Search for Dark Matter Produced in Association with a Higgs Boson Decaying to $b\bar{b}$ Using 36 fb$^{-1}$ of pp Collisions at $\sqrt{s}$ =13 TeV with the ATLAS Detector

Aaboud, M.; ATLAS Collaboration

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Search for Dark Matter Produced in Association with a Higgs Boson Decaying to $b\bar{b}$ Using 36 fb$^{-1}$ of $pp$ Collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV with the ATLAS Detector

M. Aaboud et al.*
(ATLAS Collaboration)
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Several extensions of the standard model predict associated production of dark-matter particles with a Higgs boson. Such processes are searched for in final states with missing transverse momentum and a Higgs boson decaying to a $b\bar{b}$ pair with the ATLAS detector using 36.1 fb$^{-1}$ of $pp$ collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV at the LHC. The observed data are in agreement with the standard model predictions and limits are placed on the associated production of dark-matter particles and a Higgs boson.

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One of the central open questions in physics today is the nature of dark matter (DM) that comprises most of the matter in the Universe [1]. A compelling candidate for DM is a stable electrically neutral particle $\chi$ whose nongravitational interactions with standard model (SM) particles are weak. This extension of the SM could be detectable at the scale of electroweak symmetry breaking [2] and accommodate the observed DM relic density [3,4]. Many models predict detectable production rates of such DM particles at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) [5].

Most collider-based searches for DM rely on the signature of missing transverse momentum [6] $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ from DM particles recoiling against one SM particle $X$ radiated off the initial state, denoted by the “$X + E_T^{\text{miss}}$” signature. LHC experiments have searched for this $X + E_T^{\text{miss}}$ signature, where $X$ is a light quark or gluon [7–9], a $b$ or $t$ quark [10–12], a photon [13–17], or a $W$ or $Z$ boson [18–21]. The discovery of the Higgs boson $h$ [22,23] opens a new opportunity through the $h + E_T^{\text{miss}}$ signature [24–26]. Because $h$ radiation off the initial state is Yukawa suppressed, the $h + E_T^{\text{miss}}$ process represents a direct probe of the hard interaction involving DM particles.

This Letter presents a search for DM in association with a Higgs boson decaying to a pair of $b$ quarks, $h \rightarrow b\bar{b}$, with a branching ratio $B = 57\%$ [27], using 36.1 fb$^{-1}$ of $pp$ collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV recorded with the ATLAS detector [28,29] in run 2 of the LHC in 2015 and 2016. This search substantially extends the sensitivity relative to previous results at 8 [30,31] and 13 TeV [32–34] in the $h \rightarrow b\bar{b}$ and $h \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$ channels.

A type-II two-Higgs-doublet model (2HDM) with an additional $U(1)_{X}$ gauge symmetry yielding an additional massive $Z'$ boson provides an $h + E_T^{\text{miss}}$ signature [26] used for the optimization of the search and its interpretation. This model results in five physical Higgs bosons: a light scalar $h$ identified with the SM Higgs boson in the alignment limit [35], a heavy scalar $H$, a pseudoscalar $A$, and two charged scalars $H^{\mp}$. The $h + DM$ signal in this $Z'$-2HDM model is produced through $pp \rightarrow Z' \rightarrow Ah$, where $A$ decays to $\chi\chi$ with a large $B$. Relevant model parameters are the ratio of the vacuum expectation values of the two Higgs fields coupling to the up-type and down-type quarks $\tan \beta$, the $Z'$ gauge coupling $g_{Z'}$, and the masses $m_{Z'}, m_{A},$ and $m_{\chi}$. The results are also generically interpreted in terms of the production cross section of non-SM events with large $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ and a Higgs boson without extra model assumptions.

