

RULES AND PRINCIPLES FOR COST ACTIVITIES

(Level A)

The COST Committee of Senior Officials (“CSO”) having regard to:

The Statutes of the COST Association,

In accordance with its role as General Assembly of the COST Association,

Whereas

- COST is devoted to the promotion, organisation, management and funding of practical support functions for the European Cooperation in Science and Technology. Its activities contribute to the strengthening of the scientific and technological basis and to the full implementation of the [European Research Area](#)¹. It achieves this notably by the development of European-based scientific and technological networks in any scientific or interdisciplinary domain that encourage all stakeholders to share, create and apply knowledge, ‘[the COST mission](#)’². COST shall seek responsible partnerships that streamline, complement, and create synergies in research investment efforts in Europe and beyond. This shall allow COST to initiate and participate in public and policy debates to share the input from COST Action communities with the appropriate stakeholders.
- COST activities aim at supporting [COST strategic priorities](#)³ being:
 - Promoting and spreading excellence,
 - Fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science,
 - Empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators.
- COST activities shall be conducted following a set of principles that shall be applicable throughout the whole spectrum of COST activities and to all their actors.
- COST shall ensure the researchers and innovators participating in COST activities have the best experience possible and are enabled to maximise the scientific and innovation benefit of the activity.
- COST shall therefore adopt a set of stable, minimal, and user-friendly rules to ensure efficient, effective, and impactful implementation of its activities:

Adopts the present Rules and Principles for COST activities, which shall apply to COST Members, COST Governance, COST Scientific Committee, COST Administration and to participants to COST activities.

The present Rules and Principles for COST activities shall lay down the principles and general rules for COST activities and govern:

- The Scope of COST activities,
- The Scope and hierarchy of rules,
- The Principles governing COST activities,
- The COST Global networking,

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/era_en

² <https://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/mission-vision-and-values/>

³ <https://www.cost.eu/who-we-are/cost-strategy/>

- The Rules applicable to Conflict of Interests,
- The Breach of COST Rules and Principles,
- The Reporting on the application of the Rules.

Throughout the present Rules and Principles for COST activities, the term “shall” implies an obligation to comply with the set requirement whilst the term “may” implies an authorisation to act. Other terms used in the present rules are defined in the list of Definitions and abbreviations contained in the Annex II to the present Rules and Principles for COST activities.

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1. SCOPE OF COST ACTIVITIES

COST activities aim at implementing the COST mission and COST strategic priorities in line with COST positioning in the European Research Area.

Therefore, the COST activities shall consist in:

- COST Actions,
- COST Innovators Grants,
- Other COST centrally managed activities such as but not limited to COST Connect, COST Academy, External Communication and Cross-cutting activities,
- Pilot projects.

All COST activities shall be properly selected, implemented, closely monitored, and appropriately assessed to ensure a proper execution and suitable communication, dissemination, and valorisation of their results.

2. SCOPE AND HIERARCHY OF RULES

In addition to the principles and framework conditions laid down in the present Rules and Principles for COST activities (level A), the COST activities shall be governed by specific rules, hereinafter referred to as level B rules, that shall further define and govern the functioning and management of each of the COST activities.

The level B rules shall include:

- Rules on the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals (SESA) for COST Actions;
- COST Actions Rules;
- COST Innovators Grant Rules;
- Rules applicable to centrally managed activities;
- Other specific rules for pilot projects.

The Executive Board (EB) of the COST Association may further adopt Annotated Rules, hereinafter referred to as level C rules, aiming at providing practical handbooks in support of the applicable level B rules.

Altogether, level A, B and C rules shall be referred to as the COST Implementation Rules.

Level B and C rules shall not contravene the present Rules and Principles for COST activities, nor shall the level C rules contravene the applicable level B rules. In case of any contradiction, the present Rules and Principles for COST activities shall prevail. In case of contradiction between level C and applicable level B rules, the applicable level B rules shall prevail.

In exceptional circumstances, duly justified in the superior interest of COST, the CSO may adopt specific provisions deviating from the present rules.

3. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING COST ACTIVITIES

COST activities shall be governed by principles, hereinafter referred to as COST Principles, that shall be the cornerstone of the rules applicable to COST activities as further defined in levels B and C rules and shall guide their set-up, implementation, and interpretation.

