

ctapipe – Prototype Open Event Reconstruction Pipeline for the Cherenkov Telescope Array

Maximilian Linhoff^{a,*}, Lukas Beiske^a, Noah Biederbeck^a, Stefan Fröse^a, Karl Kosack^b and Lukas Nickel^a for the CTA Consortium and Observatory

^a*Astroparticle Physics, Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University, Otto-Hahn-Str. 4a, 44227, Dortmund, Germany*

^b*Université Paris-Saclay, Université Paris Cité, CEA, CNRS, AIM F-91191, Gif-sur-Yvette, France*

E-mail: maximilian.linhoff@tu-dortmund.de

The Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory (CTAO) is the next-generation ground-based gamma-ray observatory currently under construction. It will improve over the current generation of imaging atmospheric Cherenkov telescopes (IACTs) by a factor of five to ten in sensitivity and it will be able to observe the whole sky from a combination of two sites: a northern site in La Palma, Spain, and a southern one in Paranal, Chile.

CTAO will also be the first open ground-based gamma-ray observatory. Accordingly, the CTAO data processing pipeline is developed as open-source software and `ctapipe` will be a core package therein. The event reconstruction pipeline accepts raw data of the telescopes and processes it to produce suitable input for the higher-level science tools. Its primary tasks include reconstructing the physical properties of each recorded air shower and providing the corresponding instrument response functions.

`ctapipe` is a python framework providing algorithms and command-line tools to facilitate raw data calibration, image extraction, image parametrization and event reconstruction. Its current main focus is the analysis of simulated data but it has also been successfully applied for the analysis of data obtained with the CTA prototype telescopes, and first science results have now been obtained by the LST-1 collaboration using `ctapipe`. A plugin system also allows the processing of non-CTA data.

Recent updates, including event reconstruction using machine learning and a new plugin system as well as the roadmap towards a 1.0 release will be presented.

38th International Cosmic Ray Conference (ICRC2023)
26 July – 3 August, 2023
Nagoya, Japan



*Speaker

1. Introduction

The Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory (CTAO)¹ is the next generation very-high-energy gamma-ray observatory, currently under construction. It will be sensitive to gamma-ray energies between ~ 20 GeV and 300 TeV and provide full-sky coverage by operating two sites: one on the Southern hemisphere at the Paranal Observatory in Chile and one on the Northern hemisphere at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain.

After its initial construction phase, the *alpha* configuration, the Southern array will comprise 14 Medium-Sized Telescopes (MSTs) with 12 m mirror diameter and 37 Small-Sized Telescopes (SSTs) with 4 m mirror diameter. The Northern site will comprise four Large-Sized Telescopes (LSTs) with 23 m mirror diameter and nine MSTs [8]. Additional funding for at least two LSTs for the Southern array has been secured².

CTAO will detect gamma rays by measuring the Cherenkov light emitted in extensive air showers (EAS) using very fast and sensitive cameras based on photo-multiplier tubes (PMTs) or silicon photo-multipliers (SiPMs). From the recorded Cherenkov light, the low-level analysis pipeline has to reconstruct the physical properties of the primary particle: its energy, direction and particle type. The latter is necessary since EAS are also induced by charged cosmic rays, which form a large background for imaging atmospheric cherenkov telescopes (IACTs) such as CTAO.

ctapipe is a Python framework implementing the necessary steps to perform these tasks, its development and features will be described in the next section.

2. ctapipe

ctapipe is a python package providing library functions and command-line tools to perform the analysis tasks listed in the previous section. It is developed as open-source software and the project – which was started in 2015 – is developed on Github. It is still under heavy development; the current release at the time of writing is 0.19.3 [12]. In total, 61 contributors have made this project possible. Releases are published to PyPI³, conda-packages are provided using conda-forge⁴ and the documentation is hosted on readthedocs⁵.

ctapipe is build upon the scientific python ecosystem: it depends on astropy [20] for coordinate transformations, high-precision timestamps, physical quantities and table operations, while numpy [9] and scipy [21] are used for numerical algorithms and statistics. The pytables⁶ library provides IO for the Hierarchical Data Format, Version 5 (HDF5)⁷, the file format used for most intermediate ctapipe data products. Finally, ctapipe makes use of the numba [13] jit-compiler for most of its performance critical code.

¹www.cta-observatory.org

²See www.cta-observatory.org/project/industry/\#1675157418077-1c4af6db-4be5

³pypi.org/project/ctapipe

⁴anaconda.org/conda-forge/ctapipe

⁵ctapipe.readthedocs.org

⁶www.pytables.org

⁷www.hdfgroup.org/solutions/hdf5

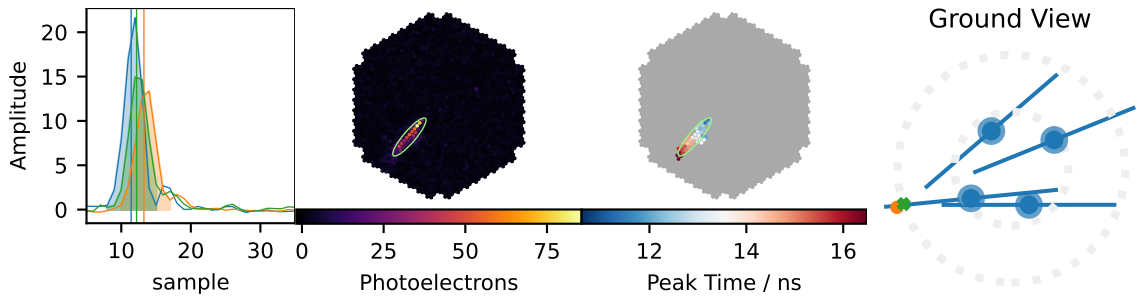


Figure 1: Steps of the analysis up to shower geometry reconstruction: 1. The Cherenkov pulses in each pixel are found and integrated (left) to obtain the number of photons (second from left) and peak times (third from left). 2. The resulting image is cleaned, the pixels not selected are shown in gray in the peak time plot. 3. The images are parametrized, including the Hillas parameters which are visualized using an ellipse. 4. The physical properties of the primary are reconstructed. The plot on the right shows the impact point of the primary on the ground, the green cross is the reconstructed position and the orange point the true value known from the simulations.

The goal of `ctapipe` is to provide the necessary tools and methods to process the pre-calibrated raw data (called DL0) of CTAO to *science-ready data* (called DL3) usable as input to the high-level science analysis tools, which will be based on Gammapy [6].

At DL0, the main unit of data is the *subarray event*, that corresponds to a single air shower recorded by the telescopes assigned to the current observation. A subarray event is composed of a varying number of *telescope events*, data of each individual telescope that was triggered as part of the subarray event. The DL0 telescope data mainly consists of the time-series of the photo-multipliers in the Cherenkov camera, additional metadata, and monitoring data, like the pointing positions of the telescopes. At DL3, only the reconstructed properties of the primary particle and the event timestamp remain for each subarray event and no telescope-wise information is required. In addition to these event lists, the instrument response functions (IRFs), which give the relationship between a true gamma-ray signal and the observed, reconstructed properties of the events are needed for the high-level analysis and are thus also part of DL3 data.

In the “classical” IACT analysis scheme, which is currently implemented in `ctapipe`, the analysis is performed in steps resulting in intermediate data levels:

1. The time-series in each pixel are reduced to two numbers each: the estimated number of Cherenkov photons and their mean arrival time, referred to as *DL1 images*.
2. The resulting images are “cleaned”, meaning that only the pixels likely to contain a significant Cherenkov signal are selected for further processing.
3. The cleaned images are described using parameters, including for example the Hillas parameters [10], resulting in a further reduction of data volume. This data level is referred to as *DL1 parameters*.
4. From the DL1 parameters of each telescope, the physical properties of the primary particle are estimated. For the direction, geometrical approaches using the stereoscopic nature of multi-telescope observations can be used. For the energy and particle type, machine learning

methods are employed. In the case of monoscopic events, machine learning is also used for the estimation of the direction.

The following sections describe each of these steps and their implementation in `ctapipe`.

2.1 Image Extraction

The first step in the `ctapipe` analysis is to reduce the pixel-wise time-series information to the number of photons and their mean arrival time. The extracted values can be calibrated for pixel inhomogeneities, both in amplitude and time. `ctapipe` supports different algorithms for extracting these quantities from single-pixel waveforms, from simple peak-finding algorithms to more complex ones that combine the waveforms of multiple pixels or that fit the expected time evolution of the shower and use that to define the integration window for each pixel.

2.2 Image Parametrization

After removal of noise pixels, the cleaned image is parametrized in order to make it exploitable by subsequent algorithms, in particular shower geometry reconstructors and/or machine-learning models that perform the shower property reconstruction. Among the most important parameters are the classical Hillas parameters [10], which describe the orientation and extension of the shower image in the camera, which is needed for the following reconstruction steps. Additionally, `ctapipe` implements general descriptive statistics of the images, morphological features like the number of isolated pixel groups and parameters describing the containment of the shower's image in the camera.

2.3 Reconstruction of Primary Particle Properties

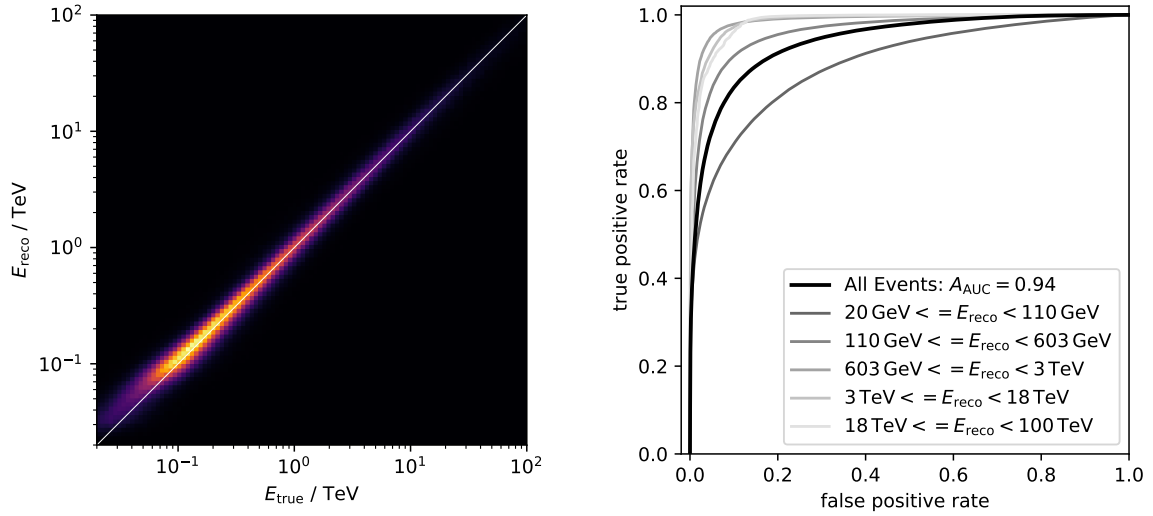
The previous steps are performed independently for each telescope event. Now, the goal is to combine the telescope events into a single prediction for the main physical properties of the primary particle that induced the air shower. Three main properties need to be estimated:

Energy the primary energy, assuming that the shower was induced by a gamma-ray,

Particle Type the particle type (gamma, electron, proton, ...) that induced the air shower,

Direction the direction on the sky where the primary particle came from.

Tools to train and apply machine learning models provided by `scikit-learn` [19] to solve these tasks were first introduced in `ctapipe` 0.18.0. Through the configuration system, it is possible to select any of the models implemented in `scikit-learn` and define their hyperparameters. Since most, if not all, classical machine learning algorithms cannot cope with variable-length input data, the approach chosen for `ctapipe` is to train models for each telescope type and apply them to a single telescope event, augmented with the available subarray-wide information. To form the final, single prediction for the subarray event, the telescope predictions are averaged. The training and application tools allow the application of quality criteria to select which events should be included in the training. It is also possible to combine features in the input files to form new ones on the fly.



(a) Energy migration for simulated diffuse gamma rays up to 2° away from the center of the field of view.

(b) ROC curve for all events and for events in different ranges of the predicted gamma-ray energy. Note that for the background this is not the predicted primary energy but the energy predicted assuming the shower was induced by a gamma ray.

Figure 2: Performance visualizations for the machine learning event reconstruction steps for the CTA-North alpha configuration processed with ctapipe v0.19.2.

Energy Estimation The gamma-ray energy estimation is a one-dimensional regression task, that can be performed using any of the regressors implemented in scikit-learn. Most commonly, decision-tree-based ensemble methods like random forests or different kinds of boosted decision trees are employed. Due to the large value range of multiple orders of magnitude, the models are trained to predict the logarithm of the energy. Models are trained per telescope type (LST, MST, SST) and single-telescope predictions are combined into a common prediction for the subarray event using a simple or weighted average. Multiple weights can be chosen, for example weighting bright images stronger than dim images. Figure 2a shows the energy migration matrix obtained for the CTA-North alpha configuration.

Particle Type Classification Currently, ctapipe implements binary classification for a given particle type as signal vs. background, resulting in a score that is a measure of how likely the given event belonged to the signal class. Usually, this means using gamma ray events for the signal class and proton events for the background class. It is possible to include the predicted gamma-ray energy from the previous step in the features for the particle type classification. Figure 2b shows receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves for different ranges of estimated gamma-ray energy for the CTA-North alpha configuration. Again, one model is trained for each telescope type and telescope events are combined using a (weighted) average.

Geometry Estimation The geometry of an air shower is described by the direction and hypothetical impact point on the ground of the primary particle. In the case of stereoscopic observations, these can be estimated using geometrical optimization approaches from the orientation of the images

in each telescope as described by the Hillas parameters. This is implemented in `ctapipe` and can be used also as input for the machine learning reconstruction of energy and particle type. Especially for the energy estimation, the distance of the telescope to the impact point is crucial.

The direction reconstruction is a much harder problem in case of a single telescope observing on its own. In this case, machine learning is also applied to estimate the direction. In general, this would be a two-dimensional regression, however, relying on the Hillas parameters allows a simplification to a one-dimensional regression and binary classification. Using the so-called `disp`-method [14], the distance from the center of gravity of the shower along the main shower axis is predicted, this is the absolute value of `disp`. This leaves two possible solutions for the direction, choosing the correct one is the goal of the following binary classification, which can be interpreted as the sign of `disp`.

2.4 Analysis Workflow

The steps from DL0 to the input data for the training of the machine learning models, which comprise the DL1 image parameters and DL2 parameters obtained from the geometrical reconstruction approaches, are performed using the `ctapipe-process` tool. It is run in parallel on many runs of the DL0 simulation output, which are then merged using `ctapipe-merge` into larger datasets for training and validation. This is followed by training the energy models using `ctapipe-train-energy-regressor` on a first set of gamma ray simulations. These models are applied to another set of gamma rays and proton simulations using `ctapipe-apply-models`, which are then used as input to `ctapipe-train-particle-classifier`. Finally, all trained models can be applied to validation datasets, again using `ctapipe-apply-models`. Using the DIRAC transformation system and workflow definitions provided by CTADIRAC [2], these steps can be applied in large scale on the CTA GRID.

2.5 Data Formats

`ctapipe` offers a plugin system for event-wise input data that allows users to implement readers for their data formats without having to modify `ctapipe` itself. `ctapipe` itself comes with two implementations, one for the data format used for CTA simulations, which are produced using `sim_telarray` [3] and one for its own data format using HDF5. The data are split by data level and telescope-wise information is stored in tables for each telescope. Metadata, like units and column descriptions are attached using HDF5 attributes. `ctapipe` offers functionality to conveniently load and join these different tables into `astropy.table.Table` instances.

3. First Scientific Results Obtained with `ctapipe`-based Analyses

The Large-Sized Telescope 1 (LST-1) has been inaugurated in 2018 and is since in its commissioning phase, taking first scientific observations. Its data analysis software, `lstchain` [16], is based on `ctapipe` and was used to publish the first scientific results obtained with a `ctapipe`-based analysis in [1]. A publication on the telescope and analysis performance using Crab Nebula observations is accepted [5] and is also presented at this conference [17]. Showing also the ability to analyze data from the current generation of telescopes, the performance of joint analysis of MAGIC and LST-1 data using `ctapipe` is presented in [7].

4. Conclusions and Outlook

With the latest releases, `ctapipe` is able to produce fully reconstructed DL2 event lists using geometrical approaches and scikit-learn-based machine learning models. The analysis can be configured using a flexible configuration system, provenance information is recorded automatically. A few critical steps remain until the full pipeline to science-ready data (DL3) is ready:

- Optimizing event selection criteria, mainly the energy dependent decision threshold in the gamma-hadron classification to optimize the sensitivity.
- Afterwards, the instrument response functions need to be computed. A python library for this task is under development [15], but is not yet directly integrated with `ctapipe` to produce IRFs from `ctapipe` data products.
- To allow multiple science cases in the same data release and reduce systematic uncertainties, CTAO plans to categorize events into discrete types based on their expected reconstruction quality and expected background contamination. This categorization is also yet to be implemented in `ctapipe`.
- Work on more advanced reconstruction algorithms is underway, this includes ImpACT [18] and a plugin system for machine learning models based e. g. on deep neural networks [4, 11].
- While the LST-1 has shown that it is possible to use `ctapipe` successfully for the analysis of actual observations, `ctapipe` itself was mainly focused on the analysis of the CTA simulations. Much of the complexities of calibration and monitoring data still need to be integrated into `ctapipe`.

Acknowledgements

This work was conducted in the context of the CTA Consortium and CTA Observatory. We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the agencies and organizations listed here:

https://www.cta-observatory.org/consortium_acknowledgments.

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Full Authors List: CTA Consortium

K. Abe¹, S. Abe², A. Acharyya³, R. Adam^{4,5}, A. Aguasca-Cabot⁶, I. Agudo⁷, J. Alfaro⁸, N. Alvarez-Crespo⁹, R. Alves Batista¹⁰, J.-P. Amans¹¹, E. Amato¹², F. Ambrosio¹³, E. O. Angüner¹⁴, L. A. Antonelli¹³, C. Aramo¹⁵, C. Arcaro¹⁶, L. Arrabito¹⁷, K. Asano², J. Aschersleben¹⁸, H. Ashkar⁵, L. Augusto Stuani¹⁹, D. Baack²⁰, M. Backes^{21,22}, C. Balazs²³, M. Balbo²⁴, A. Baquero Larriva^{9,25}, V. Barbosa Martins²⁶, U. Barres de Almeida^{27,28}, J. A. Barrio⁹, D. Bastieri²⁹, P. I. Batista²⁶, I. Batkovic²⁹, R. Batzofin³⁰, J. Baxter², G. Beck³¹, J. Becker Tjus³², L. Beiske²⁰, D. Belardinelli³³, W. Benbow³⁴, E. Bernardini²⁹, J. Bernete Medrano³⁵, K. Bernlöhr³⁶, A. Berti³⁷, V. Beshley³⁸, P. Bhattacharjee³⁹, S. Bhattacharyya⁴⁰, B. Bi⁴¹, N. Biederbeck²⁰, A. Biland⁴², E. Bissaldi^{43,44}, O. Blanch⁴⁵, J. Blazek⁴⁶, C. Boisson¹¹, J. Bolmont⁴⁷, G. Bonnoli^{48,49}, P. Bordas⁶, Z. Bosnjak⁵⁰, F. Bradascio⁵¹, C. Braiding⁵², E. Bronzini⁵³, R. Brose⁵⁴, A. M. Brown⁵⁵, F. Brun⁵¹, G. Brunelli^{53,7}, A. Bulgarelli⁵³, I. Burelli⁵⁶, L. Burmistrov⁵⁷, M. Burton^{58,59}, T. Bylund⁶⁰, P. G. Calisse⁶¹, A. Campoy-Ordaz⁶², B. K. Cantlay^{63,64}, M. Capalbi⁶⁵, A. Caproni⁶⁶, R. Capuzzo-Dolcetta¹³, C. Carile⁶⁷, S. Caroff³⁹, A. Carosi¹³, R. Carosi⁴⁹, M.-S. Carrasco⁶⁸, E. Cascone⁶⁹, F. Cassol⁶⁸, N. Castrejon⁷⁰, F. Catalani⁷¹, D. Cerasole⁷², M. Cerruti⁷³, S. Chaty⁷³, A. W. Chen³⁴, M. Chernyakova⁷⁴, A. Chiavassa^{75,76}, J. Chudoba⁴⁶, C. H. Coimbra Araujo⁷⁷, V. Conforti⁵³, F. Conte³⁶, J. L. Contreras⁹, C. Cossou⁶⁰, A. Costa⁷⁸, H. Costantini⁶⁸, P. Cristofari¹¹, O. Cueva⁷⁹, Z. Curtis-Ginsberg⁸⁰, G. D'Amico⁸¹, F. D'Ammando⁸², M. Dadina⁵³, M. Dalchenko⁵⁷, L. David²⁶, I. D. Davids²¹, F. Dazzi⁸³, A. De Angelis²⁹, M. de Bony de Lavergne⁶⁰, V. De Caprio⁶⁹, G. De Cesare⁵³, E. M. de Gouveia Dal Pino²⁸, B. De Lotto⁵⁶, M. De Lucia¹⁵, R. de Menezes^{75,76}, M. de Naurois⁵, E. de Ona Wilhelmi²⁶, N. De Simone²⁶, V. de Souza¹⁹, L. del Perai⁷⁰, M. V. del Valle²⁸, E. Delagnes⁸⁴, A. G. Delgado Giler^{19,18}, C. Delgado³⁵, M. Dell'aiera³⁹, R. Della Ceca⁴⁸, M. Della Valle⁶⁹, D. della Volpe⁵⁷, D. Depaoli³⁶, A. Dettlaff³⁷, T. Di Girolamo^{85,15}, A. Di Piano⁵³, F. Di Piero⁷⁵, R. Di Tria⁷², L. Di Venere⁴⁴, C. Díaz-Bahamondes⁸, C. Dib⁸⁶, S. Diebold⁴¹, R. Dima²⁹, A. Dinesh⁹, A. Djannati-Ataï⁷³, J. Djuvsland⁸¹, A. Domínguez⁹, R. M. Dominik²⁰, A. Donini¹³, D. Dorner^{87,42}, J. Dörner³², M. Doro²⁹, R. D. C. dos Anjos⁷⁷, J.-L. Dournaux¹¹, D. Dravins⁶⁷, C. Duangchan^{88,64}, C. Dubos⁸⁹, L. Ducci⁴¹, V. V. Dwarkadas⁹⁰, J. Ebr⁴⁶, C. Eckner^{39,91}, K. Egberts³⁰, S. Einecke⁵², D. Elsässer²⁰, G. Emery⁶⁸, M. Escobar Godoy⁹², J. Escudero⁷, P. Esposito^{93,94}, D. Falceta-Goncalves⁹⁵, V. Fallah Ramazani³², A. Faure¹⁷, E. Fedorova^{13,96}, S. Fegan⁵, K. Feijen⁷³, Q. Feng³⁴, G. Ferrand^{97,98}, F. Ferrarotto⁹⁹, E. Fiandrini¹⁰⁰, A. Fiasson³⁹, V. Fioretti⁵³, L. Foffano¹⁰¹, L. Font Guiteras⁶², G. Fontaine⁵, S. Fröse²⁰, S. Fukami⁴², Y. Fukui¹⁰², S. Funk⁸⁸, D. Gaggero⁴⁹, G. Galanti⁹⁴, G. Galaz⁸, Y. A. Gallant¹⁷, S. Gallozzi¹³, V. Gammaldi¹⁰, C. Gasbarra³³, M. Gaug⁶², A. Ghalumyan¹⁰³, F. Gianotti⁵³, M. Giarrusso¹⁰⁴, N. Giglietto^{43,44}, F. Giordano⁷², A. Giuliani⁹⁴, J.-F. Glicenstein⁵¹, J. Glombitza⁸⁸, P. Goldoni¹⁰⁵, J. M. González¹⁰⁶, M. M. González¹⁰⁷, J. Goulart Coelho¹⁰⁸, J. Granot^{109,110}, D. Grasso⁴⁹, R. Grau⁴⁵, D. Green³⁷, J. G. Green³⁷, T. Greenshaw¹¹¹, G. Grolleron⁴⁷, J. Grube¹¹², O. Gueta²⁶, S. Gunji¹¹³, D. Hadasch², P. Hamal⁴⁶, W. Hanlon³⁴, S. Hara¹¹⁴, V. M. Harvey⁵², K. Hashiyama², T. Hassan³⁵, M. Heller⁵⁷, S. Hernández Cadena¹⁰⁷, J. Hie¹¹⁵, N. Hiroshima², B. Hnatyk⁹⁶, R. Hnatyk⁹⁶, D. Hoffmann⁶⁸, W. Hofmann³⁶, M. Holler¹¹⁶, D. Horan⁵, P. Horvath¹¹⁷, T. Hovatta¹¹⁸, D. Hrupec¹¹⁹, S. Hussain^{28,120}, M. Iarlori¹²¹, T. Inada², F. Incardona⁷⁸, Y. Inoue², S. Inoue⁹⁸, F. Iocco^{85,15}, K. Ishio¹²², M. Jamrozny¹²³, P. Janecek⁴⁶, F. Jankowsky¹²⁴, C. Jarnot¹¹⁵, P. Jean¹¹⁵, I. Jiménez Martínez³⁵, W. Jin³, L. Jocou¹²⁵, C. Juramy-Gilles⁴⁷, J. Jurysek⁴⁶, O. Kalekin⁸⁸, D. Kantzas⁹¹, V. Karas¹²⁶, S. Kaufmann⁵⁵, D. Kerszberg⁴⁵, B. Khélifi⁷³, D. B. Kieda¹²⁷, T. Kleiner²⁶, W. Kluźniak¹²⁸, Y. Kobayashi², K. Kohri¹²⁹, N. Komin³¹, P. Kornecki¹¹, K. Kosack⁶⁰, H. Kubo², J. Kushida¹, A. La Barbera⁶⁵, N. La Palombara⁹⁴, M. Láinez⁹, A. Lamastra¹³, J. Lapington¹³⁰, S. Lazarević¹³¹, J. Lazendic-Galloway²³, S. Leach¹³⁰, M. Lemoine-Goumard¹³², J.-P. Lenain⁴⁷, G. Leto⁷⁸, F. Leuschner⁴¹, E. Lindfors¹¹⁸, M. Linhoff²⁰, I. Liodakis¹¹⁸, L. Loic⁵¹, S. Lombardi¹³, F. Longo¹³³, R. López-Coto⁷, M. López-Moya⁹, A. López-Oramas¹³⁴, S. Loporchio^{43,44}, J. Lozano Bahilo⁷⁰, P. L. Luque-Escamilla¹³⁵, O. Macias¹³⁶, G. Maier²⁶, P. Majumdar¹³⁷, D. Malyshev⁴¹, D. Malyshev⁸⁸, D. Mandat⁴⁶, G. Manico^{104,138}, P. Marinos⁵², S. Markoff¹³⁶, I. Márquez⁷, P. Marquez⁴⁵, G. Marsella^{139,104}, J. Martí¹³⁵, P. Martin¹¹⁵, G. A. Martínez³⁵, M. Martínez⁴⁵, O. Martínez^{140,141}, C. Marty¹¹⁵, A. Mas-Aguilar⁹, M. Mastrogiuseppe¹³, G. Maurin³⁹, W. Max-Moerbeck¹⁴², D. Mazin^{2,37}, D. Melkumyan²⁶, S. Menchiarì^{12,49}, E. Mestre¹⁴³, J.-L. Meunier⁴⁷, D. M.-A. Meyer³⁰, D. Miceli¹⁶, M. Michailidis⁴¹, J. Michałowski¹⁴⁴, T. Miener⁹, J. M. Miranda^{140,145}, A. Mitchell⁸⁸, M. Mizote¹⁴⁶, T. Mizuno¹⁴⁷, R. Moderski¹²⁸, L. Mohrmann³⁶, M. Molero¹³⁴, C. Molfese⁸³, E. Molina¹³⁴, T. Montaruli⁵⁷, A. Moralejo⁴⁵, D. Morcuende^{9,7}, K. Morik²⁰, A. Morselli³³, E. Moulin⁵¹, V. Moya Zamanillo⁹, R. Mukherjee¹⁴⁸, K. Munari⁷⁸, A. Muraczewski¹²⁸, H. Muraishi¹⁴⁹, T. Nakamori¹¹³, L. Nava⁴⁸, A. Nayak⁵⁵, R. Nemmen^{28,150}, L. Nickel²⁰, J. Niemiec¹⁴⁴, D. Nieto⁹, M. Nievas Rosillo¹³⁴, M. Nikolajuk¹⁵¹, K. Nishijima¹, K. Noda², D. Nosek¹⁵², B. Novosyadlyj¹⁵³, V. Novotny¹⁵², S. Nozaki³⁷, P. O'Brien¹³⁰, M. Ohishi², Y. Ohtani², A. Okumura^{154,155}, J.-F. Olive¹¹⁵, B. Olmi^{156,12}, R. A. Ong¹⁵⁷, M. Orienti⁸², R. Orito¹⁵⁸, M. Orlandini⁵³, E. Orlando¹³³, M. Ostrowski¹²³, N. Otte¹⁵⁹, I. Oya⁶¹, I. Pagano⁷⁸, A. Pagliaro⁶⁵, M. Palatiello⁵⁶, G. Panebianco⁵³, J. M. Paredes⁶, N. Parmiggiani⁵³, S. R. Patel⁸⁹, B. Patricelli^{13,160}, D. Pavlovic¹⁶¹, A. Pe'er³⁷, M. Pech⁴⁶, M. Pecimotika^{161,162}, M. Peresano^{76,75}, J. Pérez-Romero^{10,40}, G. Peron⁷³, M. Persic^{163,164}, P.-O. Petrucci¹²⁵, O. Petruk³⁸, F. Pfeifle⁸⁷, F. Pintore⁶⁵, G. Pirola³⁷, C. Pittori¹³, C. Plard³⁹, F. Podobnik¹⁶⁵, M. Pohl^{30,26}, E. Pons³⁹, E. Prandini²⁹, J. Prast³⁹, G. Principe¹³³, C. Priyadarshi⁴⁵, N. Produit²⁴, D. Prokhorov¹³⁶, E. Pueschel²⁶, G. Pühlhofer⁴¹, M. L. Pumo^{138,104}, M. Punch⁷³, A. Quirrenbach¹²⁴, S. Rainò⁷², N. Randazzo¹⁰⁴, R. Rando²⁹, T. Ravel¹¹⁵, S. Razzaque^{166,110}, M. Regard⁷³, P. Reichherzer^{167,32}, A. Reimer¹¹⁶, O. Reimer¹¹⁶, A. Reisenegger^{8,168}, T. Reposeur¹³², B. Reville³⁶, W. Rhode²⁰, M. Ribó⁶, T. Richtler¹⁶⁹, F. Rieger³⁶, E. Roache³⁴, G. Rodriguez Fernandez³³, M. D. Rodríguez Frías⁷⁰, J. J. Rodríguez-Vázquez³⁵, P. Romano⁴⁸, G. Romeo⁷⁸, J. Rosado⁹, G. Rowell⁵², B. Rudak¹²⁸, A. J. Ruiter¹⁷⁰, C. B. Rulten⁵⁵, F. Russo⁵³, I. Sadeh²⁶, L. Saha³⁴, T. Saito², S. Sakurai², H. Salzmann⁴¹, D. Sanchez³⁹, M. Sánchez-Conde¹⁰, P. Sangiorgi⁶⁵,

H. Sano², M. Santander³, A. Santangelo⁴¹, R. Santos-Lima²⁸, A. Sanuy⁶, T. Šarić¹⁷¹, A. Sarkar²⁶, S. Sarkar¹⁶⁷, F. G. Saturni¹³, V. Savchenko¹⁷², A. Scherer⁸, P. Schipani⁶⁹, B. Schleicher^{87,42}, P. Schovaneck⁴⁶, J. L. Schubert²⁰, F. Schussler⁵¹, U. Schwanke¹⁷³, G. Schwefer³⁶, S. Scuderi⁹⁴, M. Seglar Arroyo⁴⁵, I. Seitzzahl¹⁷⁰, O. Sergijenko^{96,174,175}, V. Sguera⁵³, R. Y. Shang¹⁵⁷, P. Sharma⁸⁹, G. D. S. SIDIBE⁸⁴, L. Sidoli⁹⁴, H. Siejkowski¹⁷⁶, C. Siqueira¹⁹, P. Sizun⁸⁴, V. Sliusar²⁴, A. Slowikowska¹⁷⁷, H. Sol¹¹, A. Specovius⁸⁸, S. T. Spencer^{88,167}, D. Spiga⁴⁸, A. Stamerra^{13,178}, S. Stanić⁴⁰, T. Starecki¹⁷⁹, R. Starling¹³⁰, C. Steppa³⁰, T. Stolarczyk⁶⁰, J. Strišković¹¹⁹, M. Strzys², Y. Suda¹⁸⁰, T. Suomijärvi⁸⁹, D. Tak²⁶, M. Takahashi¹⁵⁴, R. Takeishi², P.-H. T. Tam^{2,181}, S. J. Tanaka¹⁸², T. Tanaka¹⁴⁶, K. Terauchi¹⁸³, V. Testa¹³, L. Tibaldo¹¹⁵, O. Tibolla⁵⁵, F. Torradeflot^{184,35}, D. F. Torres¹⁴³, E. Torresi⁵³, N. Tothill¹³¹, F. Toussenel⁴⁷, V. Touzard¹¹⁵, A. Tramacere²⁴, P. Travnicek⁴⁶, G. Tripodo^{139,104}, S. Truzzi¹⁶⁵, A. Tsiaghina¹¹⁵, A. Tutone⁶⁵, M. Vacula^{117,46}, B. Vallage⁵¹, P. Vallania^{75,185}, R. Vallés¹⁴³, C. van Eldik⁸⁸, J. van Scherpenberg³⁷, J. Vandenbroucke⁸⁰, V. Vassiliev¹⁵⁷, P. Venault⁸⁴, S. Ventura¹⁶⁵, S. Vercellone⁴⁸, G. Verna¹⁶⁵, A. Viana¹⁹, N. Viaux¹⁸⁶, A. Vigliano⁵⁶, J. Vignatti⁸⁶, C. F. Vigorito^{75,76}, V. Vitale³³, V. Vodeb⁴⁰, V. Voisin⁴⁷, S. Vorobiov⁴⁰, G. Voutsinas⁵⁷, I. Vovk², V. Waeghebaert¹¹⁵, S. J. Wagner¹²⁴, R. Walter²⁴, M. Ward⁵⁵, M. Wechakama^{63,64}, R. White³⁶, A. Wierzcholska¹⁴⁴, M. Will³⁷, D. A. Williams⁹², F. Wohlleben³⁶, A. Wolter⁴⁸, T. Yamamoto¹⁴⁶, R. Yamazaki¹⁸², L. Yang^{166,181}, T. Yoshida¹⁸⁷, T. Yoshikoshi², M. Zacharias^{124,22}, R. Zanmar Sanchez⁷⁸, D. Zavrtanik⁴⁰, M. Zavrtanik⁴⁰, A. A. Zdziarski¹²⁸, A. Zech¹¹, V. I. Zhdanov⁹⁶, K. Zięta¹²³, M. Živec⁴⁰, and J. Zuriaga-Puig¹⁰

¹ Department of Physics, Tokai University, 4-1-1, Kita-Kaname, Hiratsuka, Kanagawa 259-1292, Japan

² Institute for Cosmic Ray Research, University of Tokyo, 5-1-5, Kashiwa-no-ha, Kashiwa, Chiba 277-8582, Japan

³ University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Gallalee Hall, Box 870324 Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0324, USA

⁴ Université Côte d'Azur, Observatoire de la Côte d'Azur, CNRS, Laboratoire Lagrange, France

⁵ Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, CNRS/IN2P3, École polytechnique, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, 91120 Palaiseau, France

⁶ Departament de Física Quàntica i Astrofísica, Institut de Ciències del Cosmos, Universitat de Barcelona, IEEC-UB, Martí i Franquès, 1, 08028, Barcelona, Spain

⁷ Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía-CSIC, Glorieta de la Astronomía s/n, 18008, Granada, Spain

⁸ Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins 340, Santiago, Chile

⁹ IPARCOS-UCM, Instituto de Física de Partículas y del Cosmos, and EMFTEL Department, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, E-28040 Madrid, Spain

¹⁰ Instituto de Física Teórica UAM/CSIC and Departamento de Física Teórica, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, c/ Nicolás Cabrera 13-15, Campus de Cantoblanco UAM, 28049 Madrid, Spain

¹¹ LUTH, GEPI and LERMA, Observatoire de Paris, Université PSL, Université Paris Cité, CNRS, 5 place Jules Janssen, 92190, Meudon, France

¹² INFN - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Arcetri, Largo E. Fermi, 5 - 50125 Firenze, Italy

¹³ INFN - Osservatorio Astronomico di Roma, Via di Frascati 33, 00040, Monteporzio Catone, Italy

¹⁴ TÜBİTAK Research Institute for Fundamental Sciences, 41470 Gebze, Kocaeli, Turkey

¹⁵ INFN Sezione di Napoli, Via Cintia, ed. G, 80126 Napoli, Italy

¹⁶ INFN Sezione di Padova, Via Marzolo 8, 35131 Padova, Italy

¹⁷ Laboratoire Univers et Particules de Montpellier, Université de Montpellier, CNRS/IN2P3, CC 72, Place Eugène Bataillon, F-34095 Montpellier Cedex 5, France

¹⁸ Kapteyn Astronomical Institute, University of Groningen, Landleven 12, 9747 AD, Groningen, The Netherlands

¹⁹ Instituto de Física de São Carlos, Universidade de São Paulo, Av. Trabalhador São-carlense, 400 - CEP 13566-590, São Carlos, SP, Brazil

²⁰ Astroparticle Physics, Department of Physics, TU Dortmund University, Otto-Hahn-Str. 4a, 44227 Dortmund, Germany

²¹ Department of Physics, Chemistry & Material Science, University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia

²² Centre for Space Research, North-West University, Potchefstroom, 2520, South Africa

²³ School of Physics and Astronomy, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria 3800, Australia

²⁴ Department of Astronomy, University of Geneva, Chemin d'Ecogia 16, CH-1290 Versoix, Switzerland

²⁵ Faculty of Science and Technology, Universidad del Azuay, Cuenca, Ecuador.

²⁶ Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Platanenallee 6, 15738 Zeuthen, Germany

²⁷ Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas, Rua Xavier Sigaud 150, RJ 22290-180, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

²⁸ Instituto de Astronomia, Geofísica e Ciências Atmosféricas - Universidade de São Paulo, Cidade Universitária, R. do Matão, 1226, CEP 05508-090, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

²⁹ INFN Sezione di Padova and Università degli Studi di Padova, Via Marzolo 8, 35131 Padova, Italy

³⁰ Institut für Physik & Astronomie, Universität Potsdam, Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse 24/25, 14476 Potsdam, Germany

³¹ University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein, 2000 Johannesburg, South Africa

- ³² Institut für Theoretische Physik, Lehrstuhl IV: Plasma-Astroteilchenphysik, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Universitätsstraße 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany
- ³³ INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, Via della Ricerca Scientifica 1, 00133 Rome, Italy
- ³⁴ Center for Astrophysics | Harvard & Smithsonian, 60 Garden St, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA
- ³⁵ CIEMAT, Avda. Complutense 40, 28040 Madrid, Spain
- ³⁶ Max-Planck-Institut für Kernphysik, Saupfercheckweg 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany
- ³⁷ Max-Planck-Institut für Physik, Föhringer Ring 6, 80805 München, Germany
- ³⁸ Pidstryhach Institute for Applied Problems in Mechanics and Mathematics NASU, 3B Naukova Street, Lviv, 79060, Ukraine
- ³⁹ Univ. Savoie Mont Blanc, CNRS, Laboratoire d'Annecy de Physique des Particules - IN2P3, 74000 Annecy, France
- ⁴⁰ Center for Astrophysics and Cosmology (CAC), University of Nova Gorica, Nova Gorica, Slovenia
- ⁴¹ Institut für Astronomie und Astrophysik, Universität Tübingen, Sand 1, 72076 Tübingen, Germany
- ⁴² ETH Zürich, Institute for Particle Physics and Astrophysics, Otto-Stern-Weg 5, 8093 Zürich, Switzerland
- ⁴³ Politecnico di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70124 Bari, Italy
- ⁴⁴ INFN Sezione di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70126 Bari, Italy
- ⁴⁵ Institut de Física d'Altes Energies (IFAE), The Barcelona Institute of Science and Technology, Campus UAB, 08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona), Spain
- ⁴⁶ FZU - Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Na Slovance 1999/2, 182 21 Praha 8, Czech Republic
- ⁴⁷ Sorbonne Université, CNRS/IN2P3, Laboratoire de Physique Nucléaire et de Hautes Energies, LPNHE, 4 place Jussieu, 75005 Paris, France
- ⁴⁸ INFN - Osservatorio Astronomico di Brera, Via Brera 28, 20121 Milano, Italy
- ⁴⁹ INFN Sezione di Pisa, Edificio C – Polo Fibonacci, Largo Bruno Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa
- ⁵⁰ University of Zagreb, Faculty of electrical engineering and computing, Unska 3, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
- ⁵¹ IRFU, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Bât 141, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- ⁵² School of Physics, Chemistry and Earth Sciences, University of Adelaide, Adelaide SA 5005, Australia
- ⁵³ INFN - Osservatorio di Astrofisica e Scienza dello spazio di Bologna, Via Piero Gobetti 93/3, 40129 Bologna, Italy
- ⁵⁴ Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 31 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2, Ireland
- ⁵⁵ Centre for Advanced Instrumentation, Department of Physics, Durham University, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, United Kingdom
- ⁵⁶ INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Udine, Via delle Scienze 208, 33100 Udine, Italy
- ⁵⁷ University of Geneva - Département de physique nucléaire et corpusculaire, 24 rue du Général-Dufour, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland
- ⁵⁸ Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, College Hill, Armagh BT61 9DG, United Kingdom
- ⁵⁹ School of Physics, University of New South Wales, Sydney NSW 2052, Australia
- ⁶⁰ Université Paris-Saclay, Université Paris Cité, CEA, CNRS, AIM, F-91191 Gif-sur-Yvette Cedex, France
- ⁶¹ Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory, Saupfercheckweg 1, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany
- ⁶² Unitat de Física de les Radiacions, Departament de Física, and CERES-IEEC, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Edifici C3, Campus UAB, 08193 Bellaterra, Spain
- ⁶³ Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, Kasetsart University, 50 Ngam Wong Wan Rd., Lat Yao, Chatuchak, Bangkok, 10900, Thailand
- ⁶⁴ National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand, 191 Huay Kaew Rd., Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand
- ⁶⁵ INFN - Istituto di Astrofisica Spaziale e Fisica Cosmica di Palermo, Via U. La Malfa 153, 90146 Palermo, Italy
- ⁶⁶ Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul, Núcleo de Astrofisica Teórica (NAT/UCS), Rua Galvão Bueno 8687, Bloco B, sala 16, Liberdade 01506-000 - São Paulo, Brazil
- ⁶⁷ Lund Observatory, Lund University, Box 43, SE-22100 Lund, Sweden
- ⁶⁸ Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS/IN2P3, CPPM, Marseille, France
- ⁶⁹ INFN - Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte, Via Salita Moirariello 16, 80131 Napoli, Italy
- ⁷⁰ Universidad de Alcalá - Space & Astroparticle group, Facultad de Ciencias, Campus Universitario Ctra. Madrid-Barcelona, Km. 33.600 28871 Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), Spain
- ⁷¹ Escola de Engenharia de Lorena, Universidade de São Paulo, Área I - Estrada Municipal do Campinho, s/n°, CEP 12602-810, Pte. Nova, Lorena, Brazil
- ⁷² INFN Sezione di Bari and Università degli Studi di Bari, via Orabona 4, 70124 Bari, Italy
- ⁷³ Université Paris Cité, CNRS, Astroparticule et Cosmologie, F-75013 Paris, France
- ⁷⁴ Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland
- ⁷⁵ INFN Sezione di Torino, Via P. Giuria 1, 10125 Torino, Italy
- ⁷⁶ Dipartimento di Fisica - Università degli Studi di Torino, Via Pietro Giuria 1 - 10125 Torino, Italy

- ⁷⁷ Universidade Federal Do Paraná - Setor Palotina, Departamento de Engenharias e Exatas, Rua Pioneiro, 2153, Jardim Dalls, CEP: 85950-000 Palotina, Paraná, Brazil
- ⁷⁸ INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Catania, Via S. Sofia, 78, 95123 Catania, Italy
- ⁷⁹ Universidad de Valparaíso, Blanco 951, Valparaíso, Chile
- ⁸⁰ University of Wisconsin, Madison, 500 Lincoln Drive, Madison, WI, 53706, USA
- ⁸¹ Department of Physics and Technology, University of Bergen, Museplass 1, 5007 Bergen, Norway
- ⁸² INAF - Istituto di Radioastronomia, Via Gobetti 101, 40129 Bologna, Italy
- ⁸³ INAF - Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica, Viale del Parco Mellini 84, 00136 Rome, Italy
- ⁸⁴ IRFU/DEDIP, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, Bat 141, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
- ⁸⁵ Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II" - Dipartimento di Fisica "E. Pancini", Complesso universitario di Monte Sant'Angelo, Via Cintia - 80126 Napoli, Italy
- ⁸⁶ CCTVal, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Avenida España 1680, Valparaíso, Chile
- ⁸⁷ Institute for Theoretical Physics and Astrophysics, Universität Würzburg, Campus Hubland Nord, Emil-Fischer-Str. 31, 97074 Würzburg, Germany
- ⁸⁸ Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Erlangen Centre for Astroparticle Physics, Nikolaus-Fiebiger-Str. 2, 91058 Erlangen, Germany
- ⁸⁹ Université Paris-Saclay, CNRS/IN2P3, IJCLab, 91405 Orsay, France
- ⁹⁰ Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, University of Chicago, 5640 S Ellis Ave, Chicago, Illinois, 60637, USA
- ⁹¹ LAPTh, CNRS, USMB, F-74940 Annecy, France
- ⁹² Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics and Department of Physics, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, USA
- ⁹³ University School for Advanced Studies IUSS Pavia, Palazzo del Broletto, Piazza della Vittoria 15, 27100 Pavia, Italy
- ⁹⁴ INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica Spaziale e Fisica Cosmica di Milano, Via A. Corti 12, 20133 Milano, Italy
- ⁹⁵ Escola de Artes, Ciências e Humanidades, Universidade de São Paulo, Rua Arlindo Bettio, CEP 03828-000, 1000 São Paulo, Brazil
- ⁹⁶ Astronomical Observatory of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, 3 Observatorna Street, Kyiv, 04053, Ukraine
- ⁹⁷ The University of Manitoba, Dept of Physics and Astronomy, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, Canada
- ⁹⁸ RIKEN, Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, 2-1 Hirosawa, Wako, Saitama, 351-0198, Japan
- ⁹⁹ INFN Sezione di Roma La Sapienza, P.le Aldo Moro, 2 - 00185 Roma, Italy
- ¹⁰⁰ INFN Sezione di Perugia and Università degli Studi di Perugia, Via A. Pascoli, 06123 Perugia, Italy
- ¹⁰¹ INAF - Istituto di Astrofisica e Planetologia Spaziali (IAPS), Via del Fosso del Cavaliere 100, 00133 Roma, Italy
- ¹⁰² Department of Physics, Nagoya University, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya, 464-8602, Japan
- ¹⁰³ Alikhanyan National Science Laboratory, Yerevan Physics Institute, 2 Alikhanyan Brothers St., 0036, Yerevan, Armenia
- ¹⁰⁴ INFN Sezione di Catania, Via S. Sofia 64, 95123 Catania, Italy
- ¹⁰⁵ Université Paris Cité, CNRS, CEA, Astroparticule et Cosmologie, F-75013 Paris, France
- ¹⁰⁶ Universidad Andres Bello, República 252, Santiago, Chile
- ¹⁰⁷ Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Delegación Coyoacán, 04510 Ciudad de México, Mexico
- ¹⁰⁸ Núcleo de Astrofísica e Cosmologia (Cosmo-ufes) & Departamento de Física, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Av. Fernando Ferrari, 514. 29065-910. Vitória-ES, Brazil
- ¹⁰⁹ Astrophysics Research Center of the Open University (ARCO), The Open University of Israel, P.O. Box 808, Ra'anana 4353701, Israel
- ¹¹⁰ Department of Physics, The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, USA
- ¹¹¹ University of Liverpool, Oliver Lodge Laboratory, Liverpool L69 7ZE, United Kingdom
- ¹¹² King's College London, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS, United Kingdom
- ¹¹³ Department of Physics, Yamagata University, Yamagata, Yamagata 990-8560, Japan
- ¹¹⁴ Learning and Education Development Center, Yamanashi-Gakuin University, Kofu, Yamanashi 400-8575, Japan
- ¹¹⁵ IRAP, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, CNES, UPS, 9 avenue Colonel Roche, 31028 Toulouse, Cedex 4, France
- ¹¹⁶ Universität Innsbruck, Institut für Astro- und Teilchenphysik, Technikerstr. 25/8, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria
- ¹¹⁷ Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, Joint Laboratory of Optics of Palacky University and Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 17. listopadu 1192/12, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic
- ¹¹⁸ Finnish Centre for Astronomy with ESO, University of Turku, Finland, FI-20014 University of Turku, Finland
- ¹¹⁹ Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Trg Ljudevita Gaja 6, 31000 Osijek, Croatia

