

COST Action CA21158

SMILES

**Enhancing Small-Medium Islands resilience by securing the sustainability
of Ecosystem Services**

Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSM) and Virtual Mobility (VM):

Final Call (2026)

Fourth Grant Period

1. Purpose of Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and Virtual Mobility (VM) under SMILES

The main objective of SMILES¹ is to provide a platform for coordinated interdisciplinary research on several aspects of mapping and assessment of ecosystem services (ES) in small and medium European Islands in order to synthesize and strengthen the knowledge base for conservation of island realms and contribute to their sustainable development. Achieving this goal includes fostering collaboration across disciplines and geographic regions, with a focus on PhD students, Young Researchers and Innovators and researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs).

There are **six working groups**² focusing on different aspect of the topic:

1. Small-medium island ecosystems: natural capital assessment
2. Ecosystem Services of Small-medium islands
3. Effects of Land use and climate changes (LU/CC) on ES
4. Nature-based solutions (NbS) for safeguarding ES of small-medium islands
5. Policy and Governance of Small-Medium Islands for ES provision
6. Dissemination, Participatory and user-centered design processes

¹ To learn more about aims and the key questions of COST Action SMILES, please look at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here: <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA21158/>.

² Detail of the working groups can be found here: <https://cost-smiles.eu/working-groups/>

Short-Term Scientific Missions and Virtual Mobility:

- Support capacity building and transfer of knowledge through bilateral/multilateral collaborations;
- Support specific / general topic that can help achieving the Action MoU objectives and deliverables (research coordination);
- Are very flexible and inclusive networking activities crucial to establish new collaborations or reinforce existing collaborations across disciplines and different sectors (e.g., academia and industry / SMEs) with possible impact on career development;
- Typical outcomes are spin-off publications and (funded) projects that contribute to the visibility and impact of the COST Actions, encouraging other researchers to join.

2. Specific information concerning STSMs and VM

Short Term Scientific Missions consist of a visit at 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. The STSM grant provides a contribution for travelling, accommodation and subsistence expenses, implementation of the project, delivery of the report to the COST Action MC and overall effort. The Grantee can perform the mission anywhere in the world. The financial support is a contribution to the overall expenses incurred during the STSM and may not necessarily cover all of the associated outgoings. Participant grants are non-commercial transactions, therefore, claims as such are not subject to V.A.T deduction. Taxes normally due or applicable with respect to the payment of the grant are not to be deducted from amounts payable to participants. It is the responsibility of each participant to ensure that all amounts that they receive from COST funding are compliant with their national tax rules and obligations.

Virtual Mobility consists of a collaboration in a online setting among researchers or innovators within the COST Action, to exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, etc. Examples of activities that can be performed by the VM grantee are:

- Virtual mentoring scheme, with special focus on activities and exchanges that can generate capacity building and new skills, particularly for Young Researchers and Innovators (e.g. managerial skills, methodological skills, communication skills, etc);
- To support the harmonization and standardization of methods and procedures within the Action networking activities, e.g.
 - setting up a survey amongst all Action members to collect different results and outcomes from experiments done in their respective labs and research groups;
 - coordinating the discussions to create common protocols to be used by the network afterwards;
 - preparing questionnaires and response scales to be used by the Action members as part of online networking activities.
- To support the implementation of research coordination related activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence, e.g.
 - computational or modelling activities;
 - data analysis of the Action for a specific report or activity.

The following funding conditions apply and must be respected in STSM:

- Up to a maximum of EUR 3000 in total can be awarded to each successful STSM applicant.
- Daily allowance for accommodation and subsistence will be reimbursed according to the COST rules (allowance rates table per country: www.cost.eu/daily_allowance).
- Up to a maximum of EUR 500 will be allocated for travel costs.
- The number of STSM approved and the amount granted for each individual STSM will be determined during the evaluation process by the Grant Awarding Coordinator, in cooperation with the Core Group.

The following funding conditions apply and must be respected in VM:

- Up to a maximum of EUR 500 in total can be awarded to each successful VM applicant.
- The number of VM approved and the amount granted for each individual VM will be determined during the evaluation process by the Grant Awarding Coordinator, in cooperation with the Core Group.