COST Principles shall be applicable throughout the whole spectrum of COST activities and to all their actors, including the COST Members, the COST Governance, the COST Scientific Committee, the COST Administration as well as to the participants to COST activities.

COST Principles shall be further depicted in applicable level B and complemented in level C rules which shall be abided by.

COST principles shall be as follows:

3.1. Excellence & Inclusiveness

Excellence and Inclusiveness principle aims at fostering excellence and inclusiveness in science Europe-wide, offering low-barrier access to research networks, and creating interdisciplinary research cooperation opportunities for researchers and innovators. This principle is based on openness and inclusiveness, bottom-up approach and striving for excellence as depicted hereunder and shall be implemented through the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy.

3.1.1. OPENNESS AND INCLUSIVENESS

COST activities shall be open and inclusive.

COST is about people: the researchers and innovators. The success of COST activities depends on the ability to bring together all the relevant actors. Participation to COST activities should therefore be open to all.

Participation in COST activities shall be an entry point to other European collaborative research networks, that allows to save costs and time to connect with the right partners.

COST shall encourage participation from all actors, such as academics, non-academics, SMEs, international organisations and public authorities and civil society organisations. Participation in COST may also lead to follow-up in terms of proposals submitted for collaborative research in Horizon Europe. This underpins the role of COST as a pre-portal for follow-up European funding for research and innovation.

COST and participants to COST activities shall value everyone and treat them equally and fairly, regardless of their gender, age, religious beliefs, ethnicity, political convictions, disabilities, or any other aspects.

COST and participants to COST activities shall value diversity as an asset to its pan-European, multi-cultural and interdisciplinary character.

COST shall commit to promote Open Science including through Open Access of the outputs of COST activities, notably through the dissemination of their results and outcomes.

COST and participants to COST activities shall ensure inclusiveness in COST activities through COST Inclusiveness Target Countries⁴ (ITC) representation, geographical diversity, gender balance and empowerment of young researchers.

3.1.2. BOTTOM-UP APPROACH AND STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

COST activities shall be effective and impactful, which requires COST to strive for excellence, focusing on progressing the state-of-the-art and development of breakthroughs. On a matter of principle, topics of the COST activities shall be defined following a bottom-up approach. The CSO may decide to follow a top-down approach where appropriate.

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.

⁴ See Annex I for the list of COST Inclusiveness Target Countries.

COST shall in this regard:

- Foster professionalism and cooperative attitude in all aspects of the governance, management, and implementation of COST activities,
- Listen actively, respond, encourage teamwork, and make decisions based on facts and data, in an environment that encourages promotion, achievement and continuous learning in order to improve its own performance,
- Proactively identify, assess, and manage risks in view of greater potential and impact,
- Welcome any assessment or constructive criticism to cultivate an honest and responsible organisation and ask all participants in COST activities to help to fulfil the COST mission and objectives by completing their tasks in a professional, objective, and impartial manner,
- Ensure equal access to all scientific disciplines and promote interdisciplinarity, supporting and implementing the highest-level activities,
- Nurture talent and creativity, create opportunities for everyone to fulfil their full potential, and foster the potential of participants to COST activities,
- Ensure that participants to COST activities are evaluated and selected based on objective assessment of their qualifications and performance,
- Provide participants to COST activities with appropriate and impartial supervision, guidance, and support, in order to enhance high-quality results and outcomes from COST activities,
- Make relevant results and outcomes from COST activities easily available to potential end-users in COST Members and beyond (the scientific community, business enterprises, policy makers, citizens, public and other stakeholders).

3.1.3. COST EXCELLENCE AND INCLUSIVENESS POLICY

The COST Excellence and Inclusiveness policy is developed around three main elements:

- Geographical diversity,
- Career stage: involving young researchers and innovators,
- Gender balance.

The COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy shall contribute to the objectives of the 'Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area' Work Programme under Horizon Europe.

3.2. Empowerment of researchers and innovators

COST aims at empowering the participants to COST activities by providing them, within the limits of the legal and financial framework applicable, with the powers to make the best decisions for their network. Empowerment shall notably be implemented through the application of the Principle of Openness and Inclusiveness in leadership positions in COST Actions and possibly other activities where required.