- ¹²⁰ Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), Viale Francesco Crispi 7, 67100 L'Aquila, Italy and INFN-Laboratori Nazionali del Gran Sasso (LNGS), via G. Acitelli 22, 67100 Assergi (AQ), Italy
- ¹²¹ Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche e Chimiche, Università degli Studi dell'Aquila and GSGC-LNGS-INFN, Via Vetoio 1, L'Aquila, 67100, Italy
- ¹²² Faculty of Physics and Applied Computer Science, University of Łódź, ul. Pomorska 149-153, 90-236 Łódź, Poland
- ¹²³ Astronomical Observatory, Jagiellonian University, ul. Orła 171, 30-244 Cracow, Poland
- ¹²⁴ Landessternwarte, Zentrum für Astronomie der Universität Heidelberg, Königstuhl 12, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany
- ¹²⁵ Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, IPAG, 414 rue de la Piscine, Domaine Universitaire, 38041 Grenoble Cedex 9, France
- ¹²⁶ Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Bočni II 1401 - 14100 Prague, Czech Republic
- ¹²⁷ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0830, USA
- ¹²⁸ Nicolaus Copernicus Astronomical Center, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Bartycka 18, 00-716 Warsaw, Poland
- ¹²⁹ Institute of Particle and Nuclear Studies, KEK (High Energy Accelerator Research Organization), 1-1 Oho, Tsukuba, 305-0801, Japan
- ¹³⁰ School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 7RH, United Kingdom
- ¹³¹ Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia
- ¹³² Université Bordeaux, CNRS, LP2I Bordeaux, UMR 5797, 19 Chemin du Solarium, F-33170 Gradignan, France
- ¹³³ INFN Sezione di Trieste and Università degli Studi di Trieste, Via Valerio 2 I, 34127 Trieste, Italy
- ¹³⁴ Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias and Departamento de Astrofísica, Universidad de La Laguna, La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain
- ¹³⁵ Escuela Politécnica Superior de Jaén, Universidad de Jaén, Campus Las Lagunillas s/n, Edif. A3, 23071 Jaén, Spain
- ¹³⁶ Anton Pannekoek Institute/GRAPPA, University of Amsterdam, Science Park 904 1098 XH Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- ¹³⁷ Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, A CI of Homi Bhabha National Institute, Kolkata 700064, West Bengal, India
- ¹³⁸ Università degli studi di Catania, Dipartimento di Fisica e Astronomia "Ettore Majorana", Via S. Sofia 64, 95123 Catania, Italy
- ¹³⁹ Dipartimento di Fisica e Chimica "E. Segrè", Università degli Studi di Palermo, Via Archirafi 36, 90123, Palermo, Italy
- ¹⁴⁰ UCM-ELEC group, EMFTEL Department, University Complutense of Madrid, 28040 Madrid, Spain
- ¹⁴¹ Departamento de Ingeniería Eléctrica, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas - ICAI, 28015 Madrid
- ¹⁴² Universidad de Chile, Av. Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins 1058, Santiago, Chile
- ¹⁴³ Institute of Space Sciences (ICE, CSIC), and Institut d'Estudis Espacials de Catalunya (IEEC), and Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats (ICREA), Campus UAB, Carrer de Can Magrans, s/n 08193 Cerdanyola del Vallés, Spain
- ¹⁴⁴ The Henryk Niewodniczański Institute of Nuclear Physics, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Radzikowskiego 152, 31-342 Cracow, Poland
- ¹⁴⁵ IPARCOS Institute, Faculty of Physics (UCM), 28040 Madrid, Spain
- ¹⁴⁶ Department of Physics, Konan University, Kobe, Hyogo, 658-8501, Japan
- ¹⁴⁷ Hiroshima Astrophysical Science Center, Hiroshima University, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima 739-8526, Japan
- ¹⁴⁸ Department of Physics, Columbia University, 538 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, USA
- ¹⁴⁹ School of Allied Health Sciences, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Kanagawa 228-8555, Japan
- ¹⁵⁰ Kavli Institute for Particle Astrophysics and Cosmology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, USA
- ¹⁵¹ University of Białystok, Faculty of Physics, ul. K. Ciołkowskiego 1L, 15-245 Białystok, Poland
- ¹⁵² Charles University, Institute of Particle & Nuclear Physics, V Holešovičkách 2, 180 00 Prague 8, Czech Republic
- ¹⁵³ Astronomical Observatory of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, 8 Kyryla i Mephodia Street, Lviv, 79005, Ukraine
- ¹⁵⁴ Institute for Space—Earth Environmental Research, Nagoya University, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan
- ¹⁵⁵ Kobayashi—Maskawa Institute for the Origin of Particles and the Universe, Nagoya University, Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya 464-8602, Japan
- ¹⁵⁶ INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Palermo "G.S. Vaiana", Piazza del Parlamento 1, 90134 Palermo, Italy
- ¹⁵⁷ Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA
- ¹⁵⁸ Graduate School of Technology, Industrial and Social Sciences, Tokushima University, Tokushima 770-8506, Japan
- ¹⁵⁹ School of Physics & Center for Relativistic Astrophysics, Georgia Institute of Technology, 837 State Street, Atlanta, Georgia, 30332-0430, USA
- ¹⁶⁰ University of Pisa, Largo B. Pontecorvo 3, 56127 Pisa, Italy
- ¹⁶¹ University of Rijeka, Faculty of Physics, Radmile Matejčić 2, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia

- ¹⁶² Rudjer Boskovic Institute, Bijenicka 54, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia
- ¹⁶³ INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova, Vicolo dell'Osservatorio 5, 35122 Padova, Italy
- ¹⁶⁴ INAF - Osservatorio Astronomico di Padova and INFN Sezione di Trieste, gr. coll. Udine, Via delle Scienze 208 I-33100 Udine, Italy
- ¹⁶⁵ INFN and Università degli Studi di Siena, Dipartimento di Scienze Fisiche, della Terra e dell'Ambiente (DSFTA), Sezione di Fisica, Via Roma 56, 53100 Siena, Italy
- ¹⁶⁶ Centre for Astro-Particle Physics (CAPP) and Department of Physics, University of Johannesburg, PO Box 524, Auckland Park 2006, South Africa
- ¹⁶⁷ University of Oxford, Department of Physics, Clarendon Laboratory, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PU, United Kingdom
- ¹⁶⁸ Departamento de Física, Facultad de Ciencias Básicas, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Avenida José Pedro Alessandri 774, Ñuñoa, Santiago, Chile
- ¹⁶⁹ Departamento de Astronomía, Universidad de Concepción, Barrio Universitario S/N, Concepción, Chile
- ¹⁷⁰ University of New South Wales, School of Science, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia
- ¹⁷¹ University of Split - FESB, R. Boskovicica 32, 21 000 Split, Croatia
- ¹⁷² EPFL Laboratoire d'astrophysique, Observatoire de Sauverny, CH-1290 Versoix, Switzerland
- ¹⁷³ Department of Physics, Humboldt University Berlin, Newtonstr. 15, 12489 Berlin, Germany
- ¹⁷⁴ Main Astronomical Observatory of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Zabolotnoho str., 27, 03143, Kyiv, Ukraine
- ¹⁷⁵ Space Technology Centre, AGH University of Science and Technology, Aleja Mickiewicza, 30, 30-059, Kraków, Poland
- ¹⁷⁶ Academic Computer Centre CYFRONET AGH, ul. Nawojki 11, 30-950, Kraków, Poland
- ¹⁷⁷ Institute of Astronomy, Faculty of Physics, Astronomy and Informatics, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, ul. Grudziądzka 5, 87-100 Toruń, Poland
- ¹⁷⁸ Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory gGmbH, Via Gobetti, Bologna, Italy
- ¹⁷⁹ Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Electronics and Information Technology, Institute of Electronic Systems, Nowowiejska 15/19, 00-665 Warsaw, Poland
- ¹⁸⁰ Physics Program, Graduate School of Advanced Science and Engineering, Hiroshima University, 739-8526 Hiroshima, Japan
- ¹⁸¹ School of Physics and Astronomy, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai, China
- ¹⁸² Department of Physical Sciences, Aoyama Gakuin University, Fuchinobe, Sagamihara, Kanagawa, 252-5258, Japan
- ¹⁸³ Division of Physics and Astronomy, Graduate School of Science, Kyoto University, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8502, Japan
- ¹⁸⁴ Port d'Informació Científica, Edifici D, Carrer de l'Albareda, 08193 Bellaterra (Cerdanyola del Vallès), Spain
- ¹⁸⁵ INAF - Osservatorio Astrofisico di Torino, Strada Osservatorio 20, 10025 Pino Torinese (TO), Italy
- ¹⁸⁶ Departamento de Física, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Avenida España, 1680 Valparaíso, Chile
- ¹⁸⁷ Faculty of Science, Ibaraki University, Mito, Ibaraki, 310-8512, Japan