



COMFOCUS

Community on Food Consumer Science



COMFOCUS Guidelines for applicant's Open call #1

WP3



COMFOCUS project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement n° 101005259. The website represents the view of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility: it cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA). The European Commission and the Agency do not accept responsibility for the use that may be made of the information it contains.

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1. Introduction

COMFOCUS Open Call #1 is offering virtual access to key European research infrastructure (EQT)¹ in the multidisciplinary field of food consumer science linked to healthy eating based on an original and innovative research proposal related to exploring the motivational factors in healthy eating, including interest in food products and services that aim to support healthy eating.

1.1 Overview of the COMFOCUS Project

COMFOCUS integrates key European research infrastructures in the multidisciplinary field of food consumer science, in order to promote their optimal use and joint development, covering a variety of scientific disciplines, research methodologies and geographical locations. COMFOCUS will provide the academic and private research community with easy virtual and transnational access to high quality services and resources. These are needed to harmonize and professionalize the European food consumer science community and to advance it beyond its current level of fragmentation.

COMFOCUS new level of research infrastructure could be contributing to European healthy food choice public policies and private strategies and increasing the business and policy relevance of food consumer science insights.

Essentially, COMFOCUS will achieve integration around harmonisation approaches for key food consumer science concepts, their measurement and research procedures for the use of installations, to ensure optimal use of the resources collectively. COMFOCUS will do so for:

- measures connected to other RIs (such as socio-demographic and socio-economic variables),
- sets of its more conventional self-reported measures,
- alternative and behavioural measures that the food consumer science community is increasingly adopting, but for which the installations are not (yet) widely accessible.

In parallel, a set of digital services (the COMFOCUS Toolbox) will be developed for data search, data validation, protocol search, visualisation of data, and scientific analysis, made available to all researchers in academia and industry to ensure that resources are made FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Inter-operable & Re-usable) through the central access point of the COMFOCUS Knowledge platform. This will facilitate optimal virtual access to data on food consumer science, optimal use of data, networks and facilities, thus bringing the food consumer

¹ Easy Questionnaire Tool in Open Call #1 will be provided only by Wageningen University and Research

science (starting) community to its next level. New standards will be designed to ensure that the new approach is not only FAIR, but adhering to RRI principles (Responsible Research & Innovation).

The strategic objective of optimal use and joint development of food consumer science research infrastructures (RIs) is reached through a coordinated set of activities on networking, joint research and transnational and virtual access.

Networking Activities(NA) will allow better use of existing research infrastructures and strengthen collaboration across food consumer science research groups, disciplines and borders. This will be achieved in close interactions with key stakeholders in academia and industry (users) as well as key technology developers, advanced data analytics and data science (providers). In particular, the project will:

Provide a system for harmonised and optimised transnational and virtual access to state-of-the-art food consumer science research infrastructures.

Develop and disseminate the COMFOCUS Knowledge platform as the open access point to harmonised data, procedures and insights from food consumer science research infrastructures.

Define new collaboration strategies for advancing the food consumer science community at the interface with data-and computer scientists, needed to connect still isolated consumer research infrastructures.

Actively advocate and educate FAIR science principles and RRI guidelines to food consumer science stakeholders in industry, broader academia and technology developer to foster innovation.

Through Joint Research Activities (JRA), this project will mobilise the COMFOCUS network to come up with agreed harmonised research approaches and methodologies for the field of food consumer science, according to FAIR and RRI principles. In particular, the project will:

Design, from joint development, an agreed process for harmonisation of measures and research protocols, for application throughout COMFOCUS, and beyond its scope and project duration.

Develop a set of harmonised protocols the measurement and research procedures in the areas of both more conventional self-report measures and emerging technologies.

Develop a harmonised logical framework and ontology for food consumer science data as a basis for tools allowing the actual integration and leverage of food consumer science data sources.

Define and implement RRI guidelines for transparent, ethical and societally acceptable COMFOCUS practice regarding FAIR data approaches.