Monte Carlo (MC) event generators were used to simulate the $h + DM$ signal and all SM background processes, except the multijet background, which was evaluated using data. All MC event samples were processed through a detailed simulation of the ATLAS detector [36] based on GEANT4 [37], and contributions from additional $pp$ interactions (pileup) were simulated using PYTHIA 8.186 [38] and the MSTW2008LO parton distribution function (PDF) set [39].

Signal samples for the $pp \rightarrow Z' \rightarrow Ah \rightarrow \chi\chi b\bar{b}$ process were generated at leading order using MADGRAPH_AMC@NLO 2.2.3 [5,40] interfaced to PYTHIA 8.186, using the NNPDF3.0 PDF set [41]. Samples were generated in the $(m_{Z'}, m_A)$ plane for 0.2 TeV < $m_{Z'}$ < 3 TeV and 0.2 TeV < $m_A$ < 0.8 TeV with $m_{\chi} = 100$ GeV, $\tan \beta = 1$, $g_{Z'} = 0.8$, $m_H = m_{H^0} = 300$ GeV [5].

Backgrounds from top quark pair production and single top quark production were generated at next-to-leading order (NLO) in quantum chromodynamics (QCD) with POWHEG-BOX [42–46] using CT10 PDFs [47], where the parton shower was simulated with PYTHIA 6.428 [48]. The $t\bar{t}$ samples are normalized using calculations at next-to-next-to-leading order (NNLO) in QCD including
next-to-next-to-leading logarithmic corrections for soft-
gluon radiation [49]. The single-top-quark processes are
normalized with cross sections at NLO in QCD [50–54].
Background processes involving a vector boson \( V = W, Z \)
decaying leptonically in association with jets, \( V + \) jets,
were simulated with SHERPA 2.2.1 [55] including mass
effects for \( b \) and \( c \) quarks and using NNPDF3.0 PDFs. The
perturbative calculations for \( V + \) jets were performed at
NLO for up to two partons and at leading order for up to
four partons [56,57], and matched to the parton shower [58]
using the ME+PS@NLO prescription from Ref. [59]. The
normalizations are determined at NNLO in QCD [60].
Diboson processes \((VV)\) were simulated at NLO in QCD
with SHERPA 2.1.1 and CT10 PDFs. Backgrounds from
associated \( V \) production were generated with PYTHIA
8.186 using NNPDF3.0 PDFs for \( gg \to Vh \), and POWHEG
interfaced to PYTHIA 8.186 using CT10 PDFs for \( gg \to Vh \).

Events are selected by an \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) trigger based on
calorimeter information [61]. Its threshold was 110 GeV
for most of the data taking period, and lower in the first
third. Events are required to have at least one \( pp \) collision
vertex reconstructed from at least two inner detector (ID)
tracks with \( p_T^{\text{track}} > 0.4 \) GeV. The primary vertex (PV)
for each event is the vertex with the highest \( \sum (p_T^{\text{track}})^2 \).

Reconstruction of muons (\( \mu \)) incorporates tracks or track
segments found in the muon spectrometer and matched ID
tracks. Identified muons must satisfy the “loose” quality
criteria [62] and have \(|\eta| < 2.7\). Electrons (\( e \)) are recon-
structed by matching an ID track to a cluster of energy in
the calorimeter. Electron candidates are identified through
a likelihood-based method [63] and must satisfy the loose
operating point and be within \(|\eta| < 2.47\). Muon and
electron candidates must have \( p_T > 7 \) GeV and are
required to be isolated by limiting the sum of \( p_T \) for tracks
within a cone in \( \Delta R \) around the lepton direction, as
in Ref. [32].

