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Search for new physics in the τ lepton plus missing transverse momentum final state in proton-proton collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV

The CMS Collaboration*

Abstract

A search for physics beyond the standard model (SM) in the final state with a hadronically decaying tau lepton and a neutrino is presented. This analysis is based on data recorded by the CMS experiment from proton-proton collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV at the LHC, corresponding to a total integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1} . The transverse mass spectrum is analyzed for the presence of new physics. No significant deviation from the SM prediction is observed. Limits are set on the production cross section of a W' boson decaying into a tau lepton and a neutrino. Lower limits are set on the mass of the sequential SM-like heavy charged vector boson and the mass of a quantum black hole. Upper limits are placed on the couplings of a new boson to the SM fermions. Constraints are put on a nonuniversal gauge interaction model and an effective field theory model. For the first time, upper limits on the cross section of t -channel leptoquark (LQ) exchange are presented. These limits are translated into exclusion limits on the LQ mass and on its coupling in the t -channel. The sensitivity of this analysis extends into the parameter space of LQ models that attempt to explain the anomalies observed in B meson decays. The limits presented for the various interpretations are the most stringent to date. Additionally, a model-independent limit is provided.

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1 Introduction

A search for new phenomena is conducted in the final state with a high transverse-momentum (p_T) tau lepton (τ) and large missing transverse momentum due to the neutrino (ν). This search uses proton-proton (pp) collision data at $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV recorded by the CMS experiment at the CERN LHC in 2016–2018, corresponding to an integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1} .

Due to its short lifetime, the τ lepton itself is not detected directly, but via its decay products. The hadronic decays of the τ lepton constitute about 2/3 of all its decays. The hadronic decay products, τ_h , of the tau lepton are distinctive because they result in jets with a lower charged-hadron multiplicity compared to the jets originating from the hadronization of partons produced in the hard scattering process. The selection of the hadronic τ decay mode also allows for discrimination against the leptonic τ decays, which cannot be distinguished from prompt decays to light leptons, such as those examined in the most recent searches by the ATLAS and CMS Collaborations for W' in the final states with an electron or muon plus a neutrino [1, 2].

The transverse mass, m_T , of the τ - p_T^{miss} system is the primary discriminating variable in this analysis. It is defined as

$$m_T = \sqrt{2p_T^{\tau_h} p_T^{\text{miss}} [1 - \cos \Delta\phi(\vec{p}_T^{\tau_h}, \vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}})]}, \quad (1)$$

where $p_T^{\tau_h}$ is the magnitude of the transverse momentum of the reconstructed τ_h candidate, $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ is the vector of transverse momentum misbalance in the event, p_T^{miss} is its magnitude, and $\Delta\phi(\vec{p}_T^{\tau_h}, \vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}})$ is the azimuthal opening angle between the directions of $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ and the tau lepton. We perform the search in a kinematic region where the $\vec{p}_T^{\tau_h}$ and the $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ are approximately balanced and back-to-back in the azimuthal plane.

A new charged gauge boson (W') is one possible signature of the sequential SM (SSM) [3]. In this model, the W' boson couplings to fermions are similar to those of the SM W , while the additional decay mode of the W' boson to top and bottom quarks is allowed for a sufficiently high boson mass. Searches for an SSM-like W' boson decaying to the $\tau + \nu_\tau$ final state have previously been reported by the CMS Collaboration at 8 TeV [4] and 13 TeV [5], as well as by the ATLAS Collaboration at 13 TeV [6]. These searches by the ATLAS and CMS experiments excluded W' bosons with masses up to 3.7 TeV and 4.0 TeV, respectively. The W' coupling strengths may differ from that of the SM W or the SSM W' bosons. Therefore, we also consider the case where the ratio $g_{W'}/g_W$ of the W' boson coupling strength to that of the SM W boson is not unity. The nonuniversal gauge interaction model (NUGIM) predicts an enhanced branching fraction for decays into third-generation fermions. We also place upper exclusion limits on the ratio of the W' boson coupling strength to the W boson coupling strength and on the NUGIM.

Some models of leptoquarks (LQs) are particularly interesting in light of the significant deviations from the SM predictions in measurements in the flavor sector of the $B \rightarrow D^{(*)} \ell \nu$ transitions, by the BaBar [7, 8], Belle [9–12], and LHCb [13–16] Collaborations. Separate measurements of the $B \rightarrow K^{(*)} \ell^+ \ell^-$ transitions by the LHCb Collaboration [17–20], which previously found deviations, have recently been superseded by an updated result that is compatible with the SM predictions within uncertainties [21]. The postulate of TeV-scale LQs with dominant couplings to third-generation fermions is among the favored theoretical attempts to explain these anomalies [22–44]. While numerous searches for single or pair production of LQs with dominant couplings to third-generation fermions at the LHC have yielded null results [45–55], the first search for LQ t -channel exchange in the $\tau + \nu$ final state is presented here.

If the excess seen in the $B \rightarrow D_s$ transitions is indeed due to new physics, the mass scale of its manifestation is expected to be at the TeV scale or not far beyond [56]. To provide a different test for the presence of new physics, a description based on an effective field theory (EFT) [57] with different types of coupling coefficients referred to as Wilson coefficients is also considered.

An open issue in modern particle physics is the large relative difference between the energy scale of electroweak symmetry breaking and that of gravity. This large discrepancy is often referred to as the hierarchy problem [58, 59], and is addressed in various ways in beyond-the-SM theories. In models with extra spatial dimensions, the hierarchy problem can be solved by lowering the fundamental Planck scale to the TeV range, which implies that gravity is strongly coupled at the LHC energies. In this case, the production of microscopic black holes may be possible at the LHC [60, 61]. In some models [62], these black holes would decay nonthermally into pairs of particles. Such black holes are often called quantum black holes (QBHs).

The shape of the m_T distribution is interpreted using a binned-likelihood method for the SSM, QBH, and EFT descriptions. We set upper exclusion limits on the cross section times branching fraction ($\sigma\mathcal{B}$) for the SSM description as a function of the mass of the new resonance ($m_{W'}$) and for the QBH model as a function of the mass scale of the QBH (m_{QBH}). In the case of the EFT description, upper exclusion limits are placed on the Wilson coefficients. Additionally, a model independent limit setting method is considered and discussed.

The paper is structured as follows: the CMS detector is briefly described in Section 2. The models examined in this analysis are outlined in Section 3. The data and simulated samples used are presented in Section 4, while Section 5 describes the event reconstruction and the kinematic selection of the signal region. The specific determination of the background from misidentified τ leptons is described in Section 6. Section 7 reviews the most important sources of systematic uncertainties and their impact on the measurements. The results and achieved sensitivity for all the models are detailed in Section 8 and summarized in Section 9. The results are also documented in HEPData [63].

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 silicon strip tracker, measuring the charged particle trajectories inside a pseudorapidity (η) acceptance of $|\eta| < 2.5$. Also within the solenoid volume are a lead tungstate crystal electromagnetic calorimeter (ECAL), and a brass and scintillator hadron calorimeter (HCAL). Each subdetector is composed of a barrel and two endcap sections. Forward calorimeters extend the pseudorapidity coverage provided by the barrel and endcap detectors. Muons are detected in gas-ionization detectors embedded in the steel flux-return yoke outside the solenoid.

Events of interest are selected using a two-tiered trigger system. The first level, 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 [64]. The second level, known as the high-level trigger, consists of a farm of processors running a version of the full event reconstruction software optimised for fast processing, and reduces the event rate to around 1 kHz before data storage [65].

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. [66].

3 Physics models

This section describes the different signal models used in this paper. All of these models predict physics beyond the SM that would be detectable in a final state with a τ lepton and missing transverse momentum.

3.1 The SSM heavy charged vector boson

In the SSM, the W' boson is a heavy analogue of the W boson. The experimental signature would be a resonance with fermionic decay modes and branching fractions similar to those of the SM W boson. For W' boson masses larger than 180 GeV the additional $W' \rightarrow t\bar{b}$ decay mode becomes relevant. If this decay is considered, the branching fraction for the $W' \rightarrow \tau\nu$ decay in the SSM is 8.5% [3]. Under these assumptions, the relative decay width of a 1 TeV W' boson is $\Gamma/M \approx 3.3\%$. Decays to W and Z bosons are assumed to be suppressed in the SSM. No interference between the production of the new particle and the production of the SM W boson is assumed. This is justified by the fact that the subsequent hadronic decay of the τ lepton leads to two neutrinos being present in the final state, significantly lowering the effect an interference of W' and W might have. The leading order (LO) Feynman diagram for this specific process is given in Fig. 1.

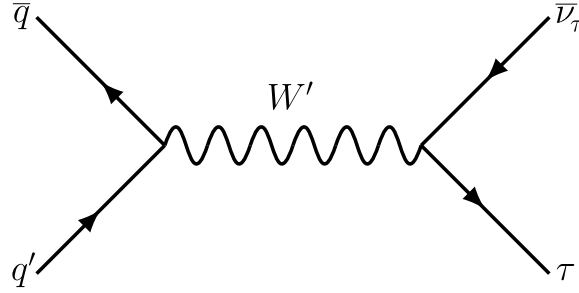


Figure 1: Leading order Feynman diagram for the production and decay of a new heavy charged vector boson, W' , decaying to $\tau\bar{\nu}_\tau$.

3.2 Varying coupling strength

In the SSM, the W' boson coupling strength, $g_{W'}$, is assumed to be identical to the SM W boson coupling, g_W . However, we also consider cases where $g_{W'} \neq g_W$. Because the W' boson width and cross section also depend on $g_{W'}$, we can interpret the kinematic distributions with respect to W' particles as described by various coupling values. The W' boson coupling strength is given in terms of the SM weak coupling strength $g_W = e/\sin^2\theta_W \approx 0.65$, where e is the electron charge and θ_W is the weak mixing angle.

3.3 Nonuniversal gauge interaction model

Models with nonuniversal couplings predict an enhanced branching fraction for decays into the third generation of SM fermions. These models could offer an explanation as to why the mass of the top quark is so large [67–69]. The NUGIM exhibits an $SU(2)_\ell \times SU(2)_h \times U(1)$ symmetry. The symmetry groups $SU(2)_\ell$ and $SU(2)_h$ govern the couplings of the gauge bosons to the light fermions of the first two generations and to the heavy fermions of the third generation, respectively. Models of this type are often called G(221) models. The weak SM $SU(2)_L$ group is a low-energy limit of two gauge groups: $SU(2)_\ell$ and $SU(2)_h$.

These groups combine via a mixing angle θ_E , resulting in an SM-like $SU(2)_L$ group and an additional extended group $SU(2)_E$. This extended group gives rise to additional heavy gauge

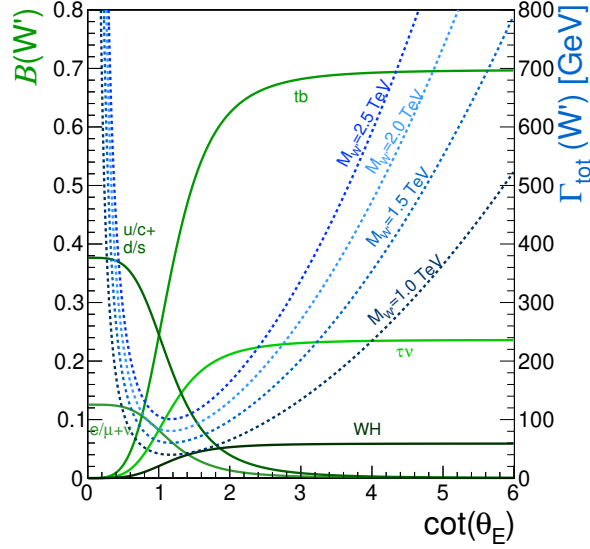


Figure 2: Branching fractions $\mathcal{B}(W')$ as function of the mixing angle $\cot \theta_E$ (solid lines), for W' boson decays in the NUGIM G(221) framework, as calculated in Refs. [67–69]. The total decay width Γ_{tot} (dotted lines) can also be determined as a function of the mixing angle. When re-scaled to accommodate the WH decay channel, the values associated with $\cot \theta_E = 1$ correspond to those in the SSM.

bosons such as the W' boson. The mixing angle directly affects the cross section and decay width of such particles, as shown in Fig. 2. As can be seen, for $\cot \theta_E = 1$ the branching fractions are equal for all lepton flavors, which would correspond to an SSM-like feature. When re-scaled to accommodate the WH decay channel, the values associated with $\cot \theta_E = 1$ correspond to those in the SSM. For values larger than one, the decay to τ leptons becomes dominant. The mixing angle changes the production cross section and the branching fractions of the W' boson. In the NUGIM, decays to W and Z bosons are negligible by construction, while decays to WH bosons typically have a branching fraction $< 6\%$.

In the NUGIM G(221), neglecting the small contribution from the WH decay, the ratio of the couplings, $g_{W'}/g_W$, is related to the parameter $\cot \theta_E$ by the following equation [69]:

$$\Gamma_{W'} = \Gamma_{W'}^{\text{SSM}} \frac{(4 + \frac{1}{4}) \cot^2 \theta_E + 8 \tan^2 \theta_E}{12 + \frac{1}{4}} = \Gamma_{W'}^{\text{SSM}} \left(\frac{g_{W'}}{g_W} \right)^2. \quad (2)$$

Because of this functional relationship, a reinterpretation of the limits on the coupling strength yields limits on the parameters of NUGIM G(221). Therefore, the SSM W' signal samples mentioned in Section 4.1 can be used to probe this model. The product of the cross section and branching fraction, $\sigma \mathcal{B}$, scales with $\Gamma_{\text{SSM}}/\Gamma_{\text{NUGIM}}$.

3.4 Quantum black holes

Theories that invoke extra spatial dimensions often permit a fundamental Planck scale in the TeV region. Such theories also provide the possibility of producing microscopic black holes at LHC energies [60, 61]. In models with QBHs [62], the regime at which gravity becomes strongly coupled to SM particles causes the theory to become non-perturbative. This creates unavoidable limitations. When working in these regimes, usage of the model and its predictions should be viewed as a dimensional analysis in which some extrapolations from the classical domain

carry over to the QBHs. In contrast to semiclassical thermal black holes that can decay to high-multiplicity final states, QBHs are nonthermal objects, expected to decay predominantly to pairs of particles. Despite not having a complete theory of quantum gravity, it is still possible to gain insight into the signatures of QBHs at the LHC based on some fundamental principles and a few assumptions. The cross section for QBH production depends on the threshold mass, m_{th} , in n additional spatial dimensions. The $n > 1$ cases correspond to the Arkani-Hamed–Dimopoulos–Dvali model [70]. In this search the number of extra dimensions is assumed to be $n=4$. The m_{th} distribution of the QBH signal is characterized by a sharp edge at the threshold of QBH production, followed by a monotonic decrease at larger masses.

