

COST Action CA22146

Harnessing the potential of underutilized crops to promote sustainable food production (DIVERSICROP)

Call for applications for short-term scientific missions (STSM)

especially for implementation from November 2023 to October 2025

Call 2

No specific deadline for applications

1. About DIVERSICROP

With population growing rapidly and within the context of agro-climatic changes, there is an increased demand for sustainably produced nutritious food. In Europe, many foods that contribute to health are not widely-grown and consumed despite their suitability to European climates and environments, and viability for sustainable production with lower inputs. Underutilised crops that are stress resilient, such as rye and legumes, have the potential to supply key nutrients and improve diets. Such crops have a long history of cultivation across the continent and are part of the historic food identity of different European countries but are underutilised due to several complex reasons. DIVERSICROP addresses these challenges using an innovative, cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach by analysing the deep history of underutilised crops in Europe, understanding the genetic diversity and adaptation to climate change of crop germplasm, analysing current regional trends in the consumption of food products and by involving national and EU policymakers and key stakeholders to revive diverse crop production and maximise the impact of Europe's agricultural sustainability. DIVERSICROP aims to harmonise fragmented data and develop strategies for the sustainable cultivation of target crops, striking a balance between agricultural sustainability and human nutritional value. DIVERSICROP brings together a skilled and interdisciplinary network to identify climate-resilient crop lines, and potential nutritional and health benefits of their consumption to rethink our food systems. DIVERSICROP will strengthen the Farm to Fork and the Biodiversity strategies under the European Green Deal to contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The objectives of DIVERSICROP are to:

1. reveal the environmental, economic and sociocultural circumstances that led to modern underutilisation of the three target crops;
2. determine the traits and characteristics of these crops that make them viable for sustainable production in a modern context;
3. assess their nutritional value, their potential use in food products and their overall market potential in the future; and
4. to provide a pathway for re-engagement with these crops by facilitating interdisciplinary exchange.

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

WG1. Ancient history

The ancient history WG maps the regional deep history for production and consumption of the three selected crops (7000 BC to early modern period) based upon evidence from archaeology, history and ethnobotany.

WG2. Crop science

The crop science WG identifies current regional environmental constraints that limit production of the three target crops, examining environmental adaptation of underutilised germplasm.

WG3. Nutrition

The nutrition WG examines the current regional trends in food consumption for key products containing the three target crops.

WG4. Policy

The policy WG reviews past policies and incentives, and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue, with a view to supporting policy development.

WG5. Dissemination, training and events

The dissemination WG disseminates project results to consolidate Europe as the nexus of promotion for underutilised crops cultivation.

2. What is a short-term scientific mission (STSM)

A short-term scientific mission (STSM) is a visit to a host organization located in a different country by a researcher or innovator to conduct a specific piece of work for a determined period of time. A STSM grantee receives funding for this work within an international team and gains new knowledge or access to equipment or techniques not available in the home institution.

STSMs serve several key purposes in EU COST Actions. COST networks encourage international collaboration among researchers and innovators in various scientific fields. The STSMs are an integral part of every COST Action. They:

- Facilitate the international mobility of researchers, especially early-career scientists, to foster new collaborations and sharing knowledge across borders.
- Enhance research skills by transferring new techniques and using equipment in different environments.
- Build and strengthen networks that lead to long-term collaborations, joint publications, and other research activities.
- Boost research projects by providing essential skills, data, and collaborations that support the Action.
- Foster development of early career researchers, including through the establishment of a research profile and gaining international experience.
- By encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing, STSMs contribute to the overall scientific excellence of the research community involved in COST Actions.
- Support COST policies on promoting gender balance, enabling young researchers, and broadening geographical inclusiveness. Grantees should be selected in an open and transparent way.
- Advance COST Excellence and Inclusiveness Policy and Principles of Openness.

3. This open call:

Applications are invited from scientists and innovators for STSMs that support the DIVERSICROP objectives and Working Groups as described in this document.

This call is open-ended. There is no set deadline. Each application will be processed on a first-come first-served basis. It is especially aimed at STSMs that will be implemented from November 2023 to October 2025. Early applications for STSMs completed before October 2024 may be supported if funds allow.

4. Eligibility

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 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](#).

5. Financial support

Before applying, candidates should read [Annex 2 of the Annotated Rules for COST actions](#).

STSM grants provide a contribution for travelling, accommodation and subsistence expenses, and for miscellaneous expenses arising from the implementation of the project and the delivery of the report to the COST Action Management Committee. There is no limit to the maximum duration. Up to a maximum of EUR 4,000 in total can be awarded 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 after approval of all required report/documentation. STSM grantees can request up to 50% pre-payment of the approved grant.

The final amount of financial support is decided by the Action Chair/Grant Holder based on the advice of the Grant Awarding Coordinator. The request of the applicant 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.

6. The grant awarding process

Each STSM must be carried out entirely within one Grant Period. Each Grant Period runs from the 1 November until the 31 October of the following year.

