



**SENSITIVE**

**OBSERVER REPORT**

CALL	
Call:	HORIZON-IU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-03 -two-stage
Topic(s):	HORIZON-IU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-03-NETWORKS-01-two-stage Global collaboration action for strengthening the Regional Networks of Excellence and Epidemic Preparedness Consortia
Type(s) of action:	HORIZON IU Coordination and Support Actions (CSA)
Service:	Global Health EDCTP3
Call deadline:	03/09/2025
Submission model:	stage 2

EVALUATION	
Evaluation model:	single
Panel(s):	HORIZON-IU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-02-NETWORKS-01-two-stage
Observer(s):	[REDACTED]

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## SUMMARY FOR PUBLICATION

### Summary for publication

*Include a summary of the main findings for publication in a call update in the Portal, including the overall assessment on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, and compliance with the applicable rules. (max. 2000 characters).*

The evaluations were deemed in all aspects to be fair, impartial and equitable. No issues of confidentiality were seen to arise, nor were any issues of non-conformity observed. The evaluations followed all the applicable procedures and rules. The eligibility of the proposals was determined by the Global Health EDCTP3 team prior to the start of the evaluations.

The overall quality of the evaluations was of a high standard. Moreover, no proposal was seen to be evaluated such that it could be considered for funding despite not being of the necessary quality.

## 1. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

### Background and scope

This report describes the observer's assessment of the evaluation of the following call:

**Call for proposals:** HORIZON-IU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-03- two-stage stage 2

**Deadline:** 03.09.2025

**Budget:** EUR 53.000.000

This call covers the following topic(s)/type(s) of action:

- HORIZON-IU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-03-NETWORKS-01-two-stage /HORIZON-IU-CSA HORIZON IU Coordination and Support Actions

Global collaboration action for strengthening the Regional Networks of Excellence and Epidemic Preparedness Consortia

The report analyses the efficiency of the procedures, usability of the instruments (including IT tools), conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, and compliance with the applicable rules.

The objective is to give independent advice for improving the evaluation processes for EU funding.

## 2. OBSERVER ASSESSMENT

### Methodology

#### Methodology

*Describe how you proceeded for observing the evaluation procedure (e.g. participation in briefing; present at evaluation session; analysis of IERs, CRs and panel report; comparison with similar procedures at national/international level; etc).*

The documentation related to the Call (both general and topic specific) provided to the experts and recorders by the Global Health EDCTP3 team was reviewed in advance of the video briefings (general and topic specific) which were carried out prior to the initial phase (Individual Reporting [IER] and initial Consensus Report [CR] drafting) of the evaluations and at the start of the evaluation week. The

SEP online system which was used for the drafting of the IERs and CRs was employed to monitor the progress and quality of the reports.

During the evaluation week, which was carried out fully on-line, the Observer was following another Call topic. As such, around 50% of each panel's consensus discussions were monitored. This permitted the discussions and interactions between the experts, recorders and the (Senior) Scientific Project Officers (POs, acting as the Moderators) to be observed.

Feedback was sought from experts and Recorders where possible.

## Assessment

### Assessment

#### Scale of complexity of the evaluation task

The scale and complexity of the evaluation was considerable given the number of proposals that had to be evaluated as well as the stage 2 evaluations employing 5 experts. Each consensus discussion was allotted 45 mins, however in all cases that were monitored the discussions went well beyond this time limit. It is important to note that the evaluations and discussions were more complex than in previous calls as the financing of proposals in terms of the "lump sum" model was incorporated in the evaluations for the first time as part of piloting of this system for the EDCTP3.

The workload and complexity of running and moderating the consensus discussions by the moderators was considerable and the role they played essential given the complexity of the evaluations. Here again the novelties introduced by the evaluation of the lump sum financing was at times challenging, requiring in at least one case discussions with a member of the EDCTP3 financial team.

#### Transparency of the procedures

The evaluation procedures that were employed were open, transparent and explained in appropriate detail to the experts and recorders. The communications with the experts and recorders were well managed, clear and timely.

Some relatively minor issues were noted during the evaluations:

- 1) The recorders did not always operate during the consensus discussions in the same way. In particular, some recorders began the discussions by outlining briefly the proposal in question while others did not.
- 2) Some recorders included in the initial draft CRs in SEP the individual IER scores and, in many such cases also the averages. Others preferred not to introduce the scores in the report until after the CR text had been agreed to during the consensus discussions.
- 3) In some cases, the recorders presented at the outset of the consensus discussion a summary of the individual scores (and sometimes the averages for each criterion) before discussing the evaluation of the criteria.
- 4) In general, it appeared that most experts were not aware that the initial draft CR was available in SEP prior to the evaluation week or prior to the scheduled consensus discussions. As such, few if any experts read the draft CR prior to the consensus discussions. It may be

noted that the moderators did urge the experts regularly during the evaluation week to prepare by reading the draft prior to the scheduled consensus meeting.

The consensus discussions relied very much on the moderator and their ability to maintain the recorder and experts on track, focussed and ensure that all relevant evaluation sub criteria were evaluated. This was all the more important when the lump sum financing was discussed which more often than not required guidance from the moderator.

- 5) In terms of scoring, the experts and recorders were supplied with guidelines, which were also covered in the video Briefings. During the consensus discussions there tended to be a greater focus on the shortcomings and weaknesses and their weight than the strengths when reaching agreement on the scoring for each Criterion.

#### Throughput time of the evaluation and the efficiency of the procedures

As is nearly always the case for the Global Health EDCPT3 calls, the scheduling of the consensus meetings was complicated at times by the different time zones which experts are in. As noted in previous reports, this, however, is a minor inconvenience compared to the advantages gained from having a wide-ranging pool of experts. The flexibility shown by the experts in changing time slots when the occasional issues arose with another expert's availability was helpful.

#### Efficiency, reliability and usability of the procedures, including the IT-tools

The procedures employed for the evaluations were reliable and efficient. The main challenges occur when time constraints become significant (specifically when consensus discussions run well-beyond their schedule duration).

SEP performed in general well and no negative feedback was received from any experts or recorders.

The only minor issues that occurred in the context of SEP were when experts had not understood that they needed to use SEP to approve a CR to confirm their agreement.

The Webex videoconferencing worked as well as could be expected. Allowing for a 10-15 minute login period prior to each day's first session starting, reduced delays as experts had time to resolve any connection issues. The only minor issues that occurred were related to Webex links when changes were made.

The use of SEP by the recorder, combined with the PC or laptop used by each of the experts during the consensus meetings, sometimes meant that the online editing the draft CR in real time was difficult to follow. In these cases, it was typically an issue of the text being too small or the SEP window too compressed for the experts and moderator to read easily. Some recorders employed a copy of the draft's text in Word which allowed the text to be more easily enlarged and hence more readable on the Webex window.

#### Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality of the evaluation

The evaluations were found to be entirely fair, impartial and equitable. Furthermore, no issues of confidentiality were observed to arise at any point in the evaluations.

Critical to this was a judicious selection of the experts and recorders as well as by ensuring that any experts or recorders with a Conflict of Interest (COI) with a proposal under evaluation were excluded from the corresponding consensus discussions. The use of the SEP platform for all aspects of the reporting (IERs, CRs and the PO implemented ESR quality control and proof reading) also reinforced the confidentiality of the evaluations.

#### Conformity of the evaluation with the applicable rules (including guidance documents)

No issues of non-conformity were observed at any point throughout the evaluations – both in the “remote” phase (IER and initial CR drafting) and during the evaluation week. The evaluations were observed to have followed all the applicable guidance, rules and procedures. The eligibility of the proposals submitted for the Call was determined by the Global Health EDCTP3 team prior to experts being assigned to them.

#### Quality of the evaluation process in comparison with similar national/international evaluation procedures

The evaluation processes were found to be of a similar level, if not superior to, equivalent evaluations that the Observer has been involved in at both national and international levels.

The evaluations benefited clearly from the wide variety of experts covering a broad range of nationalities and, most importantly, encompassing the full range of the expertise needed to examine the proposals in all their aspects.

As in previous reports, the two-stage nature of the evaluations should be underlined. In particular, it has the considerable advantage of allowing the most promising proposals to be presented in the second stage in a much more detailed form and to be examined in greater depth by the experts. The increase from 3 to 5 experts between the two stages, while complicating the evaluations from a practical point of view, ensured that they were rigorous, covered all relevant aspects and that the most promising proposals were considered for funding.

#### Overall quality of the evaluation

The overall quality and standard of the evaluations was found to be high. Some suggestions for improvements are provided but these would not fundamentally change the quality nor the standard of the evaluations.

Importantly, no proposal was seen to be evaluated such that it could be considered for funding despite not being of the necessary high quality.

#### Other remarks (optional)

This was the first year that lump sum financing was being trialled – both this Call topic and one other were being employed as pilots. In many cases this complicated the consensus discussions and was a

clear source of uncertainty for many experts. A short briefing was provided on this issue as well as a set of Q&A which was provided as a brief document to the experts as a follow up.

Lump sum financing and the issues associated with it was the principal subject of the feedback received from the experts.

Although already noted above, it must be emphasised that the role of the moderator is a critical one in permitting the consensus discussions to remain focussed, on track and to provide the guidance needed for the experts to reach consensus. The professionalism and ability of the moderators to maintain their focus and high levels of concentration over the almost 5 full days of consensus meetings is to be greatly commended.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided in the context of developing more focussed and efficient consensus discussions:

- 1) Future evaluations of this Call topic should extend the timeslots for each consensus discussion to 1h30.
- 2) The experts should be clearly instructed in the Briefings and documentation to read the draft CRs in advance of the start of the consensus discussions.
- 3) The experts should also be encouraged to provide feedback in SEP to the initial draft CR in SEP prior to the consensus meeting – ideally well before in order for the recorder to modify the CR in advance of the consensus meeting.
- 4) The recorders should be clearly instructed to provide draft CRs that list the points of disagreement in the different IERs that need to be discussed. They should be instructed to not include scores (IERs and/or averages and/or proposed CR scores) in the draft CR.
- 5) The recorders and evaluators should be clearly instructed to not present and/or discuss the scoring during the consensus meeting until the text of the corresponding CR criterion has been agreed to by all 5 experts.
- 6) If the lump sum financing is to be maintained in future evaluations, a more extended video briefing and Q&A session should be envisaged. In addition, some form of e-learning or similar should also be envisaged.