Search for events with large missing transverse momentum, jets, and at least two tau leptons in 7 TeV proton–proton collision data with the ATLAS detector

ATLAS Collaboration

A search for events with large missing transverse momentum, jets, and at least two tau leptons has been performed using 2 fb\(^{-1}\) of proton–proton collision data at \(\sqrt{s} = 7\) TeV recorded with the ATLAS detector at the Large Hadron Collider. No excess above the Standard Model background expectation is observed and a 95% CL upper limit on the visible cross section for new phenomena is set, where the visible cross section is defined by the product of cross section, branching fraction, detector acceptance and event selection efficiency. A 95% CL lower limit of 32 TeV is set on the gauge-mediated supersymmetry breaking (GMSB) scale \(A\) independent of \(\tan\beta\). These limits provide the most stringent tests to date in a large part of the considered parameter space.

1. Introduction

Supersymmetry (SUSY) [1–5] introduces a symmetry between fermions and bosons, resulting in a SUSY partner (sparticle) for each Standard Model (SM) particle with identical mass and quantum numbers except a difference by half a unit of spin. As none of these sparticles have been observed, SUSY must be a broken symmetry if realised in nature. Assuming \(R\)-parity conservation [6,7], sparticles are produced in pairs. These would then decay through cascades involving other sparticles until the lightest SUSY particle (LSP) is produced, which is stable.

Minimal gauge-mediated supersymmetry breaking (GMSB) [8–13] models can be described by six parameters: the SUSY breaking mass scale \(M_{\text{mess}}\), the vacuum expectation values of the two Higgs doublets \(\langle \phi \rangle\), the ratio of these vacuum expectation values \(\mu\), and the scale factor for the gravitino mass \(\langle G \rangle\). Due to the gravitino’s very small mass of \(\mathcal{O}(\text{keV})\), the LSP is the only sparticle decaying into the LSP. This leads to multiple jets and missing transverse momentum (\(E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}\)) in the final states. The experimental signature is then largely determined by the nature of the NLSP, which can be either the lightest stau (\(\tilde{\tau}_1\)), a right-handed slepton (\(\tilde{\ell}_R\)), the lightest neutralino (\(\tilde{\chi}_1^0\)), or a sneutrino (\(\tilde{\nu}\)), leading to final states containing taus, light leptons \((\ell = e, \mu, \tau)\), photons, b-jets, or neutrinos. For \(N_5 = 3\) the \(\tilde{\tau}_1\) and \(\tilde{\nu}_R\) NLSPs become the dominant source of events when taking into account only the NLSPs mass. The NLSP lifetime is then largely determined by the nature of the NLSP.

This Letter reports on the search for events with large \(E_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}\), jets, and at least two hadronically decaying tau leptons. The analysis has been performed using 2 fb\(^{-1}\) of proton–proton (\(pp\)) collision data at \(\sqrt{s} = 7\) TeV recorded with the ATLAS detector at the LHC between March and August 2011. Although the analysis is sensitive to a wide variety of models for physics beyond the Standard Model, the results shown here are interpreted in the context of a minimal GMSB model. The three LEP Collaborations ALEPH [17], DELPHI [18] and OPAL [19] studied \(\tilde{\tau}_1\) pair production, with the subsequent decay \(\tilde{\tau}_1 \rightarrow \tau \tilde{\chi}_1^0\) in the minimal GMSB model. The best limits are set by the OPAL Collaboration and \(\tilde{\tau}_1\) NLSPs with masses below 87.4 GeV are excluded. A limit on the SUSY breaking mass scale \(A\) of 26 TeV was set for \(N_5 = 3\), \(M_{\text{mess}} = 250\) TeV, independent of \(\tan\beta\) and the NLSP lifetime. The CMS Collaboration searched for new physics in same-sign ditau events [20] and multilepton events including di tau [21] using 35 pb\(^{-1}\) of data, but the minimal GMSB model was not considered. A search for supersymmetry in final states containing at least one hadronically decaying
2. ATLAS detector

The ATLAS detector [23] is a multi-purpose apparatus with a forward–backward symmetric cylindrical geometry and nearly 4π solid angle coverage. The inner tracking detector (ID) consists of a silicon pixel detector, a silicon strip detector and a transition radiation tracker. The ID is surrounded by a thin superconducting solenoid providing a 2 T magnetic field and by fine-granularity lead/liquid-argon (LAr) electromagnetic calorimeters. An iron/scintillating-tile calorimeter provides hadronic coverage in the central rapidity\(^1\) range. The endcap and forward regions are instrumented with liquid-argon calorimeters for both electromagnetic and hadronic measurements. An extensive muon spectrometer system that incorporates large superconducting toroidal magnets surrounds the calorimeters.