The grant awarding process for STSMs starts with a call under a strict (annual) budget. Each application is reviewed by two (or three in case the outcome is not consistent) project members who are guided by the Grant Awarding Coordinator. The Grant Awarding Coordinator advises the Action Chair who acts on the advice if the budget allows.

An STSM ends when the payment is recorded. Therefore, applicants should schedule the STSM to allow time for submitting the report, evaluating it, and processing the payment within the Grant Period. This means that the practical work in missions funded in this call should be complete by 30 September to give adequate time for reporting and grant payment by 31 October.

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

7. Application procedure

Applicants must have an e-COST profile and applications must be submitted online in e-COST via <https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm>.

Applications comprise:

1. An online Grant Application that includes:
 - A project title for the mission that communicates the main content and purpose of the work.
 - Start and end date of the STSM (within the active grant period, i.e., no overlap across two consecutive grant periods).
 - Grant requested.
 - Basic information about the host institution and contact person.
2. A completed APPLICATION FORM (Application template) describing goals, description of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected results (outcomes) and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives.
3. Confirmation from the host institution on its availability to receive the applicant.
4. A justification document setting out:
 - The statement describing applicant's motivation (1-2 pages).
 - The financial plan (about 1 page) clearly indicating the expected costs (e.g., transport, accommodation, living costs) following COST rules and the amount of support already received from other sources.
5. The applicant's curriculum vitae.
6. In the case of students, a support letter from home institution.

Any documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should be sent directly to the Grant Awarding Coordinator (Donal Murphy-Bokern donal@murphy-bokern.com) and the Chair of COST action (Sonia Negrao sonia.negrao@ucd.ie).

8. Evaluation of applications

Applications will be evaluated for their quality and for their relevance to the objectives of DIVERSICROP and its Working Groups. To avoid time-wasting, each application will be first screened by the Grant Awarding Coordinator to check that it is complete and that it is relevant to the Action. Incomplete applications are rejected with the possibility to resubmit. Irrelevant applications are also rejected and cannot be resubmitted.

Following the passing of the initial screen, STSM applications are evaluated by independent experts guided by the Grant Awarding Coordinator on behalf of the Management Committee (MC). External advice may be sought. The Grant Awarding Coordinator manages the process so that evaluators have no personal or financial interest in the application. An evaluation score is given considering the proposal clarity, relevance for the Action, feasibility, planning, and expected outputs. Scores are from 1 to 6. The final evaluation outcome is announced within one month of submission.

Scores:

1 (very poor): proposal is not logical and not understandable. Not clearly linked to any working group.

2 (poor): proposal with limited understanding, planning and no clear objectives. Weakly linked to any working group.

3 (fair): proposal with some understanding, planning and objectives. Moderate links to at least one WG.

4 (good): good proposal but would benefit from refinement. Well-linked to at least one WG.

5 (very good): clear and effective plan that is well-linked to at least one working group.

6 (excellent): the proposed work plan is well-designed and planned, is feasible with good projected outputs. Strongly linked to at least one WG.

A score is given (from 1 to 6 as above) for proposal clarity, feasibility, planning and expected outputs.

Each reviewer scores each proposal independently. The STSM Grant Awarding Coordinator collates the outcomes of the independent evaluations and communicates the final scoring (range 4-24 points) after confirming the fulfilment of requisites to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Action.

Proposals with high scores (≥ 20 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 of the evaluation criteria

Category	Notes	Scoring
Requisites		
Support letter - home Institute	Required for students only	Y/N
Support letter - host Institute		Y/N
Evaluation		
Motivation letter	Convincing	Y/N
Work plan		
<i>Clarity and relevance</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>Feasibility</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>Planning</i>	Scores	1-6
<i>Expected outputs</i>	Scores	1-6
Suitability of the candidate from the curriculum vitae and list of publications		Y/N
Grant request		
Travel	Acceptable	Y/N
Accommodation	Acceptable	Y/N
Subsistence	Acceptable	Y/N
Miscellaneous	Acceptable	Y/N

9. Submission of the STSM report and payment

- 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 before 15 October.
- The report includes a description of the work, and 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 addition to providing the STSM report, the applicant must upload a public **report** that covers:

- The main scientific findings.
- The effect of the visit on 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.
- The summary of the report will be published on the DIVERSICROP website.

Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to Grant Awarding Coordinator who is Donal Murphy-Bokern (donal@murphy-bokern.com) and the Chair of COST action who is Sonia Negrao (sonia.negrao@ucd.ie)

10. 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. Grantees 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 receipts for accommodation or meals 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.

Notes:

Each publication produced with support of a STSM must acknowledge the support of the COST Action and whenever possible use the COST and DIVERSICROP logos (on slides and posters).

Acknowledgement text:

“This publication is based on work supported by the COST Action CA22146: Harnessing the potential of underutilized crops to promote sustainable food production (DIVERSICROP).”