3.5 Leptoquarks

Leptoquarks are hypothetical new scalar or vector bosons carrying both baryon and lepton numbers and an electric charge in multiples of $(1/3)e$. The postulation of TeV-scale LQs with dominant couplings to third-generation fermions is a popular theoretical explanation of the observed anomalies in the ratio of the widths of semileptonic B meson decays

$$R_{D^{(*)}} = \frac{\Gamma(B \rightarrow D^{(*)} \tau \nu)}{\Gamma(B \rightarrow D^{(*)} \ell \nu)} \quad (3)$$

where $\ell = e$ or μ .

Under the assumption that their couplings to the SM fermions are renormalizable and gauge invariant, the possible quantum numbers of LQs are restricted to those given in the Buchmüller–Rückl–Wyler model [71].

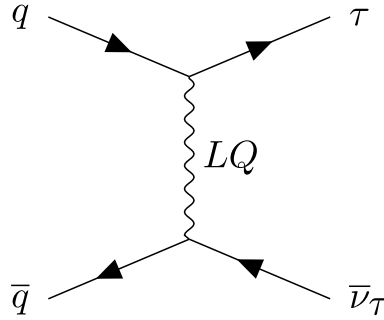


Figure 3: Leading order Feynman diagram of the process $pp \rightarrow \tau \bar{\nu}_\tau$ mediated via a leptoquark in the t -channel.

At the LHC, the final state with one τ lepton and p_T^{miss} can be produced by an LQ appearing as a t -channel propagator, leading to a nonresonant enhancement of events with large values of m_T . The LO Feynman diagram of this process is shown in Fig. 3. The cross section of this process depends on the mass of the LQ (m_{LQ}) and its coupling g_U to SM fermions. While the dependence of the cross section on m_{LQ} is weaker for a LQ in the t -channel compared to single or pair LQ production, it scales with g_U^4 at LO.

In models addressing the tension in the flavor sector, LQs are often predicted to have flavor-nonuniversal couplings to left- (LH) and right-handed (RH) fermions, effectively modifying the LQ coupling to LH and RH SM fermions to be $g_U \beta_L^{ij}$ and $g_U \beta_R^{ij}$, respectively. Here, β_L^{ij} and β_R^{ij} are complex 3×3 matrices with i and j denoting the down-type quarks and leptons, respectively. The normalization of g_U is chosen such that $\beta_L^{b\tau} = 1$.

Three coupling benchmark scenarios are considered in this analysis, two of which have been proposed in Ref. [44]. The first two scenarios are the result of a fit of the parameters of a $U(1)$ vector LQ of charge $(-1/3)e$ to explain the flavor anomalies in $R_{D^{(*)}}$ (Eq. (3)) and other related observables. The first benchmark scenario considers only couplings to LH SM fermions (i.e., $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$) and is referred to as “best fit LH” in the following. The second benchmark, referred to as “best fit LH+RH”, additionally considers $|\beta_R^{b\tau}| = 1$ with all other $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$. In the third “democratic” benchmark, equal couplings only to LH fermions are assumed, i.e. $|\beta_L^{ij}| = 1$ and $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$ for all i and j .

3.6 Effective field theory description

As mentioned above, the ratio in Eq. (3) appears to be enhanced with respect to the SM expectation by approximately 30%. If this enhancement originates from new physics, the corresponding mass scale of this physics is expected to be at, or near, the TeV scale [56]. The aim of this model is to search for any prescription that is able to address the $R_{D^{(*)}}$ anomalies with new heavy mediators. It uses a low-energy EFT of new physics in semi-leptonic ($b \rightarrow \ell \nu c$) transitions and translates this into a predictive theory at the TeV scale [57]. This EFT model introduces three Wilson coefficients — one for the LH vector coupling ϵ_L^{cb} , one for tensor like coupling ϵ_T^{cb} , and one for scalar-tensor like coupling ϵ_S^{cb} .

4 Data and simulated events

4.1 Data

In this search, we analyze a data set from pp collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 13 TeV that was recorded by the CMS experiment in 2016–2018 and corresponds to an integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1} . Events were selected with an isolated single τ trigger with $|\eta| < 2.1$ and with p_T thresholds of 120 GeV in 2016 and 180 GeV in 2017–2018. The τ trigger is complemented with a p_T^{miss} trigger with a 120 GeV threshold. The trigger efficiency for simulated signal events that pass the offline selection criteria is about 95%. The efficiency of the τ trigger estimated using Monte Carlo simulations typically differs from that measured with data by approximately 10% (depending on the particular p_T bin) across all data-taking years. The estimated p_T^{miss} trigger efficiency from simulation is only 1–4% above or below data depending on the p_T^{miss} bin. We correct these differences in trigger efficiency between simulation and data using efficiency correction factors, which are henceforth referred to as scale factors. The scale factors range from 0.88–0.99 (0.87–1.08) for the 2016 (2017–2018) datasets.

4.2 Event simulation

Generated events are processed through a simulation of the detector geometry and response using GEANT4 [72]. The same reconstruction software is applied to both data and simulated events. Backgrounds are simulated using an expected distribution of the number of additional pp interactions within the same or nearby bunch crossings (pileup). All simulated backgrounds are reweighted such that the distribution of the number of collisions per bunch crossing matches the data, with an average of approximately 23 (32) interactions per bunch crossing [73–75] in 2016 (2017–2018). Unless otherwise noted, simulated samples use the underlying event tune CUETP8M1 [76] in 2016 and the CP5 tune [77] in 2017–2018.

4.2.1 Signal simulation

The SSM W' boson signal samples ($q'\bar{q} \rightarrow W'$) are generated at LO using PYTHIA 8.2.05 [78] for each data-taking year, and employing the NNPDF2.3 [79] (NNPDF3.1 [80]) parton distribution function (PDF) set for the 2016 (2017–2018) configurations. These samples are generated for mass points ranging from 0.6 to 6.0 TeV. To interpret the results in terms of the coupling ratio of the SSM W' boson and the SM W boson, signal samples are simulated at LO using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO version 2.6.5 [81, 82] for different coupling ratios $g_{W'}/g_W$ for coupling ratio values of [0.001, 0.01, 0.1, 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 5.0], for all mass points.

Signal samples of LQ t -channel exchange at LO using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO are generated for LQ masses between 0.1 and 10 TeV neglecting interference with SM processes. Interference is expected to be negligible in the phase space sensitive to this signal [83]. The parton shower, hadronization, and underlying event are modelled with PYTHIA 8. The underlying event tune CP2 [77] is used for 2017 and 2018. The NNPDF2.3 and NNPDF3.1 PDF sets are used for 2016 and 2017–2018, respectively.

The QBH signal samples are generated with the QBH 3.0 generator [84]. We consider the $q'\bar{q}$ production of a singly positively charged QBH with its subsequent decay to a τ lepton and a neutrino. Signal samples with minimum threshold masses from 400 to 11000 GeV are employed. The CTEQ6L1 PDF set [85], which is the recommended PDF for QBHs, is used. The definition of the Q scale for PDFs is taken to be the inverse of the gravitational radius.

Signal samples for the EFT model are generated using MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO at LO, while simulation of the hadronization and τ lepton decay is performed using PYTHIA 8. The signal samples are generated with MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO using the values 0.3, 1.0, and 0.3 for the Wilson coefficients (ϵ_L^{cb} , ϵ_T^{cb} , ϵ_S^{cb}), respectively, which are obtained by fitting them to the current values of $R_{D^{(*)}}$ [86]. The event content of these signal samples can be rescaled to cover a wider range of coupling values. The CP2 tune is used in conjunction with NNPDF3.1 PDF set for generation of signal samples.

4.2.2 Simulation of the background

Background processes for this analysis include off-shell SM W production, processes coming from the decay of top quarks ($t\bar{t}$), the Drell–Yan (DY) process, and diboson (ZZ, WW, WZ) processes. These samples are produced with PYTHIA 8 (for SM W), MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO (for DY, ZZ, and WZ), and POWHEG 2.0 [87–89] (for $t\bar{t}$ and WW). Backgrounds are simulated using the NNPDF3.0 (NNPDF3.1) NNLO [90] PDF set for 2016 (2017–2018). The simulated SM samples were validated in the low-mass region ($m_T < 1$ TeV).

The SM background expected in this search consists of two different types of events: those where the τ candidate originates from a gluon- or quark-initiated jet, and others where the τ originates from a genuine τ lepton decay. The former is derived from data, while the latter is estimated using simulation.

The dominant irreducible background for this analysis comes from SM $W \rightarrow \tau\nu$ production. This background is generated at LO precision in quantum chromodynamics (QCD) with PYTHIA 8 for high-mass off-shell production. On-shell production is generated at LO precision in QCD with MADGRAPH5_aMC@NLO, and the simulated jets are matched to the matrix element and parton shower produced by PYTHIA using MLM [81] merging. The differential cross section is reweighted as a function of the invariant mass of the SM W boson, incorporating next-to-LO (NLO) electroweak (EW) and next-to-NLO (NNLO) QCD corrections. The EW and QCD corrections can be combined by two different mathematical approaches: additive

and multiplicative [91]. These approaches differ by approximately 5%. The applied correction factor uses the recommended additive approach [92], which is parametrized using a fit of a fourth order polynomial function. Differences between this approach and the multiplicative approach are taken as a systematic uncertainty. The calculation uses the FEWZ 3.1 and MCSANC 1.01 [93, 94] generators for the QCD and EW corrections, respectively.

5 Event selection and particle identification

The particle-flow algorithm [95] aims to reconstruct and identify each individual particle in an event, with an optimized combination of information from the various subsystems of the CMS detector. We obtain the photon energy from the ECAL measurement. Electron energy is determined from a combination of the electron momentum at the primary interaction vertex as determined by the tracker, the energy of the corresponding ECAL cluster, and the energy sum from all bremsstrahlung photons spatially compatible with originating from the electron track. Muon energy is obtained from the curvature of the corresponding track. Charged-hadron energy is determined from a combination of the momentum of the hadron measured in the tracker and matching ECAL and HCAL energy deposits, corrected for the response function of the calorimeters to hadronic showers. Neutral-hadron energy is obtained from the energy deposits in the ECAL and HCAL corrected in a similar way to that of the charged hadrons.

For each event, hadronic jets are clustered from these reconstructed particles using the infrared- and collinear-safe anti- k_T algorithm [96] in the FASTJET software package [97] with a distance parameter of 0.4. The jet momentum is determined as the vectorial momentum sum of each particle contained within the jet. From simulation, we find the jet momentum to be, on average, within 5–10% of the true momentum over the entire p_T spectrum and detector acceptance. Pileup can contribute additional tracks and calorimetric energy depositions to the jet momentum. To mitigate this effect, we discard charged particles identified to be originating from pileup vertices and apply an offset to correct for remaining contributions. Jet energy corrections are derived from simulation to bring the measured response of jets to be similar to that of particle-level jets, on average. In situ measurements of the momentum balance in dijet, photon+jet, Z +jet, and multijet events are used to account for any residual differences in the jet energy scale between data and simulation [98]. The jet energy resolution, obtained from a dijet balance technique, is found to be 15–20% at 30 GeV, 10% at 100 GeV, and 5% at 1 TeV [98]. We apply additional selection criteria to each jet to remove jets potentially dominated by anomalous contributions from various subdetector components or reconstruction failures [99].

The missing transverse momentum vector $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ is computed as the negative vector p_T sum of all of the particle-flow candidates in an event, and its magnitude is denoted as p_T^{miss} . The $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$ is modified to account for corrections to the energy scale of the reconstructed jets in the event [99]. Anomalous high- p_T^{miss} events can occur due to a variety of reconstruction failures, detector malfunctions, or non-collision backgrounds. We reject such events by using event filters designed to identify more than 85% of the spurious high- p_T^{miss} events, with a mistagging rate less than 0.1% [99].

The τ_h candidates are reconstructed using the Hadron-plus-Strip (HPS) algorithm [100] starting from a jet. To reconstruct the τ_h decay mode and its four momentum, we consider all particles in an η - ϕ cone of radius $\Delta R = 0.5$ around the jet axis. This candidate is subsequently compared with quark or gluon-initiated jets, electrons, and muons. We apply corrections for the small differences in the τ_h energy between simulation and data.

To distinguish between τ_h candidates originating from genuine τ leptons and other objects, we

use the DEEPTAU identification [101]. This identification method consists of a convolutional deep neural network that uses machine learning techniques and image recognition methods in order to discriminate genuine τ_h candidates from light leptons and jets. It combines high-level variables, such as the τ lepton isolation, with low-level variables such as specific energy deposits in CMS subdetectors. This method has been shown to provide excellent discrimination against these jets, electrons, and muons while retaining a high efficiency for genuine τ leptons. The identification efficiency of genuine τ_h candidates ($p_T > 100$ GeV) provided by the chosen identification method in this analysis is approximately 75%, while the probability of a jet being misidentified as a τ lepton is less than 0.7%. Differences between data and simulation arising from the application of the identification method are corrected for using scale factors. Corrections due to differences in τ identification performance and energy scale measurements are less than 5%.

We select τ_h candidates with a $p_T^{\tau_h} > 130$ (190) GeV for data recorded in 2016 (2017–2018). The τ_h candidate is required to be in the range $|\eta| < 2.1$. Additionally, we require τ_h candidates to pass anti-jet, anti-electron, and anti-muon discriminators of the DEEPTAU algorithm in order to reduce their corresponding misidentification probabilities [101]. The p_T^{miss} associated with these events is required to be at least 200 GeV.