3. Simulated samples

Monte Carlo (MC) simulations are used to extrapolate backgrounds from control regions (CRs) to the signal region (SR) and to evaluate the selection efficiencies for the SUSY models considered. Samples of W and Z/γ* production with accompanying jets are simulated with ALPGEN [24], using CTEQ6L1 [25] parton density functions (PDFs). Top quark pair production, single top production and diboson pair production are simulated with Mc@NLO [26–28] and the next-to-leading order (NLO) PDF set CT10 [29]. Fragmentation and hadronisation are performed with HERWIG [30], using JIMMY [31] for the underlying event simulation and the ATLAS MC10 parameter tune [32], TAUOLA [33,34] and PHOTOS [35] are used to model the decays of τ leptons and the radiation of photons, respectively. The production of multi-jet events is simulated with PYTHIA 6.425 [36] using the AMBT1 tune [37] and MRST2007 LO* [38] PDFs. For the minimal GMSB model considered in this analysis, the SUSY mass spectra are calculated using ISAJET 7.80 [39]. The MC signal samples are produced using HERWIG++ 2.4.2 [40] with MRST2007 LO* PDFs. NLO cross sections are calculated using PROSPINO 2.1 [41–46]; all samples are processed through the GEANT4-based simulation [47] of the ATLAS detector [48]. The variation of the number of pp interactions per bunch crossing (pile-up) as a function of the instantaneous luminosity is taken into account by modeling the simulated number of overlaid minimum bias events according to the observed distribution of the number of pile-up interactions in data, with an average of ~6 interactions.

4. Object reconstruction

Jets are reconstructed using the anti-\(k_t\) jet clustering algorithm [49] with radius parameter \(R = 0.4\). Their energies are calibrated to correct for calorimeter non-compensation, upstream material and other effects [50]. Jets are required to have transverse momentum \(p_T > 20\) GeV and \(|\eta| < 2.5\).

Muons are identified as tracks in the ID matched to track segments in the stand-alone muon spectrometer, while electrons are identified as isolated tracks with a corresponding energy deposit in the electromagnetic calorimeter. The selection criteria applied to muons and “medium” quality electrons are described in more detail in Refs. [51] and [52], respectively.

The measurement of the missing transverse momentum two-dimensional vector \(\vec{p}_T^{\text{miss}}\) (and its magnitude \(E_T^{\text{miss}}\)) is based on the transverse momenta of identified jets, electrons, muons and all calorimeter clusters with \(|\eta| < 4.5\) not associated to such objects [53]. For the purpose of the measurement of \(E_T^{\text{miss}}\), taus are not distinguished from jets.

In this search, only hadronically decaying taus are considered. The tau reconstruction is seeded from anti-\(k_t\) jets with \(p_T > 10\) GeV. An \(η\)- and \(p_T\)-dependent energy calibration to the hadronic tau energy scale is applied. Hadronic tau identification is based on observables sensitive to the transverse and longitudinal shape of the calorimeter shower and on tracking information, combined in a boosted decision tree (BDT) discriminator [54]. Transverse radiation and calorimeter information is used to veto electrons misidentified as taus. A tau candidate must have \(p_T > 20\) GeV, \(|\eta| < 2.5\), and one or three associated tracks of \(p_T > 1\) GeV with a charge sum of \(\pm 1\). The efficiency of the BDT tau identification (the “loose” working point in Ref. [54]), determined using \(Z \to \tau \tau\) events, is about 60%, independent of \(p_T\), with a jet background rejection factor of 20–50.

During a part of the data-taking period, an electronics failure in the LAr barrel EM calorimeter created a dead region in the second and third layers, corresponding to approximately 1.4 × 0.2 radians in \(Δη \times Δϕ\). Electron and tau candidates falling in this region are discarded. A correction to the jet energy is made using the energy depositions in the cells neighbouring the dead region; events having at least one jet for which the energy after correction is above 30 GeV are discarded, resulting in a loss of ~6% of the data sample.

