COST ASSOCIATION CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2023

Date: 31 May 2023

For the COST Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the fourth wave of the COST Association (hereafter "COST") Customer Satisfaction Survey, conducted in March and April 2023. A total of 30,263 customers were invited to participate in the survey and 9,336 did so, giving a response rate of 31%. This was lower than the rate achieved in the two previous waves of the survey but higher than the first wave (25% in 2015/16, 33% in 2017/18 and 37% in 2019/20).

1.1 Evaluations of the COST Framework and its services

Evaluations of the COST Framework and its services are for the most part are very positive. The majority of respondents continue to think that COST is fulfilling its strategic priorities: almost nine in ten (88%) agree that it is playing an essential role in promoting and spreading scientific and technological knowledge across Europe, while more than eight in ten agree that it is helping to enhance the careers of young researchers (85%), and enabling breakthrough scientific developments by fostering inter-disciplinary networks (83%). All of these results represent a statistically significant improvement on the (already very positive) figures recorded in 2020.

In a new question added to the survey for 2023, almost nine in ten respondents (87%) say they would speak highly of COST, with almost half saying they would even do so *even without being asked their opinion*. Further, an overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) continue to think COST has a positive reputation in the wider scientific community.

The main perceived strengths of the COST Framework continue to be the international collaboration and networking activities it enables (76%) and the opportunities it provides to make new contacts and meet new people (68%). Reflecting this, very high proportions of MC members and participants continue to regard COST's various networking tools as important. In relative terms, the tools perceived as most important remain meetings, workshops and conferences (97%) and Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) (94%).

COST's recently introduced Virtual Networking Tools are also viewed as important by a strong majority (75%), and, indeed, satisfaction with most aspects of virtual Action meetings is almost as high as for in-person meetings. Almost two-thirds (64%) of MC members feel that the current balance between in-person and virtual activities in their Action is about right. Nine in ten grant holders or those in other leadership positions (90%) say that the gender balance in their respective COST Actions is good, with 55% saying it is *very* good.

A high and increased proportion of respondents in the latest survey give positive evaluations of the e-COST platform and report generally positive experiences of receiving support from COST staff when using the platform (including when it comes to submitting proposals). In terms of wider support provided by COST, around nine in ten are satisfied with the speed of responses provided by staff (90%) and with the ability of staff to address problems and issues (90%) – with over half expressing *complete* satisfaction in each case, as in 2020.

When it comes to the management of COST Actions, around seven in ten MC Chairs and grant holders agree that the new COST Annotated Rules are easy to find (72%), allow all Action participants to easily join Action activities (74%) and were well communicated (68%). Around two-thirds of grant holders (67%) say they find the e-COST tools for grant management easy to use. A similar proportion (66%) of MC Chairs and grant holders say they would recommend managing a COST Action to a colleague.

Turning to COST's impact on customers' professional activities, almost three-quarters (72%) of MC Chairs and grant holders indicate that holding a COST grant has a very or fairly positive impact on their institution. Almost all MC members and participants report that their experience of participating in COST Actions has exceeded their expectations (68%) or met those expectations (28%), while around eight in ten MC members and participants report that participating in COST Actions led to new insights in their field(s) (83%) and to new research collaboration opportunities (81%). Almost all (96%) MC members and participants indicate they would recommend joining a COST Action.

This generally positive picture notwithstanding, the survey points to some potential areas for improvement. Firstly, although more than four in five proposers (84%) consider the SESA process to be straightforward, smaller majorities consider the evaluation criteria for proposals to be clear (67%) and the evaluation and selection procedure to be transparent (58%), with 18% explicitly *disagreeing* that this is the case. Transparency is also highlighted as an issue in relation to the nomination process and criteria for Management Committee (MC) members.

Secondly, whereas eight in ten say that funds for travel and subsistence are sufficient (80%), and around seven in ten say the same about funds for Short-Term Scientific Missions (75%) and dissemination activities (72%), somewhat smaller majorities deem as sufficient funds relating to Local Organiser Support (LOS) for training schools (66%), OERSA and FSAC expenses (66% and 56% respectively), as well as funds enabling all relevant participants to attend Action networking activities (61%). The 2023 survey findings also show a notable decrease in the proportion regarding travel and subsistence funds as sufficient.

Thirdly, the survey indicates that there may be scope for enhancing the effective functioning of certain aspects of virtual Action meetings, particularly the extent to which new ideas emerge, the extent to which collective decisions can be reached, and the level of active contribution of participants.

Finally, it continues to be the case that fewer than half of MC Chairs and grant holders regard the financial and administrative rules for managing COST Actions easy to understand (46%) or to apply (43%).

1.2 Differences in views of key customer groups

The broad pattern of responses reported above was replicated across the different customer groups surveyed. That said, evaluations were consistently more positive among respondents in COST ITCs than among those in non-ITCs. Additionally, young researchers are more positive than more experienced researchers about several aspects of the COST framework, including on the perceived importance of different COST networking tools and on the support provided by COST. On the other hand, proposers are less positive than other customer groups about some aspects of the COST Framework, including in relation to the perceived reputation of COST in the wider scientific community and the quality of support provided by COST.

1.3 Change over time

Since 2020, perceptions of the COST Framework have for the most part either become more positive (to varying extents) or have remained stable. Two areas where more substantial and positive shifts were observed are in positive evaluations of the e-COST platform and its tools (particularly its ability to deliver fast and accurate results); and the continuing downward shift in the proportion of customers experiencing problems when using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals (24% in 2023, compared to 30% in 2020 and 56% in 2018).

1.4 Summary of recommendations

Overall, the survey results suggest customers hold COST, its services and its tools in high regard. At the same time, it points to some areas of improvement for the organisation's work, specifically: the clarity and transparency of the SESA evaluation process and of the nomination process for MC members; the level of funding available for Actions (especially funding relating to Local Organiser Support for training schools, OERSA and FSAC expenses, as well as funds enabling all relevant participants to attend Action networking); aspects of virtual Action meetings, especially the extent to which these facilitate the generation of new ideas and collective decision-making; and the clarity and applicability of current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Action grants.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background to the survey

Formed in 1971, the COST Association (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is the leading European framework for research and innovation in the European Research Area (ERA). It currently comprises 41 full member states, one Cooperating Member and one Partner Member. Additionally, Near Neighbour Countries (NNC) in Europe's adjacent areas are also eligible for funding. COST's over-arching mission is to provide networking opportunities for researchers and innovators in order to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges. This mission is underpinned by three strategic priorities, as set out in the COST Strategic Plan:

- Promoting and spreading excellence
- Fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science
- Empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators

Since its formation, COST has funded the coordination of European S&T activities by supporting networks (known as "COST Actions") to combine their research and innovation efforts and provide collaboration opportunities to researchers and innovators across Europe. Each year, an average of 45,000 researchers and innovators benefit from participation in Actions.

COST is acutely focused on maximising the impact of its Actions, from the selection of proposals, to the implementation of networking activities, and helping researchers identify how they can contribute to solving scientific or societal challenges. A key means by which it seeks to measure this impact – and evaluate customers' perceptions of its work more generally – is through a regular customer satisfaction survey among participants in COST Actions (beneficiaries and grant holders) and both successful and unsuccessful proposers. Four waves of the survey have been conducted to date – in 2015/16, 2017/18, 2019/20 and 2022/23. This report presents the findings from the most of these waves.

The last few years have been a time of transition for COST and its customers alike. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions of movement and assembly presented significant challenges for the continuity of COST Actions, undermining the close networking upon which they are predicated. COST responded by expending time and effort promoting new forms of networking, most notably the development of Virtual Networking Tools (VNTs) which, going forward, present opportunities for virtual networking to complement face-to-face activities as part of an integrated strategy. Alongside these developments, COST published its Final Impact Assessment under Horizon 2020, and secured a seven-year Framework Partnership Agreement and three-year Specific Grant Agreement under Horizon Europe (2021-2028). In the meantime it has continued to pursue internal changes aimed at ensuring an efficient, customer-centred framework, including an exercise to reduce the number of reference documents for Actions and make them more accessible and understandable to all stakeholders.

The 2023 survey provided a timely opportunity to assess the impact of such developments on customers' perceptions, and to identify how perceptions have evolved more generally since previous waves of the survey.

2.2 Methodology

Reflecting the methodological approach taken for previous waves of the survey, the 2022/23 wave was conducted online. COST provided Ipsos with a database that included profile and contact information for the target group of customers – the participants (beneficiaries and grant holders) of all running COST Actions between 2021 and 2022, and the successful and unsuccessful applicants in the last three open call collection dates (OC-2020-1, OC-2021-1 and OC-2022-1). In total, the database comprised 30,263 customers.

The profile information segmented customers along three main lines: customer type, COST country and career stage.

In terms of customer type, six main groupings were defined:

1. Grant holders (or Grant Holder Managers)
2. Participants – which included:
   - Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Meeting/Training School participant
   - Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – STSM grantee
   - Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Conference grantee
   - Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Virtual grantee
   - Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Combined participant
3. Proposers – which included:
   - Proposer – Successful (Main proposer of the last OC-2020-1 and OC-2021-1)
   - Proposer – Unsuccessful (Main proposer of the last OC-2020-1 and OC-2021-1)
   - Proposer – Under evaluation (Main proposer of the last OC-2022-1)
4. Management Committee (MC) Chairs
5. Other leadership positions – which included:
   - Leadership positions: MC Vice-Chairs
   - Leadership positions: Working Group leaders /Grant Awarding Coordinators
   - Leadership positions: Science Communication Managers
6. Management Committee members (delegates)

In terms of country, customers were defined according to three main groupings:

- COST countries – Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs)[1]
- COST countries – non-ITCs[2]

[1]COST Country ITCs: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine.

[2] COST Country non-ITCs: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (Israel is a Cooperating Member. A Cooperating Member implies non-voting rights in the COST CSO. However, researchers from COST's Cooperating Member enjoy member rights in COST Action participation).

- Non-COST countries – Near Neighbour Countries (NNCs), International Partner Countries (IPCs) and COST Partner Members[3]

Finally, with regard to career stage, the database included an indicator for young researchers, defined as those aged below 40.

All customers in the database were sent an email inviting them to participate in the survey, which included a personalised link to the online questionnaire. The invitation was accompanied by a letter from the COST Director, Dr Ronald de Bruin, which highlighted, inter alia, the importance of the study and its findings to the organisation.

The survey was conducted between 9 March and 11 April 2023. During the fieldwork, three reminders were sent out (21 March, 28 March and 4 April) to remind respondents to complete the questionnaire. The survey was made available in English only. It had a maximum length of 20 minutes.

2.3 Response rates and achieved sample profile

Of the 30,263 customers who were invited to participate in the survey, a total of 9,336 did so, giving an overall response rate of 31%. This represents a decline on the steadily increasing response rate observed over previous waves (37% in 2019/2020, 33% in 2017/18 and 25% in 2015/16).

As Table 1.1 shows, the response rate varied significantly among different sub-groups of respondents. It was higher than average among MC Chairs (44%) and grant holders (35%), as well as customers based in COST ITCs (36% vs 27% in COST non-ITC countries and 23% in non-COST countries).

[3] Near Neighbour Countries are Kosovo*, Azerbaijan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, the Faeroer Islands and Palestine**. South Africa is COST Partner Member. All other countries are considered International Partner Countries (IPCs). The Russian Federation and Belarus are nominally Near Neighbour Countries, however researchers based in these two countries are not allowed to take part in COST Actions and activity in any capacity until further notice. *:This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence. **: This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

Table 1.1 Overview of achieved sample profile and response rates

Overall participants	**9336**	**31%**
Customer group		
Management Committee Members	4797	30%
Participants	6586	35%
Grant holders	125	35%
Proposers	323	29%
MC Chairs	163	44%
Other leadership positions	794	32%
COST country		
COST country- ITC	4773	36%
COST country- non-ITC	4285	27%
Non-COST country- non-ITC	137	23%
Career stage		
Young researchers	3767	29%
Experienced researchers	5569	32%
Overall participants	**9336**	**31%**

2.4 Interpreting the data

Throughout this report we highlight differences in the views of different subgroups of respondents (for example, customer type, country etc.) as well as by survey wave. It should be noted that survey results are subject to sampling tolerances meaning that not all apparent differences between groups may be statistically significant. Only differences that are statistically significant (at the 5% level) – i.e. where we can be reasonably certain that they are unlikely to have occurred by chance – are highlighted in the text.

For all questions included in the survey, respondents were able to answer '*Don't know/ Not applicable*'. For the purposes of reporting, these answers have been excluded from the analysis and the data results rebased accordingly.

Where percentages do not sum to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding or the possibility of providing multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a per cent but more than zero, while a dash (-) denotes zero. Aggregate percentages are calculated for all five-point Likert scales (e.g. "strongly agree + tend to agree").

2.5 Structure of the report

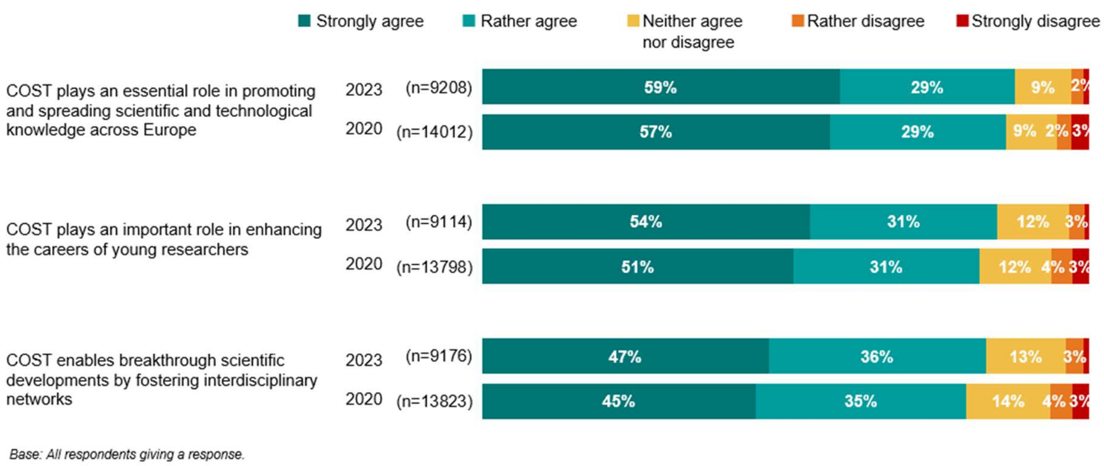
The next chapter of the report sets out customers' overall perceptions of COST, including in relation to its three strategic priorities. Chapters 3 to 8 look at customers' views and experiences in respect of: the SESA Open Call procedure and the e-COST platform; COST networking tools; gender balance in COST Actions; support provided by COST; managing and working on COST Actions; and the impact of COST, respectively. Chapter 9 sets out the main conclusions flowing from the research.

3 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF COST

3.1 Perceptions of COST's contribution

The majority of respondents continue to think that COST is fulfilling its strategic priorities. Almost nine in 10 (88%) agree that it is playing an essential role in promoting and spreading scientific and technological knowledge across Europe, while more than eight in ten agree that it is helping enhance the careers of young researchers (85%), and enabling breakthrough scientific developments by fostering inter-disciplinary networks (83%). All of these results represent a statistically significant improvement on the (already very positive) figures recorded in 2020 (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3:1: COST's perceived performance on its strategic priorities[4]



As in previous waves of the survey, the results are highly positive across all subgroups of customers. That said, COST Action participants tend to be a little more positive than MC Chairs, MC members, and proposers (See Table 3.1). Views are also consistently more positive than average among young researchers. Notably, 89% of this group agree that COST plays an important role in enhancing the careers of young researchers, compared with 82% of more established researchers.

[4] Question: "To what extent do you agree about the role played by COST?"

Table 3.1: COST's perceived performance on its strategic priorities, by customer type

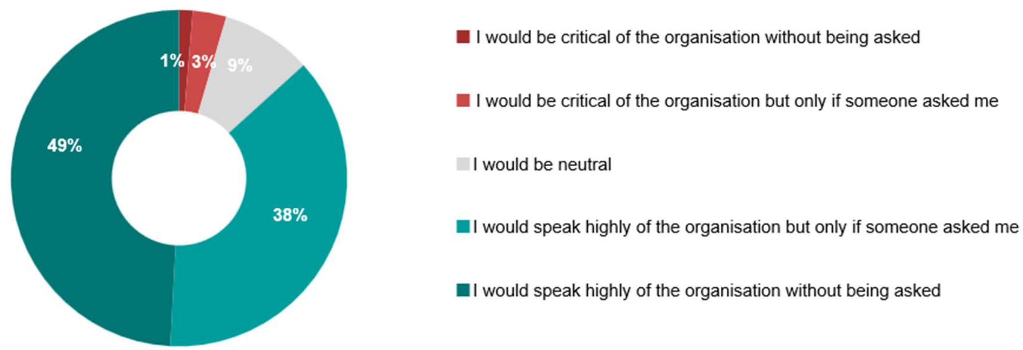
	COST plays an essential role in promoting and spreading scientific and technological knowledge across Europe		COST plays an important role in enhancing the careers of young researchers		COST enables breakthrough scientific developments by fostering interdisciplinary networks	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
MC members	85%	4%	82%	4%	79%	5%
Participants	90%	2%	87%	3%	85%	3%
Grant holders	89%	3%	88%	4%	79%	6%
Proposers	84%	4%	82%	6%	76%	6%
MC Chairs	83%	4%	87%	2%	72%	3%
Other leadership positions	85%	4%	85%	5%	78%	6%
Young researchers	90%	2%	89%	3%	86%	3%

Alongside these differences, customers in COST ITCs remain consistently more positive than those in COST non-ITCs. Here too, the difference is most pronounced in relation to COST's role in enhancing the careers of young researchers – 88% of those in COST ITCs agree the organisation is achieving this objective, compared with 81% in COST non-ITCs.