3.3. Ethical principles

COST and participants to COST activities shall adhere to the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)⁵ and adhere to, apply, and enforce the highest principles of research integrity of reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability as depicted in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

COST and participants to COST activities shall respect fundamental rights as by the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#).⁶

⁵ <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>

COST and participants to COST activities shall act fairly and without prejudice, uphold high standards of conduct and commit to thoroughness, transparency, efficiency, and regularity in the fulfilment of their tasks and responsibilities and avoid any discrimination.

COST activities shall be for peaceful purposes only. Any activities related to the development of armament or defence-oriented research shall be prohibited.

Breach of the ethical principles of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity in any COST activity shall be reported to the Scientific Committee.

3.4. Respect for confidentiality and privacy

COST and participants to COST activities shall safeguard confidential information.

COST and participants to COST activities shall ensure respect for the privacy of participants to COST activities and more generally of all individuals providing personal data to COST.

Collection and processing of personal data shall be limited to the minimum required for implementation of COST mission and strategic priorities as further defined in the appropriate [privacy policy](#)⁷.

COST shall support the COST activities, where applicable, in ensuring compliance with the applicable legislation on data protection. COST provides other advice, notably with regard to intellectual property rights (IPR), where appropriate.

3.5. Good governance, financial soundness, and efficiency

COST shall ensure good governance which includes amongst others operating along the principles of transparency, efficiency and effectiveness as well as assuring sound, lean and cost-effective management and financial soundness of all its activities.

Participants to COST activities, where they are empowered to make decisions for the management of their network, shall ensure good governance of their network and financial soundness of the COST funded activities they organise for the benefit of their network and be accountable of their decisions.

Good governance and financial soundness shall reinforce efficiency of COST activities, ensuring the maximum of its resources go to funding research networks.

3.6. Abidance by the applicable legal and financial framework

COST and participants to COST activities shall abide by the legal and financial framework applicable as described in the present Rules and Principles for COST activities and further depicted in applicable level B and complemented in level C rules. The present Rules and Principles are without prejudice to the abidance by COST and participants to COST activities to otherwise applicable law and regulations.

COST shall abide by the legal and contractual framework applicable for its functioning and financing.

As a publicly funded organisation, COST shall ensure validity, integrity, transparency, understandability, accuracy and completeness of financial reports and accounting records reflecting supporting information as required per level B rules and complemented in level C rules.

⁷ <https://e-services.cost.eu/privacy-notice>

4. COST GLOBAL NETWORKING

COST Global Networking shall be implemented throughout all COST activities and:

- Contribute to establishing and maintaining international cooperation in research, technology, development and innovation,
- Offer a trusted and safe environment for international cooperation that can open and explore new areas of collaboration,
- Enable to actively engage and bring together all relevant stakeholders that can provide added-value to tackle different societal challenges,
- Be based on an ascertained mutual benefit that ensures the advancement of the scientific fields concerned by the relevant COST activity.

Through COST Global Networking, COST shall encourage the participation of researchers and innovators affiliated in non-COST Members and Specific Organisations in COST activities. COST shall in particular support the participation of researchers and innovators affiliated in Near Neighbour Countries also by having them eligible for financial support and other non-financial benefit.

Further, COST shall on an institutional level promote COST outside of COST Members through:

- Strengthening the cooperation with Near Neighbour Countries contributing to the creation of reliable networks, building mutual knowledge exchange and trust to increase the collaboration for the achievement of common goals,
- Reinforcing the cooperation with Third States (also called International Partner Countries) to extend the scope and expertise of COST activities. This may involve in particular the negotiation of Partner Member status,
- Reinforcing the cooperation with Specific Organisations which may be part of the steering of the COST activities on the basis of ascertained mutual benefit.

5. RULES APPLICABLE TO CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

COST shall avoid and manage potential Conflicts of Interests throughout all COST activities.

5.1. Notion

There shall be a Conflict of Interests where any person involved in the conduct of a COST activity or susceptible to influence it has, directly or indirectly, a financial, economic, or other personal interest, which might compromise or be perceived to compromise their impartiality and independence in the context of the concerned COST activity.

