



COST in Switzerland

European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research

Guidelines for participation



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

State Secretariat for Education and Research SER

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Swiss Confederation

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What is COST?

Basic research and research in the pre-competitive area

34 member states
one cooperating state

Switzerland, a member with full rights

Coopération européenne dans le domaine de la recherche scientifique et technique

COST is a framework for pan-European cooperation in and coordination of research activities. Founded by a ministerial conference in 1971, COST is the oldest European initiative for collaboration in scientific and technical research. This research initiative makes it possible for the various national facilities, institutes, universities and private industry to work jointly on a wide range of R&D activities.

Today, COST – together with Eureka and the EU framework programmes – is one of the three pillars of joint European research activities in the European Research Area ERA. These three complementary structures have differing areas of research. COST is orientated towards basic research and research in the pre-competitive area. Through the dynamism of European cooperation, a structure as flexible as COST offers the possibility of recognising and taking up current developments in good time. Multidisciplinary thinking and integrated research activities, for example in the field of humanities and social sciences or the nanosciences, enable COST and Switzerland to work together in important research areas at an early stage, and also to take on a leading role.

Today, COST comprises 34 member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, The Republic of Serbia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Israel is a cooperating state.

Switzerland's position within COST

Switzerland has been a member of COST since its formation in 1971 and has the same rights and duties as the other member states. The State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, deals with the administrative and financial side of membership in COST. COST is supported by the Swiss Mission to the EU and by the Integration Office of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, DFA, and the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, DEA.

How does Cost operate?

Basic principles

Cooperation within the framework of COST is based on four fundamental characteristics:

Concerted actions

In COST, the unit of research is an 'action', which has as its objective the coordination of national research activities at European level; a management committee looks after administrative aspects of the work.

Bottom-up

Research workers from any member state can propose an action following their own scientific interest. Generation of new COST actions is carried out through a published open call for proposals.

Voluntary nature of participation

Each member state is free to decide whether it wishes to take part in a concerted action (à la carte participation).

National financing

Research is financed by each member state in accordance with its own rules; only the administrative costs of pan-European coordination are borne by a joint COST credit.

COST domains

COST currently comprises nine domains with a domain committee for each of these fields.

- Biomedicine and Molecular Biosciences (BMBS)
- Chemistry and Molecular Sciences and Technologies (CMST)
- Earth System Science and Environmental Management (ESSEM)
- Food and Agriculture (FA)
- Forests, their Products and Services (FPS)
- Individuals, Society, Culture & Health (ISCH)
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Materials, Physical and Nanosciences (MPNS)
- Transport and Urban Development (TUD)

Technical Annex

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Research programmes (= actions)

Each COST action has a specific scientific subject and clearly defined objectives, whose achievement results from national research activities (projects) coordinated with each other. The scientific and managerial description of a COST action is given in the so-called Technical Annex.

The formal basis of these actions is in each case a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which (in a legally non-binding sense) sets out the intention of the Parties to achieve the objectives of the research programme with the available resources. An action comes into being when at least five COST member states have accepted the MoU. A management committee composed of the representatives of the Parties of the action, organises and coordinates the research work.

An action runs for an average of four years.

COST structures at European level

Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

The Committee of Senior Officials, made up of two representatives of each member state, is the decision-making body of COST. It is responsible for the strategy of COST and also decides on the proposed new actions, among other things. The members of the Committee of Senior Officials are responsible for the linkage between the decisions at European level and the management in the respective states.

Group for Legal, Administrative, Financial and Strategic Matters (JAF)

The Group for Legal, Administrative, Financial and Strategic Matters (JAF) deals with the relevant problems submitted to it by the Committee of Senior Officials. It also deals with strategic matters and prepares the meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials. The JAF Group is made up of selected members of the Committee of Senior Officials.

Non-permanent working groups of the Committee of Senior Officials, ad hoc groups

In addition, ad hoc groups of varying composition (Committee of Senior Officials members and/or external experts) can be formed to investigate other aspects – such as evaluation and monitoring procedures or interdisciplinary scientific fields to be specially promoted.