3.2 Advocacy of COST

In a new question added to the survey for 2023, **almost nine in ten respondents (87%) said they would speak highly of COST, with almost half saying they would do so *even without being asked their opinion*.** Meanwhile 9% said they would be neutral about the organisation and just 4% said they would be critical (Figure 3.2). These results compare extremely favourably with advocacy benchmarking data Ipsos has collected for other organisations across the public, private and third sectors in Europe and beyond.

Figure 3.2: Advocacy of COST[5]



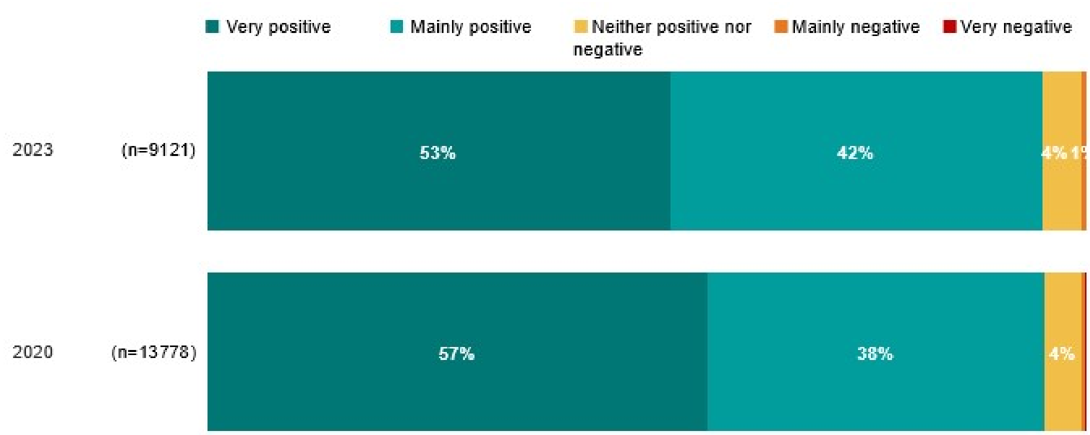
Base: All respondents giving a response (n=9101)

Consistent with other sub-group differences reported above, Action participants are slightly more likely to be advocates (speak highly) of COST than MC members (86%) and proposers (76%). Advocacy is also marginally higher in COST ITCs than in COST non-ITCs (88% versus 86% respectively).

3.3 COST's reputation in the wider scientific community

An overwhelming majority of respondents – 95% – continue to think COST has a positive reputation in the wider scientific community, with more than half (53%) saying its reputation is *very* positive. One again though, marginally less positive sentiment is evident among MC members (94%) and proposers (90%) compared with other customer types, and among COST non-ITCs than among ITCs (93% vs. 96% respectively) (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: COST's perceived reputation in the wider scientific community[6]



Base: All respondents giving a response

[5] Question: "Which of these phrases best describes the way that you personally would speak about COST to others?"

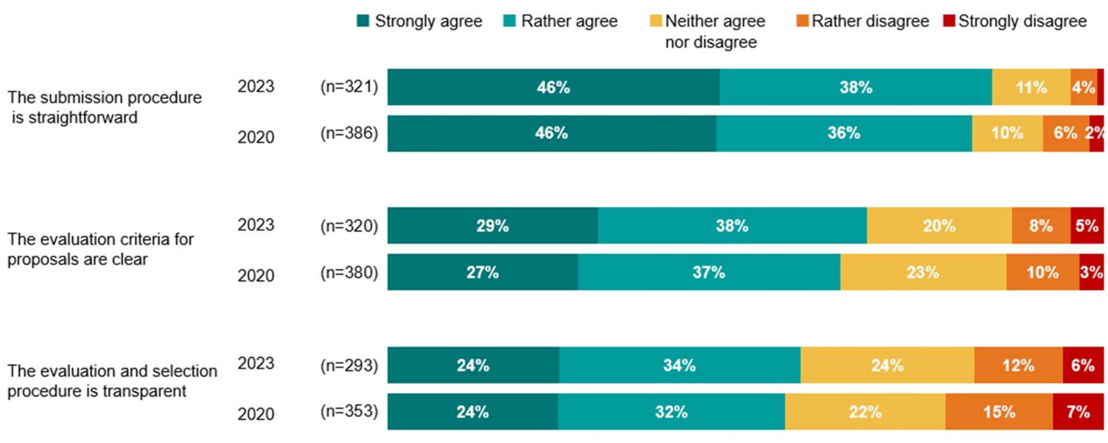
[6] Question: "Thinking about COST's reputation in the scientific community generally, would you say this is…."

4 SESA PROCEDURE AND THE E-COST PLATFORM

4.1 The Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure (SESA)

Proposers continue to report somewhat mixed feelings about COST's Submission, Evaluation, Selection, Approval (SESA) procedure, also known as the COST Open Call. While more than four in five (84%) think the submission process is straightforward, a notably lower majority (67%) think the evaluation criteria for proposals are clear. A lower proportion still (58%) think the evaluation and selection procedure is transparent, with 18% explicitly *disagreeing* that this is the case (Figure 4.1). These figures are unchanged on 2020.

Figure 4.1: Evaluations of COST's SESA procedure[7]



Base: All proposers giving a response.

As shown in Table 4.1, unsuccessful proposers generally view the SESA procedure less positively than their successful counterparts. The difference is especially marked in relation to the evaluation and selection process, with only around half (52%) of unsuccessful proposers viewing this as transparent, compared to 78% of successful ones.

Table 4.1: Evaluations of COST's SESA procedure by proposer success

	The submission procedure is straightforward		The evaluation criteria for proposals are clear		The evaluation and selection procedure is transparent	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
All proposers	84%	5%	67%	13%	58%	18%
Successful proposers	92%	3%	78%	2%	78%	5%
Unsuccessful proposers	85%	3%	62%	20%	52%	24%

[7] Question: *"To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure (SESA)"*

Alongside these differences, young researchers are notably more likely than average to regard the evaluation criteria for proposals as clear (79% versus 64% respectively).

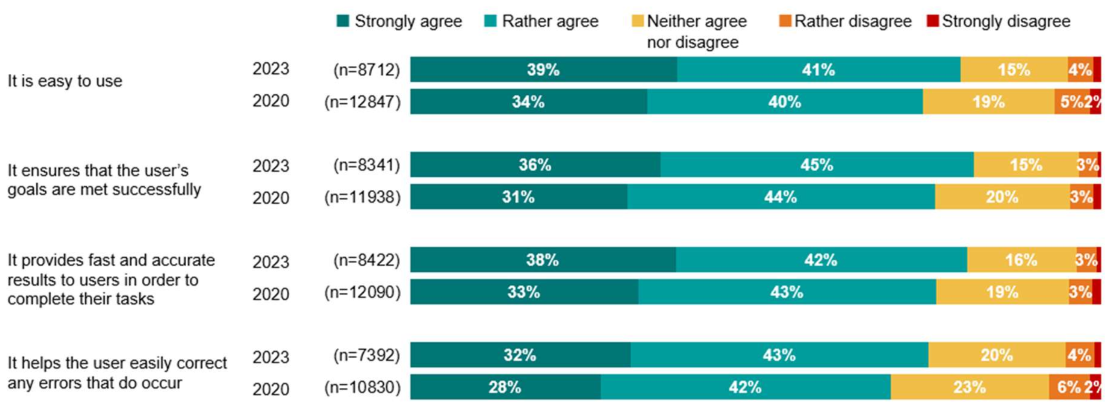
4.2 The e-COST platform and tools

4.2.1 Evaluations of the e-COST platform and tools

The e-COST platform enables COST Action MC members, participants and grant holders to manage their Action, organise networking tools and carry out related administrative tasks, such as filing reimbursement claims and effectuating financial and activity reporting.

A high proportion of respondents in the latest survey give positive evaluations of the platform and, indeed, the results shown some improvement on the 2020 wave. At least eight in ten users say the platform ensures the user's goals are met (82% compared to 76% in 2020), delivers fast and accurate results (81% compared to 76%) and is easy to use (80% compared to 74%). A slightly lower, but still improved, proportion say that that the platform allows errors to be easily corrected (75% compared to 70% in 2020).

Figure 4.2: Evaluation of the e-COST platform[8]



Base: All except proposers giving a response.

Despite this improving picture, grant holders and MC Chairs remain consistently less positive about the platform than other customer groups. Indeed, and as Table 4.2 shows, only around 50% or fewer of them agree that the platform is easy to use, and allows errors to be easily corrected.

Some smaller differences are apparent by age: more established researchers are a little less likely than their young counterparts to say the platform enables the user's goals to be met (80% versus 84%) and delivers fast and accurate information (79% versus 83%). A similar degree of variation is found between customers from COST ITCs and non-ITCs, with the former group consistently more positive than the latter.

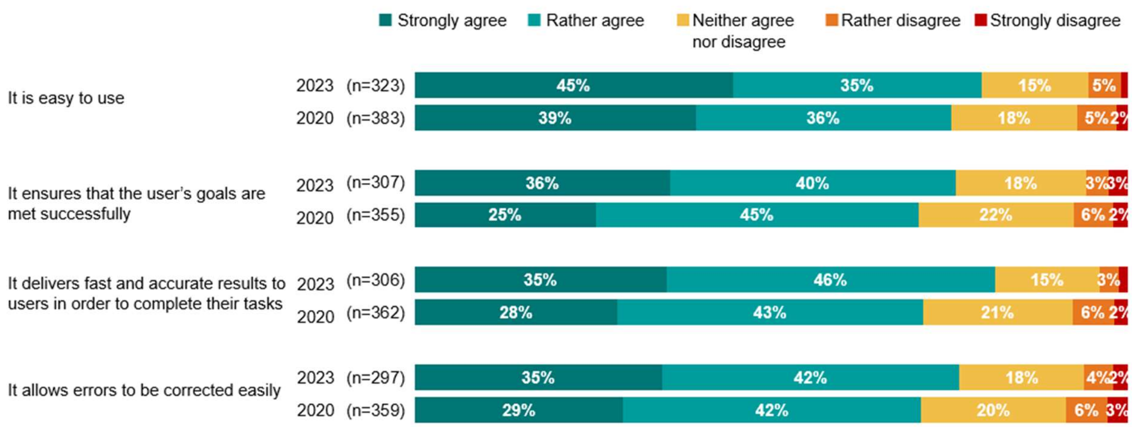
[8] Question: *"To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the e-COST platform...?"*

Table 4.2: Evaluations of the e-COST platform among MC members, participants and grant holders, by customer and country group

	Easy to use		Ensures that the user's goals are met successfully		Provides fast and accurate results for users to complete their tasks		Helps the user easily correct any errors that do occur	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
MC members	81%	4%	80%	4%	80%	4%	75%	5%
Participants	80%	5%	83%	3%	81%	3%	76%	5%
Grant holders	53%	18%	65%	11%	63%	11%	50%	21%
MC Chairs	44%	30%	60%	17%	53%	22%	42%	32%
Young researchers	80%	5%	84%	3%	83%	3%	76%	5%
COST Country - ITCs	85%	3%	86%	2%	86%	2%	81%	3%
COST Country - Non-ITCs	73%	7%	75%	4%	74%	5%	67%	8%

Proposers were asked the same question in relation to the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals. The results are very similar to those presented in Figure 4.2. **As shown below, 81% of proposers agree the tool delivers fast and accurate results, 80% agree it is easy to use, and 76% agree both that it ensures the user's goals are met, and that it allows errors to be corrected easily** (Figure 4.3). While most of these results are in line with those for 2020, the proportion agreeing that the platform delivers fast and accurate results has increased by ten percentage points.

Figure 4.3: Evaluations of the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals[9]

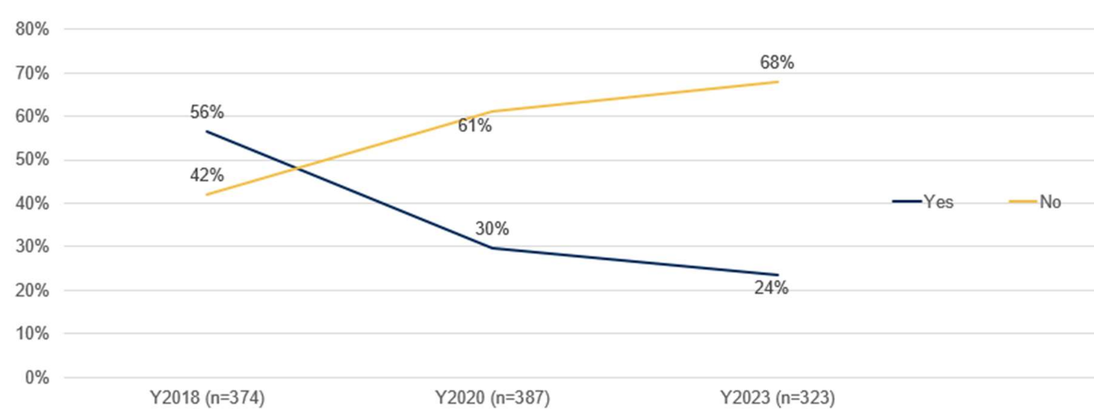


Base: All proposers giving a response.

4.2.2 Experience of problems while using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals

Around a quarter (24%) of proposers have experienced a problem while using the e-COST tool for proposal submission. This includes 21% who have experienced a *minor* problem and 3% who have experienced a *major* one. As Figure 4.4 shows, these results represent a continuation of the downward shift in experience of problems observed in 2020, when a total of 30% of proposers reported having experienced a problem (24% a minor problem and 6% a major one).

Figure 4.4: Experience of problems while using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals[10]



Base: All proposers giving a response.

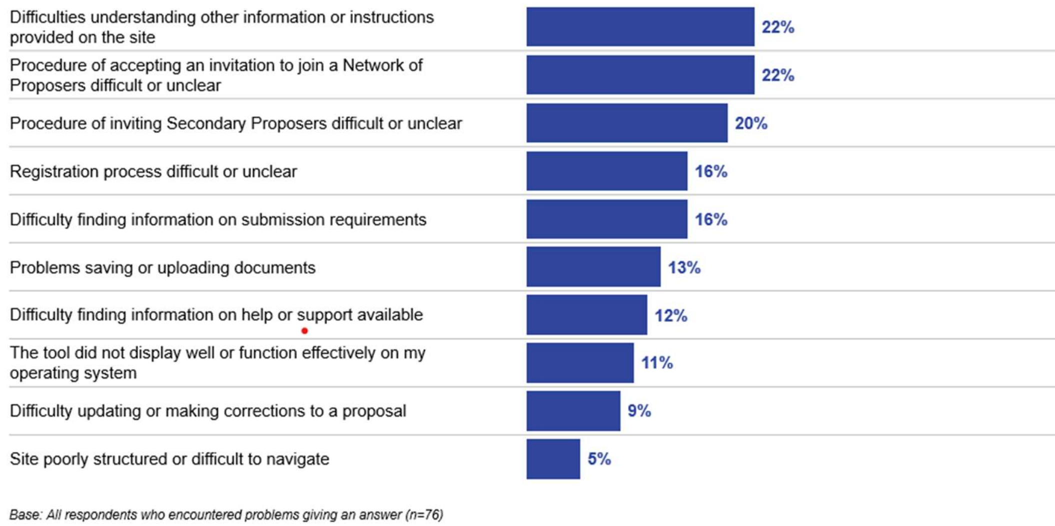
The specific types of problems that proposers have most commonly encountered while using the tool relate to the perceived difficulty of, or a lack of clarity in: the procedure for accepting

[9] Question: *"To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals…"*

[10] Question: *"Have you encountered any problems while using the e-COST online tool for submission of proposals?"*

an invitation to join a network of proposers (mentioned by 22%); the procedure for inviting secondary proposers (20%); and other information or instructions provided on the site (22%). These are followed by difficulties relating to the registration process (16%) and to finding information on submission requirements (16%). This set of results, including their rank ordering, is broadly in line with that from 2020.

Figure 4.5: Specific problems encountered while using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals[11]



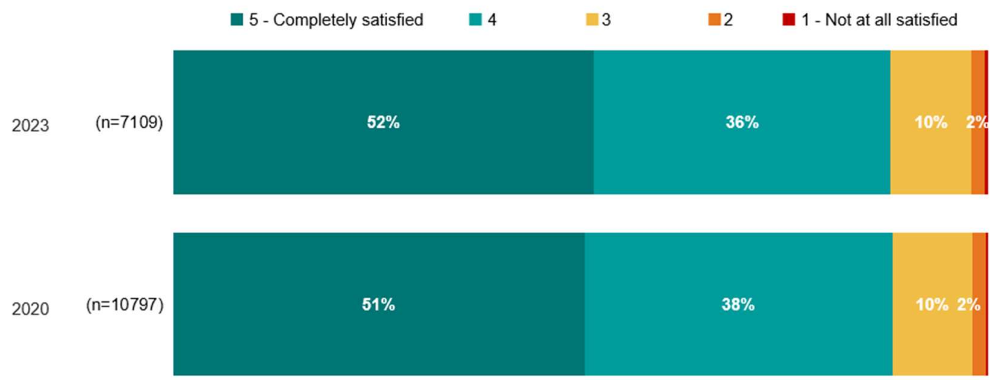
4.2.3 Satisfaction with support provided when using the e-COST platform and tools

Respondents generally report positive experiences of receiving support from COST staff when using the e-COST platform: As in 2020, almost nine in ten (88%) MC members, participants and grant holders say they are satisfied with the information the staff provide in response to queries, with only 2% expressing any level of dissatisfaction (Figure 4.6).