At the Transnational and Virtual Access level (VA/TNA), COMFOCUS will:

Provide and support effective and convenient virtual (VA) and transnational (TNA) access to state of the art food consumer science research infrastructures, to all European researchers.

Reach out to new users by publicizing widely the Open Calls for access and promoting equal opportunities (e.g. Southern and Eastern European countries)

Select VA/TNA applications according to their excellence, feasibility, scientific priorities, and follow the principles of transparency, fairness and impartiality (e.g. gender issues)

At the support level, this project aims to progress the EU food consumer science community. In particular, the project will:

Boost exploitation and innovation of the RIs by providing scientists from academia and private sector coordinated and easy transnational and virtual access across RIs.

Advance the community in impact and quality by providing the COMFOCUS Toolbox including (a) a data validation tool (incl. against FAIR & RRI principles), (b) a harmonised protocol search tool, (c) a harmonised dataset search tool, (d) a scientific analysis and visualisation tool, and (e) a representational learning tool at the COMFOCUS Knowledge platform.

Implement a communication, dissemination and exploitation strategy to guarantee a sustainable continuation of the COMFOCUS platform tailored to the current and future needs of stakeholders.

Prepare an upcoming generation of researchers for a new Europe-wide perspective of consumer science in which consumer data is shared, linked, and re-used through supervised research experiences within the Virtual and Transnational Access Open Call research programme and joint development of food consumer science research infrastructures (RIs) is reached through a coordinated set of activities on networking, joint research and transnational and virtual access.

1.2 Objectives and Domains of the Open Call #1

1.2.1 Aim of the Call

The COMFOCUS Open Call 1 invites proposals for studies in the field of food consumer science with a connection to healthy eating. These studies can relate to consumer behaviour in relation to healthy food choices, other food-related activities, motivation factors behind food choices, perceptions of healthy eating in general, or the perceptions of single food products. The main purpose and target of the studies may vary, but we expect the proposed studies to contain an aspect that relates to healthy eating.

1.2.2 Expected Outcomes for the Applicants

To tackle this challenge in food consumer science, in this Open Call, we try to find common nominators used in studies and thereby enable the use of data beyond its primary use. In order to take part in the Open Call, you are asked to comply with simple rules of using a number of selected harmonised measures (so-called connectors, see below) in your study. If you agree with this, description of your data will be included in *COMFOCUS Knowledge Platform*, and this enables you to connect with other researchers having their own datasets with the same connectors. This will enable you to work together with other researchers and create new research questions in addition to the primary purpose of your study. Thus, taking part in the Open Call does not compromise your original research aims and planned use of data.

In order to be able to combine and utilise the datasets in the future, we have selected a number of connecting concepts (see Table 1) that are measured with self-reported scales and questions in survey studies. In COMFOCUS, the measurement of these concepts has been harmonised so that the data from different studies becomes comparable.

1.2.3 Data requirements

Below is the list of constructs that have been identified by food consumer scientists as the most relevant in the study of food consumer behaviour. In order to take part in the Open Call, you need to select at least one connector concept² from category A and one from category B (from Table 1 below) as part of your study and use the harmonised measures developed by our team when operationalising the concepts. In addition, using harmonised measures for socio-demographic variables is required. Using other concepts that have harmonised measures in COMFOCUS library is highly recommended. This does not exclude using other operationalisations in parallel to those in the COMFOCUS library. The use of these measures will enable diverse

² Detailed information about connector concepts is indicated in Guidelines for applicants (Annex 1)

researchers participating in this call to connect and link their data sets, should they wish to do so and help the development of the COMFOCUS RI platform.