5. Data analysis

The analysed data sample, after applying beam, detector and data-quality requirements, corresponds to an integrated luminosity of \((2.05 \pm 0.08) \text{ fb}^{-1}\) [55,56]. Candidate events are pre-selected by a trigger requiring a leading jet, i.e. the jet having the highest transverse momentum of all jets in the event, with \(p_T > 75\) GeV, measured at the raw electromagnetic scale, and \(E_T^{\text{miss}} > 45\) GeV [57]. In the offline analysis, these events are required to have a reconstructed primary vertex with at least five tracks, a leading jet with \(p_T > 130\) GeV and \(E_T^{\text{miss}} > 130\) GeV. These requirements ensure a uniform trigger efficiency that exceeds 98%.

Pre-selected events are then required to have at least two identified tau candidates and must not contain any electron or muon candidates with transverse momenta above 20 GeV or 10 GeV, respectively. To suppress soft multi-jet events, a second jet with \(p_T > 30\) GeV is required. The \(p_T\) spectrum of the leading tau candidate after pre-selection of candidate events, soft multi-jet rejection and the requirement of two or more taus and no light leptons is shown in Fig. 1.

This selection rejects almost all soft multi-jet background events. Remaining multi-jet events, where highly energetic jets are mis-measured, are rejected by requiring the azimuthal angle between the missing transverse momentum and either of the two leading jets \(Δϕ(p_T^{\text{miss}}, \text{jet}_1, 2)\) to be larger than 0.4 radians.

The SR is defined by requiring \(m_{\text{eff}} > 700\) GeV and \(m_T^{\text{eff}} + m_T^{\tau} > 80\) GeV, where \(m_{\text{eff}}\) is the effective mass\(^2\) and \(m_T^{\tau} + m_T^{\tau}\) is the

\[^1\] ATLAS uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the centre of the detector and the z-axis along the beam pipe. The x-axis points from the IP to the centre of the LHC ring and the y-axis points upward. Cylindrical coordinates (\(R, \phi\)) are used in the transverse plane, \(\phi\) being the azimuthal angle around the beam pipe. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle \(\theta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2)\).

\[^2\] The effective mass \(m_{\text{eff}}\) is calculated as the sum of \(E_T^{\text{miss}}\) and the magnitude of the transverse momenta of the two highest-\(p_T\) jets and all selected taus.
contribution from reconstructed from hadronic activity in the final state. Since mis-

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7. Systematic uncertainties on the background

Fig. 1. The \( p_T \) spectrum of the leading tau candidates in data (points, statistical uncertainty only) and the estimated SM background after the pre-selection of candidate events, with multi-jet rejection and the requirement of two or more taus and no light leptons. The band centred around the total SM background indicates the statistical uncertainty. Also shown is the expected signal from a typical GMSB (\( \Lambda = 40 \text{ TeV}, \tan \beta = 30 \)) sample.

sum of the transverse masses\(^3\) of the two leading tau candidates. The \( m_{\text{eff}} \) distribution after the \( \Delta \phi(p_{\text{T}}^{\text{miss}}, \text{jet}_{1,2}) \) requirement and the \( m_T^2 + m_T^2 \) distribution after the \( m_{\text{eff}} \) requirement are shown in Fig. 2. After applying all the analysis requirements, 3 events are selected in the data.

6. Background estimation

The dominant backgrounds in the SR arise from top-pair plus single top events (here generically indicated as \( tt \)), \( W \rightarrow \tau \nu \tau \) events and \( Z \rightarrow \tau \tau \) events. While the latter comprises final states with two true taus, which are well described in the simulation, the \( W \) and \( \bar{t}t \) background consist of events in which one real tau is correctly reconstructed and the other tau candidates are mis-reconstructed from hadronic activity in the final state. Since mis-identified taus are not well described in the MC, the background contribution from \( tt \) and \( W \rightarrow \tau \nu \tau \) is determined simultaneously in a CR defined by inverting the \( m_{\text{eff}} \) cut. Owing to the requirement on \( \Delta \phi \) and of two or more taus, this CR has negligible contamination from multi-jet events. Moreover, a totally negligible contribution is expected in this CR from signal events. The MC overestimates the number of events in the CR compared to data, due to mis-modeling of tau misidentification probabilities. MC studies show that the tau misidentification probability is, to a good approximation, independent of \( m_{\text{eff}} \), so that the measured ratio of the data to MC event yields in the CR can be used to correct the MC background prediction in the SR.