This very positive set of results generally holds across all sub-groups of customers, albeit MC Chairs report slightly lower levels of satisfaction than other customer groups (80% versus 88% on average), as do respondents in COST non-ITCs compared with those in COST ITCs (85% versus 90% respectively).

[11] Question: "*You indicated that you have encountered problems while using the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals. What were the specific problems you encountered?*"

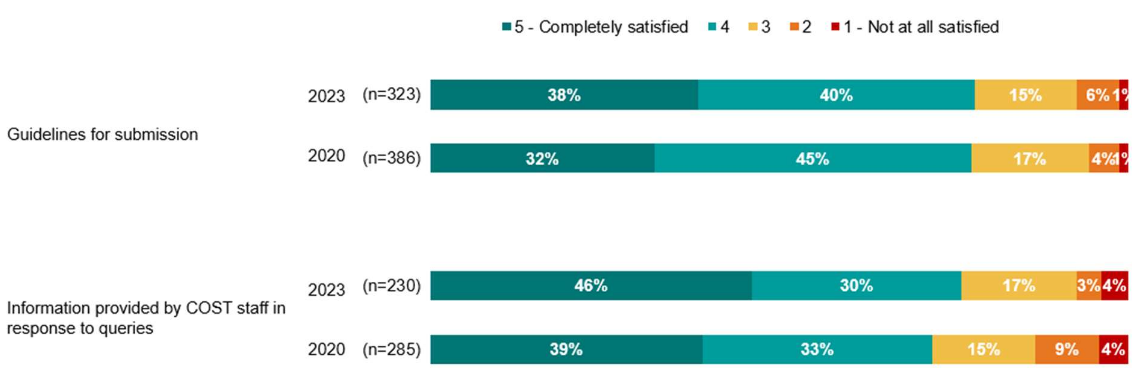
Figure 4.6: Satisfaction with information provided by COST staff[12]



Base: All except proposers giving a response

The majority of *proposers* similarly remain positive about support they have received in using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals – though their *absolute levels* of satisfaction are somewhat lower than those presented in Figure 4.7. As show below, 76% of them report being satisfied with information provided by COST staff in response to queries, and 78% with guidelines for submitting proposals. Both figures are steady on 2020.

Figure 4.7: Satisfaction with the support received using the e-COST tool for submitting proposals[13]



Base: All proposers giving a response.

4.2.4 Experiences of the COST IT Helpdesk

Consistent with findings from 2020, 13% of all respondents have contacted the COST IT Help desk to ask a question or report a problem – though the figure is two to three times higher among proposers (29%), MC chairs (41%) and grant holders (50%).

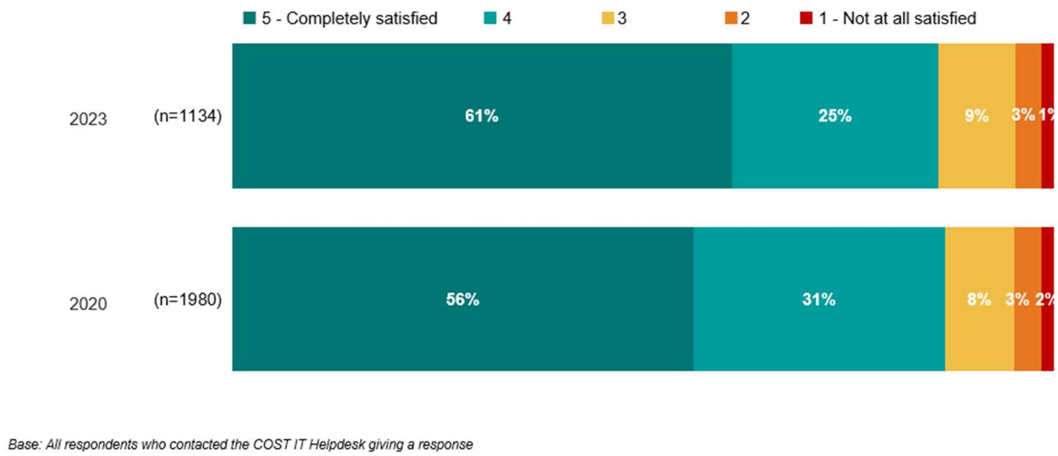
[12] Question: "*And still thinking about the e-COST platform, how satisfied are you with the information provided by COST staff in response to queries?"*

[13] Question: *"And still thinking about the e-COST online tool for submission of proposals, how satisfied are you with..?"*

As Figure 4.8 shows, **perceptions of the Helpdesk remain for the most part positive**: 86% of users are satisfied with the service they have received, while just 5% report any level of dissatisfaction.

In the 2020 survey, proposers reported lower levels of satisfaction with the Helpdesk than other customer groups. In 2023 this difference is no longer apparent; rather, MC chairs stand out as the only group expressing lower than average satisfaction with it (58% versus 86% on average).

Figure 4.8: Satisfaction with the COST IT Helpdesk[14]



[14] Question: *"How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the support provided by the COST IT Helpdesk?"*

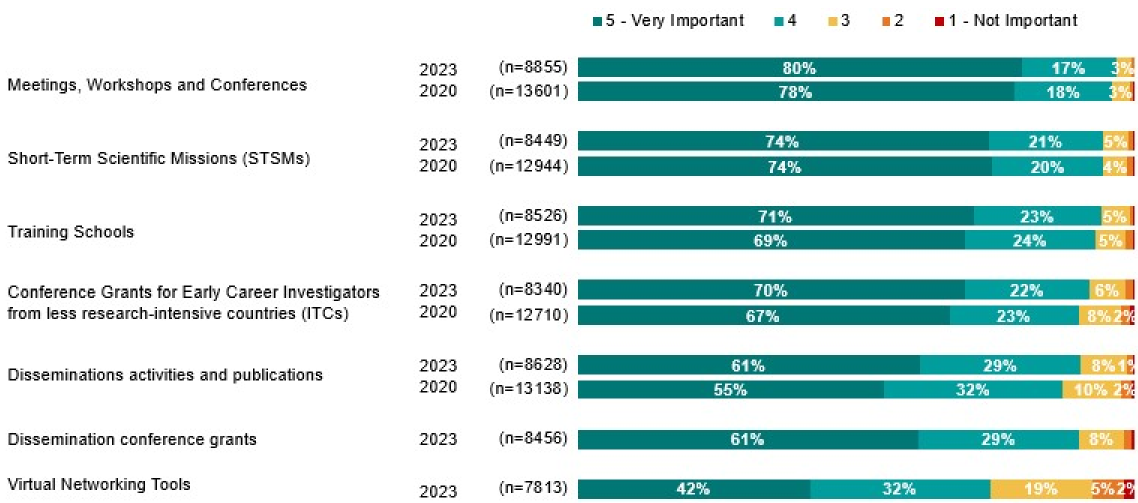
5 COST NETWORKING TOOLS

5.1 Perceived importance of different COST networking tools

As shown in Figure 5.1, very high proportions of respondents continue to regard COST's various networking tools as important. Indeed, almost all (97%) say that meetings, workshops and conferences as important, while around nine in ten say the same about Short-Term Scientific Missions (94%); Training Schools; Conference Grants for Early Career Investigators from less research-intensive countries (92%); and dissemination activities and publications (87%). All of these results are either steady or very slightly up on those recorded in 2020.

For the latest wave of the survey, respondents were also asked about the importance of two newer networking tools: dissemination conference grants and Virtual Networking Tools (VNTs). The former were deemed important by 90% of those answering, and VNTs by 74%.

Figure 5.1: Perceived importance of different COST networking tools[15]



Base: All MC members and participants giving a response.

For the most part, this very positive set of results holds across the different customer groups. Particularly high levels of positivity are generally found among Action participants, customers from COST ITCs and young researchers. On the other hand, grant holders and MC Chairs are *less* likely than average to attach importance to conference grants and dissemination conference grants. Along with MC members, they are also notably less likely than average to regard VNTs as important[16] (Table 5.1).

Respondents in COST ITCs remain consistently more likely than those in non-ITCs to rate the various networking tools as important. Indeed, they are over ten percentage points more likely

[15] Question: *"How important do you think the following COST Action networking tools are?"*

[16] Though the question was only routed to MC members and participants giving a response, significant differences are also shown in Table 5.1 for other customer groups (those who are both MC members/participants and part of another customer group).

to rate as *very* important dissemination activities and publications, conference grants and dissemination conference grants (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Perceived importance of different COST networking tools[17]

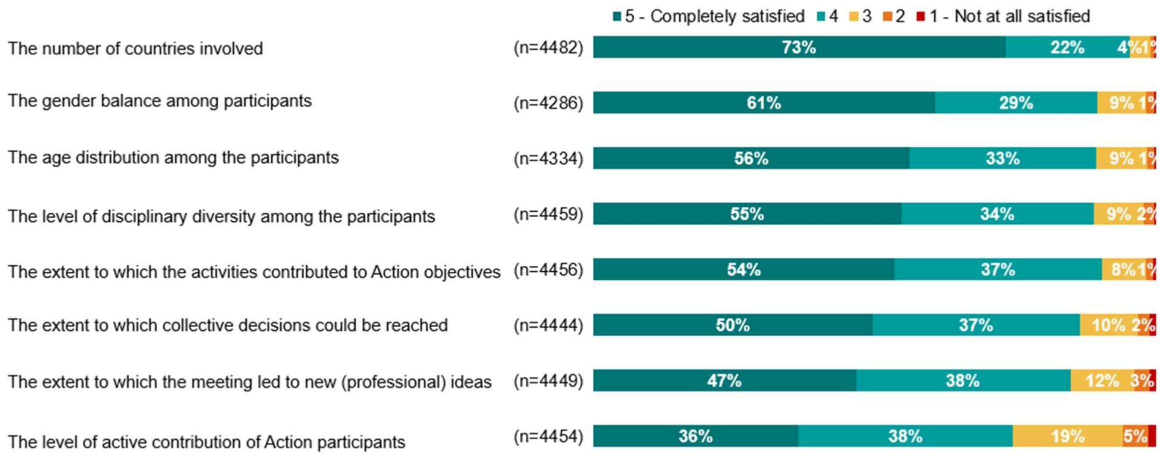
	Meetings, workshops, conferences	Short-Term Scientific Missions	Training Schools	Dissemination activities and publications	Conference Grants	Dissemination conference grants	Virtual networking Tools
	% rating each as *very* important						
MC members	79%	71%	67%	60%	66%	57%	37%
MC Chairs	86%	81%	81%	61%	41%	35%	28%
Grant holders	91%	83%	78%	58%	46%	46%	35%
Other leadership positions	83%	79%	73%	64%	67%	57%	35%
Participants	82%	77%	74%	63%	72%	63%	43%
Young researchers	81%	79%	76%	64%	76%	67%	48%
COST Country - ITCs	82%	77%	75%	67%	75%	66%	46%
COST Country - Non-ITCs	77%	70%	66%	55%	63%	55%	36%

5.2 Satisfaction with aspects of in-person Action meetings

A large majority of respondents express satisfaction with various aspects of in-person Action meetings they have attended. They are especially positive about the number of countries involved in the meetings (95%), the extent to which the activities contribute to the Action objectives (91%), the gender balance among participants (90%), the age distribution of participants (89%) and the disciplinary diversity (89%). The only aspect of meetings with which fewer than eight in ten participant express satisfaction is the level of active contribution of participants (75%) but, even here, fewer than one in ten express outright dissatisfaction (Figure 5.2).

[17] Question: *"How important do you think the following COST Action networking tools are?"*

Figure 5.2: Satisfaction with aspects of in-person Action meetings[18]



Base: All MC members giving a response.

There are fewer notable sub-groups differences in this set of results than for other questions. MC Chairs express lower than average levels of satisfaction with the degree of active contribution by participants (50% versus the average of 74%).

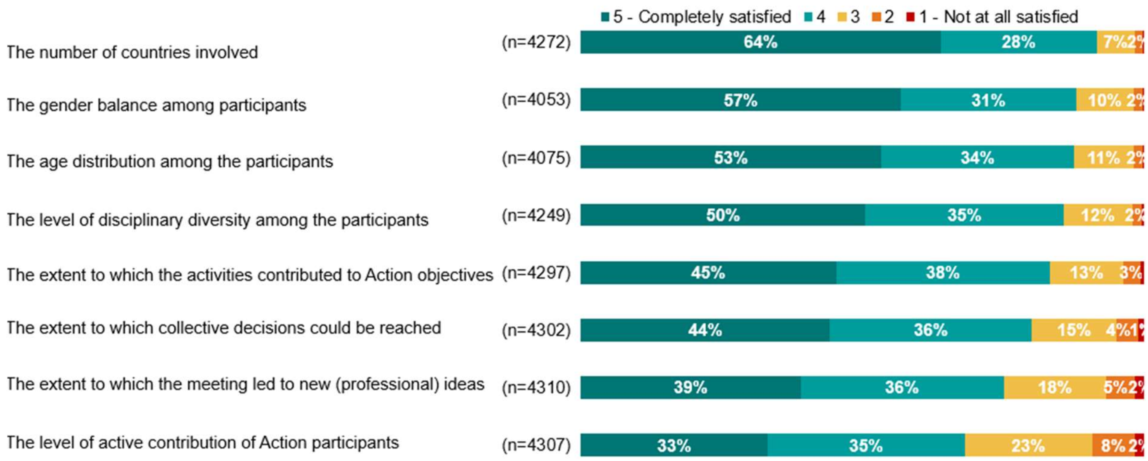
Respondents from COST ITCs are consistently *more* satisfied with the different aspects of Action meetings than those from non-ITCs, with the margin ranging between two and ten percentage points.

5.3 Satisfaction with aspects of virtual Action meetings

For the most part, overall levels of satisfaction with aspects of virtual Action meetings are very similar to those for in-person meetings. The main areas of divergence between the two sets of results concern the extent to which new ideas emerge, the extent to which collective decisions can be reached, and the level of active contribution of participants. Satisfaction with these aspects is between six and ten percentage points lower for online meetings than for in-person ones (Figure 5.3).

[18] Question: *"To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of Action meeting(s) that you have attended in-person?"*

Figure 5.3: Satisfaction with aspects of virtual Action meetings[19]



Participants from COST ITCs once again express consistently *higher* levels of satisfaction than those from non-ITCs, with the degree of difference similar to that found for in-person meetings (ranging from six to eleven percentage points).

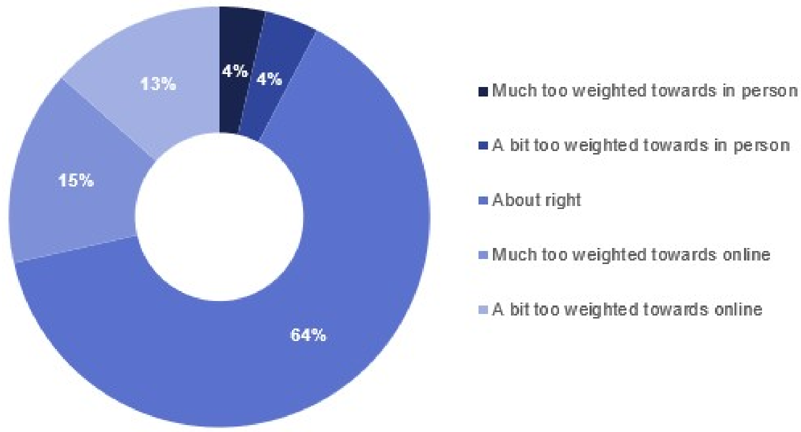
5.4 Balance between in-person and virtual activities in Actions

Almost two-thirds (64%) of MC members think that the current balance between in-person and virtual activities in their Action is about right, while 29% think it is too weighted towards virtual activities and 8% think it is too weighted towards in-person activities (Figure 5.4).

MC members from COST ITCs are a little less likely than those from non-ITCs to feel the current balance of in-person and virtual activities in their Action is about right (61% versus 68% respectively), and more likely to feel it is too weighted to online activities (31% versus 25%).

[19] Question*: "To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of Action meeting(s) that you have attended online or virtually?"*

Figure 5.4: Balance between in-person and virtual activities in Actions[20]



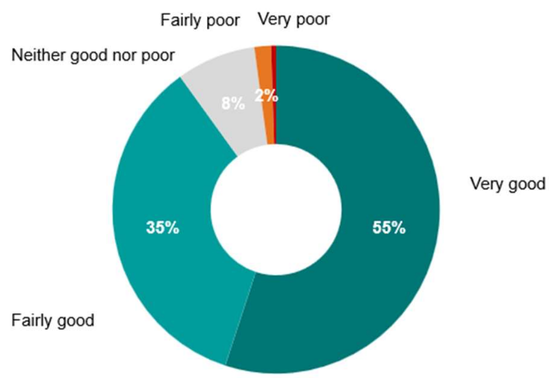
Base: All MC members giving a response (n=4380)

[20] Question: *"Do you think the current balance of online and in-person activities in your Action is...?"*

6 GENDER BALANCE IN COST ACTIONS

Gender balance in science and technology is a topic of priority for the COST Association. **Nine in ten respondents who are grant holders or in leadership positions (90%), say that the gender balance in their respective COST Actions is good, with 55% saying it is *very* good**. Just 2% explicitly state that the gender balance in their Actions is poor (Figure 6.1). Very little sub-group variation is evident in the results, including between male and female respondents.

