

## **Statement from the COST Scientific Committee**

The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) is an intergovernmental funding organisation for research and innovation networks with a membership of 43 countries. Our mission is to provide networking opportunities for researchers and innovators to strengthen Europe's capacity to address scientific, technological, and societal challenges. We have been implementing this mission since 1971 by funding bottom-up, excellence-driven, open, and inclusive networks for peaceful purposes in all areas of science and technology. Known as COST Actions, there are currently more than 250 running networks.

COST Actions **bring together around 60,000 researchers** with different scientific backgrounds and diversified career paths. Actions are unique because of their openness and flexibility: researchers do not have to be part of the proposing network to participate in the Action and Actions can easily adjust towards new, timely questions. This means that researchers and innovators, in particular **young researchers and those in less-connected countries or regions**, can benefit by joining ongoing Actions. At the same time, Actions are selected on the basis of excellence, with a focus on identifying and funding interdisciplinary ideas that have less opportunities in other funding streams.

Over the last four years, the size of the COST Action community **has grown by 25%**. Most growth took place in Widening Countries, as well as among researchers affiliated to smaller research performing institutions. In its latest Open Call (October 2024), COST received 845 proposals – the highest number ever and a 60% increase from the previous year. This shows a **growing interest** in and demand for open, inclusive research networks. With the current budget, COST can fund only 8% of submitted proposals, leaving many excellent proposals unfunded.

To accommodate this surge and to ensure that funding is available for excellent ideas, COST should be able to fund **at least 50% more new Actions per year**. To achieve this ambitious goal, it is crucial to reinforce the budget allocated to COST and we call upon the European Commission, European Parliament, and Member States to support this ambition. Without an increase in funding, the programme risks not being able to meet rising demand for pan-European networking and it would be restricted in its capacity to support research collaboration.

As the COST Scientific Committee, we see that COST Actions create an enormous impact. Actions are **platforms of integration** for those in less-connected countries and institutions, thus ensuring that all researchers have access to pan-European research networks. COST Actions are a stepping stone for follow-up funding opportunities: 39% of Horizon Europe proposals submitted by Actions are successful, beating the average success rate by a factor of three. Meanwhile, over 3000 researchers and innovators currently hold leadership positions within their COST Action. For many, this is a first experience leading and administering a European R&I project. This contributes to structural **capacity building** in the administration and successful execution of research in Europe and beyond, whilst supporting the career development of those involved.

By scaling up, COST would be better positioned to drive scientific breakthroughs and innovation in key areas, from health and climate change to AI and digital transformation, while strengthening Europe's research ecosystem. With enhanced financial backing, we, as the Scientific Committee believe that COST can greatly expand its impact across the European Research Area.

## Signatories

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Dr Órla Murphy	Ireland	<i>Vice-Chair</i>
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Prof Min Reuchamps	Belgium	
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