



4th call for Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobilities (VMs)

Closing date: 14/08/2026

This is the 4th call for applications for Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobilities (VMs) funded by COST Action CA23107 [Network for Evidence Synthesis in the Agri-Food Sector \(EU-NESA\)](#).

The main aim and objective of the Action is to create a hub and network of people and institutions, with the goal to enhance the use of evidence synthesis in the agri-food sector. This will enable research evidence to better inform decisions and a shift towards sustainable agri-food systems.

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01: STSMs and VMs

STSMs enable short research and study visits to a research institution or laboratory **in another country** to strengthen the network and foster collaboration, learn a new technique, or use equipment, data, and/or methods not available in the applicant's own institution, and contribute to the scientific objectives of the Action. STSM grants provide a contribution towards travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses, and implementation of the task.

VMs enable virtual collaboration among researchers or innovators **in different institutions**, to exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, and contribute to the scientific objectives of the Action. VM grants provide a contribution towards implementation of the task.

STSM and VM grants are available for researchers and innovators affiliated with a legal entity in a Full Member Country, Cooperating Member Country, Near Neighbour Country, or European RTD Organisation. Young researchers and innovators (<40 years old) and those from Inclusiveness Target Countries and Near Neighbour Countries are strongly encouraged to apply. Consult the [Country and Organisations Table](#) for eligibility.

02: Guidelines for applicants

STSM grants support international travel. Grants are a contribution towards the costs of travel, accommodation and subsistence, for which grantees will need to make their own arrangements. The duration of the visit should be at least 5 working days (plus 2 days for travel) and a maximum of 90 days. STSMs must be completed within a single Grant Period and within the Action's lifetime. **The maximum amount awarded for an STSM under this call is €3000.** The amount will reflect the duration and location of the STSM. For guidance on the cost of living in the host country consult the [COST Daily Allowance Rates](#). Applicants are also requested to consult the [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#).

VM grants support virtual collaboration. The duration of the task should be at least 5 working days. VMs must be completed within a single Grant Period and within the Action's lifetime. **The maximum amount awarded for a VM under this call is €1000.** The amount will reflect the duration, scope and complexity of the task and activities to be covered.

EU-NESA is organized into 4 scientific Working Groups (WGs). VMs are considered a great opportunity for participants to focus their work on research topics that have been highlighted by WGs or to introduce new ideas addressing the Action's objectives. Details on the content and goals of WGs are available in the [Action's Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#).

The coordination of STSMs and VMs is carried out by a supervisor. The supervisor oversees all the activities in the work plan and verifies and pre-approves all documents (report, deliverables, etc.). STSM and VM opportunities with a pre-defined topic already have a supervisor assigned. Applicants for the open call will need to identify a suitable supervisor. In all cases applicants must contact the supervisor and procure a letter confirming their agreement to act in that capacity. For STSM applicants the letter must confirm the agreed dates of travel and the period of the visit.

Applications for STSMs and VMs are open to research Masters students, PhD students, post-docs, and researchers from academia, research organizations and researched-focused SMEs.

Awards will be limited to one STSM or one VM grant per applicant per call.

The STSM/VM must be completed by 09/10/2026. The starting date should be agreed with the supervisor before submitting the application. **Applications should be submitted by 14/08/2026.** Decisions will be announced a few days after the deadline.

03: Application instructions

Applications for grants are managed through the e-COST management tool. All applicants must have an [e-COST profile](#). The applicant must use the e-COST management tool to register the VM application request. In addition to the information entered at the website, the applicants should also upload the following documents in a single PDF file:

- Short CV including recent publications
- [STSM application form](#) or [VM application form](#)
- Confirmation letter from the STSM/VM supervisor

For additional information on the submission via the e-COST system, see the [Grant Awarding User Guide](#).

