

# EASSH feedback to ERAC task force on FP10

## The paper in a nutshell

EASSH's guiding principle for FP10 must be to fund research that supports a sustainable and social Europe, where the costs of living are affordable, with adequate pensions and access to care, and where cultural values, human dignity, and education are guaranteed to all. A key element to achieve such an ambition is funding research in SSH disciplines and integrating them from the outset within the design of the FP10 programme. SSH research provides key evidence for policymakers, high-quality publications, and participation of all European countries.

### Key recommendations:

- 1) **A dedicated and appropriate space for supporting research into challenges to society, culture, and human values.**
- 2) **An appropriate level of resources comparable to other key priorities with a wider range of intervention areas and a balanced distribution of resources.**
- 3) **Appropriate representation of SSH expertise throughout FP10, from the initial design of the programme, through to call drafting and project evaluation.**
- 4) **Regular monitoring of SSH integration also under the next FP.**
- 5) **Flexibility of project size.**
- 6) **More resources for ERC and pillar two to support bottom-up collaborative projects.**
- 7) **More Research and Innovation Actions in pillar 2.**

EASSH would like to thank the ERAC task force on FP10 for the invitation to contribute to the meeting on 11 September 2023 and to send this written feedback as follow-up to the meeting.

This paper is divided into four parts: 1) a vision for the next framework programme; 2) a reflection on the architecture of the programme; 3) SSH integration in practice; 4) flexibility in project size and funding, a reflection on some technical aspects that could be improved in the implementation of the programme.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Vision for FP10

EASSH's guiding principle for FP10 must be to fund research that support a sustainable and social Europe, where costs of living are affordable, with adequate pensions and access to care, and where cultural values, human dignity, and education are guaranteed to all, and responsibility for future generations is actively fostered. A key element to achieve such an ambition is funding research in SSH disciplines and integrating them from the outset within the design of the FP10 programme. SSH research provides key evidence for policymakers, high-quality publications, and participation of all European countries.

Horizon Europe (HE) was the very first framework programme to formally recognise that expertise from all research fields is needed to understand the complexity of the challenges we

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<sup>1</sup> EASSH also contributed to the EC consultation in February 2023. Please see: [EASSH response to EC consultation on Horizon Europe](#).

face. It is important that FP10 can retain the principle of integrating SSH across the whole programme, and that we do not make the mistake of reverting to a search for technology-driven solutions alone. One of the priorities of the European Union policy agenda is to “achieving a more resilient, competitive, inclusive, and democratic Europe”<sup>2</sup> and “the need to continue focusing R&I investments on these core areas.”<sup>3</sup> This is and must remain a core European ambition coupled with the principle of a social Europe in place by the end of 2034, as asked by citizens in the Eurobarometer survey.

Social science and humanities research is integral to achieving such ambitions, and successfully so. The EC report “Science, Research and Innovation performance of the EU 2022”<sup>4</sup> states that: “The EU is leading globally in the domains of economics and social sciences, arts and humanities”. The achievements of this top-class research are the reason why others are looking at European leadership, and why this research must be harnessed to provide the evidential base for the pro-social policies that are needed as a new resource for the economy. Furthermore, the importance of SSH research is proven by its ability to include all European countries. According to the EASSH analysis of Cordis data, 42 % of the project coordinators in cluster 2, “Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society”, are from countries which, historically, have been underrepresented in shaping and leading research consortia. EASSH believes that this demonstrates that SSH research shows Relevance, High Quality, and Inclusiveness and tackles issues which are truly pan-European.

In the following paper we set out several issues that we believe need to be addressed – some new and some from previous Framework Programmes – to ensure the 10<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (FP10) can fulfil the mission for which it is designed: supporting Europe in achieving its highest aims.

## 2. Programme architecture

EASSH welcomed the decision to create a cluster dedicated to “Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society” in pillar 2 of HE. The cluster is of comparable scale to the other clusters, although the budget gap among clusters is still wide. All clusters should be alike in size if the aim is to encourage all fields of research to contribute to achieving Europe’s ambitions. EASSH asks that preconceptions about the relative costs associated with scientific fields should be ignored when setting budgets.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, a low budget allocation means that cluster 2 success rate remains still below average with a 12.7 % (2021–22) compared to the overall HE average which is around 16 %.<sup>6</sup> We argue that the number of ‘intervention areas’ in a future social, cultural challenges cluster should be extended beyond the three currently indicated and reflect the number and breadth of challenges faced by European society and the commitment of policymakers to address them.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2020 EU strategic foresight review defines resilience as “the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges but also to undergo transitions, in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner”.

