



Call for Applications

Short-term Scientific Mission or Virtual Mission

2022 – GP5

Proof of Concept (Working Groups 1 & 2 - Analysis Arena) and Working Group 4 (Field Arena)

22 February 2022

Deadlines for applications

23:59CET, Tuesday 1st March 2022

The European Raptor Biomonitoring Facility (ERBFacility) COST Action CA16224, Working Groups 1&2 (Proof of Concept - Analysis Arena) and Working Group 4 (Field Arena), hereby announces this Call for Applications for up to three **short-term scientific missions (STSM)** or **virtual missions (VM)** available for **Grant Period 5** (ending 16 April 2022).

1. Context

ERBFacility is a pan-European network that seeks to reduce costs imposed by contaminants on human and wildlife health, by using raptors (birds of prey and owls) as sentinels on environmental contamination. ERBFacility seeks to improve effectiveness evaluation, risk assessment and early warning in relation to regulation of priority substances, plant protection products, biocides, veterinary products and heavy metals, with a focus on persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBT) compounds. ERBFacility involves linked research coordination and capacity building in three arenas: (1) analysis (academics, laboratories, regulatory agencies); (2) collections (natural history museums, environmental specimen banks and other collections providing samples for analysis); (3) field (gathering samples and relevant contextual data). For more information see the [Action description and MoU](#) available on the [COST website](#) and see the [ERBFacility website](#).

2. Purpose of this call

* The purpose of this call is to contribute to the following ERBFacility objectives:

Objective C1: To build capacity in the 'analysis arena' through networking and collaboration among ecotoxicologists, collaborating laboratories and regulators, including through: (a) collaborative work on objective R1 (assessment, ERBioMSframework); (b) piloting joint assessment and reporting between collaborating labs to deliver proof of concept; (c) developing guidance to integrate reports with regulatory assessments of relevant regulatory bodies (e.g. ECHA, EFSA, national competent authorities).

Objective R3: To develop a framework, standards and protocols for a European Raptor Sampling Programme (ERSamP). This will provide for collection of the right raptor samples from the right locations at the right times. Standards and protocols will ensure harmonised sampling methods and harmonised recording of relevant field data.

3. Scientific priorities, number of STSMs/VMs, preferred timing

Applications under this call should relate priorities of the ERBFacility Working Groups 1, 2 (Analysis Arena – Proof of Concept), and 4 (Field Arena) for Grant Period 5, as outlined here.

Up to 2 missions (Working Groups 1 & 2 - Proof of Concept)

TITLE: PAN-EUROPEAN ANALYSIS OF THE SPATIAL PATTERNS OF CONTAMINATION BY MERCURY, LEAD AND RODENTICIDES IN THE TAWNY OWL

Reference WGs1&2/GP5/STSM1&2

Up to 2 missions.

ERBFacility is carrying out a Proof of Concept study, which will attempt to demonstrate how our joined up approach involving ecotoxicologists (analysts), storage facilities (museum and specimen banks) and field researchers (to collect samples and supporting population data) can deliver enhanced monitoring of contaminants across Europe using raptors. The focal species for this study is the Tawny Owl. The network has collected and analysed tawny owl livers across several European countries for mercury, lead and anticoagulant rodenticides.

The two proposed STSMs will carry out the analysis to describe the spatial patterns in these contaminants at a pan-European level. The results will be crossed with relevant contextual data for the tawny owl and the focal contaminants

These STSM will ideally start as soon as possible, and no later than 7 March 2022.

The length of these missions is expected to be 30 days.

One STSM or Virtual Mission (WG4)

TITLE: Review of contextual data and guidance for Tawny Owl monitoring to support a future European Raptor Sampling Programme

Reference WG4/GP5/vSTSM1

Work has been done by the Field Arena (Working Group 4) of the ERBfacility COST Action to review a range of population, migratory, demographic and dietary data for Tawny owl across Europe to support the interpretation of European-wide contaminants analysis under ERBF Proof of Concept, where Tawny Owl was selected as a target species. We now invite candidates who would like to support this work by helping to write up the results of the review for publication and also develop specific Tawny Owl monitoring guidance to form part of the ERBFacility

online 'Advice Hub'. This mission will need to begin in March 2022 and be completed by mid-April 2022 and can be conducted virtually.

4. Expected output from the STSMs / virtual missions

The STSMs/VMs are required to produce a **scientific report** (see **Reporting Template**, attached) of 2-3 pages, to be submitted to the MC Chair and to the Host Institution, within 30 days of completion of the mission.