In order to reduce the number of misidentified light leptons and to reduce background, we reject events containing loosely identified electrons [102] or muons [103] with $p_T \gtrsim 20$ GeV within the detector acceptance. Events containing more than one τ_h candidate fulfilling the identification criteria are also rejected. The τ_h decay products and the neutrino are expected to be back-to-back to each other for all signal processes. The neutrino created during the τ lepton decay is emitted in a similar direction to that of the τ lepton in the laboratory frame and therefore only slightly reduces the overall magnitude of the expected $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$. Thus, we require $0.7 < p_T^{\tau_h}/p_T^{\text{miss}} < 1.3$ and $|\Delta\phi(\vec{p}_T^{\tau_h}, \vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}})| > 2.4$. The variable used to determine the signal yields for this analysis is the transverse mass, m_T , as shown in Eq. (1).

6 Jet background estimation

We use data to estimate the backgrounds due to jets misidentified as τ_h candidates. In this analysis, this background contribution originates mostly from QCD multijet and Drell–Yan events. The signal-free control region comprises events with one well reconstructed light lepton and a τ_h candidate. These events are selected using single light lepton triggers. The misidentification rate is defined as the number of τ lepton candidates passing the full selection criteria divided by the number of those candidates that do not fulfill the isolation requirement. This rate is calculated as a function of the τ lepton candidate p_T and the number of charged hadrons within the τ lepton candidate isolation cone ($\Delta R = 0.5$). Events where a τ lepton is matched to a generator-level τ lepton in simulation are subtracted from data. The ratio is estimated at approximately 5% for τ lepton decays involving three charged hadrons and up to 30% for τ leptons that decay into one charged hadron. The rate is then applied as an event-weight to signal-like events where a τ lepton candidate does not fulfill the isolation requirement. This application region primarily contains events originating from misidentified jets, with a small contamination of genuine τ_h candidates. This contamination is subtracted from the application region using input from simulation.

This method is validated by estimating the ratio of simulated events in which jets are misidentified as τ_h candidates, applying it to signal-like events where a τ lepton candidate does not fulfill the isolation requirement, and comparing the results to the background prediction from

simulation in the signal region. In order to account for the differences found with this validation, and to cover uncertainties arising from differences in the misidentification rate measurements from the individual sideband regions, corresponding uncertainties are applied.

7 Systematic uncertainties

There are various sources of uncertainties that can affect the normalization or the shape of the m_T distribution. These affect either the signal or the background estimates. We consider three types of systematic uncertainties: normalization, shape-based, and statistical.

The dominant uncertainty that affects the shape of the m_T distribution arises from the PDF sets used in simulating the background processes. We calculate this uncertainty with the PDF4LHC procedure [104], using replicas of the NNPDF3.0 (NNPDF3.1) PDF set for 2016 (2017–2018). This uncertainty grows with increasing m_T and becomes as large as 50% in the highest bin (> 1.8 TeV) of the m_T distribution.

Another source of uncertainty comes from corrections to the measured τ lepton energy scale (1.5–4.0% for $p_T^{\tau h} > 100$ GeV, depending on the decay mode), τ identification efficiency (up to 5% for 1 TeV τ leptons), and τ trigger scale factors ($\approx 10\%$). Uncertainties coming from shifting the jet energy scale and resolution are propagated to the calculation of $\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}$.

For all backgrounds estimated at NLO, factorization and renormalization scales are each multiplied by three factors (0.5, 1.0, 2.0), with the combination (1.0, 1.0) being the nominal. The largest deviations in the resulting event yield predictions, both up and down from the nominal value, are taken as systematic uncertainty. Variations where one scale is multiplied by 0.5 and the other by 2 are considered unphysical and are not considered.

Events in simulation are reweighted based on pileup differences between measured data and simulation. The total inelastic cross section of 69.2 mb [105] is varied by $\pm 5\%$ and the resulting final m_T distribution is recalculated to estimate the uncertainty.

Uncertainties that affect the normalization of the background modeling arise from the measurement of the integrated luminosity, as well as from uncertainties in the cross sections of specific backgrounds. For the integrated luminosity, we apply an uncertainty of 1.2%/2.3%/2.5% for the year 2016/2017/2018, respectively, which correspond to the combined uncertainty of 1.6% for the full data-taking period. The cross section uncertainties are evaluated as 4% for the di-boson background and 2% for the Drell–Yan background. The background from misidentified τ lepton candidates is estimated with a normalization uncertainty of 100%. Additionally, we estimate the systematic uncertainty in the calculated ratio arising from the statistical uncertainties in the control and application regions. For the dominant W boson background, we apply the W boson mass-dependent uncertainties as explained in Section 4.2.2. Uncertainties in the jet background estimation include uncertainties from the misidentification ratio measurement, as well as the statistical uncertainties from both control and application regions of the method. Statistical uncertainties arise from data and from the limited event count in simulated background samples, and are taken into account [106]. These uncertainties are treated as uncorrelated between the bins of the final m_T distribution. The combination of all uncertainties shows an increasing trend with increasing m_T . Because the number of total expected background events becomes small, this does not affect the sensitivity by a significant amount for high-mass objects.

All systematic uncertainties are treated as fully correlated across years, except for those where the uncertainty arises from statistically independent sources. The uncertainties of the data-

driven background are treated as uncorrelated across years. Correction uncertainties related to τ_h and p_T^{miss} and the luminosity uncertainties are treated as partially correlated since they include some components that are considered correlated between years and some others that are not.

8 Results

Figure 4 displays the distribution for hadronically decaying τ lepton events with missing transverse momentum, for the combined 2016–2018 data set. To illustrate signal distributions for the models described in this analysis, simulated SSM W' boson samples, as well as simulated QBH and EFT samples are included in the figure. The W' boson masses, $m_{W'}$, of 1.0 and 5.0 TeV are used for the SSM samples, a QBH mass, m_{QBH} , of 5.0 TeV is used for the QBH sample, and a tensor-type EFT sample is used to show the expected effect of the Wilson coefficients on the m_T distribution. The main background contribution comes from off-shell W boson production, followed by events with misidentified τ leptons. Backgrounds from misidentified τ leptons are estimated using the data-driven technique described in Sec. 6. Other backgrounds are estimated using simulation. Example signal distributions are normalized to a cross section of 10 fb. The bin width increases with transverse mass.

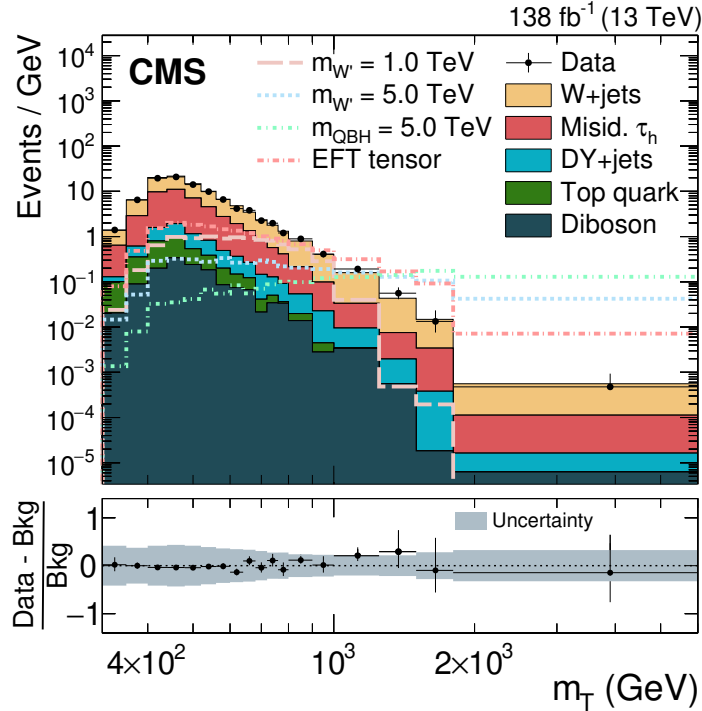


Figure 4: The transverse mass distribution of the $\tau_h + p_T^{\text{miss}}$ system observed in the 2016–2018 data (black dots with statistical uncertainty) as well as the expectation from SM processes (stacked histograms). The horizontal lines of the data points reflect the varying bin sizes. Different signal hypotheses normalized to 10 fb^{-1} are illustrated as dashed lines for exemplary SSM W' boson, QBH, and EFT signal hypotheses. The ratios of the background-subtracted data yield to the expected background yield are presented in the lower panel. The combined statistical and systematic uncertainties in the background are represented by the grey shaded band in the ratio panel.

The data agree with the expected background yields within statistical and systematic uncertainties. No significant deviation from the SM prediction is observed. We calculate limits at

95% confidence level (CL) from the m_T distribution using Bayesian methods known to have good frequentist coverage properties [107]. A software framework designed specifically to combine Higgs boson searches [108], based on the ROOSTATS package [109], is used to calculate the limits. For these limit calculations, we use a Bayesian method with a uniform positive prior probability density for the signal cross section. The nuisance parameters connected to shape-based uncertainties are modeled using a template-morphing technique, while those affecting the normalization of the distribution are included using a log-normal prior. To search for resonances in the m_T spectrum, a binned maximum likelihood fit is performed.

We calculate upper exclusion limits on $\sigma\mathcal{B}$ for each model described in Section 3. We further translate these into lower exclusion limits on $m_{W'}$ and m_{QBH} for the SSM W' and QBH models, respectively. However, for the studies focused on coupling strengths, these are left as upper exclusion limits, unless otherwise specified.

8.1 Model-independent cross section limit

New physics might produce signal shapes that are different from those expected for any of the above-mentioned signal models. Therefore, a model-independent (MI) cross section limit on $(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{MI}}$ is provided in Fig. 5. This limit is obtained by calculating a single bin limit, where we integrate from a lower m_T threshold to infinity. This procedure results in an exclusion limit with a step-like behavior that originates from the binning of the m_T distribution. For the estimation of this exclusion limit, a constant product of acceptance times efficiency of 16% is assumed. This value includes the branching fraction of hadronic τ lepton decays and experimental efficiencies for the signal. An exclusion limit on a specific model calculated using the presented MI limit can be obtained by applying the model-dependent part of $A\epsilon$.

To reflect the effect of the threshold, m_T^{min} on a new physics signal, we determine a factor f_{m_T} by counting the number of events with $m_T > m_T^{\text{min}}$ and dividing this result by the number of generated events. The reconstruction efficiency is nearly constant over the entire m_T range scanned in this analysis; therefore f_{m_T} can be evaluated at the generator level.

A limit on the product of the production cross section and branching fraction $(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{excl}}$ together with the acceptance A and the efficiency ϵ can be obtained as a function of m_T^{min} by dividing the excluded cross section of the MI limit $(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{MI}}$ given in Fig. 5 by the calculated fraction $f_{m_T}(m_T^{\text{min}})$:

$$(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{excl}} = \frac{(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{MI}}(m_T^{\text{min}})}{f_{m_T}(m_T^{\text{min}})} \quad (4)$$

Here, $\mathcal{B}$ is the branching fraction of the new particle decaying to $\tau + \nu$. A new physics model can be interpreted using the MI limit by scanning m_T^{min} for the minimum value of $(\sigma\mathcal{B}A\epsilon)_{\text{excl}}$. When accounting for the model-dependent part of $A\epsilon$, $(\sigma\mathcal{B})_{\text{excl}}$ can be extracted. Models with a theoretical cross section $(\sigma\mathcal{B})_{\text{theo}} > (\sigma\mathcal{B})_{\text{excl}}$ can be excluded. The procedure described here can be applied to all models involving the two-body decay of a massive system to a τ lepton and p_T^{miss} , which exhibit back-to-back kinematics similar to those of a generic W' boson. If the kinematic properties are different, the fraction of events $f_{m_T}(m_T^{\text{min}})$ must be determined for the particular model considered.

8.2 Mass limit for a heavy vector boson

When calculating the limit in the SSM, the parameter of interest is the product of the signal production cross section and the branching fraction $\sigma\mathcal{B}(W' \rightarrow \tau\nu)$. Figure 6 shows the exclusion limit on this product as a function of the SSM $m_{W'}$. The SSM W' boson production is excluded

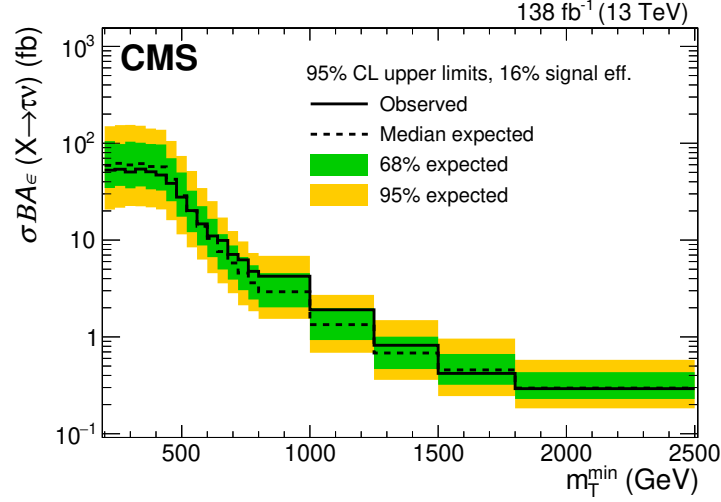


Figure 5: Bayesian 95% CL model-independent upper limit on the product of signal cross section and branching fraction for the $\tau + \nu$ decay for a back-to-back τ lepton plus p_T^{miss} topology. To calculate this limit, all events for signal, background, and data are summed starting from a minimum m_T threshold and then divided by the total number of events. No assumption on the signal shape is included in this limit, however a signal selection efficiency of 16% is assumed. The expected (dashed line) and observed (solid line) limits are shown as well as the 68% and 95% CL uncertainty bands (green and yellow, respectively). The uncertainty bands correspond to the sum in quadrature of PDF and scale variations.

for masses between 0.6 TeV and 4.8 TeV by comparison with the theoretical NNLO cross section. The observed limit is in agreement with the expected mass limit of 4.8 TeV. Previous CMS searches in this channel already exclude the lower SSM mass hypotheses [4]. The lower bound is mainly determined by the trigger thresholds and the upper bound by the available data. In the high mass region, off-shell production of W' bosons becomes dominant, shifting the signal m_T distribution towards lower m_T values.

