



Gender Equality Plan for COST Activities

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
1.1. Rationale.....	3
1.2. Objective.....	3
2. Analysis phase: state of play and areas for improvement.....	3
3. Planning and implementation phase	4
3.1. Before the COST Action kicks off	4
3.2. At the start of the COST Action.....	5
3.3. During the COST Action	5
3.4. At the level of the COST Association.....	6
4. Monitoring phase: setting indicators to monitor progress	7
5. COST statement on sexual harassment.....	8

This is a living document
Last updated: November 2024

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) is fully committed to support the advancement of gender equality in all COST activities, with a specific focus on the COST Actions. The COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy strongly encourages gender balance in its research networks, as well as the take up of leadership positions by women COST Action participants. As such, COST aims to ensure equal opportunities and gender-friendly career advancement.

Regarding the contents of the research COST Actions carry out, COST embraces the view shared and advanced by the [European Commission](#) that truly excellent research will always explore potential gender dimensions.

Women's rights and gender equality are under increasing pressure in some societies, also in COST Member Countries and other countries participating in COST Actions. Those challenges are of course not limited to Europe. COST has a role to play in securing equal opportunities in all our activities, and to not accept any inequality of opportunity based on gender.

In order to formalise, structure, and advance gender equality initiatives and activities of the COST Programme, in November 2021 the COST Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) decided to establish a Working Group on 'the development of a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) for activities in the COST Programme'. This GEP is the result of the work of the CSO Working Group. The COST Administration shall be responsible for the promotion, implementation, and monitoring of the GEP for activities in the COST Programme.

1.2. Objective

The overall objective of this GEP is to promote an inclusive culture and a gender dimension in any research carried out in COST Actions, and, where possible, on the additional activities for COST Actions organised by the COST Association. This GEP will be a 'living document', which will allow for details to be developed, adjusted and updated over time, thereby increasing its long-term impact.

A separate GEP is under development for the COST Association as a legal entity. This will be released later in 2024.

2. Analysis phase: state of play and areas for improvement

COST nourishes open networks of excellence in all scientific domains and aims to be the leading networking instrument in the European Research Area (ERA). To achieve this goal, research and innovation excellence is an absolute requirement. Promoting excellence and quality throughout all our activities while providing equal opportunities for all is a prerequisite. As such COST wants to improve gender balance in COST Actions and its other activities, and on all levels, in the fields where either men or women are underrepresented. Studies have shown that diverse teams are more innovative, and that gender diversity can lead to better research outcomes. In striving to achieve gender equality in the activities of the COST Actions, the full potential of excellence can be reached.

The current state of gender statistics within the COST Actions demonstrates a commendable level of gender balanced representation across various roles and activities. Only for the COST Action Chair position men are still in majority.

Empowering and retaining young researchers and innovators is also a strategic priority of COST, offering opportunities for networking and personal contact with more experienced researchers and innovators. To date, among young participants, there are equal numbers of men and women.

The high number of women researchers and innovators participating in COST Actions and adopting leadership positions places COST in a very good position to promote good practise. Some COST Actions are addressing gender balance from different perspectives, also in fields traditionally mostly occupied by men. There are also fields of research that have generally attracted mostly women and could benefit from more men researchers. Even research fields attracting a high number of women researchers often suffer from a lack of women in leadership positions. Regardless of which gender prevails in a particular field, such inequality is harmful to the research endeavour. There is a need for more role models in some research fields, so as to achieve gender balance and improve career continuation. Here COST can play an important role by providing opportunities for training as well as role models and mentoring schemes.

There are two main challenges regarding gender balance in COST activities:

1. Even though the number of women and men in the Actions are equal, there are still fewer women Action Chairs;
2. Looking into different fields of research there is still a clear gender divide – resulting in a majority of men in some COST Actions and a majority of women in others.

The gender balance in COST's evaluation activities has so far not been in the focus of COST's reporting. However, in order to ensure women participation is as equal as possible across all activities, thorough statistics on the ratio will now be gathered and reported.

3. Planning and implementation phase

The planning and implementation phase sets the stage for COST to make meaningful steps in gender equality. By setting clear desired outcomes and guiding targets, COST can measure its progress and hold itself accountable, ensuring that gender equality remains integral to its mission of fostering research excellence and inclusivity. As shown in the previous chapter, the COST Actions perform well in terms of gender balance, despite some remaining challenges.

The ambition of the COST programme is to maintain the overall level of gender balance with regard to overall participation in COST Actions for both Inclusiveness Target Countries and non-Inclusiveness Target Countries' participants, and to achieve gender balance throughout the COST Actions and within overall leadership positions. This chapter provides an overview of several measures that can be taken to reach these objectives. An overview of recommendations for both the COST Actions as well as centralised activities of the COST Administration are listed below.

3.1. Before the COST Action kicks off

- The COST Administration will inform COST National Coordinators about the existence of the GEP for COST activities, and advise them to inform all potential, actual and future participants on COST's commitments and the relevance of gender equality for COST Actions;
- The COST Administration will advise Main Proposers, Action Chair Candidates, and COST National Coordinators to include a reference to the GEP for COST activities in a standard e-mail to prospective or new members of a network.

3.2. At the start of the COST Action

- The COST Administration will mention the importance of the GEP for COST activities at the first Management Committee meeting of the Action, and repeatedly at the other main activities organised of the Action;
- The COST Administration will highlight the importance of ensuring a gender balance in research networks, as well as appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research networking and the importance of a gender balanced leadership team;
- The COST Administration will encourage the nomination of a Gender Equality Advisor within the COST Action;
- The COST Administration will encourage the organisation of Action events with a gender focus;
- The COST Administration will encourage the development of a COST Action Gender Equality Plan. In order to assist Actions that wish to develop a GEP, COST has developed a template that is available here <https://www.cost.eu/gep-template> and can be customised with a networks needs, preferences, and priorities;
- The COST Administration will point new COST Actions to existing initiatives such as [Gendered Innovations](#) and the [GEAR Tool](#);
- The COST Administration will encourage Action members to sign up for the COST Gender Equality Community, a peer-to-peer platform,¹ and the Gendered Innovations' mailing list² for the latest gender-related news.

