Call for evaluators

Guidelines for Evaluators

Prepared by: SPLORO

OPENING: 05 of May 2025
CLOSING: 05 of June 2025 at 17:00* CEST

*The deadline for submission is as stated in this Annex 1 document. Please note that the platform for submission's time depends on the user's configured zone and may or may not coincide with the correct time (this depends on the user, not the platform for submission). Any discrepancies in system time will not be grounds for deadline extension.

Project Website: https://www.openhorizonsproject.eu/
Apply: https://bit.ly/OpenHorizons-1st-Call-for-Evaluators

Disclaimer

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1. About Open Horizons project

Open Horizons, funded by the European Union through its Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme, connects leading corporations with high-potential, women-led deep-tech startups through an open innovation process. Despite the sector's rapid growth, women entrepreneurs continue to face systemic barriers that limit their ability to scale. These challenges include restricted access to funding, scarce industrial partnerships, and difficulty in validating their solutions in real-world settings. Many women-led deep-tech startups struggle to secure their first corporate clients, a crucial step for establishing credibility and unlocking further investment opportunities. By facilitating direct collaboration, Open Horizons enables corporates to act as first customers, helping startups gain market traction while offering businesses early access to cutting-edge innovations.

The programme follows a structured, results-driven, two-phase approach. In the initial development phase, selected startups work on tailored solutions to corporate-defined challenges, refining their technology to align with real industry needs. This phase provides financial support, mentorship, and expert guidance to ensure feasibility and market readiness. The programme then moves into a five-month implementation phase, where startups execute the agreed-upon pilot project in collaboration with their corporate partner. Throughout this period, participants benefit from continuous mentorship, industry networking, and exposure to potential investors, strengthening their position in the market.

With a total funding of €1.2 million for the startups, Open Horizons is a 26-month project, which started on February 1st, 2025, and is designed to accelerate the growth of women-led deep-tech companies by facilitating collaboration and providing substantial financial backing.

By fostering corporate-startup collaboration, Open Horizons not only accelerates the growth of women-led businesses but also strengthens corporate open innovation strategies. This model allows businesses to integrate breakthrough technologies into their processes while supporting the next generation of women

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entrepreneurs. The initiative ultimately contributes to a more inclusive, diverse, and dynamic deep-tech ecosystem, ensuring that the talent and ingenuity of women entrepreneurs drive the future of innovation.

PEDAL, SPLORO, INNOVX, and MIGROS, together with associated corporate partners, will run this initiative, creating a unique framework where businesses and startups collaborate to foster open innovation, drive industry transformation, and promote gender diversity in deep-tech entrepreneurship.

1.1 Open Horizons Calls

The purpose of Open Horizons Open Calls is to identify and select promising **women-led**, **deep-tech startups in Europe, specifically at the early-stages**, offering them a unique opportunity to participate in a tailored open innovation programme. Designed to upscale the capabilities of innovative startups, the programme provides structured pathways to access significant investment and growth opportunities.

There will be 3 Open Calls within this project. The financial support to third parties within the Open Horizons will be in the form of a grant awarded after a call for proposals. The overall budget for the 3 calls is 1.2M €.

The overarching goal of the Open Calls is to support the development and enhance the investment potential of these startups, helping them scale their solutions and create long-term impact within the deep-tech ecosystem.

These guidelines are intended for the evaluators of the first Open Call for startups.

All the supporting documents for the Open Call for evaluators can be found on the Open Horizons website.

And for more information you can contact us through info@openhorizonsproject.eu

2. Join Open Horizons as an evaluator!

Open Horizons is looking for independent evaluators who can assess the quality of received applications within **Open Call #1** shortly after the call for applicants is closed on 21 August 2025. **Open Call #1** has a total of budget of **335,000 €** to finance up to eleven women-led startups.

To ensure a high-quality and well-balanced evaluation process, evaluators must meet the following criteria:

1. Experience Requirements

- Each evaluator must have at least 5 years of experience in business-related activities and/or as an entrepreneur.
- Preference will be given to experts who have previously evaluated proposals for the European Innovation Council (EIC) or have similar experience in assessing innovation projects at the European level.

