



COST Action CA22160

Enhancing knowledge of BIOMolecular solutions for the well-being of European AQUAculture sector - BIOAQUA

Continuous Call for STSM (Short-Term Scientific Mission) Applications

The COST network BIOAQUA is pleased to announce the continuous call for STSM applications for 2026. Before applying, all candidates must read [Annotated Rules for COST actions](#). Any updates to the official Annotated Rules take precedence over this document.

1. Scope

According to the Annotated Rules for COST Actions, “STSM consist in a **visit to a host organization located in a different country** than the country of affiliation by a Researcher or Innovator for the specific work to be carried out and for a determined period of time. STSM grantee receives funding for implementing a project with an international team and gains new knowledge or access to equipment or techniques not available in the home institution.”

2. Eligibility

According to the Annotated Rules, “STSM travel grants are available to applicants employed by, or affiliated to, an institution, organization, or legal entity in a **COST Full/Cooperating Member country** or in a legal entity in a **Near Neighbour Country (NNC)**.” The eligible countries are listed in [COST Documents & Guidelines](#), particularly, in the [Country and Organisations Table](#).

3. Financial support

According to the Annotated Rules, “STSM grants are providing a contribution for **travelling, accommodation and subsistence expenses**, implementation of the project, delivery of the report to the COST Action MC and overall effort. Up to a maximum of **EUR 4,000** in total can be afforded per grant. Participants are reminded that cancellation insurance fee is an eligible expense and are advised to contract one. Grants are paid by the Grant Holder **after** the completion of the activity and approval of all required report/documentation. STSM grantees can request up to 50% pre-payment of the approved grant.”

In BIOAQUA: The final amount of financial support is decided by the Action Chair/Grant Holder based on the proposal of the Grant Evaluation Committee, in turn based on the request of the applicant and should reflect the duration and location of the STSM. The request of up to the 50% pre-payment is subject to availability

of the funds and approval by the Action Chair/Grant Holder. For 2026 according to the amount allocated to the STSM missions, approximately 10 to 12 missions will be fulfilled.

4. Period of Application

According to the Annotated Rules, “researcher or Innovator must respect that the STSM need to be carried out entirely within one Grant Period”.

In BIOAQUA: The grant awarding process for STSMs will occur through a continuous call, a strict (annual) budget, review by 2 (or 3 in case the outcome is not consistent) MC or WG members, an advice by Grant Awarding Coordinator communicated to Action Chair who takes over the advice if the budget allows.

There is no limit to the maximum duration. Keep in mind that an STSM ends when the payment is recorded, not on the last day of the stay at the host institution. Therefore, applicants should schedule the STSM to allow time for submitting the report, evaluating it, and processing the payment within the Grant Period. Each Grant Period runs from the 1st of September until the 31st of October of the following year, and for year 4, the dates are from the 1st of September 2026 to the 31st of October 2027. **This call covers the 3rd period, which finishes by 31/10/2026.**

5. Application Procedure

According to the Annotated Rules, “Applicants must have an e-COST profile and applications shall be submitted online in e-COST. To be filled in e-COST:

- Title
- Start and end date of the STSM date (within the active Grant Period, i.e., no overlap across two consecutive Grant Periods).
- Budget requested.
- Information about the host institution and contact person.

To be uploaded to e-COST:

- Application form (STSM application template) describing goals, description of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected outcomes and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives.
- Confirmation from the Host Institution on its availability to receive the applicant.
- Applicant’s CV (in applicant’s e-COST profile).

In this regard applicants are informed that their application can be accessed by the holders of leadership positions and any evaluation committees in the Action for evaluation purposes.”

In BIOAQUA: Besides the documents indicated by the Annotated Rules for COST Actions, applicant must:

- Include in the Working Plan from the application form (uploaded in e-COST), the scientific background, specific tasks, and a timetable in addition to the description of the work to be performed by the applicant.
- Upload in .pdf format:
 - ✓ Motivation letter, 1-2 pages.
 - ✓ Financial request justification, 1 page. The budget should clearly indicate the expected costs (e.g., transport, accommodation, living costs) following COST rules and the amount of support already received from other sources.
 - ✓ Support letter from Home Institution (in case of students).
 - ✓ A short CV (in academic format) including a list of publications and the (expected) date of MSc graduation or PhD defense (MSc and PhD titles are not required).

