



# Differential cross-section measurements of Higgs boson production in the $H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^-$ decay channel in $pp$ collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV with the ATLAS detector

The ATLAS Collaboration

Differential measurements of Higgs boson production in the  $\tau$ -lepton-pair decay channel are presented in the gluon fusion, vector-boson fusion (VBF),  $VH$  and  $t\bar{t}H$  associated production modes, with particular focus on the VBF production mode. The data used to perform the measurements correspond to  $140 \text{ fb}^{-1}$  of proton–proton collisions collected by the ATLAS experiment at the LHC. Two methods are used to perform the measurements: the *Simplified Template Cross-Section* (STXS) approach and an *Unfolded Fiducial Differential* measurement considering only the VBF phase space. For the STXS measurement, events are categorized by their production mode and kinematic properties such as the Higgs boson’s transverse momentum ( $p_{\text{T}}^{\text{H}}$ ), the number of jets produced in association with the Higgs boson, or the invariant mass of the two leading jets ( $m_{jj}$ ). For the VBF production mode, the ratio of the measured cross-section to the Standard Model prediction for  $m_{jj} > 1.5$  TeV and  $p_{\text{T}}^{\text{H}} > 200$  GeV ( $p_{\text{T}}^{\text{H}} < 200$  GeV) is  $1.29^{+0.39}_{-0.34}$  ( $0.12^{+0.34}_{-0.33}$ ). This is the first VBF measurement for the higher- $p_{\text{T}}^{\text{H}}$  criteria, and the most precise for the lower- $p_{\text{T}}^{\text{H}}$  criteria. The *fiducial* cross-section measurements, which only consider the kinematic properties of the event, are performed as functions of variables characterizing the VBF topology, such as the signed  $\Delta\phi_{jj}$  between the two leading jets. The measurements have a precision of 30%–50% and agree well with the Standard Model predictions. These results are interpreted in the SMEFT framework, and place the strongest constraints to date on the CP-odd Wilson coefficient  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$ .

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## 1 Introduction

Since the discovery of the Higgs boson by the ATLAS [1] and CMS [2] Collaborations in 2012, studying the properties of this boson has been a priority of the LHC experiments. The main Higgs boson production mode at the LHC is gluon–gluon fusion (ggF), followed by vector boson fusion (VBF) production, associated production with a vector boson ( $VH$ ,  $V = W$  or  $Z$ ) and associated production with a top-antitop quark pair ( $t\bar{t}H$ ). In the Standard Model (SM), the decay into a  $\tau^+\tau^-$  pair<sup>1</sup> has the largest branching ratio of all leptonic Higgs boson decays.

Previously, the ATLAS Collaboration used the Run 2 dataset to study the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  final state [3] and three measurements were performed: the total Higgs boson production cross-section, the cross-sections for the four dominant production modes, and a measurement of the cross-section in nine phase-space regions

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, a  $\tau^+\tau^-$  pair is denoted by  $\tau\tau$  throughout this paper.

(bins) in the Simplified Template Cross-Section (STXS) framework [4]. For the STXS measurement, cross-sections for Higgs boson production were measured as a function of the transverse momentum ( $p_T$ ) of the Higgs boson ( $p_T^H$ ), the number of jets produced in association with the Higgs boson, and the invariant mass of the two leading jets ( $m_{jj}$ ) where applicable. Higgs boson production through VBF was confirmed in this decay channel with an observed (expected) significance of  $5.3\sigma$  ( $6.2\sigma$ ) over the SM background, and a cross-section of  $0.90^{+0.20}_{-0.17}$  times the SM prediction. Of all the Higgs boson decay channels explored by ATLAS [3, 5–7],  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  provided the most precise single measurement of VBF production and motivates further studies of the kinematics of Higgs boson production using this channel. The results in this paper constitute the final Run 2 measurements in the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  final state and supersede those in Ref. [3]. A similar measurement was also performed by the CMS Collaboration using the Run 2 dataset [8], where the cross-section for the Higgs boson production through VBF was measured as  $0.81 \pm 0.17$  times the SM prediction.

Two approaches for investigating the properties of VBF events in the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  decay channel are reported in this paper. The first approach is to perform a cross-section measurement within the STXS framework, expanding on the measurement of Ref. [3] in which only a single bin in the VBF phase space was measured. In this context, the extracted cross-sections are based on the production mode and the kinematics of the events; in the particular case of VBF production, the events are separated into bins based on  $p_T^H$  and  $m_{jj}$ . Similar measurements were also pursued for other Higgs boson decay channels such as  $H \rightarrow ZZ^*$  [5, 9],  $H \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  [6, 10] and  $H \rightarrow WW^*$  [7, 11]. The second approach is to measure *fiducial* differential production cross-sections for  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  events. The fiducial measurement approach does not distinguish between the different Higgs boson production modes, but a phase-space region enriched in VBF events is defined to ensure optimal measurement sensitivity. This results in a less model-dependent approach than the STXS framework, although still relying on simulated SM samples to derive response matrices. The cross-section is measured as a function of several variables, including  $p_T^H$ , the azimuthal angle  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  between the jets, and the leading jet’s transverse momentum,  $p_T(j_0)$ . They are chosen to test the kinematics of the SM Higgs boson and the VBF production mode, as well as to provide sensitivity to contributions from physics beyond the SM. Differential measurements in the VBF phase space were performed previously in the  $H \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  [12] and  $H \rightarrow WW^*$  [13] channels, while this is the first differential measurement performed in the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  channel.

Additionally, the results reported in this paper extend the study of  $t\bar{t}H$  production in the STXS framework. In Ref. [3], an inclusive measurement of  $t\bar{t}H$  production was performed in the fully hadronic final state, whereas this paper considers multiple bins in  $p_T^H$  because higher momentum bins are expected to be more sensitive to physics beyond the SM.

This paper is organized as follows. The ATLAS detector is described in Section 2, followed by the data and simulated samples in Section 3, and the object reconstruction and main event selection in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the event categorization, and then Section 6 delves into more details of the background estimation methods. The systematic uncertainties are discussed in Section 7, followed by the STXS cross-section measurement results in Section 8 and the differential cross-section measurement results in Section 9. Conclusions are reported in Section 10.

## 2 ATLAS detector

The ATLAS detector [14] at the LHC covers nearly the entire solid angle around the collision point.<sup>2</sup> It consists of an inner tracking detector surrounded by a thin superconducting solenoid, electromagnetic and hadronic calorimeters, and a muon spectrometer incorporating three large superconducting air-core toroidal magnets.

The inner-detector system (ID) is immersed in a 2 T axial magnetic field and provides charged-particle tracking in the range  $|\eta| < 2.5$ . The high-granularity silicon pixel detector covers the vertex region and typically provides four measurements per track, the first hit generally being in the insertable B-layer (IBL) installed before Run 2 [15, 16]. It is followed by the SemiConductor Tracker (SCT), which usually provides eight measurements per track. These silicon detectors are complemented by the transition radiation tracker (TRT), which enables radially extended track reconstruction up to  $|\eta| = 2.0$ . The TRT also provides electron identification information based on the fraction of hits (typically 30 in total) above a higher energy-deposit threshold corresponding to transition radiation.

The calorimeter system covers the pseudorapidity range  $|\eta| < 4.9$ . Within the region  $|\eta| < 3.2$ , electromagnetic calorimetry is provided by barrel and endcap high-granularity lead/liquid-argon (LAr) calorimeters, with an additional thin LAr presampler covering  $|\eta| < 1.8$  to correct for energy loss in material upstream of the calorimeters. Hadronic calorimetry is provided by the steel/scintillator-tile calorimeter, segmented into three barrel structures within  $|\eta| < 1.7$ , and two copper/LAr hadronic endcap calorimeters. The solid angle coverage is completed with forward copper/LAr and tungsten/LAr calorimeter modules optimised for electromagnetic and hadronic energy measurements respectively.

The muon spectrometer (MS) comprises separate trigger and high-precision tracking chambers measuring the deflection of muons in a magnetic field generated by the superconducting air-core toroidal magnets. The field integral of the toroids ranges between 2.0 and 6.0 T m across most of the detector. Three layers of precision chambers, each consisting of layers of monitored drift tubes, cover the region  $|\eta| < 2.7$ , complemented by cathode-strip chambers in the forward region, where the background is highest. The muon trigger system covers the range  $|\eta| < 2.4$  with resistive-plate chambers in the barrel, and thin-gap chambers in the endcap regions.

The luminosity is measured mainly by the LUCID-2 [17] detector that records Cherenkov light produced in the quartz windows of photomultipliers located close to the beampipe.

Events are selected by the first-level trigger system implemented in custom hardware, followed by selections made by algorithms implemented in software in the high-level trigger [18]. The first-level trigger accepts events from the 40 MHz bunch crossings at a rate below 100 kHz, which the high-level trigger further reduces in order to record complete events to disk at about 1 kHz.

A software suite [19] is used in data simulation, in the reconstruction and analysis of real and simulated data, in detector operations, and in the trigger and data acquisition systems of the experiment.

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<sup>2</sup> ATLAS uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the centre of the detector and the  $z$ -axis along the beam pipe. The  $x$ -axis points from the IP to the centre of the LHC ring, and the  $y$ -axis points upwards. Polar coordinates  $(r, \phi)$  are used in the transverse plane,  $\phi$  being the azimuthal angle around the  $z$ -axis. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle  $\theta$  as  $\eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)$  and is equal to the rapidity  $y = \frac{1}{2} \ln \left( \frac{E+p_z c}{E-p_z c} \right)$  in the relativistic limit. Angular distance is measured in units of  $\Delta R \equiv \sqrt{(\Delta y)^2 + (\Delta \phi)^2}$ .

### 3 Data and simulated event samples

The data used to perform this analysis correspond to proton–proton collisions at a centre-of-mass energy  $\sqrt{s} = 13$  TeV collected by the ATLAS detector during Run 2 of the LHC (2015–2018). Events are selected for analysis only if they pass a good-quality requirement and all relevant detector components were in good operating condition [20]. This yields a total integrated luminosity of  $140.1 \text{ fb}^{-1}$  [21]. The uncertainty in the integrated luminosity is 0.83% [21], obtained using the LUCID-2 detector [17] for the primary luminosity measurements, complemented by measurements using the inner detector and calorimeters.

Monte Carlo (MC) simulated event samples are used to model the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  signal and most of the backgrounds from SM processes. A summary of the generators used for the simulation is shown in Table 1. The same MC samples were also used in Ref. [3], and only a brief description of the main samples is reported in this section. All MC samples were reconstructed in the same manner as the data.

Table 1: Summary of the MC generators used for the main signal and background samples. Information about the matrix element (ME) generator, parton shower (PS), parton distribution function (PDF) set used in the ME and the PS, and set of tuned parameter (Tune) is provided. The column labelled ‘Normalization’ specifies the order of the cross-section calculation used for the normalization of the simulated samples.

Process	Generator		PDF set		Tune	Normalization
	ME	PS	ME	PS		
Higgs boson						
ggF	POWHEG BOX v2	PYTHIA 8	PDF4LHC15NNLO	CTEQ6L1	AZNLO	N <sup>3</sup> LO QCD + NLO EW
VBF	POWHEG BOX v2	PYTHIA 8	PDF4LHC15NNLO	CTEQ6L1	AZNLO	NNLO QCD + NLO EW
VH	POWHEG BOX v2	PYTHIA 8	PDF4LHC15NNLO	CTEQ6L1	AZNLO	NNLO QCD + NLO EW
$t\bar{t}H$	POWHEG BOX v2	PYTHIA 8	NNPDF3.0NNLO	NNPDF2.3LO	A14	NLO QCD + NLO EW
Background						
V + jets (QCD/EW)	SHERPA 2.2.1		NNPDF3.0NNLO		SHERPA	NNLO for QCD, LO for EW
$t\bar{t}$	POWHEG BOX v2	PYTHIA 8	NNPDF3.0NNLO	NNPDF2.3LO	A14	NNLO + NNLL QCD

The dominant Higgs boson production mode at the LHC is ggF, with a cross-section of  $48.6 \text{ pb}$ ,<sup>3</sup> followed by VBF production, with a cross-section of  $3.78 \text{ pb}$ , then VH production, with a cross-section of  $2.25 \text{ pb}$ , and  $t\bar{t}H$  production, with a cross-section of  $0.51 \text{ pb}$ .

Higgs boson production via ggF was simulated using the POWHEG BOX v2 [22–26] generator at next-to-next-to-leading-order (NNLO) accuracy in QCD. The MC simulated samples are normalized to the next-to-next-to-next-to-leading-order (N<sup>3</sup>LO) cross-section in QCD plus electroweak (EW) corrections at next-to-leading order (NLO) [4, 27–36]. For this process the PDF4LHC15NNLO set of parton distribution functions (PDF) [37] was used, while the parton shower (PS) and non-perturbative effects were modelled with PYTHIA 8.230 [38] with parameter values set to those of the AZNLO [39] set of tuned parameters (tune).

Higgs boson production via VBF was simulated using POWHEG BOX v2 at NLO accuracy in QCD. It was tuned to match calculations with effects due to finite heavy-quark masses and soft-gluon resummation up to next-to-next-to-leading logarithms (NNLL). The MC simulated samples are normalized to an approximate-NNLO QCD cross-section with NLO electroweak corrections [40–42]. The PDF4LHC15NNLO PDF set was used, while PYTHIA 8.230 with the AZNLO tune was used for PS simulation.

<sup>3</sup> The cross-sections are reported for a centre-of-mass energy of  $\sqrt{s} = 13$  TeV.

Higgs boson production via  $VH$  was simulated with POWHEG Box v2 at NLO accuracy in QCD for  $VH$  plus one-jet production. The loop-induced  $gg \rightarrow ZH$  process was generated separately at leading order (LO) in QCD. The MC simulated samples are normalized to cross-sections calculated at NNLO in QCD with NLO electroweak corrections for  $pp \rightarrow VH$  and at NLO and next-to-leading-logarithm accuracy in QCD for  $gg \rightarrow ZH$  [43–49]. Similarly to the VBF samples, the PDF4LHC15<sub>NLO</sub> PDF set was used, while PYTHIA 8.230 with the AZNLO tune was used for PS simulation.

The production of  $t\bar{t}H$  events was simulated at NLO accuracy in QCD using POWHEG Box v2, with the decays of bottom and charm hadrons performed by EVTGEN 1.6.0 [50]. The cross-section used to normalize the  $t\bar{t}H$  process is calculated at NLO in QCD and electroweak couplings [4, 51–54]. For this sample, the NNPDF3.0<sub>NLO</sub> PDF set [55] was used, with the PS modelled by PYTHIA 8.230 with the A14 tune [56].

The normalization of all Higgs boson samples accounts for the decay branching ratio calculated with HDECAY [57–59] and PROPHECY4F [60–62]. The decays and spin correlations for  $\tau$ -leptons are handled by PYTHIA. The SM prediction of the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  branching ratio ( $0.0625 \pm 0.0014$ ) and a Higgs boson mass of 125.09 GeV are assumed in the calculation of the expected cross-sections throughout this measurement.

The QCD production of the  $V$  + jets background was simulated with the SHERPA 2.2.1 [63] generator using NLO matrix elements for up to two partons, and LO matrix elements for up to four partons, calculated with the COMIX [64] and OPENLOOPS [65–67] libraries. They were matched with the SHERPA parton shower [68] using the MEPS@NLO prescription [69–72] using the set of tuned parameters developed by the SHERPA authors. The NNPDF3.0<sub>NNLO</sub> set of PDFs [55] was used and the samples are normalized to a NNLO prediction [73]. Electroweak production of the  $lljj$  final state (with  $l = e, \mu, \tau$ , and  $j$  denoting a jet) was simulated with SHERPA 2.2.1 using LO matrix elements with up to two additional parton emissions. The LO cross-section is multiplied by a factor 1.7 to match the cross-section value measured in Ref. [74]; this scaling was also applied in Ref. [75]. For the matching with the parton shower, the same prescription as for the QCD  $V$  + jets processes was used. The samples were produced using the VBF approximation, which avoids overlap with semileptonic diboson topologies by requiring a  $t$ -channel colour-singlet exchange.

The production of  $t\bar{t}$  events was modelled at NLO in QCD by POWHEG Box v2 with the NNPDF3.0<sub>NLO</sub> PDF set and with the  $h_{\text{damp}}$  parameter<sup>4</sup> set to  $1.5 m_{\text{top}}$  [76]. The events were interfaced to PYTHIA 8.230 to model the parton shower, hadronization, and underlying event, with parameters set according to the A14 tune and using the NNPDF2.3<sub>LO</sub> set of PDFs. The decays of bottom and charm hadrons were performed by EVTGEN, as they were for the  $t\bar{t}H$  sample. The  $t\bar{t}$  sample is normalized to the cross-section prediction at NNLO in QCD, including the resummation of NNLL soft-gluon terms, calculated using TOP++ 2.0 [77–83].

To simulate the effects of additional  $pp$  collisions in the same, next or previous bunch crossing (pile-up), additional interactions were generated using the soft QCD processes provided by PYTHIA 8.186 [84] with the A3 tune [85] and the MSTW2008LO PDF set [86], and overlaid onto each simulated hard-scatter event. The MC samples were reweighted so that the pile-up distribution matches the one observed in the data, and were processed through an ATLAS detector simulation [87] based on GEANT4 [88].

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<sup>4</sup> The  $h_{\text{damp}}$  parameter is a resummation damping factor and one of the parameters that controls the matching of POWHEG matrix elements to the parton shower and thus effectively regulates the high- $p_T$  radiation against which the  $t\bar{t}$  system recoils.



## 4 Object reconstruction and event selection

The selection of  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  events requires the reconstruction of electrons, muons, the visible products of hadronically decaying  $\tau$ -leptons ( $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ ), jets (including their  $b$ -tagging properties) and missing transverse momentum. The numbers of reconstructed light leptons (electrons and muons, globally referred to as ‘leptons’ or  $\ell$ ) and  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  in each event are used for its assignment to one of the three channels used in the analysis. Requirements on the number of additional jets in the event are then used in the signal region categorization and for background suppression. Both the object selection criteria and the basic event selection are taken from Ref. [3].

Three channels from the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  decay are considered: two hadronically decaying  $\tau$ -leptons ( $\tau_{\text{had}}$ , where the  $\tau$ -lepton decays into hadrons plus a neutrino), denoted by  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ ; one leptonically decaying  $\tau$ -lepton ( $\tau_{\text{lep}}$ ) and one  $\tau_{\text{had}}$ , denoted by  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ ; and two  $\tau_{\text{lep}}$  with different flavours, denoted by  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$ . Events were collected with single-lepton, dilepton or di-hadronic  $\tau$ -lepton triggers [89–92]. The requirements imposed on the  $p_T$  of the reconstructed electrons, muons or  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  in the analysis are tighter than those applied in the trigger-object reconstruction and trigger decision, in order to be on the trigger efficiency plateau.

Electrons are reconstructed from topological clusters of energy deposits in the electromagnetic calorimeter which are matched to a track reconstructed in the ID [93]. They are required to satisfy the ‘Loose’ identification criteria described in Ref. [93], to have  $p_T > 15$  GeV, and to be in the fiducial volume of the ID and the high-granularity electromagnetic calorimeters,  $|\eta_{\text{cluster}}| < 2.47$ , with the exclusion of the LAr barrel–endcap transition region  $1.37 < |\eta_{\text{cluster}}| < 1.52$ . In the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_e\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels, the selected electron is also required to satisfy the ‘Medium’ identification and the ‘Loose’ isolation criterion [93] in the signal regions and in most of the control regions. The ‘Medium’ identification has an efficiency of 80% to 90%, while ‘Loose’ isolation has an efficiency of 90% for candidates with  $p_T = 15$  GeV, and it increases to more than 98% for candidates with  $p_T = 30$  GeV. The  $p_T$  requirement is tightened if the event is accepted by the single-electron trigger or the electron–muon trigger, as shown in Table 2.

Muons are reconstructed from signals in the MS matched with tracks in the ID. They are required to satisfy the ‘Loose’ identification criteria [94] and to have  $p_T > 10$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.5$ . In the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_\mu\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels, the selected muon in the signal regions is also required to satisfy the ‘Medium’ identification and the ‘Tight’ isolation criterion [94] based on track information. The ‘Medium’ identification has an efficiency above 97%, while the ‘Tight’ isolation has an efficiency increasing from 85% to 99% for muons with  $p_T$  increasing from 10 GeV to 50 GeV. The  $p_T$  requirement is tightened if the event is accepted by the single-muon trigger or the electron–muon trigger, as shown in Table 2.

