

EU-HYBNET NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY FINAL REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of hybrid threats refers to the domains and tools through which state and non-state actors aim to weaken social cohesion, decrease citizens' trust in democracy, and obfuscate democratic states' decision-making processes. The EU-HYBNET project (Empowering a Pan-European Network to Counter Hybrid Threats) has, between 2020 and 2025, aimed at monitoring strategic research and innovations relevant to hybrid threats; expressing common requirements to fill capability and other gaps; designating priorities for areas requiring more standardization; and empowering a pan-European network of practitioners. The project has relied significantly on two leading partners, the Joint Research Center of the European Commission and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), and especially on their conceptual model to characterize hybrid threats.¹ The project has garnered a network of interested parties which are able to support synergies among European, subnational and national networks, in particular with security practitioners, academia and industry actors.

This deliverable develops the principles outlined in D1.24 Initial Sustainability Report, published in 2022. The Hybrid CoE's work is founded on its constitutive Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed by its 36 Participating States. The principles along which the EU-HYBNET network sustainability is devised follow the Hybrid CoE's MoU and its work organization, as well as compliance with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The sustainability of the network must be conceived bearing these caveats in mind.

1.1 OVERVIEW

The aim of this deliverable is to define **the long-term sustainability of the network after the project ends in April 2025**. The sustainability of the network is based on the three key elements which are its diversity, the engagement during the project, and how ideas will remain active after the project's end. This deliverable will outline how the network was built from 2020 to 2025 (part 2) and how the Hybrid CoE has planned sustainability beyond project's end (part 3).

2. EU-HYBNET 2020-2025: BUILDING A NETWORK

2.1 AIMS OF THE EU-HYBNET NETWORK

Throughout the project's duration, EU-HYBNET has enabled knowledge sharing and facilitated cooperation between industry, practitioners, academics, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders. The goal has been to connect resources, innovations and solutions with the most critical gaps and needs of European practitioners in countering hybrid threats. EU-HYBNET sought to bring together these resources, innovations and solutions through a series of four project cycles. Reaping the benefits from the Consortium members' diverse expertise and while expanding and engaging with its network, EU-

¹ [The landscape of Hybrid Threats: A conceptual model - Hybrid CoE - The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats](#)

HYBNET has worked to define a threat landscape, which it has directly associated with a series of gaps and needs deemed most relevant to European practitioners. In parallel, considering the results from the threat landscape definition, Consortium partners monitored strategic research and innovations relevant to hybrid threats, in order to better connect resources and solutions to the gaps and needs identified in the project. The combination of both fed into the definition of target areas for improvement. Based on this output, the Consortium subsequently defined needs for standardization where appropriate. Figure 1. gives an overview of the architecture of the successive project cycles.

