

# COST STRATEGIC PLAN

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# Executive Summary

For more than 50 years, COST has been providing networking opportunities for researchers and innovators to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological and societal challenges.

COST's interdisciplinary bottom-up networks are effectively bridging the innovation divide and participation gaps in Europe and are providing a large spectrum of opportunities for young generations of researchers and innovators. Involvement in COST Actions both anticipates and complements the activities of the EU collaborative Framework Programmes (FP), spreading excellence across Europe and beyond. COST contributes to the European political goal of enhancing research and innovation excellence, mobilising the untapped potential, encouraging openness and thus boost the European scientific, economic and societal development.

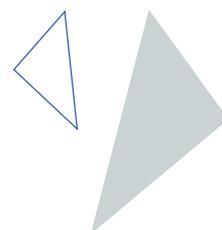
To continue as the leading networking instrument in the European Research Area (ERA), COST has defined three priorities: 1) Promoting and spreading excellence, 2) Fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science, 3) Empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators.

Pockets of excellence can be found everywhere in Europe and COST has the tools at its disposal to unlock the untapped potential, creating a win-win situation for Europe as a whole. COST encourages participation from all actors, such as academic, non-academic, SME's, international organisations and public authorities. By networking researchers and innovators from all career levels, from PhD students to Nobel Prize winners, COST connects complementary funding schemes ranging from Erasmus+ all the way to European Research Council (ERC) Grants, facilitating entry of promising young talents into these schemes, and resulting into scientific breakthroughs and discoveries. This underpins the role of COST as a pre-portal for follow-up European funding for research and innovation.

The COST Strategic Plan defines clear targets and Key Performance Indicators for each strategic priority. Several instruments are at hand to monitor and measure the outputs, tangible results and scientific impact of COST Actions.

To implement its strategic priorities, COST strengthens its core business by expanding the number and reach of COST Actions. Services, including COST Connect and the COST Academy are offered to strengthen the position and impact of COST and its Actions in the ERA. COST has also the ambition, through its community involved in COST Actions, to contribute expertise to science-informed policy advice as well as to contribute to the internationalisation process of research and innovation communities and to global cooperation in science and technology. Cross-cutting Activities are deployed to utilise COST's networking instruments for targeting specific policy priorities. The recent introduction of virtual mobility tools is offering an added-value approach to mobility, which will help to widen mobility across Europe, providing an additional and sustainable networking instrument for the years to come.

Over the next few years, COST will place increased emphasis on simplifying participation, monitoring and reporting procedures for COST activities, thereby ensuring that access to and participation in COST activities become even more straightforward. COST is open to future challenges and is devoted to act proactively. The COST activities are implemented by an effective and agile Administration. At the same time, COST is keen to contribute to prioritising sustainable development, as outlined in the Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



# 1. About COST: The Leading Open Networking Tool in the ERA

COST provides funding for bottom-up, excellence-driven, interdisciplinary, open, pan-European networks, the so-called COST Actions. These networks enable a very large spectrum of cooperation, including capacity building and training activities. COST Actions gather researchers and innovators from all career levels, degrees of specialisation and professional backgrounds, embracing the whole of Europe's cultural diversity and core values. The COST Actions produce a wide range of outcomes from joint publications, large collaborative EU projects, new technology developments aimed at addressing Europe's societal challenges and successful follow-up activities.

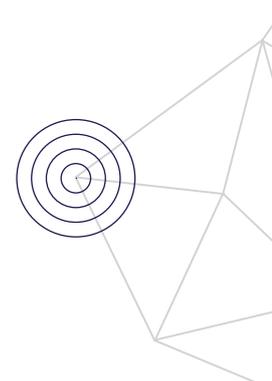
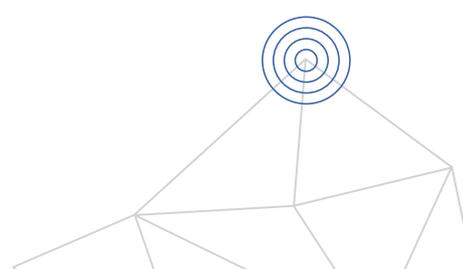
COST is the longest-running European framework for research and innovation, presently constituted by more than [40 Members](#). Near Neighbour Countries (NNC), who cover Europe's adjacent areas are also eligible for funding. The 'less research intensive' COST Members are listed as Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC).

Researchers and innovators from all over Europe perceive COST as a unique means for them to jointly develop their own ideas and new initiatives across all fields in science and technology, including social sciences and humanities, through pan-European networking of national or international funded research activities. Involvement in COST Actions both anticipates and complements the activities of the EU collaborative FPs, constituting a "bridge" towards the research and innovation communities in Europe and beyond. Through its networking instruments (Figure 1), COST promotes breakthrough knowledge in interdisciplinary topics, and spreads excellence across Europe and beyond. COST fosters brain-circulation, especially of younger generations, and offers researchers and innovators multiple possibilities to develop their careers through collaborative networks. COST can also stimulate reforms in

national research and innovation systems. In its essence, COST offers a unique space where people and ideas grow, constituting a solid bridge between different research and innovation communities in Europe and beyond.

Under Horizon Europe, COST is fully integrated into the Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area pillar, alongside with other instruments such as Teaming, Twinning, ERA Chairs, Excellence Hubs and the European Excellence Initiatives. Consequently, 80% of its budget is devoted to widening actions and 50% of its budget is invested in ITCs. During the 2021 COST Ministerial Conference, overwhelming support was expressed to reinforce the role of COST in a renewed and stronger European Research Area by promoting its bottom-up, open, inclusive, and global networks.

COST adheres to generally acknowledged values and principles in science and research. We believe that research should be conducted in an open, unbiased and transparent manner. Values and principles help to establish trust and credibility in the scientific community, and helps to ensure that research findings are accurately reported and interpreted. COST underlines principles and values as acknowledged in recent declarations, such as the [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#), the the EU Council Conclusions on "[Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality](#)", the [Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation](#), the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) and the [Magna Charta Universitatum](#).





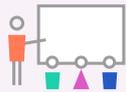
### Management Committee meetings

The Management Committee is the main decision making body of the COST Action, responsible for the coordination, implementation and management of the activities



### Working Group meetings

Each Action has several working groups, all which contribute to the general idea of the Action. They meet and discuss science and research activities, in order to reach the overall goals of the Action.



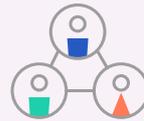
### Conference grants

These grants are aimed at young researchers and PhD students from Inclusive Target Countries (ITCs) and help individuals attend beneficial international conferences that are not organised by COST Actions.



### Training Schools

Intensive coaching opportunities in research and innovation topics within the laboratories and organisations involved in a COST Action.



### Short-term scientific missions (STSM)

Exchange visits between researchers and innovators within the COST Action STSMs allow scientists to visit an institution or laboratory in another COST Member.



### Dissemination

COST encourages and supports Action participants to disseminate the outcome of their research to other COST science and technology networks, the wider community, policy-makers, the media and society at large.



### Virtual Networking Grants

Virtual Networking Support Grants and Virtual Mobility Grants provide support for new forms of collaboration in virtual and hybrid settings as a complement to traditional ways of collaboration within the COST Actions.

Figure 1. Overview of COST's current networking instruments.



