (Copenhagen, Denmark) |
| "Brain and Plasma Alpha-Synuclein Levels of Snca flox and Drd1a-Cre Transgenic Mouse Strains" | Poster | Talat Taygun Turan, Filiz Onat | 22nd National Neuroscience Congress | 3 to 6 September 2024 (Istanbul, Turkey) |
| "Impact of Orexin-B Injection into the Intracerebroventricular Region on Absence Epilepsy Seizures" | Poster | Aylin Toplu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Rezzan Gülhan, Filiz Onat | 22nd National Neuroscience Congress | 3 to 6 September 2024 (Istanbul, Turkey) |
| "Orexin Type-2 Receptor Distribution in Genetic Absence Epileptic Rats from Strasbourg" | Poster | Filiz Onat, Nursima Mutlu, Merve Açikel Elmas, Neval Sevinç Özdemir, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Zoltán Molnár | 15th European Epilepsy Congress | 7 to 11 September 2024 (Rome, Italy) |
| "Intracerebroventricular Orexin-B Injection Effect on Absence Epilepsy Seizures" | Poster | Aylin Toplu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | 15th European Epilepsy Congress | 7 to 11 September 2024 (Rome, Italy) |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| "Investigation of Alpha-Synuclein Levels in an Animal Model of Absence Epilepsy" | Poster | Filiz Onat, Talat Taygun Turan, Merve Çavuş, Nursima Mutlu | Synuclein Meeting 2025 | 8 to 11 April 2025 (Cambridge, UK) |
| "Orexin Type-1 Receptor Expression in Somatosensory Cortex in Post-natal 21-day-old Rats with Absence Epilepsy" | Poster | Filiz Onat, Nursima Mutlu, Talat Taygun Turan, Merve Çavuş, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz | 16th European Paediatric Neurology Society Congress | 8 to 12 July 2025 (Munich, Germany) |
| "Chemogenetic Inhibition of Ventrobasal Thalamus Exacerbates Absence Seizures in Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rat Model" | Poster | Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Merve Çavuş, Nursima Mutlu, Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Özge Sarıyıldız, Filiz Onat | 36th International Epilepsy Congress | 30 August to 3 September 2025 (Lisbon, Portugal) |
| "A Research about Orexin Type-2 Receptor Protein Expression in Thalamus and Somatosensory Cortex Brain Regions in Rats with Absence Epilepsy" | Poster | Merve Çavuş, Nursima Mutlu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | 36th International Epilepsy Congress | 30 August to 3 September 2025 (Lisbon, Portugal) |
| "Orexin Receptor Type-2 Distribution in Prepubertal Neurodevelopmental Stages in Genetic Absence Epileptic Rats from Strasbourg" | Poster | Nursima Mutlu, Talat Taygun Turan, Merve Çavuş, Merve Açikel Elmas, Neval Sevinç Özdemir, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Filiz Onat | 36th International Epilepsy Congress | 30 August to 3 September 2025 (Lisbon, Portugal) |
| "Involvement of the Orexinergic System in Absence Epilepsy: Developmental Dynamics of Orexin-A" | Poster | Elif Tuğçe Erdeve, Filiz Onat, Åda Petersén, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, My Andersson | 36th International Epilepsy Congress | 30 August to 3 September 2025 (Lisbon, Portugal) |
| "Impact of Intracerebroventricular Orexin-B on Absence Seizures in GAERS: Dose-Dependent Suppression of Spike-and-Wave Discharges" | Poster | Aylin Toplu, Nihan Çarçak Yılmaz, Rezzan Gülhan, Filiz Onat | 36th International Epilepsy Congress | 30 August to 3 September 2025 (Lisbon, Portugal) |
| "Making It Work: GEMSTONE Project's Better Practices for Horizon Europe Newcomers" | Poster | Oğuzhan Altınkoz, Cem Öztürk, Filiz Onat | Building Bridges Conference | 11 to 12 September 2025 (Dresden, Germany) |
| "Translational Approach in Epilepsy: From Neurobiology to the Patient" | Lecture | Filiz Onat | 28th National and 3rd International Pharmacological Congress | 21 November 2025 (Antalya, Turkey) |

Table 5 lists the oral and poster presentations and invited lectures delivered by the GEMSTONE team. All these events not only served as an opportunity for disseminating the GEMSTONE results, but also fostered a conducive environment for networking, sharing best practices and discussing the future directions of neurodevelopmental research. More information about networking activities is available in Deliverable 5.3.