Table 1: Connectors for data

	Concepts	Harmonised measure	Scope
A1	Healthy eating index	Modified Global diet quality score X items	Healthy diet/eating
A2	Behavioural intentions	COMFOCUS 4 items	Healthy eating
A3	Habitual behaviour	2 items	Healthy eating
B1a	Subjective nutrition knowledge	5 items	Subjective nutrition knowledge
B1b	Objective nutrition knowledge	20 items	Objective nutrition knowledge
B2	Attitude towards nutritionally healthy eating	General Health Interest (GHI) 8 items	Healthy eating
B3a	Self-identity – healthy eater	Healthy eater identity 4 items	Health-oriented food consumer
B3b	Self-identity – sustainable consumer (only when with B3a)	Pro-environmental self-identity 4 items	Sustainable food consumer
B4*	Willingness to pay	Deviation from reference price 1 item	Food products/product categories
B5*	Emotional responses	EsSense® profile 25 items	Food products/product categories
B6*	Expectations about food	COMFOCUS 11 items	Food products/product categories
B6#	Expected healthiness/Health image	1 item	Food products/product categories
B7	Trust	TBD	Food and nutrition security
C	Socio-demographics	Gender, age, socio-econ. status; education	Consumer characteristics

included in B6 which is the wider expectation profile of foods

In studies where specific food products or categories are the scope, including the B6# on health image is highly recommended.

Table 2: Description of connectors

	Construct	Harmonised measure	Description of the measure items	
A1	Healthy eating -diet	Frequency scale with 13 product categories	Modified Global Diet Score – 22 items See the separate question and scoring sheets	Link1 , Link 2 to the background document
A2	Intentions	Healthy eating intentions 4 items	I will eat healthy in the next month* 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “unlikely” to 7) “likely” I intend eat healthy in the next month* 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “definitively do not” to 7) “definitively do” I plan to eat healthy in the next month* 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” to 7) “strongly agree” I will try to eat healthy in the next month* 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “false” to 7) “true” *In addition to this healthy eating intention measure, it is up to the researcher to define additional intention measurements (i.e., for specific products or product categories) as best fit their research purpose. However, the identical items and formulations of items should be used. For additional intention measurements, the researcher is free to define the time period (i.e., in the next 2 weeks/3 months/1 year etc.).	Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) Link to the background document
A3	Self-evaluated	1 item	In general, how healthy is your diet? Would you say it is Excellent, 2) very good, 3) good, 4) fair, 5) poor + options 6) refuse to say, 7)) don’t know	Loft field et al. (2015) Link to

	healthiness of diet		Choose the option that best describes the healthiness of the diet	the background document
B1a	Subjective nutrition knowledge	Subjective nutrition knowledge	<p>I know pretty much about nutrition.</p> <p>I do not feel very knowledgeable about nutrition. (R)</p> <p>Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the "experts" on nutrition.</p> <p>Compared to most other people, I know less about nutrition. (R)</p> <p>When it comes to nutrition, I really don't know a lot. (R)</p> <p>7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) "strongly disagree" to 7) "strongly agree"</p>	<p>Flynn and Goldsmith (1999)</p> <p>Link to the background document</p>
B1b	Objective nutrition knowledge	Objective nutrition knowledge	<p>Lentils contain only few useful nutrients, therefore their health benefit is not great (F).</p> <p>If you have eaten high-fat foods, you can reverse the effects by eating apples (F).</p> <p>If cream is whipped it contains less calories than in its liquid form (F).</p> <p>A healthy meal should consist of half meat, a quarter vegetables and a quarter side dishes (F).</p> <p>Fat contains fewer calories than the same amount of fiber (F).</p> <p>A salad dressing made with mayonnaise is as healthy as the same dressing made with mustard (F).</p> <p>Fat is always bad for your health; you should therefore avoid it as much as possible (F).</p> <p>Pasta with tomato sauce is healthier than pasta with mushroom and cream sauce (T).</p> <p>A balanced diet implies eating all foods in the same amounts (F).</p>	<p>Dickson-Spillmann et al. (2011)</p> <p>Link to the background document</p>