04: Evaluation of applications

Each proposal will be assessed independently by the pertinent WG leader and co-leader, and by the EU-NESA Grant Awarding Committee. A score will be given based on the following evaluation criteria:

- (i) **the clarity of the proposal** – are the objectives and methodology described in simple, precise language?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (ii) **the degree to which the STSM/VM complements or contributes to the Action's strategic priorities and objectives as defined in the MoU** – does it directly support the Action's core goals and complement existing activities?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (iii) **the added value to the ongoing work in the WGs** – does the mobility introduce new expertise, methods, data, or perspectives that directly advance WG tasks?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (iv) **work plan feasibility and outputs** – is the work plan practical and achievable and are the planned outputs relevant and timely?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (v) **the ability of the applicant to successfully complete the proposed STSM/VM and disseminate relevant outputs** – does the applicant have relevant expertise and do they have a strategy for sharing outputs?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (vi) **motivation for applying for an STSM/VM** – are the benefits to the applicant clearly articulated with evidence of how funding would enable unique opportunities not otherwise possible?
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (vii) **diversity and inclusiveness**
Would supporting this application contribute to the Action's ITC and NNC targets?
1 yes; 0 no
Would supporting this application contribute to the Action's YRI targets?
1 yes; 0 no
Is the applicant a WG member?

1 yes; 0 no

Has the applicant previously received funding from the Action?

1 no; 0 yes

A proposal can reach a maximum score of 34. The proposals will be ranked and those with the highest scores will be granted, bearing in mind the need to achieve a gender balance in accordance with the COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy. If proposals have the same score, preference will be given to those from YRI and/or applicants from ITC or NNC countries, and to candidates who have not previously received funding from the EU-NESA COST Action.

05: Reporting and payments

STSMs grantees from ITC countries may request up to 50% pre-payment of the approved grant. This amount is subject to availability of funds and approval by the Grant Holder Institution. The request of pre-payment shall be submitted to the Grant Holder Manager.

Once the STSM/VM has ended, the grantee must submit a short report on the outcomes. The [STSM report](#) or [VM report](#) needs to be submitted within **30 days after the end date of the STSM/VM or 15 days after the end of the Grant Period (31/10/2026), whichever date comes first**. The grantee claims the payment by submitting the report via e-COST. Failure to submit the required report on time may lead to the grant being cancelled.

Additionally, after the completion of the STSM/VM activities the grantee is encouraged to participate in dissemination activities related to the work developed during the period of the grant, such as testimonies, blogs, and/or reports about the activities undertaken.

06: STSM and VM topics

VM Topic 1: Training materials on meta-analysis in the agri-food sector
VM goal: To develop comprehensive, practice-oriented training materials on meta-analysis tailored to the agri-food sector, including guidance on relevant databases and hands-on practical exercises, thereby strengthening capacity building and methodological harmonisation within the Action.
VM deliverable: PowerPoint slide decks, curated guidance on relevant databases, and practical exercises (with example datasets and solutions) on meta-analysis in agri-food research.
Description: This Virtual Mobility aims to strengthen competencies in evidence synthesis by producing high-quality training materials on meta-analysis, specifically adapted to research questions in the agri-food sector. In addition to covering core methodological concepts, the materials will emphasise where and how to identify relevant evidence and how to apply meta-analytic methods in practice. This work supports WG activities on education, training, and dissemination of best practices in evidence synthesis, as defined in the Action's MoU. The VM holder will: • Develop PowerPoint presentations covering key concepts in meta-analysis (effect size estimation, heterogeneity, fixed and random effects models, subgroup and sensitivity analyses, interpretation, and reporting), with examples from the agri-food domain. • Provide structured guidance on relevant bibliographic and evidence databases commonly used in agri-food research.

- Design hands-on practical exercises, including example datasets and step-by-step instructions, allowing participants to perform and interpret meta-analyses.
- Prepare accompanying tutorial materials (e.g. annotated workflows or exercise solutions) suitable for online delivery and self-directed learning.

