

**EMPIR CALL 2019
PROPOSAL EVALUATION by EURAMET**

INDEPENDENT OBSERVER REPORT for the

European Metrology Programme for Innovation Research (EMPIR) 2019 Calls

Support for Networks (NET)

Research Potential (RPT)

Pre-and Co-normative (NRM)

Support for Impact Projects (SIP)

Energy (ENG)

Environment (ENV)

Dates of evaluations:

Central evaluation: 05 November to 14 November 2019

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Observer	Present at the evaluation
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Abbreviations

CM	Consensus Group Meeting
CS	Closing Session
EMPIR	European Metrology Programme for Innovation and Research

EURAMET MSU	EURAMET Management Support Unit
JNP	Joint Network Projects
JRP	Joint Research Projects
NMI	National Metrology Institute
PM	EMPIR Programme Manager
PS	Poster Session
IO	Independent Observer
Referee	Evaluator
RS	Referee Session
ReS	Representative Session
RPT	Research Potential
SDO	Standards Development Organisation
SIP	Support for Impact Projects
SRT	Selected Research Topic
TP	Targeted programme/Thematic programme

1. Introduction and approach taken by the observer

This report concerns the monitoring of the EMPIR Call 2019 (including Review Conference and Consensus Group meetings)

The independent observer (IO) was appointed by the Commission to observe and to give independent advice to the Commission on the conduct and fairness of the all phases of the evaluation sessions. Observer is to ensure a high degree of transparency, on ways in which the referees, consortium representatives, MSU or EURAMET staff and other actors apply the evaluation criteria and to identify best practices among the procedures observed for improving the evaluation criteria. This report reflects the activities in covering the remote and Review Conference including briefing meeting, many consensus meetings addressed.

The approach taken by the observer to perform his task was the following

1. During the remote phase IO assessed the general briefing material sent out to the referees. The observed result was considered normal and appropriate, and the times set for each stage were respected.
2. All steps of the central evaluation were followed for observing and reporting on the practical workings of the evaluation process, on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, on the application of the award criteria and on the procedures and their implementation. Based on the IO observations and comments made by the representatives, the referees, the note takers, the facilitators; the report suggests some minor improvements to the evaluation process. A complete notebook including all information, agenda and instructions for success of the evaluations was provided to each actor.

In execution of IO task the observer performed the following activities:

- Attendance in briefing meetings of the EMPIR Conference 2019, referee and representative briefing sessions, poster sessions, marking sessions of referees, ranking list sessions and closing sessions;
- Interviews of randomly chosen referees (24 of 98), as well as consortia representatives (13 of 37) in order to have their perception and feedback about the whole or specific part of the evaluation process, their interactions with facilitators, EMPIR Call staff as well as assessing their potential needs;
- Interviews of 3 note takers and 4 facilitators;
- Several time discussions with EURAMET General Secretary, EMPIR Programme Manager as well as EMPIR Chair and Deputy Chair and EC representative. For the coverage of the topic, there were 64 proposals were submitted; 49 proposals for JRPs (18 ENG, 16ENV, 11 NRM, 4RPT), 7 SIPs and 8 JNPs
- In the event a total of 98 referees were used to evaluate all proposals; 33 referees for the Energy TP, 30 referees for the Environment TP, 15 referees for Support for Networks Projects, 21 referees for the Pre- and co-normative research TP, 8 referees for the Research Potential TP and 9 referees for Support for Impact Projects. Some referees participated in more than one TP.
- Each referee looks at a maximum of 3 proposals in one conference. Per proposal 5 referees are assigned (3 specialists and 2 generalists). 1 referee can attend at a maximum of 2 conferences as well as one consensus group meeting, but MSU always invite a referee per conference.

Some details on the referees' statistics

Male	77	78.6%	Nationalities	26	
Female	21	21.4%	Austria	3	3.1%
Average age	54		Belgium	2	2.0%
Age <30	0	0.0%	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0.0%
Age 30-34	1	1.0%	Bulgaria	0	0.0%
Age 35-39	6	6.1%	Croatia	2	2.0%
Age 40-44	10	10.2%	Denmark	1	1.0%
Age 45-49	19	19.4%	Finland	3	3.1%
Age 50-54	20	20.4%	France	6	6.1%
Age 55-59	18	18.4%	FYR Macedonia	1	1.0%
Age 60-64	8	8.2%	Germany	8	8.2%
Age 65-69	7	7.1%	Greece	4	4.1%
Age 70-75	7	7.1%	Hungary	1	1.0%
Consultancy firms	1	1.0%	Ireland	1	1.0%
Higher Education Establishments	44	44.9%	Israel	1	1.0%
Non-research Commercial sector including SMEs	16	16.3%	Italy	21	21.4%
Non-research International Organisations (Association of States)	2	2.0%	Lithuania	1	1.0%
Non-research Public Sector	0	0.0%	Malta	1	1.0%
Private / Commercial Research Centres	12	12.2%	Netherlands	4	4.1%
Private Non-profit Research Centres	4	4.1%	Other	0	0.0%
Public Research Centres	15	15.3%	Poland	5	5.1%
Other	4	4.1%	Portugal	3	3.1%
No information given	0	0.0%	Romania	5	5.1%
Previous EURAMET referee	76	77.6%	Serbia	3	3.1%
Previous EC evaluator	63	64.3%	Slovakia	1	1.0%
			Slovenia	3	3.1%
			Spain	8	8.2%
			Sweden	1	1.0%
			Switzerland	0	0.0%
			Turkey	3	3.1%
			United Kingdom	6	6.1%

- a. There were 98 referees from 26 different nationalities. Italy is dominating, some countries have 0, 1 or 2 referees. As gender is concerned just over 20 % of referees are female. There is a combination of Higher Education Establishments and Public Research Organization.
- b. There are 22 referees that are new comers (about 20 % that's fine for the turnover) to the EMPIR Call evaluation procedures. The rest 76 (evaluators) are experienced (veterans).

2. Overall impression

Scale of complexity of the evaluation task

Given the topics, call text and call requirements, the evaluation process of the above-mentioned topic may be considered as a complex exercise. All evaluation phases require a great commitment from all actors: from the availability requests to the referees, allocation of proposals to the referees, remote individual evaluation of proposals, consensus meeting, question development, questions to representative, marking meetings etc. All these steps require an accurate timetable, coordination, clear definition of concepts and tasks, and efficient execution. All actors interviewed: referees, consortium representatives, EMPIR and EURAMET staff, and IO confirmed that the process was executed in accordance with all Various guides, templates and forms available from <http://msu.euramet.org/downloads/>, Guide 6: Evaluating EMPIR Projects in a timely and effective manner.

During the referee's discussion sessions, referees showed good knowledge of their field and its state-of-the-art. Overall, all interviewed referees expressed high level of satisfaction of the expertise of their colleagues.

Transparency of the procedures

The transparency of the evaluation procedure and results was recognized by the referees and confirmed by the IO. The consensus meetings within the topic panel (involving referees, note takers and facilitators) were carried out in an open and transparent atmosphere, with a comprehensive presentation of different and specific points of view, generally clearly stated and extensively motivated.

Throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures

The throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures offered some margin for improvement. In particular, allocated timing for poster presentation and marking meeting per proposal were not always sufficient for such complex call. As a result, not all the review conferences could be completed within the time allocated.

Efficiency, reliability and usability of the implementation of the procedures

The organisation was adequate. Each referee received adequate material in the beginning of the remote evaluation. The information was fully accessible (special notebook provided to each actor) and the procedures well explained. The facilitators were well prepared

Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality:

The evaluations were fully carried out with impartiality and fairness to the best of the abilities of the selected referees. The main point about equal treatment is that each proposal was properly discussed by the referees. Confidentiality was fully respected.

Quality of the evaluation process overall:

This EMPIR Call was successfully completed, fully in line with all the norms and guiding principles. The outcome is that the all proposals (57 of proposals are above threshold) have been evaluated in a transparent, fair and impartial way No breaches of confidentiality have been observed or brought to the attention of the IO.

Minor improvements are possible for bringing better clarity on how to implement in practice some of the requirements stated at rather high level in the EMPIR Call Process/ Guide 6 and related documents. Some recommendations also relate to possible measures for enhancing the efficiency of marking sessions.

3. Any other remarks on:

Quality of the on-site briefing sessions

The briefing sessions (presentations and comments) were well prepared and clearly presented. Complementarity and consistency were observed between different welcome, referees, representative and closing sessions Many important points were highlighted such as the topic content, what to focus on and the schedule of meetings. During briefings/closing meetings all the referees and facilitators were presents.

The allocation of referees to proposals: balance (gender, geographic, sector), relevance and balance of expertise, ...

One key point is the selection of referees drawn from the Referees Database following the criteria of expertise and with other considerations such as balance between academic and industrial

expertise, a reasonable gender balance would be fine (21,5 of females against 78,5 % of males), geographic coverage, a regular rotation of referees and the absence of conflicts of interest. The referees were suggested by the EURAMET MSU team and confirmed by EMPIR Chair and Deputy Chair. On the basis of observations, it may be concluded that the level of competence and expertise of new and experienced referees was generally high and in line with the requirements of the Call. Interviewed referees said that their colleagues were well qualified for the task and that there was a good balance among competencies needed. Furthermore, it was observed that some representatives had difficulty to capture all the comments expressed by their colleagues during the formal question and answer session.

The process of the individual evaluations and the actors involved

Interviewed referees said that the process of individual evaluations and cross-readings were smooth. However, all interviewed referees said very clearly that the allocated time per proposal is insufficient in order to be able to review and evaluate the proposal. This is because proposals are complex and referees need to cross-check several aspects like composition of consortium, review support letters. Some first time referees mentioned that it would be very useful to receive proposal 3 to 4 weeks before.

The process of the Review Conference and the actors involved

All steps of the process of the consensus meetings were well explained, scheduled and organised. All facilitators came from EURAMET.

Criteria and scoring scheme: appropriateness, completeness, relevance, clarity, consistency in application, ...

Overall no inconsistency was noticed regarding the application of the scoring scheme during the proposal marking meetings.

Regards the scoring scheme, observer found it consistent and appropriate. The criteria were generally recognized as very relevant as well as the scoring scheme. Referees and facilitators consulted regularly the scoring scheme that was hanging in the meeting rooms.

The process of the Conclusion meeting and the actors involved

The referees plenary session met at the end of the process to produce a single ranked list per TP (Target Programme), following the criteria set-up in the call process. A final ranked list is produced and signed by all referees.

The observer attended the plenary session, which was orderly and well executed. The ranking lists were produced based on the scores of the proposals. The meetings were open and honest. The referees identified with a conflict of interest (CoI) were unable to evaluate /speak in the proposal discussions for which they had a conflict with.

The occurrence and handling of specific issues (if any) such as conflicts of interest

In 4 cases conflict of interest (CoI) was disclosed by the independent referees and the EMPIR Programme Manager and MSU strictly followed the rules in place.

Referee conflicts identified during this Conference Call.

1 for the NRM review conference

1 for the ENG review conference

2 for the ENV review conference

Overall conduct of staff: responsiveness, hospitality, competence, ...

The overall conduct of staff was exemplary. All staff members: exhibited a very high degree of skill, diplomacy and competence. The staff quickly provided all information required by the observer and the hospitality was satisfactory.

Remuneration of referees (in relation to workload)

Referees made comments regarding the remuneration, given the time necessary to review their allocated proposals. Experts commented the compensation should be improved and that the honorarium is insufficient.

If EURAMET wants to retain the best experts the honorarium should be increased. If not only young, retired and people coming from countries with lower incomes will accept to work as experts.

Other observation concerning the general design of evaluation

Referees commented that professional proposal writers prepared many proposals. Proposals are well written, with good technical words used but the content is sometimes poor.

.4. Conclusions

64 proposals were submitted (49 JRP, 8 JNP and 7 SIP).

7 proposals scored below threshold in either one or more criteria or alternatively had an unweighted score of less than 10 and hence failed (3 Networks, 1 Normative, 1 Support for Impact, 1 Energy and 1 Environment).

32 proposals are currently above the nominal funding thresholds for the TPs, however the decision about where the funding lines will be placed and hence the number of proposals funded will be taken by the EMPIR Committee next week.

The Review Conference was organised in a highly professional manner, ranging from the logistics (selection of venue, scheduling of activities, quality of catering) to the facilitation of the individual sessions (time efficiency, technical competency and unbiased nature). The Review Conference and consensus meetings include the following: The process and procedures were carried out in accordance with the rules established in Decision No. 555/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on participation of the Union in EMPIR (15 May 2014), Regulation (EU) No. 1290/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules for participation and dissemination in Horizon 2020 (11 December 2013, with one derogation for the funding rate) and the draft Horizon 2020 Model Delegation Agreement for Article 185 Initiatives (September 2014). The overall evaluation process was conducted in a very efficient manner and the referees were carrying out their work in full compliance with the guiding principles of independence, accuracy, consistency, objectivity and impartiality. The Call documentation and all correspondences with the referees were comprehensive, of a very high standard, in keeping with the maturity of the EMPIR-MSU team and their procedures. The Call outcomes (Single Ranked Lists) were of high quality suited to submission to the EMPIR Committee for timely approval. The Call process and procedures are fitting well with Horizon 2020 guidelines. From informal discussions with referees, representatives and members of the MSU team, it was clear that all involved persons have now become familiar with the specific features and novelties of Horizon 2020 applicable to the EMPIR programme, in particular the limited grant preparation phase necessitating that proposals should be evaluated as submitted and not on potential if certain

changes are made, and the necessary attention to the new data management aspects. ***One of the major differences with the Horizon 2020 evaluation process is the interactive activity between the JRP/JNP representatives and the referees for the Research Potential, Pre and Co-Normative, Support for Networks, Energy and Environment calls through the poster sessions and the Q/A sessions.*** From witnessing these sessions, and listening to the participants, I am convinced of the benefit of these sessions. community is rather well structured, not extremely wide and the interaction is not of a large scale. The Poster Sessions were dynamic, comprising rigorous challenging/defending of the proposals as well as providing a networking activity for the metrology community. ***As an IO, I am convinced that all proposals received adequate and equal treatment, that the whole evaluation process was conducted to high standards of diligence, fairness and professionalism, in accordance with established principles at all stages and in full compliance with established rules,*** and that the resulting ranked lists reflected, for those projects above the funding line, the best projects which should be funded. No discrimination, no fraud, no corruption identified. The organisational and logistical aspects and working conditions were excellent.

Acknowledgments

In closing this report, I would like to thank the EMPIR Chair and Deputy Chair, the EURAMET General Secretary, the EMPIR Programme Manager and deputy Programme Manager, and the entire Management Support Unit team for their excellent support before and during the Review Conference. Every effort was made to assist me, to explain the relevant context and to provide me free and unrestricted access to all information and documents, thus demonstrating a high degree of transparency. Their support, their assistance and their kindness throughout the entire process were outstanding and contributed greatly to making the observation work not only a smooth but also a very enjoyable exercise.