3.3. During the COST Action

- The COST Administration will encourage COST Actions to cite and link in their publications to EU gender equality initiatives;
- The COST Administration will, on a regular basis, inform the COST Actions on relevant developments at European level regarding gender-related topics and developments;
- The COST Administration will monitor the status of gender balance within COST Actions, and recommend that Actions include 'gender equality matters' as a recurring agenda item at their Management Committee meetings;
- The COST Administration will encourage COST Actions to use gender inclusive language in their internal and external network communication in order to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias;³
- The COST Action will actively explore ways in which additional participants from the underrepresented group could be attracted and invited to the COST Action. The COST

¹ Please contact communications@cost.eu to request access to this platform.

² Gendered Innovations mailing list by Stanford University: <https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/contact-us.html>

³ COST recommends the EIGE toolkit on gender-sensitive communication for further reading: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-sensitive-communication/first-steps-towards-more-inclusive-language/terms-you-need-know?language_content_entity=en

Administration will collect feedback and best practices from Actions who were successful and share with other COST Actions hoping to reach the same goal.

3.4. At the level of the COST Association

In addition to the activities taking place at the level of the COST Action, several initiatives will be centrally managed at the level of the COST Administration, creating a multiplier effect within the wider COST community.

- The COST Administration and COST National Coordinators will highlight the importance of ensuring a gender balance in research networks at COST Info Days, as well as appropriate consideration of the gender dimension in research networking in the Actions. The COST gender factsheet and a link to the [COST web page on gender equality](#) can be used for this purpose by the COST Administration itself but also by the COST National Coordinators for their local events;
- After the approval by the CSO of the new COST Actions every year, new networks that have an excellent score regarding 'orientation in gender balance' (meaning that their objectives explicitly take into account gender balance) can be flagged and put in the spotlight via social media coverage, news articles, mentioned on the [COST web page on gender equality](#). Also, during webinars/trainings on gender equality in R&I these flagged COST Actions can be used as 'best practice' examples. The same will apply to Actions with explicit gender considerations in their research subjects;
- The COST Administration will take care to strive for gender equality when contacting external experts for evaluation as well as when calling on nominated experts for ad-hoc review panels. Gender-disaggregated data (on women participation as a whole as well as broken down by OECD fields) will be included in the relevant reports to the CSO;
- COST Academy events around gender will be organised on a regular basis. Already in October 2022, two COST Academy pilot gender webinars/trainings took place;
- COST Connect events around gender will be organised on a regular basis;
- COST will continue to play an active role in the Microsoft 'Conversations Unscripted' multistakeholder initiative that brings together European leaders to explore avenues to reduce the gender gap in the fields of politics and technology;
- Important milestone days such as International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 February) and International Women's Day (8 March) will be marked by showcasing gender-related successes from COST Actions via the COST website and social media channels;
- The COST Administration will continue to coordinate the Gender Equality peer-to-peer platform community.

As the gender dimension in research concerns the scientific contents of the research carried out, this is not per se covered by what COST funds. However, true to its commitment to excellence and inclusion, COST assumes all Actions to carry out excellent research paying attention to all relevant aspects. Thus COST recommends to all parties of a COST Action to apply sex and/or gender analysis to their projects, taking into consideration who is targeted by the research, who benefits from it, and whether and how an approach or outcome may have different implications for different groups (men, women, people with diverse genders, and intersectional categories such as age, social status etc.) and hence may require an update (extra provisions, such as changes in research design, interview partners, samples etc.) to be holistic and excellent.

4. Monitoring phase: setting indicators to monitor progress

COST is committed to monitoring progress regarding a number of gender related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and related Horizon Europe targets. The results of this annual monitoring exercise are published on the dedicated [COST gender equality web page](#).

This section gives an overview of the state of play regarding women representation in COST Actions, linked to COST Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and their specific targets for Horizon Europe. As the main ambition of this Gender Equality Plan is to achieve gender balance in the COST Actions, additional monitoring on the level of individual COST Action will be performed.

KPI	State of Play (June 2023)	Target for Horizon Europe
Share of women researchers and innovators in COST Actions	49% of women representation in COST Actions	50%
Share of leadership positions occupied by women researchers	52% of leadership positions occupied by women researchers <i>NB: 37% of the Chairs and 49% of the Vice-Chairs are women</i>	50%
Share of women among the young researchers and innovators participating in COST Actions	55% of the total young participants in COST Actions are women	50%
Share of women researchers and innovators coming from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)	57% of ITC participants in COST Actions are women	50%

With regard to evaluation of COST Actions proposals, COST strives to ensure a gender balance within the panel of evaluators, applicable in all OECD science fields. Therefore, following KPI is suggested:

Share of women evaluators participating in an evaluation (per COST Open Call and per OECD field)	Figure not included in last report to CSO. To be included by 2024 (results from the Open Call oc-2023-1)	50%
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5. COST statement on sexual harassment

COST fully embraces the general acknowledged principles and definition on sexual harassment, as developed by the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#):

“Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.”

More detailed information on this topic can be found on this dedicated webpage of the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#). An overview with links to findings and resources specific to the research environment, based on EU-funded projects can be found on the [CORDIS](#) webpage.