Eligibility requirements: Applicants should have prior hands-on experience conducting meta-analyses. PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, or early-career researchers with demonstrated methodological expertise are eligible.

Virtual host institution: University of Porto, Portugal

VM supervisor: Rafael José Vieira (rafaelvieira@med.up.pt)

VM Topic 2: Mapping decision and policy stakeholders in the agri-food sector through EU-funded projects and an Action-based participatory approach

VM goal: To map decision-making and policy-relevant stakeholders involved in the agri-food sector through a two-fold approach: 1) the distribution of a questionnaire to EU-NESA COST Action members and 2) the extrapolation of active stakeholders in the arena of the agri-food systems from approved EU-funded projects under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe (use of CORDIS database as a transparent and harmonised data source). The VM will identify public authorities, policy bodies, advisory organisations, and other decision-relevant actors participating in research and innovation projects that explicitly aim to inform agri-food policy and practice. The questionnaire will guarantee the participatory approach of the Action while the synthetic report on actors involved in funded agri-food projects will systematize the known asset of key stakeholders in the agri-food system. The VM will contribute on the development of an evidence-based overview of how decision and policy makers are currently embedded in EU-funded agri-food research. This directly addresses EU-NESA's objective of strengthening the science-policy interface and enhancing the uptake of evidence synthesis in decision-making processes.

VM deliverable: A report including the following:

- A questionnaire to be distributed among Action members
- A structured stakeholder mapping dataset identifying decision- and policy-relevant actors involved in EU-funded agri-food projects, classified by sector, governance level, country, and project role.
- A report summarizing patterns of policy-maker participation, cross-country differences, and gaps relevant to evidence synthesis uptake.
- Visual mapping outputs (tables and figures) designed for direct use in WG4 workshops, training schools, and dissemination activities.

Description: The Virtual Mobility will be implemented entirely online in close collaboration with WG4 (Capacity building with decision and policy makers), with methodological alignment ensured through interaction with WG1 where relevant. The grant holder will: 1) Prepare a questionnaire for identifying key stakeholders to be distributed to Action members via e-COST; 2) Extract agri-food projects involving stakeholders from the CORDIS platform and identify a manageable sample of approximately 30–50 projects with explicit policy relevance or stakeholder engagement components; 3) Define a data extraction framework in consultation with WG4 leadership and identify decision- and policy-relevant stakeholders for their classification and mapping; 4) Collate the questionnaires received during the VM and prepare a template for analysing them once all answers have been received. The analysis of the questionnaires will not form part of this VM; 5) Prepare a concise analytical report summarizing key findings and implications for WG4 ES capacity-building activities and policy implementation actions.

Eligibility requirements: Postdoctoral experience or a strong understanding of the VM topic is required to address the tasks quickly and within a short timeframe. Candidates should have proven experience in conducting interviews and/or developing questionnaires, liaising with stakeholders, and performing time-efficient analysis of results. Good writing skills and the ability to extract data from databases are also required. Knowledge of COST Action procedures for questionnaire distribution is an asset. A short interview will take place before evaluating the application.

Virtual host institution: The United Nations University, Dresden, Germany

VM supervisor: Serena Caucci (caucci@unu.edu)

VM Topic 3: Evidence synthesis communication and knowledge translation

VM goal: To strengthen dissemination, visibility, and knowledge sharing within the EU-NESA COST Action by developing a reusable communication framework consisting of newsletter templates, pilot newsletters, and communication templates that support the translation of evidence synthesis concepts and EU-NESA activities into accessible formats for researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders in the agri-food sector. The VM directly contributes to the objectives of the EU-NESA by:

- Supporting WG5 (Community Building, Dissemination and Communication) and science communication activities across the Action;
- Raising awareness of evidence synthesis methods and their relevance for evidence-informed decision-making in agri-food systems;
- Supporting capacity building through the development of communication and dissemination tools;
- Improving consistency, quality, and visibility of EU-NESA communication outputs;
- Facilitating the dissemination of results generated through Working Groups, STSMs, VMs, Training Schools, workshops, conferences, and stakeholder engagement activities.

VM deliverables:

1. EU-NESA Newsletter Framework

Development of a reusable newsletter structure including:

- Editorial structure, workflow, content collection;
- Recommended sections and formatting guidelines;

2. Two Pilot Newsletter Issues (2026)

Preparation of one newsletter issue for publication during 2026.

Indicative sections:

- Message from the Chair;
- EU-NESA Highlights;
- STSM and VM Spotlight;
- Research Spotlight;
- Training and Capacity Building Activities;
- Publications and Outputs;
- Upcoming Events and Opportunities.

3. Communication Toolkit

Development of reusable communication templates for:

- News Article Template: Template for website news, announcements, activity reports, and dissemination articles.
- Research Spotlight Template: Template highlighting research activities, evidence synthesis projects, and scientific outputs.
- Success Story Template: Template highlighting STSMs, VMs, workshops, Training Schools, stakeholder forums, and other EU-NESA activities.

4. Example Communication Package

Preparation of completed examples demonstrating the use of the developed templates, including:

- One completed news article;
- One completed research spotlight article;
- One completed success story article.

The examples may be based on existing EU-NESA activities such as conferences, Training Schools, stakeholder engagement activities, STSMs, VMs, workshops, or other Action-related initiatives.

Description: As the EU-NESA network grows, the number of scientific outputs, capacity-building activities, stakeholder engagement initiatives, and mobility grants continues to increase. While these activities generate valuable knowledge and impact, there is a need for standardized communication tools that ensure consistent dissemination, visibility, and accessibility of Action outputs. This VM focuses on developing communication resources that can be reused throughout the duration of the Action and beyond. The grantee will work closely with the Science Communication Coordinator and WG5 members to develop practical communication materials and pilot examples that can support future dissemination activities. The VM is expected to produce communication resources that can be used by Working Groups, grant holders, event organizers, and Action leadership to improve dissemination and communication activities throughout the lifetime of EU-NESA. The outputs will support:

- Increased visibility of EU-NESA activities;
- Improved consistency of communication materials;
- Better dissemination of evidence synthesis concepts;
- Stronger engagement with stakeholders and wider audiences;
- Long-term sustainability of communication activities within the Action.

This VM is particularly suitable for researchers interested in science communication, knowledge translation, dissemination, stakeholder engagement, policy interfaces, and evidence-informed decision-making.

Virtual host institution: University of Niš, Serbia

VM supervisor: Marko Mancic (marko.mancic@masfak.ni.ac.rs)

STSM/VM Open Call: Applicants are invited to propose their own research topic which aligns with the goals of EU-NESA and is related to current WG activities. Prospective applicants should therefore contact the WG leader and co-leader to discuss the research topic and identify a suitable supervisor.

07: Useful links & documents

- [STSM application form](#)
- [STSM report template](#)
- [VM application form](#)
- [VM report template](#)
- [e-COST](#)
- [Daily allowance rates](#)
- [Grant Awarding User Guide](#)

- [Annotated Rules for COST Actions](#)
- [Countries and Organisations Table](#)
- [EU-NESA COST page](#)
- [EU-NESA website](#)

08: Questions/enquiries

- Scope and aims of the Action: Action Chair – Nicola Randall (nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk)
- STSM & VM calls and eligibility requirements: Grant Awarding Committee – Sarah Milliken (S.Milliken@greenwich.ac.uk), Besa Shahini (besashahini@feut.edu.al), Nurinisa Esenbuğa (nesenbuga@gmail.com), Ricardo Assunção (rassuncao@egasmoniz.edu.pt)
- Reimbursement process: Grant Holder Manager – Abigail Cooke (acooke@live.harper.ac.uk)