An evaluator cannot be employed by an organization that intends to apply for Open Horizons OC#1 for applicants or by an entity that is already part of the Open Horizons consortium.

Evaluators will be responsible for conducting an impartial yet technical, scientific, and/or commercial assessment of the submitted applications. Their evaluation will primarily focus on, but is not limited to, the following criteria:

- The quality and relevance of the proposed project or initiative to solve the challenge.
- Technical feasibility and innovation potential.
- Alignment with Open Horizons' objectives and key deep-tech technologies.
- Potential impact and scalability of the proposed solution.
- Consideration of ethical, legal, and regulatory factors.
- The applicant's expertise, track record, and ability to successfully implement the project.

The number of applications assigned to each evaluator will depend on multiple factors, including:

- Evaluators' availability,

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- Time constraints, and
- The total number of applications received.

The specific number of proposals assigned to you will be communicated during the contract signing process. Once the contract is signed, you will gain access to the proposal details by logging into the SPLORO platform. For key dates, please refer to Section 3 of this document.

2. **Composition of the Evaluator Pool**

- At least 60% of the evaluators will come from industry, business, and innovation environments.
- At least 40% will have expertise in technologies and deep-tech domains.
- At least 50% of the evaluators will be women to ensure diversity and inclusivity in the evaluation process.

3. Tentative timeline of activities

- ❖ Open Horizons Open Call #1 duration: **11.06.2025 – 21.08.2025, 17h CEST**
- ❖ Call for evaluators: **05.05.2025 – 05.06.2025, 17h CEST**
- ❖ Invitation to participate for evaluators: **01/08/2025 aprox.**
- ❖ Contracting with selected evaluators: **02/08/2025 – 31/08/2025**
- ❖ Webinar with evaluators: **05/09/2025, 11h CEST** (1 hour)
- ❖ Proposals evaluation: **08/09/2025 – 19/09/2025**
- ❖ Notification to participate in interviews: **25/09/2025**
- ❖ Interviews: The evaluators will have an interview stage only with those applicants who have passed the evaluation stage. Therefore, they are required to be available on the following dates: **29/09/2025, 30/09/2025, 01/10/2025, 02/10/2025, 03/10/2025**

4.Evaluation selection process

4.1 Expression of interest

Evaluators will be selected by the Open Horizons team members based on their competencies and needs for the OC#1 for applicants.

If you are interested in becoming an evaluator, please create a profile on the Sploro platform, fill in all the required fields in the form (see Annex 1), and upload your **CV (in PDF format)**.

Apply here: https://bit.ly/OpenHorizons-1st-Call-for-Evaluators

If you know someone who may be qualified and interested in this role, feel free to share this opportunity with them. By applying to the Open Horizons Call for Evaluators, applicants automatically agree to all the terms and conditions outlined below.

4.2 Evaluator's liability

All evaluators are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement (see Annex 2) with the Open Horizons consortium before beginning the evaluation process. The Declaration of No Conflict of Interest will be signed at the time of contracting.

By applying to the Open Horizons evaluator call and registering on the SPLORO platform, the expert:

- Acknowledges that submitting an application (registration) does not guarantee selection as an evaluator for any open calls.

- Understands that, if selected, they must provide a signed Conflict of Interest and any additional requested documents to serve as an evaluator for a specific open call published on the SPLORO platform.

- Confirms that the Open Horizons team will verify their availability to conduct the evaluation within the designated timeframe, attend an

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informative session (if required), and participate in a debriefing session post-selection (if necessary).

- Expresses interest in being notified about future opportunities to serve as an evaluator for ongoing and upcoming open calls.

- Commit to evaluating only applications where no Conflict of Interest (CoI) exists.

In relation to the selection process of external evaluators as subcontractors for Open Horizons project, please note that the selection of candidates will be conducted as a subcontracting process from Sploro. Consequently, **you acknowledge and agree that additional feedback may not be provided beyond the final decision regarding your inclusion as an evaluator for the programme**. Neither the helpdesk nor the partners involved in this process will engage in discussions or provide explanations concerning the decisions made on the selected profiles. Requests for reasons pertaining to the non-selection of candidates will not be addressed.