## 2. The role of COST in the ERA – three Strategic Priorities

COST has been nourishing open networks of excellence in all scientific domains, where knowledge is freely shared among all types of specialists, promoting both the traditional academic freedom for curiosity-driven research and technical and market-oriented solutions. It has established itself as a platform where people and ideas can grow, contributing decisively to the internationalisation process of the research and innovation communities and to significant scientific and technological breakthroughs in Europe and beyond. In order

to continue to be the leading networking instrument in the ERA, COST has defined three priorities:

1. Promoting and Spreading Excellence
2. Fostering interdisciplinary research for breakthrough science
3. Empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators

### 2.1. PROMOTING AND SPREADING EXCELLENCE

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Excellence can blossom everywhere. COST's open and bottom-up nature has been contributing decisively to create an attractive ecosystem for all types of researchers and innovators in order to contribute to this process. All participants in COST Actions are real beneficiaries, regardless of their career stage, country of origin or areas of interest. What is also evident is the capacity of COST to operate in an inclusive manner, taking advantage of Europe's diverse, multicultural and highly skilled population. In doing so, COST connects Europe's "pockets of excellence", providing structural support to the ERA, widening the research and innovation base in Europe and promoting cooperation in science and technology with other countries beyond COST's current membership. Thus, COST is also instrumental in bridging the research and innovation divide and participations gaps in Europe.

At the core of COST is research and innovation excellence. But at the same time, COST is building a strong critical mass which constitutes an essential precondition for the generation of breakthrough science. To this end, COST has developed simple and low-barrier processes for universal access to networks of excellence, providing new participants with a highly rewarding start-up package into the research and innovation world. This concept of mutual benefit is an integral part of every COST Action and highly valued by COST participants. Via this low-barrier entry point, small communities in geographically dispersed regions benefit from cooperating with experienced and renowned researchers

and innovators from leading academic institutions or SMEs. However, it is important to highlight the dynamic equilibrium that is established in any COST Action. There is a focus on mutual benefit, and on expertise of specific participants rather than specific countries. Connecting the top performers to others in the same or complementary areas of science and technology maximises the production of new knowledge, and more importantly, breakthrough discoveries.

ITCs are dominant actors in various scientific and technological areas, and COST networking activities allow for a healthy knowledge exchange and the consolidation of Europe's top performers in unanticipated research and innovation domains. Highly skilled human resources are spread all over Europe, and top performers can achieve their goals faster by linking them with high-end infrastructures. COST networking activities encourage brain circulation and in many cases, researchers and innovators return to their institutions of origin, empowered with new ideas and linked into a network that lasts beyond the COST Action lifecycle. As a result, the mutual benefit driven by COST Actions contributes positively to closing the research and innovation divide in Europe, and allows for the full realisation of Europe's potential in research and innovation (See Annex 2 and 3).

COST is concerned about gender balance and therefore COST maintains a Gender Equality Plan that puts particular emphasis on advancing gender equality in all COST activities, with a focus on the COST Actions.

## COST Global Networking

COST fosters a strong core on the European level. As Cooperation in science and technology does not stop at Europe's borders, COST directly contributes to the internationalisation of the research and innovation communities. Due to its bottom-up nature, COST Actions are open to all participants from across the globe. (See

Annex 4). In its full potential, COST aggregates worldwide contributions and a global exchange of research skills among all its participants, lowering the pressure for the common use of resources and increased mobility of human resources. This international dimension is built into the core of the COST Actions, and is nourished by the COST Association through various initiatives.

## 2.2. FOSTERING INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR BREAKTHROUGH SCIENCE

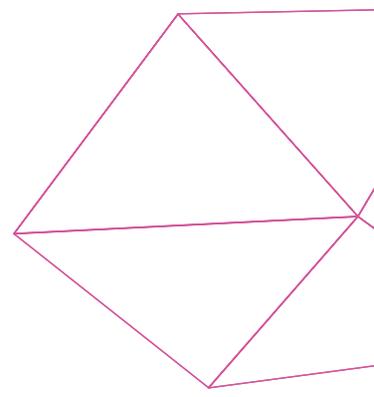
Cooperation across disciplines and different areas of science and technology are an essential precondition to achieve real breakthroughs in research and innovation. The interactions and encounters of researchers and innovators from different disciplines leads to cross-fertilisation of ideas and knowledge that enrich and foster the academic debate. Interdisciplinary research often results in discoveries, innovations and breakthroughs that are crucial in the ambition to boost jobs, economic growth, investments, and improve the quality of life of Europe's citizens and the environment.

COST activities are clear examples of putting the concept of interdisciplinary research into action. Within the COST Actions, open networks of excellence are created in all scientific fields, and knowledge is freely shared among all types of specialists. The open and bottom-up nature of the COST networking-activities allows researchers and innovators the freedom of thought and attracts contributions of various science disciplines, leading to options for solutions to societal challenges. COST Actions are characterised by their pluralism and heterogeneous nature, both in research and innovation fields, participants and in activities. Currently, more than 70% of the COST Actions have an interdisciplinary nature, a number that increased since the launch of the bottom-up and open process of receiving and selecting proposals in 2014.

Moreover, the added-value of COST Actions is not limited to the networking of scientists from different

domains, but also includes networking stakeholders from other sectors. The participation of actors representing the whole value chain of production and dissemination of knowledge is crucial if research and innovation aims for a tangible impact at society at large. Therefore COST encourages participation from non-academic actors such as SMEs, international organisations, public authorities, and civil society organisations.

COST also plays an important role in providing input to the priorities of the European FPs for R&I. Through its open, interdisciplinary and bottom-up nature, COST is an effective platform for researchers and innovators to think beyond the current research and innovation agenda's and to identify emerging research topics that sometimes are not yet addressed in the current European funding schemes. Furthermore, COST puts great emphasis on open access, as it helps to ensure that research and other related materials are available to everyone in the scientific community. It allows for the rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge and the sharing of information among scientists, enabling them to work together to tackle global challenges. Since September 2022 COST Actions have the opportunity to submit their scientific publications directly to Open Research Europe (ORE), the European Commission's Open Access publishing platform for research.



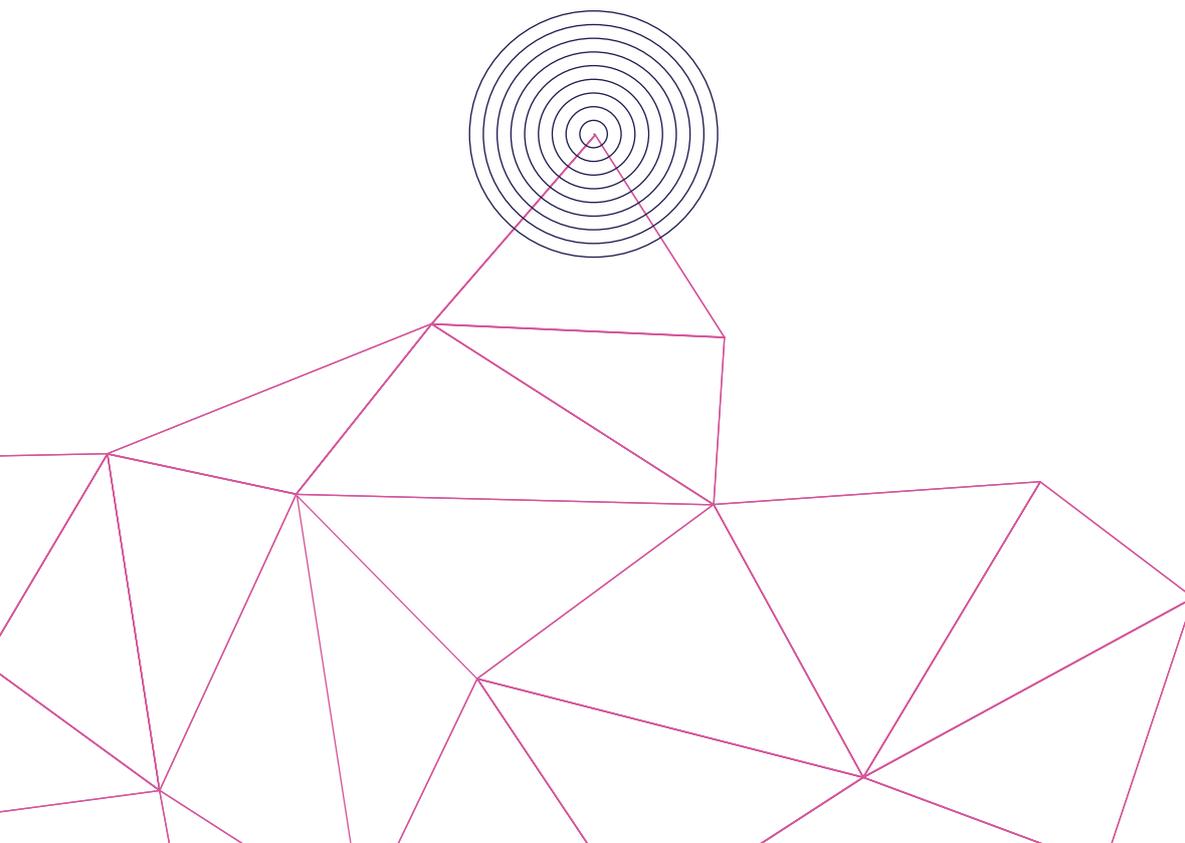
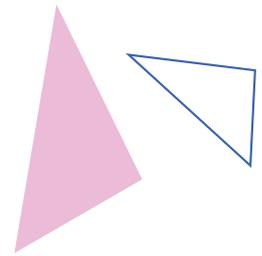
### 2.3. EMPOWERING AND RETAINING YOUNG RESEARCHERS AND INNOVATORS