Figure 6.1: Rating of gender balance in COST Actions[21]

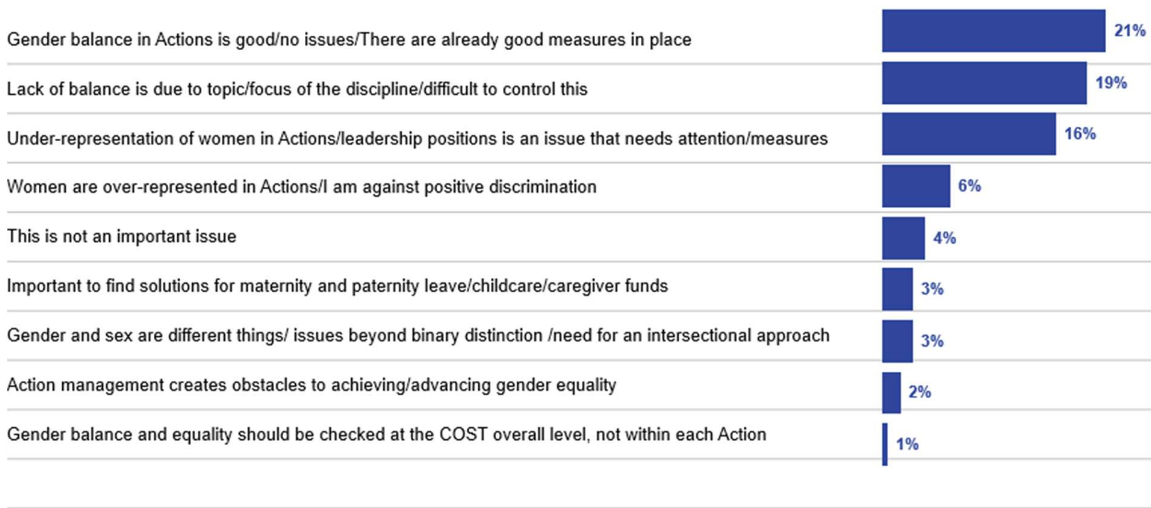


Base: All in leadership positions and grantholders giving a response (n=1034)

Asked (unprompted) if they wished to provide further comments on the topic of gender balance and/or on advancing gender equality in their Action, around three-quarters of the respondents opted to do so. As Figure 6.2 shows, their comments were somewhat mixed. Around one in five (21%) reiterated that gender balance in their Action is good and/or that measures are already in place to facilitate it. At the same time, a similar proportion expressed a view that a lack of gender balance in Actions is a reality and one that reflects the topic or disciplinary focus of Actions. A further 16% similarly referred to underrepresentation of women in Actions, and/or in leadership generally, and called for measures to address this. In contrast, a total of 10% commented that gender balance is *not* an important issue or, indeed, that women are *over*-represented in Actions.

[21] Question: *"How would you assess the gender balance in your Action, taking into account the overall gender balance in the broad scientific field(s) of your Action?"* (New question for 2022/3 survey wave)

Figure 6.2: Unprompted comments on gender balance in COST Actions[22]



Base: All in leadership positions and grantholders giving a response (n=173)

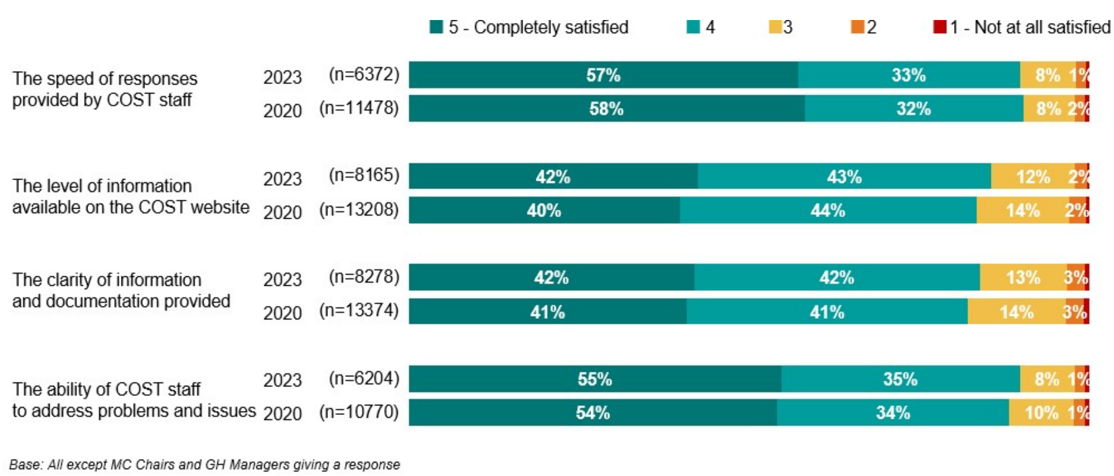
[22] Question: "*Would you like to share any additional thoughts on the topic of gender balance and/or advancing gender equality in your Action?"*

7 SUPPORT PROVIDED BY COST

7.1 Satisfaction with support provided by COST

MC Members, COST Action participants and proposers were asked how satisfied they were with the support provided by COST *overall* in respect of four parameters: the speed of responses provided by staff; the ability of staff to address problems and issues; the level of information on the COST website; and the clarity of information and documentation provided. As Figure 7.1 shows, **large majorities express satisfaction on each of these parameters, much in line with the 2020 results.** Indeed, nine in ten are satisfied with the speed of responses provided by staff (90%) and with the ability of staff to address problems and issues (90%) – with over half again expressing *complete* satisfaction in each case. Eighty-five percent express satisfaction with the level of information available on the COST website, and a similar proportion (84%) with the clarity of information and documentation provided.

Figure 7.1: Satisfaction with support provided by COST overall[23]



Satisfaction on the four parameters is generally high across the different subgroups of respondents. However, analysis of the proportions expressing *complete* satisfaction reveals some variation. As Table 7.1 shows, MC members and Action participants are significantly more likely than average to report complete satisfaction across all four parameters, while proposers are significantly less likely than average to do so. Compared to the 2020 results, the complete satisfaction scores of Action participants have improved for all parameters, whereas those of MC members have decreased slightly for the speed of responses provided by COST staff (down by four percentage points) and for the ability of COST staff to address problems and issues (down by 3 percentage points). Young researchers are more likely than average to report complete satisfaction on three out of four parameters (the exception being the level of information available on the COST website), with the figures for this group also showing an increase on 2020.

[23] Question: *"Thinking about the support provided by COST overall, how satisfied have you been with each of the following?"*

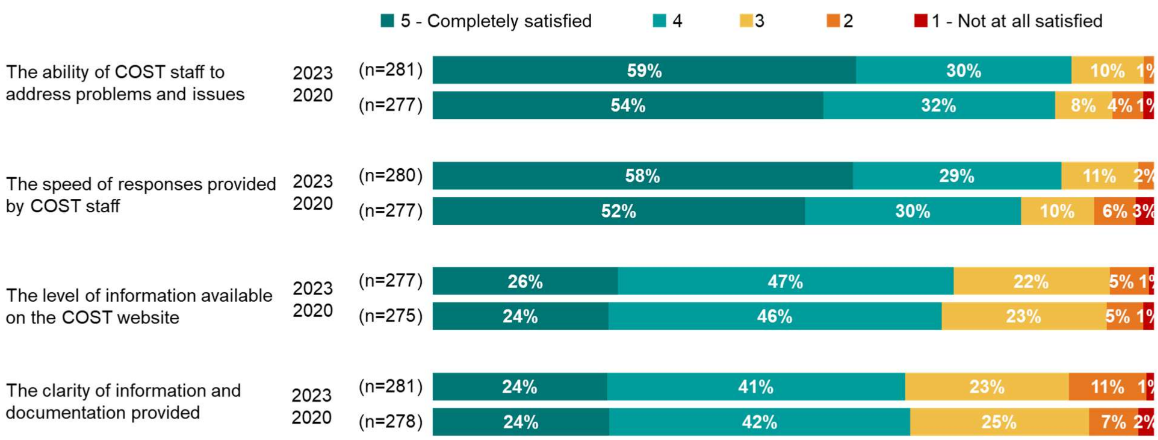
In line with results from previous waves of the survey, respondents from COST ITCs are more likely than those from non-ITCs to report complete satisfaction on all of the parameters.

Table 7.1: Satisfaction with support provided by COST overall, by customer type and country group

		The speed of responses provided by COST staff	The level of information available on the COST website	The clarity of information and documentation provided	The ability of COST staff to address problems and issues
% completely satisfied					
MC members	2023	56%	45%	44%	54%
	2020	60%	44%	44%	57%
Participants	2023	58%	42%	43%	56%
	2020	57%	37%	39%	53%
Proposers	2023	40%	29%	28%	39%
	2020	39%	31%	26%	36%
Other leadership positions	2023	51%	38%	37%	51%
	2020	/	/	/	/
Young researchers	2023	60%	43%	43%	58%
	2020	59%	39%	41%	55%
COST - ITCs	2023	61%	50%	49%	59%
	2020	64%	48%	49%	60%
COST - Non-ITCs	2023	52%	33%	33%	48%
	2020	54%	34%	34%	49%

MC Chairs and grant holders were asked a similar question in relation to the support they received in managing their COST Action. The results are generally positive, and, indeed, show some improvement on 2020 (albeit they continue to lag somewhat behind the findings reported in Figure 7.1). **Approaching nine in ten (89%) MC Chairs and grant holders are satisfied with the ability of COST staff to address problems and issues and the speed of responses provided by the staff (87%). Around seven in ten are satisfied with the level of information available on the COST website (72%), and the clarity of information and documentation provided (65%)** (Figure 7.2). A significant sub-group difference in this set of results is that MC Chairs are more likely than grant holders to express dissatisfaction with the clarity of information and documentation provided (17% vs. 6% respectively).

Figure 7.2: Satisfaction with support provided during the management of COST Action[24]



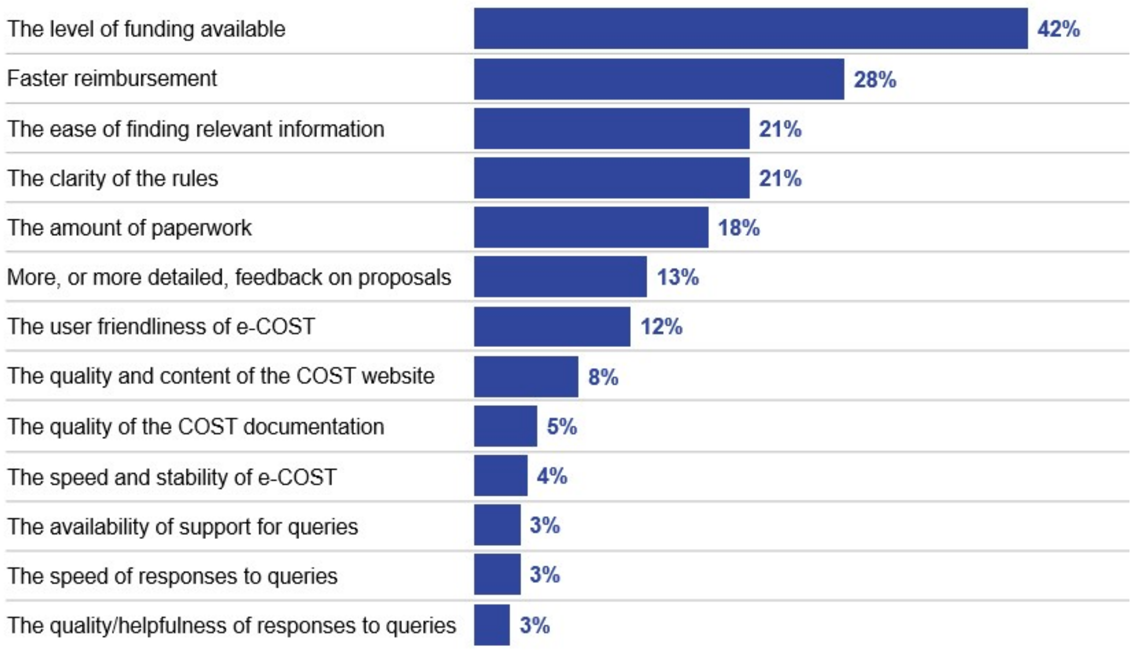
Base: All MC Chairs or GH Managers giving a response.

7.2 Suggested improvements to the support provided by COST

Asked how COST might best improve the overall support it provides, respondents most commonly mention improvements to: the level of funding available (42%), **the speed of reimbursement (28%), the ease of finding relevant information (21%), and the clarity of rules (21%).** Other, slightly less common suggestions concern the amount of paperwork (18%), the level of feedback provided on proposals (13%), and the user friendliness of the e-COST platform (12%) (Figure 7.3).

[24] Question: *"During the management of you COST Action overall, how satisfied have you been with…?"*

Figure 7.3: Suggested improvements to the support provided by COST overall[25]



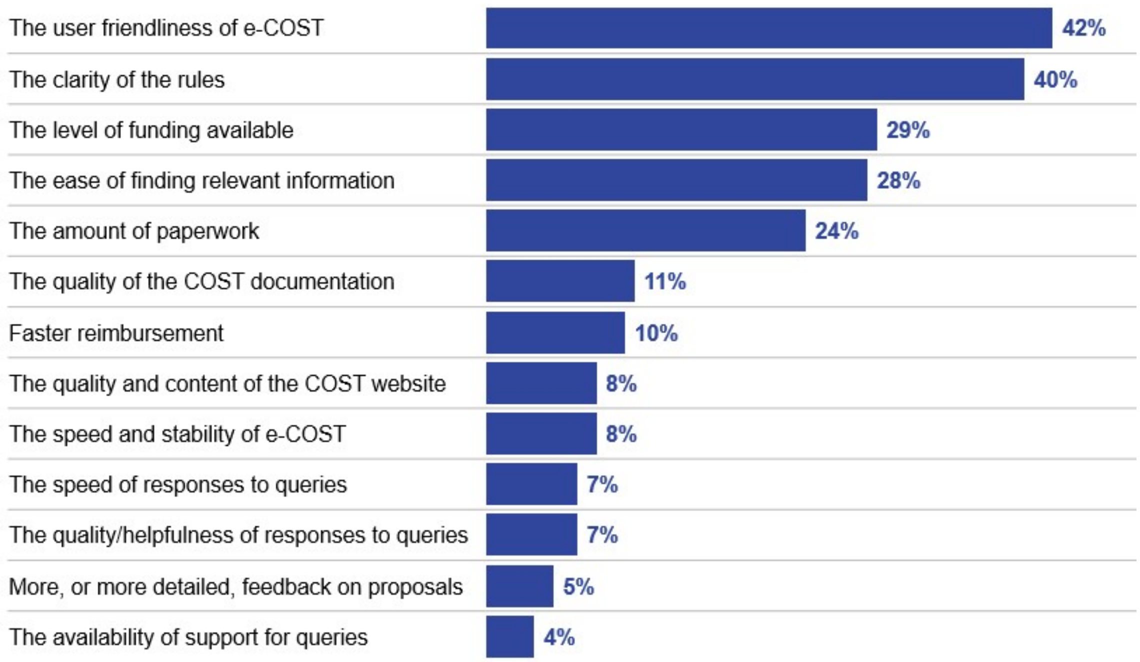
Base: All except MC Chairs and GH Managers giving a response (n=9054)

While improving the level of funding emerges as the top priority among all customer groups, the rank ordering of other improvements shows a degree of variation. Indeed, MC members and those in other leadership positions tend to give higher priority than other customer groups to improving the clarity of rules (22% and 27%), while proposers tend to give higher priority than other groups to receiving more (or more detailed) feedback on proposals (37%) and to improving the clarity of the rules (27%).

MC Chairs and grant holders were asked the same question but in relation to the support provided for the management of a grant. Collectively they most commonly favoured improvements to the user friendliness of the e-COST platform (42%) and the clarity of the rules (40%), followed by the level of funding available (29%), the ease of finding relevant information (28%) and the amount of paperwork (24%) (Figure 7.4).

[25] Question: *"What two or three of the following aspects of support provided by the COST Association would you most like to see improved?"*

Figure 7.4: Suggested improvements to the support provided by COST for the management of COST Actions[26]

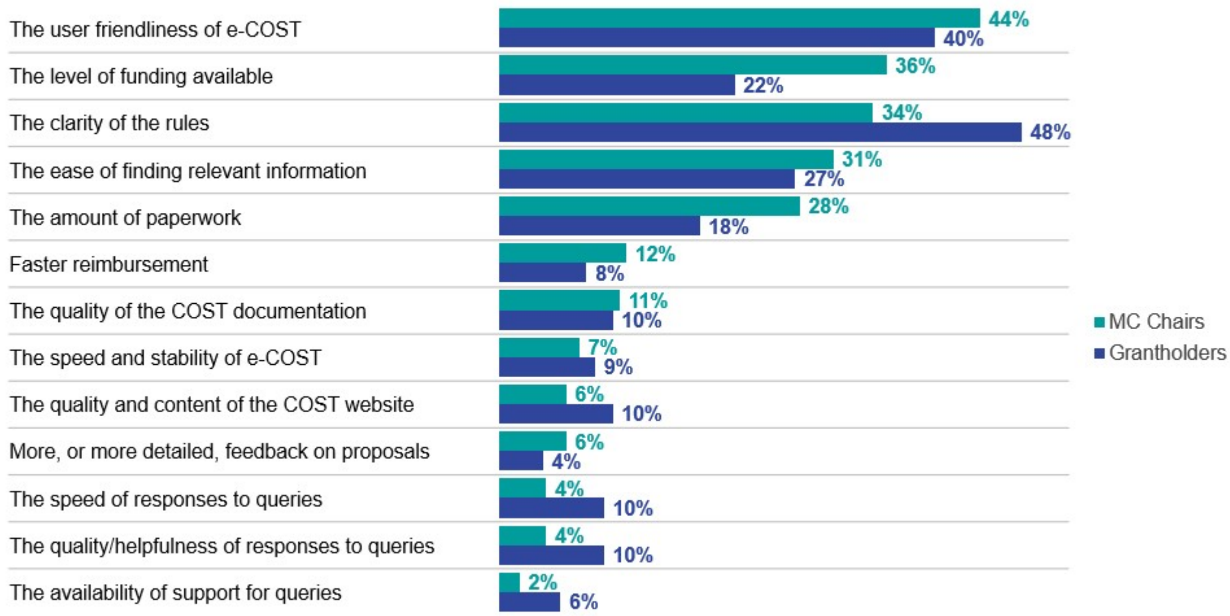


Base: All MC Chairs or GH Managers giving a response (n=282)

At the same time, the two groups do mention the various improvements to differing degrees. Grant holders' top three priorities are, respectively, the clarity of the rules (48%), the user friendliness of the e-COST platform (40%) and the ease of finding relevant information (27%). Meanwhile, MC Chairs' mention the user friendliness of the e-COST platform (44%), followed by the level of funding available (36%) and the clarity of the rules (34%) (Figure 7.5).

