

2026

CALL FOR
STSM

CA24108

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OXIDATIVE STRESS AT THE CROSSROADS OF ADVERSE OUTCOME PATHWAYS – PESTICIDES – ONE HEALTH (CAPSTONE)

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR SHORT-TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSIONS (**STSM**)

for implementation from June 2026 to
September 2026

CALL 1

No specific deadline for applications

This document is based upon work from COST Action CAPSTONE – Oxidative Stress at the Crossroads of Adverse Outcome Pathways – Pesticides – One Health (CA 24108), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.

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1 ABOUT CAPSTONE

Oxidative stress (**OxS**) plays a central role in ecosystem disturbance and human pathologies. Some pesticides have already been banned due to their pro-oxidative properties which are linked to their adverse effects in both humans or in off-target organisms in ecosystem. However, several classes of pesticides are still authorized and could lead to oxidative stress, particularly those that target mitochondria, the main site for reactive oxygen species generation in all living organisms.

There is an increasing scientific, societal, and politic concern about pesticides within the One Health framework. In this context, the challenge of the Action is to identify pesticides' adverse effects linked to oxidative stress that are relevant for both humans and ecosystems, and to describe the Key Events (**KE**) involved in these effects. This Pan-European network will develop a new research strategy based on Adverse Outcome Pathways (**AOPs**).

The Action works within the One Health concept, promoting interdisciplinary breakthroughs between ecotoxicology, toxicology, bioinformatics, epidemiology and risk assessment. It includes scientists from academia, industry, regulatory agencies, a National Social Protection Scheme in charge of agricultural workers and operators, and Non-Governmental Organizations. As there is an increasing interest of New Alternative Methods such as AOPs that has been identified as keys areas of regulatory challenges, the Action will provide scientific input to the pesticide industry and regulatory agencies, disseminating science to a broad audience that include pesticide consumers, civil society, and policy makers.

The objectives of CAPSTONE are to:

- ▶ identify and characterize oxidative stress biomarkers relevant to pesticide exposure across humans, animals, and ecosystems;
- ▶ develop and apply AOPs to better understand the links between pesticide modes of action and adverse health and environmental effects;
- ▶ integrate experimental, computational, and regulatory approaches to improve the assessment of pesticide toxicity, including mixture effects and long-term exposures; and
- ▶ support the development of improved risk assessment strategies by identifying knowledge gaps and proposing harmonized methodologies.

Six working groups (WG) focus on work as follows:

WG1. Literature analysis on pesticides KE/AOPs relevant to OxS in ecotoxicology

WG2. Literature analysis on pesticides KE/AOPs relevant to OxS in toxicology

WG3. List of existing methods to assess OxS

WG4. Comparison of OxS KE/AOPs relevant in ecotoxicology and toxicology for pesticides

WG5. Dissemination of knowledge to pesticides industry & policy makers

WG6. Dissemination among scientists from different fields and to a wide public

2 WHAT IS A SHORT-TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM)?

A Short-Term Scientific Mission (**STSM**) is a research visit carried out by a researcher or innovator to a host institution located in a different country, for a defined period and with a specific scientific objective. STSMs provide financial support to enable collaboration within an international team and offer access to expertise, methods, or equipment not available at the home institution.

STSMs are a core instrument of COST Actions and contribute to achieving their scientific and networking objectives. In particular, they:

- ▶ Facilitate **international mobility** and strengthen collaboration among researchers and innovators
- ▶ Promote the **exchange of knowledge, methods, and technical skills** across institutions and disciplines
- ▶ Provide access to **complementary expertise, data, and research infrastructure**
- ▶ Contribute to the **implementation of COST Action objectives** and the development of joint outputs (e.g. publications, tools, methodologies)
- ▶ Support the **career development of Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI)** by enhancing their research profile and international experience
- ▶ Strengthen and expand **long-term research networks and collaborations**

In line with COST policies, STSMs also contribute to promoting excellence, inclusiveness, gender balance, and openness, with particular attention to the participation of researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries (**ITC**).

3 ELIGIBILITY

Researchers and innovators are invited to apply for Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) contributing to the objectives and activities of the CAPSTONE Action and its Working Groups.

Eligible applicants must be affiliated with an institution, organization, or legal entity established in a **COST Full or Cooperating Member Country**, or in a **Near Neighbour Country (NNC)**. The proposed STSM must involve a **host institution located in a different country from the applicant's home institution**, and the host institution must be **actively participating in the CAPSTONE Action**.

4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Applicants are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with the **COST Annotated Rules (Annex 2)** prior to submission.

The duration of the mission must be consistent with the proposed activities and all STSMs must be finalized **no later than mid-September 2026**. When preparing the application, candidates are expected to ensure that the requested financial contribution is proportionate to the planned duration and location of the visit. All requested costs must comply with COST eligibility rules. The maximal amount for each STSM is **2500 euros**, depending of the project and the duration, the financial support could be lower. Funding is disbursed **only after the successful completion of the STSM, and** is conditional upon the **submission and approval** of the **required scientific report** and supporting documentation.

In accordance with COST's commitment to inclusiveness, **participants affiliated with Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)** may be eligible to receive **pre-financing**, subject to the applicable provisions. The final grant amount is determined following the evaluation process and is formally approved by the **Grant Awarding Coordinator**, in agreement with an **Evaluation Committee, Action Chair** and **Grant Holder**, considering both the quality of the application and the available budget.