Jets reconstructed from three-dimensional clusters of
calorimeter cells [64] with the anti-4 algorithm [65] are
used to identify the \( h \to bb \) decay. For small to moderate \( h \)
momenta, the decay products can be resolved using jets
with a radius parameter \( R = 0.4 \) (small-\( R \) jets or \( j \). The
decay products of high-momentum \( h \) become collimated and
are reconstructed using a single jet with \( R = 1.0 \) (large-\( R \)
jet or \( J \). Small-\( R \) jets with \(|\eta| < 2.5 \) must satisfy \( p_T > 20 \)
GeV and are called “central,” while those with \( 2.5 <
|\eta| < 4.5 \) must have \( p_T > 30 \) GeV and are called “forward.”
Small-\( R \) jets are corrected for pileup [66], and
central small-\( R \) jets with \( 20 \) GeV \(< p_T < 60 \) GeV and
\(|\eta| < 2.4 \) are additionally required to be identified as
originating from the PV using associated tracks [67].
Small-\( R \) jets closer than \( \Delta R = 0.2 \) to an electron candidate
are rejected. Large-\( R \) jets are reconstructed independently
of small-\( R \) jets and trimmed [68,69] to reduce the effects of
pileup and the underlying event. Furthermore, large-\( R \)
jets must fulfill \( p_T > 200 \) GeV and \(|\eta| < 2.0 \). To improve the
resolution and minimize uncertainties, the mass of large-\( R \)
jets is determined by the resolution-weighted mean of
the mass measured using calorimeter information alone and
the track-assisted jet mass [70]. The latter is obtained by
scaling the mass determined using ID tracks alone by the
ratio of jet \( p_T \) measured in the calorimeter and in the ID.

Multivariate algorithms are used to identify jets containing
\( b \) hadrons (\( b \) tagging), which are expected in \( h \to bb \)
decays [69,71]. These algorithms are applied directly to
small-\( R \) jets, while for large-\( R \) jets they are applied to track
jets matched to large-\( R \) jets. Track jets are reconstructed from
ID tracks matched to the PV using the anti-\( k_t \) algorithm with \( R = 0.2 \), and must fulfill \( p_T > 10 \) GeV
and \(|\eta| < 2.5 \).

The \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) observable is calculated as the negative of
the vector sum of the transverse momenta of \( e, \mu \), and jet
candidates in the event. The transverse momenta not
associated with any \( e, \mu \), or jet candidates are accounted
for using ID tracks [72,73]. Similarly, \( p_T^{\text{miss, trk}} \) is defined
as the negative of the vector sum of the transverse momenta
of tracks with \( p_T > 0.5 \) GeV associated with the PV and
within \(|\eta| < 2.5 \).

The signal is characterized by high \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \), no isolated
leptons, and an invariant mass of the \( h \) candidate \( m_h \)
compatible with the observed Higgs boson mass of 125 GeV [74].
In the signal region (SR) described below, the dominant
corrections from \( Z(\nu\nu) + \) jets, \( W + \) jets, and \( t\bar{t} \)
production contribute, respectively, 30%–60%, 10%–25%,
and 15%–50% of the total background, depending on \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \)
and the \( b\)-tag multiplicity. The models for
\( V + \) jets and \( t\bar{t} \) are constrained using two control regions
(CR): the single-muon control region (1\( \mu \)-CR) is designed
to constrain the \( b\) and \( W + \) jets backgrounds, while the
two-lepton control region (2\( \ell \)-CR) constrains the \( Z + \) jets
background contributions.

The SR requires \( E_T^{\text{miss}} > 150 \) GeV, and no isolated \( e \) or
\( \mu \). The multijet background contributes due to mismeasured
jet momenta. To suppress it, additional selections are
required: \( \min(\Delta \phi(E_T^{\text{miss}}, p_T^{\text{miss}})) > \pi/9 \) for the three
highest-\( p_T \) (leading) small-\( R \) jets, \( \Delta \phi(E_T^{\text{miss}}, p_T^{\text{miss, trk}}) < \pi/2 \),
and \( p_T^{\text{miss, trk}} > 30 \) GeV for events with fewer than two
central \( b\)-tagged small-\( R \) jets. The requirements using
\( p_T^{\text{miss, trk}} \) also reduce noncollision backgrounds.