Conflicts of Interests may arise with regard to all persons involved or identified to be involved in any evaluation, selection, monitoring or assessment procedure of a COST activity, hereinafter referred to as any Reviewing Procedure, and at all stages in the procedure, where:

- They are involved in the same procedure as a proposer or participant to the COST activity,
- They have a professional or personal relationship with any of the proposers or participants to the concerned COST activity such as but not limited to:
 - Currently work or will work in the same research unit as any of the proposers or participants to the concerned COST activity,
 - Have a close family or personal relationship with any of the proposers or participants to the concerned COST activity (relative, spouse, partner, close friend),
 - Are currently, have recently been or are set to become dependent professionally on any of the proposers or participants to the concerned COST activity or in professional competition with that person,
 - Have a close cooperation with any of the proposers or participants to the concerned COST activity among others through joint publication.
- They stand to benefit directly or indirectly from the concerned COST activity,

- They are for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the concerned COST activity,
- Their professional judgment could be biased for other reasons.

Some functions at COST or in an evaluation, selection or approval procedure of a COST activity proposal or in the monitoring and final assessment of a COST activity shall be incompatible with a participation in all or one specific COST activity. Those incompatibilities shall be further described in applicable level B rules.

5.2. Declaration of absence of Conflict of Interests and confidentiality

Any person identified to be involved in any Reviewing Procedure shall sign prior to exercising their duties a declaration of absence of conflict of interests and confidentiality stating that they:

- Are not aware of any Conflict of Interests regarding the proposal to be evaluated or selected or the activity to be monitored and assessed,
- Shall inform immediately the COST Administration of any Conflict of Interests discovered during the procedure,
- Shall maintain the confidentiality of the procedure.

Absence of signature of the declaration implies that the person cannot be involved in any Reviewing Procedure.

5.3. Handling a Conflict of Interests

5.3.1. DUTY TO DISCLOSE

Any person involved in any Reviewing Procedure of a COST activity or in the conduct of a COST activity shall, in case they encounter a Conflict of Interests, declare it.

If the concerned person fails to comply with their duty to disclose, any other person being aware of the Conflict of Interests shall disclose it.

5.3.2. DETERMINING WHETHER A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS EXISTS

When declared or, where the COST Administration get informed that any person involved in any Reviewing Procedure could be in Conflict of Interests, the case shall be instructed in writing.

Where the Conflict of Interests is doubtful, the concerned person shall be given the opportunity to disclose the financial, economic, or other personal interest and if required, the supporting material facts:

- Where acting in the frame of a body, Committee, or ad hoc working group of the COST Association, after discussion with the concerned person preliminary to any discussion or decision-making in the appropriate forum, the concerned person shall leave the room while the potential of a Conflict of Interests is discussed and determined. The remaining members of the relevant body, Committee or ad-hoc working group of the COST Association shall decide if a Conflict of Interest exists.
- Where the concerned person is an individual expert, the COST Administration shall decide if a Conflict of Interests exists on the basis of the disclosed interest and relevant material facts, if any. The COST Administration may consult the Scientific Committee if required.

5.3.3. COURSE OF ACTION WHERE CONFLICT OF INTERESTS IS CONFIRMED

If the Conflict of Interests is confirmed before or during any Reviewing Procedure or during the course of the concerned COST activity:

- The individual expert in Conflict of Interests shall stop their participation in any Reviewing Procedure of the concerned COST activity or otherwise in the conduct of the COST activity and be replaced,
- The member of a relevant body, Committee or ad hoc working group of the COST Association in Conflict of Interests shall leave the room while the Reviewing Procedure for that specific activity is ongoing,
- Any comments, marks, assessment, recommendation or otherwise equivalent already provided by the individual in Conflict of Interests shall be discarded,
- Where applicable, the Conflict of Interests shall be mentioned in the minutes of the meeting of the relevant body, Committee, or ad hoc working group of the COST Association.

If the Conflict of Interests is confirmed after the Reviewing Procedure of the concerned COST activity took place or otherwise after the conduct of the COST activity, the COST Administration shall after discussion with the concerned person:

- Assess the potential impact and consequences of the Conflict of Interests,
- If, in the opinion of the COST Administration, the Conflict of Interests would make the Reviewing Procedure of the COST activity partial or inadmissible or affect the value or quality of the COST activity, report to the EB which may take appropriate measures to mitigate the issue,
- Where the issue cannot be mitigated at the level of the EB, the case shall be reported to the CSO.

The COST Administration shall take the lead in any resolution process of a case of Conflict of Interests at any time in any Reviewing Procedure or otherwise in the conduct of a COST activity.