Domain committees (DC)

Domain committees (DC) consist of experts from the respective domain and are nominated by COST member states. The DC pursue the development of their domain, follow the actions in progress, evaluate actions and forward new actions to the CSO.

Additional experts

Two additional experts can be announced per domain and COST member state. These experts form a “pool of expertise” that can be used in an ad hoc manner by the DCs.

Management committees (MC)

Each COST action includes a management committee (MC), made up of the delegates of the Parties. It is the task of this committee to coordinate the national research work within the international structure, so the objectives set can be achieved in accordance with an exact milestone programme.

Scientific COST secretariat (COST Office)

The COST secretariat is made up of two different bodies:

- The scientific COST secretariat, the COST Office, (implementing agent: European Research Foundation, ESF) supports the COST action and technical committee activities, and also manages their budget.
- The EU Council COST secretariat looks after the Committee of Senior Officials and the JAF Group, and also other ad hoc groups.

EU Council COST secretariat

COST structures in Switzerland

State Secretariat for Education and Research SER

The State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, is responsible for the scientific, financial and administrative aspects of COST. The SER decides on the participation of Switzerland in new COST actions, determines the distribution of the available money to the individual actions and projects and appoints the Swiss delegates to the management and technical committees.

National coordinator

The SER represents Switzerland on the Committee of Senior Officials in the person of the national coordinator. Finally, the SER fulfils all administrative tasks in connection with the operation of the COST system in Switzerland.

Mission of Switzerland to the European Union

The Mission of Switzerland to the EU also represents Switzerland on the Committee of Senior Officials. It fosters contacts with the EU authorities and accepts the Memoranda of Understanding for new COST actions.

Interdepartmental cooperation

The Integration Office of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs/Federal Department of Economic Affairs supports the SER in matters of European and international law.

Swiss representatives in the domain committees

For each domain committee, the SER appoints one representative. The appointees are specialists who have a good knowledge of the Swiss research groups working in their wider domain. The domain committee delegates are able to advise the SER with regard both to the strategy to be followed in the domain concerned and to the choice of actions of interest to our country.

Swiss representatives in the management committees

For each COST action, the SER appoints one or two representatives to the management committee of the action. On this committee, the delegate (or coordinator) represents all Swiss researchers taking part in the action. In agreement with the coordinator, the SER makes a certain budget available for each signed action. He or she coordinates the Swiss research activities with each other and within the action.

How does participation in COST take place?

The researchers consider to be necessary collaboration with colleagues from several (at least five) European countries on a subject. They choose COST as the appropriate platform for their cooperation.

Open call

Swiss researchers launch a new COST action

In accordance with the bottom-up principle, the initiative for a new COST action comes from the researchers. There are essentially two different starting points:

Researchers who wish to launch a new action submit a proposal to the COST open call which is published normally twice a year (e.g. on <http://www.cost.esf.org/>).

The following steps are necessary to launch an action (see also Figure 1):

Short proposal

The researchers draw up a short proposal of the research scheme (technical annex to the Memorandum of Understanding). The research projects can be carried out within the research structure described in this way.

Evaluation/Selection of topics

The action proposal is evaluated by the domain committee of the respective domain.

Full proposal

If the outcome of this evaluation is positive, the proposer is invited to submit a full proposal with a complete Technical Annex.

Peer review

The full proposal is assessed in a peer review process.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The Technical Annex is supplemented by a Memorandum of Understanding.

It means that the Parties have the definite intention of achieving the aims of the action. This Memorandum of Understanding provides the formal basis of a COST action.

Formal and qualitative criteria

The proposal for a new COST action must fulfil certain formal and qualitative criteria. The necessary information can be obtained from the published open call, from the domain committee delegate, the COST Office, the COST homepage or from the SER.

Committee of Senior Officials approves MoU

If the MoU is approved by the Committee of Senior Officials, the COST countries wishing to take part in the COST action can accept this. If at least five countries have accepted the MoU, the action starts to run and research can begin.