4.3 Admissibility criteria

- Applications for the call for Evaluators can be submitted at any time starting from **05.05.2025 to 05.06.2025 at 17h CEST.**

    *The deadline for submission is as stated in this Guidelines document. Please note that the platform for submission's time depends on the user's configured time zone and may or may not coincide with the correct time (this depends on the user, not the platform for submission). Any discrepancies in system time will not be grounds for deadline extension.

- Applications for the call for Evaluators must be submitted electronically through the Sploro platform, as indicated in this call, using the provided form on the platform, and a CV must be attached as a **.pdf** file as part of the application. **Paper or email submissions are NOT eligible.**

- Applications must be completed in all parts, and the CV must be legible, accessible, and printable.

- The applicants must not participate as part of a team that will submit an application in response to the Open Horizons call for proposals nor be engaged with a partner from the Open Horizons consortium.

- The vehicular language of the project is English. Therefore, all fields, documents and other contents must be uploaded strictly in English.

- Evaluators must be legally registered: Spain-based evaluators need a NIF and IAE registration; those from EU Member States (except Spain) require a VAT or tax registration number in VIES; non-EU Member State based evaluators must be able to issue legal invoices, but VAT or tax number is not required

If the eligibility criteria are met, the expert evaluation will be conducted by the Open Horizons team members. To formalize the collaboration, unless otherwise specified, selected evaluators will be required to sign a declaration of no conflict of interest (see Annex 2) and the contract prior to the start of the evaluation.

Only selected experts will be notified about their selection. The results will be known from 01/08/2025. If you do not receive a notification by this date, it means you were not selected as an evaluator for this project.

4.4 Conflict of interest

Evaluators must be free from any conflicts of interest at the time of their appointment and are required to sign a contract confirming this. Additionally, they must inform the consortium if a conflict of interest arises in relation to any assigned application.

If a conflict of interest arises during the evaluation process, evaluators must immediately inform Sploro at the helpdesk email (info@openhorizonsproject.eu). Sploro will assess each case and, if a conflict is confirmed, the evaluator will be removed from assessing the affected proposal(s).

If an evaluator reports a potential conflict of interest or if one is identified by the project consortium through any means, the consortium will review the situation based on the available information and objective factors. Should a conflict of interest be confirmed, the evaluator will be removed from the assessment of the affected application.

All potential conflicts of interest will be carefully examined. For further details, please refer to HERE.

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4.5 Confidentiality

All information related to the evaluation process is strictly confidential, and evaluators are obligated to maintain secrecy. They are not allowed to disclose any details about the submitted applications, the assessment results, or the selection process to anyone. Additionally, they are prohibited from using any concepts or ideas from the applications for their own benefit.

Evaluators should also refrain from posting and announcing their role publicly in order to remain impartial and to prevent anyone from influencing their decisions.

It is also strictly forbidden to announce or reveal that evaluators are an evaluator for the Open Horizons call.

4.6 Data protection

As part of the implementation of this Open Call, which is conducted within the framework of the *Open Horizons* project, Sploro collects personal data required for the evaluation of your proposal. Such data may include:

- Name, contact details, and professional information (as submitted via application forms, CVs, standalone documents, or other formats);
- Any information provided in your application, supporting documentation, or supplementary materials.

In its capacity as the coordinator of the Open Call, Sploro will serve as the Data Controller for all information submitted through its platform for this purpose.

To ensure the safety and security of this data, the Sploro's platform has been designed and operates under strict compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR). Therefore, all applicants are required to accept the Sploro's platform terms to ensure full coverage. For more information regarding the data privacy policy and security measures implemented by Sploro, please refer to their4 website at https://sploro.eu.

Sploro is considered to be the Data Controller with regard to the processing of your personal data.

SPLOROTECH SL, address: PARQUE TOMÁS CABALLERO 2, Sexto, Oficina 1,

Despacho 6.1O, Pamplona, Spain (hereinafter Sploro)

E-mail: lopd@sploro.eu

Your personal data may be shared with third parties which may, include, but are not limited to:

Granting Authorities: European Innovation Council and SME's Executive Agency (EISMEA)

Consortium Partners: The information provided may also be shared with the partners in the consortium. These partners are contractually obligated to handle your data in compliance with applicable with national and European data protection legislation, including GDPR standards, ensuring the confidentiality and security of your personal data.