Follow the [link](#) for a helpful user guide in the Application Procedure. Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to the Grant Awarding Coordinator Konstantina Bitchava

(bitchava@aua.gr).

6. Evaluation of Applications

Proposals will be evaluated for their quality and for their relevance to BIOAQUA and Working Groups. In brief, the BIOAQUA working groups have the following objectives:

- ✓ *WG 1 “Biomolecular solutions for water prophylaxis and biosafety”, with particular focus into new proteins and biomolecular biomarkers.*
- ✓ *WG 2 “Biomolecular solutions as alternative methods and tools for fish-farm production”, with particular focus in environmental-friendly and safe treatments, and new molecular engineering methodologies or disruptive combinations.*
- ✓ *WG 3 “Fish welfare” will be a horizontal WG focused in developing an integral perspective of the potential impact over fish derived from the solutions explored in WGs 1 and 2 (disease, stress, growth, feeding, behaviour, etc.)*
- ✓ *WG 4 “Sustainability insights” will focus on an in-depth analysis of the drivers and barriers in relation to the sustainability of aquaculture and the potential adoption of the solutions explored in WGs 1 and 2. This will include regulation aspects and proposing an innovative conceptual pathway for veterinary applications and fish tracking systems. It will also be a horizontal WG to all previous WGs described.*
- ✓ *WG 5 “Informed creativity”, is a complementary WG that will focus on the context of R&I management, including the technological, sectorial, territorial, policy-oriented, and social dimensions potentially impacting research and uptake of results.*

IMPORTANT: STSM applicants should not book anything (e.g., transportation or accommodation) before receiving a confirmation through a Grant Letter.

7. Submission of the STSM report and payment

According to the Annotated Rules,

- “Once the activity has ended, the applicant claims the payment of the grant via e-COST. For this, the grantee submits the **Report** using the STSM report template, and relevant documentation **within 30 days after the end date of the STSM or 15 days after the end of the Grant Period**, whichever date comes first;
- The Report must include the work developed, main achievements of the STSM and planned future follow-up activities.
- Grants are paid by the Grant Holder **after** the completion of the activity and approval of all required report/documentation.”
- A 50% prepayment is possible.

In BIOAQUA: besides the STSM report template filled, the applicant must upload a **summary of the report** (see template at the end of document) that, besides scientific findings, includes:

- **The importance of the visit** in terms of personal development, networking, and capacity building (e.g., collaborations).
- **Foreseen publications/articles resulting from the STSM** (if applicable).
- **Confirmation by the Host Institution of the execution** of the STSM.
- **Proof of evidence of the stay** (a picture of the trainee working at the host institution facilities and a picture with the collaborators) that might be published in social media and website.
- **A video with information relevant to the work** that could be used in the social media and website.

The summary of the report will be published at the BIOAQUA website.

Additionally, in BIOAQUA the applicant must offer a 1h webinar about the results of the STSMs within one of WGs monthly audios (wherever is more relevant) before the end of the period.

Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to the Grant Awarding Coordinator Konstantina Bitchava (bitchava@aua.gr).

8. Frequently asked questions

1. **Can I postpone my STSM?** If the originally intended period is not feasible, STSM could be postponed after consultation with the Grant Awarding Coordinator and Action chair. Grantee should keep in mind that the approved STSM must be developed within the actual Grant Period.
2. **I am uncertain about the exact dates for my trip. Can I apply for a flexible three-week period within a one-month timeframe, for example?** Yes, it is possible. However, STSMs require specific start and end dates, therefore, supporting documents have to state the period in which the applicant is considering doing the STSM.
3. **Where do I upload my accommodation or meal tickets after I have returned from the STSM?** You do not have to provide any receipts for accommodation or meals. The financial support is paid in the form of a grant. However, travel-expenses and accommodation invoices **must** be presented in the case of cancellation by force majeure (see [A1-3.1.6 of Annex 1](#) for more detail).

Notes:

Each publication produced with support of a STSM must acknowledge the support of the COST Action and whenever possible use the COST and BIOAQUA logos (on slides and posters). See acknowledgements text section down.

Acknowledgement text:

Two versions, short (for posters) and long (for papers) are proposed:

Partially funded by...../Person A had a grant from... COST Office (CA22160 BIOAQUA).

Partially funded by...../Person A had a grant from... COST Office (COST Action CA22160

Enhancing knowledge of BIOMolecular solutions for the well-being of European AQUAculture sector - BIOAQUA).

Memorandum and Evaluation Criteria for Short Term Scientific Missions

The aim of a Short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM) shall be to contribute to the scientific objectives of a COST Action.

These Missions (Exchange Visits) are aimed at **strengthening the existing networks** by allowing scientists to go to an institution or laboratory in another COST Country **to foster collaboration, to learn a new technique** or **to take measurements using instruments and/or methods not available in their own institution/laboratory**. There should be special considerations to supporting COST policies on promoting gender balance, enabling Young Researchers, broadening geographical inclusiveness. Grantees should be selected in an open and transparent way. COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy and Principles of Openness should be considered when deciding. **Rejection of an application must come with a justification of rejection.**

Assessment (general criteria)

In BIOAQUA, a **Scientific Committee will evaluate STSM applications on the MC behalf**. The Scientific Committee will consist of the grant awarding coordinator and 2 or 3 reviewers for each proposal. External advice may be sought.

MC members and other assessors should not involve themselves in the assessment of proposals in which they have a personal or financial interest. In exceptional circumstances (e.g., uniqueness of expertise), such a bar may be waived with the agreement of the other members involved, if the interest is declared and considered not to compromise the potential decision.

Requisites

Home institution can be an institution, organization, or legal entity in a COST Full/Cooperating Member country, a European RTD Organisation, or a legal entity in a Near Neighbour Country (NNC). Host institution can be any legal entity anywhere in the world. The only limit is that it needs to be in a country different from the Home institution.

Evaluation

An evaluation score will be given considering the proposal clarity, relevance for the Action, feasibility, planning and expected outputs. Scoring should be attributed from 1 to 6. Final evaluation outcome should be one month after submission.

Scores

1 - Very poor: proposal illogical and not understandable. Not clearly linked to any WG.

2 - Poor: proposal with limited understanding, planning and no clear objectives. Weakly linked to at least one WG.

3 - Fair: proposal with some understanding, planning and objectives. Moderate links to at least one WG.

4 - Good: good proposal but needs input to develop feasible STSM. Well linked to at least one WG.

5 – Very Good: very good proposal. Well linked to at least one WG.

6 - Excellent: proposal well designed in terms of planning, feasibility and projected outputs. Strongly linked to at least one WG.

For each of the considered topics (i.e.: proposal clarity, feasibility, planning and expected outputs) a score has to be given (from 1 to 6 as above).

Each reviewer will score each proposal independently. The STSM coordinator will collates the outcomes of the independent evaluations, average them, and communicate the final scoring (range 4-24 points) after verifying the fulfilment of requisites to the Chair of the Action.

Proposals with high scores (≥ 16 points) will be financed, but only when all other evaluation criteria are acceptable, and the available budget suffices. The outcome will be communicated to the applicant by email. The results will be published in the COST Action website.

Summary grid of the evaluation criteria

Category	Notes	Scoring
Requisites	Yes/Not	
Support Letter - Home Institute		Y/N
Support Letter - Host Institute		Y/N
Evaluation		
Motivation Letter	Not Convincing or Convincing	Y/N
Work plan		
<i>proposal clarity</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>feasibility</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>planning</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>expected outputs</i>	Scores	1-6
Overall evaluation of the candidate	No more than three lines	
CV and publications		
Budget Request	Acceptable or Not	
Travel		Y/N
Subsistence		Y/N
Daily rate		Y/N

STSM Template Summary of the Report

The formal report should be written within a month after the end of the STSM in the format of a short communication (4 pages max.)

SCIENTIFIC REPORT	
Reference	Short Term Scientific Mission COST CA22160
Beneficiary	Put your Name PUT YOUR AFFILIATION Your email Address
Host Researcher	Name AFFILIATION email Address
Period	from DD/MM/YYYY to DD/MM/YYYY
STSM Reference Code	COST-STSM - CA22160-xxxxx
STSM Title	

- Summary (300 words, a photograph of you alongside your collaborators and a short quote describing your experience, and a picture of the trainee working at the host institution facilities, to be published on the web site of the action)
- Purpose of the Visit
- Description of the work carried out
- Description of the main results obtained
- Description of how the STSM was embedded in research project(s)
- Possible future collaboration with Host Institution
- Projected publications/articles resulting or to result from the STSM
- Confirmation by the Host Institute/Researcher of the successful execution of the Mission
- Photos taken through the visit and project carried out
- Short video from the mission