[26] Question: *"What two or three of the following aspects of support provided by the COST Association would you most like to see improved?"*

Figure 7.5: Suggested improvements to the support provided by COST for the management of COST Actions[27]



Base: All MC Chairs giving a response (n= 163) and all grantholders giving a response (n=125)

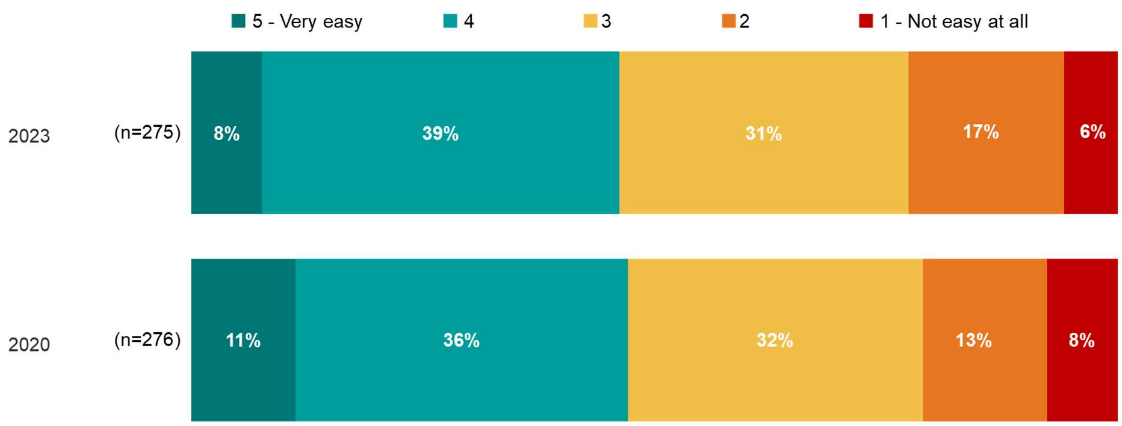
[27] Question: *"What two or three of the following aspects of support provided by the COST Association would you most like to see improved?"*

8 MANAGING AND WORKING ON COST ACTIONS

8.1 Managing COST Action grants

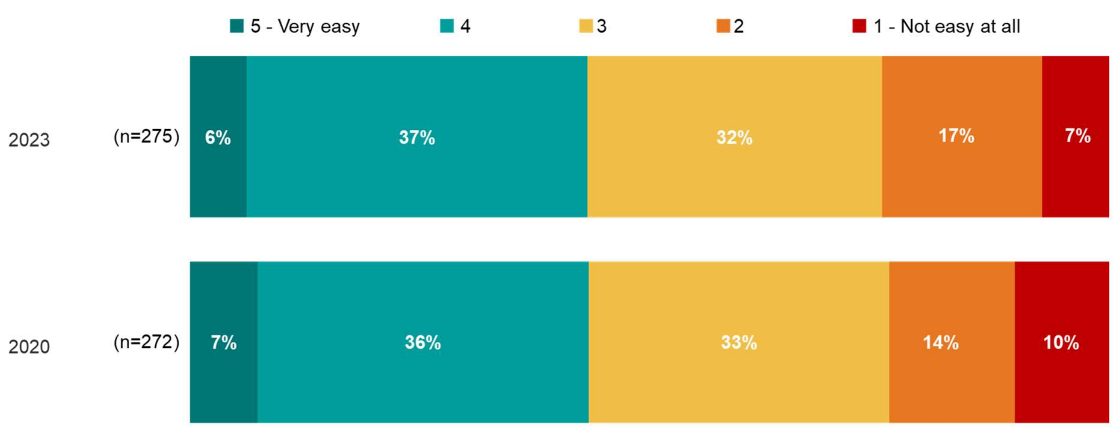
Consistent with findings from the 2020 survey, fewer than half (46%) of MC Chairs and grant holders regard the rules for managing COST Action grants as easy to understand, while 23% regard the rules as difficult to understand and around a third (31%) are more neutral on the matter (Figure 8.1). In terms of how easy respondents feel the rules are to *apply*, the results are similar, at 43%, 25% and 32% respectively (Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.1: Ease of understanding current financial and administrative rules[28]



Base: All MC Chairs and grantholders giving a response

Figure 8.2: Ease of applying current financial and administrative rules[29]



Base: All MC Chairs and grantholders giving a response

These aggregate-level findings notwithstanding, grant holders are more likely than average to regard the rules as easy to understand (57% vs. 46% on average) and apply (55% vs. 43%),

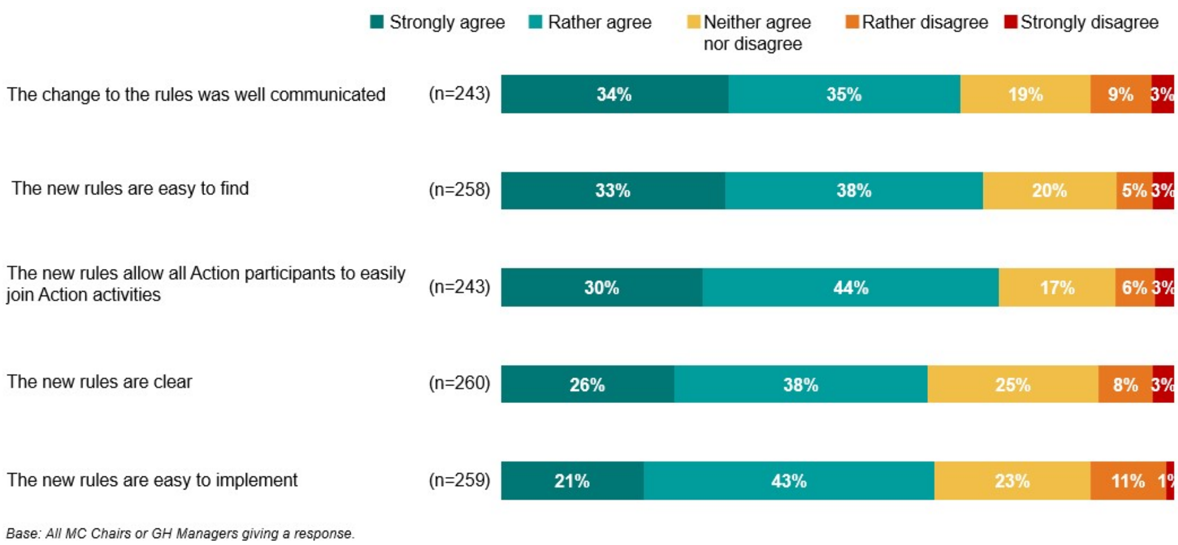
[28] Question: *"How easy to understand are current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Actions?"*

[29] Question: *"How easy to apply are current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Actions?"*

while MC Chairs are less likely than average to do so (38% vs. 46% for ease of understanding and 34% vs. 43% for ease of applying). Again, these results are fully in line with those from 2020 and likely reflect a greater level of experience of, and thus familiarity with, the rules among grant holders, than among MC Chairs.

In a new question added to the survey for 2022/3, **around seven in ten MC Chairs and grant holders agreed that the new COST Annotated Rules are easy to find (72%), allow all Action participants to easily join Action activities (74%) and were well communicated (68%).** Around six in ten agree the rules are clear (63%) and easy to implement (64%). Grant holders are more likely than MC Chairs to agree that the new rules are easy to find (78% vs. 66%) and implement (72% vs. 59%) (Figure 8.3).

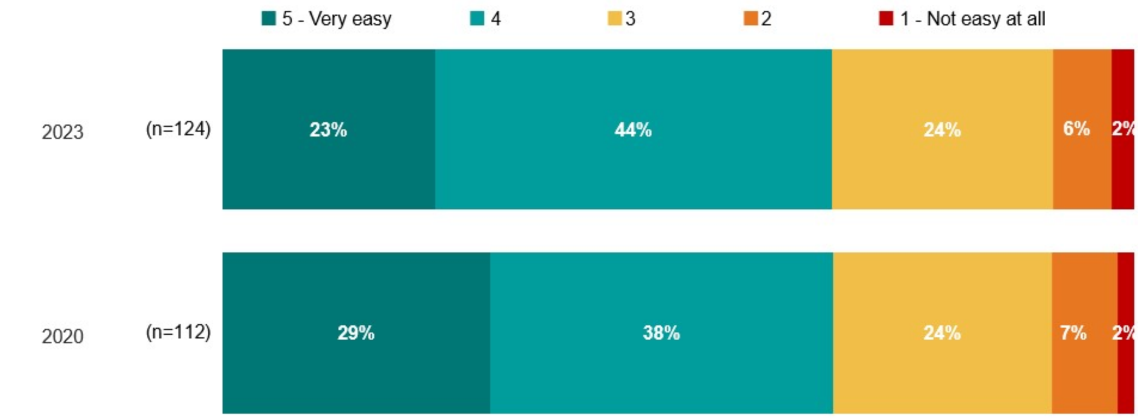
Figure 8.3: Satisfaction with COST annotated rules[30]



Grant holders were also asked about the usability of the e-COST tools for grant management. **In line with the 2020 findings, about two-thirds (67%) say they find the tools easy to use**, whereas 9% say they find them difficult to use and 24% are more neutral in their evaluations (Figure 8.4).

[30] Question: *"In 2021, COST changed some rules related to the implementation of COST Actions, introducing the COST Annotated Rules. To what extent would you agree with the following statements:..?*

Figure 8.4: Ease of using e-COST tools for grant management[31]



Base: Grantholders giving a response

Asked whether they would recommend managing a COST Action to a colleague, two-thirds (66%) of MC Chairs and grant holders say they would, while 18% say they would not and 16% are undecided. The results are unchanged on 2020.

8.2 Perceived adequacy of COST funds and reimbursement

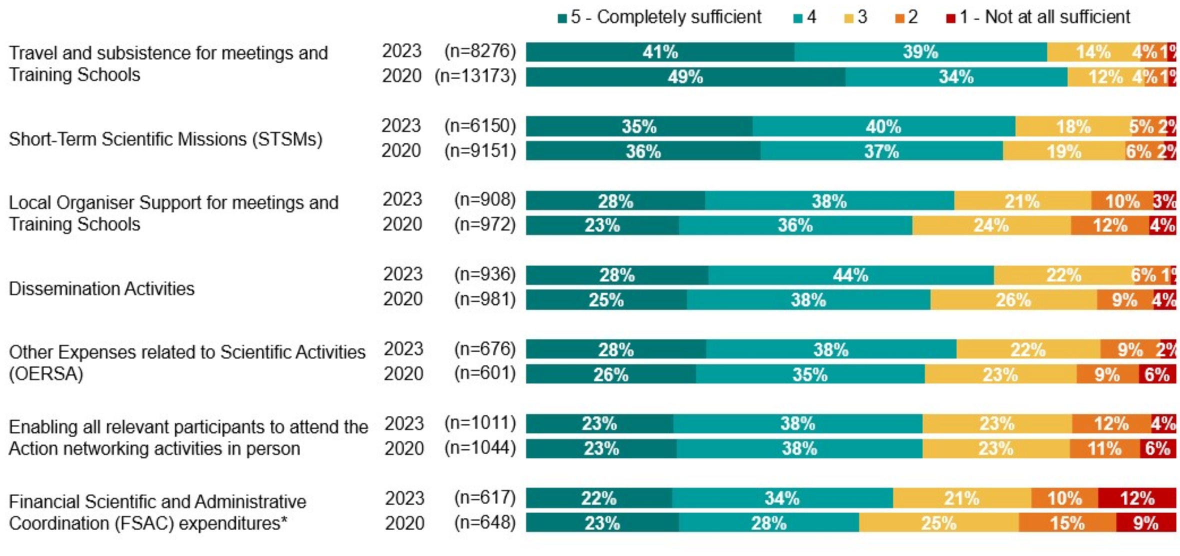
8.2.1 Perceived adequacy of funds

A majority of respondents judge the different types of COST funds put at customers' disposal as sufficient. Eight in ten say that funds for travel and subsistence are sufficient (80%), and around seven in ten say the same about funds for Short-Term Scientific Missions (75%) and Dissemination Activities (72%). Somewhat smaller majorities give positive evaluations of funds for: local organiser support for training schools (66%), expenses relating to scientific activities (OERSA) (66%), enabling all relevant participants to attend Action networking activities (61%), and Financial Scientific and Administrative Coordination (FSAC) expenses (56%). Indeed, in respect of the latter area of funding, approaching a quarter (22%) judge this as *insufficient* (Figure 8.5).

Since 2020, the proportions judging the different COST funds as sufficient have mostly increased slightly or remained stable. The main exception is in the case of travel and subsistence funds – the proportion regarding these as sufficient is eight percentage points lower than in 2020.

[31] Question: *"In your view, how easy to use are the e-COST tools for grant management (for example for reporting or invitations)?"*

Figure 8.5: Perceived adequacy of COST funds[32]



Base: All respondent giving a response.

As can be seen in Table 8.1 below, MC Chairs generally tend to evaluate the funds at their disposal less positively than the other customer groups. The difference is most marked in relation to funds for Dissemination Activities (64% of MC Chairs view these as sufficient compared to 72% of MC members and 73% of those in other leadership positions). Conversely, grant holders, participants and young researchers tend to evaluate them generally *more* positively than the other customer groups.

Table 8.1: Perceived adequacy of COST funds by customer type[33]

	MC Chairs	Other leadership positions	MC members	Participants	Grant holders	Proposers	Young researchers
	% regarding funding at their disposal for each activity as sufficient						
Travel and subsistence[34]	71%	78%	76%	83%	75%	75%	84%
Short Term Scientific Missions[35]	79%	77%	72%	77%	81%	69%	78%
Dissemination activities[36]	64%	73%	72%	72%	79%	56%	73%
Other Expenses related to Scientific Activities (OERSA)[37]	65%	64%	65%	67%	75%	59%	69%

[32] Question: *"To what extent are the COST funds put at your disposal sufficient for …?"*

[33] Question: *"To what extent are the COST funds put at your disposal sufficient for …?"*

[34] Routed to MC members, participants and grant holders.

[35] Routed to MC members, participants and grant holders.

[36] Routed to MC Chairs, grant holders and other leadership positions.

[37] Routed to MC Chairs, grant holders and other leadership positions.

	MC Chairs	Other leadership positions	MC members	Participants	Grant holders	Proposers	Young researchers
Enabling all relevant participants to attend the Action networking activities in person[38]	48%	64%	63%	62%	60%	38%	63%
Local Organiser Support for meetings and Training Schools[39]	68%	63%	62%	64%	76%	59%	68%
Financial Scientific and Administrative Coordination (FSAC) expenditures[40]	40%	66%	64%	58%	48%	39%	57%

There is also some variation by country grouping, with respondents in COST ITCs being a little more likely than those in COST non-ITCs to regard as sufficient funds for STSMs (77% vs. 74%), Local Organiser Support for meetings and Training Schools (69% vs. 62%), OERSA (71% vs. 61%) and FSAC expenditures (63% vs. 54%).

8.2.2 Length of time taken for reimbursement

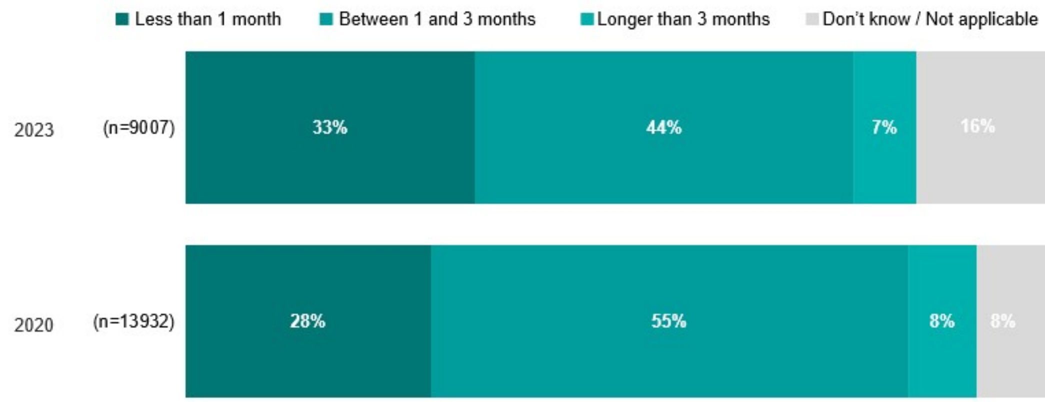
Approaching half (44%) of MC members and participants report that, the last time they were reimbursed for participating in a COST Action networking activity, the reimbursement took between one and three months. A further 33% report that the reimbursement took less than one month, while 7% report that it took longer than three months. Notably, there has been a six percentage point increase in the proportion saying they were reimbursed within a month and a decrease in the proportion saying it took longer than this (Figure 8.6).

[38] Routed to MC Chairs, grant holders and other leadership positions.

[39] Routed to MC Chairs, grant holders and other leadership positions.

[40] Routed to MC Chairs, grant holders and other leadership positions.

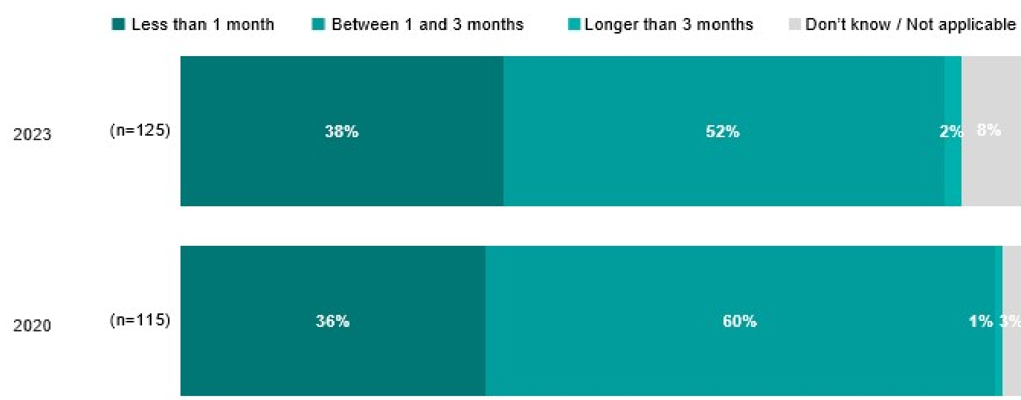
Figure 8.6: Length of time taken for reimbursement[41]



Base: All MC members and Participants giving a response

Asked how long it takes *their institution* to reimburse COST Action participants, around half of grant holders (52%) cite a period of one to three months (down by eight percentage points on 2020) **and 38% say less than a month** (up by two percentage points). Just 2% report that it takes longer than this (up by one percentage point) (Figure 8.7).

Figure 8.7: Length of time taken to reimburse COST Action participants[42]



Base: All grant holders giving a response

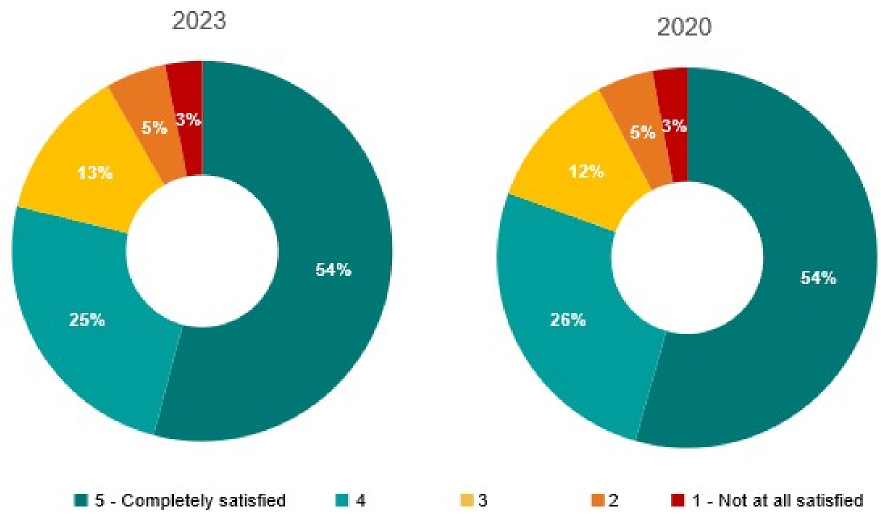
8.3 The nominations process for Management Committee members

As in 2020, around four in five (79%) MC members surveyed say they are satisfied with the nomination process to become an MC member of a COST Action in their country, with just 8% expressing any dissatisfaction (Figure 8.8).

[41] Question: *"The last time you were reimbursed for participation in a COST Action networking activity, how long did the reimbursement take?"*

[42] Question: *"On average, how long does it take your institution COST Action participants (from the moment your institution receives the claim)?"*

Figure 8.8: Satisfaction with the nominations process for MC members[43]



Base: All MC Members giving a response (2023, n= 4644; 2020, n= 5490).

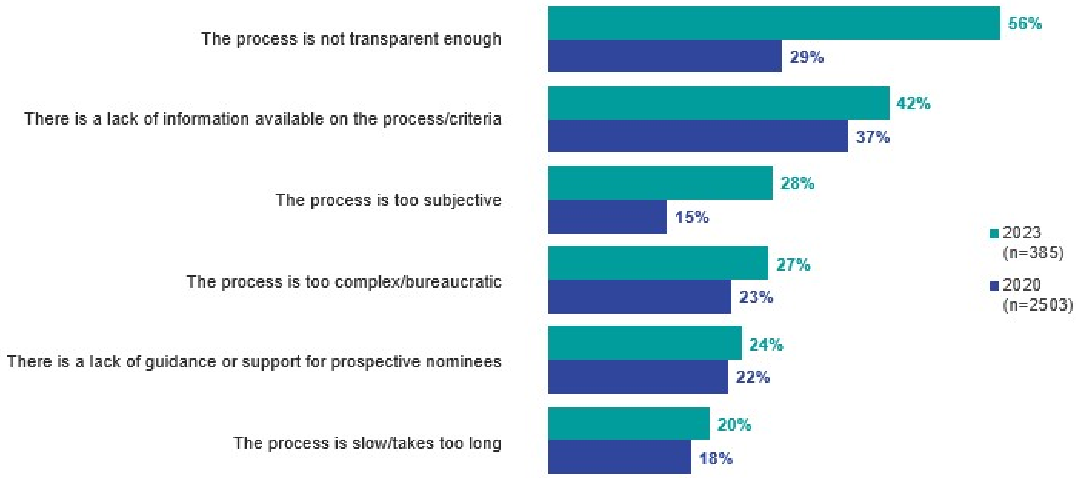
Over half of MC members expressing dissatisfaction with the nominations process explain this primarily with reference to a perceived lack of transparency in the process (56%), and 42% explain it with reference to a lack of information on the process/criteria (42%). The next most common responses are, respectively, that the process is too subjective (28%) or too complex or bureaucratic (27%), that there is a lack of guidance or support for prospective nominees (24%) and that the process takes too long (20%) (Figure 8.9).

The rank order of these responses is somewhat different to that emerging in 2020, but this is likely at least in part a reflection of the fact that the question was asked to a different subset of respondents in 2023.[44]

[43] Question: *"How satisfied are you with the process of nomination to become a Management Committee Member of a COST Action in your country?"*

[44] In 2020, all MC members who were not *completely satisfied* with the nominations process were asked this question, whereas only *dissatisfied* MC members were asked this in 2023.

Figure 8.9: Reasons for dissatisfaction with the nominations process[45]



Base: All MC Members dissatisfied with the nomination process (2023); All MC Members not completely satisfied with the nomination process (2020)

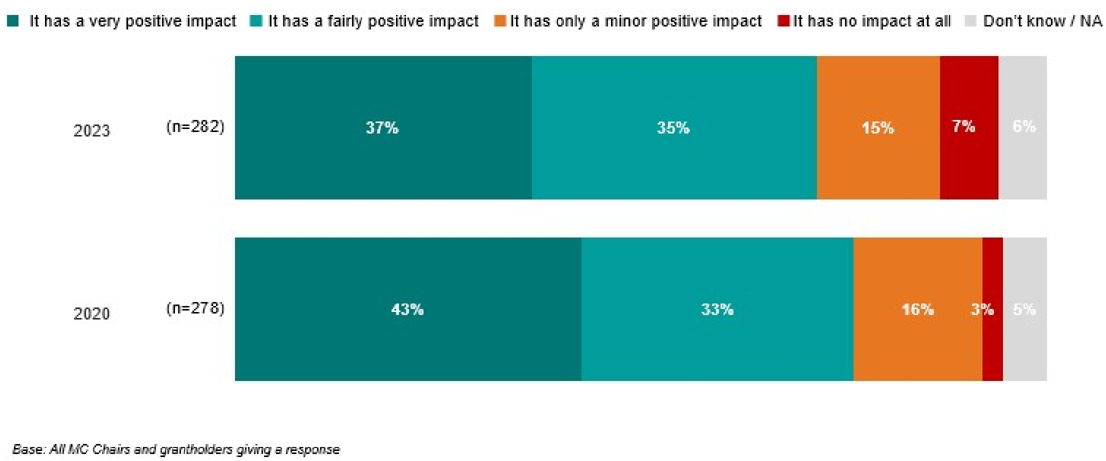
[45] Question: *"You indicated that you are not completely satisfied with the process of nomination to become a Management Committee member of a COST Action in your country. Why not?"*

9 IMPACT OF THE COST FRAMEWORK

9.1 Impact on institutions

Approaching three-quarters (72%) of MC Chairs and grant holders indicate that holding a COST grant has a very or fairly positive impact on their institution, and a further 15% state that it has a minor positive impact. Just 7% state it has no impact at all (Figure 9.1). These results are consistent with those for 2020.

Figure 9.1: Impact of holding a COST grant[46]

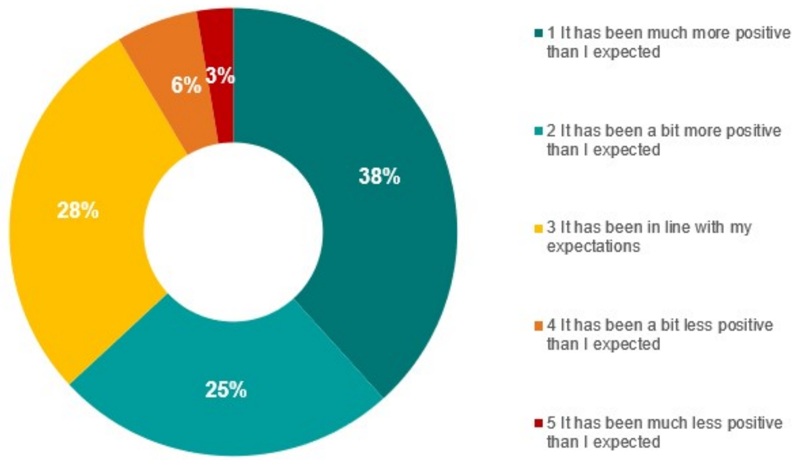


9.2 Impact on MC members and participants

In another new question for 2023, almost two-thirds (63%) of MC members and participants report that their experience of participating in COST Actions has exceeded their expectations, and a further 28% say the experience had been in line with their expectations. Just 3% say the experience has been less positive than they expected.

[46] Question: *"To what extent would you say holding a COST grant has a positive impact on your institution?"*

Figure 9.2: Participating in COST Actions – expectation versus reality[47]



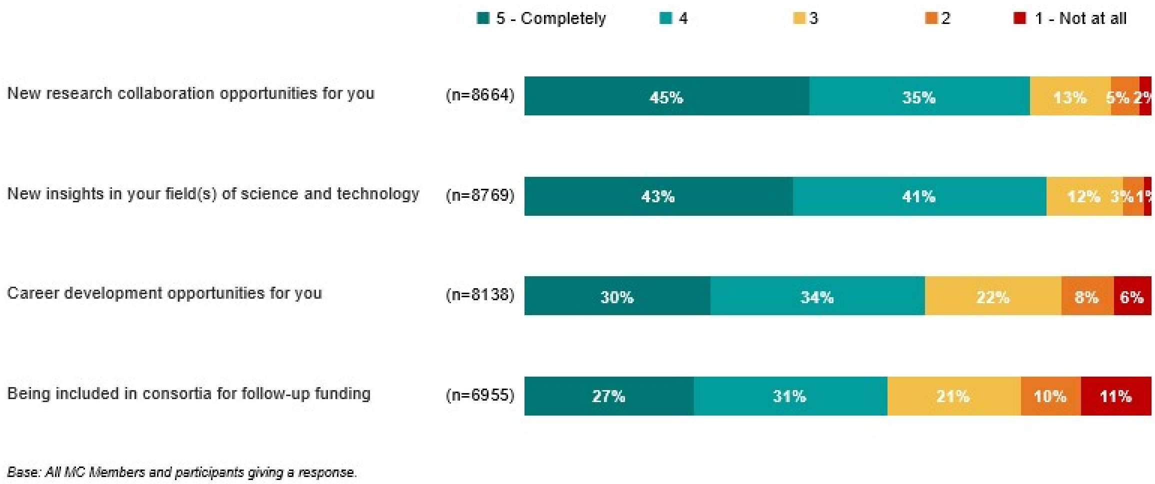
Base: All MC Members and participants giving a response (n=8864).

Action participants and young researchers are more likely than average to say their experience of participating in COST Actions has exceeded their expectations (69% and 71% respectively vs. 63% average), whereas MC members are more likely than average to say the experience has been less positive than they expected (12% vs. 9% on average).

MC members and participants were further asked about the extent to which participating in COST Actions led to new opportunities. Once again the results are very positive: **About eight in ten MC members and participants report that participating in COST Actions led to new insights in their field(s) (83%) and to new research collaboration opportunities (81%).** About six in ten report that it led to career development opportunities (64%) and being included in consortia for follow-up funding (58%) (Figure 9.3).

[47] Question: *"Overall, to what extent has your experience of participating in COST Actions fulfilled your expectations?"*

Figure 9.3: Participating in COST Actions – new opportunities[48]



Action participants are consistently more likely than average to report that participating in COST Actions led to new research collaboration opportunities (83%), new insights in their field(s) (86%), career development opportunities (68%) and being included in consortia for follow-up funding (60%). In contrast, MC members are *less* likely than average to report any of these benefits (Table 9.1 below).

Table 9.1: Participating in COST Actions – new opportunities, by customer type[49]

		New research collaboration opportunities for them	New insights in your field(s) of science and technology	Career development opportunities for you	Being included in consortia for follow-up funding
% completely/fairly					
MC members	2023	78%	79%	58%	57%
Participants	2023	83%	86%	68%	60%

9.3 Likelihood of applying for a COST Action in the future

Three-quarters (75%) of MC members, participants and proposers report that they would consider applying for another COST Action in the near future; a very slightly lower proportion than in 2020 (78%). Eighteen percent report that they are unsure if they would apply again and eight percent report that they would not.

Participants and young researchers are more likely than average to report they would consider applying for a COST Action in the near future (78% and 80% respectively), whereas MC members and proposers are less likely than average to do so (71% and 70% respectively).

48 Question: *"To what extent has participating in COST Actions led to…?"*

49 Question: *"To what extent has participating in COST Actions led to…?"*

The figure is also somewhat lower among researchers in COST non-ITCs than among those in COST ITCs (70% vs. 79% respectively).

As in previous waves of the survey, almost all (96%) MC members and participants surveyed indicate that they would recommend joining a COST Action to a colleague. The figure is only slightly lower among customers from COST non-ITCs (94%) than from COST ITCs (97%).

10 SUMMING UP

10.1 COST Satisfaction indicators

For previous waves of the survey, two composite (summary) indicators were created from the data: the COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator and the Service and Support Indicator. These were again replicated for the 2023 wave to provide a summary overview of the findings.

10.1.1 COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator

The Satisfaction Indicator comprises customers' perceptions of COST's performance on its three strategic objectives (reported in Figure 3.1) and the extent to which participation in COST Actions has opened up new opportunities in participants' professional activities. As shown in Figure 10.1 below, the 2023 COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator has a score of 82.7, which is a little higher than in 2020, when it stood at 81.0.

Figure 10.1: COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator

Reflecting the patterns of sub-group responding highlighted elsewhere in this report, the Satisfaction Indicator score is higher than average among Action participants (84.3) and young researchers (85.1), and lower than average among MC Chairs (79.6), proposers (80.1) – especially unsuccessful proposers (78.0) – MC members (80.5), and those in other leadership positions (80.8). It is also higher among respondents in COST ITCs (84.5) than in non-ITCs (80.5) (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1: COST Framework Satisfaction, by customer type

Customer type	COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator
MC Chairs	79.6
MC members	80.5
Other leadership positions	80.1
Participants	84.3
Grant holders	82.1
Proposers	80.1

Customer type	COST Framework Satisfaction Indicator
Successful proposers	79.6
Unsuccessful proposers	78.0
Career stage	
Young researchers	85.1
Experienced researchers	81.1
Country group	
COST ITC-country	84.5
COST Non-ITC country	80.5

10.1.2 Service and Support Indicator

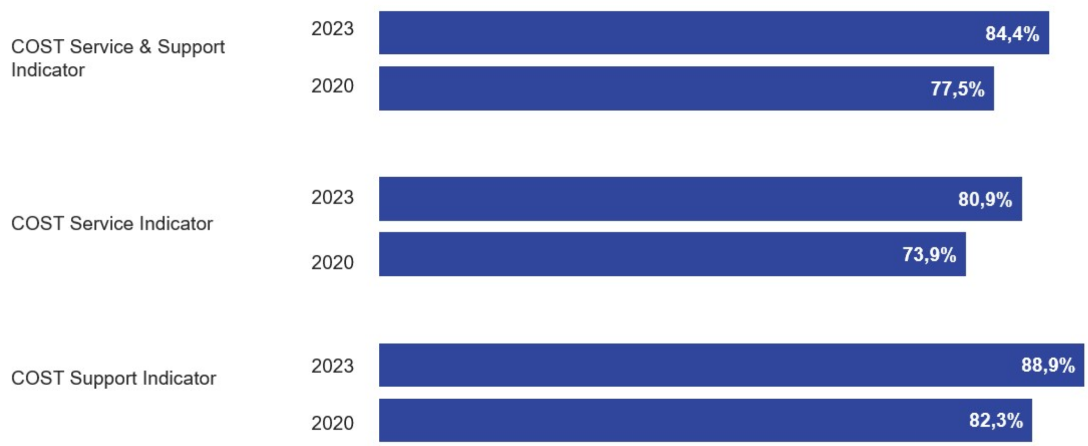
The Service and Support Indicator comprises two sub-sets of indicators:

- a Service indicator comprising the selection of statements about the e-COST platform and its user-friendliness, including:
  - how easy it is to use
  - whether it ensures that the user's goals are met successfully
  - whether it provides fast and accurate results
  - whether it helps the user to correct any errors that occur
- a Support indicator comprising the following measures:
  - the speed of responses provided by COST staff
  - the clarity of information and documentation provided
  - the ability of COST staff to address problems and issues
  - the level of information available on the COST website

As Figure 10.2 shows, the Service and Support Indicator score for 2023 is 84.4. The two constituent indicator scores vary, however, from 80.9 for the Service Indicator to 88.9 for the COST Support Indicator. Changes in the questionnaire since 2019/20 preclude direct comparison of the results with those from the previous surveys[50].

[50] In the 2019/20 wave, the Service Indicator also covered the statement: "[*the e-COST platform] allows the user to build on their knowledge without deliberate effort*".

Figure 10.2: COST Framework Service and Support Indicator



As in the case of the Satisfaction Indicator, the Service & Support Indicator score is higher than average among young researchers (85.2) but lower than average among grant holders (71), MC Chairs (72.1), proposers (81) and those in other leadership positions (81.1). It is also higher among customers from COST ITCs (86.3) than among those from COST non-ITCs (82.1).

Figure 10.2: COST Framework Service and Support Indicator, by customer type

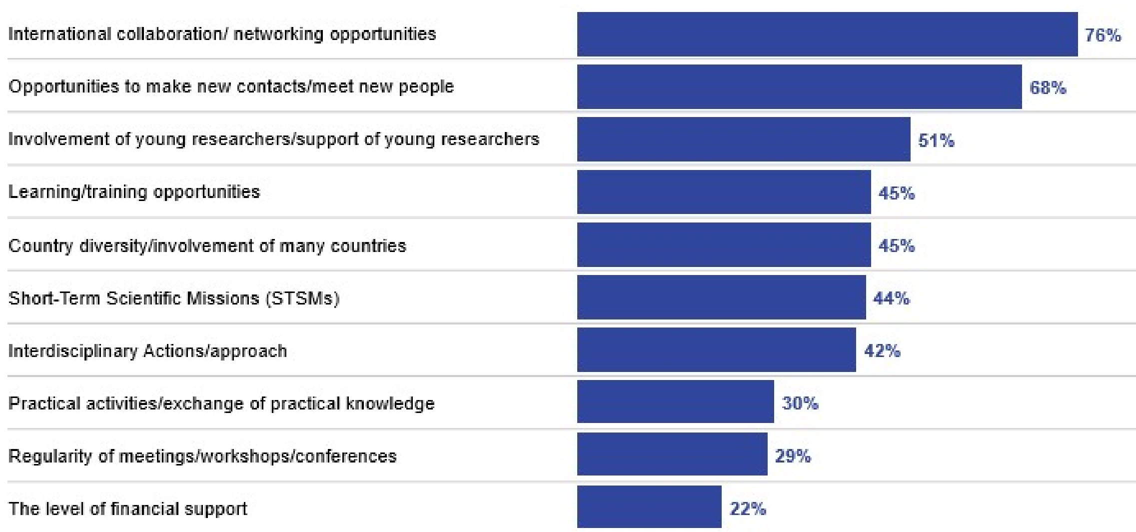
	Service and Support Indicator	Service Indicator	Support Indicator
MC Chairs	72.1	69.2	76.0
MC members	84.6	81.0	89.4
Other leadership positions	81.1	77.8	85.5
Participants	84.5	81.3	88.7
Grant holders	71.0	65.7	78.1
Proposers	81.0	79.4	83.0
Successful proposers	79.5	80.9	77.7
Unsuccessful proposers	79.8	77.5	82.8
Age researcher			
Young researchers	85.2	82.0	89.3
Experienced researchers	83.8	80.2	88.6
Country group			
COST Country - ITCs	86.3	83.1	90.5
COST Country – non-ITCs	82.1	78.5	87.1

10.2 Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the COST Framework

MC members, participants and grant holders were asked to identify what they saw as the main strengths and weaknesses of the COST Framework. Consistent with results presented elsewhere in this report, **the main strengths identified are the international collaboration and networking activities the Framework enables (mentioned by 76%) and opportunities to make new contacts and meet new people (68%)** (Figure 10.3).

Other relatively common responses are the involvement of, and support given to, young researchers (51%), learning and training opportunities (45%), country diversity (45%), STSMs (44%) and the interdisciplinary nature of Actions (42%). Changes to the question format[51] for 2023 preclude direct comparisons with the 2020 findings. Nonetheless, the two sets of findings can be said to be broadly consistent.

Figure 10.3: Top ten perceived strengths of the COST Framework[52]



Base: All MC members, participants and grantholders giving a response (n=9066)

The top three perceived strengths generally hold across the different customer types surveyed, with one notable exception: grant holders consider the involvement of young researchers a more important strength than opportunities provided by the Framework to make new contacts and meet new people (72% vs. 66% respectively).

In terms of the *absolute numbers* mentioning the different strengths:

- International collaboration and networking opportunities are mentioned by a higher than average proportion of MC members (79%)

[51] In 2020, this question was open ended.

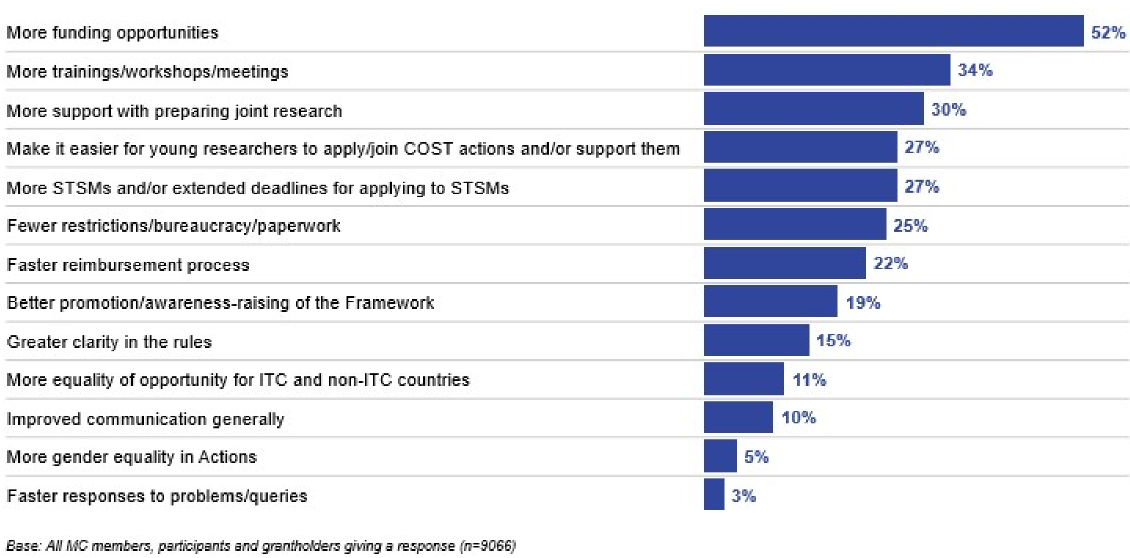
[52] Question: *"What would you say are the main strengths of the COST Framework?"*

- The involvement of young researchers is mentioned by a higher than average proportion of young researchers (59%), Action participants (53%) and grant holders (72%)
- Country diversity is mentioned by a higher than average proportion of grant holders (58%) and MC members (46%).
- Learning and training opportunities, the level of financial support and STSMs are all mentioned by a higher than average proportion of young researchers (52%, 32% and 48% respectively) and participants (47%, 25% and 46% respectively).

Customers from COST ITCs are more likely than customers from non-ITCs to mention as strengths practical activities (32% vs. 27%), interdisciplinary Actions (45% vs. 40%) and learning opportunities (49% vs. 40%).

Turning to perceived weaknesses of the COST Framework, over half (52%) of MC members, participants and grant holders mention a need for more funding opportunities - which was also the top response in the previous survey. Meanwhile, between around a third and a quarter of them mention a need for: more trainings/workshops/meetings (34%), more support with preparing joint research (30%), more support for young researchers (27%), more STSMs or extended deadlines for applying to these (27%), fewer restrictions/bureaucracy/paperwork (25%) and faster reimbursement (22%).

Figure 10.4: Perceived weaknesses of the COST Framework[53]



Among participants and MC members, the top three perceived weaknesses are generally consistent with the aggregate level results (albeit with some variation in ranking). Among grant holders, however, the top three are slightly different, with fewer restrictions, bureaucracy and paperwork coming first (mentioned by 41%), followed by more funding opportunities (38%) and greater clarity in the rules (34%).

[53] Question: *"And in what ways, if any, do you think the COST Framework could be improved?"*

In terms of the absolute numbers mentioning the different weaknesses:

- Funding opportunities and support in preparing joint research are mentioned by a higher than average proportion of MC members (56% and 36% respectively).
- Fewer restrictions, bureaucracy and paperwork are mentioned by a higher than average proportion of grant holders (41%) and MC members (27%).
- Greater clarity in rules is mentioned by a significantly higher than average proportion of grant holders (34%).
- A faster reimbursement process is mentioned by a higher than average proportion of young researchers (27%) and Action participants (26%)
- Support for young researchers to apply/join COST Actions is mentioned by a higher than average proportion of young researchers (33%).

The top perceived weaknesses also differ slightly between customers from COST ITCs and non-ITCs: Whereas the former group's responses broadly reflect the aggregate level ranking, researchers from non-ITCs tend to place greater emphasis than those from ITCs on a need for fewer restrictions, bureaucracy and paperwork (27% vs. 23%), better promotion and awareness-raising of the Framework (21% vs. 17%) and greater clarity in the rules (16% vs. 13%).

11 CONCLUSIONS

The period since the 2020 COST customer satisfaction survey was conducted has at times been a challenging one for COST Actions, particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the viability of (in-person) networking activities. Despite this, the latest (2023) survey results indicate that experiences and perceptions of COST remain for the most part very positive – and, indeed, some measures show an improvement on 2020. Most notably, a high and growing proportion of respondents think COST is fulfilling its three strategic objectives of promoting and spreading excellence, fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science, and empowering and retaining young researchers. Further, almost nine in ten are advocates of COST, saying they would speak highly of the organisation, and an even higher proportion say the organisation has a good reputation in the wider scientific community. The fact that almost all MC members and participants would recommend joining a COST Action, and most MC Chairs and grant holders would recommend managing one provides further testimony of customers' positivity towards the COST Association and its work.

Underlying these perceptions are customers´ positive (and, in many respects, improving) day-to-day practical experiences of COST and its services: a high and increased proportion give positive evaluations of most aspects of the e-COST platform and the proposal submission tool included in the platform. Further, there has been a continuation of the downward trend in experience of problems with the proposal submission tool, suggesting that COST´s improvement efforts in this area have paid off.

Perceptions of COST's various networking tools similarly remain very positive and, indeed, several of these are regarded as more important than ever. Notably, new questions added to the survey for 2023 reveal that virtual networking tools are seen as almost as important as in-person ones, and levels of satisfaction with many aspects of virtual meetings are very similar to those for in-person meetings. These findings underscore the viability of online networking as a core element of the COST Framework and a complement to face-to-face activities.

At the same time, the survey findings point to four main areas for improvement in the COST Framework that might help guide the organisation's strategy as it continues on the next phase of its journey. The first of these concerns the SESA process. Proposers in particular continue to report somewhat mixed feelings about the process, especially in relation to the transparency of the evaluation and selection procedure and the clarity of the evaluation criteria. Transparency also seems to be an issue when it comes to the nominations process and criteria for Management Committee (MC) members. These findings suggest that better understanding these perceptions and what information the customers concerned would like to have may help to increase the perceived level of transparency of these procedures.

A second potential area of improvement in customers' minds (albeit one COST has limited control over) is the level of funding at the disposal of Actions, especially that relating to local organiser support for training schools, OERSA and FSAC expenses, as well as funds enabling all relevant participants to attend Action networking activities. The decrease since 2020 in the proportion of customers who consider funds for travel and subsistence to be sufficient is also notable and potentially worthy of further attention.

Thirdly, while virtual networking appears to be functioning well within the context of the COST Framework, there is scope for enhancing its effectiveness further, especially when it comes to using it for the generation of new ideas and collective decision-making. The sharing of lessons learned and best practice between Actions in this regard may be facilitative.

Lastly, the survey findings continue to point to challenges customers face in understanding and applying the current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Action grants. Further guidance on these aspects may therefore be advisable.

Still, the 2022/23 findings on a whole suggest that the COST Association is maintaining its solid track record of customer satisfaction and continuing to effectively pursue its mission of providing networking opportunities for researchers and innovators in order to strengthen Europe’s capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges.

12 ANNEX

12.1 Survey questionnaire

COST ASSOCIATION CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2023

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

ClientType

[SCRIPTER: Create hidden variable for client type based on sample file]

1. *Management Committee Member*
2. *Participant/Beneficiary(non-MC) – Meeting/Training School participant*
3. *Participant/Beneficiary(non-MC) – STSM grantee*
4. *Participant/Beneficiary(non-MC) – Conference grantee*
5. *Participant/Beneficiary(non-MC) – Virtual grantee*
6. *Participant/Beneficiary(non-MC) - Combined participant*
7. *Grant Holder Manager*
8. *Proposer – Successful (Main proposer of the last OC 2020-1 and OC2021-1)*
9. *Proposer – Unsuccessful (Main proposer of the last OC 2020-1 and OC2021-1)*
10. *Proposer – Under evaluation (Main proposer of the last OC2022-1)*
11. *Leadership positions: MC chairs*
12. *Leadership positions: MC vice-chairs*
13. *Leadership positions: Science Communication Managers*
14. *Leadership positions: WG leaders/Grant Awarding Coordinator*

Hidden_S01= ClientType_1 up to ClientType_14

1	*Hidden_SO101*	*ClientType_1*	*Management Committee Member*
2	*Hidden_SO102*	*ClientType_2*	*Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Meeting/Training School participant*
3	*Hidden_SO103*	*ClientType_3*	*Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – STSM grantee*
4	*Hidden_SO104*	*ClientType_4*	*Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Conference grantee*
5	*Hidden_SO105*	*ClientType_5*	*Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Virtual grantee*
6	*Hidden_SO106*	*ClientType_6*	*Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC) – Combined participant*
7	*Hidden_SO107*	*ClientType_7*	*Grant Holder Manager*
8	*Hidden_SO108*	*ClientType_8*	*Proposer – Successful (Main proposer of the last OC 2020-1 and OC2021-1)*
9	*Hidden_SO109*	*ClientType_9*	*Proposer – Unsuccessful (Main proposer of the last OC 2020-1 and OC2021-1)*
10	*Hidden_SO110*	*ClientType_10*	*Proposer – Under evaluation (Main proposer of the last OC2022-1)*

11	Hidden_SO111	ClientType_11	Leadership positions: MC chairs
12	Hidden_SO112	ClientType_12	Leadership positions: MC vice-chairs
13	Hidden_SO113	ClientType_13	Leadership positions: Science Communication Managers
14	Hidden_SO114	ClientType_14	Leadership positions: WG leaders/Grant Awarding Coordinator

SCRIPTER: Recode variable Hidden_S01 into Hidden_S02

Hidden_S02 = ClientType_Recode_1 up to ClientType_Recode_6

1	Hidden_SO21	ClientType_Recode_1	MC Member	ClientType_1=1
2	Hidden_SO22	ClientType_ Recode_2	Participant/Beneficiary (non-MC)	ClientType_02=1 ClientType_03=1 ClientType_04=1 ClientType_05=1 ClientType_06=1
3	Hidden_SO23	ClientType_ Recode_3	Grant Holder	ClientType_07=1
4	Hidden_SO24	ClientType_ Recode_4	Proposer	ClientType_08=1 ClientType_09=1 ClientType_10=1
5	Hidden_SO25	ClientType_ Recode_5	MC Chairs	ClientType_11=1
6	Hidden_SO266	ClientType_ Recode_6	Other leadership positions	ClientType_12=1 ClientType_13=1 ClientType_14=1

II. INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for participating in the COST Association Satisfaction Survey 2023.

The survey is an opportunity to describe your views and experiences of the COST Association and its work. The findings from the survey will be reported directly to the COST management and governing board, to inform their ongoing efforts to improve the relevance and value of the organisation's work. Your co-operation will help ensure that the views expressed in the survey are representative of all COST clients. All those who participate in the survey will be able to opt-in to receive a summary of the findings.

All of the information you provide in the survey will be treated in the strictest confidence and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individuals or institutions in the results.

If you would like to know more about the legal basis for the survey, how the data will be processed, how Ipsos will ensures the confidentiality of your responses or your rights under data protection regulations, you can view the project Privacy Notice here. [Scripter: insert hyperlink, https://survey.ipsos.be/privacynoticeCOSTSatisfactionSurvey.pdf]

III. MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

1. General assessment

Firstly, we will ask some questions about your overall perceptions of COST.

Base: all respondents

Q1.1 [SGRID]

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the role played by COST?

Rows:

1. COST plays an essential role in promoting and spreading scientific and technological knowledge across Europe
2. COST plays an important role in enhancing the careers of young researchers
3. COST enables breakthrough scientific developments by fostering interdisciplinary networks.

Columns:

1. 1 – Strongly disagree
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Strongly agree
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: all respondents

Q1.2 [S]

Thinking about COST's reputation in the scientific community generally, would you say this is….

1. Very positive
2. Mainly positive
3. Neither positive nor negative
4. Mainly negative
5. Very negative
6. Don't know

Base: all respondents

Q1.3 [S]

Which of these phrases best describes the way that you personally would speak about COST to others?