6. BREACH OF COST RULES AND PRINCIPLES

Breach of any of the provisions of the present Rules and Principles for COST activities as further described in applicable level B rules, complemented in level C rules may lead to rejection of costs, reduction, suspension or termination of a grant, recovery, or sanctions that shall be defined and applied depending on the violated rule or principle, the kind and importance of the breach and its impact to be assessed by the entity competent to impose and enforce a potential sanction as hereunder referred to after an adversary proceeding.

The rejection of costs, reduction, suspension or termination of a grant, recovery, or sanctions as well as the procedure to be followed for applying those shall, where required, be further detailed if required in the Annotated Rules to be adopted by the EB of the COST Association (the level C Rules) or in any contract or other binding agreement with any legal entity involved in a COST activity.

Breaches leading to possible sanctions are as follows:

- Breach of COST Principles,
- Breach of COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy,
- Breach of Rules applicable to Conflict of Interests,
- For the Management Committees of COST Actions, breach of Management Committee duties,
- Financial fraud,
- Breach of reporting obligations.

Possible sanctions may encompass:

- Exclusion from participation in one specific COST activity or in all or some COST activities for a specific duration,
- Exclusion from participation in one specific evaluation, selection, monitoring or assessment procedure of a COST activity or from an expert database of COST for a specific duration,
- Revocation from a leadership position in a COST activity, where applicable after consultation with the relevant COST National Coordinator (CNC),
- Reduction of budget of a COST activity,
- Termination of a COST Action.

The Management Committee of a COST Action shall be entitled to exclude a Working Group member of a given COST Action in case of any of the above-mentioned breaches to Rules and Principles for COST activities and the Rules for COST Actions as further complemented by level C Rules.

The CSO shall be entitled to:

- Terminate a COST Action in case of breach of COST Principles by a COST Action Management Committee on the basis of a recommendation of the Scientific Committee,
- Revoke the holder of a mandatory leadership position in case of any of the above-mentioned breaches to Rules and Principles for COST activities and the Rules for COST Actions based on prior information to the appropriate CNC and recommendation of the Scientific Committee.

The EB shall be entitled to:

- Exclude an individual from any participation in any COST activity for a fixed duration to be defined by the EB in case of financial fraud,
- In case of any of the above-mentioned breaches to Rules and Principles for COST activities and the Rules for COST Actions:
 - Revoke a Management Committee Member after prior consultation with the relevant CNC,
 - Exclude a Working Group member of a specific COST Action.

The COST Administration shall be entitled to revoke an independent External Expert or COST Action Rapporteur for breach of confidentiality or for failure to declare a Conflict of Interests from the COST experts' database.

7. REPORTING ON THE APPLICATION OF THE RULES

The COST Administration shall report to the CSO on the application of and compliance with the present Rules and level B and C rules by the participants in COST activities with a specific attention for the Principles depicted in Article 3 of the present rules.

8. FINAL AND TRANSITORY PROVISIONS

The present rules shall be binding in their entirety and directly applicable to all COST activities, and to all their actors, including the COST Members, the COST Governance, COST Scientific Committee, the COST Administration as well as to the participants to COST activities.

Annexes to the present rules shall form an integral part of the present rules. However, the COST Administration under the supervision of the EB may amend Annexes I and II to reflect respectively a change in COST Members, COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC) or Near Neighbour Country (NNC) status or to add, remove or amend a definition or abbreviation applicable in COST activities.

Except for the Annexes, any change to the present rules shall be subject to the approval of the CSO.

The present rules shall enter into force on 1 November 2021. However, the present rules and level B Rules for COST Actions shall apply to COST Actions approved on 25 May 2021 as of the date of approval of the present rules.

The present rules shall cancel and replace:

- The Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities, COST 132/14 REV 6,
- The COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment, COST 134/14 REV 4,
- The COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation rules, COST 135/14 REV 2,
- The COST Code of Conduct, COST 081/15.

ANNEX I

COUNTRY AND ORGANISATIONS TABLE

Please see www.cost.eu/Country_Organisations_Table

ANNEX II

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS APPLICABLE THROUGHOUT COST IMPLEMENTATION RULES (GLOSSARY)

Please see www.cost.eu/Glossary.