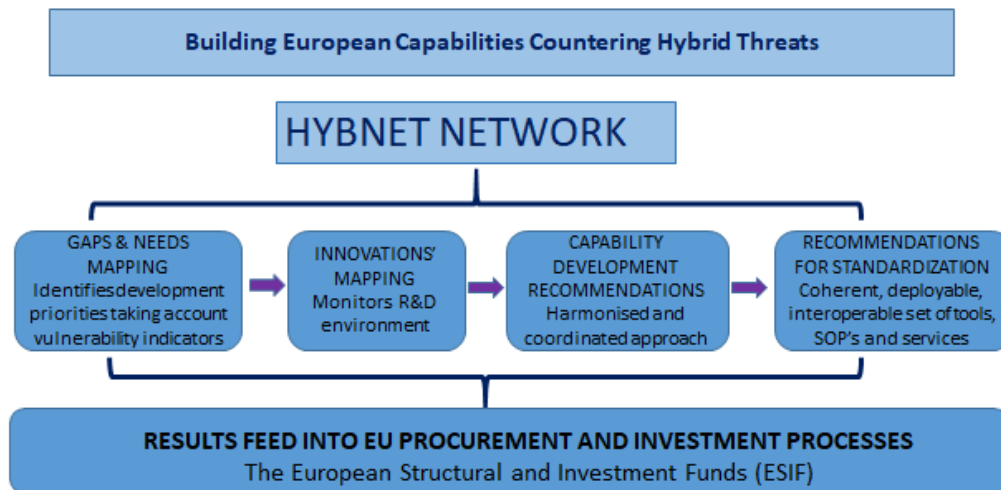


Figure 1 EU-HYBNET Network key activities and process

The Hybrid CoE, as the task leader for network extension throughout the project, has consistently sought to define adequate and streamlined criteria to accept or decline new members' applications. This was meant to constitute a solid bedrock to attract relevant European partners. In addition to making sure the basis for network building was solid, the Hybrid CoE conducted several activities to share the results of activities throughout the years of the project, including a webinar for network members in November 2024 presenting the main results of the final gaps and needs analysis. Such activities were meant to increase the network's cohesion and further a mutual and more shared understanding of the concept of hybrid threats.

2.2 PROJECT ACTIVITIES, OBJECTIVES AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The key feature and value of EU-HYBNET has been its network extension process. The extension process provided the means for empowering the EU-HYBNET network and for facilitating the activities of project partners and stakeholder group members, by continuously identifying potentially new, key actors to join the network. New network members were accepted into the network throughout all five years of the project's duration. Figure 2. exemplifies the process of network extension.

EU-HYBNET Network extension 2020 ➡

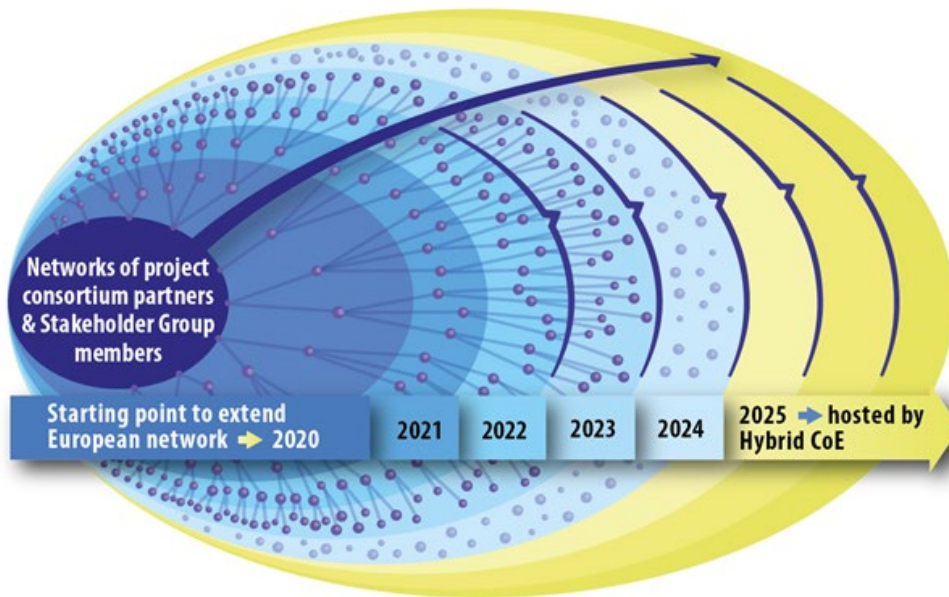


Figure 2 EU-HYBNET extension plan

EU-HYBNET built a network ecosystem, starting from the grassroots level and building it to include the practical experiences of practitioners at local levels across the EU. All project activities were planned and conducted in a manner that supported finding and attracting new, potentially valuable European actors (especially practitioners, industry, SMEs, academic actors, and NGOs) to the EU-HYBNET network.

The importance of the network is reflected in the project management board's structure, which included a dedicated Network Manager role provided by Laurea. The importance of network building and network extension to the EU-HYBNET project is highlighted in the project Objectives (OB), key performance indicators (KPI), and project milestones (MS).

The EU-HYBNET network extension activities were part of the EU-HYBNET Work Package (WP) 1 "Coordination and Project Management" and Task 1.3 "EU-HYBNET Community Extension". However, as mentioned above, the project activities related to engaging the EU-HYBNET network members were integral to each WP. The figure below describes the EU-HYBNET project workflow and activities.

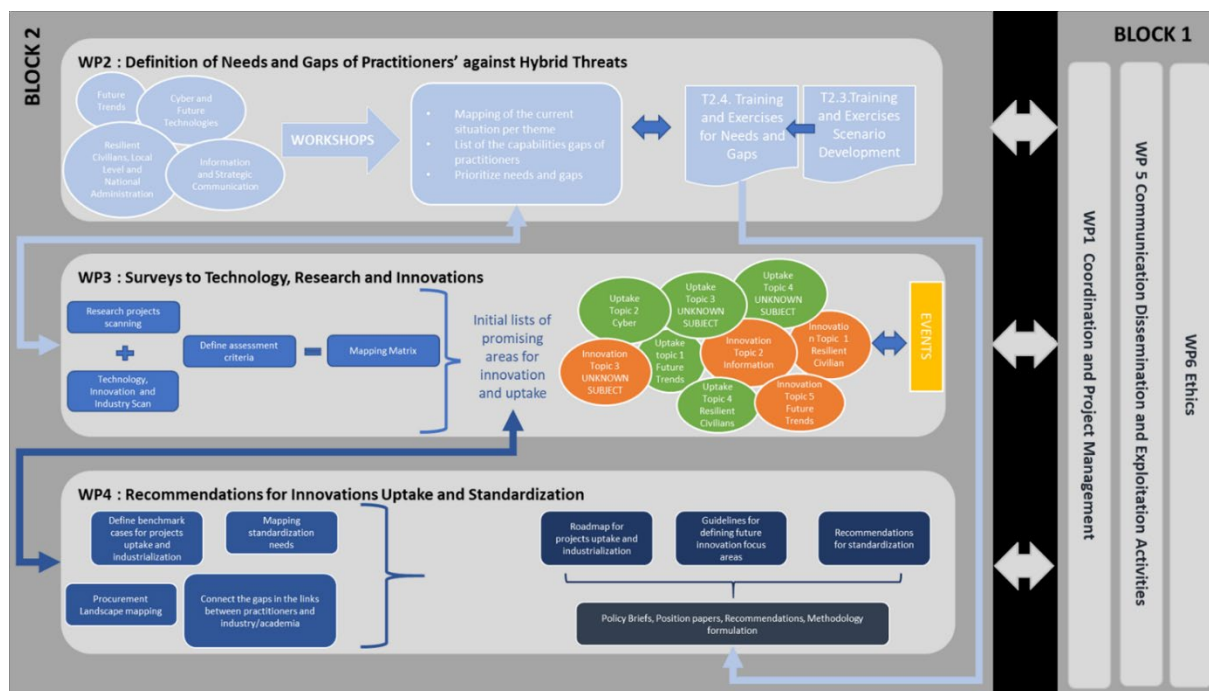


Figure 3 EU-HYBNET project content and workflow between work packages

The EU-HYBNET network extension was primarily linked to project Objective (OB) 1: *To enrich the existing network for countering hybrid threats and ensure long term sustainability*, but also supported project OB 5, 6 and 7. The KPI for the network extension was the amount of new members accepted annually, set at a minimum of 30 new actors. For the purpose of the sustainability plan, the network-specific KPIs were set up to support the project-level OB KPIs described in the EU-HYBNET Description of Action (DoA). The detailed connection between the project objectives and the network sustainability KPIs are described in the table below.

Table 1 EU-HYBNET objectives and KPIs

EU-HYBNET objective: To enrich the existing network countering hybrid threats and ensure long term sustainability			
Goals related to the network sustainability		Project-specific KPI	Network-specific KPI
1.1	To identify potential members of the network that have demonstrated concerns/appreciation for dangers associated with proliferation of hybrid threats and encourage them to join the network and engage in its activities.	- At least 30 new members to join the EU-HYBNET network yearly.	- At least 2 new expressions of interest from external actors monthly. - At least 5 new members applied to the network bimonthly.
1.4	To achieve sustainability, Hybrid CoE will lead the post-project activities for EU-HYBNET with established EU, national /sub-national networks of practitioners. Note: Hybrid CoE does not need to use the name EU-HYBNET any more after the project has ended.	- Sustainability plan as to how the network will continue to be active after project completion is finalized and ready for execution.	- Sustainability plan is published. - Hybrid CoE takes over the network maintenance and ownership after April 2025.

OB5: To establish conditions for enhanced interaction with practitioners, industry and academia for meaningful dialogue and for increasing membership in the network			
Goal		Project-specific KPI	Network-specific KPI
5.1	To establish a platform for information exchange through an Innovation Arena, along with an associated web site.	- At least 30 new users of the Innovation arena (IA) yearly.	- Level activity by users in the IA (at least 1 new activity per month).
5.2	To set up community forums that will empower the European network to engage in productive exchanges on research and innovation, needs/gaps, uptake, policy issues, standardisation.	- At least 3 events per year; at minimum 100 participants. - Innovation arena (IA) and website are in use by at least 4 forums (see KPI for Goal 5.1).	- At least 30% of the network members participating in each event.
5.3	To create a roadmap for the activities necessary to increase membership in the European network assigned to deal with hybrid threats, including the steps necessary to ensure its sustainability.	- The roadmap is put in place to be adhered to by EU-HYBNET members, all new members, and especially Hybrid CoE upon project completion.	- The roadmap presented in D5.1 Section 6 is further enhanced in this document in Sections 4 and 5.
OB6: To foster capacity building and knowledge exchange on countering hybrid threats			
Goal		Project-specific KPI	Network-specific KPI
6.1	To arrange dialogue sessions for EU and EU MS practitioners, industry, SME and academic actors to strengthen capacity and hybrid threat knowledge exchange.	- At least three yearly project events are executed with a minimum of 100 participants each time.	- At least 1/3 of the network members participate in each event.
6.3	To enhance knowledge exchange, increase knowledge/capacity of actor-actor interactions, esp. with industry.	- At least 4 published research papers yearly – 1 in each of the four project core themes.	- At least 1 article annually co-authored with EU-HYBNET network member(s). - At least 1 new joint project proposal by the network members.
6.4	To empower European practitioners, industry, SME and academic actors' capacity to counter hybrid threats by offering relevant trainings and materials.	- At least 1 training event every 20 months; at minimum 60 participants on site and via webinar for others.	- At least 50 participants are network active members. Note: active means that member joins the project events and/or contributes to the project proceedings in another way.
OB7. To create a basis for establishing effective synergies with existing European, national and sub-national networks of practitioners and other actors countering hybrid threats			
Goal		Project-specific KPI	Network-specific KPI
7.1	To share information on EU-HYBNET activities and training possibilities among European stakeholders.	- At least one training event every 20 months; minimum 3 over 5 years.	- At least 50 network members taking part in every training event.
7.3	To establish links with other European Networks and missions in related fields of interest (e.g. Community of Users).	- Annual EU-HYBNET workshop for stakeholders and other related networks/actors to build links.	- Minimum 30 network members participating in the first annual workshop, minimum 80 members participating in the final EU-

			HYBNET stakeholder workshop.
7.5	To interact with a wide circle of European stakeholders, share information, and explore possibilities for engaging the network synergistically.	- At least 2 events yearly where over 100 actors will meet.	- Systematic engagement of the network members in the online (TUOVI, IA) and offline (events) activities, at least 1 coordinated activity per month and hosted by Laurea/Project Management Board (PMB) members (coordinator, project manager, innovation manager, network manager).

2.3. NETWORK MEMBER PROFILES

Because EU-HYBNET is an EC NoP project, the focus of network extension activities relied heavily on European practitioners. EU-HYBNET followed the EC's definition of security practitioners, which states that *"a practitioner is someone who is qualified or registered to practice a particular occupation, profession in the field of security or civil protection"*². In addition, practitioners in the hybrid threat context are expected to have a legal mandate to plan and take measures, or to provide support to authorities countering hybrid threats. The EU-HYBNET practitioners were categorized as follows:

- I) *ministry level* (administration),
- II) *local level* (cities and regions),
- III) *support functions to ministry and local levels* (including Europe's third sector).

This definition of practitioner is mentioned in EU-HYBNET Description of Action (DoA) Part B document. Other key EU-HYBNET network members were representatives from European industry, SMEs, academia and NGOs. These actors were central to delivering innovative solutions for practitioners' needs and provided research and development activities for practitioners and other stakeholders in the field.

3. NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND THE PROJECT

3.1 KEY ISSUES IN NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY

During the project, sustainability has effectively been a joint responsibility of the project partners in disseminating, attracting and maintaining interactions with the network members via EU-HYBNET tasks and events. Members of EU-HYBNET have all during the past five years taken part in exchanging knowledge and sharing information between each other at a pan-European level. Taking part in events and exchanges has been made possible through the essence of Horizon funding, which is to connect European actors and get them to work with each other to create future-sustainable connections. The

² <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/support/faq;keywords=/3156>

project has also made visible the value of informal connections among partners. Horizon funding is about kick-starting connections that follow their autonomous pathways after the funding span.

The project has reached a total of more than 160 organizations. All organizations are very diverse and stem from a multitude of backgrounds and expertise areas. Network members met during project events and meetings, collaborated on several drafting processes and policy briefs, directly harnessing knowledge and expertise from their respective backgrounds. All activities implemented during the project should be considered as the real building blocks for future sustainability.

The EU-HYBNET network is diverse, and such diversity is a key feature of achieving granularity of observation in characterizing the hybrid threat challenges in Europe. One of the key features of network activities has been to maintain cohesion over diversity of expertise. The challenge of hybrid threat activities is to connect the dots to achieve better situational awareness, which is the first step in countering hybrid threats adequately and efficiently. Maintaining cohesion by speaking a commonly agreed-upon language, specifically through the conceptual model of hybrid threats, has been an important line of effort for sustainability, as ensuring a common understanding amongst network partners helps foster increased situational awareness across Europe.

As the task leader for network extension, the Hybrid CoE has devised a process of application review and processing together with the Project Management Board to ensure cohesiveness and adherence to the main goals of the project.

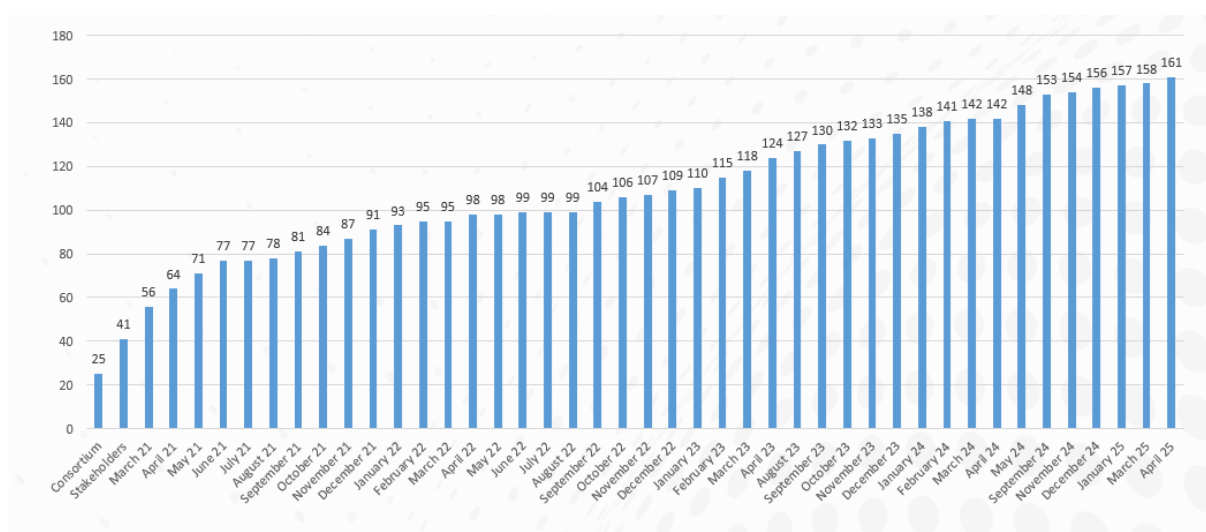


Figure 4 The Growth of network between 2020-2025, including the consortium, stakeholders and network members

3.2. THE NETWORK AFTER 2025

An integral part of the handover process has been the establishment of the Hybrid CoE's internal planning process to ensure a smooth integration of the EU-HYBNET network into processes of the Hybrid CoE after the EU-HYBNET project has ended. The Hybrid CoE has developed a plan to select and integrate willing and relevant parts of the network to some of its activities for sustainability.