STSMs and VM must respect the following criteria:

- The Applicant and the Host institution are in different countries;
- The minimum duration is 5 days (including travel);
- There is no maximum duration, but STSM and VM must be carried out entirely by **14 October 2026** and the duration has to be justified based on proposed activities;
- The applicant needs to demonstrate how the STSM or VM will result in a specific deliverable that will contribute to the dissemination and visibility of the COST Action (working paper, blog post, presentation, social media contribution, etc.)
- The applicants are advised to get in touch with the leader of the WG which their work will be related to, prior to their application.

3. Deadline for Applications

Applications for an STSM or VM grant can be made throughout the year from the date of publication **until financing is available**. Evaluations will be carried out as they are received for greater flexibility in the organization of evaluations, voting, reservations, etc.

4. Who can apply

STSM or VM applicants must be engaged in a research program as a postgraduate student or postdoctoral fellow or be officially affiliated to a public or private institution (Home institution). Participation of Young Researchers / Innovators (<40 year old) in STSM and VM is encouraged.

5. How to apply

The calls for the Short Term Scientific Missions and Virtual Mobility applications are open all year (see specifications in point 3) and published on SMILES website. In response to a call, applications are submitted on the e-COST website: <https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm>.

The list of supporting documents to be submitted includes:

- **Letter of invitation** from the Host Institution confirming that they can undertake the STSM or VM on the given dates should their application be approved.
- **Letter of support** from the Home Institution.
- The **submitted STSM or VM application form**.

- An overview of the **proposed activities** to be carried out, a **workplan** for the visit, **justification** for the choice of the Host Institution, **benefits** to the SMILES Action, benefits to the Applicant (maximum 4 standard pages).
- A **full C.V.** (including a list of academic publications – if applicable).

Applicants are informed that their application can be accessed by the holders of leadership positions and any evaluation Committees in AIM-COST Action for evaluation purposes.

6. Evaluation criteria:

The applications will be ranked by the SMILES Action Chair, Co-Chair and the Grant Awarding Coordinator base on:

- Scientific quality of the proposal
- The scientific scope of the proposed mission
- Relevance of the mission to the scientific objectives of the SMILES Action
- Feasibility of the work plan
- The academic excellence of the candidate
- Young Researchers and Innovators from ITC³ will be given priority.
- The inclusiveness criterion will be established i.e. geography, age, gender. Please, include this information if you want it to be considered in your evaluation.

The final ranking will be approved by the SMILES Action Chair, Co-Chair and the Grant Awarding Coordinator.

The selected researchers should wait for the official invitation from the Grant Holder before booking any travel arrangements and paying fees.

7. What is required after completing the STSM and VM

The STSM and VM Grantee has 30 calendar days from the end date of the mission (**or until 15 October in the case of final applications**) to submit a scientific report to the e-COST website. Grants are paid by the Grant Holder after the completion of the activity and approval of all required report/documentation, which includes confirmation by the Host institution of the successful execution of the STSM and short (3 page-max) description of:

- Purpose of the visit/activity (statement of the project aim(s) and objectives).
- Description of the work carried out.
- Description of the main results obtained.
- Future collaboration with host institution. Describe any likely follow-on work with the host institution arising from the visit- if applicable.
- Projected publications/articles resulting or to result from the STSM or VM. Mention any publications that may arise from the visit - if applicable.
- Confirmation by the host of the successful execution of the mission (Provide a brief affirmation by the Host researcher -with their signature- that the STSM or VM was carried out successfully. It can be included in the report or as a separate accompanying document)
- Other comments (if any)

The scientific report will also require the approval of the MC. Subsequently, the payment of the Grant will be made.



Publications resulting from STSM and VM activities should acknowledge COST Action CA21158 (SMILES) support. A short text and photo describing the activity for the Action's website and social media should be also provided after the completion of the STSM or VM.

Successful applicants will be asked to submit a brief of the STSM and VM outputs for the Action's website describing in summary the scientific report which will also be made available online. SMILES encouraged STSMs and VM participants to participate in the Action's events with a poster to present STSMs and VM results when applicable or when requested by the Grant Awarding Coordinator.

For any questions regarding the STSM and VM contact Xana Álvarez: xaalvarez@uvigo.gal

³ COST Inclusiveness Target Countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine. More information: <https://www.cost.eu/about/strategy/excellence-and-inclusiveness/>