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COST – Best practices mini guide for participants

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DISCLAIMER: This document is not an official COST document. Please use it for internal purposes only as an internal guideline to assist participants in CA 21146 PurpleGain activities in their fulfilment of Online Travel Reimbursement Requests (OTRR).

This document has been updated in accordance with the New Annotated Rules, effective as of 1 November 2024: https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/COST-094-21-V2.0-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C.pdf.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Before diving into making your online travel reimbursement request (OTRR), COST strongly suggests taking a quick look at the "Travel Reimbursement Rules" in the Annotated Rules (pg.82-90) <u>https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/COST-094-21-V2.0-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C.pdf</u>. It's super helpful because you'll likely find answers to most of your questions there. Plus, it'll make processing claims way smoother by cutting down on mistakes. We also strongly recommend that you use the **tools**:

- <u>https://purplegain.eu/claim-submission-quick-guide/</u> to guide you through the process of submitting your OTRR, as well as
- The "Am I eligible" tool to know whether you are eligible to participate in PurpleGain's activities and receive COST funding: https://www.cost.eu/am-i-eligible/.

Please be informed that **no travel arrangements should be made before receiving the formal invitation from e-COST or the grant letter,** unless otherwise indicated by your GHM. In case of any Force Majeure situation, the expenses will not be considered as eligible.

Please submit your claim at the latest 15 days after the event with the required supportive documents. If the claim is not submitted within that period, it can be understood that the participant waves their right to reimbursement.

For face-to-face events, participants must sign the attendance list generated from e-COST. No signature, no daily allowance will be eligible!

If you are a **new participant** (i.e. have never participated in a PurpleGain activity), please send the following documents and information to the GHM (<u>ana.gomez.rojo@urjc.es</u> and please Cc always <u>maria.verde@urjc.es</u>):

- Scanned copy of your passport (if you are Spanish, national ID)



- Filled in Excel sheet (columns A-P) ^{21146_Data necessary}

This information is requested by the URJC's Internal Payments Department and will be treated according to the GDPR and the internal data protection policies and obligations.







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EXPENSES COVERED FOR PARTICIPANTS:

In general terms, the following expenses are covered by COST funds for people participating in PurpleGain meetings (Workshop, MC meeting, Core Group meeting, Purple Bubble, etc.) **unless otherwise specified in the call for applications of the specific activity**:

(1) Long-distance travel up to a maximum of EUR 1,500, including travel insurance.

E>NEW: definition of the Long-distance travel as of November 2023 and included in the new Annotated Rules:

Long-distance travel is any travel equal to or above 101 km one way between **the main transportation hub** at the point of departure and **the main transportation hub** at the event venue and return. (*A1-3.1.3.2 LONG-DISTANCE TRAVEL EXPENSES*). This change has an impact on the reimbursement of participants.

All long-distance travel **must be related to a COST activity**. Any deviation for professional/personal reasons will NOT be reimbursed.

For example, a person participated in a COST activity which was held in Katowice between 14th and 17th of October. But on the way back, she/he decided to spend some extra days in Warsaw before going back home to Madrid. COST will only cover the trip back from Katowice to Warsaw, but not the trip back from Warsaw to Madrid.

The new Annotated Rules make a distinction between **layover** and **stopover**:

A layover refers to the waiting time between two connecting flights at the airport or 2 different modes of transport (eg. Train + flight, flight+ bus, etc). A layover should not <u>exceed</u> a duration of 24 hours.

Anything longer than 24 hours is considered a stopover. A stopover is when a traveller intentionally pauses their journey in a connecting city or country for more than 24 hours before continuing to their final destination.

- When a participant travels to the meeting location, stops over in another city (for more than 24 hours), then proceeds to arrive at the meeting location, the eligible cost is the trip from <u>city of stop over to the meeting venue/location.</u>
- When a participant leaves the meeting venue, and stops over in another city (for more than 24 hours) and proceeds to travel to final destination, the eligible cost is the trip from meeting venue/location to the city of stop over.
- Flying with low-cost airlines may imply a 'stop over' by default because these airlines don't offer "proper connecting flights", and the participant has to book several separate flights. These may be flights with different airlines, or with one airline. These should be considered as layovers (as long as it's not longer than 24 hours).

Example 1

A participant travels to a meeting held in Rome, Italy. The travel route selected is a flight from Oslo to Rome.

On the way back the participant travelled from Rome to Warsaw, stayed few days in Warsaw for personal reasons and after that travelled back to Oslo.

The participant can claim the long-distance travel from Oslo to Rome, and from Rome to Warsaw.







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Example 2

A participant travels to a meeting held in Milan, Italy. The travel route selected is a flight from Oslo to Milan.

On the way back the participant travelled from Milan, stopped in Warsaw to catch the connecting flight back to Oslo on the same day.

The participant can claim the long-distance travel from Oslo to Milan, and from Milan to Warsaw-Oslo.

Example 3

A participant travels to a meeting held in Rome, Italy. The travel route selected is a flight from Heraklion, Crete to Athens and a flight from Athens to Rome.

On the way back the participant travelled from Rome to Athens, stayed the night in Athens as the next available flight to Heraklion was early in the following morning.

The participant can claim the long-distance travel because the layover in Athens was necessary for the passenger, and it was shorter than a stopover.

If the participant had intentionally stopped over in Athens for a day (24h+) or more and had resumed the travel later, then the flight Athens to Heraklion would not be eligible for reimbursement.

Long-distance travel modalities may be by train, ferry, bus, plane, car.

Please be informed that **stand-alone medical/life insurance is not covered**, nor is luggage insurance, CO2 offset fees, fees/charges/penalties for changes/rebooking travel tickets. The whole list of **non-eligible expenses** is available in **pg. 86 and 87 of the Annotated Rules** (www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/COST-094-21-V2.0-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C.pdf). Participants are advised to contract a travel cancellation insurance for all their long-distance travel. Cancellation insurance is an eligible expenses included in the long-distance travel expenses.

- ⇒ Rebooking tickets: Please note that only the initial ticket is eligible for reimbursement. Therefore, copy of the initially purchased flight tickets (booking confirmation) along with copy of the additional ticket (booking confirmation) must be uploaded under the OTRR.
- (2) Daily allowance (DA): The amount is set in the Work & Budget Plan of each grant period. Normally, participants are informed of this amount for each activity.

This amount should cover the following expenses: **accommodation**, **meals** and **any expenses for short-distance travel** under 100km (e.g., train, bus, taxi rides).

▷ NEW: The new Annotated Rules include the concept "other incidental costs" which include costs such as taxi or parking expenses, fuel costs, carbon tax, toll charges, car rental expenses linked to car travel, tips, etc.

You can check pg.83 of the Annotated Rules (https://www.cost.eu/uploads/2024/11/COST-094-21-V2.0-Annotated-Rules-for-COST-Actions-Level-C.pdf) to see how the DA is calculated. The days immediately before and immediately after the event are partially covered by the DA depending on the travel times. See the table in pg. 83 of the Annotated Rules. **Participants can also estimate the amount**



of DA they could receive by accepting the invitation via e-COST and start completing the reimbursement claim.

The table hereunder describes how those criteria are taken into account in the calculation of the daily allowance:

Travel to the event:		
- travel starts before 11:59	Full DA rate	
- travel starts between 12:00 and 18:59	90% of DA rate	
- travel starts after 19:00	80% of DA rate	
Event days when participant does not travel:		
Each event day attended by the participant	Full DA rate	
Travel from the event		
- travel ends before 11:59	20% of DA rate	
- travel ends between 12:00 and 18:59	30% of DA rate	

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- travel ends after 19:00	40% of DA rate	
Arrival and departure on the same day of the event		
For participants arriving and departing on the same day to the event, the calculation of their daily allowance depends on their travel time.	Between 20% and 40% of DA rate	

▷ NEW: When travel hours (arrival/departure) cannot be determined by the supporting documents: using the time of arrival/departure in the supporting documents (eg. plane ticket) the arrival/departure hour can be increased by 2h.

Example: according to the OTRR the participant indicated that he/she arrived back home at 20h, but according to the plane ticket, he/she arrived at the airport at 12h. The OTRR will be changed so the arrival hour is 12h+2h=14h.

NEW: Overlapping STSMs with meeting/TS:

- The STSM beneficiary will be able to **claim**:
 - **the long-distance travel** from the place of the STSM to the place of meeting/Training School and back, as well as
 - 50% of the DA of the meeting/TS by submitting the OTRR for the meeting/TS
- For such purpose, the STSM beneficiary will need to upload in the OTRR a statement from the Host Institution or the Action Chair confirming the STSM mission indicating the number of COST action and STSM dates (from/until), as well as the meeting/TS dates.

Recommendations:

In order for the Action to make best use of the COST Grant:

• When two eligible participants share the same accommodation, whilst both participants are allowed to claim the daily allowance, they are invited to consider claiming the full daily allowance of only one of them and the other participant to claim 50% of the daily allowance;





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- When an eligible participant's primary affiliation is in the city of the event (local participants), the participant is invited to claim only 50% of the daily allowance. This option can be selected when completing the Online Travel Reimbursement claim in e-COST: "Do you wish to claim a lower total daily allowance?"
- Participants are advised to book a **refundable hotel room**.

NON-ELIGIBLE EXPENSES:

The following expenses must not be included in e-COST when claiming your expenses:

- Any expenses claimed on top of the daily allowance or long-distance travel such as incidental costs
 (taxi or parking expenses, fuel costs, carbon tax, toll charges, car rental expenses linked to car travel, tips,
 etc.) or additional accommodation or meals;
- Conference / registration fees;
- Lecture fees and honoraria;
- Third party service fee for visa processing (including form filling assistance, appointment bookings; visa application reception; information collection; data processing; transfer to the Embassy; reception and sorting of passports; express courier return; contact of applicants upon return of passports from the Embassy; handling telephone, online messages or email enquires of applicants by Call Centre; assistance Visa On Web, SMS costs, photograph cost or photocopies, postage expenses);
- Stand-alone medical or life insurance;
- Luggage insurance;
- **Carbon offset fees**. Nonetheless, COST Actions are encouraged to consider the environmental impact of their activities when making their plans and or look for other sources of funding for this expense.
- Fees, charges, and/or penalties linked to a participant changing or having to rebook travel tickets;
- Wi-Fi, telephone, internet, laundry and mini-bar consumption expenses;
- Printing and postage expenses;
- Regional and / or national taxation fees; stamp duty expenses;
- **Bank charges / exchange or commission fees** on reimbursement made by the Grant Holder (or COST Association for centralised events).

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NEW







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SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS

General rules: invoice + booking confirmation or full flight itinerary

The <u>travel supportive documents</u> must include the following information: An invoice only showing the amount will not suffice.

- The name of the service provider;
- The **full price** paid for the ticket;
- The **name of the passenger**, if applicable (in some cases, even though the passenger name is not mentioned on some the train tickets issued in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, etc, they are still eligible for reimbursement)
- The travel dates including departure and arrival times
- The travel itinerary: departure and arrival cities.
- The type of extra charges claimed such as seat reservation, extra leg room, exit row seat, fast lane, priority boarding, sms priority boarding fees, sustainable fuel, luggage associated expenses, and the associated amount paid for, if applicable.
- Remember the list of **NON-ELIGIBLE expenses** which includes: carbon tax & carbon offset fees and luggage insurance, as well as stand-alone medical insurance. Please when claiming your travel expenses, make sure to discount the amounts for these expenses.

Failure to provide the required supporting documents with the information mentioned above may lead to the rejection of the claim.

IMPORTANT:

Please note that as of now the Finance Officers will check that the travel documents indicate **the arrival times (plane, train or bus tickets). No claims will be approved without having this information.**

- In general, a copy the e-ticket must be provided, instead of the boarding passes. It is preferable not to upload the boarding passes unless they include the travel schedule (departure and arrival time). We strongly recommend that you upload the e-mail that companies (such as airlines) normally send their passengers with the whole information regarding their booking (e-booking or e-ticket email that you might receive from Wizzair, Flixbus, etc.). IMPORTANT: The booking reference or the e-ticket number should be mentioned on the invoice in order to link the purchase to that specific ticket. This is one of the most frequent reasons for rejecting the claims.
- Screenshots of supportive documents are NOT acceptable. The participants must provide the travel ticket or supportive document in single pdf format containing all the information. Claims with screenshots as supportive document will be rejected.
- If a participant <u>departs on the last day of the meeting</u> and declares travel end time **AFTER 3 AM** of the following day (i.e. receiving a full Daily Allowance), supporting documents must be submitted, such as: **accommodation or meal receipts**. Otherwise, the travel end time will have to be edited to <u>arrive not later than 3AM</u>.





Special cases:

- **Purchased package hotel with flight**: Please provide a breakdown of the expenses and adjust the cost of the flight ticket according to the invoice breakdown.
- Wizz Air: The invoice from Wizz air is not sufficient as it doesn't include the time schedule of the travel. Therefore, copy of the flight booking confirmation shall be uploaded. The reason behind this request is because sometimes the Wizz air invoice is issued for several persons. Thus, the need to require copy of the booking confirmation as we can clearly see the name(s) of the passenger(s).
- **PEGASUS tickets:** In some cases, the invoices from Pegasus include expenses which are not clearly identified, such as "Diger". Please ask the participant to provide with a reference from the Pegasus website about the nature and the cost of each expense. Otherwise, please remove them from the claim.
- Interrail Pass, abonnement or monthly subscription for domestic trains are NOT eligible.

Bank accounts

The participants are free to choose on which bank account they wish to be reimbursed: personal or institutional.

FAQ regarding travel deviation:

Please take into account the new definition of long-distance travel and the difference between layover and stopover.

- I will **travel from another country** to the Meeting/Training School AND/OR from the event I am going to a conference in another country. Can I be reimbursed? **YES, unless** it is a case of stopover
- I will **arrive few days before** the Meeting/Training School AND/OR I will **leave few days after** the event. Can I be reimbursed? **YES**. e-COST is designed to calculate the DA as if the person has travelled the day before or after the event. However, take into account the new definitions of layover and stopover as this might affect the reimbursement of your long-distance travel.

COMMON ERRORS TO AVOID

1. Short Distance travel versus Long Distance Travel:

Long-distance travel is any travel equal to or above 101 km one way BETWEEN the main transportation hub at the event venue and return. (see Article A1-3.1.3.2).

- \Rightarrow <u>If the distance is less or equal to 100 km one way</u>: transport to and from a main transportation hub (meaning an airport, harbour, main train or bus station) is **covered by the DA**.
- ⇒ If the travel distance from point of departure to meeting venue is \geq 101km, it is a long-distance travel.





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By default, each individual receipt shall be encoded separately if the participant used different means of travel with the saved map as a justification proving the expense eligibility (i.e. travel expenses of different means of travel (plane & bus tickets; train & plane tickets; bus & train tickets) should be encoded separately, with their respective map under the section "Travel expenses" of your OTRR).

2. Mismatch between the currency in the supportive documents and the currency selected by the participant in e-COST.

The currency selected in e-COST must match the currency on the supportive document: ticket or invoice:

- \Rightarrow Example: flight ticket in HUF, but the participant selects EUR in e-COST. Conversion done outside e-COST.
- \Rightarrow If the conversion HUF to EUR is indicated on the invoice, then claiming the amount in EUR is perfectly fine.

3. Rebooking tickets and eligibility:

Please note that **only the initial ticket is eligible for reimbursement**. Therefore, copy of the initially purchased flight ticket (booking confirmation) along with copy of the additional ticket (booking confirmation) must be uploaded under the claim.

SPECIFIC CASES:

- **Purchased package hotel with flight**: Please provide a breakdown of the expenses and adjust the cost of the flight ticket according to the invoice breakdown.
- Interrail Pass, abonnement or monthly subscription for domestic trains are <u>NOT</u> eligible.
- Combined travel by ferry & car.
 - \Rightarrow Ferry is eligible based on the face value receipt.
 - ⇒ When a participant pays for his/her car to go into a ferry, then this amount can be reimbursed in full. However, if the invoice or receipt shows the amount paid for is for 2 or more persons, then the total amount must be split accordingly
 - \Rightarrow Travel by car is eligible only 50% based on the google map proof of distance.

Travel by car:

➢ NEW: The previous rule distinguishing between car travel equal or over 301 km one way disappears. Now any long-distance travel by car is any travel equal or over to 101km one way.

• The limit for travel by car is 1,000km for the entire journey from any point of departure to the event venue and return to a point of arrival.





- Car travel shall be reimbursed at EUR 0.35 per km. The proof of distance in km from the point of departure and the event venue is automatically calculated by the e-COST platform when filling in your OTRR.
- **Supporting documents**: under the new rules the only supporting document admitted are: **parking tickets showing dates or a print screen of the sms** (when you got a parking spot via an app) proving you paid a parking ticket showing the dates. If these documents are not provided in the OTRR, the car travel will <u>NOT</u> be considered eligible.
- If **multiple participants travel together**, **only one person may claim** the reimbursement of the number of km. Other eligible participants travelling in the same car are not eligible for the reimbursement of the car km.
- Travellers who choose to **travel by private vehicle** should arrange for sufficient **coverage** with their car insurance provider for damages caused to the vehicle, the occupants and third parties. These **costs are not eligible** for reimbursement.

Claims with only DA

For **participants who live less or equal than 100km away from the meeting location** (local participants), they can claim 50% the DA for the meeting days attended with no further justification required.

However, <u>if participants claim DA corresponding to the</u> **day before and/or the day after** the <u>event without supporting documents to attest to the travel date/s</u>, the participant will have to provide receipts for *accommodation or meals*.

In the <u>absence of supporting documents</u>, only the DA corresponding to the meeting/Training School dates for which the participant signed the attendance list can be reimbursed.

• **Example:** meeting dates 14-15 April: The participant claims the DA on the day before the event 13/04 and/or on the day after the event 16/04, without receipts.

The participant will be requested by the GH Manager for supportive documents (*hotel invoice or meal receipts*).

In case of <u>no supportive documents</u>, the travel dates will be adjusted as if the participant had travelled on the meeting days (14-15) to be eligible for the DA only for these days, assuming the participant has signed the attendance list for both days.

Co-located activities& risk of DA exceeding 100%

GENERAL RULE: Double funding must be avoided.

Meeting (CG. MC)/Workshop/Conference + Training School

• Participants are expected to claim reimbursement of travel expenses via **one single Online Travel Reimbursement Request (OTRR)** as well as request reimbursement of daily allowance via the respective OTRRs for each of the events.



- However, the **supporting travel documents must be uploaded under both OTRRs** (the meeting and the Training school).
- <u>To avoid double funding of the daily allowance in overlapping days</u>, participants should correctly encode the travel dates and hours as explained in the example below so the total DA does not exceed 100%.

Example: for 2nd Purple Week: co-located Training School on 15-17 April and Meeting (Workshop+MC meeting) taking place on 18-19 April, the travel dates and hours are required to be encoded as follows:

Training School 15-17 April

When did you ARRIVE back home? The answer will be 18 April at 11:00 > the daily allowance will be calculated as 20% * daily allowance rate.

Meeting 18-19 April

<u>When did you LEAVE home?</u> The answer will be 18 April at 20:00 > the daily allowance will be calculated as 80% * daily allowance rate.

The total DA for the day 18/04 shall not exceed 100%.

Meeting/TS + STSM

If an STSM grantee is invited to Meeting or a Training School within the STSM period and decides to go, then only the long distance travel to the Meeting or Training School may be reimbursed and nothing more.

- For <u>co-located STSM and meeting/TS, if both happen in the same city</u>, the DA for the meeting/training school shall **not be claimed** by the participant.
- <u>If the STSM and the meeting/TS are in different countries</u>, the participant may claim **40% of the DA** in the meeting/TS.

Attending another COST Action event back-to-back

The same applies for participants attending another COST Action event, back to back to a PurpleGain event.

In this case the participant must mention the Action reference (CA2XXXX) in the comment section of the OTRR.

If the participant does not notify the participation in another COST Action event and this case is spotted during the monitoring period by COST, the participant will be requested to **refund the GH Institution** for the excess amount paid.







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"Other travel expenses"

- Any travel expenses encoded under "Other Travel Expenses" will be rejected and reassigned under the "Travel Expenses" category with the respective map proving that the distance is above 100 km to justify the eligibility.
- Participants may claim a contribution towards the required **visa costs** to travel to the meeting venue as follows:
 - visa processing fees or exit visa fees relevant to attending approved COST event(s);
 - Attach supporting documents:
 - Receipt / stamp from the embassy / consulate issuing the visa;
 - Amount paid for the visa fee.
 - Remember that when the visa is processed by a third-party, the expenses that the third-party may claim in concept of filling assistance, appointment bookings; visa application reception; information collection; data processing; transfer to the Embassy; reception and sorting of passports; express courier return; contact of applicants upon return of passports from the Embassy; handling telephone, online messages or email enquires of applicants by Call Centre; assistance Visa On Web, SMS costs, photograph cost or photocopies, postage expenses, etc. are NOT eligible.

Sickness during a face-to-face event

If the participant is sick during a face-to-face event and does not attend one of the days, to be eligible for the DA for that day, the participant must **provide with a medical certificate**. Otherwise, the DA for that day is NOT eligible.

LOCAL ORGANISER RESPONSIBILITY:

Face-to-face events

The Local Organiser must make sure that participants sign the official COST attendance list generated from e-COST. No signature, no daily allowance will be eligible! In addition, the participant will not be considered in the LOS grant calculation for that specific day, which could result in a decrease in the LOS.

For any face-to-face event, the Local Organiser is responsible for making regular announcements during the coffee/lunch breaks **each day** about **signing the COST Attendance List**.

Virtual events and/or online participation to hybrid events:

• The participants shall receive an invitation with the tag "**not eligible for reimbursement**". Therefore, they are not entitled to any reimbursement.





- The Local Organiser will have to generate the attendance log/report from Zoom, Teams or any other virtual tool used for the event and send it to the GHM after the event. Screenshots from the Zoom or Teams platform are not acceptable!
- Virtual participants must have their actual names displayed to ensure an accurate check of the attendance of those invited.

Hybrid events:

- The Local Organiser will have to generate the attendance log/report from Zoom, Teams or any other virtual tool used for the event and send it to the GHM after the event. Screenshots from the Zoom or Teams platform are not acceptable!
- The Local Organiser must also send the GHM the signed attendance list.

LOCAL ORGANISER SUPPORT GRANT

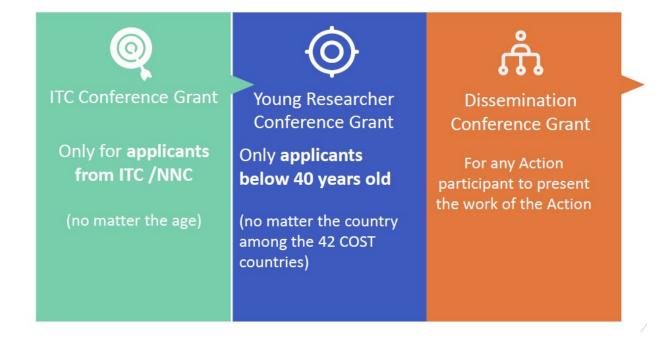
- The Local Organisers can claim either the maximum grant amount as per the table in pg.91 of the Annotated Rules or less if this is their decision.
- VAT is NOT eligible.
- EX NEW: Under the new Annotated Rules, local organisers can claim as eligible expense a **cancellation insurance** (for example, the local organiser paid in advance all the necessary arrangements and the activity did not take place in the end. The local organiser can contract a cancellation insurance and claim it). However, to claim this expense the local organiser has to prove that he/she claimed the amount from the cancellation insurance too.
- Local Organisers are responsible to comply with their national, institutional financial and legal rules in terms of grants' payments. Therefore, they must keep any invoices that might be requested by these rules for internal audit of the LO institutions. This includes TIMESHEETS when the LOS has been allocated for admin & technical support. The GH Institution is entitled to claim these invoices and supportive documents at any time.
 - \Rightarrow The document(s) must mention:
 - The event details (Action & meeting details & duration) the name of the person performing the tasks.
 - a description of the work performed
 - the hourly/daily rate
 - the total number of hours worked



- the total amount
- be signed by a person with financial/legal authority of the institution (ex. *head of department, financial representative, etc*)
- be on the letterhead of the institution

GRANTS:

Under the new Annotated Rules, there is a new type of grant: the **Young Researcher Conference grant**. You can see in the screenshots below the main characteristics of the three types of Conference Grants that exist now under the new Annotated Rules:



The **rules** for these grants are the following:

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Please refer to the Annotated Rules for full information on all the rules applicable to participation in COST Action activities, including eligible expenses, as well as the documents for participants available at https://purplegain.eu/documents-for-participants/.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in contact with your GH Manager (<u>ana.gomez.rojo@urjc.es</u>).