In the “resolved” regime, defined by \( E_T^{\text{miss}} < 500 \) GeV,
the \( h \) candidate is reconstructed from two leading \( b\)-tagged
central small-\( R \) jets, or, if only one \( b \) tag is present in the
event, from the \( b\)-tagged central small-\( R \) jet and the leading
non-\( b\)-tagged central small-\( R \) jet. At least one of the jets
comprising the \( h \) candidate must satisfy \( p_T > 45 \) GeV. A
separation in \( \Delta \phi \) between the \( h \) candidate and \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \)
of more than \( 2\pi/3 \) is required following the back-to-back configu-
ration of the Higgs boson recoiling against DM. To improve
the trigger efficiency modeling, events are retained only if
the scalar sum \( H_T \) of the \( p_T \) of the two (three) leading jets
fulfills \( H_{T,2j} > 120 \) GeV (\( H_{T,3j} > 150 \) GeV) if two (more
than two) central jets are present. Further optimization of the event selection described below provides an additional background reduction of up to 60% relative to Ref. [32], for a small signal loss. Events with a hadronic $\tau$-lepton candidate, identified either by an algorithm based on a boosted decision tree [75] or as small-$R$ jets containing one to four tracks within the jet core and $\Delta \phi(\vec{E}_T^{\text{miss}}, \vec{p}_T^{\ell}) < \pi/8$, are rejected to reduce the $t\bar{t}$ background, which can enter the SR if at least one top quark decays as $t \to Wb \to \tau\bar{\nu}b$. This background is further reduced by removing events with more than two $b$-tagged central jets, which typically happens for $t\bar{t}$ events with $t \to Wb \to csb$ decays. Since most of the hadronic activity in a signal event is expected from the $h \to b\bar{b}$ decay, the scalar sum of the $p_T$ of the two jets forming the $h$ candidate and, if present, the highest-$p_T$ additional jet must be larger than $0.63 \times H_T, \text{alljets}$. Finally, $\Delta R(\vec{p}_T^{b\cdot\text{tag}}, \vec{p}_T^{\ell}) < 1.8$ is required for the two jets forming the $h$ candidate.

In the “merged” regime, defined by $E_T^{\text{miss}} > 500$ GeV, the leading large-$R$ jet represents the $h$ candidate. Further selection optimization reduces backgrounds, primarily $t\bar{t}$ production, by up to 30% relative to Ref. [32], for a small signal loss: events containing $\tau$-lepton candidates with $\Delta R(\vec{p}_T, \vec{p}_T^{\ell}) > 1.0$ are vetoed; no $b$-tagged central small-$R$ jets with $\Delta R(\vec{p}_T^{b\cdot\text{tag}}, \vec{p}_T^{\ell}) > 1.0$ are allowed in the event; and the scalar sum of $p_T$ of the small-$R$ jets with $\Delta R(\vec{p}_T, \vec{p}_T^{\ell}) > 1.0$ is required to be smaller than 0.57 times that sum added to $p_T^{\ell}$.

The resolution in $m_h$ is improved using muons associated with small-$R$ jets in the resolved regime or with track jets matched to large-$R$ jets in the merged regime [69,76].

The event selection in the $1\mu$-CR is identical to the SR, except that exactly one isolated $\mu$ candidate with $p_T^{\mu} > 27$ GeV is required, and that $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ is added to $E_T$ to mimic the behavior of events contaminating the SR when the charged lepton is not detected.

Events in the $2\ell$-CR are collected using a single-$e$ or single-$\mu$ trigger, and selected by requiring one pair of isolated $e$ or $\mu$, one of which must have $p_T^{\ell} > 27$ GeV. Events with a $Z$ boson candidate are retained, identified as having 83 GeV $< m_{ee} < 99$ GeV or 71 GeV $< m_{\mu\mu} < 106$ GeV with an opposite-charge requirement in the $\mu\mu$ case. In addition, a measure of the $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ significance given by the ratio of the $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ to the square root of the scalar sum of $p_T$ of all leptons and small-$R$ jets in the event must be less than 3.5 GeV$^{1/2}$. This requirement separates $Z(\ell\ell') +$ jets processes from $t\bar{t}$ production, as $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ originates from finite detector resolution for the former and mainly from neutrinos for the latter. To mimic $Z \to \nu\nu$ decays in the SR, the $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ is set to the $\vec{p}_T$ of the dilepton system, which is then ignored in the subsequent analysis. All other selection requirements are identical between the $2\ell$-CR and the SR.

Subdominant backgrounds, including diboson, $Vh$, single top quark, and multijet production, contribute less than 10% of the total background in the SR. Multijet production is negligible for $E_T^{\text{miss}} > 350$ GeV. Its $m_h$ distribution is determined from data in a dedicated multijet-enriched sideband, defined by inverting the min $[\Delta \phi(\vec{E}_T^{\text{miss}}, \vec{p}_T^{\ell})]$ requirement.

Dominant sources of experimental systematic uncertainty arise from the number of background MC events, the calibration of the $b$-tagging efficiency and integrated luminosity, as well as the scale and resolution of the energy and the mass of jets. Uncertainties associated with the $t$ vetoes are found to be negligible. Dominant sources of theoretical systematic uncertainty originate from the modeling of the signal and background processes such as $t\bar{t}$, $V +$ jets, $Vh$, diboson, and multijet production. The few relevant changes in the estimation of systematic uncertainties relative to Ref. [32] encompass the improved calibrations of the $b$-tagging efficiency using $t\bar{t}$ events [69,71] as well as of the jet energy and mass scales using various in situ methods [70,71]; the reduced uncertainty from the new jet-mass observable [69,70]; and the uncertainty of 3.4% on the integrated luminosity of data collected in 2016. Table I quantifies dominant sources of uncertainty after the fit to data assuming three representative $Z'$-HDM scenarios. This search is statistically limited for $E_T^{\text{miss}} > 300$ GeV.

A fit to the $m_h$ observable based on a binned likelihood approach [78,79] is used to search for a signal. Systematic uncertainties are included in the likelihood function as nuisance parameters with Gaussian or log-normal constraints and profiled [76]. To account for changes in the background composition and to benefit from a higher signal sensitivity with increasing $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ and $b$-tag multiplicity, the data are split into categories that are fit

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<td>$t\bar{t}$, single-$t$ modeling</td>
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<td>$b$ tagging, track jets</td>
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<td>$b$ tagging, calo jets</td>
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simultaneously. Eight categories are defined for the SR and each of the two CRs: four ranges in $E^\text{miss}_T$/GeV as [150, 200), [200, 250), [250, 300), and [300, $\infty$), which are each split into two subregions with one and two $b$ tags. In the $1\mu$-CR, the electric charge of the $\mu$ is used to separate $t\bar{t}$ from $V +$ jets since the former provides an equal number of $\mu^+$ and $\mu^-$, while a prevalence of $\mu^+$ is expected from the latter process due to PDFs [80]. Only the total event yield is considered in the $2\ell$-CR due to limited data statistics. The normalizations of $t\bar{t}$, $W +$ HF, and $Z +$ HF processes are free parameters in the fit, where HF represents jets containing $b$ or $c$ quarks. In the SR, the contribution from $Z +$ jets is increased by about 50% by the fit relative to theory predictions, staying within uncertainties, while $t\bar{t}$ is reduced by up to 30% at high $E^\text{miss}_T$. The normalizations of other backgrounds modeled using MC simulations are constrained to theory predictions within uncertainties, as detailed in Ref. [32].

The distributions of $m_h$ for SR events with two $b$ tags provide the highest signal sensitivity and are shown in the four $E^\text{miss}_T$ regions in Fig. 1. No significant deviation from SM predictions is observed.

