International Politics and Diplomacy for Health for Emerging Leaders

Evaluation Report

26 October 2026



CENTER FOR RESILIENT HEALTH

Partnership for International Politics and Diplomacy for Health

Karolinska Institutet

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“The faculty’s willingness to share candid and unvarnished stories of failure, trade-offs, and crisis management offered lessons that cannot be found in standard literature or policy papers”

“I especially appreciated the informal conversations, the diversity of the fellows, and the opportunity to hear directly from people with very different experiences”

“It has clearly been very well thought through and refined in just 2 previous years. Thank you for the opportunity”

“Everything stunning. This course is the best course I've ever been on. The simply incredible faculty, the fellows, the agenda and objectives, the online seminars, warming up to the Masterclass; stunning relaxed venue - even the staff (as well as the food and drink) were excellent”

“The fellows were excellent, insightful, varied, senior, experienced, articulate, passionate. Perfect”

“I feel I have the obligation to put these new skills and networks into action to achieve something great – I will!”

"I have already begun applying the lessons from the program by leveraging the networks I built to foster partnerships beyond my immediate area of responsibility."

"The learnings on what happens before and after board meetings have been useful for me [...] I felt better prepared and at ease to engage/discuss and network more informally with other board members."

“The professional network established through the program is one of its greatest strengths”

“The programme challenged me to learn in a different way, opened my perspective, and allowed me to meet many interesting and inspiring people.”

“The faculty were highly accomplished and inspiring leaders, and I benefited greatly from the informal conversation I had with them outside the formal sessions”

“A big thank you and congratulations to the organisers – you really have created something unique. Keep up the good work!”

Introduction

This Evaluation Report of the International Politics and Diplomacy for Health for Emerging leaders – Executive Programme 2026 aims to assess the overall impressions and potential impact of the programme on fellows' skills development, understanding of the political economy, tools for political analysis, and network building.

The third year of the Executive Programme brought together a diverse cohort of 31 fellows and 17 faculty members from Africa, Europe, Asia, North America, the Middle East, Latin America, and Oceania. The cohort spanned different sectors, covering the private sector, foundations, governments, multilateral organisations, research institutions, and humanitarian organisations.

The 2026 programme consisted of five two-hour online sessions and a one-week in-person Masterclass. Special for this year was a negotiation role-playing exercise, which aimed to simulate real-world negotiations and the importance of what happens before, during, and after them. Using a practitioner-to-practitioner approach, the programme was structured around five core themes:

1) How decisions are made, both formally and informally.
2) How to build trust and networks; how to lead with courage and seize opportunities.
3) How to engage across private and public sectors.
4) How to manage failure and uncertainty.
5) How to communicate effectively in political contexts.

The evaluation was conducted through a comprehensive survey to which 28 out of the 31 fellows responded.

Summary

Fellows were highly satisfied with the programme, rating their overall satisfaction 4.5 out of 5 and the likelihood of recommending it to a colleague at 4.8. The Masterclass was particularly appreciated, meeting fellows' expectations to a very high degree with a score of 4.8. Programme leadership and management, as well as administrative and logistical support, were also well rated at 4.7 and 4.9 respectively.

The programme strengthened fellows' understanding of how politics, trust and relationships shape global health outcomes. Fellows particularly valued learning about formal and informal decision-making, recognising political windows of opportunity, and navigating uncertainty. Honest accounts of failure and difficult decisions encouraged fellows to act with greater confidence and remain anchored in their values. Fellows described applying these insights through more deliberate relationship building, negotiation and collaboration in their professional settings.

The diverse cohort and access to experienced faculty were among the programme's greatest strengths. Fellows' different professional and regional perspectives enriched discussions challenged assumptions and created valuable opportunities for peer learning. The practitioner-

to-practitioner approach offered personal insights into leadership and diplomacy that fellows felt were difficult to find elsewhere. Walk-and-talks, paired discussions and informal conversations made faculty approachable and helped professional connections develop into lasting relationships. The online workshops provided valuable preparation through their emphasis on practical experience and the "how" of leadership.

To enhance the programme further, fellows sought more time for reflection, small-group discussion, and unstructured networking. While the intensive Masterclass was appreciated, some fellows felt that the negotiation exercise occupied too much time. More interactive online sessions and practical tools for stakeholder mapping, communication, and negotiation preparation were also proposed. Additional themes proposed included political economy, cross-sector collaboration and geopolitical change. Fellows further suggested even broader representation, by inviting more fellows from the humanitarian sector and inviting faculty from Latin America and Southeast Asia.