Jets are reconstructed by applying the anti- $k_t$  algorithm [99, 100] with a radius parameter of  $R = 0.4$  to topological calorimeter-energy clusters and charged-particle tracks processed with a particle-flow algorithm [101]. The energy of the jets is corrected for the non-compensating calorimeter response, noise threshold effects, energy loss from inactive material, and pile-up contamination [102]. Only jets with  $p_T > 20$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 4.5$  are considered. A jet vertex tagger (JVT) [103] is used to remove jets with  $p_T < 60$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.5$  that are identified as not being associated with the event’s primary vertex. Similarly, pile-up jets in the forward region are suppressed with a ‘forward JVT’ [104] algorithm, which exploits jet shapes and topological jet correlations in pile-up interactions and is applied to all jets with  $p_T < 60$  GeV and  $|\eta| > 2.5$ . Jets with  $p_T > 20$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.5$  containing  $b$ -hadrons are identified using the DL1r  $b$ -tagging algorithm [105]. Two different working points (WP) for  $b$ -tagging are used depending on the channel: one with 85% efficiency is used in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels, while another with 70% efficiency is used in the  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel. The rejection factors for  $b$ -tagging of jets initiated by

Table 2: Transverse momentum thresholds applied to the selected electrons, muons and  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  depending on the trigger signature and the data-taking period. The  $p_T$  thresholds of the lowest- $p_T$  unprescaled triggers during the Run 2 ATLAS data-taking are reported in Refs. [95–98].

Trigger signature	Data-taking period	$p_T$ threshold [GeV] used in event selection
Single electron	2015	$p_T(e) > 25$
	2016–2018	$p_T(e) > 27$
Single muon	2015	$p_T(\mu) > 21$
	2016–2018	$p_T(\mu) > 27.3$
One electron, one muon	2015–2018	$p_T(e) > 18, p_T(\mu) > 14.7$
Two $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$	2015–2018	$p_T(\text{leading } \tau_{\text{had-vis}}) > 40$ $p_T(\text{sub-leading } \tau_{\text{had-vis}}) > 30$

$c$ -quarks and light partons are 9.4 (2.6) and 390 (29) respectively for the 70% (85%) efficiency working point.

Hadronic  $\tau$ -lepton decays produce a neutrino and visible decay products, mostly one or three charged pions and mostly up to two neutral pions. The reconstruction of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  is seeded by jets reconstructed using the anti- $k_t$  algorithm with a radius parameter of  $R = 0.4$ . Reconstructed tracks are then matched to  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  candidates. A multivariate discriminant is used to identify the tracks which are likely to have been produced by the charged  $\tau_{\text{had}}$  decay products, while rejecting tracks originating from other interactions, nearby jets, photon conversions or misreconstructed tracks [106]. The  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  objects are required to have one or three associated tracks selected by using this discriminant. Their charge ( $q$ ) is defined as the sum of the measured charges of these associated tracks and is required to be  $|q| = 1$ . The  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  objects must also satisfy the requirements  $p_T > 20$  GeV and  $|\eta| < 2.47$ , excluding the region  $1.37 < |\eta| < 1.52$ . The  $p_T$  requirement is tightened if the event is accepted by a di-hadronic  $\tau$ -trigger, as shown in Table 2. In order to separate the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  candidates produced by hadronic  $\tau$  decays from those produced by jets initiated by quarks or gluons, a recurrent neural-network identification algorithm [107] is used. This algorithm uses information from reconstructed charged-particle tracks and calorimeter energy clusters associated with  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  candidates, together with the values of high-level discriminating variables. In the signal regions of the  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  and  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels, the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  objects are required to fulfil the ‘Medium’ identification criterion, which has an efficiency of 75% (60%) for candidates with one (three) associated track(s). A separate discriminant (‘eBDT’) is constructed to reject backgrounds originating from electrons misidentified as  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ , arising mostly from  $Z \rightarrow ee$  events in this analysis. In the  $\tau_e\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel, for events where only one charged track is matched to the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  object, the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  is required to pass the ‘Medium’ working point of the eBDT algorithm, which has an 85% efficiency for candidates satisfying the identification requirement.

Since the objects used in the analysis are reconstructed from the same set of tracks and calorimetric energy clusters, some constituents can be associated with multiple objects. These overlaps between different objects are resolved with the procedure described in Ref. [3].

Simulated events are corrected for differences between data and MC simulation seen in jet vertex tagger and  $b$ -tagging efficiencies as well as  $b$ -tagging mis-tag rates [103, 108–110]. Corrections are also applied to account for minor differences between data and MC simulation seen in the lepton and  $\tau$ -lepton trigger, reconstruction, identification and isolation efficiencies [93, 94, 111].



The missing transverse momentum vector,  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ , is reconstructed as the negative vector sum of the transverse momenta of leptons,  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  and jets, and a soft term, which is calculated as the vectorial sum of the  $p_T$  of tracks matched to the primary vertex but not associated with a reconstructed lepton,  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  or jet [112]. The magnitude of  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  is referred to as the missing transverse energy,  $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ .

After the object reconstruction and the overlap removal, the events are selected if they contain a  $\tau\tau$  pair in one of the channels being studied:  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$ ,  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  or  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ . For each channel, additional selections based on topological criteria such as angular distances, the transverse mass  $m_T$  of the lepton and  $E_T^{\text{miss}}$  defined as  $m_T^2 = 2p_T^\ell E_T^{\text{miss}}(1 - \cos(\Delta\phi(\ell, E_T^{\text{miss}})))$ , and the fraction of each  $\tau$ -lepton's momentum carried by its visible decay products in the collinear approximation [113] ( $x_1$  and  $x_2$ ) are applied to enhance the sensitivity to the Higgs boson signal and reject background events. The collinear approximation assumes that the neutrinos from the  $\tau$ -lepton decays propagate in the same direction as the visible decay products. Additionally, a requirement of at least one jet in the event is added to the selection for each channel. These selection criteria are summarized in Table 3.

The invariant mass ( $m_{\tau\tau}$ ) of the two  $\tau$ -leptons is calculated using a likelihood-based technique, called the Missing Mass Calculator (MMC) [114], which relies on information about the  $\tau$ -lepton candidates' momenta, the presence of additional jets, the  $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$  and the type of  $\tau$ -lepton decay. In cases where the likelihood does not converge, the invariant mass is estimated in the collinear approximation, denoted by  $m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}}$ . The mass reconstruction techniques assume that the missing transverse momentum in the event is solely due to neutrinos from the  $\tau$ -lepton decays. These mass reconstruction techniques are important in separating the signal from the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau)$  background. In addition,  $m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}}$  is used to separate the phase space of the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  channel from the  $H \rightarrow WW$  analysis.

## 5 Event categorization

After the baseline event selection reported in Table 3, an additional event categorization is performed to select Higgs boson events in different STXS production modes and in a signal region targeting the VBF production mode for the differential fiducial measurement. The applied requirements are summarized in Table 4. Subsequently, within each STXS signal region, a further event splitting is performed to provide sensitivity to the targeted STXS bins. The requirements applied for this splitting are unchanged from those in Ref. [3] for the Boost and VH categories. To target additional STXS bins, finer requirements are made for VBF categories as well for those targeting  $t\bar{t}H$  production with fully hadronic top-quark and  $\tau$ -lepton decays (denoted by  $t\bar{t}(0\ell)H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  in the following), as described in more detail in the next part of this section. Most of these selections do not rely on the invariant mass of the two  $\tau$ -leptons, as the distribution of this variable is subsequently used in a likelihood fit to extract the signal as described in Section 8.

### 5.1 VBF categorization

The VBF inclusive region is designed to select events with a Higgs boson produced in association with two jets originating from the hard scattering. These events can be distinguished from those from other Higgs boson production modes, and also from  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  events, because they contain two high- $p_T$  jets with a large rapidity gap and a large dijet invariant mass ( $m_{jj}$ ). In order to further reduce the ggF contamination for the differential fiducial measurement, requirements on  $m_{jj}$  and  $|\Delta\eta_{jj}|$  are increased and

Table 3: Summary of the event selection. In the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  channel, events recorded with the electron trigger must satisfy  $p_T(e) > 27$  GeV and  $p_T(\mu) > 10$  GeV, events recorded with the muon trigger must satisfy  $p_T(e) > 15$  GeV and  $p_T(\mu) > 27.3$  GeV, and events recorded with the electron–muon trigger must satisfy  $p_T(e) > 18$  GeV and  $p_T(\mu) > 14.7$  GeV.

	$\tau_e\tau_\mu$	$\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ $e\tau_{\text{had}} \quad   \quad \mu\tau_{\text{had}}$	$\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$
<b>Preselection</b>			
Object counting	$N_e = 1, N_\mu = 1, N_{\tau_{\text{had-vis}}} = 0$	$N_{e/\mu} = 1, N_{\tau_{\text{had-vis}}} = 1$	$N_{e/\mu} = 0, N_{\tau_{\text{had-vis}}} = 2$
$p_T$ cut	$e/\mu$ : $p_T$ cut 10 to 27.3 GeV	$e/\mu$ : $p_T$ cut 21 to 27.3 GeV, $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ : $p_T > 30$ GeV	$\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ : $p_T > 40, 30$ GeV
ID, Isolation, and $e$ -veto	$e/\mu$ : Medium $e$ : Loose; $\mu$ : Tight	$e/\mu$ : Medium, $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ : Medium $e$ : Loose; $\mu$ : Tight 1-prong $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ : eBDT $e$ -veto	$\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ : Medium
Charge product	Opposite charge	Opposite charge	Opposite charge
Kinematics	$m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}} > m_Z - 25$ GeV $30 < m_{e\mu} < 100$ GeV	$m_T < 70$ GeV	
$b$ -veto	$N_{b\text{-jets}} = 0$ DL1r 85% WP	$N_{b\text{-jets}} = 0$ DL1r 85% WP	$N_{b\text{-jets}} = 0$ DL1r 70% WP not applied in $t\bar{t}(0L)H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$
$E_T^{\text{miss}}$	$E_T^{\text{miss}} > 20$ GeV	$E_T^{\text{miss}} > 20$ GeV	$E_T^{\text{miss}} > 20$ GeV
Leading jet	$p_T > 40$ GeV	$p_T > 40$ GeV	$p_T > 70$ GeV, $ \eta  < 3.2$
Angular	$\Delta R_{e\mu} < 2.0,  \Delta\eta_{e\mu}  < 1.5$	$\Delta R_{\ell\tau_{\text{had-vis}}} < 2.5,  \Delta\eta_{\ell\tau_{\text{had-vis}}}  < 1.5$	$0.6 < \Delta R_{\tau_{\text{had-vis}}\tau_{\text{had-vis}}} < 2.5$ $ \Delta\eta_{\tau_{\text{had-vis}}\tau_{\text{had-vis}}}  < 1.5$
$x_1$ and $x_2$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.0, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.0$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.4, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.2$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.4, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.4$

Table 4: Summary of the inclusive signal region selection for the STXS measurement and the fiducial differential measurement. The  $p_T^H$  computation used in the Boost category is the same as in Ref. [3] and denoted by  $p_T^{\text{reco}}(H)$ , and is not the NN-based  $p_T^H$  introduced in Section 5.1 for the VBF and ttH categories. The leading and sub-leading jets are denoted by  $j_0$  and  $j_1$ , respectively.

<b>VBF inclusive STXS</b>	$N_{\text{jets}} \geq 2, \text{ sub-leading jet } p_T > 30 \text{ GeV}$ $m_{jj} > 350 \text{ GeV},  \Delta\eta_{jj}  > 3$ $\eta(j_0) \times \eta(j_1) < 0$ lepton centrality: visible decay products of the $\tau$ -leptons between VBF jets
<b>VBF inclusive differential</b>	$N_{\text{jets}} \geq 2, \text{ sub-leading jet } p_T > 30 \text{ GeV}$ $m_{jj} > 600 \text{ GeV},  \Delta\eta_{jj}  > 3.4, p_T(jj) > 30 \text{ GeV}$ $\eta(j_0) \times \eta(j_1) < 0$ lepton centrality: visible decay products of the $\tau$ -leptons between VBF jets $p_T(Hjj) < 50 \text{ GeV}$
<b>VH inclusive</b>	$N_{\text{jets}} \geq 2, \text{ sub-leading jet } p_T > 30 \text{ GeV}$ $60 \text{ GeV} < m_{jj} < 120 \text{ GeV}$
<b>tt(<math>0\ell</math>)<math>H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}</math></b>	$N_{\text{jets}} \geq 6 \text{ and } N_{b\text{-jets}} \geq 1$ $\text{or } N_{\text{jets}} \geq 5 \text{ and } N_{b\text{-jets}} \geq 2$
<b>Boost inclusive</b>	Not VBF inclusive Not VH inclusive $p_T^{\text{reco}}(H) > 100 \text{ GeV}$

additional requirements on the dijet transverse momentum ( $p_T(jj)$ ) and the transverse momentum of the Higgs boson decay products and the two jets ( $p_T(Hjj)$ ) are introduced in the VBF inclusive region.

Following the convention of the STXS framework, events in the VBF inclusive region are split into eight bins according to  $m_{jj} \in [350, 700, 1000, 1500, \infty)$  GeV and  $p_T^H \geq 200$  GeV. A novel technique based on a neural network (NN) is adopted to estimate  $p_T^H$  for the VBF and tt( $0\ell$ ) $H \rightarrow \tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  categories. This NN is trained on ggF production events, using as input variables the  $\Delta R$  and  $\Delta\phi$  separation between the two  $\tau$ -leptons, the  $p_T$  of the system formed by the four-momenta of the two  $\tau$ -leptons and the  $E_T^{\text{miss}}$  ( $p_T^{\text{reco}}(H)$ ), and  $m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}}$  information. Since this NN exploits the invariant mass of the system and assumes  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  decays, it improves the  $p_T^H$  resolution in signal events – by 50% compared to that obtained with  $p_T^{\text{reco}}(H)$  alone – but leads to misreconstruction of the  $p_T$  for processes like  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$ .

A boosted decision tree (BDT) discriminant, trained using the dijet system’s kinematic variables as described in Table 5, is used to enhance the VBF  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  signal relative to ggF  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  production and the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  background. This BDT was also used in Ref. [3], where more details about it can be found, but the selection criteria applied to the BDT score have been optimized in each of the eight VBF

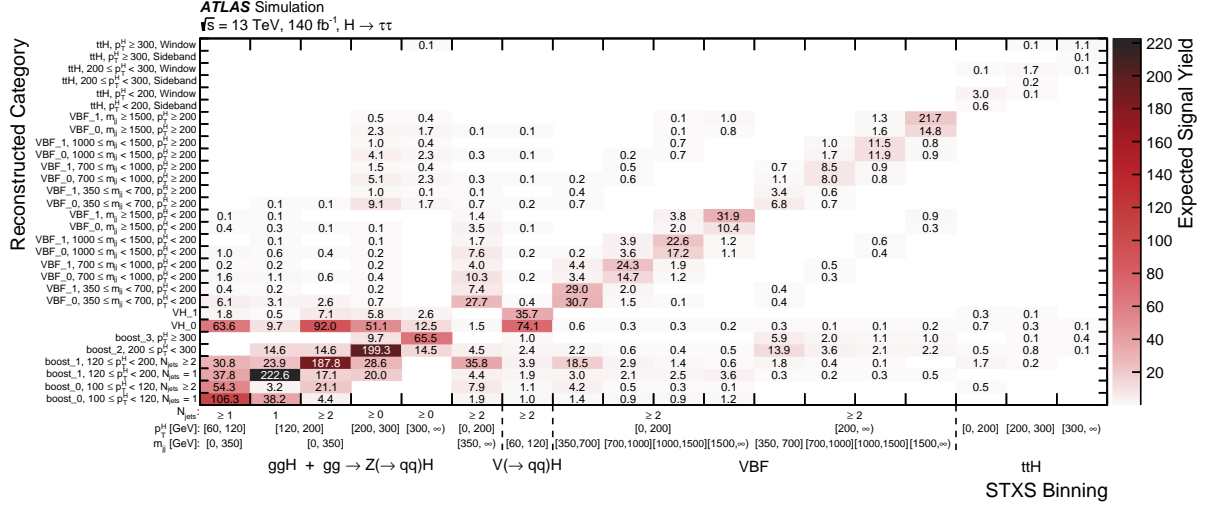
STXS bins and in the differential VBF inclusive region. Based on the discriminant output, additional event splitting into two subcategories, VBF\_0 enriched in background and VBF\_1 enriched in signal events, is defined.

Table 5: Variables used in the two multivariate taggers employed in the analysis. For each tagger, the presence or absence of a • indicates whether the variable is used or not. The symbol  $\tau$  stands for any reconstructed  $\tau$ -lepton candidate (electron, muon or  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ ) as appropriate in each channel. The symbols  $p_{\text{T}}(\tau\tau)$  and  $p_{\text{T}}(jj)$  indicate the vectorial sums of the momenta of two visible  $\tau$ -lepton candidates and of the two leading jets, respectively. The Higgs boson candidate is formed by the vector sum of the two visible  $\tau$ -lepton candidates' momenta and  $\vec{p}_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$ . The  $W$ -boson candidate in an event is built as the pair of non- $b$ -tagged jets with invariant mass closest to  $m_W$ . The top-quark candidate in an event is built as the system of the  $W$ -boson candidate and a  $b$ -tagged jet with invariant mass closest to  $m_{\text{top}}$ .

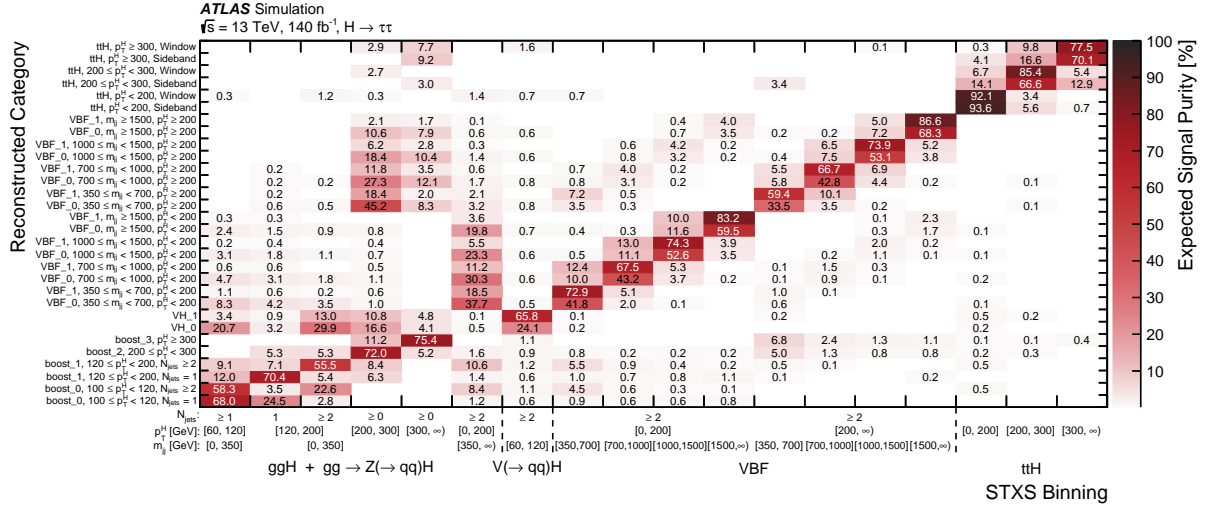
	Variable	VBF	ttH multiclass
Jet properties	Invariant mass of the two leading jets	•	
	$p_{\text{T}}(jj)$	•	
	Product of $\eta$ of the two leading jets	•	
	Sub-leading jet $p_{\text{T}}$	•	
	$\eta$ of the 5 leading jets		•
	Scalar sum of all jets $p_{\text{T}}$		•
	Scalar sum of all $b$ -tagged jets $p_{\text{T}}$		•
	Best $W$ -boson candidate dijet invariant mass		•
Angular distances	Best top-quark candidate three-jet invariant mass		•
	$\Delta\phi$ between the two leading jets	•	
	$\Delta\eta$ between the two leading jets	•	
	Minimum $\Delta R$ between two jets		•
	Minimum $\Delta R$ between a $b$ -tagged jet and a $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$		•
	$ \Delta\eta(\tau, \tau) $		•
$\tau$ -lepton properties	$\Delta R(\tau, \tau)$		•
	$p_{\text{T}}(\tau\tau)$		•
	Sub-leading $\tau$ $p_{\text{T}}$		•
$H$ candidate plus jets system	Leading $\tau$ $\eta$		•
	$p_{\text{T}}(Hjj)$	•	
$\vec{p}_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$	Missing transverse energy $E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}$		•
	Smallest $\Delta\phi(\tau, \vec{p}_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}})$		•

The threshold values for the BDT output are optimized to maximize the figure of merit  $\sigma_{\text{tot}} = \sqrt{\sigma_0^2 + \sigma_1^2}$ , where  $\sigma_i = S_i/\sqrt{S_i + B_i}$  with  $S_i$  and  $B_i$  being the numbers of signal and background events in the VBF\_0 ( $i = 0$ ) and VBF\_1 ( $i = 1$ ) categories. This results in the VBF inclusive STXS region being split into a total of 16 signal regions. The signal yield expected in each of these signal regions is shown in Figure 1(a), while Figure 1(b) illustrates the relative signal population in each signal region.

