

IHI JU responses to the Independent Observer's reports

Call ID: HORIZON-JU-IHI-2025-10-two-stage

IHI JU 10th Call for Proposals – stage 1 and stage 2

Dates of evaluation: 26-28 May 2025 and 13 November 2025

Name of the Independent Observers: Mariann Unterluggauer and Himanshu Himanshu

Summary of Recommendations

This document contains the replies to the recommendations made by the 2 Independent Observers for stage 1 and 2 of the call HORIZON-JU-IHI-2025-10-two-stage.

The collaboration between the IHI moderator and experts was very effective since roles and leadership were clearly defined at the onset of the evaluation. Maintaining a smooth and productive discussion required striking the right balance between politeness and formality. The overall organisation of the entire evaluation process including the remote evaluation phase and the consensus meetings was smooth, without any technical disruptions and allowed a clear flow of information. The experts appreciated the structured start to each session, which created a common understanding of expectations. Several experts commented informally that the moderation style was supportive and calm, helping them focus on the criteria rather than procedural detail. I also noted that the quality control feedback from IHI staff contributed to improving the clarity and consistency of expressions used in the consensus reports. The availability of the backup moderator was reassuring.

The Independent Observers (IO), in collaboration with expert evaluators, proposed the following recommendations.

- 1) It is suggested to make use of the commitment of the experts in relation to the agenda of the evaluation. The availability of experts was originally requested for three days. Depending on the number of proposals submitted, the actual consensus phase was shortened. This can be communicated to experts in advance, wherever possible.
- 2) Allocating adequate time for breaks – both to develop new ideas and to reflect on existing arguments – should not be viewed as unproductive, but rather as an essential component of an efficient and thoughtful process.
- 3) IHI itself takes the requirement of gender balance seriously. Proof was provided by the set-up of the panels by the moderators. The distribution of experts across the proposals in terms of gender, geographic location and sector was good, with a multidisciplinary balance of expertise.
- 4) Despite its importance, the discussion around how applicants meet the women's participation in research and innovation projects, is often addressed superficially. To effectively tackle the persistent imbalance

still present in academia and industry, it is suggested enforcing a more rigorous and meaningful evaluation of this criterion, ensuring it is treated with the seriousness it deserves.

- 5) There is heavy usage of abbreviations, e.g. CR, IER and ESR. While this makes the process efficient, one of the first-time experts found the heavy usage confusing, especially as the term 'CR' can refer to both 'Criteria' and 'Consensus Report'. I suggest adding a list of abbreviations to the briefing documents.
- 6) Although the expert panel was very well balanced in terms of gender, sector type, geographical reach, expertise and experience, the representation of members from widening countries could be further improved.

IHI JU responses to the recommendations

IHI JU welcomes the IO conclusions, which confirm that the overall quality of the evaluation was high. Furthermore, IHI office will take into condition the recommendations made, whenever possible:

- 1) IHI will consider communicating any potential adjustments to the duration of the consensus phase to experts in advance, whenever feasible, taking into account the final number of proposals received.
- 2) IHI appreciates this observation and fully recognise the value of adequate break times. We agree that breaks are an essential element of a productive evaluation process, as they support reflection, constructive discussion and overall efficiency. This is being taken into account in the planning of upcoming evaluations.
- 3) IHI remains strongly committed to ensuring gender balance and diversity across evaluation panels. As noted, careful attention was paid by the moderators to achieve a balanced distribution of experts across proposals in terms of gender, geographical coverage, sector and multidisciplinary expertise, and IHI is pleased that this approach was recognised.
- 4) IHI fully agrees on the relevance of meaningful consideration of women's participation in research and innovation projects. It should be noted, however, that a more rigorous and meaningful evaluation of women's participation has already been implemented in the assessment process, ensuring that this criterion is treated with the seriousness it deserves. IHI will continue to explore how this aspect of the assessment can be further strengthened.
- 5) While abbreviations are commonly used to streamline the process, we acknowledge that they may pose challenges, particularly for first-time experts. IHI will consider including a clear list of abbreviations in the briefing documents to enhance clarity and accessibility.
- 6) Considerable efforts were made to ensure a well-balanced evaluation panel in terms of gender, sector, and geographical representation, including the participation of experts from widening countries. While IHI's primary objective is to appoint the most suitable experts for the evaluation of proposals, given the relatively small size of individual IHI evaluation panels achieving a balance across all criteria simultaneously is not always feasible. However, IHI endeavours to ensure that across a call (involving several topics) the profile of the total number of experts used is as balanced as possible.