The results are interpreted as exclusion limits at 95% confidence level (C.L.) on the production cross section of $h + $ DM events $\sigma_{h + $ DM $}B(h \rightarrow b\bar{b})$ with the CLs formalism [81] using a profile likelihood ratio [82] as test statistic. Exclusion contours in the $(m_Z, m_A)$ space in the $Z'$-2HDM scenario are presented in Fig. 2, excluding $m_{Z'}$ up to 2.6 TeV and $m_A$ up to 0.6 TeV, substantially extending previous limits [30–34]. Furthermore, upper limits on $\sigma_{h + $ DM $}B(h \rightarrow b\bar{b})$ are provided under the minimal $h + $ DM model assumption that a Higgs boson is produced in a generic back-to-back configuration relative to $E^\text{miss}_T$.
from DM particles. For this, limits are set on \( \sigma_{\text{vis},h(b\bar{b})+\text{DM}} \equiv \sigma_{h+\text{DM}} \times B(h \rightarrow b\bar{b}) \times A \times \epsilon \) of \( h(b\bar{b}) + \) DM events per \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) bin at detector level, after all SR selections except the requirements on \( b\)-tag multiplicity and \( m_h \) range as used in the fit. The \( A \times \epsilon \) term quantifies the probability for an event to be reconstructed in the same \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) bin as generated and to pass all \( \sigma_{\text{vis},h(b\bar{b})+\text{DM}} \) selections, where \( A \) represents the kinematic acceptance and \( \epsilon \) accounts for the experimental efficiency. The results are shown in Table II. To minimize the dependence on the \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) distribution of a potential \( h+\text{DM} \) signal, the standard fit approach is modified to analyze one \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) range at a time in the SR. The \( Z'^{-}\text{2HDMD} \) model is used to evaluate the dependence of the \( \sigma_{\text{vis},h(b\bar{b})+\text{DM}} \) limits and of \( A \times \epsilon \) on the event kinematics within a given \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) bin. A range of \((m_Z', m_A)\) parameters that yield a sizable contribution of \( \geq 10\% \times \sigma_{h+\text{DM}} \times B(h \rightarrow b\bar{b}) \) in a given \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) bin is considered. Corresponding variations of 25% (70%) in the expected limits and of 50% (25%) in \( A \times \epsilon \) are found in the resolved (merged) regime. Table II quotes the least stringent limit and the lowest \( A \times \epsilon \) value in a given \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) bin after rounding. The limits are valid for \( p_T,h \lesssim 1.5 \text{ TeV} \).

In summary, a search for DM produced in association with a Higgs boson in final states with \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) and a \( b\bar{b} \) pair from the \( h \rightarrow b\bar{b} \) decay was conducted using 36.1 \( fb^{-1} \) of \( pp \) collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 13 \text{ TeV} \) recorded by the ATLAS detector at the LHC. The results are in agreement with SM predictions, and a substantial region of the parameter space of a representative \( Z'^{-}\text{2HDMD} \) model is excluded, significantly improving upon previous results. Stringent limits are also placed on the production cross section of non-SM events with large \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) and a Higgs boson without extra model assumptions.

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[6] ATLAS uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the center of the detector and the \( z \) axis along the beam pipe. The \( x \) axis
points to the center of the LHC ring, and the y axis points upward. Cylindrical 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 \(\eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)\). The distance between two objects in \(\eta-\phi\) space is \(\Delta R = \sqrt{\Delta \eta^2 + \Delta \phi^2}\). Transverse momentum is defined by \(p_T = p \sin \theta\).