Europe is currently building a next generation of researchers and innovators with great potential to contribute to Europe's prosperity. It is crucial to take advantage of the pool of talent that exists in the younger generation by offering career perspectives that will enable them to develop and exploit their full potential. Networks and personal contact with more experienced researchers and innovators empower young talents and open their career perspectives.

COST is offering networking tools that have exactly this ambition. Participation in the COST networking activities allows young researchers and innovators to prepare and empower themselves with more self-confidence and motivation to stay in Europe for their next career steps in research and beyond. COST also promotes brain circulation within Europe through its short-term scientific missions (STSMs), limiting brain-drain from

peripheral regions to research-intense regions in Europe. The focus of COST on young researchers and innovators also takes into consideration gender balance to ensure equal opportunities and gender-friendly career advancement. Currently, 50% of the leadership positions in COST Actions are held by female researchers and innovators. Young researchers and innovators are already well-represented within the COST Actions, as is shown Annex 5. In both ITCs and non-ITCs, the age group between 26 and 30 years is well represented, also including the largest share of female researchers.

It is important for young researchers and innovators to broaden their scope and knowledge beyond their own scientific discipline, and to acquire transferrable and transversal skills.

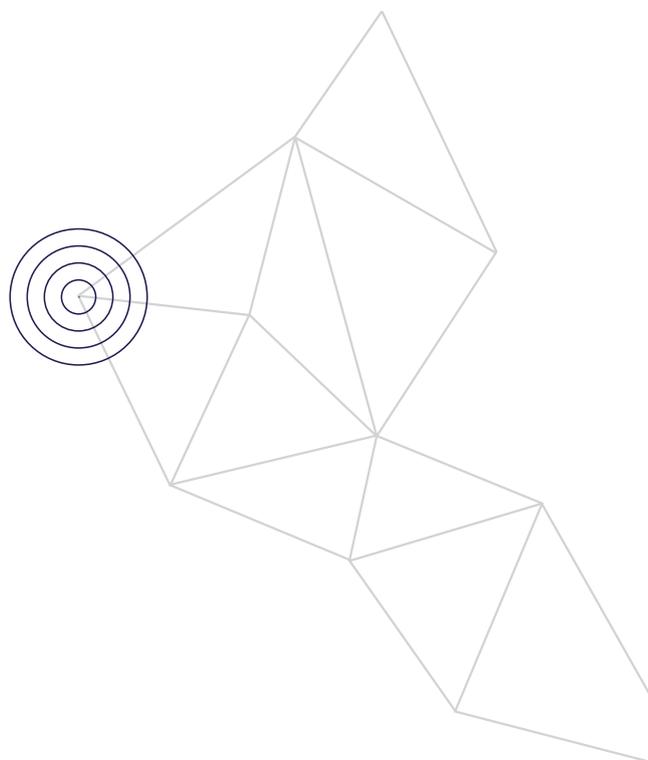
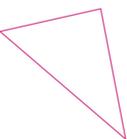


# 3. Measuring output, tangible results and scientific impact

Targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are defined for each strategic priority with a higher ambition level compared to the current situation (See table below). COST has several instruments at hand to monitor and measure the impact of its activities:

- **Monitoring and Final Assessment tool (MFA):**  
The MFA contains the Actions achievements against the objectives and the potential impact it creates. The MFA gathers information both during and after the lifetime of an Action, including proposals and collaborations initiated by the Action and impacts and success stories attained by the Action. This allows COST to collect the necessary quantitative and qualitative data in order to monitor the progress in terms of KPIs.

- **e-COST database:** The database that is available in e-COST, and in which every reimbursed participant of the COST Actions is registered, provides important information and data that is crucial to monitor and measure several KPIs that are listed in the table below.
- **Surveys (during and after ending of COST Actions):** Impact assessments will be conducted, aiming to identify the medium and long-term impact of participation in COST Actions on researchers' careers and networks. Post-Action surveys will target groups of past beneficiaries of COST Actions.



COST'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND KPI'S				
STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KPI <sup>1</sup>	BASELINE 2021	COST'S TARGETS IN HORIZON EUROPE	MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT
<b>Promoting and spreading excellence</b>	Average percentage of COST Actions in which each ITC participates	On average, an ITC participates in 74% of Actions, 10 out of 22 countries qualify for the 80% target	80% <sup>2</sup>	e-COST
	% of research and innovation community in individual ITCs mobilised <sup>3</sup> , if country participates in less than 80% of Actions (see KPI above)	7 out of 12 remaining countries qualifying	≥5%	e-COST
	% of ITCs at proposal level	55%	≥50%	e-COST
	% of Action chairs from ITCs	18%	≥20%	e-COST
	Number of leadership positions filled by ITC participants per Action	Average 2.6, 91% of Actions have at least 1 ITC leadership	≥3	e-COST
	% of budget devoted to widening actions	93%	80%	e-COST
	% of budget invested in ITCs	49% <sup>4</sup>	50%	e-COST
	% of leadership positions occupied by female researchers	48%	50%	e-COST
<b>Foster interdisciplinary</b>	Percentage of Actions with 2 or more science disciplines represented	78%	70%	e-COST
	Average share of non-academic participants per Action	9%	10%	e-COST
	Average number of peer reviewed publications per Action (including ITC)	41 (23)	50 (30)	MFA and analysis through ORE/other repositories
	Number of submitted proposals to Horizon Europe resulting from a COST Action <sup>5</sup>	2.6	2.5 per Action	MFA + assessments
	Number of granted projects in Horizon Europe resulting from COST Actions <sup>6</sup>	1.2	1 per Action	MFA + assessments
	Number of success stories of scientific results and impact	45	50/year	MFA + assessments

<sup>1</sup> KPI's and their goals are subject to change when appropriate. It is in the remit of the Executive Board to evaluate and discuss this.

<sup>2</sup> Some ITCs may not be able to participate in at least 80% of the COST Actions due to the size of their research and innovators community. If an ITC does not meet this target, then it must at least mobilise 5% of its community to participate in COST Actions (see next KPI in the table).

<sup>3</sup> "Mobilised" is defined as being Management Committee member, Working Group member or reimbursed participant to a COST Action

<sup>4</sup> Accounted benefit to ITC participants.