The programme as a whole

As can be seen in Table 1, the programme received high average ratings across all aspects. Fellows were likely to recommend the programme to a colleague, rating the likelihood 4.8/5 on average. They were immensely satisfied with the programme overall and especially appreciated the Masterclass and external faculty, scoring 4.8 and 4.5 respectively. At 4.3, the value of the online workshops was the lowest rated component but still highly valued.

Table 1. Average scores per programme component compared to 2025 and 2024.

Question	2024	2025	2026
Overall satisfaction with the programme	**4.4**	**4.6**	**4.5**
Extent to which **fellows' own goals and expectations** been achieved	**4.1**	**4.6**	**4.4**
Effectiveness of the **peer support**	**4.7**	**4.4**	**4.3**
Importance of faculty **persons**	**4.6**	**4.7**	**4.5**
Leadership and **management** of the programme	**4.7**	**4.6**	**4.7**
Administrative and **logistic support**	**4.7**	**4.6**	**4.9**
Value of the **workshops**	**4.0**	**4.4**	**4.3**
Extent to which the **Masterclass** met fellows' expectations	**4.7**	**4.8**	**4.8**
Would you **recommend the programme** to a colleague	**4.7**	**4.8**	**4.8**

Skills developed and applied in the key programmatic themes

Across the cohort, fellows reported that the program sharpened their *negotiation and diplomacy skills*. Many fellows found that the course's emphasis on critical analysis and intentional decision-making transformed their approach to complex challenges. They have more productive debates at work due to their improved ability to identify areas of agreement, minimize points of contention, and effectively prepare. Some concrete tools were mentioned, such as reframing

health as an investment in discussions with ministries of finance, and redefining health as political among colleagues.

The program's deep dive into *formal versus informal decision-making* resonated strongly, prompting fellows to invest more deliberately in trust-building and network maintenance. Inspired by candid reflections from faculty, many have increased one-on-one outreach to move negotiations forward outside official meetings. This heightened sensitivity to "where real momentum gathers" has already translated into smoother collaborations with diplomatic missions, private-sector partners, and civil society actors.

One fellow was able to persuade colleagues from a different geographical region to collaborate with another fellow, who is working at a Ministry of Health. Through relationship building, strategic engagement, and effective negotiation, interests of both parties were aligned to form a strategic collaboration that could create opportunities for both parties.

Transformative leadership and the art of *seizing political windows of opportunity* also feature prominently in fellows' feedback. The programme helped fellows think beyond formal processes and better understand how relationships, trust, timing, and informal engagement shape real world outcomes. Hearing senior leaders frame failures as learning moments equipped fellows to navigate uncertainty more confidently. Several described adopting a more entrepreneurial mindset, challenging assumptions and reframing setbacks as strategic pivots.

Even simple insights, such as looking beyond the technical solution, understanding that health is inherently political, and that small reforms create lasting impact, resonated with the participants. Collectively, these applied outcomes demonstrate that the program's core areas are not only learned but put into practice immediately, spanning academic design, policy negotiations, teaching methods, and leadership approaches across diverse global health arenas. Inspired by the program, one fellow even proposed a staff workshop immediately upon return, to strengthen their mutual understanding of organisational objectives and collective contribution to that mission.

While fellows acknowledged that true mastery of negotiation, geopolitics, and trust-building unfolds over years rather than a week, they agreed that centring these themes in the Masterclass was eye opening.

The value of peer support: Diversity and discussion as magic formula

Fellows unanimously celebrated the peer network of fellows as one of the programme's most valuable assets. A diverse cohort spanning diplomats, medical doctors, civil servants, private-sector leaders and academics, created a generous environment where everyone freely shared their day-to-day realities, career trajectories and sector-specific insights. That *diversity combined with open discussion deepened each fellow's understanding of complex varying local realities and how they translate to global health challenges*, from the mechanics of UN negotiations to the frontline stresses of community health work.

Some fellows noted the cohort was slightly imbalanced, noting differences in experience levels within the cohort and a perceived underrepresentation from humanitarian organisations. This elevated the quality and depth of discussions, though also meant the group dynamic skewed towards more experienced fellows who took more space in discussions, rather than fellows with less experience to draw on.

Fellows were highly positive of the mix of structured activities and space for unstructured interaction and genuine relationship building. Moving outside the classroom setting broke down formal structures, which created space for spontaneous and candid interaction. The walk-and-talk pairings fostered personal one-on-one conversations and coffee-break dialogues sparked cross-sector problem solving. In some cases, professional connections made during the programme have bloomed into valuable friendships.