In a similar way, the multi-jet background expectation is computed in a multi-jet dominated CR defined by inverting the \( \Delta \phi \) and \( m_{\text{eff}} \) cuts. In addition, \( E_T^{\text{miss}}/m_{\text{eff}} \leq 0.4 \) is required to increase the purity of this CR sample. The extrapolated contribution of this background source to the SR is found to be negligible.

7. Systematic uncertainties on the background

The theoretical uncertainty on the MC-based corrected extrapolation of the \( W \) and \( \bar{t}t \) backgrounds from the CR into the SR

\[^3\] The transverse mass \( m_T \) formed by \( E_T^{\text{miss}} \) and the \( p_T \) of the tau lepton (\( \tau \)) is defined as 

\[
m_T = \sqrt{2p_T E_T^{\text{miss}}(1 - \cos(\Delta \phi(\tau, p_T^{\text{miss}})))}.
\]
the $t\bar{t}$ and $W$ backgrounds, these uncertainties are absorbed into the normalisation. The systematic uncertainty associated to pile-up simulation in MC is 1%. The normalisation of the $Z +$ jets and diboson backgrounds is affected by the uncertainty of 3.7% on the luminosity measurement [55,56]. This results in a 0.8% uncertainty on the total background. The contributions from the different systematic uncertainties result in a total background systematic uncertainty of 41%.

In total $5.3 \pm 1.3$ (stat) $\pm 2.2$ (sys) background events are expected where the first uncertainty is statistical and includes the statistical component of the background correction factor uncertainty and the second is systematic. Roughly half of the background is composed of $t\bar{t}$ events and the other half is evenly split into $W$ and $Z$ events with accompanying jets.

8. Signal efficiencies and systematic uncertainties

GMSB signal samples were generated on a grid ranging from $\Lambda = 10$ TeV to $\Lambda = 80$ TeV and from $\tan \beta = 2$ to $\tan \beta = 50$. The number of selected events decreases significantly with increasing $\Lambda$ due to the reduced cross section. The cross section drops from 100 pb for $\Lambda = 15$ TeV to 5.0 fb for $\Lambda = 80$ TeV. The selection efficiency is highest ($\approx 3\%$) for high $\tan \beta$ and lower $\Lambda$ values, including in the region of the GMSB4030 point ($\Lambda = 40$, $\tan \beta = 30$) which is near the expected limit. It drops to 0.2% in the non-$\tau_1$ NLSP regions and for high $\Lambda$ values. This is primarily a consequence of the light lepton veto and the requirement of two hadronically decaying taus, respectively.

The total systematic uncertainty on the signal selection from the systematic uncertainties discussed in Section 7 ranges between 7.5% and 36% over the GMSB grid. The statistical uncertainty from the limited size of the MC signal samples is of the order of 20%, with variations between 7.6% and 59% at the edges of the accessible signal range. Theory uncertainties related to the GMSB cross section predictions are estimated through variations of the factorisation and renormalisation scales in the NLO PROSPINO calculation between half and twice their default values, by considering variations in $\alpha_s$, and by considering PDF uncertainties using the CTQ6.6M PDF error sets [58]. These uncertainties are calculated for individual SUSY production processes and for each model point, leading to overall theoretical cross section uncertainties between 6.5% and 22%. Altogether this yields $20.8 \pm 3.4$ (stat) $\pm 3.6$ (sys) $\pm 3.3$ (theo) signal events for the GMSB4030 point.

9. Results

Based on the observation of 3 events in the SR and a background expectation of $5.3 \pm 1.3$ (stat) $\pm 2.2$ (sys) events, an upper limit of 5.9 (7.0) events observed (expected) is set at 95% Confidence Level (CL) on the number of events from any scenario of physics beyond the SM, using the profile likelihood and CLs method [59]. Uncertainties on the background and signal expectations are treated as Gaussian-distributed nuisance parameters in the likelihood fit. This limit translates into a 95% observed (expected) upper limit of 2.9 fb (3.4 fb) on the visible cross section for new phenomena, defined by the product of cross section, branching fraction, acceptance and efficiency for the selections defined in Section 5. The resulting expected and observed 95% CL limits on the GMSB model parameters $\Lambda$ and $\tan \beta$ are shown in Fig. 3, including the lower limits from OPAL [19] for comparison. These limits are calculated including all experimental and theoretical uncertainties on the background and signal expectations. Excluding the theoretical uncertainties on the signal cross section from the limit calculation has a negligible effect on the limits obtained. The best exclusion is set for $\Lambda = 47$ TeV and $\tan \beta = 37$. The results extend previous limits and values of $\Lambda < 32$ TeV are now excluded at 95% CL, independent of $\tan \beta$.