The differential fiducial measurement has two signal regions: VBF\_0 enriched in background and VBF\_1 enriched in signal events.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1: (a) Expected SM  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  signal yield and (b) expected signal purity in each signal region of the analysis ( $y$ -axis). Yields are summed over the three  $\tau\tau$  channels ( $\tau_e\tau_\mu, \tau_{lep}\tau_{had}, \tau_{had}\tau_{had}$ ). Only entries with a value above 0.1 are shown in the plots.

## 5.2 $t\bar{t}(0\ell)H \rightarrow \tau_{had}\tau_{had}$ categorization

The  $t\bar{t}(0\ell)H \rightarrow \tau_{had}\tau_{had}$  region is designed to enhance the contribution from  $t\bar{t}H$  production. Events are required to have at least six jets including at least one  $b$ -tagged jet, or five jets including at least two  $b$ -tagged jets. Events within this category are split into several regions based on a multiclass BDT trained to discriminate the  $t\bar{t}H$  signal events from the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau)$  and  $t\bar{t}$  background events. A detailed description of the kinematic variables used for the multiclass BDT training is given in Table 5. Regions enhanced in signal events are defined by combining requirements on the BDT scores; the threshold values for the scores are optimized using the same figure of merit as the one used for VBF categorization. By inverting the

requirement on the score, separate control regions for the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau)$  and  $t\bar{t}$  backgrounds are also defined. According to the prescription of the STXS framework, three signal regions enriched in signal events are defined according to  $p_T^H \in [0, 200, 300, \infty)$  GeV. The NN-based  $p_T^{\text{NN}}(H)$  described in Section 5.1 is used to make this splitting. Each signal region is also required to have  $m_{\tau\tau} \in [100, 150]$  GeV, while events outside this window are assigned to a sideband region that is used to control the backgrounds. The signal yield expected in each of these regions is shown in Figure 1(a), while Figure 1(b) illustrates the relative signal population in each signal region.

### 5.3 V(had)H categorization

To match the STXS  $qq \rightarrow V(\rightarrow qq)H$  particle-level  $p_T^{\text{jet}}$  requirement and  $m_{jj}$  binning, events selected in the V(had) categories must satisfy  $60 \text{ GeV} < m_{jj} < 120 \text{ GeV}$  and the  $p_T$  of the sub-leading jet must be greater than 30 GeV. Events in this category are split into two subcategories using a dedicated tagger. The V(had)H tagger was trained by treating all Higgs boson events produced by processes other than  $VH$  as background. The BDT score requirement used to define the two categories was optimized to give the smallest uncertainty for the V(had)H cross-section, and provides a selection where the expected fraction of V(had)H among all Higgs boson events is 66% (24%) in the VH\_1 (VH\_0) category. The signal yield expected in each of these regions is shown in Figure 1(a), while Figure 1(b) illustrates the relative signal population in each signal region.

### 5.4 Boost categorization

Events failing to meet the criteria of the VBF, V(had)H and ttH categories but having a high- $p_T$  Higgs boson candidate are considered for the ‘Boost’ categories targeting ggF events with large Higgs boson transverse momentum. Events in the Boost category must satisfy  $p_T^H > 100 \text{ GeV}$ . The reconstructed Higgs boson’s transverse momentum,  $p_T^H$ , is estimated using  $p_T^{\tau\tau}$  since no significant improvement was found in this Boost category by using the NN-based  $p_T^H$  reconstruction. Following the convention of the STXS framework, events are further categorized by  $p_T^H$  value and by the total number of jets with  $p_T$  greater than 30 GeV ( $N_{\text{jets}}(p_T > 30 \text{ GeV})$ ). Events with  $p_T^H < 200 \text{ GeV}$  are separated into 1-jet and  $\geq 2$ -jet categories, while events with  $p_T^H > 200 \text{ GeV}$  and at least one jet are considered without further categorization based on jet multiplicity. The signal yield expected in each of these regions is shown in Figure 1(a), while Figure 1(b) illustrates the relative signal population in each signal region.

## 6 Background estimation

The dominant backgrounds after the event selection are irreducible backgrounds from  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  and  $t\bar{t}$  production, and reducible backgrounds from processes where at least one jet is misidentified as a  $\tau_{\text{had}}$  or a light lepton. The contributions from these processes are evaluated using a mixture of simulations and data-driven techniques, following the strategy described extensively in Ref. [3].

Events from the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  process form the dominant background and they are estimated using MC simulated samples constrained using data. The yields predicted from  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  MC samples are corrected using dedicated control regions defined by selecting events with kinematic properties similar to those in the corresponding signal regions, as described in detail in Ref. [3]. The selection used to



define these control regions starts from  $Z(\rightarrow \ell\ell) + \text{jets}$  data and MC events which are modified through a simplified implementation of the *embedding* procedure [115], rescaling the transverse momentum of each reconstructed lepton through parameterizations to account for the differences in the trigger efficiencies, the kinematics of prompt leptons and the decay products of  $\tau$ -leptons. After the rescaling, all the relevant kinematic quantities in the analysis are recomputed. This also includes accounting for the additional  $E_T^{\text{miss}}$  from the neutrinos from the decay of the  $\tau$ -leptons. These control regions are included in the fit to help constrain the normalization of  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  MC events in the signal regions. The uncertainties affecting the reconstructed objects used in the embedding are propagated through the entire procedure, and include those associated with the parameterizations. Dedicated uncertainties affecting each control region are assigned to account for the modelling differences observed between the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau)$  and embedded  $Z \rightarrow \ell\ell$  MC predictions because of the approximations associated with the simplified embedding procedure. For the fiducial differential measurement an additional shape modelling uncertainty is assigned to the variable under study by comparing the embedded data and MC samples for each variable in each control region.

Processes with at least one jet misidentified as an electron, muon or  $\tau_{\text{had}}$  are collectively referred to as misidentified  $\tau$  background. They are evaluated using data-driven techniques in the three channels considered in the analysis, following the same methodology as in Ref. [3].

In the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  channel, the misidentified  $\tau$  background is estimated using the matrix method [116]. Data events are selected using the same criteria as in Table 3, but without the lepton isolation criteria and with loosened identification criteria for the electrons. The expected number of fake leptons in each signal region is computed from a system of equations relating the efficiencies for real and fake leptons to the observed event yields. The real-lepton efficiencies are estimated using simulations corrected with data-based scale factors, while the fake-lepton efficiencies are measured using data events which have two leptons of the same charge. Uncertainties are assigned to this background, taking into account the statistical uncertainties in the derived efficiencies, the dependency on the number of jets in the final state, the different MC samples used to derive the efficiencies, and the normalization of the real-lepton component subtracted in the efficiency estimation.

In the  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel, the misidentified  $\tau$  background is evaluated using the fake-factor technique [116]. Data events are selected if they satisfy a very loose requirement on the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  identification score but do not satisfy the ‘Medium’ working point criteria. Residual contributions from processes with real  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  satisfying this requirement are evaluated using simulations and subtracted. The distribution of the misidentified  $\tau$  background component in each signal region is obtained by multiplying the contribution of data events selected with the inverted identification criterion by a fake-factor defined as the ratio of misidentified  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  that respectively pass or fail the ‘Medium’ working point of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  identification algorithm. Uncertainties are assigned to this background, taking into account the statistical uncertainties in the fake-factors, the uncertainties associated with the subtraction of the residual contributions from processes with real  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$ , and the uncertainties in the flavour composition estimate.

In the  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel, the misidentified  $\tau$  background is also determined using a fake-factor approach. The method is similar to the one used in the  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel, and it takes into account the processes with one or two jets misidentified as  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  and the trigger matching. Uncertainties are assigned to this background, taking into account the statistical uncertainties in the fake-factors, differences between fake-factors calculated in different validation regions, and different fake-factor parameterizations.

Other minor backgrounds arising from an electron or a muon misidentified as a  $\tau_{\text{had}}$  are estimated from simulation and, in the case of electrons, corrected for the efficiency measured in data.

Event contributions from the  $t\bar{t}$  process are sizeable in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels, and control regions enriched in top-quark events are defined by replacing the  $b$ -jet veto in the event selection (see Table 3) with a requirement of at least one  $b$ -tagged jet. This allows the  $t\bar{t}$  MC simulation to be validated, and the  $t\bar{t}$  process normalization to be determined using data.

## 7 Systematic uncertainties

Systematic uncertainties affect the yields in the various signal and control regions as well as the distribution shape of the main fit observable ( $m_{\tau\tau}$ ). They can be assigned to three main groups: the experimental uncertainties, the theoretical uncertainties for the backgrounds and the theoretical uncertainties for the signal. Overall, the systematic uncertainties having largest impact on the measurement are similar to those in Ref. [3].

The experimental systematic uncertainties include those affecting the trigger, reconstruction, identification and isolation efficiencies for all the considered particles in the final state, as well as their energy scale and resolution [93, 94, 102, 103, 108–111]. These uncertainties also affect the shape of the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution, the background yields and the signal cross-section through their effects on the acceptance and the migration between different event categories. Among the experimental uncertainties, the jet-related uncertainties in the energy scale and resolution are the ones having largest impact on the results discussed in Section 8. The jet energy scale uncertainty includes components related to the in situ calibration of jets as well as pile-up, the extrapolation to higher transverse momentum, and uncertainties in the different responses to quark- and gluon-initiated jets. The jet energy scale uncertainty for central jets ( $|\eta| < 1.2$ ) varies from 1% for a wide range of jet  $p_T$  ( $250 \text{ GeV} < p_T < 2000 \text{ GeV}$ ) to 5% for very low  $p_T$  jets (20 GeV) and to 3.5% for very high  $p_T$  jets ( $> 2.5 \text{ TeV}$ ). The jet energy resolution is measured in a dedicated analysis [102] and ranges from  $(24 \pm 5)\%$  at 20 GeV to  $(6.0 \pm 0.5)\%$  at 300 GeV.

The uncertainties in the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  identification efficiency range from 2% to 6% and are parameterized as a function of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$   $p_T$  and number of associated tracks. The eBDT efficiency uncertainties are of the order of 1% to 2% and are parameterized as a function of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$   $p_T$ ,  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$   $\eta$  and  $\tau$ -lepton decay mode. Since the analysis is sensitive to the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  reconstruction efficiency uncertainty through the usage of the kinematic embedding, this efficiency is left as a free parameter in the fit and measured in situ. The total uncertainty of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$  energy scale ranges from 1% to 4%, and is estimated by combining a direct measurement with  $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau \rightarrow \mu\tau_{\text{had-vis}} + 3\nu$  events, measurements of the calorimeter response to single particles, and comparisons between simulations using different detector geometries or GEANT4 physics lists. This uncertainty is also parameterized as a function of the  $\tau_{\text{had-vis}}$   $p_T$  and number of associated tracks [111].

For the theoretical uncertainties in the background, the largest impact on the results is due to the uncertainties associated with the  $Z$ +jets and  $t\bar{t}$  samples. For  $Z$ +jets, uncertainties were considered for the renormalization scale ( $\mu_r$ ), factorization scale ( $\mu_f$ ) and resummation scale ( $\mu_q$ ), for the jet-to-parton matching scheme (CKKW), for the choice of  $\alpha_s$  value, and for the choice of PDFs. The effects of uncertainties in  $\mu_r$  and  $\mu_f$  due to missing higher orders and non-perturbative effects were evaluated using six scale variations in the matrix elements by factors of 0.5 and 2, excluding the extreme variations in opposite directions [117]. The effects of  $\mu_q$  and CKKW uncertainties were estimated from a comparison with alternative samples generated with a varied resummation scale or jet-to-parton matching scheme, respectively, while the effects of other uncertainties were evaluated from internal-weight variations in simulated samples. For  $t\bar{t}$ , uncertainties were considered for the choice of matrix element and parton shower generators, the choice

of model for initial- and final-state radiation (ISR and FSR respectively), and the choice of PDFs. The effects of PDF uncertainties were estimated using the PDF4LHC15<sub>NLO</sub> set of eigenvectors, while the other uncertainties were obtained from a comparison with alternative samples generated using the same settings as the default sample apart from the variation of the parameter for which the uncertainty is estimated.

Several sources of theoretical uncertainty in the signal are considered. For all production modes, uncertainties are considered for the PDF and  $\alpha_s$ , the parton shower and hadronization model, and missing higher orders in the matrix element calculation. The effects of PDF and  $\alpha_s$  uncertainties were estimated from the PDF4LHC15<sub>NLO</sub> set of eigenvectors. The impact of using a different parton shower and hadronization model is evaluated by comparing the nominal sample with an event sample generated using HERWIG 7 [118] instead of PYTHIA 8. The impact of using a different matrix element generator for the signal sample is evaluated by comparing the nominal signal sample with an alternative sample generated with MADGRAPH5\_AMC@NLO [119] instead of POWHEG BOX, while keeping the same parton shower model.

For the ggF production process, 18 sources of uncertainty related to the ggF kinematics and the cross-section were considered, following the prescription in Ref. [120]. Two uncertainties are assigned for the overall fixed-order and resummation effects. Two uncertainties cover the migrations between different jet-multiplicity bins. Seven uncertainties are associated with the modelling the Higgs boson  $p_T$  in different phase-space regions. Four uncertainties take into account dijet mass migrations across the STXS bin boundaries. One uncertainty covers the modelling of the Higgs boson plus two leading jets transverse momentum ( $p_T^{Hjj}$ ) distribution in the  $\geq 2$ -jet region. One uncertainty is assigned to the modelling of the distribution of the Higgs boson plus one jet transverse momentum ( $p_T^{Hj}$ ) divided by  $p_T^H$  in the high- $p_T^H$  region. The last uncertainty takes into account the uncertainty from the choice of top-quark mass scheme.

For the VBF and  $VH$  processes, ten uncertainties related to the STXS categorization were considered: one related to the inclusive cross-section of the process, one related to the two-jet requirement, one related to the Higgs boson  $p_T$  selection at 200 GeV, one related to the  $p_T$  balance between the Higgs boson and the dijet system in events with two or three jets, and six which take into account dijet mass migrations across the STXS bin boundaries.

For the  $t\bar{t}H$  process, six other uncertainties are included: one related to the inclusive cross-section of the process, and five migration uncertainties related to Higgs boson  $p_T$  boundaries in the STXS scheme.

## 8 Simplified template cross-section measurement results

The statistical analysis for the measurements in this paper is based on a likelihood function constructed as the product of Poisson probability terms over the bins of the input distributions. The systematic uncertainties (described in Section 7) are incorporated in the likelihood function through nuisance parameters that are constrained by Gaussian probability terms that multiply the Poisson probability terms. Poisson terms also describe the expected event counts in each bin of the input distributions. The parameters of interest (POIs) of the model are estimated by maximizing the likelihood. The test statistic is constructed from the profile likelihood ratio, and the confidence intervals for the parameters of interest are derived using the asymptotic approximation [121].

## 8.1 Simplified template cross-section measurement fit model

For the STXS measurement, the likelihood function is built with the following signal regions (SRs) and control regions (CRs):

- Six SRs for the Boost category in each channel; the SRs are defined starting from the Boost inclusive category defined in Table 4 and further split according to the number of jets and  $p_T^H$ . For each SR and channel, a corresponding  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CR is defined using the kinematic embedding described in Section 6. Moreover, a CR enriched in the  $t\bar{t}$  process is defined for each inclusive category in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels. Summing over the SRs,  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CRs and  $t\bar{t}$  CRs, and considering the three channels, this leads to 38 Boost categories.
- Two SRs for the VH category in each channel; the SRs are defined starting from the VH inclusive category defined in Table 4 and further split into regions of high and low scores of a BDT trained to distinguish the VH production mode from the other Higgs boson production modes. For each SR and channel, a corresponding  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CR is defined using the kinematic embedding. Moreover, a CR enriched in the  $t\bar{t}$  process is defined for each inclusive category in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels. Summing over the SRs,  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CRs and  $t\bar{t}$  CRs, and considering the three channels, 14 VH categories are included in the fit.
- Sixteen SRs for the VBF category in each channel, as described in Section 5.1. For each SR and channel, a corresponding  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CR is defined using the kinematic embedding. Moreover, a CR enriched in the  $t\bar{t}$  process is defined for each inclusive category in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels. Summing over the SRs,  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CRs and  $t\bar{t}$  CRs, and considering the three channels, this leads to 98 VBF categories.
- Six SRs and two CRs for the ttH category in the  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channel, as described in Section 5.2.

In the SRs, the binned  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution is used to obtain information about the cross-section relative to the SM prediction. In the Boost and VH SRs,  $m_{\tau\tau}$  is reconstructed using only the MMC technique, while in the VBF and ttH SRs  $m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}}$  is used for events where the MMC technique failed to estimate the invariant mass. CRs are employed to constrain the event yield of specific background processes with a single-bin histogram containing the number of events in the corresponding CR. In particular, the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  CR provides additional constraining power for the  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  background uncertainties, being complementary to the mass distribution in a region centred around the  $Z$  boson peak. Three different measurements are performed:

1.  *$pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  total cross-section*: a single POI, corresponding to the  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section, is estimated by the fit. In the likelihood function, the signal yields in each category are parameterized as the product of the  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section, the integrated luminosity and the efficiency (including the acceptance of the ATLAS detector) of the selection for a SM Higgs boson with a mass of 125.09 GeV. In this measurement, the relative contributions to the  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section from the various production modes are fixed to the SM predictions.
2. *Cross-section per production mode*: four POIs, corresponding to the cross-sections of the four dominant production modes (ggF, VBF, VH,  $t\bar{t}H$ ) of the Higgs boson, are estimated by the fit. In this configuration, the event yields in the likelihood function are the sum of those from each individual production mode, parameterized as a function of the POI similarly to the way for the total cross-section measurement described above.

3. *Simplified Template Cross-Section*: eighteen POIs, corresponding to the cross-sections for different bins of the STXS *stage 1.2* framework, are determined by the fit. The cross-sections are measured for six ggF bins, three  $t\bar{t}H$  bins and nine VBF +  $qq \rightarrow V(\rightarrow qq)H$  bins. These bins were chosen by combining some of the STXS bins proposed in Ref. [4], taking into account the available signal sample size and the expected sensitivity of the analysis. The  $qq \rightarrow V(\rightarrow qq)H$  contribution is measured for events with particle-level dijet mass  $m_{jj}$  between 60 GeV and 120 GeV, while the VBF contribution is measured in events with  $m_{jj}$  above 350 GeV.

## 8.2 Simplified template cross-section results

The results of the statistical analysis performed for the total cross-section measurement are presented in Figures 2 to 4. Figures 2 and 3 show the  $\tau\tau$  invariant mass distributions, split into low and high ranges of  $p_T^H$  and  $m_{jj}$  respectively, in VBF\_0 and VBF\_1 for a subset of the categories used in the analysis. The signal from  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  is clearly visible on top of the background originating mostly from  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau)$ . Figure 4 shows the expected and observed event yields in the  $t\bar{t}H$  categories.

The measurements of the total cross-section and per-production-mode cross-sections are shown in Figure 5. Table 6 shows the impact of the different uncertainty sources on the measurements, while the cross-section measured for each production mode is reported in Table 7. Good agreement with the SM predictions is found, with  $p$ -values of 65% and 99% for compatibility of the measurements with the SM for the total cross-section and per-production-mode cross-sections, respectively. The VBF production cross-section normalized to the SM prediction is measured to be  $0.93^{+0.17}_{-0.15}$ , with slightly better precision than in Ref. [3] ( $0.90^{+0.20}_{-0.17}$ ) due to the improved categorization used in the present analysis. The  $t\bar{t}H$  cross-section normalized to the SM prediction is measured to be  $0.77^{+1.01}_{-0.92}$ , using a more refined multivariate analysis strategy which improves the expected precision by roughly 25% relative to the result in Ref. [3] ( $1.06^{+1.28}_{-1.08}$ ).