More about the project consortium members you can find at the project website.

Monitoring and oversight bodies, including internal audits, the European Court of Auditors, and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), as required under Union or national laws.

Such sharing will be conducted in compliance with GDPR, the grant agreements, and other relevant regulations. In particular.

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5.Startup Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation process for selecting applicants to enter the programme consists of five steps, as outlined below:

Step 1. Eligibility check: The Open Horizons team will screen all applications and filter out non-eligible proposals.

Step 2. Automatic red flags check: A system will identify startups that do not meet key growth and deep-tech criteria.

Step 3. Remote evaluation: External evaluators will review and score each eligible proposal based on predefined criteria.

Step 4. Normalization: A mathematical adjustment will be applied to ensure fairness in scoring and eliminate any potential bias.

Step 5. Final interview: The highest-ranked startups will be invited to an interview for further assessment.

Each step ensures a rigorous and transparent selection process, refining the pool of applicants to those best suited for the programme.
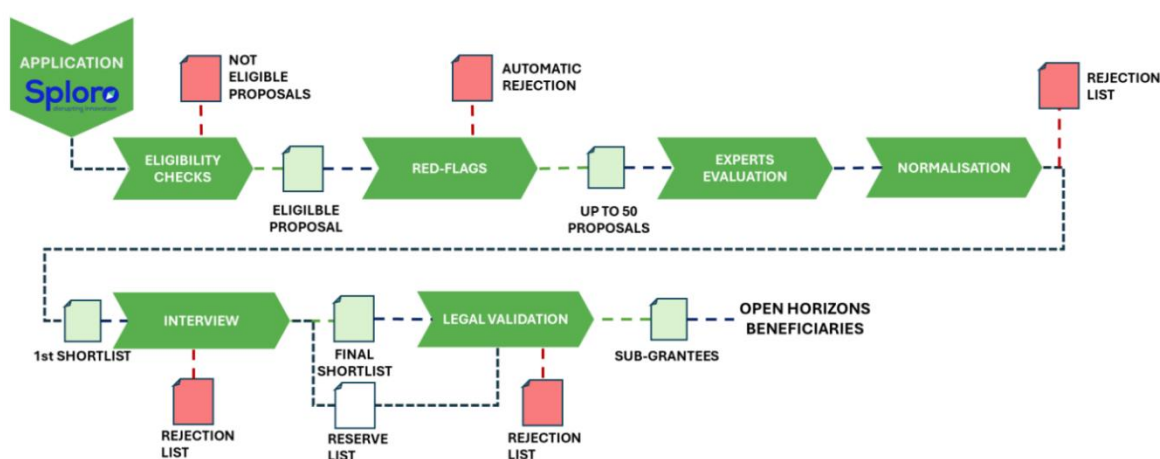

Figure 1. Startup evaluation process

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5.1 Step 1: Eligibility criteria for startups

An automatic filtering process will be carried out to discard non-eligible proposals based on the following criteria:

- All documents and application forms must be properly completed and in English, and all necessary documents must be uploaded.
- The startup operates within the 'deep-tech' sector and is clearly linked to the strategic digital technologies and deep-tech domains listed in the call.
- The startup is founded or co-founded by women holding a top management position (CEO, CTO or equivalent) in the company at the time of submission.
- Women should own at least 25% of the shares of the company at the time of submission.
- The startup exists as a legal entity.
- At the time of submission, the company must have been registered for a minimum of 6 months and have been in operation for less than 6 years.
- The startup is classified as an SME, according to the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC. This includes:
  - The headcount must be fewer than 250 employees (measured in Annual Work Units, AWU).
  - The annual turnover must be less than or equal to 50 million EUR, or the annual balance sheet total must be less than or equal to 43 million EUR.
- The company must have raised less than 1M EUR in equity until the opening date (11/06/2025).
- The company is located in an eligible country or region.