The tangible benefits of peer support quickly surfaced in fellows' learning. Exchanging real-world case studies and troubleshooting negotiation tactics sharpened fellows' analytical toolkit, while open discussions with private-sector colleagues challenged long-held assumptions and inspired new collaborative models. Cross-regional exchanges enabled critical lessons that would have been invisible in a more homogeneous group.

The importance of faculty: Wholly unique insights

Fellows were very positive of the faculty members and the practitioner-to-practitioner set-up of teaching as they could address their own questions rather than passively receive pre-set and surface-level content they could have looked up elsewhere. *This adds incredible value and uniqueness to the programme, as these are in-depth and unique insights that are otherwise nearly impossible to come by*, according to fellows.

Walk-and-talks created a relaxed setting where leaders not only shared personal career stories but also paused to explore each fellow's aspirations, leadership journey, and challenges. These informal encounters made faculty approachable and helped demystify the complexities of global health diplomacy.

Fellows were inspired by hearing senior practitioners recount moments of doubt, failure, resilience, and ultimate success. Their shared vulnerabilities underscored that true leadership encompasses overcoming personal hurdles and reinforced that impactful diplomacy and advocacy demand both technical expertise and human connection.

The combination of direct and informal engagement has already translated into tangible benefits for fellows' work. Fellows use a more empathetic approach to collaboration and global health leadership, by fostering small-group discussions and sustaining follow-up through intimate gatherings.

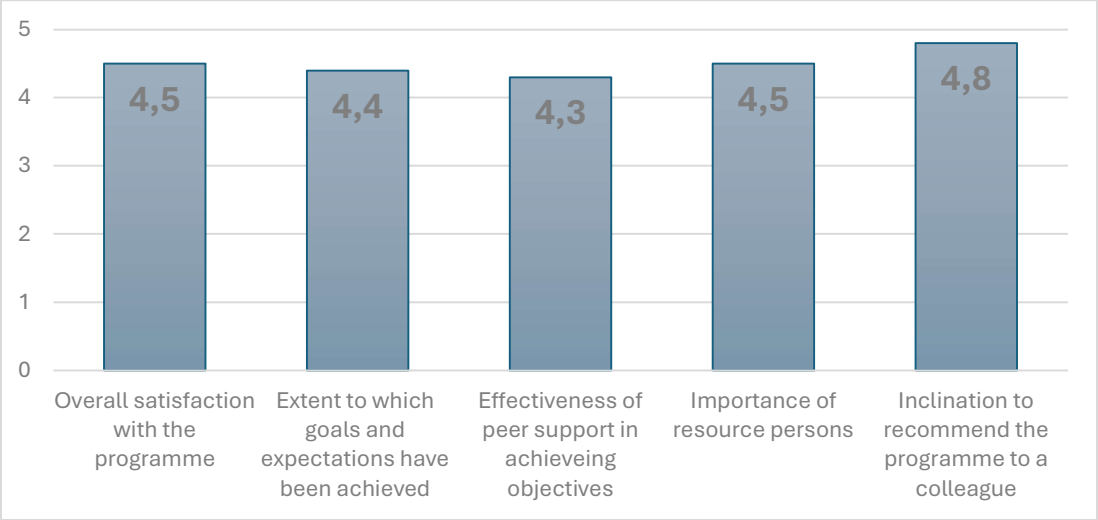
Professional network building: The programme's most valuable asset

Fellows praised the *professional network* forged through the programme as "one of its greatest strengths", with many highlighting new professional relationships and friendships being born at the Masterclass. LinkedIn and the cohort's WhatsApp group were mentioned as important channels for ongoing dialogue. Through these channels, fellows across continents share work updates, thoughts, articles, speaking invitations and job opportunities, creating a dynamic forum for real-time intelligence sharing.

During and after the Masterclass, *spontaneous collaborations have emerged* from connections made during the programme. Fellows have organised a webinar discussing what to expect of the next Director General of the WHO and next Secretary General of the UN. They have invited each other as speakers, collaborated on joint grant proposals, and have started professional engagements with each other.

Lastly, fellows are planning briefings that will draw on faculty expertise, host side-events at major multilateral and health related events, have formed strategic alliances within the network, and collaborate based on shared interests. Fellows underscore that this network remains one of the programme's most valuable and durable assets.

