



## 2nd call for Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobilities (VMs)

**Closing date: 08/02/2026**

This is the 2nd 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 €1300.** 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). STSMs and 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 or VM must take place between 01/03/2026 and 30/09/2026.** The starting date should be agreed with the supervisor before submitting the application. Applications should be submitted by 08/02/2026. 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 STSM or 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](#)
- Justification for the requested budget
- 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 (maximum 5 points)  
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 (maximum 5 points)  
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (iii) the added value to the ongoing work in the WGs (maximum 5 points)  
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (iv) work plan feasibility and outputs (maximum 5 points)  
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 (maximum 5 points)  
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (vi) motivation for applying for an STSM/VM (maximum 5 points)  
5 excellent; 4 very good; 3 satisfactory; 2 deficient; 1 poor; 0 failed
- (vii) diversity and inclusiveness (maximum 4 points)
  - 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

<b>STSM Topic 1:</b> Initiation and development of decision-maker-oriented evidence synthesis guidelines
<b>STSM goal:</b> To initiate and develop the first draft of decision-maker-oriented guidance for evidence synthesis
<b>STSM deliverable:</b> Initial draft of decision-maker-oriented evidence synthesis guidelines; Agreed structure and content outline for further development within WG1.
<p><b>Description:</b> This STSM will support intensive, in-person collaboration between the STSM grantee and the host institution to initiate the writing of stakeholder-focused evidence synthesis (ES) guidance, with a particular emphasis on decision-makers. The rationale for this STSM is that the early development of guidance for non-academic audiences requires close interaction to define scope, framing, terminology, and structure—tasks that are especially effective when conducted face-to-face. Planned activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying and extracting key messages, principles, and recommendations from the WG1 ES guidelines that are most relevant for decision-makers</li> <li>• Defining the scope, target audience, and structure of the decision-maker-oriented guidance</li> <li>• Initiating the writing of core sections using clear, non-technical language</li> <li>• Developing initial examples, case studies, or decision-support narratives relevant to agri-food policy and practice</li> <li>• Aligning the draft guidance with WG1 objectives and dissemination plans</li> </ul> <p>This STSM directly contributes to WG1 tasks outlined in the MoU related to promoting the uptake and use of evidence synthesis in agri-food decision-making and supports the development of key WG1 outputs planned for Grant Period 2.</p>

Eligibility: Open to WG1 members, including PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and early- to mid-career researchers with interest or experience in evidence synthesis, guideline development, or science–policy communication.

Time period: To be conducted during Grant Period 2, with flexible timing depending on participant availability.

**Host institution:** University of Malaga, Spain

**STSM supervisors:** Alfonso Exposito ([aexposito@uma.es](mailto:aexposito@uma.es)); Nicola Randall ([nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk))

**VM Topic 1:** Development and finalisation of evidence synthesis guidelines and user-oriented materials

**VM goal:** To collaboratively finalise the WG1 evidence synthesis (ES) guidelines and develop complementary user-oriented guidance that supports the uptake of ES by decision-makers, advisors, and practitioners in agri-food systems.

**VM deliverable:** Pre-publication version of the WG1 evidence synthesis guidelines; Draft user-oriented ES guidelines (simplified guidance for non-academic audiences); Supporting materials (tables, visuals, summaries ...)

**Description:** This Virtual Mobility focuses on advanced stages of guideline development through structured remote collaboration. The rationale for this activity is to ensure consistency, clarity, and usability of the WG1 evidence synthesis guidelines, while also translating methodological guidance into accessible formats for end-users. Planned activities include:

- Editing and harmonising content across guideline sections
- Refining structure, language, and layout for readability and coherence
- Developing visuals, navigation tools, and summary tables
- Extracting key messages from the ES guidelines and translating them into user-oriented guidance
- Drafting simplified explanations, use cases, and FAQs to support ES uptake
- Integrating feedback from WG1 members and preparing documents for internal review and dissemination

This VM directly contributes to WG1 tasks defined in the MoU related to assessing the current state of evidence synthesis in agri-food systems and developing methodological guidance and tools to support ES delivery and use. The main WG1 deliverable is the ES guidelines and associated outreach materials.

Eligibility: Open to WG1 members, including PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and early- to mid-career researchers with interest or experience in evidence synthesis, guideline development, or science–policy communication.

Time period: To be conducted during Grant Period 2, with flexible timing depending on participant availability.

**Virtual host institutions:** University of Malaga, Spain and Harper Adams University, United Kingdom

**VM supervisors:** Alfonso Exposito ([aexposito@uma.es](mailto:aexposito@uma.es)); Nicola Randall ([nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk](mailto:nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk))

**VM Topic 2:** 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.

Time period: The VM is expected to be carried out over a period of approximately 2–3 months.

**Virtual host institution:** University of Porto, Portugal

**VM supervisor:** Rafael José Vieira ([rafaelvieira@med.up.pt](mailto:rafaelvieira@med.up.pt))

**VM Topic 3:** Scoping review of methods for risk of bias assessment in the agri-food sector

**VM goal:** To systematically map and critically describe existing methods and tools used to assess risk of bias in agri-food research, informing future methodological guidance within the Action.

**VM deliverable:** A manuscript reporting a scoping review of risk of bias assessment methods in the agri-food sector.

**Description:** This Virtual Mobility will support the methodological work of the Action by conducting a scoping review on approaches used to assess risk of bias in agri-food studies. Risk of bias assessment is a key component of evidence synthesis, yet methods are heterogeneous and often inconsistently applied in agri-food research. The VM holder will:

- Develop and refine the scoping review protocol in line with established methodological guidance.
- Perform systematic searching, screening, and data charting of relevant literature.
- Map existing risk of bias tools, frameworks, and assessment approaches used in the agri-food sector.
- Synthesize findings and prepare a manuscript suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

This work directly contributes to WG tasks related to methodological development, evidence quality appraisal, and support for robust evidence synthesis, as outlined in the Action's MoU.