Figure 6 shows the results of the STXS measurement. The measurements in the inclusive ggF and VH regions are in good agreement with the SM and are similar to those in Ref. [3] as the selections for these regions have not changed, although some of the theoretical uncertainties have been updated. The eight bins used for VBF production show no significant deviation from the SM. In the phase space with higher  $p_T^H$  and/or higher  $m_{jj}$  the precision of the results is improved due to the smaller SM backgrounds in these regions, leading to a ratio of the measured cross-section to the SM expectation when  $p_T^H > 200$  GeV ( $p_T^H < 200$  GeV) and  $m_{jj} > 1.5$  TeV of  $1.29^{+0.39}_{-0.34}$  ( $0.12^{+0.34}_{-0.33}$ ). This is the first measurement for the higher- $p_T^H$  criteria, and the most precise for the lower- $p_T^H$  criteria, in this corner of phase space. As shown in Figure 7, several VBF production POIs at low  $p_T^H$  are strongly anti-correlated with a single POI describing ggF production plus two jets, causing the negative values obtained for the VBF bins at  $p_T^H < 200$  GeV. Overall, the  $p$ -value for compatibility of this result with the SM is 6%.

The results for  $t\bar{t}H$  production are limited by statistical uncertainties, and they are used to derive cross-section upper limits at 95% confidence level (CL) for  $t\bar{t}H$  production in the STXS framework, using the CL<sub>s</sub> method [122, 123], as shown in Figure 8.

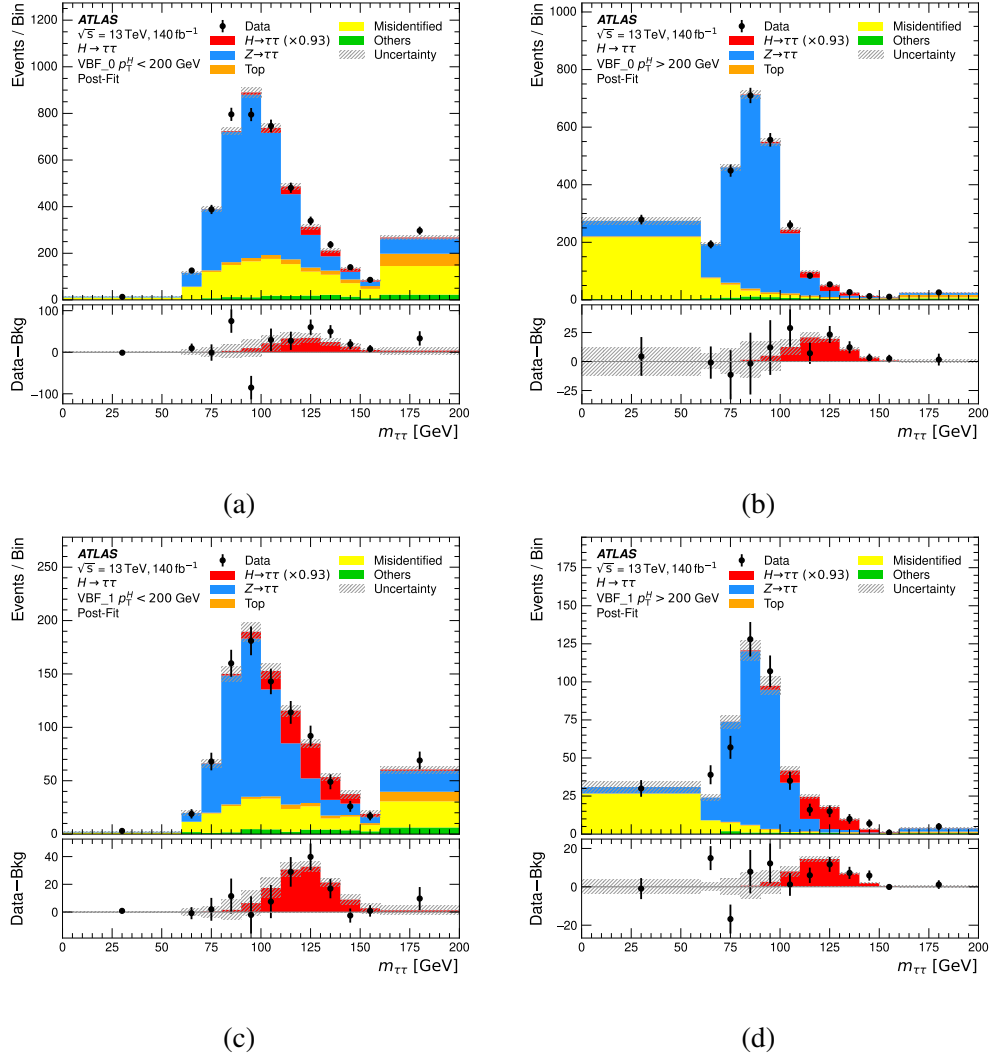


Figure 2: Distribution of the reconstructed  $\tau\tau$  invariant mass ( $m_{\tau\tau}$ ) for all events in the (a,b) VBF\_0 and (c,d) VBF\_1 signal regions for (a,c)  $p_T^H < 200$  GeV and (b,d)  $p_T^H > 200$  GeV. The bottom panel shows the differences between observed data events and expected background events (black points). The observed Higgs boson signal, corresponding to  $(\sigma \times B)/(\sigma \times B)_{\text{SM}} = 0.93$ , is shown with a filled red histogram. Entries with values above the  $x$ -axis range are shown in the last bin of each distribution. The prediction for each sample is determined from the likelihood fit performed to measure the total  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section.



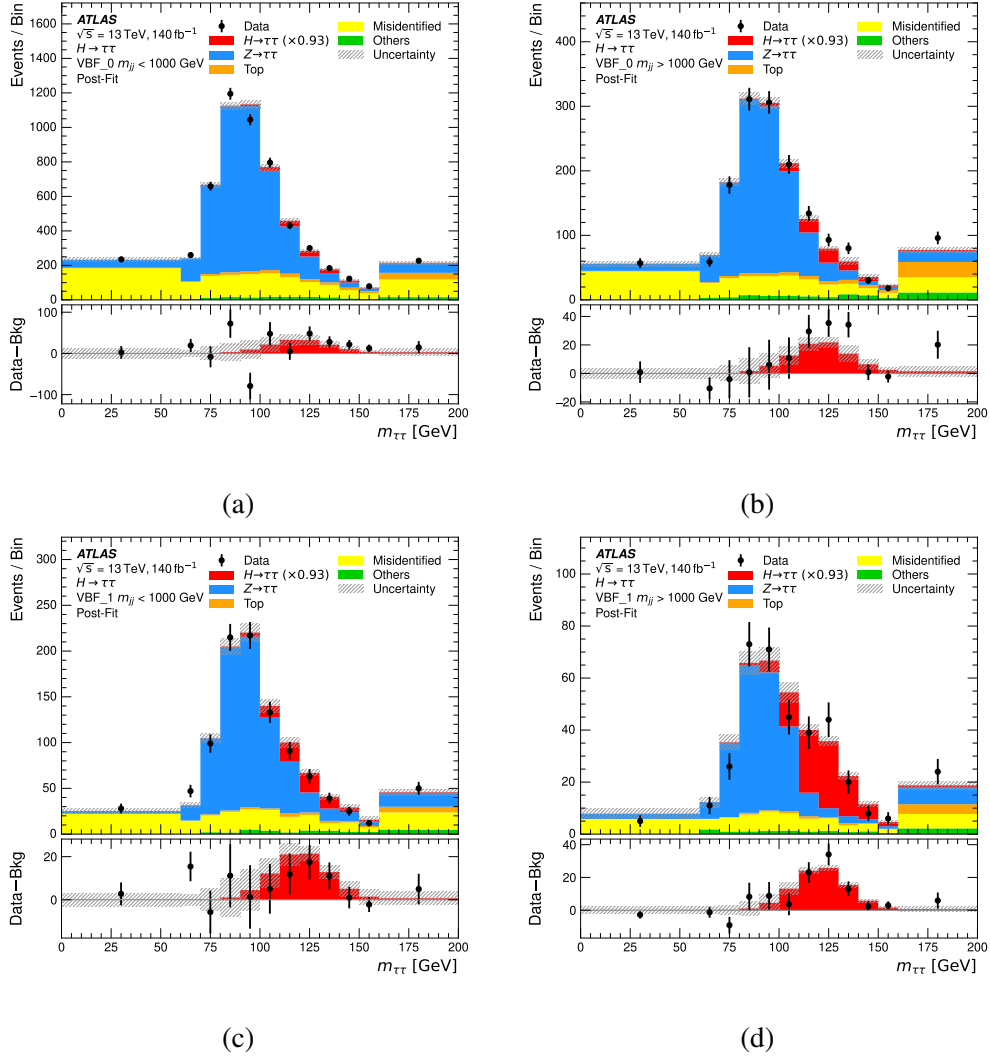


Figure 3: Distribution of the reconstructed  $\tau\tau$  invariant mass ( $m_{\tau\tau}$ ) for all events in the (a,b) VBF\_0 and (c,d) VBF\_1 signal regions for (a,c)  $m_{jj} < 1$  TeV and (b,d)  $m_{jj} > 1$  TeV. The bottom panel shows the differences between observed data events and expected background events (black points). The observed Higgs boson signal, corresponding to  $(\sigma \times B)/(\sigma \times B)_{\text{SM}} = 0.93$ , is shown with a filled red histogram. Entries with values above the  $x$ -axis range are shown in the last bin of each distribution. The prediction for each sample is determined from the likelihood fit performed to measure the total  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section.

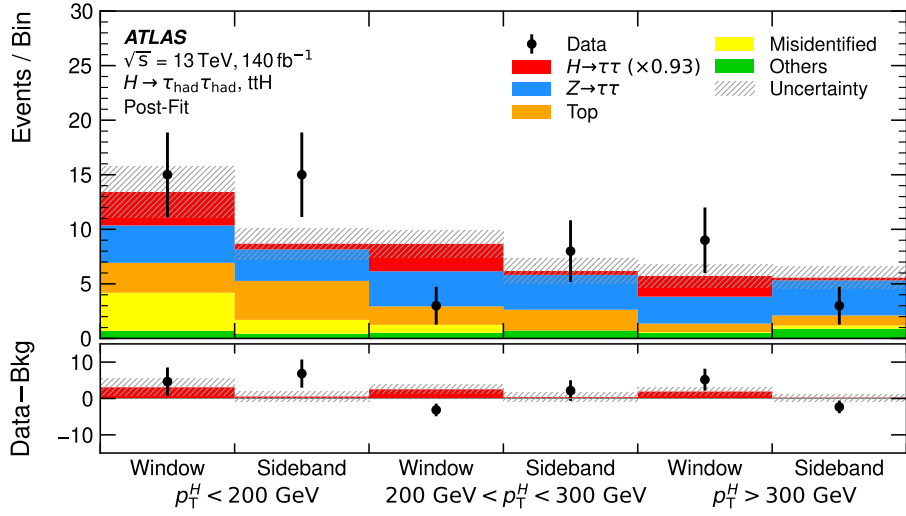


Figure 4: Comparison of the observed and expected event yields in the  $t\bar{t}H$  categories. The *window* category contains events with  $m_{\tau\tau} \in [100, 150]$  GeV, while events outside of this mass region are included in the *sideband* region. The bottom panel shows the differences between observed data events and expected background events (black points). The observed Higgs boson signal, corresponding to  $(\sigma \times B)/(\sigma \times B)_{\text{SM}} = 0.93$ , is shown with a filled red histogram. The prediction for each sample is determined from the likelihood fit performed to measure the total  $pp \rightarrow H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  cross-section.

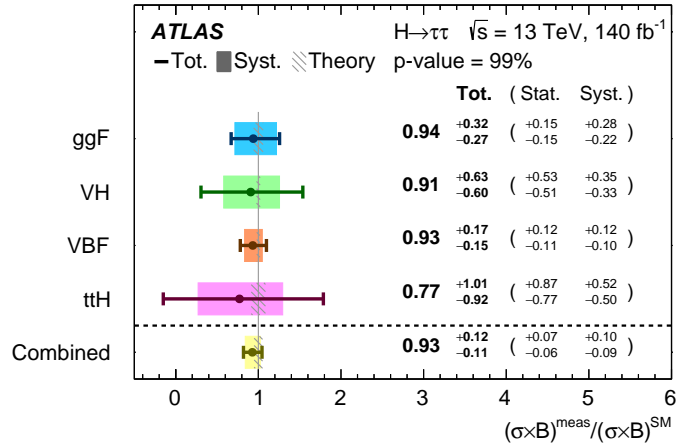


Figure 5: The measured values of  $\sigma_H \times B(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$  relative to the SM expectations in the total (labelled as ‘Combined’) and per-production-mode fit. The total  $\pm 1\sigma$  uncertainty in each measurement is indicated by the error bar, with the contribution from the systematic uncertainty indicated by the coloured band.

Table 6: Summary of the different sources of uncertainty in the ratio of  $\sigma_H \times B(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$  to the SM expectation for each production mode. Experimental uncertainties for reconstructed objects combine efficiency and energy/momentum scale and resolution uncertainties. Samples size includes the bin-by-bin statistical uncertainties in the simulated backgrounds as well as statistical uncertainties in misidentified  $\tau$  backgrounds, which are estimated using data. Entries with no significant impact on the measurement are denoted by ‘-’.

Production mode	ggF	ttH	VBF	VH
Best-fit value	0.94	0.77	0.93	0.91
Total uncertainty	$\pm 0.30$	$\pm 0.97$	$\pm 0.16$	$\pm 0.62$
Statistical uncertainty	$\pm 0.15$	$\pm 0.82$	$\pm 0.12$	$\pm 0.52$
Total systematic uncertainty	$\pm 0.26$	$\pm 0.51$	$\pm 0.11$	$\pm 0.34$
Samples size	$\pm 0.09$	$\pm 0.32$	$\pm 0.03$	$\pm 0.25$
Theoretical uncertainty in signal	$\pm 0.19$	$\pm 0.14$	$\pm 0.10$	$\pm 0.13$
Jet and $E_T^{\text{miss}}$	$\pm 0.12$	$\pm 0.14$	$\pm 0.03$	$\pm 0.11$
Hadronic $\tau$ -lepton decays	$\pm 0.05$	$\pm 0.09$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.04$
Misidentified $\tau$ -lepton background	$\pm 0.05$	$\pm 0.05$	$\pm 0.02$	$\pm 0.11$
Luminosity	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.02$
Theoretical uncertainty in top-quark processes	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.30$	-	$\pm 0.02$
Theoretical uncertainty in $Z$ + jets processes	$\pm 0.03$	$\pm 0.07$	-	$\pm 0.02$
Flavour tagging	$\pm 0.02$	$\pm 0.05$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.01$
Electrons and muons	$\pm 0.02$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.01$	$\pm 0.02$

Table 7: Best-fit values and uncertainties of the  $\sigma_H \times B(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$  for the four dominant production modes. The uncertainties include both the statistical and systematic components. The SM predictions for each region, computed using the inclusive cross-section calculations and the simulated event samples, are also shown.

Production mode	$\sigma_H \times B(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$ [pb]	
	SM prediction	Measurement
ggF	$2.77 \pm 0.09$	$2.6 \pm 0.9$
VH	$0.117 \pm 0.003$	$0.11 \pm 0.07$
VBF	$0.220 \pm 0.005$	$0.20 \pm 0.04$
$t\bar{t}H$	$0.031 \pm 0.003$	$0.02 \pm 0.03$

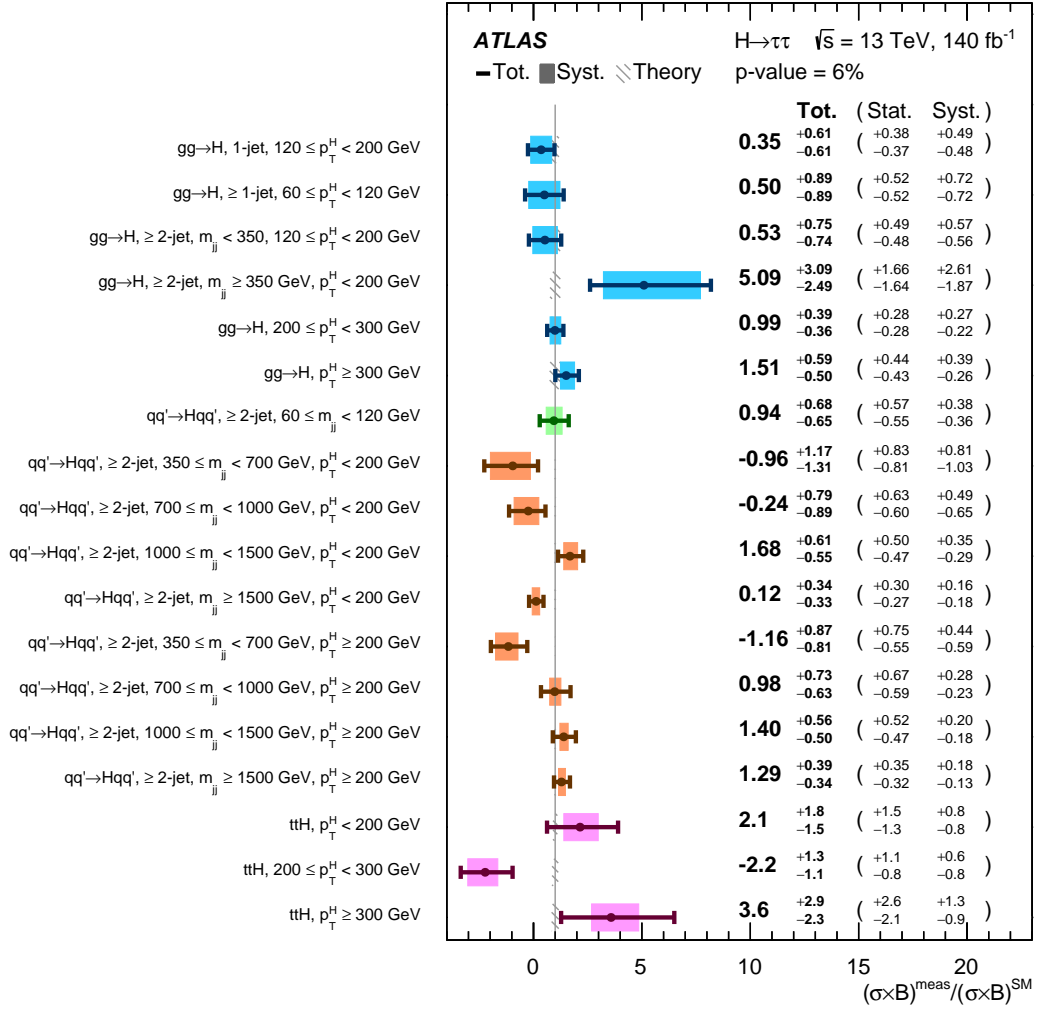


Figure 6: The measured values for  $\sigma_H \times B(H \rightarrow \tau\tau)$  relative to the SM expectations in the simplified template cross-section measurement. The error bars and shaded areas show the total uncertainty and systematic uncertainty in the measurements, respectively.

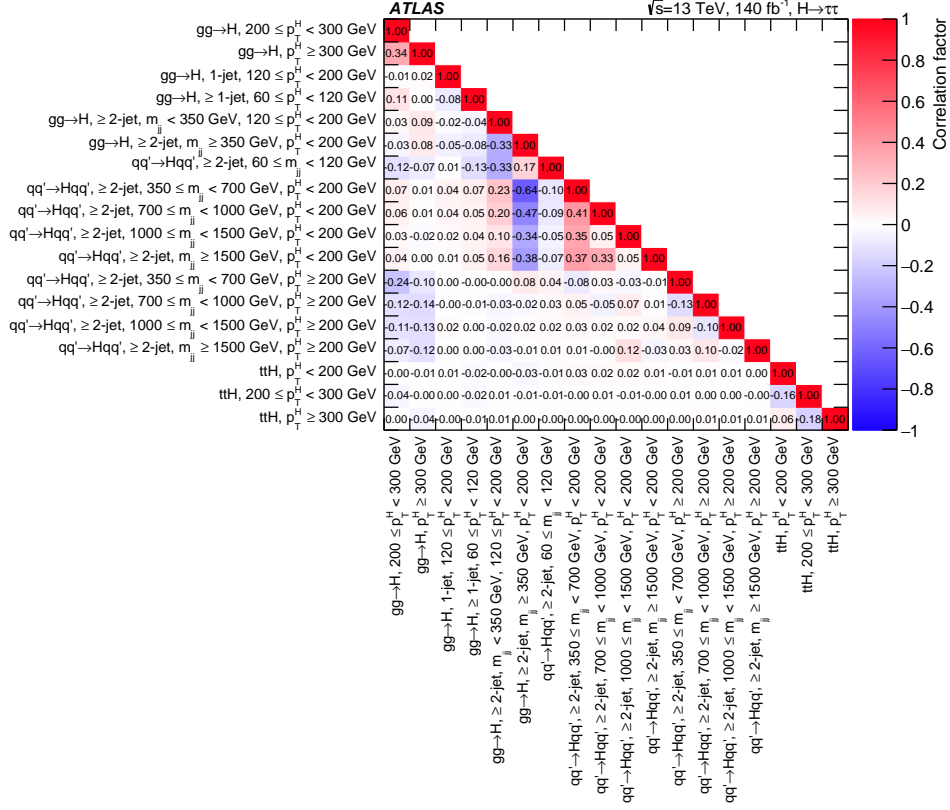


Figure 7: Measured linear correlation factors between each pair of parameters of interest in the simplified template cross-section measurement.