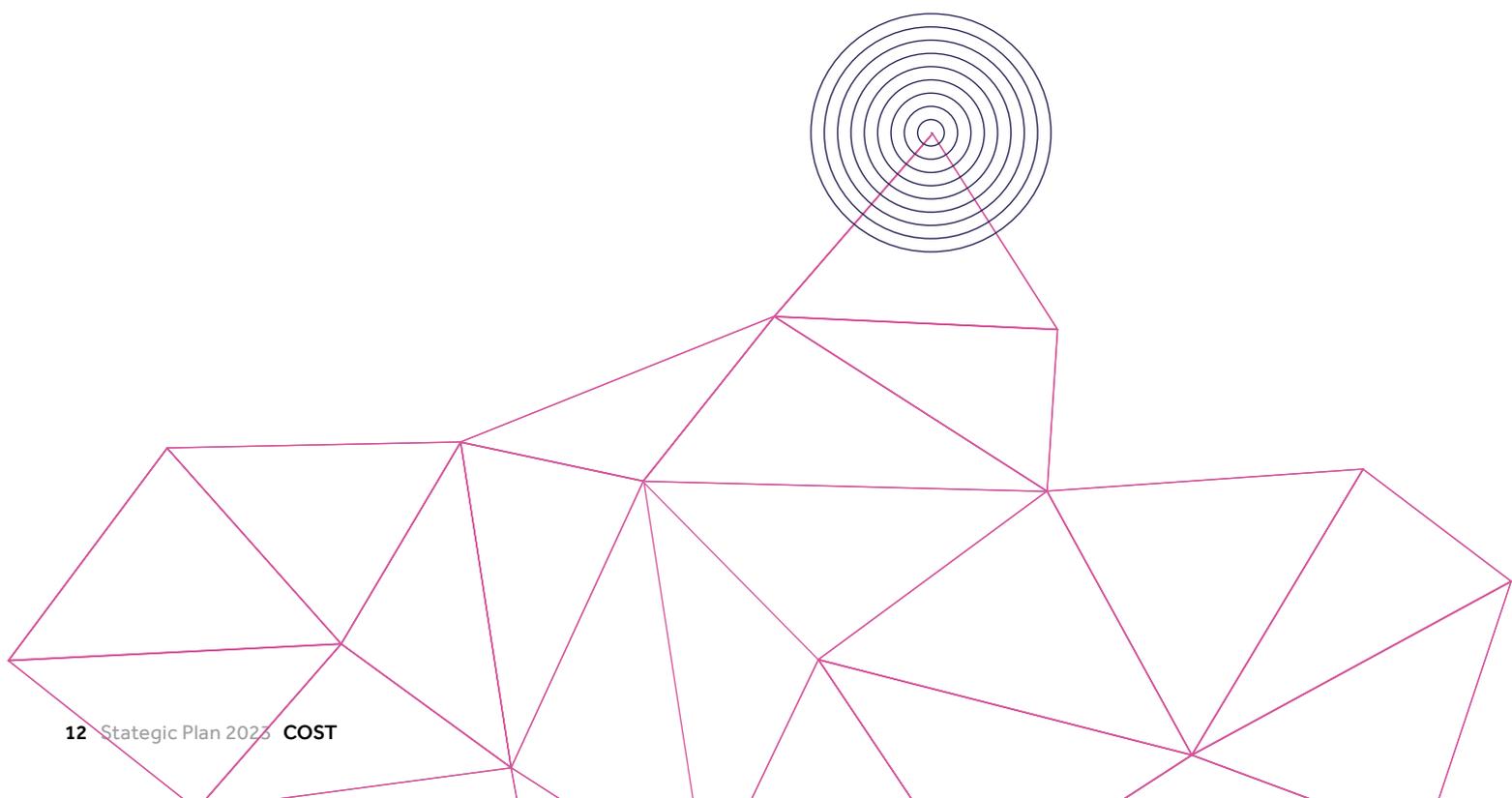
<sup>5</sup> Data concern H2020 proposals

<sup>6</sup> Data concern H2020 proposals

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	KPI	BASELINE 2021	COST'S TARGETS IN HORIZON EUROPE	MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT
Empowering and retaining young researchers	Share of young researchers and innovators participating in COST Actions	39%	40%	e-COST
	Share of young researchers and innovators in Action leadership position	17%	20%	e-COST
	Share of young researchers and innovators stating that COST has boosted their career	88%	85%	Assessments and/or survey
	Share of female researchers and innovators	46% (51%)	50%	

In addition, attention is given to data visualisation of COST Actions and activities performed within the COST Framework at-large. Finally, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the ERA, as part of the task, explorations take place regarding the possibility of establishing a digital observatory on data in European R&I policy.

The COST Strategic Plan is implemented via Multi-annual Activity Plans, including work packages with specific goals and key performance indicators, activities, deliverables, required human and financial resources, as well as stakeholders and beneficiaries concerned.



# 4. Implementing COST's Strategic Priorities

In order to implement the Strategic Priorities and create maximum impact, COST strengthens its core business and implement a number of add-on instruments.

## 4.1. STRENGTHEN THE CORE BUSINESS BY EXPANDING THE NUMBER AND REACH OF COST ACTIONS

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COST offers the most efficient and user-friendly networking tools for researchers and innovators and has the ambition to remain the leading programme for science exchange in the ERA. A wide variety of networking instruments is at the disposal of the research community, complemented with several add-on initiatives (see Annex 7). COST has the continuous aim to increase the number of COST Actions, thereby enhancing the overall capacity and impact in implementing its strategic priorities.

Although face-to-face interactions should remain the core of the networking activities, COST also deploys virtual networking tools to support its COST Actions. With these flexible, complementary and voluntary tools, COST allows researchers to stay connected, even in times when no physical meetings and events are possible.

In addition, COST participants are systematically linked to online and social networks for researchers, creating the possibilities for COST Actions to disseminate their activities and work on an even larger scale, including the access to the Open Research Europe Platform. Investments are made in order to further enhance the database of COST Action participants. Furthermore, processes are put in place in order to identify the outcomes of an Action and to transfer this knowledge to the wider research community. These particular aspects serve both the modernisation of the networking systems and the lowering of the entrance barriers for the isolated pockets of excellence.

In the follow-up of a COST Action, the COST Association accompanies COST Actions in order to help them identify and explore ways to continue their networks and/or valorise the results coming from the Action by organising trainings and events under the COST Academy umbrella.

## 4.2. ADD MAXIMUM VALUE TO COST ACTIONS

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COST adds value to its core businesses, by offering new services that strengthen its position and that of its Actions in the ERA. These services are available for participants in all COST Actions. COST establishes partnerships with other research and innovation stakeholders creating a unique network and offering a wide range of opportunities for researchers and innovators across Europe, making COST an indispensable partner in the European R&I community.

### **COST Connect**

Rationale: In order to increase its visibility and impact and to act as a pre-portal to ERA, COST creates synergies between research and innovation stakeholders

working on a common topic high on the EU policy agenda. Through COST Connect, COST provides funding and networking opportunities to the COST Actions' participants and link them with relevant ERA stakeholders in order to discuss possibilities for future research cooperation.

Implementation: With the COST Connect workshops, COST offers an interactive networking forum to COST Actions and ERA stakeholders (e.g., JPIs, JTIs, EIT KICs) in a specific research or innovation domain. COST Connect workshops are organised on different topics in which the COST Actions are active, and provide networking and funding opportunities, link researchers and innovators with policy makers and thus connect different stakeholders and funding instruments in the

ERA. These events allow to make connections among COST Actions (meta-networks) and linking them to other initiatives related to a given topic.

## **COST Academy**

Rationale: To address the needs of COST participants, in particular ITC-participants and young researchers and innovators, with respect to the management of a COST Action, the COST Academy was set up in 2017.