8.3 The NUGIM and coupling sensitivity

The limits for the coupling-dependent W' boson model and the NUGIM G(221) model are calculated in a two-dimensional plane that depends on the mass of the new mediator particle and its width. The W' boson width is affected by the coupling. We extract the limits shown in Fig. 7 by finding the intersection of the LO cross section theory plane of the corresponding model with the experimental result. The upper limits on the coupling strength in the case of SSM-like W' bosons, and on the mixing parameter $\cot \theta_E$ in the case of the NUGIM G(221) model are provided as functions of $m_{W'}$. In the latter case, for $\cot(\theta_E) > 5.5$, the width becomes so large that the model is no longer valid. We exclude coupling values above $g_{W'}/g_W = 0.05$ for masses of 1 TeV. For a mass hypothesis of 6 TeV, coupling values above 2 are excluded. For NUGIM G(221) models, we can exclude all theoretically allowed values of $\cot \theta_E$ for masses below 2.2 TeV. For values of $\cot \theta_E = 1$, masses of up to 4.8 TeV are excluded.

8.4 The QBH limits

The QBH model has the same m_T sensitive observable as the SSM model. However, it differs with respect to its production mechanism. Its signal shape in the generator mass distribution is characterized by a threshold mass with a rising edge, followed by a monotonic decrease towards higher masses. This shape is less sharp in the m_T distribution and, in parts, extends

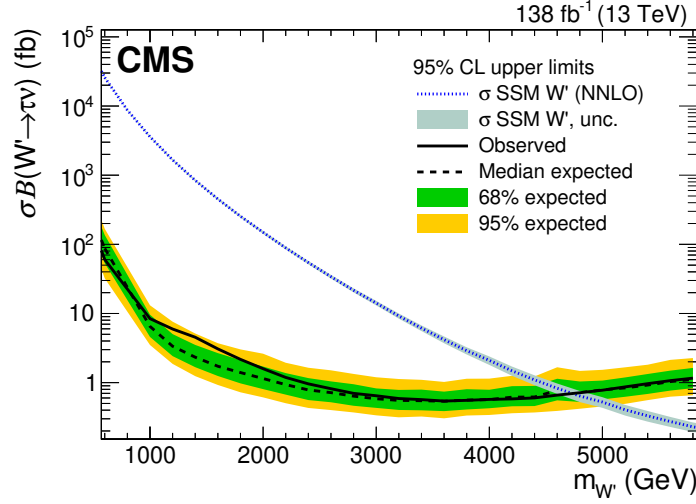


Figure 6: Bayesian upper exclusion limits at 95% CL on the product of the cross section and branching fraction of a W' boson decaying to a τ lepton and a neutrino in the SSM model. For this model, W' boson masses of up to 4.8 TeV can be excluded. The limit is given by the intersection of the observed (solid) limit and the theoretical cross section (blue dotted curve). The 68 and 95% quantiles of the limits are represented by the green and yellow bands, respectively. The $\sigma\mathcal{B}$ for an SSM W' boson, along with its associated uncertainty, calculated at NNLO precision in QCD is shown.

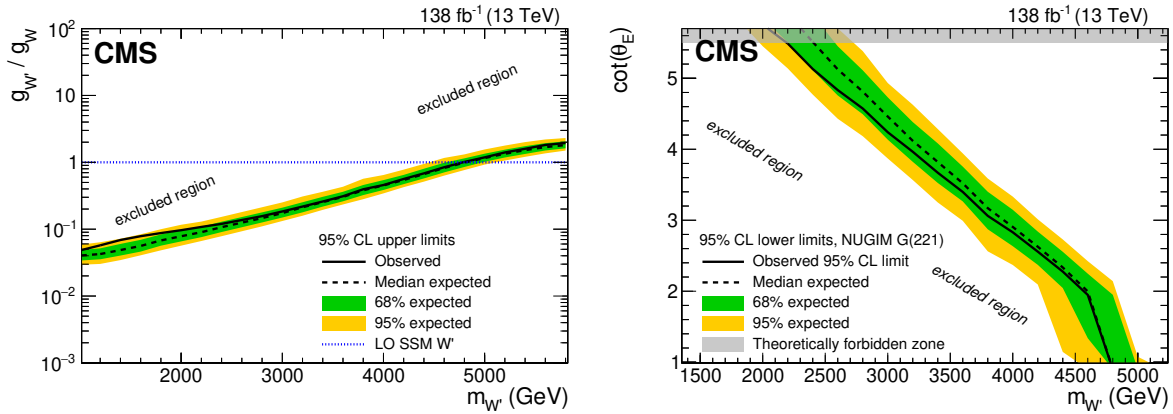


Figure 7: Bayesian upper exclusion limits on the ratio $g_{W'}/g_W$ for an SSM-like W' boson are shown on the left. The unity coupling ratio (blue dotted curve) corresponds to the SSM common benchmark. The lower exclusion limits on the NUGIM $G(221)$ mixing angle $\cot\theta_E$ are shown on the right as a function of the W' boson mass. The theoretically excluded region is shaded in grey. The 68 and 95% quantiles of the limits are represented by the green and yellow bands, respectively.

towards lower masses because of the τ lepton decay. We exclude this model for threshold masses of up to 6.6 TeV, as shown in Fig. 8.

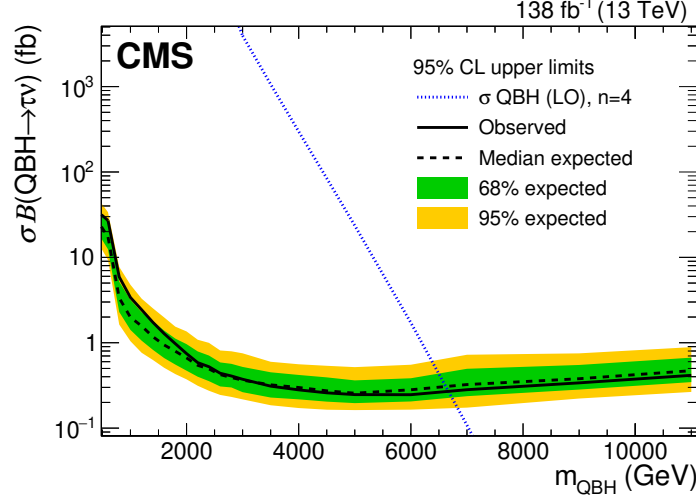


Figure 8: Bayesian upper exclusion limits at 95% CL on the product of the production cross section and branching fraction of a QBH in an associated τ lepton and neutrino final state. The 68 and 95% quantiles of the limits are represented by the green and yellow bands, respectively. Masses of up to 6.6 TeV are excluded at 95% CL. The limit is given by the intersection of the observed (solid) limit and the theoretical cross section (blue dotted curve).

8.5 Leptoquark limits

We also place upper limits on the cross section of the process $pp \rightarrow \tau\nu$ mediated by LQ exchange in the t -channel. These limits are presented in Fig. 9. Masses up to 205 / 515 / 5900 GeV are excluded for the best-fit LH / best-fit LH+RH / democratic scenarios.

Figure 10 shows lower limits on the LQ mass for varying LQ couplings g_U to SM fermions. The limits are compared to the values of g_U that are obtained in the fit [44] to the flavor anomaly data in the two best fit scenarios for only LH couplings (left) and LH+RH couplings (right).

In both best-fit scenarios, we exclude a significant part of the LQ parameter space. LQ masses up to 10 TeV and couplings g_U of up to 8 are probed. In comparison to the values of g_U preferred to explain the flavor anomalies, this analysis has direct sensitivity to LQs, as predicted by the model of Ref. [44]. The exclusion limits at 95% CL just reach the preferred phase space at large values of m_{LQ} and g_U . In addition to exclusion limits probing the couplings as predicted in the best fit scenarios, limits that are not motivated by the b anomalies are presented as well. They are obtained using the benchmark of democratic LH couplings. The lower limits on m_{LQ} are shown for varying values of g_U in Fig. 10 (lower) for this scenario.

8.6 The EFT limits

In the EFT description, we calculate limits in terms of the three Wilson coefficients used in this model. For each available signal hypothesis, the event yield is scaled with the square of the corresponding Wilson coefficient to probe a range between 0.05 and 2.0 for each coupling type, and the direct limit on the maximum allowed coupling value is extracted. The results are shown in Fig. 11. The excluded values are 0.32 (0.27) / 0.51 (0.41) / 0.27 (0.22) observed (expected) for ϵ_L / ϵ_{SL} / ϵ_T , respectively. The small difference originates from the shape of the signals, for which the m_T -region between 1.0 and 1.5 TeV has the most impact on the exclusion limits [57].

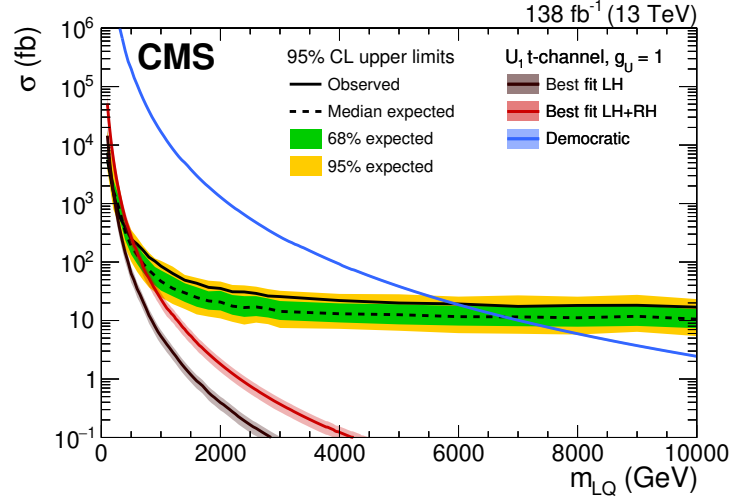


Figure 9: Bayesian upper limits at 95% CL on the cross section of the process $pp \rightarrow \tau\nu$ mediated by LQ exchange in the t -channel. The inner (green) band and the outer (yellow) band indicate the regions containing 68 and 95%, respectively, of the distribution of limits expected under the background-only hypothesis. The predicted LQ cross section at LO in the three coupling benchmark scenarios is depicted in different colors for $g_U = 1$. The uncertainty bands correspond to the sum in quadrature of PDF and scale variations. The first benchmark scenario considers only couplings to LH SM fermions (i.e. $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$) and is referred to as “best fit LH”. The second benchmark, referred to as “best fit LH+RH”, considers $|\beta_R^{b\tau}| = 1$ and all other $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$. In the third “democratic” benchmark, equal couplings only to LH fermions are assumed, i.e., $|\beta_L^{ij}| = 1$ and $\beta_R^{ij} = 0$ for all i and j .

8.7 Overview of the exclusion limits

A summary of mass exclusion limits calculated at 95% CL is shown in Table 1. The limits presented in this analysis are the most stringent to date for all the models considered.

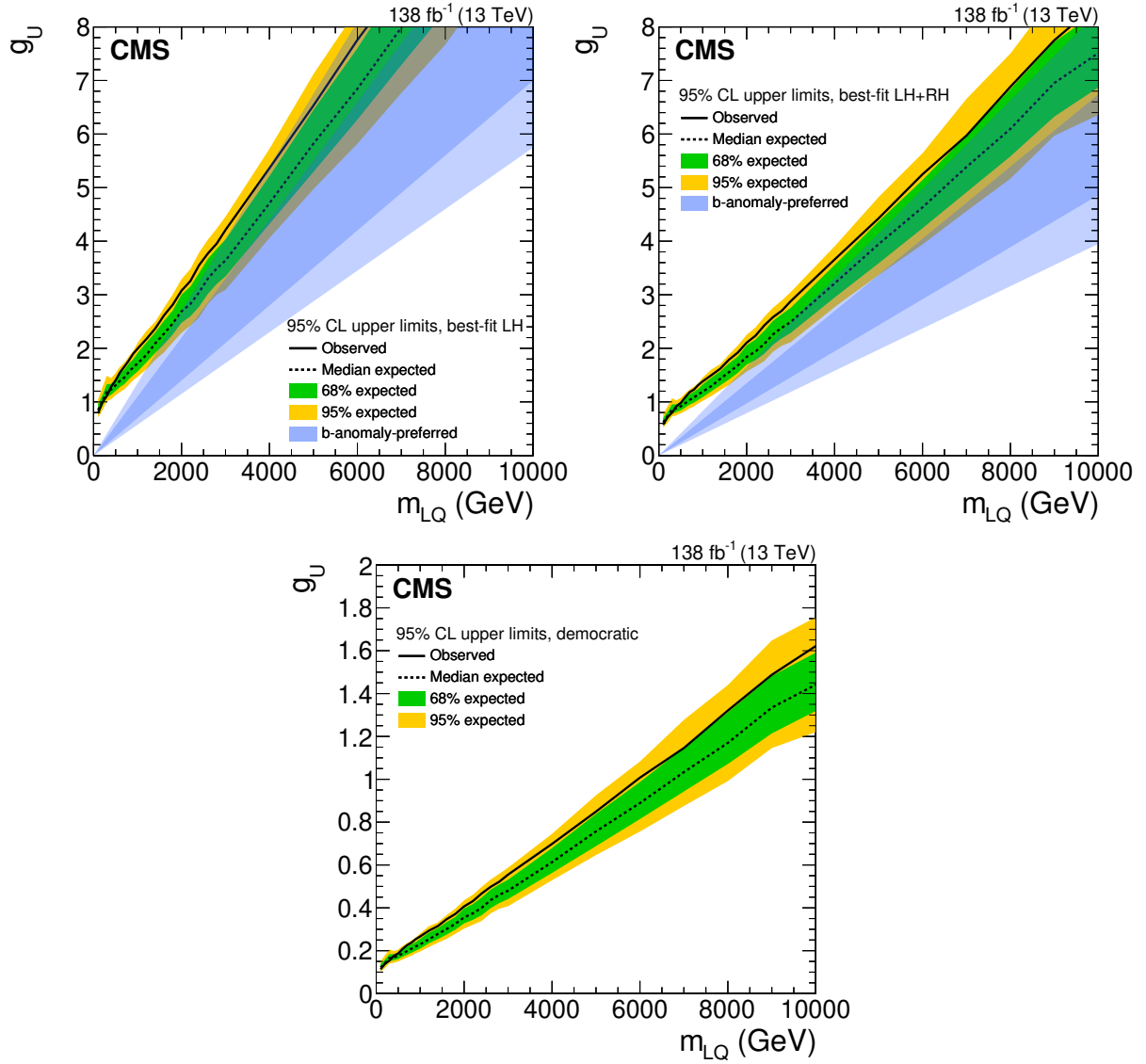


Figure 10: Expected and observed upper limits of the LQ coupling g_U as a function of the mass in the LH (left), LH+RH (right), and democratic (lower) scenarios. The blue band shows the 68 and 95% regions of g_U preferred by the fit to the b anomalies data [44].

