



# LeverAge

## LeverAge: Action Inclusiveness Plan

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COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

## Preamble

At the MC 1 meeting in October 2023, the COST Action LeverAge MC expressed a strong commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. The Action inclusiveness plan reflects this commitment, enshrining our shared principles on diversity and inclusiveness in all its aspects. In the following, we define the scope of our aims regarding diversity and inclusiveness to holistically reflect the richness of the human experience, and lay out a 7-pronged plan to best realize these principles.

## Broadening the Definition of “Young”

The COST Association formally defines Young Researchers and Innovators (YRIs) as Action participants under the age of 40. We maintain that this definition of age diversity does not go far enough. It makes no exceptions for individuals with extenuating life circumstances (e.g., working mothers who, out of necessity, had to pursue their academic dreams later on in life) and does not account for individual differences in personality or emotional intelligence (e.g., “late bloomers” who struggled early on in their careers but nevertheless rose to shine later).

Therefore, to be truly age inclusive, LeverAge expands the definition of “young Action participants” to include 1) Action participants under the age of 40 and 2) Action participants who are in the early stages of their careers, defined as currently being enrolled in a PhD program or have completed the PhD within the last 10 years of a given Grant Period (GP). This broadened definition of “young Action participants” to *include both age and career stage* thereby recognizes the heterogeneity present in the working lifespan for age diverse groups.

## A Broad View of Geographic Diversity

The COST Association most clearly emphasizes geographic diversity with a concerted focus on Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs, <https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/excellence-and-inclusiveness/>). LeverAge accepts this emphasis and likewise affirms its commitment to advancing the cause of researchers and innovators from ITCs. Yet, we go further in two important ways.

First, to ensure that we harness and grow talent in every part of the European Research Area, LeverAge will also emphasize adding and nurturing Action participants from Near Neighbor Countries (NNCs, <https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/cost-global-networking/>). The NNCs, like ITCs, are all also underserved societies that COST can and should lift up by developing research on aging at work in these countries. Moreover, the NNCs bring a richness of cultural diversity to COST because they include a variety of ethnicities, nationalities, and religions that are not well represented in continental Europe. *ITCs and NNCs will thus be given equal priority.*

Second, to ensure global reach and help foster scientific excellence in Europe and beyond, LeverAge will additionally focus on integrating Action participants from *International Partner Countries* (IPCs, <https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/international-collaboration/>) *around the world*. More specifically, we will focus on adding IPC participants who are either a) leading lights in the science of work and aging, to help best enable global knowledge

transfer and multinational research collaboration or b) young Action participants, to help best enable our commitment to openness and inclusiveness for all.

## **Broadening the Definition of “Gender”**

The COST Association defines gender diversity with an emphasis on the inclusion of women. As of this writing, 65% of our participants and 72% of our leadership are women. It is thus clear that LeverAge is already among the most inclusive active COST Actions with regards to women researchers and innovators. Yet, we maintain that this definition of gender diversity does not go far enough. Advances in the psychology of gender over the last several decades evidence that the sex (men-women) binary is an incomplete measure of gender diversity. Equally as important are sexual orientation and gender identity diversity.

These include L (Lesbian), G (Gay), Bisexual (B), Transgender (T), Queer (Q), Intersex (I), Asexual (A), and others (+). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Asexual are sexual orientations other than the heterosexual norm. Transgender and Intersex are gender identities other than the cisgender norm. “+” includes others whose sexual orientation or gender identity may not easily be captured with the above terms. Queer is an umbrella category that may be used to denote any of the other terms above. Overall, LGBTQIA+ includes all sexual orientations and gender identities other than the cisgender and heterosexual (cis/het) societal norm. LeverAge recognizes the richness of LGBTQIA+ diversity inherent in society and thus affirms its commitment to all genders to *include the men-women binary and LGBTQIA+*.

## **Ensuring Diversity and Inclusiveness: A Plan Forward**

Briefly, LeverAge will pursue the following strategies to ensure diversity and inclusiveness in all its aspects:

1. Action participation and leadership
2. Meeting and event hosting and participation
3. Fostering research collaborations
4. Grant calls
5. Training schools
6. Communications
7. Student development

### **Strategy 1: Action Participation and Leadership**

34% of LeverAge participants and 28% of LeverAge leaders are presently under age 40. These numbers are in line with COST’s targets in Horizon Europe. Although not included in the official tallies, many more participants and leaders have completed their PhDs within the last 10 years. Altogether, these numbers evidence that LeverAge has met this initial aim of age inclusiveness involving participation from young Action participants. We will aim to ensure a similar level of participation throughout the Action’s lifetime.

17% of LeverAge participants are presently from NNCs or IPCs. This makes LeverAge among the most international of all active COST Actions. Our Action participants span the globe, including presently 49 countries across all 6 inhabited continents. Altogether, these

numbers evidence that LeverAge has met this initial aim of geographic inclusiveness involving Action participation from IPCs and NNCs. Going forward, we will aim to expand Action reach into NNCs that are not currently in the LeverAge network.

Considering only COST Full/Cooperating/Partner Member countries, 50.4% of LeverAge participants and 39% of LeverAge leaders are presently from ITCs. 88% (22/25) of all ITC countries are presently participating in the LeverAge WGs. These numbers meet or beat COST's targets in Horizon Europe. Moreover, the Action Chair and GH SR is also from an ITC. Altogether, these numbers evidence that LeverAge has met this initial aim of geographic inclusiveness involving Action participation from ITCs. Going forward, we will aim to expand Action reach into ITCs that are not currently in the LeverAge network.

Although no official tallies exist, LeverAge includes LGBTQIA+ researchers and innovators at all levels, including Action leadership and junior scholars.

### **Strategy 2: Meeting and Event Hosting and Participation**

The annual Working Group (WG) meetings in GP 1 are held as separate events, with 1 face-to-face meeting held per WG. These include a mix of ITC (4) and non-ITC (1) countries. Going forward, we will maintain this commitment to hosting meetings or other Action events with an eye toward geographic balance and inclusion of ITC/NNC countries. This setup ensures geographic diversity in meeting hosting, allowing for more institutions and countries within the Action to gain visibility.

LeverAge is also committed to funding every interested Action participant to at least 1 Working Group (WG) meeting per GP, and as the budget and rules allow. If more funds are made available (e.g., via top-up opportunities), LeverAge is committed to funding more meetings or other Action event attendances for Action participants, and as the budget and rules allow. Should such opportunities arise, priority will be given to young Action participants and Action participants from ITCs/NNCs.

### **Strategy 3: Fostering Research Collaborations**

LeverAge is firmly committed to scientific excellence and thus prioritizes scientific publications in Scimago Q1 – Q3 journals, winning new national and international funding, and holding presentations at major international academic conferences. We aim to do so by carefully integrating diversity at all steps of this process. An ambitious goal of 30 scientific publications by the end of GP 4 has been set and every WG has been tasked with forming new research collaborations with an eye toward publishing in top scientific outlets. Several multinational research collaborations between various LeverAge network members have already been established, including young Action participants and scholars from ITCs/NNCs.

To maximize scientific and societal impact, a portion of Action funds will be set aside every GP from GP 2 – GP 4 onwards to pay for gold open access publications, and as the rules allow. This open access funding initiative is expected to most benefit scholars from ITCs/NNCs, whose host institutions or countries may not be able to offer such support.

Moreover, LeverAge recognizes that research on LGBTQIA+ at work is particularly lacking, and especially so with regards to the intersection of age and LGBTQIA+ at work. We will address this gap by actively forming and fostering research collaborations that specifically focus on age and LGBTQIA+, to best advance the science of work and aging in this

underserved research area, and with an eye toward scientific publications in top academic journals.

#### **Strategy 4: Grant Calls**

LeverAge is committed to setting aside a significant portion of the Action budget every GP to support ITC/Dissemination conference grants and STSMs. We will award these grants with an emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness, as detailed below.

To especially support YRIs and ITCs/NNCs, LeverAge commits to always set aside significantly more funds for ITC conference grants, made available only to YRIs from ITCs and NNCs, than for Dissemination conference grants. For example, the LeverAge MC set aside 8000 Euros to support ITC conference grants and 4000 Euros to support Dissemination conference grants in GP 1. We expect to maintain a similar ratio going forward.

Age, gender, and geographic diversity will be emphasized when awarding STSMs. STSMs will be awarded with an eye toward maximizing geographic diversity both within and across GPs. Action participants are encouraged to submit research topics dealing with understudied aspects of diversity such as the intersection of age and LGBTQIA+ at work.

#### **Strategy 5: Training Schools**

From GP 2 onwards, LeverAge is committed to setting aside a significant portion of the Action budget every GP to organize Training Schools to support young and junior scholars. In line with a broader view of “young”, eligible Trainee applicants will include both YRIs (under age 40) and participants age 40+ who are nevertheless current PhD students or have completed the PhD within 10 years of a given GP.

Trainers will be selected with an eye toward gender balance and geographic diversity both within and across GPs, to help ensure that a diversity of perspectives are offered.

Training School sessions will be designed with an eye toward including underserved areas of research in work and aging such as the intersection of age and LGBTQIA+.

#### **Strategy 6: Communications**

The LeverAge Science Communication plan strongly affirms our commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, taking care to lay out various approaches such as newsletters, a website, and social media strategies to best reach different subgroups of individuals. The accessibility of a website is paramount in ensuring that all individuals, including those with disabilities, can fully engage with its content and functionalities. By prioritizing accessibility features such as alt text for images, resizable text, keyboard navigation, and video captioning we create a digital space that embraces the diversity of its users and promotes equal access to information and opportunities, while enriching the overall user experience for everyone.

Likewise, the LeverAge Science Communication team is very diverse. Women and ITCs form the majority of the LeverAge Science Communication team, itself headed by a woman from an ITC. We will aim to ensure a similar team composition throughout the Action’s lifetime.

The LeverAge website will also include a separate section to highlight the achievements and experiences of young Action participants.

Moreover, to affirm LeverAge's commitment to inclusion and diversity, we will provide translations (e.g., by using open-source AI-based tools) into relevant local languages of any stakeholder-oriented materials (e.g., policy briefs, position papers) the Action disseminates.

### **Strategy 7: Student Development**

Throughout the Action's lifetime, LeverAge will work to ensure that PhD students are included to the fullest extent in Action meetings, conferences, and Training Schools. These will be buttressed via the availability of STSMs to help fund interested students to work with established scholars from Europe and beyond.

Additional grant funding opportunities to springboard off COST Action LeverAge and that can best contribute to student development will be pursued, for example Doctoral Network grants funded by Horizon Europe.

### **Conclusion**

Summarily, the LeverAge Action Inclusiveness Plan is holistic in its purview of diversity and inclusiveness. We maintain that this broad view best helps foster scientific excellence and inclusiveness, and recognizes the richness of the human experience to include participants from all walks of life. The above plan affirms our commitment to the cause of diversity and inclusiveness, going far beyond mere Action participation to holistically integrate, foster, and enhance age, geographic, and gender diversity in all aspects of Action activities. Indeed, we maintain that doing so will pay dividends for years to come, far beyond the Action's lifetime.