


IMPORTANT NOTICE

Please do NOT express views on the proposals under evaluation or the experts' opinions on the proposals.

 If you notice shortcomings, please do NOT directly address the experts but liaise with the Commission/Agency staff involved in the evaluation (for instance, to suggest immediate and short term improvements).



SENSITIVE

OBSERVER REPORT

CALL	
Call:	HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-two-stage
Topic(s):	HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage Tackling diarrhoeal diseases in the context of climate and health HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-ACCESS-02-two-stage Transformative Innovations in global health
Type(s) of action:	HORIZON JU Research and Innovation Actions (RIA)
Service:	Global Health EDCTP3
Call deadline:	03/09/2025
Submission model:	Stage 2

EVALUATION	
Evaluation model:	Single
Panel(s):	HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage, HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-ACCESS-02-two-stage
Observer(s):	██████████


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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 content of this section will be published in the Portal as a call update.

The evaluation ran smoothly and was compliant with all the applicable rules and was conducted in a fair manner.

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-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04- two-stage stage 2

Deadline: 03.09.2025

Budget: EUR 49.100.000

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

- HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage / HORIZON-JU-RIA HORIZON JU Research and Innovation Actions RIA
Tackling diarrhoeal diseases in the context of climate and health
- HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-ACCESS-02-two-stage / HORIZON-JU-RIA HORIZON JU Research and Innovation Actions RIA
Transformative Innovations in global health

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 role of the Independent Observer (IO) is to monitor and oversee the evaluation process, assess and analyse the transparency and efficiency of the procedures adopted, assess whether the evaluators applied the evaluation criteria in a consistent, fair, impartial manner and in accordance with the applicable rules, draw the attention of Global Health EDCTP3 staff to any potential deficiencies, and finally draw up a report with their findings together with a set of potential recommendations that could be implemented to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

It should be highlighted that the observation process involved a single observer during the evaluation

process. The observer was allocated four days to oversee the consensus meetings and final panel. The observer had to be selective when choosing which proceedings to follow during these, given that there were three panels happening concurrently.

The observer was provided with the terms of reference for the observation task, copies of the general briefing and topic briefing presentations which included the guidance of compiling the IER report and relevant guidance for recorders, plus also sent invitations to attend these meeting with the experts and provided relative access to SEP.

The IO was provided with the agenda for all activities planned for each panel together with the various meeting links.

It should be noted that, in conducting this exercise, the IO received full co-operation from all with whom she interacted and was provided with the information requested. The staff were very helpful in clarifying any questions that the observer had whilst also clarifying any difficulties that they faced during the evaluation.

The observer conducted the task according to the Terms of Reference and assessed the calls with respect to their focus, evaluation criteria and evaluation process.

Assessment

Assessment

Scale of complexity of the evaluation task

Between 22nd September and 16th October 2025, the following topic was evaluated:

HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage	10 proposals	5 evaluators per proposal (one proposal with 4 evaluators due to last-minute dropout), a recorder, project officer (topic's chair) and 1 external quality controller for 1 panel
HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-ACCESS-02-two-stage	26 proposals	5 evaluators per proposal, a recorder, project officer (topic's chair/co-chair) and 1 quality controller for 2 panels

This evaluation was conducted remotely. The experts were requested to attend the full duration of the evaluation, even when they did not have meetings. All the experts participated actively in the discussions and provided their input to formulate the CR and agree on the scoring. The evaluation went smoothly as it was well managed by the moderators who did an excellent job managing the experts and providing relevant guidelines on how to move forward in the discussion when issues arose.

The observation of Consensus and Panel Meeting did not reveal any evidence of experts who were not able to cope with the task, or with the number of proposals to evaluate. In CR meetings there were some experts who were relatively new to the process, however, the meeting still moved smoothly with active input from the project officer acting as the meeting moderator.

The staff coped well with both the scale, and the complexity having multiple panels to manage and 36 proposals to evaluate. In general, the evaluation process was executed efficiently, and all planned activities were completed within the planned timeframe without any major delays. Any minor issues that were encountered during the process were captured and were handled and communicated accordingly. Through ongoing communications, the project officers ensured that the panels handled the evaluation criteria in the same manner and where there were variances these were addressed accordingly.

Transparency of the procedures

During all phases of the evaluation, transparency was maintained. The evaluation procedures were

explained appropriately at the start of the individual evaluation process and prior to the consensus meetings with the appropriate meeting organised.

The staff underlined the correct evaluation procedures during interactions with the experts. The IO attended a sample of the CM, since the meetings occurred in parallel, and the final panel meetings.

Throughput time of the evaluation and the efficiency of the procedures

Overall process

The preparation of the evaluation involved the selection and invitation of evaluators, recorders and an observer, the preparation of their contractual engagements, checking of any CoIs and managing the logistics for the offline sessions, providing the experts with detailed information about the evaluation process.