		<p>The health benefit of fruit and vegetables lies alone in the supply of vitamins and minerals (F).</p> <p>Bacon contains more calories than ham (T).</p> <p>Oily fish (salmon, mackerel) contain healthier fats than red meat (T).</p> <p>To eat healthily, you should eat less fat. Whether you also eat more fruit and vegetables does not matter (F).</p> <p>A scoop of chocolate ice cream is just as healthy as a scoop of lemon sorbet (F).</p> <p>The same amount of beef steak and chicken breast contains equally many calories (F).</p> <p>The same amount of sugar and fat contains equally many calories (F).</p> <p>A sandwich with mozzarella contains as many calories as the same sandwich with Gruyère cheese (F).</p> <p>For a healthy nutrition, dairy products should be consumed in the same amounts as fruit and vegetables (F).</p> <p>Skimmed milk contains fewer minerals than full-fat milk (F).</p> <p>Brown sugar is much healthier than white sugar(F).</p> <p>(F): False response; (T): true response. Correct answers are assigned one point and incorrect or "don't know" answers are assigned zero points.</p>		
B2	Attitude towards nutritionally healthy eating	General Health Interest (GHI) 8 items	<p>The healthiness of food has little impact on my food choices. (R)</p> <p>I am very particular about the healthiness of food I eat.</p> <p>I eat what I like and I do not worry much about the healthiness of food. (R)</p> <p>It is important for me that my diet is low in fat.</p> <p>I always follow a healthy and balanced diet.</p> <p>It is important for me that my daily diet contains a lot of vitamins and minerals.</p>	<p>Roininen et al. 1999</p> <p>Link to the background document</p>

			<p>The healthiness of snacks makes no difference to me. (R)</p> <p>I do not avoid foods, even if they may raise my cholesterol. (R)</p> <p>(R) reversed score</p> <p>7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” to 7) “strongly agree”</p>	
B3a	<p>Self-identity – healthy eater</p>	<p>Healthy eater identity 3 items</p>	<p>I think of myself as a healthy eater.</p> <p>I think of myself as a person who is interested in eating healthy.</p> <p>I think of myself as someone who is concerned about the health consequences of what I eat.</p> <p>7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” to 7) “strongly agree”</p>	<p>Carfora, V., Caso, D., & Conner, M. (2016)</p> <p>Link to the background document</p>
B3b	<p>Self-identity – sustainable consumer (only when with B3a)</p>	<p>Pro-environmental self-identity 3 items</p>	<p>Acting environmentally friendly is an important part of who I am.</p> <p>I am the type of person who acts environmentally friendly.</p> <p>I see myself as an environmentally friendly person.</p> <p>7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” to 7) “strongly agree”</p>	<p>Van der Werff, E., Steg, L., & Keizer, K. (2013)</p> <p>Link to the background document</p>
B4*	<p>Willingness to pay</p>	<p>Deviation from reference</p>	<p>How much more, or less, would you be willing to pay for [Target Product A] compared to [Reference Product]?</p> <p>-30% -25% -20% -15% -10% -5% 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% or more or less</p> <p>Note: % should be translated to actual prices in local currency</p>	<p>Link to the background document</p>

B5*	Food evoked emotions	EsSense25 25 items	<p>Please select the words which describe how you feel right now. Select all that apply:</p> <p>Active Good natured Satisfied</p> <p>Adventurous Guilty Secure</p> <p>Aggressive Happy Tame</p> <p>Bored Interested Understanding</p> <p>Calm Joyful Warm</p> <p>Disgusted Loving Wild</p> <p>Enthusiastic Mild Worried</p> <p>Free Nostalgic</p> <p>Good Pleasant</p> <p>Check-all-that-apply</p>	<p>Nestrud, M.A, Meiselman, H.L., King, S.C., Leshner, L.L., Cardello, A.V. (2016) Link to the background document</p>
B6*	Expectations about food	Expectation profile 11 items	Food products/product categories	
B6#	Expected healthiness/ Health image	Expected healthiness 1 item	Food products/product categories	
B7a	Trust in food system actors	4 items	<p>Farmers (producing plants and animals for human consumption)</p> <p>Food manufacturers (preparing, preserving, and packaging food)</p> <p>Retailers (supermarkets, markets, food stores)</p> <p>Authorities (government agencies at national and EU level)</p>	