5. Mission hosts

Applicants must arrange an appropriate host institution for their mission. **Applicants are free to identify and contact a suitable host.** Applicants may in particular wish to find a host among members of the [ERB Facility Management Committee](#) or at other research institutions. However, please note that the following have already indicated that they may be able to host a mission:

Potential host institute	Country	Contact name	Contact email	STSM/VM reference
IREC-Universidad Castilla La Mancha	Spain	Dr. Rafael Mateo	rafael.mateo@uclm.es	WGs1&2/GP5/STSM1&2
Universidade de Évora	Portugal	Dr. Rui Lourenço	lourenco@uevora.pt	WGs1&2/GP5/STSM1&2 WG4/GP5/vSTSM1
National Institute of Biology, Ljubljana	Slovenia	Dr. Al Vrezec	al.vrezec@nib.si	WG4/GP5/vSTSM1

6. Eligibility

STSMs are exchange visits aimed at supporting individual mobility, strengthening existing networks and fostering collaboration between COST Action Participants.

VMs are similar, but do not require international mobility. Instead, they are performed virtually, with remote guidance from the Host.

A STSM/VM should specifically contribute to the scientific objectives of the COST Action, whilst at the same time allowing those partaking in the missions to learn new techniques, gain access to specific data, instruments and/or methods not available in their own institutions/organisations.

STSM/VM applicants must be engaged in an official research programme as a PhD student or postdoctoral fellow, or may be employed by, or affiliated to, an institution or legal entity, which has within its remit a clear association with performing research. **Persons holding a First or Masters Degree and not yet registered for a PhD are also eligible.**

The following table shows the scenarios available to eligible applicants.

- **Applicant's Home Institution** = the institution/organisation where an applicant pursues his/her main strand of research.
- **STSM Host Institution** = the institution/organisation that will host the STSM / virtual mission grantee.

Applicant's Home Institution	STSM Host Institution
Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member	Located in another Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member
	Located in a Participating COST Partner Member
	An Approved IPC Institution
	An Approved NNC Institution
	The EU Commission or a EU Body, Office or Agency
	An Approved European RTD Organisation
	An Approved International Organisation
Located in an Approved NNC Institution	Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member
Located in an Approved European RTD Organisation	Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member

The Participating COST Full Members / COST Cooperating Members are the country Parties to ERBFacility, listed [here](#). Please note that at present, there are no Approved IPC, NNC European RTD or International Organisations for ERBFacility. The only relevant scenarios are thus those highlighted in yellow in the table above. In other words, **the applicant's Home Institution must be located in one of the countries that are Party to ERBFacility, and the STSM/VM Host Institution must be located in one of the other countries which are Party to ERBFacility** (or the European Commission, an EU Body, Office or Agency).

STSMs must have a minimum duration of 5 days and a maximum duration of 90 days. However, STSMs involving Early Career Investigators (ECI = those studying for a PhD or with up to 8 years of experience following award of PhD) may have a maximum duration of 180 days.

Any STSM/VM under this Call must be completed (i.e. the mission-holder must have returned home) by 16 March 2022 (i.e. by the end of the current Grant Period 5).

7. Application procedure

Applications must be submitted through www.e-services.cost.eu/stsm

In order to access the submission page, you must first be registered in eCOST (accessible at www.e-services.cost.eu).

When you go to the STSM submission page, you will need to enter a '**Motivation and Workplan Summary**' of **up to 2000 words**. We advise you to prepare this summary offline in Word, and then cut and paste your summary to the online form. The Motivation and Workplan Summary should address the following points:

- **Title and reference for the mission** (as given in Section 3, above)
- **Aim and motivation** – please explain the scientific and/or other motivation for the STSM and what scientific and/or other outcomes you aim to accomplish with the STSM.
- **Proposed contribution to the scientific objectives of the Action** – please focus here on how your STSM will contribute to the Working Group scientific priorities for the selected mission (see Section 3 above)
- **Techniques** – please detail what techniques and/or equipment you may learn to use, if applicable.
- **Planning** – please detail the steps you will take to achieve your proposed aim.
- **Expected outputs** – please specify in terms of: (a) the formal mission report, (b) a detailed technical report, (c) one or more peer-reviewed papers (and indicative target journal).

Applicants must also upload the following supporting documents, which should be prepared in advance to submitting your application online:

1. **Letter of interest from the proposed Host Institution** confirming that she/he has agreed to host you for the proposed dates, and to participate in the STSM/VM (using the **Letter of Interest Template**, attached)
2. **Letter of support from your Home Institution** that the proposed STSM/VM does not interfere with any obligatory duties you may have at your home institution (using the **Letter of Support Template**, attached)
3. **Short CV of applicant** outlining qualifications and research track record.
4. **Short CV of the host** outlining qualifications, research track record, international collaborations and supervisory experience.

8. Evaluation

Applications will be evaluated by a panel of three persons, which includes the STSM Coordinator, the Working Group Leader and a Working Group member. One or more of these persons will be replaced (by other Working Group members) if there is any direct conflict of interest.

Applications will first be assessed for eligibility. Non-eligible applications will be excluded from the selection stage.

Eligible applications will then be assessed for selection based on:

- **Pertinence and quality** of the proposed research work and expected output in relation to the selected scientific priority (as specified in Section 3 above) (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)
- **Suitability of the applicant:** relevance and quality of research track record (in relation to career stage) (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)
- **Suitability of the host:** expertise and experience in the relevant research area, experience in international collaborations, supervisory experience (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)

Equal weight will be given to the above three criteria.

Evaluation will also give consideration to the suitability of the proposed timetable, and the cost effectiveness of the proposed budget.

Where applications score equally, consideration will be given to COST policies on excellence and inclusiveness, specifically:

- Geographical spread (notably, missions to and/or from Inclusiveness Target Countries)
- Involvement of Early Career Investigators
- Gender balance

In order to increase the proportion of women in successful scientific careers, we particularly encourage women to apply.

For each scientific priority specified at Section 3 above, a final ranked list of the applications will be drawn up and agreed by the panel and submitted to the Action Core Group with a recommendation for award of the mission(s) to the highest ranked application(s). Final approval of award of a grant will be made by the Action Core Group (excluding any members having a direct conflict of interest).

9. Financial support

STSM Grants

An STSM Grant is a fixed financial contribution, which takes into consideration the budget

request of the applicant and the outcome of the evaluation of the STSM application. STSM Grants do not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking a given mission. A STSM Grant is a contribution to the overall travel, accommodation and meal expenses of the Grantee.

- For shorter missions, a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses.
- For longer missions up to 90 days, a maximum of €2500 in total can be afforded to the successful applicant.
- For missions of 91-180 days, a maximum of €3500 in total can be afforded to the successful applicant.
- Up to a maximum of €300 can be afforded for travel costs.

The Action Chair and/or the Core Group will consider and may approve differentiated country rates to cover accommodation and meal expenses based on the perceived cost of living in the host country.

The STSM Grantee has 30 calendar days from the end date of the mission to submit a Scientific Report. The report must be submitted to the senior researcher hosting the mission at the Host Institution and to the STSM Coordinator, with copy to the relevant Working Group Lead and the Action Chair. Payment of the Grant is subject to a STSM scientific report being approved on behalf of the Action's MC by the delegated person(s) responsible and by the senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution (see **Letter of Acceptance Template**, attached).

Payment of the Grant is subject to the Scientific Report being approved by the Action Chair, the STSM Coordinator and a senior researcher affiliated to the Host institution. A template for the Scientific Report is made available in your eCOST profile following award of mission.

Specific provisions have been introduced to enable researchers from Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITC)¹ participating in the COST Action to request a pre-payment of 50% of their STSM Grant when they complete the first day of their STSM. In such case, the representative of the Host Institution must confirm by e-mail to the Grant Holder that the STSM applicant has officially started the mission on day 1. Only then the Grant Holder can arrange the payment of 50% of the STSM grant. The remaining 50% of the Grant is payable once the administrative requirements have been satisfied after the STSM.

The COST Association and the Grant Holder of the Action are not to be considered as being an STSM Grantee's employer. Grantees must make their own arrangements for all provisions related to personal security, health, taxation, social security and pension matters.

VM Grants

VM Grants aim at strengthening the existing networks by allowing scientists to foster collaboration in a virtual setting, to exchange knowledge, learn new techniques, disseminate Action results, etc. The successful applicant(s) will be selected by the MC to perform activities that do not necessarily require in-person presence. These activities may include surveys, questionnaires or preparation of protocols, virtual mentoring of activities that can generate capacity, build new skills, etc. The maximum amount per VM Grant is €1500.

10. Deadline for applications

The deadlines for applications under this Call are:

- **23:59 CET, Tuesday 1st March 2022**

¹ ITC Countries that are Party to ERBFacility: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Hungary, the North Republic of Macedonia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey

Applicants will normally be notified of the outcome of their application within 5 working days of the deadline.

11. Further information

For more information related to the scientific priority of WG1&2 and WG4 and the focus of these missions, please contact:

- Proof of Concept Lead, Dr Rafael Mateo, rafael.mateo@uclm.es
- WG4 Lead, Dr Chris Wernham, chris.wernham@bto.org

For more information regarding the **application process**, or any help needed with submitting your application online in eCOST, please contact the STSM Coordinator, Dr Oliver Krone, krone@izw-berlin.de