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(ATLAS Collaboration)

1Department of Physics, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia
2Physics Department, SUNY Albany, Albany New York, USA
3Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton Alberta, Canada
4aDepartment of Physics, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey
4bIstanbul Aydin University, Istanbul, Turkey
4cDivision of Physics, TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara, Turkey
5LAPP, CNRS/IN2P3 and Université Savoie Mont Blanc, Annecy-le-Vieux, France
6High Energy Physics Division, Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois, USA
7Department of Physics, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA
8Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA
9Physics Department, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece
10Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou, Greece
11Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA
12Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan
13Institut de Física d’Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Barcelona, Spain
14Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
15Department for Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
16Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley, California, USA
17Department of Physics, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
18Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
19School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom
20aDepartment of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
20bDepartment of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Turkey
20cBahcesehir University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey
20dIstanbul Bilgi University, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey
21Centro de Investigacion, Universidad Antonio Narino, Bogota, Colombia
22Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy
23Physikalisches Institut, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
24Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
25Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA
26Universidade Federal do Rio De Janeiro COPPE/EE/IF, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
26aElectrical Circuits Department, Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora, Brazil
26bFederal University of Sao Joao del Rei (UFSJ), Sao Joao del Rei, Brazil
26cInstituto de Fisica, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
27Physics Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York, USA
28aTransilvania University of Brasov, Brasov, Romania
29Department of Physics, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Iasi, Romania
30aHoria Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest, Romania
30bDepartment of Physics, University Politehnica Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
31Department of Physics, National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Cluj Napoca, Romania
32aWest University in Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania
32bUniversity Politehnica Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
33aUniversity of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina
34aDepartment of Physics, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

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Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile
Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Jiangsu, China
Physics Department, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
Department of Modern Physics and State Key Laboratory of Particle Detection and Electronics, University of Science and Technology of China, Anhui, China
School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China
Department of Physics and Astronomy, Key Laboratory for Particle Physics, Astrophysics and Ministry of Education; Shanghai Key Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai(also at PKU-CHEP), China
Université Clermont Auvergne, CNRS/IN2P3, LPC, Clermont-Ferrand, France
Nevis Laboratory, Columbia University, Irvington, New York, USA
Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, København, Denmark
INFN Gruppo Collegato di Cosenza, Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica, Università della Calabria, Rende, Italy
AGH University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, Krakow, Poland
Marian Smoluchowski Institute of Physics, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland
Institute of Nuclear Physics Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow, Poland
Physics Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, USA
Physics Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas, USA
DESY, Hamburg and Zeuthen, Germany
Lehrstuhl für Experimentelle Physik IV, Technische Universität Dortmund, Dortmund, Germany
Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, Technische Universität Dresden, Dresden, Germany
Department of Physics, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA
SUPA - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
INFN e Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
Fakultät für Mathematik und Physik, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg, Germany
Departement de Physique Nucléaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland
INFN Sezione di Genova, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova, Italy
E. Andronikashvili Institute of Physics, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
High Energy Physics Institute, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
II Physikalisches Institut, Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Giessen, Germany
Supa - School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom
II Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany
Laboratoire de Physique Subatomique et de Cosmologie, Université Grenoble-Alpes, CNRS/IN2P3, Grenoble, France
Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
Kirchhoff-Institut für Physik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
Physikalisches Institut, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
Faculty of Applied Information Science, Hiroshima Institute of Technology, Hiroshima, Japan
Department of Physics, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong, China
Department of Physics, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
Department of Physics and Institute for Advanced Study, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China
Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, Taiwan
Department of Physics, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA
Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, Austria
University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA
Department of Physics and Astronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, USA
Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, JINR Dubna, Dubna, Russia
KEK, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, Tsukuba, Japan
Graduate School of Science, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan
Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
Kyoto University of Education, Kyoto, Japan
Research Center for Advanced Particle Physics and Department of Physics, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan
Instituto de Física La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET, La Plata, Argentina
Physics Department, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom
INFN Sezione di Lecce, Italy
Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università del Salento, Lecce, Italy
Oliver Lodge Laboratory, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom
\textsuperscript{169} Department of Physics, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, USA

\textsuperscript{170} Instituto de Física Corpuscular (IFIC), Centro Mixto Universidad de Valencia - CSIC, Spain

\textsuperscript{171} Department of Physics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

\textsuperscript{172} Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

\textsuperscript{173} Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom

\textsuperscript{174} Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

\textsuperscript{175} Department of Particle Physics, The Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel

\textsuperscript{176} Department of Physics, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

\textsuperscript{177} Fakultät für Physik und Astronomie, Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, Germany

\textsuperscript{178} Fakultät für Mathematik und Naturwissenschaften, Fachgruppe Physik, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany

\textsuperscript{179} Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA

\textsuperscript{180} Erevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia

\textsuperscript{181} Centre de Calcul de l’Institut National de Physique Nucléaire et de Physique des Particules (IN2P3), Villeurbanne, France

\textsuperscript{182} Academia Sinica Grid Computing, Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

\textsuperscript{a} Deceased.

\textsuperscript{b} Also at Department of Physics, King’s College London, London, United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{c} Also at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan.

\textsuperscript{d} Also at Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia.

\textsuperscript{e} Also at TRIUMF, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

\textsuperscript{f} Also at Department of Physics & Astronomy, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.

\textsuperscript{g} Also at Physics Department, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.

\textsuperscript{h} Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Fresno, CA, USA.

\textsuperscript{i} Also at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{j} Also at II Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany.

\textsuperscript{k} Also at Departament de Fisica de la Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

\textsuperscript{l} Also at Departamento de Física e Astronomia, Faculdade de Ciencias, Universidade do Porto, Portugal.

\textsuperscript{m} Also at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia.

\textsuperscript{n} Also at The Collaborative Innovation Center of Quantum Matter (CICQM), Beijing, China.

\textsuperscript{o} Also at Universita di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli, Italy.

\textsuperscript{p} Also at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP), Canada.

\textsuperscript{q} Also at Horia Hulubei National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest, Romania.

\textsuperscript{r} Also at Department of Physics, St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia.

\textsuperscript{s} Also at Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, New York City, USA.

\textsuperscript{t} Also at Department of Financial and Management Engineering, University of the Aegean, Chios, Greece.

\textsuperscript{u} Also at Centre for High Performance Computing, CSIR Campus, Rosebank, Cape Town, South Africa.

\textsuperscript{v} Also at Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA, USA.

\textsuperscript{w} Also at Institucio Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona, Spain.

\textsuperscript{x} Also at Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan.

\textsuperscript{y} Also at Fakultät für Mathematik und Physik, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg, Germany.

\textsuperscript{z} Also at Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics, Radboud University Nijmegen/Nikhef, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

\textsuperscript{aa} Also at Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA.

\textsuperscript{bb} Also at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{cc} Also at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{dd} Also at Georgian Technical University (GTU), Tbilisi, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{ee} Also at Ochadai Academic Production, Ochanomizu University, Tokyo, Japan.

\textsuperscript{ff} Also at Manhattan College, New York, NY, USA.

\textsuperscript{gg} Also at Departamento de Fisica, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile.

\textsuperscript{hh} Also at Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA.

\textsuperscript{ii} Also at The City College of New York, New York, NY, USA.

\textsuperscript{jj} Also at School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China.

\textsuperscript{kk} Also at Departamento de Fisica Teorica y del Cosmos and CAFPE, Universidad de Granada, Granada, Portugal.

\textsuperscript{ll} Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Sacramento, CA, USA.

\textsuperscript{mm} Also at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia.

\textsuperscript{nn} Also at Departement de Physique Nucleaire et Corpusculaire, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{oo} Also at Institut de Física d’Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Barcelona, Spain.

\textsuperscript{pp} Also at School of Physics, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

\textsuperscript{qq} Also at Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy (INRNE) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria.

\textsuperscript{rr} Also at Faculty of Physics, M.V.Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.
Also at National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia.

Also at Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA.

Also at Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary.

Also at Giresun University, Faculty of Engineering, Turkey.

Also at CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France.

Also at Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Jiangsu, China.

Also at University of Malaya, Department of Physics, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Also at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.

Also at LAL, Univ. Paris-Sud, CNRS/IN2P3, Université Paris-Saclay, Orsay, France.