Implementation: The COST Academy organises trainings for COST participants following every Open Call. These trainings enhance the leadership, financial/administrative, and communication skills of ITC and young researchers and innovators. It offers a series of specific workshops and mentoring, as well as various modules of online training courses.

## **COST Science-Informed Policy Advice**

Rationale: The need for science-informed policy advice at both national and international levels is undeniably of great importance. The substantial increase of the science base, and the pace of innovation is both an opportunity and a challenge for societies and governments. COST Actions are a pool of excellence that can be utilised for science-informed policy advice on relevant EU policy topics.

Implementation: COST is in an ideal position to mobilise expertise from its COST Actions, feeding into science-informed policy advice of the Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) to policy makers. COST closely cooperates with the Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA) consortium, which makes part of the SAM, as well as the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). To this end, COST funds a series of dissemination/publication activities, and engage on an active level with policy makers and decision takers. Furthermore, all starting COST Actions receive specific training on how to engage with policy-makers and how to increase their policy impact, while running and ended COST Actions can count on specific support on how to tackle this challenge.

## **COST Global Networking**

Rationale: The scientific expertise that is required to reach the full potential within a COST Action might not always be present in Europe. By the same token, participation in COST Actions might be beneficial to NNCs. Therefore, COST has an Open to the World policy while considering its global environment, enabling that researchers and innovators from all over the world can join the COST activities based on mutual benefit. The increased involvement of NNCs furthermore empowers ITC participation in COST through several regional collaboration activities in the Mediterranean, including both ITCs and NNCs.

Implementation: NNC participation within COST Actions is further reinforced. Dedicated Info Days are organised in NNCs, in particular in less research intensive countries associated to Horizon Europe but not members of COST. With a view to even further broaden the scope of COST beyond Europe, a selected number of non-COST members which have a track record of collaboration in COST Actions are approached, in order to discuss with them the possibility to engage further with COST through a new partner status.

## **COST Innovators Grant**

Rationale: In order to enhance the pace and the success of breakthrough innovations and to create bridges between the scientific research that is performed in COST Actions and marketable applications, a COST Innovators Grant for exploring innovation potential has been developed.

Implementation: For COST Actions that demonstrate a commercial/innovation potential, an additional budget is allocated to enhance the potential take up. This activity was launched at the end of H2020. The funding covers activities of turning the research network outputs into a commercial or technical proposition. In order to fully benefit from this Innovators Grant and to successfully implement it, COST Actions can apply for a 1-year extension of their activities. COST maintains an interface with relevant initiatives, such as the EIT, as well as the newly created European Innovation Council (EIC) initiative that is subject to further development.

## Cross Cutting Activities

Rationale: As a mean to build the European Research Area and to promote the values of science in Europe, several policy priorities have been established across Europe and shared by countries. COST is also doing its part with its inclusiveness policy (geographical spread, young researchers and gender balance). However, there is still a need to better connect policy-makers and R&I actors to share best practices. The networking experience of COST is particularly useful to address this need. This can be complementary to the Policy Support Facility tools funded by the EC.

Implementation: COST Cross Cutting Activities (CCA) are installed with the objective to utilise the COST Networking instruments for targeting specific policy priorities in order to strengthen the role of COST in a given policy domain related to COST policies, ERA priorities or other EU R&I policies. They focus on horizontal topics such as impact, science communication, gender equality in R&I, and research integrity. The topics are decided top-down, and the primary beneficiaries of the outcome are the COST Action participants and the community of R&I policy in Europe as a whole.

### 4.3. COST'S INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN BUILDING SYNERGIES WITH OTHER EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

COST establishes synergies with other EU programmes and policy initiatives, creating a win-win for all partners involved by adopting a forward looking perspective. Cooperations are established with initiatives such as including Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA), the European Research Council (ERC), the European Food and Security Agency (EFSA), the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Institute of Technology (EIT) and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), EURAXESS, EUREKA, relevant Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), the European Parliamentary Research

Service, ERA Policy Network, NCP networks, R&I missions and the European Partnerships. With many of these stakeholders COST has already established an (initial) cooperation, which can be further exploited in the coming years. With the aim to further develop successful synergies, the first step is to identify how COST Actions and these initiatives can align and mutually reinforce each other by engaging in a dialogue, thereby exploring new areas of cooperation.

# Annexes

## ANNEX 1 - HISTORY OF THE COST STRATEGIC PLAN

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Both the 2016 and 2021 COST Ministerial Declarations delivered a strong political mandate for COST, calling for ambitious objectives and goals. The current COST Strategic Plan translates these goals into defined and prioritised operational objectives, expected impact, required activities, tools and potential cooperation partners. The COST Strategic Plan is implemented by Multi-Annual Activity Plans, which details the activities in order to realise the expected outcomes and results.

The COST Strategic Plan was adopted in 2017 and builds on the COST Horizon Europe Position Paper, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary bottom-up networks as impactful tools to bridge the participation gap and close the innovation divide in Europe and providing opportunities for younger generations. It also follows-up on recent developments in research and innovation policies at European level.

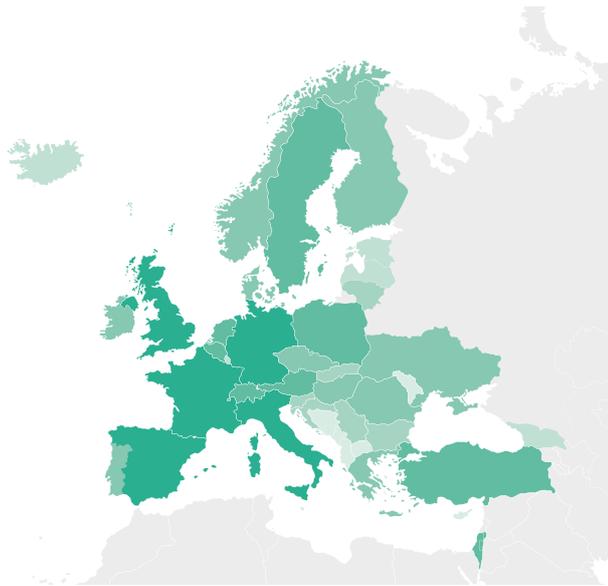
This Strategic Plan has been prepared in different stages. In January and March 2017, three workshops were organised in order to collect the views of the members of the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), the Scientific Committee (SC), the European Commission (EC) and the COST Administration. The draft resulting from this process was discussed during the CSO

meeting in April 2017, after which a Written Procedure was launched in order to collect feedback. During its meeting on 28 June 2017, the COST Executive Board mandated a Drafting Group with the task to finalise the COST Strategic Plan, building on previous workshops and discussions. The Drafting Group met four times in the course of August and September 2017, and presented the COST Strategic Plan during the 201<sup>st</sup> CSO meeting of 18-19 October 2017 in Tartu, Estonia. During the 202<sup>nd</sup> CSO meeting in Brussels on 12 December 2017 in Brussels, Belgium, the COST Strategic Plan was approved by the COST Members. The COST Strategic Plan covers the period from 13 December 2017 until the end of Horizon Europe. It is a dynamic document, with the ability to be adapted during its lifetime.

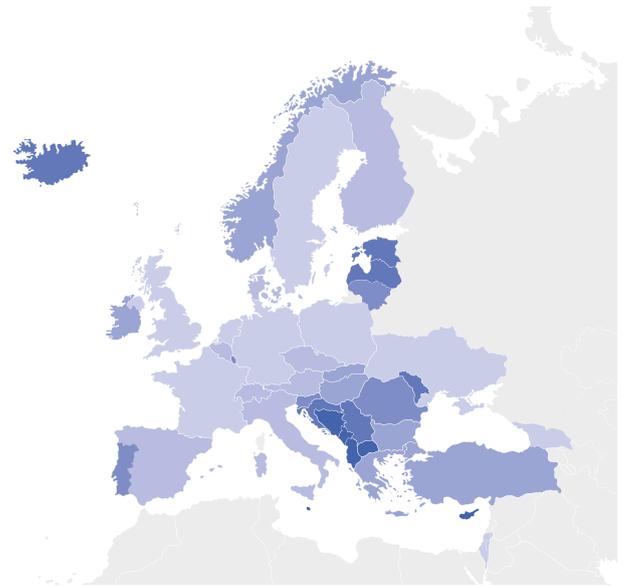
During the 213<sup>th</sup> CSO meeting in March 2022, the COST Strategic Plan was discussed and a CSO Working Group was established in order to update the Strategic Plan given some recent developments (COST entering Horizon Europe, the 2021 Ministerial Declaration, etc). The Working Group met 3 times in the course of 2022, and a new version of the Cost Strategic Plan was approved during the 216<sup>th</sup> CSO meeting in March 2023.



## ANNEX 2 – PARTICIPATION LEVELS OF ITC AND NON-ITC IN COST ACTIONS

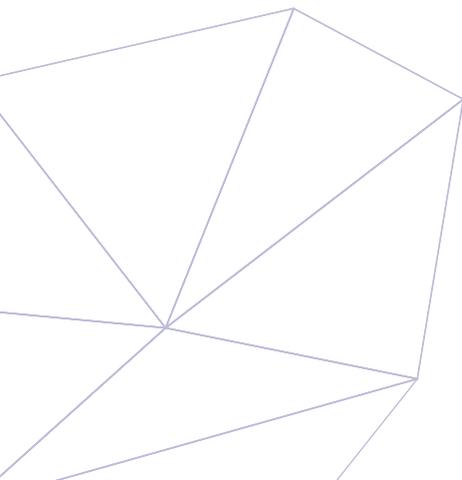


These maps provide the participation levels of the 41 COST Members and Cooperating Member, based on COST key figures of 2021. On the left, the absolute number of research participating in COST Actions is shown. Higher absolute participation levels are marked in darker shades of green. On the right, the number of participants in COST networking activities compared to the size of the research community (measured in Researchers in Full Time Equivalents, ESTAT) is displayed. Here, higher relative participation levels are marked in darker shades of blue. As a contribution to the inclusiveness objectives of the FPs for R&I, COST has been strongly dedicated to increase the participation levels from peripheral regions. This is clearly highlighted in the map on the right. The participation in COST Actions from researchers coming from ITCs is remarkable, reaching on average 10% of their research communities, compared to 2,4% in the other COST Members. It should be noted that the research communities from the ITCs represent an estimated 20% of the

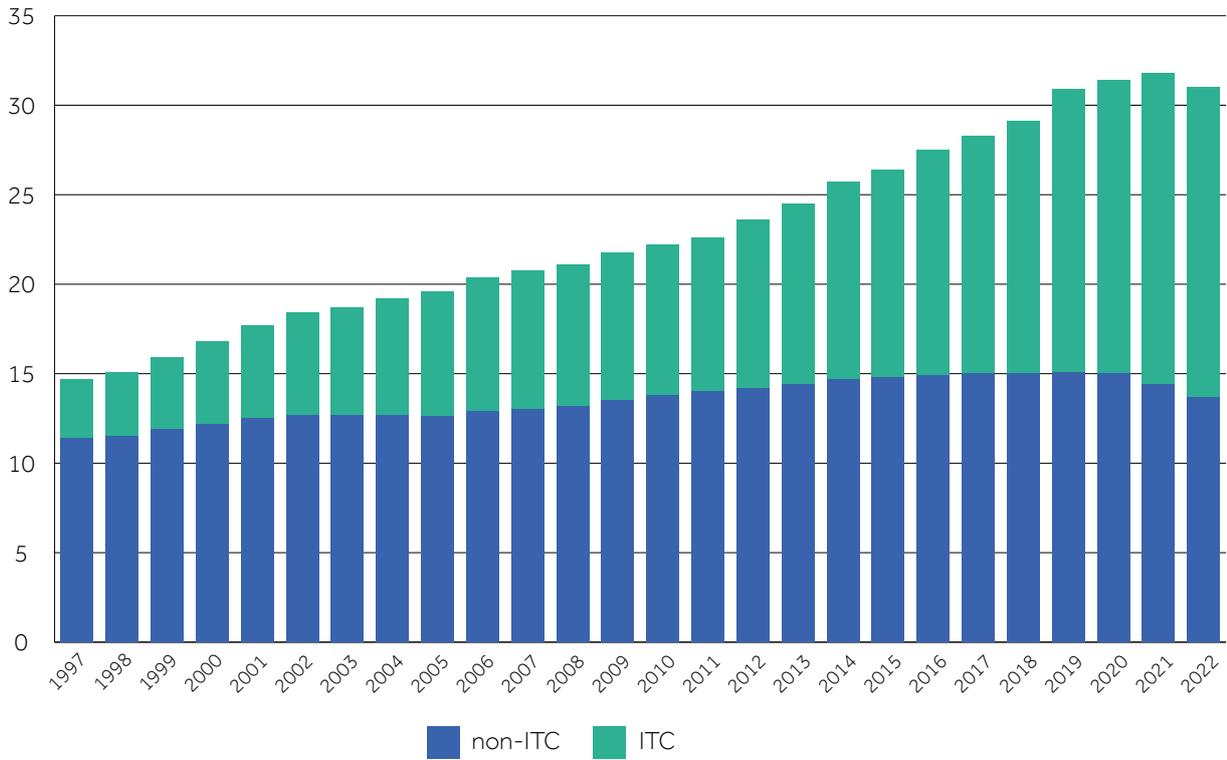


total number of researchers of the 41 COST Members and Cooperating member. The success of COST is illustrated by the example of Albania and Montenegro. Both ITCs have record participation levels compared to the size of their communities, with almost 1 out of 3 researchers and innovators benefiting from COST in 2020. However, the figures provide a different perspective when the absolute number of researchers participating in COST Actions is shown, on the left map.

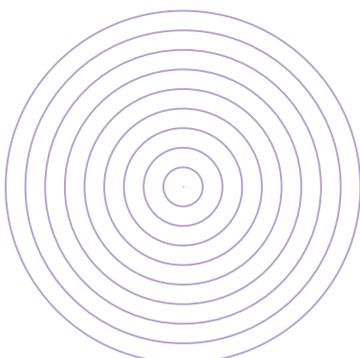
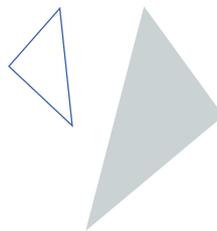
The dimension of the communities in ITCs obviously provides a limiting condition for growth in their participation. Nevertheless, COST's continuous efforts at connecting researchers and innovators from ITCs are well reflected in the statistics: at the end of FP7 (in 2013), the average number of countries in a COST Action was ca. 24,5, with 60% non-ITCs and 40% ITCs; At the end of Horizon 2020, each COST Action had on average around 31 countries per Action, with 48% non-ITCs and 52% ITCs.