Eligibility requirements: Applicants should have prior experience conducting scoping reviews and familiarity with risk of bias concepts. PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, or early-career researchers with relevant methodological background are eligible.

Time period: The VM is expected to be conducted over approximately 3 months.

**Virtual host institution:** University of Porto, Portugal

**VM supervisor:** Rafael José Vieira ([rafaelvieira@med.up.pt](mailto:rafaelvieira@med.up.pt))

**VM Topic 4:** Optimizing evidence synthesis in agri-food sector: A workflow for implementing and validating digital tools

**VM goal:** To assess how available digital tools identified in a previous virtual mobility grant perform in practice. The main objective is to transition from tool mapping to practical implementation, validating selected digital tools by applying them to live research settings to ensure they are fit for purpose.

**VM deliverable:** The grantee will be expected to deliver:

- A technical summary of the performance of the selected tools during the case study.
- A documented workflow (manual) for using digital tools in agri-food ES, specifically addressing interoperability.
- A recorded demonstration or tutorial for the Action's digital repository.
- Organize a hybrid training session for WG members to test the workflow and provide qualitative feedback on its technical barriers and efficiency gains.
- A draft paper focusing on the implementation and validation of digital tools for ES in agri-food sector.

**Description:** The grantee will collaborate with the supervisor to design and test a standardized digital workflow for implementing and validating digital tools used in ES. This involves the tools identified in a previous mapping report and applying them to a specific ES on agri-food sector case study. The VM will follow a four-stage implementation plan:

- Selection & Setup: In collaboration with the supervisor, select 2–3 high-priority tools from the VMG1 mapping report (e.g., an AI-based screening tool and a collaborative data extraction platform) to be integrated into a pilot workflow.
- Case Study Pilot: Apply the integrated workflow to a small-scale or a subset of an ongoing systematic review in the agri-food sector.
- Refinement & Protocol Finalization: Based on the pilot results, refine the tool comparison matrix into a "Digital ES Handbook" with step-by-step instructions for the Action community.

This work directly contributes to WG3 tasks and support for robust evidence synthesis, as outlined in the Action's MoU.

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.

Time period: The VM is expected to be carried out over a period of approximately 3 months.

**Virtual host institution:** CREA – Research Centre for Agriculture and Environment, Italy

**VM supervisor:** Claudia Di Bene ([claudia.dibene@crea.gov.it](mailto:claudia.dibene@crea.gov.it))

**VM Topic 5:** Evidence synthesis – scientific content translation

**VM goal:** To support the popularisation, communication, and translation of evidence synthesis concepts for non-academic audiences in the agri-food sector, by assisting the science communication coordination activities of EU-NESA

**VM deliverables:**

1. A set of communication-ready materials, such as:

- Social media posts (LinkedIn-focused)
- Short explanatory texts on evidence synthesis
- Infographics or visual summaries
- Draft content for the EU-NESA website or newsletter

2. A short summary report describing:

- Communication objectives
- Target audiences
- Outputs produced
- Lessons learned and recommendations for future dissemination

**Description:** Evidence synthesis (ES) is a cornerstone of the EU-NESA COST Action, enabling evidence-informed decision-making in agri-food systems. While ES methods are well established in scientific communities, their uptake by decision-makers, practitioners, and other non-academic stakeholders remains limited, partly due to communication barriers and lack of accessible formats. This Virtual Mobility directly contributes to the objectives of the EU-NESA Memorandum of Understanding by:

- Supporting WG5 (community building, dissemination and communication) and science communication activities in general
- Contributing to raising awareness of evidence synthesis
- Supporting capacity building objectives, e.g., the development of dissemination tools and learning materials

The VM will focus on translating complex ES concepts (e.g., systematic reviews, systematic maps, evidence-based decision-making) into clear, concise, and visually engaging communication outputs, suitable for policy officers, agri-food stakeholders, and the wider public. The outputs should include strong infographics social media ready. The VM grantee will work closely with the Science Communication coordinators to:

- Adapt existing EU-NESA scientific outputs into accessible formats
- Support ongoing dissemination campaigns
- Contribute to the coherence and consistency of EU-NESA communication messages.

This Virtual Mobility is particularly suitable for early-career researchers interested in science communication, knowledge translation, policy interfaces, and interdisciplinary research.

**Virtual host institution:** University of Niš, Serbia

**VM supervisor:** Marko Mancic ([marko.mancic@masfak.ni.ac.rs](mailto: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](mailto:nrandall@harper-adams.ac.uk))
- STSM & VM calls and eligibility requirements: Grant Awarding Committee – Sarah Milliken ([S.Milliken@greenwich.ac.uk](mailto:S.Milliken@greenwich.ac.uk)), Besa Shahini ([besashahini@feut.edu.al](mailto:besashahini@feut.edu.al)), Nurinisa Esenbuğa ([nesenbuga@gmail.com](mailto:nesenbuga@gmail.com)), Ricardo Assunção ([rassuncao@egasmoniz.edu.pt](mailto:rassuncao@egasmoniz.edu.pt))
- Reimbursement process: Grant Holder Manager – Abigail Cooke ([acooke@live.harper.ac.uk](mailto:acooke@live.harper.ac.uk))