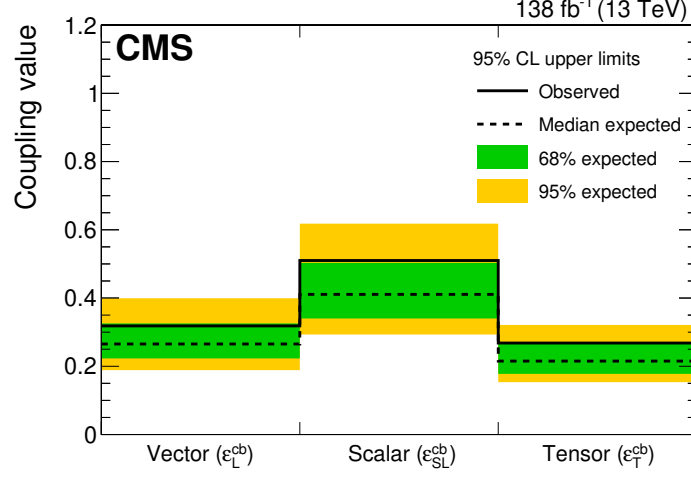


Figure 11: Bayesian upper exclusion limits at 95% CL on each of the Wilson coefficients described by the EFT model in Section 3 based on 2016–2018 data. The three different coupling types represent a LH vector coupling (ϵ_L^{cb}), scalar-tensor-like coupling ($\epsilon_{\text{SL}}^{\text{cb}}$), and tensor-like coupling (ϵ_T^{cb}). The 68 and 95% quantiles of the limits are represented by the green and yellow bands, respectively.

Table 1: Summary of 95% CL exclusion limits (expected and observed) derived from 2016–2018 data, for the physics models studied in this analysis: sequential standard model (SSM), nonuniversal gauge interaction model (NUGIM), a quantum black hole (QBH) interpretation, t -channel leptoquark (LQ), and effective field interpretation (EFT).

Model	Parameter	Expected Limit	Observed Limit
SSM $W' \rightarrow \tau + \nu$	$m_{W'}$	4.8 TeV	4.8 TeV
NUGIM $\cot(\theta_E)=1$	$m_{W'}$	4.8 TeV	4.8 TeV
NUGIM $\cot(\theta_E)=5.5$	$m_{W'}$	2.4 TeV	2.2 TeV
QBH	m_{QBH}	6.6 TeV	6.6 TeV
LQ democratic, $g_U=1.0$	m_{LQ}	6.7 TeV	5.9 TeV
LQ best-fit LH, $g_U=1.0$	m_{LQ}	145 GeV	205 GeV
LQ best-fit LH, $g_U=2.5$	m_{LQ}	1.8 TeV	1.5 TeV
LQ best-fit LH+RH, $g_U=1.0$	m_{LQ}	645 GeV	515 GeV
LQ best-fit LH+RH, $g_U=2.5$	m_{LQ}	3.0 TeV	2.5 TeV
EFT	ϵ_L^{cb}	0.27	0.32
EFT	$\epsilon_{\text{SL}}^{\text{cb}}$	0.41	0.51
EFT	ϵ_T^{cb}	0.22	0.27

9 Summary

A search for new resonant phenomena in the transverse mass distribution of a hadronically decaying τ lepton and missing transverse momentum final state has been performed. The analysis uses 2016–2018 data collected with the CMS detector in proton-proton collisions with $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV at the LHC, corresponding to an integrated luminosity of 138 fb^{-1} . The newly developed DEEPTAU algorithm is used to identify τ lepton candidates and to separate signal from background. Background from jets being misidentified as hadronically decaying τ lepton candidates is derived from data.

No significant deviation from the standard model expectations is observed. Upper limits are set at 95% confidence level on the product of the production cross section and branching fraction $\sigma\mathcal{B}$ of a new resonance gauge boson (W') decaying to a τ lepton and a neutrino. Lower limits are derived on the mass of a W' boson in the sequential standard model and on the mass of a quantum black hole. In the case of the generalized coupling model, upper limits on $\sigma\mathcal{B}$ are translated into upper exclusion limits on the ratio of the couplings of the W' boson to that of the standard model W boson, $g_{W'}/g_W$. Similarly, limits are obtained on the mixing angle θ_E for the nonuniversal gauge interaction model and on the Wilson coefficients for an effective field theory model.

The process of t -channel leptoquark (LQ) exchange is targeted explicitly in this analysis. For the first time, upper limits are placed on the cross section of the $pp \rightarrow \tau\nu$ process mediated by t -channel LQ exchange. Three benchmark coupling scenarios are tested that correspond to the best fits to the flavor anomaly data and to a generic democratic flavor structure. Significant portions of the LQ parameter space are excluded by placing upper limits on the LQ coupling g_U as a function of the LQ mass, including parts of the region preferred by a vector LQ explanation of the anomalies. Additionally, a model-independent limit is provided. The limits obtained for the various interpretations presented are the most stringent to date.

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A The CMS Collaboration

Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia

A. Tumasyan¹ 

Institut für Hochenergiephysik, Vienna, Austria

W. Adam , J.W. Andrejkovic , T. Bergauer , S. Chatterjee , K. Damanakis , M. Dragicevic , A. Escalante Del Valle , P.S. Hussain , M. Jeitler² , N. Krammer , L. Lechner , D. Liko , I. Mikulec , P. Paulitsch , F.M. Pitters , J. Schieck² , R. Schöffbeck , D. Schwarz , M. Sonawane , S. Templ , W. Waltenberger , C.-E. Wulz² 

Universiteit Antwerpen, Antwerpen, Belgium

M.R. Darwish³ , T. Janssen , T. Kello⁴ , H. Rejeb Sfar , P. Van Mechelen 

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium

E.S. Bols , J. D'Hondt , A. De Moor , M. Delcourt , H. El Faham , S. Lowette , S. Moortgat , A. Morton , D. Müller , A.R. Sahasransu , S. Tavernier , W. Van Doninck , D. Vannerom 

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium

B. Clerbaux , G. De Lentdecker , L. Favart , D. Hohov , J. Jaramillo , K. Lee , M. Mahdavihorrami , I. Makarenko , A. Malara , S. Paredes , L. Pétré , N. Postiau , L. Thomas , M. Vanden Bemden , C. Vander Velde , P. Vanlaer 

Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

D. Dobur , J. Knolle , L. Lambrecht , G. Mestdach , C. Rendón , A. Samalan , K. Skovpen , M. Tytgat , N. Van Den Bossche , B. Vermassen , L. Wezenbeek 

Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

A. Benecke , G. Bruno , F. Bury , C. Caputo , P. David , C. Delaere , I.S. Donertas , A. Giammanco , K. Jaffel , Sa. Jain , V. Lemaitre , K. Mondal , A. Taliencio , T.T. Tran , P. Vischia , S. Wertz 

Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

G.A. Alves , E. Coelho , C. Hensel , A. Moraes , P. Rebello Teles 

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. Chinellato⁵ , E.M. Da Costa , G.G. Da Silveira⁶ , D. De Jesus Damiao , V. Dos Santos Sousa , S. Fonseca De Souza , J. Martins⁷ , C. Mora Herrera , K. Mota Amarilo , L. Mundim , H. Nogima , A. Santoro , S.M. Silva Do Amaral , A. Sznajder , M. Thiel , A. Vilela Pereira 

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Universidade Federal do ABC, São Paulo, Brazil

C.A. Bernardes⁶ , L. Calligaris , T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei , E.M. Gregores , P.G. Mercadante , S.F. Novaes , 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. Rodozov , M. Shopova , G. Sultanov 

University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria

A. Dimitrov , T. Ivanov , L. Litov , B. Pavlov , P. Petkov , A. Petrov , E. Shumka 

Instituto De Alta Investigación, Universidad de Tarapacá, Casilla 7 D, Arica, Chile

S. Thakur 

Beihang University, Beijing, China

T. Cheng , T. Javaid⁸ , M. Mittal , L. Yuan 

Department of Physics, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

M. Ahmad , G. Bauer⁹, Z. Hu , S. Lezki , K. Yi^{9,10} 

Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China

G.M. Chen⁸ , H.S. Chen⁸ , M. Chen⁸ , F. Iemmi , C.H. Jiang, A. Kapoor , H. Liao , Z.-A. Liu¹¹ , V. Milosevic , F. Monti , R. Sharma , J. Tao , J. Thomas-Wilsker , J. Wang , H. Zhang , J. Zhao 

State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China

A. Agapitos , Y. An , Y. Ban , A. Levin , C. Li , Q. Li , X. Lyu, Y. Mao, S.J. Qian , X. Sun , D. Wang , J. Xiao , H. Yang

Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China

M. Lu , Z. You 

University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, China

N. Lu 

Institute of Modern Physics and Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Ion-beam Application (MOE) - Fudan University, Shanghai, China

X. Gao⁴ , D. Leggat, H. Okawa , Y. Zhang 

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 

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 , I. Puljak 

University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia

Z. Antunovic, M. Kovac , T. Sculac 

Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia

V. Brigljevic , B.K. Chitroda , D. Ferencek , S. Mishra , M. Roguljic , A. Starodumov¹² , T. Susa 

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

A. Attikis , K. Christoforou , M. Kolosova , S. Konstantinou , J. Mousa , C. Nicolaou, F. Ptochos , P.A. Razis , H. Rykaczewski, H. Saka , A. Stepenov 

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

M. Finger¹² , M. Finger Jr.¹² , 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

H. Abdalla¹³ , Y. Assran^{14,15}

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

S. Bhowmik , R.K. Dewanjee , 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

P. Eerola , H. Kirschenmann , K. Osterberg , M. Voutilainen 

Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland

S. Bharthuar , E. Brücken , F. Garcia , J. Havukainen , M.S. Kim , R. Kinnunen, T. Lampén , K. Lassila-Perini , S. Lehti , T. Lindén , M. Lotti, L. Martikainen , M. Myllymäki , J. Ott , M.m. Rantanen , H. Siikonen , E. Tuominen , J. Tuominiemi 

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland

P. Luukka , H. Petrow , T. Tuuva

IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France

C. Amendola , 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-Navarro¹⁶ , P. Simkina , M. Titov 

Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, Ecole Polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, Palaiseau, France

C. Baldenegro Barrera , F. Beaudette , A. Buchot Perraguin , P. Busson , A. Cappati , C. Charlot , F. Damas , O. Davignon , B. Diab , G. Falmagne , B.A. Fontana Santos Alves , S. Ghosh , R. Granier de Cassagnac , A. Hakimi , B. Harikrishnan , G. Liu , J. Motta , M. Nguyen , C. Ochando , L. Portales , R. Salerno , U. Sarkar , J.B. Sauvan , Y. Sirois , A. Tarabini , E. Vernazza , A. Zabi , A. Zghiche 

Université de Strasbourg, CNRS, IPHC UMR 7178, Strasbourg, France

J.-L. Agram¹⁷ , J. Andrea , D. Apparu , D. Bloch , G. Bourgatte , J.-M. Brom , E.C. Chabert , C. Collard , D. Darej, U. Goerlach , C. Grimault, A.-C. Le Bihan , P. Van Hove 

Institut de Physique des 2 Infinis de Lyon (IP2I), Villeurbanne, France

S. Beauceron , B. Blancon , G. Boudoul , A. Carle, N. Chanon , J. Choi , D. Contardo , P. Depasse , C. Dozen¹⁸ , H. El Mamouni, J. Fay , S. Gascon , M. Gouzevitch , G. Grenier , B. Ille , I.B. Laktineh, M. Lethuillier , L. Mirabito, S. Perries, L. Torterotot , M. Vander Donckt , P. Verdier , S. Viret

Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia

A. Khvedelidze¹² , I. Lomidze , Z. Tsamalaidze¹² 

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 , M. Erdmann , P. Fackeldey , D. Fasanella , B. Fischer , T. Hebbeker , K. Hoepfner , F. Ivone , M.y. Lee , L. Mastrolorenzo , M. Merschmeyer , A. Meyer , S. Mondal , S. Mukherjee , D. Noll , A. Novak , F. Nowotny , A. Pozdnyakov , Y. Rath , W. Redjeb , H. Reithler , A. Schmidt , S.C. Schuler , A. Sharma , A. Stein , F. Torres Da Silva De Araujo¹⁹ , L. Vigilante , S. Wiedenbeck , S. Zaleski 

RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany

C. Dziwok , G. Flügge , W. Haj Ahmad²⁰ , O. Hlushchenko , T. Kress , A. Nowack , O. Pooth , A. Stahl , T. Ziemons , A. Zotz 

Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany

H. Aarup Petersen , M. Aldaya Martin , P. Asmuss , S. Baxter , M. Bayatmakou , O. Behnke , A. Bermúdez Martínez , S. Bhattacharya , A.A. Bin Anuar , F. Blekman²¹ , K. Borras²² , D. Brunner , A. Campbell , A. Cardini , C. Cheng , F. Colombina , S. Consuegra Rodríguez , G. Correia Silva , M. De Silva , L. Didukh , G. Eckerlin , D. Eckstein , L.I. Estevez Banos , O. Filatov , E. Gallo²¹ , A. Geiser , A. Giraldi , G. Greau , A. Grohsjean , V. Guglielmi , M. Guthoff , A. Jafari²³ , N.Z. Jomhari , B. Kaech , M. Kasemann , H. Kaveh , C. Kleinwort , R. Kogler , M. Komm , D. Krücker , W. Lange , D. Leyva Pernia , K. Lipka²⁴ , W. Lohmann²⁵ , R. Mankel , I.-A. Melzer-Pellmann , M. Mendizabal Morentin , J. Metwally , A.B. Meyer , G. Milella , M. Mormile , A. Mussgiller , A. Nürnberg , Y. Otariid , D. Pérez Adán , A. Raspereza , B. Ribeiro Lopes , J. Rübenach , A. Saggio , A. Saibel , M. Savitskyi , M. Scham^{26,22} , V. Scheurer , S. Schnake²² , P. Schütze , C. Schwanenberger²¹ , M. Shchedrolosiev , R.E. Sosa Ricardo , D. Stafford , N. Tonon[†] , M. Van De Klundert , F. Vazzoler , A. Ventura Barroso , R. Walsh , D. Walter , Q. Wang , Y. Wen , K. Wichmann , L. Wiens²² , C. Wissing , S. Wuchterl , Y. Yang , A. Zimmermann Castro Santos 