B7b	Trust in products	15 items	<p>I am confident that food products are safe</p> <p>I am satisfied with the safety of food products</p> <p>Generally, food products are safe</p> <p>I am confident that food products are healthy</p> <p>I am satisfied with the healthiness of food products</p> <p>Generally, food products are healthy</p> <p>I am confident that food products are produced in a sustainable way (i.e., environmentally friendly, resource efficient, ethically responsible)</p> <p>I am satisfied with the sustainability of food products (i.e., that they are produced in a way that is environmentally friendly, resource efficient, ethically responsible)</p> <p>Generally, food products are produced in a sustainable way (i.e., environmentally friendly, resource efficient, ethically responsible)</p> <p>I am confident that food products are authentic (real, honest, genuine, not fake or artificial)</p> <p>I am satisfied with the authenticity of food products (that they are real, honest, genuine, not fake or artificial)</p> <p>Generally, food products are authentic (real, honest, genuine, not fake or artificial)</p> <p>I am confident that food products are tasty</p> <p>I am satisfied with the taste of food products</p> <p>Generally, food products are tasty</p>	Link to the background document
			7-point Likert scale ranging from 1) “strongly disagree” to 7) “strongly agree”	

C1	Age (Socio-demographic s)	2 items	See the background document	Link to the background document (Deliverable 4.1)
C2	Sex/Gender identity (Socio-demographic s)	2 items	See the background document	Link to the background document (Deliverable 4.1)
C3	Socio-economic status (Socio-demographic s)	9 items (NB: C1 Age and C2 Sex/Gender identity also required to compute this overall measure)	See the background document	Link to the background document (Deliverable 4.1)
C4	Educational attainment	1 item	See the background document	Link to the background document (Deliverable 4.1)

(Socio-
demographic
s)

1.2.4 Data management

A primary aim of COMFOCUS is to develop a research infrastructure to connect scientists in this domain through connecting their scientific data, sharing protocols, best practices etc.

Pursuant to this, we will be inviting researchers (external to our project) to carry out small-scale studies to collect data independently of the Consortium, using key variables identified by EASYQUESTIONNAIRE Tool (EQT), on the understanding that they will then deposit a copy of said data with the Consortium for incorporation into the platform and further (consumer science) academic research purposes.

Consumer scientists will be invited by way of an open call for research proposals (Open Call 1), which will be assessed by the Consortium based on merit. The first call for proposals, Open Call 1, will be launched May 10, 2022.

The EASYQUESTIONNAIRE Tool (EQT) software is hosted by Wageningen University and Research. This tool can store both raw research data and meta data.

Once we have capacity to link the pooled datasets, we intend to expand our invitation to the research community at large. We acknowledge that this may require a change in hosting arrangements and further funding/infrastructure.

In addition to inviting consumer research scientists to conduct studies independently of the Consortium (Open Call 1).

To encourage participation, we need to ensure engaging with our platform is:

- simple,
- mutually beneficial,
- low risk (on both sides),
- transparent.

Phase 1 - Data Deposition (Open Call 1)

A simple application form is developed for proposals, and the Management Committee take decisions on those submitted (in accordance with the governance terms of the Consortium Agreement), on, at minimum, a monthly basis.

That access to the EASYQUESTIONNAIRE Tool (EQT) software is provided for free, or at cost (if necessary).

Wageningen University and Research is appointed as host of the pooled meta and research data in the first instance, because EQT has the capacity to store these data, and determining a separate IT infrastructure for the platform will take significant time and probably more investment.

As hosts of this key software, Wageningen University should be responsible for executing any legal agreements in respect of data deposition on behalf of the Consortium, in the first instance.

A simple (sensible) non-negotiable data deposition agreement template is developed, which is available for review when each 'call for proposals' opens. It will:

- Provide a licence to access and use EQT.
- Request that only copies of data be deposited – researchers shall otherwise be free to use the data they collect as they see fit.
- Compel researchers to use 'public interest' as their legal basis for collection of personal data, as opposed to consent (because 'research' is automatically considered a compatible purpose).
- Require all data be collected in accordance with applicable laws and include a warranty in this respect - Belgian (EU) law will apply to the interpretation of the agreement.
- Require that data must be comprehensively anonymised at source.

Depositor grants to Consortium a non-exclusive, sublicensable licence to use the data for **further research purposes**, including but not limited to train our data visualisation models and representational learning tools for the future research infrastructure. This licence needs to be for broad research purposes to allow for evolution of the platform.

Grant an automatic, non-exclusive, non-sublicensable licence to access and use the pooled dataset in the platform for further **academic research purposes** to anyone who deposits data.

Ensure acknowledgement of Consortium funding in any dissemination activities such as journal publications, conference presentations, etc.

This agreement be issued as non-negotiable to minimise the administrative burden of this exercise.

Calls for proposals will be restricted to institutions in EU Member States, the UK and other countries who have secured an adequacy rating from the EU, in the first instance.

Also, if possible, we should incorporate a further level of data encryption into our data linking process, to ensure a robust approach to data protection.

Data Access

The intention is for the platform to eventually evolve to allow for mere access to the platform data, for research which does not require the use EASYQUESTIONNAIRE Tool (EQT). This would require a separate (non-negotiable) template, which, contrary to the above:

Would require a copy of any metadata data generated through analysis of COMFOCUS data be deposited back in the platform.

Does not include an automatic licence to the pooled dataset at large.

Proposals for Data Access will only be accepted for a limited dataset – as opposed to the platform dataset at large, based on the proposal submitted - but otherwise will be subject to the same decision-making procedure outlined above.

Finally, the intention is that, in time, all of the above be adapted to allow for engagement by institutions outside of the EU/Adequacy Rating.

2. Timeline

The COMFOCUS Open Calls #1 for Virtual Access (VA) is open to researchers working in EU Member States and Associated Countries as well as in Third Countries³.

A one-stage application process will be adopted within this Open Call.

Stage 1 application deadline: 31/07/2022



Figure 1: Open Call #1 timeline

3. Funding

For the COMFOCUS Open Call #1 no funding scheme is applicable.

Main benefits for the target audience:

- access to COMFOCUS knowledge platform: discussion forum, library (with harmonised measures and protocols), COMFOCUS tools access to expertise within the consortium as well as mentoring,

³ List of Participating Countries in Horizon Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

- connect one researcher to one or more researchers so that they can be independently contacted and decide whether that would like to collaborate/share/link data,
- Easy questionnaire tool (quick and simple for researchers to make questionnaires with harmonized measured),
- the possibility to shape the community in the future,
- the access to future funding opportunities.

4. Eligible Applicants

Proposals for Virtual Access (VA) need to fulfil certain criteria.

Who can apply?

The main criteria to be met are:

1. Each applicant should be aged 18 years or older.
2. An applicant (or the majority of the applicants within a group) must be employed by an organisation established in one of the aforementioned countries.
3. An applicant (or the majority of the applicants within a group) must not be employed by the organisation/ legal entity operating the VA infrastructure.
4. An applicant should be an early career researcher or industry researcher, with a minimum requirement that the data collection should be part of a Master's Thesis (Bachelor's Thesis not allowed).
5. An applicant should have a proficient level of use of English (at least B2).
6. Number of proposals per applicant: each individual may participate in more than one application. In the event of sufficient proven suitability of the proposals, a proportional distribution will be made among the applicants.

Be aware that all information provided will be verified during the evaluation process. If any false information is detected, the proposal will be immediately excluded.

5. Submission Process

Proposal submission involves 3 steps, as outlined below. Proposals have to be submitted online via the project website: <https://www.comfocus.eu/open-calls/>

The evaluation of proposals will be based on the information provided in the completed application form (Table 2), which should be correct, sufficient and adequate for purpose, taking into account the evaluation criteria as outlined in Chapter 6.

Table 3: Application form

General Description of Project	
Full name / Research team	
Country	
Institution	
Contact (e-mail)	
List of construct	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Food use frequency <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intentions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subjective assessment of past behaviour <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subjective nutrition knowledge <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Objective nutrition knowledge <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attitude towards nutritionally healthy eating <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-identity – healthy eater <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-identity – sustainable consumer (only when with B3a) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Willingness to pay <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emotional responses <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expectations about food <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expected healthiness/Health image <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trust <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Socio-demographics
Research contribution	
A brief description of the research contribution	
Consent of the institution/supervisor	Upload document

Applicant commitment

The awarded applicant commits to:

- Join the COMFOCUS project as a Stakeholder, and work within the COMFOCUS processes and procedures, including data sharing.
- Allow the COMFOCUS project to re-use results of the deployed service as appropriate within proof of concept and demonstrating activities within the scope of the GA and CA.
- Acknowledge the role of the COMFOCUS project in all publications which include the results from the execution of the awarded project. Users shall use the following (or equivalent) wording in such acknowledgements: “We acknowledge the COMFOCUS project [GA 101005259] for the support received. Specifically, we gratefully appreciate the support of using [name of installation facilitated by person/people] from [organisation name], [country].”

6. Evaluation and Selection Process

The evaluation process involves 3 stages, as outlined below.

Stage 1 – Eligibility evaluation

Initial filtering to discard non-eligible proposals based on the eligibility evaluation. All proposals received within the COMFOCUS Open Call #1, will be first checked according to the following items:

1. Type of Beneficiary: see above Eligible Applicants. [Y/N]
2. Project domains: The proposal is submitted under the project domains. [Y/N]
3. English language: English is the official language for the Open Call. The proposal must be in English in all its mandatory parts in order to be eligible. If the mandatory parts of the proposal are in any other language, the proposal will not be eligible. [Y/N]
4. Submission system: All the proposals should be submitted through the submission system on the COMFOCUS website. Proposals submitted by any other means will not be evaluated. [Y/N]
5. Submission before the Deadline: Applications must be submitted by the closing time and date published in the Open Call. Late proposals will not be admitted. [Y/N]
6. Absence of conflict of interest: Applicants shall not have any potential conflict of interest with the COMFOCUS project. [Y/N]
7. Required documentation complete. All the requested documents must be submitted correctly. [Y/N]

Proposals being marked as non-eligible will get a rejection letter including the reasons (1 to 7) for being catalogued as non-eligible. No further feedback on the process will be given.

Stage 2 – Individual evaluation

All eligible proposals will be evaluated by two COMFOCUS evaluators. The evaluators will be selected based on their expertise accordingly with the specific characteristics of the proposed project.

The proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Scoring
Research description (research design, sample size, research questions, data connectors)	Scoring (0-5)

Scoring

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

Ethical assessment	Yes	No
<p>Do you find ethical issues present in this proposal?</p> <p><i>Please, indicate if the proposed research will confront ethical issues that may be related to conflicts of interest between funders and researchers, to the interests and safety of participants, to the security of data and to the security of the researchers.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If yes, are the ethical issues handled satisfactorily?</p> <p><i>Please, indicate if the proposal sufficiently addresses the following issues: i.e. conflicts of interest; recruitment of participants; consent by participants; informed consent form; security of data; secondary data collection; research risks; research in unsafe areas.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Stage 3 – Final Evaluation

Once the individual experts to whom proposals have been assigned have completed their evaluations, a final evaluation meeting is convened to enable joint consideration of proposals by the COMFOCUS Independent Selection Panel. During the meeting, the panel members will consider each proposal and agree on a final mark for each of the evaluation criteria and an overall mark (score) for the proposal.

Proposals recommended for scheduling will then be ranked according to their overall score. Evaluators will justify their marks with constructive and informative comments. The COMFOCUS Independent Selection Panel will agree on an overall Final Evaluation Report. All applicants will be given feedback on the outcome of the evaluation.

Priority order for proposals with the same score

Given equal scores on proposal criteria, the selection process will give priority to research projects:

- a) first-time users,
- b) early career researchers,
- d) to maintain gender balance.



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