10. Conclusions

A search for events with two or more hadronically decaying tau leptons, large $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ and jets is performed using 2 fb$^{-1}$ of $\sqrt{s} = 7$ TeV $pp$ collision data recorded with the ATLAS detector at the LHC. Three events are found, consistent with the expected SM background. The results are used to set a model-independent 95% CL upper limit of 5.9 events from new phenomena, corresponding to an upper limit on the visible cross section of 2.9 fb. Limits on the model parameters are set for a minimal GMSB model. The limit on the SUSY breaking scale $\Lambda$ of 32 TeV is determined, independent of $\tan \beta$. It increases up to 47 TeV for $\tan \beta = 37$. These results provide the most stringent tests in a large part of the parameter space considered to date, improving the previous best limits.

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1 University at Albany, Albany, NY, United States
2 Department of Physics, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada
3 (a) Department of Physics, Ankara University, Ankara; (b) Department of Physics, Dumlupinar University, Kütahya
4 Department of Physics, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, United States
5 Physics Department, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX, United States
6 Physics Department, University of Athens, Athens, Greece
7 Physics Department, National Technical University of Athens, Zografou, Greece
8 Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan
9 Instituto de Física de Altas Energias and Department of Physics of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and ICREA, Barcelona, Spain
10 (a) Institute of Physics, University of Belgrade, Belgrade; (b) Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia
11 Department of Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
12 Physics Division, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and University of California, Berkeley, CA, United States
13 Department of Physics, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
14 Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics and Laboratory for High Energy Physics, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland
15 School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom
16 (a) Department of Physics, Bogazici University, Istanbul; (b) Division of Physics, Dogus University, Istanbul; (c) Department of Physics Engineering, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep;
17 (a) Department of Physics, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul; (b) Department of Physics, Bosphorus University, Istanbul, Turkey
18 (c) INFN Sezione di Bologna; (d) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy
19 Physikalisches Institut, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
20 Department of Physics, Boston University, Boston, MA, United States
21 Department of Physics, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, United States
22 (a) Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro COPPE/EIEF; Rio de Janeiro; (b) Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Juiz de Fora; (c) Federal University of Sao Joao del Rei (UFSJ), Sao Joao del Rei;
23 (a) Instituto de Fisica, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil; (b) University of Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
24 Physics Department, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, NY, United States
25 (a) National Institute of Physics and Nuclear Engineering, Bucharest; (b) University Politehnica Bucharest, Bucharest; (c) West University in Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania
26 Departamento de Física, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina
27 Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom
28 Department of Physics, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON, Canada
29 CERN, Geneva, Switzerland
30 Enrico Fermi Institute, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, United States
31 (a) Departamento de Fisica, Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, Santiago; (b) Departamento de Fisica, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa Maria, Valparaiso, Chile
32 (a) Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing; (b) Department of Modern Physics, University of Science and Technology of China, Anhui;
33 (a) Department of Physics, Nanjing University, Nanjing; (b) School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China
34 Laboratoire de Physique Corpusculaire, Clermont Université and Université Blaise Pascal and CNRS/IN2P3, Aubiere Cedex, France
35 Nevis Laboratory, Columbia University, Irvington, NY, United States
36 Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
37 INFN Sezione di Genova; (a) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova, Italy
38 AGH University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, Krakow, Poland
39 The Henryk Niewodniczanski Institute of Nuclear Physics, Polish Academy of Sciences, Krakow, Poland
40 (a) Physics Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, United States
41 Physics Department, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, United States
42 DESY, Hamburg and Zeuthen, Germany
43 Institut für Experimentelle Physik IV, Technische Universität Dortmund, Dortmund, Germany
44 Institut für Kern- und Teilchenphysik, Technical University Dresden, Dresden, Germany
45 Department of Physics, Duke University, Durham, NC, United States
46 SUPA – School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
47 Fachhochschule Wiener Neustadt, Johannes Gutenbergstrasse 3 2700 Wiener Neustadt, Austria
48 INFN Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, Frascati, Italy
49 Fakultät für Mathematik und Physik, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg i.Br., Germany
50 Section de Physique, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland
51 (a) INFN Sezione di Genova; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Genova, Genova, Italy
52 II Physikalisches Institut, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Gießen, Germany
53 SOPA – School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom
54 II Physikalisches Institut, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany
55 Laboratoire de Physique Subatomique et de Cosmologie, Université Joseph Fourier and CNRS/IN2P3 and Institut National Polytechnique de Grenoble, Grenoble, France
56 Department of Physics, Hampton University, Hampton, VA, United States
57 Laboratory for Particle Physics and Cosmology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, United States
58 (a) Kirchhoff-Institut für Physik, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Heidelberg; (b) Physikalisches Institut, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Mannheim, Germany
59 Faculty of Applied Information Science, Hiroshima Institute of Technology, Hiroshima, Japan
60 Department of Physics, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, United States
61 Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Leopold-Franzens-Universität, Innsbruck, Austria
62 University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, United States
63 Department of Physics and Astronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, United States
64 Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, JINR Dubna, Dubna, Russia
65 KEK, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization, Tsukuba, Japan
66 Graduate School of Science, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan
67 Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan
68 Kyoto University of Education, Kyoto, Japan
69 Instituto de Fisica La Plata, Universidad Nacional de La Plata and CONICET, La Plata, Argentina
70 Physics Department, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom
Sciences, Kosice, Slovak Republic