Proposals failing to meet any of the eligibility criteria will be automatically rejected, and applicants will receive a rejection letter with the reasons for ineligibility.

5.2 Step 2: Automatic red flags check

This step involves an automated filtering process to assess whether startups align with the programme's objectives. Four key indicators, or "red flags," will be evaluated:

1. Whether the startup has the capacity to survive without grants.
2. Whether the company demonstrates a strong orientation towards growth.
3. Whether the startup has an interest in scaling and attracting investors.
4. Whether the startup is genuinely deep-tech focused.

Only those applications that pass this automatic filtering will proceed to the next phase. The number of filtered applications will be limited to a maximum of 50 to ensure a manageable evaluation process.

5.3 Step 3. Remote evaluation

A panel of external evaluators with expertise in entrepreneurship, R&D, technology, and business development will assess the remaining applications. Each proposal will be reviewed by two independent evaluators and scored based on:

1) Excellence: The *Excellence* is evaluated according to the following criteria:

a) Alignment of the application with the call.

b) Alignment with the challenge proposed by the corporate and selected by the startup.

c) Degree of innovation (i.e., going beyond the state-of-the-art, chances to succeed, its feasibility.

d) Current traction/implementation/achievements of the project.

2) Impact: The *Impact* is evaluated according to the following criteria:

a) Business plan (i.e., whether it is realistic and convincing, whether the applicant demonstrated market need and willingness to pay, as well as commercialisation plan and market entry plan).

b) The growth potential of the proposed innovation/solution in terms of turnover, profit, and jobs, as well as its broader economic impact.

c) Fundraising situation and historical track record: Priority will be given to growth-oriented startups. Traditional self-employment projects that lack scalability potential will not be considered.

d) How critical this grant is for the company and whether it will make a difference and add value to the company.

e) IPR aspects.

3) Implementation: The *Implementation* is evaluated according to the following criteria:

a) Relevance of the woman (co-)founder role in the company (i.e., whether the woman (co-)founder has a leading role in the company, whether she is the decision-maker, whether she has a management capacity and whether she can bring the company to the next level).

b) An overall gender balance and the positions held by women in the startup.

c) Team's skills, motivation, and commitment to execute the project.

d) Quality and efficiency of the work plan (i.e., whether the proposed activities are sound and well explained, as well as whether these activities are most needed at this stage).

Proposals will be evaluated **by two independent evaluators** (technical and business profile), who will receive evaluation guidelines, templates, and information on process timing and conflict of interest rules. Evaluation documents will follow the consortium's expertise and European Commission standards. Evaluators and experts will sign a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality.

Each evaluator will score proposals on a scale of 0 to 5, based on three criteria. The score definitions range from 0 (fails to address the criterion) to 5 (successfully addresses all aspects). A proposal must score at least 3 in each criterion and 10 overall to be considered for funding.

SCORE	DEFINITION
0	**Proposal fails** to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	**Poor** – criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	**Fair** – proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3	**Good** – proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	**Very good** – proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	The proposal **successfully addresses** all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Table 1. Criteria score

The final score will be an average of the individual assessments, adjusted for bias. The external evaluation will produce a shortlist of applicants, twice the number of projects to be funded in each open call.

At the end of this step, a shortlist of applicants will be created, ensuring at least two eligible startups per challenge category and maintaining a number of shortlisted applicants that is twice the number of projects to be funded in each open call.

5.4 Step 4: Normalisation

Given that each proposal will be evaluated independently by two different experts, it is natural for scoring variations to occur due to differences in perspectives,

criteria interpretation, or personal judgment. These variations can sometimes lead to discrepancies that might unfairly advantage or disadvantage certain proposals.

To ensure fairness and consistency in the evaluation process, a **mathematical normalization process** will be applied. This method adjusts the scores given by different evaluators to create a balanced and standardized ranking system. By applying this approach, we can prevent situations where one evaluator's stricter or more lenient scoring significantly impacts the overall ranking of a proposal.

The normalization process minimizes potential biases and ensures that all startups are assessed on a level playing field. This leads to a more objective and equitable selection process, allowing the most promising and high-potential startups to advance to the final stages of evaluation.

