



COST in Switzerland

Guidelines for participation

European Cooperation
in the Field of Scientific
and Technical Research



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Home Affairs DHA
State Secretariat for Education and Research SER

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What is COST?

Basic research and research in the pre-competitive area

35 member states
one cooperating state

Switzerland, a member with full rights

European Cooperation in Science and Technology

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 and SMEs 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 and Innovation 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, 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 35 member states: Today, COST comprises 35 member states: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, F.Y.R. of Macedonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom. 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 works together with the Swiss Mission to the EU and the Integration Office of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, DFA, and the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, DEA.

How does COST operate?

Concerted actions

Basic principles

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

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

Researchers from any COST 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 COST member state is free to decide whether it wishes to take part in a concerted action (variable geometry).

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 each action is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which (in a legally nonbinding 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.

The Action lifetime is four years.

COST structures at European level

COST Ministerial Conference

The COST Ministerial Conferences, which are held on average every five years give the political guidance for COST. The latest COST Ministerial Conference took place on 15 June 2010 in Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

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 DCs pursue the development of their domain, evaluate Action proposals in the open call, forward new actions to the CSO, follow the actions in progress and evaluate finished actions.

Additional experts

Additional experts can be announced for each domain by the COST member states. These experts form a “pool of expertise” that can be used in an ad hoc manner by the DCs and the COST Office.

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)

EU Council COST secretariat

The COST secretariat is made up of two different bodies:

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

COST structures in Switzerland

State Secretariat for Education and Research SER

The State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, is responsible for all financial and administrative aspects of COST. The SER decides on the participation of Switzerland in new COST actions on request of researchers, determines the distribution of the available money to COST cooperation activities and to the submitted research projects. The SER appoints the Swiss delegates to the management and domain committees.

National coordinator

The SER represents Switzerland on the Committee of Senior Officials in the person of the national coordinator. 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 fosters contacts with the EU authorities and cooperates with the SER/COST whenever necessary.

Interdepartmental cooperation

The Integration Office of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs/Federal Department of Economic Affairs advises 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 up to 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.

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

Short proposal

Evaluation/Selection of topics

Full proposal

Peer review

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Formal and qualitative criteria

Committee of Senior Officials approves MoU

Swiss Action acceptance

Chairperson of the action

Switzerland-based 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.eu>).

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

The researchers draw up a short proposal (about three pages) of the planned research (technical annex to the Memorandum of Understanding).

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

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

The full proposal is assessed in a peer review process.

The Technical Annex is supplemented by a Memorandum of Understanding.

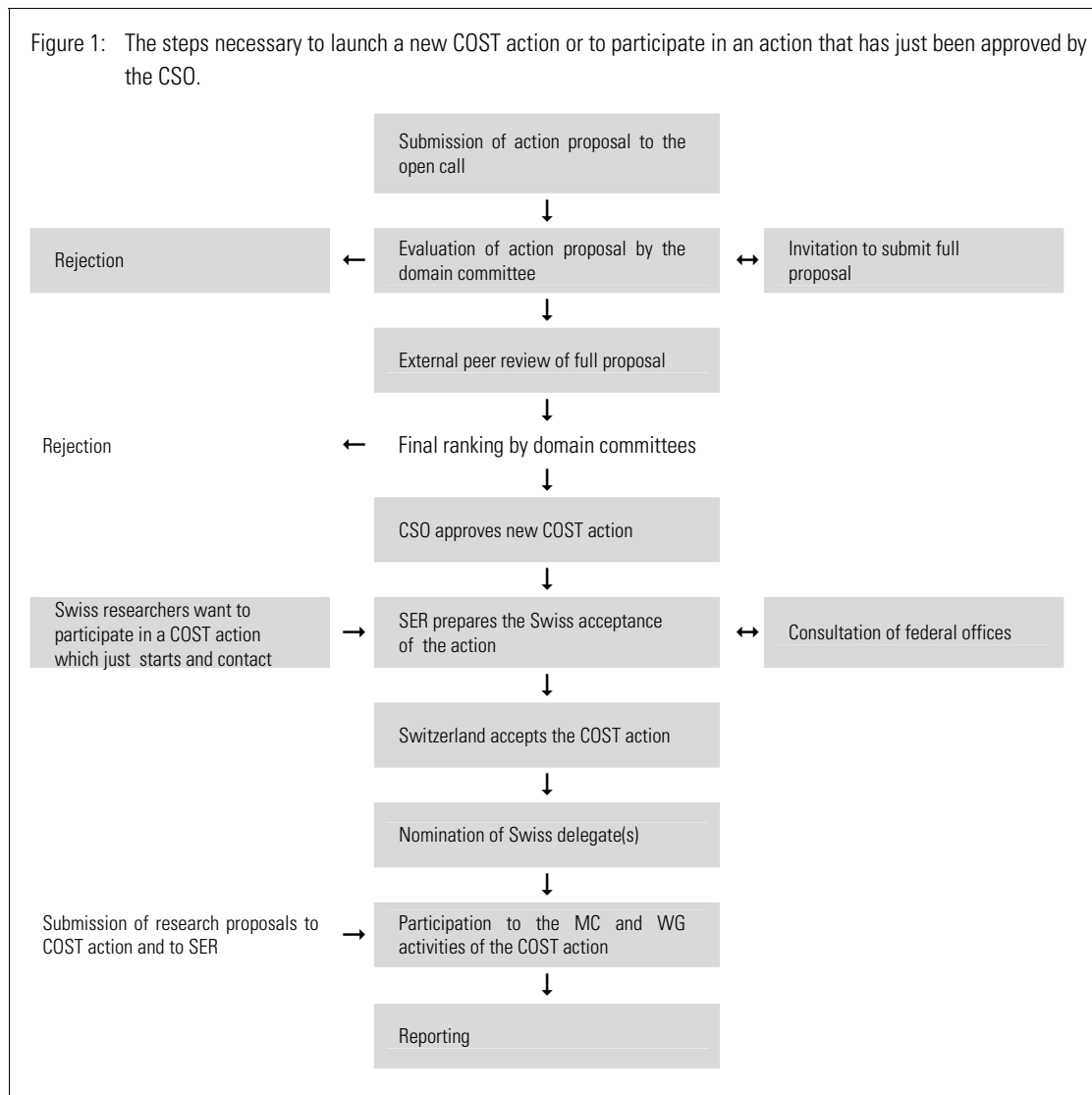
It means that the Parties have the definite intention of achieving the aims of the action. This Memorandum of Understanding provides the formal basis of a COST action.

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.

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.

The procedure for accepting the Memorandum of Understanding is largely carried out in the SER. In the course of this procedure, the SER management decides on participation in the action on request by researchers and accepts the MoU. The researcher has to provide a statement of interest.

Whoever initiates a new action in most cases also makes himself or herself available as chairperson of this action. In such a case Switzerland can still appoint two persons as Swiss representatives to the management committee of the action.



Switzerland-based 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 accepts the MoU. If at least five countries have accepted the MoU, the action begins with a kick-off meeting.

Swiss MC delegates

The Switzerland -based researchers interested in a COST Action agree jointly with the SER and with the Swiss DC member of the relevant domain on the two Swiss delegates (= 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 SNF, the Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI, the State Secretariat for Education and Research 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 of the Action. 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, short visits, publications, etc.

The activities within the action include meetings, workshops, seminars, short scientific visits 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 by the SER

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

COST budget line

Switzerland is one of the few COST member states to have a special credit line for financing some of their national participation in COST. This consists of a committed credit voted by parliament for a period of four years. For 2008 - 2011 CHF 28 million (2012: CHF 5.4 million) 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 COST 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 (PhD students and PostDocs), 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, evaluation process and contracts

If a research project is to be supported by the SER, an application must be submitted to the SER. Detailed information related to project submission is given and regularly updated in a leaflet to be downloaded from <http://www.sbf.admin.ch/form-e.html>.

The related forms can be called up from the same internet address

Applications can be submitted to meet the following closing dates

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 external experts and according to the criteria given in the flyer.

Research contracts

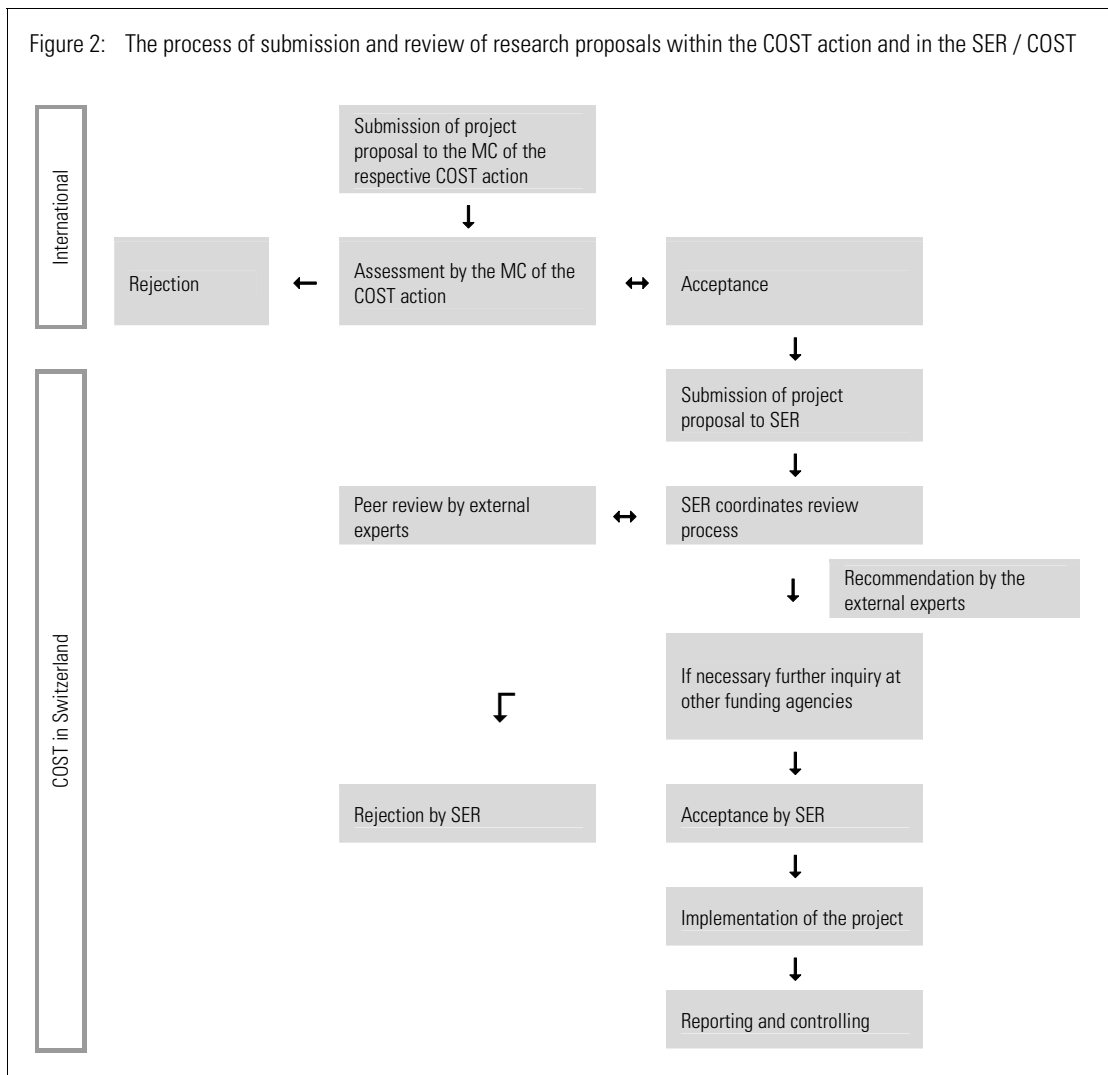
Use of the COST credit is regulated by contracts and financial commitments between the SER and the researcher representing his/her institution.

Research contracts regulate the financing of research work, in particular salaries (mostly graduate students working for doctorates, PostDocs), travelling expenses (outside Europe upon request only and reimbursement up to a maximum of 50%) and expenditure for consumable materials. It should be noted that in the case of profit-orientated private undertakings (industrial firms, SMEs, 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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and Research SER
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Tel. +41 (0)31 322 88 82
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COST@sbf.admin.ch
www.sbf.admin.ch

The COST competence center within the State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, provides information on COST. The SER maintains an Internet homepage 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 the Euresearch e-Newsletter, the monthly bulletin of the Swiss information network for the EU framework programmes. Here, information is available about the open call for new Actions, newly approved COST actions, the various domains, etc. The Euresearch regional 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.eu

The Scientific COST Secretariat in Brussels, the COST Office, maintains a comprehensive homepage.

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

The EU-Council hosts the Secretariat of the CSO.



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