## ANNEX 3: AVERAGE PARTICIPATION IN COST ACTIONS, ITCS AND OTHER COUNTRIES

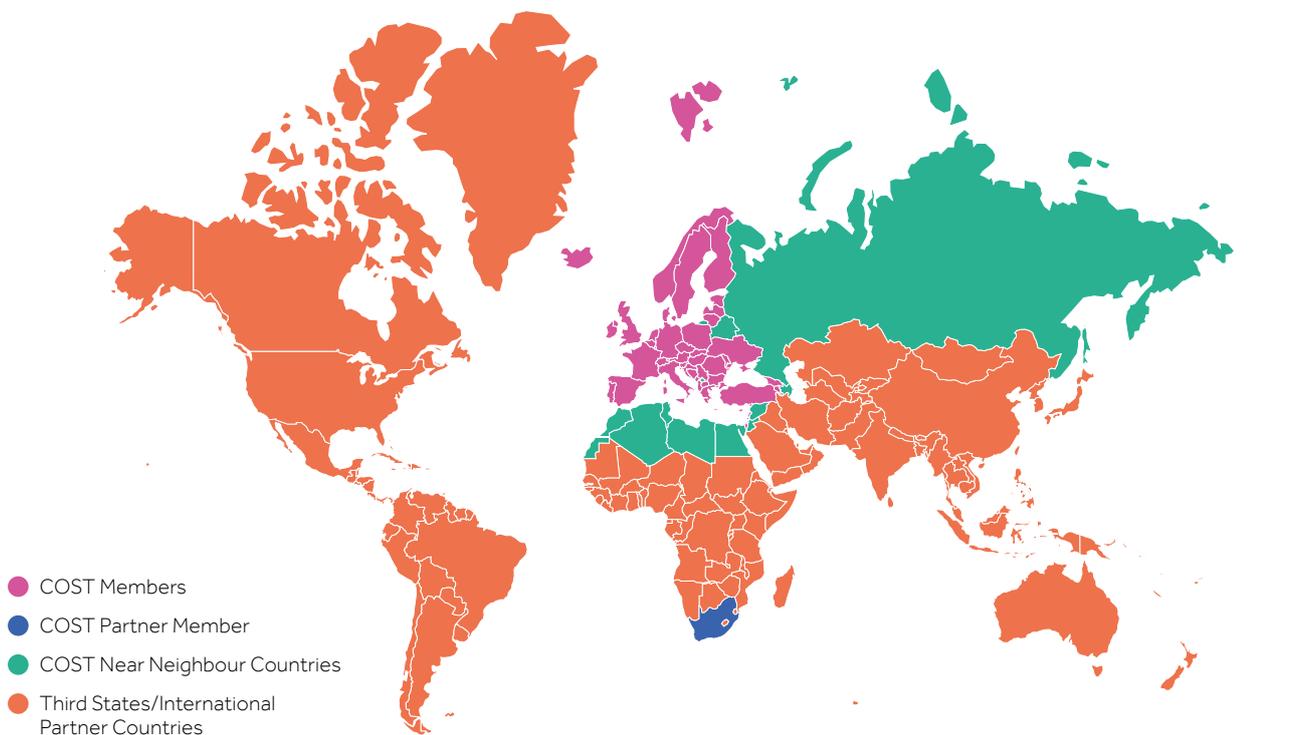


Average number of countries participating in a COST Action from 1997 to 2022. For each year, the number of ITCs (in green) and the number of non-ITCs (in blue) are highlighted.



## ANNEX 4 – COST GLOBAL COOPERATION<sup>1</sup>

With regional and international cooperation high on the agenda, it is foreseen that these numbers will increase, through centralised dissemination of COST in targeted areas of the globe.



<span style="color: blue;">●</span> South Africa	34	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Brazil	40	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> New Zealand	13
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Algeria	16	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Canada	63	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Nigeria	3
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Azerbaijan	18	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Chile	12	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Pakistan	2
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Belarus <sup>2</sup>		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> China	30	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Peru	2
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Egypt	15	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Colombia	11	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Republic of Rwanda	1
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Faroe Islands		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Costa Rica	5	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Saudi Arabia	2
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Jordan	18	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Cuba	1	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Senegal	1
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Kosovo <sup>3</sup>	36	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Ecuador	3	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Singapore	10
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Lebanon	12	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Ethiopia	1	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> South Korea	7
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Morocco	36	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Hong Kong SAR	2	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Taiwan	2
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Palestine <sup>4</sup>	7	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> India	13	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Uganda	1
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Russian Federation <sup>5</sup>		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Iran	8	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> United Arab Emirates	4
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Syrian Arab Republic	1	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Japan	47	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> United States	211
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Tunisia	55	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Kazakhstan	2	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Uruguay	2
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Argentina	14	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Kenya	2	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Uzbekistan	1
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Australia	69	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Kuwait	1	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Venezuela	1
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Bangladesh	1	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Mexico	11	<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Vietnam	2
		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Malaysia	2		
		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Nepal	1		

### Number of individual participations from Near Neighbour Countries, Partner Member and International Partner Countries (2022)

<sup>1</sup> Data from 2022.