Remote evaluations

The evaluation was kicked off by inviting the experts to attend a general web briefing, to give an overall view of the evaluation exercise and what was expected from the evaluators. This remote presentation focused on the call's objectives, the evaluation process and timeline whilst provided any clarifications arising. The experts were provided with the relevant documentation including the call text, guidance on how to complete the IERs together with a checklist for the call being evaluated.

The experts were provided with a very detailed specific checklist, which provided a very good guidance on how to complete the to ensure that all the aspects of the evaluation were tackled. For every negative assessment statement, the experts had to qualify whether it was a minor shortcoming, a shortcoming or a weakness.

During the remote evaluation phase each expert had to read their respective assigned proposals and pay particular attention to the IER checklist. The process of remote evaluation is efficiently supported by the SEP system.

The topic coordinator forwarded in advance the schedule for Consensus Meetings (CM), to help the experts prepare for the meetings a priori.

Moderating of the CMs

To ensure that the onsite moderating of CMs is conducted efficiently and effectively the following actions were taken by staff:

- (a) The project officers selected very knowledgeable and experienced experts together with some new experts.
- (b) The project officers had the appropriate training and exposure on how to moderate such meetings.
- (c) The project officers provided appropriate guidance to the experts during the evaluation or brought their attention to matters to ensure a calibrated evaluation across all the proposals.
- (d) Most recorders were experienced in how evaluations are conducted and were very quick to grasp the experts' discussion and reflect them in the CR.
- (e) Ensured that the quality checkers' inputs were reflected in the final CR report with the consensus of the experts.

The CMs are managed and moderated by an appointed PO. The observed meetings were very well managed. The PO acted appropriately in their moderating role, providing guidance and clarifications to the experts and ensuring that the discussion was focused on the evaluation criteria being discussed.

The meetings observed were characterized by mutual respect and openness to each other's different opinions and all experts had the opportunity to express themselves with respect to their assessment and substantiated their divergence with appropriate examples and arguments, helping to reach an

agreed consensus.

Each criterion was discussed, and the recorders facilitated the discussion by showing the draft of the CR, projecting the common views of the experts and areas for discussion. Most of the meetings during this call were completed within the allocated time of 1.5 hours.

When input was received from the quality checkers, the discussion was either conducted by the comments section in SEP or by discussing these aspects online.

Recording of the Consensus meeting discussion

It was observed that a detailed and well explained guidance and checklist for recorders was provided in the beginning of the remote phase, which surely helped a great deal with conducting the task at hand. It was noted that most of the recorders selected were experienced with the specifics of this role, had good command of the English language and had good drafting skills.

The role of the recorders in the overall process is very important. A well-prepared draft CR based on the CR guidelines and checklist ensured was prepared providing a very good basis to kick off the discussions in the consensus meeting.

From the meetings observed, most of the recorders prepared a good quality draft CR on which to kick start the discussions. Although the quality and length of the draft CR did vary, most were of a very good quality and focused on providing a clear and unambiguous assessment of every sub-criterion and an assessment fully substantiated by qualitative comments and examples.

Apart from preparing the draft CR, the recorders must also support the discussion during the meeting by providing modified suggestions and capture the essence of the discussions in a CR. In all cases this was done by projecting the draft CR on screen and going through the draft CR criterion by criterion and sub criteria. It was evident that experienced recorders were quick to translate the core arguments of the experts.

The recorder also had the role to go through the comments received from the quality check review and, together with the experts and moderator, provide the needed alterations to the text. Ample time was dedicated to go through the quality check input and conduct the changes, where appropriate.

Quality checking

The quality assurance is done to ensure that the final ESRs produced are to the required quality and addressed each sub-criterion fully and ensure that there are no room for ambiguity or potential assessment conflict in the text provided. The quality check covers language quality, consistency between comments and marks, the right comments are under the right criterion, the absence of repeated penalization for the same weakness and clarity of the strengths and weakness with appropriate examples provided.

The quality check exercise was done meticulously against the guidance provided. Each statement needed to reflect the experts' assessment, and where required this was justified with examples and ensured that it had the qualitative assessment of what the statement was minor shortcoming, shortcoming or weakness.

The quality checker reviewed all CRs and provided annotation with respect to what needed to be clarified or amended in the CR. Furthermore, the quality checker also provided relevant language revisions and suggestions. Once the quality check is completed, this triggers a task in SEP for the experts and recorder, so they can revisit the report based on the QC feedback. After making the necessary changes, the CR is re-assessed by the quality assurance experts to ensure that all the changes were comprehensive and addressed fully.

Panel Meetings

The panel meetings were composed of all the experts, the recorders, the project officers.

The chair projected on screen the list of proposals ranked according to the pre-established criteria as established in Horizon Europe 2025 Work programme, general annexes, section F procedure on evaluation procedure and ranking which states:

For each group of proposals with the same score, starting with the group achieving the highest score and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Proposals that address aspects of the call that have not otherwise been covered by more highly ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The proposals identified under 1), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Excellence'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for

'Impact'. In the case of 'Innovation actions', priority will be given to the score for 'Impact', followed by that for 'Excellence'.

3) If necessary, the gender balance among the researchers with a leading role named in the researchers table in the proposal, will be used as a factor for prioritisation.

4) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on geographical diversity, defined as the number of Member States or Associated Countries represented in the proposal, not otherwise receiving funds from projects higher up the ranking list (and if equal in number, then by budget).

5) If a distinction still cannot be made, the panel may decide to further prioritise by considering other factors related to the objectives of the call, or to Horizon Europe in general. These may include, for example, enhancing the quality of the project portfolio through synergies between projects or, where relevant and feasible, involving SMEs. These factors will be documented in the panel report.

6) The method described in 1), 2), 3) and 4) will then be applied to the remaining equally ranked proposals in the group.

The chair provided the appropriate explanation as to how the ranking was reached together with an estimate of the number of proposals that would potentially be funded based on the available call budget.

During the panel meeting of *HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-ACCESS-02-two-stage* the following calibration aspect conducted in other calls was not observed. When there are multiple panels, it is good practice to read a selection of ESRs from each panel to ensure that the experts from both panels tackled the evaluation equally. If the panel had any reservations with respect to the ESR wording and scoring this was discussed and changes reflected accordingly with the consensus of the full panel.

During the panel meeting any experts with COIs were identified a priori and were not allowed to participate in the discussion pertaining to the proposal where they had COIs. Furthermore, the chairman asked the experts to declare themselves if they had any soft COIs for any proposals being discussed and to not participate in the discussion. It should be noted that all experts are scanned for any potential COIs at the start of the process i.e. when selecting experts to be called for the evaluation.

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

The evaluation was conducted remotely using various IT tools namely SEP and use of MS Teams for all meetings. MS Teams tool together with SEP facilitated the online CR meetings and worked very well with no major issues. Some recorders preferred to use MS Word to type up their CRs and have multiple versions to go back to, if there was a need, then paste the approved text in SEP.

The approach taken to have an agenda with the prescheduled meetings for each panel facilitated the execution of the evaluation.

Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality of the evaluation

The evaluation process was conducted with the highest degree of impartiality, fairness, and confidentiality from the beginning to the end. At the start of each meeting the moderator specifically showed the proposal's partners and asked the experts if they had any Col, besides having also declared no Col prior to start evaluation offline. All experts were fully committed to the rules and guidelines provided.

The moderators and recorders supported the discussion at the CMs, while maintaining a strict and impartial neutrality and thus contributed to a constructive atmosphere where all the experts could openly contribute with their opinion during the discussion, while adhering to the guidelines.

Overall, the IO was pleased to notice that the atmosphere remained positive during the evaluation. None of the evaluators or staff members reported any deviations from rules and principles.

The IO acknowledges that everyone involved in the evaluation process, namely evaluators, recorders and staff, showed full dedication to ensure that all proposals were given a fair consideration according to the standards laid down for the evaluation procedures. The IO is satisfied that the evaluation exercise was comprehensive and that the outcome has been fair.

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

The evaluation process followed the published evaluation procedures, the guidance documents and the applicable rules.

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

In comparison to similar national and international evaluation procedures the evaluation process is more transparent, fairer and more balanced in terms of equal gender participation, participation of various countries and participation of a wide range of experts with their respective experience. Moreover, staff guaranteed and maintained the highest quality standards through the evaluation.

Overall quality of the evaluation

The IO considers that the evaluation was transparent, fair and conducted to the highest quality. Proposals were evaluated and ranked according to their merit by adopting the same evaluation criteria across the board.

Other remarks *(optional)*

There was a comment from one expert with respect to call text for HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage relating to Global collaborative action tackling diarrhoeal diseases in the context of climate and health that the call text was not clear. For example, whether climate change aspect was mandatory. What contemplated a treatment, for example did vaccines or food supplement fall under this category.

Extract from the call text HORIZON-JU-GH-EDCTP3-2025-04-CH-01-two-stage states:

This call focuses on diarrhoeal diseases (DDs) as part of the climate and health related diseases, majority of which are mostly transmitted through excreta-related infections

Increased temperatures, heavy rainfall or flooding have been associated to increased incidence of diarrhoeal diseases and have been shown to influence the transmission, geographical and seasonal ranges of diarrhoeal diseases.

Generate evidence to evaluate the populations and geographies of most vulnerable to DDs, understand the key underlying factors including those related to climate change, and understand the barriers to protect the people affected.

Where appropriate, proposals are encouraged to include implementation research combining interventions with current standard of care (including vaccines), as well as complementary research components that help to improve the understanding on how diarrhoeal diseases are currently influenced by climate and weather and may be further exacerbated by climate change

Recommendations

Recommendations

It is recommended that the following calibration activity is be conducted rigorously during the final panel meeting. When there are multiple panels, it is good practice to read a selection of ESRs from each panel to ensure that the experts from all the various panels tackled the evaluation equally. During this task, if the panel have any reservations with respect to the ESR wording and scoring this can be discussed and any changes reflected accordingly with the consensus of the full panel.