

H-Gaza Virtual Research Collaboration Hub

Terms of Reference for Applicants

Supporting Palestinian researchers in and from Gaza through virtual collaboration, mentoring, and research capacity support

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1. Overview

The project *Research Horizons for Gaza* (H-Gaza) is an Horizon Europe project implemented by UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union to support Palestinian researchers in and from Gaza.

The project responds to the urgent need to safeguard and reconnect the research and innovation capacity of the research community in Gaza, and prevent the isolation of an entire generation of scientists. The overall objective of the project is to support the continuity of research activities in Gaza and among displaced Palestinian researchers from Gaza, strengthening international research collaboration to facilitate the reintegration of researchers into the global scientific community.

The H-Gaza project is launching a 9-month Virtual Research Collaboration Hub to support 75 Palestinian researchers in or from Gaza to continue their research activities and expand international collaborations.

As a **pilot initiative**, the H-Gaza also aims to generate learning and evidence on effective mechanisms for supporting Palestinian researchers in and from Gaza affected by conflict and displacement. Feedback and experiences shared by participants will contribute to inform the development of future support models and policy recommendations.

2. Programme components

Selected researchers will benefit from the following activities:

- **Mentoring and career guidance.** Each selected researcher will be matched with one or more international mentors or co-supervisors from the UNIMED network and beyond, based on their research profile.

Mentoring aims to support the continuation of research activities, strengthen academic skills, and foster international collaboration. It may include guidance on research design and methods, publication strategies, career development, and networking opportunities.

Where relevant, additional support may be provided by senior scholars and emeritus professors from Gaza, through remote or in-person interactions.

- **Research capacity support** (up to EUR 7000). Each selected researcher will receive financial support of up to EUR 7000 to facilitate the continuation of their research activities during the programme (see section 5 below).
- **Discipline-specific discussion groups.** Researchers will engage in online thematic groups to facilitate peer exchange, networking, and potential collaborations.
- **Training in transferable skills.** Researchers will participate in a series of online training workshops (e.g. academic writing, research methods, open science) to support career development.

- **Networking and collaboration opportunities.** Researchers will engage in networking activities to build international research connections and stimulate academic partnership.

English is required to participate in the activities, but Arabic-language mentoring and resources in Arabic will be provided where possible.

The activities of the Virtual Research Collaboration Hub will run for 9 months, from September 2026 until May 2027.

3. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be **early-stage researchers** (i.e. PhD candidates enrolled in a PhD programme offered by an university in Gaza at the time of application), **or** be **postdoctoral** and **experienced researchers** (i.e. in possession of a PhD at the time of application);
- Be affiliated with an university in Gaza at the time of application;
- Be residing in Gaza or displaced outside Gaza after 7 October 2023.

Applications from female researchers are strongly encouraged.

Please note: Emeritus and retired professors in and from Gaza are not eligible to apply as researchers under this call. However, the programme welcomes their contribution as mentors or co-supervisors in order to share their expertise and support the next generation of researchers. Emeritus and retired professors interested in contributing to the programme are invited to contact UNIMED at h-gaza@uni-med.net.

4. Eligible disciplines and thematic areas

The call is open to all academic disciplines. Priority will be given to research activities contributing to the following thematic areas:

- 1. Infrastructure, energy, and urban development.** This area brings together engineering, housing, transport, municipal services, land management, and energy systems. It focuses on the planning, reconstruction, and sustainable development of physical infrastructures, climate change and environmental vulnerability, waste management and urban infrastructure.
- 2. Health systems and environmental sustainability.** This area brings together healthcare, medicine, pharmacy, water resources, environmental management, chemistry, biology, physics, and other applied sciences. It focuses on public health challenges, environmental resilience, resource sustainability, medical infrastructure management, healthcare facility environment, mental health, and worker safety.
- 3. Education, culture, and social development.** This area brings together education, humanities, women rights, arts, communication, and cultural heritage. It focuses on social cohesion, knowledge production, cultural identity, and human development.
- 4. Economic systems, governance, and employment.** This area brings together economics, finance, business, governance, and labor systems. It focuses on economic recovery, institutional development, and job creation.

- 5. Digital technologies and innovation systems.** This area brings together information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence, and digital innovation. It focuses on technological development, digital transformation, and innovation-driven growth.

Thematic areas above are identified as those requiring urgent attention on the basis of three main sources: the priorities identified by the Palestinian Ministry of Education of the Palestinian National Authority¹; the thematic priorities outlined in the April 2026 report jointly issued by the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union²; and the principal fields of study resulted through the elaboration of data provided by research universities in Gaza. The thematic priorities are designed based on common elements and aiming at preserving a multidisciplinary approach.

5. Eligible costs and payment modalities

Each selected researcher will receive financial support of up to EUR 7000 to facilitate the continuation of their research activities during the programme.

Funding is intended to support research-related costs and capacity development based on actual eligible costs. All costs must be necessary, justified, and directly related to the proposed research.

Eligible costs include (but not limited to):

- Publication and dissemination costs (i.e. open access fees, journal submission fees, language editing, dissemination materials);
- Research materials (i.e. books, software licences, research supplies if applicable);
- Data access and datasets (i.e. database subscriptions, dataset purchases, archival access);
- Training and capacity building (i.e. online courses, workshops, certifications relevant to the research);
- Conference participation (i.e. conference fees, travel, accommodation where applicable);
- Digital tools and connectivity (i.e. access to co-working spaces in Gaza and internet costs, online platforms, digital tools);
- Other justified research-related expenses (i.e. any additional costs not listed above directly linked to the proposed research activities, and approved in advance by UNIMED);
- Feedback activities related to the pilot nature of the project, for those interested in participating.

Ineligible costs include:

- Physical fellowships or research grants;

¹ Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2024). *National research priorities 2024*. State of Palestine, at <https://researchgate.ps/#/page/nrp2025> (accessed on 14 May 2026)

² European Union, United Nations and World Bank. (2026). *Gaza Strip Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment*, April 2026, at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-gaza-strip-rapid-damage-20apr26/> (accessed on 14 May 2026).

- Major equipment purchases (unless exceptionally justified);
- Costs unrelated to the proposed research activities.

Funds will be allocated based on the evaluation of the proposed budget and may be adjusted throughout the implementation based on the actual Career Development plan.

Payment modalities. Eligible costs may either be paid directly to suppliers or service providers identified by the selected applicant, or reimbursed to the selected applicant upon submission and verification of the relevant supporting documents (e.g. invoices, receipts, proof of payment). Payments will be made exclusively through bank transfers, no cash payments will be made. All disbursements will be subject to prior approval and compliance with the programme's financial and reporting procedures.

6. How to apply

Applicants are invited to submit an online application form via the webpage of the Call for Applications at <https://h-gaza.eu/hub>, together with the following supporting documents uploaded through the online application form:

- 1) **Completed application form**, based on the template provided on the webpage of the Call for Applications.
- 2) **Curriculum vitae** (max. 3 pages, min. font size: 10) of the researcher with details on academic achievements and career to date.
- 3) Publications and research outputs

For postdoctoral and experienced researchers:

- **List of publications** categorised by publications in reviewed journals, specialist books, conference papers and with details of the type of publication (original work, review, etc.) accompanied by the URL, DOI and any other identifiers, if available. The status of the publication must be indicated for each publication (published, in print, accepted, submitted).
- **Selection of up to 3 main publications** with explanation of the reasons for their selection, and accompanied by the URL, DOI and any other identifiers, if available. If several authors are involved, the researcher's own contribution must be specified.

For early-stage researchers:

- **List of publications** (as above), if available.
- **Selection of up to 3 main publications** (as above), if available.
- **Progress report** on the topic and status quo of the PhD project (max. 2 pages, min. font size: 10).

4) Academic certificates:

For postdoctoral and experienced researchers:

- PhD certificate (or, if not available, provisional certificate or official confirmation of successful defense of the doctoral thesis).

For early-stage researchers:

- Master's degree (or equivalent).

- Proof of having started the PhD project (e.g. last enrolment as a PhD student, admission to the PhD programme, transcript of records, etc.).

Please note: if academic certificates are not available at the time of application, applicants are kindly requested to contact h-gaza@uni-med.net for guidance on alternative documentation.

- 5) Official letter from the home university in Gaza:** a letter signed by an authorised representative, confirming the applicant's current affiliation and academic status. The letter should be issued on official letterhead and signed by an authorised representative (e.g. supervisor, head of department, or administration). If the official letter from the home university in Gaza is not available at the time of application, selected applicants will be required to provide it prior to the signature of the engagement agreement.

Please note:

- Applications must be submitted in English. For documents in other languages, please include an English courtesy translation.
- Multiple applications by the same applicant are not permitted. In this case, only the first submitted application will be considered for evaluation.
- Once an application has been submitted, no changes can be made, or additional documents sent.
- Applicants who experience **connectivity or technical difficulties** when submitting the online form are kindly invited to contact h-gaza@uni-med.net. Alternative submission options will be provided.

7. Evaluation criteria and selection process

7.1. Evaluation criteria

Applications will be evaluated through a qualitative assessment based on three criteria: Excellence, Relevance, and Impact. Each application will be scored against these three evaluation criteria, with a maximum total score of **100 points**.

Applications will be assessed in relation to the applicant's career stage (PhD candidates or postdoc and experienced researchers).

1. Excellence (30 points)

- Academic profile and research experience
- Quality and relevance of previous research activities, outputs, or ongoing research
- Research achievements and academic engagement

2. Relevance (30 points)

- Alignment with one or more thematic priorities of the programme
- Potential benefit from engagement in the programme
- Motivation and clarity of identified support needs

3. Impact (40 points)

- Expected research outputs and feasibility

- Expected professional development and future research trajectory
- Strategic use of the research capacity support

Thresholds

A minimum score of 60/100 will be required for an application to be considered for selection. In addition, applicants must achieve at least:

- 15/30 in Excellence
- 15/30 in Relevance
- 20/40 in Impact

The evaluation will be conducted in line with the principles of transparency, fairness, and equal opportunities.

7.2. Selection process

The application and selection process will be managed by UNIMED, while the evaluation will be carried out by independent external evaluators. The selection process will follow these steps:

STEP 1 Eligibility check. UNIMED will verify compliance with formal eligibility criteria (i.e. completeness of application, eligibility requirements, and required documentation).

STEP 2: Shortlisting. In case of a high number of applications (e.g. more than 150), UNIMED will conduct an initial screening based on a simplified scoring grid based on the evaluation criteria above and taking into account a balanced representation (discipline, gender, career stage) in order to inform the pilot nature of the project. Approximately twice the number of available positions (around 150 applications) will be shortlisted for external evaluation.

STEP 3: External Evaluation. Each shortlisted application will be assessed independently by two external evaluators. Where deemed appropriate to ensure consistency, fairness and quality in the evaluation process, and in case of significant discrepancy between scores (i.e. more than 25%), applications may be referred for further assessment, and a third independent evaluation will be carried out. The final score will be calculated as the average of the evaluations.

STEP 4: Ethics Review. Applications that, based on the nature of the research, indicate potential ethical risks or raise ethical considerations, will be reviewed by the project Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with ethical standards. This step does not assess scientific merit but focuses on ethical risk and safeguards.

STEP 5: Final Selection. Applications will be ranked according to their final evaluation score. Given the pilot nature of the project, the final selection will take into account both the ranking and specific quotas to ensure representation across institutions and applicant profiles. The final selection will be made by UNIMED in consultation with the project Advisory Board as relevant.

The distribution of places will be as follows:

- **Institutional quota (min. 5 places per university):** minimum of 5 places will be allocated to applicants affiliated with each of the following universities in Gaza (up to 35 places in total): Al-Quds Open University - Gaza branch, Al-Aqsa University,

Al-Azhar University, Israa University, Gaza University, Islamic University of Gaza, University of Palestine.

An additional number of 40 places will be allocated through an open quota for eligible researchers affiliated or not affiliated with the institutions listed above.

- **Researchers displaced outside Gaza (max. 25 places):** up to 25 places will be allocated to applicants residing outside Gaza following displacement after 7 October 2023.
- **Early-stage researchers (max. 15 places):** up to 15 places will be allocated to PhD candidates.

Any places not filled within a specific quota due to a lack of sufficiently qualified applications will be reallocated to other quotas based on the overall ranking. In case of a tie between candidates with comparable profiles, priority will be given to younger female researchers.

A reserve list will be used in case selected candidates withdraw or additional places become available.

STEP 6: Notification. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the selection via email. Selected candidates will receive formal confirmation and next steps regarding participation.

STEP 7: Signature of the engagement agreement. Selected researchers that accept to participate in the programme will receive an engagement agreement to be signed, including details on the financial arrangements and reporting obligations.

Redress procedure: Applicants who believe an error has been made in the evaluation of their application may submit a request for redress. The request must be submitted by the applicant to UNIMED by email. Only one redress request per application will be accepted which must be submitted at the latest two weeks after receiving the selection results.

The request for redress must clearly outline the grounds for the complaint. It may only be submitted on procedural grounds, such as factual errors, deficiencies in the eligibility check or evaluation process, or the existence of a conflict of interests, but can not be requested on the merits of the application itself or on the comparison of the evaluation of proposals from other applicants. Disagreements based on differences in opinion about the results will not be considered.

After the two-week period, UNIMED will review the validity of all redress requests submitted. If the rejection is found to be due to an error in the selection process, the results will be adjusted accordingly, otherwise, the applicant will be informed that its request has been rejected. The decision communicated following the request for redress is final.

8. Ethics

All research activities must comply with the applicable national legislation of the country in which the research is conducted. In any case, and in accordance with EU regulations and ethical standards³, the following fields of research shall not be financed:

- (a) activities aiming at human cloning for reproductive purposes;
- (b) activities intended to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such modifications heritable (research relating to cancer treatment of the gonads can be financed);
- (c) activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer.
- (d) activities leading to the destruction of human embryos (for example, for obtaining stem cells).

UNIMED reserves the right to request additional information or clarification regarding ethical aspects of the proposed activities at any stage of the selection or implementation process.

The project Ethics Committee may review selected cases and provide recommendations where necessary to ensure ethical compliance and participant protection.

9. Use of generative AI tools in applications

The use of generative AI tools is strongly discouraged, as applications should reflect the applicant's own voice. Perceived extensive use of AI-generated language may be considered negatively in the evaluation process. Language errors will not be taken into account in the evaluation. In case applicants use generative AI tools to support the preparation of their application, responsibility for the content, accuracy, and authenticity of all the submitted information remains entirely with the applicant.

10. Feedback activities

As the H-Gaza Virtual Research Collaboration Hub is a pilot initiative, monitoring, evaluation, and participant feedback constitute an important component of the programme.

Selected researchers may be requested to contribute to monitoring and learning activities throughout and after the implementation period. These activities may include participation in surveys, interviews, focus groups, or feedback sessions, submission of short progress updates or testimonials, participation in impact assessment and evaluation activities.

The information collected will be used exclusively for programme improvement, reporting, research, policy recommendations, and the design of future initiatives supporting Palestinian researchers in and from Gaza affected by conflict and displacement.

Participation in monitoring and feedback activities will be conducted with respect for confidentiality, safety, and ethical standards.

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe

11. Timeline

Call launch: 1 July 2026

Application deadline: 31 July 2026, 23:59 Palestine time

Notification of results: September 2026

Signature of the engagement agreement and onboarding: September 2026

12. Exceptional circumstances

Due to the exceptional and evolving context affecting researchers in Gaza, UNIMED reserves the right to modify timelines, activities, or participation arrangements where necessary due to force majeure or circumstances beyond the control of the project team. Any changes will be communicated to participants as promptly as possible.

13. Frequently Asked Questions

For further clarification, you may consult the H-Gaza FAQs section <https://h-gaza.eu/faq>.

14. Website and contact information

Website: <https://www.h-gaza.eu/>

For further information, please contact:

UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union

h-gaza@uni-med.net

About H-Gaza

H-Gaza is an Horizon Europe project implemented by UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union to support Palestinian researchers in and from Gaza. It runs for 18 months as of 1 January 2026. Project nr. 101262261.