Figure 1. Summary of average scores of different aspects of the programme



The Online workshops

The importance of the Online workshops received an average score of 4.3. Fellows praised the online workshops for their strong emphasis on practical "how" over theoretical "what", noting that the Programme Directors (Anders Nordström and Gunilla Carlsson) excelled at creating an open, collaborative atmosphere where faculty shared candid, real-world insights.

The sessions were appreciated for their excellent presenters and content, and moments of small-group reflection to deepen learning. Many valued the focus on career-journey narratives, digging one level deeper than a typical interview or podcast could provide.

At the same time, fellows identified opportunities to boost interactivity and refine the pacing of the sessions. Fellows expressed that room for discussion and asking questions created a lot of value in the workshops and felt that sometimes there was too little space for this. Small group discussions in breakout rooms, extra room for questions, and icebreaker activities were flagged as underused tools that could help strengthen peer connections, especially early in the series, and make the virtual format feel more engaging.

In addition, fellows appreciated speakers with practical lessons they could implement right away. To expand on the practical applicability, exercises, cases, and tools could be utilized more. This would also enrich the Masterclass, as fellows have already started to implement insights from the workshops.

The Masterclass

With an average score of 4.8, the Masterclass met the expectations of the fellows to a very high degree.

The most impactful lessons of the Masterclass

The Masterclass reframed how politics and governance intersect with health diplomacy. Fellows recognized that decision-making rarely begins at the negotiating table but in the informal corridors of power, where trust and relationships matter most. They took away concrete lessons on building genuine relationships, leveraging networks across regions, and balancing global structures with local realities, such as the importance of genuine relationships, what happens before and after the negotiation table, and feel more capable of mapping stakeholders, nurturing long-term relationships, and steering governance processes at global and regional levels.

Leadership surfaced as a living practice anchored in personal values, resilience, courage, vision, and friendships. Hearing senior faculty speak openly about failures and crossroads taught that true leadership demands vulnerability and the courage to decide under uncertainty. Fellows embraced the mantra “If you fail, learn from it - Don’t hesitate”.

Leadership and diplomacy under uncertainty also emerged as areas of professional growth. Fellows described shedding self-doubt by watching senior faculty navigate crises without roadmaps, seize windows of opportunity, and anchor decisions in deeply held values. The programme’s honest discussions on failure, vision, and taking initiative helped fellows embrace uncertainty rather than fear it, strengthening their conviction to “just get on and do it” and to identify the right forums and allies across sectors for influence.

The consensus is that the Masterclass laid a robust foundation and was "clearly very well thought through". The combination of expert insights, peer exchanges, and immersive simulations has left them better equipped to apply negotiation tactics, lead transformational initiatives, and communicate with both clarity and conviction in their daily work.

Pacing and format of the Masterclass

Fellows agreed that the Masterclass's pace and structure struck a generally successful balance between depth and dynamism, with many describing the schedule as "Intense but rewarding". Fellows appreciated the fully packed agenda, mixing lectures, garden talks, role plays, well timed breaks, and evening discussions to maximize value in a single week.

At the same time, a few fellows noted fatigue during some late-day activities due to the intensity of the schedule. The short breaks and little time allocated for group preparation hindered to some extent deeper absorption of material. Some fellows felt that the negotiation simulation ran too long for its impact and suggest support during preparation and a shorter debrief to improve it. To create more breathing room in the programme, others suggested having more space between activities to digest newly acquired insights and to socialize with other fellows.

They recommended more interactive formats, such as small-group conversations, and one-on-one or peer-pair check-ins, as well as morning icebreakers that both recap the prior day and deepen personal connections. A few also proposed freeing up post-dinner slots for unstructured networking rather than formal sessions.

Walk-and-Talks and discussions in pairs

Fellows appreciated the walk-and-talk sessions as "one of the highlights of the Masterclass", calling it one of the most memorable and effective formats.

By grouping fellows with faculty members for an unhurried stroll outside, fellows found a more relaxed setting to raise questions they might have hesitated to ask within the formal barriers lecture hall. Many noted that the fresh air and scenic surroundings helped ideas flow more freely, making it easier to share personal challenges, troubleshoot real-world problems, and exchange candid reflections on leadership, negotiation and resilience. Beyond the intellectual benefits, walk-and-talks fostered genuine human connection. Fellows described how these conversations were more honest, personal, and concrete, building trust quickly and effectively.

Some felt that the walks were not as effective in larger groups, as this diminished the intimate and informal nature of the format. Fellows noted it was hard to hear what was being discussed and found it hard to engage meaningfully. Some noticed groups sitting down or segregating into smaller groups naturally due to the large size. They underscore that small groups are essential for this set-up to be effective.

Proposals for additional programme themes

Fellows identified four main areas for enriching the curriculum. First, they recommended dedicating modules and supplementary readings on health financing and political economy. Fellows were interested in the intersection between financing, development, and diplomacy, and how countries mobilize resources in complex political and economic settings. An expert from a multilateral development bank was suggested to fill this gap by one fellow.

Second, fellows suggested expanding on cross-sector collaborations, especially public-private partnership. They were keen to learn how global health could be positioned as a valuable business case, and how cross-sector partnerships can create lasting impact. One fellow suggested a session that discusses a practical example of a collaboration between public, private, and NGO sectors.

Finally, the cohort urged more strategic policy content that addresses today's challenges. This could include discussions on current geopolitical tensions, workshops on resource mobilization for aid independence, and case studies of governments investing in NCD prevention, climate adaptation, and food-system health.

Tools, readings, or expert interactions that could enhance the programme

Fellows offered a range of proposals to deepen learning and sustain engagement beyond the week-long Masterclass. Many suggested establishing semi-formal alumni networks, through quarterly online or in-person workshops where fellows present recent work, exchange feedback, and mentor each other.

Several fellows suggested broadened geographic and stakeholder representation among faculty and readings. Latin America and Southeast Asia were highlighted as underrepresented regions; bringing in diplomats, health ministers or civil-society leaders from these areas would enrich multilateral discussions with alternative policy narratives. One fellow suggested bringing in experts that work with health issues outside the health sector, such as infrastructure, urban development, and climate to broaden perspectives further.

A stronger emphasis on innovation, technology and communication was also recommended. Dedicated sessions on artificial intelligence, health data governance, digital and social media diplomacy would help fellows anticipate emerging governance challenges and public-opinion tactics. Supplementary readings on health-system financing, network building and strategic media engagement would advance fellows' ability to craft narratives, leverage data and shape public debate.

To enhance experiential learning, fellows recommended that the programme should incorporate modules on concrete methods and tools, such as advocacy tactics, strategic

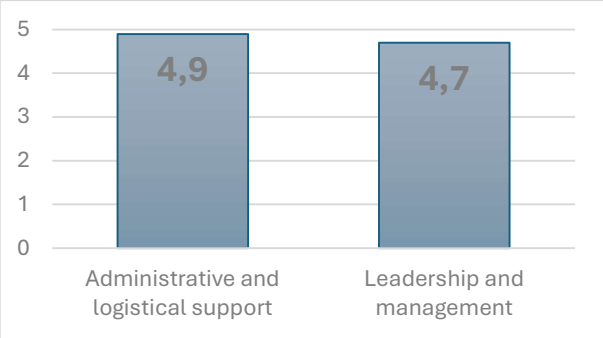
communication, templates for stakeholder mapping and coalition building, negotiation preparation, and techniques for maintaining health on the global agenda.

Program management, administrative and logistical support and cost

As shown by Figure 2, administrative and logistical support as well as programme leadership and management were well rated, with average scores of 4.9 and 4.7 respectively.

Most fellows agreed that the programme fees represented excellent value for money. They appreciated the tiered pricing model, particularly the reduced rates for public-sector, NGO, LMIC, and civil-society fellows, which many described as "incredibly reasonable" and thoughtful for ensuring diverse participation. Attendees highlighted that the quality of the in-person week, including outstanding faculty, immersive learning, top-tier accommodations, and exceptional meals, far exceeded the cost.

Figure 2. Average scores of operational



A minority of fellows raised practical concerns around departure times. One fellow noted that some had to look for emergency accommodation on the last day of the Masterclass due to unclear communication about check-out and departure times.

Conclusion

The Partnership for International Politics and Diplomacy for Health is immensely grateful for the constructive feedback provided by the fellows of the 2026 programme. The reflections and suggestions will be taken into consideration when planning the 2027 edition of the programme.

About Us

The Partnership for International Politics and Diplomacy for Health is a collaboration between the Stockholm School of Economics and Karolinska Institutet. Our executive programme seeks to create equip emerging health leaders with the skills to effectively navigate in global and regional political settings of importance for health. The programme is grounded in collaboration and exchange, bringing together diverse expertise, perspectives, and experiences. Although the programme is based on the theories that have shaped and explained the current state of the world, its focus is forward-oriented, with emphasis on the practical aspects of health diplomacy and what future health leaders may require to succeed.

Read more about our work and Executive Programme here



Stockholm School of Economics
Center for Resilient Health

Partnership for International Politics and Diplomacy for Health

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