University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

A. Albrecht , S. Albrecht , M. Antonello , S. Bein , L. Benato , M. Bonanomi , P. Connor , K. De Leo , M. Eich , K. El Morabit , F. Feindt , A. Fröhlich , C. Garbers , E. Garutti , M. Hajheidari , J. Haller , A. Hinzmann , H.R. Jabusch , G. Kasieczka , P. Keicher , R. Klanner , W. Korcar , 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 , M. Rieger , O. Rieger , D. Savoia , 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 , R. Caspart , T. Chwalek , A. Dierlamm , A. Droll , N. Faltermann , M. Giffels , J.O. Gosewisch , A. Gottmann , F. Hartmann²⁷ , M. Horzela , U. Husemann , M. Klute , R. Koppenhöfer , M. Link , A. Lintuluoto , S. Maier , S. Mitra , Th. Müller , M. Neukum , M. Oh , G. Quast , K. Rabbertz , J. Rauser , M. Schnepf , I. Shvetsov , H.J. Simonis , N. Trevisani , R. Ulrich , J. van der Linden , R.F. Von Cube , M. Wassmer , S. Wieland , R. Wolf , S. Wozniowski , S. Wunsch , X. Zuo 

Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece

G. Anagnostou , P. Assiouras , G. Daskalakis , A. Kyriakis , A. Stakia 

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

M. Diamantopoulou, D. Karasavvas, P. Kontaxakis , A. Manousakis-Katsikakis , A. Panagiotou, I. Papavergou , N. Saoulidou , K. Theofilatos , E. Tziaferi , K. Vellidis , I. Zisopoulos 

National Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece

G. Bakas , T. Chatzistavrou, K. Kousouris , I. Papakrivopoulos , G. Tsipolitis, A. Zacharopoulou

University of Ioánnina, Ioánnina, Greece

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

MTA-ELTE Lendület CMS Particle and Nuclear Physics Group, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

M. Csanád , K. Farkas , M.M.A. Gadallah²⁸ , S. Lökös²⁹ , P. Major , K. Mandal , G. Pásztor , A.J. Rádli³⁰ , O. Surányi , G.I. Veres 

Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary

M. Bartók³¹ , G. Bencze, C. Hajdu , D. Horvath^{32,33} , F. Sikler , V. Veszpremi 

Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary

N. Beni , S. Czellar, J. Karancsi³¹ , J. Molnar, Z. Szillasi, D. Teyssier 

Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

P. Raics, B. Ujvari³⁴ 

Karoly Robert Campus, MATE Institute of Technology, Gyongyos, Hungary

T. Csorgo³⁰ , F. Nemes³⁰ , T. Novak 

Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

J. Babbar , S. Bansal , S.B. Beri, V. Bhatnagar , G. Chaudhary , S. Chauhan , N. Dhingra³⁵ , R. Gupta, A. Kaur , A. Kaur , H. Kaur , M. Kaur , S. Kumar , P. Kumari , M. Meena , K. Sandeep , T. Sheokand, J.B. Singh³⁶ , A. Singla , A. K. Viridi 

University of Delhi, Delhi, India

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

Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, HBNI, Kolkata, India

S. Baradia , S. Barman³⁷ , S. Bhattacharya , D. Bhowmik, S. Dutta , S. Dutta, B. Gomber³⁸ , M. Maity³⁷, P. Palit , G. Saha , B. Sahu , S. Sarkar

Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Madras, India

P.K. Behera , S.C. Behera , S. Chatterjee , P. Kalbhor , J.R. Komaragiri³⁹ , D. Kumar³⁹ , A. Muhammad , L. Panwar³⁹ , R. Pradhan , P.R. Pujahari , A. Sharma , A.K. Sikdar , P.C. Tiwari³⁹ , S. Verma 

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, India

K. Naskar⁴⁰ 

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-A, Mumbai, India

T. Aziz, I. Das , S. Dugad, M. Kumar , G.B. Mohanty , P. Suryadevara

Tata Institute of Fundamental Research-B, Mumbai, India

S. Banerjee , R. Chudasama , M. Guchait , S. Karmakar , S. Kumar , G. Majumder , K. Mazumdar , S. Mukherjee , A. Thachayath

National Institute of Science Education and Research, An OCC of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

S. Bahinipati⁴¹ , A.K. Das , C. Kar , P. Mal , T. Mishra , V.K. Muraleedharan Nair Bindhu⁴² , A. Nayak⁴² , P. Saha , S.K. Swain , D. Vats⁴²

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, India

A. Alpana , S. Dube , B. Kansal , A. Laha , S. Pandey , A. Rastogi , S. Sharma 

Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran

H. Bakhshiansohi^{43,44} , E. Khazaie⁴⁴ , M. Zeinali⁴⁵ 

Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences (IPM), Tehran, Iran

S. Chenarani⁴⁶ , 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,47} , C. Aruta^{a,b} , A. Colaleo^a , D. Creanza^{a,c} , N. De Filippis^{a,c} , M. De Palma^{a,b} , A. Di Florio^{a,b} , W. Elmetenawee^{a,b} , F. Errico^{a,b} , L. Fiore^a , G. Iaselli^{a,c} , 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 , D. Ramos^a , A. Ranieri^a , G. Selvaggi^{a,b} , L. Silvestris^a , F.M. Simone^{a,b} , Ü. Sözbilir^a , A. Stamerra^a , R. Venditti^a , P. Verwilligen^a

INFN Sezione di Bologna^a, Università di Bologna^b, Bologna, Italy

G. Abbiendi^a , C. Battilana^{a,b} , D. Bonacorsi^{a,b} , L. Borghonovi^a , L. Brigliadori^a , R. Campanini^{a,b} , P. Capiluppi^{a,b} , A. Castro^{a,b} , F.R. Cavallo^a , M. Cuffiani^{a,b} , G.M. Dallavalle^a , T. Diotallevi^{a,b} , F. Fabbri^a , A. Fanfani^{a,b} , P. Giacomelli^a , L. Giommi^{a,b} , C. Grandi^a , L. Guiducci^{a,b} , S. Lo Meo^{a,48} , 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,49} , A. Di Mattia^a , R. Potenza^{a,b} , A. Tricomi^{a,b,49} , C. Tuve^{a,b} 

INFN Sezione di Firenze^a, Università di Firenze^b, Firenze, Italy

G. Barbagli^a , G. Bardelli^{a,b} , B. Camaiani^{a,b} , A. Cassese^a , R. Ceccarelli^{a,b} , V. Ciulli^{a,b} , C. Civinini^a , R. D'Alessandro^{a,b} , E. Focardi^{a,b} , G. Latino^{a,b} , P. Lenzi^{a,b} , M. Lizzo^{a,b} , M. Meschini^a , S. Paoletti^a , R. Seidita^{a,b} , G. Sguazzoni^a , L. Viliani^a

INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy

L. Benussi , S. Bianco , S. Meola⁵⁰ , D. Piccolo 

INFN Sezione di Genova^a, Università di Genova^b, Genova, Italy

M. Bozzo^{a,b} , 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 , F. Brivio^{a,b} , F. Cetorelli^{a,b} , F. De Guio^{a,b} , M.E. Dinardo^{a,b} , P. Dini^a , S. Gennai^a , A. Ghezzi^{a,b} , P. Govoni^{a,b} , L. Guzzi^{a,b}

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} , N. Redaelli^a , T. Tabarelli de Fatis^{a,b} , D. Zuolo^{a,b} 

INFN Sezione di Napoli^a, Università di Napoli 'Federico II'^b, Napoli, Italy; Università della Basilicata^c, Potenza, Italy; Università G. Marconi^d, Roma, Italy

S. Buontempo^a , F. Carnevali^{a,b}, N. Cavallo^{a,c} , A. De Iorio^{a,b} , F. Fabozzi^{a,c} , A.O.M. Iorio^{a,b} , L. Lista^{a,b,51} , P. Paolucci^{a,27} , B. Rossi^a , C. Sciacca^{a,b} 

INFN Sezione di Padova^a, Università di Padova^b, Padova, Italy; Università di Trento^c, Trento, Italy

P. Azzi^a , N. Bacchetta^{a,52} , D. Bisello^{a,b} , P. Bortignon^a , A. Bragagnolo^{a,b} , R. Carlin^{a,b} , T. Dorigo^a , F. Gasparini^{a,b} , U. Gasparini^{a,b} , A. Gozzelino^a , G. Grosso^a, L. Layer^{a,53}, E. Lusiani^a , M. Margoni^{a,b} , A.T. Meneguzzo^{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} , H. Yarar^{a,b}, M. Zanetti^{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,54} , C. Aimè^{a,b} , A. Braghieri^a , S. Calzaferri^{a,b} , D. Fiorina^{a,b} , P. Montagna^{a,b} , V. Re^a , C. Riccardi^{a,b} , P. Salvini^a , I. Vai^a , P. Vitulo^{a,b} 

INFN Sezione di Perugia^a, Università di Perugia^b, Perugia, Italy

P. Asenov^{a,55} , 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,55} , A. Piccinelli^{a,b} , M. Presilla^{a,b} , 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. Azzurri^a , G. Bagliesi^a , V. Bertacchi^{a,c} , R. Bhattacharya^a , L. Bianchini^{a,b} , T. Boccali^a , E. Bossini^{a,b} , D. Bruschini^{a,c} , R. Castaldi^a , M.A. Ciocci^{a,b} , V. D'Amante^{a,d} , R. Dell'Orso^a , M.R. Di Domenico^{a,d} , S. Donato^a , A. Giassi^a , F. Ligabue^{a,c} , G. Mandorli^{a,c} , D. Matos Figueiredo^a , A. Messineo^{a,b} , M. Musich^{a,b} , F. Palla^a , S. Parolia^a , G. Ramirez-Sanchez^{a,c} , A. Rizzi^{a,b} , G. Rolandi^{a,c} , S. Roy Chowdhury^a , T. Sarkar^a , A. Scribano^a , N. Shafiei^{a,b} , P. Spagnolo^a , R. Tenchini^a , G. Tonelli^{a,b} , N. Turini^{a,d} , A. Venturi^a , P.G. Verdini^a 

INFN Sezione di Roma^a, Sapienza Università di Roma^b, Roma, Italy

P. Barria^a , M. Campana^{a,b} , F. Cavallari^a , D. Del Re^{a,b} , E. Di Marco^a , M. Diemoz^a , E. Longo^{a,b} , P. Meridiani^a , 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 , R. Tramontano^{a,b} 

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 , N. Cartiglia^a , M. Costa^{a,b} , R. Covarelli^{a,b} , N. Demaria^a , M. Grippio^{a,b} , B. Kiani^{a,b} , F. Legger^a , C. Mariotti^a , S. Maselli^a , A. Mecca^{a,b} , E. Migliore^{a,b} , E. Monteil^{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} , K. Shchelina^a , F. Siviero^{a,b} , V. Sola^a , A. Solano^{a,b} , D. Soldi^{a,b} , A. Staiano^a , M. Tornago^{a,b} , D. Trocino^a , G. Umoret^{a,b} , A. Vagnerini^{a,b} 

INFN Sezione di Trieste^a, Università di Trieste^b, Trieste, Italy

S. Belforte^a , V. Candelise^{a,b} , M. Casarsa^a , F. Cossutti^a , A. Da Rold^{a,b} ,
G. Della Ricca^{a,b} , G. Sorrentino^{a,b} 

Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea

S. Dogra , C. Huh , B. Kim , D.H. Kim , G.N. Kim , J. Kim , J. Lee , S.W. Lee ,
C.S. Moon , Y.D. Oh , S.I. Pak , M.S. Ryu , S. Sekmen , Y.C. Yang 

Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Korea

H. Kim , D.H. Moon 

Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea

E. Asilar , T.J. Kim , J. Park 

Korea University, Seoul, Korea

S. Choi , S. Han , B. Hong , K. Lee , K.S. Lee , J. Lim , J. Park , S.K. Park , J. Yoo 

Kyung Hee University, Department of Physics, Seoul, Korea

J. Goh 

Sejong University, Seoul, Korea

H. S. Kim , Y. Kim , S. Lee 

Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea

J. Almond , J.H. Bhyun , J. Choi , S. Jeon , J. Kim , J.S. Kim , S. Ko , H. Kwon , H. Lee ,
S. 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 , D. Kim , S. Kim , B. Ko , J.S.H. Lee , Y. Lee , J.A. Merlin ,
I.C. Park , Y. Roh , D. Song , I.J. Watson , S. Yang 

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 , Y. Lee , I. Yu 

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

T. Beyrouthy , Y. Maghrbi 

Riga Technical University, Riga, Latvia

K. Dreimanis , G. Pikurs , A. Potrebko , M. Seidel , V. Veckalns 

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

M. Ambrozaitis , A. Carvalho Antunes De Oliveira , A. Juodagalvis , A. Rinkevicius ,
G. Tamulaitis 

National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

N. Bin Norjoharuddeen , S.Y. Hoh⁵⁶ , I. Yusuff⁵⁶ , 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 , I. Heredia-De La Cruz⁵⁷ , R. Lopez-Fernandez 

C.A. Mondragon Herrera, D.A. Perez Navarro , A. Sánchez Hernández 

Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico

C. Oropeza Barrera , F. Vazquez Valencia 

Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Puebla, Mexico

I. Pedraza , H.A. Salazar Ibarguen , C. Uribe Estrada 

University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro

I. Bubanja, J. Mijuskovic⁵⁸ , N. Raicevic 

National Centre for Physics, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

A. Ahmad , M.I. Asghar, A. Awais , M.I.M. Awan, M. Gul , H.R. Hoorani ,
W.A. Khan , M. Shoaib , M. Waqas 

AGH University of Science and Technology 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 

Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas, Lisboa, Portugal

M. Araujo , P. Bargassa , D. Bastos , A. Boletti , P. Faccioli , M. Gallinaro , J. Hollar ,
N. Leonardo , T. Niknejad , M. Pisano , J. Seixas , J. Varela 