The Hybrid CoE also requested for data protection purposes that all network members resubmit their contact details to a dedicated form so as to be able to directly manage communication towards the

network members. This provides a demonstrated benefit for the EU-HYBNET network members: being potentially solicited for working with a network-based organization promoting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach in countering hybrid threats. This framework will provide opportunities to attend events and to receive relevant information on publications and activities, upon the registration of their data directly with the Hybrid CoE. This in turn presents an opportunity for the network members to connect and collaborate in the future.

As announced in its initial sustainability report, the Hybrid CoE could select and solicit members of the EU-HYBNET network for future activities. A large part of the network transition is an internal Hybrid CoE process because of the sensitive nature of its work. The Hybrid CoE will not disclose in this public deliverable the exact ways in which some of the network members could be solicited to contribute to its work for due diligence and discretionary reasons. However, all members who have agreed to have their contacts listed in compliance with the GDPR with the Hybrid CoE will remain informed of the Centre's activities and outreach via its public newsletter.

Further, an important aspect of the project sustainability is that the project established cooperation and collaboration practices among network members that provide an additional cooperation framework to maintain. The Hybrid CoE has considered the future of project platforms TUOVI and Innovation Arena after 2025 to assess whether these platforms will be useful or duplicates from the engagement frameworks of the Hybrid CoE, within the framework of which the sustainability of the EU-HYBNET network of practitioners is conceived. As they were found to duplicate the Hybrid CoE's own platforms and communication methods, their use will be discontinued by the Hybrid CoE.

4. CONCLUSION

In this document, we have described the EU-HYBNET network sustainability plan after the project's completion in 2025. Sustainability will take the form of relevant engagement and solicitations and communication activities towards the network members as part of the Hybrid CoE's regular network-based activities.

The Hybrid CoE will seek to pursue the approach of EU-HYBNET by soliciting its expertise through network members where, when and as often as it would add value to its work. Network members can also continue cooperating directly with each other. Endemic working relations and habits have been developed over five years between and among a great number of network members. Although sustainability is a common responsibility of all partners and interested members of EU-HYBNET, the Hybrid CoE will drive connections, spot and create relevant opportunities and potential events to keep the exchange of ideas and EU-HYBNET expertise close to relevance.

ANNEX I. GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

Table 2 Glossary and Acronyms

Term	Definition / Description
D	Deliverables
DoA	Description of Action
EC	European Commission
Eduuni	Platform for EU-HYBNET consortium for internal project work
EU	European Union
EU-HYBNET	Pan-European Network to Counter Hybrid Threats (project name)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
Hybrid CoE	European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats / Euroopan hybridiuhkien torjunnan osaamiskeskus
IA/Innovation Arena	Platform for EU-HYBNET consortium and network members to use for gaps and needs work and innovative solutions sharing
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LAUREA	Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu Oy
M	Project Month
MS	Milestone
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NM	EU-HYBNET Network Manager
NoP	Network of Practitioners project funded by EC
OB	Objective
PMB	EU-HYBNET Project Management Board
SG	Stakeholder Group
T	Task
TUOVI	Platform for EU-HYBNET consortium and network members to engage
WP	Work Package

ANNEX II. REFERENCES

- [1] European Commission Decision C (2014)4995 of 22 July 2014.
- [2] Communicating EU Research & Innovation (A guide for project participants), European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Directorate A, Unit A.1 — External & Internal Communication, 2012, ISBN 978-92-79-25639-4, doi:10.2777/7985.