COST Action CA24161

INDoS - Improving Neuroimaging Data for Sharing

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

for implementation from March 2026 to October 2026

Call 1

No specific deadline for applications

1. About INDoS

Improving Neuroimaging Data for Sharing (INDoS) is a European COST Action focused on transforming how human neuroimaging data — such as MRI, MEG, and EEG — is shared and reused. By addressing key challenges in data quality control, metadata standardization, preprocessing pipelines, and ethical and legal frameworks, INDoS fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration, develops FAIR-aligned guidelines and tools, and trains researchers in open science practices to accelerate innovation and reproducibility in brain research.

Our mission is to make neuroimaging data truly FAIR — Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable — by developing shared standards, tools, and ethical guidelines for data sharing. INDoS connects experts across Europe to improve data quality, transparency, and legal clarity, enabling researchers to share and reuse neuroimaging data efficiently, responsibly, and reproducibly.

The objectives of INDoS are to:
- **Establish shared standards for data quality** Develop and promote guidelines for quality assessment and control (QA/QC) across neuroimaging modalities to ensure transparent, reliable, and reusable data.
- **Enhance metadata practices** Improve the description and annotation of neuroimaging data and experimental information to make datasets more findable, interoperable, and reusable.
- **Standardize preprocessing pipelines** Define and disseminate rational, well-documented preprocessing procedures to improve reproducibility and facilitate data integration across studies and sites.
- **Clarify ethical and legal frameworks** Develop practical guidelines and training to help researchers navigate privacy regulations and ethical considerations while sharing human

neuroimaging data responsibly.
- **Build a pan-European network** Connect researchers, software developers, data stewards, and legal experts to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of interoperable tools.
- **Promote training and capacity building** Create high-quality training materials, workshops, and opportunities for young researchers to strengthen skills in open science and neuroimaging data sharing.
- **Support dissemination and adoption** Ensure that the Action's outputs—guidelines, tools, and standards—are widely communicated, openly accessible, and adopted by the neuroimaging community and beyond.
- **Advance FAIR and open science** Contribute to a shift toward more transparent, efficient, and ethical research practices in neuroimaging, aligning with European and international open science goals.

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

WG1. Quality Assessment and Quality Control
This Working Group focuses on improving the reliability and usability of neuroimaging data by developing shared standards and guidelines for quality assessment (QA) and quality control (QC) across different imaging modalities, including MRI, MEG, EEG, and fNIRS. By bringing together experts and existing initiatives, WG1 aims to establish clear, transparent, and interoperable QA/QC practices that make it easier for researchers to evaluate data quality before use. These efforts will reduce duplication of work, enhance reproducibility, and support the use of neuroimaging data in advanced applications such as AI.

WG2. Metadata
WG2 is dedicated to improving the way neuroimaging data and experimental information are described and annotated. Metadata plays a crucial role in making data findable, interoperable, and reusable, but current practices are often inconsistent or incomplete. This Working Group will extend and refine existing standards, such as BIDS, and foster collaboration between metadata developers, software tool creators, and researchers. By improving metadata practices, WG2 will make it easier to discover, understand, and reuse neuroimaging datasets across research groups and disciplines.

WG3. Automated Preprocessing Pipelines
Preprocessing is a critical step in preparing neuroimaging data for analysis, but current practices are often ad hoc and poorly documented. WG3 aims to standardize and rationalize preprocessing procedures to enhance transparency, reproducibility, and interoperability. Focusing initially on EEG and MEG, this Working Group will define best practices and documentation standards for preprocessing pipelines, drawing on successful examples from MRI. The outcome will be clearer, more reusable pipelines that support consistent and trustworthy analyses across research sites.

WG4. Ethics, Practices, and Regulations
Sharing human neuroimaging data raises important ethical and legal questions, particularly regarding privacy and compliance with regulations such as the GDPR. WG4 will clarify and address these challenges by developing guidelines, tools, and training that help researchers navigate legal frameworks while maximizing the scientific and societal benefits of data sharing. It will also foster ethical discussions within the community, balancing openness and transparency with respect for participants' rights and researchers' concerns, ultimately supporting responsible and sustainable data sharing practices.

WG5. Dissemination and Communication
WG5 ensures that the outcomes of the Action are visible, accessible, and impactful. This Working

Group coordinates the communication and dissemination of guidelines, tools, training materials, and scientific results to the research community, stakeholders, and the public. By maintaining a strong online presence, engaging with key conferences and platforms, and supporting open access publication, WG5 plays a central role in building a vibrant network and encouraging the widespread adoption of the Action's outputs across Europe and beyond.

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 STMSs are an integral part of every COST Action. They:

- The primary purpose of an STSM is to support and contribute to the realization of the objectives of the workgroup.
- 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 INDoS 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 March 2026 to October 2026.But the call can be changed after the May 15th based on the evaluation from first two months and possibly specific deadlines can be set up.

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)**. Moreover,the applicant must be a participant of the INDoS COST Action and the host of the STSM must be a WG lead or co-lead in this call.

The eligible countries are listed in COST Documents & Guidelines, particularly, in the Country and Organizations Table.

5. Financial support

Before applying, candidates should read Annex 2 of the Annotated Rules for COST actions.

STSM grants provide a contribution for traveling, accommodation and subsistence expenses, and for miscellaneous expenses (such as conference fees) 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 September 30th 2026. Up to a maximum of EUR 4,000 in total can be awarded per grant. Participants are reminded that cancellation insurance fees are 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.

The final amount of financial support is decided by the Action Chair/Grant Holder based on the advice of the Grant Awarding Coordinator. The funds requested by the applicant should reflect the duration and location of the STSM.

6. The grant awarding process

Each STSM must be carried out entirely within one Grant Period. There will be two calls, each with approx 5 grants. The first call will be open for 2 months and the decisions are on excellence (see below) and time of submission. The second round will follow short time and will be open for a fixed duration (deadline) and evaluation will be done on excellence. The details for the second call will be set up based on the evaluation of the applications from the first call. Other call may occur if there is budged remaining after the first two calls. 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. Missions must be complete 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 be INDoS participants and have an e-COST profile. Applications must be submitted

online in e-COST via https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm.

Applications comprise:

1. An online Grant Application (found at https://e-services.cost.eu/stsm) which includes:

- A project title for the mission that communicates the content and purpose of the work.
- Start and end date of the STSM (within the active grant period up to 30 September 2026, i.e., no overlap across two consecutive grant periods and leave enough to proceed the payment).
- 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 of its availability to receive the applicant.

4. A justification document setting out:

- The statement describing applicant's motivation and a detailed description of the work to be carried out, including the "Goals, description of the work to be carried out by the applicant, expected outcomes and description of the contribution to the Action MoU objectives" (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. Applicant's curriculum vitae.

6. In the case of students, a support letter from the home institution.

Any documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should be sent directly to the Grant Awarding Coordinator (Michal Mikl michal.mikl@ceitec.muni.cz) and the Chair of COST action (Jochem Rieger indos-chair@uol.de).

8. Evaluation of applications

Applications will be evaluated for their quality and for their relevance to the objectives of INDoS and its Working Groups. For time efficiency, each application will be first screened by the Grant Awarding Coordinator to check that it is complete, meets the requirements 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 passing of the screening, STSM applications are evaluated by independent experts (e.g. mebers of INDoS MC or WGs) guided by the Grant Awarding Coordinator. 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. There are six items for assessment by the evaluators. The first one serves as exclusion criteria too. Individual items can be scored with 0 to 4 points. These scores are summed to the overall evaluation score per reviewer. The final evaluation outcome is announced within one month of submission.

Scale for individual items: 0:not at all; 1: weak but recognizable; 2: recognizable; 3: clearly recognizable; 4: strong

Scoring items:

1. The project is related to the goals of INDoS (0-4 points). Zero is an exclusion criterion.

2. The project contributes to the specific goals the current funding period (0-4 points).

3. The proposal clearly and understandably describes what the goals an the benefits of the project are for the applicant and for INDoS. (0-4 points)

4. The proposal clearly and understandably describes the feasibility of the goals (0-4 points).

5. The proposal includes effective measures for the assessment of success regarding its goals (0-4 points)

6. The host is one of the WG leads or co-leads (compulsory)

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

Proposals with high scores (≥ 12 points) will be funded, 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
Host is WG lead or co-lead	required	Y/N
Applicant is a member of INDoS	required	Y/N
Evaluation		
Motivation letter and goals	Convincing and clear	Y/N
Work plan	clear and goals achievable	Y/N
Related to the goals of INDoS	Score (must be >0)	0-4
Contributes to the specific goals the current funding period	Score	0-4
Clear and understandable description	Score	0-4
Feasibility of the goals	Score	0-4

Includes effective measures for the assessment of success	Score	0-4
Suitability of the candidate from the curriculum vitae and list of publications		
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 short STSM report using the STSM report template, and relevant documentation within 15 working days of the completion of the mission.

- The report includes a short 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.

In addition to providing the STSM report, the applicant must upload a Scientific Report for use in communications that includes:

- The background and a full description of the work and 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).

- The summary of the report will be published on the INDoS website.

- In addition to the Mission Report, a document confirming the host institution of the execution of the STSM and

- Proof of evidence of the stay (a picture of the grantee working at the host institution facilities and a picture with the collaborators) that might be published in social media and website.

Documents that cannot be uploaded via the e-COST interface should directly be sent to Grant Awarding Coordinator (Michal Mikl michal.mikl@ceitec.muni.cz) and the Chair of COST action (Jochem Rieger indos-chair@uol.de).

Notes:
Each publication produced with support of a STSM must acknowledge the support of the COST

Action and whenever possible use the COST and INDoS logos (on slides and posters).

Acknowledgement text:

"This publication is based on work supported by the COST Action CA24161: Improving Neuroimaging Data for Sharing (INDoS)."

**Funded by
the European Union**