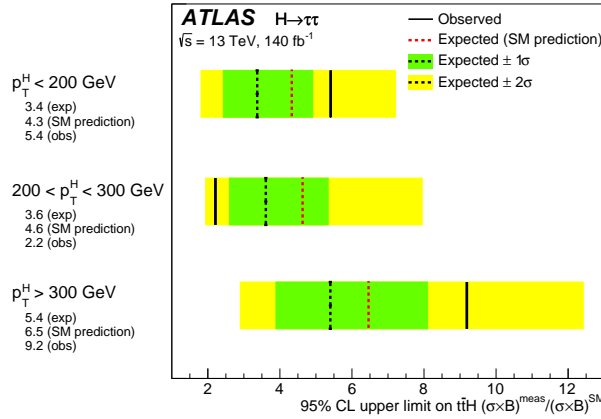


Figure 8: Upper limits at 95% CL on simplified template cross-sections in the individual  $t\bar{t}H$   $p_T^H$  bins relative to their SM expectation in the  $H \rightarrow \tau\tau$  decay channel, derived using the CL<sub>s</sub> method. The observed upper limits (solid black lines) are shown, together with the expected limits both in the background-only hypothesis (dotted black lines) and in the SM hypothesis (dotted red lines). In the case of the expected limits in the background-only hypothesis, one- and two-standard-deviation uncertainty bands are also shown.

## 9 Unfolded fiducial differential cross-section measurement results

Another way to study the properties of VBF Higgs boson production is to measure its cross-section in a fiducial phase space that targets the VBF phase space defined by detector acceptance and selection requirements. The measured cross-sections are inclusive in the production process, thus minimizing SM assumptions. The measurements are corrected for detector effects and efficiencies (unfolded) using the combined SM MC prediction of VBF, ggF,  $VH$  and  $t\bar{t}H$  production.

The fiducial differential cross-section is defined in each particle-level kinematic bin,  $i$ , of the variable under study as shown in Eq. (1):

$$\sigma_i^{\text{fid}} = \frac{1}{\mathcal{L}\epsilon_i} \sum_j \mathcal{M}_{ij}^{-1} f_j (N_j^{\text{data}} - N_j^{\text{bkg}}), \quad (1)$$

where  $j$  is the reconstruction-level bin index,  $\mathcal{L}$  is the integrated luminosity, and  $\mathcal{M}$  is the migration matrix for events passing both reconstruction- and fiducial-level selections.  $\mathcal{M}$  gives the probability that an event in particle-level bin  $i$  is reconstructed in reconstruction-level bin  $j$ . The selection efficiency  $\epsilon_i$  is defined as the number of events passing both the fiducial- and reconstruction-level selections divided by the number of events passing the fiducial-level selection. The out-of-acceptance correction  $f_j$  is defined as the number of events passing both the fiducial- and reconstruction-level selections divided by the number of events that pass the reconstruction-level selection. This is multiplied by the number of signal events in the SRs, defined as the number of events observed in data ( $N_j^{\text{data}}$ ) after the estimated total number of background events ( $N_j^{\text{bkg}}$ ) is subtracted.  $\mathcal{M}$ ,  $\epsilon_i$ , and  $f_j$  are determined using the SM signal MC prediction.

In the following, the fiducial phase space is defined, the measured variables are introduced, the likelihood fit model is discussed, and the results of the fiducial differential cross-section measurement are presented.

### 9.1 Fiducial phase space

The fiducial differential cross-sections are evaluated in a fiducial phase space. This phase space is defined by particle-level kinematic criteria which closely follow the differential inclusive VBF selection applied at reconstruction level and are defined in Tables 3 and 4. The fiducial phase space, in which VBF production constitutes approximately 83% of the Higgs boson signal, and ggF production approximately 17%, is defined in Table 8. The VBF, ggF,  $VH$ , and  $t\bar{t}H$  Higgs boson production modes are combined as signal, and their relative contributions are fixed to the SM predictions.

For the object definition, only stable final-state particles (with a mean lifetime  $c\tau > 10$  mm) are considered at particle level. Electrons and muons are required to not originate from hadrons or hadronic decay products. Their four-momenta are corrected by adding the momenta of final-state radiation photons emitted in a cone of size  $\Delta R = 0.1$  around the lepton direction. Hadronically decaying  $\tau$ -leptons (denoted by  $\tau_{\text{truth}}$  at particle level) are reconstructed by identifying all stable  $\tau$ -lepton decay particles except for neutrinos and summing their four-momenta. All leptons are required to have  $|\eta| < 2.5$ , and electrons are excluded from the LAr transition region  $1.37 < |\eta| < 1.52$ . Jets are defined by clustering all stable particles using the anti- $k_r$  algorithm with a radius parameter of  $R = 0.4$ . The clustering algorithm excludes prompt leptons and Higgs boson decay products. Jets are required to be separated from  $\tau_{\text{truth}}$  ( $\Delta R > 0.4$ ) and light leptons ( $\Delta R > 0.2$ ), and are required to have  $|\eta| < 4.5$ . The missing transverse momentum is defined as the vector sum of the transverse momenta of all neutrinos that do not originate from the decay of a hadron.



Table 8: Summary of the fiducial particle-level event selection for all channels. The requirements on light-lepton  $p_T$  and  $\tau_{\text{truth}} p_T$  follow those reported in Table 3.

	$\tau_e \tau_\mu$	$\tau_{\text{lep}} \tau_{\text{had}}$	$\tau_{\text{had}} \tau_{\text{had}}$
<b>Per Channel</b>			
Object counting	$N_e = 1, N_\mu = 1, N_{\tau_{\text{truth}}} = 0$	$N_{e/\mu} = 1, N_{\tau_{\text{truth}}} = 1$	$N_{e/\mu} = 0, N_{\tau_{\text{truth}}} = 2$
$p_T$ cut	$e/\mu$ : $p_T$ cut 10 to 27.3 GeV	$e/\mu$ : $p_T$ cut 27.0 to 27.3 GeV, $\tau_{\text{truth}}$ : $p_T > 30$ GeV	$\tau_{\text{truth}}$ : $p_T > 40, 30$ GeV
Kinematics	$m_{\tau\tau}^{\text{coll}} > m_Z - 25$ GeV $30 < m_{e\mu} < 100$ GeV	$m_T < 70$ GeV	
Angular	$\Delta R_{e\mu} < 2.0,  \Delta\eta_{e\mu}  < 1.5$	$\Delta R_{\ell\tau_{\text{truth}}} < 2.5,  \Delta\eta_{\ell\tau_{\text{truth}}}  < 1.5$	$0.6 < \Delta R_{\tau_{\text{truth}}\tau_{\text{truth}}} < 2.5$ $ \Delta\eta_{\tau_{\text{truth}}\tau_{\text{truth}}}  < 1.5$
$x_1$ and $x_2$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.0, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.0$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.4, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.2$	$0.1 < x_1 < 1.4, 0.1 < x_2 < 1.4$
<b>Common selection</b>	leading jet $p_T > 40$ GeV, sub-leading jet $p_T > 30$ GeV $E_T^{\text{miss}} > 20$ GeV Opposite charge of $\tau$ -decay products $m_{jj} > 600$ GeV, $ \Delta\eta_{jj}  > 3.4, p_T(jj) > 30$ GeV $\eta(j_0) \times \eta(j_1) < 0$ lepton centrality: visible decay products of the $\tau$ -leptons between VBF jets $p_T(Hjj) < 50$ GeV		

## 9.2 Differential variables

The differential cross-sections are measured in the fiducial phase space as a function of variables sensitive to the kinematics of VBF Higgs boson production, with the goal of validating the SM as well as providing sensitivity to physics beyond the SM. The variables related to jets are the transverse momentum of the leading jet,  $p_T(j_0)$ , and the signed angle (sorted by rapidity of the jets) in the transverse plane of the two jets,  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ , which also provides a way to test of the charge (C) and parity (P) of the Higgs boson. The kinematics of the Higgs boson is tested by measuring its transverse momentum ( $p_T^H$ ). As in the STXS measurement, the NN reconstruction of  $p_T^H$ , introduced in Section 5.1, is used at reconstruction level. To increase the sensitivity to the CP property of the Higgs boson,  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  is also measured as a function of  $p_T^H$ . The binning of each differential distribution is driven by the size of the available data sample and is reported in Table 9.

Table 9: Binning of the differential variables.

	$p_T(j_0)$ [GeV]	$p_T^H$ [GeV]	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ vs $p_T^H$ [GeV]
Bin 1	[40, 95]	[0, 110]	$[-\pi, -\pi/2]$	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}} < 0$ & $p_T^H < 200$
Bin 2	[95, 130]	[110, 150]	$[-\pi/2, 0]$	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}} > 0$ & $p_T^H < 200$
Bin 3	[130, 180]	[150, 200]	$[0, \pi/2]$	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}} < 0$ & $p_T^H > 200$
Bin 4	[180, 500]	[200, 550]	$[\pi/2, \pi]$	$\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}} > 0$ & $p_T^H > 200$

The migration matrix is highly diagonal for all variables considered, with values above 75%, 85%, 95% and 90% for the  $p_T(j_0)$ ,  $p_T^H$ ,  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ , and  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  distributions. This is due to the binning being coarse compared to experimental resolution effects. The selection efficiency,  $\epsilon_i$ , includes the effect of object reconstruction efficiencies and event-level selections. These are 25%, 15%, and 43% for the  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ ,  $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ , and  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  channels respectively. The out-of-acceptance corrections,  $f_j$ , range from 74% to 83% across the channels.

### 9.3 Differential cross-section measurement fit model

For the differential cross-section measurement, the likelihood function is built with the following SRs and CRs:

- Eight SRs for the VBF category in each channel, based on the BDT-based splitting, as described in Section 5.1, plus the different bins reported in Table 9.
- Two  $Z(\rightarrow \tau\tau) + \text{jets}$  control regions in each channel, one for each inclusive VBF\_0 and VBF\_1 SR, defined using the kinematic embedding.
- A CR enriched in the  $t\bar{t}$  process, defined for each inclusive category in the  $\tau_e\tau_\mu$  and  $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$  channels.

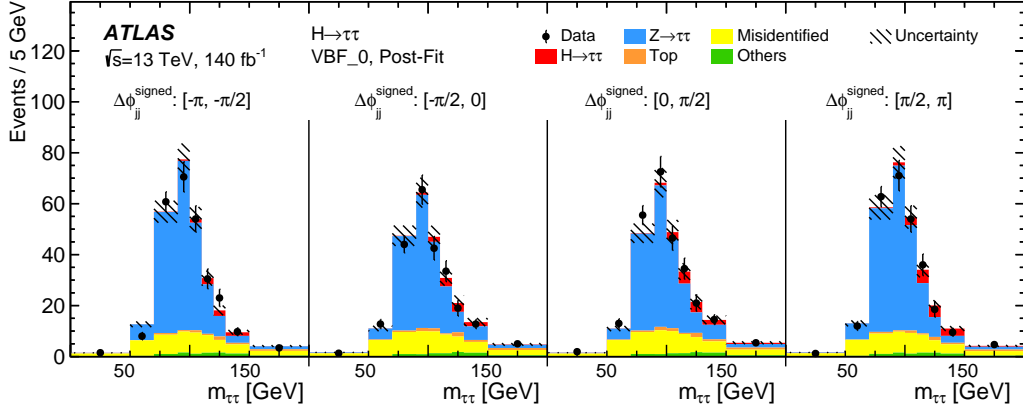
Similarly to the STXS cross-section measurement set-up, the  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distribution is used to obtain information about the cross-section relative to the SM prediction, and a single-bin histogram is used for each CR to constrain the background normalization. The detector-level  $m_{\tau\tau}$  distributions for each bin of the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  observable (specified in Table 9) are shown in Figure 9 and compared with the MC templates after the likelihood fit. In these distributions, all three analysis channels are combined in the VBF\_0 and VBF\_1 SRs.

The differential measurements are performed by using the profile-likelihood unfolding [124] in the signal regions. The free parameters of the fit are the Higgs boson production cross-sections in each bin of the distribution at particle level. No regularization is applied, due to the small bin-to-bin migrations for all variables considered. The performance of the unfolding procedure is tested for possible biases from the choice of MC model. It is verified that it reproduces altered shapes well within the statistical precision of the measurements.

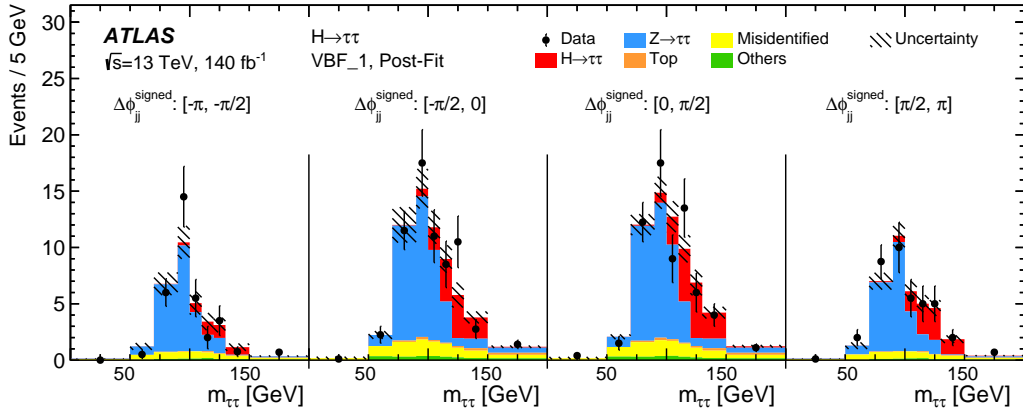
### 9.4 Differential cross-section measurement results

The fiducial differential cross-sections as a function of the variables of interest are shown in Figure 10. The per-bin precision of the differential cross-section measurements is typically 25%–50%, except for the lowest  $p_T^H$  bin, where it reaches 300%. The experimental precision is dominated by the statistical uncertainties in most of the bins, particularly at high values of  $p_T^H$  and  $p_T(j_0)$ . Leading systematic uncertainties, depending on the measured bin, are the limited statistics of the background model, experimental uncertainties for jets and  $\tau$ -leptons, and uncertainties in the fake-lepton background estimation.

The data are compared with SM predictions from the POWHEG+PYTHIA 8, POWHEG+HERWIG 7 and MADGRAPH5\_AMC@NLO+PYTHIA 8 generators for the VBF, ggF,  $VH$ , and  $t\bar{t}H$  Higgs boson production modes, which are combined according to their SM branching ratios. The theoretical uncertainty in these predictions is much smaller than the experimental uncertainty in the measurements. The RIVET analysis library [125] is used to apply the fiducial selections and calculate the observables to obtain the differential



(a)



(b)

Figure 9: Distribution of the reconstructed  $\tau\tau$  invariant mass ( $m_{\tau\tau}$ ) for all events in the (a) VBF\_0 and (b) VBF\_1 signal regions, shown for each bin of the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  observable. The observed Higgs boson signal is scaled by the cross-section measured in each bin. Entries with values outside the  $x$ -axis range are shown in the last bin of each distribution. The prediction for each sample is determined from the likelihood fit performed to measure the fiducial differential cross-section.

cross-section predictions. Overall, there is good agreement between measured cross-sections and the SM predictions from all generators, with only a few bins showing discrepancies of more than one standard deviation.

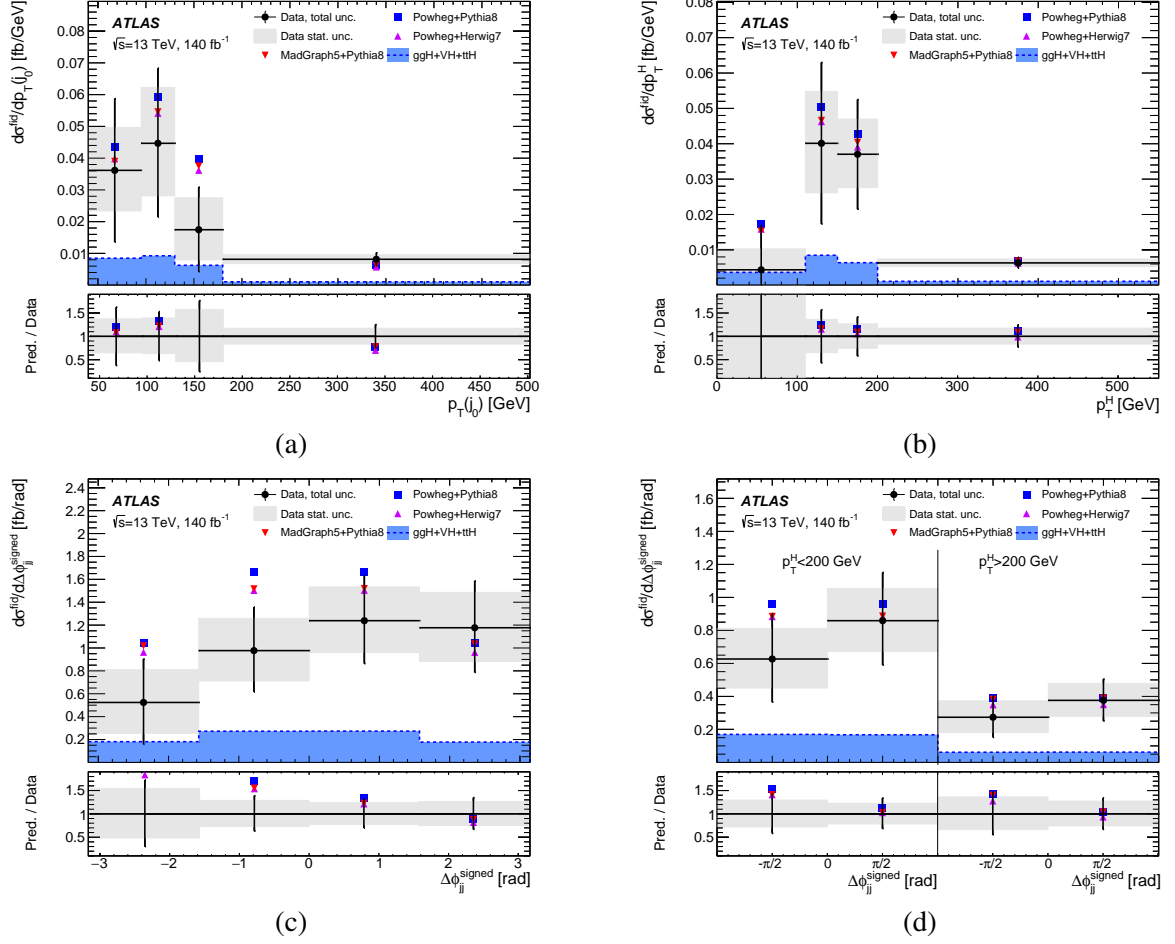


Figure 10: Measured fiducial differential cross-sections for (a)  $p_T(j_0)$ , (b)  $p_T^H$ , (c)  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ , and (d)  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$ . The measurements are compared with particle-level SM predictions from the POWHEG+PYTHIA 8, POWHEG+HERWIG 7 and MADGRAPH5\_AMC@NLO+PYTHIA 8 generators for the combined VBF, ggF,  $VH$ , and  $t\bar{t}H$  Higgs boson production modes. The shaded box around each data point shows the statistical uncertainty, while the total uncertainty is indicated by the error bar. The contribution from the ggF,  $VH$ , and  $t\bar{t}H$  production modes as predicted by POWHEG+PYTHIA 8 is also shown. The bottom panel shows the ratio of different predictions to the data, with the error bars and shaded bands representing the total and statistical uncertainties of the measurements, respectively.