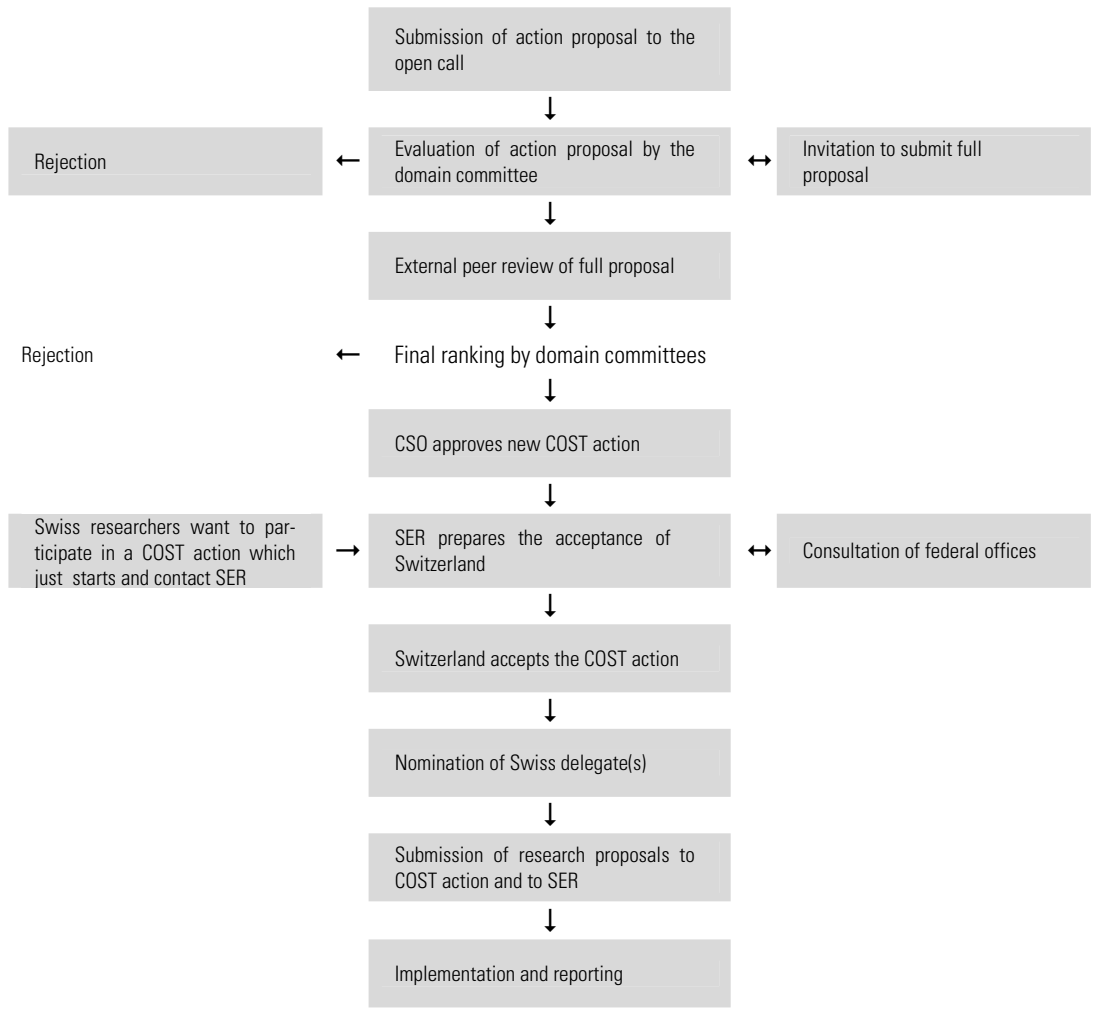
Swiss acceptance

The procedure for accepting the Memorandum of Understanding is carried out in the SER. In the course of this procedure, the SER management decides on participation in the action and the Mission of Switzerland to the EU accepts the MoU.

Chairperson of the action

Whoever initiates a new action in most cases also makes himself available as chairperson of this action. Switzerland also appoints this person as Swiss representative of the action.

Figure 1: The steps necessary to launch a new COST action or to participate in an action that has just been approved by the CSO.



Swiss researchers take part in an action which is just starting, or one which is already in progress

Researchers are interested in the subject of the action and are willing to coordinate their research activities at European level.

Swiss researchers would like to participate in an action which has already been approved by the Committee of Senior Officials; they therefore contact the domain committee delegate and the SER. In the SER, the procedure for the acceptance of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is then set in motion, in the course of which the SER management decides on participation and the Swiss Mission in Brussels officially accepts the MoU. If at least five countries have accepted the MoU, the action begins.

Swiss MC delegates

The Swiss researchers interested agree jointly with the technical delegate for the domain and with the SER on a Swiss delegate (= coordinator) in the management committee of the action.

Implementation of an action

Swiss participation in an action takes place on the basis of research projects, with funding for this research work coming from sources such as the Swiss National Science Foundation, CTI, SER, and other credits or in the form of contributions by private industry. In each case, the researchers concerned agree with the coordinator to present their project regularly within the framework of the various working groups. If a project which is to be financed by the SER is involved then the researcher must draw this to the attention of the Swiss coordinator for the action and submit an appropriate application to the SER (see below).

Meetings, seminars, brief assignments, publications, etc.

The activities within the action include meetings, seminars, brief assignments to other laboratories and institutions (Short term scientific missions), joint publications, etc.

With the acceptance of an action by Switzerland, a public research subsidy is not automatically assured. If a state subsidy is desired, an application must be made to the appropriate bodies (e.g. SER, SNSF, CTI, etc.) and is subject to the specific rules and procedures of the respective funding agency.

Financing of Swiss participation

It is one of the basic principles of COST that the research is financed nationally.

Four-year credit line

Switzerland is one of the few COST member states to have a special credit for financing their national participation in COST. This consists of a committed credit voted by parliament for a period of four years.

For 2008 – 2011 around 28 million CHF is available.

The SER/COST credit serves the following purposes:

- **Coordination and cooperation**
Financing of coordination activities, i.e. of activities which are connected with international collaboration and with the organisation of Swiss participation (meetings, seminars) and which are not covered otherwise.
- **Research promotion contributions**
Contributions can be paid to research projects which need support in respect of the internationalisation of their research work. This is primarily in the form of contributions to staff resources, travel expenses and consumable materials. The research infrastructure is provided by universities, colleges and other research institutions.
- **COST Fund contributions**
Swiss contribution to the European COST Fund.

Submission of applications and evaluation

If a research project is to be supported by the SER, an application must be submitted to the SER. The necessary forms can be called up via the Internet:
<http://www.sbf.admin.ch/form-e.html>.

Applications can be submitted to meet two closing dates:
31 March, 30 September.

The sequence of application processing in the SER is shown in Figure 2 and described in a flyer available from the SER / COST homepage.

Each project must be approved by the following bodies:

- the management committee of the action which prepares comments on the conformity and usefulness of the project in terms of the objectives of the action;
- the SER which has the project assessed by at least three external experts.

Use of the COST credit is regulated by contracts and financial commitments between the SER and delegates or research partners.

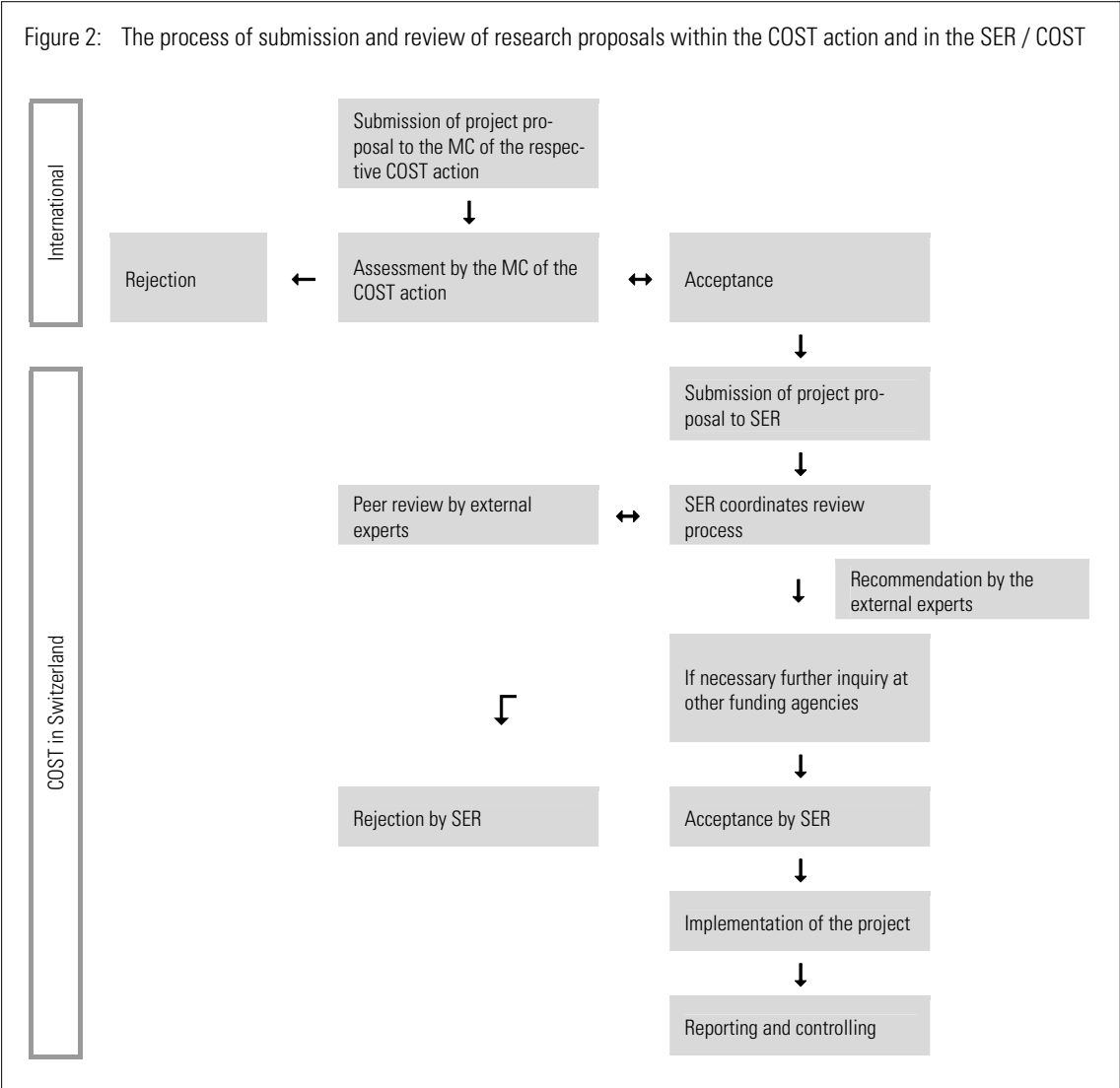
Research contracts

Research contracts regulate the financing of research work, in particular salaries (mostly graduate students working for doctorates), travelling expenses and expenditure for consumable material. It should be noted that in the case of profit-orientated private undertakings (industrial firms, consultancy practices, self-employed workers, etc.) the COST credit supports the research expenditure only to a maximum of 50%.

Obligations of contract holders

If researchers receive financial support from the SER for a research project, they undertake to maintain a separate account for this money and to submit a scientific and financial report to the SER annually.

Figure 2: The process of submission and review of research proposals within the COST action and in the SER / COST





How does one obtain information about COST?

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COST Switzerland within the State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, provides information. The SER maintains an Internet page which contains current information about new actions and basic information about COST. The SER issues an annual report which provides comprehensive information about Swiss participation in COST for interested groups from science and politics. Finally, the scientific reports on COST projects are published annually via the Internet and on CD-ROM.

Euresearch
info@euresearch.ch
www.euresearch.ch

The latest COST developments are reported in Euresearch Info, the monthly bulletin of the Swiss information network for the EU framework programmes. Here, information is available about new COST actions in which Switzerland is taking part, examples of participation, information about individual domains, announcements of publications, seminars, etc.

The Euresearch regional advisory offices also have information on COST.

Swiss representation in the
COST Committee of Senior Officials

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Scientific COST Secretariat, Brussels
www.cost.esf.org

The Scientific COST Secretariat in Brussels maintains a comprehensive homepage.

COST at the EU-Council
www.consilium.europa.eu
(follow "policies" to "COST")

The EU-Council supports the CSO and informs a more politically interested audience about COST.

