

Statement on Research Integrity and Responsible Research Practice in the OMEGA-NET COST Action

1. The OMEGA-NET Collaboration

The overarching concept of the Network on the Coordination and Harmonisation of European Occupational Cohorts (OMEGA-NET) is to create a network to optimize the use of occupational, industrial, and population cohorts at the European level. OMEGA-NET will advance:

- i) collaboration of existing cohorts, with extensive contemporary information on employment and occupational exposures,
- ii) coordination and harmonization of occupational exposure assessment efforts, and
- iii) facilitation of an integrated research strategy for occupational health in Europe.

The network will create an inventory of numerous cohorts with occupational information in Europe; implement an online interactive tool with detailed information on existing cohorts; facilitate work on harmonization of occupational exposure and health outcome information and establish new protocols for data collection; connect scientific communities on occupational health in Europe and beyond; and provide networking, leadership and training opportunities for early career researchers in occupational epidemiology and exposure assessment. The work will provide a foundation for an enhanced evidence base for the identification of health risks and gains related to occupation and employment to foster safe and healthy preventive strategies and policies.

2. General Declaration of OMEGA-NET Participants

Collaboration in OMEGA-NET is based on shared values and ambitions to conduct excellent research according to fundamental principles of research integrity, covering all activities carried out within the network (e.g. collaborations, data management, data sharing, publication and dissemination of knowledge). These principles extend to all communications and partnerships with industrial associations, insurance associations, medical and professional organizations, NGOs such as environmental organizations, patient groups, social partners or funders. A culture of research integrity is also fostered throughout all training activities within OMEGA-NET, including Short-term Scientific Missions and Inclusiveness Target Country conference grants.

These fundamental principles adopted by the participants in OMEGA-NET are¹:

Reliability

Reliability in ensuring the quality of work, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources. We will assure that our activities meet the highest scientific standards, are verifiable and reproducible by participants and other researchers.

¹ This Declaration follows the ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, 2017.

Honesty

Honesty in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating work in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way. OMEGA-NET partners will carry out their activities independently of pressure from commissioning parties and from ideological, economic or political interests. OMEGA-NET participants may actively engage with different stakeholders but this collaboration will not have any direct or indirect influence on choices made within the OMEGA-NET project.

Respect

Respect for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment. All OMEGA-NET participants will strictly adhere to national and European legislation to ensure that subjects of studies are treated with full respect to their fundamental rights and dignity. We will ensure confidentiality for subjects of study data, and adhere to appropriate procedures for informed consent within the relevant jurisdiction according to research ethics rules. We will act in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the declaration of Helsinki.

Accountability

Accountability for the work from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring, and for its wider impacts.

3. Responsible research practice within OMEGA-NET

Data Management

Data privacy is a fundamental issue in OMEGA-NET. All collection, sourcing, processing and curation of data will be performed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner, respecting the principle of minimisation of data and harm prevention. All participants ensure that access to data will be as open as possible, as closed as necessary, and where appropriate, in line with the FAIR Principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable) for data management. We will make an utmost effort to provide appropriate stewardship of all data and research material promoting accessibility and usability of data and research material, where applicable.

Methods of data sharing will be thoughtful and responsible and reflected in agreements between participants. Due respect will be paid to the individuals or groups from which the data originate as well as to those who provide the data. Participants to data sharing agreements will be treated equitably by each other. Proper ethical evaluations, safety of settings and technologies used, will be taken into due consideration in data sharing. Best efforts will be made to protect the anonymity of data subjects and to prevent unauthorized access.

Independence and Conflict of Interest

All researchers and team members participating in OMEGA-NET will make sure to avoid any conflict of interest throughout the life cycle of this project and commit to disclose all individual and institutional relationships with stakeholders that could jeopardize the integrity of work carried out. Transparent and detailed research agreements establishing clear roles and responsibilities will form part of the project, including data ownership, agreed publication plans, authorship and review processes for intended manuscripts and presentations.

Authorship, Publications, Dissemination

OMEGA-NET encourages the dissemination of results, outcomes and impact generated and while supporting the protection of intellectual property, it actively promotes an Open Access policy for results and outcomes. OMEGA-NET participants are committed to inclusive authorship, based on appropriate acknowledgements of significant contribution to the research conducted. All authors commit to disclose any conflicts of interest and financial or other types of support for the work or for parts of this work before the publication of its results.

4. Management of Research Misconduct and Other Questionable Practices

In case of concerns about responsible research practice, participants undertake to notify the Management Committee (MC) who can take appropriate action if needed. All procedures regarding management of misconduct or questionable practices will be dealt with in a consistent and transparent manner, promoting trust and credibility between consortium partners, research subjects and potential stakeholders. Procedures will also be conducted as confidentially as possible as long as confidentiality does not have a compromising effect. Parties involved in this procedure will declare any potential conflict of interest. The MC is accountable for the research integrity of the working groups within the network. Participants in OMEGA-NET are accountable for their own contribution as well as the collective work conducted with other participants.

(1) ALLEA 2017: The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity-Revised Edition.