## 9.5 Interpretation of the differential cross-section measurement in an Effective Field Theory

The unfolded distributions are sensitive to effects beyond-the-SM (BSM) contributions in VBF Higgs boson production. This motivates the interpretation of the results in a generic *Effective Field Theory* (EFT) that parameterizes these potential BSM effects. Anomalous higher-dimensional operators are added to the SM Lagrangian to encapsulate the effects of BSM physics at higher scales, as shown in Eq. (2):

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{EFT}} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{SM}} + \sum_d \sum_i \frac{c_i^{(d)}}{\Lambda^{d-4}} \mathcal{O}_i^{(d)}, \text{ for } d > 4. \quad (2)$$

The parameters  $c_i^{(d)}$ , referred to as Wilson coefficients, specify the strength of the anomalous interactions introduced by their corresponding operators,  $\mathcal{O}_i^{(d)}$ , where the index  $i$  runs over all possible operators, and  $\Lambda$  sets the scale of the BSM physics. Only dimension-six operators are considered since the dimension-five and dimension-seven operators violate lepton- or baryon-number conservation, and the impact of higher-dimensional operators is expected to be further suppressed [126]. In this scenario, only the ratio  $c_i^{(d=6)}/\Lambda^2$  determines the strength of the BSM physics and  $\Lambda$  is chosen to be 1 TeV by convention.

In the Warsaw basis [127] of the *Standard Model Effective Field Theory* (SMEFT) formalism [128], there are three CP-even and three CP-odd operators that directly affect the interactions between the Higgs boson and the vector bosons; they are listed alongside their corresponding Wilson coefficients in Table 10. The change in the cross-section for each kinematic bin as a function of the Wilson coefficients follows a second-order polynomial as there is an interference term which depends linearly on the Wilson coefficient and a quadratic term that is purely from BSM physics as shown in Eq. (3):

$$\sigma_{\text{SM+EFT}} \propto |\mathcal{M}_{\text{SM}} + \sum_i \frac{c_i}{\Lambda^2} \mathcal{M}_i|^2 = |\mathcal{M}_{\text{SM}}|^2 + 2 \sum_i \frac{c_i}{\Lambda^2} \mathcal{R}(\mathcal{M}_{\text{SM}}^* \mathcal{M}_i) + \sum_{i,j} \frac{c_i c_j}{\Lambda^4} \mathcal{R}(\mathcal{M}_i^* \mathcal{M}_j). \quad (3)$$

Therefore, for each Wilson coefficient, the dependence in each kinematic bin,  $k$ , can be parameterized using the form

$$\sigma_{\text{SM+EFT}}^k = \sigma_{\text{SM}}^k \left( 1 + \alpha_{ik} \frac{c_i}{\Lambda^2} + \beta_{ik} \left( \frac{c_i}{\Lambda^2} \right)^2 \right). \quad (4)$$

The coefficients  $\alpha_{ik}$  and  $\beta_{ik}$  are determined from simulated samples with different values of  $c_i$  produced using MADGRAPH5\_AMC@NLO 2.9.5 with the SMEFTsim [128, 129] model in the  $U(3)^5$  flavour-symmetric limit with  $\Lambda = 1$  TeV. The events were generated at LO using the NNPDF3.0<sub>NLO</sub> PDF set and were showered using PYTHIA 8.245 with the A14 tune. The dependence was determined relative to a SM sample produced using the same set-up and validated against the sample described in Section 3. These fractional changes determined from these BSM samples are then applied to the VBF cross-section predictions from the POWHEG Box v2 sample showered with PYTHIA 8.230 also described in Section 3. For the small contributions from Higgs boson production processes other than VBF, the various other samples described in Section 3 are used.

The linear term that is determined by  $\alpha$  comes from the interference of the new physics with the SM matrix element and enters at the lowest order in  $\mathcal{O}(\Lambda^{-2})$ . The second, quadratic, term is purely from the new-physics contribution and enters at  $\mathcal{O}(\Lambda^{-4})$ . However, potential terms from dimension-8 operators interfering with the SM would also enter at the same order in  $1/\Lambda$ . Therefore, for the validity of the EFT approach only considering dimension-6 operators, it is desirable that the contribution from the quadratic term is small and the results are dominated by the contributions from the linear term which enters at

Table 10: The three CP-even and three CP-odd operators and their corresponding Wilson coefficients which directly impact the interactions between the Higgs boson and vector bosons.

	CP-even		
Operator $O_i^{(d=6)}$	$H^\dagger HW_{\mu\nu}^n W^{n\mu\nu}$	$H^\dagger HB_{\mu\nu} B^{\mu\nu}$	$H^\dagger \tau^n HW_{\mu\nu}^n B^{\mu\nu}$
Wilson coefficient	$c_{HW}$	$c_{HB}$	$c_{HWB}$
	CP-odd		
Operator $O_i^{(d=6)}$	$H^\dagger H\tilde{W}_{\mu\nu}^n W^{n\mu\nu}$	$H^\dagger H\tilde{B}_{\mu\nu} B^{\mu\nu}$	$H^\dagger \tau^n H\tilde{W}_{\mu\nu}^n B^{\mu\nu}$
Wilson coefficient	$c_{H\tilde{W}}$	$c_{H\tilde{B}}$	$c_{H\tilde{W}B}$

$O(\Lambda^{-2})$ . To assess this, when considering each of the operators in Table 10, measurements are made considering the full form of Eq. (4), and also excluding the quadratic term.

Figure 11 shows the impact of several values of  $c_{HW}$  and  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$  on the distributions of  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ ,  $p_T^H$ , and  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$ , demonstrating that these variables are sensitive to BSM effects. Due to the CP-odd nature of the operator associated with  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$ , an asymmetric impact is seen in  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  and additionally it is seen that the relative magnitude of the effect is enhanced by the cut on  $p_T^H$  in the two-dimensional distribution. For  $c_{HW}$ , effects are seen in both the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  and  $p_T^H$  distributions and, contrary to  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$ , the effects are symmetric in  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  due to the CP-even nature of the associated operator.

Firstly considered is the scenario where only one of the Wilson coefficients is non-zero and the rest are neglected. The unfolded data are used along with the theoretical dependence of the cross-section on the Wilson coefficients to extract the best-fit value of each of the six considered Wilson coefficients. The same profile-likelihood formalism as presented in Section 9.3 is used with only one degree of freedom introduced, corresponding to the floating Wilson coefficient, and all other Wilson coefficients are set to zero. A scan of the negative log-likelihood described in Section 9.3 is performed for different values of each Wilson coefficient, with the cross-section in each bin fixed to the value predicted by the SMEFT. By considering the change in the negative log-likelihood from its minimum value, the 95% confidence interval for each Wilson coefficient is found. This is done for only the linear term as well as for both the linear and quadratic terms. For the Wilson coefficients associated with CP-even operators the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  distribution is used, while for those associated with CP-odd operators the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  distribution is used. These are the distributions that give the best expected precision. Figure 12 shows the expected and observed confidence intervals for each of the six coefficients individually. Other than for the  $c_{HWB}$  coefficient, the intervals considering only the linear term are very similar to the one when both the linear and quadratic terms are considered. Therefore, the approach of using an EFT only considering dimension-six operators is valid for most of the operators considered in the analysis. The observed (expected) intervals for  $c_{HW}$  and  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$  are  $[-1.85, +0.57]$  ( $[-1.17, +1.23]$ ) and  $[-0.31, +0.88]$  ( $[-0.60, +0.60]$ ) in the linear scenario and are the most stringent among the considered coefficients. The constraints on  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$  are the tightest to date.

The operators considered are closely related and new physics could result in contributions from multiple operators [130] such that it is also interesting to explore the case where two of the operators are non-zero. This proceeds in the same way by scanning the change in negative log-likelihood across a plane of two of the Wilson coefficients while the others are set to zero. Only terms which enter at  $O(\Lambda^{-2})$  are considered. The first plane considered, in Figure 13(a), is  $c_{HW}$  vs  $c_{HB}$  where the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  distribution is used to perform the measurement. The effects of these two coefficients are very similar such that there is a ‘flat direction’ where the effects of the two Wilson coefficients cancel each other out and there is no sensitivity

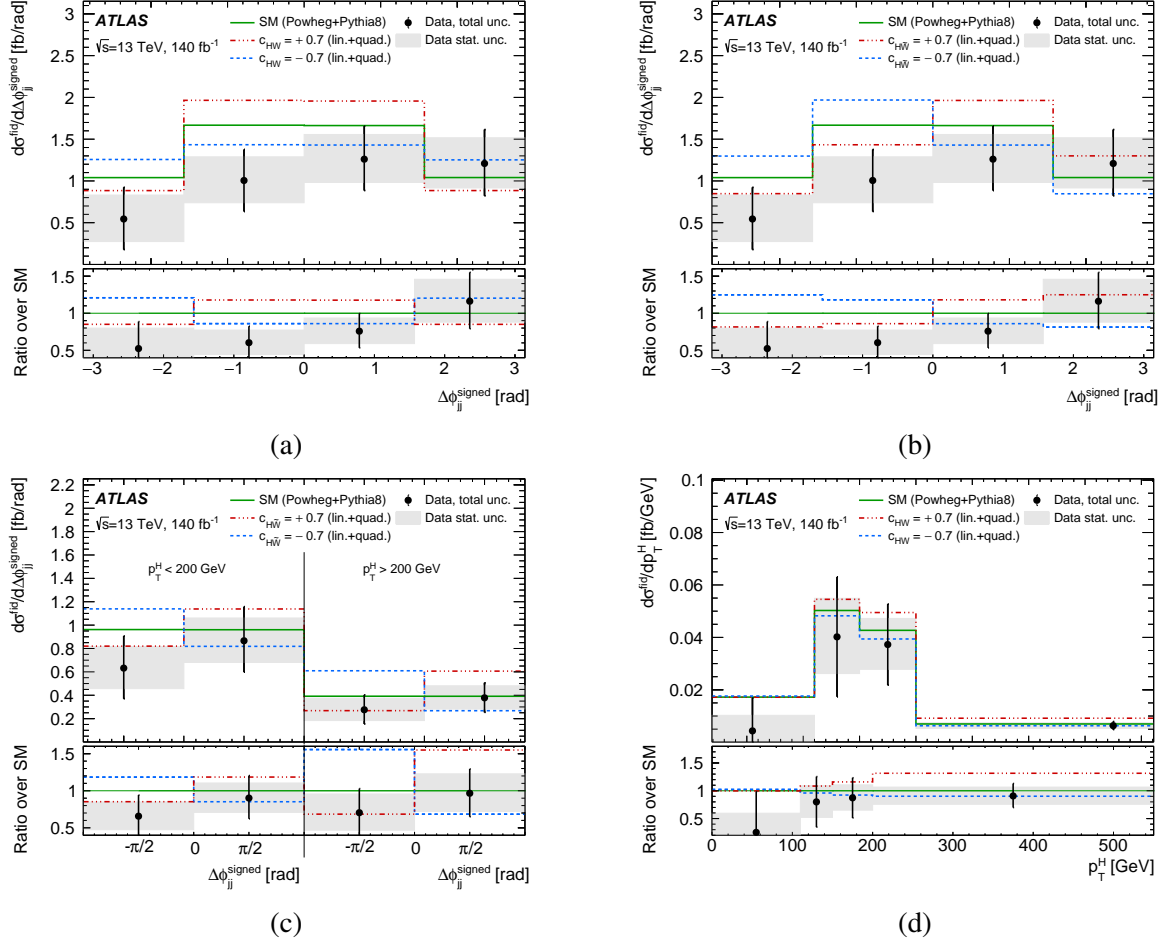


Figure 11: The unfolded data compared with the nominal SM predictions from POWHEG+PYTHIA 8, as well as the predictions for several values of Wilson coefficients in the SMEFT, for (a,b)  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ , (c)  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  and (d)  $p_T^H$ .

from the analysis. As one moves away from this direction the analysis gains sensitivity and can constrain the allowed values of the coefficients. In Ref. [131] a fit across multiple Higgs analyses measured the Higgs boson's decay width into two photons or into a Z boson and a photon. These two decay channels only proceed through loop diagrams in the SM so they are very sensitive to BSM physics contributions which have been calculated at NLO [132, 133]. These channels also have ‘flat directions’ where the  $O(\Lambda^{-2})$  contributions from the two operators cancel each other out. However, these are different from the ‘flat direction’ in this analysis, showing the complementarity of the different types of measurement and that multiple measurements are required to constrain the multi-dimensional EFT parameter space. It should also be noted that while in the displayed plane  $c_{HWB}$  is set to zero, both this analysis and the two decay widths also have a dependence on this parameter such that in three dimensions any two measurements will still have a direction in which neither is sensitive. The second considered plane, in Figure 13(b), is  $c_{H\bar{W}}$  vs  $c_{H\bar{B}}$ , where the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  distribution is used. This also shows a ‘flat direction’ and also tighter constraints than the first plane because of the two-dimensional distribution used. There are no constraints from Higgs boson decay widths in this case, due to the CP-odd nature of the operators. Finally, the plane of  $c_{HW}$  vs  $c_{H\bar{W}}$  in Figure 13(c) is considered using the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  distribution. In this case the two operators



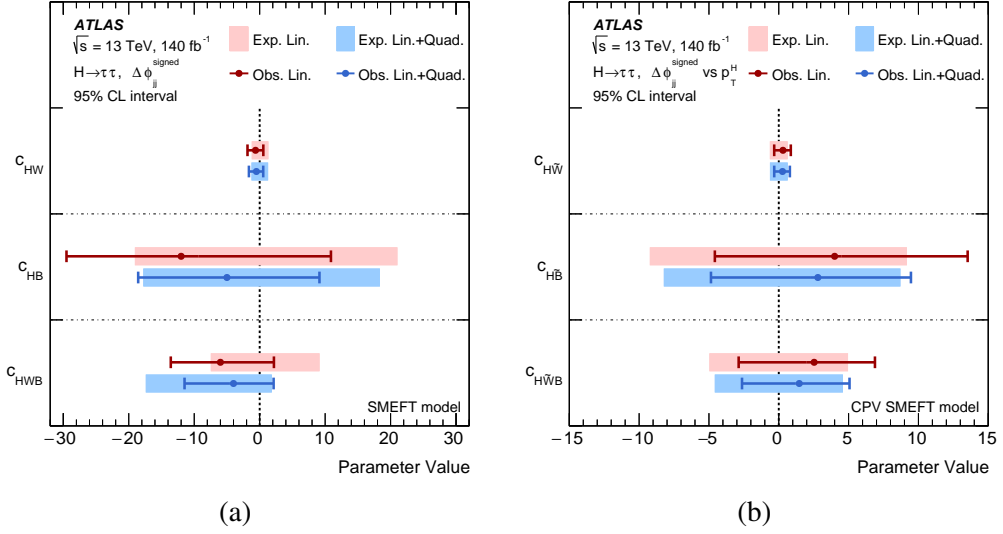


Figure 12: The 95% expected and observed confidence intervals for each of the six considered Wilson coefficients. Each coefficient is treated individually and both the linear and linear + quadratic models are considered when evaluating the sensitivity to the terms that enter at  $\mathcal{O}(\Lambda^{-4})$ . For the (a) CP-even operators the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  distribution is used to extract the confidence interval, while for (b) the CP-odd operators the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  distribution is used. The limits are computed at a new-physics scale  $\Lambda = 1$  TeV.

introduce distinct shape differences to the distribution such that there are no ‘flat directions’. In all cases the observed 95% confidence limits agree well with the expected confidence limits such that there is no evidence of BSM physics.

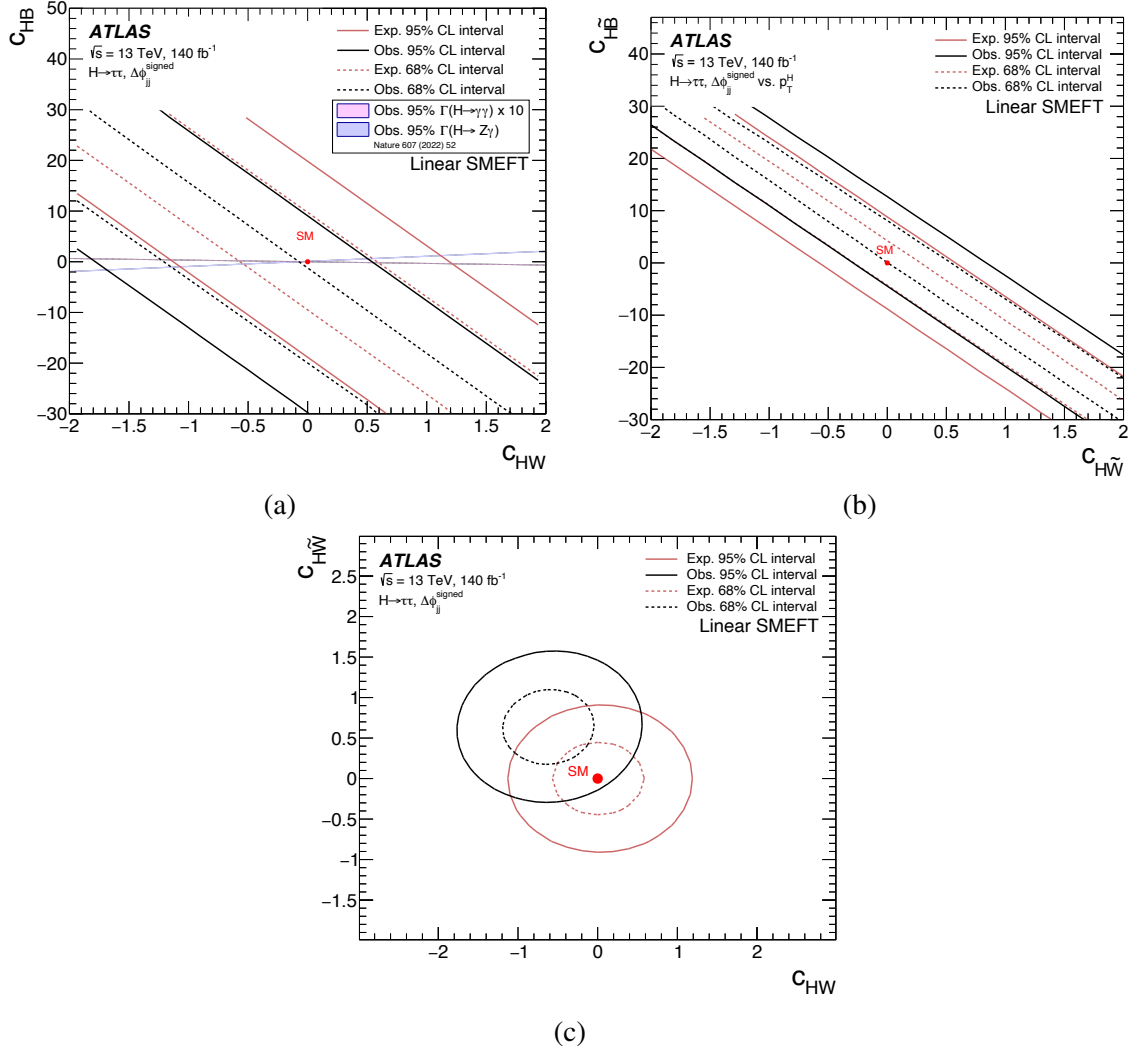


Figure 13: Two-dimensional observed and expected limits at 68% and 95% confidence level obtained from various combinations of two Wilson coefficients using only the SM–dimension-6 interference in the SMEFT basis: (a)  $c_{HW}$  vs  $c_{HB}$ , (b)  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$  vs  $c_{H\tilde{B}}$  and (c)  $c_{HW}$  vs  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$ . The limits are computed at a new-physics scale  $\Lambda = 1$  TeV. In (a) and (c), the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  distribution is used, while in the purely CP-odd case (b), the  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$  distribution is used. To illustrate the complementarity of this measurement with other Higgs boson studies, in (a) the limits from measurements in the  $H \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  and  $H \rightarrow Z\gamma$  [131] interpreted in the SMEFT [132, 133] are also shown. The interval resulting from the  $H \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  measurement has been increased by a factor of ten for visibility.

## 10 Conclusion

Measurements of Higgs boson production cross-sections in the  $\tau$ -lepton-pair decay channel are presented. The analysis uses  $140 \text{ fb}^{-1}$  of proton–proton collisions at  $\sqrt{s} = 13$  TeV recorded by the ATLAS detector at the LHC and supersedes the previous analysis of the same dataset. Two different types of measurement were performed: cross-section measurements of the four main production processes in the STXS framework, including eight kinematic bins for VBF production, and unfolded differential measurements in a region of phase space enhanced in VBF production. The latter are also used to derive 95% confidence intervals for

dimension-six operators in the SMEFT formalism. Many of these measurements are limited by the size of the analyzed data sample.

Cross-section measurements for the four main Higgs boson production modes (gluon–gluon fusion, vector-boson fusion, associated production with a vector boson, and associated production with a top–antitop quark pair) are found to agree well with the SM predictions. In particular, the ratio of the measured cross-section to the SM prediction for VBF Higgs boson production is found to be  $0.93^{+0.17}_{-0.15}$ , representing the most precise measurement of this production mode across all Higgs boson results.

Eighteen bins of the STXS framework were measured, with an overall  $p$ -value of 6% for compatibility with the SM prediction, demonstrating reasonable agreement. For VBF production, higher precision is achieved in the higher  $p_T^H$  and higher  $m_{jj}$  regions because of their higher signal purity. The ratio of the measured cross-section to the SM prediction for VBF production with  $p_T^H > 200$  GeV ( $p_T^H < 200$  GeV) and  $m_{jj} > 1.5$  TeV is  $1.29^{+0.39}_{-0.34}$  ( $0.12^{+0.34}_{-0.33}$ ). This is the first measurement for the higher  $p_T^H$  range, and the most precise for the lower  $p_T^H$  range, in this corner of phase space.

Unfolded differential cross-sections for Higgs boson production in a region of phase space dominated by VBF production are also presented. Four distributions are unfolded to particle level:  $p_T^H$ ,  $p_T(j_0)$ ,  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$ , and  $\Delta\phi_{jj}^{\text{signed}}$  vs  $p_T^H$ . All of these distributions show good agreement with the SM predictions, with typical uncertainties of 30%–50%, dominated by the statistical uncertainty of the data.

These distributions are sensitive to BSM physics and a SMEFT interpretation is presented. Six operators were considered, all affecting the VBF Higgs boson production vertex, and the associated Wilson coefficients are  $c_{HW}$ ,  $c_{HB}$ ,  $c_{HWB}$ , and their CP-odd counterparts. For each coefficient, 95% confidence intervals were derived for the interference term alone and for both the interference and purely BSM contributions. The constraints on the CP-odd Wilson coefficient  $c_{H\tilde{W}}$  in the former case,  $[-0.31, +0.88]$ , are the strongest to date from any channel. Two-dimensional 95% confidence intervals were also derived, demonstrating unique sensitivity for these operators compared to other Higgs boson analyses.

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G. Aad <sup>104</sup>, E. Aakvaag <sup>17</sup>, B. Abbott <sup>123</sup>, S. Abdelhameed <sup>119a</sup>, K. Abeling <sup>56</sup>, N.J. Abicht <sup>50</sup>, S.H. Abidi <sup>30</sup>, M. Aboeela <sup>45</sup>, A. Abouhorma <sup>36e</sup>, H. Abramowicz <sup>154</sup>, H. Abreu <sup>153</sup>, Y. Abulaiti <sup>120</sup>, B.S. Acharya <sup>70a,70b,k</sup>, A. Ackermann <sup>64a</sup>, C. Adam Bourdarios <sup>4</sup>, L. Adamczyk <sup>87a</sup>, S.V. Addepalli <sup>27</sup>, M.J. Addison <sup>103</sup>, J. Adelman <sup>118</sup>, A. Adiguzel <sup>22c</sup>, T. Adye <sup>137</sup>, A.A. Affolder <sup>139</sup>, Y. Afik <sup>40</sup>, M.N. Agaras <sup>13</sup>, J. Agarwala <sup>74a,74b</sup>, A. Aggarwal <sup>102</sup>, C. Agheorghiesei <sup>28c</sup>, F. Ahmadov <sup>39,x</sup>, W.S. Ahmed <sup>106</sup>, S. Ahuja <sup>97</sup>, X. Ai <sup>63e</sup>, G. Aielli <sup>77a,77b</sup>, A. Aikot <sup>166</sup>, M. Ait Tamlihat <sup>36e</sup>, B. Aitbenkikh <sup>36a</sup>, M. Akbiyik <sup>102</sup>, T.P.A. Åkesson <sup>100</sup>, A.V. Akimov <sup>38</sup>, D. Akiyama <sup>171</sup>, N.N. Akolkar <sup>25</sup>, S. Aktas <sup>22a</sup>, K. Al Houry <sup>42</sup>, G.L. Alberghi <sup>24b</sup>, J. Albert <sup>168</sup>, P. Albicocco <sup>54</sup>, G.L. Albouy <sup>61</sup>, S. Alderweireldt <sup>53</sup>, Z.L. Alegria <sup>124</sup>, M. Aleksa <sup>37</sup>, I.N. Aleksandrov <sup>39</sup>, C. Alexa <sup>28b</sup>, T. Alexopoulos <sup>10</sup>, F. Alfonsi <sup>24b</sup>, M. Algren <sup>57</sup>, M. Alhroob <sup>170</sup>, B. Ali <sup>135</sup>, H.M.J. Ali <sup>93,r</sup>, S. Ali <sup>32</sup>, S.W. Alibocus <sup>94</sup>, M. Aliev <sup>34c</sup>, G. Alimonti <sup>72a</sup>, W. Alkahi <sup>56</sup>, C. Allaire <sup>67</sup>, B.M.M. Allbrooke <sup>149</sup>, J.S. Allen <sup>103</sup>, J.F. Allen <sup>53</sup>, C.A. Allendes Flores <sup>140f</sup>, P.P. Allport <sup>21</sup>, A. Aloisio <sup>73a,73b</sup>, F. Alonso <sup>92</sup>, C. Alpigiani <sup>141</sup>, Z.M.K. Alsolami <sup>93</sup>, M. Alvarez Estevez <sup>101</sup>, A. Alvarez Fernandez <sup>102</sup>, M. Alves Cardoso <sup>57</sup>, M.G. Alvigi <sup>73a,73b</sup>, M. Aly <sup>103</sup>, Y. Amaral Coutinho <sup>84b</sup>, A. Ambler <sup>106</sup>, C. Amelung <sup>37</sup>, M. Amerl <sup>103</sup>, C.G. Ames <sup>111</sup>, D. Amidei <sup>108</sup>, B. Amini <sup>55</sup>, K.J. Amirie <sup>158</sup>, S.P. Amor Dos Santos <sup>133a</sup>, K.R. Amos <sup>166</sup>, D. Amperiadou <sup>155</sup>, S. An <sup>85</sup>, V. Ananiev <sup>128</sup>, C. Anastopoulos <sup>142</sup>, T. Andeen <sup>11</sup>, J.K. Anders <sup>37</sup>, A.C. Anderson <sup>60</sup>, S.Y. Andrean <sup>48a,48b</sup>, A. Andreatza <sup>72a,72b</sup>, S. Angelidakis <sup>9</sup>, A. Angerami <sup>42</sup>, A.V. Anisenkov <sup>38</sup>, A. Annovi <sup>75a</sup>, C. Antel <sup>57</sup>, E. Antipov <sup>148</sup>, M. Antonelli <sup>54</sup>, F. Anulli <sup>76a</sup>, M. Aoki <sup>85</sup>, T. 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Beauchemin <sup>161</sup>, P. Bechtel <sup>25</sup>, H.P. Beck <sup>20,n</sup>, K. Becker <sup>170</sup>, A.J. Beddall <sup>83</sup>, V.A. Bednyakov <sup>39</sup>, C.P. Bee <sup>148</sup>, L.J. Beemster <sup>16</sup>, T.A. Beermann <sup>37</sup>, M. Begalli <sup>84d</sup>, M. Begel <sup>30</sup>, A. Behera <sup>148</sup>, J.K. Behr <sup>49</sup>, J.F. Beirer <sup>37</sup>, F. Beisiegel <sup>25</sup>, M. Belfkir <sup>119b</sup>, G. Bella <sup>154</sup>, L. Bellagamba <sup>24b</sup>, A. Bellerive <sup>35</sup>, P. Bellos <sup>21</sup>, K. Beloborodov <sup>38</sup>, D. Benckekroun <sup>36a</sup>, F. Bendebba <sup>36a</sup>, Y. Benhammou <sup>154</sup>,



K.C. Benkendorfer [ID62](#), L. Beresford [ID49](#), M. Beretta [ID54](#), E. Bergeaas Kuutmann [ID164](#), N. Berger [ID4](#),  
 B. Bergmann [ID135](#), J. Beringer [ID18a](#), G. Bernardi [ID5](#), C. Bernius [ID146](#), F.U. Bernlochner [ID25](#),  
 F. Bernon [ID37](#), A. Berrocal Guardia [ID13](#), T. Berry [ID97](#), P. Berta [ID136](#), A. Berthold [ID51](#), S. Bethke [ID112](#),  
 A. Betti [ID76a,76b](#), A.J. Bevan [ID96](#), N.K. Bhalla [ID55](#), S. Bhatta [ID148](#), D.S. Bhattacharya [ID169](#),  
 P. Bhattarai [ID146](#), Z.M. Bhatti [ID120](#), K.D. Bhide [ID55](#), V.S. Bhopatkar [ID124](#), R.M. Bianchi [ID132](#),  
 G. Bianco [ID24b,24a](#), O. Biebel [ID111](#), R. Bielski [ID126](#), M. Biglietti [ID78a](#), C.S. Billingsley [ID45](#), Y. Bimgdi [ID36f](#),  
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 S. Biryukov [ID149](#), T. Bisanz [ID50](#), E. Bisceglie [ID44b,44a](#), J.P. Biswal [ID137](#), D. Biswas [ID144](#), I. Bloch [ID49](#),  
 A. Blue [ID60](#), U. Blumenschein [ID96](#), J. Blumenthal [ID102](#), V.S. Bobrovnikov [ID38](#), M. Boehler [ID55](#),  
 B. Boehm [ID169](#), D. Bogavac [ID37](#), A.G. Bogdanchikov [ID38](#), L.S. Boggia [ID130](#), C. Bohm [ID48a](#),  
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 C.D. Booth [ID97](#), A.G. Borbély [ID60](#), I.S. Bordulev [ID38](#), G. Borissov [ID93](#), D. Bortoletto [ID129](#),  
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 L. Boudet [ID4](#), J. Boudreau [ID132](#), E.V. Bouhova-Thacker [ID93](#), D. Boumediene [ID41](#), R. Bouquet [ID58b,58a](#),  
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 N. Brahimí [ID4](#), G. Brandt [ID174](#), O. Brandt [ID33](#), F. Braren [ID49](#), B. Brau [ID105](#), J.E. Brau [ID126](#),  
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 D. Britzger [ID112](#), I. Brock [ID25](#), G. Brooijmans [ID42](#), E.M. Brooks [ID159b](#), E. Brost [ID30](#), L.M. Brown [ID168](#),  
 L.E. Bruce [ID62](#), T.L. Bruckler [ID129](#), P.A. Bruckman de Renstrom [ID88](#), B. Brüers [ID49](#), A. Bruni [ID24b](#),  
 G. Bruni [ID24b](#), M. Bruschi [ID24b](#), N. Brusino [ID76a,76b](#), T. Buanes [ID17](#), Q. Buat [ID141](#), D. Buchin [ID112](#),  
 A.G. Buckley [ID60](#), O. Bulekov [ID38](#), B.A. Bullard [ID146](#), S. Burdin [ID94](#), C.D. Burgard [ID50](#),  
 A.M. Burger [ID37](#), B. Burghgrave [ID8](#), O. Burlayenko [ID55](#), J. Burleson [ID165](#), J.T.P. Burr [ID33](#),  
 J.C. Burzynski [ID145](#), E.L. Busch [ID42](#), V. Büscher [ID102](#), P.J. Bussey [ID60](#), J.M. Butler [ID26](#), C.M. Buttar [ID60](#),  
 J.M. Butterworth [ID98](#), W. Buttinger [ID137](#), C.J. Buxo Vazquez [ID109](#), A.R. Buzykaev [ID38](#),  
 S. Cabrera Urbán [ID166](#), L. Cadamuro [ID67](#), D. Caforio [ID59](#), H. Cai [ID132](#), Y. Cai [ID14,114c](#), Y. Cai [ID114a](#),  
 V.M.M. Cairo [ID37](#), O. Cakir [ID3a](#), N. Calace [ID37](#), P. Calafiura [ID18a](#), G. Calderini [ID130](#), P. Calfayan [ID69](#),  
 G. Callea [ID60](#), L.P. Caloba [ID84b](#), D. Calvet [ID41](#), S. Calvet [ID41](#), M. Calvetti [ID75a,75b](#), R. Camacho Toro [ID130](#),  
 S. Camarda [ID37](#), D. Camarero Munoz [ID27](#), P. Camarri [ID77a,77b](#), M.T. Camerlingo [ID73a,73b](#),  
 D. Cameron [ID37](#), C. Camincher [ID168](#), M. Campanelli [ID98](#), A. Camplani [ID43](#), V. Canale [ID73a,73b](#),  
 A.C. Canbay [ID3a](#), E. Canonero [ID97](#), J. Cantero [ID166](#), Y. Cao [ID165](#), F. Capocasa [ID27](#), M. Capua [ID44b,44a](#),  
 A. Carbone [ID72a,72b](#), R. Cardarelli [ID77a](#), J.C.J. Cardenas [ID8](#), G. Carducci [ID44b,44a](#), T. Carli [ID37](#),  
 G. Carlino [ID73a](#), J.I. Carlotto [ID13](#), B.T. Carlson [ID132,p](#), E.M. Carlson [ID168,159a](#), J. Carmignani [ID94](#),  
 L. Carminati [ID72a,72b](#), A. Carnelli [ID138](#), M. Carnesale [ID76a,76b](#), S. Caron [ID116](#), E. Carquin [ID140f](#),  
 I.B. Carr [ID107](#), S. Carrá [ID72a](#), G. Carratta [ID24b,24a](#), A.M. Carroll [ID126](#), M.P. Casado [ID13,h](#), M. Caspar [ID49](#),  
 F.L. Castillo [ID4](#), L. Castillo Garcia [ID13](#), V. Castillo Gimenez [ID166](#), N.F. Castro [ID133a,133e](#),  
 A. Catinaccio [ID37](#), J.R. Catmore [ID128](#), T. Cavaliere [ID4](#), V. Cavaliere [ID30](#), N. Cavalli [ID24b,24a](#),  
 L.J. Caviedes Betancourt [ID23b](#), Y.C. Cekmecelioglu [ID49](#), E. Celebi [ID83](#), S. Cella [ID37](#),  
 M.S. Centonze [ID71a,71b](#), V. Cepaitis [ID57](#), K. Cerny [ID125](#), A.S. Cerqueira [ID84a](#), A. Cerri [ID149](#),  
 L. Cerrito [ID77a,77b](#), F. Cerutti [ID18a](#), B. Cervato [ID144](#), A. Cervelli [ID24b](#), G. Cesarini [ID54](#), S.A. Cetin [ID83](#),  
 D. Chakraborty [ID118](#), J. Chan [ID18a](#), W.Y. Chan [ID156](#), J.D. Chapman [ID33](#), E. Chapon [ID138](#),  
 B. Chargeishvili [ID152b](#), D.G. Charlton [ID21](#), M. Chatterjee [ID20](#), C. Chauhan [ID136](#), Y. Che [ID114a](#),  
 S. Chekanov [ID6](#), S.V. Chekulaev [ID159a](#), G.A. Chelkov [ID39,a](#), A. Chen [ID108](#), B. Chen [ID154](#), B. Chen [ID168](#),  
 H. Chen [ID114a](#), H. Chen [ID30](#), J. Chen [ID63c](#), J. Chen [ID145](#), M. Chen [ID129](#), S. Chen [ID89](#), S.J. Chen [ID114a](#),  
 X. Chen [ID63c](#), X. Chen [ID15,ab](#), Y. Chen [ID63a](#), C.L. Cheng [ID173](#), H.C. Cheng [ID65a](#), S. Cheong [ID146](#),  
 A. Cheplakov [ID39](#), E. Cheremushkina [ID49](#), E. Cherepanova [ID117](#), R. Cherkaoui El Moursli [ID36e](#),  
 E. Cheu [ID7](#), K. Cheung [ID66](#), L. Chevalier [ID138](#), V. Chiarella [ID54](#), G. Chiarelli [ID75a](#), N. Chiedde [ID104](#),  
 G. Chiodini [ID71a](#), A.S. Chisholm [ID21](#), A. Chitan [ID28b](#), M. Chitishvili [ID166](#), M.V. Chizhov [ID39](#),

K. Choi <sup>11</sup>, Y. Chou <sup>141</sup>, E.Y.S. Chow <sup>116</sup>, K.L. Chu <sup>172</sup>, M.C. Chu <sup>65a</sup>, X. Chu <sup>14,114c</sup>,  
 Z. Chubinidze <sup>54</sup>, J. Chudoba <sup>134</sup>, J.J. Chwastowski <sup>88</sup>, D. Cieri <sup>112</sup>, K.M. Ciesla <sup>87a</sup>,  
 V. Cindro <sup>95</sup>, A. Ciocio <sup>18a</sup>, F. Cirotto <sup>73a,73b</sup>, Z.H. Citron <sup>172</sup>, M. Citterio <sup>72a</sup>, D.A. Ciubotaru <sup>28b</sup>,  
 A. Clark <sup>57</sup>, P.J. Clark <sup>53</sup>, N. Clarke Hall <sup>98</sup>, C. Clarry <sup>158</sup>, J.M. Clavijo Columbie <sup>49</sup>,  
 S.E. Clawson <sup>49</sup>, C. Clement <sup>48a,48b</sup>, Y. Coadou <sup>104</sup>, M. Cobal <sup>70a,70c</sup>, A. Coccaro <sup>58b</sup>,  
 M.G. Cochran Branson <sup>141</sup>, R.F. Coelho Barrue <sup>133a</sup>, R. Coelho Lopes De Sa <sup>105</sup>, S. Coelli <sup>72a</sup>,  
 L.S. Colangeli <sup>158</sup>, B. Cole <sup>42</sup>, J. Collot <sup>61</sup>, P. Conde Muiño <sup>133a,133g</sup>, M.P. Connell <sup>34c</sup>,  
 S.H. Connell <sup>34c</sup>, E.I. Conroy <sup>129</sup>, F. Conventi <sup>73a,ad</sup>, H.G. Cooke <sup>21</sup>, A.M. Cooper-Sarkar <sup>129</sup>,  
 F.A. Corchia <sup>24b,24a</sup>, A. Cordeiro Oudot Choi <sup>130</sup>, L.D. Corpe <sup>41</sup>, M. Corradi <sup>76a,76b</sup>,  
 F. Corriveau <sup>106,w</sup>, A. Cortes-Gonzalez <sup>19</sup>, M.J. Costa <sup>166</sup>, F. Costanza <sup>4</sup>, D. Costanzo <sup>142</sup>,  
 B.M. Cote <sup>122</sup>, J. Couthures <sup>4</sup>, G. Cowan <sup>97</sup>, K. Cranmer <sup>173</sup>, L. Cremer <sup>50</sup>,  
 D. Cremonini <sup>24b,24a</sup>, S. Crépe-Renaudin <sup>61</sup>, F. Crescioli <sup>130</sup>, M. Cristinziani <sup>144</sup>,  
 M. Cristoforetti <sup>79a,79b</sup>, V. Croft <sup>117</sup>, J.E. Crosby <sup>124</sup>, G. Crosetti <sup>44b,44a</sup>, A. Cueto <sup>101</sup>, H. Cui <sup>98</sup>,  
 Z. Cui <sup>7</sup>, W.R. Cunningham <sup>60</sup>, F. Curcio <sup>166</sup>, J.R. Curran <sup>53</sup>, P. Czodrowski <sup>37</sup>,  
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Trzupiek <sup>88</sup>, F. Tsai <sup>148</sup>, M. Tsai <sup>108</sup>, A. Tsiamis <sup>155</sup>, P.V. Tsiareshka <sup>38</sup>, S. Tsigaridas <sup>159a</sup>, A. Tsirigotis <sup>155,q</sup>, V. Tsiskaridze <sup>158</sup>, E.G. Tskhadadze <sup>152a</sup>, M. Tsopoulou <sup>155</sup>, Y. Tsujikawa <sup>89</sup>, I.I. Tsukerman <sup>38</sup>, V. Tsulaia <sup>18a</sup>, S. Tsuno <sup>85</sup>, K. Tsuru <sup>121</sup>, D. Tsybychev <sup>148</sup>, Y. Tu <sup>65b</sup>, A. Tudorache <sup>28b</sup>, V. Tudorache <sup>28b</sup>, A.N. Tuna <sup>62</sup>, S. Turchikhin <sup>58b,58a</sup>, I. Turk Cakir <sup>3a</sup>, R. Turra <sup>72a</sup>, T. Turtuvshin <sup>39</sup>, P.M. Tuts <sup>42</sup>, S. Tzamarias <sup>155,d</sup>, E. Tzovara <sup>102</sup>, F. Ukegawa <sup>160</sup>, P.A. Ulloa Poblete <sup>140c,140b</sup>, E.N. Umaka <sup>30</sup>, G. Unal <sup>37</sup>, A. Undrus <sup>30</sup>, G. Unel <sup>162</sup>, J. Urban <sup>29b</sup>, P. Urrejola <sup>140a</sup>, G. Usai <sup>8</sup>, R. 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<sup>1</sup>Department of Physics, University of Adelaide, Adelaide; Australia.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton AB; Canada.

<sup>3</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Physics, Ankara University, Ankara; (<sup>b</sup>)Division of Physics, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara; Türkiye.

<sup>4</sup>LAPP, Université Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS/IN2P3, Annecy; France.

<sup>5</sup>APC, Université Paris Cité, CNRS/IN2P3, Paris; France.

<sup>6</sup>High Energy Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne IL; United States of America.

<sup>7</sup>Department of Physics, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ; United States of America.

<sup>8</sup>Department of Physics, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington TX; United States of America.

<sup>9</sup>Physics Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens; Greece.

<sup>10</sup>Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou; Greece.

<sup>11</sup>Department of Physics, University of Texas at Austin, Austin TX; United States of America.

<sup>12</sup>Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku; Azerbaijan.

<sup>13</sup>Institut de Física d'Altes Energies (IFAE), Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Barcelona; Spain.

<sup>14</sup>Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing; China.

- <sup>15</sup>Physics Department, Tsinghua University, Beijing; China.
- <sup>16</sup>Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade; Serbia.
- <sup>17</sup>Department for Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen; Norway.
- <sup>18</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Berkeley CA; (<sup>b</sup>)University of California, Berkeley CA; United States of America.
- <sup>19</sup>Institut für Physik, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Berlin; Germany.
- <sup>20</sup>Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern; Switzerland.
- <sup>21</sup>School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham; United Kingdom.
- <sup>22</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul; (<sup>b</sup>)Department of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep; (<sup>c</sup>)Department of Physics, Istanbul University, Istanbul; Türkiye.
- <sup>23</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Facultad de Ciencias y Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Antonio Nariño, Bogotá; (<sup>b</sup>)Departamento de Física, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá; Colombia.
- <sup>24</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia A. Righi, Università di Bologna, Bologna; (<sup>b</sup>)INFN Sezione di Bologna; Italy.
- <sup>25</sup>Physikalisches Institut, Universität Bonn, Bonn; Germany.
- <sup>26</sup>Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston MA; United States of America.
- <sup>27</sup>Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham MA; United States of America.
- <sup>28</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Transilvania University of Brasov, Brasov; (<sup>b</sup>)Horia Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest; (<sup>c</sup>)Department of Physics, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Iasi; (<sup>d</sup>)National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Physics Department, Cluj-Napoca; (<sup>e</sup>)National University of Science and Technology Politehnica, Bucharest; (<sup>f</sup>)West University in Timisoara, Timisoara; (<sup>g</sup>)Faculty of Physics, University of Bucharest, Bucharest; Romania.
- <sup>29</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava; (<sup>b</sup>)Department of Subnuclear Physics, Institute of Experimental Physics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Kosice; Slovak Republic.
- <sup>30</sup>Physics Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton NY; United States of America.
- <sup>31</sup>Universidad de Buenos Aires, Facultad de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales, Departamento de Física, y CONICET, Instituto de Física de Buenos Aires (IFIBA), Buenos Aires; Argentina.
- <sup>32</sup>California State University, CA; United States of America.
- <sup>33</sup>Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, Cambridge; United Kingdom.
- <sup>34</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Physics, University of Cape Town, Cape Town; (<sup>b</sup>)iThemba Labs, Western Cape; (<sup>c</sup>)Department of Mechanical Engineering Science, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg; (<sup>d</sup>)National Institute of Physics, University of the Philippines Diliman (Philippines); (<sup>e</sup>)University of South Africa, Department of Physics, Pretoria; (<sup>f</sup>)University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa; (<sup>g</sup>)School of Physics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; South Africa.
- <sup>35</sup>Department of Physics, Carleton University, Ottawa ON; Canada.
- <sup>36</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Faculté des Sciences Ain Chock, Université Hassan II de Casablanca; (<sup>b</sup>)Faculté des Sciences, Université Ibn-Tofail, Kénitra; (<sup>c</sup>)Faculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, LPHEA-Marrakech; (<sup>d</sup>)LPMR, Faculté des Sciences, Université Mohamed Premier, Oujda; (<sup>e</sup>)Faculté des sciences, Université Mohammed V, Rabat; (<sup>f</sup>)Institute of Applied Physics, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Ben Guerir; Morocco.
- <sup>37</sup>CERN, Geneva; Switzerland.
- <sup>38</sup>Affiliated with an institute covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN.
- <sup>39</sup>Affiliated with an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN.
- <sup>40</sup>Enrico Fermi Institute, University of Chicago, Chicago IL; United States of America.
- <sup>41</sup>LPC, Université Clermont Auvergne, CNRS/IN2P3, Clermont-Ferrand; France.



- <sup>42</sup>Nevis Laboratory, Columbia University, Irvington NY; United States of America.
- <sup>43</sup>Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen; Denmark.
- <sup>44</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università della Calabria, Rende;(<sup>b</sup>)INFN Gruppo Collegato di Cosenza, Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati; Italy.
- <sup>45</sup>Physics Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas TX; United States of America.
- <sup>46</sup>Physics Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson TX; United States of America.
- <sup>47</sup>National Centre for Scientific Research "Demokritos", Agia Paraskevi; Greece.
- <sup>48</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Physics, Stockholm University;(<sup>b</sup>)Oskar Klein Centre, Stockholm; Sweden.
- <sup>49</sup>Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron DESY, Hamburg and Zeuthen; Germany.
- <sup>50</sup>Fakultät Physik , Technische Universität Dortmund, Dortmund; Germany.
- <sup>51</sup>Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden; Germany.
- <sup>52</sup>Department of Physics, Duke University, Durham NC; United States of America.
- <sup>53</sup>SUPA - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh; United Kingdom.
- <sup>54</sup>INFN e Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati; Italy.
- <sup>55</sup>Physikalisches Institut, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg; Germany.
- <sup>56</sup>II. Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Göttingen; Germany.
- <sup>57</sup>Département de Physique Nucléaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Genève; Switzerland.
- <sup>58</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova;(<sup>b</sup>)INFN Sezione di Genova; Italy.
- <sup>59</sup>II. Physikalisches Institut, Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Giessen; Germany.
- <sup>60</sup>SUPA - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow; United Kingdom.
- <sup>61</sup>LPSC, Université Grenoble Alpes, CNRS/IN2P3, Grenoble INP, Grenoble; France.
- <sup>62</sup>Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Harvard University, Cambridge MA; United States of America.
- <sup>63</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Modern Physics and State Key Laboratory of Particle Detection and Electronics, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei;(<sup>b</sup>)Institute of Frontier and Interdisciplinary Science and Key Laboratory of Particle Physics and Particle Irradiation (MOE), Shandong University, Qingdao;(<sup>c</sup>)School of Physics and Astronomy, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Key Laboratory for Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology (MOE), SKLPPC, Shanghai;(<sup>d</sup>)Tsung-Dao Lee Institute, Shanghai;(<sup>e</sup>)School of Physics and Microelectronics, Zhengzhou University; China.
- <sup>64</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Kirchhoff-Institut für Physik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg;(<sup>b</sup>)Physikalisches Institut, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg; Germany.
- <sup>65</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)Department of Physics, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong;(<sup>b</sup>)Department of Physics, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong;(<sup>c</sup>)Department of Physics and Institute for Advanced Study, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong; China.
- <sup>66</sup>Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu; Taiwan.
- <sup>67</sup>IJCLab, Université Paris-Saclay, CNRS/IN2P3, 91405, Orsay; France.
- <sup>68</sup>Centro Nacional de Microelectrónica (IMB-CNM-CSIC), Barcelona; Spain.
- <sup>69</sup>Department of Physics, Indiana University, Bloomington IN; United States of America.
- <sup>70</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Gruppo Collegato di Udine, Sezione di Trieste, Udine;(<sup>b</sup>)ICTP, Trieste;(<sup>c</sup>)Dipartimento Politecnico di Ingegneria e Architettura, Università di Udine, Udine; Italy.
- <sup>71</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Lecce;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università del Salento, Lecce; Italy.
- <sup>72</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Milano;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Milano, Milano; Italy.
- <sup>73</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Napoli;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Napoli, Napoli; Italy.
- <sup>74</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Pavia;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pavia, Pavia; Italy.
- <sup>75</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Pisa;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica E. Fermi, Università di Pisa, Pisa; Italy.
- <sup>76</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Roma;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma; Italy.
- <sup>77</sup>(<sup>a</sup>)INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata;(<sup>b</sup>)Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Roma Tor Vergata,

Roma; Italy.

<sup>78(a)</sup>INFN Sezione di Roma Tre; <sup>(b)</sup>Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università Roma Tre, Roma; Italy.

<sup>79(a)</sup>INFN-TIFPA; <sup>(b)</sup>Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento; Italy.

<sup>80</sup>Universität Innsbruck, Department of Astro and Particle Physics, Innsbruck; Austria.

<sup>81</sup>University of Iowa, Iowa City IA; United States of America.

<sup>82</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, Iowa State University, Ames IA; United States of America.

<sup>83</sup>Istinye University, Sariyer, Istanbul; Türkiye.

<sup>84(a)</sup>Departamento de Engenharia Elétrica, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora; <sup>(b)</sup>Universidade Federal do Rio De Janeiro COPPE/EE/IF, Rio de Janeiro; <sup>(c)</sup>Instituto de Física, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo; <sup>(d)</sup>Rio de Janeiro State University, Rio de Janeiro; <sup>(e)</sup>Federal University of Bahia, Bahia; Brazil.

<sup>85</sup>KEK, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, Tsukuba; Japan.

<sup>86</sup>Graduate School of Science, Kobe University, Kobe; Japan.

<sup>87(a)</sup>AGH University of Krakow, Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, Krakow; <sup>(b)</sup>Marian Smoluchowski Institute of Physics, Jagiellonian University, Krakow; Poland.

<sup>88</sup>Institute of Nuclear Physics Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow; Poland.

<sup>89</sup>Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, Kyoto; Japan.

<sup>90</sup>Research Center for Advanced Particle Physics and Department of Physics, Kyushu University, Fukuoka ; Japan.

<sup>91</sup>L2IT, Université de Toulouse, CNRS/IN2P3, UPS, Toulouse; France.

<sup>92</sup>Instituto de Física La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET, La Plata; Argentina.

<sup>93</sup>Physics Department, Lancaster University, Lancaster; United Kingdom.

<sup>94</sup>Oliver Lodge Laboratory, University of Liverpool, Liverpool; United Kingdom.

<sup>95</sup>Department of Experimental Particle Physics, Jožef Stefan Institute and Department of Physics, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana; Slovenia.

<sup>96</sup>School of Physics and Astronomy, Queen Mary University of London, London; United Kingdom.

<sup>97</sup>Department of Physics, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham; United Kingdom.

<sup>98</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University College London, London; United Kingdom.

<sup>99</sup>Louisiana Tech University, Ruston LA; United States of America.

<sup>100</sup>Fysiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund; Sweden.

<sup>101</sup>Departamento de Física Teórica C-15 and CIAFF, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid; Spain.

<sup>102</sup>Institut für Physik, Universität Mainz, Mainz; Germany.

<sup>103</sup>School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Manchester, Manchester; United Kingdom.

<sup>104</sup>CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université, CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille; France.

<sup>105</sup>Department of Physics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA; United States of America.

<sup>106</sup>Department of Physics, McGill University, Montreal QC; Canada.

<sup>107</sup>School of Physics, University of Melbourne, Victoria; Australia.

<sup>108</sup>Department of Physics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI; United States of America.

<sup>109</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI; United States of America.

<sup>110</sup>Group of Particle Physics, University of Montreal, Montreal QC; Canada.

<sup>111</sup>Fakultät für Physik, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, München; Germany.

<sup>112</sup>Max-Planck-Institut für Physik (Werner-Heisenberg-Institut), München; Germany.

<sup>113</sup>Graduate School of Science and Kobayashi-Maskawa Institute, Nagoya University, Nagoya; Japan.

<sup>114(a)</sup>Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Nanjing; <sup>(b)</sup>School of Science, Shenzhen Campus of Sun Yat-sen University; <sup>(c)</sup>University of Chinese Academy of Science (UCAS), Beijing; China.



- <sup>115</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM; United States of America.
- <sup>116</sup>Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University/Nikhef, Nijmegen; Netherlands.
- <sup>117</sup>Nikhef National Institute for Subatomic Physics and University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam; Netherlands.
- <sup>118</sup>Department of Physics, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb IL; United States of America.
- <sup>119</sup><sup>(a)</sup>New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi;<sup>(b)</sup>United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain; United Arab Emirates.
- <sup>120</sup>Department of Physics, New York University, New York NY; United States of America.
- <sup>121</sup>Ochanomizu University, Otsuka, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo; Japan.
- <sup>122</sup>Ohio State University, Columbus OH; United States of America.
- <sup>123</sup>Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Oklahoma, Norman OK; United States of America.
- <sup>124</sup>Department of Physics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater OK; United States of America.
- <sup>125</sup>Palacký University, Joint Laboratory of Optics, Olomouc; Czech Republic.
- <sup>126</sup>Institute for Fundamental Science, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR; United States of America.
- <sup>127</sup>Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka; Japan.
- <sup>128</sup>Department of Physics, University of Oslo, Oslo; Norway.
- <sup>129</sup>Department of Physics, Oxford University, Oxford; United Kingdom.
- <sup>130</sup>LPNHE, Sorbonne Université, Université Paris Cité, CNRS/IN2P3, Paris; France.
- <sup>131</sup>Department of Physics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA; United States of America.
- <sup>132</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA; United States of America.
- <sup>133</sup><sup>(a)</sup>Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas - LIP, Lisboa;<sup>(b)</sup>Departamento de Física, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa;<sup>(c)</sup>Departamento de Física, Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra;<sup>(d)</sup>Centro de Física Nuclear da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa;<sup>(e)</sup>Departamento de Física, Universidade do Minho, Braga;<sup>(f)</sup>Departamento de Física Teórica y del Cosmos, Universidad de Granada, Granada (Spain);<sup>(g)</sup>Departamento de Física, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa; Portugal.
- <sup>134</sup>Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague; Czech Republic.
- <sup>135</sup>Czech Technical University in Prague, Prague; Czech Republic.
- <sup>136</sup>Charles University, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Prague; Czech Republic.
- <sup>137</sup>Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot; United Kingdom.
- <sup>138</sup>IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette; France.
- <sup>139</sup>Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz CA; United States of America.
- <sup>140</sup><sup>(a)</sup>Departamento de Física, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago;<sup>(b)</sup>Millennium Institute for Subatomic physics at high energy frontier (SAPHIR), Santiago;<sup>(c)</sup>Instituto de Investigación Multidisciplinario en Ciencia y Tecnología, y Departamento de Física, Universidad de La Serena;<sup>(d)</sup>Universidad Andres Bello, Department of Physics, Santiago;<sup>(e)</sup>Instituto de Alta Investigación, Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica;<sup>(f)</sup>Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso; Chile.
- <sup>141</sup>Department of Physics, University of Washington, Seattle WA; United States of America.
- <sup>142</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield; United Kingdom.
- <sup>143</sup>Department of Physics, Shinshu University, Nagano; Japan.
- <sup>144</sup>Department Physik, Universität Siegen, Siegen; Germany.

- <sup>145</sup>Department of Physics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC; Canada.
- <sup>146</sup>SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, Stanford CA; United States of America.
- <sup>147</sup>Department of Physics, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm; Sweden.
- <sup>148</sup>Departments of Physics and Astronomy, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY; United States of America.
- <sup>149</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sussex, Brighton; United Kingdom.
- <sup>150</sup>School of Physics, University of Sydney, Sydney; Australia.
- <sup>151</sup>Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei; Taiwan.
- <sup>152</sup><sup>(a)</sup>E. Andronikashvili Institute of Physics, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi;<sup>(b)</sup>High Energy Physics Institute, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi;<sup>(c)</sup>University of Georgia, Tbilisi; Georgia.
- <sup>153</sup>Department of Physics, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa; Israel.
- <sup>154</sup>Raymond and Beverly Sackler School of Physics and Astronomy, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv; Israel.
- <sup>155</sup>Department of Physics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki; Greece.
- <sup>156</sup>International Center for Elementary Particle Physics and Department of Physics, University of Tokyo, Tokyo; Japan.
- <sup>157</sup>Department of Physics, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo; Japan.
- <sup>158</sup>Department of Physics, University of Toronto, Toronto ON; Canada.
- <sup>159</sup><sup>(a)</sup>TRIUMF, Vancouver BC;<sup>(b)</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, York University, Toronto ON; Canada.
- <sup>160</sup>Division of Physics and Tomonaga Center for the History of the Universe, Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba; Japan.
- <sup>161</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, Tufts University, Medford MA; United States of America.
- <sup>162</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California Irvine, Irvine CA; United States of America.
- <sup>163</sup>University of Sharjah, Sharjah; United Arab Emirates.
- <sup>164</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Uppsala, Uppsala; Sweden.
- <sup>165</sup>Department of Physics, University of Illinois, Urbana IL; United States of America.
- <sup>166</sup>Instituto de Física Corpuscular (IFIC), Centro Mixto Universidad de Valencia - CSIC, Valencia; Spain.
- <sup>167</sup>Department of Physics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC; Canada.
- <sup>168</sup>Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Victoria, Victoria BC; Canada.
- <sup>169</sup>Fakultät für Physik und Astronomie, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, Würzburg; Germany.
- <sup>170</sup>Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Coventry; United Kingdom.
- <sup>171</sup>Waseda University, Tokyo; Japan.
- <sup>172</sup>Department of Particle Physics and Astrophysics, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot; Israel.
- <sup>173</sup>Department of Physics, University of Wisconsin, Madison WI; United States of America.
- <sup>174</sup>Fakultät für Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften, Fachgruppe Physik, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal; Germany.
- <sup>175</sup>Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven CT; United States of America.
- <sup>176</sup>Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan; Armenia.
- <sup>a</sup> Also Affiliated with an institute covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN.
- <sup>b</sup> Also at An-Najah National University, Nablus; Palestine.
- <sup>c</sup> Also at Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, New York NY; United States of America.
- <sup>d</sup> Also at Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation (CIRI-AUTH), Thessaloniki; Greece.
- <sup>e</sup> Also at CERN, Geneva; Switzerland.
- <sup>f</sup> Also at CMD-AC UNEC Research Center, Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC); Azerbaijan.

- <sup>g</sup> Also at Département de Physique Nucléaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Genève; Switzerland.
- <sup>h</sup> Also at Departament de Física de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona; Spain.
- <sup>i</sup> Also at Department of Financial and Management Engineering, University of the Aegean, Chios; Greece.
- <sup>j</sup> Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Sacramento; United States of America.
- <sup>k</sup> Also at Department of Physics, King's College London, London; United Kingdom.
- <sup>l</sup> Also at Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford CA; United States of America.
- <sup>m</sup> Also at Department of Physics, Stellenbosch University; South Africa.
- <sup>n</sup> Also at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg; Switzerland.
- <sup>o</sup> Also at Department of Physics, University of Thessaly; Greece.
- <sup>p</sup> Also at Department of Physics, Westmont College, Santa Barbara; United States of America.
- <sup>q</sup> Also at Hellenic Open University, Patras; Greece.
- <sup>r</sup> Also at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University; Saudi Arabia.
- <sup>s</sup> Also at Institutio Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona; Spain.
- <sup>t</sup> Also at Institut für Experimentalphysik, Universität Hamburg, Hamburg; Germany.
- <sup>u</sup> Also at Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy (INRNE) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia; Bulgaria.
- <sup>v</sup> Also at Institute of Applied Physics, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Ben Guerir; Morocco.
- <sup>w</sup> Also at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP); Canada.
- <sup>x</sup> Also at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku; Azerbaijan.
- <sup>y</sup> Also at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Ilia State University, Tbilisi; Georgia.
- <sup>z</sup> Also at National Institute of Physics, University of the Philippines Diliman (Philippines); Philippines.
- <sup>aa</sup> Also at Technical University of Munich, Munich; Germany.
- <sup>ab</sup> Also at The Collaborative Innovation Center of Quantum Matter (CICQM), Beijing; China.
- <sup>ac</sup> Also at TRIUMF, Vancouver BC; Canada.
- <sup>ad</sup> Also at Università di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli; Italy.
- <sup>ae</sup> Also at University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Physics, Colorado; United States of America.
- <sup>af</sup> Also at Washington College, Chestertown, MD; United States of America.
- <sup>ag</sup> Also at Yeditepe University, Physics Department, Istanbul; Türkiye.
- \* Deceased