VINCA Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

P. Adzic⁵⁹ , M. Dordevic , P. Milenovic , J. Milosevic 

Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain

M. Aguilar-Benitez, J. Alcaraz Maestre , A. Álvarez Fernández , M. Barrio Luna, Cristina F. Bedoya , C.A. Carrillo Montoya , M. Cepeda , M. Cerrada , N. Colino ,
B. De La Cruz , A. Delgado Peris , 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 , J. León Holgado , D. Moran , C. Perez Dengra , A. Pérez-Calero Yzquierdo ,
J. Puerta Pelayo , I. Redondo , D.D. Redondo Ferrero , L. Romero, S. Sánchez Navas ,
J. Sastre , 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 , E. Palencia Cortezon , C. Ramón Álvarez ,
V. Rodríguez Bouza , A. Soto Rodríguez , A. Trapote , C. Vico Villalba 

Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC-Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain

J.A. Brochero Cifuentes , I.J. Cabrillo , A. Calderon , J. Duarte Campderros , M. Fernandez , C. Fernandez Madrazo , A. García Alonso, G. Gomez , C. Lasasa García ,
C. Martinez Rivero , P. Martinez Ruiz del Arbol , F. Matorras , P. Matorras Cuevas 

J. Piedra Gomez , C. Prieels, A. Ruiz-Jimeno , L. Scodellaro , I. Vila , J.M. Vizan Garcia 

University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

M.K. Jayananda , B. Kailasapathy⁶⁰ , D.U.J. Sonnadara , D.D.C. Wickramarathna 

University of Ruhuna, Department of Physics, Matara, Sri Lanka

W.G.D. Dharmaratna , K. Liyanage , N. Perera , N. Wickramage 

CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland

D. Abbaneo , J. Alimena , E. Auffray , G. Auzinger , J. Baechler, P. Baillon[†], D. Barney , J. Bendavid , M. Bianco , B. Bilin , A. Bocci , E. Brondolin , C. Caillol , T. Camporesi , G. Cerminara , N. Chernyavskaya , S.S. Chhibra , S. Choudhury, M. Cipriani , L. Cristella , D. d'Enterria , A. Dabrowski , A. David , A. De Roeck , M.M. Defranchis , M. Deile , M. Dobson , M. Dünser , N. Dupont, F. Fallavollita⁶¹, A. Florent , L. Forthomme , G. Franzoni , W. Funk , S. Ghosh , S. Giani, D. Gigi, K. Gill , F. Glege , L. Gouskos , E. Govorkova , M. Haranko , J. Hegeman , V. Innocente , T. James , P. Janot , J. Kaspar , J. Kieseler , N. Kratochwil , S. Laurila , P. Lecoq , E. Leutgeb , C. Lourenço , B. Maier , L. Malgeri , M. Mannelli , A.C. Marini , F. Meijers , S. Mersi , E. Meschi , F. Moortgat , M. Mulders , S. Orfanelli, L. Orsini, F. Pantaleo , E. Perez, M. Peruzzi , A. Petrilli , G. Petrucciani , A. Pfeiffer , M. Pierini , D. Piparo , M. Pitt , H. Qu , T. Quast, D. Rabady , A. Racz, G. Reales Gutiérrez, M. Rovere , H. Sakulin , J. Salfeld-Nebgen , S. Scarfi , M. Selvaggi , A. Sharma , P. Silva , P. Sphicas⁶² , A.G. Stahl Leiton , S. Summers , K. Tatar , V.R. Tavolaro , D. Treille , P. Tropea , A. Tsirou, J. Wanczyk⁶³ , K.A. Wozniak , W.D. Zeuner

Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland

L. Caminada⁶⁴ , A. Ebrahimi , W. Erdmann , R. Horisberger , Q. Ingram , H.C. Kaestli , D. Kotlinski , C. Lange , M. Missiroli⁶⁴ , L. Noehte⁶⁴ , T. Rohe 

ETH Zurich - Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics (IPA), Zurich, Switzerland

T.K. Aarrestad , K. Androsov⁶³ , M. Backhaus , P. Berger, A. Calandri , K. Datta , A. De Cosa , G. Dissertori , M. Dittmar, M. Donegà , F. Eble , M. Galli , K. Gedia , F. Glessgen , T.A. Gómez Espinosa , C. Grab , D. Hits , W. Lustermann , A.-M. Lyon , R.A. Manzoni , L. Marchese , C. Martin Perez , A. Mascellani⁶³ , F. Nessi-Tedaldi , J. Niedziela , F. Pauss , V. Perovic , S. Pigazzini , M.G. Ratti , M. Reichmann , C. Reissel , T. Reitenspiess , B. Ristic , F. Riti , D. Ruini, D.A. Sanz Becerra , J. Steggemann⁶³ , D. Valsecchi²⁷ , R. Wallny 

Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland

C. AMSLER⁶⁵ , P. Bärtschi , C. Botta , D. Brzhechko, M.F. Canelli , K. Cormier , A. De Wit , R. Del Burgo, J.K. Heikkilä , M. Huwiler , W. Jin , A. Jofrehei , B. Kilminster , S. Leontsinis , S.P. Liechti , A. Macchiolo , P. Meiring , V.M. Mikuni , U. Molinatti , I. Neutelings , A. Reimers , P. Robmann, S. Sanchez Cruz , K. Schweiger , M. Senger , Y. Takahashi 

National Central University, Chung-Li, Taiwan

C. Adloff⁶⁶, C.M. Kuo, W. Lin, P.K. Rout , S.S. Yu 

National Taiwan University (NTU), Taipei, Taiwan

L. Ceard, Y. Chao , K.F. Chen , P.s. Chen, H. Cheng , W.-S. Hou , R. Khurana, G. Kole , Y.y. Li , R.-S. Lu , E. Paganis , A. Psallidas, A. Steen , H.y. Wu, E. Yazgan , P.r. Yu

Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Science, Department of Physics, 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. Dumanoglu⁶⁷ , E. Eskut ,
Y. Guler⁶⁸ , E. Gurpinar Guler⁶⁸ , C. Isik , O. Kara, A. Kayis Topaksu , U. Kiminsu ,
G. Onengut , K. Ozdemir⁶⁹ , A. Polatoz , A.E. Simsek , B. Tali⁷⁰ , U.G. Tok ,
S. Turkcapar , E. Uslan , I.S. Zorbakir 

Middle East Technical University, Physics Department, Ankara, Turkey

G. Karapinar⁷¹, K. Ocalan⁷² , M. Yalvac⁷³ 

Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey

B. Akgun , I.O. Atakisi , E. Gülmez , M. Kaya⁷⁴ , O. Kaya⁷⁵ , S. Tekten⁷⁶ 

Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey

A. Cakir , K. Cankocak⁶⁷ , Y. Komurcu , S. Sen⁶⁷ 

Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey

O. Aydilek , S. Cerci⁷⁰ , B. Hacisahinoglu , I. Hos⁷⁷ , B. Isildak⁷⁸ , B. Kaynak ,
S. Ozkorucuklu , C. Simsek , D. Sunar Cerci⁷⁰ 

Institute for Scintillation Materials of National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Kharkiv, Ukraine

B. Grynyov 

National Science Centre, Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology, Kharkiv, Ukraine

L. Levchuk 

University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom

D. Anthony , E. Bhal , J.J. Brooke , A. Bundock , E. Clement , D. Cussans ,
H. Flacher , M. Glowacki, J. Goldstein , H.F. Heath , L. Kreczko , B. Krikler ,
S. Paramesvaran , S. Seif El Nasr-Storey, V.J. Smith , N. Stylianou⁷⁹ , K. Walkingshaw Pass,
R. White 

Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom

A.H. Ball, K.W. Bell , A. Belyaev⁸⁰ , C. Brew , R.M. Brown , D.J.A. Cockerill ,
C. Cooke , K.V. Ellis, K. Harder , S. Harper , M.-L. Holmberg⁸¹ , Sh. Jain , J. Linacre ,
K. Manolopoulos, D.M. Newbold , E. Olaiya, D. Petyt , T. Reis , G. Salvi , T. Schuh,
C.H. Shepherd-Themistocleous , I.R. Tomalin , T. Williams 

Imperial College, London, United Kingdom

R. Bainbridge , P. Bloch , S. Bonomally, J. Borg , C.E. Brown , O. Buchmuller, V. Cacchio,
V. Cepaitis , G.S. Chahal⁸² , D. Colling , J.S. Dancu, P. Dauncey , G. Davies , J. Davies,
M. Della Negra , S. Fayer, G. Fedi , G. Hall , M.H. Hassanshahi , A. Howard, G. Iles ,
J. Langford , L. Lyons , A.-M. Magnan , S. Malik, A. Martelli , M. Mieskolainen ,
D.G. Monk , J. Nash⁸³ , M. Pesaresi, B.C. Radburn-Smith , D.M. Raymond, A. Richards,
A. Rose , E. Scott , C. Seez , R. Shukla , A. Tapper , K. Uchida , G.P. Uttley ,
L.H. Vage, T. Virdee²⁷ , M. Vojinovic , N. Wardle , S.N. Webb , 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 , J. Dittmann , K. Hatakeyama , A.R. Kanu-
ganti , B. McMaster , M. Saunders , S. Sawant , C. Sutantawibul , M. Toms 

J. Wilson 

Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA

R. Bartek , A. Dominguez , R. Uniyal , A.M. Vargas Hernandez 

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA

S.I. Cooper , D. Di Croce , S.V. Gleyzer , C. Henderson , C.U. Perez , P. Rumerio⁸⁴ ,
C. West 

Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

A. Akpinar , A. Albert , D. Arcaro , C. Cosby , Z. Demiragli , C. Erice ,
E. Fontanesi , D. Gastler , S. May , J. Rohlf , K. Salyer , D. Sperka , D. Spitzbart ,
I. Suarez , A. Tsatsos , S. Yuan 

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA

G. Benelli , B. Burkle , X. Coubez²² , D. Cutts , M. Hadley , U. Heintz , J.M. Hogan⁸⁵ ,
T. Kwon , G. Landsberg , K.T. Lau , D. Li , J. Luo , M. Narain , N. Pervan ,
S. Sagir⁸⁶ , F. Simpson , E. Usai , W.Y. Wong , X. Yan , D. Yu , W. Zhang 

University of California, Davis, Davis, California, USA

J. Bonilla , C. Brainerd , R. Breedon , M. Calderon De La Barca Sanchez , M. Chertok ,
J. Conway , P.T. Cox , R. Erbacher , G. Haza , F. Jensen , O. Kukral , G. Mocellin ,
M. Mulhearn , D. Pellett , B. Regnery , Y. Yao , F. Zhang 

University of California, Los Angeles, California, USA

M. Bachtis , R. Cousins , A. Datta , D. Hamilton , J. Hauser , M. Ignatenko ,
M.A. Iqbal , T. Lam , E. Manca , W.A. Nash , S. Regnard , D. Saltzberg , B. Stone ,
V. Valuev 

University of California, Riverside, Riverside, California, USA

R. Clare , J.W. Gary , M. Gordon , G. Hanson , G. Karapostoli , O.R. Long ,
N. Manganeli , W. Si , S. Wimpenny 

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

J.G. Branson , P. Chang , S. Cittolin , S. Cooperstein , D. Diaz , J. Duarte ,
R. Gerosa , L. Giannini , J. Guiang , R. Kansal , V. Krutelyov , R. Lee , J. Letts ,
M. Masciovecchio , F. Mokhtar , M. Pieri , 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

N. Amin , C. Campagnari , M. Citron , G. Collura , A. Dorsett , V. Dutta ,
J. Incandela , M. Kilpatrick , J. Kim , A.J. Li , P. Masterson , H. Mei , M. Oshiro ,
M. Quinnan , J. Richman , U. Sarica , R. Schmitz , F. Setti , J. Sheplock , P. Siddireddy ,
D. Stuart , S. Wang 

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA

A. Bornheim , O. Cerri , I. Dutta , A. Latorre , J.M. Lawhorn , J. Mao , H.B. Newman ,
T. Q. Nguyen , 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 , T. Ferguson , A. Harilal , C. Liu ,
T. Mudholkar , S. Murthy , M. Paulini , A. Roberts , A. Sanchez , W. Terrill 

University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, USA

J.P. Cumalat , W.T. Ford , A. Hassani , G. Karathanasis , E. MacDonald, F. Marini , 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 , D. Gadkari , S. Hogan , J. Monroy , J.R. Patterson , D. Quach , J. Reichert , M. Reid , A. Ryd , J. Thom , P. Wittich , R. Zou 

Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA

M. Albrow , M. Alyari , 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 , K.F. Di Petrillo , J. Dickinson , V.D. Elvira , Y. Feng , J. Freeman , A. Gandrakota , Z. Gece , L. Gray , D. Green, 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. Klijsma , 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. Pena⁸⁷ , F. Ravera , A. Reinsvold Hall⁸⁸ , L. Ristori , E. Sexton-Kennedy , N. Smith , A. Soha , L. Spiegel , J. Strait , L. Taylor , S. Tkaczyk , N.V. Tran , L. Uplegger , E.W. Vaandering , I. Zoi 

University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA

P. Avery , D. Bourilkov , L. Cadamuro , V. Cherepanov , R.D. Field, M. Kim, E. Koenig , J. Konigsberg , A. Korytov , E. Kuznetsova , K.H. Lo, K. Matchev , N. Menendez , G. Mitselmakher , A. Muthirakalayil Madhu , N. Rawal , D. Rosenzweig , S. Rosenzweig , K. Shi , J. Wang , Z. Wu 

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, USA

T. Adams , A. Askew , N. Bower , R. Habibullah , V. Hagopian , T. Kolberg , G. Martinez, H. Prosper , O. Viazlo , M. Wulansatiti , R. Yohay , J. Zhang

Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, USA

M.M. Baarmand , S. Butalla , T. Elkafrawy⁵⁴ , M. Hohlmann , R. Kumar Verma , M. Rahmani, F. Yumiceva 

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Chicago, Illinois, USA

M.R. Adams , H. Becerril Gonzalez , R. Cavanaugh , S. Dittmer , O. Evdokimov , C.E. Gerber , D.J. Hofman , D. S. Lemos , A.H. Merrit , C. Mills , G. Oh , T. Roy , S. Rudrabhatla , M.B. Tonjes , N. Varelas , X. Wang , Z. Ye , J. Yoo 

The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA

M. Alhusseini , K. Dilsiz⁸⁹ , L. Emediato , G. Karaman , O.K. Köseyan , J.-P. Merlo, A. Mestvirishvili⁹⁰ , J. Nachtman , O. Neogi, H. Ogul⁹¹ , Y. Onel , A. Penzo , C. Snyder, E. Tiras⁹² 

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

O. Amram , B. Blumenfeld , L. Corcodilos , J. Davis , A.V. Gritsan , S. Kyriacou , P. Maksimovic , J. Roskes , S. Sekhar , M. Swartz , T.Á. Vámi 

The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA

A. Abreu , L.F. Alcerro Alcerro , J. Anguiano , P. Baringer , A. Bean , Z. Flowers , T. Isidori , J. King , G. Krintiras , M. Lazarovits , C. Le Mahieu , C. Lindsey

J. Marquez , N. Minafra , M. Murray , M. Nickel , C. Rogan , C. Royon , R. Salvatico , S. Sanders , C. Smith , Q. Wang , G. Wilson 

Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, USA

B. Allmond , S. Duric, A. Ivanov , K. Kaadze , A. Kalogeropoulos , D. Kim, Y. Maravin , T. Mitchell, A. Modak, K. Nam, D. Roy 

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, California, USA

F. Rebassoo , D. Wright 

University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA

E. Adams , A. Baden , O. Baron, A. Belloni , A. Bethani , 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 , L. Wang , K. Wong 

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

D. Abercrombie, W. Busza , I.A. Cali , Y. Chen , M. D'Alfonso , J. Eysermans , C. Freer , G. Gomez-Ceballos , M. Goncharov, P. Harris, M. Hu , D. Kovalskyi , J. Krupa , Y.-J. Lee , K. Long , C. Mironov , C. Paus , D. Rankin , C. Roland , G. Roland , Z. Shi , G.S.F. Stephans , J. Wang, Z. Wang , B. Wyslouch , T. J. Yang 

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

R.M. Chatterjee, B. Crossman , A. Evans , J. Hiltbrand , B.M. Joshi , C. Kapsiak , M. Krohn , Y. Kubota , J. Mans , 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 , M. Bryson, D.R. Claes , C. Fangmeier , L. Finco , F. Golf , C. Joo , R. Kamalieddin, I. Kravchenko , I. Reed , J.E. Siado , G.R. Snow[†], W. Tabb , A. Wightman , F. Yan , A.G. Zecchinelli 

State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, USA

G. Agarwal , H. Bandyopadhyay , L. Hay , I. Iashvili , A. Kharchilava , C. McLean , M. Morris , D. Nguyen , J. Pekkanen , S. Rappoccio , A. Williams 

Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

G. Alverson , E. Barberis , Y. Haddad , Y. Han , A. Krishna , J. Li , J. Lidrych , G. Madigan , B. Marzocchi , D.M. Morse , V. Nguyen , T. Orimoto , A. Parker , L. Skinnari , A. Tishelman-Charny , T. Wamorkar , B. Wang , A. Wisecarver , D. Wood 

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA

S. Bhattacharya , J. Bueghly, Z. Chen , A. Gilbert , K.A. Hahn , Y. Liu , N. Odell , M.H. Schmitt , M. Velasco

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, USA

R. Band , R. Bucci, M. Cremonesi, A. Das , R. Goldouzian , M. Hildreth , K. Hurtado Anampa , C. Jessop , K. Lannon , J. Lawrence , N. Loukas , L. Lutton , J. Mariano, N. Marinelli, I. Mcalister, T. McCauley , C. Mcgrady , K. Mohrman , C. Moore , Y. Musienko¹² , R. Ruchti , A. Townsend , M. Wayne , H. Yockey, M. Zarucki , L. Zygala 

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

B. Bylsma, M. Carrigan , L.S. Durkin , B. Francis , C. Hill , M. Joyce , A. Lesauvage ,
M. Nunez Ornelas , K. Wei, B.L. Winer , B. R. Yates 

Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, USA

F.M. Addesa , P. Das , G. Dezoort , P. Elmer , A. Frankenthal , B. Greenberg ,
N. Haubrich , S. Higginbotham , G. Kopp , S. Kwan , D. Lange , D. Marlow ,
I. Ojalvo , J. Olsen , D. Stickland , C. Tully 

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, USA

S. Malik , S. Norberg

Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

A.S. Bakshi , V.E. Barnes , R. Chawla , S. Das , L. Gutay, M. Jones , A.W. Jung ,
D. Kondratyev , A.M. Koshy, M. Liu , G. Negro , N. Neumeister , G. Paspalaki ,
S. Piperov , A. Purohit , J.F. Schulte , M. Stojanovic , J. Thieman , F. Wang ,
R. Xiao , W. Xie 

Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, Indiana, USA

J. Dolen , N. Parashar 

Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA

D. Acosta , A. Baty , T. Carnahan , S. Dildick , K.M. Ecklund , P.J. Fernández Manteca ,
S. Freed, P. Gardner, F.J.M. Geurts , A. Kumar , W. Li , B.P. Padley , R. Redjimi,
J. Rotter , S. Yang , E. Yigitbasi , L. Zhang⁹³, Y. Zhang 

University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, USA

A. Bodek , P. de Barbaro , R. Demina , J.L. Dulemba , C. Fallon, T. Ferbel , M. Galanti,
A. Garcia-Bellido , O. Hindrichs , A. Khukhunaishvili , P. Parygin , E. Popova ,
E. Ranken , R. Taus , G.P. Van Onsem 

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 , Y. Gershtein , E. Halkiadakis , A. Hart , M. Heindl ,
D. Jaroslawski , O. Karacheban²⁵ , I. Laflotte , A. Lath , R. Montalvo, K. Nash,
M. Osherson , H. Routray , S. Salur , S. Schnetzer, S. Somalwar , R. Stone ,
S.A. Thayil , S. Thomas, H. Wang 

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA

H. Acharya, A.G. Delannoy , S. Fiorendi , T. Holmes , E. Nibigira , S. Spanier 

Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA

O. Bouhali⁹⁴ , M. Dalchenko , A. Delgado , R. Eusebi , J. Gilmore , T. Huang ,
T. Kamon⁹⁵ , H. Kim , S. Luo , S. Malhotra, R. Mueller , D. Overton , D. Rathjens ,
A. Safonov 

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, USA

N. Akchurin , J. Damgov , V. Hegde , K. Lamichhane , S.W. Lee , T. Mengke,
S. Muthumuni , T. Peltola , I. Volobouev , A. Whitbeck 

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

E. Appelt , S. Greene, A. Gurrola , W. Johns , A. Melo , F. Romeo , P. Sheldon ,
S. Tuo , J. Velkovska , J. Viinikainen 

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

B. Cardwell , B. Cox , G. Cummings , J. Hakala , R. Hirosky , A. Ledovskoy ,
A. Li , C. Neu , C.E. Perez Lara , B. Tannenwald 

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

P.E. Karchin , N. Poudyal 

University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

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, A. Loeliger , R. Loveless ,
J. Madhusudanan Sreekala , A. Mallampalli , A. Mohammadi , S. Mondal, G. Parida ,
D. Pinna, A. Savin, V. Shang , V. Sharma , W.H. Smith , D. Teague, H.F. Tsoi ,
W. Vetens 

Authors affiliated with an institute or an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

S. Afanasiev , V. Andreev , Yu. Andreev , T. Aushev , M. Azarkin , A. Babaev ,
A. Belyaev , V. Blinov⁹⁶, E. Boos , V. Borshch , D. Budkouski , V. Bunichev ,
V. Chekhovsky, R. Chistov⁹⁶ , M. Danilov⁹⁶ , A. Dermenev , T. Dimova⁹⁶ , I. Dremin ,
M. Dubinin⁸⁷ , L. Dudko , V. Epshteyn , A. Ershov , G. Gavrillov , V. Gavrillov ,
S. Gninenko , V. Golovtcov , N. Golubev , I. Golutvin , I. Gorbunov , A. Gribushin ,
Y. Ivanov , V. Kachanov , L. Kardapoltsev⁹⁶ , V. Karjavine , A. Karneyeu , V. Kim⁹⁶ ,
M. Kirakosyan, D. Kirpichnikov , M. Kirsanov , V. Klyukhin , O. Kodolova⁹⁷ ,
D. Konstantinov , V. Korenkov , A. Kozyrev⁹⁶ , N. Krasnikov , A. Lanev ,
P. Levchenko , A. Litomin, N. Lychkovskaya , V. Makarenko , A. Malakhov ,
V. Matveev⁹⁶ , V. Murzin , A. Nikitenko⁹⁸ , S. Obraztsov , A. Oskin, I. Ovtin⁹⁶ ,
V. Palichik , V. Perelygin , S. Polikarpov⁹⁶ , V. Popov, O. Radchenko⁹⁶ , M. Savina ,
V. Savrin , V. Shalaev , S. Shmatov , S. Shulha , Y. Skovpen⁹⁶ , S. Slabospitskii ,
V. Smirnov , A. Snigirev , D. Sosnov , V. Sulimov , E. Tcherniaev , A. Terkulov ,
O. Teryaev , I. Tlisova , A. Toropin , L. Uvarov , A. Uzunian , E. Vlasov ,
A. Vorobyev, N. Voytishin , B.S. Yuldashev⁹⁹, A. Zarubin , I. Zhizhin , A. Zhokin 

†: Deceased

¹Also at Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia

²Also at TU Wien, Vienna, Austria

³Also at Institute of Basic and Applied Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Alexandria, Egypt

⁴Also at Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium

⁵Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil

⁶Also at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

⁷Also at UFMS, Nova Andradina, Brazil

⁸Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China

⁹Also at Nanjing Normal University Department of Physics, Nanjing, China

¹⁰Now at The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA

¹¹Also at University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China

¹²Also at an institute or an international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

¹³Also at Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt

¹⁴Also at Suez University, Suez, Egypt

¹⁵Now at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt

¹⁶Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

- ¹⁷Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France
- ¹⁸Also at Department of Physics, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
- ¹⁹Also at The University of the State of Amazonas, Manaus, Brazil
- ²⁰Also at Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Erzincan, Turkey
- ²¹Also at University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
- ²²Also at RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany
- ²³Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
- ²⁴Also at Bergische University Wuppertal (BUW), Wuppertal, Germany
- ²⁵Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany
- ²⁶Also at Forschungszentrum Jülich, Juelich, Germany
- ²⁷Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland
- ²⁸Also at Physics Department, Faculty of Science, Assiut University, Assiut, Egypt
- ²⁹Also at Karoly Robert Campus, MATE Institute of Technology, Gyongyos, Hungary
- ³⁰Also at Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary
- ³¹Also at Institute of Physics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
- ³²Also at Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary
- ³³Now at Universitatea Babes-Bolyai - Facultatea de Fizica, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- ³⁴Also at Faculty of Informatics, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary
- ³⁵Also at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India
- ³⁶Also at UPES - University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun, India
- ³⁷Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India
- ³⁸Also at University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India
- ³⁹Also at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, India
- ⁴⁰Also at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mumbai, India
- ⁴¹Also at IIT Bhubaneswar, Bhubaneswar, India
- ⁴²Also at Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, India
- ⁴³Also at Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany
- ⁴⁴Now at Department of Physics, Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran
- ⁴⁵Also at Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran
- ⁴⁶Also at Department of Physics, University of Science and Technology of Mazandaran, Behshahr, Iran
- ⁴⁷Also at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt
- ⁴⁸Also at Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, Bologna, Italy
- ⁴⁹Also at Centro Siciliano di Fisica Nucleare e di Struttura Della Materia, Catania, Italy
- ⁵⁰Also at Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi, Roma, Italy
- ⁵¹Also at Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Università di Napoli 'Federico II', Napoli, Italy
- ⁵²Also at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Batavia, Illinois, USA
- ⁵³Also at Università di Napoli 'Federico II', Napoli, Italy
- ⁵⁴Also at Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt
- ⁵⁵Also at Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - Istituto Officina dei Materiali, Perugia, Italy
- ⁵⁶Also at Department of Applied Physics, Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia
- ⁵⁷Also at Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, Mexico City, Mexico
- ⁵⁸Also at IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- ⁵⁹Also at Faculty of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
- ⁶⁰Also at Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka, Nilaveli, Sri Lanka
- ⁶¹Also at INFN Sezione di Pavia, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
- ⁶²Also at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

⁶³Also at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

⁶⁴Also at Universität Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland

⁶⁵Also at Stefan Meyer Institute for Subatomic Physics, Vienna, Austria

⁶⁶Also at Laboratoire d'Annecy-le-Vieux de Physique des Particules, IN2P3-CNRS, Annecy-le-Vieux, France

⁶⁷Also at Near East University, Research Center of Experimental Health Science, Mersin, Turkey

⁶⁸Also at Konya Technical University, Konya, Turkey

⁶⁹Also at Izmir Bakircay University, Izmir, Turkey

⁷⁰Also at Adiyaman University, Adiyaman, Turkey

⁷¹Also at Istanbul Gedik University, Istanbul, Turkey

⁷²Also at Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya, Turkey

⁷³Also at Bozok Universitetesi Rektörlüğü, Yozgat, Turkey

⁷⁴Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey

⁷⁵Also at Milli Savunma University, Istanbul, Turkey

⁷⁶Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey

⁷⁷Also at Istanbul University - Cerrahpasa, Faculty of Engineering, Istanbul, Turkey

⁷⁸Also at Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey

⁷⁹Also at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium

⁸⁰Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom

⁸¹Also at University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom

⁸²Also at IPPP Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom

⁸³Also at Monash University, Faculty of Science, Clayton, Australia

⁸⁴Also at Università di Torino, Torino, Italy

⁸⁵Also at Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

⁸⁶Also at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey

⁸⁷Also at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA

⁸⁸Also at United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, USA

⁸⁹Also at Bingol University, Bingol, Turkey

⁹⁰Also at Georgian Technical University, Tbilisi, Georgia

⁹¹Also at Sinop University, Sinop, Turkey

⁹²Also at Erciyes University, Kayseri, Turkey

⁹³Also at Institute of Modern Physics and Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Ion-beam Application (MOE) - Fudan University, Shanghai, China

⁹⁴Also at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar

⁹⁵Also at Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Korea

⁹⁶Also at another institute or international laboratory covered by a cooperation agreement with CERN

⁹⁷Also at Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia

⁹⁸Also at Imperial College, London, United Kingdom

⁹⁹Also at Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan