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Search for flavor-changing neutral current interactions of the top quark mediated by a Higgs boson in proton-proton collisions at 13 TeV

The CMS Collaboration*

Abstract

A search for flavor-changing neutral current interactions of the top quark (t) and the Higgs boson (H) is presented. The search is based on proton-proton collision data collected in 2016–2018 at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV with the CMS detector at the LHC, and corresponding to an integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1}. Events containing a pair of leptons with the same-sign electric charge and at least one jet are considered. The results are used to constrain the branching fraction ($\mathcal{B}$) of the top quark decaying to a Higgs boson and an up (u) or charm (c) quark. No significant excess above the estimated background was found. The observed (expected) upper limits at 95% confidence level are found to be 0.072% (0.059%) for $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hu})$ and 0.043% (0.062%) for $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hc})$. These results are combined with two other searches performed by the CMS Collaboration for flavor-changing neutral current interactions of top quarks and Higgs bosons in final states with a pair of photons or of bottom quarks. The resulting observed (expected) upper limits at 95% confidence level are 0.019% (0.027%) for $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hu})$ and 0.037% (0.035%) for $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hc})$. These results constitute the most stringent limits on these branching fractions to date.

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*See Appendix A for the list of collaboration members

1 Introduction

Quark decays mediated by flavor-changing neutral currents (FCNCs) are forbidden at tree level in the standard model (SM) and are suppressed at higher orders in the perturbative expansion by the Glashow–Iliopoulos–Maiani mechanism [1] and Cabibbo–Kobayashi–Maskawa unitarity constraints [2]. As a result, the SM branching fractions for the decay of a top quark (t) into a Higgs boson (H) and an up quark (u), $t \to Hu$, or a charm quark (c), $t \to Hc$, are expected to be of the order of 10^{-17} and 10^{-15}, respectively [3–6].

Many scenarios of physics beyond the SM may enhance these interactions, possibly by many orders of magnitude. Examples of such models include those of warped extra dimensions [7], composite Higgs boson models [8], two-Higgs-doublet models (2HDMs) [9–12] including supersymmetric models with R-parity violation [13], and quark-singlet models [14]. These scenarios may lead to sizable FCNC interactions of quarks with any of the neutral force mediators or with the Higgs boson. The Hct interaction in particular may be enhanced in 2HDMs [15–18], including scenarios of flavor-violating Yukawa couplings [19].

Searches for FCNC interactions of the top quark mediated by a Higgs boson have been performed by the ATLAS [20–22] and CMS [23–25] Collaborations in different final states or with a smaller data set. This paper presents searches for FCNC top quark interations in a final state having at least two leptons (e, μ) with the same-sign (SS) electric charge and at least one jet. It exploits both the decay of a top quark to a Higgs boson and an up or charm quark in top quark-antiquark ($t\bar{t}$) pair production (TT production mode), as well as the associated production of a single top quark (ST production mode) with a Higgs boson via an up or charm quark, as shown in Fig. 1. There are other possible production modes of this signal, including a tW production mode; however, this production mode accounts for less than 4% of the signal. For the sake of consistency with other published searches for this phenomenon, only the TT and ST modes shown in Fig. 1 are considered.

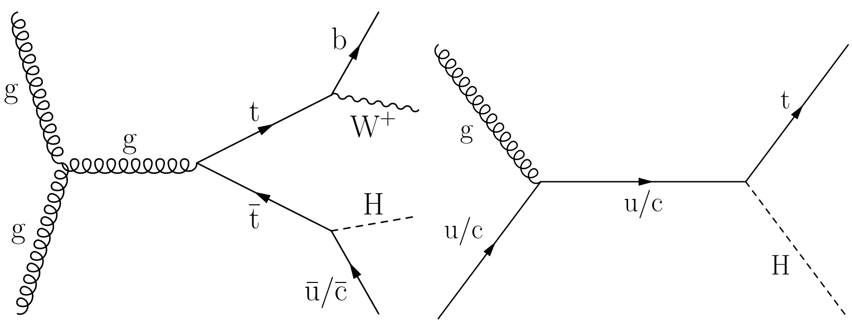

Figure 1: Representative Feynman diagrams for the production modes considered: $t\bar{t}$ production with the FCNC decay of the top quark to a Higgs boson and an up or charm quark (TT, left), and FCNC-associated production of a single top quark with a Higgs boson (ST, right).

The results are obtained from the analysis of proton-proton (pp) collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV, targeting the decay of the Higgs boson to WW, ZZ, or $\tau\tau$ leading to the final states described above. The data were collected with the CMS detector at the CERN LHC in 2016–2018, and correspond to an integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1}. These results are combined with other FCNC searches performed by the CMS Collaboration targeting the decay of the Higgs boson to a pair of b quarks [24] or a pair of photons [25].

2 The CMS detector

The central feature of the CMS apparatus is a superconducting solenoid of 6 m internal diameter, providing a magnetic field of 3.8 T. Within the solenoid volume are a silicon pixel and strip tracker, a lead tungstate crystal electromagnetic calorimeter (ECAL), and a brass and scintillator hadron calorimeter, each composed of a barrel and two endcap sections. Forward calorimeters extend the pseudorapidity (η) coverage provided by the barrel and endcap detectors. Muons are measured in gas-ionization detectors embedded in the steel flux-return yoke outside the solenoid. A more detailed description of the CMS detector, together with a definition of the coordinate system used and the relevant kinematic variables, can be found in Ref. [26].

Events of interest are selected using a two-tiered trigger system. The first level trigger, composed of custom hardware processors, uses information from the calorimeters and muon detectors to select events at a rate of around 100 kHz within a fixed latency of about 4 μs [27]. The second level trigger, known as the high-level trigger, consists of a farm of processors running a version of the full event reconstruction software optimized for fast processing, and reduces the event rate to around 1 kHz before data storage [28].

3 Simulated samples

Samples of simulated events are used in the design and validation of the analysis, the training of event classifiers, and in the estimate of expected yields from signal and rare SM background processes. Three separate sets of simulated events for each process are used in order to match the different data-taking conditions and algorithms used in 2016, 2017, and 2018.

The POWHEG v2 event generator [29–31] is used to simulate $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}$ production [32], WZ and ZZ pair production [33], H production via gluon fusion [34], and $\mathrm{t\bar{t}H}$ production [35] at next-to-leading order (NLO) in perturbative quantum chromodynamics (QCD). The JHUGEN generator [36] is used to simulate the decay of the Higgs boson into vector bosons in the gluon fusion production mode. Events with single top quarks produced in association with W bosons (tW) are simulated at NLO with POWHEG v1 [37] (2016) or POWHEG v2 (2017–2018). Samples of the Drell–Yan and W boson production processes are generated with up to four additional partons in the matrix element (ME) calculations using the MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO event generator at leading order (LO) [38]. The MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO v2.3.3 (v2.4.2) package is used for samples corresponding to 2016 (2017–2018) data-taking conditions. The electroweak production of $\mathrm{W^{\pm}W^{\pm}}$, as well as the tWZ, $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}\gamma$, and $\mathrm{t\bar{t}} + \mathrm{XX}$ (with $\mathrm{X} = \mathrm{W, Z, H}$) processes, are generated using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO at LO. Triple vector boson production (VVV, $\mathrm{V} = \mathrm{Z, W}$), diboson production in association with a photon ($\mathrm{WZ}\gamma$, $\mathrm{WW}\gamma$) as well as the $\mathrm{t\bar{t}Z}$, tZq, $\mathrm{t}\gamma$ and $\mathrm{t\bar{t}t\bar{t}}$ processes are simulated using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO at NLO in QCD. The $\mathrm{t\bar{t}W}$, $\mathrm{W}\gamma$, $\mathrm{Z}\gamma$, and VH processes are simulated at NLO with up to one or two extra partons in the ME calculations using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO.

The NNPDF3.0 [39] LO and NLO parton distribution function (PDF) sets are used to generate LO and NLO samples with 2016 data-taking conditions, while NNPDF3.1 next-to-NLO (NNLO) [40] is used for 2017–2018 samples. Event generators are interfaced with PYTHIA v8.226 [41] using the CUETP8M1 tune [42, 43] for 2016 and PYTHIA v8.230 using the CP5 tune [44] for 2017–2018 to simulate the parton shower, fragmentation, and hadronization of initial- and final-state partons, along with the underlying event. The MLM [45] and FXFX [46] prescriptions are employed to remove double counting of additional partons generated with MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO and PYTHIA for the LO and NLO samples, respectively. The GEANT4 toolkit [47] is used to model the response of the CMS detector.

The effective Lagrangian with an FCNC coupling is:

$$\mathcal{L} = \sum_{\mathrm{q=u,c}} \frac{g}{\sqrt{2}} \bar{\mathrm{t}} \kappa_{\mathrm{Hqt}} \left(F^{\mathrm{L}}_{\mathrm{Hq}} P_{\mathrm{L}} + F^{\mathrm{R}}_{\mathrm{Hq}} P_{\mathrm{R}} \right) \mathrm{qH} + \mathrm{h.c.}. \quad (1)$$

It is implemented in the FEYNRULES package [48], and the universal FEYNRULES output format [49] is used to generate the signal model. The complex chiral parameters are arbitrarily fixed to the values $F^{\mathrm{L}}_{\mathrm{Hq}} = 1$ and $F^{\mathrm{R}}_{\mathrm{Hq}} = 0$, as these parameters have no impact on the signal cross sections and usually have a small impact on kinematic distributions of objects in the event. Signal samples are generated in the TT and ST production modes assuming, for each mode, one of the two κ couplings is non-zero at a time. For the ST sample, the production and decays of the top quark and antiquark are simulated using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO at LO. The ST production mode cross section is calculated at LO precision with MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO v2.6.0 as 72.6 (10.0) pb, equivalent to a coupling constant κ_{Hqt} = 1 (κ_{Hct} = 1). The difference of the respective production cross sections originates from the up and charm quark parton distribution functions of the initial state protons. The TT production signal sample is generated with MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO v2.4.2 at LO with up to two extra partons in the ME. The TT production mode cross section is taken to be 832 pb, as calculated at NNLO precision in perturbative QCD including soft-gluon resummation to next-to-next-to-leading-logarithm [50]. The SM and FCNC decays of the top quark and antiquark are simulated using MADSPIN [51]. The top quark and Higgs boson masses are set to 172.5 and 125.0 GeV, respectively. The Higgs boson decay is simulated using PYTHIA v8.226 (2016) or PYTHIA v8.230 (2017 and 2018). The generated signal samples are filtered to have one leptonically decaying top quark and one Higgs boson decaying to WW, ZZ, or $\tau\tau$. The cross sections applied in the analysis account for the branching fraction of these filtered LO decays. These adjusted cross sections are 12.08 pb for the TT production and 7.32 (1.01) pb for the ST Hut (Hct) production.

Additional simulated minimum bias pp interactions within the same or adjacent bunch crossings (pileup) are included in the simulated events, and events are reweighted according to the observed instantaneous luminosity and the total inelastic pp cross section of 69.2 mb [52].

4 Event selection and search strategy

This analysis considers events with at least two leptons (electron or muon) with the SS electric charge and at least one jet. The main backgrounds for this search are from detector effects (namely nonprompt leptons and charge misidentified leptons) and SM processes that produce an SS lepton pair, including processes producing multiple gauge bosons and/or top quarks. These backgrounds are suppressed by making requirements on the kinematic variables of reconstructed physics objects, the same as those presented in Refs. [53–55].

Events are reconstructed using the particle-flow (PF) algorithm [56], which combines information from the CMS subdetectors to identify charged and neutral hadrons, photons, electrons, and muons, collectively referred to as PF candidates. These candidates are associated with reconstructed vertices. The primary vertex is taken to be the vertex corresponding to the hardest scattering in the event, evaluated using tracking information alone, as described in Section 9.4.1 of Ref. [57]. The physics objects used in this analysis include jets clustered from PF candidates associated with the PV and the magnitude of missing transverse momentum, $\vec{p}_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}}$ [58]. The $\vec{p}_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}}$ is computed as the negative vector sum of the transverse momentum ($\vec{p}_{\mathrm{T}}$) of all the PF candidates, excluding charged-hadron candidates that do not originate from the PV. The magnitude of this vector is referred to as $p_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}}$.

Electron candidates are reconstructed by combining clusters of energy deposits in the ECAL with tracks [59]. The electron identification is performed using shower shape variables, track-cluster matching variables, and track quality variables. To reject electrons originating from photon conversions inside the detector, electron candidates are required to have at most one missing measurement in the innermost tracker layers and to be incompatible with any conversion-like secondary vertices. Muon candidates are reconstructed by geometrically matching tracks from measurements in the muon system and tracker, and fitting them to form a global muon track. Good muon candidates are selected using the qualities of the geometrical matching and of these tracks [60].

Selected electrons (muons) are required to have $p_{\mathrm{T}} > 20\,\mathrm{GeV}$, $|\eta| < 2.4\,(2.5)$ and originate from the PV. Additionally, electrons in the transition region $1.442 < |\eta| < 1.556$, between the barrel and endcaps of the ECAL, are excluded since the reconstruction of an electron object in this region is not optimal. Leptons are required to be isolated using a logical combination of three isolation variables: the energy surrounding the lepton candidate in a fixed cone size $\Delta R = 0.4$, the energy surrounding the lepton candidate in a cone size that depends on the candidate p_{T}, and the transverse momentum of the lepton candidate relative to the residual momentum of the nearest jet after lepton momentum subtraction. This definition is designed to distinguish leptons produced in decays of W or Z bosons ("prompt leptons") from leptons produced in hadron decays, in conversions of photons in jets, or hadrons misidentified as leptons ("nonprompt leptons"). Lepton selection efficiencies are in the ranges of 45–80 (70–90)% for electrons (muons), increasing as a function of the lepton p_{T} and reaching a maximum value for $p_{\mathrm{T}} > 60\,\mathrm{GeV}$. Details of this selection can be found in [53].

Hadronic jets are clustered from neutral and charged PF candidates associated with the PV, using the anti-k_{T} algorithm [61, 62] and a distance parameter of 0.4. The jet momentum is determined as the vector sum of all PF candidate momenta in the jet. Jet energy corrections are derived from simulation studies so that the average measured energy of jets becomes identical to that of particle level jets. In situ measurements of the momentum balance in dijet, $\gamma +$ jets, $\mathrm{Z} +$ jets, and multijet events are used to determine any residual differences between the observed and simulated jet energy scale, and appropriate corrections are made [63]. Additional selection criteria are applied to each jet to remove jets potentially dominated by instrumental effects or reconstruction failures. The $\vec{p}_{\mathrm{T}}^{\text{miss}}$ is modified to account for corrections to the energy scale of the reconstructed jets in the event. The H_{T} is defined as the scalar p_{T} sum of jets in an event.

Selected jets must have $p_{\mathrm{T}} > 25\,\mathrm{GeV}$, $|\eta| < 2.4$, and be separated from isolated leptons by $\Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta\eta)^2 + (\Delta\phi)^2} > 0.4$, where ϕ is the azimuthal angle in radians. Jets containing the decay of a b hadron are identified as bottom quark jets (b-tagged jets) using a deep neural network algorithm, DEEPJET [64–66]. The discriminator working point is chosen so that the misidentification rate to tag light-flavor or gluon jets is approximately 1%. This choice results in an efficiency to identify a bottom quark jet in the range 75–85% for jets with p_{T} of 25–400 GeV, and a misidentification rate of about 15% for jets originating from a charm quark. Jets failing the b tagging requirement are further required to have $p_{\mathrm{T}} > 30\,\mathrm{GeV}$ to improve signal purity. The DEEPJET algorithm is also used to identify jets containing the decay of a c-flavored hadron (c-tagged jets) [67]. The DeepJet algorithm is a multiclassifier, allowing for a b tagging discriminator score and a c tagging discriminator score to be returned by the same algorithm. Jets arising from b and c hadrons tend to be amongst the hardest jets in the event and thus the b and c tagging discriminator scores for the leading three jets are used for event classification.

Events are selected using a logical OR of triggers that require the presence of two isolated lep-

Table 1: Summary of the trigger thresholds used to select the analysis data set. The triggers require two isolated leptons, with different p_T requirements depending on their flavors. For each trigger, the p_T threshold 1 corresponds to the lepton listed first, and the p_T threshold 2 to the lepton listed last.

Trigger	$p_{T,1}$ threshold	$p_{T,2}$ threshold
ee	23 GeV	12 GeV
eμ	23 GeV	8 GeV
μe	23 GeV	12 GeV
$\mu\mu$	17 GeV	8 GeV

Table 2: Baseline analysis selections.

Physics objects	Selection criteria
Lepton	Pair of isolated SS leptons (e or μ), lead $p_T > 25$ GeV, else $p_T > 20$ GeV, $\lvert\eta_e\rvert < 2.4$, $\lvert\eta_\mu\rvert < 2.5$
Jet	$\geq$2 in SS events or $\geq$1 in multilepton events, $p_T > 30$ GeV, $\lvert\eta\rvert < 2.4$
b-tagged jet	$p_T > 25$ GeV, $\lvert\eta\rvert < 2.4$
$m_{\ell\ell}$(SF)	>12 GeV
$m_{\ell\ell}$(any flavor, any charge)	>8 GeV
m_{ee}(SS)	<75 or >105 GeV

tons, either electrons or muons. The trigger efficiency for electrons is 90–98%, reaching its maximum value for $p_T > 30$ GeV. For muons, the trigger efficiency is around 92%. The uncertainty in the trigger efficiency measurement is 1–5% per trigger lepton. The trigger requirements are summarized in Table 1.

Lepton pairings are vetoed if their invariant mass is within specific ranges to reduce background contributions from known resonances. Events with a same-flavor (SF) pair, where electrons (muons) with $p_T > 7\,(5)$ GeV pass a relaxed lepton identification, that has an invariant mass ($m_{\ell\ell}$) < 12 GeV are rejected. Additionally, events with $m_{\ell\ell} < 8$ GeV are rejected, regardless of lepton flavor or charge. Events with an SS electron pair whose invariant mass falls in the Z boson mass window of 75–105 GeV are rejected. A baseline analysis selection defined in terms of requirements on these objects is summarized in Table 2. The main SM processes that contribute at this stage of the selection are dibosons, associated production of gauge bosons with top quarks, $t\bar{t}$, W + jets, and Drell–Yan.

Events passing the baseline selection are classified using a boosted decision tree (BDT) trained on simulated samples of signal and background processes. Two BDTs are trained for use in this analysis: one for identifying the Hut signal and one the Hct signal. Both BDTs are trained using the XGBOOST [68] framework with 33 input features, which were selected for their expected differences between signal and background events:

- The number of electrons, jets, and b-tagged jets in the event,
- kinematic features of up to three leptons including the p_T, $\lvert\eta\rvert$, transverse and longitudinal impact parameters, and the transverse mass of the lepton and the p_T^{miss} (15),
- features of the leading three jets: p_T, b and c tagging discriminator score,
- invariant mass of the two p_T-leading leptons,

- p_{T} of the jet with the largest $|\eta|$,
- b tagging discriminator score of the p_{T}-leading b-tagged jet,
- p_{T} of the jet with the highest b tagging discriminator score,
- $p_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}}$,
- H_{T}.

Search regions (SRs) are defined by bins in the BDT discriminator value. Bin edges are determined using the SCIKITLEARN [69] quantile transformation function so that the signal acceptance is approximately uniform across SRs, reducing the effects of outlier events.

Expected yields of the signal process in these SRs are determined from simulation after applying scale factors (SFs) that correct for differences between data and simulation in the efficiencies of the applied triggers, lepton selection, and b tagging.

5 Background estimation

Events containing an SS lepton pair and jets arise from several SM processes. The first category consists of events that contain one or more nonprompt leptons. Events containing a pair of prompt leptons with the SS electric charge arise from SM processes including diboson and triboson production and associated production of a boson with a $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}$. This background is subdominant and is estimated from simulation. The smallest category of background consists of dilepton events from $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}$, Drell–Yan, and WW processes with a charge-misidentified prompt electron. Descriptions of the methods used to estimate each category of background and the validation studies follow.

Semileptonic $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}$ and leptonic W + jets processes with an additional nonprompt lepton with the same-sign electric charge as a prompt lepton constitute the largest background in this search. This background is estimated using the "tight-to-loose" (TL) ratio method [53]. The tight identification and isolation requirements used to select prompt leptons are relaxed to define a loose lepton selection that is enriched in nonprompt leptons. The efficiency, ϵ_{TL}, for a nonprompt lepton that satisfies the loose selection to also pass the tight requirement is measured in a control sample of single-lepton events, as a function of the lepton flavor, p_{T}, and $|\eta|$. Contamination from processes producing a prompt lepton, mostly W + jets and followed by Drell–Yan, is subtracted using the simulation. The loose-lepton definition was optimized to achieve an ϵ_{TL} that is approximately independent of the mother parton flavor. Furthermore, for leptons that fail the tight selection, the lepton p_{T} is redefined as the sum of the lepton p_{T} and the energy in the isolation cone, where the isolation cone is an angular distance $\Delta R = 0.4$ from the lepton p_{T}. This redefinition accounts for the momentum of the parent parton. Together, these criteria allow constructing an ϵ_{TL} that is approximately independent of sample and SR. See Ref. [53] for further details. For each SR, a control region (CR) is constructed with the same selection criteria as the SR but requiring that at least one lepton passes the loose selection but fails the tight requirement. The number of events with a nonprompt lepton in each SR is estimated by weighting each loose-not-tight lepton in a corresponding CR event by a factor of $\epsilon_{\mathrm{TL}}/(1-\epsilon_{\mathrm{TL}})$.

The simulation is used to evaluate the performance of the method. A TL efficiency, measured from simulated samples of multijet production, is used to predict the number of events with a nonprompt lepton expected to enter the SRs. The estimate is compared with the observed number of events with a nonprompt lepton in simulated $\mathrm{t\bar{t}}$ and W + jets samples. The predicted and observed rates of events with a nonprompt lepton are compared in each SR and as functions of kinematic properties. These rates are found to agree within 30%, which is taken as a flat systematic uncertainty in the final nonprompt-lepton background estimate.

The second category of background consists of SM processes that produce a pair of prompt SS leptons. Diboson and triboson processes and associated production of a boson with $t\bar{t}$ are the most significant processes in this background category. Smaller contributions arise from processes including a genuine photon such as $W\gamma, Z\gamma, t\gamma$ via photon conversion, and "rare" processes, such as tWZ and $t\bar{t}t\bar{t}$.

As it is not possible to construct a CR enriched in these processes with a large number of events and high purity, this background is estimated from simulation. Expected yields for these processes are estimated after applying SFs that account for small differences between data and simulation in the measured trigger, lepton selection, and b tagging efficiencies, with associated systematic uncertainties described in Section 6.

The smallest category of background consists of dilepton $t\bar{t}$ and Drell–Yan events where the charge of an electron is misidentified, thus misclassifying a pair of prompt leptons with opposite-sign electric charge as an SS pair. This source, referred to as the "charge flip" background, is estimated using a method similar to that described above for estimating the nonprompt-lepton background. The probability, ϵ_{q}, to misidentify the charge of an electron is estimated in simulation, as a function of electron p_{T} and $|\eta|$. This probability ranges between 10^{-5} and 10^{-3} for electrons and is at least an order of magnitude smaller for muons. For each SR requiring two SS leptons, a CR is constructed with the same selections except that the two leptons have opposite electric charge. The number of events with a lepton whose charge is misidentified is estimated by scaling each CR event by a weight obtained by summing a factor of $\epsilon_{q}/(1-\epsilon_{q})$ for each lepton in the event.

Because the charge misidentification rate is estimated using simulation, the performance is evaluated in a CR enriched in $Z \to e^{+}e^{-}$ events with the charge of the electron or positron misidentified. For each data collection year, a single SF inclusive in p_{T} and $|\eta|$ is derived from a comparison of the observed and estimated number of such electron pairs. For 2016 (2017–2018) this correction factor is approximately 1.1 (1.4). A flat 30% uncertainty in this estimate is assumed in all regions based on these and other studies described in the following section.

6 Systematic uncertainties

Sources of systematic uncertainties related to signal and background processes and their impact on the results are summarized in Table 3. The change in SR yields is reported as a one standard deviation range. A description of the uncertainties considered in this search are summarized in this section, first in backgrounds estimated using CRs (charge-misidentified and nonprompt-lepton) followed by yields estimated from simulation.

The nonprompt-lepton background is assigned an uncertainty of 30% based on the agreement observed in closure tests of the TL method using simulated QCD multijet, $t\bar{t}$, and W + jets samples. The simulation is used to subtract contamination from prompt leptons, which is less than 1% in the CR, but is typically between 10% and 20% in the ϵ_{TL} measurement control sample, with uncertainties in ϵ_{TL} as large as 50% in the least statistically significant bins. This uncertainty leads to a 7–10% impact on the predicted yields in the SR. The charge-misidentified lepton background is assigned an uncertainty of 30% based on the agreement observed between the estimate and data in a control sample enriched in $Z \to e^{+}e^{-}$ events with one electron or positron having a misidentified charge. An uncertainty <5% in the rate at which the electron charge is misidentified results from the limited number of events in the simulated samples in which this rate is measured. The statistical uncertainty in the CRs used to estimate the charge-misidentified and nonprompt-lepton backgrounds is included in the total uncertainty. The statistical uncertainties in the nonprompt-lepton background and the charge-misidentified lepton background are treated as fully uncorrelated. The other uncertainties in these backgrounds are treated as correlated between SR bins but uncorrelated between runs. The uncertainty in the estimate of the contribution of processes with a nonprompt lepton is the dominant uncertainty in the background.

The remaining uncertainties described in this section apply only for the estimate of yields of the signal process and backgrounds arising from SM processes with a prompt, SS lepton pair, which are estimated using simulation. Statistical uncertainties originating from the finite size of simulated samples are accounted for in each SR bin and for signal and background separately [70]. The integrated luminosities of the 2016, 2017, and 2018 data-taking periods are individually known with uncertainties in the 1.2–2.5% range [71–73], while the total 2016–2018 integrated luminosity has an uncertainty of 1.6%, the improvement in precision reflecting the (uncorrelated) time evolution of some systematic effects. The simulated samples are reweighted according to the observed instantaneous luminosity and the minimum bias cross section. The uncertainty in the total inelastic pp cross section leads to changes $<2\%$ in the expected signal and background yields.

The efficiency of the trigger requirements is measured with an uncertainty of 2%, using an independent data sample selected with single-lepton triggers. The efficiencies of the lepton reconstruction and identification requirements are measured using data samples enriched in $Z \to \ell\ell$ events, with uncertainties of up to 5 (3)% per electron (muon). Varying the lepton efficiency SFs results in a 2–3% effect on the SR yields. The jet energy scale is varied within its uncertainty resulting in a 1–8% effect in signal yields and $<5\%$ in background yields for rare SM processes.

The tagging efficiencies for b, c, and light-flavor jets are measured in dedicated data samples [65]. Varying these efficiencies within their measured uncertainties results in variations between 6–16% of the SR yields.

Uncertainties in the normalization and shape distribution of events across SRs are considered for each background process estimated from simulation. Flat uncertainties are applied to specific background processes to account for the uncertainty in the total cross section:5% for WZ [74], 10% for SS WW [75], 12% for $t\bar{t}W$ [76], and 8% for $t\bar{t}Z$ [76]. These flat uncertainties also account for the normalization changes due to the choice of the renormalization (μ_R) and factorization (μ_F) scales. The uncertainties in the shape distrubtion of events for each background process from the choice of the μ_R, μ_F, and α_S scales is accounted for separately and are obtained by taking the envelope of the distributions obtained with modified scales. The typical effect of varying the μ_F and μ_R scales on the shapes of the BDT distributions is 10 to 15%. The impact of variations of the PDFs [77] is 4 to 6%.

For signal events, the total cross section uncertainty in the TT production mode is 6%, estimated from the uncertainty in the $t\bar{t}$ NNLO cross section, caused by the variation of the PDFs and the strong coupling α_S [78–80]. An uncertainty of 30% is assigned in the ST signal production mode cross section, resulting from missing higher-order corrections. The total impact in the normalization of the signal yields ranges from 6 to 10% across SRs. The typical effect of varying the μ_F and μ_R scales on the shapes of the BDT distributions is 2 to 9% for signal processes. The impact of variations of the PDFs [77] is $<2\%$.

All systematic uncertainties are correlated between the SR bins. With the exception of the μ_F

and μ_R scales and cross section uncertainties, every systematic effect is correlated between signal and the rare SM background. The trigger efficiency uncertainties are assumed as being uncorrelated between the data taking periods. The uncertainty in the integrated luminosity is partially correlated between runs, while all remaining uncertainties are correlated.

Table 3: Sources of systematic uncertainties in the yields of signal and background processes, as well as their impact on the yields in the SRs. The impact is expressed as a one standard deviation range.

Source	Uncertainty in tcH prediction	Uncertainty in tuH prediction	Uncertainty in SM SS prediction	Uncertainty in nonprompt estimate	Uncertainty in charge flip estimate
Estimate normalization	—	—	—	30%	30%
ϵ_{TL}/ϵ_q	—	—	—	7–10%	<5%
Integrated luminosity	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	—	—
Pileup	<2%	<2%	<2%	—	—
Trigger efficiency	2%	2%	2%	—	—
Lepton efficiency	2–3%	2–3%	2–3%	—	—
Jet energy scale	1–6%	<8%	<5%	—	—
b/c tagging	10–16%	6–13%	7–14%	—	—
Theory normalization	6–10%	6–10%	5–25%	—	—
Renormalization and factorization scale shape	7–9%	2–6%	10–15%	—	—
PDF shape	<2%	<2%	4–6%	—	—
Total	14–16%	11–14%	20–28%	31–35%	29–31%

7 Results

A binned likelihood fit is constructed using yields from the signal and control regions, incorporating the theoretical and experimental uncertainties described in Section 6 as nuisance parameters. The number of observed events and of simulated events in the SRs and CRs are Poisson distributed. Figure 2 shows that the estimated backgrounds and observed data are consistent within statistical and systematic uncertainties as a function of the BDT score, before ("prefit") and after maximizing the likelihood function ("postfit"). Overlaid are distributions of signal, normalized assuming a coupling strength of 0.1 between the top quark, the Higgs boson, and an up or charm quark. While the presence of FCNC interactions would affect other Higgs boson couplings, existing experimental constraints on FCNC interactions limit the potential impact on the Higgs boson decay modes, rendering the effects negligible for the purposes of this analysis.

Results are obtained using the CMS statistical analysis tool COMBINE [81] which is based on the RooFit [82] and RooStats [83] frameworks. Upper limits on the coupling strengths and branching fractions are set at 95% confidence level (CL), using the CL_s criterion with the LHC profile likelihood ratio as a test statistic in the asymptotic formulation [84–87]. Observed (expected) limits are 0.072 (0.059)% on the $\mathcal{B}(t \to Hu)$ and 0.043 (0.062)% on the $\mathcal{B}(t \to Hc)$. These limits can be cast as observed (expected) constraints on the anomalous coupling strengths: $\kappa_{Hut} < 0.071(0.064)$ and $\kappa_{Hct} < 0.055(0.065)$. The limits agree within one standard deviation, see Fig. 3, which shows the expected and observed limits, as well as the one and two standard deviation bands on the coupling strength and on the branching fraction for each anomalous coupling.

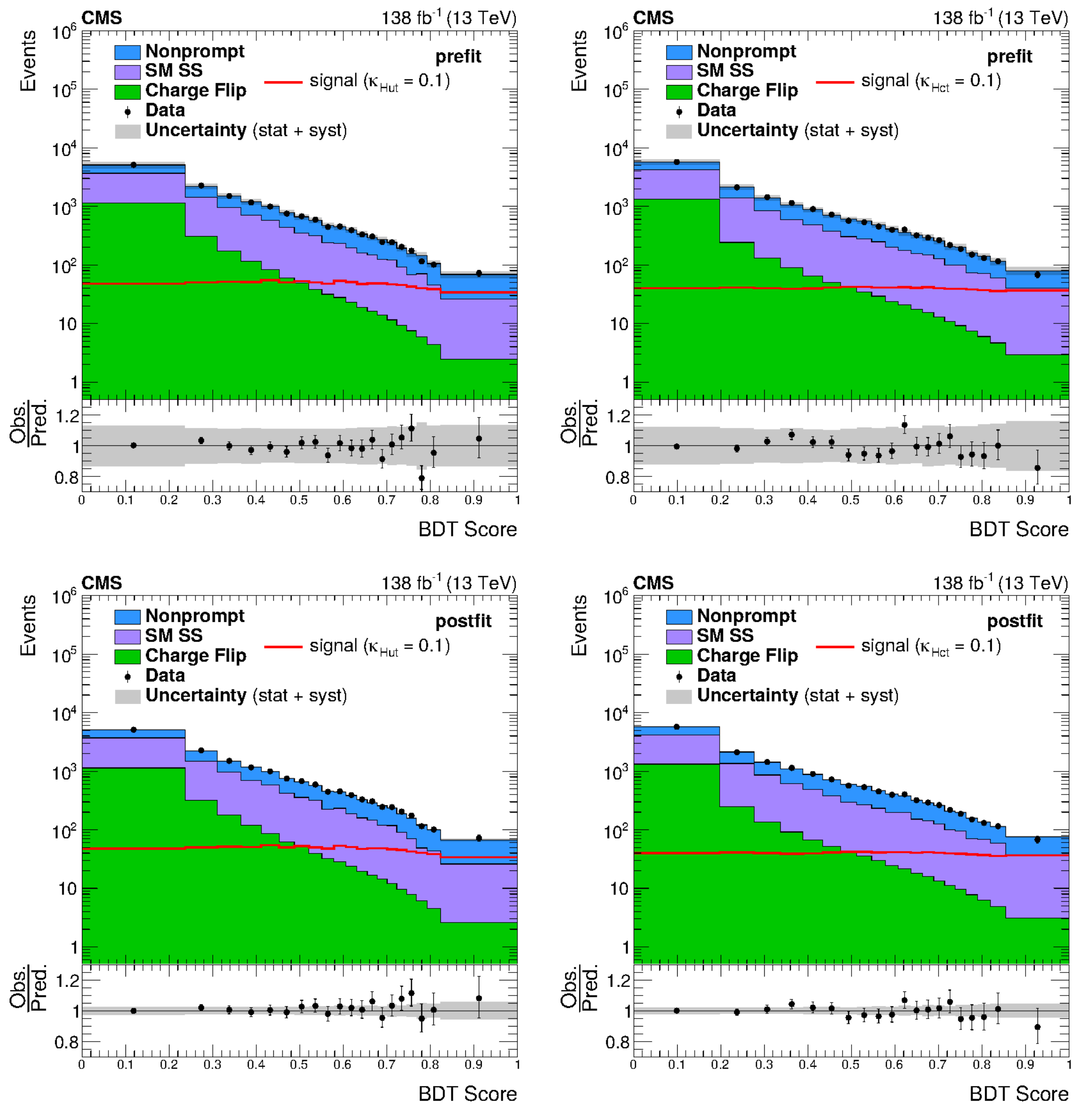

Figure 2: The prefit (upper) and postfit (lower) observed and expected distributions of BDT score in the SR for 2016–2018 data are shown. The $\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hu}$ signal is shown on the left and $\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hc}$ is shown on the right. The uncertainty bands include statistical and systematic uncertainties in the estimated backgrounds.

8 Combination

In addition to the results presented in the previous section, the CMS Collaboration has reported the results of two other searches for Higgs-mediated FCNC decays of the top quark, in which the Higgs boson decays to bottom quark pairs [24] or to a pair of photons [25]. The results of these searches and the new search presented in this paper are summarized in Table 4. A statistical combination of the results of the three searches is performed. As the three results target different and distinct decay modes of the Higgs boson, there is no overlap between the SRs of the three analyses. Correlations of systematic uncertainties in the signal and background yields are studied and accounted for. Uncertainties are correlated between the three analyses if the object definitions and approaches to measuring uncertainties are the same; otherwise, they are uncorrelated. Uncertainties in the jet energy scale and $p_{\mathrm{T}}^{\mathrm{miss}}$ resolution, the integrated luminosity, the lepton identification efficiencies, and per-process theoretical uncertainties are

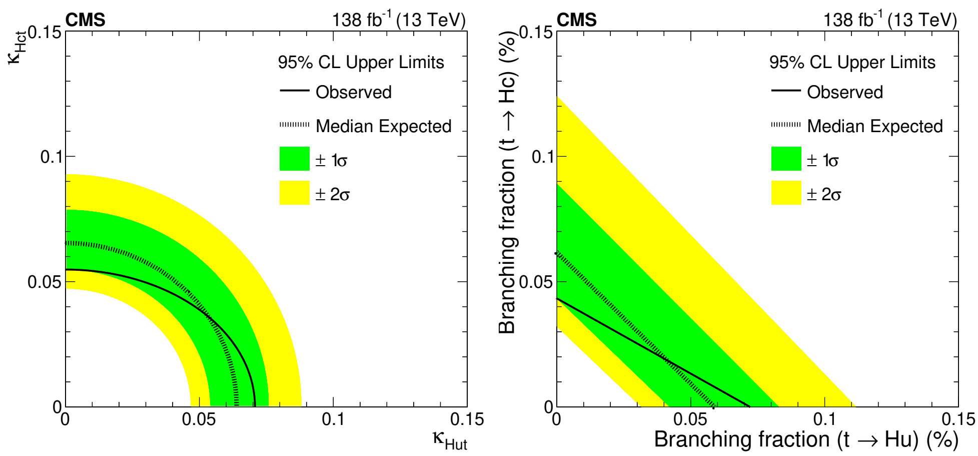

Figure 3: The expected (dashed line) and observed (solid line) limits on the coupling strength (left) and on the branching fraction (right) are shown. The green (yellow) bands show the 68 (95)% confidence level ranges of the expected limits. The area to the right and above the solid line is excluded.

treated as fully correlated. Remaining uncertainties are treated as uncorrelated. The impact of the choice of the correlation scheme on the combination result was studied and found to be <1%. The results of the combination are reported in Table 4. A summary and comparison of the results of the individual analyses and the combination is shown in Fig. 4.

Table 4: Observed and expected limits on the $t \to Hu$ and $t \to Hc$ branching fractions for the three searches in different Higgs boson decay channels performed by the CMS Collaboration. A statistical combination of the results is also reported.

Analysis	$\mathcal{B}(t \to Hu)$ observed (expected)	$\mathcal{B}(t \to Hc)$ observed (expected)
$H \to b\bar{b}$ [24]	0.079 (0.11)%	0.094 (0.086)%
$H \to \gamma\gamma$ [25]	0.019 (0.031)%	0.073 (0.051)%
Leptonic (this analysis)	0.072 (0.059)%	0.043 (0.062)%
Combination	0.019 (0.027)%	0.037 (0.035)%

9 Summary

This paper presents the results of a search for flavor changing neutral current interactions of the top quark (t), Higgs boson (H), and an up (u) or charm (c) quark. The search is performed in a final state with a pair of leptons of same electric charge and at least one jet. Expected yields from backgrounds emerging from detector effects are estimated by extrapolating yields observed in control regions using transfer factors measured in orthogonal data or simulated samples. Expected yields from standard model processes producing a pair of prompt leptons with the same-sign electric charge are estimated from simulation. Two trained boosted decision trees are used to evaluate and classify each event. No excess above the estimated background from standard model processes is observed. The observed (expected) upper limits at 95% confidence level (CL) on the branching fraction are found to be 0.072% (0.059%) for $\mathcal{B}(t \to Hu)$ and 0.043% (0.062%) for $\mathcal{B}(t \to Hc)$. These limits can be cast as observed (expected) constraints on the anomalous coupling strengths: $\kappa_{Hut} < 0.071(0.064)$ and $\kappa_{Hct} < 0.055(0.065)$. A statistical combination of the results of this search with those of previous CMS publications searching

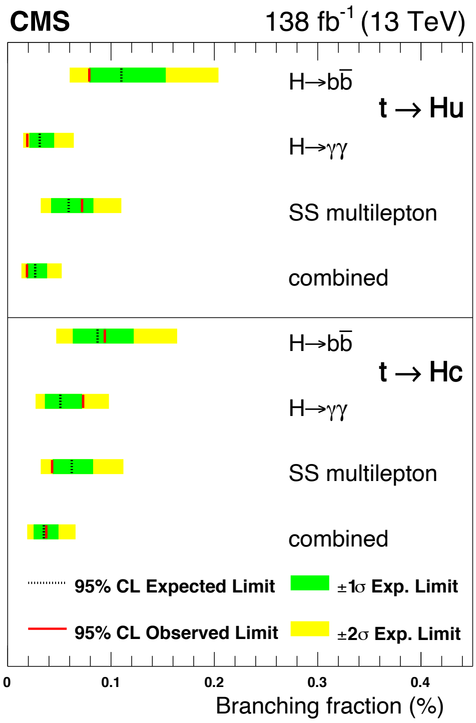

Figure 4: Summary of the observed and expected results from the three individual analyses and their combination. The dotted line shows the expected limits and the solid red lines shows the observed limits. The green and yellow bands show the 68 and 95% confidence level ranges of the expected limits.

for the same phenomena where the Higgs boson decays to a bottom quark-antiquark pair or to a pair of photons is performed. The results of this combination lead to observed (expected) exclusion limits at the 95% CL on the branching fractions $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hu}) < 0.019\% (0.027\%)$ and $\mathcal{B}(\mathrm{t} \to \mathrm{Hc}) < 0.037\% (0.035\%)$ and represent the most stringent constraints on these interactions to date.

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A The CMS Collaboration

Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
A. Hayrapetyan, A. Tumasyan[1]

Institut für Hochenergiephysik, Vienna, Austria
W. Adam, J.W. Andrejkovic, T. Bergauer, S. Chatterjee, K. Damanakis, M. Dragicevic, P.S. Hussain, M. Jeitler[2], N. Krammer, A. Li, D. Liko, I. Mikulec, J. Schieck[2], R. Schöfbeck, D. Schwarz, M. Sonawane, S. Templ, W. Waltenberger, C.-E. Wulz[2]

Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium
M.R. Darwish[3], T. Janssen, P. Van Mechelen

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium
E.S. Bols, J. D'Hondt, S. Dansana, A. De Moor, M. Delcourt, S. Lowette, I. Makarenko, D. Müller, S. Tavernier, M. Tytgat[4], G.P. Van Onsem, S. Van Putte, D. Vannerom

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
B. Clerbaux, A.K. Das, G. De Lentdecker, H. Evard, L. Favart, P. Gianneios, D. Hohov, J. Jaramillo, A. Khalilzadeh, F.A. Khan, K. Lee, M. Mahdavikhorrami, A. Malara, S. Paredes, L. Thomas, M. Vanden Bemden, C. Vander Velde, P. Vanlaer

Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
M. De Coen, D. Dobur, Y. Hong, J. Knolle, L. Lambrecht, G. Mestdach, K. Mota Amarilo, C. Rendón, A. Samalan, K. Skovpen, N. Van Den Bossche, J. van der Linden, L. Wezenbeek

Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
A. Benecke, A. Bethani, G. Bruno, C. Caputo, C. Delaere, I.S. Donertas, A. Giammanco, Sa. Jain, V. Lemaitre, J. Lidrych, P. Mastrapasqua, T.T. Tran, S. Wertz

Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Fisicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
G.A. Alves, E. Coelho, C. Hensel, T. Menezes De Oliveira, A. Moraes, P. Rebello Teles, M. Soeiro

Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
W.L. Aldá Júnior, M. Alves Gallo Pereira, M. Barroso Ferreira Filho, H. Brandao Malbouisson, W. Carvalho, J. Chinellato[5], E.M. Da Costa, G.G. Da Silveira[6], D. De Jesus Damiao, S. Fonseca De Souza, R. Gomes De Souza, J. Martins[7], C. Mora Herrera, L. Mundim, H. Nogima, J.P. Pinheiro, A. Santoro, A. Sznajder, M. Thiel, A. Vilela Pereira

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Universidade Federal do ABC, São Paulo, Brazil
C.A. Bernardes[6], L. Calligaris, T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei, E.M. Gregores, P.G. Mercadante, S.F. Novaes, B. Orzari, Sandra S. Padula

Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
A. Aleksandrov, G. Antchev, R. Hadjiiska, P. Iaydjiev, M. Misheva, M. Shopova, G. Sultanov

University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria
A. Dimitrov, L. Litov, B. Pavlov, P. Petkov, A. Petrov, E. Shumka

Instituto De Alta Investigación, Universidad de Tarapacá, Casilla 7 D, Arica, Chile
S. Keshri, S. Thakur

Beihang University, Beijing, China
T. Cheng, T. Javaid, L. Yuan

Department of Physics, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
Z. Hu, J. Liu, K. Yi[8,9]

Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China
G.M. Chen[10], H.S. Chen[10], M. Chen[10], F. Iemmi, C.H. Jiang, A. Kapoor[11], H. Liao, Z.-A. Liu[12], R. Sharma[13], J.N. Song[12], J. Tao, C. Wang[10], J. Wang, Z. Wang[10], H. Zhang

State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China
A. Agapitos, Y. Ban, A. Levin, C. Li, Q. Li, Y. Mao, S.J. Qian, X. Sun, D. Wang, H. Yang, L. Zhang, C. Zhou

Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China
Z. You

University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China
K. Jaffel, N. Lu

Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
G. Bauer[14]

Institute of Modern Physics and Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Ion-beam Application (MOE) - Fudan University, Shanghai, China
X. Gao[15]

Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China
Z. Lin, C. Lu, M. Xiao

Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia
C. Avila, D.A. Barbosa Trujillo, A. Cabrera, C. Florez, J. Fraga, J.A. Reyes Vega

Universidad de Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia
J. Mejia Guisao, F. Ramirez, M. Rodriguez, J.D. Ruiz Alvarez

University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Split, Croatia
D. Giljanovic, N. Godinovic, D. Lelas, A. Sculac

University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia
M. Kovac, T. Sculac

Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia
P. Bargassa, V. Brigljevic, B.K. Chitroda, D. Ferencek, K. Jakovcic, S. Mishra, A. Starodumov[16], T. Susa

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus
A. Attikis, K. Christoforou, A. Hadjiagapiou, S. Konstantinou, J. Mousa, C. Nicolaou, F. Ptochos, P.A. Razis, H. Rykaczewski, H. Saka, A. Stepennov

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
M. Finger, M. Finger Jr., A. Kveton

Escuela Politecnica Nacional, Quito, Ecuador
E. Ayala

Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Quito, Ecuador
E. Carrera Jarrin

Academy of Scientific Research and Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Egyptian Network of High Energy Physics, Cairo, Egypt
A.A. Abdelalim[17,18], E. Salama[19,20]

Center for High Energy Physics (CHEP-FU), Fayoum University, El-Fayoum, Egypt
M. Abdullah Al-Mashad, M.A. Mahmoud

National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia
K. Ehataht, M. Kadastik, T. Lange, S. Nandan, C. Nielsen, J. Pata, M. Raidal, L. Tani, C. Veelken

Department of Physics, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
H. Kirschenmann, K. Osterberg, M. Voutilainen

Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland
S. Bharthuar, E. Brücken, F. Garcia, K.T.S. Kallonen, R. Kinnunen, T. Lampén, K. Lassila-Perini, S. Lehti, T. Lindén, L. Martikainen, M. Myllymäki, M.m. Rantanen, H. Siikonen, E. Tuominen, J. Tuominiemi

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland
P. Luukka, H. Petrow

IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
M. Besancon, F. Couderc, M. Dejardin, D. Denegri, J.L. Faure, F. Ferri, S. Ganjour, P. Gras, G. Hamel de Monchenault, V. Lohezic, J. Malcles, J. Rander, A. Rosowsky, M.Ö. Sahin, A. Savoy-Navarro[21], P. Simkina, M. Titov, M. Tornago

Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, Ecole Polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Palaiseau, France
F. Beaudette, A. Buchot Perraguin, P. Busson, A. Cappati, C. Charlot, M. Chiusi, F. Damas, O. Davignon, A. De Wit, I.T. Ehle, B.A. Fontana Santos Alves, S. Ghosh, A. Gilbert, R. Granier de Cassagnac, A. Hakimi, B. Harikrishnan, L. Kalipoliti, G. Liu, J. Motta, M. Nguyen, C. Ochando, L. Portales, R. Salerno, J.B. Sauvan, Y. Sirois, A. Tarabini, E. Vernazza, A. Zabi, A. Zghiche

Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, Strasbourg, France
J.-L. Agram[22], J. Andrea, D. Apparu, D. Bloch, J.-M. Brom, E.C. Chabert, C. Collard, S. Falke, U. Goerlach, C. Grimault, R. Haeberle, A.-C. Le Bihan, M. Meena, G. Saha, M.A. Sessini, P. Van Hove

Institut de Physique des 2 Infinis de Lyon (IP2I), Villeurbanne, France
S. Beauceron, B. Blancon, G. Boudoul, N. Chanon, J. Choi, D. Contardo, P. Depasse, C. Dozen[23], H. El Mamouni, J. Fay, S. Gascon, M. Gouzevitch, C. Greenberg, G. Grenier, B. Ille, I.B. Laktineh, M. Lethuillier, L. Mirabito, S. Perries, A. Purohit, M. Vander Donckt, P. Verdier, J. Xiao

Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia

A. Khvedelidze[16], I. Lomidze, Z. Tsamalaidze[16]

RWTH Aachen University, I. Physikalisches Institut, Aachen, Germany
V. Botta, L. Feld, K. Klein, M. Lipinski, D. Meuser, A. Pauls, N. Röwert, M. Teroerde

RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
S. Diekmann, A. Dodonova, N. Eich, D. Eliseev, F. Engelke, J. Erdmann, M. Erdmann, P. Fackeldey, B. Fischer, T. Hebbeker, K. Hoepfner, F. Ivone, A. Jung, M.y. Lee, F. Mausolf, M. Merschmeyer, A. Meyer, S. Mukherjee, D. Noll, F. Nowotny, A. Pozdnyakov, Y. Rath, W. Redjeb, F. Rehm, H. Reithler, U. Sarkar, V. Sarkisovi, A. Schmidt, A. Sharma, J.L. Spah, A. Stein, F. Torres Da Silva De Araujo[24], S. Wiedenbeck, S. Zaleski

RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany
C. Dziwok, G. Flügge, W. Haj Ahmad[25], T. Kress, A. Nowack, O. Pooth, A. Stahl, T. Ziemons, A. Zotz

Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
H. Aarup Petersen, M. Aldaya Martin, J. Alimena, S. Amoroso, Y. An, S. Baxter, M. Bayatmakou, H. Becerril Gonzalez, O. Behnke, A. Belvedere, S. Bhattacharya, F. Blekman[26], K. Borras[27], A. Campbell, A. Cardini, C. Cheng, F. Colombina, S. Consuegra Rodríguez, G. Correia Silva, M. De Silva, G. Eckerlin, D. Eckstein, L.I. Estevez Banos, O. Filatov, E. Gallo[26], A. Geiser, A. Giraldi, V. Guglielmi, M. Guthoff, A. Hinzmann, A. Jafari[28], L. Jeppe, N.Z. Jomhari, B. Kaech, M. Kasemann, C. Kleinwort, R. Kogler, M. Komm, D. Krücker, W. Lange, D. Leyva Pernia, K. Lipka[29], W. Lohmann[30], R. Mankel, I.-A. Melzer-Pellmann, M. Mendizabal Morentin, A.B. Meyer, G. Milella, A. Mussgiller, L.P. Nair, A. Nürnberg, Y. Otarid, J. Park, D. Pérez Adán, E. Ranken, A. Raspereza, B. Ribeiro Lopes, J. Rübenach, A. Saggio, M. Scham[31,27], S. Schnake[27], P. Schütze, C. Schwanenberger[26], D. Selivanova, K. Sharko, M. Shchedrolosiev, R.E. Sosa Ricardo, D. Stafford, F. Vazzoler, A. Ventura Barroso, R. Walsh, Q. Wang, Y. Wen, K. Wichmann, L. Wiens[27], C. Wissing, Y. Yang, A. Zimermmane Castro Santos

University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
A. Albrecht, S. Albrecht, M. Antonello, S. Bein, L. Benato, S. Bollweg, M. Bonanomi, P. Connor, K. El Morabit, Y. Fischer, E. Garutti, A. Grohsjean, J. Haller, H.R. Jabusch, G. Kasieczka, P. Keicher, R. Klanner, W. Korcari, T. Kramer, V. Kutzner, F. Labe, J. Lange, A. Lobanov, C. Matthies, A. Mehta, L. Moureaux, M. Mrowietz, A. Nigamova, Y. Nissan, A. Paasch, K.J. Pena Rodriguez, T. Quadfasel, B. Raciti, M. Rieger, D. Savoiu, J. Schindler, P. Schleper, M. Schröder, J. Schwandt, M. Sommerhalder, H. Stadie, G. Steinbrück, A. Tews, M. Wolf

Karlsruher Institut fuer Technologie, Karlsruhe, Germany
S. Brommer, M. Burkart, E. Butz, T. Chwalek, A. Dierlamm, A. Droll, N. Faltermann, M. Giffels, A. Gottmann, F. Hartmann[32], R. Hofsaess, M. Horzela, U. Husemann, J. Kieseler, M. Klute, R. Koppenhöfer, J.M. Lawhorn, M. Link, A. Lintuluoto, S. Maier, S. Mitra, M. Mormile, Th. Müller, M. Neukum, M. Oh, E. Pfeffer, M. Presilla, G. Quast, K. Rabbertz, B. Regnery, N. Shadskiy, I. Shvetsov, H.J. Simonis, M. Toms, N. Trevisani, R.F. Von Cube, M. Wassmer, S. Wieland, F. Wittig, R. Wolf, X. Zuo

Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece
G. Anagnostou, G. Daskalakis, A. Kyriakis, A. Papadopoulos[32], A. Stakia

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
P. Kontaxakis, G. Melachroinos, Z. Painesis, A. Panagiotou, I. Papavergou, I. Paraskevas, N. Saoulidou, K. Theofilatos, E. Tziaferi, K. Vellidis, I. Zisopoulos

National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece
G. Bakas, T. Chatzistavrou, G. Karapostoli, K. Kousouris, I. Papakrivopoulos, E. Siamarkou, G. Tsipolitis, A. Zacharopoulou

University of Ioánnina, Ioánnina, Greece
K. Adamidis, I. Bestintzanos, I. Evangelou, C. Foudas, C. Kamtsikis, P. Katsoulis, P. Kokkas, P.G. Kosmoglou Kioseoglou, N. Manthos, I. Papadopoulos, J. Strologas

HUN-REN Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
M. Bartók[33], C. Hajdu, D. Horvath[34,35], K. Márton, A.J. Rádl[36], F. Sikler, V. Veszpremi

MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
M. Csanád, K. Farkas, M.M.A. Gadallah[37], Á. Kadlecsik, P. Major, K. Mandal, G. Pásztor, G.I. Veres

Faculty of Informatics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
P. Raics, B. Ujvari, G. Zilizi

Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
G. Bencze, S. Czellar, J. Molnar, Z. Szillasi

Karoly Robert Campus, MATE Institute of Technology, Gyongyos, Hungary
T. Csorgo[38], F. Nemes[38], T. Novak

Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
J. Babbar, S. Bansal, S.B. Beri, V. Bhatnagar, G. Chaudhary, S. Chauhan, N. Dhingra[39], A. Kaur, A. Kaur, H. Kaur, M. Kaur, S. Kumar, K. Sandeep, T. Sheokand, J.B. Singh, A. Singla

University of Delhi, Delhi, India
A. Ahmed, A. Bhardwaj, A. Chhetri, B.C. Choudhary, A. Kumar, A. Kumar, M. Naimuddin, K. Ranjan, S. Saumya

Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, HBNI, Kolkata, India
S. Baradia, S. Barman[40], S. Bhattacharya, S. Dutta, S. Dutta, S. Sarkar

Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Madras, India
M.M. Ameen, P.K. Behera, S.C. Behera, S. Chatterjee, P. Jana, P. Kalbhor, J.R. Komaragiri[41], D. Kumar[41], P.R. Pujahari, N.R. Saha, A. Sharma, A.K. Sikdar, S. Verma

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-A, Mumbai, India
S. Dugad, M. Kumar, G.B. Mohanty, P. Suryadevara

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-B, Mumbai, India
A. Bala, S. Banerjee, R.M. Chatterjee, R.K. Dewanjee[42], M. Guchait, Sh. Jain,

A. Jaiswal, S. Karmakar, S. Kumar, G. Majumder, K. Mazumdar, S. Parolia, A. Thachayath

National Institute of Science Education and Research, An OCC of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India
S. Bahinipati[43], C. Kar, D. Maity[44], P. Mal, T. Mishra, V.K. Muraleedharan Nair Bindhu[44], K. Naskar[44], A. Nayak[44], P. Sadangi, S.K. Swain, S. Varghese[44], D. Vats[44]

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, India
S. Acharya[45], A. Alpana, S. Dube, B. Gomber[45], B. Kansal, A. Laha, B. Sahu[45], S. Sharma, K.Y. Vaish

Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
H. Bakhshiansohi[46], E. Khazaie[47], M. Zeinali[48]

Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), Tehran, Iran
S. Chenarani[49], S.M. Etesami, M. Khakzad, M. Mohammadi Najafabadi

University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
M. Grunewald

INFN Sezione di Bari[a], Università di Bari[b], Politecnico di Bari[c], Bari, Italy
M. Abbrescia[a,b], R. Aly[a,c,17], A. Colaleo[a,b], D. Creanza[a,c], B. D'Anzi[a,b], N. De Filippis[a,c], M. De Palma[a,b], A. Di Florio[a,c], W. Elmetenawee[a,b,17], L. Fiore[a], G. Iaselli[a,c], M. Louka[a,b], G. Maggi[a,c], M. Maggi[a], I. Margjeka[a,b], V. Mastrapasqua[a,b], S. My[a,b], S. Nuzzo[a,b], A. Pellecchia[a,b], A. Pompili[a,b], G. Pugliese[a,c], R. Radogna[a], G. Ramirez-Sanchez[a,c], D. Ramos[a], A. Ranieri[a], L. Silvestris[a], F.M. Simone[a,b], Ü. Sözbilir[a], A. Stamerra[a], R. Venditti[a], P. Verwilligen[a], A. Zaza[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Bologna[a], Università di Bologna[b], Bologna, Italy
G. Abbiendi[a], C. Battilana[a,b], D. Bonacorsi[a,b], L. Borgonovi[a], R. Campanini[a,b], P. Capiluppi[a,b], A. Castro[a,b], M. Cuffiani[a,b], G.M. Dallavalle[a], T. Diotalevi[a,b], F. Fabbri[a], A. Fanfani[a,b], D. Fasanella[a,b], P. Giacomelli[a], L. Giommi[a,b], C. Grandi[a], L. Guiducci[a,b], S. Lo Meo[a,50], L. Lunerti[a,b], S. Marcellini[a], G. Masetti[a], F.L. Navarria[a,b], A. Perrotta[a], F. Primavera[a,b], A.M. Rossi[a,b], T. Rovelli[a,b], G.P. Siroli[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Catania[a], Università di Catania[b], Catania, Italy
S. Costa[a,b,51], A. Di Mattia[a], R. Potenza[a,b], A. Tricomi[a,b,51], C. Tuve[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Firenze[a], Università di Firenze[b], Firenze, Italy
P. Assiouras[a], G. Barbagli[a], G. Bardelli[a,b], B. Camaiani[a,b], A. Cassese[a], R. Ceccarelli[a], V. Ciulli[a,b], C. Civinini[a], R. D'Alessandro[a,b], E. Focardi[a,b], T. Kello[a], G. Latino[a,b], P. Lenzi[a,b], M. Lizzo[a], M. Meschini[a], S. Paoletti[a], A. Papanastassiou[a,b], G. Sguazzoni[a], L. Viliani[a]

INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
L. Benussi, S. Bianco, S. Meola[52], D. Piccolo

INFN Sezione di Genova[a], Università di Genova[b], Genova, Italy
P. Chatagnon[a], F. Ferro[a], E. Robutti[a], S. Tosi[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Milano-Bicocca[a], Università di Milano-Bicocca[b], Milano, Italy

A. Benaglia[a], G. Boldrini[a,b], F. Brivio[a], F. Cetorelli[a], F. De Guio[a,b], M.E. Dinardo[a,b], P. Dini[a], S. Gennai[a], R. Gerosa[a,b], A. Ghezzi[a,b], P. Govoni[a,b], L. Guzzi[a], M.T. Lucchini[a,b], M. Malberti[a], S. Malvezzi[a], A. Massironi[a], D. Menasce[a], L. Moroni[a], M. Paganoni[a,b], D. Pedrini[a], B.S. Pinolini[a], S. Ragazzi[a,b], T. Tabarelli de Fatis[a,b], D. Zuolo[a]

INFN Sezione di Napoli[a], Università di Napoli 'Federico II'[b], Napoli, Italy; Università della Basilicata[c], Potenza, Italy; Scuola Superiore Meridionale (SSM)[d], Napoli, Italy
S. Buontempo[a], A. Cagnotta[a,b], F. Carnevali[a,b], N. Cavallo[a,c], F. Fabozzi[a,c], A.O.M. Iorio[a,b], L. Lista[a,b,53], P. Paolucci[a,32], B. Rossi[a], C. Sciacca[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Padova[a], Università di Padova[b], Padova, Italy; Università di Trento[c], Trento, Italy
R. Ardino[a], P. Azzi[a], N. Bacchetta[a,54], D. Bisello[a,b], P. Bortignon[a], G. Bortolato[a,b], A. Bragagnolo[a,b], R. Carlin[a,b], P. Checchia[a], T. Dorigo[a], U. Gasparini[a,b], A. Gozzelino[a], M. Gulmini[a,55], E. Lusiani[a], M. Margoni[a,b], F. Marini[a], A.T. Meneguzzo[a,b], M. Migliorini[a,b], J. Pazzini[a,b], P. Ronchese[a,b], R. Rossin[a,b], F. Simonetto[a,b], G. Strong[a], M. Tosi[a,b], A. Triossi[a,b], S. Ventura[a], H. Yarar[a,b], P. Zotto[a,b], A. Zucchetta[a,b], G. Zumerle[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Pavia[a], Università di Pavia[b], Pavia, Italy
S. Abu Zeid[a,20], C. Aimè[a,b], A. Braghieri[a], S. Calzaferri[a], D. Fiorina[a], P. Montagna[a,b], V. Re[a], C. Riccardi[a,b], P. Salvini[a], I. Vai[a,b], P. Vitulo[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Perugia[a], Università di Perugia[b], Perugia, Italy
S. Ajmal[a,b], G.M. Bilei[a], D. Ciangottini[a,b], L. Fanò[a,b], M. Magherini[a,b], G. Mantovani[a,b], V. Mariani[a,b], M. Menichelli[a], F. Moscatelli[a,56], A. Rossi[a,b], A. Santocchia[a,b], D. Spiga[a], T. Tedeschi[a,b]

INFN Sezione di Pisa[a], Università di Pisa[b], Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa[c], Pisa, Italy; Università di Siena[d], Siena, Italy
P. Asenov[a,b], P. Azzurri[a], G. Bagliesi[a], R. Bhattacharya[a], L. Bianchini[a,b], T. Boccali[a], E. Bossini[a], D. Bruschini[a,c], R. Castaldi[a], M.A. Ciocci[a,b], M. Cipriani[a,b], V. D'Amante[a,d], R. Dell'Orso[a], S. Donato[a], A. Giassi[a], F. Ligabue[a,c], D. Matos Figueiredo[a], A. Messineo[a,b], M. Musich[a,b], F. Palla[a], A. Rizzi[a,b], G. Rolandi[a,c], S. Roy Chowdhury[a], T. Sarkar[a], A. Scribano[a], P. Spagnolo[a], R. Tenchini[a], G. Tonelli[a,b], N. Turini[a,d], F. Vaselli[a,c], A. Venturi[a], P.G. Verdini[a]

INFN Sezione di Roma[a], Sapienza Università di Roma[b], Roma, Italy
C. Baldenegro Barrera[a,b], P. Barria[a], C. Basile[a,b], M. Campana[a,b], F. Cavallari[a], L. Cunqueiro Mendez[a,b], D. Del Re[a,b], E. Di Marco[a], M. Diemoz[a], F. Errico[a,b], E. Longo[a,b], P. Meridiani[a], J. Mijuskovic[a,b], G. Organtini[a,b], F. Pandolfi[a], R. Paramatti[a,b], C. Quaranta[a,b], S. Rahatlou[a,b], C. Rovelli[a], F. Santanastasio[a,b], L. Soffi[a]

INFN Sezione di Torino[a], Università di Torino[b], Torino, Italy; Università del Piemonte Orientale[c], Novara, Italy
N. Amapane[a,b], R. Arcidiacono[a,c], S. Argiro[a,b], M. Arneodo[a,c], N. Bartosik[a], R. Bellan[a,b], A. Bellora[a,b], C. Biino[a], C. Borca[a,b], N. Cartiglia[a], M. Costa[a,b], R. Covarelli[a,b], N. Demaria[a], L. Finco[a], M. Grippo[a,b], B. Kiani[a,b], F. Legger[a], F. Luongo[a,b], C. Mariotti[a], L. Markovic[a,b], S. Maselli[a], A. Mecca[a,b], E. Migliore[a,b], M. Monteno[a], R. Mulargia[a], M.M. Obertino[a,b], G. Ortona[a],

L. Pacher[a,b], N. Pastrone[a], M. Pelliccioni[a], M. Ruspa[a,c], F. Siviero[a,b], V. Sola[a,b], A. Solano[a,b], A. Staiano[a], C. Tarricone[a,b], D. Trocino[a], G. Umoret[a,b], E. Vlasov[a,b], R. White[a]

INFN Sezione di Trieste[a], Università di Trieste[b], Trieste, Italy
S. Belforte[a], V. Candelise[a,b], M. Casarsa[a], F. Cossutti[a], K. De Leo[a], G. Della Ricca[a,b]

Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea
S. Dogra, J. Hong, C. Huh, B. Kim, D.H. Kim, J. Kim, H. Lee, S.W. Lee, C.S. Moon, Y.D. Oh, M.S. Ryu, S. Sekmen, Y.C. Yang

Department of Mathematics and Physics - GWNU, Gangneung, Korea
M.S. Kim

Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Korea
G. Bak, P. Gwak, H. Kim, D.H. Moon

Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea
E. Asilar, D. Kim, T.J. Kim, J.A. Merlin

Korea University, Seoul, Korea
S. Choi, S. Han, B. Hong, K. Lee, K.S. Lee, S. Lee, J. Park, S.K. Park, J. Yoo

Kyung Hee University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea
J. Goh, S. Yang

Sejong University, Seoul, Korea
H. S. Kim, Y. Kim, S. Lee

Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
J. Almond, J.H. Bhyun, J. Choi, W. Jun, J. Kim, S. Ko, H. Kwon, H. Lee, J. Lee, J. Lee, B.H. Oh, S.B. Oh, H. Seo, U.K. Yang, I. Yoon

University of Seoul, Seoul, Korea
W. Jang, D.Y. Kang, Y. Kang, S. Kim, B. Ko, J.S.H. Lee, Y. Lee, I.C. Park, Y. Roh, I.J. Watson

Yonsei University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea
S. Ha, H.D. Yoo

Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Korea
M. Choi, M.R. Kim, H. Lee, Y. Lee, I. Yu

College of Engineering and Technology, American University of the Middle East (AUM), Dasman, Kuwait
T. Beyrouthy

Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia
K. Dreimanis, A. Gaile, G. Pikurs, A. Potrebko, M. Seidel

University of Latvia (LU), Riga, Latvia
N.R. Strautnieks

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania
M. Ambrozas, A. Juodagalvis, A. Rinkevicius, G. Tamulaitis

National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
N. Bin Norjoharuddeen, I. Yusuff[57], Z. Zolkapli

Universidad de Sonora (UNISON), Hermosillo, Mexico
J.F. Benitez, A. Castaneda Hernandez, H.A. Encinas Acosta, L.G. Gallegos Maríñez, M. León Coello, J.A. Murillo Quijada, A. Sehrawat, L. Valencia Palomo

Centro de Investigacion y de Estudios Avanzados del IPN, Mexico City, Mexico
G. Ayala, H. Castilla-Valdez, H. Crotte Ledesma, E. De La Cruz-Burelo, I. Heredia-De La Cruz[58], R. Lopez-Fernandez, C.A. Mondragon Herrera, A. Sánchez Hernández

Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico
C. Oropeza Barrera, M. Ramírez García

Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico
I. Bautista, I. Pedraza, H.A. Salazar Ibarguen, C. Uribe Estrada

University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro
I. Bubanja, N. Raicevic

University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
P.H. Butler

National Centre for Physics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan
A. Ahmad, M.I. Asghar, A. Awais, M.I.M. Awan, H.R. Hoorani, W.A. Khan

AGH University of Krakow, Faculty of Computer Science, Electronics and Telecommunications, Krakow, Poland
V. Avati, L. Grzanka, M. Malawski

National Centre for Nuclear Research, Swierk, Poland
H. Bialkowska, M. Bluj, B. Boimska, M. Górski, M. Kazana, M. Szleper, P. Zalewski

Institute of Experimental Physics, Faculty of Physics, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
K. Bunkowski, K. Doroba, A. Kalinowski, M. Konecki, J. Krolikowski, A. Muhammad

Warsaw University of Technology, Warsaw, Poland
K. Pozniak, W. Zabolotny

Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas, Lisboa, Portugal
M. Araujo, D. Bastos, C. Beirão Da Cruz E Silva, A. Boletti, M. Bozzo, T. Camporesi, G. Da Molin, P. Faccioli, M. Gallinaro, J. Hollar, N. Leonardo, T. Niknejad, A. Petrilli, M. Pisano, J. Seixas, J. Varela, J.W. Wulff

Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
P. Adzic, P. Milenovic

VINCA Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
M. Dordevic, J. Milosevic, V. Rekovic

Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain
M. Aguilar-Benitez, J. Alcaraz Maestre, Cristina F. Bedoya, Oliver M. Carretero, M. Cepeda, M. Cerrada, N. Colino, B. De La Cruz, A. Delgado Peris, A. Escalante Del Valle, D. Fernández Del Val, J.P. Fernández Ramos, J. Flix,

M.C. Fouz, O. Gonzalez Lopez, S. Goy Lopez, J.M. Hernandez, M.I. Josa, D. Moran, C. M. Morcillo Perez, Á. Navarro Tobar, C. Perez Dengra, A. Pérez-Calero Yzquierdo, J. Puerta Pelayo, I. Redondo, D.D. Redondo Ferrero, L. Romero, S. Sánchez Navas, L. Urda Gómez, J. Vazquez Escobar, C. Willmott

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain
J.F. de Trocóniz

Universidad de Oviedo, Instituto Universitario de Ciencias y Tecnologías Espaciales de Asturias (ICTEA), Oviedo, Spain
B. Alvarez Gonzalez, J. Cuevas, J. Fernandez Menendez, S. Folgueras, I. Gonzalez Caballero, J.R. González Fernández, P. Leguina, E. Palencia Cortezon, C. Ramón Álvarez, V. Rodríguez Bouza, A. Soto Rodríguez, A. Trapote, C. Vico Villalba, P. Vischia

Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC-Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain
S. Bhowmik, S. Blanco Fernández, J.A. Brochero Cifuentes, I.J. Cabrillo, A. Calderon, J. Duarte Campderros, M. Fernandez, G. Gomez, C. Lasaosa García, C. Martinez Rivero, P. Martinez Ruiz del Arbol, F. Matorras, P. Matorras Cuevas, E. Navarrete Ramos, J. Piedra Gomez, L. Scodellaro, I. Vila, J.M. Vizan Garcia

University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka
M.K. Jayananda, B. Kailasapathy[59], D.U.J. Sonnadara, D.D.C. Wickramarathna

University of Ruhuna, Department of Physics, Matara, Sri Lanka
W.G.D. Dharmaratna[60], K. Liyanage, N. Perera, N. Wickramage

CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
D. Abbaneo, C. Amendola, E. Auffray, G. Auzinger, J. Baechler, D. Barney, A. Bermúdez Martínez, M. Bianco, B. Bilin, A.A. Bin Anuar, A. Bocci, C. Botta, E. Brondolin, C. Caillol, G. Cerminara, N. Chernyavskaya, D. d'Enterria, A. Dabrowski, A. David, A. De Roeck, M.M. Defranchis, M. Deile, M. Dobson, L. Forthomme, G. Franzoni, W. Funk, S. Giani, D. Gigi, K. Gill, F. Glege, L. Gouskos, M. Haranko, J. Hegeman, B. Huber, V. Innocente, T. James, P. Janot, O. Kaluzinska, S. Laurila, P. Lecoq, E. Leutgeb, C. Lourenço, B. Maier, L. Malgeri, M. Mannelli, A.C. Marini, M. Matthewman, F. Meijers, S. Mersi, E. Meschi, V. Milosevic, F. Monti, F. Moortgat, M. Mulders, I. Neutelings, S. Orfanelli, F. Pantaleo, G. Petrucciani, A. Pfeiffer, M. Pierini, D. Piparo, H. Qu, D. Rabady, G. Reales Gutiérrez, M. Rovere, H. Sakulin, S. Scarfi, C. Schwick, M. Selvaggi, A. Sharma, K. Shchelina, P. Silva, P. Sphicas[61], A.G. Stahl Leiton, A. Steen, S. Summers, D. Treille, P. Tropea, A. Tsirou, D. Walter, J. Wanczyk[62], J. Wang, S. Wuchterl, P. Zehetner, P. Zejdl, W.D. Zeuner

Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland
T. Bevilacqua[63], L. Caminada[63], A. Ebrahimi, W. Erdmann, R. Horisberger, Q. Ingram, H.C. Kaestli, D. Kotlinski, C. Lange, M. Missiroli[63], L. Noehte[63], T. Rohe

ETH Zurich - Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics (IPA), Zurich, Switzerland
T.K. Aarrestad, K. Androsov[62], M. Backhaus, A. Calandri, C. Cazzaniga, K. Datta, A. De Cosa, G. Dissertori, M. Dittmar, M. Donegà, F. Eble, M. Galli, K. Gedia, F. Glessgen, C. Grab, N. Härringer, D. Hits, W. Lustermann, A.-M. Lyon, R.A. Manzoni, M. Marchegiani, L. Marchese, C. Martin Perez,

A. Mascellani[62], F. Nessi-Tedaldi, F. Pauss, V. Perovic, S. Pigazzini, C. Reissel, T. Reitenspiess, B. Ristic, F. Riti, R. Seidita, J. Steggemann[62], D. Valsecchi, R. Wallny

Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
C. Amsler[64], P. Bärtschi, M.F. Canelli, K. Cormier, J.K. Heikkilä, M. Huwiler, W. Jin, A. Jofrehei, B. Kilminster, S. Leontsinis, S.P. Liechti, A. Macchiolo, P. Meiring, U. Molinatti, A. Reimers, P. Robmann, S. Sanchez Cruz, M. Senger, F. Stäger, Y. Takahashi, R. Tramontano

National Central University, Chung-Li, Taiwan
C. Adloff[65], D. Bhowmik, C.M. Kuo, W. Lin, P.K. Rout, P.C. Tiwari[41], S.S. Yu

National Taiwan University (NTU), Taipei, Taiwan
L. Ceard, Y. Chao, K.F. Chen, P.s. Chen, Z.g. Chen, A. De Iorio, W.-S. Hou, T.h. Hsu, Y.w. Kao, R. Khurana, G. Kole, Y.y. Li, R.-S. Lu, E. Paganis, X.f. Su, J. Thomas-Wilsker, L.s. Tsai, H.y. Wu, E. Yazgan

High Energy Physics Research Unit, Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
C. Asawatangtrakuldee, N. Srimanobhas, V. Wachirapusitanand

Çukurova University, Physics Department, Science and Art Faculty, Adana, Turkey
D. Agyel, F. Boran, Z.S. Demiroglu, F. Dolek, I. Dumanoglu[66], E. Eskut, Y. Guler[67], E. Gurpinar Guler[67], C. Isik, O. Kara, A. Kayis Topaksu, U. Kiminsu, G. Onengut, K. Ozdemir[68], A. Polatoz, B. Tali[69], U.G. Tok, S. Turkcapar, E. Uslan, I.S. Zorbakir

Middle East Technical University, Physics Department, Ankara, Turkey
M. Yalvac[70]

Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
B. Akgun, I.O. Atakisi, E. Gülmez, M. Kaya[71], O. Kaya[72], S. Tekten[73]

Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
A. Cakir, K. Cankocak[66,74], G.G. Dincer, Y. Komurcu, S. Sen[75]

Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey
O. Aydilek[25], S. Cerci[69], V. Epshteyn, B. Hacisahinoglu, I. Hos[76], B. Kaynak, S. Ozkorucuklu, O. Potok, H. Sert, C. Simsek, C. Zorbilmez

Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
B. Isildak[77], D. Sunar Cerci[69]

Institute for Scintillation Materials of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine
A. Boyaryntsev, B. Grynyov

National Science Centre, Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, Kharkiv, Ukraine
L. Levchuk

University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
D. Anthony, J.J. Brooke, A. Bundock, F. Bury, E. Clement, D. Cussans, H. Flacher, M. Glowacki, J. Goldstein, H.F. Heath, M.-L. Holmberg, L. Kreczko, S. Paramesvaran, L. Robertshaw, S. Seif El Nasr-Storey, V.J. Smith, N. Stylianou[78], K. Walkingshaw Pass

Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
A.H. Ball, K.W. Bell, A. Belyaev[79], C. Brew, R.M. Brown, D.J.A. Cockerill, C. Cooke, K.V. Ellis, K. Harder, S. Harper, J. Linacre, K. Manolopoulos, D.M. Newbold, E. Olaiya, D. Petyt, T. Reis, A.R. Sahasransu, G. Salvi, T. Schuh, C.H. Shepherd-Themistocleous, I.R. Tomalin, T. Williams

Imperial College, London, United Kingdom
R. Bainbridge, P. Bloch, C.E. Brown, O. Buchmuller, V. Cacchio, C.A. Carrillo Montoya, G.S. Chahal[80], D. Colling, J.S. Dancu, I. Das, P. Dauncey, G. Davies, J. Davies, M. Della Negra, S. Fayer, G. Fedi, G. Hall, M.H. Hassanshahi, A. Howard, G. Iles, M. Knight, J. Langford, J. León Holgado, L. Lyons, A.-M. Magnan, S. Malik, M. Mieskolainen, J. Nash[81], M. Pesaresi, B.C. Radburn-Smith, A. Richards, A. Rose, K. Savva, C. Seez, R. Shukla, A. Tapper, K. Uchida, G.P. Uttley, L.H. Vage, T. Virdee[32], M. Vojinovic, N. Wardle, D. Winterbottom

Brunel University, Uxbridge, United Kingdom
K. Coldham, J.E. Cole, A. Khan, P. Kyberd, I.D. Reid

Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA
S. Abdullin, A. Brinkerhoff, B. Caraway, E. Collins, J. Dittmann, K. Hatakeyama, J. Hiltbrand, B. McMaster, M. Saunders, S. Sawant, C. Sutantawibul, J. Wilson

Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA
R. Bartek, A. Dominguez, C. Huerta Escamilla, A.E. Simsek, R. Uniyal, A.M. Vargas Hernandez

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA
B. Bam, R. Chudasama, S.I. Cooper, S.V. Gleyzer, C.U. Perez, P. Rumerio[82], E. Usai, R. Yi

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
A. Akpinar, D. Arcaro, C. Cosby, Z. Demiragli, C. Erice, C. Fangmeier, C. Fernandez Madrazo, E. Fontanesi, D. Gastler, F. Golf, S. Jeon, I. Reed, J. Rohlf, K. Salyer, D. Sperka, D. Spitzbart, I. Suarez, A. Tsatsos, S. Yuan, A.G. Zecchinelli

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA
G. Benelli, X. Coubez[27], D. Cutts, M. Hadley, U. Heintz, J.M. Hogan[83], T. Kwon, G. Landsberg, K.T. Lau, D. Li, J. Luo, S. Mondal, M. Narain[†], N. Pervan, S. Sagir[84], F. Simpson, M. Stamenkovic, X. Yan, W. Zhang

University of California, Davis, Davis, California, USA
S. Abbott, J. Bonilla, C. Brainerd, R. Breedon, H. Cai, M. Calderon De La Barca Sanchez, M. Chertok, M. Citron, J. Conway, P.T. Cox, R. Erbacher, F. Jensen, O. Kukral, G. Mocellin, M. Mulhearn, D. Pellett, W. Wei, Y. Yao, F. Zhang

University of California, Los Angeles, California, USA
M. Bachtis, R. Cousins, A. Datta, G. Flores Avila, J. Hauser, M. Ignatenko, M.A. Iqbal, T. Lam, E. Manca, A. Nunez Del Prado, D. Saltzberg, V. Valuev

University of California, Riverside, Riverside, California, USA
R. Clare, J.W. Gary, M. Gordon, G. Hanson, W. Si, S. Wimpenny[†]

University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA

J.G. Branson, S. Cittolin, S. Cooperstein, D. Diaz, J. Duarte, L. Giannini, J. Guiang, R. Kansal, V. Krutelyov, R. Lee, J. Letts, M. Masciovecchio, F. Mokhtar, S. Mukherjee, M. Pieri, M. Quinnan, B.V. Sathia Narayanan, V. Sharma, M. Tadel, E. Vourliotis, F. Würthwein, Y. Xiang, A. Yagil

University of California, Santa Barbara - Department of Physics, Santa Barbara, California, USA
A. Barzdukas, L. Brennan, C. Campagnari, J. Incandela, J. Kim, A.J. Li, P. Masterson, H. Mei, J. Richman, U. Sarica, R. Schmitz, F. Setti, J. Sheplock, D. Stuart, T.Á. Vámi, S. Wang

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA
A. Bornheim, O. Cerri, A. Latorre, J. Mao, H.B. Newman, M. Spiropulu, J.R. Vlimant, C. Wang, S. Xie, R.Y. Zhu

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
J. Alison, S. An, M.B. Andrews, P. Bryant, M. Cremonesi, V. Dutta, T. Ferguson, A. Harilal, C. Liu, T. Mudholkar, S. Murthy, P. Palit, M. Paulini, A. Roberts, A. Sanchez, W. Terrill

University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, USA
J.P. Cumalat, W.T. Ford, A. Hart, A. Hassani, G. Karathanasis, N. Manganelli, A. Perloff, C. Savard, N. Schonbeck, K. Stenson, K.A. Ulmer, S.R. Wagner, N. Zipper

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA
J. Alexander, S. Bright-Thonney, X. Chen, D.J. Cranshaw, J. Fan, X. Fan, S. Hogan, P. Kotamnives, J. Monroy, M. Oshiro, J.R. Patterson, J. Reichert, M. Reid, A. Ryd, J. Thom, P. Wittich, R. Zou

Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA
M. Albrow, M. Alyari, O. Amram, G. Apollinari, A. Apresyan, L.A.T. Bauerdick, D. Berry, J. Berryhill, P.C. Bhat, K. Burkett, J.N. Butler, A. Canepa, G.B. Cerati, H.W.K. Cheung, F. Chlebana, G. Cummings, J. Dickinson, I. Dutta, V.D. Elvira, Y. Feng, J. Freeman, A. Gandrakota, Z. Gecse, L. Gray, D. Green, A. Grummer, S. Grünendahl, D. Guerrero, O. Gutsche, R.M. Harris, R. Heller, T.C. Herwig, J. Hirschauer, L. Horyn, B. Jayatilaka, S. Jindariani, M. Johnson, U. Joshi, T. Klijnsma, B. Klima, K.H.M. Kwok, S. Lammel, D. Lincoln, R. Lipton, T. Liu, C. Madrid, K. Maeshima, C. Mantilla, D. Mason, P. McBride, P. Merkel, S. Mrenna, S. Nahn, J. Ngadiuba, D. Noonan, V. Papadimitriou, N. Pastika, K. Pedro, C. Pena[85], F. Ravera, A. Reinsvold Hall[86], L. Ristori, E. Sexton-Kennedy, N. Smith, A. Soha, L. Spiegel, S. Stoynev, J. Strait, L. Taylor, S. Tkaczyk, N.V. Tran, L. Uplegger, E.W. Vaandering, A. Whitbeck, I. Zoi

University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA
C. Aruta, P. Avery, D. Bourilkov, L. Cadamuro, P. Chang, V. Cherepanov, R.D. Field, E. Koenig, M. Kolosova, J. Konigsberg, A. Korytov, K. Matchev, N. Menendez, G. Mitselmakher, K. Mohrman, A. Muthirakalayil Madhu, N. Rawal, D. Rosenzweig, S. Rosenzweig, J. Wang

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA
T. Adams, A. Al Kadhim, A. Askew, S. Bower, R. Habibullah, V. Hagopian, R. Hashmi, R.S. Kim, S. Kim, T. Kolberg, G. Martinez, H. Prosper, P.R. Prova,

M. Wulansatiti, R. Yohay, J. Zhang

Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, USA
B. Alsufyani, M.M. Baarmand, S. Butalla, S. Das, T. Elkafrawy[20], M. Hohlmann, R. Kumar Verma, M. Rahmani, E. Yanes

University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, USA, Chicago, USA
M.R. Adams, A. Baty, C. Bennett, R. Cavanaugh, R. Escobar Franco, O. Evdokimov, C.E. Gerber, A. Hingrajiya, D.J. Hofman, J.h. Lee, D. S. Lemos, A.H. Merrit, C. Mills, S. Nanda, G. Oh, B. Ozek, D. Pilipovic, R. Pradhan, E. Prifti, T. Roy, S. Rudrabhatla, M.B. Tonjes, N. Varelas, Z. Ye, J. Yoo

The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
M. Alhusseini, D. Blend, K. Dilsiz[87], L. Emediato, G. Karaman, O.K. Köseyan, J.-P. Merlo, A. Mestvirishvili[88], J. Nachtman, O. Neogi, H. Ogul[89], Y. Onel, A. Penzo, C. Snyder, E. Tiras[90]

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
B. Blumenfeld, L. Corcodilos, J. Davis, A.V. Gritsan, L. Kang, S. Kyriacou, P. Maksimovic, M. Roguljic, J. Roskes, S. Sekhar, M. Swartz

The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA
A. Abreu, L.F. Alcerro Alcerro, J. Anguiano, P. Baringer, A. Bean, Z. Flowers, D. Grove, J. King, G. Krintiras, M. Lazarovits, C. Le Mahieu, J. Marquez, N. Minafra, M. Murray, M. Nickel, M. Pitt, S. Popescu[91], C. Rogan, C. Royon, R. Salvatico, S. Sanders, C. Smith, Q. Wang, G. Wilson

Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA
B. Allmond, A. Ivanov, K. Kaadze, A. Kalogeropoulos, D. Kim, Y. Maravin, J. Natoli, D. Roy, G. Sorrentino

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, California, USA
F. Rebassoo, D. Wright

University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA
A. Baden, A. Belloni, Y.M. Chen, S.C. Eno, N.J. Hadley, S. Jabeen, R.G. Kellogg, T. Koeth, Y. Lai, S. Lascio, A.C. Mignerey, S. Nabili, C. Palmer, C. Papageorgakis, M.M. Paranjpe, L. Wang

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
J. Bendavid, I.A. Cali, M. D'Alfonso, J. Eysermans, C. Freer, G. Gomez-Ceballos, M. Goncharov, G. Grosso, P. Harris, D. Hoang, D. Kovalskyi, J. Krupa, L. Lavezzo, Y.-J. Lee, K. Long, A. Novak, C. Paus, D. Rankin, C. Roland, G. Roland, S. Rothman, G.S.F. Stephans, Z. Wang, B. Wyslouch, T. J. Yang

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
B. Crossman, B.M. Joshi, C. Kapsiak, M. Krohn, D. Mahon, J. Mans, B. Marzocchi, S. Pandey, M. Revering, R. Rusack, R. Saradhy, N. Schroeder, N. Strobbe, M.A. Wadud

University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, USA
L.M. Cremaldi

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
K. Bloom, D.R. Claes, G. Haza, J. Hossain, C. Joo, I. Kravchenko, J.E. Siado,

W. Tabb, A. Vagnerini, A. Wightman, F. Yan, D. Yu

State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, USA
H. Bandyopadhyay, L. Hay, I. Iashvili, A. Kharchilava, M. Morris, D. Nguyen, S. Rappoccio, H. Rejeb Sfar, A. Williams

Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
G. Alverson, E. Barberis, J. Dervan, Y. Haddad, Y. Han, A. Krishna, J. Li, M. Lu, G. Madigan, R. Mccarthy, D.M. Morse, V. Nguyen, T. Orimoto, A. Parker, L. Skinnari, B. Wang, D. Wood

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA
S. Bhattacharya, J. Bueghly, Z. Chen, S. Dittmer, K.A. Hahn, Y. Liu, Y. Miao, D.G. Monk, M.H. Schmitt, A. Taliercio, M. Velasco

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA
G. Agarwal, R. Band, R. Bucci, S. Castells, A. Das, R. Goldouzian, M. Hildreth, K.W. Ho, K. Hurtado Anampa, T. Ivanov, C. Jessop, K. Lannon, J. Lawrence, N. Loukas, L. Lutton, J. Mariano, N. Marinelli, I. Mcalister, T. McCauley, C. Mcgrady, C. Moore, Y. Musienko[16], H. Nelson, M. Osherson, A. Piccinelli, R. Ruchti, A. Townsend, Y. Wan, M. Wayne, H. Yockey, M. Zarucki, L. Zygala

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA
A. Basnet, B. Bylsma, M. Carrigan, L.S. Durkin, C. Hill, M. Joyce, M. Nunez Ornelas, K. Wei, B.L. Winer, B. R. Yates

Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, USA
F.M. Addesa, H. Bouchamaoui, P. Das, G. Dezoort, P. Elmer, A. Frankenthal, B. Greenberg, N. Haubrich, G. Kopp, S. Kwan, D. Lange, A. Loeliger, D. Marlow, I. Ojalvo, J. Olsen, A. Shevelev, D. Stickland, C. Tully

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, USA
S. Malik

Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
A.S. Bakshi, V.E. Barnes, S. Chandra, R. Chawla, A. Gu, L. Gutay, M. Jones, A.W. Jung, D. Kondratyev, A.M. Koshy, M. Liu, G. Negro, N. Neumeister, G. Paspalaki, S. Piperov, V. Scheurer, J.F. Schulte, M. Stojanovic, J. Thieman, A. K. Virdi, F. Wang, W. Xie

Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, Indiana, USA
J. Dolen, N. Parashar, A. Pathak

Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA
D. Acosta, T. Carnahan, K.M. Ecklund, P.J. Fernández Manteca, S. Freed, P. Gardner, F.J.M. Geurts, W. Li, O. Miguel Colin, B.P. Padley, R. Redjimi, J. Rotter, E. Yigitbasi, Y. Zhang

University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, USA
A. Bodek, P. de Barbaro, R. Demina, J.L. Dulemba, A. Garcia-Bellido, O. Hindrichs, A. Khukhunaishvili, N. Parmar, P. Parygin[92], E. Popova[92], R. Taus

The Rockefeller University, New York, New York, USA
K. Goulianos

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

B. Chiarito, J.P. Chou, S.V. Clark, D. Gadkari, Y. Gershtein, E. Halkiadakis, M. Heindl, C. Houghton, D. Jaroslawski, O. Karacheban[30], I. Laflotte, A. Lath, R. Montalvo, K. Nash, H. Routray, P. Saha, S. Salur, S. Schnetzer, S. Somalwar, R. Stone, S.A. Thayil, S. Thomas, J. Vora, H. Wang

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA
H. Acharya, D. Ally, A.G. Delannoy, S. Fiorendi, S. Higginbotham, T. Holmes, A.R. Kanuganti, N. Karunarathna, L. Lee, E. Nibigira, S. Spanier

Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA
D. Aebi, M. Ahmad, O. Bouhali[93], R. Eusebi, J. Gilmore, T. Huang, T. Kamon[94], H. Kim, S. Luo, R. Mueller, D. Overton, D. Rathjens, A. Safonov

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, USA
N. Akchurin, J. Damgov, V. Hegde, A. Hussain, Y. Kazhykarim, K. Lamichhane, S.W. Lee, A. Mankel, T. Peltola, I. Volobouev

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA
E. Appelt, Y. Chen, S. Greene, A. Gurrola, W. Johns, R. Kunnawalkam Elayavalli, A. Melo, F. Romeo, P. Sheldon, S. Tuo, J. Velkovska, J. Viinikainen

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA
B. Cardwell, B. Cox, J. Hakala, R. Hirosky, A. Ledovskoy, C. Neu, C.E. Perez Lara

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA
P.E. Karchin

University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA
A. Aravind, S. Banerjee, K. Black, T. Bose, S. Dasu, I. De Bruyn, P. Everaerts, C. Galloni, H. He, M. Herndon, A. Herve, C.K. Koraka, A. Lanaro, R. Loveless, J. Madhusudanan Sreekala, A. Mallampalli, A. Mohammadi, S. Mondal, G. Parida, L. Pétré, D. Pinna, A. Savin, V. Shang, V. Sharma, W.H. Smith, D. Teague, H.F. Tsoi, W. Vetens, A. Warden

Authors affiliated with an institute or an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
S. Afanasiev, D. Budkouski, I. Golutvin, I. Gorbunov, V. Karjavine, V. Korenkov, A. Lanev, A. Malakhov, V. Matveev[95], V. Palichik, V. Perelygin, M. Savina, V. Shalaev, S. Shmatov, S. Shulha, V. Smirnov, O. Teryaev, N. Voytishin, B.S. Yuldashev[96], A. Zarubin, I. Zhizhin, G. Gavrilov, V. Golovtcov, Y. Ivanov, V. Kim[95], P. Levchenko[97], V. Murzin, V. Oreshkin, D. Sosnov, V. Sulimov, L. Uvarov, A. Vorobyev[†], Yu. Andreev, A. Dermenev, S. Gninenko, N. Golubev, A. Karneyeu, D. Kirpichnikov, M. Kirsanov, N. Krasnikov, I. Tlisova, A. Toropin, T. Aushev, V. Gavrilov, N. Lychkovskaya, A. Nikitenko[98,99], V. Popov, A. Zhokin, R. Chistov[95], M. Danilov[95], S. Polikarpov[95], V. Andreev, M. Azarkin, M. Kirakosyan, A. Terkulov, A. Belyaev, E. Boos, V. Bunichev, M. Dubinin[85], L. Dudko, A. Ershov, A. Gribushin, V. Klyukhin, S. Obraztsov, M. Perfilov, V. Savrin, P. Volkov, G. Vorotnikov, V. Blinov[95], T. Dimova[95], A. Kozyrev[95], O. Radchenko[95], Y. Skovpen[95], I. Azhgirey, V. Kachanov, D. Konstantinov, R. Ryutin, S. Slabospitskii, A. Uzunian, A. Babaev, V. Borshch, D. Druzhkin[100], E. Tcherniaev

Authors affiliated with an institute formerly covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

V. Chekhovsky, V. Makarenko

†: Deceased
[1]Also at Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia
[2]Also at TU Wien, Vienna, Austria
[3]Also at Institute of Basic and Applied Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Alexandria, Egypt
[4]Also at Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
[5]Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil
[6]Also at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil
[7]Also at UFMS, Nova Andradina, Brazil
[8]Also at Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
[9]Now at The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
[10]Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
[11]Also at China Center of Advanced Science and Technology, Beijing, China
[12]Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
[13]Also at China Spallation Neutron Source, Guangdong, China
[14]Now at Henan Normal University, Xinxiang, China
[15]Also at Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium
[16]Also at an institute or an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
[17]Also at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt
[18]Now at Zewail City of Science and Technology, Zewail, Egypt
[19]Also at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
[20]Now at Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt
[21]Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
[22]Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France
[23]Also at Istinye University, Istanbul, Turkey
[24]Also at The University of the State of Amazonas, Manaus, Brazil
[25]Also at Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Erzincan, Turkey
[26]Also at University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
[27]Also at RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
[28]Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
[29]Also at Bergische University Wuppertal (BUW), Wuppertal, Germany
[30]Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany
[31]Also at Forschungszentrum Jülich, Juelich, Germany
[32]Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
[33]Also at Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
[34]Also at Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
[35]Now at Universitatea Babes-Bolyai - Facultatea de Fizica, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
[36]Also at MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
[37]Also at Physics Department, Faculty of Science, Assiut University, Assiut, Egypt
[38]Also at HUN-REN Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
[39]Also at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India
[40]Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India
[41]Also at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, India
[42]Also at Birla Institute of Technology, Mesra, Mesra, India
[43]Also at IIT Bhubaneswar, Bhubaneswar, India
[44]Also at Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, India

[45]Also at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India
[46]Also at Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
[47]Also at Department of Physics, Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
[48]Also at Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran
[49]Also at Department of Physics, University of Science and Technology of Mazandaran, Behshahr, Iran
[50]Also at Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, Bologna, Italy
[51]Also at Centro Siciliano di Fisica Nucleare e di Struttura Della Materia, Catania, Italy
[52]Also at Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Roma, Italy
[53]Also at Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Napoli 'Federico II', Napoli, Italy
[54]Also at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA
[55]Also at Laboratori Nazionali di Legnaro dell'INFN, Legnaro, Italy
[56]Also at Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - Istituto Officina dei Materiali, Perugia, Italy
[57]Also at Department of Applied Physics, Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia
[58]Also at Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, Mexico City, Mexico
[59]Also at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, Nilaveli, Sri Lanka
[60]Also at Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka
[61]Also at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
[62]Also at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland
[63]Also at Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
[64]Also at Stefan Meyer Institute for Subatomic Physics, Vienna, Austria
[65]Also at Laboratoire d'Annecy-le-Vieux de Physique des Particules, IN2P3-CNRS, Annecy-le-Vieux, France
[66]Also at Near East University, Research Center of Experimental Health Science, Mersin, Turkey
[67]Also at Konya Technical University, Konya, Turkey
[68]Also at Izmir Bakircay University, Izmir, Turkey
[69]Also at Adiyaman University, Adiyaman, Turkey
[70]Also at Bozok Universitetesi Rektörlügü, Yozgat, Turkey
[71]Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey
[72]Also at Milli Savunma University, Istanbul, Turkey
[73]Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey
[74]Now at Istanbul Okan University, Istanbul, Turkey
[75]Also at Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey
[76]Also at Istanbul University - Cerrahpasa, Faculty of Engineering, Istanbul, Turkey
[77]Also at Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
[78]Also at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium
[79]Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom
[80]Also at IPPP Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom
[81]Also at Monash University, Faculty of Science, Clayton, Australia
[82]Also at Università di Torino, Torino, Italy
[83]Also at Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
[84]Also at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey
[85]Also at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA
[86]Also at United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, USA
[87]Also at Bingol University, Bingol, Turkey

[88]Also at Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia
[89]Also at Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey
[90]Also at Erciyes University, Kayseri, Turkey
[91]Also at Horia Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering (IFIN-HH), Bucharest, Romania
[92]Now at another institute or international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
[93]Also at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar
[94]Also at Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea
[95]Also at another institute or international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN
[96]Also at Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[97]Also at Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
[98]Also at Imperial College, London, United Kingdom
[99]Now at Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
[100]Also at Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium