

SSH integration: Past, Present and Future – A data analysis



EASSH Position Paper

7 November 2025

The paper in a nutshell

Article 5 of the European Commission proposal for FP10 confirms again the critical role of interdisciplinarity and the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH) and the commitment to deliver a truly multidisciplinary research programme.

In July 2025, the European Commission released its first monitoring report on SSH integration under Horizon Europe (HEU) covering the period 2021–2023 mainly under pillar II.¹ In response to this report, and addressing SSH integration, EASSH would like to:

- Welcome the European Commission's continued commitment to implement, monitor, and improve SSH integration because multidisciplinary enhances research results and social impact;
- Reiterate recommendations for a more robust assessment method, and invite the European Commission to consider all phases of the project life cycle in its analysis;
- Stress the need for sustained implementation and monitoring of SSH integration to continue in FP10, with a robust assessment methodology in place ahead of the first calls;
- Encourage the European Commission to ensure that the results of those assessments translate to lessons – with implementation in practice – about appropriate integration of SSH for programme management at the policy level, as well as at the level of the research community;
- Recommend that SSH integration is used as an observation point to monitor multidisciplinary;
- Recommend that in FP10, societal challenges are implemented in the next framework programme across all the policy windows, rather than confined to the smallest section called Society.

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¹ European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon Europe – First monitoring report on SSH-flagged projects funded under Pillar II of Horizon Europe – 2021–2023, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/6733555>.

SSH integration: why and what is it for?

Interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary, including the integration of SSH was introduced in Horizon 2020 (H2020), and continued as a principle of Horizon Europe (HEU). Now it is proposed anew for the next framework programme, FP10. While in ERC, MSCA where funding supports bottom up research, there are no concerns around interdisciplinarity, in the policy driven calls, this principle is intended to create opportunities for doing research in an ‘integrated way’, in other words, not to separate for example research on medicine or technology from its impact on society and to include research questions related to societal well-being. SSH integration has been particularly relevant also in other parts of the programme, like the partnerships and the innovation pillar. It should be reminded that SSH integration is a requirement across the whole programme.

In July 2025, the European Commission released its first monitoring report on SSH integration under Horizon Europe (HEU), covering the period 2021–2023 and mainly pillar II.² EASSH welcomes the publication of the monitoring report, and importantly, the European Commission’s continued commitment to support, monitor and improve SSH integration. We hope to see further monitoring of integration across the rest of the programme (e.g. European Partnerships).

The report states that SSH integration is viewed as “a key driver for greater societal impact, strengthened public trust and better societal uptake of technologies in Europe, that fits the European shared values and long-term vision”. It is acknowledged that appropriate SSH contributions and insights in multidisciplinary research serve to improve our understanding of, and response to, complex societal challenges and problems and the pursuit of suitable solutions. We also know that effective integration of research contributions from different research fields is not easy. It can bring great benefits, but there remain challenges, which is why monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this policy is so important.

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2 Ibid, p. 31.

SSH Integration report findings

This first monitoring report of HEU finds that around 40% of pillar II topics are SSH-flagged and allocated €7.2 billion in funding. The flagging of topics now reaches across more of the programme and represents a significant expansion in the potential for SSH contribution when compared to Horizon 2020 (H2020). The greater use of ‘flagged topics’ is to be applauded. However, there are some reservations around the implementation of this method. Simply flagging a topic is not in itself an indicator of integration at all. Flagging of topics is implemented by the funder for the only purpose of encouraging integration but, it is not evidence of actual integration.

Where we have an even greater concern is the reliability of the estimates underpinning findings such as “88% of the projects under these [flagged] topics had at least one SSH partner, while 22% of the total number of partners were SSH partners”. As we discuss later in this paper, the methodological choices made by the European Commission in undertaking the report significantly overestimate the degree of SSH integration.

As the authors note, trying to understand the new report’s figures in the context of historic monitoring reports is not possible because of the change in structure and thematic alignment of the overall programme, in addition to the methodological changes made for the analysis. However, as EASSH has been using the same methodology over time, we are able to offer some comparative estimates.

EASSH analysis

Researchers, even when working in multidisciplinary projects, tend to publish in single-discipline journals in their own field.³ Therefore, EASSH undertook an analysis where instead of looking at deliverable descriptions as ‘detectors’ of the presence of SSH, we analysed articles derived from HEU funded projects. Each article is published in a journal, and each journal has an easily traceable connection to academic research fields. We therefore use this connection from project to research field as a more

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3 Barthel R, Seidl R (2017) Interdisciplinary Collaboration between Natural and Social Sciences - Status and Trends Exemplified in Groundwater Research. PLoS ONE 12 (1): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0170754>. Examples of multidisciplinary projects which integrate SSH successfully and strong guidelines in the [Gluon model](#) can inform the development of new methodologies for SSH integration and impact assessment in transdisciplinary research.

reliable indicator of the research contributions of a project funded under H2020 or HEU. As we have been doing data analysis with this method since H2020, our approach does allow comparison between the two framework programmes.

Our analysis shows that across the comparable Clusters and Societal Challenges there is little change in SSH integration between H2020 and HEU until 2024. There are some areas where the levels have moved in a positive direction. But overall the proportion of SSH research across HEU remains low (7.5% of publications). For example, in H2020 around 2% of all publications in the Health challenge were from SSH research fields, and 2.99% under Horizon Europe. This is despite the higher percentage (about a third) of flagged topics in HEU. The Food challenge in H2020 represents a little over 4% and in HEU just over 6%. The full results are set out in the tables below.

Table 1: Percentage of publications in SSH

H2020 Health	H2020 Food	H2020 Energy	H2020 Transport	H2020 Climate Env	H2020 IIR Societies	H2020 Secure Societies	H2020 (average)
2.04%	4.14%	3.90%	6.68%	7.08%	75.58%	12.98%	7.13%

HEU CL1 Health	HEU CL 2 Inclusive Societies	HEU CL3 Security	HEU CL4 Digital	HEU CL5 Climate	HEU CL6 Food	HEU (average)
2.99%	58.94%	6.67%	7.18%	9.35%	6.32%	7.51%

While the results show some increase in the overall representation of SSH research, just 7.5% of publications in SSH disciplines in HEU compared to 7.13% in H2020, remains so far limited. Furthermore, using this methodology as a test of reliability, revealed a significant overestimate of SSH integration in the EC report. In fact, our results show that despite the suggestion in the Commission's report, achieving a figure of 40% of topics being flagged for SSH does not imply a successful integration.

Once again, the data and our analysis demonstrates the challenges of multidisciplinary and the need for a monitoring methodology that can better capture the contribution of different disciplinary approaches in multidisciplinary projects.

Evaluating SSH Integration: Methodological considerations and concerns

EASSH would agree with the European Commission's assessment on the need to develop a new methodology to monitor SSH and STEM cooperation across projects. This capability is needed in an environment where multidisciplinary approaches in research are valued and encouraged. Improved methodological approaches will provide more reliable evidence of the nature of multidisciplinaryity. We regret that despite raising similar concerns about the methods with each iteration of this series of reports, there has been little 'learning' over time. EASSH therefore calls on the Commission, the Parliament and the Council to ensure that appropriate monitoring of policies such as flagging is in place for the start of FP10.⁴

It is worth reiterating some of the recommendations EASSH proposed (in April 2024) in response to the last SSH monitoring report.⁵ These focused on the need for more robust assessment of integration, both in calls and in awarded projects, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It is also critical to include text and topic analysis and the use of AI-enabled tools. While some of these recommendations align with the plans set out in the latest EC monitoring report (notably the development of a new methodology ensuring better qualitative and quantitative evaluation), EASSH would invite the European Commission to also consider our own recommendations at the end of this paper.

Implementation of policies

The most recent monitoring reports, both in H2020 and now in HEU, have been useful in highlighting just how frequently the projects under 'flagged topics' have little or no SSH representation. The policy of flagging was designed with the purpose of encouraging SSH contributions. However, the implementation has not produced the intended result. We believe that areas to be strengthened are the design of the calls to be more open to SSH contribution, and another area that needs challenging is whether there is an inclusive evaluation process for proposals in flagged topics. It is critical to involve experts and scholars engaged in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinaryity and who understand SSH disciplinary contributions and research questions.

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⁴ See EASSH position paper [Monitoring SSH integration still matters](#), April 2024.

⁵ Idem.

SSH integration in FP10

The monitoring report on SSH integration was published in the same month as the European Commission's proposal for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2028-2034).⁶ The final monitoring report for Horizon Europe is foreseen for 2028. It is therefore appropriate to think about SSH integration and monitoring plans for FP10 at this early stage.

In the FP10 proposal, the design of the programme must be improved. Societal challenges are only mentioned in the smallest part of the programme Society, which will also finance the New European Bauhaus and Missions with a modest proposed budget of €7.6Bn. This is clearly unrealistic, unless Society is dedicated to research on Society only as we published in our most recent position paper.⁷ More societal challenges must be included in the four policy windows under the heading Competitiveness. By including a wider range of societal challenges across the different headings from Health to Space, we can also secure interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches and SSH integration on a wider scale. Similar considerations to design paths for the integration of SSH must be included in the other parts of the programme as well, from the European partnerships, to the European Innovation Council.

EASSH recommendations

For future monitoring reports on SSH integration:

- Continued commitment to monitoring the integration of SSH research across the main themes of current and future framework programmes.
- Future monitoring reports should examine all phases of the project life cycle, not just the outcomes. This includes SSH integration at programme design level, call/topic text drafting, the setting of evaluation procedures, and representation of SSH experts in all phases, from design to evaluation.
- Continuing to collect project level data to provide an evidence base for future monitoring exercises (e.g. participants, work packages, publications and other research outputs).

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⁶ See COM(2025) 543 final and COM/2025/544 final.

⁷ See [EASSH Society in FP10 proposal is for research on Society](#).

Immediate actions based on the first monitoring reports:

- Review the evaluation process. Evaluations need to be adapted to the aim of the programme, particularly when they aim to encourage the integration of SSH and indeed interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary projects.
- The flagging mechanism needs to be improved. The monitoring report and EASSH analysis provide evidence that SSH participation has increased only marginally. Less prescriptive calls which encourage different disciplinary approaches to challenges in a combination of possible interpretation (a portfolio approach) can improve flagging.
- Promoting meaningful integration of SSH within FP10 requires innovative approaches throughout various stages of the programme. The design stage of FP 10 will be a key driver to SSH integration across the subsequent stages. Therefore, urgent attention should be given to the FP10 structure.

In view of its unique ties to the SSH research community in the EU, EASSH is ready to advise and assist the Commission in this important matter.

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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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