5.5 Step 5: Final interview

The 22 highest-ranked startups from the remote evaluation will be invited to an online interview. The objective of this stage is to gain a deeper understanding of:

- The company's business concept.
- The team's skills and competence.
- The startup's growth potential and scalability.
- The strategic fit of the company with the programme.

These interviews will be conducted by corporate members and external experts. The interviews will take place in the following dates: **29/09/2025, 30/09/2025, 01/10/2025, 02/10/2025, 03/10/2025**

At the end of the evaluation process, the final ranking of proposals will determine the selected startups for the acceleration programme.

6.Payment conditions

As a fundamental requirement, all evaluators must be able to issue a legal invoice in accordance with the applicable tax regulations in their country of residence.

- **For evaluators based in Spain**, this means holding a valid NIF and being registered under the *Impuesto de Actividades Económicas (IAE)*.

- **For evaluators based in another EU Member State**, a valid ID number and VAT number are required, and they must be registered in the *VIES* (VAT Information Exchange System).

- **For evaluators based outside the EU**, they must be able to issue a legal invoice in compliance with the tax laws of their country.

This requirement is essential to ensure legal compliance, financial transparency, and the proper processing of compensation."

Each evaluator is eligible to receive up to 100 EUR for each proposal reviewed. Those who participate in interviews will receive an additional 32 EUR per interview. This compensation structure is designed to acknowledge and reward the evaluators' time and effort, encouraging their full engagement in the evaluation process.

Action	Amount/Action
Review	100 EUR
Interview	32 EUR

Table 2. Payment per Action

Due to the flexible nature of the evaluation process, which assigns tasks based on the evaluator's expertise, it is not possible to guarantee a specific minimum number of evaluation sessions. However, the Open Horizons consortium will formally communicate the exact details of the evaluator's tasks via email. It is estimated that an evaluator will review up to 20 applications in Open Horizons Open Call #1 and conduct no more than 10 interviews, based on the established evaluation criteria.

Each evaluator will sign a contract for evaluating the proposals with SPLORO.

The evaluator is required to prepare an invoice and forward it to SPLORO. Each invoice submitted by the evaluator must clearly state:

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Funded by
the European Union

General invoice information:

- Invoice number

- Issue Date

- Due Date: Must be 2 months from the Issue Date of the Invoice (*e.g., Issue Date: 01/01/2025 // Due Date 01/03/2025*)

Fiscal and Legal information of the issuer:

- Full name or company name

- Tax Identification Number (VAT, TAX, ID or Equivalent)

- Complete legal address

Fiscal and legal information of SPLOROTECH SL

- Name: SPLOROTECH S.L.

- **VAT**: ESB71438956

- **Legal address:** Parque Tomas Caballero 2, Sexto, Oficina 1, Despacho 6.10. Pamplona (31006) Navarra, España.

Tax Information

It is mandatory to clearly state the **percentage** and amount of tax applied. As well as the **tax rate** type. If no VAT is applied, the legal exemption of 0€ tax rate must be justified.

- Percentage and amount of tax (e.g., Taxable Amount: 1.000€ // VAT: 21% // VAT Amount: 210€)

- Tax rate type

- Some valid examples include:

    o "Intra-community transaction exempt under Article XX of Directive XX"

    o "Transaction under reverse charge according to Law XX of the country of origin"

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o   "VAT exempt operation under Article XX of the national VAT Law"

For invoices issued under the Spanish tax system, in addition to VAT, please verify whether the invoice should include IRPF (personal income tax withholding) as required by local regulations.

Service details

- The reference of the contract: OpenHorizons2025-OC#1.

- Identification of the evaluator.

- Service period (clearly specify the start and en dates)

- The number of evaluations performed, and their topic and cost per evaluation.

SPLORO will make a single payment via bank transfer. All payments will be made to the bank account provided by the evaluator, strictly in euros, to bank accounts that accept euros. The transfer will be made to the evaluator's account within 60 days of receiving the invoice.

All taxes, including VAT, are included in the fees payable by SPLORO. It is important to note that SPLORO is not subject to any commercial tax, including VAT, and the amount indicated as the project fee is therefore considered all-inclusive.

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