COST Action CA24158

Disparities In Surgical Specialization and Education in Cancer Training (DISSECT)

Call for applications inclusiveness target countries conference grants

for implementation from 1 November 2025 to 31 October 2026

Call 1

1. About DISSECT

Cancer surgery remains a key treatment for solid malignancies, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where access to newer therapies is limited. With the growing global cancer burden, the demand for high-quality surgery will rise. As precision medicine advances, cancer surgeons need not only technical expertise but also an understanding of multidisciplinary cancer care, preventive and palliative care, clinical trials, and effective communication. However, disparities in surgical oncology training exist across Europe, affecting access to complex cases, clinical trials, mentorship, and research facilities. These variations are linked to economic disparities, leading to differences in patient outcomes.

The DISSECT project aims to identify and address these disparities in cancer surgery training in Europe. By fostering knowledge exchange between high- and low-resource settings, the project will enhance multidisciplinary training, mentorship, and research capacity. It aligns with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to ensure equitable access to high standards of care and to reduce cancer-related inequalities. DISSECT seeks to create a sustainable impact on cancer surgery outcomes through improved training and innovation in surgical education.

The main objective of the DISSECT Action is to create a cohesive network and identify the critical gaps and variabilities in cancer surgery training in Europe. The consortium aims to leverage on knowledge exchange between high and low-resource settings, strengthen the multidisciplinary approach, integrate patient partnership and facilitate mentorship in cancer surgery training, and foster research and surgical innovation. This will be done through achievement of our objectives:

1. Perform a needs assessment to identify areas of cancer surgery training disparities through surveys and focused group discussions.
2. Organize at least two multi-stakeholder meetings within the funding period to develop a roadmap to address critical areas of disparities in cancer surgery training and assess its impact.
3. Identify five priority areas of disparities in cancer surgery training where collaboration from high and lower resource settings can have meaningful impact.
4. Generate at least five open access publications from the DISSECT network in peer-reviewed journals.
5. Facilitate knowledge exchange and a multidisciplinary team approach between high and low-resource settings
6. Conduct joint MDTs with virtual clinical discussions between paired high and low resource institutions within the network DISSECT

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7. Assess the impact of these joint MDT sessions on patient outcomes, surgical decision-making among young surgeons and research output among trainees.
8. Develop learning pathways and tailored mentorship programs for surgical trainees dedicated to patient-focused cancer research, effective leadership, communication, and innovation
9. Develop and assess the feasibility of a tele-mentoring program for surgeons to improve competency in cancer surgery, decision-making for complex clinical cases, and predicting surgical outcomes

Five working groups (WG) focus on work as follows:

- WG1. Identification & evaluation of disparities
- WG2. Building research capacity
- WG3. Multidisciplinary teams (MDT) knowledge exchange
- WG4. Surgical mentorship
- WG5. Innovation

Detailed information on the planned activities in the Working Groups can be found in this document.

2. What is a Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC) conference grant

ITC Conference grants fund an oral presentation of their own work within the scope of the Action by an Action Participant affiliated to a legal entity located in an Inclusiveness Target Country / Near Neighbour Country in a high-level conference fully organized by a third party, i.e. not organized nor co-organized by the COST Action.

ITC Conference grant:

- Serve COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy;
- Supports Action Participant affiliated to a legal entity located in an Inclusiveness Target Countries/ Near Neighbour Countries to establish a strong network and increase their visibility in the research community through sharing their work and to gain knowledge;
- Can contribute to increasing visibility of the Action.

ITC Conference grant benefits to:

- ITC Conference Grantee: receives support for attending and presenting their own work within the scope of the Action (oral presentation) in a conference and can establish new contacts for future collaborations.

3. Open call

Applications should support the DISSECT objectives and Working Groups as described in this document. This call is open-ended. There is no set deadline. Each application will be processed on a first -come first-served basis. It is especially aimed at ITC conference grant that will be implemented from November 2025 to October 2026.

4. Eligibility

ITC conference grant are available to young researchers/innovators (<40 years) employed by, or affiliated to, an institution, organization, or legal entity in an **Inclusiveness Target Country** or a legal entity in a **near neighbour country (NNC)**. Institutions or entities based in International Partner Countries (IPC) are not eligible.

The eligible countries are listed in COST Documents & Guidelines, particularly, in the Country and Organisations Table.

5. Financial support

The financial support provides a contribution for travelling, accommodation and subsistence expenses, insurance costs, conference registration fee, and any publication costs arising. The final amount of financial support is decided by the Action Chair/Grant Holder based on the advice of the Grant Awarding Coordinator.

The financial support is provided in the form of a grant. No invoices are required.

6. The grant awarding process

The supported activity must be carried out entirely within one grant period. Each grant period runs from the 1 November until the 31 October of the following year.

Applications will be evaluated for their quality and for their relevance to the objectives of DISSECT and its Working Groups. To avoid time-wasting, each application will be first screened by the Grant Awarding Coordinator to check that it is complete and that it is relevant to the Action. Incomplete applications are rejected with the possibility to resubmit. Irrelevant applications are also rejected and cannot be resubmitted.

Following the passing of the screen, each application is reviewed by two (or three in case the outcome is not consistent) relevant Action members who are guided by the Grant Awarding Coordinator. This assessment considers the relevance of the presentation and of the conference to the Action. The Grant Awarding Coordinator advises the Action Chair who acts on the advice if the budget allows. Successful applicants receive a grant letter.

7. Application procedure

Applicants must have an e-COST profile and applications must be submitted online in e-COST via Apply for a Grant and selecting the 'ITC conference grant' option.

In addition to completing the fields, the following should be uploaded:

1. ITC Conference Grant Application (based on e-COST template)
2. Copy of the abstract of the accepted oral presentation
3. Acceptance (or invitation) letter from the conference organisers
4. The financial plan clearly indicating the expected costs (e.g., transport, accommation,..)

Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to Grant Awarding Coordinator, Sarah Cosyns (sarah.cosyns@ugent.be).

8. Submission of the report and payment

Once the activity has ended, the applicant claims the payment of the grant via e-COST. For this, the grantee submits the ITC conference grant report using the report template, and relevant documentation within 30 working days of the completion of the mission.
The report includes:

- Report template
- Certificate of attendance
- Programme of the conference or book of abstracts / proceedings indicating the oral presentation
- Copy of the given oral presentation

Failure to submit the grant report within 30 days will effectively cancel the grant. The Grant Awarding

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Coordinator is responsible for approving the grant report and informing the Grant Holder that the ITC conference grant has been successfully accomplished. After receipt of the approval by email, the Grant Holder will execute the payment of the grant.

Notes:
Each publication produced with support of a ITC conference grant must acknowledge the support of the COST Action and whenever possible use the COST and DISSECT logos (on slides and posters).

Acknowledgement text:
"This publication is based on work supported by the COST Action CA24158: Disparities In Surgical Specialization and Education in Cancer Training (DISSECT) ."

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