



Brussels, 18 November 2015

COST 081/15

**CSO DECISION**

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Subject: **COST Code of Conduct**

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The Committee of Senior Officials approved the COST Code of the Conduct at its 195<sup>th</sup> CSO meeting held on 18-19 November 2015 in Brussels.

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**COST Association**  
Avenue Louise 149 | 1050 Brussels, Belgium  
t: +32 (0)2 533 3800 | f: +32 (0)2 533 3890  
office@cost.eu | www.cost.eu



## Code of Conduct<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The world is constantly changing, as is the environment in which research is carried out, what society and governments expect from research, and the way that research is conducted and assessed. However, one thing that will never change is the need to maintain the highest ethical standards at every step of the research process and its supporting mechanisms and organisations.

COST is one of these organisations. It promotes pan-European cooperation in science and technology through its networks by means of COST Actions, which provide platforms to test and develop new ideas and initiatives across all disciplines by bringing researchers, engineers and scholars together with other partners such as businesses, citizens or policy-makers. COST is an intergovernmental organisation<sup>2</sup> for which the COST Association<sup>3</sup> is the legal entity in charge of COST governance, management and implementation.

The COST Association and its activities encompass a wide spectrum of actors ranging from individuals in the governing and management bodies, employees, those involved in the scientific structure supporting the evaluation, selection and assessment of COST Actions, to every participant in COST Actions. The actors are based in Europe as well as in every corner of the globe, creating a diversity in culture, experience and talent that makes COST stronger and capable of confronting global challenges. Though this diversity is a unique asset, COST actors share a common set of values (COST values are openness, bottom-up networks and inclusiveness) and ethical principles that are described in the COST Code of Conduct which forms the cornerstone of everything COST and its actors do.

### Reporting and responsibilities

All institutions and individuals involved in COST shall adhere to the COST principles and are responsible for respecting and promoting them, always bearing in mind that the general interest of COST prevails over any personal or professional interests. This includes the COST Association Committee of Senior Officials, the Executive Board and its members, the President, Vice-President and Director, COST employees, COST National Coordinators, the Scientific Committee members, the Review Panels and all external experts and participants.

COST welcomes any assessment or constructive criticism in order to cultivate an honest and responsible organisation. Should non-compliance with ethical principles, values and responsibilities result in misconduct, the COST Association will ensure that all such allegations or reports of any other irresponsible or unprofessional behaviour are acknowledged and receive an appropriate and proportional response. In the event of confirmed cases of misconduct, appropriate action will be taken, having been fairly and evenly considered with regard to all the stakes involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved at the 195<sup>th</sup> CSO meeting of 18-19 November 2015 by the CSO. The Code of Conduct applies to the COST Association governing bodies, management and employees, all associated with COST Actions and all participants in COST activities in Europe and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> COST was first established through the Resolution of 22-23 November 1971 by the Conference of European Research Ministers. The COST Association, which was founded on 19 September 2013, replaced the arrangements set out in the Ministerial Resolution of 1971. COST has 36 Member Countries and one Cooperating State.

<sup>3</sup> The COST Association is an international not-for-profit association under Belgian Law whose members are COST Member Countries, integrating the COST governance, management and implementation functions.



Nevertheless, the COST Association reserves the right to take appropriate measures to preserve its reputation and that of its staff. It also reserves the right to contest and penalise any false or biased information that could damage COST and/or undermine the trust and support of the COST Member Countries and Cooperating State, the European institutions and the European research community as a whole.

All COST Association bodies are responsible and accountable for ensuring that the present Code of Conduct is respected and followed.

## **COST Ethical Principles and Values**

This Code of Conduct is intended to emphasise that our ethical principles are fundamental to the core values and operations of COST, and is not designed to replace existing national, academic or other guidelines. All COST actions and processes in Europe and around the world are guided by the following ethical principles that underpin the core values of COST.

### **1) INTEGRITY**

Integrity is the power of honesty, the alignment and coherence between words and actions, between promises and their fulfilment. We maintain our integrity by acting honestly at all times, by fostering professional courtesy and mutual respect, by being fair when working with others, in practices and procedures as well as in interactions between all players, and by guaranteeing good guidance in work on behalf of others.

#### **Prevention and management of conflicts and potential conflicts of interest**

COST strives to avoid and manage potential conflicts of interest throughout its activities, in the governance, management and implementation of COST activities as well as in the daily implementation of COST Actions.

#### **Accuracy and completeness of our financial reports and accounting records**

As a publically funded organisation, COST provides information on its financial and accounting records. The integrity of COST's financial reports and accounting records is based on the validity, accuracy, completeness, understandability and up-to-date nature of the basic information supporting entries in the accounting books. COST ensures that every accounting or financial entry accurately reflects what is described by the supporting information.

#### **Awareness of and adherence to regulations**

Integrity can only be attained through the observance of any and all regulations. As such, all those involved in COST and COST activities must be aware of both internal and external regulations.

Though COST respects the established rules and regulations, it acknowledges that the value and benefits of science and technology research and the associated networking activities are essentially dependent on the integrity of all actors involved, regardless of the nature of their involvement in COST.

COST invites COST Action participants to devote their best efforts to nurturing a climate of respect, mutual trust and cooperation.

## 2) EXCELLENCE

Excellence is an essential objective for science and technology as well as for individuals and organisations; it is the desire to achieve the highest quality in all endeavours, find the best solutions to new challenges, and contribute to tangible and intangible results and outcomes to guarantee progress and welfare.

COST aims to achieve excellence in its organisation and framework by providing the best quality in its procedures and services, fostering an environment that encourages excellence, and striving for continuous improvement and dedication to achieving COST's ambitions and goals.

### **Establishment of an environment that encourages excellence**

All aspects of the governance, management and implementation of the COST organisation and its activities foster a professional spirit and cooperative attitude.

The COST Association and its members act fairly and without prejudice at all times, pursuant to the mission, objectives and values of COST. They will always be mindful of their responsibility to uphold and enhance the ethical standards and reputation of COST.

The COST Association and its members pursue the COST objectives according to the principles of good governance, lean management and best practice. COST operates with an eye on maximum efficiency, effectiveness and user-friendliness while ensuring the clear and logical demarcation of roles and responsibilities. COST will always uphold high standards of conduct and commit to thoroughness, efficiency and regularity in the fulfilment of our tasks and responsibilities.

COST actively listens, responds, encourages teamwork and makes decisions based on facts and data, in an environment that encourages promotion, achievement and continuous learning so that COST can improve its own performance.

COST proactively identifies, assesses and manages risks with the understanding that well-managed risks are also a source of opportunity for greater potential and impact.

COST provides COST participants with appropriate and impartial supervision, guidance and support.

### **Selection and evaluation based on qualifications and performance, guaranteeing equal opportunities**

COST values everyone and strives to ensure that they are treated equally and fairly, regardless of their gender, age, religious beliefs, ethnicity, political convictions or any other features. Moreover, COST values diversity as an asset to our pan-European, multi-cultural and interdisciplinary cooperation. COST pledges to expend maximum effort in fostering and enhancing the potential of participants in COST activities. COST strives to create opportunities for everyone to fulfil their full potential, regardless of their financial status or origin, in connection with the European Research Area.

COST ensures that participants are selected and evaluated based on the objective assessment of their qualifications and performance.

### **Sound, lean and cost-effective financial management of public funds**

COST strives to efficiently use public funds across our wide range of activities. In doing so, it aims to guarantee the sound, lean and cost-effective financial management of these funds through high-quality accountability and continuous financial auditing measures.

The set of rules, regulations and policies established by COST governance, including those related to the internal organisation of the COST Association as well as those related to the implementation of COST activities, is intended to prevent and rectify any irregularities or fraud.

### **Objective and impartial scientific management**

COST asks all experts involved in the evaluation, selection, management, monitoring and assessment of COST Actions and other activities to help to fulfil the COST mission and objectives by completing their tasks in a professional, objective and impartial manner. Scientific excellence and the quality of research proposals should always be the only thing that counts; COST expects its experts to be impartial when it comes to research and conducting research.

### **Best practice for ensuring originality**

Though COST does not fund research activities and focuses instead on promoting cooperation through networking and encouraging the open publication of results and outcomes, COST strives to avoid the deliberate replication of ideas, data, results or other scientific work without due permission and acknowledgement, thus protecting the originality of findings and ideas. Any risk of fraud and plagiarism within COST, such as in proposals for COST Actions, must be avoided.

## **3) TRANSPARENCY**

Transparency is an essential principle that implies openness, clear communication and accountability necessary in organisations like COST, which is built on democratic principles. All COST actors should regularly disclose full, accurate and up-to-date information on policies and decisions related to the fulfilment of the COST mission and objectives. Such information should be presented in a way that is clear and accessible to the general public.

### **Fair, honest and open communication**

COST actors and stakeholders are respectful, fair, honest and open when communicating with one another. By publically releasing relevant and understandable information, COST keeps all interested parties informed without showing preference or favouritism to any individual or group.

COST responds to public inquiries, including those submitted by news media, governments and others, with prompt, courteous and honest answers through the members of the executive board or employees authorised to speak in public on COST's behalf.

### **Appropriate and lawful handling of information: respecting confidentiality**

Though committed to transparency, COST recognises that the confidentiality of data and/or work may be necessary if related to the protection of the legitimate interests of COST and/or the individuals involved in COST activities. This includes, but is not limited to, procedures involving evaluation, selection, management, monitoring and assessment, and activities related to COST Actions. In such cases, all COST stakeholders are expected to commit to the non-disclosure of data identified as confidential.

### **Accessibility of research results**

The COST Association encourages the dissemination of results, outcomes and impact generated by COST Actions. While the COST Association would like to direct attention to and support the

protection of intellectual property, it actively promotes an Open Access policy for results and outcomes published with COST funding.

#### **4) COMMITMENT**

Commitment is key to the successful fulfilment of objectives and dedication to activities, guaranteeing achievement and declaring personal commitment based on faithfulness and trust. Commitment goes hand in hand with accountability as each of us has a duty to account for our decisions and actions and to accept responsibility for them and their consequences.

##### **Protection and safety**

COST is committed to the principle that activities supported by COST are intended for peaceful purposes only. Any activities related to the development of sensitive technology, armament or defence-oriented research will be avoided. Activities carried out with the support of COST must comply with fundamental ethical principles, including the avoidance of strife amongst peoples or nations.

##### **Safeguarding of confidential information: right to privacy and use of personal data**

COST shows due respect to every person's right to privacy and to the protection thereof. COST pledges to limit the collection of data on participants and other individuals involved with COST to those aspects which are necessary for the continuation of COST operations, or where required by the law of the land. COST also promises to restrict the dissemination of personal data to those occasions where the purpose serves the wider COST Mission, and only with the explicit permission of the individuals involved.

##### **Responsible and professional use of the electronic communication technologies**

Electronic communication technology and media is now commonly used to conduct activities and communicate, thanks to access to the Internet, intranet systems, e-mail, telephones and mobile devices. COST expects everyone to use such technology in a responsible and professional manner consistent with this Code and other COST policies.

##### **Responsible partnerships and proactive, appropriate participation in public and political debates**

COST is a proactive member of the European Research Area and aims to significantly contribute to its full implementation. In the same vein, all individuals involved in COST are encouraged to participate in and promote the ERA's common goals and pursue its joint ambitions.

Successful and open cooperation in science and technology should contribute to the quality of life, prosperity and sustainability of our communities and the world.

COST seeks responsible partnerships that streamline, complement and create synergies in research investment efforts in Europe and beyond.

COST initiates and participates in public and policy debates to share the input from COST Action communities with the appropriate stakeholders. These also provide a platform for the discussion of policy issues among their target groups by using the COST Actions hubs.