1. I would be critical of the organisation without being asked
2. I would be critical of the organisation but only if someone asked me
3. I would be neutral
4. I would speak highly of the organisation but only if someone asked me
5. I would speak highly of the organisation without being asked
6. Don't know

2. COST Submission Evaluation Selection and Approval procedure

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Info1. [Info]

In the last three years, you submitted a COST Action proposal as a main proposer. We would like to ask you a few questions about the COST Open Call, which is also known under the name SESA (Submission, Evaluation, Selection, Approval).

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Q2.1 [SGRID]

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval procedure (SESA)?

Rows

1. The submission procedure is **straightforward**
2. The evaluation criteria for proposals are **clear**
3. The evaluation and selection procedure is **transparent**

Columns:

1. 1 – Strongly disagree
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Strongly agree
6. Don’t know / Not applicable

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Q2.2 [SGRID]

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals…

Rows (randomize):

1. It is easy to use
2. It ensures that the user’s goals are met successfully
3. It delivers fast and accurate results to users in order to complete their tasks
4. It allows errors to be corrected easily

Columns:

1. 1 – Strongly disagree
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Strongly agree
6. Don’t know / Not applicable

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Q2.3 [SGRID]

And still thinking about the e-COST online tool for submission of proposals, how satisfied are you with…?

Rows:

1. Guidelines for submission
2. Information provided by COST staff in response to queries

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Q2.4 [S]

Have you encountered any problems while using the e-COST online tool for submission of proposals?

1. No
2. Yes, a minor problem
3. Yes, a major problem
4. Don't know/can't remember

Base: IF Q2.4=2 or 3 (Respondents who encountered problems)

Q2.5 [M]

You indicated that you have encountered problems while using the e-COST online tool for submitting proposals. What were the specific problems you encountered?

1. The tool did not display well or function effectively on my operating system
2. I found the registration process difficult or unclear
3. I had difficulties understanding other information or instructions provided on the site
4. I found the site poorly structured or difficult to navigate
5. I found the procedure of inviting Secondary Proposers difficult or unclear
6. I found the procedure of accepting an invitation to join a Network of Proposers difficult or unclear
7. I had difficulty finding information on submission requirements
8. I had difficulty finding information on help or support available
9. I had difficulty updating or making corrections to a proposal
10. Problems saving or uploading documents
11. Another type of problem (please write in): **[PROG: Text box]**
12. Don't know/can't remember **[PROG: Single answer]**

Base: ClientType_ Recode_4=1 (proposers)

Q2.6 [S]

When using the e-COST tool, have you ever contacted the COST IT Helpdesk to ask a question or to report a problem?

1. Yes
2. No

3. Don't know/can't remember

Base: IF Q2.6=1 (Proposers who contacted COST IT Helpdesk)

Q2.7 [S]

How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the support provided by the COST IT Helpdesk?

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_3=1 AND ClientType_ Recode_4 =0 (MC members, participants, grant holders WHO ARE NOT PROPOSERS)

We will now ask you some questions on your experiences using the e-COST platform.

Q2.8 [SGRID]

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the e-COST platform

Rows (randomize):

1. … is easy to use
2. … ensures that the user's goals are met successfully
3. … provides fast and accurate results to users in order to complete their tasks
4. … helps the user easily correct any errors that do occur

Columns:

1. 1 – Strongly disagree
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Strongly agree
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_3=1 AND ClientType_ Recode_4 =0 (MC members, participants, grant holders WHO ARE NOT PROPOSERS)

Q2.9 [S]

And still thinking about the e-COST platform, how satisfied are you with the information provided by COST staff in response to queries?

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 4 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_3=1 AND ClientType_ Recode_4 =0 (MC members, participants, grant holders WHO ARE NOT PROPOSERS)

Q2.10 [S]

When using the e-COST platform, have you ever contacted the COST IT Helpdesk to ask a question or to report a problem?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know/can't remember

Base: IF Q2.10=1 (MC Members, Participants, Grant Holders who contacted COST IT Helpdesk AND WHO ARE NOT PROPOSERS)

Q2.11 [S]

How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the support provided by the COST IT Helpdesk?

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

3. COST networking tools

Base:IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 (MC Members or Participants)

The next few questions focus on your views of different COST networking tools

Q3.1 [SGRID]

How important do you think the following COST Action networking tools are?

Rows (randomize):

1. Meetings, Workshops and Conferences (organised by the COST Action Management Committees in any COST country participating in the network)
2. Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)
3. Training Schools
4. Dissemination activities and publications
5. Conference Grants for Early Career Investigators from less research-intensive countries (ITCs)
6. Dissemination conference grants
7. Virtual Networking Tools (Virtual Mobility grants and Virtual Networking Support grants)

Columns:

1. 1 – Not important
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Very important
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base:IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 (MC members)

Q3.2a [SGRID]

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of Action meeting(s) that you have attended in-person?

Rows (randomize):

1. The level of active contribution of Action participants
2. The number of countries involved
3. The age distribution among the participants
4. The level of disciplinary diversity among the participants
5. The gender balance among participants
6. The extent to which the activities contributed to the objectives of the COST Action
7. The extent to which the meeting led to new (professional) ideas
8. The extent to which collective decisions could be reached

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. I have not attended an Action meeting yet
7. Don't know / Not applicable

Base:IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 (MC members)

Q3.2b [SGRID]

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of Action meeting(s) that you have attended online or virtually?

Rows (randomize):

1. The level of active contribution of Action participants
2. The number of countries involved
3. The age distribution among the participants
4. The level of disciplinary diversity among the participants
5. The gender balance among participants
6. The extent to which the activities contributed to the objectives of the COST Action
7. The extent to which the meeting led to new (professional ideas)
8. The extent to which collective decisions could be reached

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. I have not attended an Action meeting yet
7. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 (MC Members)

Q3.3 [S]

Do you think the current balance of online and in-person activities in your Action is:

1. Much too weighted towards in person
2. A bit too weighted toward in person
3. About right
4. Much too weighted towards online
5. A bit too weighted toward online
6. Don't know/Not applicable

4a. Support provided by the COST Association

Base: All except MC Chairs and GH Managers (so show if ClientType_Recode3=0 AND ClientType_Recode_5=0)

Q4.1 [SGRID]

Thinking about the support provided by COST overall, how satisfied have you been with each of the following? If you feel that you do not have enough experience of COST to comment, please select "Not applicable"

Rows (DO NOT RANDOMISE):

1. The speed of responses provided by COST staff
2. The level of information available on the COST website
3. The clarity of information and documentation provided
4. The ability of COST staff to address problems and issues

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: All except MC Chairs and GH Managers (so show if ClientType_Recode3=0 AND ClientType_Recode_5=0)

Q4.2 [M] (max 3 answers allowed) (randomize items 1-13)

What two or three of the following aspects of support provided by the COST Association would you most like to see improved?

1. The quality and content of the COST website
2. The ease of finding relevant information
3. The user friendliness of e-COST
4. The speed and stability of e-COST
5. The availability of support for queries
6. The speed of responses to queries
7. The quality/helpfulness of responses to queries
8. The clarity of the rules
9. The amount of paperwork
10. The quality of the COST documentation
11. More, or more detailed, feedback on proposals
12. Faster reimbursement
13. The level of funding available

14. Something else (please write in): **[PROG: Text box]**
15. Don't know **[PROG: Single answer]**

4b. Leadership Module

Base: MC Chairs or GH Managers (ClientType_Recode_3=1 OR ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q4.3 [SGRID]

During the management of your COST Action overall, how satisfied have you been with?

Rows (DO NOT RANDOMISE):

1. The speed of responses provided by COST staff
2. The level of information available on the COST website
3. The clarity of information and documentation provided
4. The ability of COST staff to address problems and issues

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: MC Chairs or GH Managers (ClientType_Recode_3=1 OR ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q4.4 [M] (max 3 answers allowed) (randomize items 1-13)

What two or three of the following aspects of support provided by the COST Association would you most like to see improved?

1. The quality and content of the COST website
2. The ease of finding relevant information
3. The user friendliness of e-COST
4. The speed and stability of e-COST
5. The availability of support for queries
6. The speed of responses to queries
7. The quality/helpfulness of responses to queries
8. The clarity of the rules
9. The amount of paperwork
10. The quality of the COST documentation
11. More, or more detailed, feedback on proposals
12. Faster reimbursement
13. The level of funding available
14. Something else (please write in): **[PROG: Text box]**
15. Don't know **[PROG: Single answer]**

Base: MC Chairs or GH Managers (ClientType_Recode_3=1 OR ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q4.5a [S]

In 2021, COST changed some rules related to the implementation of COST Actions, introducing the COST Annotated Rules. To what extend would you agree with the following statements:

Rows (DO NOT RANDOMISE):

1. The new rules are easy to find
2. The new rules allow all Action participants to easily join Action activities
3. The new rules are clear
4. The new rules are easy to implement
5. The change to the rules was well communicated

Columns:

1. 1 – Strongly disagree
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Strongly agree
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: Leadership positions, GH Managers (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 OR ClientType_Recode_5=1 or ClientType_Recode_6=1)

Q4.5b [S]

Gender balance in science and technology is a topic of priority for the COST Association. How would you assess the gender balance in your Action, taking into account the overall gender balance in the broad scientific field(s) of your Action?

1. Very good
2. Fairly good
3. Neither good nor poor
4. Fairly poor
5. Very poor
6. Don't know

Base: Leadership positions, GH Managers (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 OR ClientType_Recode_5=1 or ClientType_Recode_6=1)

Q4.5c [O]

[Scripter: Please make question non-mandatory]

Would you like to share any additional thoughts on the topic of gender balance and/or advancing gender equality in your Action?

5. Financial and Administrative support

Base: all respondents

Q5.1 [SGRID]

To what extent are the COST funds put at your disposal sufficient for …?

Rows:

1. Travel and subsistence for meetings and Training Schools (IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_3=1 (MC members, participants, grant holders)
2. Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) (IF ClientType_ Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_ Recode_3=1 (MC members, participants, grant holders)
3. Local Organiser Support for meetings and Training Schools *ONLY SHOW IF ClientType_07=1 OR ClientType_11=1 OR ClientType_12=1 OR ClientType_13=1 OR ClientType_14=1 , meaning SHOW IF GH managers, or MC CHAIRS, or MC vice-chairs, or science communication managers or WG leaders/grant awarding coordinator]*
4. Dissemination Activities *ONLY SHOW IF ClientType_07=1 OR ClientType_11=1 OR ClientType_12=1 OR ClientType_13=1 OR ClientType_14=1 , meaning SHOW IF GH managers, or MC CHAIRS, or MC vice-chairs, or science communication managers or WG leaders/grant awarding coordinator]*
5. Other Expenses related to Scientific Activities (OERSA) *ONLY SHOW IF ClientType_07=1 OR ClientType_11=1 OR ClientType_12=1 OR ClientType_13=1 OR ClientType_14=1 , meaning SHOW IF GH managers, or MC CHAIRS, or MC vice-chairs, or science communication managers or WG leaders/grant awarding coordinator]*
6. Financial Scientific and Administrative Coordination (FSAC) expenditures* *ONLY SHOW IF ClientType_07=1 OR ClientType_11=1 OR ClientType_12=1 OR ClientType_13=1 OR ClientType_14=1 , meaning SHOW IF GH managers, or MC CHAIRS, or MC vice-chairs, or science communication managers or WG leaders/grant awarding coordinator]*
7. Enabling all relevant participants to attend the Action networking activities in person *ONLY SHOW IF ClientType_07=1 OR ClientType_11=1 OR ClientType_12=1 OR ClientType_13=1 OR ClientType_14=1 , meaning SHOW IF GH managers, or MC CHAIRS, or MC vice-chairs, or science communication managers or WG leaders/grant awarding coordinator]*

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all sufficient
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely sufficient
6. Don't know / Not applicable

**FSAC (Financial, Scientific, Administration and Coordination) budget line is a fixed % contribution allocated to the grant holder which supports the administrative tasks relating to managing and coordinating the agreed scientific activities undertaken during a given grant period.*

Base: MC members, Participants (IF ClientType_RECODE_1=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_2=1)

Q5.2 [S]

The last time you were reimbursed for participation in a COST Action networking activity, how long did the reimbursement take?

1. Less than 1 month
2. Between 1 and 3 months
3. Longer than 3 months
4. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: GH managers (IF ClientType_recode_3=1)

Q5.3 [S]

On average, how long does it take your institution to reimburse COST Actions participants (from the moment your institution receives the claim) ?

1. Less than 1 month
2. Between 1 and 3 months
3. Longer than 3 months
4. Don't know / Not applicable

6. COST Grant System

Base: GH Managers, MC Chairs (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 or IF ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q6.1 [S]

To what extent would you say holding a COST grant has a positive impact on your institution?

1. It has a very positive impact
2. It has a fairly positive impact
3. It has only a minor positive impact
4. It has no impact at all
5. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: GH Managers, MC Chairs (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 or IF ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q6.2a [S]

In your view, how easy to understand are current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Actions?

1. 1 – Not easy at all
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Very easy
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: GH Managers, MC Chairs (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 or IF ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q6.2b [S]

And how easy to apply are current financial and administrative rules for managing COST Actions?

1. 1 – Not easy at all
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Very easy
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: GH Managers (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1)

Q6.3 [S]

In your view, how easy to use are the e-COST tools for grant management (for example for reporting or invitations)?

1. 1 – Not easy at all
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Very easy
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: GH Managers, MC Chairs (IF ClientType_Recode_3=1 or IF ClientType_Recode_5=1)

Q6.5 [S]

Would you recommend managing COST Actions to a colleague**?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

7. Nomination Procedures

Base: MC Members (IF ClientType_Recode_1=1)

Q7.1 [S]

How satisfied are you with the process of nomination to become a Management Committee Member of a COST Action in your country?

1. 1 – Not at all satisfied
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely satisfied
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: IF Q7.1=1 or 2 (MC Members dissatisfied with the nomination process)

Q7.2 [M]

You indicated that you are not completely satisfied with the process of nomination to become a Management Committee member of a COST Action in your country. Why not?

1. The process is slow/takes too long
2. The process is too complex/bureaucratic
3. The process is not transparent enough
4. There is a lack of information available on the process/criteria
5. There is a lack of guidance or support for prospective nominees
6. The process is too subjective
7. Something else [Scripter: OE]
8. Don't know [Scripter: exclusive]

8. Strengths and weaknesses of the COST Framework

Base: MC Members, Participants (IF ClientType_RECODE_1=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_2=1)

Q8.1 [S]

Overall, to what extent has your experience of participating in COST Actions fulfilled your expectations?

1. It has been much more positive than I expected
2. It has been a bit more positive than I expected
3. It has been in line with my expectations
4. It has been a bit less positive than I expected
5. It has been much less positive than I expected
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: MC Members, Participants (IF ClientType_RECODE_1=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_2=1)

Q8.2 [SGRID]

To what extent has participating in COST Actions led to…?

Rows (randomize items)

1. New insights in your field(s) of science and technology
2. New research collaboration opportunities for you
3. Career development opportunities for you
4. Being included in consortia for follow-up funding?

Columns:

1. 1 – Not at all
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5 – Completely
6. Don't know / Not applicable

Base: MC Members, Participants, Proposers (IF ClientType_Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_Recode_2=1 OR ClientType_Recode_4=1)

Q8.4 [S]

Would you consider applying for a COST Action in the near future?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know/not applicable

Base: MC Members, Participants (ClientType_Recode_1=1 OR ClientType_Recode_2=1)

Q8.6 [S]

Would you recommend to a colleague to join a COST Action?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Base: MC Members, Participants, Grant holders (IF ClientType_RECODE_1=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_2=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_3=1)

Q8.7 [M, randomise items 1-10]

What would you say are the main strengths of the COST Framework?

1. International collaboration/ networking opportunities
2. Involvement of young researchers/support of young researchers
3. Practical activities/exchange of practical knowledge
4. Opportunities to make new contacts/meet new people
5. Interdisciplinary Actions/approach
6. The level of financial support
7. Regularity of meetings/workshops/conferences
8. Learning/training opportunities
9. Country diversity/involvement of many countries
10. Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs)
11. Other, please specify [SCRIPTER: OE] [fixed]

Base: MC Members, Participants, Grant holders (IF ClientType_RECODE_1=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_2=1 OR ClientType_RECODE_3=1)

Q8.8 [M, randomise rows 1-13]

And in what ways, if, any, do you think the COST Framework could be improved?

1. More funding opportunities
2. Fewer restrictions/bureaucracy/paperwork
3. Faster reimbursement process
4. Faster responses to problems/queries
5. Better promotion/awareness-raising of the Framework
6. More support with preparing joint research
7. More trainings/workshops/meetings
8. More gender equality in Actions
9. More equality of opportunity for ITC and non-ITC countries
10. Greater clarity in the rules
11. Improved communication generally
12. Make it easier for young researchers to apply/join COST actions and/or support them
13. More STSMs and/or extended deadlines for applying to STSMs
14. Other, please specify [SCRIPTER: OPEN BOX] [fixed]

9. RECONTACT INFORMATION

Base: all respondents

QCONTACT [S]

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey. In the near future, the COST Association may wish to recontact people who participated in the survey to explore in more depth some key issues arising from this research. Would you be willing to be re-contacted by the COST Association sometime within the next 12 months for this follow up research? You would, of course, be free to say 'no' at the time.

1. Yes, I am willing for the information I have provided in the survey to be passed to the COST Association in order that they might contact me to take part in future, related research
2. No, I am not willing for the information I have provided to be passed to the COST Association in order that they might contact me to take part in future, related research

Base: all respondents

QCONTACT2 [S]

As a token of appreciation for your survey participation, the COST Association wishes to share with you a summary of the survey findings once the survey is completed. Would you be willing for Ipsos to re-contact you with a summary of findings within the next 12 months?

1. Yes, would be willing
2. No, would not be willing

Thank you very much indeed for taking part in the survey. We very much appreciate your time.