Granada, Spain

Nucleaires, Rabat; Sciences, Université Mohammed V- Agdal, Rabat, Morocco

Fachbereich Physik, Universität Siegen, Siegen, Germany

Department of Physics, Shinshu University, Nagano, Japan

DSM/IRFU (Institut de Recherches sur les Lois Fondamentales de l'Univers), CEA Saclay (Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique), Gif-sur-Yvette, France

Ritsumeikan University, Kusatsu, Shiga, Japan

Physics Department, University of Regina, Regina, SK, Canada

Czech Technical University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic

Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic

Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan

Graduate School of Science, Okayama University, Okayama, Japan

Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, United States

Department of Physics, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, United States

Palacký University, RCPHM, Olomouc, Czech Republic

Center for High Energy Physics, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, United States

LAL, Univ. Paris-Sud and CNRS/IN2P3, Orsay, France

Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan

Department of Physics, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

Department of Physics, Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom

INFN Sezione di Pavia; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy

Department of Physics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, United States

Petersburg Nuclear Institute, Gatchina, Russia

INFN Sezione di Pisa; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy

Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, United States

Laboratorio de Instrumentación e Física Experimental de Partículas – LPF, Lisboa, Portugal; (b) Departamento de Física Teórica y del Cosmos and CAFPE, Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain

Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic

Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

Czech Technical University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic

State Research Center Institute for High Energy Physics, Protvino, Russia

Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom

Physics Department, University of Regina, Regina, SK, Canada

Ritsumeikan University, Kusatsu, Shiga, Japan

INFN Sezione di Roma I; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università La Sapienza, Roma, Italy

INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma, Italy

INFN Sezione di Roma Tre; (b) Dipartimento di Fisica, Università Roma Tre, Roma, Italy

Faculté des Sciences Ain Chock, Réseau Universitaire de Physique des Hautes Energies – Université Hassan II, Casablanca; (b) Centre National de l’Energie des Sciences Techniques Nucléaires, Rabat; (c) Faculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, LPHEA-Marrakech; (d) Faculté des Sciences, Université Mohamed Premier and LPTPMP, Oujda; (e) Faculté des Sciences, Université Mohammed V- Agdal, Rabat, Morocco

DSM/IRFU (Institut de Recherches sur les Lois Fondamentales de l’Univers), CEA Saclay (Commissariat a l’Energie Atomique), GIF-sur-Yvette, France

Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, United States

Department of Physics, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, United States

Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom

Department of Physics, Shinshu University, Nagano, Japan

Fachbereich Physik, Universität Siegen, Siegen, Germany

Department of Physics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, Stanford, CA, United States

Faculty of Mathematics, Physics & Informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava; (b) Department of Subnuclear Physics, Institute of Experimental Physics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Košice, Slovak Republic

Department of Physics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg; (b) School of Physics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Department of Physics, Stockholm University; (b) The Oskar Klein Centre, Stockholm, Sweden