Performance Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

The academic and clinical neuroscience community was successfully reached. Twenty-three oral and poster presentations acknowledging GEMSTONE have been held, while the planned target was >10. These presentations were a balanced mix of national and international scientific events, with 8 presentations delivered at national meetings and 16 at international conferences, ensuring broad scientific visibility.

Four dissemination events were organised, as planned in Description of Action. In particular, the neuroscience day branded as ACU NeuroConnect had a huge success, with 352 participants attending from 48 institutions and a great visibility in social media with 1,313 followers on the event's dedicated accounts. Moreover, three further events responding to emerging opportunities and stakeholder interest have been organised during implementation.

Some of these events were the results of collaboration with other stakeholders (one with an EU-funded project, one with the national chapter of an international scientific/professional society in the field of epilepsy, and two with a national scientific association in the fields of basic and clinical neuroscience), thus contributing to the KPI on joint events. Leaflet distribution significantly exceeded expectations (>2,000 copies vs. the original target of >100), due to extensive use at events and through institutional and partner dissemination channels.

Only in the case of open-access articles acknowledging GEMSTONE, the KPI was partially achieved. Although we planned to prepare more than 10 publications, only 4 were published. This is due to the fact that the project primarily focused on capacity building and the acquisition of new advanced techniques rather than the immediate generation of high-volume scientific outputs.

At the time of reporting, three additional articles are under peer review and one further manuscript is under preparation. Additional publications are expected to emerge as results mature beyond the project duration, reflecting the nature and timelines of the scientific research process. Moreover, also based on the Independent Advisory Board's suggestion, the consortium strategically re-directed their effort to produce articles focusing on capacity-building KERs (see following sections), originally not foreseen in the plan.

In general, dissemination activities towards the neuroscience community have been successful, not only as they served as an opportunity to present the project research results, but also because they offered ACU researchers the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration with other neuroscientists across Europe. By attending dissemination events and international meetings, they had the opportunity to share insights, discuss research developments and forge partnerships across geographical boundaries. This exposure not only enriched their research experience, but also opened up new avenues for future collaboration. These new collaborations are expected to lead to additional research projects, joint publications and grant applications, thereby strengthening ACU's position in the scientific community. In addition, the project's extensive communication and dissemination activities are expected to enhance ACU's reputation in the neuroscience community.

3.2.2. Research Support Personnel, Academic Administrations, and Staff in Widening Countries

This target group was engaged to disseminate and promote the uptake of capacity-building and research management-related Key Exploitable Results (KER7-11, see Table 1), with the objective of strengthening institutional support structures and enhancing research management practices, particularly in Widening countries.

KER7-9 were disseminated through a poster presented at the EARMA conference and a dedicated article describing the methodology and institutional upgrading process implemented within GEMSTONE, KER10 was at the centre of the debate in an event organised with the Trakya University Project Coordination Application and Research Centre, while the Best Practice Book (KER11) was actively disseminated during events to research support staff, Research Project Offices and university administrations as a practical reference document.

Abstract Submitted at the EARMA Conference

The data derived from surveys conducted as part of WP4 have been presented in a poster format during the EARMA Conference 2024. This event, annually organised by the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), took place in Odense, Denmark, from 23 to 25 April 2024. The EARMA Conference represents a vital forum for the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and innovations in the field of research management and administration. It gathers professionals and academics from across Europe and beyond, facilitating discussions on enhancing research support services, navigating the complexities of funding programmes, and fostering international collaboration in research projects.

Our poster presentation highlighted our efforts to improve ACU's research support services, which are key for helping researchers compete and succeed in Europe's research scene. By sharing what we have learned from the GEMSTONE project, we had the opportunity to offer useful insights to other stakeholders, including universities and policymakers in Widening countries who want to boost their research support systems. The participation to the conference was not only the occasion to present the project results, but also as a networking opportunity that allowed the exchange with experts and project managers from other countries. To this end, promotional materials about ACU and GEMSTONE have been distributed to the conference.

Best Practice Book

A best practice book was developed to consolidate the lessons learned by ACU during the GEMSTONE Project, particularly in relation to improving administrative competences in research management.

- Oğuzhan Altınkoz, Cem Öztürk, Filiz Onat. Making It Work: GEMSTONE Project's Better Practices for Horizon Europe Newcomers. Acibadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University Publications, 2025. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16900756.

The publication was targeted at research support staff, Research Project Offices, University administrations and researchers in Widening countries (and beyond) who are approaching the coordination of a Horizon Europe project for the first time. The book was released toward the end of the project once sufficient evidence and results were available.

ACU coordinated the development, design, and dissemination of the best practice book. To further increase the project visibility and help the dissemination of the best practice book as a key project output, the consortium received support from the Booster initiative and a video was produced (see Section 3.3 below).

Article on Capacity-Building Activities

ACU prepared an article focusing on capacity-building activities designed for the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) at ACU through the GEMSTONE Project. The manuscript was submitted on 24 July 2025 and was still under peer review at the time of reporting. Nevertheless, a preprint version was deposited in the publisher’s repository by the journal and was subsequently redeposited in the repositories used by the project to ensure open-access and wider dissemination.

- Melike Şahiner, Oğuzhan Altınkoz, Eda Tanoğlu, Filiz Onat. “Enhancing Research Support Services Through an EU Project: A Case Study.” SSRN, 2025 (Preprint). doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5365646.

Participation to and Organisation of Events

To engage research managers and university administrators, the GEMSTONE Project leveraged a set of targeted in-person events (see Table 6 below) designed to disseminate and support the exploitation of its best practices and policy-oriented outputs (see Section 3.2.3 below).

Table 6: Dissemination events targeting research managers and university administrators

| Event | Date | Location | Target audience | Number of participants |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| “GEMSTONE: Enhancing Research Support Services” poster presentation during the EARMA Conference 2024 | 23 to 25 April 2024 | Odense, Denmark | Research managers | >50 |
| “Good Practices from GEMSTONE Project” meeting during the 3rd Good Practices in Medical Education Symposium (organised by the Association for Evaluation and Accreditation Medical Education and World Medical Education Federation) | 20 May 2024 | ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus | University rectors, scientific directors, deans of medical schools | 10 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| "From Research to Practice: The Role of Librarians in EU Projects in Health-Themed Universities" invited lecture during the Health Literacy Summit: Access to Information for Healthcare Professionals | 11 January 2025 | Istanbul, Turkey | Healthcare professionals, academics, librarians, research support staff | >100 |
| "Making It Work: GEMSTONE Project's Better Practices for Horizon Europe Newcomers" poster presentation during the Building Bridges Conference | 11 to 12 September 2025 | Dresden, Germany | Research managers, industry representatives | >50 |
| "GEMSTONE Best Practices for Horizon Europe Newcomers" special session during the International Cooperation Project Calls Information Day: Multilateral and Bilateral Collaboration Opportunities (in collaboration with Trakya University Project Coordination Application and Research Centre) | 3 October 2025 | Trakya University Millet Library | University rectors, scientific directors, research support staff from Turkey and other Widening countries | 33 |
| "International Cooperation Project Calls Information Day: Multilateral and Bilateral Collaboration Opportunities" (in collaboration with Trakya University Project Coordination Application and Research Centre) | 3 October 2025 | Trakya University Millet Library | Academics, senior researchers, and early-career researcher at Trakya University | 90 |
| "GEMSTONE Project's Better Practices for Widening Institutions: Road from Capacity Building to Competitiveness" presentation during the Research Managers International Staff Week (organised by the University of Malta Research Support Services Directorate) | 21 October 2025 | University of Malta Msida Campus | Research managers from Widening region and other countries | 37 |

Performance Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

The best practice book was successfully delivered as foreseen. The book was printed in 500 copies, shared with relevant stakeholders during events, and mailed to 200 universities across Turkey. It has also been published through online channels and downloaded >500 times on Zenodo.

Dissemination and networking objectives were successfully addressed, especially through participation in one joint regional in-person event organised with a national university's project office (3 October 2025) and attendance at one international event hosted by a Widening university's project office (21 October 2025). The project also took the advantage of an international symposium at ACU to further engage with decision-makers at universities at an earlier stage (20 May 2024).

Although online meetings were initially foreseen in the Description of Action, the consortium assessed during implementation that face-to-face events would provide more effective conditions for dialogue, peer exchange, networking, and meaningful uptake of results. These opportunities combined dissemination with interactive discussions and strategic reflection, enabling direct engagement with institutional leaders and research managers. Participation to these events exceeded expectations, with 80 (10+33+37) attendees including research managers and university administrators, over the >50 planned.

Though these activities, GEMSTONE was able to share the lessons learned, highlight the strategic value of investing in training and capacity-building, and provide recommendations, guidelines and transferable practices relevant to research management, institutional development, and participation in Horizon Europe. This effort aimed to favour replication in other universities, especially in the Widening countries.

3.2.3. National Contact Points, Research Funders, and Policy Actors Involved in Horizon Europe

Policy actors have been addressed with the aim to share the lessons learned, highlight the strategic value of investing in capacity building and in research facilities, contribute to existing regulations and strategies in academia and research, and provide recommendations and guidelines for future policy decisions and directives. This has been done mainly through the publication of a joint policy brief and supplementary policy factsheets, and through in-person events to disseminate these results.

Joint Policy Brief and Supplementary Policy Factsheets

A joint policy brief and accompanying policy factsheets were developed in response to the evolving policy context and the ongoing discussions on the future of the WIDERA Work Programme and Framework Programme 10. Drawing on the experience gained through GEMSTONE's implementation, it was considered timely and relevant to contribute evidence-based reflections on the added value and long-term impact of the Twinning instrument.

- Cem Öztürk, Hana Owsianková, Tanja Botić, Emilie Trakalova, Blanka Marušincová, Yasemin Ertan, Burcu Kiran, Viera Pechancová, Serena Cogoni, Filiz Onat. "Twinning for Europe's Competitiveness: Keeping Excellence Connected Across All Regions." Zenodo, 2025. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17589583.
- Emilie Trakalova, Cem Öztürk, Hana Owsianková, Tanja Botić, Blanka Marušincová, Yasemin Ertan, Burcu Kiran, Viera Pechancová, Serena Cogoni, Filiz Onat. "Why Twinning Matters: Factsheets for Policymakers, Research Community, and the Public." Zenodo, 2025. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17594764.

To ensure that this contribution was meaningful and representative, GEMSTONE coordinated a collaborative effort involving eight sister Horizon Europe Twinning projects. The resulting policy brief synthesised cross-sectoral experiences from neuroscience, environmental sciences, cultural heritage, business innovation, and social sciences, and presented concrete recommendations, including the reinstatement of annual Twinning calls and strengthened synergies with other Horizon Europe instruments.

External media multipliers were used to extend the dissemination of GEMSTONE outputs of broader public interest. Communication channels relevant to the project’s thematic focus were identified and included in targeted distribution lists to support wider outreach. These four multipliers included a National Contact Points (NCPs) newsletter (NCP_WIDERA.NET), two national Horizon Europe websites (Turkey and Czechia), and a specialised research and policy newsletter (The Widening by Science|Business).

Events to Disseminate the Best Practices and Policy-Oriented Outputs

In addition to events listed in Table 6 to engage with decision-makers at universities, an additional meeting was held with the representatives of a diplomatic mission to further engage with policy actors.

Table 7: Dissemination events targeting policy actors

| Event | Date | Location | Target audience | Number of participants |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Meeting with Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul and Business Sweden in Turkey | 17 November 2025 | Swedish Palace | Policy actors, senior diplomats, communicators | 10 |

Performance Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

Although direct engagement with Ministries of Universities and Research (listed among the stakeholders in the initial strategy) remained limited due to the institutional scope of the project, GEMSTONE was nevertheless able to reach relevant policy multipliers not originally foreseen, including NCPs and representatives involved in research programme design and implementation.

In the initial strategy, engagement with policy actors had primarily been linked to the dissemination of the Best Practice Book. However, as discussions on the future of the WIDERA Work Programme and FP10 gained momentum during the project’s implementation, it became clear that a more structured policy-oriented output would provide a meaningful contribution to the ongoing debate. The consortium therefore adapted its strategy and target engagement approach to reflect this opportunity.

Through the development of a joint policy brief in collaboration with eight sister Twinning projects, GEMSTONE contributed evidence-based reflections on the added value, challenges, and future perspectives of the Twinning instrument. By leveraging cross-project exchange and collective experience, the initiative enabled a coordinated and informed input into the policy discussion.

The policy brief was printed in 50 copies and shared with relevant stakeholders engaged in research policy and programme design. Both the policy brief and the accompanying factsheets were published online and made openly available via Zenodo, where they were downloaded more than 450 and 350 times respectively. The level of downloads and positive engagement on social media indicate that the topic resonated with the research and policy community and addressed a widely perceived need for reflection on the future of Widening instruments.

3.2.4. Industrial Community

The initial strategy foresaw outreach to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in neuroscience and pharmaceutical companies, with the objective of positioning GEMSTONE as a source of knowledge and tools potentially supporting innovation in neuroscience and fostering research-industry collaboration. The key messages emphasised ACU's strengthening expertise and infrastructure in neuroscience and the opportunities this could create for future collaboration.

However, GEMSTONE primarily focused on institutional capacity building and the transfer of knowledge and skills, rather than on direct industry-driven innovation or product development. In line with this focus, research-related KERs remain at an early stage of exploitation, as their maturation and validation require further development beyond the project duration. While the foundations for potential future uptake have been established, no specific actions were organised exclusively targeting industrial stakeholders, and engagement with this group remained limited.

Nevertheless, elements of industry dialogue were integrated within broader scientific events. During the Regional Symposium on Neurodevelopmental Aspects of Brain Disorders & Genetically Engineered Models, keynote speeches addressed topics such as the translation of preclinical research into drug discovery and the evolving landscape of gene therapy in movement disorders. These sessions were followed by a dedicated discussion on university-industry collaboration and international networking, providing a platform for exchange. A representative from a national company participated in this discussion, contributing an industry perspective.

In addition, the project's Independent Advisory Board included a representative from the industrial sector. Through this role, industry expertise was incorporated into the project's governance structure, providing insights on technological trends and market dynamics and contributing to bridging research outputs with potential practical applications.

Industry outreach was also framed as part of the project's broader networking activities, ensuring that potential industrial stakeholders were considered within the overall stakeholder engagement strategy. More detailed information on networking activities is provided in Deliverable 5.3.

3.3. Communication Activities

In addition to dissemination and exploitation activities linked to specific KERs (Table 1), GEMSTONE implemented a structured set of communication actions aimed at promoting the project's overall objectives, societal relevance, and impact.

While dissemination focused on transferring concrete research outputs and capacity-building results to defined stakeholder groups, communication activities were designed to raise awareness about the project's mission, highlight its contribution to neuroscience research, and increase its visibility among broader audiences.

In line with the initial strategy, communication efforts primarily targeted European citizens with an interest in neuroscience, patients affected by absence epilepsy and Parkinson's disease, their families and caregivers, as well as journalists and local or international media. The objective was to raise awareness of the societal burden associated with neurological disorders and to emphasise the importance of neuroscience research, including the use of advanced experimental models, in improving understanding, prevention, and future care.

An additional communication target group included students, early-stage researchers and clinicians interested in pursuing a career in neuroscience. Communication towards this audience aimed to position GEMSTONE and ACU as an enabling environment for scientific training and professional development, highlighting the opportunities to acquire advanced knowledge and technical skills within an international research context.

To address these audiences, GEMSTONE employed a range of communication channels, including, among others, the project website, social media platforms, press and news releases, and annual magazines. These tools ensured continuous visibility of project activities and achievements, supported engagement with different audience segments, and contributed to reinforcing the project's public profile throughout its duration.

Where appropriate, the Project Officer was informed of key communication outputs and invited to support their dissemination through institutional channels. Through the Project Officer, selected major project events were also promoted via the Research Executive Agency social media accounts, further increasing visibility at European level.

Consortium partners further contributed to amplification by sharing project news and press materials through their own communication networks.

Communication Toolkit

A comprehensive communication kit was developed to provide consortium partners with professional materials for promoting the GEMSTONE Project. The kit included a project logo, website, flyer, poster, and roll-up banner. These materials supported consistent and effective communication across project activities.

The communication kit enabled partners to provide clear and accessible information about the project and its objectives, particularly during events. ACU coordinated the design and development of all materials, with consortium partners contributing additional content as required for updates. More information is available in Deliverable 6.1.

Website

The project website (www.gemstoneproject.eu) functioned as the central communication platform for the GEMSTONE Project, showcasing its objectives, activities, and key results. It acted as the primary communication channel between the consortium and GEMSTONE target audiences, by providing access to project resources and regular updates on progress, challenges, achievements, and research outputs. The website was launched in Month 4 of the project and remained active throughout its duration.

The website was developed and managed by ACU, with contributions encouraged from consortium partners. Compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 was ensured, with ACU acting as data controller and guaranteeing the confidentiality and secure handling of personal data collected through online registration and interactions.

Website performance was monitored using Google Analytics, providing data on traffic, user behaviour, and audience reach, including metrics such as page views, sessions, and visitor numbers.

To guarantee long-term accessibility beyond the project lifetime, an offline copy of the website was deposited in the open-access repositories employed by the project. Following the end of the action, the full website was archived and made publicly available on DSpace and Zenodo as a compressed offline version, preserving its structure, pages, and media files for reference and documentation purposes.

Social Media

To complement the website, the project maintained an active presence on major social media platforms. Four accounts were established at the beginning of the project and maintained throughout the project:

- GEMSTONE Instagram account: www.instagram.com/gemstonehorizon
- GEMSTONE LinkedIn account: www.linkedin.com/company/gemstonehorizon
- GEMSTONE X account: www.x.com/gemstonehorizon
- GEMSTONE YouTube account: www.youtube.com/@gemstonehorizon

These channels were used to promote project objectives, activities, results, and upcoming events, enabling outreach to diverse audiences not easily reached through conventional dissemination tools. The consortium also published posts with the aim to raise awareness on epilepsy and PD and their societal burden, often in conjunction with international days (e.g. International Epilepsy Day, Brain Awareness Week).

ACU coordinated social media activities, including account management, content publication, and outreach monitoring, while consortium partners contributed by sharing and amplifying project content through their institutional networks. Staff involved in the project also contributed to spread the contents through their private accounts to make use of their personal and professional networks.

Targeted hashtags related to neuroscience and neurodevelopmental brain disorders as well as institutional capacity building and international collaboration were used consistently to enhance visibility and engagement across platforms.

In Month 36, the project additionally established dedicated social media channels to support dissemination activities related to its planned neuroscience day event, branded as ACU NeuroConnect:

- ACU NeuroConnect Instagram account: www.instagram.com/acu_neuroconnect
- ACU NeuroConnect LinkedIn account: www.linkedin.com/company/acu-neuroconnect

This initiative was conceived as a flagship outreach activity and is intended to continue beyond the project lifetime as a legacy event, ensuring sustained visibility and long-term impact of GEMSTONE's results.

Social media performance constituted a second key indicator and was assessed through platform-specific analytics, tracking follower growth, content engagement, and interaction levels. The regularity and consistency of content publication across channels were monitored to support sustained audience growth and engagement.

News and Press Releases

News releases were used to raise awareness of the GEMSTONE Project, its progress, and its key outcomes among stakeholders and the wider public, communicating project developments in an accessible format, using clear and non-technical language.

These items were primarily published on the project website to highlight relevant activities, innovative concepts, partner participation in external events, and other noteworthy developments that supported ongoing engagement with the GEMSTONE community.

A press release was prepared at the start of the project and circulated among the partners. Apart from being published in the partners' websites, the press release was published by at least 4 external multipliers, like Science X, Alpha Galileo, EU Agenda or Times Higher Education.

After ACU NeuroConnect, a press release including information about the event, the project, and interviews with some of the invited speakers was sent to national news agencies by the ACU Corporate Communications Department, resulting in wide coverage (114 news stories in digital media and 5 in printed press).

All content was coordinated by ACU, with consortium partners contributing relevant information and background material. When appropriate, they were disseminated through external media channels and multipliers. Consortium members further supported dissemination by sharing published content through their institutional communication channels.

Annual Magazines

Three digital magazines were produced (March 2024, January 2025, and December 2025) and distributed through the project website to provide a curated overview of GEMSTONE's activities and results, covering both technical progress and capacity building achievements.

All issues were published in English. Content coordination, editorial management, and distribution were carried out by ACU, with consortium partners contributing relevant information and updates throughout the project.

Video Production

During the GEMSTONE Project, short video interviews featuring a diverse range of profiles, including senior and early-career researchers, technical staff, and research support personnel at ACU were produced to showcase the research environment and academic opportunities available at the institution. Content addressed GEMSTONE's contributions to individual career development, institutional capacity, doctoral training, and technology transfer.

These videos specifically targeted early-career researchers and students with the dual objective of promoting the ACU research and increase their interest in neuroscience, and present the ACU environment, to attract them to accomplish their training and scientific career there.

The eight video-interviews were disseminated through the project website, social media channels, and were also used for project promotion at selected external events where relevant. ACU coordinated the production and distribution process, with video content and formats agreed in consultation with consortium partners.

In connection with the ACU NeuroConnect event (see Table 4 above), a specific dissemination video was produced, capturing key moments and highlights of this neuroscience-focused day. This video was designed to raise awareness of the event and to stimulate interest in neuroscience among students and early-career researchers. As mentioned, this initiative was conceived as a flagship outreach activity and is intended to continue beyond the project lifetime as a legacy event, ensuring sustained visibility and long-term impact of GEMSTONE's results.

Info-Days

Three info-days were held at ACU Kerem Aydınlar Campus to promote its research and academic environment among young students and early-career researchers (Table 8). These activities targeted respectively prospective graduate students, medical students and undergraduate local students and aimed to increase awareness of training and career opportunities at the institution.

Table 8: ACU info-days participated by the GEMSTONE Project

| Event | Date | Target audience |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Graduate Programmes Info-Day | 29 June 2024 | Prospective graduate students |
| MD-PhD Programme Info-Day | 13 June 2025 | Continuing medical students |
| Undergraduate Programmes Info-Day | 21 July to 8 August 2025 | Prospective undergraduate students |

Performance Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

Overall, communication activities proved highly successful, reaching – and in several cases significantly exceeding – the targets defined in the initial strategy. The results demonstrate sustained interest in the project’s activities and an effective capacity to engage diverse audiences throughout its duration.

The project website attracted 4,229 users, more than doubling the planned KPI of >2,000 visitors. This figure indicates strong interest in GEMSTONE’s objectives and achievements, as well as consistent traffic over time. Visibility was further reinforced through the publication of 99 news articles on the website, ensuring continuous updates and dynamic content.

Social media engagement substantially surpassed expectations. A total of 3,020 followers were reached across platforms, far exceeding the initial target of >500. This result was supported by consistent and structured content production, as well as the establishment of dedicated communication channels for both the GEMSTONE accounts (1,707 followers) and the ACU NeuroConnect accounts (1,313 followers). The distribution of activity across platforms was as follows:

- GEMSTONE Instagram account: 246 posts – 466 followers
- GEMSTONE LinkedIn account: 246 posts – 1,161 followers
- GEMSTONE X account: 687 posts – 57 followers
- GEMSTONE YouTube account: 19 videos – 23 subscribers
- ACU NeuroConnect Instagram account: 34 posts – 1,147 followers
- ACU NeuroConnect LinkedIn account: 34 posts – 166 followers

These figures reflect not only quantitative growth but also the consolidation of an online community interested in neuroscience research and GEMSTONE’s activities.

The three annual magazines initially planned were successfully published within the project duration, reaching more than 200 downloads (on website and Zenodo). In addition, two press releases were issued and further disseminated through external media multipliers, exceeding the original target of >8 media relays and resulting in broad coverage across national outlets (119 news articles). This media amplification significantly increased the project's visibility beyond the immediate research community, contributing to raising public awareness of neurological disorders and EU-funded research initiatives.

Communication activities specifically targeting students and early-stage researchers also exceeded expectations. An eight-part video interview series (compared to the initially planned >3 videos) was produced to showcase scientific careers and research environments, and three information days (instead of >2) were organised to attract prospective students to ACU. These actions strengthened ACU's positioning as an attractive environment for training and research in neuroscience and contributed to reinforcing its visibility among young talents considering academic careers.

Beyond quantitative indicators, the communication activities generated tangible impact in several dimensions. First, they enhanced public awareness of absence epilepsy and Parkinson's disease, highlighting the importance of neuroscience research and advanced experimental models in addressing societal health challenges. Second, they strengthened the public profile of ACU as an emerging research-intensive institution, supporting its long-term positioning within the European Research Area. Third, by actively engaging students and young researchers, GEMSTONE contributed to fostering future scientific talent and encouraging participation in neuroscience research.

Overall, communication actions successfully supported the project's broader mission of promoting the societal relevance of research, increasing trust in science, and reinforcing the visibility and added value of Horizon Europe funding.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the PEDR within GEMSTONE confirms that dissemination, communication, and exploitation are most effective when conceived as adaptive processes rather than static plans. While the initial strategy provided a solid framework with clearly identified targets, key messages and KPIs, its real added value emerged from the consortium's capacity to adjust actions in response to evolving project results, stakeholder feedback, and the broader European policy context.

Throughout the project, the DCE strategy was progressively refined to better align outputs with stakeholder needs. This is evident in several strategic choices: the decision to prioritise face-to-face engagement to maximise uptake among research managers and university administrators; the reorientation of publication efforts towards capacity-building KERs following Advisory Board recommendations; and the development of a joint policy brief in response to emerging discussions on the future of the WIDERA Work Programme and FP10. These adaptations strengthened the relevance and timeliness of GEMSTONE's outputs and increased their potential for long-term impact.

From an exploitation perspective, a differentiated picture emerges. Capacity-building and research management KERs – including best practices, policy-oriented outputs, procedures and training approaches – have already entered active reuse through replication, knowledge transfer, and integration into institutional strategies and training initiatives. By contrast, research-related KERs such as experimental models, datasets, and SOPs remain at an earlier stage of exploitation. Their scientific value has been consolidated, and foundations for reuse have been established, but their full impact will materialise over time through follow-up projects, additional publications, external collaborations, and future funding applications. This trajectory reflects the natural timelines of scientific research and the structural focus of GEMSTONE on institutional strengthening.

Importantly, exploitation activities are continuing beyond the formal implementation period. A concrete example is the invited presentation of GEMSTONE's best practices and policy-oriented outputs within the "Project Writing Camp on Horizon Europe Twinning Calls: From Call Text to Competitive Proposal", hosted by TÜBİTAK in February 2026 in the framework of the Technical Assistance for Turkey in Horizon Europe project. In this context, GEMSTONE results are directly reused to support new applicants to the Twinning scheme (40 participants were present at the training), translating project experience into practical guidance for future coordinators. This illustrates a clear post-project exploitation pathway, whereby knowledge generated within GEMSTONE feeds into capacity-building actions for the next generation of Horizon Europe proposals.

Overall, the PEDR has functioned as a central instrument to maximise visibility, ensure targeted engagement and support sustainable impact. By combining structured planning with strategic flexibility, GEMSTONE not only achieved – and often exceeded – its dissemination and communication objectives, but also embedded its results within institutional practices, professional networks, and policy discussions. This positions the project's outputs to continue generating scientific, institutional and societal value well beyond the project duration.