COST Action CA24158

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

Call for applications for virtual mobility 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
7. Assess the impact of these joint MDT sessions on patient outcomes, surgical decision-making

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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 virtual mobility grant

A Virtual Mobility (VM) Grant in a COST Action is a small grant that supports remote collaboration between researchers. It does not cover travel, because no travel is involved — instead, it provides a financial contribution for the time and effort you invest in completing a specific virtual task for the Action. The VM Grants cannot be used to attend virtual conferences or to purchase software license or set up a database.

Virtual Mobility grant benefits to:
- COST Action: uses a flexible tool to implement online activities inside the network, achieve the objectives and significantly increase their impact and reach. Contributes to European leadership in knowledge creation and increasing its innovation potential. However, this grant should not be used to compensate the tasks of leadership positions (e.g. the Grant Holder Manager, Grant Awarding Coordinator, etc.);
- VM grantee: develop(s) capacity in online collaboration and networking in a pan-European framework.

Examples of activities that can be performed by the VM grantee are:
- Virtual mentoring scheme, with special focus on activities and exchanges that can generate capacity building and new skills, particularly for Young Researchers and Innovators (e.g. managerial skills, methodological skills, communication skills, etc);
- To support the harmonisation and standardisation of methods and procedures within the Action networking activities, e.g.
    - setting up a survey amongst all Action members to collect different results and outcomes from experiments done in their respective labs and research groups;
    - coordinating the discussions to create common protocols to be used by the network afterwards;
    - preparing questionnaires and response scales to be used by the Action members as part of online networking activities.
- To support the implementation of research coordination related activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence, e.g.
    - computational or modelling activities;
    - data analysis of the Action for a specific report or activity.

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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 VMs that will be implemented from November 2025 to October 2026.

4. Eligibility

VM grants are available to applicants employed by, or affiliated to, an institution, organization, or legal entity in a **COST full/cooperating member 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 amount of funding provided through VM Grants is typically modest, reflecting the lower costs associated with virtual activities compared to physical mobility grants. Up to a maximum of EUR 1,500 in total can be awarded per grant. The final amount of financial support is decided by the Action Chair/Grant Holder based on the advice of the Grant Awarding Coordinator. For this year's work and budget plan, the average for a VM is set on €1,300.

Since the financial support comes as a grant, no invoices or other justification of the expenses will be requested.

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 proposed activity 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 'virtual mobility' option.

Applications comprise:

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1. An online Grant Application which includes:
   - A project title for the mission that communicates the content and purpose of the work.
   - Start and end date of the VM (within the active grant period up to 31 October 2026, i.e., no overlap across two consecutive grant periods).
   - Grant requested.
2. A completed Application Form (Application template) describing goals, description of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected results (outcomes) and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives.
3. A document setting out the financial plan clearly indicating the expected costs .
4. Applicant's curriculum vitae.

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 VM report using the report template, and relevant documentation within 30 working days of the completion of the mission.
The report includes:

- A detailed account of the activities carried out.
- An assessment of how the activity met its objective sand contributed to the COST Action goals
- A financial overview detailing how the grant funds were used.

Failure to submit the grant report within 30 days will effectively cancel the grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator is responsible for approving the grant report and informing the Grant Holder that the VM 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 VM 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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