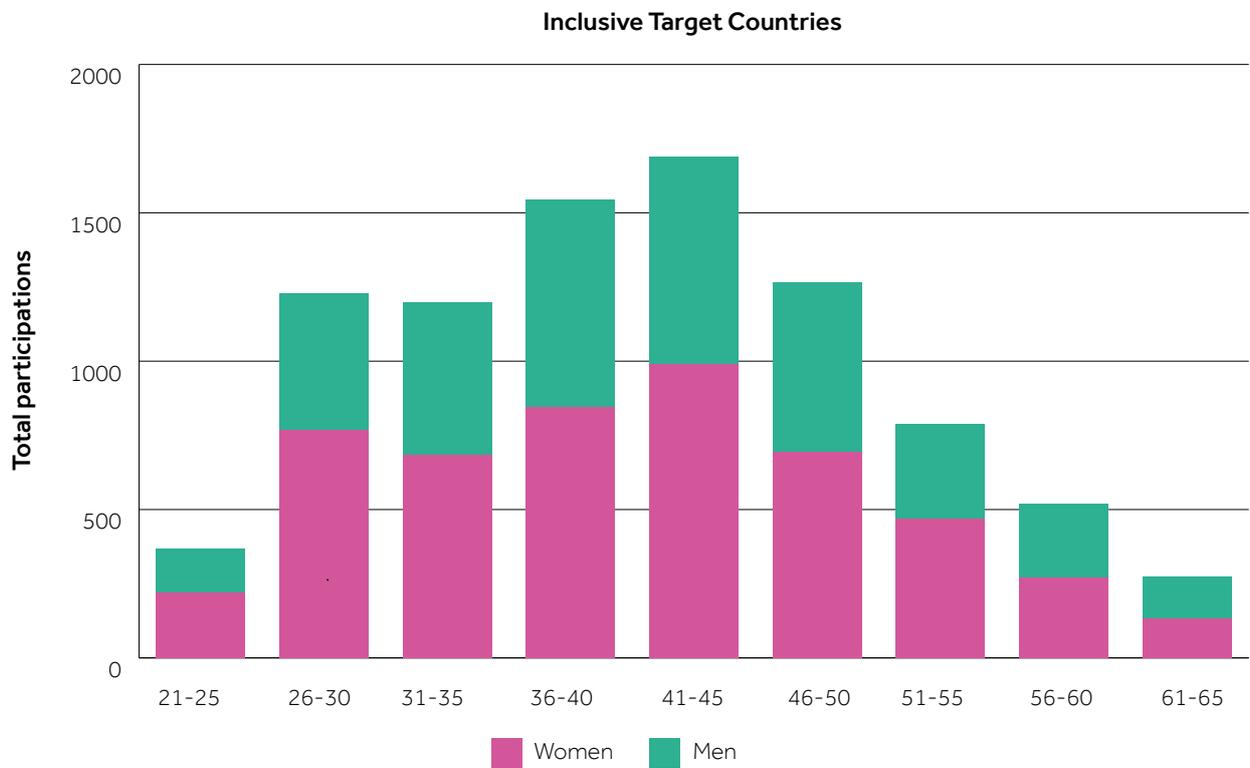
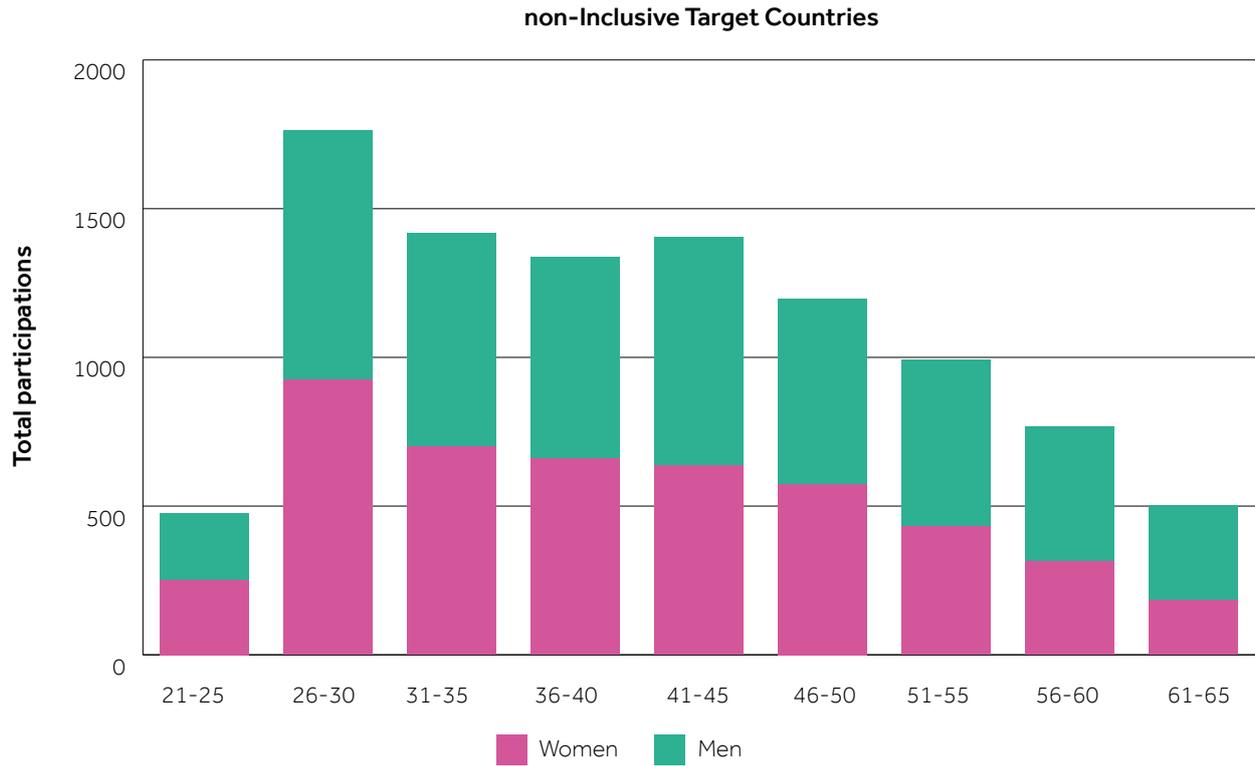
<sup>2</sup> As of 1 March 2023 until further notice, measures are taken to suspend cooperation with Belarus for the execution of the COST Actions and COST activities. Amongst these measures, participation and eligibility of COST Action participants affiliated to a legal entity established in Belarus are suspended for all COST Actions and COST activities.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> As of 6 May 2022 until further notice, measures are taken to suspend cooperation with Russia for the execution of the COST Actions and COST activities. Amongst these measures, participation and eligibility of COST Action participants affiliated to a legal entity established in Russia are suspended for all COST Actions and COST activities.

## ANNEX 5 – SHARE OF YOUNG RESEARCHERS IN COST ACTIONS (2022)



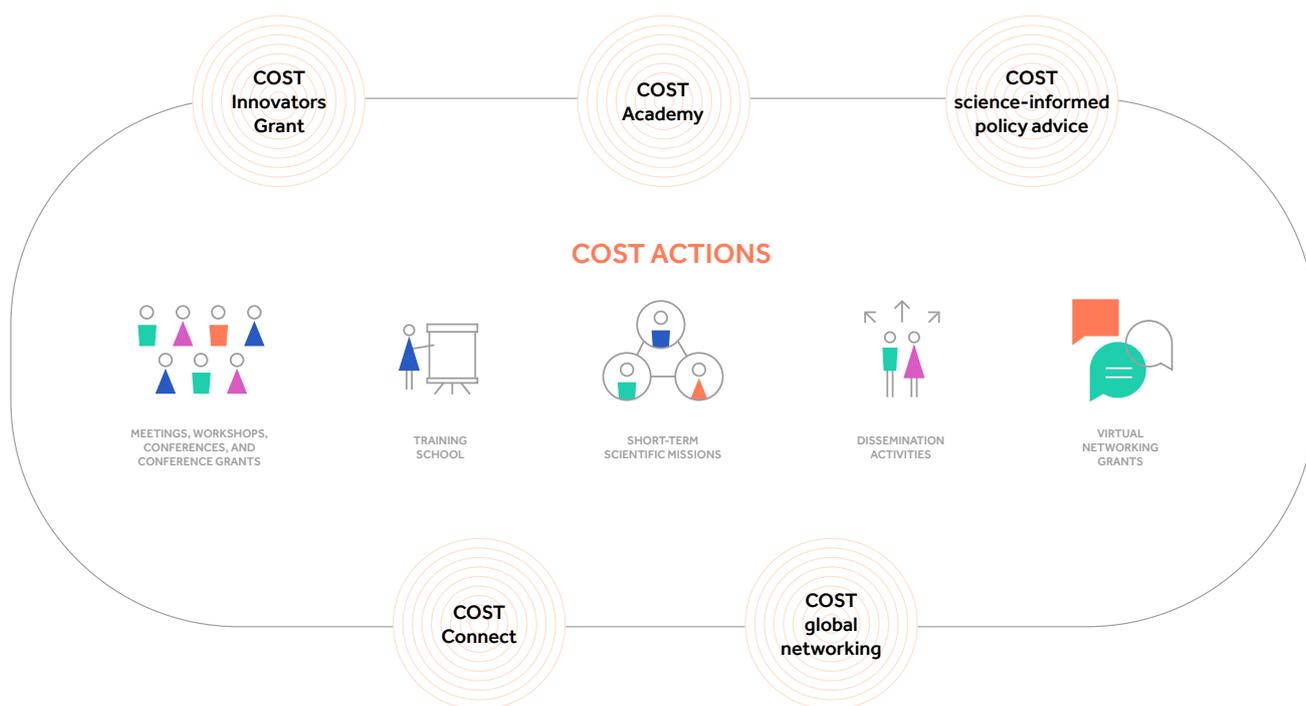
## ANNEX 6 – SUCCESS RATE IN HORIZON 2020

Participation in COST Actions leads to a significant follow-up in terms of the number of submitted proposals for collaborative research in Horizon 2020. Even more striking is the success rate of an average of 38% of these submitted proposals, outnumbering by far the common success rates in the Framework Programme,

being typically of the order of 10-15%. On a yearly basis, around € 390 million of approved common research projects spin off from ending Actions. This indicates that COST Actions act as a successful pre-portal to follow-up European funding for research and innovation, contributing to the advancement of breakthrough science.

HORIZON 2020 APPLICATIONS REPORTED BY FINISHED COST ACTIONS			
Number of Actions with ended Action report	Number of proposals	Number of successful proposals	Success rate
362	1152	435	38%

## ANNEX 7 – CORE ACTIVITIES OF THE COST ACTIONS PLUS ADD-ON ACTIVITIES



The add-on activities are implemented in cooperations with several EU R&I initiatives, such as:



