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H-Gaza Virtual Research Collaboration Hub

Guide for External Evaluators

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1. Background

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 to continue their research activities and expand international collaborations. The project will support 75 researchers through a Virtual Research Collaboration Hub, a 9-month programme offering mentoring and career development guidance, research capacity support of up to EUR 7,000, discipline-specific discussion groups, training in transferable skills, as well as networking and collaboration opportunities.

As part of the project, UNIMED launched a call for applications to participate in the Virtual Research Collaboration Hub, open from 1 to 31 July 2026. The call for applications and the terms of reference for applicants are available at https://www.h-gaza.eu/hub.

Following the eligibility check and shortlisting steps conducted by UNIMED, shortlisted applications will be assessed by independent external evaluators in accordance with the evaluation criteria and scoring system described in this guide.

2. Evaluation task

External evaluators will assess applications individually and score them against the criteria of Excellence, Relevance and Impact, providing brief qualitative comments. Evaluators must respect confidentiality, conflict of interest rules, and may be invited to briefing sessions.

Evaluations will be conducted remotely. Each evaluator is expected to assess approximately 10 applications. The final allocation may be adjusted based on availability and the overall distribution of applications. Please note that this is a voluntary, non-remunerated role.

3. Requirements

To be considered for inclusion in the pool of external evaluators, experts should:

- have at least five years of research and/or academic experience following the award of their PhD degree or equivalent doctoral degree (or demonstrate equivalent professional expertise in research, higher education or research management);
- have an active research profile or relevant experience in higher education, research management, academic evaluation, or researcher development;
- demonstrate expertise in at least one of the H-Gaza programme thematic areas as specified below;
- be of any nationality with the exception of holders of Palestinian nationality or resident in occupied Palestinian territories.

UNIMED welcomes experts with experience in research, higher education, researcher development and academic evaluation across the following thematic areas:

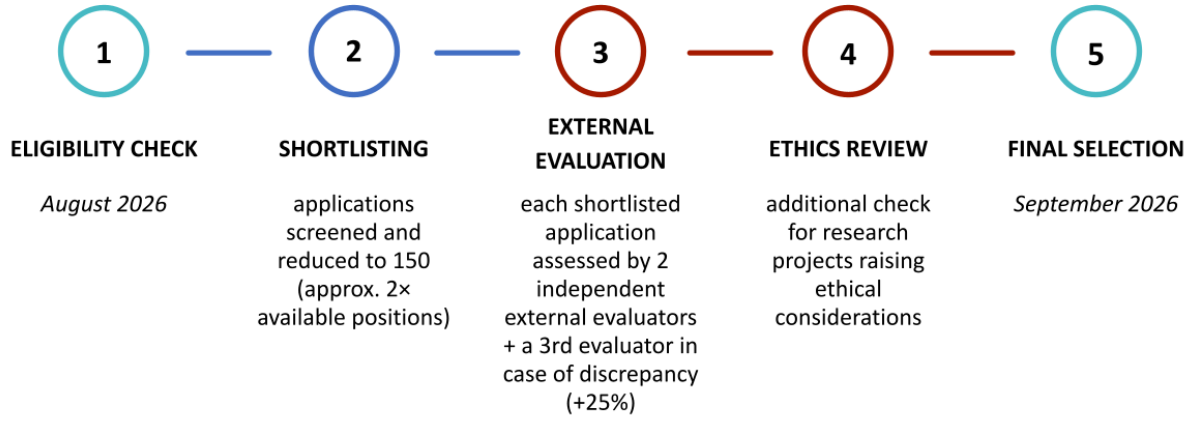
1. **Infrastructure, energy, and urban development.** This area brings together engineering, housing, transport, municipal services, land management, and energy systems. It focuses on the planning, reconstruction, and sustainable development of

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.

4. Selection process

The H-Gaza selection process is managed by UNIMED and consists of five steps:



External evaluators are involved in **Step 3 (external evaluation)**. Please refer to the Terms of Reference for Applicants for the description of the selection process.

5. External evaluation

Evaluation principles

Evaluators will contribute to a high-quality selection process, in line with the principles of transparency, fairness, and equal opportunities. Evaluators shall assess applications independently and impartially, respect confidentiality of all application materials, declare any

actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, and apply the evaluation criteria consistently across all applications in relation to the applicant's career stage (PhD candidate or Postdoctoral/experienced researcher).

Evaluators must not contact applicants directly, or respond to enquiries, as well as request additional information, or seek clarification from applicants. Applications shall be assessed exclusively on the basis of the information provided and the evaluation criteria presented in this guide. No assumptions, external information, or personal knowledge of the applicant should influence the assessment.

Evaluators must not upload application materials or personal data to external AI tools or other third-party platforms to ensure the safeguarding and data protection of the applicants.

Before accessing application materials, external evaluators must sign the Declaration of independence, conflict of interest and confidentiality.

Evaluation process

Each shortlisted application will be assessed independently by two external evaluators who will assess and score the application separately on a scale of 100 points. The final score will be the average of the scores awarded by the evaluators. In case of significant discrepancy between scores (i.e. more than 25%), applications may be referred for further assessment by a third independent evaluator. The final score will be calculated as the average of the evaluations.

Independence and conflict of interest

Evaluators must declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest before the allocation of applications and inform UNIMED should such a conflict arise during the evaluation process. Examples of conflicts of interest include, but are not limited to:

- current or recent collaboration with the applicant;
- a supervisory, mentoring or personal relationship with the applicant;
- any financial, professional or personal interest that could compromise;
- or be perceived to compromise the evaluator's independence.

Where a conflict of interest is identified, the application will be reallocated to another evaluator.

Ethics compliance

Evaluators are not expected to conduct an ethics assessment of the research conducted by the researchers. However, as part of the evaluation process, they should identify any potential ethical concerns arising from the proposed research and indicate whether these require further review by the H-Gaza Ethics Committee. Such referral does not automatically affect the evaluation of the application but may result in an ethics review before final selection.

6. 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 Postdoctoral/experienced researcher) and actual research.

1. **Excellence (30 points)**

- Academic profile and research experience (10 points)
- Quality and relevance of previous research activities, outputs, or ongoing research (10 points)
- Research achievements and academic engagement (10 points)

2. **Relevance (30 points)**

- Alignment with one or more thematic priorities of the programme (10 points)
- Potential benefit from engagement in the programme (10 points)
- Motivation and clarity of identified support needs (10 points)

3. **Impact (40 points)**

- Expected research outputs and feasibility (10 points)
- Expected professional development and future research trajectory (20 points)
- Strategic use of the research capacity support (10 points)

Evaluation score

Each sub-criterion will be assessed using:

- 4 = Excellent
- 3 = Good
- 2 = Moderate
- 1 = Weak
- 0 = Not demonstrated / insufficient evidence

The qualitative score assigned by evaluators is converted into weighted points according to the maximum value of each sub-criterion:

Weighted score = Evaluator score / 4 × Maximum points of the sub-criterion

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, confidentiality, fairness, and equal opportunities.

7. Evaluation grid and scoring rubric

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Max. points	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Moderate (2)	Weak (1)	Not demonstrated (0)
Excellence (30 points) *Assesses the applicant's academic and research profile, evaluated according to career stage (PhD candidate or postdoc/experienced researcher).*	**Academic profile and research experience** *PhD candidates: academic background and disciplinary preparation* *Postdoc/experienced researchers: academic qualifications, research experience and professional development since the doctoral studies.*	**10**	Outstanding academic profile demonstrating a high level of preparation and significant research potential appropriate to the applicant's career stage.	Strong academic profile with relevant research experience appropriate to the applicant's career stage.	Adequate academic background and research experience, although evidence is limited or uneven in line with the applicant's career stage.	Limited academic preparation and research experience; profile does not clearly demonstrate readiness for the programme.	Insufficient evidence
	Quality and relevance of previous research activities, outputs or ongoing research *PhD candidates: doctoral research progress, research experience to date, and potential contribution to the field* *Postdoc/experienced researchers: quality, relevance, and originality of the applicant's research activities, outputs, projects, and collaborations.*	**10**	Research activities demonstrate excellent quality, originality (postdoc only) and clear relevance to the applicant's field and future development.	Research activities are relevant, coherent, original (postdoc only) and demonstrate good scientific quality.	Research activities demonstrate some relevance and quality, and originality (postdoc only), but remain insufficiently developed or documented.	Research activities are poorly described, of limited relevance, or lack evidence of quality and originality (postdoc only).	Insufficient evidence
	Research achievements and academic engagement *PhD candidates: engagement in research through scientific outputs appropriate to the applicant's career*	**10**	Strong and sustained research engagement, with achievements that are outstanding relative to the	Consistent engagement in research demonstrated through appropriate	Some evidence of research engagement through publications,	Very limited evidence of engagement in research or scholarly activities.	Insufficient evidence

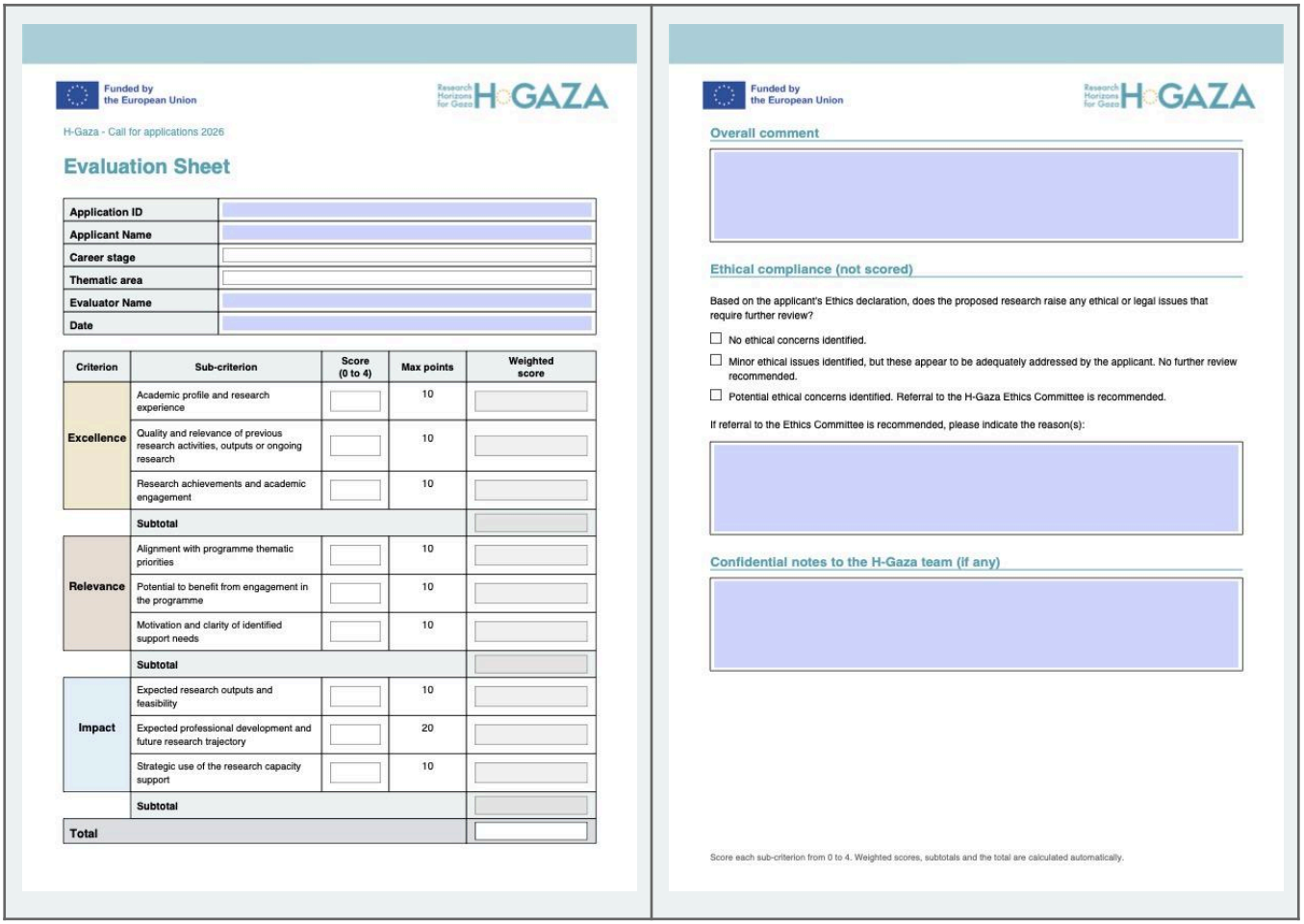
	stage, such as publications, presentations, research reports, participation in research projects. *Postdoc/experienced researchers: research achievements, peer-reviewed publications, scientific outputs, studies, research funding, supervision, knowledge transfer, or other evidence of sustained academic development appropriate to the career stage.*		applicant's career stage.	scholarly outputs and academic activities.	conferences, reports or research activities.		
Relevance (30 points) *Assesses the relevance of the applicant's profile and objectives to the aims of the H-Gaza programme.*	**Alignment with programme thematic priorities** *Extent to which the applicant's research interests and objectives align with one or more of the programme's thematic priority areas.*	**10**	Excellent alignment with the programme objectives and thematic priorities.	Clear alignment with one or more thematic priorities.	Some alignment is demonstrated but links remain weak or insufficiently justified.	Limited alignment with the programme's thematic priorities.	Insufficient evidence
	Potential to benefit from engagement in the programme *Likelihood that participation will strengthen the applicant's research capacity, international collaborations, and academic/professional development.*	**10**	Participation is expected to have a transformative impact on the applicant's research capacity, collaborations and career development.	Participation is likely to substantially strengthen the applicant's research capacity and international engagement.	Participation is likely to provide some benefit, although expected outcomes remain only partially justified.	Limited evidence that participation would significantly contribute to the applicant's development.	Insufficient evidence
	Motivation and clarity of identified support needs *Assessment of the applicant's motivation to participate and clarity with which the applicant identifies research, mentoring, training and networking needs, and alignment with*	**10**	The applicant presents compelling motivation together with a well-defined and strategic plan for making effective use of the programme opportunities.	The applicant demonstrates clear motivation and identifies realistic research and professional development needs.	Motivation is evident but could be better articulated; support needs are only partially explained.	Motivation is unclear or poorly justified; support needs are insufficiently identified.	Insufficient evidence

	the opportunities offered by the programme.						
Impact (40 points) *Assesses the extent to which participation in the H-Gaza programme will contribute to the applicant's future academic and professional development.*	**Expected research outputs and feasibility** *Potential to develop international research collaborations, publications, and acceptance of papers in open access journals.*	**10**	Expected outputs are ambitious yet highly feasible, with strong potential to generate international collaborations and high-quality research outputs.	Expected outputs are realistic, relevant and demonstrate good potential for international collaboration and dissemination.	Expected outputs are appropriate but lack sufficient detail or feasibility.	Expected outputs are vague, unrealistic or poorly connected to programme participation.	Insufficient evidence
	Expected professional development and future research trajectory *Extent to which the project is likely to support the applicant's research skills, career development and future academic goals.*	**20**	Participation is expected to make a significant contribution to the applicant's long-term academic trajectory and professional development.	Participation is likely to strengthen research skills, career development and future academic opportunities.	Some positive impact is anticipated, although future plans remain insufficiently developed.	Limited evidence that participation will contribute to future academic or professional development.	Insufficient evidence
	Strategic use of the research capacity support *Evidence of the applicant's ability to effectively use the financial support offered.*	**10**	The applicant presents a convincing, well-structured and strategic plan for maximising all aspects of the H-Gaza Virtual Research Collaboration Hub to strengthen research capacity and international engagement.	The applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of how mentoring, networking, training and financial support will be used to achieve his/her objectives.	The applicant identifies some relevant opportunities but presents only a partially developed strategy.	The applicant provides limited evidence of how the programme opportunities will be used.	Insufficient evidence

8. Evaluation sheet

Each evaluator will receive access to a secure, dedicated shared folder containing the application documents assigned to them. Evaluators must complete one evaluation sheet for each application, using the template provided by UNIMED.

The evaluation sheet includes the scores for each sub-criterion, an overall comment, and any relevant ethical concerns or confidential notes. Completed evaluation sheets must be saved in the designated folder.



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H-Gaza - Call for applications 2026

Evaluation Sheet

Application ID	
Applicant Name	
Career stage	
Thematic area	
Evaluator Name	
Date	

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Score (0 to 4)	Max points	Weighted score
Excellence	Academic profile and research experience		10	
	Quality and relevance of previous research activities, outputs or ongoing research		10	
	Research achievements and academic engagement		10	
	Subtotal			
Relevance	Alignment with programme thematic priorities		10	
	Potential to benefit from engagement in the programme		10	
	Motivation and clarity of identified support needs		10	
	Subtotal			
Impact	Expected research outputs and feasibility		10	
	Expected professional development and future research trajectory		20	
	Strategic use of the research capacity support		10	
	Subtotal			
Total				

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Overall comment

Ethical compliance (not scored)

Based on the applicant's Ethics declaration, does the proposed research raise any ethical or legal issues that require further review?

- ☐ No ethical concerns identified.
- ☐ Minor ethical issues identified, but these appear to be adequately addressed by the applicant. No further review recommended.
- ☐ Potential ethical concerns identified. Referral to the H-Gaza Ethics Committee is recommended.

If referral to the Ethics Committee is recommended, please indicate the reason(s):

Confidential notes to the H-Gaza team (if any)

Score each sub-criterion from 0 to 4. Weighted scores, subtotals and the total are calculated automatically.

9. Timeline

Deadline for confirming availability as an external evaluator: 31 August 2026

Evaluation period: 14-25 September 2026

10. 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 as promptly as possible.

11. Contacts

H-Gaza 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.

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