<sup>3</sup> [The second Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027](#).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2023) “Science, Research and Innovation performance of the EU 2022” [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/publications/all-publications/science-research-and-innovation-performance-eu-2022-report\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-publications-tools-and-data/publications/all-publications/science-research-and-innovation-performance-eu-2022-report_en)

<sup>5</sup> EASSH showed in the position paper “[Resources for clusters in Horizon Europe](#) that “the costs of research in the framework programme are predominantly related to investment in salaries, or conferences and engagement actions, and that the cost of all these elements are independent from disciplines or topics.” The paper argued and demonstrated that the true cost of research across different fields does not explain the differences in the resources allocated. It also shows that when a challenge is too little resourced and success rates are very low (e.g. in H2020 challenge 6 with 3 % success rate) this result will bring down dramatically the average results of the programme.

<sup>6</sup> See Science Business [Here’s what the first two years of HE look like in numbers](#).

**Recommendations:**

- 1) A dedicated and appropriate space for supporting research into society, culture, and human values.**
- 2) An appropriate level of resources comparable to other key priorities with a wider range of intervention areas.**

**3. SSH integration in practice**

H2020 introduced the notion of SSH integration and the understanding that social sciences and humanities were to be considered a cross-cutting issue. In other words, all dimensions of research across the programme needed to explore and include, where relevant, evidence from research that focused on the legal, social, historical, and human aspects alongside technological and clinical aspects.

Horizon Europe reinforced this concept with a major focus on societal impact (which is not necessarily related to integrating data and research in social and human sciences). EASSH welcomes the continued commitment of the European Commission to integrating SSH expertise in decision-making processes and in all aspects of the research funded by HE. It is also key that the legal commitment to report on such aspects be continued.

However, so far, the implementation and outcome have been disappointing. To comply with reporting obligations in the Horizon 2020 programme, the Commission produced four monitoring reports. Each of the reports showed that the integration of SSH across the societal challenges remained very weak in the four years of monitoring the programme (2012–2017).

Despite the introduction of flagging topics which have a strong social component and require SSH perspectives, many projects funded under these topics went ahead with no SSH contribution.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, since 2018, no further reports have been published, despite there being a legal obligation, and there are no data to show whether the programme has improved. We can only assume that this is unlikely as no structural changes have been introduced. Furthermore, according to our preliminary analysis, HE has not yet implemented any real improvements in integration, although some calls are far better designed to be inclusive of SSH expertise and research. EASSH is conducting an exercise to examine the integration of SSH research. A more detailed analysis will be presented in due time.

EASSH pleads for a renewed approach to SSH integration across the whole FP10 programme, in particular the parts on excellent science, innovation-focused initiatives, as well as missions and partnerships. Monitoring needs also to be prioritised.

The design of the calls demonstrates profound differences in the understanding of effective SSH integration. In fact, the major obstacle remains a scarce understanding of research themes in SSH disciplines. A general ‘catch-all’ statement on SSH involvement does not appropriately reflect the diversity of SSH disciplines nor the potential contribution they can make to a project. EASSH recommends more in-depth reflection at the call drafting stage and that SSH researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds to be consulted early on during the design

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<sup>7</sup> EASSH has analysed these reports and already provided clear recommendations to improve the architecture, which will ensure real integration of SSH research in those topics where there is a strong social dimension. See for example EASSH paper: [Interdisciplinary perspectives for Horizon Europe: Lessons from the 4th SSH Integration Monitor Report](#)

of the larger programme priorities, rather than at the end of the decision-making process. EASSH proposes once again that an organisation like a European Technological Platform<sup>8</sup> should be established to advise and support the alignment of research priorities on societal and human centric issues as well as the design of the calls of the FP10 programme.

Moreover, if true SSH integration is to be achieved, this must be reflected in the evaluation process. This could be done in two ways. Firstly, if an SSH contribution is required in the call text, its omission in a project proposal should lead to the proposal not being funded. Secondly, the composition of evaluation panels ought to be such that sufficient SSH expertise from different and appropriate disciplinary background must be present to ensure a meaningful evaluation.

While we still think it necessary to pay specific attention to the integration of SSH disciplines, the longer-term objective is for SSH to be treated on a par with STEM. As such, topic flagging and other conducive measures would eventually become obsolete.