5 GRANT AWARDING PROCESS

This call will remain open without a fixed deadline, and applications will be evaluated on a rolling basis. Proposals will be considered in the order in which they are received, subject to the availability of funds. The present call particularly supports missions planned to take place between **June 2026 and mid-September 2026**.

Each application will undergo an evaluation by at least two members of the evaluation committee, under the coordination of the Grant Awarding Coordinator. Based on this assessment, the Grant Awarding Coordinator will provide a recommendation to the Action Chair, who will take the final decision in line with the available budget.

Applicants should note that an STSM is considered completed only after the activity has taken place, all reporting obligations have been fulfilled, and the payment has been processed. All missions must be finalized **no later than 15 September 2026**.

Candidates are strongly advised not to make any financial commitments, such as booking travel or accommodation, prior to receiving formal approval in the form of a **Grant Letter**.

6 APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Applications should be submitted directly to the Grant Awarding Coordinator (Katarina Matković) by email at kmatkovic@imi.hr.

Each application should contain the following key elements:

- ▶ **Completed application form** ([Template](#)), including:
 - A clear and informative project title
 - Planned start and end dates (ending 15 September)
 - The requested financial contribution
 - Details of the host institution and contact person

- ▶ **Scientific proposal**, describing (up to two pages max.):
 - The objectives and rationale of the STSM
 - The planned activities and work plan
 - Expected outcomes and contribution to the Action's MoU objectives

- ▶ **Acceptance Letter from the host institution** ([Template](#)), indicating its agreement to host the applicant and support the proposed work

- ▶ **Supporting justification**, including:
 - A motivation statement (typically 1–2 pages)
 - A financial plan outlining estimated costs (travel, accommodation, subsistence), in line with COST rules, and any additional funding sources

- ▶ **Curriculum vitae (CV)** of the applicant

- ▶ **Letter of support from the home institution**, required in the case of student applicants

 All documents should be sent directly to the Grant Awarding Coordinator (Katarina Matković).

7 EVALUATION

Applications will be evaluated for their scientific quality, feasibility, and relevance to the objectives of the CAPSTONE Action and its Working Groups, according to the evaluation criteria outlined below.

All submissions will first be checked for eligibility and completeness by the **Grant Awarding Coordinator**. Eligible applications will then be evaluated by at least two independent reviewers, coordinated on behalf of the Evaluation Committee and the Core Group, in accordance with COST principles of transparency and impartiality.

Funding decisions will be based on the **overall evaluation** (see criteria on next page), **budget justification**, and **available funds**.

The final decision will be made by the **Grant Awarding Coordinator** in consultation with the **Action Chair, Evaluation Committee**, and the **Core Group**.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome by email.

Applicants must have an **e-COST profile**, since selected participants will receive information from the Grant Awarding Coordinator to proceed with the administrative procedure to finalize the process of selection through the e-COST platform ([Link](#)).

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Summary of the evaluation criteria

CATEGORY	ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION/NOTES	ASSESSMENT
Eligibility Requirements	Host institution confirmation	Mandatory for all applicants	Yes / No
	Home institution support letter	Required for student applicants only	Yes / No
Qualitative Assessment	Motivation	Clarity and strength of the applicant's motivation	Yes / No
	Candidate profile	Suitability based on CV and track record	Qualitative
Scientific Evaluation	Critical assessment of the proposal	Coherence, scientific soundness, and relevance to the Action and Working Groups	1-5
	Project objectives and feasibility	Clarity of objectives and feasibility of achieving them within the proposed timeframe	1-5
	Description of activities	Quality and appropriateness of the planned work and methodology	1-5
	Expected contribution	Anticipated outputs and contribution to the Action's objectives	1-5
Budget Assessment	Travel	Justification and compliance with COST rules	Yes / No
	Accommodation	Justification and compliance with COST rules	Yes / No
	Subsistence	Justification and compliance with COST rules	Yes / No
	Other costs (if applicable)	Eligibility and justification	Yes / No

8 SUBMISSION OF THE STSM REPORT AND PAYMENT

Upon completion of the STSM, the grantee must submit the required documentation through the **e-COST system** in order to initiate the payment procedure. All reporting materials must be provided **within 15 working days** following the end of the mission. The submission shall include a **short STSM report**, prepared using the official [template](#), summarizing the activities carried out, the main results achieved, and any planned follow-up actions.

In addition, applicants are required to provide a scientific report intended for dissemination and communication purposes.


This report should present:

- ▶ the background and objectives of the mission, together with a detailed description of the work performed and the main scientific outcomes
- ▶ the impact of the STSM on the applicant's professional development, including networking and capacity-building aspects
- ▶ any planned or potential publications arising from the mission, where applicable

A summary of the scientific report may be published on the CAPSTONE website.

Applicants must also provide a **confirmation from the host institution** verifying that the STSM has been successfully carried out, together with appropriate evidence of the stay (e.g. photographs documenting the visit), which may be used for communication and dissemination purposes.

The grant will be paid by the Grant Holder only **after the successful completion** of the STSM and the approval of all required reports and supporting documentation.

 All documents should also be sent directly to the Grant Awarding Coordinator (Katarina Matković).

Acknowledgement text:

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