

European Cooperation in Science & Technology (COST)

What is the COST programme?

COST is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology established in 1971. Its mission is to enable breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contribute to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities. It aims to allow the cooperation of nationally funded research on a European level, reducing fragmentation of investment and contributing to the European Research Area (ERA) agenda. It funds pan-European, bottom-up networks of scientists and researchers across all disciplines and institution types called 'COST Actions'.

COST Actions last for four years and require a minimum participation of seven eligible countries. COST Actions often pave the way for the development of consortia which go on to participate successfully in EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation.

COST is funded, in part, by contributions from COST Member States and receives funding from the 'Widening participation and spreading excellence' part of Horizon Europe.

What funding is available?

The average budget per COST action is €150,000 for a four-year period. COST does not provide funding for research itself, but for a broad range of networking and collaboration activities and opportunities, including meetings, workshops, conferences, training schools, short-term scientific missions (STSM), and dissemination activities.

Once a COST Action is funded, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed that provides the Action's objectives, tasks, activities, and milestones. Based on the MoU, the Management Committee of the Action agrees an annual Work and Budget Plan at the start of the Action. Then, for each year of the Action, an Annual Grant Agreement is signed between the Grant Holder and the COST Association.

UK participation

The UK will continue to participate in COST as a **Full Member** country with UK-based researchers fully eligible to participate in all COST calls and act as expert evaluators. Researchers and institutions based in the UK can be:

- reimbursed for participation in Action networking activities
- a main or secondary proposer in the COST Open Call for new Actions
- can hold leadership positions in ongoing Actions
- the Grant Holder Institution for an Action
- reimbursed participation in activities organised by COST, such as COST Academy training.

Further information on the involvement of the UK in COST, can be found on the [COST website](#).

How can I participate?

Researchers can participate in several ways. Firstly, they may submit proposals for new COST Actions through a continuously open call, which has an annual collection date. The COST Association coordinates an independent evaluation procedure.

The next collection date is 23 October at 12:00 noon (CET).

Up to 70 new COST Actions are expected to be funded. The evaluation procedure is designed to be driven by the science and technology and is completely bottom-up. COST Actions are open to all science and technology fields (including social sciences and humanities), with an emphasis on excellence.

The second way that an individual can become involved in COST is by [joining one of the COST Actions already in operation](#).

To do this, individuals need to identify an Action on the COST website, decide what level of participation they want and then either click on the 'Apply to join your Working Groups of interest' option, or contact the national coordinator if they wish to join the Management Committee.

Finally, individuals can **become an External COST expert**, participating in the evaluation of proposals for COST Actions collected once a year through the COST Open Call.

COST proposal submission and evaluation procedure

The submission process for COST Action proposals is single stage and the technical annex (main research objectives) of proposals should be up to 15 pages in length.

COST Actions have a number of eligibility requirements; these include that each proposal must represent a network of proposers from at least seven COST Member Countries or Cooperating State (Israel), the proposal must be coordinated by a main proposer from a COST Member Country or Cooperating State, and that they must be anonymous. Furthermore, at the proposal stage, at least 50% of the participants **must be located in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs)**.

Proposals for COST Actions are submitted through the e-COST system and there are guidelines available on the COST website.

COST proposals also include a section on how they will contribute to various COST policies: inclusiveness (encouraging the participation of less research active COST countries), gender balance, early-career investigators, international cooperation and participation of SMEs/industry. Further details on these policies can be found in the proposal guidance at the link below.

Proposal evaluation and selection is a three-step process. First proposals are evaluated remotely by experts in the field who will come to a consensus using online tools. The evaluation criteria are *Excellence*, *Impact* and *Implementation* and the specific criteria under these headings that the evaluators will consider are given in the guidance documentation. Following remote evaluation, the proposal will then go to a review panel that reports to the Scientific Committee (consisting of 38 high-level experts representing each COST Member Country, Cooperating State and Partner Member appointed by the Committee of Senior Officials).

Finally, the Scientific Committee selects the top-ranked proposals and recommends them for approval by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO). The CSO is the decision-making body within the COST Association and is composed of representatives from 38 COST Member Countries, the Cooperating State and the Partner Members; each country can nominate up to two representatives.

What does a COST Action involve?

Overall, a successful proposal for a new COST Action should entail the following features/elements:

- Create new networks rather than simply seek funding for existing networks
- Contribute substantially to the coordination of research efforts across Europe and to the strengthening of Europe's scientific networking capacity (in the context of the European Research Area), namely with the participation of relevant stakeholders
- Contribute strongly and visibly to European society, economic growth and welfare by producing results of potential interest to important sectors such as public authorities, policy institutions, standards bodies and/or private companies and industry
- Be based upon:
 - careful consideration of the level of interest and relevant research resources in the countries likely to participate in the Action
 - assessment of the added-value expected from the coordination of national research efforts by the Action
- Be expandable to new participants
- Identify and take into account R&D efforts supported by other national and international funding schemes

- Encourage capacity-building, by connecting high-quality scientific communities in Europe and worldwide, and encourage the mobility of early-career European researchers
- Take into account COST policies.

Call timing

The 2024 call (OC-2024-1) is currently open with a collection date of 23 October 2024 at 12:00pm (Brussels time). It is expected that up to 70 new COST actions will be approved subject to available budget.

Virtual Networking Tools

The COST programme includes two types of eligible grants to increase the use of digital networking tools.

Virtual Mobility (VM) grants

- These grants are designed to strengthen existing networks by allowing individual participants to foster collaboration, exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, etc. The successful applicants will be selected by the MC to perform activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence. These activities may include surveys, questionnaires or preparation of protocols, virtual mentoring of activities that can generate capacity or to build new skills.
- A maximum of €1.5m per grant is available.

Virtual Networking Support (VNS) grants

- These grants are designed to stimulate virtual collaboration among all the members of a given Action by appointing a Virtual Networking Support Manager. A maximum of one VNS grant for each COST Action (per Grant Period) of up to €4000, is available.
- This budget line will continue as a pilot project until 31 October 2024.

In November 2019, the COST Association launched a new **COST Innovator's Grant (CIG)** pilot scheme. The CIG pilot has now been extended and will apply to those COST Actions ending in 2024.

More information

Useful websites and resources

- [Horizon Europe website](#)
- [COST website](#)
- [Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area Work Programme 2023-2024](#)
- [How to join existing Actions](#)
- [Eligible countries](#)
- [COST CIG](#)
- [COST Strategic Plan \(2017-2027\)](#)
- [COST Association statement following the UK's exit from the EU](#)

Horizon Europe's legal basis:

- [Regulation establishing Horizon Europe](#)
- [Decision establishing the Specific Programme of Horizon Europe](#)
- [First Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe \(2021-2024\)](#)

UKRO Portal

- [UKRO Portal](#) (subscriber access required)