**Recommendations:**

- 3) Ensure appropriate representation of SSH expertise throughout FP10, from the initial design of the programme, through to call drafting and project evaluation.**
- 4) Commit to regular monitoring of SSH integration also under the next FP.**

**4. Flexibility in project size**

The societal challenges in H2020 and the clusters in HE are very large umbrella programmes, not always aligned with national funding and member states' priorities, but rather aimed at identifying large scale solutions. Since H2020, the EC also has increased the average size of projects. This has been done as a cost-efficiency measure when it comes to project management. However, a programme compelling all projects to be designed as large-scale projects does not always suit the specific research challenge that they aim to address.

It is important that large calls requiring large-scale funding continue. Yet, smaller and more focused calls which encourage smaller scale projects, with high-quality research and relevant potential outputs, should also be funded. They can be well designed and tackle specific issues that are potentially at least as impactful as the large-scale projects.

The focus should be on flexibility. Call and project size does not need to be equal across all projects. Some well-advanced areas could gain more from smaller and more targeted projects. These may focus on a specific aspect or provide evidence from a single area of studies whereas others could benefit from synergies with work already supported at member state level.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> European Technology Platforms (ETP) were the first type of public-private partnership established in the research field at European level. These industry-led stakeholders' fora define and implement a strategic research agenda (SRA) aiming at aligning research priorities in a technological area.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_ATA\(2017\)603935](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2017)603935)

<sup>9</sup> A couple of examples. Since the third report of the IPCC, social and natural scientists have worked together on interdisciplinary approaches towards climate change challenges. Scientists have learnt to respect different scientific domains, methods, and scientific approaches. The cluster on climate change in HE has showcased a remarkable level of maturity in the co-design of the calls, and this was already validated in H2020. Technology tends to be a self-standing environment. While humanities' scholars and linguists have provided remarkable advancements in robotics, for example, engineers still fundamentally approach their knowledge from a self-standing, independent pathway that is not perceived to be in need to capitalise from a human centric approach. Europe is leading on digital rights and on legislation in AI, as well as in digital humanities yet this is not reflected in the relevant cluster.

This demands two pre-requisites in terms of flexibility. All clusters must be resourced with a similar level of investment to allow a fluid capacity to exchange topics across disciplinary approaches. Also, more fundamental research in the clusters and cooperation programmes is very important. Along similar lines, CESAER and EUA have raised already the need to rebalance the proportion of calls with different levels of applied and close to market solutions.<sup>10</sup> In particular, EASSH would also like to encourage funding for more Research and Innovation Actions in the second pillar.

Projects can be of a different size, from rather small and focused ones to large ones, as well as based on a wide ‘team science’ approach or on a portfolio approach, where single aspects are combined by the funder. It is crucial the calls allow different levels of investigation and as a result that the size of the project be decided by the applicant or application team, a choice adapted to the topic and justified by good quality research design. Furthermore, the applicant and relevant teams should be asked to identify potential cross-cluster relevance of the research being proposed.

With that in mind, evaluation criteria must be adapted. For example, while the current minimum eligibility criteria for consortia is three beneficiaries, the average funded project in cluster 2 has around twelve partners. An EASSH analysis shows that smaller consortia with three to six partners receive on average a lower score.

Finally, along with the flexibility for applicants to choose the scale of the project, we also pledge firmly for stronger support and more funding to support fundamental research, as in ERC, for collaborative projects. There should also be more funding for bottom-up research via cooperation programmes that allow researchers to benefit from open programmes to address pressing challenges with innovative approaches.

**Recommendations:**

- 5) Flexibility of project size.**
- 6) More resources for ERC and in the second pillar to support bottom-up collaborative projects.**
- 7) More Research and Innovation Actions in pillar 2.**

*EASSH is the largest umbrella organisation for SSH in Europe with over 70 members including universities, disciplinary associations, and corporate associate partners. Our mission is to promote learning and research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) as a resource for Europe and the world, and to engage with policymakers and research funders in support of the social sciences and humanities.*

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<sup>10</sup> Referring to art 7.3 of Regulations 2021/695, CESAER and EUA raised the need to “rebalance the proportion of calls with lower, medium and higher TLRs for collaborative call topics within the Horizon Europe clusters”. See CESAER and EUA statement (February 2023) [Future-proof Horizon Europe through balanced cluster calls](#).